

Meeting began: 1:40 p  
Meeting ended: 3:25 p

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S  
LUNCHEON MEETING  
WITH  
SENIOR AMERICAN ADVISORS

January 29, 1968  
The Family Dining Room

The President: How many intelligence ships do the Soviets have compared with the U. S. ?

Secretary McNamara: It depends on how you count them. The Soviets have 15 to 20. We have five.

The President: There should be an independent investigation of this incident and all of the complexities involved by a good panel. I would suggest Admiral McDonald, George Ball, General Ridgeway, an Army General, and a good Naval Admiral.

General Wheeler: I would recommend a later commander in career than General Ridgeway. I would suggest General Taylor.

The President: Before I select a lawyer I always look at the jury. We should have a man who will appeal to the various elements that will be judging us.

The GI Bill of Rights is educating 400,000 and enabling 200,000 to buy houses. (The President was reading from a proposed message to the Congress on Veterans which will be sent up on Tuesday.)

Secretary McNamara: Time Magazine said the reservists who were called up had good morale. Newsweek said many of them were grumbling.

George Ball: I have seen a cynical assertion that the reserves were called under the pretext of Korea but for actual use in Vietnam.

Secretary McNamara: That is untrue. We have 361 planes going to South Korea without pulling any away from Vietnam or Southeast Asia or Western Europe.

If we get the Pueblo and its crew back, we will de-activate the reservists in all probability. The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with this in a meeting we have just completed.

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6

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By CG, NARA Date 9-10-99

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- 2 -

The President: There is no need to call up the reserves for Vietnam. In fact, General Westmoreland would rather go without reserves in Vietnam. We called the reserves to substitute in this country for units which are being sent to South Korea. Of course we could call up reserves at anytime without Korea if we wanted.

Walt, would you review where we stand with my outside counselors who are here today?

Walt Rostow: We have discussed three principal issues. Then we went through the ten military alternatives and added at least one suggestion.

We reported to the group that we have put our position in writing to the North Koreans at Panmunjon.

We have discussed the Rusk letter to Gromyko. In it, Gromyko said he knew for sure that we had entered Korean territorial waters because the ship's captain had said he had entered territorial waters in his own handwriting. We do not believe he did. But we cannot deny it because we do not have the captain's log.

The President: On that point, are we reasonably sure that we are right? What are my odds?

Secretary McNamara: The odds are three to one that we are right. We do not believe the commander got into territorial waters. We know both from our own messages and from the messages of the North Koreans that he was seized outside territorial waters. The captain's orders were clear. The conditions were precise. But as Nick Katzenbach has said, even if he did go into North Korean waters the action which the North Koreans took is not a very appropriate one.

Secretary Katzenbach: The evidence is quite good and quite strong that the detention was made in territorial waters. We have a fix on the Pueblo at 8:30 when he was 25 miles out. He must have been outside of that area several hours before.

Secretary Rusk: The ship was on radio silence. We do not have the log. The captain broke radio silence the day before and broke it when accosted by the North Koreans.

Secretary Katzenbach: We still would not know for sure if the ship had gone into territorial waters. We do not believe that it did. It would not show on the ship's log unless the captain had something special to report. Otherwise he would log items as he regularly does three times a day.

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- 3 -

Walt Rostow: What Gromyko has said is that the North Koreans have it in the captain's own hand writing that he did violate territorial waters.

The President: We do know at the times he gave fixes that he was not in territorial waters and could not have gotten there.

We should leave ourselves a loophole until we know precisely what happened. We do know what his orders were.

Clark Clifford: If we see something down the road which is attractive, we may want to leave ourselves a little room for a minor admission if that is what they want for return of the ship and the men.

Secretary Rusk: We gave him instructions not to go inside of the 13 mile limit. We must keep in mind there might have been a navigational error of one mile on our side and one mile on the North Korean side. If you assume for a moment that both made errors, that could place the ship 11 miles from shore. We still could not accept their claim of being only 7 miles away.

The President: All of you should get together and have your very best legal minds work out what we should say.

Secretary McNamara: I have five lawyers working on this now. We should have a defense briefing by tomorrow night.

The President: Let's make our own study to review the facts, ask all the questions and then present this information to the committee. We must make sure we don't do more damage with our own speeches.

Secretary Rusk: A public announcement of our own investigation would throw doubt on our own position.

The President: What about a private investigation?

Secretary Rusk: That is fine.

Secretary Katzenbach: This would be a broad investigation, not just limited to the position of the ship.

The President: Yes, that is right. It would answer all the questions which are being raised. I suggest all of you get together and decide on an impartial board.

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- 4 -

I would put on it Admiral McDonald, George Ball and General Mark Clark.

Secretary Rusk: Mundt said you had no business having the ship there anyway.

Walt Rostow: What about the questions of putting the problem before the World Court. Each side could select an arbitrator and let the President of the World Court select a third name.

There are ten items for possible military action:

1. Airborne reconnaissance.  
The group is against this. The photographic coverage has been excellent from the Oxcart and Black Shield missions.

For the moment we do not need it. The group is against the use of drones. To have one shot down would be very bad.

2. The build-up of aircraft in South Korea.  
The group thinks this action is good and that we need it to back up our diplomatic efforts.

3. Replacing the Pueblo with the U. S. S. Banner.  
The group feels we should not carry this out now. After the matter settles we may want to re-establish our position under international law and replace the Pueblo with an armed vessel.

4. Send divers to get the crypto gear.  
The group felt this was a fruitless effort which would not pay off. To do this would require armed escorts and risk a possible confrontation.

