

DRAFT

Conversation No. 33-92¹

Date: November 18, 1972

Time: 12:15 pm - 12:20 pm

Location: White House Telephone

Participants: Richard M. Nixon, Henry A. Kissinger.

In this conversation, Nixon and Kissinger discuss the “hard line” the administration sought to take with South Vietnamese President Nyugen Van Thieu. If the US ally refused to go along with the negotiations after a letter urging cooperation, Nixon quipped “why it may just be one of those breaking of relations.”

Alluding to press reports out of Saigon that the South Vietnamese would not agree to the peace concessions, Nixon continued: “...as I pointed out in my letter...we’re going to negotiate as hard as we can, get the best position that we can, and that we’re on this course, and that he must realize that we will not be subjected to pressure or harassment on this thing.”

Nixon stressed that he would not accept an emissary from President Thieu, and that all communications were to go through the US Ambassador to South Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker. Nixon said, everything “is to be transmitted through Bunker. That’s the way it’s to be done.”

Kissinger complained of the stream of revisions from the US ally: “The trouble is that if we accept all of these on top of all of the others, we have an entirely new document and [North Vietnamese negotiator] Le Duc Tho is going to walk out.”

Nixon reiterated that the negotiations were to be conducted through Ambassador Bunker: “The withdrawal has got to be handled on the basis that we’ve already suggested.”

Kissinger saw an opportunity in the adversity, and counseled delay: “I think we should wait until we see what we get. If Hanoi kicks us in the teeth, then we don’t have problem. But if Hanoi accepts the changes which we are bringing [...] then an already-good agreement becomes excellent.”

The conversation ends with a brief discussion of moving Peter Peterson out of the Commerce Department as part of Nixon’s planned executive branch reorganization following the election.

Nixon: Yeah?

¹ Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Nixon’s Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, had his secretaries transcribe selected phone conversations by listening in on phone conversations or transcribing phone conversations from tape recordings (which were supposedly destroyed). These telephone conversation transcripts, or telcons, offer a unique glimpse into Kissinger’s conduct of foreign policy, his relations with the press, and a myriad of other interesting issues. There is some overlap with the Nixon tapes recorded from the White House telephone switchboard. This conversation is one of many overlap conversations, and we have included the text from the telcon so you can compare a verbatim transcript from the Nixon tapes with an edited telcon. The telcon text begins on p.6 of this transcript.

Operator: Dr. Kissinger, sir.

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: Mr. President?

Nixon: It seems to me that you ought to inform Bunker that I have directed that we go ahead, so that Bunker knows we're taking on hard line on the thing. We're gonna—

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: —and inform him now, so that Thieu knows that there's no, there's no fooling around here and this bargaining pos[ition]—time is over. I mean that fellow has got to be out of his mind to think that, uh, to think that after the letter I wrote, that if after that we don't get anything why it may just be one of those breaking of relations.

Kissinger: They want to send an emissary to see you personally, too.

Nixon: Is that what they said?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: No.

Kissinger: They can't do that while we're—

Nixon: No.

Kissinger: —negotiating in Paris—

Nixon: No.

Kissinger: —if we just...

Nixon: No, no, no. There's not going to be any emissary and I've got, uh, I've got everything. Anything they have to say [*through an*] emi[ssary], Bunker's to say. [*It*] is to be transmitted through Bunker. That's the way it's to be done.

Kissinger: Right—

Nixon: Right?

Kissinger: Right.

DRAFT

Nixon: And, uh—Good. We've had enough emissaries and that sort of thing. So, we just say that we're ready to—that we—that if they have any—I just think Bunker has got to get to him a message from me to the effect that you're going ahead and we're—we've, as I pointed out in my letter, we're going to make, we're going to negotiate as hard as we can, get the best position that we can, and that we're on this course, and that he must realize that we will not be subjected to pressure or harassment on this thing.

Kissinger: Right. I think that is essential—

Nixon: This is a negotiation. It isn't any—There's no ultimatums to be come from them under any circumstances.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Right—

Nixon: But you don't have the substance of what they're beefing—

Kissinger: Yes—

Nixon: —about.

Kissinger: Now I have the substance. It just came in. Uh, and again, the trouble with them is we have—You see, every draft we give back to them already incorporates seventy percent of their changes.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: This has now been going on for three weeks.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Now they've sent us another batch of changes.

Nixon: Um-hmmm.

Kissinger: I would say again we could accept fifty percent of them. The trouble is that if we accept all of these on top of all of the others, we have an entirely new document and Le Duc Tho is going to walk out.

Nixon: That's right. No, no, no. Just say that we—

Kissinger: So, if we didn't—

DRAFT

Nixon: Just say that the document that we already have is the basic framework and that that's that, and that we're going to do the best that we can and he's to know that that's the situation.

Kissinger: After Haig went out there...

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: When Haig went out there we already incorporated all the changes they made to me when I was there.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Since then we have made two more revisions...

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: ...based on comments they gave to him and comments—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: —they sent us afterwards.

Nixon: Right. Right.

Kissinger: Now, they have given us yet another, oh, ten pages of comments and the end result of that is to kill the agreement.

