



H. R. Haldeman Diaries Collection, January 18, 1969 – April 30, 1973

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Tuesday, December 5.

In Washington. The President had me over first thing this morning. In fact, he called me at home. I wasn't planning to go in until late, but I hurried up to go in. We had a problem because some of the Cabinet announcements had leaked, and he wanted them canceled, although he simmered down on that. The problem was the *Post* got the story, which was especially galling.

Then got into the Vietnam problem and wanted to discuss it in some detail. The question of whether he should go on TV or not. He got Kissinger's cable, which pushed hard on his going on again. Also, he got word that today's meeting had been canceled. They were going to meet tomorrow.

This led to a discussion later in the day with Colson on the same subject. He had Colson read the cable and discussed it. Chuck felt as I do and as the President does, that he should not go on. You can't rally the people again, and so on. Then he told me to go over this with Connally before his meeting with John, which I did. He also had Ziegler go over it, on the basis of whether there is anything that the President can say now that's new. The question is who to blame for the breakdown? Kissinger wants the President to blame North Vietnam and then pick the thing up. The President's concern is that this just ties him in with a failure and doesn't really accomplish anything. Connally felt the same way, after we had talked about it a little bit. He feels that this is going to be a serious blow to the American people, that we can't rely on the translation excuse, and that TV's not the answer. If there's any alternative, we should low key it as much as possible as being an interruption, not a breakdown or a breakoff. Kissinger has to take the heat, not the President, but he should not do it in despair or frustration. He should make the point that they have backed off. So then the President told me to send a message to Kissinger to tell North Vietnam tomorrow, first, that it's his belief now, that in view of the North Vietnam reneged on the October 26 agreement, and their intransigence, that the President will be able to get funds from Congress to continue military action and military and economic support for South Vietnam.



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Also, that we should avoid a dramatic breakoff by us, should treat it as a case where we reached an impasse at this time, and each side has gone back for consultation; we'll resume when it appears productive to resume. Indicate it's the unanimous opinion here that it would be a mistake to break it off and the President to go on TV with chapter and verse as to why the negotiations failed. Instead, you should go as hard as you can. If you can't do it, you go home and consult further to see what the next course is, without saying anything we'd order a short military step-up. Kissinger should do a very short, matter-of-fact briefing, not with a huge buildup. Say North Vietnam backed off their commitment, we'll bargain in good faith whenever they're ready. Don't use the translation excuse. They insisted on North Vietnam forces in South Vietnam and a formula that they interpret as a coalition government, which we cannot accept. The President should not get into any details, nor should Kissinger --we're in the Christmas season now, people feel good, and so on, they don't want to hear all this. We should keep the hopes alive. We need to get Kissinger into a different frame of mind. We can't rally people to back negotiations that failed. Kissinger's TV idea would be a mistake. A briefing by you, at a low key, is the way to handle. As a bargaining point, make the point that the President now believes that he can get the funds from Congress. I should cover all these points in the message; that we must not assume that the gun is there to be fired. Henry's got to be turned off on dealing with this, so that he won't take the position when he gets in the meeting with the North Vietnamese and lock the President into it. The President called me later and said I should add to the cable a thing that says "Incidentally, the President and all of us here, feel that any discussion of your resignation is totally out of order", and then he agreed that that shouldn't be raised. Kissinger is overdramatizing that whole thing.

The President got into the Christmas plans problem early today. Lucy and Bull are apparently going at it on the social plan, and we don't have anything worked out, so he was calling for action on that. Ended up calling Lucy and Steve into the office, going through what he wants with them.



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Had a long session with Connally on the whole question of the new party and Connally's going for the Presidency, and it's clear that Connally is ready to run, but not totally convinced that we can do it by building a new party. That the third party route just isn't workable, and there's no point in trying it. He does feel that we could do something in the way of building or re-establishing the Republican Party in a different way, with a new name, such as the Republican Independent Party. It would clearly put a new cast on it, but not lose the base that we have now, which Connally feels is indispensable. He debated the question of whether he would change parties and came to no conclusion on that. It will depend on how the whole question comes out at the Democratic National Committee meeting, first of all, and then in general decision. Connally's feeling, however, is that he shouldn't change things when they are going well, and that we're in a pretty good position now, we ought to leave it that way. He ought not to change parties until there's a clear indication that that's the thing to do, which he doesn't feel there is at this point. I made the point that he maybe can't afford that luxury, in that it would be bad for him to change parties; in a way that looks like an opportunistic move to go for the nomination, where it would be good for him to change as a reaction to the sellout of the Party to the Libs. He agreed with that. The meeting went on for a couple of hours with general discussion of this and the whole Vietnam question. It was left that Connally would explore, and nothing really was settled.

End of December 5.