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#42 meeting notes	1/28/66 meeting with foreign policy advisors on resumption of bombing <i>sanitized 3-24-82 NSC</i> possible classified information 11 p.	1/28/66	A

FILE LOCATION

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Meeting in Cabinet Room  
January 28, 1966  
Time: 1:20 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.  
Subject: Resumption of Bombing

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(p. 9)

Present: President, Vice President, Rusk, McNamara, Harriman, Mac Bundy, Bill Bundy, General Taylor, General Wheeler, Ball, Goldberg, Marks, Valenti. Also the Wise Men -- McCloy, Dulles, Dean, Clifford.

President: Because of large range of judgment and experience you have, I want your evaluation of this. Fresh approaches can do much sometime. The President's difficulty is not doing what is right -- but knowing what is right.

I see each day serious difficulties, mounting of pressure. It may result in deep divisions in our government.

A year ago, by 504-2 the President told the Congress to do what was necessary in Vietnam. Today they could muster probably 40 votes. The Majority Leader and the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee are against the general policy of that resolution.

Bundy: Situation not essentially different from what is in the press. While we did not expect any serious response to the pause, we have no answer -- only nibbles of an undefined source to confuse the record.

We have comprehensive evidence of continuing reinforcement from the North.

Clear that PAVN units continue in VN. True, there have been no large-scale operations initiated by the VC.

The President is not disposed to do anything in a hurry. We need your comments.

McNamara: (President asked McNamara to give military assessment of situation)

Objective of VC to conquer in 1965 and 1966. US troops defeated this. VC has 27 battalions of PAVN. Capable of infiltrating 4,500 men a month, about three times the rate of last year.

Our bombing objectives:

1. Lift morale of South Vietnam.
2. Cost the NVN and reduce and supply route.

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Perhaps we have reduced the flow by 50 per cent.

600 trucks in four-week period beginning December 27. Twice the level of a year ago. Records don't show, because of lack of accuracy, if this is (unreadable) over before the pause.

President: Assuming we were bombing NVN, is it your opinion that fewer trucks would be coming through?

McNamara: We would eliminate some trucks -- but they would probably use human backs.

Ceiling on movement is about 200 tons a day. Can't tell you if air attacks limit movements in toto. They are reactivating routes, roads through reconstruction. Camouflaging trails and routes. (McNamara used a number of photographs to show evidence of substantial infiltration.)

We do know they are steadily expanding forces in the South.

President: Any questions for Bob?

Dean: Resume bombing? As we were before or step it up to deter their supply movement?

McNamara: Don't think we can affect their will through bombing. The pressure on VC in the South will affect their willingness to talk. What kind of bombing should we have. Did have 700 sorties a week. We could direct more sorties against supply lines by doubling the sorties. No matter what bombing we do we need more men.

Dean: Assuming not bombing large centers of population. Would we bomb POL? Power stations? etc.

McNamara: Right now that's not as important as infiltration routes.

McCloy: What can we accomplish by doubling sorties? Would this bring us victory?

McNamara: To avoid a weakness, we'll need to increase our forces. A chance that doubling our force over a period of six months might be sufficient to break their will.

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Meeting in Cabinet Room  
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McCloy: Are we on offensive?

McNamara: Yes, we are on offensive.

McCloy: Would this kind of thrust bring about pacification?

McNamara: No, this can't make peace until Vietnam has organized a pacification effort.

Rusk: If there was general drift toward Hanoi, we'd know about it.

McCloy: How about morale of Vietnamese Army?

McNamara: High desertion rate of about one sixth. But they go back to their farms -- and not to VC. Rand Corporation report shows VC morale problems.

Goldberg: What is meant by "increased cost of bombing?"

McNamara: This does not include China. It does mean...

Dean: What effect on bombing installations near Hanoi -- mine the harbor of Haiphong?

McNamara: If we mined Haiphong, we would cut off petroleum supplies -- don't know if we would markedly cut down supplies to the South.

Dulles: How do you appraise the Vietnamese Government?

McNamara: Evidence we have is good.

Rusk: Government draws strength from the fact most of the country doesn't want Communism.

Dean: Would it be possible to carry out Gavin's theory?

McNamara: -- unstable military situation  
-- (unreadable) proposed by men who believe it is not against communists taking over Southeast Asia.

Carrying on a bombing program against North Vietnam carries risks. Could escalate. And response from China. Think it is danger that can be avoided-- but must consider it.

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If not bomb, it is risk. Don't think the American people will long support a government which will not support by bombing 400,000 troops there.

South Vietnam will not understand why we don't bomb the enemy supplying enemy troops.

