



H. R. Haldeman Diaries Collection, January 18, 1969 – April 30, 1973

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Thursday, May 4.

Hoover funeral this morning. President did the eulogy and did an extremely good job. Rest of the day was devoted to the debate over the point of the Summit cancellation. President called me in first thing this morning, said he had just gone over things with Haig; he's concerned about the public information operation in Vietnam, thinks we have to ride Laird harder on watching the news reports, that they're letting incorrect things get out and not correcting them. Then he said he wanted Kissinger and me to see Connally, give him a cold turkey briefing on the Summit situation, get his judgment, says the other possibility for conferring would be Mitchell. In any event I called Connally from his office and set up an appointment for right after the funeral, and then the President said he had an added extra ingredient in the whole thing that he had thought of last night, which is that if we cancel the Summit, we go for all the marbles, including a blockade. Then he deplored again the problem that the military are so completely unimaginative.

He said that we should-- I should try to get Connally to stay till June 1, that he can't leave in the middle of the Soviet flap, and the war will also be in better shape by then. He's concerned that if we cancel the Soviet thing, we'll dash the hopes that we've created in the minds of people by the Soviet trip, that we'll get a very big bang against us with the Democrats on the warpath with Soviet support.

He said he wanted me to run another poll, saying that the North Vietnamese hold 400 Americans as Prisoners of War, some for as long as five years, and they refuse to release them. Would you favor the President imposing a naval blockade on North Vietnam to be lifted only when all Prisoners of War are returned and there's a cease-fire obtained in South Vietnam? Then to add, even though this would mean United States Naval ships stopping Russian ships delivering arms to North Vietnam.

We-- Henry and I went over and had an hour and a half meeting with Connally. Henry spent most of the time giving him the background and making the case that we were now faced with three alternatives: one, was to do nothing, and in effect back down on our bluff; second, would



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be to bomb the North, and Hanoi and Haiphong, with the attendant risks, including the great risk of the cancellation of the Summit; and the third would be to cancel the Summit ourselves and then follow that up by bombing the North. Before I could make the case for the other side, Connally leaped in and said he felt very strongly that under no circumstances should we cancel and then bomb the North, that people want the Soviet Summit, and we should not be in the position of cancelling it; if it's going to be canceled we should let the Soviets cancel it. He says you've got to start with the basic premise, however, that the President cannot take a military defeat in Vietnam, it's absolutely imperative that we not let this offensive succeed, so we have to do anything and everything necessary in order to deal with that. On that basis he also feels the President is now in a very good position in this country in that he's got to have the guts to meet this situation, and that we've got to make it clear to the Russians that we are not going to be defeated, and we are not going to surrender, as the President has said. In other words, the President has got to back up his public posture.

I came back. Henry had to go on to a luncheon. I reported this to the President and he was inclined to agree with the Connally view, saying that's basically the conclusion he had already come to and that this confirmed it, that he would therefore, wanted to meet with Henry and me at 3:00 and go over the thing, so we went over to the EOB then and President made the point that he had made up his mind, that he can't lose the war, that the only mistakes-- real mistakes he had made in his Administration were the times when he had not followed his own instincts. On the EC-121 situation with North Korea, he knew we should move in and hit all their air bases but he let himself be talked out of it because Rogers and Laird both threatened to quit if he went ahead with it. After the November 3 speech, when he swung the nation behind him he should've moved--

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[Begin tape reel AC-21(B)]

I was talking about the 3:00 meeting with Henry where the President reviewed the point that the only mistakes he'd made were when he didn't follow his instincts. On Cambodia we should've gone ahead and bombed the North at the time, although we didn't. If we had moved on that kind of move then, we wouldn't have these problems now. Same with Laos, that although there he basically did follow his instincts on this thing, it worked as well as it could have. He said that he had been thinking the thing over, and on this basis he had decided that we can't lose the war, that we're going to hit hard, that we're going to move in. The Summit is not important in this context, and that going to the Summit as a price-- by paying the price of losing in Vietnam would not be satisfactory.

