

Conversation 717-10

Date: May 2, 1972

Time: Unknown after 11:19-11:40am

Location: Oval Office

Participants: Nixon, Ziegler, Haldeman, Butterfield, Haig

[*The President met with Ronald L. Ziegler*]

Nixon: [*Writing noises obscure Nixon's voice*]

Ziegler: They will always ask how we were informed to support the—they will always ask how we informed [*unclear*]

Nixon: [*Unclear*] different claims this morning.

Ziegler: Right.

Nixon: Yeah. You said the Attorney General [*unclear*]

Ziegler: This morning.

Nixon: Yeah, this morning and then find him. They say, “Well, why didn’t you do it earlier?” I said, “Well he wasn’t [*unclear*].”

Ziegler: [*Unclear*] to do it earlier

Nixon: Well, because basically the doctor didn’t find him until 9 o’clock.

Ziegler: Well, you have that and then you have to—When a man like J. Edgar Hoover dies you have to notify the copy board.

Nixon: [*Unclear exchange; overlapping conversation*]

Ziegler: —within, there are certain figures other than—You know that the President—

Nixon: I heard it—I heard it shortly after 9 o’clock this morning. I’d just say, “Shortly after 9 o’clock.” [*Writing noises*] The doctor didn’t know till 9 o’clock.

Ziegler: He was found at 8:30, I guess, by the maid, and then they had to get the doctor there. It’s a—there wasn’t a delay

Nixon: Sure, well they didn't know what the hell it was, shortly after—shortly after.

Ziegler: I hope there'll be no question.

Nixon: It was early this morning, I'm—

Ziegler: Your statement went very well.

Nixon: But the two sons-of-bitches...

Ziegler: You were on the wire three minutes after the announcement, so it worked just fine.

Nixon: Depending on when anyone pushes the vicious criticism or character assassination—

Ziegler: Right.

Nixon: —they submit it to you.

Ziegler: Well, it's—you did.

Nixon: That came through.

Ziegler: It sure did.

[*H.R. ("Bob") Haldeman entered at 11:24am*]

Nixon: His life at the FBI [*unclear*] that isn't in my written statement. The oral is a little different than the written.

Ziegler: The oral is more important than the written.

Nixon: The oral is [*unclear*], the written [*unclear*]. Buchanan worked on it. We worked out something.

Haldeman: The oral, on that one, will go—

Ziegler: Far—

Haldeman: Far and wide.

Ziegler: And long

Nixon: They'll carry it.

Haldeman: And they'll write what they think [*unclear*]

Ziegler: They'll carry all of it.

Nixon: It wasn't too long. I don't think it was more than a couple of minutes.

Haldeman: I think they'll carry that whole thing.

Ziegler: Give it some time.

Haldeman: We've got to get this.

Ziegler: You see, I didn't realize he has no family at all.

Nixon: None. I don't think he's got a brother or a sister.

Haldeman: He doesn't. He has none. There's—apparently—

Nixon: His family is the FBI, basically.

Haldeman: There's some distant cousin-type people.

Nixon: They are not too in on it.

Haldeman: But they have—That's right. We have no time limit. The only instructions he's left is that he wants to be buried with his mother and father, and they're in some non-descript cemetery here in the Washington area someplace. It's old, run down—

Nixon: Now are they working on this business, so that...

Well I think we should bury him at Arlington if he doesn't have any request on that, and I think we'll just decide that. Just, just tell Ehrlichman that the President has designated that he be buried in Arlington. By God, go out there and put a torch on the boy.

Haldeman: Put him with the Kennedy's?

Nixon: Yes, sir. Put him right out there in Arlington. That's where he belongs.

Goddamn right he should be in Arlington, that's the national—

Haldeman: Just put him at the other end then?

Nixon: —at the national cemetery.

Haldeman: The last thing he'd want is to be anywhere near Bobby Kennedy.

Nixon: Yeah, but how about that? Arlington, I think he should be at Arlington. I mean he is the—That sort of request is not one that has to be honored, you know, where a man should be buried in the cemetery, [*unclear*] something like that.

Haldeman: Actually, we can move his parents to Arlington.

Nixon: Yeah, put them to Arlington.

Ziegler: We can get them a family plot there.

Nixon: Um-hmmm. Alright, he—

Haldeman: What he said is that he wants to be buried with his parents; you can keep that request.

Nixon: Yeah.

Ziegler: But Arlington [*unclear*]

Nixon: Yeah, but I think he should be buried at Arlington. Now, have they given any thought to the memorial service? Has anybody gotten any—

Haldeman: A little.

Nixon: Who's working on the damn thing? We don't have anybody here, just—just—
Have they gotten a hold of Colson yet?

Ziegler: Yeah.

Nixon: What's Colson say?

