

WITHDRAWAL SHEET (PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES)

FORM OF DOCUMENT	CORRESPONDENTS OR TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
#51a notes	of President's meeting with foreign policy advisers on 6/9/68, Cabinet Room 2:30 pm top secret [exempt NLJ/CBS 39] <i>open 7-11-91</i> NLJ 89-207 14 p	06/09/68	A
#51b letter	to Mr. Chairman re: Vietnam secret [exempt NLJ 90-106] 2 p	undated	A
#51c letter	to Mr. Chairman re: Vietnam secret [exempt NLJ 90-106] 2 p	06/09/68	A
#51d letter	translation of letter to Pres. Johnson from A. Kosygin secret [exempt NLJ 90-106] 2 p	undated	A
#51e memo	to the President from W. W. Rostow re: response to Kosygin letter secret [exempt NLJ 90-106] 2 p	06/09/68	A
#52 notes	handwritten notes of #51a above top secret 53 p	06/09/68	A

FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings
June 9, 1968 - 2:30 p.m. Meeting with Foreign Advisors in Cabinet Room
Box 3

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JUNE 9, 1968 - 2:30 p.m.

MEETING WITH FOREIGN POLICY
ADVISORS

The President
Secretary Clifford
Secretary Rusk
Ambassador Thompson
Cyrus Vance
Averell Harriman

Abe Fortas
Charles Bohlen
Walt Rostow
Richard Helms
Jim Jones
Tom Johnson

— ps
Mr. President, 30

Tom Johnson thought you would want to review these notes he made of your meeting Sunday afternoon.

This is the only copy, Tom says.

mjdr
June 10

Junita:

Please note the question mark by the President on page 11. He said he didn't understand that paragraph

diana
6/10/68
7:30 p.m.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

June 10, 1968

6:15 p.m.

Mr. President:

Here are notes of Sunday meeting
in Cabinet Room

Tom

Tom Johnson

~~TOP SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4(b)

White House Guidelines, Feb. 14, 1983
by DCH, NARA, Date 3-7-91

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51a

NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH FOREIGN POLICY ADVISERS

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JUNE 9, 1968
Cabinet Room
2:30 p.m.

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4
NLJ 89-207
By iso, NARA, Date 4-24-91

Attending the meeting:

The President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary Clifford
Ambassador Thompson
Cyrus Vance
Averell Harriman

Abe Fortas
Charles Bohlen
Walt Rostow
Richard Helms
Jim Jones
Tom Johnson

Secretary Rusk: We are here today to assess the importance of the Kosygin message and how we might deal with it.

This is a very significant message. The fact that he sent it on his own initiative rather than in response to anything is significant.

This is important. We must determine what they mean by it. He also associates "his colleagues" with it.

He says a complete bombing cessation could lead to a breakthrough. He says this would lead to a peaceful settlement.

Kosygin says if we take such a step it will not result in any negative consequences for the United States - either its security or its prestige.

The message is hard to interpret. If we stopped all bombing and NVN continued to carry on war, there is nothing in this message which would condemn the Soviets. We need a clarification.

The degree to which we do anything without further clarification is what needs to be discussed here today. We need guarantees they would do something concrete in response to the bombing halt.

We also need to know what would be the effect on the morale of our own men if we stopped bombing and Hanoi continued their activities "flat out."

The Soviets think we should have unofficial contacts between our two delegations in Paris.

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In summary:

1. It is an important message.
2. It lacks ^{clarity,} clarification.
3. We must seek clarification.

We need to tell Kosygin that most of North Vietnam's territory and population is free from bombing while none of South Vietnam is free of attacks.

We need to know what they specifically will do if we stop bombing.

The President: What do you think, Averell?

Averell Harriman: This is an extremely important letter. We think this is an extraordinarily definite statement for the Soviets to make. We do need clarification. We want them to know what is going on in South Vietnam.

Cy and I have a slightly different approach which is not as good as Clark Clifford's.

In any case, we should lead Kosygin on.

Cy Vance: I agree with that.

Averell Harriman: This could be a breakthrough.

The President: Dean thinks it lacks ^{clarity} ~~clarification~~ and we need to seek clarification. Do you agree?

Averell Harriman: Yes, sir, I do. But I think, as Clark does, that we should assume the message means what we want it to mean.

(2:55 Message reviewed - see Clark Clifford's draft of Appendix A).

Cy Vance: We are at a central crossroad.

I agree with Dean. It is significant.

We do not know what it means.

It may mean the Soviets are willing to assist with resolution of the

conflict.

