

TRANSCRIPT OF A RECORDING OF A MEETING
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND H.R. HALDEMAN,
OVAL OFFICE, APRIL 20, 1973, FROM 11:07 TO
11:23 A.M.

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HALDEMAN: Yep. This is exactly the right thing to do that, I think. I think you were right in saying something; I think he couldn't have hit you. I pretended I wasn't there.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. I understood that.
(Unintelligible, with noise)

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Yeah. I had a talk with, uh, Bush. He wants to be just as helpful as he can but, boy, he's a workhorse.

HALDEMAN: Really?

PRESIDENT: Yeah. Well you know (unintelligible) evil wandering, said uh, and you know and then something about Reitz. He says Reitz let him go because Magruder told Reitz that Magruder had talked about Reitz's involvement in what was called the dirty tricks department, which I don't know apparently about what it is and I said, "What the hell is that?" And, uh, (unintelligible). He said, "Well, it was something about some demonstration in front of the White House here," or some damn thing. (Unintelligible) Charges are illegal.

HALDEMAN: God sake. That was something they had a guy, let's see, come over and joint the demonstration group over here to tell 'em -to listen to what they were doing and report back.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. You're right. So I -so George says he's rewritten.

HALDEMAN: At least that's what the story is.

PRESIDENT: He's got a lawyer.

HALDEMAN: Reitz says?

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: Good Lord.

PRESIDENT: And, uh, he's got Jerry Leonard
(unintelligible) involved 15 or 16 in the
White House.

HALDEMAN: In the White House?

PRESIDENT: **RESTRICTED-"D"**

HALDEMAN: In the dirty tricks thing?

PRESIDENT: Everything.

HALDEMAN: Reitz says that?

PRESIDENT: This is something Newsweek would want to
keep track. He said, "How much would they
have?"

HALDEMAN: Oh. (unintelligible with noise) Well, if
you take account the press, that would be
good. (Unintelligible with noise) sounds
like probably true.

PRESIDENT: Anybody?

HALDEMAN: That's what they say.

(24 second pause)

HALDEMAN: I would doubt that, say how you could.
Well, unless they're stretching out, uh,
people that haven't any real -any direct tie
in. Um.

(Unintelligible with noise)

PRESIDENT: And uh, (unintelligible with noise) the, of
course, burgeoning kind of hard to figure
out, isn't it Bob? Very hard...

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HALDEMAN: Well, yeah, it's burgeoning, burgeoning in other directions.

PRESIDENT: What the hell is there putting Magruder into the -I know what's going on, that sort of thing I can't figure out. Can you?

HALDEMAN: Magruder's lashing out on the thing you know. I think, I think the damned thing is here...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: So what he's -what's happening is that he's trying for a better deal than they're giving him and they're trying to get more information out him. They've already given him a better deal. Looking at their past (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Magruder.

HALDEMAN: What this is -Magruder is give them some thing that will nail that down and, uh, we'll knock off (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Magruder, Magruder's uh, coming close. See he told Reitz what he had done (unintelligible). Magruder basically telling everything.

HALDEMAN: So, Reitz better be careful. Magruder's told a lot of people what he's done that he hasn't done. And that's -this is a part of process where people are, are, uh, panicking because somebody said something that isn't, that hasn't happened. Now, Magruder. You cannot -see this is the problem here, we, we tend to look at each individual shop as having some having validity under the circumstances. That's the Washington Post story today or yesterday or the Magruder story that he told one person or that he told another but they don't check. So something is wrong with some of 'em. You can't take all of them because they don't come together. And maybe you can't take any of 'em. The truth of the matter is you have to take some but the question is which and who knows which.

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PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: And that is still a real problem. People look at you and say, well, you know, come clean and tell us what really happened. Who knows?

PRESIDENT: I tried to explain to George that moment he said (unintelligible). I said, "But George, you know every campaign there's going to be activities of-demonstrations, counter-demonstrations and that sort of thing and I suppose that Reitz is involved in that, but I don't know that -I said, "Was he involved in Watergate?" and he said, "Well, I don't think so," uh, you know George is (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: Well, I can imagine that they had the youth crew working in all kinds of various, you know, demonstrations, infiltrating other demonstrations, anti-demonstrations to find out what was going on.

PRESIDENT: George called it the dirty tricks department they were in.

HALDEMAN: That would be.

PRESIDENT: Really in the dirty tricks department...

HALDEMAN: Ha.

PRESIDENT: Magruder.

HALDEMAN: If they had 'em it wasn't very damn good because that was one of our problems is you could never get anything -any action in their area.

PRESIDENT: Magruder.
(Pause)

PRESIDENT: I said, "George," uh, I said, "Give me the truth. Have I done the right thing here?" And he said, "Oh, yes. It's like everything else. It's right for 24 hours and they say. 'Try to do something more.'"

HALDEMAN: Ha ha.

PRESIDENT: Right?

HALDEMAN: Well, yeah, but I guess you could, well, you know, and that's that...

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: No matter what bright thing you do.

