

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

August 31, 1972

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: AMBASSADOR ELLSWORTH BUNKER
DR. HENRY A. KISSINGER
PETER W. RODMAN, NSC STAFF

DATE & TIME: Thursday, August 31, 1972
7:55 a. m. - 8:45 a. m. (breakfast)

PLACE: Dr. Kissinger's Room
Kuilima Hotel
Oahu, Hawaii

SANITIZED

Dr. Kissinger: Where do you think we stand? per sec. 3.3(b)(6)

[REDACTED] the Japs take the cake. It's not just their indecent haste in normalizing relations with China, but they even picked National Day as their preference to go there. We have an intelligence report which says the Chinese didn't even want them then, or any foreigners. And yesterday they send me a message saying their Deputy Vice Foreign Minister Tsurumi wants to meet with me privately to work out the agenda, and the next thing you know they've told Rogers and Johnson, who were then hovering all around me. I don't know how they do it. I told (the Japanese) I wouldn't see him.

But back to our problem. What bothers me most is, do you think we've made an unreasonable proposal?

Ambassador Bunker: No, I do not think so.

Dr. Kissinger: We haven't sacrificed all these years in order to sell out now. If you think this is unreasonable, we'll change it. And we'll pay whatever price we have to.

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DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 13526, Section 3.5
NLN 05-27/31, per sec. 3.3(b)(6); ltr. 9-2-09
By: MLH, NARA; Date: 7/13/2011
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Ambassador Bunker: The guts of it, of course, is Point 4.

They feel -- and I've tried to dissuade them of this -- that the Committee will be seen as a disguised coalition government, or at least as a first move towards getting to one. On the other hand, their proposal for a referendum is unrealistic.

Dr. Kissinger: Isn't it a patent fraud? The same objections to the election will be made to this.

Ambassador Bunker: Yes. If the referendum is held with the government in power, it will be rigged just as the Presidential election of last October was -- unnecessarily rigged.

Dr. Kissinger: Does Charlie Whitehouse know of this?

Ambassador Bunker: Yes. He's the only one.

Dr. Kissinger: That's all right. I just want to know. What does he think?

Ambassador Bunker: He agrees it's a reasonable proposal.

They (the South Vietnamese) also feel they might lose control of their part. They fear that if we surface it, they'll be charged with giving away too much. It's a question of their resolve, and the morale of the armed forces.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes.

Ambassador Bunker: And finally, there is a feeling that South Vietnam is not yet ready to face a political confrontation with the Communists, frankly.

Dr. Kissinger: Neither side feels ready to face up to a political confrontation.

Ambassador Bunker: Yes. They fear they are not yet well enough organized to compete politically with such a tough disciplined organization. Their efforts at integrating politically are feeble.

Ambassador Bunker:(con't) The evidence of all this is that Thieu for the first time consulted with his full Security Council -- The Vice President, the Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister. Nha told me this.

Dr. Kissinger: Will they leak?

Ambassador Bunker: No.

I went to see him. I wrote out the whole sequence of events for you. (Tab A). I think he was too embarrassed to tell me. He asked me to send a memorandum first, and then he would see me, so I sent one. Then I waited for an appointment. I told Nha I certainly should see the President anyway.

Dr. Kissinger: Do they recognize that we have accepted many of their proposals?

Ambassador Bunker: They should; I pointed it out to them.

So I waited until 7:30 for an appointment and called Nha. He said it couldn't be arranged but they would have a message. Meanwhile the Palace called Eva (the Ambassador's secretary) and told me a messenger would come by at 7:30. Nha came himself at 7:30, with no memorandum. Nha said they were shocked at our turndown of their proposals.

Dr. Kissinger: I think we're better off sticking where we are, with no referendum.

If we go too far, Ellsworth, you tell us.

Ambassador Bunker: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: If all of this works, with all these elaborate forums, the process will last at least through November. We then can say it's a mess, we can go back to the proposal for the military issues alone. We can say, give us the prisoners and a ceasefire; we're getting out.

Ambassador Bunker: They won't accept it anyway.

Dr. Kissinger: That's right. And even if they did, this is the January 25th proposal with the Electoral Commission called a Committee of National Reconciliation.

Ambassador Bunker: That's quite right.

Dr. Kissinger: We've changed parts to meet their concerns. We say we will "review the Constitution for its consistency with the conditions of peace." We've taken out "equality." We've taken out "neutrality."

But where do we go from here?

Ambassador Bunker: They promised to have a memorandum for me when I got back.

Dr. Kissinger: But we cannot have a confrontation now. It will be their death, and our death. We have positioned ourselves domestically so that a confrontation would prove McGovern's case. It would be the biggest boost for McGovern.

They can't have the President go through the whole election without their help and then have a confrontation with the North Vietnamese in November as we plan.

Should we write a letter to them?

Ambassador Bunker: That may be a good idea. You draft it, putting down your points.

Dr. Kissinger (to Rodman:) We should say, first, on the basis of the Ambassador's report, we've made adjustments which the Ambassador will explain. On the other hand, it is essential for us to have a position from which we can demonstrate to the American people that the only obstacle is the Communists' insistence on our putting them in power. Once we do this, we can survive a stalemate and have a basis for returning to the May 8th position -- settling the military issues alone.

