



“There’s No Arrangement”

Date: 1968-11-14

Conversation: WH6811-05-13737 and WH6811-05-13738-13739

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Bryce N. Harlow

Start Time: 20:03 and 09:20

Duration: 03:36

Place: Mansion

SCENE SETTER: As the presidential transition from the incumbent Johnson administration to the incoming Nixon administration began to take shape, President Johnson sought to ensure a smooth transfer of power while still retaining all the prerogatives of the office—including the sole authority for policymaking in foreign affairs. Speaking with Nixon assistant Bryce N. Harlow on 14 November 1968, and again the next day, Johnson conveyed the message that the country had only one president at a time.

President Johnson: Hello?

White House Operator: Yes, please.

President Johnson: I want that call on [*unclear*].

White House Operator: Mr. [Bryce N.] Harlow? Yes, sir. [*The call connects.*] There you are, Mr.—

President Johnson: Hello?

Bryce N. Harlow: Mr. President?

President Johnson: Yes, Bryce.

Harlow: I’m—I fear I’m a little impudent to call you, but I wanted to—and I very much appreciate your courtesy of letting me talk. I was talking with Mr. [Richard M. “Dick”] Nixon this afternoon. He told me of your call, and he was quite troubled over it. And I told him that you had told me the other evening to call you whenever I felt like it, and I thought I would do that. He was concerned whether or not it was being construed that he had indicated he had a veto right over your actions for the balance of your term. And he did not say that, and I was very fearful that the press was trying to read it this way and had so reported to you. And I was present when he had his press conference. And he very specifically did not say that and said exactly the opposite. And I wanted to make sure that that was understood by you, because he is trying to play the game, I think, exactly the way you want it played.

President Johnson: I was bothered, because we did not get the transcript, and they would like to divide us any way they can.

Harlow: Well, of course, they [*unclear*]

President Johnson: We could not see what he said. But the phrase that gave us trouble was not that he was sending [Robert D. “Bob”] Murphy as an observer, which he had stated to me in the telephone call, but that before we would take action, it would be necessary to have approval. Now, that language is given in the—tonight in his television statement. I saw it on ABC [American Broadcasting Company] at seven o’clock. It very definitely connotes an agreement between us that (a) not only calls for an observer, (b) a consultation, but (c) approval.

End of WH6811-05-13737 excerpt.

Harlow: No veto. That was made clear.

President Johnson: He made that very clear yesterday, but it’s a little inconsistent. [*speaking over Harlow*] Let me read you this statement: “Would you clarify a point on the need for agreement on the course of action? Are you saying that the President will not take a course of action unless you have approved of it?” Nixon: “We did not discuss it that precisely.” So he handles it—that well there. But then he goes on a little longer, and he says, “Do you think of dealing with ABMs [antiballistic missiles], which Johnson’s anxious to initiate—is that also included in this arrangement?” Now, bear in mind, Bryce, we’ve had no arrangement.

Harlow: Yes, I know.

President Johnson: We just asked a man to come here and follow it, that’s all. There’s no arrangement. There’s no deal. There’s no secret. There’s no contract. Then Nixon replies—[*rereading the last question aloud*] “Is that also included in the whole arrangement?” Nixon said, “Yes, anything. Any subject in the whole general field of foreign policy will be within Ambassador Murphy’s assignment.” Now, that’s all right, up to that point. [*speaking deliberately*] “And, of course, as far as any decision on that is concerned, like obviously any arrangement with the Soviet Union, it would be essential that there be prior consultation and prior agreement.” [*Chuckles.*]

Harlow: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah—

President Johnson: [*chuckling*] Ah, so . . .

Harlow: —I see. I see your concern.

End of WH6811-05-13738-13739 excerpt.

CITATION: “Lyndon B. Johnson, Bryce N. Harlow, and White House Operator on 14 November 1968,” Conversation WH6811-05-13737; and “Lyndon B. Johnson and Bryce N. Harlow on 15 November 1968,” Conversation WH6811-05-13738-13739, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [Johnson Telephone Tapes: 1968, ed. Kent B. Germany, Nicole Hemmer, and Ken Hughes] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014—).

URLs: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4011253>;

<http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4005502>

This conversation was transcribed by the [Miller Center's Presidential Recordings Program](#) with the generous support of the [National Historical Publications and Records Commission](#).

Full information about this conversation: ["There's No Arrangement"](#)