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#56 meeting notes	<i>open 7-8-85 NLS 84-363</i> meeting with U Thant 4/4/68 Top Secret	4 p. 4/4/68	

FILE LOCATION

Meeting Notes File, Box 2

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SUBJECT: Meeting with Secretary General of the United Nations U Thant
Thursday, April 4, 1968 at the United Nations Building in
New York City.

MEETING CONVENED: 3:50 p.m.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 4:45 p.m.

ATTENDING;

President Johnson
Secretary General U Thant
Ambassador Arthur Goldberg
Ralph Bunche
Tom Johnson
Jim Jones

U Thant opened the meeting by thanking the President for his thoughtfulness in sending a copy of his speech with Arthur Goldberg to brief him. You made a very magnanimous move that generated progress for peace. My only regret -- but I should not comment on the internal politics of another nation -- your speech will generate a process which will lead to peace in Vietnam.

The President said that that is very encouraging. I spent the last several weeks trying to convince our people that some move had to be made. We went to other governments. We felt this was a step and I want to make a big step if the conditions permit. If we can, we will make another step. The only thing that would stand in the way is that we will not stand by and permit the massacre of our men by the enemy. We will go our part of the way to get talks started. I asked Ambassador Goldberg to brief you on this speech...

U Thant replied that he appreciated the consideration. It is important, in my view, that Peking did not broadcast Hanoi's statement until 1:00 p.m. this afternoon. On many instances, Hanoi has ignored Peking, and I think this is the latest example. Another example is when the NLF asked the Rumanians. This was opposed by Peking. Another was when Foreign Minister Trihn of Hanoi said there could be and would be talks. Peking never did broadcast that. On 8 February I asked some questions of the Communist Government of North Vietnam. On 11 February, Peking blasted U Thant publicly as a stooge of Washington. On 13 February, Hanoi replied to me through Mai Van Bo to London. This was two (2) days after Peking's criticism and this shows that

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Peking has no influence on Hanoi. These are some of the factors that shows Hanoi is somewhat independent of Peking. They cannot be totally independent, but they are somewhat. Last year I told Ho I was going to Rangon and asked if I could discuss with someone from his Government. They consulted Peking and Peking said no. In spite of this, however, Hanoi sent a representative. Thus, you should bear this in mind. It is very difficult for the doves in Hanoi to come up with the answer to your peace talk proposal.

U Thant continued. On Monday, I sent a message to Hanoi through two governments. The first message said don't react negatively and immediately to the President's speech. The second message said, consider very closely and only then react to the President's speech. One message was delivered Monday night. One got there Tuesday. I told DeGaulle also on Monday. DeGaulle's statement was also a factor.

It's the prerogative of your government, U Thant said, to weigh the pros and cons, but this is a very significant first move because of your magnanimity and Hanoi's retreat.

There are some procedural questions on the contacts with Hanoi which you should consider. My view is that Geneva would be the best place to hold these talks because the 1954 and 1962 talks were at Geneva and there are other facilities at Geneva which make these international talks practical. Mrs. Indira Gandhi informed me that India would be privileged to host the two governments for talks in New Dehli. The French Government, although not very officially, said that they would be privileged to hold talks either in Paris or in one of the many places outside Paris.

U Thant said, secondly, I am at your disposal. My sole concern is to contribute to the best of my ability to a solution of this problem.

U Thant said he told Ambassador Lodge 10 years ago that he (U Thant) came from a country where there were wars, colonialism, etc. We were very bitter towards the British and when the Japanese came in, 95% of our people were elated because we were driving out the British colonialists and we thought this was getting us independence. But the more they stayed on, the more bitter our feelings towards them became, even though they were Asians. Therefore, any prolonged stay in any country, even with the best of motivations, the more hostile one gets towards the stay. Our government in Berma is anti-communist, but we try to deal with our problems by our own means. Mr. Eisenhower and Mr. Dulles gave us generous aid by way of arms in the 1950's, but if we got United States bases there we were sure that China

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would have come in. We feel that we are still dealing with the Communists by our own means, but to have U. S. bases would be a propaganda factor for the Communists by showing that there is colonialism in our country.

U Thant recommended that we test the bona fides of Hanoi. They are Communists but they are independent Communists. Even a divided nation itself can be a nonaligned independent nation. This is my assesment. I want to also recommend that a positive contribution could be made by involving Justice Goldberg in the talks. I am also at your disposal and I will be at Hanoi's disposal. I am leaving this evening for Geneva for the ICC meeting which has been planned for some time. I may have an occasion to talk to Mai Van Bo. If not tomorrow, maybe Saturday.

The President said, I have enjoyed all you say and agree with it. Your evaluation and assesment is reasonable. I appreciate the constructive attitude you always take. I welcome any recommendations you make publicly or privately. Your statement on TV was very good. I'm glad you saw fit to take some initiative and contact Hanoi. I don't hold out much hope from this message, but it is something and that is hope. I don't know what the Russians had to do with it, but I want to involve them. I asked the Soviet Ambassador to come down and I gave him copies and said I would like to have his help. Publicly they have taken no position.

U Thant said the Russians are very discreet. We can't get anything out of the Russians.

The President said I have always been disappointed that their estimate of what would happen after our 37-day pause did not come true. I assured him that we had no intention of keeping our bases in Vietnam. I said to him what I said at Johns Hopkins that all we were interested in was one man, one vote. Let them form whatever government they want. I said that if they would quit pouring troops in there that we'll pick up and bring everything back in six months. South Vietnam was concerned about this, but I thought we had to show that we were not colonizers and we were only interested in self-determination. At Manila, Ky accepted this. It was a Clifford plan.

The President continued that this latest was the Clifford plan which passed the Joint Chiefs by a 3-2 vote with the Army and Air Force against it. We can take the Cam Ranh Bay's and move them into industrial plants to rebuild South Vietnam.

The President continued that in August he proposed the San Antonio formula and announced it in September. You could help them understand Americans.

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We don't want to whip them. We don't want their real-estate. We just want them to be able to vote unintimidated. I believe we could have a new Asia by just spending a portion of what we are spending on the war for economic development. We just want to give them some hope of a tomorrow. I am a poor communicator. I can communicate with you because I trust you and I like you. Our bombing is only to protect our own men. We weren't going to bomb beyond the 20th parallel. That got misunderstood. They are moving their trucks down the routes toward the DMZ and they are in such desperate shape that they are moving them with their lights on at night, bumper to bumper. If they don't pull another Tet deal and unless we found something new, I think you will find that we will move our bombing back closer to the DMZ. Goldberg said let's stop the bombing all together, but that dog will not hunt. If I stopped, they say there will be enough supplies to wipe out our men in 10 days. Westmoreland is now optimistic. Abrams, who is one of the toughest Generals we have out there, is optimistic about the South Vietnamese. Of the 149 Divisions, only eight (8) are not up to par.

The President concluded the meeting at 4:45 p.m. and said let's try to get together at my home and bring in representatives of other nations and let's visit further on this.

The photographers were brought in for pictures.

Secretary General U Thant, Ambassador Goldberg and Ralph Bunche escorted the President to the front of the U.N. building for departure.


Jim Jones

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