

Conversation No. 35-35

Date December 28, 1972

Time: 4:00 – 4:15 p.m.

Location: White House Telephone

Participants: Richard Nixon-Henry A Kissinger

Kissinger: Mr. President.

Nixon: Hi, Henry, how are you? How's the weather out there?

Kissinger: The weather is perfect.

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: A little breezy today, but I'm staying in the sun.

Nixon: You're in Palm Springs?

Kissinger: Yes, still in Palm Springs.

Nixon: Yeah. That's good. Do you have a house there?

Kissinger: Yes, I have Ted Cummings' house.

Nixon: O-oh.

Kissinger: He has a little house here.

Nixon: But it's nice, though. He's a—

Kissinger: Very [nice].

Nixon: He's got such fine taste.

Kissinger: Exactly. It's small, but it's very—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —exquisite.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah.

Kissinger: And it's got a swimming pool.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: It's in good shape.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Well, [Colonel Richard T.] Kennedy called me—

Nixon: Yeah, he said—he just gave me a brief, and then said you'd be calling me.

Kissinger: Right, everything has gone just as programmed. I mean, just as was proposed.

Nixon: No conditions?

Kissinger: No. No, no. They—It's all of ours are—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: —are accepted. So—

Nixon: Now the question is: how about the time now? How does it? How do we? What? How does that work?

Kissinger: We'll go Saturday.

Nixon: Today is Thursday?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Is that—is that their understanding, too?

Kissinger: We'll just tell them.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I don't think we should horse around.

Nixon: Yeah, I just want to know what the understanding is.

Kissinger: Well, their understanding is that we'll notify them whenever we'll do it.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: And we'll do that tomorrow morning.

Nixon: Tomorrow morning, then, you will have notified them that what, in effect? What I meant is, I'm trying to think in terms of what—when it becomes public, etc.

Kissinger: It's be public 24 hours later. Tomorrow morning, we'll notify them about the halt.

Nixon: Tomorrow morning is Friday? Right.

Kissinger: And we've worked that out with Moorer, and we'll stop it at 7:00.

Nixon: At 7:00? When?

Kissinger: P.M. Tomorrow night.

Nixon: Oh, 7 p.m. tomorrow night we stop? Oh, I see, Ok. I'd—

Kissinger: Then, we announce it at 10 a.m. Saturday.

Nixon: Oh, the public announcement is at 10 a.m. Saturday?

Kissinger: But that, frankly, Mr. President, we won't even ask them. We'll just tell them—

Nixon: Oh, sure, I just want to—

Kissinger: We'll tell them two hours ahead of time that that's what we're going to do.

Nixon: Yeah, I understand.

Kissinger: Don't you think? Well, at any rate, I think it's—

Nixon: To what—I see no reason, no reason to do it otherwise. I mean, what are the arguments here?

Kissinger: What are they going to do about it?

Nixon: Huh?

Kissinger: What they're going to do about it?

Nixon: Well, I don't know. I know—

Kissinger: Can we exchange another set of messages?

Nixon: No, no, no. I wouldn't exchange any messages. No—

Kissinger: I think we'll just tell them.

Nixon: Well, because, basically, they have accepted our proposal. Right?

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: Our proposal was that we would halt on the 31st?

Kissinger: No. Our proposal was that we'd halt within 36 hours of an answer.

Nixon: I see. And, then—so we will be keeping our word? That's all I want to be sure of, up to a point.

Kissinger: No, no, we'll keep our word by two—we'll be within two hours. We're stopping within 34 hours.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Right.

Kissinger: But, you know, we got an answer within 12 hours.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Which shows how anxious they are.

Nixon: What do you—What significance do you attach to all this?

Kissinger: Well, I think they are practically on their knees.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: Because, also in their answer, they said, "We will fix a schedule for the final signing at that next meeting."

Nixon: [chuckles] They always want to talk about schedules. Don't they?

Kissinger: Yeah, but this one—I mean, considering what we've done to them—

Nixon: Yep.

Kissinger: —that they are willing—

Nixon: I must say this: this should have some effect on our brethren in the press, shouldn't it?

Kissinger: As you know, if they had strung us out—if they could have taken it another week or two, we would have had unshirted hell in this country—

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah. Right—

Kissinger: —so, for them to accept this within 12 hours is a sign of enormous weakness.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

Kissinger: And it's a very conciliatory reply. They said they'll come with a very serious attitude, and they hope we will, too, and that it can be rapidly settled.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: Technical meetings are starting Tuesday.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Ok. Well, that's good. 10 o'clock, then. A public announcement [at] 10 o'clock Saturday morning.

Kissinger: Right, and I think all we should do is just a very brief one.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Just saying, "Private meetings will be resumed."

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: We'll give them the date. "Technical meetings will be resumed." Give the date.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: And then, in answer to a question, which is sure to come, we should say, "Yes, while these talks are going on, we are not bombing North of the 20th."