Haldeman: That's fine. This is all—Colson's the one who said he, about the burial thing, and he said, "He wanted," he said, "I know he didn't want any ceremonies—"

Nixon: Nobody wants any ceremonies.

Haldeman: But that isn't—he doesn't have that option.

Nixon: Nobody gets any. Nobody ever wants a ceremony, but you've gotta get Hoover one. We're gonna have a hell of a ceremony for him. Did he go to any church?

Ziegler: I don't think he went to church.

Haldeman: I don't know.

Nixon: If we have a ceremony, where could it be? [*unclear*]

Nixon: The FBI, that's not the place for it

Haldeman: It shouldn't be up at the Capitol.

Nixon: The Capitol? Hell no, not with that bunch of shit asses. Is there any place we could do it at the White House? We don't want it at the Kennedy Center.

Ziegler: Hah, no.

Nixon: He's a great favorite of Catholic clergy, you know, sometime.

Haldeman: Well, the obvious place to do it is the National Cathedral.

Ziegler: That's what I was going through my mind.

Haldeman: That because it is our National Cathedral.

Ziegler: National Cathedral's nice.

Nixon: But he hated that goddamned son-of-a-bitch out there, you know, that, that—

Haldeman: Well don't have him do it.

Nixon: I will not have him do it.

Haldeman: Do it at the National Cathedral, but have a Catholic cardinal come down and do the service.

Ziegler: The large—

Haldeman: You see, the Cathedral is non-denominational.

Nixon: You see, you take—the thing about that [*unclear*] out there, though, is that he's

one of Hoover's most vicious critics.

Haldeman: Dean Sayre?

Nixon: Oh hell yes, he's a left-wing son-of-a-bitch.

Haldeman: I know he is. I know he's left wing, I didn't know...

Ziegler: But the National Cathedral's [*unclear*] Dean Sayre.

Nixon: Yeah, well, Sayre is not going to have anything to do with it, because [*it's*] Edgar Hoover's funeral. That's right, for sure.

Ziegler: With a large appropriate ceremony there, and a burial at Arlington, that's...

Nixon: I think there ought to be.

Haldeman: Well maybe he just—

[*Alexander P. Butterfield entered at an unknown time before 11:25am*]

Butterfield: I'm putting Al Haig through to discuss something [*unclear*].

Nixon: Alright. Fine.

Haldeman: It might be [*ringer noise obscures Haldeman*].

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: He's not a church guy, maybe he didn't believe in church.

Nixon: Yeah.

Unknown person [?]: [*unclear*] waiting.

Nixon: Have him come to my office.

[*Butterfield and Ziegler left at 11:25am*]

Well, I think that's—what I want to do was to make it, by God, a national memorial. I mean people will turn out for this man,

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: Don't you think so?

Haldeman: Alright, but we're in a good weather period now.

Nixon: Right, do it outside, an outside service.

Haldeman: Do an outside service. [*Unclear*] this man, why—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: Why [*unclear*]—

Nixon: Yeah, yeah. Why not do it at Arlington? He will be buried at Arlington, have the service there? Could we do that? I know you need them.

Haldeman: I don't know why not.

Nixon: I don't like it at Congress.

Haldeman: They have an amphitheater at Arlington, behind the Unknown Soldier.

Nixon: [*Unclear; sounds like 'Charlie'—maybe Charles Colson?*]

Haldeman [?]: They have an amphitheater.

Nixon: Correct.

Haldeman [?]: You could have that and have people overflowing onto the lawns of Arlington and have the service—

Nixon: They did [*John Foster*] Dulles out there.

Haldeman: The service in the—in that little amphitheater, which is a beautiful little, little—

Nixon: Um-hmmm.

Haldeman: —place for, you know, the dignitaries to gather.

Nixon: You give Colson a call and tell him that I—tell Colson that I think we ought to do it at Arlington, and, uh [*unclear*]...

Incidentally, I would rather not have the Colson meeting today. You know I—I can't get out of the radio thing, but I'd just rather not go through that today. It's at three

o'clock. He won't mind. I'll just—I'll do it when I'm more—you know what I mean, I don't want to go through it today. I'll be grateful.

Ok, you've got a good idea. Put it in the amphitheater at Arlington. The only thing is, I'd just like to have a...

[?]: You don't want [*unclear*], Bob, you're just not going to get the kind of—

Nixon: Yeah, that's right.

[?]: —turn out.

Nixon: Ok, you work on that and let me know.

[*Haig entered at 11:27am*]

[*Haldeman left at 11:27am*]

Nixon: Yeah?

Haig: I have a message from Henry: "They finished their meeting very early. Very short. Meeting least productive on record. Other side would not beyond position already on public record for many months."

Nixon: Um-hmmm.

