

Timothy Naftali

Hi, I'm Tim Naftali. It's October 5, 2007. I'm Director of President Nixon -- the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. I'm in New York City, and I have the honor and privilege of interviewing Leonard Garment for the Richard Nixon Presidential Oral History Program. Len, thank you for joining us for a second time so we can cover a couple of areas that we didn't the first time around. My first question has to do with your sometime role as an intermediary with the government of Israel, particularly Golda Meir. How did that happen?

Leonard Garment

Well, it started actually right after the election of 1968, when we were still -- when Nixon was still putting his government together. And I was in New York doing whatever I did, interviewing people, and I was visited by Shlomo Argov, who was deputy to Ambassador Yitzhak Rabin. And he took me to lunch at the Hotel Plaza, and that was my first contact with the government of Israel during the time that I was in the government. And the purpose of the lunch was simply to get to know each other, because he had the thought that my being, apparently, close to Nixon in the campaign, and being Jewish, and being interested in Middle East affairs, that I might have some role to play that would be useful to both the United States and Israel. The lunch was actually a very pleasant briefing on the situation that existed then in 1969, shortly after the Six Day War, that is, in terms of years it was two years after the war. And there was still lot of scrambling. And Argov became a very good friend of mine, friend of mine and of my family when we went to Washington. The lunch was filled with anecdotes and stories, and this was a very intelligent and charming man. In Washington, I played a very incidental role in Middle East affairs. It's a little hard for me to pull all those details together a quarter of a century later, but it was understood that I would be from time to time, with respect to incidental matters, something like an emissary between the United States and Israel, sometimes having explicit assignments to say something or carry a message to a particular official, and more frequently, doing my own prospecting and trying to be helpful, based upon whatever information I could gather or that was made available to me. And a fair amount was made available to me. I had access to all lot of information.

In fact, I guess the first formal event in this relationship was a briefing, a rather extensive one, by Hal Saunders, who was deputy on the National Security Council, deputy to Henry Kissinger and thoroughly grounded in Middle East history, politics, issues for the present and future. The first design that I had was a curious one in the sense that it was joined with an assignment I had to attend the Moscow Film Festival as chairman or leader of a delegation of Americans going to the Moscow Film Festival. And I think we were carrying the, as the American entry, Stanley Kubrick's, "Destination 2001." I'm not sure of the title, but something like that. And before we left, Henry Kissinger told me that this would be a good occasion for me to meet the principals in Israel, and that I should meet and it would be arranged for me to meet Joe Cisco, the assistant secretary of state for the Middle East, to meet him in Moscow, and that from Moscow, I would go to Israel and there meet so much of the leadership as the Israelis wanted me to meet. The meeting with Cisco took place toward the end of the film festival. It took place in the American Embassy in the secure headquarters, which was a little bit colder than this room. And Cisco explained that what I had to do was basically to convey a simple message to Mrs. Meir, the Prime Minister, and he handed me a document that was -- had marks of "Confidentiality" or "Top Secret" on it, and said, you're not to take this piece of paper, just read it and

memorize it, something that I was not particularly trained to do under the pressure of examination by the State Department people. I read the document a few times, and after I left the room, I scribbled some notes because the essence of the document was quite simple. It basically referred to, as I recall it now, the Rogers Plan, and the effort that was being made by the secretary of state to draw the Soviets into some kind of collaboration on lowering the temperature in the Middle East where the Egyptians and the Israelis were at each other again with border raids and combat in the air and other somewhat threatening events. But the message was essentially that the Russians didn't want to -- were not going to be cooperative. They were making too much headway with Egypt and in furtherance of their longtime desire to have a significant presence in the Middle East. I flew to Israel, and was greeted there by the man who was my guide for the days I was there. I think it was most of a week. His name, as I recalled it, was Jacoby -- whether a real name or otherwise, I don't know -- very interesting, very pleasant, very knowledgeable Israeli. We went to my hotel, I think, checked in, and he said, "Your first visit will be with the, I think, the defense minister, Moshe Dayan." I think he was the defense minister then. In any event, he was a very senior figure in the defense establishment and he said, "He'll be calling on you tomorrow morning at your hotel for breakfast at 8:00." The next morning, the phone rang and Dayan said that he -- we had to postpone a sit-down lunch, but he had brought some rolls and coffee.

