

Conversation Number 744-24\_745-1  
June 30 1972, 3:24-4:22 P.M.  
Oval Office  
President and Haldeman [and Kliendienst]

[Haldeman returns to the Oval Office with the president's newly confirmed attorney general Richard Kliendienst at 3:24 p.m., and the president tells Kliendienst that they are going to defer his briefing the press on the death penalty decision. He says they will do it next week from San Clemente. The president takes a call from Caspar Weinberger, and then continues with Kliendienst.]

[This meeting is remarkable not for what was said, rather for what was not said. Twelve days earlier Gordon Liddy had met with Kliendienst, the day after the arrest of his bugging and burglary team at the Watergate, and confessed to Kliendienst that his men were in jail and requested the attorney general get them out. Kliendienst, who had no such power, sent Liddy packing. As attorney general, however, Kliendienst was responsible for the Watergate investigation with both the FBI, which was investigating what had taken place, and the Criminal Division of the Justice Department, which would prosecute any violations of the law, under his nominal direction. Until the cover-up unraveled, Kliendienst never told any investigator or prosecutor about Liddy's actions following the arrests of his men. Fourteen months after this meeting with the president, on August 7, 1973, Kliendienst could not recall it (along with several others meetings) when testifying before the Senate Watergate Committee, yet he offered false or distorted information, for at that time, the cover-up was still in progress.<sup>1</sup> For example, he testified that at our first meeting about the Watergate investigation, he claims he told me that "in addition to being a felony, if you can think of anything worse, it went to the very heart of our political system, and that it was an act of such a heinous nature that [he was] going to call forth and bring about an investigation immediately" - and while he was not sure, he thought I had volunteered to report the Justice Department reaction to the president. The characterization of this meeting in his testimony was false.<sup>1</sup> If Kleindienst's position was even remotely close to what he later claimed, is it conceivable that he could have spent over a half-hour with the president, less that two weeks after the arrests at the Watergate complex, and said absolutely nothing about the Watergate investigation. Watergate was an ugly 800-pound gorilla who sat silently but conspicuously at this, which was little more than a shoot-the-breeze session at which Kliendienst had innumerable opportunities to express his concern about the Watergate investigation, but said nothing." Because Liddy had confessed to him,

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<sup>1</sup> See Part \_\_\_, The Cover-up PRESIDENT: Phase Two/

<sup>2</sup> The only substantive matters that arose during Kleindienst's visit to the Oval Office was that the Justice Department would prepare a statement for the president on the recent ruling by the Supreme Court on the death penalty, and his Justice Department would stay out of law enforcement activities during the forthcoming Democratic National Convention in Miami, so they would not be responsible if demonstrators caused problems. While the president asked his attorney general passing questions about Social Security, George Wallace, and if he could think of any president or vice president since George Washington with the first name "George," and FBI protection for the attorney general, this meeting would have been ideal to brace the president about Watergate and its implications. For example, when the president asked Kliendienst: "Well, how do you like your job?" the new attorney general said he appreciated the pay raise, for he had three kids in collage and was making less money than he had in the past 12 years. But he was enjoying it. He assured the president there were "no problems" at the Justice Department, and everything was under control. In fact,

and he surely feared the prospect of his Justice Department prosecuting his friend, his predecessor, and the man who'd made him attorney general, John Mitchell, he remained silent. But as soon as he departed, Haldeman and the president instantly turned to the subject they had been avoiding.]

PRESIDENT: You know that Mitchell's a good guy.

HALDEMAN: [To see what he's going through, on top of it] he was back in my office when [interrupted by noise on president's desk] he said Martha was sending the help out to do the shopping at 3 o'clock, he said, Jesus, I've got to get home right now. [Noise.] He said the doctor was working on her stitches, but the doctor [unclear], so he went over to the house.

PRESIDENT: Oh.

HALDEMAN: Said he had to stay there, he went over to the apartment, thought he had to stay there until, until the help got back.

PRESIDENT: He was so right to say, you know, what he said, the convention, that you can't do it. [The president appears to be referring to his just completed conversation with Kliendienst, who advised that the Federal government stay out of the Democratic convention security.]

HALDEMAN: For a lot of reasons, he knows damn well there are.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Can't do it now, today, tomorrow, the past.

