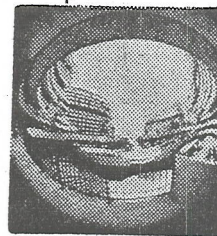


A Refusal To Believe It All



By Haynes Johnson

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THE WATERGATE, shortly after midnight, Sunday, June 18, 1972: Frank Wills, 24, slim, black, an \$80-a-week security guard who lived in a one-room Washington apartment, was patrolling alone that night. The other guard who was supposed to be on duty had left early. Wills was checking the bottom level of the building when he noticed tape placed over the latches of two doors so the doors wouldn't lock when closed. He removed the tape and continued on his rounds. It hadn't struck him as suspicious: "I thought it might be maintenance men." Still, "just to make sure," he returned about 10 minutes later.

This time he found the locks on all the doors of the level taped open. He immediately went to the lobby and called the metropolitan police. After the police arrived, they discovered the locks on upper floor levels also had been taped and that the 6th floor suite occupied by the Democratic National Committee had been tampered with and opened. "When we went inside all the office lights were on and we saw men speaking in foreign accents moving around and crawling on the floor," a policeman said. All the men were well-dressed, all were wearing rubber surgical gloves.

The police confiscated lock-picks, door jimmies, a walkie-talkie, a short-wave receiver, 40 rolls of unexposed film, two 35-millimeter cameras, three pen-sized tear gas guns and an array of sophisticated eavesdropping equipment capable of picking up and transmitting all conversations, including those over telephones. They also seized \$2,300 in cash, most in \$100 bills, with the serial numbers in sequence. One of the suspects was carrying an application blank of the kind the Democrats had been sending to college newspapers for issuance

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of press credentials for their presidential nominating convention to be held three weeks later in Miami Beach. In the address books carried by two of the five men police noted the name of someone called "Hunt." Beside Hunt's name one of the suspects had written "W.H." Another noted Hunt's association as "W. House."

THE WHITE HOUSE, about 9:15 Monday night, April 30, 1973: President Richard M. Nixon was sitting behind his desk in the Oval Office, flanked by a bust of Lincoln and the American flag, reporting to the American people on what "has come to be known as the Watergate affair." The President was in the midst of his address when he said: "Looking back at the history of this case, two questions arise: How could it have happened—who is to blame?" Moments later, he said: "I will not place blame on subordinates, on people whose zeal exceeded their judgment and who may have done wrong in a cause they deeply believe to be right. In any organization the man at the top must bear the responsibility. That responsibility, therefore, belongs here in this office. I accept it."

The President had taken the responsibility, but still the larger questions lodged between those two events remained unanswered: How — and why — did it happen? What was to be accomplished at such risk? How could so many of the President's men—men he himself had carefully picked for their loyalty and dedication—betray their public trust? What degree of damage has Watergate done to Richard Nixon personally, to the office of the presidency, and to the judicial process? And, perhaps the most perplexing piece of the puzzle, why did it take so long for Watergate to make any impact on the country?

It is not as though nothing has been known about Watergate for the past 10 months. Indeed, within days after the break-in last June many of the critical elements in the case had already appeared in the press.

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In less than a week it had been established that E. Howard Hunt, the former CIA agent, had been hired by the White House after a recommendation from a key Nixon adviser, Charles W. Colson; that Hunt had refused to answer questions by FBI agents in connection with the Watergate break-in; that Bernard Barker, his longtime CIA associate arrested at the Watergate, had attempted a year before to obtain blueprints of the Miami Beach convention hall and its air-conditioning system; that big money was involved, that it flowed to a Miami bank, and that Barker withdrew large sums in \$100 bills; that James McCord, now established as a high-ranking veteran CIA agent and previously a toiler for the FBI, had been hired not just by the Committee for the Re-election of the President, but in October, 1971, by the Republican National Committee; that forgeries and diagrams of the two large ballrooms to be used for George McGovern's Florida convention headquarters figured in the case; that there had been other break-ins—one also at the Watergate, in the offices of Sargent Shriver, Patricia Harris and Max Kampelman, all prominent in national Democratic Party affairs; and, in the most bizarre touch of all, that Martha Mitchell was saying publicly she would leave her husband John unless he left the Nixon re-election effort because of "all those dirty things that go on."

Despite all this, there was no public outcry.

