

Eastern Kentucky University

Encompass

Online Theses and Dissertations

Student Scholarship

January 2016

Nixon's Wars: Secrecy, Watergate, and the CIA

Chris Collins

Eastern Kentucky University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://encompass.eku.edu/etd>



Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Collins, Chris, "Nixon's Wars: Secrecy, Watergate, and the CIA" (2016). *Online Theses and Dissertations*. 352.

<https://encompass.eku.edu/etd/352>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Encompass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Online Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Encompass. For more information, please contact Linda.Sizemore@eku.edu.

Nixon's Wars: Secrecy, Watergate, and the CIA

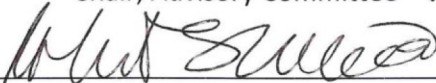
By

Christopher M. Collins

Thesis Approved:



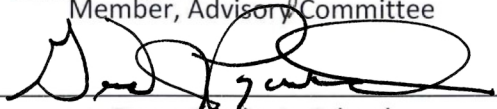
Chair, Advisory Committee



Member, Advisory Committee



Member, Advisory Committee



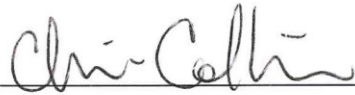
Dean, Graduate School

Statement of Permission to Use

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master's degree at Eastern Kentucky University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of the source is made.

Permission for extensive quotation from or reproduction of this thesis may be granted by my major professor, or in his absence, by the Head of Interlibrary Services when, in the opinion of either, the proposed use of the material is for scholarly purposes. Any copying or use of the material in this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature



Date

11-10-2016

Nixon's Wars: Secrecy, Watergate, and the CIA

By

Christopher M. Collins

Bachelor of Arts
Eastern Kentucky University
Richmond, Kentucky
2011

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
December, 2016

Copyright © Christopher M. Collins, 2016
All rights reserved

Acknowledgments

I could not have completed this thesis without the support and generosity of many remarkable people.

First, I am grateful to the entire ECU history department for creating such a wonderful environment in which to work. It has truly been a great experience.

I am thankful to the members of my advisory committee, Dr. Robert Weise, Dr. Carolyn Dupont, and especially Dr. Thomas Appleton, who has been a true friend and mentor to me, and whose kind words and confidence in my work has been a tremendous source of encouragement, without which I would not have made it this far.

Also, a special thanks to Dr. Jennifer Spock for her kindness in directing an independent study with me on the Soviet Union and the Cold War, which helped expand my perspective on the period.

And I wish to thank my fellow graduate students, whose company and conversation has often helped to ease the stress which naturally accompanies any lengthy project such as this. In particular, I owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Matthew Gerth, who first suggested to me the idea of writing about Watergate when I was searching for a topic within the vague context of secrecy and national security.

In addition, I must acknowledge the scholars and writers who have pursued this subject before me, especially Dr. Stanley Kutler, Dr. Douglas Brinkley, and Dr. Luke Nichter, all of whom have done outstanding work on the Nixon tapes and tape transcripts, which was invaluable to my research. Also, authors Jim Hougan, Len Colodny, Robert Gettlin, and Lamar Waldron; much of my work followed in their footsteps.

Finally, I am grateful for the love and support of my family. Jennifer, Christian, and Rylie; I apologize for being so preoccupied for the past year or so. Thanks for putting up with me.

Abstract

Watergate is considered the most infamous political scandal in American history. It resulted in the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon, and it had a profound, lasting, and damaging impact on the American people's trust in government. The story of Watergate is often intertwined with that of President Nixon—his corruption, paranoia, abuse of power, and dramatic political demise. This thesis argues that the crisis of Watergate was rooted not merely in the personality and conduct of the tragically flawed Nixon, but in the deep, systemic government secrecy that developed in the United States at the onset of the cold war. There are four central ways in which this institutional secrecy affected the Watergate affair: (1) The emergence of a “national security” ideology in the United States in the immediate postwar years gave rise to hidden foreign policies and secret, often illegal, government activities; (2) the growing public awareness and discontent regarding this secrecy in the 1960s, particularly concerning US involvement in Vietnam, which thereupon led to the increasing regularity of national security leaks (media disclosures of state secrets); (3) the mentality of President Nixon and his subordinates concerning the use of illegal clandestine operations (“dirty tricks”) to combat perceived domestic enemies—a practice that had been employed by US intelligence and law-enforcement agencies for decades; and (4) the involvement of the CIA in the events surrounding Watergate, which demonstrates the secrecy and autonomy prevalent in the intelligence community, often to the detriment of American democracy.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Secrecy.....	7
Chapter 2: Backlash.....	32
Chapter 3: Dirty Tricks.....	58
Chapter 4: Watergate	84
Chapter 5: Fallout.....	118
Bibliography.....	124

Introduction

“History is a way of learning, of getting closer to the truth. It is only by abandoning the clichés that we can even define the tragedy.” –William Appleman Williams ¹

“That atmosphere has to be understood in the context of the times. This nation was at war. Men were dying. The people that got us into the war, the brightest and the best, proved to be the worst in this crisis.” –Richard Nixon²

In the early-morning hours of June 17, 1972, five members of a secret intelligence team were arrested while breaking into the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C. Their target was the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, where they sought to install electronic surveillance devices and to obtain secret documents relating to financial corruption and national security. The burglars themselves, it was soon discovered, all had connections to the most elusive and clandestine branch of the American national security establishment—the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). However, they also had connections to another organization, a political action group called the Committee to Re-Elect the President (CRP), which was directly linked to President Richard M. Nixon. This scandalous revelation ignited a political firestorm, a media extravaganza, and a cultural phenomenon—collectively known as “Watergate”—that engulfed the country for nearly two years, and ultimately destroyed the administration and legacy of Richard Nixon.

Watergate was the most serious political crisis experienced by the United States in the twentieth century. It was the first and only occasion in American history in which

¹ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), 13.