There was an emergency that he had to attend to at his headquarters. And he came up to share with me this breakfast and to begin something of the orientation that was the principal activity that week. He was a very calm, cool. A man who had an interesting job and was looking forward to the activity of the day, the excitement, the air battles, which he outlined for me. And then took his leave, saying that he would be in touch with me later in the week and we would have that breakfast or lunch. Jacoby then took me to various places, but the main event was a visit to Mrs. Meir, I think, quite promptly that first day. And she was, as I had thought her to be, Golda Meir, a strong, maternal figure who knew what she was doing, who knew what she wanted to say and was very direct and forceful, reciting for me the history, the relatively recent history of the Middle East conflict, which was then almost as complicated as it is now. I took in what I could take in, both of us smoking like chimneys. I think that's my most vivid memory, is Mrs. Meir puffing away on an unfiltered cigarette, cigarettes, one after another, and taking phone calls from time to time during this orientation that were reports on the air action that was then under way. And if my memory serves me correctly, from time to time, at least on one occasion, she hung up the phone and said, "Well, we shot down another Egyptian plane." They were flying Russian MIGS, I think, at that time, so this was a -- it was an important moment in the engagement between Israel and Egypt. I gave her the message, which she knew, long before I came, what it was. It was really unnecessary. I don't even recall having to tell her. She may well have told me that nothing was going to happen with the Russians, that it was going to be a very tight time. The other objective of this little meeting was Mrs. Meir's effort to persuade me that I should do what I could do to persuade President Nixon to invite her to the United States to talk about the current situation, mainly the problem of delivery of military supplies, mostly airplanes that had been under contract for some time from the Johnson administration but were stuck in the bureaucratic bottlenecks. I said I would do what I could do. I would try to acquaint myself with what was going on. She wanted to know about, a little bit about the personality of some of the leading figures, what I thought about, what I could say about the President, what I had to say about Henry Kissinger, about the Secretary of State William Rogers, their relationships and what I, how I saw the lineup in the government. There were no great secrets because I didn't have any particular secrets. I didn't have that much information and wasn't close enough to the center of the planning to be able to divulge much.

Timothy Naftali

But you knew the President.

Leonard Garment

Pardon me?

Timothy Naftali

You knew the President.

Leonard Garment

I knew the President, yes. I felt rather confident and expressed my confidence that he would, within normal political restraints, be helpful. That was what I took from what I knew about the President and Henry Kissinger. That was essentially the meeting with Mrs. Meir. I don't believe I saw her again before I left. Jacoby, my guide, then took me in a spotter plane down to Sharm el Sheikh, along the way letting me see the remains of the war, the burnt tanks, the equipment strewn all over the Sinai desert. And at Sharm el Sheikh, we had a pleasant lunch, which had one singular feature: a young lieutenant, a junior officer, in any event, was invited to the lunch was posted in the Golan Heights. And he was brought down to have this lunch, and to sit next to me for the simple purpose of reciting to me what Richard Nixon told him when Nixon visited the Golan Heights on his last previous visit, which was in essence, "Hold tight, don't surrender an inch." And he said, "If you will, when you return to Washington, would you please remind the President of his promise and of his advice?" Jacoby and I went to a lot and went for a swim. While wading around in the water, Jacoby talked to me about personalities, who in the administration would the President listen to with respect to arms deliveries, matters of substance? Was there anyone that had a special voice, aside from Henry Kissinger? And I said, well, I think the most powerful voice, the most persuasive voice would be that of John Mitchell, the attorney general. And Jacoby said, "Would it be possible for you to urge Mitchell to urge the President to take some affirmative action with respect to the shipment of phantom jets and other ordinance, military supplies?" And I said, "Well, I'll be happy to try." I mean, I was, at that point, the quintessential amateur, the innocent abroad and happy to become part of this drama. And having had no particular experience before, every event was a new event. Every personality was a new personality. And it was in that spirit that I attended a dinner that Abba Iban, at his home, tended to. I think it was to me, but it was attended by the senior officials of the government. And it was the -- I think it was nighttime in Israel, but it was when the first landing on the moon took place. So that was a very dramatic evening. And there were lots of other incidental activities and visits, and that was the essence of it.

