

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDING OF A MEETING
AMONG THE PRESIDENT, H.R. HALDEMAN,
JOHN EHRLICHMAN, AND RONALD ZIEGLER
ON MARCH 27, 1973 FROM 11:10 A.M. TO
1:30 P.M.

EHRLICHMAN: This story and, uh, this one, uh, this, this Watergate thing is potentially very debilitating around, but we have to devote a large part of our time to keeping people busy in, uh...

PRESIDENT: I know.

EHRLICHMAN: ...affirmative kinds of (unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: Unintelligible) because it involves people we know.

EHRLICHMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: It involves, frankly, people who don't (unintelligible) guilty. This and that.

EHRLICHMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: And, and, also for, you, you don't want anybody guilty, or, it isn't the question. We know that everybody in this thing did it whatever they did with the best of intention. That's the sad thing about it.

EHRLICHMAN: Sure.

PRESIDENT: I told them all this morning, I don't want people on the staff to divide up and say, "Well, it's this guy that did it, or this guy that did it," or th-th-th-th--

EHRLICHMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: The point is what's done is done. We do the very best we can, and cut our losses and so forth, best you ever could do.

EHRLICHMAN: Did he talk to you about this, uh, this thing, uh, uh... Commission...Commission thing?

[Part II]

EHRlichman: Oh, oh, no. I hadn't, uh, we hadn't talked about that.

HalDEMAN: That's Bill Rogers.

PResIDENT: Well, I'm sorry, John.

EHRlichman: No. I, uh, uh, we talked this morning about getting him out front. I'm afraid it s --

PResIDENT: (Unintelligible) of canning him right away. Uh, let's see. Let's see about that. Maybe we can. Well, whatever, what have you got to report. John and I have just started a (unintelligible).

HalDEMAN: All I have is Dean's report. I did not talk to Mitchell, because this thing changed (unintelligible) want to be from Mitchell. Uh, he had a long conversation again today with Paul O'Brien, who's the guy he's been - -talked with yesterday...you know, this, that, and all that, and uh, he says O'Brien is very distressed with Mitchell. The more he thinks about it, the more O'Brien comes down to Mitchell could cut this whole thing off, if he would just step forward and cut it off. That the fact of the matter is as far as Gray could determine that Mitchell did sign off on it. And if that's what it is...

PResIDENT: You mean as far as O'Brien is concerned.

HalDEMAN: Yeah.

EHRlichman: You said, "Gray."

PResIDENT: What's that?

HalDEMAN: I'm sorry. O'Brien not Gray. As far as O'Brien can determine, Mitchell did sign off on this thing and, uh, that's, and Dean believes that to be the case also. He can't, Dean doesn't think he can prove it, and apparently O'Brien can't either, but they both think that that...

PResIDENT: That's my intention...

HALDEMAN: The more O'Brien thinks about it, the more it bothers him with all he knows, to see all the people getting whacked around, getting whacked around, in order to keep the thing from focusing on John Mitchell, when inevitably it's going to end up doing that anyway and all these other people are going to be so badly hurt they're not going to be able to get out from under. Uh, and that's one view. How, to go back on the Magruder situation as O'Brien reports it, having spent several hours with Magruder, yesterday afternoon, O'Brien and Parkinson. Jeb believes, or professes to believe, and O'Brien is inclined to think he really does believe, that the whole Liddy plan, the whole super-security operation, super-intelligence operation was put together by the White House, by Haldeman, Dean and others.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Really, Dean, that Dean cooked the whole thing up at Haldeman's instructions. Uh, the whole idea of the need for a super-intelligence operation. "Now there's some semblance of, of, uh, validity to the point, that I did talk", not with Dean, but with Mitchell, about the need for intelligence activity and--

PRESIDENT: And that Dean recommended Liddy?

HALDEMAN: Yeah, but not for intelligence. Dean recommended Liddy as the General Counsel.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, but you see this is where Magruder might come Well, go ahead. Okay.

