

Mr. Kissinger/The President (tape)
December 9, 1970 8:45 p.m.

jlj

K: Mr. President

P: The thing that concerns me about this thing you sent over on Cambodia was Moorer's, it seems to me, lame excuse that they did not have any intelligence because the weather has been bad. I don't think they are trying to do a good enough job in trying to get the intelligence over there. You understand what I mean?

K: Yes I do.

P: There are other methods of getting intelligence than simply flying. They've got the methods of the Cambodians to talk to and a hell of a lot of other people and I don't think they have done enough there. The second thing is as I have put on here now I want you to get ahold of Moorer tonight and I want a plan where every goddamn thing that can fly goes into Cambodia and hits every target that is open.

K: Right

P: That's to be done tomorrow. Tomorrow. Is that clear?

K: That is right.

P: I want this done. Now that is one thing that can turn this around some. They are running these goddamn milk runs in order to get the air medal. You know what they are doing Henry. It's horrible what the Air Force is doing. They aren't doing anything at all worth a damn.

K: They are not imaginative.

P: Well, their not only not imaginative but they are just running these things - bombing jungles. You know that. They have got to go in there and I mean really go in. I don't want the gunships, I want the helicopter ships. I want everything that can fly to go in there and crack the hell out of them. There is no limitation on mileage and there is no limitation on budget. Is that clear?

K: Right, Mr. President.

P: Now that he's got to understand. Now the second thing on this drill and I want you to tell both Bill and Mel that this is what I have decided to do. We will go forward on it on the basis, and we will do it - we're not going to do it on the basis of an open end commitment but on the basis that you are going to fly in supplies - airlift supplies to a place and so you airlift a hell of a lot of troops with it too. Now there must be absolute security on it. It should be supplies. In other words the troops go in with their supplies - so what The South Vietnamese have to - the troops have to unload them don't they?

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K: Right.

P: And I think that should be . . .

K: No, that is a very ingenuous formula.

P: The point is that Bill understands that. We have been airlifting supplies into Phnom Penh haven't we?

K: Yes. No, Bill actually - That's right - Bill made that point and actually . . .

P: Airlifting supplies to me is the thing. We are airlifting supplies and sure there are some troops but I don't want any numbers out. I don't want anything like that. I don't want any plan out and I don't want the air force bragging about it and I don't want a goddamn thing said.

K: Well Mr. President. Actually with this airlift we don't have to do anything for 48 hours on the troops. They have to go ahead - the whole thing wasn't really planned to go before the 11th or 12th.

P: All right.

K: They just felt that if there was no chance of it going we shouldn't get the Vietnamese all cranked up.

P: Get 'em ready. Get 'em ready and do it. And I think the main thing is if the Vietnamese are ready to go in there and they think they are going to have - Can they give them a real bloody nose and . . .

K: That's what they think and that's what Abrams seems to think.

P: If Abrams strongly recommends it we will do it.

K: Right.

P: We will take the heat on it. I'll do it but it is on the basis of the airlift thing and that's all and they have got to remember that there is absolute security on this, having in mind that we have a situation here which is political, which is going to be with us until about the 23rd and then that is over. Then we either have the damn supplemental or we don't have it.

K: Exactly.

P: So we don't want them to screw that up. And if they can delay it a week then fine but the point is that I see no objection to it if it doesn't screw up the supplemental. We've got to do the things that are necessary to see that this doesn't . . . But there is absolutely - they are not even to submit to me any plan that requires the use of American ground forces. Under any circumstances whatever!!!! Is that clear?

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K: Absolutely, Right.

P: It is not going to be done.

K: No, there is no . . .

P: And I am not going to keep it open at the press conference. There is not going to be done. It isn't what we want to do at this point. Don't expect to have to answer it but if I do I am not going to keep anything open. I am simply going to say that we don't have any such plans.

K: Well that . . .

P: Don't even - Understand. It isn't the question we can't play these Mickey Mouse games right now. We have got . . .

