

NOTE: The attached is a recently prepared transcript of a conversation between President Richard M. Nixon, John D. Ehrlichman, and Egil Krogh, Jr. on July 24, 1971. The meeting was prompted by the President's concern over leaks regarding the SALT talks. The quality of the tape was poor, presumably due to helicopter engine noise. The participants are identified as follows:

N President

E Ehrlichman

K Krogh

X Unknown No. 1 (either E or K)

Y Unknown No. 2 (either E or K)

JULY 24, 1971 CONVERSATION BETWEEN NIXON, KROGH AND EHRLICHMAN
[Inaudible Section]

N: I think that's a place to start. Hook this guy. Hit it very hard, consider it true fight...

X: Well...

N: I don't want anybody to...

X: But there again...

N: ...break (inaudible)...

X: Yes, I know...

N: ...in a polygraph. Take it over. And then, uh, (she's off to) immediately get a confession from him. Start with him.

X: Okay.

N: Do you agree with that?

K: Yes I do. It's, uh...

E: Haig says that you'll get resignations, and you'll get legal action. If you do it this way. If you could...

N: (Inaudible) that, and that!

X: No, well, we're only gonna do, what, twenty...

Y: Twenty.

X: ...twenty, thirty people.

Y: Yeah.

X: It might be thirty.

Y: Yeah.

X: He said (inaudible) ten to fifteen people that will resign. We don't know these people. They heard that. He didn't tell me the exact (inaudible). Just be aware of what we'll have. And, I... (inaudible) liberal, you know, but allright, we've got a prime suspect. Fine. Start there and let's screw the hell out of that guy and the people around him in that one unit.

Y: Van Cleeve (inaudible).

N: Oh, (inaudible) to go.

E: Well, we've got one person, that comes out of DOD according to Al Haig, who is the prime suspect right now, a man by the name of Van Cleeve who they feel is very much the guy that did it. Spent two hours with Beecher apparently this week, he had access to the documents. Uh, he apparently had views very similar to those which were reflected in the Beecher article, and it would be my feeling that we should begin with him, and go immediately around him before going to a dragnet polygraph of any other people.

K: Fine.

E: If he doesn't pan out, then move on to a polygraph test.

K: Yessir.

N: Do you understand?

K: Yessir, I do.

N: Well, uh, are any of these more hawkish or doveish?

X: Uh, Haig was not able to tell me at this point. This is just what they've got from his man over in DOD, that they've got this man nailed down but they didn't give him (inaudible) before, they don't know that either.

E: We're, we're thinking of hearsay about twice removed right now...

X: That's right.

E: ...whether he's lib.

N: I don't care whether he's a hawk or dove or anything. Now that the thing's leaked, he's up with the government. Listen, now, that's it (inaudible.)

X: Sir, I don't have anything...

N: Wright.

X: ...more to say.

N: Wright, alright. I want you to get over there, I want to get over there. But I don't want any ifs, ands, or buts. But, this Van Cleeve man is what (inaudible) the polygraph for.

X: Fair enough.

N: I can tell you something of the polygraph being (inaudible.) (inaudible) have to get a million people who... Are there are a million who have top secret clearances? Do we...

X: No, not that many.

N: Well, four hundred thousand?

X: Yup, yeah.

Y: (inaudible) and I will (inaudible) to nail three or four hundred thousand.

N: Fine, fine, fine. Here's what I want: I believe that what we have to do, first, with regards to all, all people, uh, uh (inaudible.) Little people do not leak. This crap, the effect (inaudible) this crap is, is never ending. I studied these cases long enough and it's always the sonofabitch that leaks, as liaison...

X: Ellsberg.

N: ...at, uh (inaudible) or, uh...

X: Ellsberg!

N: Sure, there, there's our (inaudible word). So, what I would like to do is have everybody down through GS-something-or-other, you know, the Foreign Service, and so forth and so on and, uh, and you know what I mean?

X: Sure.

N: Here, in Washington, in, in Washington, I want all of them who have top secret clearances, I mean, we could get them, uh, to agree to take part. And then, I think maybe another approach would be to set up a (inaudible) already, with classification, alright, which we would call what?

X: The President's (inaudible) if you'd like.

N: Don't use my (inaudible) My (inaudible) this goddamn office.

X: (Laughter)

N: I think just call...Should we call it, uh (inaudible) presidential, or, uh, I don't think presidential, uh, that doesn't mean anything anymore. Uh...

X: We used presidential documents before, with one of the (inaudible) we were working with, but that didn't uh...

E: How about...Uh, looking forward to the court case, I wonder if we could get the word national security into it.

N: Yeah.

X: So that national, uh, (inaudible). National security classified, or national security such-and-such, or uh...

N: Well, not the word (inaudible)...

X: Alright, uh, uh,

N: ...because if you (inaudible) now (inaudible)...

Y: How about, how about (inaudible).

N: National security, uh, national security, uh, restricted.

X: (inaudible word.)

N: National security, and, uh, (pause) and, uh, I think national, national security, uh, restriction or code, or national security, or, er, er...Well, let us work at it. What I had intended, I want a good classification for that purpose. And everything that I consider important, and only those things I consider important, will have that classification. Then all that classification, every document that is ours, is to be numbered. You see what I mean?

X: Um-hmm.