HALDEMAN: Uh, that Mitchell bought the idea that was cooked up in the White House for a super-intelligence operation, and that this was all set and an accomplished fact in December of '71, before Liddy was hired by the Committee. But then, Liddy was hired by the

Committee to carry it out and that's why Dean sent Liddy over to the Committee. Then there was a hiatus. There were these meetings in Mitchell's office, uh, where Liddy unveiled his plan. And the first plan he unveiled, uh, nobody bought. They all laughed at it. Cause it was so bizarre. So he went back to the drawing board and came back with a second plan and the second plan didn't get bought either. That was at the second meeting and everything just kind of lingered around then. It was sort of hanging fire. Liddy was pushing to get something done. He wanted to get moving on his plans. And at that point, he went to Colson and said, "Nobody will approve any of this, uh, uh, and, you know, we could, we should be getting,..."

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: ...getting going on it." And Colson then got into the act in pushing to get which, Erich started with the Colson phone call to Magruder saying, Well, at least listen to these guys." Then the final step was--all of this was rattling, around in January. The final step was when Gordon Strachan called Magruder and said Haldeman told him to get this going, "The President wants it done and there's to be no more arguing about it." This meaning the intelligence activity, the Liddy program. Magruder told Mitchell this, that Strachan had ordered him to get it going on Haldeman's orders on the President's orders and Mitchell signed off on it. He said, "Okay, if they say to do it, go ahead."

PRESIDENT: Uh, as that this is the bugging?

HALDEMAN: The whole thing, including the bugging.

PRESIDENT: Shit.

HALDEMAN: The bugging was implicit in the second plan. I, Dean doesn't seem. to be sure whether

PRESIDENT: Well, anyway--

HALDEMAN: he doesn't think that particular bug was explicit, but that the process of bugging was implicit and, as I didn't realize it, nor did he, but it was also in the Sandwedge going way back--the early plan. That, incidentally, is a potential source of fascinating problems in that it involved Mike Acree, who's now the Customs Commissioner or something, Joe Woods, uh, a few other people.

PRESIDENT: Nothing happened?

HALDEMAN: It wasn't done, that's right, but there -- at some point, according to Magruder, after this was then signed off and put under way, Mitch-Magruder--Mitchell, Mitchell, called Liddy into his office and read him the riot act on the poor quality, of stuff they were getting. (Pause) Uh, that's basically the scenario or the summary of, of what Magruder told the lawyer. Dean's theory is that both Mitchell and Magruder realize that they now have their ass in a sling , and that they're trying to untangle it, not necessarily working together again, at least he doesn't think they are But, in the process of that they are mixing apples and oranges for their own protection. And that they're remembering various things in connection with others, uh, (unintelligible) like Hunt and Liddy (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: You don't have another (unintelligible) do you?

HALDEMAN: No sir.

(material not related to Presidential actions has been deleted)

[Part III]

HALDEMAN: He says, for example, Magruder doesn't realize how little Dean told Liddy. He thinks that Dean sent Liddy in. Liddy said...Frankly, now as far as Dean screening to Liddy was that, uh, you as General Counsel over there

HALDEMAN: can also take as a side activity the, the
(Cont' d) political intelligence question because we
do need some input on demonstrators and
stuff like that. That, that, that they're
not doing anything about, but he never got
into any, setting up an elaborate
intelligence apparatus.

PRESIDENT: Okay.

