

**DRAFT**

**Conversation No. 388-17**

**Date: November 8, 1972**

**Time: 3:30 pm - 3:37 pm**

**Location: Executive Office Building**

**Participants: Richard M. Nixon; Henry A. Kissinger; Alexander M. Haig; Charles W. Colson, Alexander P. Butterfield**

*During a meeting in the Executive Office Building between President Nixon, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Henry A. Kissinger, and Alexander M. Haig, Kissinger reports to the president that the North Vietnamese have delayed the latest meeting to determine the end of American involvement in Vietnam. Nixon responds, "I'm not concerned about the delay. Screw it now, the election is over, and so forth. So do it on our time. Get it done in a reasonable time."*

*However, the president notes, "Look, we've already been down that road, already been down with Thieu. The election is over. And if the hell, uh, that's the way it is. If Thieu wants to play, fine, but if he doesn't, we're just not going [to negotiate]. That's all there is to it." Finally, for emphasis, he adds, "Let me say this, though. We're savvy with this peace crap agenda up to this point, we're ruthless as hell...I want you to tell him, 'don't test the president at this point'...He's got to know damn well that anymore of this screwing around is not going to be taken well."*

Nixon: Hello, hi, how are you?

Kissinger: We've just heard from the North Vietnamese. They want to put the meeting off until the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Nixon: Why do you think they want to do that?

Kissinger: Uh, well they'd rather announce it ahead of time.

Nixon: Well, [we've gone as far as that works].

Kissinger: So, uh—

Nixon: Chuck, incidentally, oh, I want, what I'd like you to do is to also, [*unclear*] yesterday, the, uh, those figures for the '24 and '36 elections.

[*phone rings*]

Colson: '24 and '36 elections, yes sir.

Nixon: [*speaking into phone*] Yeah. Yeah. Ok. [*hangs up phone*]

Kissinger: The 21<sup>st</sup> is a Tuesday.

Nixon: All right.

**DRAFT**

Kissinger: Better announce it on Sunday.

Nixon: Sunday is what?

Kissinger: The 19<sup>th</sup>. But I'm sure they will permit it to be moved up to the 17<sup>th</sup>.

Nixon: Well, I'm just talking—

Kissinger: Just say that we have to—

Nixon: —well, we're not going to wait that long. Maybe going to Saigon will [*unclear*], [that's going to start the wheels] [*unclear*] [clicking] again.

Kissinger: We'll just say then 'well my view is the 17<sup>th</sup>'—

Nixon: Say the 15<sup>th</sup> is what we're going to do, the 15<sup>th</sup>. What, what reason are they urging you to delay the announcement?

Kissinger: They'll have to—They'll want Le Duc Tho [*unclear*].

Nixon: Why don't you tell them to [*unclear*].

Haig: Mr. President, if they say the 17<sup>th</sup> you can do it on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

Nixon: [*unclear*] Well, fine. Why don't, they just probably couldn't get ready for the [time period]?

Kissinger: They proposed the 14<sup>th</sup>. That was their day. They should [be able to do it] the 15<sup>th</sup>, because of—I think they're basically [*unclear*] propose, one, they may want to get some more supplies into the South, but [*unclear*]—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —but they've taken care of [*unclear*]

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Second, maybe they want to pull out some forces before they meet us. Because if that's the issue of—

Nixon: Well, for whatever reason, I'm not concerned about the delay on that thing. Screw it now, the election is over, and so forth. So do it on our time. I'd like to get it done in a reasonable time. You're trip's already been announced to go to Saigon?

Haig: No, sir.

**DRAFT**

Nixon: That's alright. Take your time. But I'd like to have the announcement as early as possible.

Haig: Yes, sir.

Kissinger: So, this time we have to announce it. How do you propose [the language] [*unclear*]?

Nixon: Now it doesn't matter.

Kissinger: They would have the slightest advantage of announcing it too early, if—

Nixon: No.

Kissinger: —we really want to work them over, with bombing.

Nixon: You'll be around tomorrow? Then what do you, what do you say? That may be true. If you don't, don't worry about the [it now]. We don't care about the [announcement]. [It doesn't make any difference].

Haig: I think time is working on our benefit, basically..

Nixon: Well let's use the time, and use it well.

Kissinger: I think Thieu will—

Nixon: [*unclear*] will be damn confident all the way through the next backgrounder [*unclear*].

Kissinger: Thieu will announce it towards the end of next week.

Nixon: Look, we've already been down that road, already been down with Thieu. The election is over. And [what] the hell, [today] that's the way it is. If Thieu wants to play, fine, but if he doesn't we'll do something else. That's all there is to it. Right?

Haig: [As far as they say they've got a stake], but—

Nixon: [That's what we're trying to plan here].

Kissinger: They started complaining Saturday when they proposed the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Nixon: Don't you think maybe they would have proposed the 14<sup>th</sup> on Saturday because of their fearing the election? Now they decided it might be best to wait now that we didn't do anything? They're damned fools. And—

Kissinger: [*unclear*].

**DRAFT**

Nixon: I think they're—I think Thieu's probably [the natural victim]. They have some reason to prolong it—

Kissinger: They may have. They have, we have a lot of information that they [*unclear*] was [arrested].

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: See, we gave them a sort of new procedure of what would happen in the next year. We told them that after the next meeting there would still be a few [weeks for the proposal to be signed], and I think what they now have to do is [withhold their troops].

Nixon: Yeah. Let me say this, though. We're [savvy] with this peace crap agenda up to this point, we're ruthless as hell. I mean, here this country [*unclear*]. Understand, that's the option we have, and I said we aren't going to be delayed here. They say the 20<sup>th</sup>, why don't you tell them we prefer the 17<sup>th</sup>?

Kissinger: We've scheduled on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Now if we make it at a later date we say there's domestic pressure.

Nixon: Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. No, I just meant make it the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Kissinger: Well, I don't think we can give them a date before the date they've given us. We can give them a date afterward if we want to schedule [*unclear*]—

Nixon: I've got to go catch a dentist, I'm sorry. Well, the main thing I want to say, Al, is that, you know, you've got to be an authority. You had a long with me about my views, and the main thing is the view of trust. After all, [*unclear*] trust the [*unclear*] trust the [President]. That's the only way it's going to work. And, 'the president's made his decision' and [I have his total backing]. Now, we're going to play [*unclear*]. But, I would just lay this across, 'don't test him.' You know—

Haig: It'll have repercussions.

Nixon: No, I'm not speaking to you. I want you to tell him, 'don't test the president at this point.'

Haig: That's it.

Nixon: He's got to know damn well that anymore of this screwing around is not going to be taken well. They know it. We got that in the letter. Don't you agree, Henry?

Haig: That's my draft of it.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: [But they know] [*unclear*].

*[Conversation trails off as they walk toward the door]*