Nixon, Kissinger, and Reports of Crises

A week passed. No word from the Russians. Kissinger huddled with the National Security Council, State Department and military chiefs. The first option was to act exactly as Kennedy had: make a dramatic announcement on television and confront the Soviets with a crisis of war or peace.

But Nixon was determined to go the other way, toward peace with the Soviets. So Henry saw Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin and quietly informed him that the naval base would not only destroy détente but spark an updated missile crisis. If the construction was halted, nothing more would be said.

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The quiet pressure worked. On Oct. 22, Andrei Gromyko told Nixon that the 1962 understanding would be reduced.

"But ships so far from the Soviet homeland required a support base, and Cuba, a Communist satellite, would be that base,—unless Nixon stopped it.

By a self-serving literal reading of the 1962 agreement, the Soviets concluded that while they were specifically forbidden to base missiles on Cuban soil they were not expressly forbidden to base missiles on Cuba. In any case, the only way for them to find out how America would react was to go ahead and see, and that's exactly what they did.

Using the STIX missile system of rather cumbersome but extremely accurate surface-launched medium-range missiles somewhat similar to the now-obsolete American Regulus, the Soviets could reach their most important targets in preventing a maximally effective American retaliation.

Their strategy was as simple as it was brilliant. Across the Arctic reaches of North America the American Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) could catch any incoming missile attack early enough to allow time for a massive American retaliation. The consequences of the retaliation were unacceptable to the Russians and so the balance of terror was maintained. But like the "impregnable" Singapore and Maginot defense, BMEWS had a fatal flaw: It was only oriented to intercept an attack from the north. By maintaining the capability for a STIX-type attack resupplied from a Cuban base, the Soviets would reach up behind BMEWS and within 15 minutes might be able to destroy all 21 American nuclear command headquarters which had nuclear release authority before sending their main attack over the pole.

By electronic monitoring of American military exercises in which our bases were alerted to prepare to execute a nuclear strike, the Soviets had learned which United States bases had the authority to pull the nuclear trigger—command headquarters, such as the White House, the Pentagon, NORAD (Colorado Springs), CINCLANT (Norfolk), SAC (Omaha), and the like. If the STIX system would knock out enough of them, the resulting confusion might sufficiently delay the American retaliation to greatly reduce its effectiveness. In this United States command chaos the Soviet polar attack might even catch a good portion of our nuclear force on the ground. With the STIX capability, then, minimized retaliatory damage to the Soviet Union might well make a pre-emptive, strike an acceptable possibility.

Choices That Nixon Faced

What To do? Henry and Nixon huddled with the National Security Council, State Department and military chiefs. The first option was to act exactly as Kennedy had: make a dramatic announcement on television and confront the Soviets with a crisis of war or peace.

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China had once held a series of meetings in Warsaw, but those talks had broken off. Kissinger contacted Walter J. Stoessel Jr., United States Ambassador to Poland. His orders to Stoessel: Find the highest ranking Chinese envoy to Poland as a social function and tell him the United States wants to resume the Warsaw talks.

In the atmosphere of the time, when China was a bitter enemy of the United States, and their diplomats never uttered a word to each other, this approach at a party would be a seismic event. It ended up as high comedy: The chargé d'affaires at the Chinese embassy, Lei Yang, attending a Yugoslav reception, was so startled by Stoessel's approach, he turned and walked out of the door.

Stoessel ran down the stairs after him. Later, Chou En-lai told Kissinger in China: "If you want our diplomats to have heart attacks, approach them at parties and propose serious talks."

On Dec. 10, Kissinger's unorthodox approach worked, as my log entry showed. The request to resume the Warsaw talks carried two messages. One to Peking, that we were ready to reverse our policy of enmity to China and reopen relations. The second to Moscow, that the United States and China had common interests and a Soviet nuclear strike might bring the Russians into confrontation with the United States.

Meanwhile, Air Force Intelligence studied the photos of Russian missiles and nuclear warheads. Their fallout studies showed the immensity of the catastrophe in store: If a Soviet strike against China, nubus nuclear plants were destroyed, China would not be a foreboding of existential danger. As far as we knew, the Soviets had no "surgical" capability either—but that fact apparently would not stop them.

In 1969 there were several overtures by the Soviets to the United States for a joint venture in the surgical strike. Nixon turned the Soviets down, but was then informed, to his horror, that the Soviets intended to go ahead on their own.

Reversing U.S. Policy on China

Nixon for years had been this nation's foremost enemy of Communist China. But by 1967 he had decided that Communist China was a fact of life. When Nixon took office, one of his first priorities was a reopening of relations with China. His foreign affairs adviser, Kissinger, was a reluctant passenger on that first six-months.