HALDEMAN: Dean, Dean says that as a matter of fact, in
contrast to Magruder's opinion, at the first
meeting where a Liddy plan was presented,
everybody at the meeting laughed at the plan
on the basis that it was just, it was so
bizarre that it was absurd and it would be
funny.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: The second meeting, Dean came into the
meeting late. He was not there during most
of the presentation, but when he came in he
could see that they were still on the same
kind of a thing. And he says in effect, I
got Mitchell off the hook because I said, I
took the initiative in saying, "You know
it's an impossible, uh, proposal and we
can't, we shouldn't even be discussing this
in the Attorney General's office," and all
that. Mitchell agreed, and then that's when
Dean came over and told me that he had just,
had seen this wrap-up on it, and that they,
still it (unintelligible) was impossible,
and then we, that they shouldn't be doing,
it; that we shouldn't be involved in it and
we ought to, uh, drop the whole thing. Then
as Dean said, "I saw a problem there and,
uh, I thought they had turned it off and in
any event I wanted to stay ten miles away
from it, and did." He said the problem from
then on, starting somewhere in early January
probably, was that Liddy was never really
given any guidance after that. Uh, Mitchell
was in the midst or the IT and T and all
that stuff, and didn't focus on it...

PRESIDENT: Martha.

HALDEMAN: ...and Magruder was running around with other things and didn't pay much attention, and Liddy was kind of bouncing around loose there, uh.

EHRlichman: Well, now, how do you square that with the allocation of money to it?

HALDEMAN: Well, that presumably was the subject in focus by somebody else...

EHRlichman: Magruder.

HALDEMAN: ...Who signed off on that.

EHRlichman: Magruder, uh, possibly Mitchell, possibly Stans, certainly, uh-- (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: I suppose they could say the allocation of money was just for intelligence operations generally. I think (unintelligible. That's what my guess is. That's what Magruder said is true.

EHRlichman: Someone was paid to focus on, somebody--

HALDEMAN: Yeah, someone, someone focused and agreed that there had to be some intelligence and that it, it could take some money and that Liddy should get it.

EHRlichman: And against the background of the two plans being presented and rejected, the natural question that would arise is, well, what are you going to do with the money? You don't have an approved plan?

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

EHRlichman: So that doesn't put anything together.

PRESIDENT: Well, it doesn't hang together, but it could in the sense that the campaign--

HALDEMAN: Well, what he, what he thinks, he thinks...

PRESIDENT: My guess--

HALDEMAN: ...that Mitchell did sign off on it.

PRESIDENT: That's the point. But uh, my, my guess is Mitchell could just say, "Look," I, he says, "he has this and that and the other thing," and I said, "all right go ahead, but there was no buying of this da, da, da--"

HALDEMAN: He says if you heard Dean's opinion (unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: So--

HALDEMAN: Now O'Brien says that Magruder's objectives or motive at the moment is a meeting with Mitchell and, me. And, uh, that what he has told some of the lawyers, may well be a shot cross the bow to jar that meeting loose. Uh, O'Brien doesn't really believe Jeb, but he's not sure. O'Brien is shook a little bit himself as he hears all this. But he does see very definitely and holds also to the theory of mixing of apples and oranges. He's convinced that Jeb is pushing together things that don't necessarily fit together in order to help with a conclusion. And, again he's very disappointed in Mitchell. He feels that Mitchell is the guy that's letting, people down. O'Brien made the suggestion that if you wanted to force some of this to a head, one thing you might consider is that O'Brien and Parkinson, who are getting a little shaky now themselves, are retained by the Committee. That is by Frank Dale, who is the, the Chairman of the Committee.

PRESIDENT: Does it still exist?

HALDEMAN: Uh, the...They, did they're--

PRESIDENT: They aren't involved in the damn thing are they? O'Brien and Parkinson?

HALDEMAN: Yes.

PRESIDENT: They ran this all from the beginning?

HALDEMAN: Oh, no.

PRESIDENT: Well, that is what I thought.

HALDEMAN: But they are involved in the post-discovery, post-June 17th.

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible) O'Brien says, "Everything with the Committee," said, "What you might want to consider is the possibility is to waive our retainer, waive our, our, uh, privileges and instruct us to report to the President all of the facts as they are known to us as to what really went on at the Committee to Re-Elect the President".

