

April 4, 1968
Thursday - 10:00 a.m.

FOR THE PRESIDENT

I will always kick myself for my part in our 20° problem. I simply did not think it through. At about 3 o'clock on Sunday afternoon, Clark called and asked whether I thought there were any geographical implications in dropping the 20° language in favor of the language we ultimately used. I said I had never heard that suggested; I thought we were simply describing, in functional terms, what we had previously described in geographical terms -- hoping this would sound more palatable to the North Vietnamese, and more of a dramatic move to our own people.

Then I said, "It would sure help if we could restrict the bombing to the southern area of the panhandle for a few days." Clark said, "The orders saying simply South of 20° have already gone out." I said, "Well, I guess it's o.k." I should have realized what was likely to happen, and what in fact did; I should have asked you to call a meeting, even at that late hour, to decide the question -- which we had never focused on before.

This experience leads me to believe that:

There must be someone in the White House or State to manage the peace talks -- military scenario over the next few weeks:

-- someone who will drive the Pentagon and the State Department to look at the consequences of each step before they take it.

Further,

This must be someone whom the "peace advocates" trust. If it is Walt, failure of the talks will be laid to his "rigidity" and "bellicosity." If it is Bill Bundy, failure will be due to his rigidity and bureaucratic stuffiness.

My candidate is Mac Bundy. I think he should be asked to come down for 2 weeks. I can't think of anyone else who combines knowledge of the subject, the tenacity to ask the question everyone else is too tired to ask, and credibility with the peace people.

Harry C. McPherson, Jr.