Nixon: Well, how does it kill it?

Kissinger: Well, because they're changing everything. For example, wherever they talk about the United States...

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: ...they say the United States will withdraw its forces, they want to say the North Vietnamese will withdraw its forces—

Nixon: No, no, no, no, no. We've—The withdrawal has got to be handled on the basis that we've already suggested.

Kissinger: And—And so they keep putting in needles in practically—

Nixon: That's right.

DRAFT

Kissinger: Where it says, “replace” —There’s a phrase that says, “U.S. forces and those allied with the United States”—

Nixon: You really feel now that Bunker can handle this? We don’t need to send an emissary there. I don’t mean Haig, but the Connally ploy.

Kissinger: I think we should wait until we see what we get. If Hanoi kicks us in the teeth, then we don’t have problem. But if Hanoi accepts the changes which we are bringing...

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: ...then an already-good agreement becomes excellent.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And then we might consider sending somebody.

Nixon: Yeah. Alright, that’s the way it should be, but be sure Bunker tells him we’re going to go forward and the document is already—that we already have will be the basis for it. We’ll do the best we can, but we—and negotiation involves give and take on both sides.

Kissinger: Incidentally, I talked to Peterson this morning and I think he will almost certainly accept it.

Nixon: Oh, you do, huh?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, that’s the best thing. It’s a better job for him.

Kissinger: It’s a better job for him and—and it’s really in foreign policy.

Nixon: That’s right. And it gives him a chance then to move. In Commerce he’ll simply be a second man to Shultz and all the others.

Kissinger: That’s right. And I told him he’d have access to the White House and...

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: ...which is you had—

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: —already discussed with him—

DRAFT

Nixon: Good. Good. Ok.

Kissinger: Right.

TELCON²

Mr. Kissinger/President

11/18/72 12:18p.m.

RN: Henry, you ought to inform Bunker that I have directed that we go ahead so that Bunker knows we are taking a hardline on this thing.

HK: Absolutely.

RN : And inform him so that Thieu knows that there is no fooling around here and that this bargaining is-the time is over--the fellow has got to be out of his mind after the letter that I wrote --if after that we don't get anything why it may be one of those breaking of relations.

HK: He wants to send an emissary to see you personally too.

RN: Is that what they said?

HK: Yeh.

RN: No.

HK: They can't do that while we are negotiating in Paris--

RN: No, no, no. Not going to be any emissary--Anything they have to say--Is to be transmitted through Bunker --that's the way it is to be done.

HK: Right.

RN: And that we've had enough emissaries and that sort of thing--so we'll just ready to--we have any--I just think that Bunker has to get to him a message from me to the effect that we are going ahead and and as pointed out in my letter we're going to negotiate as hard as we can for the best position we can and that we're on this course and that he must realize that we will not be subjected to harassment on this thing.

HK: Right. I think that essential to the negotiations

RN: --there are to be no ultimatums to be come from them under any circumstances.

² Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation (Telcon) Transcripts, Nixon Presidential Materials Project (NPMP), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (NARA II), Box 17.

DRAFT

HK: Now I have the substance it just came in and again the trouble with them is every draft we give back to them already incorporates 70% of their changes. This has now been going on for three weeks. Now they sent us another batch of changes. I would say again we could accept 50% of them but the trouble is if you accept all of these on top of all the others we have an entirely new document, and Le Duc Tho is going to walk out.

RN: No, no no--just say that the document that we already have is the basic framework. And that's that. And we're going to do the best we can, and he has to know that that's the situation.

HK: After Haig went out there--we already incorporated all the changes they made to me when I was there. Since then we have made two more revisions.--Based on comments they gave to him and comments they sent us afterwards. Now they have given us yet another 10 pages of comments. And the end result of that is to kill the agreement.

RN: How does it kill it?

HK: Because they are changing everything--for example, wherever they talk about the U.S., they say the US will withdraw its forces, they want to say the North Vietnamese will withdraw--

RN: No, no, withdrawal has to be handled on the basis that we already suggested.

HK: And so they keep putting in needles--there is a phrase which says U.S. forces and those allied to the U.S. --

RN: We rigged the deal so Bunker can handle this--we don't need to send an emissary--I don't mean Haig--but

HK: I think we should wait until we see what we get--if Hanoi kicks us in the teeth then we don't have a problem, but if Hanoi accepts the changes we are bringing then an already good agreement becomes excellent and then we might consider sending somebody.

RN: Yeh, all right, but be sure Bunker tells them we are going forward and the document is--that we already have will be the basis for it. We'll do the best we can, but the negotiation involves give and take on both sides.

HK: Incidentally, I talked to Peterson this morning and I think he will almost certainly accept it.

RN: Ah--you do huh? It's the best thing--It's a better job for him.

HK: It is a better job for him--his talent is really in foreign policy--

DRAFT

RN: Right and it'll get him a chance to move--in commerce, he'll simply be a second man to Shultz and all the others.

HK: That's right. And I told him he would have access to the White House.

RN: Right.

HK: Which is what you apparently had already discussed with him.

RN: Right. Okay.

HK: Okay.