

Ben Read (head of executive secretariat, who functions as a sort of mac bundy for the secy. of state)

may 4, 1967

The Tuesday Lunch:

Lasts about two hours, sometimes occurs twice a week. Accounts for a good share of the ~~the~~ policy-making and decision-making on foreign affairs, except for emergency situations. The members are Rusk, McNamara, Rostow, Christian, sometimes Helms and occasionally Katzenback, especially if he is about ~~to be~~ ~~acting~~ acting Secretary for a spell. President has lots of contacts individually with the same men, and sheer proximity gives Rostow the most contact, though not necessarily on the most important things. But he is in and out of the President's office. Johnson may talk by phone to Rusk six or ten times a day, or go for a day or two without talking at all.

The agenda is put together by Read and Rostow, with State, McNamara and Rostow probably providing about an equal share of the items. ~~McNamara~~ McNamara, the great efficiency expert, is the most disorderly, especially since Califano left; he has nobody, apparently, who is in direct ~~charge~~ charge of follow-up, except that he presumably confides in, and is debriefed by, Vance. Read debriefs Rusk, but only on results, and bits and pieces. Reid doesn't know what position Rusk takes, and anybody who says he does, other than McNamara, Rostow, ~~the~~ the President or Christian is talking through his hat. This distinctly doesn't mean Rusk doesn't take positions -- this is a bum rap. It means that he doesn't go around town saying what his position is, on the theory that the President ~~is~~ has the responsibility in the end and that his is the only position that matters. Rusk suffers by comparison with McNamara, who is all things to all men, a real Janus operation, takes on protective colorization with whomever he's talking. Amazing how he gets away with it, and remains the idol of people with categorially different views of the war.

The hawk-dove over-simplification distorts Rusk and McNamara viewpoints, which are infinitely more complex. Rusk is no more all-Hawk than McNamara is all-Dove. It's practically like the war itself, a case-by-case situation where sides change, opinions change, depending on the issue. There are very few yes-no, black-or-white issues, and therefore very few easy categorizations.

Undoubtedly, the present system doesn't bring in as much dissent and other-sides-of-arguments as Bundy did, and Moyers & Hayes Redmon did afterwards, to some degree. They practically ran an underground, with second and third tier disgruntleds dishing out dissents for direct relay to the White House ~~and~~ the President. (Read was part of this operation) But Bundy, of course, had a quite different relationship with Kennedy; and Moyers role was haphazard, and not so frequent though it produced some significant contributions to policy. (Africa is an example which can be ~~is~~ cited at length if needed). Rostow is much more of an advocate. Furthermore, the policy being pursued ~~is~~ ~~is~~ when he arrived at the White House, was and is essentially

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a Rostow policy. This probably accounts in large part for the Johnson-Rostow rapport, which surprised everybody. Betting at state was that Rostow wouldn't amount to much as the White House. But he appeals to Johnson also because he puts the President's programs in grand historic perspective, makes them sound like major developments in the sweep of history, as part of a consistent, logical, and intellectual pattern. All Presidents like this, and Johnson all the more since his capacity to attract professors has always been compared, with Kennedy's, unfavorably.

Rostow works well with Rusk, and they probably do have an understanding that Rostow will not work against Rusk's designs and intents without telling him so. Nothing in writing, but an understanding, before Rusk went along with the Rostow appointment. Rusk did not want a repeat of the Bundy operation, when papers were slipped to the President by Bundy about which Rusk knew nothing, and which sometimes collided with Rusk's view.

The Tuesday set-up probably works to the detriment of the President getting all the arguments. It was safer when Moyers or Bundy were consciously trying to widen choices, keep open options. But the President does make specific requests for the other side of proposals or arguments. However, this group is not large enough to bring in enough diversity. These are tired men, and they know each other so well, and are so comfortable together, that widening the group, and the choice, is an effort and a complication, and they naturally don't do it enough.

But the agendas are pretty broad. Too many items are on it because of the pressure of events, like an impending state visit, or a presidential trip, or some development which forces a decision, and not enough ~~is~~ that spring from an initiative within the government or from a ~~king~~ prudent look ahead at some situation which looks troublesome and might be improved by preventive action. Usually about a dozen items, but sometimes only one. Not long ago, a very useful long look at Indonesia took up the whole lunch. This was Brom Smith's idea; he is the one man who is responsible for looking ahead, trying to anticipate trouble and he comes up with a good many of the not-so-obvious agenda items. Vietnam, one way or the other, is almost always discussed. Lately ABM's, the non-proliferation treaty, the Kennedy round, Greece, are some of the others that have taken up a lot of time. The Harriman operation serves up some good, some bad ideas, and we have tried a number of them. This group meets once weekly, with Harriman, Siscoe, Gene Rostow, Read, Tom Hughes, Chet Cooper, sometimes McNaughton, who has an invitation, and maybe somebody from CIA.

System is admittedly a little slipshod. Matamara serves up his agenda items by calling Rostow, usually the night before. Nobody takes notes. Rostow and Read do not carefully check to see that they have covered everything, though they do compare notes. Read has no way of knowing how much he's getting of the whole, however, and ~~with~~ nothing is formally put in writing, unless there are operational orders or action cables which are agreed upon. Stuff that gets lost in the shuffle

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is put back on the agenda again, apparently a little like piling hay on a ~~wagon~~ moving wagon, with a little slipping off as you go along, and being thrown back on.

