

524-027

Date: 1971-06-17

Participant: Richard M. Nixon

Participant: H. R. "Bob" Haldeman

Participant: Ronald L. Ziegler

Participant: Charles W. Colson

Start Time: 14:42

End Time: 15:33

Place: Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "Our Track Record's Pretty Stinky"

SCENE SETTER: After learning the previous day that *Newsweek* magazine was about to identify Daniel J. "Dan" Ellsberg as the source of the Pentagon Papers leak, President Nixon and several White House aides speculated on the role of religion and ethnicity in Ellsberg's decision to commit espionage. Their conversation laid bare a host of prejudicial assumptions as they considered the presence of Jews in their administration, particularly on the staff of the National Security Council headed by Henry A. Kissinger.

H. R. "Bob" Haldeman: They're zeroing in on [Daniel J. "Dan"] Ellsberg in the public press brief.

President Nixon: Are they?

Haldeman: And—

President Nixon: Well, why doesn't the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] pick him up, throw him in the can? That's the next move, isn't it?

Ronald L. "Ron" Ziegler: [*Unclear*]—

President Nixon: He's going to get out on a hundred-thousand-dollar bail. What?

Ziegler: [*Unclear.*]

Charles W. "Chuck" Colson: [*Unclear.*] They can do it—they can do it either way. I think that's the danger of this leak.

President Nixon: Ellsberg, or what do you . . . what do mean? Well, they've got to arrest him if they find that he's guilty.

Colson: Oh, well, but he—

Haldeman: You have to bring him in for—

President Nixon: Have they questioned him yet?

Colson: I'd assume they have.

Haldeman: I don't know. I assume so.

Colson: They'll bring him in for Miranda [warning].

President Nixon: Yeah, OK, OK. Incidentally, I hope to God he's—he's not Jewish, is he?

Haldeman: [*chuckling*] Oh, I'm sure he is.

Ziegler: Ellsberg?

President Nixon: [*Pause.*] I hope not. I hope not.

Colson: With that name, I [*unclear*]—

Ziegler: Yeah, he's—

Haldeman: All the spies up to now have been Jewish. Why the hell wouldn't he be? [*Laughs.*]

President Nixon: Oh, well, I know, I know, I know. But it's a bad wicket for us. It's a bad wicket. [*Unclear exchange.*] Maybe we'll be lucky for once. Look, you can't tell by the name. It might just be German or something like it. You see, the problem is that one of the things that really hurt us in the [Elizabeth] Bentley investigations, they were—we had the goods on all these people, but who the hell? Nathan Silvermine [Nathan G. Silvermaster]. John [J.] Abt. Also Victor Perlo. So they were all of them Jews. [*Unclear exchange.*] It was a whole Jewish ring. The only two non-Jews in the Communist conspiracy—the Gold—Goldberg, the Gold—which ones—the atom spies were Jews. The only two non-Jews were [Whittaker] Chambers and [Alger] Hiss. Many thought that Hiss was. He could've been a half, but back a ways, but he was not by religion. The only two non-Jews. Every other one was a Jew. And it raised hell with this. But in this case, I hope to God he's not a Jew.

Pause.

Haldeman: Well, I suspect he is. [*Chuckles.*]

President Nixon: I know, except you can't tell by the name.

Haldeman: [Morton K.] Mort Halperin.

President Nixon: Halperin is, yeah.

Haldeman: [Leslie H.] Gelb is.

Colson: Gelb—

President Nixon: Is Gelb a Jew?

Ziegler: Gelb—

President Nixon: Hell. Well, then, by golly, we've got to—what is [Melvin R. "Mel"] Laird doing and what is [William P. "Bill"] Rogers doing about cleaning up their own security situations?

Haldeman: Well, what are we doing about cleaning up our own here?

President Nixon: Well, that's what I mean. I'm just—

Haldeman: No, I mean in the White House.

President Nixon: I mean Henry's shop. Exactly. Just don't know when one of them's going to run out and take a lot of papers.

Haldeman: We are in no position to criticize [Departments of] State or Defense on security leaks or on disloyal personnel. And that's a problem, I think.

President Nixon: You mean right now? I thought we'd cleared them all out.

Haldeman: Well, we hope we have.

Colson: We just [*unclear*]

Haldeman: But our track record's pretty stinky.

CITATION: "Richard M. Nixon, H. R. 'Bob' Haldeman, Ronald L. Ziegler, and Charles W. Colson on 17 June 1971," Conversation 524-027, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.