

Conversation No. 17-125
Date: January 1, 1972
Time: 10:57 am - 11:19 am
Location: White House Telephone
Participants: Richard M. Nixon, Henry A. Kissinger

[See also: Conversation No. 311-14]

Kissinger: Mr. President, a Happy New Year.

Nixon: Yeah—

BEGIN WITHDRAWN ITEM

[Personal Returnable]

[Duration: 9s]

END WITHDRAWN ITEM

Nixon: Good. Good. You're back in New York now?

Kissinger: Yeah, I'm back in New York.

Nixon: Right. Right. Ok, well, anything new?

Kissinger: No. Well, to tell you the truth, I just woke up about half an hour ago—

Nixon: That's good.

Kissinger: I will check right away.

Nixon: No, I—I read the papers. There's not anything in there.

Kissinger: But, last night, when I checked last, there wasn't anything new. There was this fellow, [Dominic] Mintoff.¹ I didn't bother you with all the—

Nixon: Oh, you mean there—that—?

Kissinger: —permutations of Malta—

Nixon: Oh, the hell with that.

Kissinger: —and try to get you on the phone. And, we didn't put him through, because there was—whatever you would have said, you would have been in the middle of it. And we put him on to Ellsworth, who had been out there as your ambassador.

Nixon: Who?

Kissinger: Bob Ellsworth. We sent [him] out on a special mission—

Nixon: Oh, yeah.

¹ Dominic Mintoff was the Prime Minister of Malta (Malta Labour Party) from 1971-1984. Mintoff's negotiations with the U.K. resulted in the removal of the British military base from Malta in 1979. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dom_Mintoff

Kissinger: —to Malta in December. And, so now he's extended his ultimatum by two weeks.² He can't throw the British out. It would be mass unemployment on the island.³

Nixon: He'd kill himself, won't he?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: And he's just trying to drive the British to a—to too hard a bargain?

Kissinger: And if he gets the Libyan money—Even if he got Libyan money that wouldn't get him 10,000 jobs.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

Kissinger: He can't put the whole island on the dole.

Nixon: [Chuckles] Yeah. Well, I don't know. I suppose Ellsworth talked to him about all that to him, yeah?

Kissinger: And—Well, what he—the result of all of that is that he has extended his deadline, and—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —we have said we would—We didn't say we could mediate, but we said—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —we'd keep an eye on the negotiations.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And we've told [British PM Edward] Heath we would up the ante a little bit.

Nixon: That we would help Heath with the ante?

Kissinger: With the ante. That's right.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: We are not talking to him ourselves.

Nixon: Yeah. No, never talk to Mintoff. Let the British do the—do it, and—

Kissinger: That's right, but we have sent a message from you to Heath—

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah.

Kissinger: —saying we are prepared to up the, uh—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —the ante; to help them in upping the ante.

² According to a Reuters article, Mintoff extended his deadline for the withdrawal of all British forces from Malta to January 15, 1972. See: "Malta Postpones British Deadline," *The New York Times* (January 1, 1972) p.1.

³ See: C. L. Sulzberger, "Malta, Moscow and the West," *The New York Times* (December 29, 1971) p.31.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Ok.

Kissinger: But that's the only thing of any—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —consequence that's been going on—

Nixon: I was noting—I just noted Mrs. Gandhi made a speech to the Parliament in which she still takes her line that foreign aid has really never aided them, that they'd paid back every bit that they'd ever gotten, and... [chuckles]

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: ...and that she's going to take this line about what she's going to do and so forth and so on.⁴

Kissinger: Yeah, but on the other hand—

Nixon: But—

Kissinger: —when she doesn't talk to Parliament—her Parliament is very—

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: —kind of—

Nixon: Hawk-like.

Kissinger: —fanatical from both sides.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: She's put all out all sorts of signals.

Nixon: Right. [clears throat]—

Kissinger: [Unclear].

Nixon: Well, well she's taking the public line that we don't understand her and all that. That, uh...

Kissinger: Yeah, but the Indians are master psychologists. They've got to deal with us. They've got literally—now they're in worse shape than ever.