K: No, No. I agree with it!

P: We have got to get down to the real thing that matters and the thing that matters is not to have a big debate about whether- If we don't get this supplement through - See we have got to make a commitment on that Henry or there is no chance on the supplemental. You don't understand what it means unless we make an absolute commitment that no American ground forces are going to be used in Cambodia you will never get the supplemental. That's why . . .

K: I have no problem with that.

P: That's the problem. Well, I have left it open up to this point, but I can't now because the supplemental's up there see. So we will nail it and say the purpose of the supplemental is only to help the Cambodians defend themselves.

K: Right

P: That's all.

K: No, I was certain that we were not going to use any American ground forces . . .

P: I know. We have always been certain of that but we were keeping it open in order to keep the enemy off balance over it. But right now we have another enemy here to fight. And that is a group of legislators who will not support us unless they have an absolute commitment.

K: Well, your instinct on those things has always been right.

P: We have to do what is necessary to go it and it is a long shot and that's the way it is. The point of the matter is - oh Goddammit Abrams can do more and that damned Air Force can do more about hitting Cambodia with their bombing attacks. There is something wrong here. I don't know what it is.

K: I'll get that laid on.

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P: What the hell are they doing?

K: I'll get that laid on immediately.

P: The whole goddamn Air Force over there farting around doing nothing and I have watched that stuff and they aren't doing a thing. I mean they get one or two trucks a day and fly 800 sorties and get 1500 air medals. You know that's all it is. It's awful.

K: Yep, Yep.

P: It is a disgraceful performance and they are going to get off their ass and start doing something on it. I want gunships in there. That means armed helicopters, DC-3s, anything else that will destroy personnel that can fly. I want it done!! Get them off their ass and get them to work now.

K: Well we will get it done immediately Mr. President.

P: What is needed here is they need a little drive out there. I don't know what the hell is the matter with them. What are they doing?

K: The problem Mr. President . . .

P: You know we talk about this Cambodia thing and I am not going to have another crisis on Cambodia hit us in the face like it did last year. That again was a case of them not being on top of things. By God we are not going to let this happen this time.

K: The problem is Mr. President the Air Force is designed to fight an air battle against the Soviet Union. They are not designed for this war and that is the - in fact they are not designed for any war we are likely to have to fight.

P: That's right. There isn't going to be any air battle against the Soviet Union as you well know.

K: Exactly, I agree completely.

P: The difficulty is that they need some TBFs and a hell of a lot of SBDs and things like that could go in and knock the hell out of them. Bazookas - anything. That's what they need. A world war II Air Force would definitely make the North Vietnamese . . .

K: That is unfortunately true.

P: And we do not have a World War II Air Force.

K: That is unfortunately . . .

P: And they should be told this. Now goddamit maybe they have some stuff over here than can do that. I want that examined tomorrow and I mean on an

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urgency basis. I am disappointed in the fact that their jets and the rest - and get those goddamned jet pilots the hell over to Taiwan and get somebody else out there that can fight them. You understand?

K: Of course and I will move on that immediately.

P: Look. Get some conventional prop airplanes over there fast. And those prop airplanes whatever they are. We've got a lot of prop airplanes left. I have seen them on the runways. The National Guard's got them. I want them to give me a report by tomorrow - not tomorrow but Saturday morning every prop plane that could be made air worthy for the purpose of fighting the kind of battle we need to fight there. I want the goddamn planes over there. You understand?

K: I will get that report . . .

P: Get it out of there. Get it out of the Air National Guard and everything else. Shake up this air force and tell them exactly that I have reached the conclusion that they are designed to fight only the Soviets and they are not doing worth a damn here and it's time we are going to start doing different.

K: I will get that report for you by first thing Saturday.

P: But tomorrow . . .

K: And I will get the bombing campaign laid on for tomorrow.

