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#54 meeting notes	luncheon meeting with advisors <i>sanitized 10-11-83</i> <i>NLS 82-85</i> Top Secret 4 p.	3/22/68	A

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LUNCHEON MEETING, MARCH 22, 1968

ATTENDING THE MEETING WERE:

The President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary Clifford
Secretary Fowler
Attorney General Clark
Justice Fortas
William Bundy
McGeorge Bundy
Walt Rostow
Harry McPherson
George Christian

The President opened the proceedings with the statement that Senator Hayden was not going to run for re-election. He said that he was glad that he was not taking on Goldwater and that Hayden was one of the finest and best men he had ever known. The President also said that he had talked to Governor Rockefeller and told him that the people close to him had mixed reactions on the Governor's decision. "Those who want me to run were glad you stepped out, and those who do not want me to run are sorry you are not going to be in the race."

The President referred to Secretary Freeman's confrontation with jeering students at the University of Wisconsin and said he thought Freeman handled the matter very well.

Justice Fortas said that he had seen Leon Keyserling on television, and it was the the meanest thing he had ever seen directed against Bobby Kennedy.

The President said he feels there has been a dramatic shift in public opinion on the war, that a lot of people are really ready to surrender without knowing they are following a party line.

Secretary Clifford said he thought Senator Kennedy was too "shrill" this early. He referred to Kennedy's comments holding the President

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responsible for all the evils of society. Secretary Clifford said at this stage a moderate appeal would be better for Kennedy.

The President asked Secretary Clifford to check and see if the National Guard and Reservists who have been called up are doing anything. He said two of his best backers had told him that their sons did not have anything to do, and intimated that Pat Nugent had told him the same thing. He suggested that Secretary Clifford might get Rivers to take somebody and make a study of manpower in the services. He said he went through this during the Kennedy call-ups and hated to see it happening again.

The group then began work on Harry McPherson's draft of a speech incorporating suggestions from McGeorge Bundy, Bill Bundy and Walt Rostow.

Secretary Fowler said the speech did not have a "sense of crisis" on inflation. Fowler also contended that we continue to play to people who are against the tax and budget cutting program. "If we pass this program, it will be the 268 conservative votes. The liberals don't have the guts to vote for a tax bill. They don't want either taxes or a cut."

During the discussions on the speech, the President and Secretary Rusk left the room to talk on the telephone to Sargent Shriver in Madrid. During their absence, McGeorge Bundy said that extreme care had to be taken in the President's statements. That a speech like the one last Saturday will cost the President the election. Secretary Clifford agreed, saying that the President's Saturday speech to the National Alliance of Businessmen had caused concern among thoughtful people because the President seemed to be saying that he was going to win the war no matter what the cost in American lives.

When the President and Secretary Rusk returned, Secretary Clifford advised that Joe Fowler take the economic part of the speech and he would take the call-up part and they would try to make these sections stronger and more palatable. He wanted to tie in the American call-up with the additional Vietnamese soldiers.

The President suggested that his advisers should get together on their thinking. He said he felt that Congress was going to interpret the speech as pressure on the tax payers and that others would say it was a speech for the campaign year if he made the address before a Joint Session. He said he thought he should make the statement from his office on television, talking about taxes, troops and reserves, negotiations and peace.

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The President said it had been his feeling that when the weather is bad we should take advantage of possibilities for changes in bombing. He said we might provide a circle around Hanoi and Haiphong again and wait two weeks on possible developments.

Secretary Clifford said the major concern of the people is that they do not see victory ahead. He said the military has not come up with a plan for victory. He thought the people were discouraged as more men go in and are chewed up in a bottomless pit. Since the men Westmoreland wants won't get there until summer they really aren't going to be any use to him in the emergency. Secretary Clifford suggested that possibly we should call up the reserves but not commit any troops other than those we had promised Westmoreland. He said we could be training now and make the decision later. He said he thought support troops only should be sent.

Secretary Clifford suggested that the President have General Wheeler meet General Westmoreland at Manila and discuss it with him.

The President asked for opinions on how to proceed on more peace moves. Secretary Clifford suggested that de-escalation be started by a limited cessation of bombing above the 20th parallel, with reciprocal action by the enemy by stopping shelling from the DMZ or just north of the DMZ.

Secretary Rusk said this would be alright if there were no hard conditions on the enemy. He did not believe Hanoi would reciprocate.

Bill Bundy said that in Bunker's judgment this would cause major difficulties in Saigon. He said he would be skeptical of the idea but had no alternative.

Walt Rostow said Hanoi would know full well that we were taking advantage of the bad weather. He said it might have some effect on doves and some effect in Europe, but would not succeed and would cause them problems. Secretary Rusk said a critical time for a peace offensive is later after the winter fighting has subsided. He said that if we do this and the enemy hit Saigon, we would have to be prepared to hit Hanoi very hard in retaliation.

Secretary Fowler said he did not think the speech need to commit us to measured escalation.

Justice Fortas said the decision would be criticized as too little, too late and insincere. He said the speech lacks an essential ingredient in that it does not explain why we are in Vietnam.

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If we do not talk in terms of Communism, it is like a production of Hamlet without the prince. He said he would emphasize the invasion of Laos by the North Vietnamese and the brutal murders of the civilians during the Tet truce. He said he did not believe the people would give the President the support we need in the speech's present form.

Mac Bundy said he thought Secretary Clifford's proposal would have a short life diplomatically, but he was not against it. He agreed with Rostow that if you wanted to do more later, it is smarter to do less now.

George Christian
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