Nixon: I guess they must be.

Kissinger: Because now—when people say, first of all, they put themselves on the Soviet side. John Freeman⁵ told Henry Brandon⁶ when he was there—and Freeman, you know, was

⁴ According to an article in the *New York Times*: “[Mrs. Gandhi] said that foreign aid had been misdefined over the years. ‘It is not aid at all,’ she said, ‘but long term credits. India so far has paid back every cent, every paise it owed to other countries. If some countries want to stop this so-called aid, there will be hardship in some areas. But it will not push us back.’” Sydney H. Schanberg, “Mrs. Gandhi says India Would Like U.S. Friendship,” *The New York Times* (January 1, 1972), p.1.

⁵ British Ambassador to the United States, 1969-1971.

ambassador—

Nixon: Ambassador. Yeah.

Kissinger: —for years—that they in '67 cold bloodedly decided they needed the Russians to deal with the Pakistanis.⁷

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And that we just weren't enough of a factor in that area. That's when they made their move.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But, now, their problem is they cannot permit—For their own domestic reasons, if the Russians become too influential in India the Communist Party becomes too strong, and—

Nixon: I know. That's a real problem for 'em.

Kissinger: —and they can't have that. Secondly, this problem of East Bengal is going to become harder and harder for them. Now they have the problem that Pakistan used to have.

Nixon: How the hell of feed 'em and govern 'em—

Kissinger: How to feed them and how to govern. They can't govern their own Bengalis.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: People keep forgetting that they have martial law in Calcutta.

Nixon: That's right—

Kissinger: They kept—called—yakking about martial law in Dacca, but there's martial law in Calcutta also.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Yep. With regard to the question of recognition of Bangladesh, I think it should—the answer—should simply be very well: “It's premature to talk about that.” Isn't that about what we say?

Kissinger: First, Mr. President, no one has recognized Bangladesh except Bhutan and India. No one. Not even Russia.⁸

Nixon: Yeah. I—Well, I think we should just say it's premature to talk about it.

Kissinger: That's right. We should say—

Nixon: And not go into it any longer, any further.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Or, unless we—I don't think we ought to hang out the idea. Well, it might [unclear] into

⁶ Foreign Correspondent for the *Sunday Times* (UK). Papers are at the Library of Congress: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/eadxlmss/eadpdfmss/2001/ms001009.pdf>

⁷ John Freeman was actually the High Commissioner to India from 1965-1968, not the British ambassador. A High Commissioner has a similar function of an ambassador, but to is usually an exchange between Commonwealth nations.

⁸ Kissinger recommended U.S. recognition of Bangladesh in a 16 February 1972 memo to the president. Online: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e7txt/49269.htm>

Pakistan and all the rest. I don't think we should reject it—

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: —but, uh...

Kissinger: No, the fact of the matter is at this point the Chinese would take violent objection because of their parallels to Tibet and Manchukuo.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But, that's just something to keep in the back of the mind. But if you say no more than it's premature that's fine.

Nixon: Oh, yes, to just say, "Well, I have nothing on that. It's premature and we haven't, we have not yet determined." Only India and Russia have recommended them—Um, Bhutan—

Kissinger: No, it hasn't.

Nixon: Russia hasn't. That's right. That's right.

Kissinger: You—I would just say, "Up to now there are only two countries that have recognized them. This is not an acute issue."

Nixon: Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

Kissinger: Of course, we have a Consul in Dacca⁹ who has already put up a map calling it—he's calling it Bangladesh.

Nixon: Yeah, I know. The same bastard that was there before, isn't it?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: He's really an all-out Indian-lover, isn't he?

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: And poor [Kenneth B.] Keating in the other place.¹⁰ We really have [chuckles]—

Kissinger: Well, I have to say this for Keating: he's bleated and he's wept and tried, but he hasn't actually leaked to the press against you.