N: Uh, and the people, so that we'll know what people had it. Now the fact that a hundred had it, uh, would (inaudible) that, and I want to find out why a hundred had it. They may grovel around or (inaudible.) Well, Goddamn it, I told them two weeks ago not to put this up, and they should follow up on it. Nobody at all is up on a goddamned thing. We've got to follow up on this thing, however. We, uh, we, uh, had that meeting, you remember the meeting we had when I told that group of clowns that we had around here, Renchler and that group. What was his name?

X: Renquist.

N: Oh, Renquist.

X: Yeah.

N: I said, look, look at the number of people. What have they done about the (inaudible) number?

X: Oh, they're, they're at work.

N: What have they done about the thing?

X: They're going to come back at you with a whole new classification scheme.

N: But they didn't. But they didn't.

Y: (inaudible)

X: (inaudible) and Haig confirms it. The point in doing this is obtaining (inaudible).

N: Good. Well, what I want with this, but that I want with this, what I want, what I want with the polygraph, I, uh, you put your finger on the real problem. A person in government, or a person with access to top secrets, can refuse to take a polygraph. Nobody is to have access to the president's class-, uh, or no, national security, uh, national security, uh, (pause). Why don't we just say national security, I think you're right, national security not top secret, national security, uh (pause). Let's go national security, or something like that, but anyway, get that. Go to three letters, like, ah, FM or SMS, or something like that, uh...

X: FM?

N: On the whole, that kind of a thing, let's say. But limit the number of people that get them. We know who gets them, and then everybody who gets them must sign the thing to do, agreement to take a polygraph. But also, with regard to, with regard to the agreement to take a polygraph pledge: I want that to be done now, with about four or five hundred people in State, Defense, do forth, so that we can, uh, immediately enter that. Don't you figure that?

X: Yes, I do.

Y: Yessir, we're going to have drafts of that waiver prepared and samps, we're having to look at what the samps...

N: Yeah.

Y: ...and the tapes develop first. And (unintelligible passage.)

N: Yeah.

Y: (Inaudible)

N: Uh, uh, granted, I mean, uh, this place is all people who you're doing this with, the top executives of the government, who have access but not to (inaudible) thing, that should include everybody on the NSC staff, for example, if you start with them. You should include about, ah, a hundred people, say. Probably about four or five hundred at State, four or five hundred at Defense, and uh, two or three hundred over at, uh, CIA, and uh, that's it. I don't care about these other agencies, forget that. All CIA people have gone through a polygraph. They take their own polygraph.

X: But it's uh, obviously, then, an employee can furnish or refuse to take it.

N: That's right. But now, if they're (inaudible), if they take a polygraph and happen to (inaudible passage) the job that doesn't waive their right not to take a polygraph.

X: That's right.

N: I don't want anybody, that just has everybody, to have to do these. They should have that. Every CIA person should have to (inaudible word) a polygraph.

X: Yeah.

N: But I, uh, but uh, I'm uh, but I don't know anything about polygraphs, and I don't know how accurate they are, but I know they'll scare the hell out of people.

K: They scare people, they're clumsy. They ask a lot of tough questions, personal questions about a man's sex life, about what his mother was like, things like that. These polygraph tests, if we run them, would, would be more restrictive, we'd ask four or five basic questions about the story, their familiarity with the incident, whether they talked to Beecher, what he said to Beecher, things in that context. I've got the thing, the set-up now, if you are, are, in other words, maybe (unintelligible passage) making critical, or...

X: Haig, Haig has told me that he's...

N: Wright, now we're talking about one person.

X: ...that he is, he is for taking the one guy as far as you're going.

N: Go ahead.

X: Yes. But what he's objecting to is, is trouble past that. He says you will find for yourself...

N: I don't think I (inaudible word) your point.

X: (inaudible phrase)

N: The point is we're going off this one person now.

Y: Okay.

X: And then I'll decide whether we have to go beyond the guy.

N: Right.

X: What I'd like to do is, I'll do a report on this guy and go immediately around it, one that...

N: That's right.

X: ...come back, then come back and start...

N: Come back and see what else we've got to do. But we're going to start shaping up, (unintelligible).

X: (Inaudible) keep this moving through the weekend, so that we may send something back to you...

N: Oh, I'll be available.

X: ...after tomorrow.

N: I'll be available.

X: Allright, I just wanted to know. And if we catch the guy, and his resignation is to be demanded, and, and, and, (inaudible word)...

N: Not quiet. Alright, understand. Any person, there's. there's one condition. You catch anybody, it's not going to be quiet, I'm gonna, we're gonna put the goddamn story out. He's gonna be dismissed, prosecuted, ...they're prosecuting him.

E: Uh, the polygraph is not useful for prosecution.

N: Alright, but the point is that if a (inaudible word) charge is made against him, then we're going to have to see that he's to be prosecuted.

X: The basic decision (inaudible).

N: I'll let you work the guy out (inaudible) ...cross-examination...(inaudible).

X: Right, right.

N: Alright? I will, well, I just think we ought to run ahead and, it does count. This does affect the national security, this is a case for measures (inaudible word) like the Pentagon Papers. This would involve the current negotiation, and it should not (inaudible) getting out, jeopardize with the negotiation position. Now, goddamn it, we're not going to allow that. we're just not going to allow it. Alright, good luck.

K: Yessir, thank you.

N: Fine.

N: Oh John. I just, uh (inaudible) the first of my occasions (inaudible) talk about the tax thing that way. (tape ends.)