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#118 meeting notes	<i>sanitized 10-6-83 NLS 82-51</i> meeting with foreign policy advisors on Vietnam 8/18/67 <del>possible classified information</del> <i>SECRET per NSC 8-23-83</i> <i>NLS 82-51</i>	notes dated 8/19/67	A

Meeting Notes File, Box 1

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August 19, 1967  
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Case # NLJ 82-51  
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~~TOP SECRET~~  
TO: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Jim Jones *J*

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SUBJECT: Meeting with Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, General  
Earl Wheeler, and Walt Rostow.  
Place: Cabinet Room  
Date: Friday, August 18, 1967  
Meeting convened: 8:35 p.m.  
Meeting adjourned: 9:55 p.m.

SANITIZED

Authority NLJ 82-51

By ms, NARS, Date 10-6-83

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General Wheeler opened the meeting by showing the President a map of 10 targets. Three of them are proposed for a strike next week. Wheeler said information from the Navy is that the Oriskany will be on station tonight. He said Air Force will hit Hanoi thermal power plant tonight. TOT planned time is 1900 tomorrow or 7 p.m. Washington time. If the weather is good, these will go. That will leave three other targets.

McNamara said there are 7 targets authorized and he believes there is a good chance of doing that in the next 5 days.

The President asked how many targets had been approved to get behind us before September.

McNamara said 7 have been approved and he is asking for 3 additional (shown on the map) to be included as a package and thinks there is a good chance of getting them all out of the way by the 24th. McNamara pointed out 3 targets, including target 62 and 59 (depot).

The President asked if target 59 was in a populated area.

McNamara said 59 is a good target but close to a populated area, and that the other 2 were no problem.

Secretary Rusk asked if we have hit 59 before.

McNamara said no.

The President said we hit target 62 before - yes.

General Wheeler showed target 59 location at the northern edge of Hanoi. He calculates 30 civilian casualties.

McNamara said this is a high estimate compared to 5, 10 or 15 casualty estimates on other targets. He said this also shows the target is more critical. He said this is a large depot.

General Wheeler said it is not necessary to approve this target tonight.

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The President said he should go ahead and approve it. "If we send a McNamara to talk to Ho Chi Minh, we don't want to approve it after he gets there."

Wheeler said the weather forecast is the best in 3 days. The cloud coverage is dissipating.

The President interrupted to ask how many strikes were made in one night.

General Wheeler said 2 or 3, sometimes 4. He said the Hanoi thermal power plant is based on a one strike basis.

Walt Rostow said this strike is not like a bridge, but it's like hitting a steel yard.

McNamara recommended against approving this target tonight (59-depot). He said the target is too complicated, and it is in a populated area.

Rusk and McNamara agreed that the other two targets were okay.

The President asked how many more targets were in the Hanoi area.

Wheeler said about 10. Some of these he will want to think about because they are in highly populated areas. Wheeler said he'll prune the list of 12 targets in Haiphong area to 10. Wheeler recommended that the President approve 2 targets tonight and consider the other next week.

McNamara agreed delaying the decision on target 59 saying it's not that important as a supply depot and that it will be there, and the strike could come around September 5 or 6.

Wheeler told the President he would come in about Tuesday of next week asking that two other targets be hit - Phuc Yen Airfield and Cat Bi in the Haiphong area. Wheeler said he would justify them by Tuesday. He said Phuc Yen is a military airfield and has nothing to do with ICC or with international travelers using the airfield.

The President asked when should we finish up on the targets.

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McNamara replied he and Rusk had minor differences in that Rusk thought it should be 24 to 4th and McNamara 25 to 5th. McNamara said however he had no problem accepting Rusk's idea. Rusk said "these fellows will get there on the 25th and it's not good to hit them when they get there."

The President commented that Congress will be recessing about that time.

McNamara said he testifies on the 25th.

The President said they approved all but target 59.

Rusk said we can tell them -- don't expect dramatic events on the 24th.

