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#69 notes	Notes from 10/29/68 - 6:28 p.m. Foreign Policy meeting [Sanitized NLJ 87-37] <i>open 5/19/03</i> Secret 5 pp. <i>NLJ/AL01-239</i>	10/29/68	A
#71 notes	Handwritten notes from 10/29/68 meeting Secret 12 pp.	10/29/68	A

FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 4

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FOREIGN POLICY MEETING
OCTOBER 29, 1968

6:28 p.m.

THOSE ATTENDING:

The President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary Clifford
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

NOTES ON FOREIGN POLICY MEETING
CABINET ROOM, OCTOBER 29

THOSE ATTENDING THE MEETING:

The President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary Clifford
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

Secretary Rusk: You should see these two telegrams.

The President: Read George Christian's briefing on General Abrams' visit.

Secretary Clifford: It is hard for Abrams to get on an aircraft and depart unseen. We can't brief everybody.

The President: Read George Christian's memorandum to the President:

"Our luck just ran out. Abrams was seen by somebody in the Defense Department, prompting press inquiries from CBS. I gave them the guidelines we discussed and have now advised other reporters of his visit in order to diminish the mystery as much as I could. A transcript will be sent in as soon as possible."

Secretary Rusk: Mood of Hanoi delegation.

Three alternatives, possibly four.

1. Forget it -- let thing go over.

Add some days to the five and a-half months we have spent working on this.

We need to talk to the Soviets. It will be a setback for our relationship. It's a shame. Today a Soviet diplomat told a Frenchman after Vietnam, we could move to settlement on the basis of 1962 accords.

2. Go back and insist upon the 2nd. Hard to meet that timing.

3. Meet on the 4th -- look as though we made concessions to South Vietnam.

4. If we don't get agreement, make a unilateral declaration. We have a major problem on our hands. They may figure they help Nixon by staying put.

We need to get Ellsworth back in touch with Thieu.

It is a very unhappy situation. One possibility is November 4. They will try to hold up until after our elections.

My own preference: try for the 4th, or say arrangements have been made for the GVN to sit at the talks. We can say the GVN can come when he wants to.

The President: ~~At~~ you together on a recommended course?

Secretary Clifford: At lunch we thought Saigon's approach might be due to ineptitude or other considerations represented by intercepts.

It is due to the fact they want to push this over. They do not want to affect Nixon adversely.

1. They tried to dredge up reasons for the delay:

- A. Need for legislature to meet.
- B. Harriman said something about the NLF.
- C. Questions of procedure must be taken up.
- D. Saigon cannot be ready for November 2 because Thieu and Ky cannot be ready. They do not want to participate in what the President is trying to do.

2. The President has been urged to stop the bombing. You took solid position. Now, three days before the election, you decide to stop the bombing.

We did have an understanding on the GVN presence at the talks. This constitutes something of a problem. We have established the principle that the GVN will be at the talks.

We're faced with the fact that the meeting of the GVN leaders will be all over town. The President may have to clear the air with a sharp, clear statement tomorrow.

We might do well to consider the fact that we talked in good faith with the Soviets. You can't get by with nothing.

You might choose alternative one -- do nothing and let Wednesday meetings go on.

Two, get Bunker to tell Thieu we will slide along for 24 hours.

Tell them the President will make a public statement, stopping bombing, and there would be a meeting on November 4. Tell Thieu to come along. This is the way it will go. Tell them none of the reasons have any validity. Tell Thieu either Thieu goes along or we go alone.

Although sometimes doing nothing is better, this is not the time.

I feel it is inappropriate for us, after bearing these burdens for so many years, to turn this over to Thieu and his people and a new Administration.

We know this is a decent, honorable deal. All your advisers can live with it.

This seems to be in the other camp's hands. I do not have a strong definitive plan.

The President: We have never gone so far that we have to do something. The fact that we worked with the Soviets doesn't bother me. They pushed and shoved.

Saigon may see this as a political deal. They may think this would help HHH. They know the Vice President would be softer. I do not want to help them put over a man who has this attitude toward us.

That's one reason I wanted to talk to Abrams. The JCS relieved my fears on the pause.

We don't want to tear ourselves to pieces over this, with the Vietnamese and South Korea. Doing it before the election would be interpreted as political. The Nixon forces have been working on South Vietnam.

We must reassess this.

We can't walk out, quit, split. We have got to hold together. We must tell them we won't stand for their vetoing this. Look at the Bundy speech, the Vice President's Salt Lake City speech, and you see reasons for Saigon's concern.

It may be better to wait.

The best choice:

Say to Bunker, now we have attained what we worked for. We must not let this get away from us. You must emphasize that the country

It may be we can't trust these people. We have got to get the family together. Why don't we stop the bombing right now. Nobody can force us to continue bombing. I do not feel good about a quickie before the election.

Secretary Rusk: If we go alone the only conclusion is that we went ahead only for political reasons.

Walt Rostow: Can we go to the Soviets?

The President: The Soviets didn't answer my letter.

Walt Rostow: Delay it one week. Get the election out of it.

The President: Let's don't go it alone. I know what forces are at work. I would postpone a day or two before I broke up the alliance. They can shove you around. It is almost impossible with the people in our camp making these speeches.

Thieu and the others are voting for a man they see as one who will stick with it -- Nixon.

Bunker must take Thieu up on the mountain and really let him know what the facts are.

1. The bombing not as significant because of the weather. We'll compensate with emphasis in Laos.
2. If he blows this deal, God help him. He has no right to act this way. His people may not like this NLF thing.

Secretary Clifford: There is great merit in what you say. Thieu and his associates are not reading the situation clearly here.

The President: I agree with that.

We must get over the situation to him as we see it.

1. If he keeps us from moving, God help South Vietnam -- because I can't help him anymore, neither can anyone else who has my job.
2. There will be criticism.

Secretary Clifford: Thieu must know he must deal with the same military and a Democratic Congress and the same leaders.

The President: If we abandon Korea, Thailand and South Vietnam's 1,000,000.

General Wheeler: Let me send a message to Goodpaster. I can get him to see General Vien and give him the same treatment Bunker gave Thieu. I am frankly disgusted. We can't permit our allies to dictate what are policies of the United States.

The President: I think we have a basic weakness. Thieu doesn't realize what he is doing to himself. The American people will know that just as soon as we got sight of the promised land they blew it.

We have to give him time.

Secretary Rusk: Let's go back on 24-hour, 4 November basis.

The President: (Read note on conversation between Cy Vance and Ben Read).

Tell Kosygin the best laid plans of mice and men often come to naught.

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MEMORANDUM

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 29, 1968
6:20 p.m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: George Christian *by*

Our luck just ran out. Abrams was seen by somebody in the Defense Department, prompting press inquiries from CBS. I gave them the guidelines we discussed and have now advised other reporters of his visit in order to diminish the mystery as much as I could. A transcript will be sent in as soon as possible.