Nixon: Um-hmm. Well, you—But you're going to tell them—they already know that, though?

Kissinger: They will have known that tomorrow morning.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: They'll have known it for 36 hours when we announce it—

Nixon: So, basically, you would have [Press Secretary Ronald] Ziegler make the announcement, right?

Kissinger: Well, [Gerald L.] Warren will have to do it.

Nixon: All right, it doesn't make any difference. He can do it. We'll announce it at, at, uh—

Kissinger: Just the resumption of the meetings.

Nixon: Right. And then?

Kissinger: You make a formal announcement of—

Nixon: Then they'll say, "What about the bombing?" That until the— Well, you prepare the answer.

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: That there will be no bombing until the meetings are concluded, or something?

Kissinger: That's it. While serious negotiations are going on.

Nixon: Yeah. Um-hmm. Ok, fine.

Kissinger: So this has been another spectacular for you, Mr. President—

Nixon: Yeah. Well, hell, we don't know whether it's that—

Kissinger: It took terrific courage to do it.

Nixon: Yeah. Well, at least, it pricked the boil, didn't it?

Kissinger: Mr. President, anything else would have been worse in the long run.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: And all the guys who are now saying, "Well, why do we do it with B-52s?" [Nixon laughs] These are the people who oppose this thing—

Nixon: What with?

Kissinger: —if you did it with DC-3s they'd be affected—

Nixon: The point is that, as we know, we couldn't do it with anything but B-52s, because, Goddamnit, there's nothing else that can fly at this time of year.

Kissinger: Mr. President, within 10 days, you got these guys back to the table...

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: ...which no other method could have done.

Nixon: Well, that's—Just keep right on and—

Kissinger: And I think it, this way, it makes the weekend papers, and the excitement is going to die—

Nixon: Boy, it'll make the news magazines, too.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: They'll open up for this, don't worry.

Kissinger: Mac [McGeorge] Bundy called me last night. He said he's going to write a letter, a public letter to you and—

Nixon: I've seen it. Protesting?

Kissinger: —[unclear]—

Nixon: Yeah. Well, of course.

Kissinger: I said, “Why?” And he said, “Because, what am I going to tell my son?” I said, “I’ll tell you what you can tell your son: Tell him: “I got us into this war and now I’m preventing us from getting out.” And [I] hung up on him.

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: But that New York establishment hasn’t—

Nixon: They’re done. They’re done.

Kissinger: —hasn’t ever come—

Nixon: Well, the main thing now, Henry, is that we have to pull this off. I think it’s going to be tough titty.

Kissinger: I think now we’re going to turn—we’ve already got a list of economic pressures—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: —and we’re going to start implementing those next week.

Nixon: On?

Kissinger: Saigon.

Nixon: Well, yes. Right. Oh, on Saigon, though, as I see—and I’m talking to Kennedy a little, which he’ll fill you in a little this morning, about, some of the, you know, some of the concerns as to the options that we had to be considering here. That’s assuming we go forward with our plan by just talking to the North. My view is: we talk and we settle. Right? With them—?

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: Now, then, then what do we—? At what point do we inform Saigon that we are going to precede in that way, or that we have proceeded in that way?

Kissinger: Well, I think this thing is going to happen just before your inauguration. Basically, I would still send Agnew and Haig out there, to give them a face-saving way off. I would—

Nixon: Yeah, but, [laughs] suppose he doesn’t. That’s, I suppose, our—

Kissinger: Then we just proceed and sign the documents.

Nixon: Proceed and sign the documents? But they won’t sign if Hanoi doesn’t—if Saigon doesn’t sign. I’m just trying to raise the questions, you understand?

Kissinger: No, well, I think it will wind up with Saigon, at least, implementing it, whether they sign it or not.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Well, you've got to have that understood with Hanoi, then, that they aren't going to say, "Well." You see, I—I think you wouldn't want to have that happening just before the inauguration, have Saigon—

Kissinger: That's what I think should happen, Mr. President. If we send Agnew to Saigon before the inauguration, that would get him back by the 16th.

Nixon: Yes.

Kissinger: Then that I go on the final leg of this exercise right after the inauguration.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: It stretches it out a little more, and then you could go on around the 29th or 30th.

Nixon: In other words, we would have no announcement before the inauguration.

Kissinger: No announcement, but obvious activity.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Well, I don't think, then, I'd send—I don't think I would send Agnew out with the possibility of getting a rebuff before the inauguration. I'm inclined to think I'd have the activity if—You see, the problem we have here, which we've got to think about, the problem we have here is that I—we may as well play the inauguration as best we can, and I think you'd better—you may have to string your talk out to shove him past that point. I mean, if we can't—if we aren't going to get it—if we can't get it settled before the inauguration, I don't want him going out there and getting rebuffed before the inauguration. I don't think the risk is worth it—

Kissinger: I think we can be extraordinarily—I don't think he will be rebuffed.

