

Conversation No. 20-106**Date: February 28, 1972****Time: 10:52 pm - 11:00 pm****Location: White House Telephone****Participants: Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger****Kissinger:** Mr. President.**Nixon:** Hi, Henry.**Kissinger:** I'm sorry. I—I thought it was better if I finished with Reagan—**Nixon:** Oh, no, no, no. I'm just calling to get a report. I thought you had called. I had been eating dinner.**Kissinger:** No, I talked to [Ronald] Reagan and he's in great shape.¹**Nixon:** Well, did you get the Taiwan thing under control? I'll tell you what I think has happened on Taiwan. It is the goddamn *Washington Post*. Their headline, if you see it is: "Nixon agrees to withdraw from Taiwan."²**Kissinger:** Well, Reagan says there is a little trouble out on the West Coast in some of their evening paper's headlines. But he said he never doubted for a minute. He read the Communiqué. He said, "Hell that's what the President told me he'd do." He said, "It's conditional. This is our policy; that's the Nixon Doctrine."**Nixon:** Yeah.**Kissinger:** And he said, "You have to remember, Henry"—he was giving me courage.**Nixon:** Yeah. What did he say?

¹ Kissinger-Reagan Telephone Conversation Transcript (Telcon), February 28, 1972, 10:30 p.m., Kissinger Telcons, Box 13, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. The relevant portion of the conversation is printed here: **Kissinger:** "In Shanghai what did President say that we have reached—and we have agreed that we will reduce troops as tensions ease and our objective is to withdraw them as peace is made. That has been our policy all along. I reaffirmed our pledge in Shanghai. **Reagan:** "Is there—I have understood the delivery (?) of the President's position. Is there some way that there can just be some flat way and rather shortly before this thing begins to. . . a position reaffirming our position. Jim Buckley called and he knew what was going to be said and I told him how I felt. Do you suppose that the President would reaffirm. . . . Pledge of support to Chiang Kai-shek. I just feel that maybe this is a important thing to do." **Kissinger:** "You don't think he did it tonight?" **Reagan:** "For me yes but not for the average man." **Kissinger:** "The one problem we have this week is coming to a certain point publicly without it being complained by Peking. (?) If we make too many statements we will wind up in a position where they will start screaming." **Reagan:** "What would happen if [press secretary] Ron Ziegler would say look and quote the President from his speech and say this is a clear declaration that we are still honoring our treaty with Taiwan?" **Kissinger:** "We will do it before the week is out." **Reagan:** "This would be good."

² Stanley Karnow, "Nixon Pledges Pullout of Forces in Taiwan," *The Washington Post* (February 29, 1972), p.A1. Karnow wrote, "President Nixon has acceded to Chinese Communist demands by publicly pledging, for the first time, to withdraw all American forces and military installations from Taiwan."

Kissinger: He said, “You have to remember the press has been dying all week long.”

Nixon: Oh—

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: He did huh?

Kissinger: Yeah. And he said he had heard what you said tonight. He said that’s terrific. He said the—

Nixon: Oh, he heard the speech?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: He said he was proud of you. He said the only other thing that he would suggest is that we plant a question for [Press Secretary Ronald] Ziegler tomorrow saying, “Well, what about the defense commitment?” And he [Ziegler] could say, “As Dr. Kissinger said in Shanghai, as the President said yesterday, note [that] the defense commitment will stand.” And that’s the last thing we’ll say on it.

Nixon: Is that all right?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Ok, we’ll do it.

Kissinger: Well, I think you should take it just a tiny bit easy with your statement with these guys.

Nixon: To the Leaders? Oh, don’t worry. I—I’ve covered it. I’m gonna let you and Rogers say what you want.