P: I want them to hit everything. I want them to use the big planes, the small planes, everything that will help out here and let's start giving them a little shock. There must be something we can do. Let L. Abrams, he's to take personal charge and dismiss the Air Force commander if necessary over there. And I want Haig to look into this when he is over there.

K: Absolutely.

P: We have got to do a better job because we are just coming to the crunch. Right now there is a chance to win this goddamn war and that's probably what we are going to have to do because we are not going to do anything at the conference table. But we aren't going to win it with the people - the kind of assholes come in here like today saying well now there is a crisis in Cambodia. Hell, I have been asking about it for the last two weeks you know and you said no there isn't one.

K: Well, because . . .

P: So we learn it today, right?

K: That's what they told me. I asked them every day. I sent backchannels. For three months I have been bugging them about that column that is now being attacked. And so has Haig. Mr. President, On Houdek I think the best answer

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to give is I am satisfied that the relevant information was not given to the White House and I have set up procedures that this cannot happen again. Because the relevant information was not given to the White House.

P: The relevant information was not given. OK I will just say that. The relevant information was not given to the White House. And I am satisfied .

K: I am satisfied that the relevant information was not given to the White House and I have ordered - set up procedures that this cannot happen again. And that is exactly the fact as it is.

P: You can't blame him. I don't blame Houdek at all. You don't fire a person .

K: Hell, he didn't even understand what he was being told.

P: He just tried to piss off on us and he ought to take the responsibility himself.

K: They shouldn't have put it in their report. That was outrageous.

P: Well, why don't we put something - as I say the report should be hitting them for what they did on . . . let me ask you this. Have we ordered a court marshall?

K: Volpe promised us a report tonight or tomorrow morning.

P: Is there going to be one or not?

K: He said he was moving towards a court marshall. But I will get you a report on that . . .

P: I don't want to have a long report Henry. I don't want . . . one sentence.

K: Yes or no?

That's right.

P:/ Is there going to be one or not. If there is one then I can after all defer all questions. I have to. If there is not going to be one then I'll have to go into some detail on the damn thing. I want a court marshall. I think the Commandant up there should be court marshalled. Let's find out what the hell he did.

K: You will have the answer on that by nonn.

P: That's right. Just say there is or there isn't. And no fooling around. But let me tell you on this business on Cambodia - I want something done tonight. I don't want any screwing around and I want that Air Force to make its study immediately of anything in conventional World War II type craft that can be used over there. I am disappointed in what they have been doing. I want a new plan. I want it fast and let's get going. Also, the ~~XXXXXX~~ program for the

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South Vietnamese to make the ground attack is laid on, it's approved as of today. Have it go the first time it gets dry enough to go. Now get going on these things and don't let them delay so long. I think that the trouble is we are so busy over here - we got so many things. We worry about the Chilean elections and we worry about whether or not there is going to be a vote on Guinea and all that bull and the only thing that really matters at this point is this and I just want everybody to clear their minds of all this other crap. Let the State Department handle that. I don't give a goddamn what happens in those other places now - there is nothing we can do about it anyway. But this does matter and I just think that we have made a mistake here. We haven't put enough emphasis on it and let's start putting the emphasis in there where it matters.

K: Exactly.

P: Forget all that other crap.

K: Right. And I will get after Moorer this minute.

P: And those are the only reports I want to see from now on. For the next two months I don't want to see anything about Chile, I don't want to see anything about Biafra. I don't want to see anything about Guinea. I don't want to see anything about all the other crap. Doesn't make any difference right now. The Pakistan elections; there's not a goddamn thing we can do about any of those things. You understand?

K: Right.

P: Right now Henry we have got to concentrate on what can make or break us and none of those things will. And that's what we have got to . . . We've got to get more of a sense of direction here. A direction and urgency and priority or otherwise the whole thing will go down the drain. Some of these other things just don't matter.

K: Right.

P: They don't matter. You put it right to them. I really want some action now. OK.

K: Right Mr. President I will get it done immediately.

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