



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

National Archives and Records Administration, Online Public Access Catalog Identifier: 7787364

Thursday, April 17.

President scratched some of the morning stuff. Didn't come in to office until after League of Women Voters reception. (A real disaster operationally - apparently because we didn't control it. I've now put Ruwe in charge of all White House social functions and overall coordination - should help).

Met with Kissinger, then received a few Ambassadors. Spent almost all afternoon alone, except for a session with Kissinger. Worked on briefing books for press conference.

Main thrust elsewhere is on the Korean incident. Building up to first really major decision - whether to retaliate. Kissinger told me after afternoon meeting with President that we would bomb the North Korean airfield at noon on Monday, and move in four carriers, plus a lot of other strength. He's uptight on this - Rogers opposing as usual. Kissinger furious because Rogers doesn't openly oppose, just stalls for time then takes steps to make strike impossible, i.e., refer to UN. Kissinger sidestepped that with astute maneuver via Yost.

Late this afternoon President called me in - Kissinger there - to set up meeting Saturday morning - clear out everything else. Will make decision then. Later in evening Kissinger called to say President wanted him to brief me and Ehrlichman. I called John in his car on way to make speech and got him back. Got full story - eliminated alternative of bombing Cambodia (Kissinger later did with President, on phone). I spent one and a half hours in Kissinger's office discussing - Ehrlichman left after forty-five minutes.

Fascinating problem. Only two viable alternatives. Bomb airfield - or not retaliate but continue reconnaissance flights but with fighter cover. Or, of course, do nothing but protest. Argument for bombing is show of real Nixon strength, especially to Soviets. Problems are public and world reaction - and possible danger of opening a Korean ground war or air battle. Will be a very strong move - dangerous - but potentially very productive toward ending Vietnam. Would sure back up Kissinger's earlier conversation this week.



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

National Archives and Records Administration, Online Public Access Catalog Identifier: 7787364

Also a long political session with Ehrlichman, Harlow, Flanigan, [W], Finch and Mitchell. Lot of problems. Haven't really settled the RNC takeover.

Later - as I was getting in the shower, Kissinger called to talk about Korea - and make sure he had my opinion accurately. I'm for the strike, but with the caveat that we have to know what we'll do - and be willing to do it - if the North Koreans counterattack South Korea by air, or open up a ground attack. Kissinger says then he would go to nuclear weapons and blow them out completely. We talked over the alternatives again. This is really tough for Kissinger, because the risk level is enormous and he is the principal proponent. He feels strongly that a major show of strength and overreaction for the first time in many years by a United States President would have an enormous effect abroad, and would mobilize great support here. But it would sure lose the doves and might screw up the ABM battle.