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Conversation No. 33-7

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Time: 8:52 am - 9:00 am

Location: White House Telephone

Participants: Richard M. Nixon, William P. Rogers

In this conversation between President Nixon and Secretary of State Rogers, Nixon defines what the administration response should be to criticism by the McGovern campaign related to negotiations to end American involvement in Vietnam. The president notes that administration line should be that there has been a "major breakthrough" in negotiations on the following key provisions: "that there should be a ceasefire, that all of our POWs will be returned and the Missing In Action accounted for, then that the people of South Vietnam shall determine their future without having a communist or coalition government imposed upon them."

Further, in response to anticipated criticism that the breakthrough in negotiations was timed with the coming presidential election, Rogers notes that "the timing of this was all determined by the North Vietnamese." Nixon agrees, adding "yeah, that's a very good point that you've been making." Rogers and Nixon concur that the McGovern criticism of the breakthrough in negotiations is a "desperate, last minute move", and that "he's coming apart at the seams."

Nixon: Hello?

Operator: Secretary Rogers.

Rogers: Hello.

Nixon: Hello.

Rogers: Hi, Mr. President.

Nixon: Have you got any wars started anywhere?

Rogers: [laughs] I don't think so. Is everything quiet?

Nixon: Yeah. Not even in the Mid East I know.

Rogers: No.

Nixon: Right. They call it sort of a pre-election...

Rogers: Quiet?

Nixon: ...pause.

Rogers: Pause?

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Nixon: Pause, right. I was going to ask you what you thought about the, uh—how this, how the McGovern thing ought to be handled. I, uh—Bill, I'm just going to stay right on the line I've been on, you know? Let me tell you briefly, I've been saying, in addition to what—it's basically the line I took in the television broadcast. I'm saying, first, that we have in the negotiations made a major breakthrough. We have reached agreement on the three major principles that I laid down on May 8th that there should be a ceasefire, that all of our POWs will be returned and the Missing In Action accounted for, then that the people of South Vietnam shall determine their future without having a communist or coalition government imposed upon them.

Rogers: Um-hmmm—

Nixon: However, the details and the issues that are not—that are still ambiguous that must be settled. We want them settled because details can make the difference as to whether an agreement is going to be kept and whether it's going to last or whether it's not going to last. And we're—as I put it home yesterday, that as far as the election is concerned an election isn't going to rush us into a bad agreement and it isn't going to delay a good agreement. The main thing is to get it done and to get it done right. *[clears throat]* The McGovern charge, of course, is affected and highly irresponsible because he knows very well what the situation is, that we are trying to—and, of course, it is going to be worked out as you know.

Rogers: Yeah.

Nixon: It's, uh—What is your feeling as to—? I don't know, frankly, how much attention to give to it, but I mean I'm not going to give anything to it—

Rogers: Do you speak again today—?

Nixon: I speak three times today, yeah, but I—

Rogers: Television, do you, too? Do you have another television—

Nixon: No, no. No television today.

Rogers: Do you have one Monday? You have one more television show?

Nixon: Well, I have but it won't be an opportunity to do this because it's simply an election eve...

Rogers: I see.

Nixon: ...plea for votes. But all day today I'll be speaking in ways I'll be on the evening news.

Rogers: Uh-huh.

Nixon: See?

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Rogers: Well, I think you ought to stay right on that.

Nixon: I don't think I ought to pay attention to him. I have said I'm on a—I have said we're not going to make the mistake we made in '68. We're going to have peace with honor and not surrender. I always throw that into him hard because that's, of course, that's something we have to do. Go ahead. Go ahead. What do you?—

Rogers: I think you ought to stay right on that line. I've got to be on *Meet the Press* tomorrow and I thought I'd take him on some. I don't know if we want—What I thought is I would say is pretty much what you just said that it's irresponsible and then point out that the timing of this was all determined by the North Vietnamese.

Nixon: Right. Yeah, that's a very good point that you've been making. We didn't—We didn't pick the time. We didn't blow the cover on the damn thing. I mean, they announced that we had this—

Rogers: Now, on the veto matter, the veto by...

Nixon: Thieu?

Rogers: ...by Thieu—

Nixon: Not true.

Rogers: We can—I think we can say that it at all times we made it clear that this is a matter that has to be done to the concurrence of the South Vietnamese—

Nixon: That's right.

Rogers: —because they're going to have to carry out many of the provisions—

Nixon: Yeah.

Rogers: —of it, so, obviously, they are concerned. We can't make an—

Nixon: Right.

Rogers: —agreement that affects them without having the agreement, but we think we can get it. And that the points that they raised in the discussions with us are valid and that...

Nixon: Well, the points—

Rogers: ...that is we ought to consider them—

Nixon: And that they are for the purpose—The points they raise really are to assure that there will be a ceasefire, that there will be elections—

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Rogers: That it will last.

