

The Transcript of a White House Meeting

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WASHINGTON, July 18—The following is the text of the transcript of a White House tape of a Presidential meeting of July 24, 1971. The transcript was prepared by the impeachment inquiry staff for the House Judiciary Committee.

EHRlichman: Sir, Bud is here and, uh, has staff information on this leak.

PRESIDENT: Right. Just a second [unintelligible]. Just got to talk to the guard a bit. All right. [President leaves room.]

E. I think that's the place to start, is to hit this guy.

KROGH: And hit him very hard in the next day or two. E. Well,

K. I don't know why—E. today, anybody can institute it. E. today—Yeah, get him in and polygraph him. Take it over, and then, uh, if you don't immediately get a confession from him, start with Henderson. K. Okay.

E. Do you agree with that? K. Yes I do. It's, uh—Haig said that you'll get resignations and you'll get legal action. If you do it this way. He said that—

E. En masse? K. En masse.

E. Well, we're only going to do, what, twenty—K. Twenty, twenty or thirty people.

E. Yeah. K. Might be thirty.

E. Yeah. K. He said you could influence ten to fifteen people that will resign. We don't know these people.

E. In State or in Defense? K. He didn't tell me exactly where. Just be aware of what will happen.

E. Yup. K. And [unintelligible] came back, back with us.

E. Oh. K. You know, and said, "All right," he said, "we've got a prime suspect." I said, "Fine, let's start there and let's just grill the hell out of that guy and people around him in that one unit."

E. Um huh. It's Van Cleve right now. E. What does he do? K. He didn't tell me, yet. [President returns.]

P. Oh, come in Bud. K. Yes, sir.

P. What's the dope?

K. Well, we've got one person that comes out of DOD according to Al Haig who is the prime suspect right now. A man by the name of Van Cleve who, they feel, is very much the guy that did it. He spent two hours with Beecher, apparently this week. He had access to the document. Uh, he apparently has views very similar to those which were reflected in the Beecher article. And, it would be my feeling that we should begin with him and those immediately around him before going to a dragnet polygraph.

P. Okay. K. With the other people.

P. Right. K. If he doesn't pan out—then to move on to the rest.

P. Polygraph him. K. Yes, sir.

P. You understand. K. Yes, sir. I do.

P. Well, uh, are his views what hawkish or dovish? K. Well, Haig was not able to tell me at this point. This man over in DOD. That they've got this is just what they got from, from this man nailed down, but they didn't give me substance.

P. Now, has he leaked before, or something? K. They don't know that either.

E. We're we're taking this hearsay, about twice removed. K. That's right.

E. No, will he say— K. [Unintelligible]

P. I don't care whether he's a hawk or a dove or a— If the son-of-a-bitch leaked, he's not for the government. K. Sir.

P. Uh, that's it. Is he an appointee? Or, uh— K. Sir, I, I don't

P. Fine. K. have a lot more than this.

P. All right. Now I want you to get over there; I want to get over there, but I don't want any ifs, ands, or buts. But, if Van Cleve answers questions you can say, "Ill right, we're going to give you a polygraph." That's orders. Fair enough. I've decided something on the polygraph thing, John, today, and it make more sense. Trying to get a million people to—Are there a million that have top secret clearances in government? E. No. Not that many.

P. eWll—four hundred thousand? K. Yeah. Yeah. E. I would say in the neighborhood of three, P. All right. E. Four five. P. Fine. E. Thousand.

P. Here's what I want. I believe that what we have to do, first with regard to all, all the people of, uh, uh, uh, li—, little people do leak. E. That's right.

P. This crap to the effect: Well, a stenographer did it, or the waste paper, paper basket did it. It's never that case. I've studied these cases long enough, and its always a son-of-a-bitch that leaks. You agree or not? E. In that judgment—

P. [Unintelligible] or, uh— E. or K. Oh, sure.

P. Yeah. Yeah. Sure, they're they're [unintelligible]. So, what I plan to do is to have everybody down through GS

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Between Nixon, Krogh and Ehrlichman

something or other, you know, in the Foreign Service and so forth and so on, and, uh, uh, uh, and, and you know what I mean. K. Sure.

