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Conversation No. 33-98

Date: November 18, 1972

Time: 12:32 pm - 12:44 pm

Location: White House Telephone

Participants: Richard M. Nixon, H. R. ("Bob") Haldeman.

Continuing the theme of his conversation with Kissinger moments before (33-92), Nixon tells his chief of staff: "we're just going to have to, in my opinion, then say to Thieu, 'This is it. If you don't want to go, fine. Then we, we'll make our own deal and you'll have to paddle your own canoe.'"

Nixon continues: "...it's a good deal; that's the point...The big thing we have here is that if Thieu doesn't go, of course, it poisons the agreement to an extent and so forth and so on, but that then we have completed Vietnamization, we have made a deal with the others, we're getting out and South Vietnam...is strong enough to defend itself and now it's up to South Vietnam."

Haldeman: If he collapses then there we are.

Nixon: I don't think he'll collapse...Well, he will certainly collapse if he plays this dog in the manger thing and on that because the Congress is damn well not going to appropriate the money for him.

Haldeman: Yep, because we told him that.

Nixon: Yeah, well, we're going to tell him that again.

*[Thank you to the Miller Center of Public Affairs for providing a draft of this conversation online at <http://tapes.millercenter.virginia.edu/transcripts/> and via email. Additions made using the Miller Center transcript are denoted by **bolded** speaker's name.]*

Nixon: Yeah?

Operator: Ready with Mr. Haldeman, sir. You're on the line.

Haldeman: Hello—

Nixon: Hello?

Haldeman: Yes, sir.

Nixon: What's the report?

Haldeman: I just got back. I spent an hour-and-a-half with him.¹

¹ Secretary of State William P. Rogers.

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Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: And, he's going to stay on. He completely accepts all of the...

Nixon: Conditions.

Haldeman: ...conditions, understands them, then we will go ahead with reorganization. That you will make the decision on all appointments as we're doing in all departments, that promotions in the Foreign Service and any activity there has to be based on loyalty. And I hit the Yost thing hard.²

Nixon: Good.

Haldeman: That we've got to shift to working within the system, that we've got to get out of the president going through the agonizing role of being the referee and that stuff and, that you've got to agree to work that out, and it's got to be done, and he bought that and that we have a clear understanding that the departure is June 1st or sooner. And then he said, "Absolutely." He said, "I just took June 1st out of the air and maybe it'd be much better go in May or even April, but..."

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: ... "in any event that," he said, "I feel strongly I should go by June 1st because I don't want to get started on the European Security Conference because a new secretary should do that."

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: Yeah—

Nixon: And also it doesn't give the new secretary—The thing we've got to think [is] we can't ask a guy to take over on the job for, you know, he's got to have his four years; that's the other thing.

Haldeman: Yeah. Um, he's—He's, I think, you know, after thinking it all over he—I hit him pretty hard on all this stuff. I said that it was kind of a surprise to go through the thing that we went through there because the understanding, the thought that you had had and I certainly had was that Bill intended to leave.

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: That there was no intention of anybody firing him, it was a matter of confirming what we thought was the plan.

² Charles W. Yost.

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Nixon: That's right.

Haldeman: And he said, "Well, I did. It's not a question of that at all. It's just timing."

Nixon: Right. Ok—

Haldeman: "And I didn't want to look like I was being fired."

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: And then he goes into all his stuff of how, you know, the usual—the same stuff he went through with you—the loyal Foreign Service and all of that.

Nixon: But you cracked him on Yost?

Haldeman: I sure did. And, of course he doesn't blame him. He mitigates it by that old Moynihan flap, and all that, you know, when he was—

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: We fired him and he said Yost—

Nixon: Yeah, but Yost was—

Haldeman: —that if he had gone on the right grounds he wouldn't have done this—

Nixon: No, but Yost was disloyal before that.

Haldeman: That's all I said, though, you know the guy didn't change his thinking as a result of that; and, you know, sure, that probably aggravated the situation but it didn't create it.

Nixon: Good.

Haldeman: And, uh...

Nixon: Good.

Haldeman: ...he agreed with that.

Nixon: All right. Well...

Haldeman: I hit him hard on how rough it had been for you in some of these things where you've had to, on top of making the decisions and all, to get into a refereeing of a sparring match between him and Henry and that you just couldn't perpetuate something that's going to work that way. And he came, you know, with, "I understand that, but it's hard to work with Henry because he lies all the time." Which is true.

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Nixon: It's true—

Haldeman: Henry admits that—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: And, uh...

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: ...then he went through some specific names—

Nixon: Hmmm.

Haldeman: —and ideas and stuff, but he's—

Nixon: Incidentally, I've, sort of in my own mind, come around to the view that we'll definitely make the shift from—to put a few of Laird's ideas of putting HEW Richardson over to Defense we're going to have to sell that to the committees I don't think they can object to that too much

Haldeman: Well, especially with [Deputy Secretary of Defense William P.] Clements [Jr.] there.