Telegraphs the wrong signal to Hanoi, China. Universal opinion of our estimators that cessation of bombing would cause the enemy to believe their cause was right.

At some appropriate time, we should resume carefully controlled bombing.

Wheeler: We should resume. Reasons about the same as McNamara -- although I would place greater weight on the part bombing would reduce supplies. Campaign against North should be increased or substantially. I think POL should be attacked. Basic to ability to move trucks and water craft.

Westmoreland reports a continuing buildup in VC forces in the North area.

President: Is it because of the pause?

Wheeler: Can't tell. On other hand, infiltration has continued. Pause permitted them to move more freely.

President: Did the infiltration go up?

Wheeler: Don't know.

President: I'm trying to find out if this infiltration has increased.

Wheeler: I think so. But can't tell. But they are moving in daylight now -- and before the pause we didn't see any daylight moving.

President: And if we bomb again, would daylight movement end?

Wheeler: Yes.

President: What proof do you have that our bombing has been affected?

(Source of answer not identified): The very stridency of the screams from the enemy is pretty good evidence. Diverted large number of laborers to

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fix up lines of communication.

You estimate 150,000 to 200,000 repairing bomb damage.

We know two Chinese construction companies are in Vietnam to do construction. They would accept Chinese only under dire circumstances. Reports from defectors indicate disruption to transportation and general havoc because of bombing.

Figures of actual destruction are impressive.

Vice President: Do I gather that bombing targets should be enlarged from the report of the Secretary?

McNamara: You hear a lot about industrial targets. There are no worthy industrial targets except for one steel and iron works. But even that (unreadable) return item in bombing.

Others that are worthy:

1. POL system. Most located at Haiphong.
2. Next storage area near Hanoi.

In my judgment these are vital. Also have thermal power plant system that is not too vital. In Haiphong and Hanoi area (within 30 miles) certain ammo and other terminals.

Clifford: Can you bomb every target you want to bomb without endangering civilians?

Wheeler: Yes. POL in Haiphong is located on the outskirts of the city. Great majority of bridges can be attacked without danger to civilians.

President: On the theory that "a hit dog howls" is that evidence that we are hurting?

Wheeler: Yes, Sir.

President: What (do) prisoners tell you?

Wheeler: One thing they cite for defection -- the bombing. Afraid of B-52s because they don't know about it until the bombs fall.

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President: If you stopped in North Vietnam, do you think the next step will be to stop in South Vietnam and finally stop fighting?

Wheeler: Yes, Sir. This always happens.

President: Assuming not bombing civilians, what is argument against bombing in North Vietnam that wouldn't be true for the South?

Wheeler: Don't know of any.

Rusk: In terms of (unreadable) pose to North Vietnam and Moscow and China, there is difference. Russia feels there is no problem in bombing in South Vietnam.

President: I agree. But if we refrain, will not peace lovers exhibit same instincts towards South Vietnam as they do towards North Vietnam?

Goldberg: If bombing has caused Chinese construction workers, will not more come in with more bombing?

Wheeler: Not necessarily. They are there because the railroad they are rebuilding is important to the Chinese.

Vice President: Considering Moscow's concern over bombing in the North and not in the South, how many North Vietnamese do you estimate now in South Vietnam?

Wheeler: At least nine regiments -- about 12,000-15,000 men. But we are not sure this is all. These are the only ones positively identified.

Vice President: Then there is little punishment being inflicted in North Vietnam but only in South Vietnam -- which means, what pressures are we bringing on North Vietnam?

Wheeler: I think this is true. Until North Vietnam introduced his own men, Ho was fighting this war cheaply. No trouble in North Vietnam.

Goldberg: Can you bring about an interdiction in Haiphong without retaliation in Saigon port?

Wheeler: They have capability of doing this -- and have already caused trouble in this respect. We are on alert against this kind of attack.

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In December we had 87 ships waiting to be unloaded. Now down to 76.

We think we will be out of the woods by end of year.

President: What are U.S. casualties in a month?

Wheeler: Last week 28 or 29 killed. Heaviest month was November -- 250 plus.

President: How many lost last year?

Wheeler: 1300 plus in 1965.

20,000 VC killed -- Vietnam lost about 9,000.

President: How long can they take such losses?

Wheeler: Not too long -- or indefinitely. Morale of troops won't stand up to it. VC are having substantial trouble on their part.

President: Think possible it will break this year?

Wheeler: Don't think so. People in the South want to continue, might (break) it next year. Within the next two years we ought to get favorable results.

President: That means continuing the bombing and doubling the forces.

