

Conversation Number 745-2
June 30, 1972, 4:30–6:15 P.M.
Oval Office
President, MacGregor and Haldeman

[After discussing the Social Security bill that was then in conference on the Hill, and of great interest to the president, the president mentions the Mitchell situation.]

PRESIDENT: Well, here's the thing, another thing I'd like to suggest on it, it's extremely [unclear] that I want you to do. Ah, John, due to the fact of IT and T, and frankly Martha's very substantial problems, ah, which incidentally we want to keep totally under the rug, we want to do it on the basis that it's, we're just going to say that she just wanted to see her husband more, and all that sort of thing, and all those problems, we can't anticipate, but they are substantial. But due to that John has been unable to watch the committee, it is not as well organized as he would like, he must never know that we think that.

[tone for withdrawn material]

[When the tape resumes, they talk about MacGregor's staff, with MacGregor strongly recommending that when he leaves the White House that Bill Timmons be placed in charge of the Congressional relations staff. The president agrees that Timmons "is a damn good man," and that he will be placed in charge. After another nine-second withdrawal of personal information, which has been shortened here, they talk about Martha Mitchell when the conversation resumes on the recorded conversation.]

PRESIDENT: You don't know anything about her problem?

MACGREGOR: No, no I don't know anything.

PRESIDENT: [unclear]

MACGREGOR: Newsweek called Barbara this week, you know, she may have recognized what, what, she said I'll call you back. So she went and called Newsweek back, and the lady was there, and said we're going to do a feature on Martha Mitchell. And Barbara was all positive. Barbara said, I love her. I worked with her at the Senate, at lunches for congressional wives, and she's one of the most marvelous people I've ever met.

PRESIDENT: Good.

MACGREGOR: So I wanted you to know that. That'll apparently be in Newsweek.

PRESIDENT: I hope it is.

[Haldeman arrives at 4:48 p.m., and after a bit more conversation about the Congressional relations staff, and Timmon's work on organizing the GOP's coming convention, and a withdrawal of personal information for almost nineteen and a half minutes, which has been

shortened here, the conversation turned to Watergate, and a pitch to dazzle the new campaign director with the innocence of all the important people.]

MACGREGOR: I don't need to know anything about the past, but I need to, I guess, to know something about the future. I have said to people absolutely flat out, I've talked to Congressmen and Senators, that the Committee to Re Elect the President and the White House had absolutely nothing to do with the [recently disclosed] incident.

PRESIDENT: That's what you've got, that's the line you should take.

HALDEMAN: That's what Mitchell is doing.

PRESIDENT: I know the White House had nothing to do with it. As far as the committee is concerned, I know Mitchell had nothing to do with it. As far as the Cubans are concerned, they certainly are Republicans, that's the problem.

HALDEMAN: There are some lines of inter-connection.

PRESIDENT: And they—

HALDEMAN: That's our problem.

PRESIDENT: They certainly were doing it to hurt McGovern and support Nixon. That's the problem and that's what Mitchell basically is concerned about. But you can be sure that, as far as Mitchell is concerned, he of course had nothing to do with it. I mean, basically the reason you can be sure, Clark, even if you figure that he was lying, which he would not do to us, is he's not a stupid man.

MACGREGOR: Oh, no.

PRESIDENT: He wouldn't do such a stupid thing. The White House thing, I mean, this fellow, what's his name, Hunt? [Nixon pronounces Hunt's name as if he were not sure it was his name.]

HALDEMAN: Hunt.

PRESIDENT: Hunt is a former CIA agent. He's a super-sleuth, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Ah. But he hasn't been with the White House, I mean, there's some story today that they found some gun in his safe over here or something like that, but I don't know anything about it. But he hasn't been in the White House since when?

HALDEMAN: March, I guess.

MACGREGOR: March 29th I think was the last day he was paid.

HALDEMAN: See, when he was here he worked on a totally different thing. He was in the Bay of Pigs. He was working on the declassification thing, which we had, were, we had an,

an all out unit going on, and Hunt was working on. He knew about that stuff. [[Note: Hunt never worked on the declassification project.]]