We must answer right. If we don't, we may lose the chance and strengthen the hand of Peking in Hanoi.

The North Vietnamese have changed in Paris -

- in their attitude
- in admitting North Vietnam presence in South
- in sending Le Duc Tho

On the "con" side, they may be:

1. Testing our mettle. If we give, they will be tougher later on.
2. If we stop bombing, it will be tough to restart.
3. Time is on their side, they think.

The enemy can fight for 12-18 months. They can control the level of the war. Time is not on our side. Clark's draft is the best way to respond.

The President: What does Kosygin's letter say to you?

Secretary Rusk: At worst, he is trying to get us to stop bombing and all other acts of war against them without any commitments by Hanoi and by Soviets as to how they will respond to it.

It would be costly to stop bombing and restart it.

The President: Can we say for a few days we will stop it and go back if there is no restraint by them?

NVN are not unique. If they have a serious interest in peace, they can let us know that certain specific things will happen. They can do this without losing face.

The absence of this shows there is nothing yet they will do for sure.

I don't think the South Vietnamese will stand still without reason to believe there will be some de-escalation on the enemy side. We would have problems with South Koreans, and other allies as well.

The President: If we stopped bombing tomorrow, how long would we have to go before we could expect results?

Secretary Rusk: It could be several weeks and into the fall.

The President: Didn't they double shipments down into the South in May over March?

Secretary Rusk: Yes.

General Wheeler: Infiltration groups of 127,000 men were identified. May is the highest month so far. Also the shipment south of supplies are up double over March. Also, they have moved anti-aircraft batteries into the Panhandle and have shown no restraint.

The President: How long could we stand it without jeopardizing our position in I Corps? What would we do?

General Wheeler: We could hold for about a month.

We suffer 7,500 U.S. casualties for every 100,000 they infiltrate in.

The President: How long could we take it?

General Wheeler: About 30 days. Morale may go to hell in a handbag.

The President: Couldn't you start bombing back?

General Wheeler: I don't know. This couldn't be stood very long.

The President: I would take the chance if I had a reasonable supposition of results and if I could get back in bombing when we need to.

General Wheeler: I don't see anything new and startling in the Kosygin letter.

This may not be on Kosygin's initiative. Averell talked to Zoran. It may be a response to that conversation. I agree with Dean that the matter should be pursued. We should probe to see if we can get assurances from the Soviets.

Also, we need private talks with North Vietnamese.

Secretary Rusk: The key difference is whether we go back with request for clarification or whether we are prepared to rely on what he has said so far. The private talks in Paris with Hanoi may be more important than those with Soviets.

Clark Clifford: We have a great opportunity here. We should take serious advantage of it. All of us want to bring the war to a conclusion. It is good for you to get the benefit of all of our views. We won't end the war by negotiations with the North Vietnamese. They control the level of the war. They can go on indefinitely from the manpower aspect. Soviets and Red China continue to supply them with all they need. The combat in South Vietnam has not forced them to end this war. Bombing in South or North won't stop war. What will stop it is an arrangement with the Soviets so they can use their leverage - which we don't have - to bring the Soviets to force Hanoi to stop it. The cost of the war for the Soviets is becoming heavier. The Kosygin letter has the same tone as the hot line message he made to us at the time of the Middle East crisis.

It is a very remarkable and promising letter. It is temperate and statesmanlike.

Key passages are

1. "My colleagues and I think -- we have grounds to do so..."
2. Also the fact that they say our security interests will not be damaged.

He says he has information to lead him to that conclusion. He says it will lessen international tensions as a whole. I would take him at his word.

The President should accept it in good faith. It is in our own interests to do this.

We should accept his statement as assurance. We should take him up on it.

The President: We took him up on it at the time of the 37-day pause.

Clark Clifford: I favor this pause. Circumstances are different. I did not favor the 37-day pause, you will remember. He is asking us to give up the bombing. The price is not too great for us to take the chance.

Let's give it a test. The aid to North Vietnam was not great until we started bombing their sister Socialist state. Now we may be stopping 25% of their flow. They will be able to keep up the level of their fighting even if bombing continues.

We should accept his letter as assurances. He honestly wants war to end. If we stop bombing, the Soviets will turn pressure on North Vietnam to stop the fighting. The Soviets are sending 80% of supplies. They have the means to make them stop this war.

If there is no action on their part in two weeks we should get message to Kosygin saying we have to start bombing again.

We have better position to start again than we ever had before March 31 on this.

If it doesn't happen we would resume bombing.