Enter G. Gordon Liddy

WITHIN TWO WEEKS after the break-in other damaging information had come to light. There was the discovery of a loaded pistol, diagrams of the Democratic National Committee headquarters and electronic eavesdropping devices in Hunt's office within the White House complex. There was Mitchell's own resignation as director of the Nixon campaign apparatus. And it was learned—and printed—that Hunt had been gathering considerable information about Sen. Edward M. Kennedy's accident at Chappaquiddick.

Still no public outcry.

Within a month the name of G. Gordon Liddy had entered the case, and his association with the White House and the re-election committee had been established. Phone records dating back to March, 1972, showed that Barker had made at least 15 calls to the Nixon campaign organization in Washington headquartered at 1701 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, just across from the White House.

August, after the Democrats had met and chosen George McGovern as their presidential nominee and the month the Republicans gathered to again nominate Mr. Nixon, brought further major disclosures. On August 1, The Washington Post reported that a \$25,000 check had been given personally to Maurice Stans, the former Secretary of Commerce who had become the President's chief fund-raiser in his re-election campaign. The check, in turn, was deposited in Barker's Miami bank account. Questions about

secret funds and huge publicly unaccounted campaign donations dominated the headlines for the rest of the month. On Aug. 26 the General Accounting Office, Congress' fiscal watchdog, reported "apparent violations" of the federal Election Campaign Act

"They were acting because they sincerely believed that the end justified the means of keeping him in office."

by the Nixon re-election committee. Banner headlines trumpeted official documentation that a \$350,000 cash fund had been kept in Stans' re-election office safe.

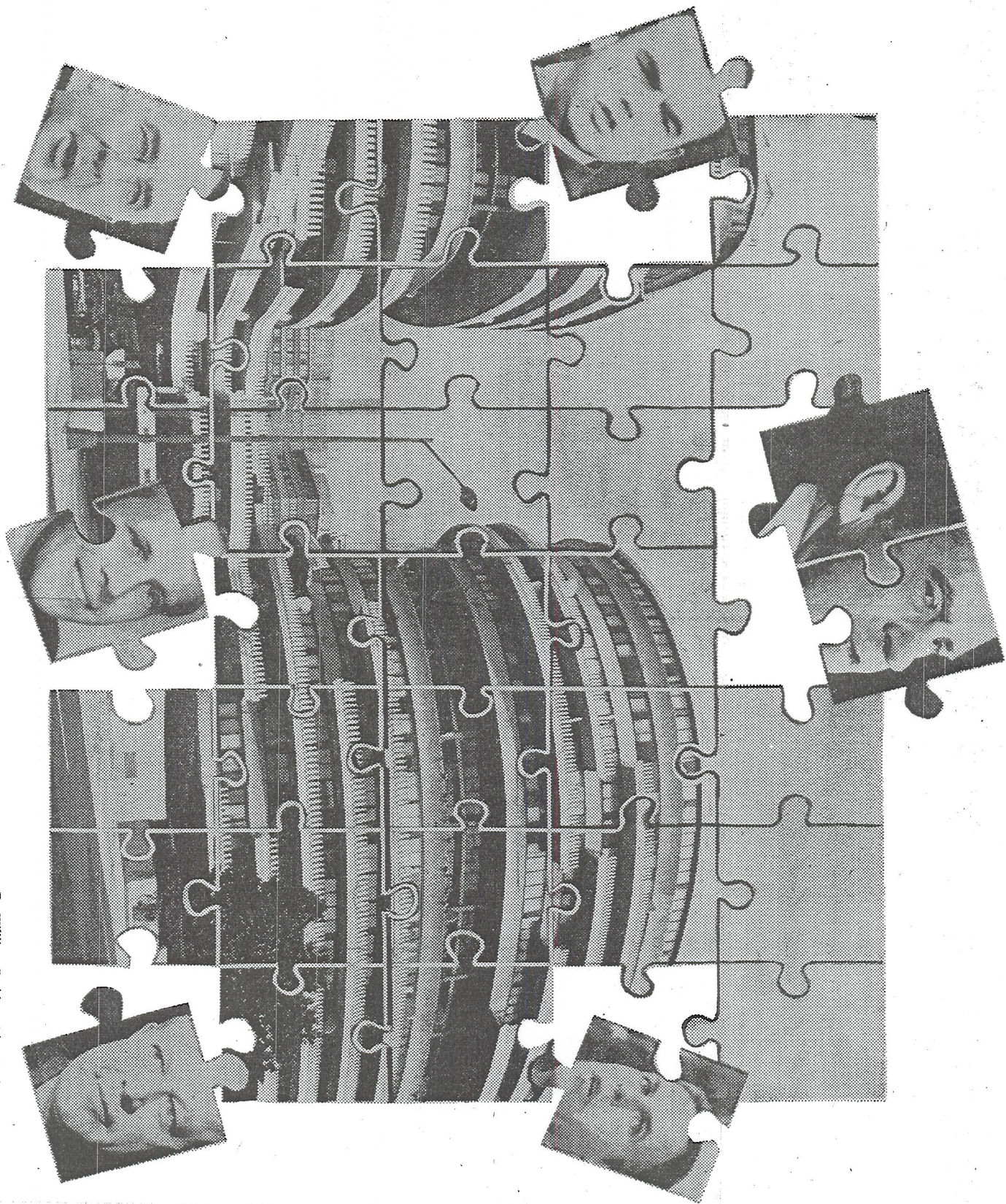
Still no outcry. Damning as these collective reports had been on a daily basis over more than two months, and ominous as were the implications, the American public did not believe. In crossing the country during the month of September interviewing voters in their homes, a team of eight Washington Post reporters would go for days without hearing a single person voluntarily bring up the Watergate case. The people did not want to face the implications, did not want to believe them, or did not want to acknowledge that they could be anything more than another example of dirty tricks employed by all politicians.