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: He also, they found out when they were working with him on that, he could be very helpful on some of the narcotics stuff.

PRESIDENT: [Cross talking] working on that.

HALDEMAN: He was working on narcotics. Now, he's also been involved, as this thing starts to develop, in other things, things we didn't know anything about. And this is what you get when you start dealing with these underground characters, as you know as a lawyer.

PRESIDENT: Well, I'm not, I wouldn't, I can't be sure, but I would say this, one thing I think you should know, I can't be sure that Hunt was not involved with the Cubans, because the Cubans—

HALDEMAN: They had his name in their address book.

PRESIDENT: Well, well—

HALDEMAN: And he worked with the Cubans.

PRESIDENT: The point is he headed the God damn Bay of Pigs thing, and these people worked with him. So I can't be sure. I don't think he is, you know what I mean, but I don't know. So that's one of the reasons why I said, all that I know is the White House had nothing to do with it. I know Colson had nothing to do with it. I know Hunt was gone, so as far as Mitchell is concerned, Mitchell is in a spot, I would have to admit, where we really don't know. You have to worry a bit about it. Mitchell is in a spot where he hasn't been watching the committee too closely and you can't be very, you can't be sure that, ah, these Cubans, ah, who were, you know, hanging around, didn't have some contacts in that committee. I don't know who. If we did, we'd fire them.

HALDEMAN: Well, they did. The Bureau has a line into one guy at the committee named Liddy.

PRESIDENT: Liddy.

HALDEMAN: Who was working over at the Finance Committee, not at the—

PRESIDENT: For Stans.

HALDEMAN: He worked for Stans as a counsel. He is a guy that was in the White House office working with Krogh's office on the drug stuff. He knew these people. And they have some lines that tie him into some of this. In their interrogation of him, they weren't satisfied with his answers, or he said he wanted to get a lawyer and they said, well, the lawyer would

tell you to shut up, and he said, well, I'll do what the lawyer says. And they said, well then, there's no point in talking to you. When the committee found that out, that that's what had happened in his interrogation, they fired him. The word that they have fired him is not out yet and we had hoped, we hope it doesn't get out. But Liddy has been released from the committee, from his post.

PRESIDENT: Let's put it this way—

HALDEMAN: He's no longer employed there.

PRESIDENT: If he was involved, and I'm not sure that he was, I mean—

HALDEMAN: That's right.

PRESIDENT: But if he was, if any of what he didn't want to talk about was his own involvement in it—

HALDEMAN: That's right.

PRESIDENT: Cause he was involved with the Cuban too, you see. This whole thing is a strange bag.

HALDEMAN: Well, that runs to some, flies around directly into the CIA, what they're concerned about.

PRESIDENT: That's why they, but anyway the Liddy thing, that if he, if he's involved, is that, ah, the point is, if any, if he was involved, Clark, it was an unauthorized involvement. That's the point that you need to know. It was without, it was without the authority or without the knowledge of John Mitchell. That's the way I'd put it. And as a matter of fact, this is not this has nothing to do with John's leaving, because he has to leave for other personal reasons, but in a sense it's a good thing because at least you're in and you know very well that you had nothing to do with anything. And if anything happens, I would assume John—

HALDEMAN: Yeah, but I don't think, I don't know. We, we purposely don't know a lot of what that kind of thing was involve—

PRESIDENT: [Cross-talking over Haldeman.] I don't want to find out.

HALDEMAN: Both on the governmental side or the committee.

PRESIDENT: To me, it's such a crude God damn thing. You almost think it's a bunch of double agents.

HALDEMAN: It may very well be.

PRESIDENT: Double agents, that's what I'm afraid of. It just looks to me like, almost like a fix. Doesn't it to you? How the hell, the main thing, I said, why in the name of Christ did they want to bug the National Committee?

HALDEMAN: [Cross-talking.] That's the overriding—

PRESIDENT: What in the name of God, if you're going to bug, bug the McGovern committee.

