

Conversation No. 342-027

TRANSCRIPT OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND CHARLES
COLSON ON JUNE 20, 1972, FROM 2:20 TO 3:30 P.M.

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COLSON: Sir.

PRESIDENT: Hi. Now I hope everybody is not going to get in a tizzy about the, uh, Democratic Committee.

COLSON: A little, uh, it's a little frustrating, disheartening, I guess, is the right word.

PRESIDENT: Well.

COLSON: Pick up that God damn Washington Post and see that guilt by association.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. (Unintelligible)you?

COLSON: Yeah. I, this is the (unintelligible) in three months. Been off our payroll for three months.

PRESIDENT: No, don't worry about your personal expense and pension problems.

COLSON: No, I've learned a lesson from you in that regard. I must say that...

PRESIDENT: Can't rule out the fact, it happened. Oh, well--

COLSON: (Unintelligible) family--they knew us (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Really?

COLSON: Sickening you know, they say, "Were you involved in this thing?"

PRESIDENT: Yeah.
(Unintelligible)

COLSON: Do they think I'm that dumb?

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible).

COLSON: (Unintelligible) quite that way.

PRESIDENT: Well, don't worry about that.

COLSON: Well, I don't think it's--it's even less than IT and T. It's the kind of thing that no one in the country...

PRESIDENT: Yeah, well now (unintelligible)...

COLSON: (Unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: A lot of people think you oughta wiretap.

COLSON: Well they, I'm, I'm sure most people...

PRESIDENT: Knew why the hell we're doing it, and they probably figure they're doing it to us, which they are.

COLSON: Most people figure that, uh, political parties spy on each other and that's part of the problem. (Unintelligible) spying. I...

PRESIDENT: That's why, uh, that's why, uh, they hired this guy in the first place to sweep the rooms, didn't they?

COLSON: Yes sir. Frankly sir, I haven't got into the, uh, ultimate details that we want to on this. But I assume he was hired to protect their own offices.

PRESIDENT: Well, they better, better have somebody you know, the, uh, uh, Bob gave them 340 on the chopper. (Unintelligible). The chopper had some guy with McGovern, aides that they have are--they hope the committee bugged--I just had Bob pick it up.

COLSON: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) good story.

COLSON: (Unintelligible) they've, they've known most of our leads (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Was he the guy that bugged the U.S.--
(Unintelligible). You've got a God damn
person over there that's ratting on us.
What do you think?

COLSON: I think its undoubtedly, O'Brien's group.

PRESIDENT: Do you?

COLSON: You never know.

PRESIDENT: You say who... I don't know who the hell it
would be. Some disgruntled (unintelligible)
or somebody planted it.

COLSON: Or it could be his secretary.

PRESIDENT: Well, secretaries do it, not that you pay
them any (unintelligible).

COLSON: Sure. There, there's no way you can guard
against that kind of thing. The only thing
you can do is be...

PRESIDENT: Be sure the White House has told, you
know...

COLSON: Well, I think--oh sure, I mean, that's the
kind of thing (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: At least the ones we're going to investigate
are. (Unintelligible).

COLSON: Oh yeah (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: I mean like, ah, the ones we have over there
according to (unintelligible) and uh, the
Yates girl, Buz Yates, Yates
(unintelligible) both worked for Johnson.
That's sort of a key that, uh,--Oh, hell,
uh...

COLSON: Those, those kind of people, I think you can
tell a person from the way...

PRESIDENT: I, I think so, they don't look that--Well...

COLSON: Yeah. I don't quite know if--might be able to do it long enough to (unintelligible). (Tape noise) that's the kind of thing you can never be sure of.

PRESIDENT: On this thing here, I, uh, I've got to, well, it's a dangerous job.

COLSON: Well, Bob is pulling it all together--thus far, I think we've done this, I think, I think we've done the right things to date.

PRESIDENT: I think the real question is whether, uh, we want to (unintelligible) the charge-(tape noise) (unintelligible) to hold up. Basically, they all pretty hard line guys.

