

August 6, 1964

12:46 P.M.

To James Rowe¹

[*Extract*]

President Johnson: I don't know...uh, I don't know how to get this message over, but this boy—our friend Hubert [Humphrey]—is just destroying himself with his big mouth.

James Rowe: Is he talking again?

President Johnson: Yeah, all the time and never . . . He just can't stop it. He's just got hydrophobia [as in the later stages of rabies], and every responsible person gets frightened when they see him. He hasn't missed any program, or he just . . . He's just like a wild man when he kind of sees this thing in the distance.

And what he ought to do is be a very retiring, and very sober, and very judicious and . . . uh . . . fellow.

Rowe: Yeah.

President Johnson: Now, yesterday morning he went on the TV and looks like he's gotten by with it, but he said everybody in the Joint Chiefs of Staff and

1. Tape WH6408.09, Citation #4777, Recordings of Telephone Conversations—White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, Lyndon B. Johnson Library.

every person in town that's handling the war plans, it just scared them *to death* because he just blabbed everything that he had heard in a briefing, just like it was his personal knowledge.

Rowe: Wow.

President Johnson: And almost— He wanted to claim credit for it.

They said, for instance, “How would you account for these PT boat attack[s] on our destroyer when we are innocently out there in the gulf 60 miles from shore?” And McNamara said that was a very difficult thing to explain the reasoning of these people. It may be that they wanted to try to scare us out of the area, but that he couldn't . . . he couldn't explain Communist thinking on a good many matters. [Rowe assents.] Rusk said substantially the same thing. Humphrey said, “Well, we have been carrying on some operations in that area, and we've been having some covert operations where we have been going in and knocking out roads and petroleum things, and so forth.”

Rowe: Good Lord.

President Johnson: And that is exactly what we *have* been doing. But the damned fool got it up, and now he's got [Oregon Senator Wayne] Morse talking about it, who wasn't in on the briefing. And it's just . . . You just got to understand that you can't talk about war plans, you just can't talk about it.

Rowe: That's [*unclear*].

President Johnson: Now this morning—

Rowe: Got a whole carrier out there, [*unclear*] the war .

President Johnson: This morning, a fellow called me *very* upset—one of the highest officials in the government—and said, “Have you talked to Humphrey about a communication from Khrushchev?” I said “No, I haven’t seen Humphrey. Haven’t seen anybody around Humphrey. Haven’t talked to my wife. Haven’t talked to a human being.” Well, Humphrey has discussed the details of communications with Khrushchev that somebody must have let him know about, and with a correspondent for NBC!”

Rowe: Oh my.

President Johnson: It’s the one thing that could make Khrushchev drop a bomb on us. And he just ought to keep his God damned big mouth shut on foreign affairs at least until election is over.

Rowe: It’ll be done.

President Johnson: And just say that this has just got people running wild and they’re running in every moment to me, and for him not to be speculating on why the Communists would be doing something.

Rowe: Yeah. . . .