P. Here, in Washington, and just in Washington, I want all of them who have top secret clearances. It means if we can get them to, to agree to take a polygraph. Then—E. or K. I think—

P. And maybe another approach to it would be to set up and remember I already mentioned to set up a new classification. E. Right.

P. Which we would call what? Let's just call it a new classifica—Don't use top secret for me eevr again. I never want to see top secret in this God damn office. I think we just solved—shall we call it—Uh, John, what would be a good name? "President's Secure—" Or, uh—"Eyes Only" is a silly thing too. It doesn't mean anything anymore. Uh—

K. We used "Presidential Document" before with one of the counsel we were working with, but that didn't—There's some—

E. How about—Uh(uh, looking forward to the court case, I wonder if we could get the words "National Security" in it. P. Yeah.

E. So that "National," uh, just say "National Security Classified" or National Security—K. [Unintelligible]

E. "Secret or uh—P. Well, uh, not the word "Secret" should not be used.

E. All right, uh, uh—P. Because you see "Secret" has been now compromised.

E. How about "Privilege"? P. "Privilege is, is not strong."

E. Too soft. Too soft. P. "National Security —" uh, "National Security —" uh —

E. "Restricted." "Restricted." P. Right. "National Security —" and, uh — I agree to "National, Na —, National Security —"

E. "Restriction"? P. "Priority."

E. "Controlled"? P. Or "National Security" — "Priority" — "Restricted" — "Controlled." E. Oh, we'll — Let us work on it.

P. What I am getting at is this: I want a new classification for that purpose and everything that I consider important, and only those things I consider important will have that classification. Then on that classification every document that is out is to be numbered. You see what I mean? E. Um hm.

'Nobody Follows Up'

P. There's the — and the people — so that we'll know what people have it. Now the fact that a hundred had this is —was terrible. That — and I want to find out why a hundred had it. Henry grumbled around and said, "Well, who we going to clear it out with?" Well, God damn it, I'd told them two weeks ago not to put this out. See, Haig didn't follow up on it. Nobody follows up on a God damn thing. We've got to follow up on this thing; however, we, uh, we, uh, we had that meeting. You remember the meeting we had when I told that group of clowns we had around there. Renschburg and that group. What's his name?

E. Renschguist. P. Yeah. Rehnquist. E. Yeah.

P. I said, "Look, let's limit the number of people." What have they done about limiting the number of people? E. Uh, they're, they're at work.

P. What have they done about limiting — E. Tehy're going to come back at you with a whole new classi — P. Good. E. — ification scheme. P. Right. E. In this, but in this —

P. What I'm getting at is this—K. Haig confirmed this morning that

they're doing this

P. Yeah. K. [Unintelligible] the thing with, uh—

P. Good. What I want them to introduce, what I want with this, what I want, what I want with the polygraph—I, uh, uh, is—You put your finger on the real problem. A person in government or a person who has access to top secret can refuse to take a polygraph. Nobody is to have access to the "President Cla—" or, uh, uh, no—"National Security." Uh, "National Security"—no. And that's—Why don't we just say "National Security?" I—Maybe you're right. "National Security"—not top secret. "National Security," uh—or "Special National Security," or, uh, it's something like that. But anyway, get that. So that it's just three letters. Like, uh, "SNs—," "SNS" or something like that.

E. or K. Um huh.

Subject of Polygraphs

P. Or, uh—And then on those, that kind of a thing. As I say, let's limit the number of people that get it. We know who'll get it, and then everybody who gets must sign the, the, the agreement to take a polygraph. And also, with regard to, with regard to the agreement to take polygraphs, Bud, I want to be done now with about four or five hundred people in State, Defense and so forth, so that we can s—, uh, immediately scare the bastards. Don't you agree?

