

TELCON

The President/Mr. Kissinger
11:30 -- April 15, 1972

K: ... about 50 % of ours so they are getting it.

P: So certainly, Henry, they must be hitting something.

K: Well, Mr. President, they claimed to have counted 10,000 bodies up to now and if you cut it in half, there must be another 5,000 that they have killed that we don't find.

P: Sure, sure.

K: In B-52 attacks.

P: Well, I'll tell you they are being punished and they are taking heavy casualties. The bastards are --

K: Mr. President, if they don't make it this time, they are not going to come back for two years.

P: If they don't make it this time, we're out of the woods but the point is that we have to realize though that our hold card is the blockade. However, that's why you've got to get it settled with the Russians now. I don't want a meeting -- you see, when you meet with them it's either got to be on the way to settlement or we blockade. You see that's the one thing I'm concerned about, these bastards, that they will filibuster us.

K: They can't filibuster you beyond the 25th of April.

P: Right.

K: And on the other hand, Mr. President, the major thing now is to beat down these North Vietnamese. I told them that you could not have a reasonable summit meeting if there were major action going on in Vietnam.

P: Right. He understands that, doesn't he?

K: Oh, yes.

P: Good, God, we can't go there with Russian tanks and Russian guns killing South Vietnamese and Americans. Hell, no, we're not going to go! We won't go. It isn't just a reasonable summit; it means there ain't going to be no meeting, that's what he's got to understand.

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K: Right.

P: And you can -- so you've got a few cards to play yourself on your trip.

K: Well, I think when I say if we keep our nerves, I don't mean you. I mean if as a country we keep our nerves, we are going to make it. Assuming the South Vietnamese don't collapse on us but there is no sign of this.

P: They may be stronger than we think.

K: Well, so far, Mr. President --

P: It's been three weeks now.

K: Actions have been going on three weeks; they have not achieved one major objective. When it started, we said to ourselves if they take 3 or 4 provincial towns, we are not doing badly. They've not yet taken one.

P: Yeah; pretty good, isn't it?

K: That's right.

P: Well, in any event, you would be going under present plans Wednesday night.

K: Yes. I suggested moving it a day but he said there is a meeting of the Politburo on Sunday and so it would be very inconvenient if they had to change.

P: Move it back a day, which way?

K: To Thursday night.

P: Hell, no, go Wednesday. The sooner, the better for us.

K: Right. Well, we're going Wednesday night now.

P: Yeah, yeah; get it over with.

K: Right.

P: In the meantime though, you mean our hands are tied now for a week?

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K: Well, no, we can bomb the bejesus out of them all over North Vietnam except in the Hanoi and Haiphong area.

P: You would not -- because you in effect had said we would not bomb there, is that what you told them?

K: That's right.

P: What about naval action?

K: We can go up and down the coast but not beyond the 20th parallel in effect.

P: That's all right too.

K: But, Mr. President, that gets every port of North Vietnam except Haiphong.

P: Yeah. But on the other hand, that allows Abrams to do what he wants to do and concentrate his air power in the battle area and we've given them quite a shock up in that area for a while.

K: That's right, Mr. President. They know what the situation is.

P: Why do you think though they will interpret, Henry -- what do you think they will interpret our stopping hitting the North, protests or something? You see, that's what worries me.

K: No, no, no; they know we are talking to the Russians. And after all, we are only stopping something that we have only done one day. We are continuing everything else.

P: They might expect we might come back another day.

K: Exactly.

P: Has it been carried in the news yet?

K: Yeah. Heavily.

P: [Laughter] What are they saying about it? Squealing?

K: Well, they are just reporting it -- it's just the first wave there. It's wave after wave of planes. You see, they can't see the B-52 and they dropped a million pounds of bombs.

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P: What? A million pounds of bombs.

K: A million pounds of bombs.

P: In the Haiphong area?

K: In the Haiphong area.

P: Did they have their calibrators fit?

K: Yeah, they are fixed now.

P: You think they really hit something this time, don't you?

K: Well, actually, we now have the photographs; they hit something last time too.

P: Yeah. But this time they probably hit a hell of a lot though, don't you think?

K: Oh, God, yes. And this time they did it visually, Mr. President.

P: Oh, the weather was good enough?

K: Yes, they did it with radar visually.

P: Goddamn, that must have been a good strike!

K: Yeah.

P: Of course, you want to remember Johnson bombed them for years and it didn't do any good.

K: But, Mr. President, Johnson never had a strategy; he was sort of picking away at them. He would go in with 50 planes, 20 planes; I bet you we will have had more planes over there in one day than Johnson had in a month.

P: Really?

K: Yeah.

P: Well, that has more impact too.

K: That's right.