We have to survive if the letter surfaces. Don't say the May 8th position. Say that it will show world opinion the lengths to which we are willing to go, and provide a basis for handling the consequences if it fails.

Their suspiciousness is unbelievable.

Ambassador Bunker: This is Thieu's defect.

Dr. Kissinger: But it's true of Le Duc Tho, too. They'll never accept this.

Our plan is this, to be precise: If there is no settlement by November 7th we plan to walk out by November 9th.

If Thieu wants to do a heroic landing operation, let him do this. Seriously, is he planning this?

Ambassador Bunker: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Seriously. Let him do it.

We're facing sabotage in Washington. Laird has just recommended a 20% cut in the augmentation forces, a 40% cut in the sortie rate, and a cut in our ammunition supplies -- and all this in a written memorandum to the President! Tell Weyand this. And at this moment! If Thieu wants to deal with Laird. . . .

We brought Laird to San Clemente, not for the draft but to tell him he can't do it. The President handed him a written order not to make the cuts. Then Laird went out and told the press that 27,000 wasn't the final figure -- which we had gone to great lengths to avoid doing. Then he asked Moorer to make a military request for the cuts!

You have to stick with us. You always have. I have to be the headmaster of a reform school. When we hit some Chinese lifeboats, MACV came out with a denial. The Chinese sent us an apologetic note explaining why they had to protest publicly!

Tell Thieu: His only friends are the President and I. Therefore I'm really concerned by his attitude towards you.

Ambassador Bunker: I think Thieu was embarrassed to tell me he didn't have a memorandum.

Dr. Kissinger: In the letter, we should say, "I have come through four years. We will not overthrow our ally. What we do is in the mutual interest. The only danger we face now is mistrust between us. Please work with Ambassador Bunker in the spirit of total frankness that we have always had. We have told you our every move. It is essential now."

After November we will be in a unique position. We have never had a mandate for an honorable end to the war. In 1968 we promised to end the war. Even if it's only by 51%, we can claim the other guy made it an issue and we won.

We've got theater planned through November. Monday we'll announce I'm going to Moscow. Have I told you this?

Ambassador Bunker: Yes, you told me you were going.

(At this point, Dr. Kissinger spoke on the phone with General Haig, instructing him, inter alia, to tell DOD that the President wanted no further comment on troop withdrawals.)

Dr. Kissinger: Here are the papers for you. There is a new substantive proposal (Tab B) and a new procedural proposal (Tab C). And here is an annotated copy of our August 18th paper showing which of their suggestions we have accepted and which we have not. (Tab D).

Ambassador Bunker: That's helpful.

Dr. Kissinger: On Point 4, we've addressed many of their concerns.

Ambassador Bunker: You've taken out "neutrality."

Dr. Kissinger: Yes.

Ambassador Bunker: (reading): "Review the Constitution for its consistency with the conditions of peace." That's good.

Dr. Kissinger: So they don't have to "revise" it. And a "referendum" is in there to ratify it.

Ambassador Bunker: Good, yes. "Fairness" you did accept.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. Frankly, if it becomes a sticking point we'll have to fall off it.

Ambassador Bunker: Yes. (Reads:) "Lessening the burdens of people." They wanted it out?

Dr. Kissinger: What does it mean?

Ambassador Bunker: I don't know.

Dr. Kissinger: Maybe we should accept all their sacramental phrases.

Ambassador Bunker: I don't know what it means.

Dr. Kissinger: Even if Thieu should tearfully say, "Let's sign it," we wouldn't be able to sign it right away. If we table this on September 15th, it will take through October. I will take personal charge of confusing who offered what. We will be able to say to McGovern that the only thing we haven't offered is a Communist government. I don't see why Thieu is so obtuse.

Ambassador Bunker: Some of their proposed changes are meaningless: "Various" in place of "all." Some we rejected, with good reason: "for purely defensive purposes."

Can I use this?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. We thought it would help you run through it with Thieu.

Ambassador Bunker: You say "Deal with" in the procedural part.

Dr. Kissinger: They wanted to say "discuss" and not "resolve". We propose "deal with," which is more neutral.

Le Duc Tho is the same. They'll raise a theological point and stick to it forever.

Dr. Kissinger (con't): One other thing they (the North Vietnamese) keep coming back to: At one meeting I said in passing that if it was useful I would be willing to meet with any other Politburo members in complete secrecy, at a different location if necessary. They keep coming back to this. And in messages, too. They haven't proposed it, but they mentioned Laos, or Hanoi. I don't know how physically I would do it.

Would a visit by me to Hanoi wreck everything in Saigon? Or would it depend on the outcome?

Ambassador Bunker: It would depend on the outcome.

Dr. Kissinger: I'd go to Saigon first, I suppose, and then disappear to Hanoi.

(At 8:45, conversation broke up and Dr. Kissinger accompanied Ambassador Bunker to see the President.)

(The letter to Thieu drafted later for the President's signature is at Tab E.)