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5 August 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: White House Staff Meeting, 5 August 1964.

1. Mr. Bundy presided.

2. Southeast Asia. Much of today's session was spent discussing various aspects of the Southeast Asia situation, and the entire waterfront was covered. Before getting into specifics, I should state that the general tone of the remarks, especially Bundy's, was that thus far everything the US had done was well in hand. As to possible future developments, there was uncertainty, the feeling being that both friendly and unfriendly reactions would become better known during the day.

Bundy began by saying that it is difficult to understand the DRV motives in attacking US warships. He said there obviously was some relation between the recent covert attacks on DRV maritime bases, but how much was not clear. Further, he recognized the DRV might have feared stepped-up US actions against them and decided to act. Still it was difficult to conceive what kind of image they had of the US to think we could stand for such attacks.

Later in the meeting I came back to the point of DRV intentions by asking what steps we were taking to find out what Hanoi was thinking. I recalled that at one point we were trying to cultivate the Canadians to perform this chore. Bundy responded that things were being done but he chose not to mention them specifically. He added that one problem was that even after an outsider talked with Hanoi, it was difficult to determine what the DRV had in mind.

Wilson of USIA asked what evidence we could offer publicly that the attacks had taken place. Bundy replied that Rowan had stressed last night the importance of making the evidence public, and he was right. On the first attack, the evidence would be pretty good. On the second one the amount of evidence we have today is less than we had yesterday. This resulted primarily from correlating bits and pieces of information eliminating double counting and mistaken signals. This much seemed certain: There was an attack. How many PT boats

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were involved, how many torpedoes were fired, etc. -- all this was still somewhat uncertain. This matter may be of some importance since Hanoi has denied making the second attack.

Douglas Cater, sitting in at his first staff meeting, raised a question about the Congressional resolution on SE Asia. He said he had not thought it through completely, but the logic behind the resolution troubled him somewhat, and he also questioned use of the Middle East precedent -- that turning out a not too successful venture. The logic that troubled him was how an attack on US forces specifically justified a resolution in favor of maintenance of freedom in SE Asia. Bundy, in reply, jokingly told him perhaps the matter should not be thought through too far. For his own part, he welcomed the recent events as justification for a resolution the Administration had wanted for some time.

Other points of interest mentioned:

Bromley Smith thought it prudent to emphasize that our attacks were reprisals. Thus he thought that restrikes or follow-on air attacks should not continue over an extended period of days. He asked who would approve restrikes. After the meeting I confirmed what Bundy thought: that authority for restrikes would come from Washington, at least from McNamara and probably from the White House. In the same vein, Bromley Smith also thought we should emphasize that "iron" bombs are being used, not nuclear ones. No one thought this a problem; this word is out already.

Some one asked what would happen if the ChiComs brought their air power on the DRV. Bundy cautiously said that our people thought we could handle them. He then looked at me and said, "General LeMay doesn't think in terms of the enemy, does he? He assumes they won't be there." I made some response to the effect that General LeMay assumes some of his people will take care of the enemy for him; he doesn't have to worry too much about that. All this was said in good humor, and the matter dropped.

Referring to the President's meeting with the Congressional "leadership" yesterday, Bundy commented that "leadership" was a

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fussy word in this case, is that there was little Congressmen could do in the way of leading in a situation in which the President's role was so primary.

6. President's speech. The President originally was to speak of the dangers of nuclear war at Syracuse today. He first, among others, decided today was the wrong day; so a new subject was chosen. SE Asia will be covered, to some extent, at least.

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W. Y. S.