Nixon: Right. Right. And putting [Office of Management and Budget Director Caspar W.] Cap [Weinberger] in the other one. I think Cap is going to really enjoy the other one.

Haldeman: HEW?

Nixon: Yeah, sure.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: And he's more of my view. That's all there is to it. And on Defense, I'll run the damn thing.

Haldeman: Well—

Nixon: OK. Anything further on the [White House political operative Charles W.] Colson matter?³

³ Nixon is referring to Colson's departure from the administration

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Haldeman: Nope.

Nixon: Mm-hmm.

Haldeman: Nope, I haven't talked to him.

Nixon: With your conversation with [former Treasury Secretary John B.] Connally though, Connally was—was he very hard on it or thought we could do it either way? Or—

Haldeman: No. No. He wasn't hard on it, but he was very, very positive. He just said, "Of course that's what you should do."

Nixon: Good.

Haldeman: But he didn't really see any—and I made the Colson case.

Nixon: Mm-hmm.

Haldeman: He said, "Well, that's"—he said, "That"—he just sort of dismissed out of hand. He said, "Well, that just, you know, it isn't going to be a problem, and—"

Nixon: What's he think about the business of the loyalty, I mean, to a fellow, you know? We do have that problem, you know. Loyalty to Colson and so forth.

Haldeman: Well, he thinks you're doing the right thing by moving him out.

Nixon: Because he thinks—

Haldeman: That you're not damaging the loyalty.

Nixon: Because he thinks he sees a possibility that Colson is going to be a lightning rod for—

Haldeman: Yeah, and his point, though, is that even if he isn't, this is the time for him to do it. You're doing the right thing, and that'll be obvious to him a little later. Keeping him in for four or six months isn't going to—is going to deteriorate his position, not improve it.

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Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: And even Colson, in a sense, recognizes that when he makes the point that if he stays in, he's got to be promoted and moved over and all that sort of stuff, which really isn't realistic. You're then in a really untenable position, I think.

Nixon: It's out of the question because it doesn't fit into the whole scheme of the reorganization either.

Haldeman: Well, that's right. If that's the decision, then the only way to handle it with Colson—and let me take the heat on it—is—and he'll do it.

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: But it's got to be done on a just a straight, hard-line basis. The—all the arguments have been thought through, weighed carefully. There are obvious merits to both sides, and so on. On balance, the decision clearly comes down that—

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: —for everybody's interest, the way to do it is to—

Nixon: And just make it—

Haldeman: —to do it—

Nixon: —and also say that his interests require it. Despite what he says, that we—that the President's concern, when you raise it with him, is this: I don't want to have to turn my back on him at a later time.

Haldeman: Right.

Nixon: And that's really the case. That is, that there is a chance—I don't—it may be one of five, but that's a hell of a big, big chance. Right?

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Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: Now it can be done in the right way and we can have the proper relationship, and that I would appreciate his finding the men for us that we need. Because we do—

Haldeman: Sure, then I'll tell him—

Nixon: —we do need his eye for that.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: And we'll count on him to make the recommendations and to set it up.

Haldeman: [*Unclear*]—

Nixon: You see, and in a sense, that gives him—he can—by setting it up, it gives him the stroke over it. Also tell Colson I'm very intrigued with the idea of [Construction Workers Union President Peter J.] Brennan for, say, Transportation or something.

Haldeman: OK.

Nixon: You know, a labor guy—

Haldeman: Yeah. Yeah.

Nixon: —in another position. I think Transportation is the only one that will work, though. Don't you think so?

Haldeman: It really is. Yeah. There's not much . . . He can't realistically do HUD [Housing and Urban Development]. And you can't—

Nixon: No, no, no, no, no. It's too big.

Haldeman: —and you can't do Interior because it doesn't fit that.

Nixon: Right. No other position, is there?

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Haldeman: That's really it. Transportation is it.

Nixon: It's a good thing that he's . . .

Haldeman: See whether we can't work that.

Nixon: Some people say he's not qualified for it. What do you think of that?

Haldeman: I think what you say is that we're going on the basis of people that are generally qualified. You could say Richardson's not qualified for Defense also.

Nixon: But he's—

Haldeman: Because he's never been in the [*unclear*]

Nixon: —a very capable man.

Haldeman: You're putting men in who can do the job, and they'll build the qualifications.

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: The credentials. They have the qualifications, they just don't have the credentials.

Nixon: Tell Colson—run that by Colson, if you would, fairly soon. I'd like for you to get at it—

Haldeman: OK.

Nixon: —you know, say, “Look,” you know, and that gives him a chance, and we'll let him offer the job in effect, too.

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: And that if he wants to take it, but he's got to be sure that [Seafarers International Union President] Paul Hall will take it. You know—

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Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: —because that's Maritime. OK?

Haldeman: Yeah. Well—

Nixon: Well, Henry says he's having some more problems with Thieu. He's kicking up his heels—

Haldeman: Oh, really?