HALDEMAN: [Cross-talking.] Of all the things in this town to bug—

PRESIDENT: Is there anything in our Republican National Committee that anyone would want to bug? Shit.

HALDEMAN: That's the one place I couldn't care less if they bug.

PRESIDENT: When I saw that, I thought, well, these crazy bastards. I didn't know who it was at the time, the Cuban thing, and I was surprised to find a lot of these Cuban people working around here. And they're all gone from now. Do we have any more of them left?

HALDEMAN: I don't think so.

PRESIDENT: Who's McCord? Is he with us?

HALDEMAN: Well, he was. He was, they hired as a security, you know, surveillance system guy, to check out their bugging, and all that. Well, he's in jail.

MACGREGOR: On my end of it, obviously, Mr. President, my fear is that—

PRESIDENT: He's going to get F. Lee Bailey?

HALDEMAN: He's the one that says he's going to get F. Lee Bailey.

PRESIDENT: Oh, Christ.

MACGREGOR: My fear is that the, the remarkable record that you've made is going to be besmirched by these extraneous things—

HALDEMAN: That's right.

MACGREGOR: —that—

PRESIDENT: Sure.

MACGREGOR: —that you have no knowledge of.

HALDEMAN: The worst thing we can do, though, the worst thing we can do is let them do exactly what they want to, which is to get us so involved in that that we don't keep shooting our, our guns.

PRESIDENT: Well, you're going to have this sort of thing more, I guess. People do stupid things. I mean, that long agonizing IT and T business. We survived. It was very stupid.

HALDEMAN: We did some stupid things. Our people did some stupid things.

PRESIDENT: Sure. [unclear]

HALDEMAN: Well, there are things, there are a thousand stupid things like that that don't get uncovered, that we do and that they do. It's when they get uncovered that they look so stupid.

PRESIDENT: There will be more. They're going to have a few problems, too.

MACGREGOR: I've been asking myself, Mr. President, if there's anything in my background, political or otherwise—

PRESIDENT: Forget it.

MACGREGOR: —that would redound on you.

PRESIDENT: Forget it.

MACGREGOR: And I don't think that there is.

PRESIDENT: Let me say this. Everybody's got something in his background, everybody.

MACGREGOR: I can't think of anything.

PRESIDENT: And if you don't have, why—

HALDEMAN: If they didn't get yours four years ago, they ain't going to get it this time, because they're a lot more confused than Hubert's people were.

PRESIDENT: We don't worry about that. But I must admit, I must say, that you're going to go in there and it'll be good that you're going in with a clean slate, and when you're asked about this, that you were confident John Mitchell had absolutely nothing to do with this, this was an activity that was unauthorized, it's a bizarre business, period. [I don't know that you should comment on this] Hunt fellow, did you ever meet Hunt? I've never seen him.

MACGREGOR: No, sir. I know nothing about him except what I've picked up.

PRESIDENT: If he had a gun, apparently, if Hunt had a gun. [unclear] wiretapping equipment. It seems to me if he'd have had any guilt about it, he'd have gotten it out.

MACGREGOR: He'd have gotten it out.

PRESIDENT: But here it is two months later, it's still in the safe. You see my point?

MACGREGOR: Well, there probably are other people around who have guns in their safe. See my point. Isn't that bizarre?

HALDEMAN: I suppose there are other people around with guns in their safes.

PRESIDENT: What?

HALDEMAN: I suppose there are other people around with guns in their safes.

PRESIDENT: Well, and wiretapping equipment?

HALDEMAN: Except you don't even think about it.

PRESIDENT: This guy is a wire-tapper. He's been tapping for years, hasn't he?

HALDEMAN: I don't know. I don't know what he, he's a disguise type guy.

PRESIDENT: And deep cover.

HALDEMAN: He writes dirty books.

MACGREGOR: The phrase is, the CIA phrase is the deep cover.

PRESIDENT: Deep cover. [We could hang a little revenge for,] of course, he was also with Kennedy and he worked for Johnson.