5. Mining Wonsan Harbor.  
This would require 17 sorties. It might lead to more trouble. It would not hurt them much.

Secretary Rusk interrupted to say that many of these alternatives had been deferred pending contacts with the North Koreans and contacts through the United Nations. The Secretary predicted there would be a meeting.

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6. Seizure of North Korean vessels.  
This action would be taken only if we were to determine that the men and ships would not be returned promptly. This idea has certain appeal. McGeorge Bundy liked this as a sanction for them and to encourage them to let this ship and men go.  
  
There is a difficulty on this, since it is unclear which ships to pick up and their value.
7. Selected air strikes over North Korea.  
This was felt to be excessive. This would require a very substantial air engagement and would heighten the conflict.
8. Raids across the DMZ.  
The group felt this to be too risky.
9. A naval blockade.  
The group felt this to run a high risk of retaliatory action and we do not know when the blockade would end.
10. Application of free world economic pressure.  
Korean trade is not great with the free world. We would have trouble getting many of the countries such as Japan aboard.

Walt Rostow said consideration was being given to advising the Soviets of actual or possible retaliatory action. Ambassador Thompson recommended against this.

It was generally agreed that no further reference to any use or non-use of the hot line should be made by George Christian or any other briefing officers.

Walt Rostow said that Ambassador Lodge had raised the question of having bombing practice in South Korea using bombing ranges there.

Rostow said the build-up that we are undertaking there now is impressive both to North Koreans and to the other countries involved.

Cyrus Vance: I would recommend further reconnaissance flights, particularly more Oxcart missions over the DMZ to determine any possible build-up of North Korean forces.

~~TOP SECRET~~

- 6 -

Walt Rostow: The group also considered the type of statement the President might want to make. We will have a draft by the end of the day.

The President: I want to say as little as I can. That three-minute statement last week was re-assuring.

Goldberg thinks that the U. S. people and the world believe in a decision by a court.

After we run out all of our moves in the United Nations, we must consider if we are willing to go into an international world court. There, we could submit all of our evidence. They could submit theirs. Goldberg thinks we should prepared to do that.

George Ball: There are problems with a world court. It recognizes North Korea as a state. But we should consider the use of an impartial tribunal.

The President: Shouldn't we answer all these questions about our being spread too thin?

George Ball: I think Admiral McDonald can do this.

Cyrus Vance: You cannot submit this matter to a tribunal until you see what happens at the meeting in Panmunjon.

The President: I want you (Vance), and Mac Bundy to give me a statement to make in case there is one which should be made.

Secretary Rusk: This group is paralyzed because of the Panmonjun conference. They needed to know what will come out of that before they can make any kind of statement.

The President: I still want Bundy, George Ball and Cyrus Vance to get me a statement on what I might say, if anything.

McGeorge Bundy: You have a promising pair of contacts in the Soviets and in North Korea. I would say that my diplomats are at work and I am not going to say anything right now.

If you look at the courses available they are very unattractive. No one ever thought a small power such as North Korea would take offensive action against a major power in a situation such as this.

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- 7 -

Any warfare will pin these boys in rather than get them out. We are too big a power to start a war over this. The punishment of picking up their ships fits the crime.

You do not know what happened precisely in the ten days the Pueblo was on station. As long as the commander is in hock you will not know. I would not be making any statements about the number of planes which we have moved to South Korea. Somebody will ask, O.K., what are you going to do now that you have them here?

Secretary Rusk: In terms of parallels the shooting down of the RB-47 in 1960 is the closest. It took seven months to get those two fliers back.

General Taylor: You never know exactly what the motives of the North Koreans are in this matter. If it was to embarrass us, they have done that. If it was to inflict a loss on our intelligence, they have done that.

They may be seeking to cause trouble with our allies. They may want to interrupt the flow of Korean aid to Vietnam.

We should make every effort to keep South Korean plans going as scheduled in sending supplies to Vietnam.

The President then read a memo from a distinguished American. (The President later identified this as General Eisenhower.) This memo outlined what courses this "distinguished American thought were offered to us."  
(That memo is attached as appendix A.)

Clark Clifford: Any way you look at it this incident is a loser. We cannot come out even. We must cut our losses. I doubt we will ever want to use any one of the ten military alternatives. Of course one can never know what the exact situation was unless we talk with the captain. We must make some kind of disposition of the matter.

I believe consideration should be given to the idea of going to the world court. There are nine members on it, and they have some members friendly to them. In conclusion we end up having taken some sort of a bump. The next time they try it, let's be ready to give it back to them.

Secretary Rusk: Let's look at how we formulate this court matter.

Secretary Katzenbach: I am inclined to think the President should have the Leadership in.

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- 8 -

The President: I am having the Leadership in for breakfast tomorrow.

Secretary Katzenbach: I do not think we should ask Congress for anything before we get all the facts.

Secretary McNamara: Within the next 72 hours we will announce an increase in our military aid to South Korea. This will show the North Koreans the price they will pay for this incident is heavy.

The President: Walt, will you take the questions we are getting asked most often and have them answered for me? We will tell them that we are still exploring the diplomatic alternatives; we do not want to add to our problems. We will have General Wheeler explain the military pitch. Secretary Rusk will discuss the diplomatic moves.

Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge: This situation has a lot of qualities of a kidnapping case. If you use force you kill the victim. We do not want to kill the boys or open up a second front. The reason I talked about bombing maneuvers in South Korea was to raise the feeling of awe.

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