Kissinger: Now, [Arizona Senator] Barry Goldwater—I talked to [him]—was a little more difficult.³

³ Kissinger-Goldwater Telcon, February 28, 1972, 10:10 p.m., Kissinger Telcons, Box 13, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. After Kissinger and Senator Goldwater agreed to meet for breakfast on March 1 (?), the follow exchange took place: **Kissinger:** “Why don’t we do that. I just briefly want to make a number of points about that communiqué which has apparently not been caught by some of our friends in a hasty reading. One, the problem of withdrawal made on peacefulSecond, the reduction of forces is merely a restatement of the Nixon Doctrine that none of the forces in Taiwan are combat forces. no condition of whether it would be this year or next.” **Goldwater:** “Make it clear.” **Kissinger:** “I think the President made it clear. Have you seen what the President said tonight?” **Goldwater:** “No. I have a bad leg and can’t move too much.” **Kissinger:** “I said it on Chinese soil that the commitment was unimpaired and the President said it on his arrival tonight. Thirdly, about Taiwan is simply restated policy. The President said it on national television.” **Goldwater:** “Have him make it goddamn clear tomorrow. Some of us are hanging to have it clear.” **Kissinger:** “The President will make it goddamn clear at the Leaders meeting.”

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: He said, “Just make sure you explain it properly tomorrow morning to the Leaders.” And I’m having breakfast with him on Wednesday.⁴

Nixon: All right.

Kissinger: And I think we’re going to get him. He—

Nixon: Well, he’s, of course—Buckley’s working on him.⁵

Kissinger: And, uh—

Nixon: See, Buckley’s working on him—

Kissinger: Actually, I have to say in Reagan’s defense, Jim Buckley⁶ called him this morning trying to get him agitated.

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: And he [Reagan] said, “No, I believe in the President.” And, uh—

Nixon: You think maybe Jim Buckley’s lost, huh?

Kissinger: I don’t think so. No, he just—He—No, to put it more fairly, Jim Buckley asked him what he, Reagan, thought he should say. And he [Reagan] said, “Just say that the President—” He said, “You are sure the President didn’t undermine the defense commitment.”

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: [Unclear]—

Nixon: Well, we said it tonight; what the hell’s he want?

Kissinger: That’s right.

Nixon: It’s all said.

Kissinger: But, Reagan—

Nixon: Ok.

Kissinger: Reagan congratulated you. He said this was one of the greatest weeks of the American Presidency. He just—He was bubbling. And Nancy, whose got a hell of a lot more brains than he has—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

⁴ March 1, 1972.

⁵ The context is unclear as to whether or not Nixon was referring to *National Review* editor William F. Buckley.

⁶ U.S. Senator (Conservative Party of New York), 1971-1977. Older brother of *National Review* editor William F. Buckley.

Kissinger: — was equally enthusiastic.

Nixon: She was, huh?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, of course, Reagan can see it in terms of the political impact, can't he?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: The television impact, huh?

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: He said you had a great pilot last week, and I think he thinks you can run it as a television series.

Nixon: [Laughs] Ok. Well, good, Henry. Fine.

Kissinger: So, I really think we —

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: — all reacted a little bit too strongly to the *Washington Post*.

Nixon: Well, the *Washington Post*. Then there was some radio and the early wires and you know. And also lets face it Buckley has quite an influence, Henry.

Kissinger: Well, we made a damned mistake taking him to China.

Nixon: We really did. Because he's has been supercilious and nasty and hard to deal with —

Kissinger: There are a lot of columns the press couldn't have written if he hadn't been along.

Nixon: That's right. I—I don't know how to handle him except to have nothing to do with him from now on. What do you think?

Kissinger: Well, I may try to talk to him. [Unclear]. But I think one lesson we've learned is there's no sense taking an opponent —

Nixon: Never take your enemies. I've told Haldemen that a dozen times.

Kissinger: You give him —

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: Because to only give them empirical information —

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah. Buchanan was the one that pushed it—pushed for it.

Kissinger: And you — You know Haig —

Nixon: Well—

Kissinger: —is about as hardline as you can get.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: He thinks this one of the great diplomatic revolutions.

