

November 25, 2008

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Processing Note

Transcript only of this conversation; there is no recording.

A copy of this transcript was interfiled on this date from the Alpha transcript series.

The time of this conversation is not indicated on the transcript; the time is 6:05 p.m.

DATE: 10/31/68

TIME: 6:05 PM

CALLER: Hubert Humphrey, Richard Nixon, George Wallace

Pages of Transcript: 5 pages

Barbara Cline
Archivist

SUBJECT: Transcript of Conference Call between the
President and Presidential Candidates Humphrey,
Nixon and Wallace on Thursday, October 31, 1968

First: Our position -- the Government's position today --
is exactly what it was the last time all three of you were briefed.
That position mainly is this: We're anxious to stop the bombing and
would be willing to stop the bombing if they -- Hanoi -- would sit down
with us, with the Government of South Vietnam present and have pro-
ductive discussions. We have told them that we did not think that we
could have productive discussion if, while we were talking, they were
shelling the cities, or if they were abusing the DMZ. That was on
October 16th, when I talked to you.

The next sentence said "From time to time they have nibbled
back and forth at these various items. Each time they do, there is a
flurry of excitement and so on, and so forth.

Since that time, they have sent their man back to Hanoi; we have
continued to have our regular weekly meetings and other meetings; we
have been in touch with a good many governments in the world -- from
Eastern Europe to India to the Soviet Union -- all these people working
every hour to try to (A) get them to accept the Government of South
Vietnam that they say are all puppets and that they would never sit down
in a room with, and (B) trying to inform them that we would be glad to stop
the bombing, but that the bombing could not continue stopped if they

(A) shelled the cities; or (B) if they abused the DMZ.

On Sunday night, I was informed by Paris that there were very good indications that they would let the Government of Vietnam come and be present at the conferences, and that they fully understood what would happen if we stop the bombing and they shell the cities, or abuse the DMZ.

When I got back to Washington from New York, I went back to the Soviet Union and point out that I did not want to deceive anybody and didn't want them to be deceived, didn't want to stop the bombing and have to start it again; but I wanted to make it abundantly clear that if they would let the Government of Vietnam come to the meetings and if they thoroughly understood what would happen, then I wanted to seriously consider this matter. But I had doubts -- repeat "doubts" -- that the North Vietnamese would stop shelling the cities or would stop abusing the DMZ. The Soviet Union came back to me on Tuesday or Wednesday, and said that my doubts were not justified.

Ambassador Harriman came back to me and said, "We have repeated to you at least 12 times -- we've repeated to North Vietnam at least 12 times -- in 12 meetings, and some meetings we repeated it several times -- that we could not have a productive discussion in an atmosphere of shelling the cities or abusing the DMZ; therefore, you may be sure we understand it.

WHILE THIS WAS GOING ON, WE'D GONE OUT AND TALKED TO ALL OF OUR ALLIED COUNTRIES, AND AT THAT TIME THEY ALL TENTATIVELY AGREED THAT THIS WAS A WISE MOVE.

NOW, SINCE THAT TIME WITH OUR CAMPAIGN ON, WE HAVE HAD SOME MINOR PROBLEMS DEVELOP. FIRST, THERE HAVE BEEN SOME SPEECHES THAT WE OUGHT TO WITHDRAW TROOPS, OR THAT WE'D STOP THE BOMBING WITHOUT ANY -- OBTAINING ANYTHING IN RETURN, OR SOME OF OUR FOLKS ARE -- EVEN INCLUDING SOME OF THE OLD CHINA LOBBYISTS, THEY ARE GOING AROUND AND IMPLYING TO SOME OF THE EMBASSIES AND SOME OF THE OTHERS THAT THEY MIGHT GET A BETTER DEAL OUT OF SOMEBODY THAT WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THIS.

Now that's made it difficult and it's held up things a little bit and I know that none of you candidates are aware of it or responsible for it, because I'm looking in my transcript here, When we talked before, and I asked for your comments. The Vice President said he had no comment, but thanks very much; Vice President Nixon said, "Well, as you know, this is consistent with what my position has been all along and I made it very clear: I'll make no statements that will undercut the negotiations so we'll just stay right on that, and hope that this thing works out", and then Mr. Wallace said, "Yes, sir, Mr. President, that's been my position all along too, the position you stated, and I agree with you that we shouldn't play any politics in this matter, so it might foul up the negotiations."

Now, I'm meeting with the Security Council and am going to review it with them. We've gone out to our allies -- I don't know just -- they approved it several days ago. But in the light of these overtures that have been surreptitiously made -- the gossip that's gone on by some of the lobbys, and the campaigners -- I don't know just what will come out of that situation. We're in touch with it. We're on top of it. We're watching it. But we think that this is what we ought to do. Now, I would hope, and I'm going to say so in my statement tonight -- that this would not be to anyone's advantage, except to the countries, to peace and to the men in Vietnam.

NIXON: WITH REGARD TO THE TALKS, IF THEY BEGIN, AND AS I KNOW, YOU'VE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY MAY NOT -- BUT YOU THINK THEY MAY; DOES THAT MEAN AT THAT POINT WE WILL NOT BE STOPPING ACTIVITIES IN THE SOUTH, EXCEPT FOR -- WHAT YOU'RE STOPPING IS IMPLY THE BOMBING?

PRESIDENT: DICK, THE TALKS WILL BE HELD. WE HAVE A FIRM AGREEMENT THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WILL BRING THE NLF IN AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE WILL BE PERMITTED TO ATTEND. WE WILL STOP THE BOMBING ONLY IN THE NORTH WHERE -- IN THE CONFIDENCE OF THE FAMILY, THE AMERICAN FAMILY -- WE PRACTICALLY HAVE STOPPED IT ALREADY, ANYWAY. We will take that same bombing that's taking place in the North today

and apply it in Laos and in South Vietnam, where we need it much more than we do in the North. In other words, I'm running a transportation company and I run between Atlanta and New York, but the bridge is out between now and spring between here and New York, so I'm going to put all my trucks going to Atlanta.