Nixon: Good. Well, he probably knows that there's problems. Boy, that's difficult. You know, the Indians just, just are—just smother you out there when you come, you know, with all their devious, tricky things. They are really something. Yeah. The most difficult questions that I'm going to have are, I think, going to be on Vietnam. Not in terms of the bombing and so forth. That's no problem, but in terms of POWs, when it ends, and so forth. You see we're now coming to the—coming to the moment of truth in terms of we've been able to put the press off, and say, "Well, we'll have another announcement, and we'll do this, and this, and this, and this, and this." But, then they—I know where I—because some of the POW wives have put in a question for

⁹ Herbert D. Spivack was the Consul General in Dacca (Dhaka) from June 1971 – September 1972. Kissinger may have confused Spivack with his predecessor as consul, Archer Blood, although this is not clear from the context of this conversation.

¹⁰ Keating was the U.S. Ambassador to India from May 1969 – July 1972.

Rather to ask that we're going to get a tough one on that, but what do you—talk just a little about how we can handle, how we can say something on this without saying anything. This is the tough problem. I don't—It isn't question now where we can go back and argue about what a good job we've done. What I meant is there's got to be a—I mean I'll make that point, of course. I'll—Yes, we've withdrawn 400,000, and our casualties are down, and we've—

Kissinger: [unclear]

Nixon: —we've—we've made it, we've made a peace offer and—

Kissinger: Couldn't we say that the first thing that one has to remember is—is that these, that the other side is using—I mean with some indignation against the other side—that they're using them brutally, using the prisoners brutally.

Nixon: I know. No, I will say that, but then, of course, Henry, the question is, “Now, what are you going to do about it.” See?

Kissinger: But, secondly, we have made every reasonable offer that can be made.

Nixon: Now they say, “Well, now, all those offers haven't been—this isn't—they don't stop there. All those offers have been turned down and they don't expect them; what are you going to do?”

Kissinger: Well, but then, what I have always said to the wives is—I don't know whether one can say that to a national audience—I have always said to the wives that, “I don't believe your husbands want you to have America just surrender. That we've made any—that we've gone 9/10ths of the way towards the other side.”

Nixon: It will work with them because they're still, basically, patriots. It will not work now with a national audience. I mean, putting it in—

Kissinger: That's for sure.

Nixon: —putting it in terms, oh, we have. It's been very, very heavily polled in the last couple of months that is. You see that's the thing, the new factor we've got here, as to what we can wheel and they're quite aware of this, the, you know, it's just the attrition of the support for the war. It's that. That's the basic thing, problem which is—changes—

Kissinger: But I think the problem also what the Australian Prime Minister ¹¹said to me. That the—not their Prime Minister, their ambassador¹², he said as he goes around the country he's the only guy that's speaking for the war.

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: And no one ever speaks up for it and the people get confused.

Nixon: True, but don't, don't get any—we can't be under any illusions that we can, that you can

¹¹ William McMahon (Liberal Party of Australia).

¹² Sir James Plimsoll was Australia's Ambassador to the U.S. from 1970 to 1973. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Plimsoll

do this before certain intelligent audiences and the rest. But—And my line, of course, will always be more hawkish than others, but we are in a position now where just saying, well, we can just wheel it up like we did in November of '69 is just—that time is gone, you see?

Kissinger: No, I'm not saying that—

Nixon: It can't be done. It can't even be done in terms of the Cambodian period. We're in a different period, but be that as it may the question of airpower, how long it's used, and so forth, what's your suggestion as to how to handle that? In other words, the point is that we get back fundamentally to the question that will—that everybody knows. We come to an election and then the question is not how much we have reduced American casualties and how many less Americans there are there, but did we or did we not end the American involvement? See, that's what we're—?

Kissinger: Of course, Mr. President, I believe if you watch—if I have to give my honest conviction—if you watch the history of the war, the opponents have always focused on one thing I don't happen to believe, but you may uphold it: that the use of air power upsets the American people.

Nixon: It does some. It's—it's not the use of airpower. It has nothing to do with that. It's just the fact that it's the war, you see? They, they—Because the media puts it in terms of continuation of the war. No, I don't think you could say that you could just continue airpower for 4 or 5 years.

Kissinger: No, you can't say it.

Nixon: It's not going to end, it's not going to work. It won't wheel. That means you just—that means that then you have failed in an effort to bring the war to an end, and you've left them.

