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#65 notes	Notes from 10/29/68 - 1 p.m. Tuesday luncheon with Foreign Policy Advisors [Sanitized NLJ 87-37] Secret 6 pp.	10/29/68	A
#66 notes	Handwritten notes from 10/29/68 meeting Secret 23 pp.	10/29/68	A

## FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 4

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NOTES ON TUESDAY  
LUNCHEON

OCTOBER 29, 1968

THOSE PRESENT:

The President  
Secretary Rusk  
Secretary Clifford  
General Taylor  
General Abrams  
CIA Director Helms  
General Wheeler  
Harry McPherson  
Walt Rostow  
George Christian  
Tom Johnson

Meeting began: 1:00 p.m.

Meeting ended: 2:20 p.m.

~~MEETING NOTES~~  
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NOTES ON TUESDAY LUNCHEON  
OCTOBER 29, 1968

65

THOSE ATTENDING THE MEETING WERE:

The President  
Secretary Rusk  
Secretary Clifford  
General Taylor  
General Abrams  
CIA Director Helms  
General Wheeler  
Harry McPherson  
Walt Rostow  
George Christian  
Tom Johnson

SANITIZED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NLJ 87-37

By WJ, NARA, Date 6-20-89

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Secretary Clifford: I thought final clearance with Thieu was mere formality. I thought we said -- now, here's the time. What happened?

The President: We don't know. I challenged Ellsworth. He said they are sitting on their hands.

General Taylor: They were barred from talking with anybody.

Secretary Rusk: I am annoyed to beat hell, but it is not unusual for this to develop.

These things get complicated. Look at the Middle East.

General Abrams: When we talked to Thieu, Bunker went through it and reviewed it. I reviewed the military situation. This was the 13th and 14th.

General Taylor: Did he raise the matter of consultations?

General Abrams: No. He was asked to postpone it. But he gave a decision. It was unequivocal. He took it, understood it; marched right up to the plate and swung.

Walt Rostow: He handled it well then.

Secretary Rusk: We got 2 and 1/2 hour delay.

The President: What is the situation in Saigon?

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Secretary Rusk: They are meeting with the NSC. It's 2:00 a.m. in Saigon now.

General Abrams: I am sure it's the first time the NSC has met at this time of night, even during Tet.

Secretary Clifford: I have trouble with the fact that nothing in the last few days has gone irregularly. The President said he would stop the bombing, if he got productive talks. We said the GVN had to be at the table. They have been kept closely advised. We have friends on the NSC -- sure we do. I thought Thieu said we were going in the right direction. It looks like Thieu is going bad on the deal. It looks ominous, even sinister. His excuse is lame -- that he didn't have the time.

General Abrams: They talked about flags, name-plates, etc. It was overcome by logic. It does represent a long list of things that had to be settled with them.

Secretary Rusk: We have had the same problem with Hanoi at Paris. There is a problem of face. We can't say Hanoi has face -- and Saigon does not.

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General Abrams: When you get down to reality, this type of thing is possible.

Secretary Rusk: These things are tough.

Walt Rostow: It is a tough moment to walk into the room with Hanoi.

General Abrams: I don't think anybody could produce anything when Thieu got concerned about a coup. Maybe it reflects the uncertainty he feels.

The President: Summarize it.

Secretary Rusk: Recommend you wait to hear from Bunker. I take the long view. President Kennedy said we would make a battle there to save South Vietnam. That set us on course. After the Tonkin Gulf, you put in troops to keep South Vietnam from being overrun. We have invested 29,000 dead and \$75 billion. We must be careful not to flush this down the drain. But we do have the right to expect cooperation from South Vietnam. Thieu and Ky agreed to this. Bunker said they needed more time. South Vietnam does not want a low-level representative to sit at the table for them. I do not know what is really in the minds of the NSC. If they are playing domestic political politics here, it is a different matter.

If they insist this is a matter of timing, I suggest we go ahead and set time convenient to them. But we should not sacrifice everything by creating a confrontation with our Asian allies. The issues are too grave. We should meet with Dobrynin so that the Soviets are not confused about our attitude.

General Wheeler: Should we meet with Bui Diem?

Secretary Rusk: If we did this yesterday or the day before. Maybe we could though.

Harry McPherson: What is the worst result out of NSC?

Secretary Rusk: If they cannot agree to a ceasefire before November 7 or agree to meeting before November 10, we know they are playing politics. If they agree to Monday I would proceed.

The President: Does anybody have anything to say?