COLSON: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT: If we are going to have this funny guy take credit for that

COLSON: You mean the one with the--Hunt?

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible).

COLSON: Course I, I can't believe he's involved. I think (unintelligible) he's, he's, he's too smart to do it this way, he's just too damned shrewd (unintelligible/**REMOVED**) too much sophisticated techniques. You don't have to get into (unintelligible with tape noise) heavy equipment like that, put it in the ceiling, hell of a lot easier way.

PRESIDENT: It doesn't sound like a, a skillful job. (Unintelligible). If we didn't know better, would have thought it was deliberately butchered.

COLSON: Yeah, uh, I thought of that this weekend. And, uh, then I, then I figured, uh, maybe it's the Cubans that did it. Organizing it on their own, because you know they had, uh, (unintelligible). (Coughs)

PRESIDENT: I just, just feel very strongly.

COLSON: Oh, Jesus. I just talked to Clawson. He said you know we should (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: I saw a paper when I was in there--it says, Kennedy, uh, public enemy number one for Cubans (unintelligible).

COLSON: Oh, they're violent. Well you know, Mr. President, most of them keep (unintelligible)...

PRESIDENT: I'm anxious to get that, why don't you get that paper of ah, Rebozo had it on his, uh, desk. It's the last published, the last issue, I think to the paper. Published, had to be published (unintelligible) public enemy number one.

COLSON: They hate him, of course they hate McGovern because they're not used to Kennedy (unintelligible). You know, if we were to recognize Castro and he was the man who returned the Cuban Nationals. A lot of these guys who were, who were, would be considered fugitives from Cuba--they don't know where to get political asylum.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible).

COLSON: That's right.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) these days...Jesus Christ.

COLSON: Well.

PRESIDENT: We pay a price. McGovern would do it in a minute.

COLSON: You, he, put yourself in their shoes, when you think that, uh, that they're sitting here thinking--God that's not what (unintelligible). He may be taken back to a firing squad in Havana. (Unintelligible) resort to some further (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Or the Post, obviously, would be in a hell of a fight on that, and it will rub off on some others. I cannot believe that the press is as vicious as it is. Be able to make this an issue, that's uh-- Stay relaxed, you know what I mean (unintelligible).

COLSON: The Post story is the front page in Boston this morning, in the Boston Globe. They've got some (unintelligible) large pictures so I called a few people up here this morning, and nobody's seen it. And those who had seen it said, "Look, (unintelligible)." I, I don't think people pay attention.

PRESIDENT: I read the story. (Unintelligible). But, uh, of course I (unintelligible). What the hell does it prove? That he had-somebody had your number in a book, so that's, what the hell does that prove? But...(unintelligible). Probably had mine.

COLSON: They had Howard Hunt's number, not mine. (Unintelligible) telephone

PRESIDENT: That's right, but Hunt was, uh...

COLSON: But you read that story in the paper and you think they had mine. Now, that was a brilliantly written piece of, uh, political knavery because the first time you read it you think they had my number and then you read it again and it's Howard Hunt's.

PRESIDENT: Know about Howard Hunt's, but how did we get you in there?

COLSON: Well, Howard Hunt was here as a consultant and I wrote an (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Oh yeah. Well, I said to him I don't suppose any lawyer from (unintelligible) the guy will get a Pulitzer Prize for this...

COLSON: Probably.

PRESIDENT: (Laughs). No, no, no, you know what I mean, the guy that broke in...

COLSON: Oh, oh.

PRESIDENT: ...for Christ sakes, they gave the Times the Pulitzer Prize.

COLSON: They gave Anderson a Pulitzer Prize. In other words, stealing documents (unintelligible) for (intelligible).

PRESIDENT: Belonging to the Government, top secret, shit, uh, who, did, did any of these people squeal about that then?

COLSON: Yeah, isn't that true.