Timothy Naftali

Did anyone raise the nuclear issue with you when you were there?

Leonard Garment

I'm sorry?

Timothy Naftali

Did anyone raise the nuclear issue, the Israeli nuclear issue?

Leonard Garment

No, well, I'm not sure it was then. It may have been then, but on one of the visits, I met one of the nuclear scientists. I'm sorry I don't remember his name, a senior figure in the scientific establishment. We talked some about defense issues and anxieties that prompted the development of various defense activities by Israel. There was no disclosure to me about the existence of any nuclear devices or anything of that sort. That was sort of generally a kind of -- a slightly ghostly assumption that most people made but was never confirmed by any official party, that Israel indeed had a nuclear capability. But there was no point in asking the question because there would be no answer.

Timothy Naftali

This conversation with the Israeli nuclear scientist was in Israel, or --

Leonard Garment

Was in Israel.

Timothy Naftali

Was in Israel. From your description of the visit, it sounds like it was as much a visit that the Israelis used to lobby you as it was a visit that the United States initiated to send a message. Where do you think the idea for the visit had come from?

Leonard Garment

Well, I think there's nothing unusual about a President having informal emissaries, emissaries, persons without portfolio who were trusted to have some informal relationship with allies, friendly nations like Israel. And I think the purpose of the visit was for me to get to know the people and for them to know me. Because I'd met -- I think Rabin was back in Israel at that time, and I remember having dinner with Rabin, who was the U.S. ambassador. I had dinner with Rabin and later Rabin, on the roof of a building where there was a very fine restaurant. I mean, there are those memories that are still present. So that -- there was no great significance to what took place except to open me up to make me available to the Israelis if they had something to say. And if on occasion, Henry Kissinger or the President wanted me to convey a message, or if I had something of my own to say that was helpful and harmless, all of that was essentially the reason for this visit.

Timothy Naftali

Did you brief President Nixon on the visit?

Leonard Garment

When I went back, I talked to Henry Kissinger.

Timothy Naftali

Do you remember that conversation?

Leonard Garment

It's essentially what I've just told you. What did take place was my visit to John Mitchell, to present to him the story that had been given to me in Israel about the arms delay and the need for the equipment. And Mitchell, for reasons unrelated to foreign policy, but essentially for political reasons, and probably for some subtle sentimental reasons he, as a New Yorker, but as a figure very much involved in politics, said he would get on the case. And measured by the outcome, that is the rather, fairly rapid development of the increase in the supply of equipment to Israel, Mitchell presumably had something to say.

Timothy Naftali

We're gonna change the tape --

Leonard Garment

-- unearth, and he gave me one of them as a going away present, something that dated back to times before, some period before the modern era.

Timothy Naftali

Did Moshe talk to you about how he had actually wanted to give the West Bank back to --

Leonard Garment

He may have. I mean, that sounds like that would have been his -- I mean, there was, at the beginning, a strong argument. Presumably Dayan was a voice in that argument to return the occupied territories or the administered territories, with some exceptions that were felt necessary for defense purposes. But that, for various reasons, did not come to pass, as the difficulties between Israel and the Palestinians, and particularly the Arab nation became difficult and entrenched.

Timothy Naftali

You open up this channel, or Kissinger opens this channel to the Israelis. Did they -- how did they make use of it, if at all?

