



## “You Go to That Conference”

**Date:** 1968-11-08  
**Conversation:** WH6811-04-13723-13724-13725  
**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson  
**Participant:** Richard M. Nixon  
**Start Time:** 21:23  
**Duration:** 02:42  
**Place:** Mansion

SCENE SETTER: Three days after the 1968 presidential election, President Johnson asked president-elect Richard M. “Dick” Nixon to privately urge the South Vietnamese to take part in the Paris Peace Talks. If Nixon refused, Johnson would reveal that the Nixon campaign had secretly urged South Vietnam to boycott the talks before the election. Johnson instructed Nixon on how to phrase the request to the ambassador.

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**Richard M. “Dick” Nixon:** Now, [*clears throat*] getting to the one—the key point: Is there anything I could do before that on this business of South Vietnam? If you want me to do something, you know I’ll do anything, because we’re not going to let these people stop these peace things, if you think I could do something.

**President Johnson:** Dick, I told [Everett M.] Dirksen [R–Illinois] last night, I thought it’d be better [to] do it that way than to be calling on the trips. I think this: these people are proceeding on the assumption that folks close to you tell them to do nothing till January the 20th.

**Nixon:** I get it.

*End of excerpt 1.*

**President Johnson:** Now, I think the wise thing to do from the standpoint of your country and from the standpoint of your presidency—and I hope you believe me—I—

**Nixon:** Oh, I do.

**President Johnson:** —I want to help you. I want to help you. I don’t want to trick you or deceive you.

**Nixon:** Oh, I know that.

**President Johnson:** I want peace. And I don’t want to get some Democrat in a favorable position over you. But I think they [South Vietnamese] ought to go to that conference. Now—

**Nixon:** Let me ask you this: Is there anything we could do right now?

**President Johnson:** Yes, I think you ought to have whoever you trust the most in Washington, whoever you're—

**Nixon:** [*Unclear*] to the ambassador?

**President Johnson:** Yes, sir.

*End of excerpt 2.*

**President Johnson:** "Therefore, Mr. Ambassador [Bùi Diễm], I think you ought to tell the President [Nguyễn Văn Thiệu] that I support our President on going to the conference, and I think you ought to go. And if they try to sell you out, you don't have to agree. But you ought to go, because the [J. William "Bill"] Fulbrights [D–Arkansas] and the [Michael J. "Mike"] Mansfields [D–Montana] and [*Nixon acknowledges*] even the Dirksens will not go along with anybody that won't go to a conference table." Now, that's where they are tonight.

**Nixon:** Let me ask you this: About the ambassador, is—I met him about five or six months ago—does he have any influence with that government?

**President Johnson:** Yes, he is giving them these signals, and [*Nixon acknowledges throughout*] he is telling them that he has just talked to New Mexico, and he has just talked to the Nixon people, and they say, "Hold out. Don't do anything. We're going to win. We'll do better by you."

Now, that's the story, Dick, and it's a sordid story. I told you that Sunday when I talked to you.

**Nixon:** Right.

**President Johnson:** You remember when I talked to [George A.] Smathers [D–Florida] and Dirksen?

**Nixon:** Right.

**President Johnson:** Now, I don't want to say that to the country, because that's not good.

**Nixon:** Right.

**President Johnson:** But they're playing that game. I don't think you're playing it, and I'd get off that hook. I'd just say to them, "You go to that conference, [*Nixon acknowledges*] and you protect your country. And I'm going to support our President as long as he doesn't agree to a coalition government, as long as he doesn't agree to recognize the NLF [National Liberation Front], as long as he stands on the conditions he does, and we're united. And don't—"

**Nixon:** Right.

**President Johnson:** "—depend on me to give you a better deal."

**Nixon:** We'll do that.

*End of excerpt 3.*

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CITATION: “Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon on 8 November 1968,” Conversation WH6811-04-13723-13724-13725, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [Johnson Telephone Tapes: 1968, ed. Kent B. Germany, Nicole Hemmer, and Ken Hughes] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014–). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4006133>

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