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Transcript only of this conversation; there is no recording.

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CALLER: Mike Mansfield, Everett Dirksen, John McCormack, Hale Boggs, Thomas Kuchel, Leslie Arends

Pages of Transcript: 8 pages

Barbara Cline
Archivist

October 31, 1968

Re: *Banking Hall*

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JONES: Hello, Senator Mansfield?

MANSFIELD: Yes, Jim.

JONES: You will have to talk up, we can't hear you. Senator Dirksen?

DIRKSEN: Hello.

JONES: Senator Dirksen - Senator Kuchel, are you on?

JONES: Speaker McCormack?

McCORMACK: Yes, I'm here.

JONES: Congressman Boggs?

BOGGS: Yeah

JONES: Congressman Arends, are you on?

----- He left the line, Jim.

JONES: All right. If we can just hold one minute to get him back.

PRESIDENT: Everett?

DIRKSEN: Hello.

PRESIDENT: Mike? Are you there?

MANSFIELD: Yes.

PRESIDENT: Speaker McCormack?

McCORMACK: I'm right here.

PRESIDENT: Senator Kuchel?

KUCHEL: How are you, Mr. President?

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PRESIDENT: Les? Les Arends?

ARENDS: Right here.

PRESIDENT: Hale Boggs?

BOGGS: Here, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT: I have just met with Secretaries Rusk and Clifford and Mr. Helms and Mr. Rostow and General Wheeler. The early part of October we got an indication from Paris that if we would stop the bombing they might agree to allow Government of Vietnam -- which we had demanded -- to come and stay in the meeting. We told them that they would have to understand that ~~D~~^SVN would have to be there and we could not have a productive meeting, as I had outlined in San Antonio, if the cities were shelled or if the DMZ was abused. Sunday night they gave us some indication they would sign off. We went back to various countries to make sure that all of them understood it.

I am going to have a National Security Council meeting a little later tonight. I will probably have some statement after eight o'clock. That statement will very probably say that we are stopping the bombing in order to have prompt and productive discussions that they did not take advantage of and the productive discussions will mean that

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the Government of South Viet Nam that they said they would never meet with -- these stooges that they said they would never meet with -- but they have got to be there and if they want them to be productive they better not shell the cities or abuse the DMZ. We cannot say so publicly; we must not; but we have indications from the Soviets and others that they understand this and it is very likely that they would not do it. You cannot ever tell what a communist's agreement is worth. But I called General Abrams back and I have got all of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the next room. General Abrams recommended to me that we take this step; all of the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that we take it for two reasons. One, if we can avoid the abuse of the DMZ and the shelling of the cities, that's a great advantage. If not, we can go back to bombing the next day and we all understand it. Second, our bombing in the North is not very profitable now because of the heavy rains -- the monsoon -- and we can use that same power better in South Viet Nam and other parts of that general area. So we will say tonight -- and I

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have told the candidates and they all say that they will back us -- that we will stop the bombing and expect prompt and productive discussions with the Government -- the elected Government of South Viet Nam -- present and those discussions will continue and be productive as far as we are concerned unless or until they shell the cities or abuse the DMZ, in which event we will resume the bombing.

I have that statement for television after I meet with the Security Council and the Joint Chiefs. I wanted all of you to know that every military and civilian adviser, Secretary Rusk and Katzenbach, Secretary Clifford and Nitze, General Wheeler and each member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Abrams who came in at 2:30 morning before last and stayed here until four o'clock and General Goodpaster, his deputy. Now here is the comment that was made at my last meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Chief of Air Staff McConnell said: "I recommend you go ahead and do this."

Marine Chapman said: "I think we should go ahead with it."

Palmer, who is deputy to Westmoreland and acting Chief of Army, said: "Considering everything, I would go along with making this proposition."

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Westmoreland said: "If the rules of engagements are as suggested, I would see no problem."

Abrams said: "I subscribe to it a hundred per cent."

I would hope that you all could be prepared to say nothing, answer no telephone calls, do no leaking. I know that's possible if the Congress determines that it wants it that way and I think it is important that it be that way now until after we get on the air with our television statement and explain it to all of the people, and until Bunker can explain it to Thieu. We do not know whether Thieu will issue a joint announcement or not. A few days ago he was aboard but we got a political campaign and some of our fellows have been running around with the China lobby and talking to embassies and telling them that if they would wait until after the election they could do better. Some of them have been making speeches about how they are going to withdraw troops. That is very confusing to a foreign government that doesn't realize that our Administration goes on until January 20 and even after that we have the Congressional

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leaders, we have the same Joint Chiefs of Staff for a while and things of that kind. So our policy is really not going to change from what I am announcing tonight. But that has held us up for two days.

A good many boys have died as a result of it. But we are going to announce this tonight. We will stop bombing some time tomorrow -- then if they do not abuse the DMZ and do not shell the cities, we will get the elected government of South Viet Nam to come to Paris as soon as we can get them there and we will try to have productive discussions and really test their faith because everybody said if you will stop the bombing we can really get peace. I am going to see if they knew what they were talking about and since they have finally acceded and agreed that they will sit down with these people they call puppets and they have at least acquiesced by their silence that they will not shell the cities and not abuse the DMZ -- I don't think I could wait another day and have the blood of these boys on my conscience. I hope that each of you will support me in this move so that we will have just one voice in foreign affairs at this very critical time.

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MANSFIELD: Mr. President: Mike Mansfield speaking out in the pro-Indian country -- off God-knows-where -- I am with you a hundred per cent.

P. Thank you, Mike.

McCORMICK: This is John McCormick, Mr. President. I think it is a calculated risk that we are justified in taking. I am for it.

P. Thank you.

KUCHEL: So do I, Mr. President. All the way.

P. Thank you, Tommy. Hale, you and Everett want to say anything?

BOGGS: Mr. President, I'm for you one million per cent. God bless you. I have just said a prayer for you.

P. Everett?

DIRKSEN: Well, you know how I feel.

P. How?

DIRKSEN: Well, I said so this afternoon -- that this is a go --

P. Well, I hope that all of you will issue a statement so that we can show the communist world that we are united and on November 6 I am going to call in the President-elect and review everything with him. I have gone over it with all of them this afternoon. I have just finished talking to them. I am going to the Security Council now and I will work with

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whoever the President-elect is and we just hope that we can get some results. No one can tell what a communist agreement means but we will at least go the last mile and test their good faith.

MANSFIELD: Mr. President, Mike Mansfield speaking. You don't want us to say anything, though, until after you go on TV?

P. That's right. I would say you ought to watch the TV around eight o'clock and then call up your AP and UP and say anything you can that you think would help us abroad because the more united we are the better chance we've got. And all of the candidates have said "We back you, Mr. President." Nixon, Wallace, and Humphrey. Now if they can say it, I don't know why you leaders can't say it loud and clear.

MANSFIELD: Don't worry. I'll be glad to.

_____ We will, Mr. President. Delighted.

_____ Thank you, Mr. President.

P. Be careful. Don't say anything until you hear it on TV.

_____ Thankyou , Mr. President.

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