Leonard Garment

I had innumerable visits with Argov. I mean, he would come to my home. He became a real family friend and discussed almost on a daily basis the developments in Israel, all of it mixed in with a

marvelous history lesson. He's a very wonderful man, who suffered a tragic injury years later when he was ambassador to England and was shot in the head by an assailant. And in a way, sad to say, the British surgeons were too talented. This is what his, as his wife put it, because he stayed alive, but he was hospitalized. And this is a man who could hardly remember anything or talk, and yet was in this state of constant anxiety. And when I visited him, I left with a feeling of greater anguish than I had ever felt for anyone. So I spent a lot of time with Argov, then after Argov, Shalev [phonetic sp] came and became the DCM, and he, too, was a confidante. I wrote, I scribbled memoranda that I sent to various places. I don't remember -- either to Kissinger or to Haldeman or to the President -- where they went, whether they were read, what action was taken is something that I either simply don't remember or nothing happened. But in any event, at this point, I have no recollection of the train of events, except that I later on, from time to time, I became involved in more serious consultations that I've written about.

Timothy Naftali

Let's talk a bit about 1973. Do you remember the Israelis sharing a concern about the possibility of an Arab attack?

Leonard Garment

Well, that was always present. There was always, I mean, that was the continuing debate in Israel, whether Egypt was going to do something or not do something. And from time to time, as I recall, there was the problem of countering movements of troops by the Egyptians with the Israeli mobilization. And the mobilizations were a great problem for the Israelis because it meant a huge drain on manpower, huge expense, and it was, of course, at that crucial moment, when another movement was made by Egypt that was the subject of a debate, to wit, whether was it another feint or was it the real thing? And Mrs. Meir thought it was a maneuver, a feint, not the real thing, but it was the real thing, and that was the beginning of the Yom Kippur War.

Timothy Naftali

Did the Israelis employ the informal Garment channel during the Yom Kippur War?

Leonard Garment

Yeah, I remember, I don't know that I had a substantive role, but I was -- I was a phone companion. I received calls from all of the people I've mentioned, including Mrs. Meir. As the war developed, it became something of a military crisis for Israel, running out of equipment, confronted with the possibility of being overrun. And everyone, in the center of Middle East policy in Washington -- well, I mean the relative handful: certainly Kissinger, the President, Security, National Security Council members, myself, received these phone calls pleading for help. And I had at least one phone call, I think more, but as I recall, one, from Mrs. Meir and other calls from the embassy, from Rabin, from Shalev, I think, who at that time was the DCM. I don't know whether it was Shalev. I think that was before Netanyahu.

Timothy Naftali

Do you remember playing a role in getting the Pentagon to move a little faster with the airlift?

Leonard Garment

I said what I could say to everyone who was involved in that. I don't know what weight it had. It was not, I was not present at the formal meetings where the debate about the re-supply of Israel took place, but I was at the edges of it because we were involved in Watergate. It was all going on concurrently, including the removal of the Vice President, the naming of another Vice President, the crisis with the Soviet Union. It was more than a three-ring circus. And where I could, and with whomever I could, I made my views known.

Timothy Naftali

Did you see the President at that point?

Leonard Garment

Well, I did see the President and -- but I think it was more related to Watergate activities. I mean, he knew what my view was. There couldn't be anything clearer. And then ultimately the decision was made to provide the critical supplies that Israel needed. And after a great debate among the, principally between the Defense Department, Schlesinger, and Kissinger. As I recall it, the President finally decided to go all out, to put aside the concerns that this would produce a crisis with the Arab nation and the possibility of an oil boycott, oil embargo, and provide all the assistance that we could provide.

Timothy Naftali

Do you remember the Israelis sharing with you of a concern they had about détente?

Leonard Garment

No, I have no specific recollection, and I think everything was discussed, but I don't recall any particular discussion of that nature.

Timothy Naftali

Was there some, did they register some concern about the President's growing relations with Sadat in '74? Were they a little afraid That we were being naive about the Egyptians?

Leonard Garment

They may have. I don't recall anything in particular.