HALDEMAN: And he was damn helpful in uncovering some stuff we needed uncovered, which we also would just as soon not get out. Nothing wrong with it.

PRESIDENT: The main thing, frankly, that I was concerned about was Colson, because Colson did work with him on the, on the, ah, you know, the Pentagon Papers, whatever the hell it was they were working on. Anyway, but that job [unclear] And, ah, Colson has been questioned by the Bureau, under oath, absolutely. So I am not concerned. That's why I said categorically the White House, and I can only say, people lie to me, because they [unclear]—

HALDEMAN: I don't think, I honestly don't think there is any guy in the White House. I think there obviously were some contacts at the committee. There was a contact with McCord. I don't know what the hell they were, and I haven't, there's nothing at any level of authority, and I don't know whether, you know, whether there was any contact with us in that way.

PRESIDENT: When did McCord [unclear]?

HALDEMAN: Yesterday, I guess, or something, there was just a thing in the paper, that he was going to get F. Lee Bailey.

PRESIDENT: Why the Christ don't these guys plead guilty?

HALDEMAN: Well, I think they're going to. They waived the preliminary hearing.

PRESIDENT: They're going to? That's, that's going to—

HALDEMAN: Yes, the first part is to get them charged.

PRESIDENT: Why didn't they get charged?

HALDEMAN: Because they have to go to a grand jury, and a grand jury hasn't drawn up an indictment yet.

PRESIDENT: I see. They have to be charged with breaking and entering, or something like that.

HALDEMAN: Well, yeah, and then booked, and arrested, arraigned [cross talking]—

PRESIDENT: Charge them, have them plead guilty, and take their sentences. You know, really they could, they could, breaking and entering is a minuscule crime, [crossing talking]—

HALDEMAN: Well, the problem, the real problem we deal with though, from a governmental view point, that has nothing to do with politics at all, is that the lines from these people lead to places we don't want led to.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: The government does not want led to.

PRESIDENT: The CIA understands.

HALDEMAN: And the, the investigatory people are on those lines and don't know that they cut in, they don't know where one thing crosses the other.

PRESIDENT: Trouble is, frankly, that Helms's shop, does not want these, this thing involved in, we just won't say anything further about it, it could very well involve, it could very well involve some anti-Castro activities. The Cubans are frightened to death of McGovern, frightened to death, you know, because he made this statement that he'd get along with Allende—

HALDEMAN: Cool relations, relations with Allende, and Castro.

PRESIDENT: Oh, shit. We used to have a lot of illegal Cubans in here, and if we had a normalization with Castro, one of the conditions [they would be] returned, [president snapped his fingers], and so Miami is a hotbed, they're all for these Cubans in Miami, oh Christ, they're really livid, raising their bail and all that crap. They think it's great that they were tapping the Democrats.

[Withdrawal of personal material originally for just over nineteen minutes at this point in the conversation, when the recorded conversation resumes, the president addresses MacGregor's role as the new head of his reelection committee.]

PRESIDENT: But you've got to remember this. You're going to have, you'll probably have another Watergate. Watch that. There'll be some asshole things will be done. People are going to say they can do things, steal.

HALDEMAN: Well, they're going to be desperate.

PRESIDENT: They're going to be after, for example, what about the \$10 million we discussed. They were complying with the law.

MACGREGOR: Your position on that is absolutely right. It's the position that I hoped you'd take. [unclear]

PRESIDENT: You know what the problem is? You know why we don't want to disclose it?

MACGREGOR: Well—

PRESIDENT: It has nothing to do with the contributors. Who are they, Clem Stone, John Mulcahy? They'll all be on the list next month. But it happens that in that Maury Stans has a number of very prominent Democrats who are playing both sides.

HALDEMAN: Well, he's got some that are only playing one side.

PRESIDENT: Well, some Democrats that are playing our side only, who don't want to get caught. That's the point, see.

HALDEMAN: Some of them we have commitments to.

PRESIDENT: We have commitments that, we can't say this, it would ruin the Democratic Party. That's what it really is. It's nothing to do with having anything to hide. There's no Mafia money or foreign money or any of that.