² Interview with David Frost, *Frost/Nixon: The Complete Interviews*, Part 3: “The War at Home and Abroad,” DVD, Liberation Entertainment, 2008.

a sitting president resigned from office, and it severely damaged the public's faith in government in ways that are still felt in the present day. After Watergate, there developed an intense cynicism in the American consciousness with regard to public office holders—a sort of *fait accompli* that the government was not trustworthy. This development had profound implications for the democratic process in the United States, because it affected public perceptions with regard to the value of participatory government, the efficacy of an active, involved electorate, and the responsiveness of government to the will of the people.

President Nixon was the central figure in the drama of Watergate. Nixon is rightfully considered by most historians as the primary architect of his own downfall. An endlessly fascinating and complex character, Nixon's story is utterly intertwined with that of the United States during the three decades in which he was a prominent political figure, and it is impossible to fully understand one without the other. In hindsight, it seems inevitable that he would change the course of American history, for better or worse. In 1973, historian Arthur Schlesinger railed against the president's attempts to expand the powers of the executive office and wrote of the emergence of an "imperial presidency" under Nixon's control.³ Stanley Kutler, in his 1990 book *Wars of Watergate*, held that Watergate was "rooted in the lifelong political personality of Richard Nixon. . . his well-documented record of political paranoia, his determination to wreak vengeance on his enemies, and his overweening concern with winning elections." Kutler added, however, that "the period is also bounded by much more than a burglary in 1972 and resignation in 1974," concluding that "the fall of Richard Nixon was the last act in a decade-long melodrama that haunted the American stage."⁴ In a more sympathetic portrayal, Evan Thomas wrote in his 2015 biography that Nixon's story is one of "hubris and of human frailty. . . . Consumed by ambition, he took on enormous burdens and

³ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

⁴ Stanley Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 617.

risks and, just as he ascended to the heights. . . he fell, as dramatically as if he were a tragic hero in an ancient myth or parable.”⁵

Nixon’s life and his role in Watergate have been studied, written about, analyzed, psychoanalyzed, and debated ad nauseam for half a century. There are Nixon detractors and Nixon apologists; but mostly we see in Nixon a tragically flawed and paradoxical man—an introvert in an extrovert’s profession, a leader who achieved great things, but also caused tremendous harm. But if the story of Nixon and Watergate is an American parable, its lesson is generally taken as a warning about the dangers of corruption and abuse of power by the individual. The present study is not intended to dismiss these ideas, nor is it an attempt to justify or exonerate Nixon for his crimes. It is, however, an effort to explore the exterior, non-Nixon factors that contributed to Watergate, as well as how the cold war experiences of Nixon and his colleagues helped guide their actions before and during the scandal.

This thesis will argue that, at the most fundamental level, Watergate was about government secrecy. It was a secrecy that began well before 1972, and even before the ascent of Nixon to the presidency in January 1969. Indeed, its roots stretch back to the very dawn of the cold war, when a culture of official secrecy became deeply entrenched within America’s national security establishment. It originated in the country’s new role as global superpower, and, ultimately, it diminished the ability of open, free, representative government to affect the making of foreign policy in the United States. This was a crucial development, because America now held the economic and military power to impact the entire world, and that power came to rest in the hands of a small group of mostly unelected elites and a secretive intelligence community with minimal oversight or accountability. In the 1960s, a growing segment of the population became wary of their nation’s actions in the world, and distrustful of the processes by which such policies were decided upon, especially with regard to US involvement in Southeast

⁵ Evan Thomas, *Being Nixon: A Man Divided* (New York: Random House, 2015), 530.

Asia. It was the conflict that arose between a restive public and a secretive national security state that culminated in the Watergate crisis.

Thus, the events that led to the downfall of President Nixon must be seen as part of a larger historical process. Problems of secrecy, national security, public trust in government, and the role of democracy in foreign policymaking all intersect in the story of Watergate. The institutional secrecy that took hold in the United States during the cold war was directly related to the actions of the Nixon administration, and it affected the Watergate crisis in several ways. First, the ideology of “national security” which emerged in the early cold war gave US policy makers the hubris to act in ways that were both illegal and contrary to American ideals. For example, by the late 1940s a policy framework was established through the National Security Council (NSC) that allowed the US to carry out covert foreign policies designed specifically to be hidden from the American people and from other international actors. Moreover, the covert methods of intelligence and law-enforcement agencies, such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and National Security Agency (NSA), were increasingly turned against American citizens in the 1950s and 1960s. Radicals or dissident groups in the United States—communists, civil rights groups, and antiwar activists—were often the targets of domestic espionage programs that included illegal break-ins, wiretapping, mail-opening, infiltration, and other forms of surveillance. These activities laid the groundwork for the types of illegal domestic surveillance and political espionage programs employed by the Nixon administration.

Second, the collapse of America’s foreign policy consensus in the mid-1960s and the emergence of the antiwar movement directly challenged the systemic government secrecy of this national security state. As public awareness of government secrecy grew in response to such events as the U-2 spy plane crash in 1960, the Bay of Pigs in 1961, and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, the very premise of America’s actions in the world—and particularly in Vietnam—came under assault. Social unrest caused by Vietnam so discouraged President Lyndon Johnson that he declined to

seek another term in 1968. The antiwar movement was galvanized by revelations of government dishonesty on matters such as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the My Lai massacre, and the Pentagon Papers. The phenomenon of national security leaks in the media became extraordinarily disruptive for President Nixon, who came to believe that such breaches of secrecy were part of an Eastern Establishment conspiracy to deliberately sabotage his foreign policy. Nixon's response was an attempt at broadening the powers of the intelligence community to combat more effectively what was perceived as a grave threat to national security, and when that failed due to J. Edgar Hoover's refusal to cooperate, Nixon in essence centralized the control of domestic intelligence in the White House, and operations began to take place that would culminate in the Watergate arrests on June 17, 1972.

Third, the men who were responsible for implementing these clandestine operations were veterans of intelligence and law enforcement. They had spent their careers engaged in the same types of activities for which they were now employed by the Nixon White House, including CIA programs to overthrow foreign governments or oversee domestic surveillance, and the FBI's own counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO), which targeted civil rights and antiwar groups. They saw no distinction between operations sanctioned by the CIA or FBI, and those authorized by the president of the United States against perceived domestic enemies. Nixon himself was also experienced in the realm of covert action, at least from a policy perspective, based on his tenure as vice president in the Eisenhower administration, during which time he served on the NSC and strongly advocated for the use of covert tactics against Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Thus, the *concept* of secret government operations was well established in the mindset of the individuals involved based on their participation in them over the previous two decades. That these activities could yield intelligence of a political nature was also a feature long recognized and not unique to the Nixon administration.