Timothy Naftali

You didn't accompany the President to the Middle East did you, when he went in '74?

Leonard Garment

No.

Timothy Naftali

Do you recall any conversations with Richard Nixon about the Middle East?

Leonard Garment

Not really. I don't think there was ever any occasion for a discussion about it. I knew what his general views were and probably he knew what my sympathies were. I was not in a position to offer strategic counsel.

Timothy Naftali

Richard Nixon did not involve Henry Kissinger, overtly, in Middle East policy, I think because of concern -- but he used Rogers. Rogers was given the Middle East portfolio.

Leonard Garment

Well, yes, but -- -- I'm sure you know that Rogers was given that assignment in part to keep Rogers busy with a major assignment, in part because the President wanted Kissinger to concentrate on other matters, in part because Kissinger was Jewish, and not the ideal figure to conduct negotiations with Israel and with Arab participants. But in fact, when the Rogers Plan was developed, and that became clearer really in the fall of 1969, when Mrs. Meir came to Washington for a state visit. That had been known really for some time that the Rogers Plan was cooking. A plan that would have rolled the Israelis all the way back to the pre-Six Day War lines, something that was unacceptable to the Israelis, with some other wrinkles that I don't recall. But Nixon permitted Rogers to go public with that plan, but he undertook to, in his own way, he and Kissinger, to sabotage it. And in a small way I had a role in that. Kissinger called me down to his office before, just before Mrs. Meir left Washington on a cross country visit to drop in and say hello to friends of Israel in various cities. And he said, "The President would like you to urge Mrs. Meir to criticize -- more than criticize -- to knock the stuffings out of the Rogers Plan publicly. Go to see her before she leaves, see her outside, arrange for a visit to see her on the tarmac before her plane leaves and convey that message to her." And this was truly extraordinary, and I said so and he said, "Well, if you have doubts check with the President," which I did through Haldeman. I told him what had transpired and within 30 seconds he said that the President wants you to do that. So, I called the embassy. I don't recall who I spoke to. It was probably the ambassador or the DCM and arranged for this brief contact with Mrs. Meir in New York, at LaGuardia Airport, where she was leaving from New York on her cross country trip. Nobody was surprised when I said I wanted to see her. The arrangement was made. I flew to New York. I saw her on the tarmac. She came off the plane, said hello. I gave her the message. She was delighted to hear it. She shook my hand. She went back on the plane. And in the days that followed, I had the unusual pleasure and surprise -- I don't think it was a surprise, but it was a -- it was bizarre -- of seeing the newspaper reports of Mrs. Meir's bitter criticism of the Rogers Plan, which of course, eventually died.

Timothy Naftali

When you told -- when you described the message you sent to Mrs. Meir when you went to Israel, it seemed to me that was also an effort to tell them not to worry about the Rogers Plan, since the Russians won't go for it.

Leonard Garment

I think there was real doubt about anything coming out of the State Department with respect to the Middle East, generated in substantial part by Henry, who felt that this was an important part of his own general planning and that he didn't trust the State Department or Secretary Rogers in particular to handle it appropriately.

Timothy Naftali

It's interesting, though, they involved Cisco. So Rogers knew that you were taking this trip to Israel, right?

Leonard Garment

Yes, it was harmless. I was a harmless fellow. I went there with my clarinet to Moscow and played with some very good Soviet jazz musicians in the Cafe Pechora [phonetic sp]. Why is it we remember some strange little things, and forget some of the really big blockbuster events?

Timothy Naftali

You have the memory of a poet or a musician.

Leonard Garment

Maybe the little events are more important than the so-called blockbuster events.

Timothy Naftali

Let's change tapes. Brian?

Male Speaker

We have ten minutes.

Timothy Naftali

We have ten minutes? Okay, good. Well then, we'll continue. I wasn't sure how many minutes. Let's switch gears. In the spring of 1973, did you have any contact, directly or indirectly, with Bob Woodward that you can recall?