HALDEMAN: No problem with any of it except the Democrats.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: And some others who don't want to do it for personal reasons.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, don't want to be contacted by other campaigns.

[Withdrawal for personal material for originally for 5m 6s, after which MacGregor leaves the Oval Office at 5:52 pm. David Hoopes brings the president several bills that require signing, and the president can be heard chatting with Haldeman about the legislation — migratory waterfowl and private bills — while signing. When Hoopes departs at 5:58 pm, they assess their visit with MacGregor, before getting deep into how they will deal with Watergate.]

PRESIDENT: I think that he, ah, how did he react to the remarks?

HALDEMAN: Damn prudent.

PRESIDENT: He has every right to know [what he's getting into], and he asked the right questions. In my mind, he should take this job without asking about Watergate.

HALDEMAN: [unclear] I told him about the Liddy thing because he's going to find it out right away anyway, and it was better to let him know there was a guy, what we were talking about is trying to, we're going to write a scenario, in fact, we're going to have Liddy write it, which brings all of the loose ends that might lead anywhere at all to him. [unclear]

PRESIDENT: What is he going to say?

HALDEMAN: He's going to say that, yeah, he was doing this, he wasn't authorized.

PRESIDENT: Well, what else?

HALDEMAN: He thought it was an honorable thing to do. He thought it was important. Obviously it was wrong. He didn't think he should ask for authorization because he knew it was something that he didn't want to put anybody else in a position of, of authorizing. How did he get the money? See, we've got that one problem, the check from Dahlberg. What happened is, and that works out nicely because the check came in after the spending limit thing. So it was given to him with the instruction to return it to Dahlberg. Instead, he subverted it to this other purpose, deposited it in the bank. That explains where the money came from. That explains everything. And they're working on writing out a scenario. I think that's the answer to this, and admit that, by God, there was some campaign involvement.

PRESIDENT: But without Mitchell's knowledge.

HALDEMAN: But without Mitchell's knowledge.

PRESIDENT: Or authorization.

HALDEMAN: Or authorization.

PRESIDENT: He's fired.

HALDEMAN: And he's fired.

PRESIDENT: What does he get out of it? What's his penalty?

HALDEMAN: Oh, not too much. They don't think it will be any big problem. Whatever it is, we'll take care of him.

PRESIDENT: Well again, if you have to do it, Bob, of course, he was involved. Mitchell, I'm confident, is, I really think Mitchell is telling us, even though he is, well, let's find out what we can, so we've got [unclear]

HALDEMAN: I can't imagine that he knew specifically that this is what they were doing. I think he said, get, for God's sake, get out and get this God damn information, don't pussyfoot around.

PRESIDENT: How'd he [Liddy] get the check, he, he, ah—

HALDEMAN: He was processing the checks. It was an illegal check. You know, he was going to run it down to Mexico and put it into cash or something.

PRESIDENT: Then what did we do, return the money to the guy? What, what happened—

HALDEMAN: That's what they're going to say he was supposed to do.

PRESIDENT: And what—

HALDEMAN: But he didn't. He on his own initiative decided this was a good source of funds for this covert operation he was running. So he took the check, processed it through this Mexican bank, and ran it up here, which is what he did do.

PRESIDENT: When would he do this?

HALDEMAN: Quickly, and hopefully, I think the thing to do is do it during the Democratic convention.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: But he didn't. He on his own initiative decided this was a good source of funds for this covert operation he was running. So he took the check, processed it through this Mexican bank, and ran it up here, which is what he did do.

PRESIDENT: When would he do this?

HALDEMAN: Quickly, and hopefully, I think the thing to do is do it during the Democratic convention.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: The way to do it, they, they think, that's the reason, they, they know they've got some lines into him, the FBI does, and they now, Dean says, they've identified him as a, a suspect in the case, and they're on this, before he was just a source of information that didn't pan out, so if you let them follow their routine investigation, we don't, he doesn't offer up anything, they just catch him, but he works out his whole plan beforehand, so what they catch him at, is, ah—

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Is in that end. But there may be some flaws in this, and that's what they going to kind of work out. It has the great advantage of being—

PRESIDENT: [He thought it up?]

