

“No One Will Give a Damn”

Date: August 3, 1972

Participant: Richard M. Nixon

Participant: Henry A. Kissinger

Start Time: 08:28

Place: Oval Office

After North Vietnam dropped its demand that South Vietnamese president Nguyen Van Thieu resign, National Security Adviser Henry A. Kissinger told President Nixon he had a real chance to reach a settlement ending American participation in the war. It would provide a “decent interval” of a year or two between the final withdrawal of American troops and the final collapse of South Vietnam.

President Nixon: —as I look at the tide of history out there—South Vietnam probably is never going to survive anyway. I’m just being perfectly candid. I—

Henry A. Kissinger: In the pull-out area—

President Nixon: [*Unclear*] we’ve got to be—if we can get certain guarantees so that they aren’t . . . as you know, looking at the foreign policy process, though, I mean, you’ve got to be—we also have to realize, Henry, that winning an election is terribly important. It’s terribly important this year. But can we have a viable foreign policy if, a year from now or two years from now, North Vietnam gobbles up South Vietnam? That’s the real question.

Kissinger: If a year or two years from now North Vietnam gobbles up South Vietnam, we can have a viable foreign policy if it looks as if it’s the result of South Vietnamese incompetence. If we now sell out in such a way, and say that in a three- to four-month period, we have pushed President [Nguyễn Văn] Thiệu over the brink—we ourselves—I think there is going to be—even the Chinese won’t like that. I mean, they’ll pay verbal—verbally, they’ll like it.

President Nixon: But it’ll worry them.

Kissinger: But it will worry everybody. And domestically, in the long run, it won’t help us all that much because our opponents will say we should’ve done it three years ago.

President Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: So we’ve got to find some formula that holds the thing together a year or two, after which—after a year, Mr. President, Vietnam will be a backwater. If we settle it, say, this October, by January ’74 no one will give a damn.

End of excerpt.

“Richard Nixon and Henry A. Kissinger on 3 August 1972,” Conversation 760-006 (PRDE Excerpt A), *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition [Fatal Politics]*, ed. Ken Hughes] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4006748>