PRESIDENT: He's reflecting I think, Bob, the uh, concern of the people on the hill as you said. He goes up there.

HALDEMAN: Of course, this is just what we said when we say it could just be -if you could just release your people to speak at the Senate, that'll take care of it. So you release your people to speak to the Senate and they say, "What else will you do?" Then you say you're busted the case and you shifted the people over and the truth is going to come out. And, uh, now you have -first, you nail 'em, it would appear public pressure, nailing the Attorney-General.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: Campaign manager.

(Pause)

HALDEMAN: one of the problems this morning made the point that they're not gonna settle for scapegoats. You can't get away with trying to blame this on Magruder and Dean, which I think is probably true. And then they said so you have to move it up to Haldeman and then totally ignore Mitchell. And, uh, because you have to move to someone who was high enough to have had the responsibility, but the dilemma that you have, the President answers -If you move to Haldeman, then there's no way the President escapes responsibility.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: The other point is that on the Watergate, you can't go to Helm. On the other thing you can only very remotely remove him.

PRESIDENT: Structures?

HALDEMAN: Yeah. And even there, making the worst possible case of adding everything up and believing it, of all the worst things that could be said, you make a very remote case of, of, uh, knowledge and of one overt act that, that uh was in itself indirect three times removed. And that, that's what we gotta work for the lawyers so that's a good question in taking it at its very worst and saying that every adverse witness' testimony is accepted and acceptable, and believed, where would we come out? And even there, they say you don't come out where it matters.

PRESIDENT: Well, you know I think -how I feel the uh.

(Unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: If talk about Mitchell, you do come out.
There's um...

PRESIDENT: The Mitchell thing is going to be clear as
hell. He's gonna be indicted. I don't
think...

HALDEMAN: See that's not really accepted yet. The
thing we don't realize is that we read these
stories knowing more than the people who
read them know. And the people now, I
think...

PRESIDENT: Think it's going to be Haldeman?

HALDEMAN: No. I don't think they know. I don't -but
I don't think they're -I don't think they
believe what they're reading. And even the
analysts I don't think believe what they're
reading. I -I think a lot of people just
can't accept the possibility in their own
minds that John Mitchell was involved. I
don't think they can accept the possibility
I was either. I think that they -that...

PRESIDENT: They might.

HALDEMAN: But then on the other side...

PRESIDENT: The enemies?

HALDEMAN: The enemies would like to. But then on the
other side, they have to say somebody must
have been. And we damn well better find out
who because it won't suffice that we knew
that

PRESIDENT: Haldeman and Ehrlichman and Dean did it...

HALDEMAN: That some low level types did it.

PRESIDENT: I mean, uh, Magruder.

HALDEMAN: Magruder and Dean. Well, unless you could make a rock bottom case on that, but now I don't think you can. There are too many people that know that the truth is, is otherwise.

PRESIDENT: Why'd the Grand Jury know? They're getting into strangest issues. The dirty tricks department is more than I can figure out.

HALDEMAN: Uh, I would guess that why they are is that they're -well, it's the same thing you talked about when you talked with them on Sunday (unintelligible) thing you concluded which is that they are scared to death to let the Ervin Committee uncover anything that they haven't already uncovered, because that will then move to legislative action or at least higher. Uh, "Why in the hell did you discover this?"

PRESIDENT: I don't believe I'll ask Petersen -you gotta reach your lawyers. I don't think I'm going to ask Petersen about what Hunt talked about and so forth. I'm afraid, afraid it wouldn't do any good.

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: What do you agree?

HALDEMAN: I think so. I don't think you ought to ask anything on it. I, I -you get these day to-day developments. There's nothing you can do about it. I think we've got to look at it in a little bit broader picture. You can't help but get sticklered by each one of them, but then each one gets revised or changed or overwritten by something else.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. The only problem is the Hunt thing. Go over again and these damn national security taps.

HALDEMAN: They (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Huh?

HALDEMAN: If they know.

PRESIDENT: How can we avoid it, Bob?

HALDEMAN: That -he can just avoid talking about it if he wants to. We don't know what -so far

PRESIDENT: I told 'em not to question him about it that I'm sure they're into it.

HALDEMAN: Well, if they go into it -well, if they go into it the Grand Jury, then it'll be out as a Grand Jury leak. That's why I, I can't understand the lawyers don't seem to get very excited about it. I guess so maybe it's not exciting. It seems to me that that is more than the thing where you just sit and say, "Oh, it must have been the court reporters."

PRESIDENT: Sure.

HALDEMAN: And if it is the court reporters, they ought to indict the court reporters right now. And there ought to be -it seems to be that's as big scandal as the Watergate is, but nobody seems to think so.

PRESIDENT: (Laughs) I guess they figure that when it's the truth getting out to the columnist that are trying to do us in and so forth.

HALDEMAN: But what happens to the process of justice? What's the point of a Grand Jury when Bill Rogers (unintelligible) about the whole -you know, that you're entitled to be indicted before you are charged. (Pause) And ordinary...

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

HALDEMAN: People are...

PRESIDENT: What the hell...

