

Document 7

Conversation Among President Nixon, Secretary of State William Rogers, and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, 30 September 1971

[Source: National Archives, Nixon White House Tapes, Conversation 581-6]

Transcript prepared by Sharon Chamberlain, Ph.D. student, History, George Washington University

In the following excerpt, Secretary of State Rogers is protesting the timing of Kissinger's planned second trip to China, on the grounds that it would adversely affect the outcome of the vote in the United Nations on the seating of the People's Republic of China and the ouster of Taiwan.

Rogers: Mr. President, what I, what I wanted to say—I talked about this the other day. I think that the timing of this is particularly important in [inaudible] in relation to the motivation that the Chinese have. I'm inclined to think it's to use us in connection with the China vote.

Nixon: Oh.

Rogers: Yeah. You see, first they're having a series of problems—nobody knows what the problems are but apparently it's some kind of internal squabble politically in their country¹ and secondly the vote is coming up just about the time Henry would be there. Now, we are going to have one hell of a fight on our hands to win that; at the moment we're behind—we're going to lose by about two votes. You see, the conservative senators have come out and said that if we lose it they're not—they're going to quit their support of the United Nations; they're going to vote against [inaudible] and so forth. So there is a great deal of interest in the outcome and it will build up in the next two weeks, three weeks. Ah, I think if Henry was there when the announcement was made—he was there at the time of the vote everybody would think we were deliberately undercutting our own effort. This [inaudible] that we don't—that we're not serious about it anyway. Now we've gotten the Japanese on board and the Australians and New Zealand and so forth. So I think that—I think it would really be a serious mistake as far as timing. I talked to Henry about if we could delay it until after the vote—the Chinese representation vote—the announcement. Then I think it'd be fine. And Henry suggested that we have somebody from the State Department go with him and I think that's a good idea and we can work that out eventually. But I think that the announcement now and Henry's presence there at the time of the vote would be a very, very serious mistake, particularly because there's no reason for it—I mean if we don't make the trip until February you still—including November you've got four months. You have November, December, January and February, so there isn't any real hurry. And I think that the charge would be made that we've been used by the Chinese.

[Tape deletion: 12 second segment on foreign affairs withdrawn for national security reasons]

Nixon: Another possibility which might—it's the presence [inaudible]. The announcement it seems to me is very difficult—it's very difficult to [inaudible] to see Gromyko to tell the

¹ Around this time reports had begun to surface in the West about the internal power struggle going on in China that resulted in the attempted flight of Vice Chairman (and Mao's designated successor) Lin Biao to the Soviet Union and the crash of his plane in Mongolia.

Chinese government [inaudible]. I'm quite [inaudible] they might be using us, and we sure don't want that. On the other hand, all these people are [inaudible] to see each other. And [inaudible] figure it out if you put it off for that reason. Now what do you think of that?

Rogers: [inaudible].

Kissinger: What do you think causes more trouble?

[Tape deletion: no reason given in tape log]

Rogers: I don't think the announcement will cause that trouble because—

Nixon: [Inaudible]. The announcement is no problem. [Inaudible] Ziegler² can just go out in his regular briefing and say, preparatory to the trip, Dr. Kissinger accompanied by Dwight Chapin³ and, ah [inaudible] to make the arrangements for the trip.

Rogers: That doesn't—

Nixon: That doesn't bother me. It's the fact that he is there in Peking.

Rogers: Plus the fact, Mr. President, if it were—if it were people that were just making arrangements for the trip as such—advance men it'd be no problem. But Henry's presence is going to be looked at as a sort of a mini-summit. And he's there four days so everyone is going to say well, listen, he isn't there to make arrangements for television or something—he's there to talk substance. Well, look, it's—

Nixon: When does the vote take place?

Rogers: Well, just about the time Henry'd be there.

Kissinger: Any time between the 28th and the 1st is what I get from your people.

Rogers: Well, yeah, it's probably going to start—the debate's probably going to start around the 16th, 17th or something like that, and those will be, those will be the tricky times.

Kissinger: 19th to the 28th is what we've been [inaudible].

Rogers: So that if you did it—if you left it and you said in September—in November, say [inaudible] make arrangements for the trip I don't think that would cause any particular trouble. And I would think that we could, ah—

Nixon: [Inaudible]. Real problem is [inaudible]. We had this problem with the Russians—we just call Dobrynin⁴ in and say we'd like to get an answer tomorrow. Here the whole goddamn thing's gotta be done even though [inaudible].