Leonard Garment

I think I had one or two visits with him. He came to see me. I may have gone to see him, but I know there was at least one visit when he came to the White House and made some private disclosures about the extent of the White House involvement in the Watergate mess. That particular visit is in "All the President's Men." It's not -- my name is not associated with the visit, but it's there.

Timothy Naftali

Why do you think he made -- how did he explain why he was making these disclosures?

Leonard Garment

It was an effort to get -- Woodward was always in pursuit of information, and he was looking for information. And in the course of trying to get information from me, he gave me some information. He was a very skillful interviewer, as we know.

Timothy Naftali

Do you recall that he was also contacting other members of the White House?

Leonard Garment

Oh yeah, Gergen, in particular, David Gergen.

Timothy Naftali

And the White House was monitoring this?

Leonard Garment

To the extent that the White House could. I just don't know what kind of monitoring went on.

Timothy Naftali

But from that area, you've developed a great interest, which ultimately led to a book, in search of the sources of Woodward and Bernstein's reporting. Are you satisfied that Mark Felt is the -- that Mark Felt is the source, the great source?

Leonard Garment

Well, there's no reason to doubt that he was, that he was the principal source. I think there were other sources who fitted into the picture of "Deep Throat," but they were ancillary, there might be an ear and a nose, the rest of the face was Mark Felt.

Timothy Naftali

I wanted to ask you about, last time we started a conversation, I was trying to understand why Richard Nixon asked you to be a counselor, someone who had known him so well, and yet spent so little time, face time with you during the Watergate period?

Leonard Garment

Well, I think he asked me to be a counselor for reasons having to do with, number one, a rather urgent need to have somebody as counsel, a sense of trust in me -- -- a realization that I was not going

to be a -- -- the kind of lawyer, litigator, advocate, rough and tumble lawyer that he needed. And that would come as he developed his defense. Richard Nixon defended himself. He was the lawyer. And he picked his staff. I was picked, I think, because I had a reasonably decent reputation with the press, so I was named because he was trying to line up an administration at that stage of Watergate, when Ehrlichman and Haldeman were terminated and Dean was gone, that would seem to be a real change in the way the business of the White House was being conducted.

Timothy Naftali

So that would explain why he never brought you and Buzhardt together and talked with you about what he knew, what anyone knew?

Leonard Garment

Basically there was no real disclosure by him to anybody, I mean real disclosure. But that's true in many cases where there's the suspicion of a crime or an investigation of a crime. The person under suspicion quite frequently does not confide to his lawyer what actually happened. It's a rare thing for a malfeasor to say to his lawyer, "I'm guilty." It's rather the other way and as a matter of fact, most experienced criminal lawyers don't particularly want to hear that kind of -- or have that kind of frankness from the client.

Timothy Naftali

But he was also your friend.

Leonard Garment

Well, he may have been my friend, but he was -- that was way down on the list of his priorities at that point. He was concerned with his survival as President.

Timothy Naftali

Let me ask you, did you ever catch a whiff of his concerns about the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1971?

Leonard Garment

I think I heard about it, but it doesn't register. Was that Fred Malek?

Timothy Naftali

Yes.

Leonard Garment

And Jews?

Timothy Naftali

Yes, and Colson.

Leonard Garment

And Colson? There were those episodes that I came to know about. I'm not sure that I knew about them when they were taking place, but when they were unearthed, along with all the other treasures, I came to know them.

Timothy Naftali

So he compartmentalized that, those obsessions.

Leonard Garment

Totally. I can't emphasize how central to the whole Watergate story and how central to his ultimate, the ultimate outcome was Nixon's decision as he formulated it. It may have not all happen at once, to defend himself, to be chief counsel for Richard Nixon.

Timothy Naftali

When you got to know him as a lawyer, did you see some of these, this deep fear?