Then came the Soviet-Chinese border clashes, surprising the rest of the world which had seen the two countries as one great Communist monolith. Kissinger and Nixon huddled. They decided they would send a signal to the Soviets that the United States was determined to be a friend of China.

How to send that signal? The United States and China had once held a series of meetings in Warsaw, but those talks had broken off. Kissinger contacted Walter J. Stoessel Jr., United States Ambassador to Poland. His orders to Stoessel: Find the highest ranking Chinese envoy to Poland as a social function and tell him the United States wants to resume the Warsaw talks.

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How to send that signal? The United States and
The Need to Protect a President

 MUCH HAS been made of the “Berlin Wall” that I am supposed to have constructed around Nixon. Why did I think—rightly or wrongly—that Nixon needed a wall of any kind? First, Nixon was able to halt, through me, the unending flow of Government officials who “just had to see the President.”

The other reason was that I soon realized that this President had to be protected from himself. Time and again, I would receive petty vindictive orders. If I took no action, I would pay for it. The President never let up. I’d say, “I’m working on it,” and delay and delay until Nixon would one day comment, with a sort of half-smile on his face, “I guess you never took action on that, did you?”

“No.”

“Well, I guess it was the best thing.”

Then another character entered the White House, Charles (Chuck) Colson. Unfortunately, Colson encouraged the dark impulses in Nixon’s mind, and acted on those impulses instead of ignoring them. Of course, if there were no Nixon, there would have been no Colson in the White House. Nixon provided the output which all of us were ordered to put into action.

Richard Nixon used to disappear in the middle of the night during campaign trips. I would call for him at his hotel room in a small Midwestern city in the morning and find that he was missing. Some time in the early dawn he had gotten out of bed and slipped away, with a nervous Secret Service man tailing him. We’d search all over town until we found the candidate looking haggard and wan in a flea-bitten coffee shop. I think that this urge—even need—to make these occasional strange post-midnight excursions, was Nixon’s unique way of letting off steam when things were very tense or he was very tired.

Another factor that I very soon became aware of was Nixon’s insecurity about his truly humble background. He never let us forget that his mother had to scrub bedpans. Security. “He tried to overcome that insecurity by imposing a rigid self-discipline to shield him from mistakes. That self-discipline was so tight it was unnatural. And when it burst, the effects were devastating.

But if that were the sum of Nixon, he would not be so fascinating; he would never have gone to work for him—or stayed so long. Nixon had many strong, positive characteristics which are generally conceded even by his detractors: intelligence, analytical ability, judgment, shrewdness, courage, decisiveness, and strength. And, believe it or not, he had a “heart.”

He absolutely hated the large formal dinners that he constantly had to host.

Detailed Critique of a Dinner

The day after our first formal state banquet at the White House, Nixon critiqued the dinner as if it had been a major military battle. One item more than any other drew his attention, the soup course. As he put it, “We’ve got to speed up these dinners. They take forever. So why don’t we just leave out the soup course? Men don’t really like soup.”

That afternoon I met Manola Sanchez, Nixon’s valet, in the hall. “Is it true there was anything wrong with the President’s suit after that dinner last night?”

Manola said yes, “He spilled soup down his vest.”

Just what I expected. And that’s why soup was never again served at a state banquet in the Nixon years.

In the White House by day we knew Henry Kissinger, the other half of our brilliant diplomatic team, as “the hawk of hawks.” But in the evenings, a magical transformation took place. Touching glasses at a party with his liberal friends, the belligerent Kissinger would suddenly become a dove.

And the press, beguiled by Henry’s charm and humor, bought it.

During the Christmas bombing of North Vietnam in 1972, Kissinger was strongly in favor of the bombing. Just two months before Henry had said, “Peace is at hand,” and been criticized for political maneuvering before election day. But peace had been at hand, Kissinger said, and now the North Vietnamese were reneging again. So he urged the bombing.

It was therefore with some amazement that we read a column by James Reston in The New York Times after the bombing started saying, “Mr. Kissinger . . . has said nothing in public about the bombing in North Vietnam, which he undoubtedly opposes.” The whole tenor of the column was that a split was developing between Kissinger and Nixon, and Reston provided a lot of “inside information” on Kissinger’s current thinking that could only have come from Kissinger himself.

Nixon was furious and told me to “find out what the hell Henry’s doing.” I talked to Henry that day. He hotly denied that he had said anything about the bombing to anyone. In particular, he vehemently claimed he had never talked to Reston. He said, “I did not give Reston an interview.”