Rusk said a few days ago he felt there was one chance in 100 - but today he feels there is one chance in 50 that out of this may come secret contacts. McNamara replied he felt there was one chance in 10 for such results.

Rusk commented that [REDACTED] we learned that the North Vietnamese Ambassador to Peking said that any negotiations that would fail would be a disaster. (9)

The President again asked why should we cut out the big ordnance plant - is it used for supplies?

Wheeler said the North Vietnamese are having trouble with supplies. But he said the ordnance plant is not important to the distribution of ammunition. He said this is mostly for rehabilitation of weapons, according to his intelligence, and for the storage of supplies for trucks and weapons.

McNamara summarized the reasons for not striking the depot: a) it is in a highly concentrated population area; b) it is not that important; c) it can't be done in one strike.

The President asked what North Vietnam is short of - petroleum?

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Wheeler said food. Wheeler said we have destroyed the major storage areas of petroleum, and that we have put a strain on the distribution of it, but it's carried in small tanks - 600 metric tons - partly buried.

The President asked what is the answer to the stalemate issue. Wheeler responded there is no stalemate. The President said that's not a good enough answer. He said McNamara gets ridiculed when he says it. The President said he answered it today by saying it was pure Communist propaganda. The President suggested we should have some colorful general like McArthur with his shirt neck open to go in there and say this is pure propaganda and cite them General Larson's figures.

Wheeler said Larson's report cited dramatic improvements.

The President commented that Larson's report was three pages. This was boiled down to the point where finally he had five things that took one minute to say. The President also directed Walt Rostow to assign someone to digest and sanitize Westmoreland's weekly report.

The President said to get a colorful general to go to Saigon and argue with them (the press). He said we've got to do something dramatic.

Wheeler said he read Larson's report. He cabled it to Westmoreland and asked for a report along the same lines from the I, III and IV Corps areas.

The President sent J. Jones to get copies of the condensed Larson report for each person present. He read from the report concerning progress in II Corps area. He pointed out that two years ago there were no important roads open, today 90% are. Two years ago almost no operating railroads, today 53% are. The North Vietnam army lost about 7,000 killed in action to about 800 Americans killed in the last two years. The South Korean division has contributed magnificently. In Phu Yen Province, Vietcong controlled 75% of the rice growing land and about 80% of the population in 1965. Now the Province is almost completely under the control of the South Vietnam government.

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The President said he used this information and other material in the last few days meetings with many newspaper people, bureau chiefs, columnists, magazine writers and broadcast men. He said he gave backgrounders to them all. He said they all practically surrender. Kilpatrick (Washington Post) has a son about ready to go to Vietnam. The President said he cites these reports, some of which are so optimistic that he believes Komer must be writing them. But the President said today we have no songs, no parades, no bond drives, etc. and he said we can't win the war otherwise.

The President said he may have brought on trouble today when he said in his press conference that Congress could take away his Tonkin Gulf Resolution. He said Fulbright was quoted tonight saying he didn't think that would be practical.

Rusk said that Senator Hugh Scott, who has been helpful, suggested that a group of moderates be brought down to the White House for a pep talk.

The President said you can't trust them. He said he met with 48 House Republican freshmen and took all their questions from Vietnam, to elections to a question from Mrs. Heckler about Brad Morse's proposal. He said they applauded the President twice. He said tonight that they are all out telling what he said. The President relayed that he told the Republican freshmen that in war, politics stops at the water's edge. He said he supported President Eisenhower while Majority Leader 79% on foreign policy, even when the Republican Senate leader refused to help his President. He said he didn't expect these Freshmen Republicans to vote 79% for their President (Johnson) but he did expect them to do so for their country.

The President said he also told Dirksen today. Dirksen had told the President he is worried by a great volume of mail he's getting saying someone in Washington is putting the reins on the military commanders and that the war could be won if the military wasn't held back.

The President asked when the bad weather sets in - around the 15th of September?