PRESIDENT: That's my point. Did McGovern, did the Times, did the Post squeal about that then? Now here was an attempted theft that failed, against a political party, not against the Government of the United States. They give Pulitzer Prizes for publishing stolen documents. Now let's get at a, I think a hell of a tough speech. (Unintelligible). An article, I mean, let a, a...

COLSON: ...that's right, if, if you steal classified Government documents and print them in a newspaper you get a Pulitzer Prize.

PRESIDENT: Right. And don't...

COLSON: (Unintelligible) political party headquarters, uh, you get pilloried.

PRESIDENT: That's great, great. Well, and then, too of course, we are just going to leave this where it is, with the Cubans. I hired a detective as being, happens to be the most (unintelligible). Now--

COLSON: I think that's (unintelligible) when he was younger. (Unintelligible) the picture said he's good. The fact that they had Hunt's name was the most logical thing in the world because he ran and trained the chief of brigade that went to the Bay of Pigs. He's the fellow that came up and, and cried at John Kennedy's office to win such and such a waiver.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible).

COLSON: Bill Buckley is his children's Godfather. He's a very hard, right hard running guy.

PRESIDENT: Buckley's the kind to write the story.

COLSON: Buckley's the guy who just (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: I hope to Christ that he's got (unintelligible) they get Hunt for trying? (Unintelligible) double standard (tape noise). (Unintelligible) I'm not gonna worry about it. I've (unintelligible) sh-, the hell with it. Well, let me say it flatly-- we're not going to reach to it that way. we're gonna, we've worked hard on that (unintelligible). What else could we overlook?

COLSON: They'll feel sure (unintelligible). No basis for that. O'Brie-, O'Brien has sued for invasion of privacy. That's that's, that's libel in my book. That's libel. That isn't--

PRESIDENT: When will that get up?

COLSON: Well, they, they brought the suit today, it was announced they were bringing the suit today that the attorneys. I don't think that be dismissed for lack of a (unintelligible) But the, the, uh, you know, it's a great Washington story, because Washington just thrives on intrigue, and spys and suspense.

PRESIDENT: Well, as you know...

COLSON: ...the political (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Where in the hell (unintelligible), where the hell are all these leaks from our side coming from? Now let's put that aside for (unintelligible) Jesus Christ we've got our place replace. You know damn well, there, you're, you're either bugged or disloyal or thievery are common par for the course. You don't have to deal in proving a bugging count.

COLSON: Of course, the thing we have to guard against, Mr. President, is the idea of (unintelligible) on ITT mistake. Now, we were riding so damned high and I guess we couldn't do much about it but they dragged us into it, but--the press, the media and the Democrats are so God damn desperate that any issue that they can lay their hands on--that it's something which normally wouldn't amount to that much. They're just going to blow their cool out because they haven't got any other place they can lay a glove on US. And that was the case with ITT, which came after China, the economy was picking up, wage-price controls were working, they had nothing so they went into ITT viciously.

PRESIDENT: Sure. (Unintelligible/**REMOVED**).

COLSON: (Cough) I think they'll try to. You can't, you can't make a case out of this the way you could out of ITT. The weakness in ITT was that it fed the public suspicion that the Republicans are dedicated to big business.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, I know, it's \$400,000 and all that and so forth. But here it is, they're just trying, let the Committee try to find out what the others are doing (unintelligible).

COLSON: I think people expect it. I really do. I think they expect it. The trouble is

PRESIDENT: Mistake would be what? (Unintelligible).

COLSON: Mistake would be to get all of them zeroed in on it.

PRESIDENT: Oh.

COLSON: Make a big case out of it.

PRESIDENT: Oh shit. (Unintelligible) I couldn't agree more.

COLSON: Go after it day in and day out.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: Follow the every--uh, I'd say the hell with it, believe me.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, gotta--, and keep your people all away from it. (Unintelligible) like this and I cop out. (Unintelligible).

COLSON: This is good. This is a (unintelligible). This get's into the media in a way that they would have accepted

PRESIDENT: That's right. It couldn't be very hard.