Fourth, the CIA was intimately connected to the Watergate affair. This was due in part to Nixon's distrust of the agency and his rivalry with CIA Director Richard Helms, but also to the CIA's own fears regarding the disclosure of state secrets, particularly those dealing with agency-sanctioned "dirty tricks," such as the repeated attempts to assassinate Castro and other foreign leaders. Nixon's secret White House intelligence team was in effect infiltrated by the CIA because several of its members—all former or current CIA agents— remained loyal to the agency. This allowed the CIA to not only spy on the Nixon White House, but in certain instances to influence or direct the activities of the president's intelligence group. The actual Watergate burglary was the result of multiple agendas by different individuals. While the White House was pushing for a specific objective—wiretapping and stealing documents from the office of DNC Chairman Lawrence O'Brien—the CIA element of the group clearly had an alternative goal, which was related to a possible call-girl service that was being facilitated from inside the DNC. The CIA's involvement in Watergate was demonstrative of the compartmentalization of information and bureaucratic disaffection that characterized the national security apparatus and its institutional secrecy, but also of the autonomy and self-preserving mindset that was ubiquitous in the intelligence community, and especially the CIA.

The history of Watergate must be viewed as more than the story of one man's tragic fall from power, or as a political scandal—albeit the political scandal by which all others are measured. Exploring the broader historical context of Watergate reveals how government secrecy—and public awareness of it—can affect American democracy in profound and impactful ways. Thus, Nixon's wars were, in a very real sense, America's wars, not only in terms of the military conflict in Vietnam, but also with regard to the limits of power, the control of knowledge and decision-making, what the role of the United States in the world should be, and who ought to have the authority to decide. Watergate was the result of a deep rift that developed in American society concerning these questions, and the efforts of a president who struggled to deal with it.

Chapter 1: Secrecy

“Espionage was distasteful but vital. . . . One had to weigh the risks, keep the knowledge in as few hands as possible, and accept the consequences if something went wrong. There is no glory in this business, if it *is* successful, it cannot be told.” –Dwight D. Eisenhower¹

“A democracy cannot wage war.” –Gen. Walter Bedell Smith²

The culture of secrecy that gave rise to Watergate developed in the early years of the cold war. It grew steadily through the 1950s and 1960s, so that by the time Richard M. Nixon came into office in January 1969, official secrecy, domestic surveillance, illegal covert operations, and hidden foreign policies were commonplace. They were firmly rooted in the concept of national security, which often gave political leaders and government officials the moral and conceptual flexibility to operate in ways that clearly violated the law. The very same abuses of authority and subversions of constitutional rights that so characterized the Watergate scandal were already a part of the national security landscape and the American political culture by 1969. Nixon once famously said, “when the president does it, that means that it is not illegal”—a statement that is often held up as evidence of Nixon’s imperious attitude toward executive power.³ In fact, what Nixon was ultimately guilty of was co-opting a power that had already existed within the state security apparatus, and bringing it under more direct presidential control, and thus, presidential culpability.

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace: The White House Years, 1956-1961* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 551.

² Quoted in Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), 205.

³ Interview with David Frost, March-April 1977, *Frost/Nixon: The Complete Interviews* DVD, Liberation Entertainment, Part 3: “War at Home and Abroad,” 2008.

The Cold War

The cold war began almost as soon as the smoke cleared from the most catastrophic war in human history. From the ashes of World War II there arose only the United States and the Soviet Union as geopolitical superpowers poised to exert their leadership on the world. There were early hopes for continued cooperation between the two countries, which had been allies during the war, but by the time of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's death in April 1945, that hope was quickly fading. The Soviet Union's reluctance to loosen its grip on the Eastern European countries that it occupied during the war was seen in Washington as an ominous portent of things to come.

In February 1946, George F. Kennan, an American diplomatic officer stationed in Moscow, cabled an eight-thousand-word telegram to Washington explaining the deep social and ideological roots of recent Soviet behavior.⁴ The basic outlook of the Soviets, according to Kennan, was that the "USSR still lives in an antagonistic 'capitalist encirclement' with which in the long run there can be no permanent peaceful coexistence."⁵ He predicted that there would "emerge two centers of world significance: a socialist center. . . and a capitalist center," and that the "battle between these two centers for command of [the] world economy will decide [the] fate of capitalism and of communism in the entire world." Kennan's analysis had helped solidify fears that were already growing amidst a small circle of US policymakers. A dangerous struggle for the future of Europe—perhaps the world—was taking shape.

The cold war was a complex and multifaceted conflict. It involved aspects that were political, ideological, cultural, military—but perhaps at the most basic level, it was about economics.⁶ More specifically, it was based on a fundamental disagreement over

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ George Kennan, Telegram from Moscow to US State Department in Washington, DC, February 22, 1946, National Security Archives, [<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents>].

⁶ For an excellent historiographical essay on the causes of the cold war, see Edward Crapol, "Some Reflections on the Historiography of the Cold War," *History Teacher* Vol. 20, No. 2 (Feb., 1987): 251-262. Also, other important works on this subject include John

the very ways in which human societies ought to organize themselves from a political-economic standpoint. The United States had emerged from the war as the world's unchallenged economic powerhouse. It owned over half of the world's manufacturing capability and produced more than one-third of all the world's goods and services.⁷ The gross national product (GNP) of the United States was three times larger than that of the Soviet Union, and five times larger than Great Britain's.⁸ American policymakers believed that in order for the United States to maintain this position of economic preeminence in the world—and to sustain healthy economic growth at home—the US would have to become a global leader in free trade, democracy, and international partnerships. Industrial centers such as Western Europe and Japan would have to be stabilized and protected; developing nations would need to be secured and brought under US influence; and the entire global financial system would be built around the American dollar.