He put it very toughly to Henry. He said he'd made up his mind, didn't want any further discussion about it, didn't want to be talked out of it. Henry kept trying to interrupt, but the President went on very strongly in this vein. He obviously sensed something of the drama of the moment and was pushing his position very hard. When Henry finally did get to talk, he said that he, too, had been thinking about it, that the objectives that he came up with were the same as the President's; he agreed that we couldn't lose the war and that we had to do something. His difference, however, was that we should not move ahead with the bombing, as the President thought we should, but rather should first move to blockade Haiphong. The point being that bombing was what they were expecting and it's better to do the unexpected, first of all. Secondly, that the blockade would in some ways be a less aggressive move it's better to do the unexpected, first of all. Second, the blockade would in some ways be a less aggressive move than the bombing, although it would be a stronger signal to them and would do us more good. Henry's opposed to just a symbolic bombing, he feels that if we bomb we've got to do it totally, and that it would be better to blockade first and then run a continuing set of bombing. Also by blockading



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it gives us a little more time to keep the bombers in the South, where the military wants them during the current tough action.

The more the President thought about it, the more he bought Henry's ideas as long as it was followed up with continued bombing, so that became his conclusion.

He then had Connally and Haig come over and join the meeting. When they got there he reviewed the history again about not following his instincts and so forth, the point that he can't lose the war. He said we won't lose the country if we lose the Summit meeting, but we will lose the country if we lose the war. Then he said what he had decided was a blockade of Haiphong plus bombing. There was a question as to whether it'll work, and there's a greater risk to the Summit than just bombing, but those are problems we're going to deal with.

He then got Connally to agree with him, and gave him strong support on it. He then got into the question of whether Abrams was to be replaced, and felt that he had to be, that he was not following orders, he's lost his steam, and so on. The decision was to replace him by sending Haig to Vietnam. Then it was decided that it wasn't such a good idea, that we'd leave Abrams there, but send Haig out for a couple of weeks as an observer for the President. Also decided to call Rogers back Sunday, since the President will announce this Monday night on television.

After an hour and a half with that group we added Moorer, and the President very strongly put the thing to Moorer that this was his decision, that it was to be discussed with no one, especially not the Secretary, or anybody at State, or anybody over in Vietnam, but that Moorer was to put the blockade plan together, get everything ready to put it into motion so that it would take effect Tuesday morning after the President's address Monday night. He hit Moorer on the fact that this is a chance to save the military's honor and to save the country. Moorer said he could do it; he also suggested that there ought to be some offensive action by the South Vietnamese, and it was agreed they would try to mobilize enough troops, 2,000 or 3,000 for an amphibious landing north of the DMZ by North Vietnamese using our support and lift capability.



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Kissinger had to leave for a dinner. The President talked a few minutes more and then Moorer and Haig left and we kind of wrapped it up with Connally. Then the President talked with me a bit about the whole thing, feeling that he's done the right thing, that we can justify the blockade as a means of keeping lethal weapons from the hands of murderers and international outlaws, and develop that line. I think he feels good that he's made a decision and that he feels it's the right one. He also feels that it's quite a dramatic step, because it is a basic decision to go all out to win the war now, under, of course, totally different circumstances than Johnson was faced with, because we've got our troops out, we've made all the peace overtures, we've made the China trip, and laid a lot of other groundwork that should make it possible for us to do this.

My feeling is that the public reaction here is not going to be so great on the blockade, even though it is a big move, because it's not aggressive, but the bombing that goes with it will, over a period of time, stir some people up. Some question as to what the quid pro quo will be on this, probably something to the effect that the blockade will stay on until there's a cease-fire, all POW's released. When that takes place, we'll lift the blockade and we'll remove all of our troops from South Vietnam within some time period.

Connally was absolutely astounded at the President's description of the problems he had gone through and the other things, especially the lack of support and the lack of loyalty on the part of Laird and Rogers. I think he can't understand why the President would even keep them around and thinks it's a sign of weakness that he hadn't fired them long ago, and that he doesn't fire them now. He also strongly feels that he should pull Abrams back. The President backed off on that, and I think rightly so. Haig called me later this evening and said he thought it was a very bad idea for him to go out to Vietnam for any extended period because with a tight crunch around here he's needed to keep Henry in tow, which I totally agree with.

End of May 4.