Believing the Denials

IF THEY FOLLOWED the case at all, they evidently believed the official denials which had begun immediately following the break-in news and which continued as each episode was unveiled. They believed because they wanted to believe. It was unthinkable that such a massive pattern of lying could be conducted from so high a level.

June 18, John Mitchell, commenting on the break-in and the knowledge that McCord worked for his committee: "The person involved is the proprietor of a private security agency who was employed by our committee months ago to assist with the installation of our security system. He has, as we understand it, a number of business clients and interests and we have no knowledge of these relationships... There is no place in our campaign, or in the electoral process, for this type of activity and we will not permit it nor condone it."

June 20, Ken W. Clawson, deputy director of communications at the White House, commenting on the fact that Hunt had been hired at Charles Colson's recommendation in the White House: "I've looked into the matter very thoroughly and I am convinced that neither Mr. Colson nor anyone else at the White House had any knowledge of, or



By William Perkins—The Washington Post

participation in, this deplorable incident at the DNC." Hunt, he stressed, had been working as a White House consultant on declassification of the Pentagon Papers and most recently on narcotics intelligence.

June 21, Ronald Ziegler: "We don't know where Mr. Hunt has been because he has not been involved in a consulting capacity with the White House since March." He added that President Nixon was not concerned "about any allegation of the committing of a crime" and that "the appropriate investigations of that are taking place."

July 8, Mitchell, after resigning "to devote more time to his wife and family" and being praised by the President for making "a most substantial sacrifice, personal and financial," answering whether his departure was in any way connected with Watergate: "On the contrary, if my own investigation had turned up a link between the White House and the raid, I would have wanted to stick around and clear it up." His own Watergate inquiries, he went on, "have not produced much more than the private agencies or the newspapers have," but he was satisfied that no one in authority in the Republican apparatus had anything to do with it.

An Explosive Report

THE DISCLOSURES and denials came ever more quickly through September and October, and still it was the denials which were believed.

There were allegations about destruction of Nixon committee financial records after the June break-in, of Mitchell controlling a secret fund used to pay for gathering information on the Democrats, of eavesdropping logs being delivered to the committee after the "bugs" had been implanted in Democratic headquarters before the arrests, of an attempt to place more "bugs" in McGovern's Capitol Hill campaign headquarters. More names surfaced: Jeb Stuart Magruder, Robert C. Mardian, Frederick La Rue, Alfred C. Baldwin.

Then, on Tuesday, Oct. 10, 1972, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of The Post disclosed the most explosive evidence to that time:

"FBI agents have established that the Watergate bugging incident stemmed from a massive campaign of political spying and sabotage conducted on behalf of President Nixon's re-election and directed by officials of the White House and the Committee for the Re-election of the President. The activities, according to information in FBI and Department of Justice files, were aimed at all the major Democratic presidential contenders and—since 1971—represented a basic strategy of the Nixon re-election effort."