Nixon: He does, huh?

Kissinger: Now, one other interesting thing: Last week, I didn't want to bother you there with things.

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: The Russians sent us a message sort saying, “What's going on? You keep criticizing us.”

Nixon: We aren't criticizing them.

Kissinger: Well, it was World Report and our friends at TASS were doing it. I sent back a message [unclear; this evening] saying we would make it quiet down; we are serious about pursuing détente with you, and—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and from that day on there hasn't been any hostile articles, and TASS so far has commented [unclear] very factual way.

Nixon: Well, I think on this meeting with Dobrynin it's probably worth it if you would bring him in for a minute just to say, “Hello,” to me.

Kissinger: Yeah. I could do that—

Nixon: I just think it's just a good little touch, you see.

Kissinger: Well, my frank opinion is to do it after—not right this minute.

Nixon: Why?

Kissinger: Because I'm worried that these sons-of-bitches—

Nixon: The Chinese?

Kissinger: —may just get it back to the Chinese, that you saw Dobrynin right after [seeing them]—

Nixon: Fine, fine, fine. But, you can see him?

Kissinger: Oh, I'll see him Wednesday. I am having lunch with him.

Nixon: Um-hmm. And then you tell him, though, 'cause he may say, well, the President said he'd like to see him—

Kissinger: [Unclear]—

Nixon: Say, “Yes, the President does want to see you, because prior to the trip, Mr. Ambassador, the President wants to have a good off-the-record talk with you to get your advice.” How about that? Something like that?

Kissinger: Oh, that’s good.

Nixon: And then say we’ll—say that you and him—maybe we’ll set it up for a little dinner or something, for a private dinner. Let’s do it that way—

Kissinger: My experience, Mr. President, with the Russians has been that you never lose by being [unclear]—

Nixon: Well, my point is: hang that out there, and then he can report to his government that he’s going to be seeing the President to have a talk. Ok?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Ok, boy.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Get some rest. You ought to feel pretty good.

Kissinger: That’s right. I—Well, you—you did it all.

Nixon: Hell, we [unclear]. You know, poor Rogers. He—He’ll—I think you’re right; he’ll be for this now that he’s seen what the public thinks. That public reaction out there—I mean that we didn’t expect that goddamned audience. That was a—

Kissinger: Oh, hell, there were demonstrators there—

Nixon: Yeah. Oh, sure. A few. [Unclear; There were these interruptions a couple of times]—

Kissinger: No, no. I mean—I’m just saying this was the best group, that it [unclear]—

Nixon: On the other hand, they were with us; I mean those people were cheering. They started to clap when the plane drove up. Did you know that? Before we even landed—

Kissinger: [Unclear] Cabinet which has—which if things were at all tough they would certainly—they’ve never yet been out in front when things were tough—they were in ecstasy. And Elliot Richardson, who’s a sophisticated guy, said this was a diplomatic masterstroke, that the communiqué was superb.

Nixon: He sees it. He sees it.

Kissinger: [Unclear] Mr. President—

Nixon: What the hell didn't Bill see it? Goddamnit, I don't understand it—

Kissinger: Because he doesn't have that sort of mind—

Nixon: [Unclear].

Kissinger: He doesn't have it.

Nixon: [Unclear]. And that poor damn [Marshall] Green was egging him on, I'm sure.⁷

Kissinger: Well, he's done it on everything. We saw—If you remember on Berlin he told us this was going to lose us everybody. Reagan saw it. These guys are now—

Nixon: Reagan is really—but he was all right?

Kissinger: Reagan is [unclear; next to us on it]—

Nixon: Would—would you ask him to make a statement?

Kissinger: I asked him for his support. And tomorrow morning—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —when Ziegler—

Nixon: Yeah. I want him to make a statement.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Ok.

Kissinger: Good.

⁷ Marshall Green was the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the time.

TELCON

The President/Mr. Kissinger

10:55 p.m., February 28, 1972

K: I thought it was better if I finished with Reagan.