PRESIDENT: [Pause.] Ron had some sort of flap today about, reported to him on a gun in some place [cross-talking], oh, that's Hunt—

HALDEMAN: That apparently leaked out of the Bureau, which we're—

PRESIDENT: The Bureau says it's not true.

HALDEMAN: Well it is true. And, ah, it is true. It's not true that it was made in Spain. They said it was a Spanish-made gun. [High pitch whistler sound.]

PRESIDENT: Well, how does Ziegler, Ziegler has a position that it isn't true?

HALDEMAN: He does?

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Kliendienst knew he had a nightmare on his hands with the Watergate investigation of the president's reelection committee and White House staff, and could have given the White House appropriate advice to keep it out of trouble.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, he said, actually the Bureau said it was not true, or something.

HALDEMAN: Does he understand why the Bureau does?

PRESIDENT: You mean he had a gun?

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: What, you mean this guy [Hunt] has, has, I thought he left two months ago?

HALDEMAN: He did, but he left files, there was a safe. He had an office over there and he left stuff in the safe. He had a safe in the office and he had stuff in the safe, and among the things in the safe were a gun and a wiretapping kit or suitcase.

PRESIDENT: What about the map of the convention?

HALDEMAN: That isn't apparently true, which is kind of interesting. There was a lot of other stuff, [pause] which was handled at a very supposedly high level, discreet level, with the Bureau.

PRESIDENT: But I understood, though, that on that Bureau thing, though, that they were to watch, they were to keep off of this guy, you know what I mean?

HALDEMAN: That's what they were told. They aren't.

PRESIDENT: Huh?

HALDEMAN: They aren't. We're having problems here with the Bureau. That's what we were talking about with Dean and Mitchell before our meeting with you.

PRESIDENT: I see. You mean, despite what you've told, ah, despite Walters going over there?

HALDEMAN: [Pause.] Gray doesn't know how to turn them off and neither does Felt, I guess. They're concerned about how to do it, get the record clear, and all this sort of stuff.

PRESIDENT: Well, incidentally, there's the—

HALDEMAN: Kleindienst hasn't turned Justice off, either, which is another problem.

PRESIDENT: Huh?

HALDEMAN: The U.S. Attorney and his criminal head [referring to Henry Petersen] are both pushing the Bureau, and forward, now, we've got to— we'll work it out. We've got to somehow get Kleindienst to tell them.

PRESIDENT: Well, I'd have Walters go see them, too. About, you've got this fellow too [Hunt], I mean, after all, the gun and the wiretapping doesn't bother me a bit with this fellow. He's in the Cuban thing, the whole Cuban business. He's out of the country, now, I assume. [[Difficult to find clearer evidence of the president's hearty participation in the conspiracy to obstruct justice.]]

HALDEMAN: No.

PRESIDENT: He's back in the country?

HALDEMAN: He never went out, but it doesn't matter. He's a at least they say, his main stock in trade is he's a master of disguise. [Chuckles.] He's someplace under some disguise, although he's supposed to go abroad. [Unclear.]

PRESIDENT: So, ah. [Pause.] It would seem to me that, was Colson aware he had stuff in his safe and all that sort of thing?

HALDEMAN: I don't think so. I don't think Colson saw it.

PRESIDENT: Huh?

PRESIDENT: Colson wasn't there when they opened the safe. I don't think he knows what was in it. In fact, I'm sure he doesn't. They haven't told turn what was in it.

PRESIDENT: When did the story appear, yesterday or today? Huh?

HALDEMAN: Today.

PRESIDENT: Washington Daily News.

HALDEMAN: This afternoon.

PRESIDENT: What reaction did you take on it? Or did Ziegler just no comment.

HALDEMAN: [Unclear regarding Zeigler's comment.] The story says they found a Spanish-made gun. The reason that's not true is they did not find a Spanish-made gun.

PRESIDENT: They didn't find a map?

HALDEMAN: I don't think so. John Dean's the one who knows about this and he says there wasn't any map. He says there was a road map, but it had nothing to do with the Democratic National Committee, and there was no map of the committee headquarters.

PRESIDENT: Sort of add up that he's, wiretapping stuff, of course.

HALDEMAN: Dean hasn't discounted the possibility that we're dealing with a double agent in this thing somewhere.

