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#2a meeting notes	open 10-6-83 NLS 82-51 cabinet room meeting on Vietnam TS 2 p.	5/1/68	A
#3 meeting notes	hand written notes from which #2a were transcribed open 10-6-83 NLS 82-51	5/1/68	A

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Meeting Notes File, Box 3

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MAY 4, 1968 - 6:30 p.m.

MEETING IN CABINET ROOM ON VIETNAM

The President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary Clifford
Justice Fortas
General Taylor
General Wheeler
Mr. Rostow
George Christian

SERVICE SET

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 4, 1968

Saturday, 6:30 p.m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: George Christian *GC*

Attached are notes of the May 4, 1968 meeting in the Cabinet Room.

Attending were:

The President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary Clifford
Justice Fortas
General Taylor
General Wheeler
Mr. Rostow
George Christian

SERVICE SET

Meeting began: 4:30 p. m.
Meeting ended: 5:30 p. m.

ja

~~TOP SECRET~~

MEETING IN THE CABINET ROOM, MAY 4, 1968

THE PRESIDENT: Walt and Bus will explain what is happening.

GENERAL WHEELER: Starting at midnight their time, we had a number of attacks, mostly airfields, also city of Kontum.

Information we have is that the attack in Danang area was light. But Chu Lai and Pleiku airfields were temporarily closed. Overall, attacks relatively light.

Could well be prelude to attack later this week. This was one of their objectives -- air capability -- in TET offensive.

It will be tomorrow night before they renew attacks.

Hit 18 places.

PRESIDENT: Dean, what is the significance?

SECRETARY RUSK: I think we can expect pretty heavy fighting as we move into talks. Have no trouble going to 20th but rather the news carry their attacks good first.

GENERAL WHEELER: Have sent carrier command an alert message, he recommended no movement of his search and rescue vessels without their discovery.

SECRETARY CLIFFORD: What is behind it? I believe it is their reaction to licking on Warsaw. I would be surprised if this is prelude to wide offensive. Too early in negotiations. We're limited in retaliation. This not time to use retaliation -- save Than Hoa for now. We'll get a more dramatic opportunity.

This attack of theirs will disconcert world opinion.

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Authority NLS 82-51 ~~TOP SECRET~~
By 112, NARS, Date 10-6-83

SERVICE SET

~~TOP SECRET~~

- 2 -

SECRETARY CLIFFORD: Bus, I'd get ready for attack on Than Hoa, and maybe others. Psychological value of getting ships and planes in place. Keep in position for a while, even if we don't use.

SECRETARY RUSK: I don't think there will be indignation at Hanoi, only at us if we retaliate.

MR. ROSTOW: I think their intention is to do more than slap on wrists over Warsaw.

THE PRESIDENT: Don't agree that Warsaw was a big victory. Think they wanted Paris.

MR. ROSTOW: They have a fixed picture of negotiations. Think it would be easier for us to get back to the 20th now than after Harriman is in Paris. Proceed to selected target between 19th and 20th.

JUSTICE FORTAS: Perhaps they are testing to see if your hands are tied by dove sentiment. But have a hunch it is too soon for counter-reaction. Would wipe out great gain and make negotiation more difficult. You might issue a statement to help build up sentiment.

SECRETARY RUSK: I don't think we should leave the impression that anybody's hands are tied in the South.

PRESIDENT: I think we ought to background --

-- 35,000 infiltrated this month

-- hit airfields today

-- doesn't look like they are very serious

Then authorize the ships to move and hold.

~~TOP SECRET~~

SERVICE SET

~~TOP SECRET~~

- 3 -

JUSTICE FORTAS: Think we have to get away from infiltration as only reason for concern. Been using vastly increased flow for purposes of attacking airfields; tie infiltration to their military actions.

GENERAL WHEELER: It would be fatal for us to be forced into de facto cease fire.

SECRETARY RUSK: What's going on in Ashau?

GENERAL WHEELER: Finding caches of weapons, anti-aircraft guns, rice -- not as many troops as thought. Believe he's in Laos. Weather turning bad; Westmoreland will have to move out in next three or four days.

SECRETARY CLIFFORD: Get ships out. May have to get ready not only for Than Hoa, but also Hanoi and Haiphong.

SECRETARY RUSK: I think we should look for bigger game. When I asked Dobrynin if he would be for return to Geneva Laos accords if we stop bombing, he said "Yes." That means stopping infiltration.

Background only on:

80,000 - 100,000 last 4 months --

April record month.

I will talk to Ball about "Meet the Press".

~~TOP SECRET~~

① Pres ② Wheeler ③ Rostow ④ Rusk ⑤ Clifford
⑥ Taylor ⑦ Christian ⑧ Fortas [Cab Room 5/4/68]

Pres - Walt, Bus - explain what's happening.

Wheeler - starting at midnight their time,
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By us, NARS, Date 10-6-83

(2)

Bush - think we can expect pretty heavy fighting as we move into Tokyo. Have no trouble going to 20th but rather the news carry their attacks good first.

Wheeler - ~~about~~ have sent carrier command an alert message, he recommended no movement of his search + rescue vessels w/o their discovering. th

Clifford - what behind it? I believe it's their reaction to licking on Warsaw, I would be surprised if this is prelude to a wide offensive. Too early in negotiations. We're limited in retaliation. This not time to use retaliation - save Than Hox for now. We'll get a more dramatic opportunity.

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SERVICE SET

(3)

Bus, I'd get ready for attack on Than Hoo, & maybe others. Psychological value of getting ships and planes in place. Keep in position for a while, even if we don't use.

Rusk - I don't think there'll be indignation at Hanoi, only at us if we retaliate.

Rostow - I think their intention is to do more than slap our ~~side~~ wrists over Warsaw.

Pres - don't agree Warsaw was a big victory. Think they wanted Paris.

Rostow - they have a fixed picture of negotiations. Think it would be easier for us to get back to the 20th now than after Hammann in Paris. Proceed to selected targets between 19th and 20th.

(4)

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Pres - I think we ought to ^①background -
- 35,000 infiltrated this month -
- hit airfields today.
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② Then authorize the ships to move and hold.

(5)

Fortas - Think we have to get away from infiltration as only reason for concern. Been using vastly increased force for purposes of attacking air fields; tie infiltration to their military actions.

Rush Wheeler - it would be fatal for us to be forced into de facto cease fire.

Rush - what's going on in Ashau?

Wheeler - finding caches of weapons, anti-aircraft guns, rice - not as many troops as thought. Believe he's in Laos. Weather turning bad; Westy will have to move out in next 3-4 days.

Clifford - get ships out. May have to get ready not only for Than Hoa, but also Hanoi + Haiphong.

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Rush - I think we should look for bigger game. When I asked Dobrynin if he would ^{be for} return to Geneva Laos accounts if we stop bombing, he said "yes." That means stopping infiltration.

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