Wheeler said it starts to flip about the middle of September. From September 15 to October 15 the weather is bad. It stays mostly bad until early or late April.

The President asked if we get out of North Vietnam at that time and where do we put our planes.

Wheeler suggested that the operational commanders be allowed to permit planes to fly north of North Vietnam when the weather is good during this bad season. He also said that flying weather during this time is relatively good in Laos even though weather is bad in North Vietnam. Wheeler said we should apply pressure when we can in North Vietnam during this bad season, especially in the Haiphong-Hanoi area. But Wheeler says we should not set a number of sorties per week

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during this time.

Rusk commented that "it rains like hell during this period but between times there is some good weather."

Wheeler suggested that during the bad weather period, we have a high level of sorties in Laos and a low level number of sorties in North Vietnam.

McNamara said we have 2600 to 3000 sorties more or an increase in the last six months of about 600% in the Haiphong-Hanoi area.

Wheeler said we've put a heavy stress on their supply and distribution system. Pilots now report that they go into a defended area with a highway of flack one day and go back the next day and there is almost nothing.

Rusk said, "I'm convinced our bombing program has paid considerable dividends."

Wheeler cited a Navy research paper showing length of time for movement into the south from the Hanoi area for three periods - 1965, early 1966, and late 1966. There is a dramatic increase in the time it takes for this movement. The President asked how Wheeler fared before the Senate Committee and how many were present for the hearing.

Wheeler replied he got a friendly reception. There were seven members there. He started listing Senators Stennis, Symington, Cannon, Margaret Smith, Thurmond and Jack Miller. Wheeler said the committee counsel is Kirbow (Charles) whom Wheeler described as not very good. Wheeler said Stennis likes Kirbow however. Wheeler said Kirbow's work was not thorough and this showed up in the questioning.

Wheeler said he and General Momyer had hoped to do some educating of the members.

McNamara said Wheeler "did a helluva good job." He told them that bombing in the north is not a substitute, but a supplement for the activity in the south. McNamara said "Symington's thesis is that if you bomb hell out of the north you can forget the south." McNamara said he and Wheeler cannot support this.

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Wheeler acknowledged that Symington was the roughest questioner at the hearing. Wheeler said Momyer could not support Symington's bombing thesis either. McNamara agreed and said Momyer was excellent at the hearing too.

McNamara said the Senate Committee was trying to prove: 1) we can win it by air and Naval power in the north; 2) there is a gap between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Defense Secretary or between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the President. McNamara acknowledged that "sure there are small differences but these are worked out." McNamara said the proof of what a good job Wheeler did was that there were no stories even though they were out to get stories.

Wheeler said "Symington is on Phuc Yen like a broken record."

McNamara said there are a total of 27 Migs in North Vietnam. These Migs aren't shooting down our planes. Why risk lives of American pilots over these?

The President asked when would we get our additional 45,000 men in there - in October?

Wheeler answered that a brigade of about 5,000 would be there in October. There will be an additional division around the first of the year, about February, 1968. The rest Westmoreland will get from in-country, etc. and everything should be there by the first of July.

McNamara said Westmoreland will get the 19 battalions by about the first of March.

The President asked when Vietnam will put in their 65,000 additional troops.

Wheeler said probably not until after the elections.

Rusk pointed out that they were freezing some in the ranks now, however.

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The President asked if the election is cooling off a bit.

Rusk replied that Leonard Marks received a report from his man in Vietnam - Zorthien - which said there has been a real change in the civilian candidates exploiting the press.

The President suggested that some speeches be worked up to show how the Saigon politicians made dummies of the press corps there and how the politicians were leading the press around by the nose. President said Resnick might make this speech. The President directed Rostow to get up some speeches. The President told J. Jones if Rostow couldn't get this done to have Ben Wattenberg write up a speech.

The President inquired about the observers in Vietnam.

Rusk replied that Bunker cabled for fewer than 25.