COLSON: Sure these fellas are just in there trying to win the Pulitzer Prize. He's going at this pretty well--it's going to be a damned effective speech. Apparently was on a T.V. program out in California, state-wide hookup, state-wide program. And, uh, (tape noise) Ellsberg, he didn't know he was having it on Ellsberg, and they asked him to comment on Ellsberg today and come here today prepared to discuss the wholesale price of (unintelligible) (laughs and coughs) And I gave a very good opeech and said, "Look, I, that the President is monitoring it himself (unintelligible). Actually, Mr. President, in this area we've been making, I think, some pretty good progress with the media. It's (unintelligible with tape noise). Now, well it has taken hold really. And the interesting thing is that the press office, every week, come around asking questions about who's money we are (unintelligible) the media this week.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: It shows they're ner-, I'd say it shows they are nervous about it. They're, they're...

PRESIDENT: Here we have meetings and so forth and so on. So they'll know better next time.

COLSON: We, we too, but (Laughs)

PRESIDENT: That's right. (Unintelligible). I'm not saying about it

COLSON: You know, I, I picked up just earlier this,-- I guess it was yesterday--run down of oral (unintelligible) and published them around the country as a result of Ken Clawson's attack on the New York Times. And it's really, ah, it's ah, fascinating, uh study, the Dallas Editorial...

PRESIDENT: Great.

COLSON: ...the Detroit News, the, it's run all over the country, little syndicates picked it up, uh, media critics picked it up, Newsday featured it. He caught them on that one. He really--and this, really hurt them. They're still stinging over that Anthony Lewis story on Vietnam.

PRESIDENT: They're still writing that same lousy line, but they're stinging about the story. You're right.

COLSON: And they're also stinging now about that impeachment ad in the New York Times.

PRESIDENT: Are they?

COLSON: I don't know whether you've noticed it but but that Common Cause (unintelligible) up against, uh against the New York Times and the sponsors of the impeachment ad.

PRESIDENT: On what grounds? Common Cause.

COLSON: Yes sir.

PRESIDENT: Why?

COLSON: Because they, this is their chance to prove that they're (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Fair?

COLSON: Fair.

PRESIDENT: On what a, what ground?

COLSON: Well, the Times violated the new, the new campaign spending (unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: How did it violate it?

COLSON: Because they didn't, they didn't require the political disclaimer which, uh, says that this ad is, was paid for or not paid for on behalf of...

PRESIDENT: My guess is the Times would be pretty--

COLSON: No, no they'd have, they'd have to, to charge them for it.

PRESIDENT: What look, well, you know what I mean.

COLSON: Oh yeah, yeah.

PRESIDENT: That's what they believe.

COLSON: If that comes out, uh, we'll, we'll have a case against the New York Times on that quick. The GAO is now investigating the Times on that... Would be a lovely twist...

PRESIDENT: The GAO is...

COLSON: ...basically...

PRESIDENT: Because of this?

COLSON: ...because of a violation of the campaign spending section.

Yeah, they're on, the Times is on very weak ground, I think...

PRESIDENT: What're they arguing? They just, they just-oversite...?

COLSON: No, they're gonna argue that it wasn't a political ad, yet right in the body of the ad was a request for funds for candidates who would vote to impeach you as President. So, they, they don't have much of a defense. Then they'll have to disclose who

COLSON: paid for the ad. And if it turns out that
(cont'd) that may be traced back to McGovern people, you, you can make this bugging incident look puny by comparison, because that ad was placed the day you left the Soviet Union. And here you are coming back from negotiating with a, one of the most important, critically important meetings in modern history and they're placing an ad to impeach the President of the United States. If that can be traced back to McGovern, I think it would, make, uh eavesdropping at the Watergate Hotel look like child's play.

PRESIDENT: At times, uh, I just--stonewall it, they're not gonna...