Nixon: I know, but the point is, if he isn't rebuffed, then we would settle it right then. I mean, there's no—there's nothing to be gained by having him go out there and just show a lot of activity before the inauguration.

Kissinger: No, but we—

Nixon: The activity—It's enough for you to go over to Paris, frankly. I'm inclined to think that much up and down is the only activity that would be worth anything more than your going to Paris is basically something that I said, you see?

Kissinger: Right. Well, uh—

Nixon: You see, because I won't be able to address the matter of—It's really—See, a lot of this depends; a lot of this affects the flavor of the inaugural address, you understand? That's the problem.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: And, I'm—

Kissinger: I'd hate to have this whole thing if we—

Nixon: That's why I don't want [laughs] That's why I don't want Agnew to blow it before the inauguration. I don't want to. I don't want—I don't plan to—Under these circumstances, I can't say much about it, but I'm going to have to play it very close to the vest.

Kissinger: Well, if we have an agreement— Well, I said it is dangerous to tie ourselves to a schedule that culminates just before the inauguration, because if anything goes wrong with that, we'll be in the same position as we were at the end of October.

Nixon: Well then, let's push Agnew past the inauguration, too, then.

Kissinger: All right. We can do that.

Nixon: I think that's the best thing. Just— You mean, you'd take, then, you'd take a whack on the 8th, and then another on the 15th? Something like that?

Kissinger: Well, I think we should conclude it by the 11th, this time. I just think it's too dangerous.

Nixon: All right, but you conclude it, it's going to start getting out, and then Saigon I suppose— You see, my problem, I think once it's concluded, well, we can talk about this later, but you can be thinking about this so that we get a plan. Once this thing is concluded, and we agree, the damn thing is going to get out, and then Saigon might blow. On the other hand, I don't want Agnew going out there and basically provoking it. If so—I realize there's a risk if he doesn't go, but I think there's even, at least, we do not have the confrontation before the inauguration. If Agnew goes before the inauguration, Henry, you could well have a confrontation and have the whole damn thing seem to be shattered. So, what we have to do is to work out some sort of a plan—

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: —whereby you do your deal, and then we sort of—

Kissinger: Well, we could put it into cold storage for ten days and just start it on inaugural day.

Nixon: I'm afraid that's what we'd better do.

Kissinger: Although it's a high risk if one leaves these things lying around. But, of course, we may not finish it by the 11th.

Nixon: Well, yeah. I understand that. Well, the main thing [is] you'll have some activity, and we won't be bombing.

Kissinger: We can ask Bunker's judgment.

Nixon: Yeah. Well, I don't know. Kennedy seemed to have some views that Thieu would—was going to be more, might begin to be reasonable, more reasonable, but I think that's sort of silly—

Kissinger: No, I think that's right.

Nixon: Well, we've felt that before, haven't we?

Kissinger: Yes, but we haven't really. The last time, when Haig was out there, we didn't have a specific proposition to put before him.

Nixon: Well—[laughs] Well, this is going to be goddamn specific, and he isn't going to like it, right?

Kissinger: But what are his options?

Nixon: Yeah. I know. Well, I'd rather have him blow, Henry, right after the inauguration, than before. You see my problem?

Kissinger: Of course.

Nixon: The problem being that I don't want to have the—and we'll just tell the North: "Look, with the inauguration coming on, we've got—we can't do it, then, but you're going to send Agnew right immediately after the inauguration."

Kissinger: That's right and—

Nixon: That's—I think you could—I think they'd well understand that, if they're not being bombed. Get my point?

Kissinger: That's right. Getting through with these bastards always is when you let up—

Nixon: They might let off they might get off the hook.

Kissinger: When you let up the pressure on them, they are again—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —feel confident.

Nixon: On the other hand, we ought to get—Hmm.

Kissinger: But it can easily be done that way, and then we could, perhaps, compress it by having Agnew go to Saigon and have me go to the other places, simultaneously—

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. [Unclear]—

Kissinger: There was some advantage in having Agnew come back and then start again.

Nixon: Yeah, but Agnew coming back—I mean, with problems with Thieu, and all that, it's just not the right story before the inauguration. I mean, I know it's—

Kissinger: Well, we—

Nixon: —that's too high of risk from the standpoint of our domestic situation.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: I know the risk on the other side, but I think we'd better take the risk on the other side and delay Agnew for five days.

Kissinger: We can do that.

Nixon: Right—

Kissinger: It can be done—

Nixon: Well, I do think we'd better do it.

Kissinger: That can be done.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And it may stretch beyond the 11th, anyway.

Nixon: Yeah. Well, we hope not. But if it does; it does. We'll just take a little more time.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: And, at least, we'll get the statements about progress out. Ok. Well fine, Henry—

Kissinger: [Unclear]—

Nixon: Enjoy the weekend [laughs]

Kissinger: [It's] a good problem to have.

Nixon: Yeah. For a change. Thank you.

Kissinger: Right. Thank you.