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P: That shock treatment of cracking them. The only thing I regret is that when we made this plan, we didn't take out the power plants. The power plants, that can really demoralize a person.

K: Well, they have a power plant that they can hit south of the 20th parallel.

P: I meant the ones in Hanoi; put out the lights.

K: Well, it may be on there.

P: Really?

K: I have to check that list. What they gave them was 10 targets of which they were supposed to hit 6.

P: I see. Well, it's probably a pretty good strike, Henry, isn't it?

K: Well, 196 airplanes, Mr. President, that's pretty serious.

P: Well, in World War I -- II though, we used to have a thousand plane raid.

K: Yeah, but these planes can carry -- each plane can carry about 10 times the load of World War II plane could carry.

P: Yeah. Well, anyway, we will hold on and see what happens.

K: Well, we've got a few hold cards.

P: I think we've got Bill on salvo; he'll take a hard line. I think he knows it.

K: I mean, Mr. President, even if some protests start next week, we've got a big hold card.

P: Well, the fact that you've been to Russia.

K: Exactly.

P: When we blow that one, that's going to really -- of course, if we blow that one, you realize we will say then that we are not going to the summit. But that's --

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K: Well, no, but there may be conditions which we may blow it --

P: And still go, huh?

K: And still go to the summit. For example, supposing we get a settlement which the Russians guarantee.

P: Oh, that! Oh, any settlement.

K: My assessment is that the chances are 50-50 that we may want to blow it at some point. But at any rate, it is a good hold care to have.

P: Well, we shall see. Oh, yes, that's the reason why you are going. It's a good thing to do. As I said, after reversing earlier the decision, I think it's right; you've just got to go. Whether they come or not, the Vietnamese --

K: You could even make a case if they come a week later, it gives them a better chance to work them over.

P: Yeah, yeah. Well, also, we've got a chance to work them over too. You understand if they don't show -- I mean, after you meet the Russians --

K: Oh, we go right back to him.

P: Don't you agree?

K: Oh, yeah.

P: ^{And} The Russians have got to damn well understand that. And, also, they've got to understand -- Well, I don't know, I just have a feeling, Henry, that the strategy, which you and I both agree on, is the right one.

K: No question.

P: Everybody thinks it's too Hawkish; too unreasonable and so forth but what the hell else can you do?

K: Mr. President, if we had pursued the Laird strategy, we might have won in the South but the war would have dragged on and on and on and winning in the South is no -- doesn't bring the Russians in. What brings the Russians in -- I mean, we wouldn't have won in the

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K: (con'td) South, we could have held in the South and what brings the Russians in is the fact that the situation may get out of hand. Pouring that Fleet in there has made more of an impact on the Russians than the defense of An Loc which they don't understand.

P: Yeah. The Fleet shakes them because they think it's a blockade.

K: Of course.

P: And they're right. This time we aren't fooling; we've got enough to do it with, haven't we? We have Morris and Bill Cumin (?) out there --

K: Two carriers on the way. One of them is going to be there on Monday and operational on Wednesday. That immediately gives us 96 sorties more.

P: I tell you the thing to do is to pour it in there every place we can; just pour it down wherever the weather is and just bomb the hell out of them. I would think they'd be tearing the hell out of the I Corps now, shouldn't they? The weather's pretty good.

K: Oh, God --

P: Are they hitting some things?

K: Oh, yes. And they are tearing up the Panhandle. I don't even report this stuff to you; 26 secondaries, warehouses destroyed and stuff like that.

P: In the Panhandle?

K: Yeah. And the cumulative effect of that is going to be quite a lot.

P: Oh, Abrams has got the horses now. He can't blame it on anybody but himself.

K: Exactly.

P: Okay. Well, we finished one Pan American one again. I tell you there is sure not a damn thing to say to these folks.

K: That's the truth.

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P: They've been at it a week and -- God, I love them but Jesus Christ it's -- the Organization, I mean they are just lovely people but they just haven't got it, have they?

K: No. Well, there's something missing.

P: Except for Brazil.

K: Yeah. There's something missing.

P: Well, anyway, we'll see. In the morning you will give me --

K: I'm going over to the Pentagon to get a full wrap-up on today's operations and then I will give you a call.

P: Yeah. On the Rogers' thing, I told him to give me a call if he had any thoughts or anything he wanted to ask about. But he's all set for the hard line. Is there anything more you think we want to feed him, why, let's give it to him.

K: Right, Mr. President.

P: You know, let's let him go --

K: Well, I don't think we should overdo it now; I think we are in good shape.

P: He won't overdo it, you know that. What I meant is, whatever he says won't sound near as hard as if Laird says it. That's the reason his saying it is good.

K: Oh, yes; it's a great asset.

P: Yeah. Okay, thank you.

K: Right, Mr. President.

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