But Reston’s story implied that he had spoken to Kissinger. So we did some checking and found out that Kissinger had, in fact, conversed with him. I confronted Henry. “You told us you didn’t give Reston an interview but in fact you did talk to him,” and he said, “Yes, but that was only on the telephone.”

Trying to Vex Kissinger

My own attitude toward Henry was great respect and affection tinged with amusement. Almost every day around 1 o’clock I’d have lunch with Larry Higby in my office. About that time, Henry would drop in to find out what was happening and report on his own activities. But he also tried to read everything of interest on my desk.

We’d deliberately place letters or documents that looked very interesting in an exposed area. Then, when Henry got there, Higby would take his lunch tray and set it on top of the paper, as if by accident, just as Henry started to read it. And everyone kept a straight face.

By 1972 Henry also was a national legend as a lover, to our great amusement. Nixon secretly got a kick out of Henry’s love life, and so did the rest of us. Ehrlichman worked on a long-time project that took him hours. He was compiling nude photos of various starlets Henry had dated, he then would forge Presidential memos complete with Nixon’s “bizarre demands” for certain types of woman would send the memos to Henry in envelopes that always looked official—until Henry opened them and saw the nudes.

By 1972, Henry’s popularity was a problem on the campaign trail. We’d arrive at an airport, and when Henry came out of the plane a roar from the crowd would go up. This was fine except Henry would go right over to the fence and start shaking hands just as if he were the candidate. By the time Nixon emerged from the plane all eyes were on Henry far down the line.

Nixon told me to stop it, so I told Henry to leave the handshaking to the President. Henry smiled. “You’re just jealous, Herr haldeman.” But wouldn’t only make him jealous, Herr haldeman,” but would only make it through a few more airport ceremonies before he would forget and plunge happily into the crowd again.

Gloria Steinem once said that power is an aphrodisiac
to women. And Henry was powerful. (Miss Steinem was the subject of one of Henry’s great bon mots, told at a press conference that Miss Steinem had denied she had a romance with him, Henry agreed it was true. “But she did not say if elected, she would not serve.”)

I had a chance to needle him when he came to me wrestling with the problem of whether he should return to Harvard, or risk losing his tenure when his sabbatical was up.

I reminded him of an important factor. If he went back to Harvard as an ordinary professor, it would be the end of his allure to the Hollywood beauties.

“Unless they have good memories,” he shot back.

It always amused me that Henry, whose anger at leaks really started the 1969 F.B.I. national security wiretapping, was constantly worried that his own telephone was tapped. Time and again he would pass me in the hall and say, “What do your taps tell you about me today, Haldeman?”

(Mr. Haldeman writes that President Nixon and Mr. Kissinger were confident that the Vietnam War could be ended. Toward that end, the President conceived the “madman theory”—he wanted the Vietnamese to believe that he would do anything to win the war and his finger was on the nuclear button.

(Mr. Kissinger took that theory and a generous offer of aid to the first Paris peace talks, Mr. Haldeman writes, but the theory collapsed. The Secretary of State found that the North Vietnamese wouldn’t even negotiate. They saw no reason to do so. The mood in the United States had turned against the war, and it was merely a matter of time before the United States would have to pull out.)

Nixon was faced with a terrible decision. He knew he had to act. He decided to secretly bomb the North Vietnamese supply caravans which passed through Cambodia, a neutral country.

Bomoming in secret would get the message to the North Vietnamese and prevent a flare-up of antiwar protests in the U.S., which would disable our peace negotiations.

In May 1969 New York Times reporter William Beecher wrote a story which began: “American B-52 bombers in recent weeks have raided several Viet Con supplies and North Vietnamese supply dumps and base camps in Cambodia for the first time, according to Nixon Administration sources.”

A Debate over the Wiretaps—10 pt

Kissinger was furious. Nixon was equally as angry. Both of them were determined to find the source of the “leaks” to the press. A debate still lingers as to how the wiretapping program began. Henry represents himself as a passive participant—called into the Oval Office for a conference in late April, where he found J. Edgar Hoover with the President, Kissinger was told that a wiretapping program was underway, and was asked by Hoover only to supply information on people he suspected of leaking.

Nixon doesn’t remember such a conference. Neither do I. But I do recall Henry’s initial anger, which helped initiate the whole wiretap program.

Nevertheless, Nixon was 100 percent behind the wiretaps. And I was, too.