HALDEMAN: ...even more so.

PRESIDENT: I want to say that, uh, we, uh...
(Pause)

PRESIDENT: ...uh, we really uh get the chance over the weekend. Go over (unintelligible with noise) it seems to me (unintelligible with noise).

HALDEMAN: It's a grateful point.

PRESIDENT: Would you say is the P.R., of the Presidential posture of the goddamned thing, uh, we've already talked about that. (Pause)

PRESIDENT: The Presidential posture. You think we're in the right posture at the moment?

HALDEMAN: (Unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: Something now, their line, I suppose is they have to get something higher. We can't get a scapegoat, so it's gotta be Haldeman.

HALDEMAN: No.

PRESIDENT: or, it's got to be Mitchell? What else?

HALDEMAN: There's got to be someone. Obviously, they're gonna keep trying on all of this. It's a quicker target. Of course, that's what they make of it. Somebody has to make the legal thing work and then the public point.

PRESIDENT: Right.

HALDEMAN: Somehow it's a question of really putting that out and, and seeing where it comes out.
(Pause)

PRESIDENT: Wonder when will Dean start crashing Ehrlichman.

HALDEMAN: I had a feeling that he did, but he didn't name names. So that he, what he said was you know there's people higher up -people from lower down (unintelligible) and then the guy that put it out assumed it was Haldeman and said it. Because John -what Ron says -John was surprised, startled, and chagrined that the name was named because he says he didn't name any -he didn't name my name. And I think he's playing both that the guy misunderstood him. He told him to get the story out, said it was higher ups involved in this. And that is his cover on it, which we expected it would be. He was doing what he was told. Now the question is who, who will we say told him. And then can you get away with saying that we told him. I assume he'll say both of us did. He may just say I did. Got a tough one there 'cause he had much more communication with John than he did with me.

PRESIDENT: Correct.

HALDEMAN: He had no communication with you so there's no way he can hang you into it.

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: Come after the part that you were investigating. That's why I think you're you're covered. Even on the -well, the Hunt -but that's -you're covered under national security grounds on that.

PRESIDENT: Well, I don't know. But the recollection -my recollection -in fact, I did make notes on that conversation -I don't think we'd want to...

HALDEMAN: Apparently, apparently I gave Dean 'em 'cause I can't find any.

PRESIDENT: May be just as well. But, the point was it was also discussed in terms of blackmail 'cause it was the same conversation.

HALDEMAN: I think so.

PRESIDENT: Well, I remember specifically my saying I'd like you to (unintelligible) a million dollars. (Unintelligible) He said a million dollars. I guess we can get that.

HALDEMAN: Hal But then I said about that but then I said, "We've started down that track," and you agreed that, you know, you won't get anywhere. That doesn't accomplish anything. The fact that you said a million or ten million or, or...

PRESIDENT: Right. And Dean agreed.
(Pause)

HALDEMAN: The facts still remain...

PRESIDENT: Dean (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: That's privileged conversation...

PRESIDENT: That's right.

HALDEMAN: ...you can't use. You can try him as a (unintelligible) and if then you -we want some other way.

PRESIDENT: Well, there's no action taken as far as we're concerned. That's the one thing. Right?

HALDEMAN: None.

PRESIDENT: I don't know, either. Did he call Mitchell then or who did call him, John Ehrlichman?

HALDEMAN: I don't know. I don't have any idea. I don't know that anybody did. (Pause)

PRESIDENT: You don't think John did?

HALDEMAN: John Ehrlichman?.

PRESIDENT: Mitchell (unintelligible).

HALDEMAN: That was John Ehrlichman wasn't the least bit concerned about it.

PRESIDENT: About the leak?

HALDEMAN: He said come and (unintelligible) it out.

PRESIDENT: Is that right? About a leak.

HALDEMAN: Almost complete (unintelligible).

PRESIDENT: That's fine. If we have a leak, just let the Grand Jury.

HALDEMAN: We just know they were leaking.
(Pause)

PRESIDENT: Well somebody -didn't see them and uh.

HALDEMAN: See, what the public saying this morning.

PRESIDENT: Well my view is, I'd like to perhaps have a short talk after you've met (unintelligible) perhaps we could meet with you and John could come in and we'd have a little...

HALDEMAN: Okay.

PRESIDENT: (Unintelligible) Maybe ten after.

HALDEMAN: Sure.

PRESIDENT: Particularly if you could discuss the question how we view to the public. Have the public watch the thing and how we, how we stand on the -what we know is the crescendo that's going to be built up.

HALDEMAN: Yeah.

PRESIDENT: Perhaps on you -And, perhaps on John, too. In other words we got to really have a, a, we've got to have a not only a legal, but we've got to have a, a public stands fare. And I just don't think Ziegler could go out without an expression of confidence in you and John. That's what I'm concerned about.

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HALDEMAN: I think he's got to.

PRESIDENT: Huh.

HALDEMAN: I think he's got to. I think he can express
confid -Well, I want to talk to him. I
don't think you should express confidence in
anyone.

PRESIDENT: We'll see you. Bye