They reported that hundreds of thousands of dollars in Nixon campaign contributions had been set aside to pay for an extensive undercover campaign aimed at discrediting individual Democratic presidential candidates and disrupting their campaigns. These activities, which they described as "unprecedented in scope and intensity," included following members of Democratic candidates' families and assembling dossiers on their personal lives; forging letters and distributing them under the candidates' letterheads; leaking false and manufactured information to the press; throwing campaign schedules into disarray; seizing confidential campaign files and looking into the lives of dozens of Democratic campaign workers; planting provocateurs among groups preparing to demonstrate at both the Republican and Democratic conventions; and investigating potential donors to the Nixon campaign before their contributions were solicited.

The Sharpest Response

FIVE DAYS later, the Post reporters disclosed that Dwight Chapin, the President's appointments secretary, was one of the "spy" contacts for Donald Segretti, who was paid for his undercover work by the President's personal lawyer, Herbert W. Kalmbach. And five days after that, they reported that Haldeman, the President's strong right-hand man and most trusted counselor, was among the officials authorized to approve payments from a secret espionage and sabotage fund.

These stories drew the sharpest response of all. "The Post had maliciously sought to give the appearance of a direct connection between the White House and the Watergate—a charge The Post knows—and a half dozen investigations have found—to be

false," said Clark MacGregor, chairman of the re-election committee.

And the people still wanted to believe the White House, still could not accept what had happened. Even today, after all the disclosures, many Americans do not want to believe it.

Of all the voices raised thousands of miles apart on the same day last week, two undoubtedly expressed the thoughts of many citizens. In California, Ronald Reagan said those responsible for Watergate should not be considered criminals. They are not, he said, "criminals at heart." In Washington, Melvin Laird said if the gravest suspicion—that the President himself in fact was involved—were proved true, that kind of disclosure "would be very bad for the country." There are some things, he added, that "I don't want to know."

In short, we should believe the best, not the worst.

Thus, at the heart of the Watergate affair lies more than a case study of power misused and trust misplaced. Watergate betrays an attitude. The President touched on it in his speech last week when he said: "I know that it can be very easy under the intensive pressures of a campaign for even well-intentioned people to fall into shady tactics, to rationalize this on the grounds that what is at stake is of such importance to the nation that the end justifies the means."

This is precisely the cast of mind—that the ends do justify the means, that the most powerful people know what is best, that the system is served most effectively by those who are convinced that *their* motives, *their* goals, *their* methods justify the actions taken—that has resulted in the shaking of America's belief in the presidency.

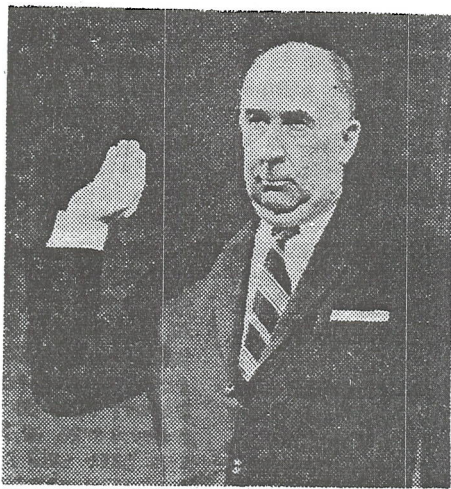
The Nixon Tone

IN THE COMMENTARIES on Watergate, much has been made of the grimly determined, disciplined, humorless, arrogant Nixon loyalists who have now become implicated, but, unpalatable though it may be, the President cannot easily disassociate himself from the attitudes of his subordinates. The tone in the Nixon White House has been set from the top down. It is a tone that has consistently articulated the idea that only *we* know what's best, *we* have the wisest sense of the country's course, *we* alone will make the necessary judgment and decisions, *we* will not brook criticism or dissent.

Thus, Richard Nixon: "The average American is just like the child in the family. You give him some responsibility and he is going to amount to something. He is going to do something. If, on the other hand, you make him completely dependent and pamper him and cater to him too much, you are going to make him soft, spoiled and eventually a very weak individual."

