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Date: Oct 16, 1968

Participants: Lyndon B. Johnson, Hubert H. Humphrey, Jr., Richard M. Nixon, George C. Wallace, Jr.

Location: Oval Office

Conversation Number: WH6810-04-13547-13548

SCROLLER TITLE: "This Is in Absolute Confidence"

SCENE SETTER: In this conference call with three 1968 presidential candidates, President Johnson reviewed recent developments on Vietnam and his conditions for imposing a total bombing halt on the North. Hanoi had demanded a cessation of bombing in order for peace talks to move forward; for his part, Johnson needed assurance that the North Vietnamese would refrain from shelling civilians in South Vietnamese cities, respect the Demilitarized Zone [DMZ] between North and South Vietnam, and consent to Saigon's participation in peace talks. Hanoi's move toward acceptance of those conditions had set the stage for a bombing halt—and the emergence of a new dynamic in the U.S. presidential race.

President Johnson: The—this is in absolute confidence, because any statement or any speeches or any comments at this time referring to the substance of these matters will be injurious to your country. I don't think there's any question about that.

End of excerpt 1.

President Johnson: The government's position is going to be this: Our—we are willing to stop the bombing when it will not cost us men's lives, when the government of South Vietnam can be a party to the negotiations, and when they will not abuse the DMZ and not shell the cities. [*Faint, unclear comment by George Wallace.*] Now, we do not have to get a firm contract on all these three things, but I do have to have good reason to believe that it won't be on-again, off-again, Flanagan. That I won't have to stop the bombing one day and start it the next. Now, obviously they can deceive me. And we know that in dealing with the Communists that they frequently do that. We have had a good many experiences of that right in these negotiations.

But what I called you for was to say in substance this: Our position has not changed. I do not plan to see it change. I have not issued any such orders. I will con—I will talk to each of you before I do, and all of you on an equal basis. I know you don't want to play politics with your country. I'm trying to tell you what my judgment is about how not to play politics with it, and I know all of you want peace at the earliest possible moment, and I would just express the hope that you be awfully sure of what you're talking about before you get into the intricacies of these negotiations. Over. Now, I'll be glad to have any comment any of you want to make or answer any question.

Hubert H. Humphrey Jr.: No comment, Mr. President. Thank you very much.

Richard M. "Dick" Nixon: Yeah. [*Clears throat.*] Well, as you know, my—this is consistent with what my position has been all along. I've made it very clear that I will make no statement that would undercut the negotiation. So we'll just stay right on there and hope that this thing works out.

President Johnson: George, are you on?

George C. Wallace Jr.: Yes, sir, Mr. President, and, of course, that's my position all along, too—is the position you stated, yes, sir. And I agree with you that we shouldn't play any politics with the—this matter so that it might foul up the negotiations in any manner.

End of excerpt 2.

CITATION: “Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Hubert H. Humphrey Jr., Walt W. Rostow, and George C. Wallace Jr. on 16 October 1968,” Conversation WH6810-04-13547-13548, *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/4006073>