Taylor: I was with you on the pause, I was against length.

I don't think Hanoi will ever come forward unless our home front is strengthened. It works against all our efforts in the war.

President: Our enemy gets great encouragement from the opposition voices here. Is that right?

Taylor: Yes. It's true. Hanoi lives in another world. They really believe we have lost 1200 planes.

President: We've lost 1400 to 1500 men in five years?

Wheeler: Yes.

McCloy: Anything developing in the way of tactics or weapons that give  
further.

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Wheeler: Yes, Sir. From a flat start, we inserted 100,000 in Vietnam in three months. No other country in the world could do this.

Airlift, Red Ball Express to bring vital items quickly. Ask every commander if any shortages -- and in every case, no shortages were evident.

Counting on weapons:

1. Choppers  
In late May, 400 plus  
Today, 1800  
At end of year, 2000
2. Using fighter bombers for close support
3. Artillery in quantities North Vietnam have never run into before
4. B-52s running close support missions

Vice President: Next argument will be noises to quit using B-52s.

President: Do you think cessation will prolong the war?

Wheeler: Yes.

Rusk: If it were not for the Chinese dispute, Russians would settle for the Geneva Accords. But they are immobilized. Greatly complicates their problem with China. Peking is completely adamant on this. They will not talk or do anything. Peking has actively intruded on any talks between Hanoi and U.S. Hanoi appears to be somewhere between Moscow and Peking -- but closer to Peking.

Sufficient differences among them to make them look over their shoulders at each other -- so that other nations find it difficult to bring about a consensus. We've asked every nation, "Have you heard anything?" The answer is no.

Dulles: If they are willing to stop the subversion, would the bombing cease.

Rusk: This has been talked ad nauseum. But if they respond in some way, we can respond likewise.

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McCloy: Puzzled Hanoi hasn't thrown us off balance with some phony probe.

Rusk: We were prepared for this but they haven't been as imaginative as they might have been.

President: Allen, what is your reaction to the pause?

Dulles: Helpful to have -- but I'm not sure about the other side.

President: What about others? Will they say it is too short?

Dulles: Don't think they can make a case out of it.

McCloy: In convincing we are eager to talk. But paid a price abroad. Thought this was done largely for political purpose.

Hasn't been conducive to bringing about talks -- we've been too excited, too panicky -- an indication of weakness to the enemy.

General impression abroad is we overdid it. But I'm not criticizing it. It helped us here at home.

I think I would resume the bombing after having made these efforts -- and saying we would if we didn't get response -- talks would be diminished if we don't resume.

Insofar as Hanoi is concerned, they are confirmed in their estimate that we are weak and feeling the pressures at home.

Dean: I would resume without question. If you don't American people won't support you -- and casualties will rise. In Korea, we lost more men after truce than before. I would (unreadable) move them, bomb infiltration points -- and at same time keep up peace moves.

Clifford: Only way to get out of Vietnam is to persuade Hanoi we are too brave to be frightened and too strong to be defeated. We must persuade them we cannot lose -- and they will never talk until they are so convinced.

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U.S. attitude is misunderstood in Hanoi. They hear Senators and protests and they are convinced we are losing the support of our people.

War must be made more costly to Vietnam. If we can accelerate military pressures to the point where the North Vietnamese people wonder if it is all worth it.

I want to resume the bombing -- before we get a phony peace bid.

If we don't bomb, China will be more bolder than us. If we keep the strength of our Air Force before them and make them feel we can destroy them if we come in.

We must fight the war where we are strongest and we are strongest in the air.

Dulles: I would resume the bombing -- but we have left impression that bombing has been ineffective.

Our bombing did two things:

- Limited forces VC could put into the field
- Limited momentum of their attacks

Goldberg: Am in disagreement with Clifford.

We have been helped overseas with the pause.

The pause has not been an indication of weakness -- we have strengthened our position, particularly in the communist world. That would not have been done without the Soviets.

Accelerating military pressure in the North has advantages -- and great risks -- involving China and Russia. And this would defeat one of our objectives: to keep the split open with (meaning between) Russia and China. I suggest: Don't bomb tomorrow. Think there is a way to handle public opinion. Therefore, out of deference to world opinion, continue deliberations and have decided to give another short period -- but not under the setting of this one. Think would have great impact on the Hill.

Vice President: The Congress is without leadership. We must take a firm position. The longer you delay, Congress will run all over the lot.

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President: I was the first Congressman to speak up for the Truman Doctrine.

I am not happy about Vietnam but we cannot run out --we have to resume bombing.

END OF MEETING

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