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131. Minutes of Secretary of State Kissinger's Principals and Regionals Staff Meeting¹

Washington, August 25, 1976, 8 a.m.

[Omitted here are a list of attendees and discussion of unrelated matters.]

Mr. Schlaudeman: Mr. Secretary, we will need a decision on whether Ellsworth should come back to Panama next month.

Secretary Kissinger: Well, his schedule is insane. It is impossible. There is no possible way that we can lock this thing up between November and January, without looking like having perpetrated a fraud on the American people. You can't have an election and then before the inauguration come in with a Panama Treaty.

Mr. Schlaudeman: But I think the question here is whether his going wouldn't be a good step in keeping Torrijos more or less quiet.

Secretary Kissinger: I have no problem with the going, as long as he doesn't do anything.

Mr. Schlaudeman: O.K.

Secretary Kissinger: But he had better disabuse them of that schedule idea that he has—it is absolutely impossible. We will start negotiating in good faith after the election. But there has to be a plausible process.

Mr. Schlaudeman: Yes.

Secretary Kissinger: We haven't made our internal decisions yet. And there is no possible way—

I mean, supposing if the President loses—I don't think he can then do it. If the President wins, then he can proceed in November and December to take the internal decisions. But then it will still take a few months to [\[Page 348\]](#) negotiate it.

But if he loses, he has to leave it for the next Administration. I don't see how he, as President, can take a decision of this magnitude. It wouldn't be proper.

Mr. Schlaudeman: The Panamanians wouldn't strike any deal under those circumstances anyway.

Secretary Kissinger: It would raise a serious Constitutional question.

Mr. Hartman: If you are seeing George Bush at 1:00, as they thought you might be, there is a note from George [Aldrich] that you should read.

[The Secretary left for another appointment.]

1. Source: National Archives, RG 59, Transcripts of Secretary of State Kissinger's Staff Meetings, 1973–1977, Lot 78D443, Box 11, Secretary's Staff Meeting, August 25, 1976. Secret. All brackets except those that indicate omitted text are in the original.↵