PRESIDENT: Meaning this fellow, Hunt?

HALDEMAN: Probably not this guy. Probably one of the other guys, or several of them.

PRESIDENT: A double agent who is putting out this information, giving leads, or what?

HALDEMAN: Well, who purposely moved this thing? There's something, [it's complex], it's so ridiculous; it's still kind of hard to figure the whole thing out.

PRESIDENT: Well, let me tell you, the Mitchell thing couldn't have come at a better time from our standpoint. He goes and he takes responsibility for it. He understands that, doesn't he? [[The president says this firmly; he is no longer willing to lose the election if Mitchell has to take the rap.]]

HALDEMAN: [Pause.] He mentioned that himself. He raised it [as a possibility that can be use.]

PRESIDENT: Well, I wonder then, in view of this break today, that means whether Mitchell going tomorrow is a good idea after all.

HALDEMAN: Yes. This thing doesn't tie back to that.

PRESIDENT: Why not?

HALDEMAN: Because it leads to the White House, not to Mitchell and the Re-Election Committee. They haven't tied Hunt to the Re-Election Committee. They're tying him to Colson.

PRESIDENT: Well, they haven't really tied Hunt to the group yet, have they?

HALDEMAN: No, except that his name was in their book.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Or Colson, does he know about all this, so he's told the story? What does he say?

HALDEMAN: I haven't talked to him, since the story the story just came this afternoon. I haven't talked to Chuck since. But knowing Chuck, I'm sure he's very disturbed.

PRESIDENT: Humm. Well, there's not much we can do about it, is there?

HALDEMAN: No.

PRESIDENT: I don't know what you can.

HALDEMAN: I've said to Mitchell, but I'm not at all sure, he, somebody—

PRESIDENT: [Ought to put it out, or what]—

HALDEMAN: Well, if it's Mitchell, I want him to call Kleindienst and Gray in and say, look, this happened. I used to sit on the National Security Council. You know, this happens to lead to some lines that [don't relate to] the Watergate/National Committee caper. Your people are investigating stuff that must not be investigated. That's what, that's the signal you've gotten from the CIA. For Christ's sake, smarten up, smarten up and turn this off. Go ahead and toss your cards to the grand jury on the open and shut case stuff, and let it go at that. [Silence.] McCord is, ah, developing a case, [talking to the attorneys over there], is trying to get F. Lee Bailey to handle his case. So we may be getting into an F. Lee Bailey versus Edward Bennett Williams....

[[Tape ran out midsentence, resulting in a gap of unknown length in original recording, while they were changing the tape. When the exchange resumed in Conversation No. 745-1, it began midsentence.]]

PRESIDENT: [High pitch whistler sound, again.] ...

PRESIDENT: I don't know anything about that. [high pitch sound] I understand, I thought it was all over, over in the committee.

HALDEMAN: Hunt is the only tie.

PRESIDENT: If we don't think Colson, but Colson told the Bureau he had nothing to do with Hunt, didn't he? He was questioned?

HALDEMAN: That's right.

PRESIDENT: What did he tell then?

HALDEMAN: He told them the straight truth. He has had to do with Hunt. He told them he had nothing to do with Hunt as far as this thing was concerned, that he'd worked with Hunt on totally unrelated. [Left hanging, then pause.] See Hunt was working for—

PRESIDENT: We know, in a sense, the fact that his gun and wiretapping equipment is still there and so forth, it would seem to me would be an indication that he's not afraid of anything. You get my point?

HALDEMAN: Yeah, I can't understand why it was still there, because he came back to the office after this [thing]. I can't understand why he didn't empty his safe. A lot of this just totally passes me by. I just can't put it together and have it add up.

PRESIDENT: Humm, hum.

HALDEMAN: It's just a lot of very strange things in it.

PRESIDENT: Well, the guy that really, the committee contact was through Liddy. What was his job?

HALDEMAN: He was the counsel for the Finance Committee, this job for Stans. That was just a cover. [The president can be heard tapping his fingers on his desk.]

PRESIDENT: And he's the guy that did this with apparently Mitchell's knowledge?

HALDEMAN: Well—

PRESIDENT: We don't know.

