

27 January 1974

Dear Harold:

We're much puzzled by Sam Ervin's sudden decision to postpone further WG hearings indefinitely until after the Mitchell-Stans jury is selected and sequestered. This appears to be an obviously flimsy excuse, to be interpreted as such, since it could have been made for the same reason at any time, and there's still time to hold the proposed six days of hearings (agreed upon only the day before Ervin's announcement by a 4-3 vote along party lines) before jury selection even begins (it could begin Feb. 19, but probably won't).

It would appear, therefore, that Sam or somebody has been leaned upon very hard. No clue thus far as to how or by whom. However this development seems to fall into somewhat the same category of Egil Krogh's decision that he didn't, after all, get his instructions for the Fielding breakin straight from the Oval Office. Krogh's disarmament, however, is rather clearly explained by his statement that he had just listened to a tape of his meeting with Nixon, clearly implying that the tape (no longer?) bears out his former story.

To get back to Ol' Sam's change of heart, it comes so suddenly and drastically that it seems to suggest some very violent threat in the background, and in any case is the same thing we have seen before -- how every investigation pointing toward Rebozo somehow gets derailed before anyone can get him on the witness stand. Whether that is the reason this time or not, a threat of great seriousness if not violence is implied, and if you've been able to develop any ideas as to what we'd be most interested.

I do not, for obvious reasons, suggest that the Paracel Island incident has anything to do with this, but do suggest what I have felt all along, that it is of potentially great importance. The rather elaborate scenario followed thus far suggests the same kind of planning that was behind the Gulf of Tonkin incident, and the same potential is present. In the first place, Chinese claims to these islands date back to the Han Dynasty (before Christ) and Vietnam's earliest claim is put at 1802, with the earliest in modern times at 1932, the latter being made while Vietnam still was a French colony and at a time when China was being attacked by Japan in Manchuria and Shanghai. The incident was started by the Saigon Navy, which sent a small force that found only a Chinese sign on the beach (no doubt claiming ~~xxx~~ sovereignty and warning others off) and which, when it landed, was then attacked by Chinese ships. In the battle that followed, Saigon asked the 7th Fleet for air cover twice, and was refused. But the next day American planes reconnoitred the scene. And there was an American civilian from Saigon along with the Vietnamese landing party. He was captured by the Chinese. He sounds like a CIA employe.

Since there ~~undoubtedly~~ undoubtedly is a great deal we haven't been told about all this, it seems possible that Nixon was showing one and all who might be interested that he is fully capable of plunging us into war at any moment. I don't say that is what happened, but it has that potential. As far as Ol' Sam is concerned, it seems like a most roundabout way to get him to lay off, but the fact remains that he ~~HAD~~ laid off and gave only the flimsiest excuse for doing so. Something about the way the news broke this past few days gives us the feeling that something rather powerful is at work behind the scenes. I say that in spite of Hugh Sidey's accurate remark on the Agranovsky program that whenever the WH goes into one of these hang tough sequences it usually means that all hell is about to break loose in the form of some further devastating revelation of WH scandal.

Best. jdw