HALDEMAN: I don't know.

PRESIDENT: Cause he's going to have to lie about that, you see.

HALDEMAN: Well, maybe we can turn it off on that basis. That'll give them, you see they know there are other lines involved.

PRESIDENT: But then—

HALDEMAN: We can get 'em not to ask about that, maybe.

PRESIDENT: On the basis of the CIA. [This was not a question, rather a statement.] But the Hunt outfit was involved for other reasons?

HALDEMAN: Maybe he ties Hunt in. Maybe that's the better way. They've got to work that out. Just say he, he —

PRESIDENT: He found this group of people [cross-talking] that were very amenable—

HALDEMAN: He met them over here when he was working on this other project and he used them on the side for his project.

PRESIDENT: Well, another way he could do it is to say that they came in to, wanting to do something. I mean, because of their concern that—

HALDEMAN: That he did funding; he shifted some money around for them.

PRESIDENT: And that he, and the he, ah—

HALDEMAN: This sounded like a good idea to him.

PRESIDENT: It sounded like a good idea and they said we want to do this. And he said: all right, I'll work with you. And he found the money for them, and there, and because he did work with them. But in other words, keep it, keep it I think it's well to keep the scenario involved in the Cuban plot as much as possible. In other words, were these Cubans, after all, it is to a certain extent. Why would they risk their God damn selves playing such a game as this?

HALDEMAN: You know who Dahlberg is?

PRESIDENT: No.

HALDEMAN: He's [Dwayne] Andreas's bagman.

PRESIDENT: Oh.

HALDEMAN: So it all of a sudden starts running over to the other side, too. It's kind of intriguing.

PRESIDENT: Well, [silence] I agree. I think the best thing to do is to cut your losses in such things, get the damn thing down. It's just one of those things and they were involved.

HALDEMAN: Otherwise they're going to keep pursuing these fixings that lead into the wrong directions.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: And there just isn't any point in—

PRESIDENT: Why do that, why keep them, I don't want to get, Colson is valuable to us, I don't want to get him messed up in this damn thing.

HALDEMAN: Well, it goes beyond that, too. When he started into the other, not in this project. And he doesn't get into this project either, but you've got [pause] Hunt's tied to Krogh, Liddy's tied to Krogh. They're all tied to Ehrlichman. And—

PRESIDENT: You mean they worked here?

HALDEMAN: Sure.

PRESIDENT: Well, what the hell's wrong with that? [Dismissing it.]

HALDEMAN: They're tied in to Dave Young. Nothing any more than there is with Colson.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, that's what I mean. No, but not in any hanky-panky. The only thing that you mean in the Pentagon Papers? What the hell is the matter with that? [President asked with alarm and concern in his voice.]

HALDEMAN: The investigation, the process.

PRESIDENT: What?

HALDEMAN: Just the process that they used.

PRESIDENT: Well, that's perfectly all right.

[At this extremely sensitive moment, when Haldeman might have explained the full dimensions of the problems confronting the White House, Ron Ziegler walks in, and interrupts the conversation: "Just one quick thing, Mr. President," Ron says when he arrived at 6:02 p.m., telling the president that Reuters is doing a story that John Connally was going to become involved in the Paris peace negotiations, and Ron felt he needed to shoot the story down fast, or it would become a big story. The president instructs him to say, "there is absolutely no foundation, period" for the story. He tells Ron it "was not true." He then tells him if anyone saw Kliendienst earlier, he was visiting on the recent Supreme Court ruling, and they would have something next week in California on that. By 6:03 p.m. Ziegler is gone. Before return to Watergate, Haldeman mentions the matter of MacGregor's salary as the head of the reelection committee, and the president agrees that \$50,000 — the same a cabinet officers — is the right amount. Then the conversation returns to Watergate.]

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