PRESIDENT: I've been, I, I've been informed. For me to sit down and talk to them and go through, uh--

HALDEMAN: I don't know he, he says, he doesn't mean necessarily personally talk to you, but he means talk to Dean or whoever you designate as your, your, uh, man to be working on this. 'Uh, now--other facts. Hunt is at the Grand Jury today. (Unintelligible) We don't know how far he is going to go. The danger area for him is on the money, that he was given money. Uh, he's reported by O'Brien, who has been talking to his lawyer, Bittman, not to be as desperate today as he was yesterday, but to still be on the brink, or at least shaky. What's made him shaky is that he's seen McCord bouncing out there and probably walking out scot free.

PRESIDENT: Scot free, - a hero.

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HALDEMAN: And he doesn't like that. He figures it, it's my turn. And. that he may go--

PRESIDENT: That's the way I, that's the way I would think all of them would feel.

HALDEMAN: And that he may decide to go with as much as is necessary to get himself into that sane position, but probably would only go with as much as is necessary. There isn't a feeling on his part of a desire to get people, but, uh, you know, a desire to take care of himself. And, uh, that he might be willing to do what he had to do to take care of himself, but he would probably do it a gradual basis and he may in fact be doing it right now at the Grand Jury. He feels in summary that on, uh, both Hunt and Magruder questions we're not really at the crunch that were last night. He isn't as concerned as he was when we talked to him last night. (Unintelligible) we are now going with uh, uh, Silbert--

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

HALDEMAN: The U.S. Attorney has is going to Sirica seeking immunity for Liddy so Libby can be a witness. Liddy's lawyer will argue against immunity, for he does not want it. Uh, Dean's judgment is that he'll prob-, probably fail. Sirica will grant it given Sirica's clear disposition--

PRESIDENT: Then he gets, if he doesn't talk, then he gets contempt. Is that it?

HALDEMAN: If Liddy is in, if he gets immunity his intention, as of now at least, is to refuse to talk, and then be in contempt. The contempt is civil contempt and it only runs for the duration of the Grand Jury which is of a limited duration. And as long as he's in jail anyway, it doesn't make a hell of a lot of difference to him.

PRESIDENT: I, I would almost bet that's what Liddy will do.

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HALDEMAN: Well, that's what Dean will al-also bet. Dean has asked through O'Brien to see Maroulis, or whatever his name is, Liddy's lawyer, for Liddy to provide a private statement saying that Dean knew nothing in advance on the Watergate, which Liddy knows to be the case. To his knowledge, Dean knew nothing about it and Dean would like to have that statement in his pocket and has asked Liddy, Liddy's lawyer to ask Liddy, for such a statement, which he feels Liddy will, would want to give him. Uh, raised the question whether Dean actually had no knowledge of what was going on in the intelligence area between the time of the meetings in Mitchell's office, when he said don't do anything, and the time of the Watergate discovery. And I put that direct question to Dean, and he said, "Absolutely nothing."

PRESIDENT: I, I would, I would, uh, the reason I would totally agree, that, that I would believe Dean there (unintelligible) say would be lying to us about that

EHRlichman: Well he said --

PRESIDENT: But I would believe for another reason--that he thought it was a stupid God damned idea.

EHRlichman: There just isn't a scintilla...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

EHRlichman: ...of hint that Dean knew about this.

PRESIDENT: No, sir.

EHRlichman: Dean was pretty good all through that period of time in sharing things, and he was tracking with a number of us on --

PRESIDENT: Well, you know the thing that, the reason I told Bob--and this incidentally also covers Colson--and I, uh, and I, I don't know whether, ah--I know that most everybody except Bob, and perhaps you, think Colson knew all about it. But I was talking to Colson, remember exclusively about it--and maybe that

[Part IV]

EHRlichman: And that's a terrible thing. I, uh, I think if he were faced with that reality, uh, he would, uh--

PRESIDENT: Well, what is Mitchell's option though? You mean to say, uh let's, let's see what he could do. Does Mitchell come in and say, "My fault...My memory was faulty. I lied?" No. He can't say that.