And so the program started, inspired by Henry’s rage, but ordered by Nixon, who soon broadened it even further to include newsman. Eventually seventeen people were wiretapped by the F.B.I., including seven on Kissinger’s National Security Council staff and three on the White House staff.

There is one wiretap that is important in Watergate history because Nixon personally ordered it privately—by White House aides—not through the F.B.I. It was on influential columnist Joseph Kraft, who had been a supporter of Nixon’s, had now turned against him.

The F.B.I. claimed that Kraft’s telephone was “untapp-
UNE 17, 1972, a Saturday afternoon in Key Biscayne, Fla., I stretched and yawned. Across the terrace of our villa at the Key Biscayne Hotel, Larry Higby, my young deputy, read a book.

Two weeks ago I had returned with President Richard Nixon from Moscow where he had worked out the beginnings of the first meaningful disarmament agreement with the Soviets in this century, and had begun a new policy, which was being described as "détente," that could reverse twenty-seven years of cold war.

The President needed a rest, and he flew south on June 16. Air Force One had dropped him off in the Bahamas where he went to Walker's Cay, owned by one of his friends, Robert Abplanalp, the aerosol-valve millionaire.

At 2:30 A.M., June 17, 1972, while Nixon slept in his friend's luxurious house in the Caribbean, three Cubans, one Italian-American, and a man named James McCord, had been arrested in the Democratic national Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex in Washington, carrying electronic wiretapping equipment.

Higby saw a familiar figure in bathing trunks walking toward us on the beach; trailing a long white paper in one hand. "Hey, look," said Higby, "Old Whaleboat." It was Ron Ziegler, the President's press secretary, whose Signal Corps name was "Whaleboat."

Higby handed me the sheet of paper. It was wire service copy. The news bulletin said that five men had been caught breaking into the Democratic national Committee headquarters in Washington, carrying electronic wiretapping equipment.

If Charles Colson was involved, he could very well have been on one of his projects for the President of the United States.

Colson's Secret Exploits

Chuck Colson had become the President's personal "hit man." He had signed up an ex-C.I.A. agent named Howard Hunt to work for him and thereafter became very secretive about his exploits. Years later I heard of such wild schemes as the proposed fire-bombing of a politically liberal foundation (Brookings) in order to retrieve a document Nixon wanted; feeding LSD to an anti-Nixon commentator (Jack Anderson) before he went on television; and breaking into the offices of a newspaperman (Hank Greenspun) who was supposed to have documents from Howard Hughes that revealed certain secrets about Nixon.

"Should I inform the President?" Ziegler asked.

I thought it over. John Ehrlichman, assistant to the President for domestic policy, was in Washington. The break-in had happened almost 15 hours ago. If any real problem had surfaced he would have telephoned me by now.

So I said, "I don't think there's anything to worry the President about."

This was his year. In the past six months he had not only begun the disarmament talks with the Soviet Union, he had dramatically reopened diplomatic relations with China and—finally—he was about to end the crippling, suicidal Vietnam War.

Nothing could hurt him now.


The President wasn't concerned at all by the break-in. In fact, he was amused. "Track down Magruder and see what he knows about it," the President said.

Jeb Magruder, a 38-year-old public relations specialist, was "our man at C.R.P.,” the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. At the White House, where he previously had been employed, I had found him eager but unreliable.

When the Committee for the Re-election of the President was first being staffed, I saw a chance to reassign him to a position that was less demanding and better.

Continued on following page.
Continued from preceding page.

I reached him and he was worried. He said, "You gotta believe me, Bob. It wasn't me. Tell the President that."

But when I called the President, I relaxed again. As I was saying my plea, I told myself, "No Watergate. The FBI is going to be following the orders of a strong leader, John Mitchell, who would be following the orders of a strong leader, John Mitchell, who would be moving over from Attorney General to campaign chairman.

Then toward the end of the confirmation hearings for Richard Kleindienst as Mitchell's successor as Attorney General, the international Telephone and Telegraph scandal surfaced with its politically explosive charge that in

I stepped into Nixon's White House office. At the No. 2 post of C.R.P., he simply would be following the orders of a strong leader, John Mitchell, who would be moving over from Attorney General to campaign chairman.

The President summoning me. We were about to begin one of the most fateful conversations in Watergate history. For this was to be the meeting in which 18½ minutes of taped conversation was mysteriously erased.

But in 1971 a new taping system was installed. Whereas Nixon had started trying to erase the tapes himself, but realized it would take him ten years in fits and starts, (The investigators counted five different starts in the 18½ minute gap alone.)

So I believed that Nixon had started trying to erase the 18½ minute gap. That, in 1971 a new taping system was installed.