Haig: "Refused to discuss end of offensive or return to *status quo ante* or separation of military and political issues. Insisted on final troop withdrawal date and overthrow of Thieu." And he adds, "Inform Bunker to tell Thieu, by way, Bunker should tell Thieu that under circumstances [William J.] Porter will almost certainly refuse to attend the, a plenary after Thursday." Henry's talked to Porter, so I think Porter would probably walk out on this Thursday and then refuse to meet the following week. "With respect to PR it seems, to me, unwise to announce private meeting on Wednesday, raising public expectations of breakthrough, and then walk out of the plenary on Thursday."

Nixon: Oh really?

Haig: “And therefore agree to the other side that there would be no formal announcements. Have arranged with Porter wrapping it into his statement on Thursday.”

Nixon: And he has not agreed to any for the time being? Henry has not, has he?

Haig: It doesn't appear that he has, sir. He didn't address that in his message. He said, “Weekend plans should go,” of course, and he'll be back here at six o'clock.

Nixon: Yeah, it looks like he should. Are yours or my expectations supposed to be different from his? Henry said he thought they'd given us something, not in their earlier message.

Haig: No, when they make it—

Nixon: No—

Haig: —when they make it.

Nixon: No, and it shows they have a goddamned range, that Peter [?] didn't try, but he—

Haig: Well, my view is, sir, that—

Nixon: The Russians aren't going to help?

Haig: They're not going to help a goddamned bit—

Nixon: Isn't that what you felt all along?

Haig: All along.

Nixon: See, that's been my view, that's why I was so bearish on Henry's trip to Moscow about Henry. Despite what he really felt, they won't know we got him coming and they've got their attention, you know, and now they're going to do something and so forth.

Haig: I, uh—Why the hell should they?

Nixon: I think we've got to take a hard look at canceling the summit right now. What do you think?

Haig: Well, I think we have to rack 'em and rack 'em good, and see what the reaction is after the two-day strike. I don't think they'll cancel it based on that, especially in light of—

Nixon: I think they're going to cancel it first.

Haig: No, and then I think if they don't then we make an assessment of what it's going to take militarily. Continual, on more slops up there.

Nixon: Why do you feel that we shouldn't really impose a blockade? And that has a...

Haig: Well, my view is, sir, I don't discount the blockade, but I think—

Nixon: You see assume you're going to break off the Russians, Al. The blockade doesn't—

Haig: Oh, if you're going to—If you decide to cancel the summit—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —and to go the limit on this thing, in terms of a confrontation, then that's fine. That's one thing. You could—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —risk both at the same time.

Nixon: Right.

Haig: Or—and announce one and do the other concurrently, but I think there's a good chance with the kind of bombing that we're going to do in there that we may get that port closed without that kind of direct confrontation with them. That we can only assess after we see what happens. We can't bomb their ships, obviously, but we can come pretty close to making that a scary place for them to be. We'll see what they do. On the other hand, after assessing that, we may want to mine it. We may even want to let the South Vietnamese to do it. After all they're—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —they're mining all over the Mekong River and everything else and there are U.S. ships and friendly ships that are being menaced by that kind of activity.

[*Pause, 6 seconds*]

Nixon: It'll be a big disappointment to Henry if it's true.

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: It's gonna shock him. You see, he really, Al, always had a theory that the Russians would help us, you know, because of their—the summit thing, you know—but I got the uneasy feeling that despite what he says—and I'm sure he was pretty tough and everything—that they still didn't come away with the feeling that by God that they got Henry to Moscow and [*unclear*] there. You see, that's why I was—and I frankly didn't [*unclear*] I didn't want to go out on the SALT thing myself. I think I was very right not to defend myself.

Haig: Totally.

Nixon: Don't you think so?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: And I just—and we played it in a lower key way, you know. We didn't say that it's a hell of a big thing and so forth, he was just sending back for new instructions. But my point is that—and my assessment of the communists is different from Henry's. I do not believe they ever react to anything unless there's very, very powerful incentives. I only—I don't think the incentive is powerful enough now. I think they see these sons of bitches succeed—

Haig: That's right and that's the incentive, and that incentive, in the short term—

Nixon: That is why Henry was wrong in not wanting to strike before he went. You don't

agree with me? You see my point? I think for Henry's meeting to be any success at all, we have to hit the sons of bitches before we went. I know what he would say. He'd say, "Well then that would risk the meeting." The point is he went there empty handed.

Haig: He had no cards to play at all—

Nixon: He had no cards. Sure.

Haig: —short of a collapse.

Nixon: Huh?

Haig: Short of a collapse, and they didn't even give him a chance to do that.

