

Newly Released Secret Tapes Reveal LBJ Knew but Never Spoke Out About Nixon's 'Treason'

Rumors and whispers of Richard Nixon's 'treason' -- sabotaging Vietnam peace talks to help his Presidential campaign -- have floated around for years, but newly released tapes from Lyndon Johnson's Presidency confirm that LBJ knew about Nixon's behaviour and didn't bother to report it.

In [previously released tapes](#) from Johnson's Presidency, we had heard about Johnson having a substantial body of evidence showing Nixon schemed to keep the South Vietnamese away from the negotiating table at the 1968 Paris peace talks. Johnson recorded all of his conversations held inside the White House while he was President. (Where do you think Nixon got the idea?) Nixon was accused of dispatching Anna Chennault, a senior advisor, to convince the South Vietnamese they would get a better deal if they didn't agree to peace, effectively ending the Vietnam war, until after the U.S. Presidential election. Chennault [confirmed](#) she spoke with the Vietnamese in her autobiography, *The Education of Anna*, but nothing more than that. If true, the charge would likely amount to treason.

Which brings us to today. The BBC's David Taylor [reports newly unclassified Johnson tapes](#), combined with unreleased interviews carried out by the BBC's former Washington correspondent Charles Wheeler with senior Johnson administration officials (before Wheeler's death), reveals new, amazing information about the scandal. In October 1968, there was a breakthrough in the Paris peace talks that would end the Vietnam war. At the same time, Nixon's campaign was relying heavily on the war continuing. If a deal was reached, Johnson would halt the bombing of North Vietnam. But Nixon had Chennault convince South Vietnam that they "should withdraw from the talks, refuse to deal with Johnson, and if Nixon was elected, they would get a much better deal," Taylor [writes](#). They did on the day before Johnson was going to announce the end of the Vietnam war.

And Johnson knew about it all. In the recently released tapes, we can hear Johnson being told about Nixon's interference by Defence Secretary Clark Clifford. The FBI had bugged the South Vietnamese ambassadors phone. They had Chennault lobbying the ambassador on tape. Johnson was justifiably furious -- he ordered Nixon's campaign be placed under FBI surveillance. Johnson passed along a note to Nixon that he knew about the move. Nixon played like he had no idea why the South backed out, and offered to travel to Saigon to get them back to the negotiating table.

Johnson also passed along a note to Nixon's opponent, Democrat Hubert Humphrey. The Democratic campaign found out just days before the election, though, and decided they were close enough in the polls to not release the information. A treason accusation could potentially damage the country's security, they thought, before Humphrey lost a narrow election. Hindsight is 20/20, others say.

But even before Nixon won, Johnson had his own issues to deal with. The South pulling out of the Paris talks meant the war would continue. Johnson could independently release the information if he wanted, destroy Nixon, and ensure a win for his Democratic ally Humphrey. But he opted not to for the country's [greater security concerns](#):

Johnson felt it was the ultimate expression of political hypocrisy but in calls recorded with Clifford they express the fear that going public would require revealing the FBI were bugging the ambassador's phone and the National Security Agency (NSA) was intercepting his communications with Saigon.

So they decided to say nothing.

Nixon went on to win the Presidency in 1968. In 1973, after escalating the Vietnam War in his first term, a peace deal was finally agreed upon. The rest, as they say, is history.