As far as Saigon is concerned, we are the chief suppliers of men and material. We have lost 26,000 men and it is costing us \$25 billion this year alone.

In summary, we should do the following:

1. We should accept his letter as assurances.
2. We will find out if they aren't assurances.
3. We have good record with Kosygin. We shouldn't affect it by an improper response to his letter.

Walt Rostow: We could state that we would give one week for him to state if these are not assurances.

We could follow on his reference to Ambassador Harriman's talks with Ambassador Zoran.

It would give:

1. Kosygin a chance to come back if he isn't giving assurances.
2. Restraint would be expected as we define it.
3. Resumption would be required if no response is forthcoming.

The President: Why not try to get clarification before burning our bridges?

We could say we know you are acting in good faith, but that we know what happened on the 37-day pause before. Say if we do it again, and we are all wrong again, we electrify the world with hope and get nothing.

Walt Rostow: I do not see how the President could take this act without some kind of assurances. Our relations with Soviets are hopeful outside of the Vietnam situation.

The President: We would have problems with our allies. Also with our own people.

How many boys will we gamble if we do this?

Abe Fortas: There isn't much difference of opinion, really. Clark Clifford wants to wait until Kosygin comes back with a reply before acting.

I read Kosygin's letter differently.

They are saying they may be able to get something underway, but only if North Vietnam doesn't have to lose face.

Clark Clifford is being very rigid and tough in asking for specific restraints, however.

We need to get an informal understanding.

It appears they want you to agree to stop bombing before they will agree to de-escalation. We must have an informal understanding beforehand.

We should say we appreciate this and will stop bombing provided informal talks are fruitful. I would leave out specific conditions.

Clark Clifford is not being easier in first full paragraph at top of page 2.

We will stop bombing if a mutually satisfactory set of terms is reached.

Secretary Rusk: We have said we will stop bombing first if we know then what will follow.

Walt Rostow: The important thing is that Le Duc Tho has gone to Paris. Rate of attrition is leading to a deterioration of the quality of the enemy forces. They can control the intensity of the violence, but if they scale down they know their position on the ground will rapidly deteriorate given the U.S. - South Vietnamese ground strength.

We need to force Kosygin to be explicit about his assumptions.

Ambassador Thompson: This does seem to be an opportunity to get the Soviets to bring pressure to bear on Hanoi.

The President: How does this differ from the 37-day pause? You thought then we would wait no longer than 12-days. This will raise hopes. There will be excuses to wait again. I got burned on it before.

Ambassador Thompson: If you took a step and they didn't react, you could go back to all bombing. They should consider that.

The President: I feel we should say we will stop all bombing when we are sure of restraint by them.

Ambassador Bohlen: Main interest of Soviets in Vietnam has been ideological. If you stop the bombing of all of North Vietnam, it would strengthen the hand of Soviet influence in Hanoi.

If you could live with this for two or three weeks militarily we should try the full pause.

This letter may have resulted from Harriman's talk with Zorán. I would go back to all bombing if they didn't respond.

Secretary Rusk: That would break up talks.

Ambassador Bohlen: So what. I would if they aren't going to do more than they have since the talks started.

The President: The bombing doesn't stop all their men and supplies. It stops some. It raises the price. Since March we haven't done much.

Richard Helms: I don't see anything new in this note. The Russians would like to see us call off bombing. I do think that NVN and VC can go on for a year.

I think we should see what specifically they have in mind.

Some Senators can't wait until you get out of this war.

Secretary Rusk: We should say:

Point 1 -- It is important to have informal talks with the Soviets in Paris.

Point 2 - We will examine a halt to bombing.

Point 3 - We will be prepared to discuss this matter further with you.

We should say we are prepared to accept his statement as assurances if they are that.

Abe Fortas: For my part, it looks as though we will institute a complete cessation without public knowledge of what the precise nature of private understanding may be.

You can't admit to "acts of war" against NVN, as is written in draft one.

Clark Clifford: We have an offer from Kosygin. We need to agree to his offer if these are assurances on his part. We say if you are really assuring us, we are willing to proceed and test it out.

I don't think we should reply in a way that could be interpreted as a rejection of his offer.

I think he has gone as far as he can go.

We come to the question about relative importance of our bombings. The restriction in bombing has not led to the step-up in our losses. They have done it by putting more intensity in their fighting in the South.

The President: All I know is what they were doing before March 31 and after March 31.

General Wheeler: Slackening off of the bombing has contributed to higher losses.

4:15 The President leaves the meeting.

4:19 The President returns.

(During interval Secretary Rusk suggested changes in the first draft).