[*Pause, 20 seconds*] Admiral [*Thomas H.*] Moorer and [*David Kenneth*] Rush are sorting out the timing on the B-52s and the strike for Friday—probably will take place Friday afternoon our time. The first would be, and that'll be very early morning Saturday time with B-52's the first wave. I told them to get very heavy on the B-52s, to tell Abrams right now—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —that, by God, he's going to have to count on losing those assets. We've got the Fifth Carrier out there, you know, and on line.

Nixon: Good.

Haig: And the Sixth will be there next week. It's just going to be a case of pouring it to these bastards.

Nixon: I think so, and as you said this morning, sure the military situation isn't all that—it isn't improving. We just keep get going. I mean they're gonna—they can't maintain it, too, you know. They've gotta—

Haig: That's right.

Nixon: They can't take 22,000 wounded. You don't think that's a fake story, do you?

Haig: Well, I...

BEGIN WITHDRAWN ITEM NUMBER 1

[National Security]

[Duration 13 seconds]

INTELLIGENCE

END WITHDRAWN ITEM NUMBER 1

Nixon: You see, right now, you can see what a jackass position we would have been in. Over the week, you know, when I was in Texas they asked that—they got the senator to repair something and some of our people, basically the sort of PR offices, office there—not because they're soft but because they thought it was important from a PR standpoint. It should be this week with Colson and Scali, Ziegler, etc.—I don't know whether Ziegler's in it—but they were, they recommended that I give hope that, about negotiations. Ehrlichman, to his great credit, who basically is softer on the issue because of his kids and so forth, said, "No, not with Thru [?]." And boy, thank God I didn't—

Haig: Yeah, I think you didn't. That's right.

Nixon: Did you notice [*unclear*]—

Haig: Boy you turned—you turned what could have been a very, very difficult situation that the peaceniks have already tried to start. [*Marvin L.*] Kalb quoting this wheat-cutting son-of-a-bitch who said Henry bought a coalition government. That was on the news last night.

Nixon: What time, what [*unclear*]?

Haig: Labor union guy who was in Hanoi, came back and saw Henry and then went out and said that Henry told him he was in favor of coalition government, which is absolute bullshit.

Nixon: And also they're all saying that Henry's, Henry's taking a softer—

Haig: Softer line.

Nixon: —line, but you think the press is looking at an opportunity?

Haig: Yes. I think—

Nixon: You know Henry isn't, 'cause—

Haig: No, Henry's not.

Nixon: —he's not taking that line.

Haig: I think, I think there's a conscious effort by peace groups in the path—in the press and probably over at State to try to get a split going like they did in '68 in the administration with hard-line/soft-line. It worked in '68 with Clifford and—

Nixon: Well, and of course Johnson caved.

Haig: That's right.

Nixon: But you see when I was in Dallas I took an even stronger line. I mean—and I told you that I have the conference place, which I did deliberately.

Haig: Well, I think it's a damn good thing you did because it just turned that here on Monday and today. Otherwise, we'd have been—If you'd taken us off line, we'd have been up in the kind of story that would drive Thieu up the wall and...

Nixon: I wanted a personal note from me to Thieu. Could you back-channel on to him what you're saying?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: [*Dictating to Haig*] Saying that I don't have to know that—"I know this is a trying time. I mean this is a very trying time for you and for your brave South Vietnamese forces. [*Writing noises*] Please inform your—You can be assured of our continued support of South Vietnam's courageous attitude"—excuse me—"to maintain,

to”—just one second, here, yeah—“courageous defense of the country against this massive communist invasion. What will determine the battle now is the will and spirit of the South Vietnamese people. The enemy cannot win unless they break the spirit of the free people of South Vietnam. See, I am confident that you will provide the leadership which will maintain that necessary spirit—the necessary—the spirit necessary for you to defeat them—No, necessary for the survival of South Vietnam as an independent country.” I think that’s a good thing to get out.

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Right away.

Haig: We’ll put that in there, deliver the outcome of the thing give him a personal note from you. It would be very good.

Nixon: Yeah. Ok, bye.

[Ziegler entered at 11:38am]

Ziegler: I just want to—I just wanted to check one thing. State called and indicated that we should get something out on the coalition government. That’s the material we used.

Haig: That’s right; to deny it flat cold.

Ziegler: There’s nothing beyond that, that...

Haig: No, but it has to be done right away so it doesn’t—

Nixon: Oh, that’s just a total fabrication.

Ziegler: I just didn’t know how, hypo—We want Gerry [*Gerald L. Warren*] to do it, not me. I just—

Haig: I want it done early, that’s—

Nixon: Just say it’s a total fabri—totally—down this whole thought, nothing to be—Just say nothing to be really concerned about.

Ziegler: But you want Gerry to do it, not me?

Nixon: Yes. Yeah, get it done.

[Haig and Ziegler left at 11:40am]