The Soviet Union posed a direct threat to the United States' vision of the postwar world order. Having been invaded twice in the past three decades, and having endured the highest casualty rate of any other nation in the Second World War (estimates of up to 20 million), the Soviet Union was distrustful of American intentions in Europe. Of primary concern to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin was the security of his country's vast borders and the prevention of Germany or Japan regaining the economic and military power that might allow them to once again threaten the USSR.⁹ Soviet

L. Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), and *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992); and William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959).

⁷ Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1973* (New York: Praeger, 1974).

control in Europe or in developing areas such as Asia or the Middle East would undermine the US's ability to incorporate those areas into the American-based global system.

Further, the ideology of communism was immensely threatening to US policymakers. Communism—especially Soviet communism—was antithetical to the very principles on which American society was predicated, such as individualism, property ownership, socio-economic mobility, freedom of the press, and an open, democratic system of government. The Soviet Union had achieved incredible technological and industrial advancements since 1917, but those gains had come at a terrible cost. Millions of Soviet citizens had died as a result of mass famines, and millions more languished in gulags or forced labor camps. Stalin was a despotic and paranoid ruler who would not hesitate to kill in order to maintain his position. This was the perception of communism held by the political leadership of the United States. Communism anywhere in the world was viewed not on an individual, localized basis, but rather as part of a global monolithic conspiracy directed from Moscow.

Compounding the problem in the view of US officials was the fact that communism was on the march. Poor economic conditions brought about by years of depression and war, along with growing nationalist movements in the developing world, was causing people to turn to communism in large numbers. In Belgium, Communist party membership grew from 9,000 in 1939 to 100,000 in 1945; in Italy from 5,000 in 1943 to 1.7 million by the end of 1945; and in Hungary from a few hundred in 1942 to 100,000 by December 1945.¹⁰ The trend was similar throughout Europe.

A series of crises in Europe and Asia throughout the late 1940s—the Berlin Blockade, the communist victory in China, the USSR's achievement of nuclear weaponry— gradually increased tensions between the US and the USSR, until by the 1950s the US was involved in another major ground war in Korea, and its basic national security strategy was governed by a secret document that framed the conflict in terms

¹⁰ Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 7.

of a global battle for civilization. That document, National Security Memorandum Number 68 (NSC-68), was a policy paper drafted by the more hawkish elements of President Harry S. Truman's national security team. It trumpeted the Soviet Union's military gains and nefarious intentions, and called for a massive increase in US defense spending. It became the foundation of US foreign policy throughout the cold war, and it remained classified "top-secret" until 1975. The fundamental goal of the United States, as outlined in NSC-68, was "to foster a world environment in which the American system can survive and flourish."¹¹ The paper emphasized the global and absolute nature of the conflict: "The assault on free institutions is world-wide now, and in the context of the present polarization of power a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere," it stated.¹² This conceptualization of the cold war as a battle for hearts and minds everywhere, throughout the world, laid the foundation for the United States' most divisive war of the twentieth century in Vietnam. That conflict would come to dominate the Nixon administration and would have important implications for Watergate.

By the end of 1946, the cold war was also beginning to develop a domestic front. Revelations that Soviet spies had penetrated the United States' most secretive military program, the Manhattan Project, awakened fears that communist agents and provocateurs might be embedded at the very highest levels of government.¹³ On May 29, 1946, FBI Director John Edgar Hoover sent a letter to President Truman that read, "you might be interested in the following information with respect to certain high Government officials operating an alleged espionage network in Washington, D.C., on behalf of the Soviet Government. . . there is an enormous Soviet espionage ring in Washington operating with the view of obtaining all information possible with reference

¹¹ *A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary on United States Objectives and Programs for National Security*, NSC-68, April 14, 1950, [https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents], 21.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ John L. Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 25.

to atomic energy.”¹⁴ Right-wing Republicans soon began to latch onto anticommunist hysteria as a defining political issue, which led to the witch-hunt mentality of the McCarthy era in the early 1950s.

Although Hoover and the Republicans vastly overstated the threat of Soviet/communist infiltration into the US Government, there were in fact many Soviet spies operating within the United States. The group that had infiltrated the nuclear bomb program included an esteemed British scientist named Klaus Fuchs and also Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who in 1953 became the first American citizens to be executed for espionage. Witnesses for the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), such as Whittaker Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley, claimed that there was an extensive communist spy ring within the government, and that it included former State Department official Alger Hiss and Treasury Department economist Harry Dexter White. But the right-wing attack on Democrats and the Truman administration forced liberals to downplay and even ridicule the possibility there were communist spies within the government. As a result, the extreme positions held by both sides of the political spectrum precluded the possibility of sober public discourse about the problem. Truman did institute loyalty tests and background checks for government employees, but for the Republican hawks it was not enough.

Richard M. Nixon came to power riding this wave of anti-communist hysteria and political division. His work on the HUAC, and especially on the Alger Hiss case, propelled him to national prominence.¹⁵ The Hiss case was in many ways a microcosm of the battles Nixon would fight throughout his career, until Watergate and his resignation from the presidency. Hiss had been a prominent diplomatic officer in the war years, had worked on the Yalta conference, and had been a leading figure in directing the early United Nations conference in San Francisco. But Nixon held a deep disdain for diplomat.

¹⁴ Quoted in Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Secrecy: The American Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 62.

¹⁵ See Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

He saw in Hiss precisely the type of Eastern Establishment elite who ridiculed men like Nixon; who did not take the communist menace seriously; and who were the darlings of the liberal media and intellectuals who criticized the work of HUAC. “The Committee [HUAC] in 1948 was under constant and severe attack from many segments of both the press and public,” wrote Nixon in his first book, *Six Crises*.¹⁶ “It had been widely condemned as a red-baiting group, habitually unfair and irresponsible, whose investigations had failed to lead to a single conviction.”¹⁷ If Nixon could prove that Hiss was a Soviet spy, it would be a vindication of HUAC’s work, a win for the Republican party, and a major political coup for Nixon himself. When the Justice Department expressed doubts about prosecuting Hiss, Nixon believed it was simply another attempt by Hiss’s left-wing allies to cover up the true extent of the communist conspiracy. Nixon argued his case in the press, hoping that public pressure would force the Justice Department to act—and it worked. Public outcry compelled the Justice Department to prosecute Hiss.¹⁸ It was an early example of how Nixon understood the power of the media. When he could harness that power for his benefit, he welcomed it. However, he would expend a great deal of energy throughout his career fearing that his enemies might bring that power to bear on him instead.