Kissinger: Well, I just don't have the benefit of these polls. I don't have the sense that Vietnam is that much of an issue in people's minds.

Nixon: It's not a big issue in the people's mind, but it's a very negative issue to the extent that it is now. That's the problem, and will continue to be. And it will—it will become one more as these guys—See, this is stuff—not polls that we've taken, but that Harris and Gallup have taken. They'll all—they'll all be, our Democratic friends, that's why they're jumping on this at this point, you see, and they'll do their best to make it an issue. Well, be that as it may, the—

Kissinger: The fact on—the fact is that the Soviets—that the other side is getting close to a billion dollars worth of military aid a year and it's invading all of the surrounding countries.

Nixon: That's correct.

Kissinger: I mean that is the fact. And that all we are trying to do is to interdict the movement of the supplies. Besides, if we promise to end the war, to end the bombing, if we do all the things which our opponents now drive, then within 3 months you will be in the debate of overthrowing Thieu and that one is going to be harder to conduct.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Because no one gives a damn about him.

Nixon: That's correct. I'm not suggesting that for now. I'm trying to set the stage of where we're going to be in June, as you know, the thing we were talking about yesterday.

Kissinger: Yes, I have given that a lot of thought—

Nixon: So that we can—So that we can—

Kissinger: —I'm trying to figure out some—

Nixon: —Basically so that we have a way to just take the issue out of the debate for about 3 months. That's what we're trying to do. It will be a very, very clever move if we can do it.

Kissinger: Well, it's certainly a very intriguing idea, and I've given it a lot of thought—

Nixon: Let's face it. Let's face it, Henry, the bombing halt was a totally political move. You know it didn't mean a goddamned thing in terms of that, and it damned near won the election for Humphrey. Now, we've got to be smart enough to do something. I mean, when we—

Kissinger: That was at a time when Vietnam was the only foreign policy issue—

Nixon: I know. Don't have—Don't make any mistake, though. It's a question, though, that anything, anything may change, change 1 percent. See, that's what we're talking about here. So, we're, we're—And, as I said, gives our people a positive rather than simply a defensive—an offensive rather than a defensive thing. Well, we don't have to answer that now, but with regard to the dates, incidentally, we're—

Kissinger: That will be after the Moscow Summit, so then we will be in a much better position to judge what the necessities are.

Nixon: Yeah. The dates for the—the date for the next announcement we've—we're trying, I was talking to Haldeman. He's going to get me a report later today. It's—we've got to work it out in terms of Humphrey's going to make an announcement and I don't want to do it too close to that. And I have to accept the New Hampshire delegation's letter, which, of course, will be tantamount to a formal announcement. I've got to put it in that care, but in terms of playing it around, what's the earliest you can have him? Are we are talking about now—?

Kissinger: Mr. President, first, we have to get Thieu aboard.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Secondly, this peace program, I have thought a lot about it. It's going to set off a shock wave in Asia again because it's absolutely sweeping.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: It may kick over Thailand completely. Now my—

Nixon: Then we won't do it if it goes that far.

Kissinger: Well, no. I think it's a good one to do but it shouldn't be sprung very suddenly. Now, uh...

Nixon: No, I'm speaking in terms of the period between the 10th and the 18th. That's really the

ballpark—

Kissinger: Oh, I see. I thought you wanted it even earlier than the 12th when we spoke yesterday.

Nixon: No, no. The 12th is out because, I think that's Humphrey's date.

Kissinger: But one of the things I wanted to suggest—

Nixon: I don't want do it the same date one of those are moving. You see—

Kissinger: No, no—

Nixon: —we have to move all of these away from the political stuff.

Kissinger: But one of the things I wanted to suggest for your consideration, Mr. President, I have already wired the whole program to [Ellsworth] Bunker¹³ and I've asked Bunker to take it up with Thieu. So, we will know Monday¹⁴ or Tuesday¹⁵ how we stand there. If he approves it, and if we don't have to spend any time there modifying it, we can go literally any day you say from the 10th on. The thing that I was going—so the date is in itself not so crucial if it isn't—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: —before the 10th, because before the 10th would be next week.