Leonard Garment

No, I saw his talents when I knew him as a lawyer, which were the talents he had as a politician: high intelligence, a quick wit, meticulous examination of facts and retention of them, rigorous analysis of a problem, and acknowledgment of difficulties in the case. It was basically one case, but it was a case that went on for some time and involved a number of stages and issues. But there he was a lawyer. I was helping him. And there weren't anything like the issues that were involved in Watergate, which is still remains -- I mean, there are so many strands and so many inner pressures, inner mysteries and forces that were going on. I don't know that it has been completely dissected yet, despite all the hundreds of books and articles.

Timothy Naftali

If you could have asked President Nixon a question in one of those meetings, what would you have asked him? What answer would you have wanted from him?

Leonard Garment

Well, I had a meeting with him when he asked me to be counsel. And the meeting was designed to find, to determine whether or not I would be his counsel, and he said that he was innocent, that he knew nothing about the cover-up, that the whole thing was something that occurred without his knowledge. And so that was the assumption for quite some time until the story began to emerge piece by piece.

Timothy Naftali

At this meeting where President Nixon asked you to be his counsel, he said he was innocent of participation in the cover-up. Did you ever talk to him after the tapes, after the evidence came out?

Leonard Garment

Yeah, I did talk to him. We talked at different times about issues that came up of executive privilege, when there were congressional demands. I remember once a call from Air Force One that came to a doctor's office where he, I think he was responding to a call from me to get his reaction to a demand for certain information. The whole executive privilege issue became very central, and gradually all those issues dissolved as the facts of Watergate forced their way out with McCord and the trial, breaking out of the silence, going to the judge with the tapes. The issue and the tapes' disclosures, at that point it was a really a question of time.

Timothy Naftali

I'm just -- more on the human personal level, if you don't mind, he had said something to you in confidence as a way of getting you to take this job and then you discovered it wasn't the truth. That happens [unintelligible], but did you ever talk to him about that?

Leonard Garment

Well, the discovery that it was not true was a complex, slow and complex process. And I think that the power of rationalization on my part and on the part of my colleagues certainly fairly straightforward people like Ray Price, for example, entertained the hope, if not the expectation that there were some answers and that it was not -- and that there was a reason to persist despite the negative information that was coming out, that there were larger issues than Watergate, that there were foreign policy issues. Everyone is familiar with that particular line of thinking, which I think had some merit, that there was China, there was Vietnam, there were so many things going on, and here was the President of the United States as a criminal suspect. I mean, it was very American and very much part of the process of law, but it was at the same time -- it was grotesque. And many of us who had spent some years involved in the election and administration by President Nixon -- -- continued with our jobs, however burdened we were by doubts that arose.

Timothy Naftali

When did you conclude that that conversation you had with the President, that he had not been straightforward with you?

Leonard Garment

That was -- there was no single time. It was over a period of time that the information that was developed made it clear that what he had said at that initial meeting and what he said publicly after that time and time again was not true. I don't remember a specific occasion.

Timothy Naftali

Did you ever talk to him about this, I mean, after --

Leonard Garment

Well, I mean there were occasions and there were events that led to discussions with him. For example, when the tapes were disclosed, and the question was presented, what to do with them after the subpoena from the Senate committee was served, and we were confronted with the prospect of turning over the tapes, and we didn't know what was in the tapes except that we knew that from some of the tapes that it was very damaging material. And that's when he developed a -- I think it was, you know, bronchial, a pneumonia of some sort and was in hospital. Al Haig and Buzhardt and I went there to discuss what to do about the tapes. And that's where we had private meetings, the three us, and then we met with him on a couple of occasions in the hospital to talk through what to do about the tapes. And it fell to me, as counsel to the President, to do some legal research and to turn up a case that was very directly in point, a controlling case that said the destruction of material under subpoena would be subject to a charge of obstruction of justice, a felony, which led me to say that that could be the first count in a resolution of impeachment. And the other views that we all shared, the possibility of destruction, whether he could survive the destruction of the tapes. There were many outsiders, several outsiders -- Henry Kissinger, Nelson Rockefeller, John Connally -- who wanted, urged Nixon to destroy the tapes. It was a very tangled affair because there were so many tapes, and there were so many issues about what would happen to the tapes if they were destroyed, how they would be destroyed, who would destroy them. And in all of that, as that went along, the President was consulting with other people, particularly Bob Haldeman, about what was thought then to be the crucial April 21 tape. I'm not sure of the date.