EHRlichman: He says, uh, uh--

PRESIDENT: "That I may have given a -- without intending to, I may have given, been responsible for this, and I, I regret it very much, but I did not intend that, I did not realize what they were up to. They, they were talking, we were talking about apples and oranges." That's what I think he would say. Don't you agree?

HALDEMAN: I think. -

EHRlichman: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: He authorized apples and they bought oranges. Yeah

PRESIDENT: Mitchell, you see, is never, never going to go in and admit perjury. I mean you can uh, talk about immunity and all the rest, but he's never going to do that.

HALDEMAN: They won't give him immunity anyway, I wouldn't think, unless they figure they could get you. He is as high up as they've been.

EHRlichman: He's the big Enchilada.

HALDEMAN: And he's the one the magazines zeroed in on this weekend.

PRESIDENT: They did? Uh, what grounds? That he knew?

HALDEMAN: Well, just a quote that they maybe have a big fish on the hook.

PRESIDENT: I think Mitchell should come down.

(Unintelligible).

EHRlichman: To see you, me, Magruder.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. We'll have him come down at 5:30. Tell him that there's, there's, tell him that Magruder's (unintelligible). Come down I'd like to talk to him (unintelligible). I would like to talk with him, with you Magruder and he -- is that who you mean? -- and Dean -- no, no.

HALDEMAN: Well, Magruder said he would be happy to have Dean sit in. It's my view, I don't think we want Dean to sit in.

PRESIDENT: Alright, well alright.(unintelligible) Sit down and have it (unintelligible) then we should have my talk.

HALDEMAN: I would think so. I think that would be very constructive.

PRESIDENT: Magruder has got to know that I, I Just don't, that my own feeling is, Bob, the reason I raise the question of Magruder is what stroke have you got with Magruder? I guess we've got none.

EHRlichman: I think that, I think that the stroke Bob has with him is that the, in the confrontation to say, "Jeb, You know that just plain isn't so" and, uh, uh, Just stare him down on some of this stuff and it's a golden opportunity to do that and I mean, uh, and I think you will only have this one opportunity to do it.

HALDEMAN Course he's told me it isn't so before.

EHRlichman: That's all the better, but I, in his present frame of mind I'm sure he's rationalized himself into a, into a table that hangs together and--But if he knows that you are going to righteously and indignantly deny it, uh--

PRESIDENT: Say that he's trying to lie to save his own skin.

EHRlichman: It'll, it'll bend, uh, it'll bend him.

HALDEMAN: Well, then I can make a personal point of view in the other direction, and say, "Jeb, for God's sake don't get yourself screwed up by..."

EHRlichman: Yes.

HALDEMAN: ...solving one lie with a second."

EHRlichman: That's right.

HALDEMAN: "You've got a problem. You ain't going to make it better by making it worse."

PRESIDENT: Yeah, he'll be a hero for the moment, but, ah, in the minds of --

HALDEMAN: Well, then you've got, then you've got Magruder facing all...

PRESIDENT: Let me tell you something.

HALDEMAN: ...the choices.

PRESIDENT: ...let me tell you something. Uh, I have been wanting to tell you this for some time (unintelligible) always dealing with the informer, good causes are destroyed. Chambers is a case in point. Chambers told the truth, but he was an informer, obviously it was because he was informed against Hiss, that they made it worse for him, but it didn't make any difference if he(unintelligible). First of all, he was an (unintelligible)informed and, uh, Hiss was destroyed because he lied-- committed perjury. Chambers was destroyed because he was an informer, but Chambers knew he was going to be destroyed. Now, they've got to know--Magruder's got to know that this whole business of McCord going down this road and so forth. Uh, I don't know what I don't know what the (unintelligible).

EHRlichman: McCord is a strange bird.

PRESIDENT: He's trying to get out. I have never met him. Ever meet him?

EHRlichman: Nope. But, uh, Dean--

PRESIDENT: Tell me about him.