COLSON: Well they haven't, they haven't yet been, uh ...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

COLSON: They've just been served now, with the, uh, the request for information so they will have to start answering. The Boston Globe, you know, refused to run that same ad. Uh, that shows you how far out the Times is, Jesus (tape noise). The Times and the Post (unintelligible) they're not supposed to do it. That's different.

PRESIDENT: Is anybody over at the Committee--good intentions I'm sure. All that work, gets up on (unintelligible)--McGovern crowd I suppose.

COLSON: It's gonna be a lot of bitterness coming out of the McGovern crowd before it's over. I don't think we have to go looking for it. (unintelligible) (tape distortion) he, he really does, a lot of people (unintelligible) that are frightened to death that he could get elected.

PRESIDENT: I noticed in reading the news summary today, I, uh (unintelligible/**REMOVED**) some of these goddamned politics are gettin' a little worried.

COLSON: (Unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: I don't know. I, uh (unintelligible)

COLSON: It's a, it's a...

PRESIDENT: I mean they're worried because they hate my guts so that so. That, that they're worried...

Second Excerpt

COLSON: Keep the (unintelligible) up on our troops, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT: Oh sure, and as I said, my goodness...

COLSON: We won't let this one bug us, uh,

PRESIDENT: Dumbest thing. My God, there are going to be all sorts of things in the campaign. (15-second unintelligible/**REMOVED**). We can't let this (unintelligible) worlds coming to an end.

COLSON: (Unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible). This is a development. Nothing loses an election. Nothing changes it that much. (unintelligible).

COLSON: (Unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Sure. (Unintelligible/**REMOVED**).

COLSON: (Unintelligible/**REMOVED**).

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible/**REMOVED**) washes away (unintelligible). And you look at this damn thing now and its gonna be forgotten after awhile.

COLSON: This'll be forgotten and I hope a lot faster than ITT.

PRESIDENT: Oh sure, you know who the hell is going to keep it alive. We're gonna have a court case and indeed,...the difficulty we'll have ahead, we have got to have lawyers smart enough to have our people de-, delay (unintelligible) avoiding--depositions, of course,

PRESIDENT: uh, are one possibility. We've got--I think
(cont'd) it would be a quite the thing for the judge
to call in Mitchell and have a deposition in
the middle of the campaign, don't you?

COLSON: I do. I don't think he would. Of course,
I'd love to have a deposition, I love to
have a de position taken around here. I'm
not--, because nobody, everybody's
completely out of it.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, I know.

COLSON: But--this is, this is once when you'd like
for people to testify.
(Unintelligible/**REMOVED**).

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible/**REMOVED**).

COLSON: (Unintelligible/**REMOVED**).

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible/**REMOVED**).

COLSON: (Unintelligible/**REMOVED**).

PRESIDENT: I don't think you should (unintelligible)...

COLSON: (Unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: ...you're an inside man.

COLSON: I shouldn't. I'd love to but...

PRESIDENT: I'd just stay out of it, uh, all there is to
it.

COLSON: (Unintelligible). I want (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Oh, should be (unintelligible).

COLSON: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) could kill him. But I just
think, ya know, sometimes the uh, you may
have your chance later on. (Unintelligible)
how we (tape distortion). The Press
(unintelligible) they know goddamn well.
(Unintelligible/**REMOVED**). Well, go right
out and answer these questions for now
(unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: "Well Ron, isn't this a terrible thing."
Shit.

COLSON: You know, Mr. President (unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: I, I tell ya, I didn't have that much to
(unintelligible).

COLSON: The greatest lesson, uh, those of us around
you learn from you. I just, I, I wonder how
in other Presidencies (unintelligible) the
guts to stay with it. Because it gets to
your morale, personally. (Unintelligible)
it does.

PRESIDENT: Ya.

COLSON: And after it does--I put up with it a dozen
times in the last three years. Every time I
do I stop and think "My God, look at what
the President has gone through...

PRESIDENT: Well...

COLSON: ...over the years.

PRESIDENT: One thing I do...