Nixon: —that it will last, and that so that the war won't start again. That's all we're trying to get from them.

Rogers: Exactly.

Nixon: And that those points should be worked out, and that they can be and will be.

Rogers: Right.

Nixon: And I'd be very confident: There will be an agreement. I think you ought to say what I've been saying: that there is going to be an agreement. It's just a question of working out the details.

Rogers: That's right. I think we can do that. I think that, uh...

Nixon: I think it's a—I think the more he can be attacked the better. I mean, the more that he can be, you know, for the—I mean not attacked for his views, I mean—I think, first, it comes with ill grace for someone that has offered the North Vietnamese terms that go far beyond what we have now agreed to—

Rogers: Yeah.

Nixon: —to say this. But the second point is that for him to accuse us of misleading the people and so forth by this when the South—when the North—it was the North Vietnamese that put out the whole damned thing. Well, anyway...

Rogers: I thought that the two words maybe I'd use is that he's "irresponsible" and that these are "desperate" moves of his, knowing—

Nixon: Desperate, last minute. Yeah.

Rogers: Desperate, last minute moves.

Nixon: Right.

Rogers: I don't know if we ought to go too far in making personal attacks. I think those two are pretty strong words and then I think we—

Nixon: As a matter—yeah. Um-hmmm.

Rogers: Irresponsible and desperate last moves; that explains that it was the North Vietnamese that made this public and that we—

Nixon: Yeah

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Rogers: —that you’ve insisted agreement that will last.

Nixon: And then I think, too, the main thing, Bill, is to be very confident that it is because it is going to be, you know. You know that once—

Rogers: Well, I—Yeah—

Nixon: —Once this is over with we’re going ring their necks and their goddamned thing is going to be done.

Rogers: That’s right.

Nixon: But nevertheless we can’t say that.

Rogers: That’s right.

Nixon: I think we should be very confident and say, “Look, we’ve got agreement on the big issues, but we have to get them pinned down so they will be enforceable.” We had a bombing pause of ’68, but it meant nothing because they rushed into it and didn’t get the understandings nailed down.

Rogers: Right.

Nixon: I always hit that, too. That’s very effective.

Rogers: Right. Oh, I think it’s going very well.

Nixon: He’s sort of coming apart at the seams a bit, don’t you think?

Rogers: Yeah, I think so.

Nixon: Actually, it’s natural that he would, you know, when the fellow’s behind and all that sort of thing. You know he doesn’t have the problems that we have. You know we—everyplace we go not only me, but members of the family and Agnew with these goddamned hecklers who shout all the time through the speeches. It’s really disgraceful.

Rogers: It is, yeah.

Nixon: And try to, you know—And you just have to plow through it. They don’t have any of that, you know. Our people are so goddamned polite [*laughs*]

Rogers: [*laughs*]

Nixon: I don’t think—I think they shouldn’t be. I mean I just don’t approve of it. But, nevertheless, [*unclear*] I thought the funniest thing was the “Kiss my ass” remark.

Rogers: [*laughs*] Wasn't that funny?

Nixon: [*laughs*] Then he went and spoke to some ministers right after that.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Rogers: I think it's going very well.

Nixon: Yeah.

Rogers: You've got a busy day today?

Nixon: Well, today I do. Yeah, I'm doing three states. I'm doing North Carolina for Helms, where there is a chance that he can be the senator [but] it's tough, close. We have New Mexico where we think we have a better than even chance with Dominici, but it's close. And then I finish in California in Ontario...

Rogers: Uh-huh

Nixon: ...tonight and then tomorrow do the usual things Sunday and Monday.

Rogers: Uh-huh. Monday is fairly quiet is it? Do you have any—?

Nixon: Monday is—well, I go to a campaign headquarters in the morning in order to, you know, make the evening news, you know, urging the workers to get out the vote and so forth and then I do the television at night, which is mainly—not a last minute issue talk. I don't think that goes well on Monday night. People are just pissed off at politics.

Rogers: That's right.

Nixon: I'm going to, you know, urge them to get out the vote—I mean urge them to vote, tell them that the issues are clear, with the verdict, and so forth and so on. Oh, another thing, that I think McGovern is doing that is going to backfire, even with some of the lib[eral]s, is the same thing he did before the Democratic Convention. He isn't going to rally around and try to bring the country together after the election you know.

Rogers: Oh yeah. That was a bad mistake.

Nixon: You know because after what I did with Kennedy and what Humphrey did with me and all that sort of thing...

Rogers: That's right.

Nixon: ...and Goldwater did with Johnson, you know, it's just totally different.

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Rogers: Right. You're come back here Tuesday night, huh?

Nixon: I'll be here 6 o'clock. Yeah.

Rogers: Well...

Nixon: Ok.

Rogers: We'll celebrate.

Nixon: Good luck!

Rogers: Thank you, Mr. President—

Nixon: Bye.

Rogers: Bye.