

519-007

Date: 1971-06-14

Participant: Richard M. Nixon

Participant: Alexander M. Haig Jr.

Participant: William P. Rogers

Start Time: 12:26

End Time: 13:09

Place: Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "Our Strong Suspicion Is It's Dan Ellsberg"

SCENE SETTER: After alerting President Nixon the previous day to the disclosure in the *New York Times* of secret government documents on the Vietnam War, Deputy National Security Adviser Alexander M. "Al" Haig Jr. briefed Nixon and Secretary of State William P. "Bill" Rogers on the likely identity of the leaker. The source of that information was Walt W. Rostow, a national security adviser in the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson during the last three years of Johnson's presidency.

Alexander M. "Al" Haig Jr.: Well, I—

President Nixon: I think it's [Leslie H.] Gelb.

Haig: —I had a call last night with Walt [W.] Rostow, and President [Lyndon B.] Johnson and Walt are both *very* upset about this, for obvious reasons.

President Nixon: [*Chuckles.*] Wouldn't you be? You realize, though, what it is? It shows that Johnson, in effect, didn't tell the American people the truth before his election.

William P. "Bill" Rogers: That's right.

President Nixon: That's why they may think that we put it out. [*Unclear.*]

Haig: There's some suspicion of that.

President Nixon: There is? [*Haig acknowledges.*] Well, Johnson doesn't have that suspicion, does he?

Haig: No, no. No, [*unclear*].

President Nixon: Good God!

Haig: No, I called Walt first thing yesterday morning. I said, "You better get the *New York Times*, and you better read this."

President Nixon: Yeah. All right—

Haig: [*Unclear*] late last night, and he said, "Now, I don't want to cast any aspersions about who might have done this, but our strong suspicion is it's [Daniel J.] Dan Ellsberg." Dan Ellsberg was part of ISA [International Security Affairs] at the time. He's a RAND [Corporation] employee now and a teacher at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology].

President Nixon: He's a radical. Why in the hell did they give him—how did he get in—how did he get the files, Al?

Haig: He said that he understood that he had a copy of that study when he was in ISA and probably took it out with him. He said he doesn't think it's Gelb. It may be; he says he doesn't think so. And he doesn't think it's [Morton H.] Halperin or [unclear] or the other character, the Air Force guy, as Walt had gathered.

President Nixon: Mm-hmm. [Unclear] the study. Gelb was in on it, wasn't he? Wasn't he in charge?

Haig: Gelb was in on it. Gelb's very anti-Vietnam, but—

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —Gelb is a responsible—

President Nixon: Henry [A. Kissinger]'s in California. He's—he thought Gelb was apparently—he thought was the guy. [Unclear exchange.] [Unclear] Brookings [Institution]—Brookings. He was in charge of it. Now, this fellow, Ellsberg or whatever his name is—

Haig: Ellsberg.

President Nixon: Ellsberg. I never heard his name before. [Haig attempts to interject.] That's the one Rostow thinks it is?

Haig: Yes, he thinks that's who it was. He said, "Whoever did this could not be a good Democrat." He said, "He would have to be a radicalized individual."

President Nixon: Yeah. Well, he didn't [unclear]. [Rogers acknowledges.] If you want to look at it [unclear]. And, incidentally, has any of the stuff that's—that exposes [John F. "Jack"] Kennedy come out on the thing, too? He was [unclear]—huh?

Haig: Yes, sir. Although—

President Nixon: [Unclear] come out yet.

Haig: —their—in the analysis that was done in the *Times* yesterday, they referred to the fact that Kennedy had made a number of decisions, which faced Lyndon Johnson with a decision of withdrawing and taking defeat or escalating.

President Nixon: Mm-hmm.

Haig: So the real impression made is that Kennedy's covert decision—

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —led up to—

Rogers: As a matter of fact, they were fairly good on [Dwight D.] Eisenhower. It said that he had a limited—he [unclear] involved a limited-risk operation. And then it made it clear that Kennedy

moved so far down [*President Nixon acknowledges*] the road that it really was no longer a limited risk, that it became either—

President Nixon: You remember Kennedy's first television speech was on Laos. Remember?

Rogers: I know. I know. You know, the way that Kennedy supporters explain that is they blame Eisenhower. They say Eisenhower told Kennedy to do this.

President Nixon: [*Unclear.*]

Rogers: No, this is what they say.

President Nixon: Listen, we all know Eisenhower extremely well in this respect, and Eisenhower was a noninvolvement man. As a matter of fact, he might have done too little. But nevertheless that was the way he played it.

CITATION: "Richard M. Nixon, Alexander M. Haig Jr., and William P. Rogers on 14 June 1971," Conversation 519-007, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.