The President said to get a good group ready. He suggested 3 governors, 3 mayors, 3 veterans 3 newspaper people, 3 radio-tv, 3 from labor. The President recommended the Chairmen of the Armed Forces and Foreign Relations Committees of both Houses to be invited. He said Fulbright won't go any farther than Hawaii.

Rusk added it's not safe for Fulbright to go farther than Hawaii because nobody in Asia wants to see Fulbright.

McNamara suggested three from League of Women Voters go. McNamara also recommended Archbishop Lucey of Texas. He said Lucey is terrific on Vietnam.

The President said Republican Governor Rhodes of Ohio is ready to go. President suggested Arthur Fleming, Archbishop Lucey and Billy Graham go.

Wheeler asked if the Secretaries of State and Defense should go.

The President said he didn't want Rusk or McNamara ever to go again. He didn't want any official "above the rank of first lieutenant" to go there because "I just catch hell for two weeks before they go and then after they come back." The President said he counted 15 crises in the last two months. He ticked some off -- Westmoreland and troops, McNamara, railroad strike, Middle East flareup, riots.

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The President said Romney got the jump on us on the riots. Because of this, Romney's popularity goes up and the President's goes down. He said Romney took that one away from us. It was Romney's riot in Romney's state and Romney couldn't handle it even though he preaches local action. It will catch up with him, but Romney stayed with the press while Cy Vance and General Throckmorton did their job.

Wheeler says he counts the war in Vietnam as having gone on for 2 years. He counts the start of the ground war in October 1965.

The President asked how many in South Vietnam - 12-15 million?

Wheeler said about 15 million and replied that the Vietcong are about 4 million.

The President wondered aloud, "it seems like with all of the South Vietnamese and all the American troops, we could whip 'em."

The President asked if the ICC will find anything in Cambodia.

"No" Wheeler replied, "it will be a whitewash."

The President asked when will the targets in Vietnam be cleared.

"Never," said Wheeler.

McNamara said "It's movement -- about 90% are against moving targets."

The President commented on the picture in today's New York Times showing about 20 North Vietnamese troops in water re-building a bridge. He suggested this picture be blown up along with another picture of North Vietnamese troops shooting American soldiers. He said the two pictures can be shown to Congressional committees and you can ask, "do you want their boys doing this (repairing bridges) or shooting your men." (This is in answer to bombing critics.)

McNamara pointed to the map and said that much of the five divisions (North Vietnamese) have moved north of the DMZ -- sometimes as much as 100 miles north.

Wheeler said this is because they have suffered heavy casualties in the DMZ and they are probably short of supplies. He said the drought has hurt them. They probably have moved north for re-training and re-supply.

Rusk advised that Russia may say in the future that the United States always justified its bombing of the north in order to save the lives of American troops at the DMZ who were facing the North Vietnamese divisions. Rusk said Russia may say that we knew those divisions had moved, but yet we continued to bomb.

Wheeler said whole regiments had pulled back. He said that south of the DMZ today, there are not more than 10 or 12,000 North Vietnamese troops. These are mostly for reconnaissance or holding the line.

The President asked if their (North Vietnam) casualties amounted to 100,000.

Rusk replied that the population in the north never hears this.

Wheeler said he had evidence they (North Vietnam) have lowered their draft age to 16. He said a Vietnamese officer touring a battlefield noted that many of the dead were 13, 14 and 15 year old boys.

Rusk said their manpower is committed or being chewed up. He said ~~Viet~~ North Vietnam is having a manpower shortage. Rusk and McNamara said we should watch the 300,000 enemy in the south because that's where the 100,000 casualties are. Rusk said Vietcong morale is low. Wheeler answered the President that of the 300,000 enemy in the south, about 55,000 are North Vietnamese. McNamara commented that these are the ones who have a ticket to death.

The meeting adjourned at 9:55 p.m. The President told Rusk and McNamara he wanted to move on a group of observers tomorrow.

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