But Nixon was the least dexterous man I have known; clumsy would be too elegant a word to describe his mechanical aptitude. Reportedly, Pat Nixon once said that when they were courting, "Dick almost killed himself trying to learn to roller skate."

Lyndon B. Johnson. 1.

The White House switchboard found Magruder at the Beverly Hills Hotel in California. He was nervous and his sentences faltered. His words were disturbing.

Those guys operating on their own, Bob. They just got carried away."

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Then toward the end of the confirmation hearings for Richard Kleindienst as Mitchell's successor as Attorney General, the international Telephone and Telegraph scandal surfaced with its politically explosive charge that in exchange for a $600,000 political contribution to the Republican Party, John Mitchell's Justice Department had made a favorable settlement of an antitrust case against the multinational corporation. Kleindienst demanded the hearings be reopened so he could deny the charges.

In 1977, Richard Nixon said that the secret story of Watergate is that it would never have happened if not for Martha Mitchell's illness—and the resultant diversion of John Mitchell's attention.

A Problem of Supervision

Well before the break-in, I made my first Watergate mistake by leaving Magruder in charge at C.R.P. without the direct and continuing supervision of John Mitchell. We could, and should, have moved a new campaign manager in, either temporarily or permanently.

A new manager would never have permitted the break-in, and there would have been no Watergate.

For years, the Haldeman book says, Nixon had been trying to get proof that Lawrence O'Brien was working as a lobbyist for Howard Hughes while serving as chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Mr. Haldeman writes that his retainer from Hughes was reportedly $18,000 a year.

[Nixon: The FBI's starting their investigation, and I know one thing, I can't stand an FBI Interrogation of Colson.]

"Colson can talk about the President, if he cracks. You know I was on Colson's tail for months to nail him..."

Larry O'Brien on the Hughes deal, Colson told me he was going to get the information I wanted one way or the other. And that was O'Brien's office they were bugging, wasn't it? And who's behind it, Colson's boy, Hunt.

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[After the I.T.T. scandal broke, O'Brien, as Democratic chairman, normally used it in an effort to discredit the Republican, Mr. Haldeman says that has gave President Nixon and Mr. Colson still another reason for wanting to discredit Mr. O'Brien.]

In the months ahead Nixon was to fight an epic battle to prevent disclosure of the tapes. And when finally he was forced to turn over some of them, there was further embarrassment. Unexplained gaps and erasures, including the famous 18½-minute conversation of June 20th.

My own perception had always been that Nixon simply began to erase all of the Watergate material from the tapes.

But Nixon was the least dexterous man I have known: clumsy would be too elegant a word to describe his mechanical aptitude. Reportedly, Pat Nixon once said that when they were courting, "Dick almost killed himself trying to learn to roller skate."

So I believed that Nixon had started trying to erase the 18½ minute gap, but realized it would take him ten years in fits and starts, (The investigators counted five different starts in the 18½ minute gap alone.)

But now, I'm confused, because of the tapes referred to that 18½ minute gap (in a telephone call after I resigned). In this way: "Rose's 18 minutes."

(On the first order, given by Richard Nixon when he became President in 1969 was to rip out the tape-recording system installed in the President's office by Lyndon B. Johnson, J. Edgar Hoover, the F.B.I. director, had told [But in 1971 a new taping system was installed.]

President Nixon, Mr. Haldeman says in his book, wanted an accurate record of everything said in his office. He particularly wanted to pin down the accusations of Henry Kissinger and other advisors who often came up with their own versions of controversial policy discussions.

The Haldeman account maintains that one fatal mistake was made in installing the new system. Whereas President Johnson had had a switch under his desk with which he could turn off the recording equipment during sensitive discussions, Mr. Nixon's system operated automatically.

In the whole story of the White House recording system the one question asked over and over again by both friends and foes of Nixon is "Why didn't he destroy the tapes?"

Lamenting the Tapes

In a telephone call long after I left the White House.
Nixon laughed wishfully: 'You know it's funny, I was just listening to one of the early April tapes of a meeting between you and me. I had completely forgotten this, but in that meeting I said to you, 'Bob, maybe we security stuff.' And you said no, you thought we should get rid of all those tapes and just save him national keep them. Oh, well!'

As far as I know, that April conversation was the closest he ever came to any idea of destroying the tapes. Very soon after that conversation about destroying the tapes time ran out swiftly on Nixon. On April 15, Henry Petersen, the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Criminal Division at the Justice Department, came into the Oval Office in tennis shoes and jeans (he'd been working on his boat) to inform President John Dean, Watergate prosecutors. Already Dean had made charges the President's counsel, was cooperating fully with the against John Ehrlichman, John Mitchell and me in his escalating efforts to gain immunity, and the President knew full well who would be next.