Thus, H. R. Haldeman: "He [the President] is naturally concerned by the kind of criticism that can get in the way of what he's trying to do, and that would be unfair criticism. Or the kind of criticism—you get a very good case in point right now where we're faced with the President having the other night on television very carefully explained . . . the background and the present status of his peace negotiations . . . and before that talk on television you could say that his critics, people who were opposing what he was doing, were unconsciously echoing the line that the enemy wanted echoed."

Thus, John Ehrlichman telling the FBI that he knew that G. Gordon Liddy and E.



Then-Attorney General Mitchell is sworn in to testify on organized crime.

Howard Hunt had broken into the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in September of 1971 and that he had merely instructed them "not to do this again."

Thus, John Mitchell, after repeatedly denying that he knew anything about the Watergate break-in, conceding that while still chief legal officer of the United States, he twice participated in private meetings in which illegal activities were raised and discussed, but clearly took no steps to prosecute them.

Thus, Richard Kleindienst as attorney general telling a Senate hearing that the President has the power to forbid 2.5 million federal employees from testifying before Congress under any circumstances, including the commission of a crime, and saying: "If it feels he is exercising power like a monarch you could conduct an impeachment proceeding."

Thus, Charles W. Colson, in a memo to the White House staff 72 days before the 1972 presidential election: "Think to yourself at the beginning of each day, 'What am I going to do to help the President's re-election today?' and then at the end of each day think what you did in fact do to help the President's re-election . . . Just so you understand me, let me point out that the statement in last week's UPI story that I was once reported to have said that 'I would walk over my grandmother if necessary' is absolutely accurate."

Thus, Dwight Chapin, before the grand jury: "I had the authority to do a lot of things; I had the authority to plan a presidential trip to China; I sure as hell had the authority to go and do some other things." When a juror noted that Segretti had been paid "pretty high" (\$16,000) for "such low-grade work," he asked about Segretti's work before he had been discharged from the Army. He hadn't been getting the salary in the Army, had he? Chapin was asked. "As a taxpayer I would like to complain if he was," Chapin said. After the prosecutor suggested the taxpayers might be justified in complaining about the kind of work Segretti

was doing as an alleged political saboteur, Chapin haughtily retorted: "That's none of their concern. This is private enterprise."

Thus, DeVan L. Shumway, director of information for the Committee for the Re-election of the President, refusing to make available for questions the man who hired James W. McCord Jr., "because he is not a public figure."

Such was the anything-goes attitude, the imperiousness, the utter disdain that emanated from the Nixon White House. And, even more frightening, for a long time most Americans were not outraged. Perhaps they were weary after a decade of Vietnam abroad and civil strife at home. Perhaps they were willing to pay any price for a sense of stability and security. At any rate, most Americans just did not want to believe that such statements were an accurate reflection of the thinking of the men around the President.

They certainly did not want to believe that these attitudes were in any way associated with the President himself. Whatever Richard Nixon's problems in the past—over Helen Gahagan Douglas, the 1952 secret Nixon fund and Checkers, over his unsuccessful 1962 gubernatorial campaign and the later finding of a San Francisco court that he and Haldeman had authorized an effort to sabotage his opponent among registered Democrats—in 1972 American voters were saying they had confidence and respect in him. Now, a little more than three months after his second inauguration, the President finds a dramatic change in public attitudes toward him. On Friday, for example, half of all those interviewed in a special Gallup Poll said they believe that Mr. Nixon participated in a coverup of Watergate. The President not only has damaged his own personal standing, but it seems certain that he has diminished the public awe and respect for his office—and maybe he has reduced presidential power as well.

Now that the President and his men have been overtaken by Watergate and so many unthinkable thoughts have turned out to be true, there is a disposition to regard the Nixon team as an aberrant breed. They are, as Michael Davie suggested recently, "Orange County" men, men on the make, men of limited vision. They are the hacks and flacks of the advertising-PR world, swol-

len with power, contemptuous of critics whether in the Congress or the press.

There is some truth in this view. Certainly Watergate, as we now understand it, was an audacious attempt to use any means—including subverting the entire political process, the judiciary and the press—and a willingness to destroy anyone and anything that stood in the way of realizing the final desired end: retaining the presidency. In scope and scale, America has never experienced anything like it. But the Nixon people are not the prototypes of a political animal we have never seen before. Nor is Watergate, unfortunately, entirely alien to the American political experience.