Alger Hiss was indeed a spy for the Soviet Union, and had been since the 1930s. Although he was ultimately found guilty and sentenced to prison, the charge was only for perjury. The full evidence against him could not be disclosed in open court because its source was a highly classified national security secret. Beginning in 1943, the Army’s Signals Intelligence Services had begun intercepting and deciphering the international communications of the Soviet Union. The program, called VENONA, was so secret that even President Truman was not fully informed of its existence.¹⁹ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar Bradley made the decision to keep the program secret

¹⁶ Richard Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁹ Moynihan, *Secrecy*, 61-62.

from all other government agencies except for the FBI, as an internal FBI memo from October 1949 reveals. It stated that General Bradley would “personally assume the responsibility of advising the President or anyone else in authority *if the contents of any of this material so demanded,*” but that the FBI should “not handle the material in such a way that [CIA Director] Admiral [Roscoe] Hillenkoetter or anyone else outside the Army Security Agency and the Bureau are aware of the contents of these messages and the activity being conducted.”²⁰ The VENONA intercepts had produced proof of Hiss’s espionage for the Soviet Union (and also Harry D. White’s), but due to the secrecy of the operation, it could not be made public for fear of exposing the program. Such secrecy exemplified the type of internal distrust, competition between intelligence agencies, and compartmentalization of information that characterized the cold war era.

National Security and Secrecy

The concept of national security can be difficult to define in specific terms, but for the purposes of this study, it is important to develop a working definition in order to understand how it ultimately had important implications for the Watergate crisis. Historian Melvyn P. Leffler has written that “national security was interpreted in terms of correlations of power,” and that “power was defined in terms of the control of resources, industrial infrastructure, and overseas bases.”²¹ In this sense, “national security” takes on a more geopolitical context, rather than the domestic security aspect with which it is generally associated. President Truman reinforced this idea in a 1951 address to Congress, stating that “our own national security is deeply involved with that of other free nations. . . [and] if communism is allowed to absorb the free nations, then we would be isolated from our sources of supply and detached from our friends.”²² Thus, the idea of national security encompassed much more than simply defending the

²⁰ Ibid., 70.

²¹ Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 12.

²² Ibid.

United States against physical attack. It entailed the broad concept of protecting the “national interest,” which included economic, security, or political connotations that might affect the well-being of the United States in any meaningful way. Therefore, a broad definition of “national security” (and it is always interpreted broadly by political and defense officials) might be stated as the preservation of an equilibrium in which the United States is the preeminent global power, so that it may ensure the continuation of its desired way of life, standards of living, economic growth, and political values. Seen in this expansive context, it is easier to understand how US policymakers could use the concept of national security to justify almost any action, domestic or international.

The advent of the national security mentality also gave rise to “a new class of national security managers. . . who were neither elected politicians nor permanent government bureaucrats,” wrote historian Michael Hogan.²³ The first generation of this group of elite cold war policymakers included men like George F. Kennan, Dean Acheson, Averell Harriman, and John McCloy. The foreign policies of succeeding administrations would be largely shaped by similar groups of men. The Eisenhower years saw the rise to prominence of the Dulles brothers, John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State, and Allen Dulles as CIA Director. In the Kennedy/Johnson era, Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and Walt Rostow were leading architects in foreign policy, and in the Nixon administration, Henry Kissinger became almost a co-president in the realm of foreign affairs.

The framework of national security was solidified by the National Security Act of 1947, which reorganized the defense establishment into a more permanent apparatus, and established “the modern mechanisms of the national security state.”²⁴ The act created the various groups and institutions that comprise the modern national security system, including the Office of Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the

²³ Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

National Security Council (NSC), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).²⁵ Within this system, secrecy was imperative. As we have seen, the very literature that guided American policy was classified at the highest levels. Information was highly compartmentalized. National security secrets were restricted not only by general classifications such as “confidential” or “top secret,” but also by an elaborate system of code word clearances, by which only specific individuals were cleared to view certain information. “We have classified information and locked it in safes behind locked doors, in locked and guarded buildings, within fenced and heavily guarded reservations,” declared Hubert H. Humphrey in a 1955 speech on the Senate floor.²⁶ “What are we trying to protect, and against what? What price are we willing to pay for security?”

There are several factors that contributed to the heightened level of secrecy which developed in the United States government during the cold war. The most obvious is that there were important military or technological secrets that needed to be safeguarded against the Soviet Union or other enemies for genuine security purposes. After all, the Soviets were much more adept at the spy game than the United States at the start of the cold war. Second, bureaucracies are prone to secrecy by nature, because they are hierarchical in structure, and thus based upon correlations of power. Secrecy represents a form of power. This is especially true within military bureaucracies and intelligence services, and both of those were expanded in the United States with the National Security Act. Third, inter-agency rivalries—especially between intelligence services—and political division led to a large degree of compartmentalization of information within government. Even the president was at times not fully informed on what the military or intelligence agencies were doing. This would continue to be an issue in the Nixon administration. And finally, the growth of the national security state created a disconnect between public opinion and policymaking. This meant that the public was often kept in the dark about the government’s national security policies, as

²⁵ Ibid., 65.

²⁶ Moynihan, *Secrecy*, 164.

well as the means used to carry them out, such as instigating foreign coups or assassinations, or using espionage and surveillance to target American citizens. All of these aspects of secrecy played a role in creating the Watergate scandal, because they are all related to the rise in presidential power, bureaucratic conflict, and official secrecy that culminated with the Nixon administration, which in turn led to the increased public skepticism of government.