Nixon quickly realized that the tapes could be the weapon he needed 'against Dean. While Dean would have to rely on his memory, the President might be able to use the tapes to trip him up.

But why didn't Nixon, who had so much to fear, destroy the tapes after their existence had been made public by Alex Butterfield, the White House aide who was in charge of the tapes, when questioned by Senator Sam Ervin's Watergate Committee?

That the tapes would ever be heard by anyone other than The President just never dreamed it was possible himself. And, meanwhile, he could use them in his Watergate battle.

The F.B.I.'s Mistaken Theory

I hung up, wondering at a coincidence. Three nights ago, Nixon had called me, suggesting I tell Ehrlichman that the Cubans were in the Bay of Pigs. The implication was that there was some sort of connection between that C.I.A. operation and Watergate. Now the F.B.I. also thought there was a connection, but this prior conversation with Nixon has another significance. It led me to make a crucial—even historical—error.

I did something I shouldn't have done. Dean had suggested that I call Gen. Vernon Walters at the C.I.A. I knew Walters well. Normally, I would have simply called him over to my office at the White House and asked Walters that we don't know where that Mexican investigation is going to lead. Have him talk to Gray—and maybe the C.I.A. can turn off the F.B.I. down there in Mexico.

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Ironically, it was one remark that Nixon had made earlier in his telephone call on June 20 that caused me to change my routine. His surprising reference to the Bay of Pigs had puzzled me. Nixon obviously knew something about the C.I.A. that was unknown to me, and I felt I should check with him before asking Walters to help.

And so I walked into the Oval Office and as it turned out sealed Nixon's doom, as soon as I closed the door. Nixon listened silently as I read from my notes about Dean's report on the Mexican bank connection.

Nixon wanted to know if they had traced the money to the contributors.

I said, "They've traced to a name, but they haven't gotten to the guy yet, Ken Dahlberg. He gave $25,000 in Minnesota and the check went directly to this guy Barker."
in deeper political terms than 1. He asked me if the money was traceable from C.R.F., and I said yes. He said, "I'm just thinking, if the contributors don't cooperate, what do they say? That they were approached by the Cubans? That's what Dahlberg has to say, the Texans, too."

But that remark I realized Nixon thought the connection of the Watergate burglars to C.R.F. might be avoided. I didn't think there was much chance of that. With McCord under arrest, so I steered Nixon off that course, and back to the C.I.A.

Nixon's Directions to Mislead

He gazed out of the window, then turned to me. "When you get the C.I.A. people in say, 'Look, the problem is that this will open up the whole Bay of Pigs thing again!' So they should call the F.B.I. in and for the good of the country don't go any further into this case. Period."

Richard Helms, the C.I.A. director, and General Walters entered John Ehrlichman's office at 1:30. I laid out the situation. He was surprised by revealing he had already talked to the F.B.I. director about Watergate on the previous day. He said he had made it plain to Gray that the C.I.A. was not connected to Watergate in any way, and none of the suspects had worked for the agency in the last two years.

Elegantly put, with just the right, tone of injured innocence. Of course, the Ervin committee would later discover the pious statement was three-fourths baloney. The C.I.A. was connected to the Watergate matter. They run into or expose one another's 'assets' they will not interfere with each other."

Now in Ehrlichman's office the C.I.A. was stonewalling me. "Not connected." "No way." Then I played Nixon's trump card. "The President asked me to tell you this entire affair may be connected to the Bay of Pigs, and if it opens up, the Bay of Pigs may be blown."

Silence. Finally, I said, "I'm just following my instructions, Dick. This is what the President told me to relay to you."

Helms was settwe. "All right," he said. But the atmosphere had changed. Surprisingly, the two C.I.A. officials expressed no concern about the request that Walters go to see Gray. And Walters later testified that when he and Helms went downstairs they talked briefly and Helms said, "You must remind Mr. Gray of the agreement between the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. that if they run into or expose one another's 'assets' they will not interfere with each other."


I went back to see the President and told him his strategy had worked.

And so the "smoking gun" conversations were created to rest, stored on a reel, in a closet gathering dust until August 1974.

What 'Bay of Pigs' Meant

Years later, former CBS correspondent Dan Schoor called me. He was seeking information concerning the FBI investigation Nixon had mounted against him in August 1971.