Precursors of Watergate

WATERGATE FLOWS out of a historical background of sleazy tactics and uneasy ethical standards in the employment of money, dirty tricks and assaults on character—all in the pursuit of political power. The mentality of Watergate also comes after a period in which men of highest power in the American government have often employed an end-justifies-the-means philosophy. For years, the end was safeguarding the country from alien threats, from the Communists, if you will, and the means has sometimes been to violate our treaty obligations by attempting to subvert or overthrow foreign governments (Guate-

mala, 1954; Cuba, 1961; South Vietnam, 1963; Chile, 1970). At home, the Justice Department, the FBI and the Pentagon have engaged in illegal acts, have spied on American citizens, have attempted to impair reputations (wiretapping, Army dossiers on "suspect" citizens, Martin Luther King). And ever since the U-2 spy plane incident, there has been a history of U.S. spokesmen publicly lying or trying to cover up embarrassing facts (the Cuban missile crisis, the Pentagon Papers, Watergate). All, always, in the apparent belief that the government knew best, that in employing dubious means it was nevertheless achieving desirable ends.

So it was, it appears, with the Nixon men who planned and executed Watergate, and the broader campaign of espionage and sabotage. They were not motivated by desire for personal gain, for their own Swiss bank accounts or villas on the Riviera. They were acting because they sincerely believed that the end—re-electing the man they thought the best leader—justified the means of keeping him in office.

That may explain the rationale for Watergate, but it does not answer the specific

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questions of when it began and why it was thought necessary. We do not know, at this point, all those details. There are, however, strong clues.

The Rehearsal: 1970

IT SEEMS NOW that for an explanation of Watergate one can look back to the congressional campaign of 1970, in which President Nixon and his chief political operatives made a bold attempt to fashion the beginnings of their long-hoped-for "new majority." It was an ugly campaign, a campaign of smears and scare tactics, of appeals to fears of crime and violence, of the most lavish expenditure of funds in American history, of slogans and epithets directed against the Democrats, the press and the "radiclibs," the "impudent snobs," the "effete elite" and the "rotten apples." The Nixon administration, led by the President himself with Spiro Agnew as a principal spokesman, vigorously criss-crossed the country seeking to gain control of the Senate and improve the Republican position in the House and governorships. It was also a try-out for 1972.

On Wednesday morning, Nov. 4, 1970, after the ballots had been counted, the President's efforts had failed: The Democrats had solidly retained control of the Senate and House and totally erased the Republicans' two-to-one majority in the nation's governorships. Richard Nixon was in trouble. It was quite possible that he would turn out to be a one-term president. The polls, for instance, showed Sen. Edmund Muskie beating him in head-to-head encounters, and Sen. Edward Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey running even with him. On Feb. 1, 1971, The Harris Survey showed Muskie beating Nixon 43 to 40. In March, it was Muskie 44 to 39. In May, it was Muskie 48 to 39.

There is evidence that the Nixon political operatives were spurred on in their espionage and sabotage campaign by the 1970 political results and the polls showing the President losing to the leading Democrat.

Listen, for instance, to these remarks by a man who had been personally close to Mr. Nixon, and who knew intimately the White House operation and state of mind:

"The President was walking into a one-term presidency in the summer of '71—on almost every issue," he said. "Wallace had always been a threat. Muskie had come out of the '70 campaign with roses. Muskie was at his peak and Nixon was moving to his nadir. The fellows [in the White House] looking at the political landscape were saying one threat is Muskie; one threat is Wallace. Those were the big things around."

'Extraordinarily Able People'

THEN, REFERRING TO Watergate, he said, "I can see how it happened. Early in '71 you say the guy who can hurt me the worst is Muskie. The guy who can hurt me the least is McGovern. So help me, we'll nominate McGovern. There is a whole bunch of extraordinarily able people they [the Nixon political apparatus] have to accomplish it."

Perhaps he was right. We do not know.

The President has now addressed himself in public to what he called "this whole sordid affair" and to "how far this false doctrine" of the end justifying the means can take us. And he has made this pledge:

"I will do everything in my power to insure that the guilty are brought to justice and that such abuses are purged from our political processes in the years to come long after I have left this office."

In that, Americans who have lost such faith in their leaders and institutions in recent years firmly do want to believe.