Covert Action as an Instrument of Foreign Policy

Early in the cold war, the use of covert actions was strongly advocated by men like 'George Kennan and Defense Secretary James Forrestal as a way to achieve US policy goals. During World War II, clandestine operations such as espionage, sabotage, and guerilla campaigns behind enemy lines had been conducted by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), but that agency was dissolved by after the war. On September 27, 1947, Kennan sent Forrestal a paper proposing the creation of a "guerilla warfare corps."²⁷ Given the Soviets' expertise in espionage, Kennan wrote, "it might be essential to our security to fight fire with fire."²⁸ The Truman administration first authorized the CIA to conduct "psychological warfare" in December 1947 under NSC 4-A.²⁹ An early example of such "psychological warfare" was the CIA's interference in the 1948 Italian elections. Fearing that Communists were going to take power in Italy by means of the ballot, the agency undertook to swing the election in favor of the Christian Democratic Party.³⁰ It worked closely with the Vatican to deliver suitcases full of cash to Italian politicians and political action groups. The program worked, and the agency would continue this method of purchasing foreign elections for the next twenty-five years.³¹

²⁷ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS), Volume X, Vietnam, January 1973-July 1975, "Note on US Covert Actions," US State Department, [<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v10/note>].

³⁰ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 29-31.

³¹ *Ibid.*

But in 1948, events were moving quickly and the cold war was escalating. Many in the defense and intelligence communities did not believe that the language and framework of NSC 4-A was far-reaching enough. In June 1948, NSC 4-A was replaced by a new directive, NSC 10/2. That document established that “the National Security Council, taking cognizance of the vicious covert activities of the USSR, its satellite countries and Communist groups. . . has determined that, in the interest of world peace and US national security, the overt foreign activities of the United States government must be supplemented by covert operations.”³² It continued: “The Central Intelligence Agency is charged by the National Security Council with conducting espionage and counter-espionage abroad. . . ‘covert operations’ are understood to be all activities. . . which are conducted or sponsored by this Government against hostile foreign states or or groups. . . that *if uncovered the US Government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them* [emphasis added].”³³ The group that would be responsible for coordinating the NSC’s covert operations was originally hidden away in the State Department and given the unassuming name of Office of Policy Coordination (OPC). Although the CIA itself was a publicly known (if obscure) agency at the time, the OPC was not. “OPC’s operations were not only secret, the existence of the organization itself was also secret,” recalled James McCargar, an early member of the group. “It was, in fact. . . the *most* secret thing in the U.S. Government after nuclear weapons.”³⁴

The number of CIA personnel involved in covert operations grew from 302 in 1949 to 2,812 in 1952, with another 3,142 overseas “contract” personnel.³⁵ The budget for covert operations during the same period grew from \$4.7 million to \$82 million.³⁶ Clearly, covert operations were a central part of United States national security strategy.

³² FRUS, 1945-1950, *Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, Document 292, “National Security Council Directive on Office of Special Projects,” June 18, 1948.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 38.

³⁵ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 155.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

But it was not until the Eisenhower administration that they truly became a centerpiece of American policy. This was due to several factors, one being that the president wished to reduce defense spending and avoid another costly war like Korea. As such, he placed a heavy emphasis on nuclear weapons as a strategic deterrent to Soviet aggression, and also utilized covert action to achieve secret policy objectives, such as overthrowing foreign governments. Another reason was that Eisenhower's Director of Central Intelligence, Allen Dulles, and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, were brothers, which meant that national security strategy and intelligence operations would be inherently more closely coordinated.³⁷

During the Eisenhower years the CIA engaged in at least two successful operations to overthrow foreign governments—Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954—and attempted to do so in Indonesia in 1958. It was also the Eisenhower administration that laid the groundwork for the CIA's failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. In addition, it was during the Eisenhower years that the CIA became engaged in paramilitary campaigns in Southeast Asia, particularly in Laos and Vietnam—conflicts that eventually morphed into full-scale US military intervention in Vietnam.³⁸

Assassinations were also a valid instrument of secret US foreign policy. A 1975 Senate report found that between 1960 and 1970, the United States Government had actively engaged in attempts to assassinate at least five foreign leaders: Fidel Castro, Patrice Lumumba (Congo), Rafael Trujillo (Dominican Republic), Ngo Dinh Diem (South Vietnam), and Rene Schneider (Chile).³⁹ With the exception of Castro, all of these individuals were killed in plots that were in some way influenced by US involvement.

³⁷ Ibid., 155-156.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders, an Interim Report of the Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities*, 94th Congress, 1st Session, Report No. 94-465, Assassination Archives and Research Center, [http://aarclibrary.org/publib/contents/contents_church.htm], 4-6.

After the embarrassment of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, President John F. Kennedy lost confidence in the CIA and placed control of covert operations with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.⁴⁰ The Kennedy brothers were fascinated by covert action. JFK's administration oversaw 163 such operations in only three years; by comparison, the Eisenhower administration had conducted 170 in eight years.⁴¹ But Cuba was still the number-one priority. "No time, money, effort, or manpower is to be spared" in ousting Castro, Robert Kennedy told new CIA Director John McCone in January 1962.⁴² A startling example of just how committed the national security establishment was about neutralizing the communists in Cuba was the so-called "Northwoods" document, which was uncovered by researcher James Bamford in 2001.⁴³ The document, written in March 1962, outlined a plan by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS)—called Operation Northwoods—to conduct attacks on the United States and blame them on Cuba as a pretext for invading the island.⁴⁴ "The desired resultant from the execution of this plan would be to place the United States in the apparent position of suffering defensible grievances from a rash and irresponsible government of Cuba and to develop an international image of a Cuban threat to peace in the Western Hemisphere," the memo stated.⁴⁵ The JCS proposed a number of possible scenarios that could be manufactured in order to make it appear that Cuba had attacked the United States. They included blowing up a ship in Guantanamo Bay, staging terrorist attacks in Miami or Washington, or faking the hijacking of an airliner.⁴⁶ It is not clear whether President Kennedy ever saw the memo,

⁴⁰ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 207.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 212.

⁴³ James Bamford, *Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency* (New York: Anchor, 2001), 82-91.

⁴⁴ Memorandum for Secretary of Defense, "Justification for US Military Intervention in Cuba," March 13, 1962, National Security Archive, [<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/news/20010430>].