Nixon: We can't go. No, I don't expect to before the 10th, but I—we might have to go, [clears throat] we might have to consider that early in—if—depending upon what my own New Hampshire thing turns out to be.

Kissinger: Well, what I wanted to put before your consideration, Mr. President, is whether going anyway in the period before the Congress goes back isn't a mistake. Sure, they may put in a lot of odd-and-end resolutions, although they probably won't do it the first two weeks—

Nixon: Well, Henry, there's another reason we have to do it: I cannot have it left at the time of the State of the Union, because I can't get up and make the State of the Union address—and, if I haven't said something on Vietnam by that time I will have—which is on the 20th—I will be, I will have to spend, you know, a good part of my time there.

Kissinger: You couldn't just have a paragraph and say you'll discuss it more fully in the following weeks—?

Nixon: No, that won't work. Not on that. It'd be a real dud. No, I want it—it has to be done before then.

Kissinger: Well, then, we'll do it whenever you say. We'll be ready.

Nixon: Of course, if they don't get ready there then we'll have to make it a different kind of a proposal. We'll just make the announcement or whatever we're going to do.

¹³ Ellsworth Bunker was the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), 1967-1973.

¹⁴ January 3, 1972.

¹⁵ January 4, 1972.

Kissinger: No, we'll have—We can do it any time. My instinct is that the later the better, because once it's out there, then they have something to react to. Then they can frame all their proposals in reaction to what you've put on the table.

Nixon: They'll do that—

Kissinger: Not that their proposals are going to go anywhere near as far as what this has gone—

Nixon: They're going to do it anyway, Henry. I mean, whenever we put it out. If we put it out the 22nd, then on the 24th—

Kissinger: The later it is then the closer it comes to China.¹⁶

Nixon: True, but they'll still [chuckles] they'll still have—

Kissinger: While this way—

Nixon: —a month.

Kissinger: —all, all the restraints will be off once this proposal is on the table. They'll pass—

Nixon: It won't make that much difference, Henry. With a week or whatever the case might be isn't going to make that much difference—

Kissinger: Well, two weeks would gain us two weeks closer—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —to China.

Nixon: Yeah. Well, we'll have to do it before the State of the Union, so which—so that's the latest, the 20th. And we can—we can move back in that period of time any time we want. We'll have got—I'm going to get the dates from Haldeman that all these people are going to be filing, then we'll try to fit one to fit this in.

BEGIN WITHDRAWN ITEM NO. 3

[Personal Returnable]

[Duration: 16s]

END WITHDRAWN ITEM NO. 3

Nixon: But, ok, so let's figure anyplace between the 10th and the...

Kissinger: No, we can be ready between—

Nixon: ...between the 10th and the 20th.

Kissinger: —the 10th and the 20th—

Nixon: Yeah. The 10th and the 20th. Wait a minute. 9th, 10th, well, actually, the 11th would be the first day. I can't do it the 10th, because I won't be back in time. The 11th. Between the 11th and the 20th. That's what we're—that's the game we have to play.

¹⁶ Nixon visited China February 21 – 28, 1972.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Ok. Ok. I've—It'll be interesting see what Thieu reacts at the long last, now. He may be in a position where he feels he's too strong to get—

Kissinger: Well, it's a hell of a thing to have public—

Nixon: Yep. And if he doesn't want to do it, we won't do it. We'll just do something else, you know? Put in what we've already done, or—It's a pretty good proposal without that.

Kissinger: Yeah. Yeah.

Nixon: Yeah. I think it is. I mean it isn't—I don't think his agreeing to get out is all that big.

Kissinger: Well, it's a fact of life—

Nixon: It's a symbolic thing. Yeah.

Kissinger: But there are a lot of factors in that proposal, like agreeing to curtail military aid.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: If they do...

Nixon: Yep, yeah.

Kissinger: ...like agreeing that South Vietnam could have a foreign policy of neutrality.

Nixon: Right. I know. It's really great. Well, ok, we'll—I'll be in touch with you when I get any more specific questions on the book, ok?

Kissinger: Right. Ok—

Nixon: Fine.