K. Right.

P. Maybe start now. K. Yes, sir. We're having a look at what the stamp P. Yeah. K. indicates developed first and then P. Yeah. K. how we draft the tape request on that.

P. You see [unintelligible]. An agreement to take the, uh, uh, an agreement—I mean, just say that all people who you're doing this with the top executives in government, who have access to top secret things. That should include everybody in the N.S.C. Staff, for example. You start with them. It should include about, uh, a hundred people. But, uh, probably four or five hundred at State; four or five hundred at Defense, and uh, two or three hundred over at, uh, C.I.A. And, uh, that's it.

K. All—

P. I don't care about these other agencies. Forget them. K. All C.I.A. people have gone through a polygraph. They take their own polygraph.

P. But they, they obviously, then have waived any rights to refuse to take them. K. That's right.

P. No, no. They go, they, they take a polygraph—K. —as an applicant.

K. and E. [Unintelligible] E. — — as a part of their employment process. P. or K. Right.

E. That doesn't waive their right not to take a polygraph. K. That's right. [Unintelligible]

P. I want everybody that — just have everybody — just Helms can do these. They should have that. Every C.I.A. person should have, should waive the polygraph. E. or K. Yeah.

P. But I, uh, but, uh, I'm, uh—Listen, I don't know anything about polygraphs and I don't know how accurate they are but I know they'll scare the hell out of people.

K. They scare people. They're clumsy. They ask a lot of tough questions. P. Um.

K. personal questions about a man's sex life. About P. Um.

K. What his mother was like and things like that. These polygraph tests, if we run them, would, would be more restrictive. Would ask four or five basic questions about this story; the familiarity with the issues; whether they talked to Beecher; what he said to Beecher, things in that line. I've got the—this thing is set up now.

E. If you are, uh [unintelligible]. Haig's point is, he's, he said you not do this. He says, on this, his advice to you [unintelligible] making a critical [unintelligible]

Other Problems Cited

K. Haig, Haig has told me that you just—P. Oh, no, no, no, no. We're talking about one person.

E. If you do the—He's just for taking the one guy, that's all. So I said, "No,—," K. Yeah. That's the way. E. What he's objecting to is, is problems that go past that. He says you will find for yourself [unintelligible]

P. I don't think that's the point. The point is going on this one person now. E. Okay.

P. And then I'll decide whether we have to go beyond it. E. Right.

K. What I'd like to do is—E. That's fine.

K. I'll do a report on this guy and those immediately around him. P. That's right.

K. Once we get that, then come back P. That's right.

'I'll Be Available'

K. and—P. Come back and see what else we have to do. But we're going to start shaking them, shaking the trees around here.

E. We'd like to keep this moving through the week-end so we may send something back to you P. Oh, I'll be available.

E. this afternoon or tomorrow. P. I'll be available. I'd just like to know. E. All right.

P. And if we catch the guy his resignation is speedy, and, and, and that's what I like. Not quietly. E. Right.

P. Understand, any person. On one condition. You catch anybody, it's not going to be quiet. I'm going to—we're going to put the God damn story out and he's going to be dismissed and prosecuted. There's prosecution—E. You can't—

K. Uh, the polygraph is not useful in prosecution, P. All right.

K. sir. P. But the point is, it is taken. E. That's right.

P. Doesn't make any difference. If it's taken, we're going to catch him and he needs to be prosecuted. E. or K. Doesn't make any difference.

E. The polygraph, per se, is that your knowledge of what's in it—P. I know, you—E. or K. That's right.

P. You use it for purposes of cross-examination. K. You use it to correct. Yeah. E. All right, sir?

P. Well, I just think we ought to go out ahead and it, it does happen. This does affect the national security—this particular one. This isn't like the Pentagon papers. This one involves a current negotiation and it should not have been, and it, its getting out jeopardizes the negotiating position. Now, God damn it, we're not going to allow it. We just aren't going to allow it. E. or K. All right.

P. Good luck. E or K. Yes, sir. Thank you. P. Fine.