Nixon: —according to a line from Bunker and so forth, and he wants to renegotiate this and that and more, a hell of a lot of other things. And I told Henry, "Well, just go right ahead to Paris," [to] get the very best deal he could. And then we're just going to have to, in my opinion, then say to Thieu, "This is it. If you don't want to go, fine. Then we, we'll make our own deal and you'll have to paddle your own canoe." It's tough, but don't you think that's what we have to do?—

Haldeman: I don't see what else you can do now.

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: 'cause, uh...

Nixon: Well, it's a good deal; that's the point. The only thing is that what—the big thing we have here is that if Thieu doesn't go, of course, it poisons the agreement to an extent and so forth and so on, but that, uh, then we have completed Vietnamization, we have made a deal with the others, we're getting out and South Vietnam—

Haldeman: Turn it over to him.

Nixon: —is strong enough to defend itself and now it's up to South Vietnam.

Haldeman: If he collapses then there we are.

Nixon: I don't think he'll collapse.

Haldeman: He's going to ride that out anyway.

Nixon: Well, he will certainly collapse if he plays this dog in the manger thing and on that because the Congress is damn well not going to appropriate the money for him.

Haldeman: Yep, because we told him that.

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Nixon: Yeah, well, we're going to tell him that again.

[NARA Excision: Category: Deed of gift-Privacy Duration: 6s]

Haldeman: I wondered whether you were—you're going to stay down tonight, then?

Nixon: I'm going to stay down tonight, and—

Haldeman: Good.

Nixon: —go over—and then go back up tomorrow at about, oh, perhaps, tomorrow afternoon around 4:00.

Haldeman: OK. Well, I was planning to come up later on tomorrow evening.

Nixon: Fine.

Haldeman: If that's OK?

Nixon: No problem. I—

Haldeman: And then—

Nixon: —I'll just go up tomorrow [*unclear*]

Haldeman: —we'll start cracking them through—

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: —again on Monday.

Nixon: Right. I talked to [White House Counsel] Len Garment a moment ago and asked him to come up tomorrow about 5:00. I thought we'd have—be open by then. I wanted to have a chat with Len.

Haldeman: Oh, good. OK.

Nixon: Good. So put him on the list.

Haldeman: All right.

Nixon: OK.

Haldeman: He's—you asked him to come Sunday or Monday?

Nixon: Monday.

Haldeman: Monday.

Nixon: Five, yeah.

Haldeman: OK. Good.

Nixon: All right. Nothing else of interest at the moment, huh?

Haldeman: No, no. I'm planning to do [International Economic Affairs Adviser Peter M.] Flanigan on Monday and [White House Communications Director Herbert G.] Klein on Tuesday.

Nixon: Right. Up there?

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, then they should come in to see me [*unclear*].

Haldeman: And I think, I—well, I got to thinking about it. First, I said they shouldn't [*coughs*]. I think they should because that's—

Nixon: That's right.

Haldeman: —you might as well get all this crap over with.

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Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: And if you—if they don't come in and see you, then you're going to have to do it later, which means it's hanging on your head.

Nixon: That's right.

Haldeman: I think it's better to do it, wrap it up—

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: —get the trauma over with and . . .

Nixon: With Flanigan, it really isn't—we don't really have anything to offer him, have we?

Haldeman: Nope.

Nixon: I mean, because we really don't think he should stay—well, [Council on International Economic Policy] CIEP, but under [Treasury Secretary George P.] Shultz.

Haldeman: Well, did you talk to Shultz about that?

Nixon: No.

Haldeman: OK, I'll check him on that.

Nixon: Well, if he wants, he could do that. But that's what we're going to do, if he wants to stay under those circumstances. There's no problem of his staying, in my view, in the White House.

Haldeman: In that role.

Nixon: In that role.

Haldeman: But he's got to get out of his personnel-type roles—

Nixon: Person—

Haldeman: —and his agency-type roles.

Nixon: Personnel and agency thing we're putting all over to [future Office of Management and Budget Director Roy L.] Ash.

Haldeman: [*Unclear*]—

Nixon: Right?

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: And we've got—and that—isn't that true? And—

Haldeman: Well, the agencies are divided up in different places. The regulatory ones we're putting through the—through [White House Counsel] John Dean.

Nixon: Right.

Haldeman: So that they're non-politicized, but—

Nixon: We're going to get it out of the political thing, right. But Pete's got to understand they don't have CIEP alone but that to kind of realize that it's a different deal now.

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: And we'd be glad to offer that, but no Cabinet thing. OK?

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: Fine, but I don't see—is he—I see no problem having him stay in if he'll stay in under those circumstances.

Haldeman: Right.

Nixon: Now, does that change his title? No, you leave it the same.

Haldeman: I think you have to leave it the same. You can't—

Nixon: Leave it the same.

Haldeman: —you could change it but I don't think he can.

Nixon: Yeah. Well, we can leave the same. Fine. OK.

Haldeman: OK.

Nixon: Bye.

Haldeman: Very good.