Timothy Naftali

March.

Leonard Garment

Pardon me?

Timothy Naftali

You mean the cancer on the President?

Leonard Garment

Yes.

Timothy Naftali

Yeah, March.

Leonard Garment

March 21. Then Haldeman had listened to it and apparently reported, apparently reported that it was more helpful than hurtful. And for a variety of reasons, some known and some subject to speculation, Nixon decided to ride it out and not destroy the tapes, much to his later regret.

Timothy Naftali

Henry Kissinger suggested that the tapes be destroyed?

Leonard Garment

Yes.

Timothy Naftali

Did he say that to you?

Leonard Garment

Said it, I mean it was voiced within the meeting, perhaps by Al Haig, perhaps by the President.

Timothy Naftali

And Nelson Rockefeller had an opinion?

Leonard Garment

Yes.

Timothy Naftali

How did he get that opinion? Did you talk to him?

Leonard Garment

I didn't talk to Rockefeller, but it was known that he urged the destruction of the tapes.

Timothy Naftali

Did you watch President Nixon when he was on the Frost interviews? Did you see? Did you watch the Frost interviews?

Leonard Garment

I may have. I have absolutely no recollection. I saw the "Frost/Nixon" play.

Timothy Naftali

What did you think of the play?

Leonard Garment

Well, it was well done. The performance by -- what was his name?

Timothy Naftali

Frank Langella.

Leonard Garment

Frank Langella was first rate, but it wasn't Nixon, so I mean, it was just not Nixon. And there was a degree of fictionalization that made me uncomfortable watching the play, listening to it. So I was not part of the audience that praised it to the skies.

Timothy Naftali

I think the point of the play was the issue of whether the President, whether Richard Nixon would apologize or not.

Leonard Garment

Right, well, I thought he apologized many times in different ways to different people. I mean, he apologized to the staff, expressed his sadness at the whole mess for which he was responsible. I think the focus in the Frost play on the contest over whether Nixon would make a confession of guilt and ask for forgiveness was a combination of fact, fiction and hype. That's about how I see it.

Timothy Naftali

There was no contest for that though, at the time in the '70s? Did people want that sort of thing?

Leonard Garment

Did they want it?

Timothy Naftali

Yeah.

Leonard Garment

I really don't know. I mean, I think people -- that issue was settled. Nixon was guilty. He had been impeached -- was going to be impeached, had resigned, and was generally treated as a malefactor and on different occasions, expressed his, the sense of responsibility he had for what went on. I mean, I frankly think that it was a mystery that Nixon regretted what he had done. The fact that a formal

apology on a syndicated television program would be elevated to a major political event is something surprising to me. Well, not surprising. That's the way it goes.

Timothy Naftali

As we finish this interview, our second, is there an anecdote that you'd like to record that we haven't touched on? We've gone and touched a lot of ground here. Is there something, an anecdote about the President, about your time in Washington that you'd like to preserve?

Leonard Garment

Not really, I mean there are a number of other incidents. There was the Pollard case --

Timothy Naftali

Pollard?

Leonard Garment

Pollard.

Timothy Naftali

The spy?

Leonard Garment

The spy, and the involvement of Avi Amsella [phonetic sp], the Israeli pilot, and the effort to find a compromise solution to the knock down, drag out battle between the Justice Department and the Israelis over the disposition of the case against the Israeli pilot. I mean, it's a rather long and complicated story, but it involved Ahrens and Peres, all of the Israeli leaders, and it was a rather fantastic episode, which I've written about. But I think it's not really part of this discussion, which is focused on Richard Nixon. He had nothing to do with that episode.

Timothy Naftali

Well then, thank you very much. Thank you, Len. It was great.

Leonard Garment

And thanks for giving me a chance to remember a few things.