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-11.

but the plan was not put into action. However, it was signed by all members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

A similar idea—generating support for war under false pretenses—may have been used by the Johnson administration to get congressional authorization for war in Vietnam. Congress’s 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution giving President Lyndon B. Johnson authority to wage war in Vietnam was based on the belief that two US Navy ships had come under attack by North Vietnamese ships in international waters on August 2 and 4, 1964. By 1967, Senator William J. Fulbright had launched a Senate inquiry into the incident amid doubts about the veracity of the Johnson administration’s account. “What we originally understood was not correct,” Fulbright said in January 1968.⁴⁷ “We were told [the US ships] were on the high seas, and at times they were within the territorial waters of North Vietnam.” Indeed, as an internal study by the National Security Agency (NSA), de-classified in 2005, reveals, the August 2 attack was preceded by US-supported commando raids into North Vietnam, which were being monitored by the NSA, and the August 4 attack never took place at all.⁴⁸ Furthermore, intelligence data from NSA was “presented in such a manner as to preclude responsible decision makers in the Johnson administration from having the complete and objective narrative of events.”⁴⁹ The study continues: “The objective. . . was to support the Navy’s claim that the. . . patrol had been deliberately attacked by the North Vietnamese. Yet, in order to substantiate that claim, all of the relevant SIGINT could not be provided to the White House and the Defense and intelligence officials.”⁵⁰ In other words, the Johnson administration only wanted information that would verify the story that it had already decided to endorse.

⁴⁷ “Fulbright Reports Violation in Tonkin Incident of 1964,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1968, 2.

⁴⁸ Robert J. Hanyok, “Skunks, Bogies, Silent Hounds, and the Flying Fish: The Gulf of Tonkin Mystery, 2-4 August 1964,” *Cryptologic Quarterly* (Internal NSA Publication) Vol. 19., No. 4 (Winter 2000), National Security Archive, [<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB132/press20051201.htm>], 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

As Johnson himself summed it up a few years later: “Hell, those damn, stupid sailors were just shooting at flying fish.”⁵¹

Presidential Power and Public Opinion in Foreign Policy

The excessive secrecy that took hold in the national security establishment during the cold war was in part related to the role of the president in conducting foreign affairs, and the idea that public opinion should have limited impact on the making of foreign policy. With the US’s increased role in the world, presidents had a larger responsibility in wielding American power abroad, and as a matter of expediency, often did not consult the public or even Congress with major decisions. Until the end of World War II, America had professed a long-standing tradition of non-involvement—at least officially—dating back to the early republic and the warnings of President George Washington in his farewell address regarding “foreign entanglements.”⁵² The American people had long felt that their natural borders and distance from Europe and Asia kept them immune from foreign commitments. World War II had changed that. With America’s involvement in the war, President Roosevelt took on extraordinary powers as wartime commander-in-chief, as had President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. As historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., has written, “war. . . nourished the Presidency. The towering figure of Franklin Roosevelt. . . gave Americans in the postwar period an exalted conception of presidential power.”⁵³ But the ideology of the cold war and national security seemingly placed America in a state of perpetual danger, if not

⁵¹ Ibid., 47.

⁵² In *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Norton, 1959), William Appleman Williams argues convincingly that American policy had always been rooted in expansionism, an idea representative of Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis.” Based on this theory, the US’s dominance of the North American continent by the end of the nineteenth century had given rise to new ambitions to expand US economic hegemony across the Pacific and into Asia via the Open Door Policy. Thus, the cold war was a continuance of this drive to spread American economic influence by either military, economic, or political means.

⁵³ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1973), 125.

perpetual war. As such, national security officials believed the president needed the autonomy to act in the best interests of the country without consulting Congress or the people on every decision.

Congress was largely acquiescent to the president's predominant role in foreign policy. This was due to the leadership of Arthur Vandenberg, a Republican from Michigan, who was the foreign policy leader in the Senate and who believed it important for the country to be unified and bi-partisan in the area of foreign policy. The "situation of external danger restrained the post-Roosevelt Congress from attempting the moral equivalent of rejecting Lincoln's Reconstruction or Wilson's League," wrote Schlesinger.⁵⁴ But not everyone agreed that foreign affairs should be the sole domain of the president. "There is no principle of subjection to the Executive in foreign policy," insisted Republican Senator Robert A. Taft. "Only Hitler or Stalin would assert that."⁵⁵ Nonetheless, such dissent was in the minority, and the president's power and control over the now-permanent national security state was rarely questioned by Congress.

The authority of the president in foreign affairs had been reinforced by the Supreme Court with its 1936 decision in *The United States v. Curtiss-Wright Co.*, a case that involved the violation of trade sanctions by a US corporation. The Court held that there was a "fundamental distinction" between the president's power in domestic and foreign matters. Further, the president, "and not the Congress, has the better opportunity of knowing the conditions which prevail in foreign countries," because "he has his confidential sources of information," and "secrecy in respect of information gathered by them may be highly necessary."⁵⁶

There was also an inherent elitism within the defense/foreign policy establishment. Many of the men who comprised Washington's foreign policy elite were

⁵⁴ Ibid., 126.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 129.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 101-102.

Ivy League-educated lawyers and bankers who believed that the public was largely ignorant and uninformed, and thus incapable of contributing to complex decisions regarding foreign affairs. “The unhappy truth is that the prevailing public opinion has been destructively wrong at critical junctures,” wrote Walter Lippmann, the preeminent journalist-philosopher of the era.⁵⁷ “Mass opinion has acquired mounting power in this century,” and, he continued, “it has shown itself to be a dangerous master of decision when the stakes are life and death.” George Kennan, one of the architects of the US’s postwar national security policy, had begun work on a book in 1938 that proposed that America travel “along the road which leads through constitutional change to the authoritarian state.” The US should be governed by an “enlightened elite,” he argued, because “there are millions of people in this country who haven’t the faintest conception of the rights and wrongs of the complicated questions which the federal government faces.” The work was never completed or published, but the manuscript was discovered by journalists Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas while researching their book about Kennan and other foreign policy elites of the period.⁵⁸

Nixon seemed to share a similar outlook on the relationship between the government and the governed. His views on leadership and public opinion were made apparent in a memorandum that he sent to President Eisenhower in 1959, after Nixon met with Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro. “I . . . emphasize[d] that he had the great gift of leadership,” the vice president explained, “but that it was the responsibility of a leader not always to follow public opinion but to help direct it in the proper channels—not to give the people what they think they want in a time of emotional stress but to make them want what they ought to have.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1955), 23, 48.

