

DRAFT

Conversation No. 33-99

Date: November 18, 1972

Time: 12:45 pm - 12:49 pm

Location: White House Telephone

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

In this important phone conversation, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Dr. Henry Kissinger, lists a number of complaints about the South Vietnamese in the peace negotiations. Kissinger's litany is in response to South Vietnamese President Nyugen Van Thieu's stream of revisions and proposals, seen as an attempt to "scuttle the agreement."

Kissinger advised: "What we should do is send a message to them from you reciting all these changes we've already made and saying we can only conclude that this latest [...] would have the objective consequence of scuttling the agreement; it's no longer a negotiation [...] And that we cannot accept. That, secondly, having sent Haig three times, me twice, Bunker always available, and four letters, you see no need to receive any emissary [...]; you fully understand their position; you've read every memorandum and every letter [...]; You have personally drafted the letters."

Nixon replied, "it takes two to make a deal and there must be give and take on both sides... I'm convinced that the agreement as modified and as we will modify it is good one. We can make it better, but we cannot scuttle it and I will not do it."

Kissinger saw the South Vietnamese haggling as interminable and advocated taking a hard line, even threatening to conduct bilateral peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese to complete the American withdrawal and the return of POWs: "If we don't give them some shock...this is just going to go on and on."

Nixon recognized new political implications by the failure of the GOP to win majorities in Congress, and told Kissinger to include warning in the message to Thieu, "I don't want it to come to the point where we have an open break about this but we have to remember that even I cannot with the makeup of the new Congress [...] if we do not now go forward and get the agreement, that then the responsibility for not getting it will fall upon him and [...] that the programs of assistance, military and economic, have not one chance of getting through the Congress. Period."

Nixon ordered, "Make it tough," to which Kissinger replied, "We have no choice, Mr. President."

"That's too bad if the record and so forth is small, frankly, small solace in the event," the president stated, "South Vietnam goes down. We don't want it to. You see [...] I don't want to be right on the record; what I want to do is be right on what we achieve."

Nixon also pointed out that Thieu's position seemed detached from reality: "We're going to play the game hard now. He just acts as if the election has not been held, doesn't he? [...] And as if he had a bargaining position."

DRAFT

Nixon: Yeah?

Operator: Mr. President, I have Dr. Kissinger for you. There you are.

Nixon: In the event that we have to go bilaterally...

Kissinger: Yes, Mr. President?

Nixon: ...the question that is raised is what then happens to the aid programs for South Vietnam?

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: And I think what will happen is that the Congress then will...

Kissinger: Cut them off.

Nixon:cut them off. And I think that [*unclear*]—

Kissinger: We've made that clear to them.

Nixon: Well, be sure Bunker makes it clear again.

Kissinger: Well, what we thought, Mr. President, is that we would draft a message from you to Thieu saying—you see what they've done here, I don't want to plague you with it, [*but*] they have collected every comment they've ever made. We are just now vetting it...

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: ...and put it into an endless memorandum. Some we have already accepted. Some parts are irrelevant because the text has changed completely. One or two we can accept, but we've reached now a point where the accumulation of their proposals scuttles the agreement. What we should do is send a message to them from you reciting all these changes we've already made...

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: ...and saying we can only conclude that this latest message sent to us twenty-four hours before would have the objective consequence of scuttling the agreement; it's no longer a negotiation—

Nixon: And that's not—That's not acceptable.

Kissinger: And that we cannot accept. That, secondly, having sent Haig three times, me twice, Bunker always available, and four letters, you see no need to receive any emissary—

DRAFT

Nixon: No.

Kissinger: —You fully understand their position; you've read every memorandum and every letter—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —You have personally drafted the letters—

Nixon: And that we're gonna—And that it takes two to make a deal and there must be give and take on both sides, that I'm convinced that the agreement as modified and as we will modify it is good one. We can make it better, but we cannot scuttle it and I will not do it.

Kissinger: And if—If we don't give them some shock...

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: ...this is just going to go on and on—

Nixon: But that I—But that under the circumstances that I don't want it to come to the point where we have an open break about this but we have to remember that even I cannot with the makeup of the new Congress, I can say—with the makeup of the new Congress there is, if we do not now go forward and get the agreement, that then the responsibility for not getting it will fall upon him and that I—that the programs of assistance, military and economic, have not one chance of getting through the Congress. Period.

Kissinger: That's right. That's right.

Nixon: Lay it right out there.

Kissinger: I think we have to.

Nixon: Make it tough.

Kissinger: We have no choice, Mr. President.

Nixon: Make it tough. That's right. We'll see. They're bargainers. They're bargainers—

Kissinger: Oh, yes.

Nixon: —just like the North and we'll see what they come up with.

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: And frankly I'm just thinking, you don't think he'd get out over more if suppose we do just go forward without him. We can then, by God, we will blame him. I just think—

DRAFT

Kissinger: But we have to move forward—

Nixon: —that's too bad if the record and so forth is small, frankly, small solace in the event—

Kissinger: Of course.

Nixon: —that North Viet[nam]—South Vietnam goes down. We don't want it to. You see, that's the thing that bothered me about the whole thing. I'm just—I don't want to be right on the record. What I want to do is be right on what we achieve

Kissinger: Well, what worries me, Mr. President, is that these guys are talking themselves into such a frame of mind where they may not be able to handle the agreement when it does come, even if they agree to it.

Nixon: Hmmm. What do you mean to that?

Kissinger: Well, if they conducted themselves aggressively, confidently, and positively they would come out as the victors in this agreement. I've had the CIA prepare a control map of South Vietnam as it stands today...

Nixon: I'd put that in there.

Kissinger: ...and I must tell you it is absurd: 95% belongs to the GVN. We can't even find—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —most areas any—

Nixon: Yeah, of course. Of course.

Kissinger: —if it's the North Vietnamese.

Nixon: And there'll be less if they conduct themselves aggressively but—Ok. Lay her—Lay her right out there. We're going to play the game hard now. He—He just acts as if the election has not been held, doesn't he?

Kissinger: He acts as if the election had not been held and—

Nixon: And as if he had a bargaining position.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Ok.

Kissinger: Right, Mr. President—

DRAFT

Nixon: That's the way it's going to be.