HALDEMAN: Not this. Not specifically this, but—

PRESIDENT: But he was getting information.

HALDEMAN: Developing intelligence and so forth.

PRESIDENT: He was off on his own, though.

HALDEMAN: And some counter-activity, and that stuff.

PRESIDENT: Which, as we know, is standard practice.

HALDEMAN: Yeah. [Pause.] See, Liddy used to work at the White House, too.

PRESIDENT: He did?

HALDEMAN: He worked for Bud Krogh. So did Hunt.

PRESIDENT: Where was Krogh? What, what capacity?

HALDEMAN: The, ah, narcotics.

PRESIDENT: Well, there's nothing particularly wrong with that.

HALDEMAN: No, there isn't. And he worked, same time, no it's not Liddy, and he worked on the Pentagon Papers.

PRESIDENT: [Unclear.][Pause.]

HALDEMAN: [Changes the subject to Mitchell's resignation.] As Moore said, it could have gone the other way.

PRESIDENT: [Pause.] What do you mean gone the other way?

HALDEMAN: Well, he, I think he said [unclear], we've got a very brief announcement and then a long letter to the President. I mean, that's [low-key enough].

PRESIDENT: Is the letter going to be made public?

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: That's all right.

HALDEMAN: Hey, this is pretty good: "Dear Mr. President, Your words of friendship and understanding when we met today meant more to me than I can possibly convey in this letter. I have long believed and often said nothing is more important to the future of our country than your re-election as President. I had looked forward to devoting all my time and energy to that result. I have found, however, I can no longer do so on a full-time basis and still meet the one obligation which must come first: the happiness and welfare of my wife and daughter. They have patiently put up with my long absence for some four years. The moment has come when I must devote more time to them. Relatively few men have the privilege of serving the President of the United States. In my service it has been special indeed because of the strength of your leadership. As I said today, I shall continue to work for your re-election as well as to be grateful for your unfailing friendship and confidence."

PRESIDENT: It's an excellent letter, couldn't be better. It's very subtle.

HALDEMAN: Very personal—

PRESIDENT: Very subtle.

HALDEMAN: —and all that.

PRESIDENT: Excellent.

HALDEMAN: That, you release that along with just a straight announcement, John Mitchell announced today he's resigned as campaign director for the Committee to Re-Elect the President in order to devote more time to his wife and family. He will continue to serve the committee in an advisory capacity.

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: And the Frank Dale has—

PRESIDENT: That's excellent. Now will he prepare a letter for me, or—

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Or should I just dictate one.



HALDEMAN: He's waiting out there if you want to talk to him, go over this, right now.

PRESIDENT: Maybe I'll have him do it, save me the time. [Material redacted on the president's conversation with Dick Moore discusses the letter he should send to Mitchell accepting his resignation as director of his reelection campaign.]

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<sup>1</sup> See 9 SSC 3563 and Richard Kliendienst, *Justice: The Memoirs of an Attorney General* (Ottawa, IL: Jameson Books, 1985) 147. Like his Senate testimony, Kliendienst appears to have written this book without making any effort to learn the true facts. His information about me, and Watergate, is patently false and distorted, and as is the case with many works about Watergate by those involved, the errors are so voluminous that it would take a book to correct them. For example, matters that Kliendienst could not recall before the Senate, he made into facts that are designed to make him look good while point the finger at others. For purposes of illustration of Kliendienst failure to do any fact checking whatsoever when he spoke about Watergate after it all fell apart, he claims that at that first meeting about the investigation with Henry Petersen, that when first Petersen said they would be conducting an all out investigation so the president should cut his losses, and Kliendienst made a similar remark, he writes: "... I remember, Dean broke in hastily and suggested that since he was about to go to San Clemente and would be talking to the president there anyway he would be willing to convey our recommendations to the president in person." Aside from the fact I never said this, aside from the fact that Kliendienst knew I reported to Haldeman and Ehrlichman and in eleven months I had been at the White House Kliendienst had always reported to either Haldeman and Ehrlichman rather than me when he wanted to send information to the White House, but even more absurdly, the president was not going to San Clemente until July 1, 1972, a trip that had been publicly announced, which would have been ten days away. To avoid engaging in the very activity that add so little to history, I do not need to say any more about Kleindienst's self-serving finger pointing.