P: No, no; that's all right. How are things going?

K: In great shape.

P: The Taiwan thing -- I think what has happened on Taiwan is the Washington Post coming out and saying Nixon agrees to withdraw from Taiwan.

K: Reagan says there has been a little trouble with the evening papers there.

P: What did he say?

K: He never doubted you. He read the Communique and knew this is our policy; the Nixon Doctrine. He said you have to remember the press has been dying all week long.

P: He did, huh.

K: And he heard what you said tonight.

P: He heard the speech.

K: He said he was proud of you. The only other thing he would suggest is that we plant a question for Ziegler tomorrow asking, "What about our defense commitment?" and then we could answer, "As Dr. Kissinger said in Shanghai and as the President said last night, the defense commitment still stands."

P: Think we should do that. Good.

K: Barry Goldwater is a little more difficult. He wants to make sure you explain it properly tomorrow morning to the Leaders and I am going to have breakfast with him on Wednesday.

P: Buckley is working on him.

K: In Reagan's defense, Jim Buckley called him this morning trying to get him agitated.

P: Jim Buckley is lost, huh?

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- K: No. To put it more fairly, he asked Reagan what he thought he should say. Reagan told him to just say you are sure the President didn't undermine the defense commitment.
- P: We said it tonight; what else can we say.
- K: Reagan congratulated you. He said this was one of your greatest weeks as President. Nancy was equally enthusiastic.
- P: She was. Reagan can see it in terms of political impact; in terms of television impact.
- K: Reagan said he caught your pilot last week; you can sell it as a series.
- P: (laughter) Good, fine, Henry.
- K: We acted a little too strongly to the Washington Post.
- P: Bill has quite an influence. (Buckley)
- K: We made a mistake taking him.
- P: (agreed)
- K: There would have been a lot of columns he couldn't have written if he hadn't been along.
- P: I don't know how to handle him unless I just don't have anything else to do with him.
- K: Never take your opponents.
- P: Just never take your enemies; I've told Haldeman that a thousand times.
- K: You only give them information You know Haig is about as hardline as you can get and he thinks this is the beginning of a diplomatic revolution. I didn't want to bother you before but last week the Russians sent us a message saying "What's going on? You keep criticizing us."
- P: We aren't criticizing them.

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The President/Mr. Kissinger

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- K: I sent them a message saying quiet down; we are serious about pursuing a detente. Since then there have been no opposing articles and TASS so far has communicated only in a very factual way.
- P: Get a meeting with Dobrynin and it's probably worth it to bring him in to see me for a few minutes.
- K: Do it after, not right this minute.
- P: Why?
- K: What worries me is these sons-of-bitches, they may get word to Peking that they met with the President as soon as he came back.
- P: You see him.
- K: I am having lunch with him on Wednesday.
- P: Tell him the President said he does want to see you prior to the trip. He wants to have a good off-the-record meeting with you to get your advice. Set it up for a little private dinner.
- K: My experience with the Russians is that you never lost by having a dinner (?)
- P: Hang that out there. Let him get the word to his government that he will be seeing the President. Get some rest, Henry. You ought to feel pretty good about this.
- K: You did it all.
- P: Poor Rogers. I think you are right; he will be for this after the public reaction. We didn't stack that audience.
- K: There were demonstrators there too.
- P: A few. They were with us; they started to clap when the plane drove up.
- K: And the Cabinet was there. If things were tough -- they never have been out when things are tough. Eliot Richardson said this was a diplomatic master stroke.
- P: He sees it. Why didn't Bill see it?

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- K: Because he doesn't have that sort of mind.
- P: That poor damn Greene egging him on.
- K: On Berlin, he told us this was going to lose us everything.
Reagan is for us.
- P: Is he going to make a statement, did you ask him to?
- K: I asked him for his support.
- P: I want him to make a statement.
- K: Right.
- P: Okay.