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WH6602-01-9603

Participants: Lyndon Johnson, Maxwell Taylor

Location: Mansion

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The operators connect the call.

President Johnson: Max?

Maxwell Taylor: Mr. President, yes, sir.

President Johnson: I got a little labor of love. I think this fellow [Eugene] McCarthy is a[n] intellectual and one of our problems. And he keeps saying that he can see no reason for the bombing and no case for the bombing.

Taylor: Yes.

President Johnson: And I would like you to do your homework a little bit and try to get such speculations as you need from the CIA and from the Defense people and from [General William] Westmoreland's people. I'd sure take that letter, cable I got from [Henry Cabot] Lodge yesterday, the revised one. The first one he said it'd be over this year, and we told him to get that out, we don't want to be predicting it, so he revised it. Get Lodge's cable and then get your best military planner over there. You might want to take him with you. I don't know who you could take. Maybe take somebody like [General Andrew] Goodpaster who's been briefing folks, and go to see McCarthy and make the case for bombing. He says there's no case and nobody's every given him any reasons for it, and he doesn't understand it, and he doesn't know why, and so on and so forth. And I think that you can show him that if the boys just hunker up in these enclaves like a jackass in a hailstorm and let them shoot at them, why they're going to be a helluva shape.

Taylor: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: And if they don't try some way to make it hard on them and stop them, why they're going to kill a bunch of American



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boys that oughtn't to die.

Taylor: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: And that the only way you can do that is to try to stop the trucks when they come down the road.

Taylor: Yes.

President Johnson: And try to stop the oil that goes into them, and try to keep them busy fixing the bridges, and try to hold them up for a few weeks.

Taylor: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: And try to make them pay enough through attrition that they'll finally say, "Well, we'd better talk." And then show them that that's what we're trying to do. And point out to him--he's pretty anti-CIA--but just point out to him that John McCone told us last April that we just had to not take a 100 sorties or 200 sorties, but we had to take everything we had and unload it right away on all these areas because the American people wouldn't stand still for over 6-8 months of bombing.

Taylor: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: I read his memo yesterday, and it just proves it's right, the way they're raising hell, they're breaking ranks up on the Hill because of bombing.

Taylor: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: But just say, "Now, every time we lose a \$3 million plane--we lost 3 of them yesterday, and we got pilots back, at least we got 2 out of the 3--but every time we lose those \$3 million plane we may have saved ourselves 308 Marines."

Taylor: [*Unclear.*]

President Johnson: "And we have proceeded on the theory that we use a little steel and a little hydraulics and a little electric system instead of a human. And we think that they've got 100,000 people kept busy because of what we've done."

Taylor: Yes.

President Johnson: "We think they might have twice as many people down there. We don't think we ought to match them man-for-man, and we're not to match them man-for-man. We've either got to put some ships or planes, because that's all we've got besides man-for-man."

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Taylor: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: [*with Taylor acknowledging*] "And that's what we've tried to do. And here are the ten reasons why I, as a military man and as a political man, think that it is essential." And just say, "Now, I went along with the [bombing] pause because all these people said from May until December that if you pause long enough to give us a chance that we can bring them to the peace table."

And the Russians said it. And Bill Fulbright came to me and said it. And [Mike] Mansfield came to me and said it. And [George] McGovern came to me and said it. Everybody that this Russian ambassador [Anatoly Dobrynin] talked to came to me and said it. After he talked to Mac Bundy his blood pressure went to 208 and he said he's got it all worked out. And then Bob McNamara felt the same way. And finally got to [Dean] Rusk, and Rusk had doubts about it and we held it up three times, and then Rusk got up and said, "Well, I think so." And I still thought that we were just being a plain, damn fool to take off our pressure and do this. But everybody else thought otherwise, and finally they told me they'd talked to Max Taylor and that he would say that if we're every going to have a pause, that he wasn't urging it or recommending it, but it would do a minimum amount of damage during Christmas when we had bad weather, and so forth.

Now, I did, and I finally, on my own, without anybody being responsible, concluded that I had listened to this belly-aching so long, by so many, so frequently--it took so much of my time, every day with the Fulbrights and the Mansfields and the [Vance] Hartke's and the McCarthys and the rest of them coming in, that I just say, "Put up or shut up." So I told them to go tell that Russian ambassador, give him plenty of advance notice, and tell him we not only he'd have his 12 days, we'd have his 20 days. "And, now, let's see you get busy and let's see what they do." Well, they couldn't pee a drop. I think [Alexander] Shelepin had tried.¹ I just don't think he can deliver. I think they wanted to try to work out something, but I just don't think they could.

Taylor: [*Unclear.*]

President Johnson: [*with Taylor acknowledging*] To believe otherwise is just to believe that they are really determined to eat us up and they can't be trusted at all, and I rather think that's true. I think that anybody that treat [John F.] Kennedy like they did on missiles and lied to him about that, I don't think you can trust them a second.² But I want to try to get along in the world.

So, anyway, I went ahead on that. And I didn't go for five days; I went for five weeks. And the very damn crowd, this same crowd now, that said "if you just give us 12 days. Just give us a chance." And Fulbright

and [Wayne] Morse both had been out to dinner, and Averell [Harriman] had been to dinner. They had everyone in this town to dinner. I bet they had you to dinner, telling you what they'd do. And they had [McGeorge] Bundy to dinner, and all of them. And by God, we bought it lock, stock, and barrell, and we wound up as the British said about my clothes, with a big, fat hunk, chunk of nothing. That's the way we wound up.

But we oughtn't to be blamed now for warmongers because we did. We tried to extend the peace wand, and we know that the United Nations is not going to resolve anything, at least we don't think so. But they raised hell about the United Nations, so we're going to do that. Now, their record of prophecy and success is just about as poor as ours. They started out and said we've got to kill [Ngo Dinh] Diem , because he's no damn good and let's knock him off. And we did.³

Taylor: That's where it all started.

President Johnson: That's exactly where it started. And I just pled with them at the time, "Please don't do it." But that's where it started. And they knocked him off. And then, by God, they came along and said, "Well, you've got to have pacification. You've got no economic program," and so on and so forth. So we did what we could there. Then they said, "Well, you're not negotiating." I said, "Well, we'll talk to anybody--

[recording cuts off]

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1. During the Christmas bombing pause, Alexander Shelepin, Secretary of the Soviet Union's Central Committee and member of the Politburo, had led a secret delegation to Hanoi in an unsuccessful attempt to convince the North Vietnamese leaders to enter into negotiations with the United States.
 2. During an 18 October 1962 meeting in the Oval Office, after American U-2 spyplanes had photographed Soviet military installations in Cuba but before President Kennedy had made that finding public, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had flatly denied that the Soviet Union was installing missiles in Cuba.
 3. South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother were murdered in a coup on 2 November 1963. The level of complicity in the coup and the assassinations on the part of the U.S. government is the subject of a hotly contested historical debate.

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