

Conversation Number 742-6
June 26, 1972, 8:57-9:40 A.M.
Oval Office
President and Kissinger

[Note: This conversation addressed both Watergate and the situation regarding General Lavelle, which I wrote about on October 1, 2010, while working on *The Nixon Defense*. See <http://writ.corporate.findlaw.com/dean/20101001.html>. The conversation transcribed below originally began at 0:31:116.0 on tape 742a.]

PRESIDENT: Let me ask you about the, ah, ah, the Lavelle thing. How do you think that ought to be handled at this point? I just hate to see the son-of-a-gun made the goat. As you know, we've left it up to Defense. What, what's your reaction to it?

KISSINGER: I have asked Defense to get me a rundown on all the unauthorized attacks and the bastards haven't done it yet.

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.]

KISSINGER: I'd like to think, that's what he did.

PRESIDENT: If he did?

KISSINGER: If what he was doing was not attacking regular sites, that he would have had a right to attack if they locked in on them, he was just moving up the point of attack a bit.

PRESIDENT: Sure.

KISSINGER: If what he was doing was attacking, ah, targets that were never authorized, then I think we ought to be very tough on him. Because they're getting him on two separate charges, only one of which is correct. One is, the argument is made that he ought to use the phrase "protective reactions," that was the pre-planned attack.

PRESIDENT: Right.

KISSINGER: Well, we haven't fooled anybody with that, that was a signal to Hanoi that this was a short-termed—

PRESIDENT: No, [unclear] the broad liberal pretext reaction. Also, the idea that if they hadn't been able, if they haven't been to knock if off, to go back and get it later, that's all part of protective reaction.

KISSINGER: [That's right.] But it, but also that happened when we did these three day strikes, we called it protective reaction.

PRESIDENT: Yes.

KISSINGER: Just to make clear we weren't resuming the bombing of the North. Ah, when we were in [unclear], as so forth, last December, that was not protective reaction, in the strict sense. That was a punishment for their acts, and that has to be made clear here.

PRESIDENT: Well, the thing is, you and I know, that we told Laird [unclear], I just don't want, frankly, I don't feel right about our pushing him into this thing, and then, then giving him a bad rap. You see what I mean?

KISSINGER: Well, but I don't think Lavelle was pushed into it. But, really, Lavelle did it on an unauthorized basis.

PRESIDENT: You do?

KISSINGER: Yes.

PRESIDENT: Humm.

KISSINGER: And I think, in any event, you should stay out of it, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT: Well, I suppose, I'm aware of it. They, they figured then, Lavelle then, [unclear word], I don't know. I just think that Lavelle, and ITT, and, unfortunately this is the part, part of the reason that Moscow thinks, drives these god damn liberals up the wall, they run Lavelle and ITT and the bugging of the national committee, and I think, frankly, I think their out of their minds, and [unclear] huh—?

KISSINGER: That's part of it [unclear.]

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.] My goodness, for Christ's sake.

KISSINGER: That's what is just so stupid. But it's, the pattern's clear—

PRESIDENT: [Unclear,] we were bugged too. You doubt that? [Cross talking.]

KISSINGER: Oh, I'm sure we are. Somebody told me this weekend that Larry O'Brien called, ah, who the hell was it, let me think. Larry O'Brien called Stuart Alsop, and asked Stuart where he had picked up anything about his future with McGovern.

PRESIDENT: About, oh, whether Stuart was bugging?

KISSINGER: No, no. That Larry O'Brien doesn't know, had to do with whether Stuart Alsop had talked with McGovern. Larry O'Brien called him up afterward to find out whether McGovern had given him any clue about what he was going to do with Larry O'Brien. So I don't think O'Brien is too much clued into what's going on. [Brief silence.] I'm sure that he's not.

PRESIDENT: I am too, I'm sure. [Cross talking]. As I told you it's not us, we don't know a damn thing. The trouble is everything in this shop leaks, everything, you know that.

KISSINGER: But it's—

PRESIDENT: Ours is terrible. But that's not what I'm going to say. I digress. I don't think the Lavelle stuff rubbed of here, not yet. I want to keep it away if I can. But I don't want to hurt an innocent man.

[Conversation on Lavelle and Watergate ends when a tone redacts the next sentence. The conversation originally ended at 0:35:42.0.]