Schoor later sent me his fascinating book, "Clear the Air." In it I was interested to find that evidence he had gleaned while investigating the C.I.A. finally cleared up for me the mystery of the Bay of Pigs connection.

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It seems that in all of those Nixon references to the Bay of Pigs, he was actually referring to the Kennedy assassination.

As an outgrowth of the Bay of Pigs, the C.I.A. made several attempts on Fidel Castro's life. The deputy director of plans at the C.I.A. at the time was Richard Helms.

Unfortunately, Castro knew of the assassination attempts all the time. On Sept. 7, 1963, a few months before John Kennedy was assassinated, Castro made a speech in which he was quoted, "Let Kennedy and his brother Robert take care of themselves, since they, too, can be the victims of an attempt which will cause their death."

After Kennedy was killed, the C.I.A. launched a fantastic cover-up. Many of the facts about Lee Harvey Oswald undoubtedly pointed to a Cuban connection.

1. Oswald had been arrested in New Orleans in August 1963 while distributing pro-Castro pamphlets.
2. On a New Orleans radio program he extolled Cuba and defended Castro.
3. Less than two months before the assassination he visited the Cuban consulate in Mexico City and tried to obtain a visa.

And when Nixon said, "It's likely to blow the whole Bay of Pigs," he might have been reminding Helms, not so gently, of the cover-up of the C.I.A. assassination attempts on the hero of the Bay of Pigs, Fidel Castro—a C.I.A. operation that may have triggered the Kennedy tragedy and which Helms desperately wanted to hide.
An Effort That Was Bound to Fail

What is our conclusion? We do not yet know the whole Watergate story, and may never know it. President Nixon feared a Colson role in the break-in and suspected that John Mitchell might also be involved. He wanted to protect them. In addition, he feared the revelation of what he called "other things"—including both national security matters and Colson political projects.

The cover-up collapsed because it was doomed from the start. Morally and legally it was the wrong thing to do—so it should have failed. Tactically, too many people knew too much. Too many foolish risks were taken. Too little judgment was used at every stage to evaluate the potential risks vs. the gains. And when the crunch came, too many people decided to save their own skins at whatever cost to the President or anyone else. Especially John Dean, the President's young legal counsel.

Thus, there were many many players in the Watergate drama—and behind them all lurks the ever-present shadow of the President of the United States.

Had Watergate been handled through the usual White House staff system, and been managed by Nixon in his usual fashion, it would never have happened in the first place. And even if it happened, it would have been handled in such a way as to avoid the disaster that it eventually became.

A Problem Outside the White House

Why was this problem dealt with differently? Partly because the Democratic National Committee headquarters break-in was completely a political problem, coming under the jurisdiction of the Committee to Re-elect the President instead of the White House (the whole reason for setting up C.R.P. was to handle political operations outside of the White House).

This particular problem was also handled differently because either the President did not know or did not choose to tell us, what it was really all about and what he wanted done about it.

One of the reasons for my lack of concern after the Watergate break-in was my complete confidence that President Nixon had always told me everything of any importance, and that I therefore always had all the information I needed to assess the relative dangers at any time. But if my theory of the break-in is correct, then it is obvious to me now that this confidence was, at least in this case, misplaced.

Colson and Nixon had been operating in an area to which I paid little attention, but one which I should have realized could potentially cause a problem. Yet I preferred running the risk of Colson's getting out of control to losing his value to me in filling Nixon's need for lengthy discussion and planning in many political areas which I would have had to handle if Colson hadn't been there.

So, perhaps arrogantly, I went on my way, confident that Watergate was a "third-rate burglary" foiled up by some of the people at C.R.P. and that any political attempt to tie it to the White House would fail.

This was perhaps Nixon's most important mistake. For if he had concluded that the break-in resulted from Colson's implementation of a Presidential desire to link Larry O'Brien to Howard Hughes, it must have been obvious to him that the buckheads we had assumed would contain the break-in to C.R.P. would never hold.

Many people have wondered why Watergate was not handled better. It's a fair question. The answer may be that we did not know what we were dealing with until it was too late. We thought we knew at the time, but a key part of the puzzle was withheld from us. Most of us would have been willing to sacrifice ourselves, if necessary, to save the Presidency that we believed in. But we couldn't even do that because we didn't know the real situation. And because we didn't know, many of us weren't even concerned at first—especially as the President gave us no hint.

This claim of a lack of concern throughout the White House seems to be hard for most people to swallow. But in the days when it was happening, it was only a very small blip on the overall radar screen of White House activity, interest and concern.