Overestimates of diplomatic risk matched by over-estimates of military success -- maybe they balance each other out. ~~make~~ ~~everybody~~ that much more cautious and suspicious.

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Bundy: Thinks this system probably ideally suited, both for the nature of the war, and the nature of the man it serves, in whatever priority you want to assign.

McNamara hates Rostow.

Goldberg no comparison to Stevenson, who ~~x~~ was really rather ineffective. Goldberg does his homework, comes down here and wrestles through things with assistant secretaries, presents reasoned, well-prepared proposals, and gets a hearing, if though the current phase of the war leaves Goldberg and the UN rather out of things.

You need a fluid system for a fluid problem, with all options open in the sense that the war could end tomorrow, and spread to China, or Cambodia or Laos, or begin winding down. It has no clear and final objective, it is psychological and political and military. there are no good parallels, though Rostow apparently sees one in World War II bombing surveys. He has a higher view of the efficacy of bombing than most people.

Problems recut in Vietnam, like what do you bomb, whereas we only had to face the Yalu issue once.

Dissent is another unique feature. Regularly there is talk of a resolution in Congress --not a declaration of war, but an updated Tonkin. But it must collapse over at the White House, presumably when the leadership is sounded out. Apparently the political problems are the argument against it, that and the danger that it might stir more dissent than it would be worth.

Decision to go north and land combat troops was staffed out meticulously. where we erred was that we did not foresee the extent of combat involvement and the need for troops and possibly most people thought bombing would change Hanoi's mind faster. But we had considered all the possibilities. Who will ever know whether Johnson would have done it if he had known how far he would have to go. But sure Kennedy would have gone down substantially the same road. Saigon was about to go under, had to do something.

Tommy Thompson still very active, but not as close, naturally, though everything on Viet am that might effect Russians is passed along to him for comments. Kohler has yet to achieve the influence Thompson had with Johnson.

There is danger that success, in escalating without inviting response, could have lulling effect, reduce the effectiveness of those who have cautioned against it in the past and whose alarm has proved baseless. But we are aware of this very danger.

One of my jobs (Bundy) is to check out proposals and decisions pending to see if President is getting rounded ~~view.~~ v-v-

May 4, 1967

BEN READ:

Mrs. LBJ also drops in sometime on ~~xxxxx~~ Tuesday lunches.

Rostow does have very fixed position on Vietnam, unlike ~~Bundy~~ MacBundy on most issues who was more the traditional staff chief. Rostow is in position to tilt options and arguments and Read indicated he does.

In addition to getting debriefed by Rusk, Read also gets regularly debriefed by Rostow on Tuesday lunches.

Agrees that Rusk very definitely intended to signal a change of mood by his hard-line briefing of Friday. Read said this followed a lunch w Rusk had with Bundy. He said they felt it was time to cut-down line that U.S. was falling over-itself in ~~FRANKIE~~ groping for a diplomatic out to the war--because it looked like it was getting counter-productive. In view of military situation, with heavy forces on DMZ, thought it time to shift mood to grimmer tone.

AGREES that risk-crying at each ~~x~~ step up ladder which encountered no great repercussion puts ~~xx~~ risk-criers in weakened position. But who can be sure what move may be the final straw?

(On reference to full session on Indonesia, Marder thinks Read was talking about NSC, rather than Tuesday lunch. Read was saying that NSC meetings ~~had~~ usually were little more than formalities)

BUNDY: Phrase that Bundy used in comparing Vietnam to Korean war was that in Vietnam debate "the litigation continues" (meaning same arguments recur)

Concedes that Rostow more committed on Vietnam than ~~Bund~~ MacBundy was, but notes change of problem. Disagrees with thesis that Rostow pores over maps and target lists; says Bundy Mac had same practice with running crisis.

Acknowledged he does not see all pieces of decisions.

Insisted that only military action that may have ~~xxxxxx~~ crossed diplomatic line without realization that was happening was ~~xxxxxx~~ Dec. 1-2 bombing of Hanoi. Said he and Rusk were getting on plane when they received word of it. Implied they were surprised by it because it cut across bows of Warsaw probe operation. Contended that Dec. 13 bombing of Hanoi area did not hit them that way, meaning that was planned decision to do it despite Warsaw probing operation. Sharply disagrees with Bartlett-Weintal sequence on Vietnam.

Agrees ~~xxxxxx~~ with thesis that this war different w from all other wars and is managed in different way than ever before. ~~x~~ Concedes readily that argument couched in terms that "Hanoi won't pick up the phone" is absolute nonsense. Two sides in fundamental disagreement about results of any negotiation.

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Bundy agrees that Burchett interview marked, from Hanoi's standpoint, an important shift, and a turn away from nit-picking argumentation over four basic points and whether ~~xxxxxx~~ preconditions or not. Says that he thought there was "once chance in four" that maybe some development might come out of Kosygin London sequence, but that became apparent that Hanoi had moved as far as it intended in Burchett interview and was stopping right there.

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National Security Archive,
Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University,
2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037,
Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu