

Document 8

Conversation Between President Nixon and National Security Adviser Kissinger, 30 September 1971

[Source: National Archives, Nixon White House Tapes, Conversation 582-3]

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In the following excerpt, Nixon and Kissinger discuss whether to attempt to change the scheduled date of Kissinger's second trip to Beijing, following meetings with Secretary of State Rogers and Ambassador Bush in which the possible adverse consequences for the U.N. vote on Chinese representation had been discussed.

Kissinger: Mr. President [inaudible]. I've talked it over with Haig¹ [inaudible]. Talked to Bob² about the [inaudible] side of it. I just don't think it's a good idea. I wrote out the message of what we would send them tonight. Ah, Mr. President, I think it's easier to tell George³ to delay the goddamn thing no matter what it costs.

[Pause in the conversation]

Kissinger: I mean, supposing they don't follow our game plan. Supposing they come back and say all right, come November 15th, but have the announcement on October 30th. Then the day after the vote we announce I'm going to China—I don't know whether that's any better from a public relations point of view. You can judge that better than I. We can do it—Al—Haig and I, we've gone back and forth. For selfish reasons I would prefer to delay it but if they can't personally—

Nixon: Yeah.

[Pause]

Nixon: [Inaudible].

Kissinger: It's a pain in the neck and I hate to [inaudible] with it—

[Pause—sound perhaps of pages being turned]

Nixon: Well, I guess this is it.

Kissinger: Well, it's a definite call, either way it has disadvantages and advantages. If Taiwan gets kicked out, which in my view is—I think the vote is probably not as close as State thinks. I looked over their list—I don't think the list is—. Then is it better for me to go

¹ Kissinger's deputy Alexander M. Haig, Jr.

² H.R. "Bob" Haldeman, President Nixon's Chief of Staff.

³ U.N. Ambassador George Bush.

after they've been kicked out. I don't know but of course—they could of course put on a show while I'm there, it makes it look embarrassing with the debate is going on.

[Pause]

Nixon: Yeah. I think so. [Inaudible]. It's probably something that's easy to say [inaudible] kind of mean spirited—

Kissinger: I think if we all pull together he could do it but you know it would take some real enthusiasm on everybody's part, which we won't have, so it's ah—

Nixon: Haig feels you should not do it?

Kissinger: We've been sitting there for an hour and a half going back and forth, Mr. President, so we have [inaudible] ourselves that at some point we lean slightly for doing it and others remain slightly against doing it. It's—the Chinese in their dealings with us have been very meticulous and precise. They have kept their promise on the—on no Democrats in there;⁴ they have not given us a hard time in the press—I mean they have [inaudible], but what they said on Japan and so forth wasn't all that critical about—and even that they've now stopped. Since the Reston interview⁵ they haven't let in any newsmen. And, these dates are ours. I mean [inaudible] that he says they're tricking us.⁶ But we tried to move it as early in the congressional session as we could, and we thought that the U.N. vote would be at the end of November rather than at the end of October.

Nixon: Well, I know. You were trying to move it into [inaudible]. You were trying to, frankly get us on the [inaudible]. This goddamn Congress was—

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: Vietnam. [Inaudible] realize at that point that's the reason we did it.

Kissinger: Of course.

Nixon: Jesus Christ, we just didn't want to—it wasn't going to do us any good to [inaudible].

Kissinger: Well, that's exactly the point, Mr. President. And that's—this is our date, not their date. The announcement date is our date, not their date. Their date was announced and was the 14th.

[Pause]

⁴ Nixon and Kissinger had fretted that the Chinese would invite prominent Democrats to visit China before Nixon's trip, thereby stealing the Administration's thunder, and had sought Chinese assurances that this would not happen. See Mann, *About Face*, 28-30 and Kissinger, *White House Years*, 734.

⁵ James B. "Scotty" Reston, reporter for the *New York Times*, whose trip to Beijing followed immediately after Kissinger's first, secret visit.

⁶ Probably a reference to Rogers' position that the Chinese were manipulating the Americans.

Kissinger: What concerns Haig and me is the impression this will make on them. If what we couch this in the form of a personal request by you.

Nixon: Yeah. [Inaudible].

Kissinger: Oh, yeah, we've done all of that.

Nixon: [Inaudible].

Kissinger: Oh no, we've done that, and we have even said that if it isn't possible I'd be prepared to come at the agreed-upon day.

[Pause]

Kissinger: There is a good chance that they will not agree to the announcement next week under these conditions. That I think is—

Nixon: [Inaudible].

Kissinger: Now? When? No, but that doesn't help us much.

Nixon: I mean just to [inaudible].

Kissinger: I thought if I said [inaudible]. But first of all no one believes my illnesses any more.⁷

Nixon: True.

Kissinger: And second—particularly related to China. Secondly, I'd have to get sick from now till the end of the month.

Nixon: [Inaudible] won't work.

Kissinger: I thought of that first thing this morning.

Nixon: [Inaudible] that won't work. [Inaudible] so they kick Taiwan out, what happens?

Kissinger: Right, then I think hell will break loose in this country anyway, don't you?

Nixon: I do. I just [inaudible].

Kissinger: [Inaudible] you'll be asked to veto this thing in the Security Council.

Nixon: We can't do that, can we?

Kissinger: No, well, you could make a hell of a fight if you wanted to. You can make a case that you can't—that you could also—

⁷ Kissinger had faked illness in Pakistan to provide cover for his secret trip to Beijing in July.

Nixon: Well let me ask you this—we don't intend to [inaudible] we're not going to veto [inaudible].

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: And the [inaudible] we've got to make the case—Rogers is doing it now, but, ah, somebody has to [inaudible].

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Correct?

Kissinger: Correct.

Nixon: [Inaudible].

Kissinger: But we won't do that.

Nixon: You don't think you can do anything at the U.N.?

Kissinger: I never thought so. That's why I wasn't for this whole scheme to begin with. And we have no great choice—I mean I thought that as long as we were going to lose we were better off losing on the old stand, but, ah, I think we are further behind than they think. They have to consider that when these diplomats talk to us they'll try to make it sound as good as possible—why annoy us four weeks before the vote. We may want something, they may want something from us until then. The assessment is their present count is two down—it will be more than that on the day of the vote.

Nixon: Wonder how much the [inaudible].

Kissinger: I have to say in defense of George and Bill, it will enable some of those who have pretended to us that they're closer to us than they are to use that as an alibi. I think they [inaudible]—the votes are set now. I do not think that objectively it affects the vote for anybody.

Nixon: No, I know that. Oh, I know that. People will use things for excuses.

Kissinger: I think some [inaudible]. So we are telling them I'm prepared to come on the earlier day if they can do it. So it's not—they are asking it as a favor.

Nixon: You say [inaudible].

Kissinger: Yeah, well, he went like everybody. His first instinct was to do it, and by the time you called him in, my impression was that he thought not to do it.

Nixon: Not to send him up there?

Kissinger: Not to send him up. But you might want to check it with him personally. That was at any rate my impression. Because it takes so long to set these goddamn things up that if any—

Nixon: That's the problem.

Kissinger: If any part of it gets unstuck—over two months of negotiation to get it set. You don't want to have it said that you're so panting for that visit that you'll do anything to—sacrifice anything to get it.

Nixon: [Inaudible] sacrificing something to get it—this is not something that we even considered at the time.

Kissinger: Oh no—no no, I'm looking at what enemies can say, not what is true. And we proposed it, we did it on the assumption that the vote would be four weeks later.

[*pause*]

Nixon: [Inaudible].

[*pause*]

Kissinger: It's sort of a rude thing to do.

Nixon: That's a point.

Kissinger: And yet if you don't give them the choices, maybe make it earlier—then they're certain to think that there's something being cooked up.

[*pause*]

Nixon: [Inaudible] we had—because there's no chance now that State can play a—

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: It's already too [inaudible] discussions and so forth.

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: [Inaudible].

Kissinger: Oh yeah. And Bill said [inaudible]. Then he phones the [inaudible]. But that's the note [inaudible]; we got exactly the—went out and got exactly the same paper they've given me.

Nixon: This would naturally influence the vote. [Inaudible] make this crisp in view of the fact [inaudible].

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: This presents problems [inaudible] pissed off.

Kissinger: But what will hurt you more with the right-wingers—if I go to Peking after Taiwan has been kicked out, under this scheme even if State has not delayed the debate, I will not be there when the vote is going on. The vote will be about five days later.

Nixon: After you get back?

Kissinger: The vote will be around the 29th and 30th.

Nixon: You'll be back?

Kissinger: I'll be back on the 23rd.

Nixon: [Inaudible] objections. There might be some objections to your going there after [inaudible] although the announcement comes earlier.

Kissinger: That's assuming they'll agree to the earlier announcement now.

Nixon: [Inaudible]. Suppose they're kicked off [out], and then you—

Kissinger: That's what—

Nixon: [Inaudible]. You go there after they throw out Taiwan. [Inaudible] after they're kicked out, there'll be strong pressures on us to [inaudible] the whole China thing.

Kissinger: [Inaudible].

Nixon: And there'll be immediate pressures on us [inaudible] Kissinger should not go over there and talk to [inaudible].

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: [Inaudible] I think we need to tell Rogers, though, that we checked [inaudible].

Kissinger: I think we should tell him we went through it.

Nixon: [Inaudible] we just checked with Walters⁸ and we just can't, can't get it through in time. Well, why don't you just wait a couple of days and say we were unable to get a reply.

Kissinger: Why don't I tell him that I put it to them to make it later and they said it's either then or not at all?

Nixon: Well, I don't want him—

Kissinger: No, but then he'll say—

Nixon: [Inaudible]. See what you can—

Kissinger: The truth that if your political—that it's our political judgment here.

⁸ Gen. Vernon Walters, U.S. Defense Attaché in Paris, who was used to relay messages between the White House and the Chinese government.

Nixon: Oh, I think that if the—because the risk isn't—I think that going after, immediately after the vote would be worse than your going before the vote.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: That's the way I look at it.

Kissinger: And of course they might even come back—you gave the best case which is that we make an announcement next week and I go after the vote. But supposing they come back and agree, say, to November 10th or 17th with an announcement day of November 1st.

Nixon: Yeah, [inaudible] that close.

Kissinger: We lose on the 28th and on November 1st I announce—now I go to Peking; I think that might be the worse—I don't know—

Nixon: That'd be the worst. [Inaudible].

Kissinger: I think—

Nixon: [Inaudible]. Maybe we ought to try to fight a little harder to try to keep them in. Are we doing everything we can?

Kissinger: They're doing everything. As you know, Mr. President, I have always thought it was a loser. We always thought—

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: I'm not saying—I finally went along with it because I had no better solution.

[The brief remainder of the conversation dealt primarily with the President's schedule and was not transcribed; it did include one remark from Nixon to Kissinger: "Don't tell Bill the truth quite so soon," presumably a reference to their earlier discussion on keeping from Rogers their reluctance to ask the Chinese to change the date of Kissinger's second trip.]