

# National Security Used To Counter Hunt Move

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President Nixon decided to invoke national security as a defense strategy to counter reported "blackmail" threats by Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr., the White House tapes transcripts demonstrated yesterday.

The Oval Office conversations reveal that national security—a central theme in the President's Watergate defense—was employed as a major tactic in efforts by Mr. Nixon and his chief aides to avoid the appearance of criminal liability in the Ellsberg break-in.

The transcript shows that when the President professed to have first learned, in a March 17, 1973, conversation with John W. Dean III, of the burglary of the office of the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, Mr. Nixon proclaimed it "irrelevant."

Dean had raised the matter in discussing the possible criminal liability of then-White House aide John D. Ehrlichman for his dealings with Hunt and fellow Watergate burglar G. Gordon Liddy.

When Dean mentioned the burglary the President is quoted as responding: "What in the world—what in the name of God was Ehrlichman having something (unintelligible) in the Ellsberg (unintelligible)?"

Dean explained that it was "part of an operation . . . in connection with the Pentagon Papers. They were—the whole thing—they wanted to get Ellsberg's psychiatric records for some reason. I don't know."

Mr. Nixon answered: "This is the first I ever heard of this." He then went on to describe it as "irrelevant."

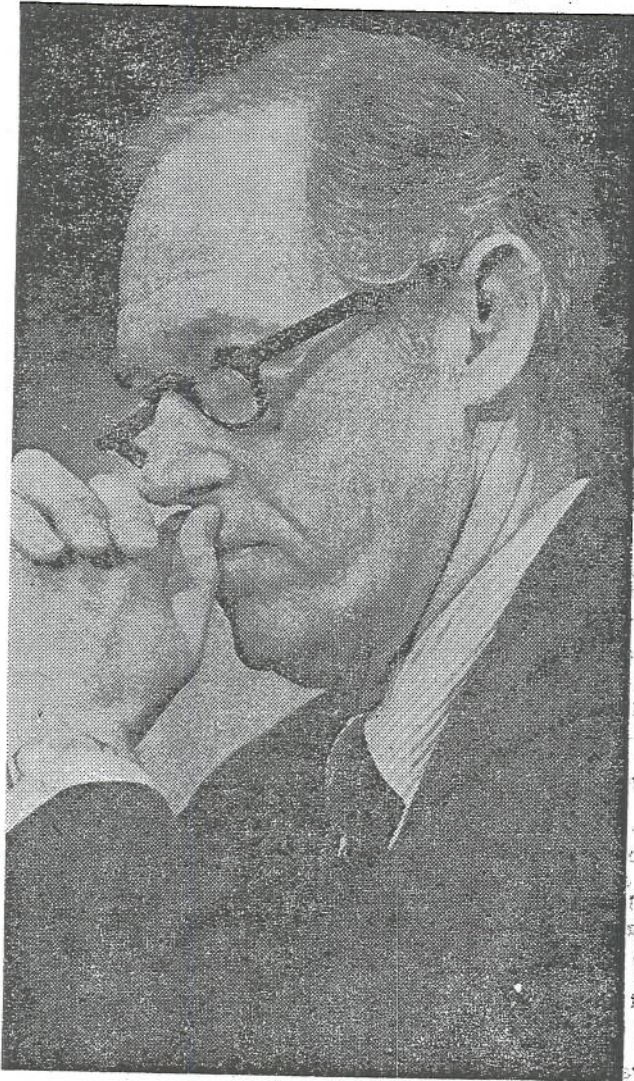
But four days later the subject came up again in the Oval Office. Dean reported to the President that Hunt was demanding an additional \$120,000.

"Hunt has now made a direct threat against Ehrlichman," Dean was quoted as telling President Nixon. "As a result of this, this is his blackmail. He says, 'I will bring John Ehrlichman down to his knees and put him in jail . . .'"

"Was he talking about Ellsberg?" the President asked.

"Ellsberg and apparently some other things. I don't know the full extent of it," Dean replied.

"I don't know about anything else," the President said.



by James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

E. Howard Hunt Jr.: \$120,000 demand on Oval Office.

Later in the conversation of March 21 Dean told Mr. Nixon that he believed Ehrlichman had potential criminal liability "because of this conspiracy to burglarize the Ellsberg doctor's office."

Subsequently, after H. R. (Bob) Haldeman joined them, the President posed the central question before the three men:

"What is the answer on this?" asked Mr. Nixon. "How (can) you keep it out, I don't know. You can't keep it out if Hunt talks . . ."

Dean at this point suggested that "you might put it on a national security grounds basis."

"National security," the President agreed. "We had to get information for national security grounds."

The three examined this defense.

"Then," interjected Dean, "the question is, why didn't the CIA do it or why didn't the FBI do it?"

"Because," offered Mr. Nixon, "we had to do it on a confidential basis."

"Because," chimed in

Haldeman, "we were checking them."

"Neither," concluded the President, "could be trusted."

"I think we could get by on that," Dean assured.

In his televised address Monday night the President said he considered "long and hard" whether he should allow "blackmail" payments to be made to Hunt because of Hunt's threat to expose "a potential national security problem of serious proportions."

The transcript revealed nothing beyond the colloquy on the Ellsberg burglary to suggest the existence of such a major national security issue. Mr. Nixon emphasized during the March 21 transcript that he knew of no other activities involving Hunt than the burglary of the psychiatrist's office and the Watergate break-in.

In the major Watergate defense statement that the President issued on May 22, 1973, he declared that "it is not my intention to place a national security 'cover' on Watergate . . ." He also disclosed that he had ordered the Justice Department, in questioning Hunt, to "stay out of national security matters."

The transcripts also disclosed the discussion of a plan between Dean and the President on March 13 to surface "dirty trick" activities by the Democrats during the 1968 campaign and also "destroy" the image of former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. The key to this scheme, as it was discussed by the two men, was to be a former top aide to Hoover, William Sullivan. (Hoover eventually fired Sullivan for his criticism of FBI performance.)

President Nixon asked why Sullivan would cooperate with the plan, and Dean explained that "the quid pro quo with Sullivan is that he wants someday to get back in the bureau very badly."

"That's easy," said the President.

Dean then suggested that Sullivan's "desire in life is

to set up a domestic national security intelligence program" and that "you could put him out in the CIA or someplace . . ."

The President answered: "We will do it."

Dean further told the President that Sullivan assisted former White House aide Tom Charles Huston on a plan for instituting a domestic national intelligence program during June, 1970. The plan was put into operation by the President for five days and rescinded because of the bitter opposition of Hoover.

Huston's plan provided for illegal break-ins and telephone and mail surveillance of suspected subversives.



In discussing the prospects of Sullivan's employment to counter the Watergate revelations that were pouring out in the press, the President said the former FBI official's disclosures of Democratic irregularities "would be a hell of a break for a newspaper, a hell of a story! The Star just run [sic] a whole story on a real bomb on the FBI..."

Mr. Nixon finally suggested that if Sullivan were at all reluctant to do the job because of its political nature, Dean could give him this assurance:

"Well, why don't you just tell him—he could say, 'I did no political work at all. My work in the Nixon administration was solely in the national security.' And that is thoroughly true!"

"That is true," Dean responded.

"Well, good luck," said President Nixon.