Secretary Clifford: I thought South Vietnam wanted to be at the talks. We have now reached an agreement. They have had five months to think about who it would be. We have an enormous investment. They put Bunker off. Then he sees them. Then he must see them again. Then they must have an NSC meeting.

They are trying to decide what is best -- a Johnson Administration or a Nixon Administration to go on with. Bunker may not be putting it to them stiffly enough. I consider this a deep issue of good faith.

Secretary Rusk: What if Nixon's people say be tough. They read the polls. They are whip-sawed too. They have a problem.

Secretary Clifford: They have a moral obligation to go along with us. We said there were months of hard bargaining ahead. It is a matter of good faith. They may think they will get a better deal from the next President. I think they have left us in an almost impossible position -- Saigon throws a wrench in the wheel just as we are about to go on this. We cannot move in face of public opposition from Vietnam and other Asian allies.

The great weight of opinion is with us.

The President: Isn't it a case of you losing more than you gain.



Secretary Rusk: The GOP may be giving them advice. HHH has also scared them.

The President: They may just be testing HHH. If I were Thieu I wouldn't feel very kindly about it. I think we have to go through with it, making every effort to take them with us. It is not of world-shaking importance whether it's November 2, 4, 6 or 8. Let's see if they're serious.

General Taylor: Is this request for a delay ineptitude or actual need to touch bases -- or is it a doublecross?

The Political factor has been waved at them. There is a murky relationship. It may be sinister, or it may be ineptitude. We have so much at stake that we can afford some slippage.

The President: Nixon will doublecross them after November 5. All this publicity, Gorton, HHH, MacBundy -- all had an effect on Nixon. When the GOP could do it with us, they went to work on the Embassy. They made Bui Diem think he could get a better deal from Nixon than us.

I am trying to do what I ought to do if I can do it -- if it's right.

Based on Abrams' views, the JCS views, and all of you, I was ready to go. I was 80% ready before General Abrams came here. Now I am ready to go.

We should try to take South Vietnam with us. We must tell him we are ready to go. If you can't take South Vietnam and South Korea with you, you may have to reassess this situation.

Secretary Rusk: If you were doing this for political reasons you would have done this before the conventions.

The President: I got damn good cold out of this.

General Wheeler: This can be ineptitude or skullduggery. We must be guided by what they are up to. If it is serious, 24 hours is in order. If they play politics, I would take a hard line. You still have playing room on the field. The length of the NSC meeting does not disturb me.

The President: I think Ky is getting just as independent as Hubert.

Walt Rostow: We could say we will start meeting on a three-way basis if they can't get a delegation.

Secretary Rusk: What are their capabilities.

General Abrams: They don't do any bombing up there.

The President: Can they bomb?

General Abrams: Yes.

The President: Could we stop them?

General Abrams: Not really.

The President: Who gives them fuel?

General Abrams: We do.

The President: What would they use?

General Abrams: A - 1's.

Harry McPherson: Wouldn't we lose them.

General Wheeler: No more than jets.

Secretary Clifford: We are down to one-fourth of the planes we lost before.

General Abrams: I would try to work around the time of the meeting.  
You can't work over there with them mad -- and all of our relationships.

The President: When are you going back?

General Abrams: Whenever you say.

The President: I am ready now.

Secretary Rusk: "I sleep better when I know you are at your post."

The President: Who runs things when you are away?

General Abrams: General Goodpaster. He, Ambassador Berger, Ambassador Bunker and I are lockstep on this all the way.

Secretary Clifford: I do not think you can get by without announcing General Abrams visit. You can say you intended to see him in Honolulu, but couldn't.

You can say you asked him back to review work. I think you are better off to announce it -- to meet it head on.

The President: Well, I'm not sure. I would like to get him back to his base first. If they raise it, that's okay.

General Abrams: There are three plane crews, three men on emergency leave, two other enlisted men. All plane crews sworn to secrecy.

General Taylor: We are stretching our luck to think we can.

George Christian: Every movement of military commanders is not public.

General Abrams: I would like to get back. I will go into CamRanh.

The President: The NSC met -- it was bad news. They said we couldn't do it for four reasons.

1. Unconstitutional,
2. More time needed,
3. November 2 is too quick,
4. Harriman insulted them, saying they couldn't veto.

This may mean that everything we have done is in vain. There is no basic change -- no breakthrough.

The President has been wanting to see General Abrams. Been wanting to see him at some place. It looked like travel this week-end. General Abrams came. We reviewed the whole military situation with him. Can't be more specific than that. Don't say when he got here or when he left.

Gave him Distinguished Service Medal today.

General Abrams has returned.

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