A Few Crucial Tapes

For example, all the tapes that were thought to be useful in finding out what actually had gone on in the Watergate cover-up were subpoenaed. They covered a few days in June, one in September, a few in January. It was not until the end of February that there was any real White House concentration on Watergate and by then the cover-up was practically over.

I remember a stiflingly muggy Washington summer day in 1973. In the fifth floor attic room of the Executive Office Building with its corrugated tin roof and almost unbearable heat. Even the little window air conditioner had given up and was just dripping water on the floor as the ice which jammed it melted in the heat. I had been locked in there for more than two hours and despite the urgency of my work on my files, which had been stacked there sheets that were my notes of all my meetings with the President for the Watergate period—from June 1972 until my resignation in April 1973.

I couldn't resist pointing out to the Secret Service agent the difference between the two piles of paper in front of me. The pile of pages that had any mention of Watergate on them was less than a half inch high. The pile of all the other non-Watergate pages was over a foot high. Clear indication of the relative importance of Watergate when it was happening.

The Soviet détente and the opening to China would have been pursued vigorously and effectly. The Middle East initiative would have been maintained and a stable peace established.

John Connally would have been appointed Vice President and would have been nominated by the Republican Party for President in 1976.

I continue to have the utmost respect for the President that Richard Nixon could have been, and usually was; and utmost sorrow for the tragedy that brought him to his present state, thereby depriving this nation and the world of the continuing leadership of the man I believe uniquely fitted the overwhelming demands of the times. I am certain that the perspective of history will greatly change the attitudes and views of those who evaluate the Nixon Presidency from the current continuing obsession with all that was bad—and there was some—to a real appreciation of all that was truly great and good—and there was an enormous amount.

Pride Undiminished by Events

I have paid a terrible price for that privilege, but I have had plenty of time to reflect on the question of whether it was worth it. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind today that if I were back at the starting point, faced with the decision of whether to join up, even knowing what the ultimate outcome would be, I would unhesitatingly do it.

Few men in all history have had the privilege of being raised as high as I was; and few have had the tragedy of being brought as low. It has been an enriching experience in all of its phases. I am eternally grateful for all of it and...
for what it has taught me.

When several of us from the White House were at Camp David, the Presidential retreat, planning the reorganization of the Government in 1972, some classic feuds came to a climax there. The mightiest was the long-running show: Kissinger vs. Rogers. The President's national security adviser against the Secretary of State.

Both Rogers and Kissinger would bring their complaints to me. Rogers, a very nice, considerate man, could still explode, with some reason, when he learned that secret negotiations were going on without his knowing it. "How can I testify on the Hill, or communicate with the Soviets, if I don't know everything that's going on?" he would say.

Henry, on his part, viewed the entire State Department monolith as a conspiracy of thousands of men and women "out to get me."

In November 1972, we moved to resolve this long-standing feud by replacing Rogers as Secretary of State with a man who could work better with Henry.

Despite the popular press belief, Henry Kissinger did not want or expect to be Secretary of State in 1972.

From my many conversations with Henry in those days, I know that he realized that the true foreign affairs power position was his National Security Council post at the White House. The Secretary of State was a figurehead.

Nixon wrestled with the problem for months. Bill Rogers was his oldest friend in government, Nixon didn't want to hurt Rogers, but he knew Henry was right.

Easing Out Rogers

So Nixon called in Henry and we talked it out. It was decided Bill Rogers would be asked to resign at the end of Nixon's first term. Henry agreed strongly with Nixon's choice of a successor, a man he liked and could work with, the Ambassador to Germany, Kenneth Rush. But Henry had spoken to me in a corridor of the White House: "I won't believe it until I see it, Haldeman. That Rogers will never quit. He'll be with me until I die."

I had the unenviable task of telling Richard Nixon's closest personal friend in the Government that Richard Nixon had decided it was now time for him to leave.

In rather cold tones, he told me, "I feel very strongly that it is not in either my interest or the President's for me to resign at this time." So I went to see the President.

As I rather expected, the President was not up to fighting it out with his old friend, and he agreed to Rogers's concept of a commitment to leave by mid-June. I didn't blame Nixon. But I wasn't happy either because I dreaded the words Nixon would say next: "You tell Henry."

I told him Bill Rogers would leave in June for certain. How ironic is history on all levels. I ended up in Camp David five months later with Bill Rogers and Richard Nixon talking resignation, all right. Only this time it was Rogers telling Nixon that I must resign instead of the other way around.

Ironically, it was because Rogers did not resign as he wanted him to in November that Henry ended up Secretary of State himself.

And Kenneth Rush became the Secretary of State who-never-was.