² Presidential Press Secretary Ron Ziegler.

³ The White House staffer who led the advance team in charge of preparations for Nixon's trip.

⁴ Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin.

Rogers: He'll understand. I think we've got to let them know that we're standing [inaudible] and they know perfectly well that if Henry's there at that time it will put us on the [inaudible]. And if we say if we lose it that'll be blamed—his presence even—

Nixon: The announcement though does not bother you.

Rogers; No.

Nixon: I think there is a problem [inaudible]. The problem with delaying the announcement I think would be extremely difficult for [inaudible] because of this thing [inaudible] the merits of the case. The announcement of the Soviet [inaudible] date is May. Anything further [inaudible]. Also we're going to have a hell of a time explaining this to [inaudible].

Kissinger: As far as I'm concerned, November 10th is as good as October 20th.

Rogers Yeah.

Kissinger: And, ah [inaudible] no interest in that one way or the other.

Nixon: Do you think that's a possibility or something? What is today [inaudible].

Kissinger: It's going to be tight, but we could try, we could try.

Rogers: I think we have to be careful in our dealing with them not to put us in a position where they always have their payments.

Nixon: That's true.

[Tape deletion: 4 second segment on foreign affairs withdrawn for national security reasons]

Rogers: You know the suspicion has been on the part of some of those who oppose us that we are in a weak negotiating position. That we are so anxious to be certain that the trip takes place that we're willing to make concessions—

Nixon: Yeah, they [inaudible].

Rogers: We ought to avoid that.

Kissinger: Depending on how [inaudible]

Nixon: [Inaudible]. Well, let's think about it; let's do a little cogitating about it. Let me see if we can [inaudible] a way to get at it. I know the problem is [inaudible]. [Inaudible] the vote was going to come later, but, ah—as a matter of fact when they raised it in August we [inaudible] aware of all this [inaudible].

Kissinger: It wasn't so obvious that they were [inaudible]. First it was [inaudible]. [Inaudible] which came in about ten days ago. Ah—

Rogers: Of course at that time you weren't really sure how soon the trip was coming.

Kissinger: Exactly. And [inaudible].

[Part of tape inaudible and not transcribed.]

Rogers: The problem is aggravated by the time that elapses between Henry's trip and your trip. If it turns out to be four months, and that's what we're thinking about, then everybody says—why'd you go so soon? So that it almost looks as if we were suckers, to do it right at the time that we've got the most important issue between us coming to a vote. If we could justify it on the grounds that we had to do it because it was the time factor, but—

Nixon: I get you. Let's—let me do a little cogitating about it.

[Discussion of Roger's upcoming meeting with Gromyko, the Middle East, and SALT not transcribed; Rogers then departed and Kissinger and Nixon continue the conversation, only part of which was audible and is transcribed below.]

Nixon: [Inaudible] And it's worth trying. Why don't you just say [inaudible]. Just say because of [inaudible]. That you would like to make the announcement on the [inaudible] come on the 10th because of—you could say because of—you could say congressional action or something like that or it could be a meeting of the chief of state or someone was coming.

Kissinger: Well, the Tito visit is coming, but I already [inaudible].

Nixon: I know, but it's—I

Kissinger: Let me talk to one of my men who's been with me on all these meetings. If we can make the announcement so that they know they're not [inaudible].

Nixon: The announcement still [inaudible]. I think—you notice we got Bill to agree to that. The announcement—you say we would like to make the announcement on the 5th. [inaudible] as a matter of fact we must do that for the Russian reason too. The announcement must be made on the 5th. But we would say that you'll be going on the, ah—that you'd like to—could you slip the date for three weeks—or just say—

Kissinger: I could say I'll be there on the 10th. I'll be there on the 10th.

Nixon: Because of ah—you'd like to delay your arrival to the 10th in order to, ah—you can probably think up something that, something that sounds very [inaudible]. What do you think?

Kissinger: Well, it's not good but its ah, it's ah—

Nixon: But he does have a point, doesn't he?

Kissinger: He does have a point.

Nixon: He does have a point.

[Remainder of conversation inaudible and not transcribed.]