The President: What do all of you think?

Ambassador Thompson: I like it (the new draft).

Clark Clifford: Dean's language brings into question our willingness to take him up on his offer.

We must remember a lot has happened since the bombing pauses before I would take whatever minor risk is involved.

The President: I am not willing to take their assurance and rely on it on face value.

We have softened. They have done nothing.

Clark Clifford: I think we are better off today because of the March 31 speech than if you hadn't have made it. It started us on the road toward the ultimate conclusion of war.

This could be the next step.

Abe Fortas: What is the difference between Rusk's last statement and Clark Clifford's?

(Rusk read his statement.)

Abe Fortas: You are close together. Clifford says:

"Unless you tell me our assumption is wrong we will be prepared to stop bombing."

Clark Clifford: Dean is saying private talks must produce agreement before we stop bombing.

Secretary Rusk: You can't determine the outcome of a war by manpower studies.

The President: I think ~~we~~ ^{making} we may have them beaten now. Only thing that will stop us from taking a peace is ourselves.

I think Clark is unrealistic about attitude of how our men will react to this.

Secretary Rusk: We must be precise with the Soviets.

Ambassador Bohlen: We should follow up the Soviet hint. I would ask a straight, simple clarification.

Secretary Rusk: If Soviets are for informal contacts, isn't it worth exploring it with Harriman in Paris?

Averell Harriman: We will never end this war without Soviet help. We should move forward with Kosygin.

(The President was then shown a draft by Harriman.)

Averell Harriman: We need to keep the Soviets involved.

Secretary Rusk: My draft was designed to meet your four points.

Averell Harriman: You put back a lot of propaganda in your letter.

Clark Clifford: When we have as much disagreement as we have today, we must look at things behind it.

You called my position unrealistic. I believe it is realistic.

We are not ending the War, even though we have massive firepower, huge B-52 flights, largest number of troops ever in Vietnam.

We can't bring war to a conclusion militarily.

We should go on with our 95% fighting - that in the South. I am willing to try for a political settlement, by taking this risk of stopping the bombing.

The President: I don't think being soft will get us peace.

Averell Harriman: Rusk's letter is to them propaganda.

(4:20 p.m. - no agreement on drafts)

The President: What importance do we attach to bombing of the North?

General Wheeler: Considerable importance.

Militarily, we are on the strategic defensive. We always have been. Nobody wins a war by being on the defensive. The only offensive pressure we have had was the bombing, which has been unduly restrictive.

They suffered from the restricted bombing.

They turned down your San Antonio formula, but accepted a tougher March 31 formula. There is much involved, but if we stop all our activities North of the 17th, they can take advantage of it.

REVERSE SET

They can:

1. Move forces to DMZ to support further action.
2. Load Panhandle with anti-aircraft equipment.

We lost more planes in lower route packages because of anti-aircraft inventory.

3. They could load SAM's up to DMZ. They will fire at B-52's without us being able to do anything about it.

The President: What about Clark's proposition of two weeks cessation of bombing?

General Wheeler:

1. The enemy can go all out.
2. He can mass forces North of the DMZ.
3. He can move aircraft South.
4. He can rehabilitate air bases.
5. You would suffer tactical setbacks.
6. Some units might be overrun.
7. You run a military risk.
8. You won't be run out of South Vietnam.
9. Our people could hold for a while.

On the negotiating situation:

I defer to the diplomats how to respond. It should be straight to him from the President. I believe it is in the best interest not to move to give up the one offensive action you have without some assurance -- formal or informal -- that you will get something in return. Don't buy it as unclear as it is now. It would weaken your position.

The President: Let's ask Bunker and our Ambassador in Korea for their reactions.

I fear there may be a blow up in South Vietnam. I do not look for any change of government without great grief. Whatever we agree on, let's get Bunker and Porter to agree on it.

Averell Harriman: Keep dialogue going with Kosygin. That will end this war. Our dialogue with North Vietnam won't.

Clark Clifford: All four of us recommend General Seignious to replace General Goodpaster as Military Adviser.

General Wheeler: We are for him from the JCS standpoint.

The President nodded approval.

5:09 p.m. Rusk draft brought in.

5:10 p.m. The President left for church service.

6:12 p.m. The President returns - Reads final draft - approves it. It is attached as Appendix B.

The President: Is this agreeable to all of you?

Secretary Rusk: O.K.

Averell Harriman: It is all right.

Cy Vance: It is all right.

Clark Clifford: It is all right.

Walt Rostow: It is all right.

General Wheeler: O.K.

#