HALDEMAN: Let's go another one. So, so you persuade Magruder that his present approach is (a) not true; I think you can probably persuade him of that; and (b) not desirable to fake. So he then says, in despair, "Hey what do I do? Here's McCord out here accusing me. McCord has flatly accused me of perjury. He's flatly accused Dean of complicity." Dean is going to go, and Magruder knows as a fact that Dean wasn't involved, so he knows that Dean is clean, he knows when Dean goes down, Dean can testify as an honest man.

PRESIDENT: But, is Dean going to finger, uh, Magruder?

HALDEMAN: No, sir.

PRESIDENT: There's the other point.

HALDEMAN: Dean will not finger Magruder but Dean can't either. Likewise, he can't defend Magruder.

PRESIDENT: Well-- Alright.--

HALDEMAN: Dean won't, Dean won't (unintelligible) Magruder. But Magruder then says, "Okay, if Dean goes down to the Grand Jury and clears, clears himself, there's no evidence against him except McCord's statement, which won't hold up, and it isn't true."

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: "Now, I go down to the Grand Jury, because obviously they are going to call me back

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: "...and I go to defend myself against McCord's statement which I know is true. Now I've a little tougher problem than Dean has. You're saying to me don't make up a new lie to cover up the old one. What would you recommend that I do? Stay with the old

lie and hope I would come out, or clean myself up and go to jail?"

PRESIDENT: What do...

HALDEMAN: Or what?

PRESIDENT: ...you advise? What would you advise him to do?

HALDEMAN: I, I'd advise him to go down and clean it up.

PRESIDENT: And say, "I lied?"

HALDEMAN: Say, "I lied." I would advise him to seek immunity and do it.

PRESIDENT: Do you think...

EHRlichman: If he can get immunity?

HALDEMAN: Absolutely.

PRESIDENT: Then what would he say?

EHRlichman: Say, "I thought I was helping. Uh, it's obvious that, uh, there is no profit in this route, uh, uh. I did it on my own motive. Nobody asked me to do it. I just did it because I thought it was the best thing to do from everybody's standpoint and I was wrong to do it." That's basically it.

HALDEMAN: Magruder's viewpoint that to be ruined that way, which isn't really being ruined, is infinitely preferable to going to jail. Going to jail for Jeb will be a very, very, very difficult...

PRESIDENT: Well, if it's a --

EHRlichman: Well Magruder doesn't seem to be (unintelligible)

PRESIDENT: Magruder is a very unusual person.

HALDEMAN: (Laughs) Yep.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible)

EHRlichman: The question is whether the U.S. Attorney will grant immunity under the circumstances.

HALDEMAN: Well, he would if he thought he was going to get Mitchell.

EHRlichman: Yeah, that's right.

HALDEMAN: The interesting thing is, would be, would be to watch Mitchell's face at the time I, I recommend to Magruder that he go down and ask for immunity and confess. (Pause)

PRESIDENT: Go on with this, uh, go on with this Commission.

EHRlichman: Step on that it seems to me is to sell Bill Rogers on the idea, if it's a good idea.

HALDEMAN: The, the other, first thing is to talk with Bill Rogers and see whether he comes up with a decent committee.

EHRlichman: Well I'd say first we've got to be convinced that it's a good idea. If the President's satisfied that it is a good idea, then we'll get Bill Rogers to (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Well you see, to make it is--the problem that we've got here as, we've gotta, we've gotta, uh, everybody (unintelligible) felt that the time and energy put into this thing (unintelligible) the amount of time that I should spend with Bill and Mitchell and so forth (unintelligible) necessary Rogers uh, how do we open that. Do you want to open it (unintelligible).

EHRlichman: ...glory in this for Bill (unintelligible). This is his idea (unintelligible) clean.

HALDEMAN: You see you're, you're saying Bill would publicly be the father of this.

EHRlichman: Bill would be the father of this. He'd go to Ervin and say, "I'm terribly concerned about..."

PRESIDENT: He'd be the broker

EHRlichman: ...this whole business, uh, uh."

HALDEMAN: He came to the President and said this is what you must do.

PRESIDENT: Go to Warren?