⁵⁸ Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 171-172.

⁵⁹ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 202.

The United States' entry into the Korean War was a further expression of the president's power to unilaterally direct the country's foreign policy. The Korean War was a crucial development in the history of US national security policy because it established the concept of limited wars, waged in order to secure a US-friendly government in a developing nation. It would create the precedent for later wars in places such as Vietnam and Iraq. Communist North Korea invaded the south on June 24, 1950. Truman gave the order to intervene militarily the following day, but did not consult Congress or announce the decision publicly until two days later.⁶⁰ "I recommended that the President should not ask for a resolution of approval," wrote Dean Acheson, Secretary of State at the time, "but rest on his constitutional authority as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces."⁶¹ Acheson argued that North Korea's attack on the south was "an open, undisguised challenge to our internationally accepted position as protector of South Korea. . . . To back away from this challenge . . . would be highly destructive of the power and prestige of the United States."⁶² Acheson's emphasis on the United States' "power and prestige" was important, because it highlighted the way in which American policymakers conceptualized the very nature of the US's role in the world. In order to achieve its broader, underlying goal of world leadership, the US would sometimes be required to act in situations that were not necessarily essential from a security or economic standpoint, but purely because it had to uphold its overall image of power in the world. Nixon's rhetoric about ending the war in Vietnam by achieving "peace with honor" would follow along these same lines.

Domestic Surveillance

One of the central issues in the Watergate scandal was Nixon's use of wiretapping to spy on political rivals, journalists, dissenters, or even members of his own

⁶⁰ Schlesinger, *Imperial Presidency*, 131.

⁶¹ Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1969), 414.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 405.

administration. In fact, the practice of electronic surveillance was widespread in the United States well before the Nixon administration. It was used by presidents dating back to FDR, as well as by various intelligence agencies to spy on foreign countries and on American citizens. On May 21, 1940, President Roosevelt sent a confidential directive to Attorney General Robert Jackson. He said that, even though the Supreme Court had recently ruled that unwarranted wiretappings should not be carried out by law enforcement, "other nations have been engaged in the organization of propaganda of so-called 'fifth columns' in other countries and in preparation for sabotage," and that "it is too late to do anything about it after sabotage, assassinations, and 'fifth column' activities are completed." Therefore, Roosevelt told the attorney general that he was "authorized and directed in such cases as you approve. . . to secure information by listening devices directed to the conversations or other communications of persons suspected of subversive activities against the Government of the United States, including suspected spies."⁶³

Hoover's FBI was active in bugging suspected communists and civil rights leaders in the 1940s. Even First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's hotel room was wiretapped by Army Intelligence in Chicago in 1943.⁶⁴ Truman expanded Roosevelt's order on domestic wiretapping, ordering officials to focus on cases "vitally affecting the domestic security, or where human life is in jeopardy."⁶⁵ Though wiretapping was ostensibly done for security reasons, the surveillance would often yield intelligence of a political nature, which would obviously be treated as highly-valued information.

During the Eisenhower administration, the FBI began its most far-reaching and invasive program of domestic espionage. Beginning in 1956, the FBI's Counter-

⁶³ Barton J. Bernstein, "The Road to Watergate and Beyond: The Growth and Abuse of Executive Power Since 1940," *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Spring 1976), 63-64.

⁶⁴ "Ex-Agent Says He Bugged Room of Mrs. Roosevelt," *New York Times*, November 1, 1965, 1.

⁶⁵ Bernstein, "The Road to Watergate and Beyond," 68.

Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) was intended to “‘disrupt’ groups or ‘neutralize’ individuals deemed to be threats to domestic security.”⁶⁶The program involved the infiltration and subversion of perceived dissident groups, mostly targeting the civil rights and antiwar movements, and included attempts to generate internal discord by deceitful means, such as mailing false letters to create conflict between individuals. The program utilized extensive wiretapping, surreptitious entries (“black bag jobs”), and mail openings.⁶⁷ COINTELPRO continued to operate in secret until it was exposed to the public in 1971. An activist group uncovered its existence when they broke into an FBI office and discovered files relating to the program.

The CIA was also heavily engaged in domestic intelligence gathering during the 1950s and 1960s, even though such activities were expressly forbidden by its charter. According to the 1976 Senate committee on intelligence activities, headed by Senator Frank F. Church, the CIA opened and photographed nearly a quarter of a million first-class letters between 1953 and 1973, producing a CIA computerized index of nearly 1.5 million names.⁶⁸ Further, in 1962 President Kennedy ordered CIA Director John McCone to set up a domestic security task force to uncover leaks after the *New York Times* published an article that contained information from a classified national security estimate. The CIA subsequently monitored several reporters from 1962 to 1965.⁶⁹ Kennedy’s domestic CIA task force was, in essence, an early iteration of Nixon’s “plumbers” outfit, the difference being that Nixon placed his group under his direct control due to his distrust of the CIA and Hoover’s reluctance to cooperate. The Church committee also reported that “the Kennedy Administration had the FBI wiretap a Congressional staff member, three executive officials, a lobbyist, and a Washington law

⁶⁶*Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 1975-1976, Final Report* (hereafter Church Report), No. 94-755, Book II, United States Senate, [<http://www.intelligence.senate.gov/resources/intelligence-related-commissions>], 10.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁹ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 223.

firm,” and that “Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy received the fruits of a FBI ‘tap’ on Martin Luther King, Jr., and a ‘bug’ on a Congressman, both of which yielded information of a political nature.”⁷⁰

The Johnson administration continued using wiretaps and domestic surveillance for security purposes, but also for political intelligence. “President Johnson asked the FBI to conduct ‘name checks’ of his critics and of members of the staff of his 1964 opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater,” stated the Church report. “He also requested purely political intelligence on . . . activity at the 1964 Democratic Convention from FBI electronic surveillance.”⁷¹ Nixon himself had reason to believe that Johnson ordered his campaign plane bugged in 1968. In a conversation with John Connally in October 1972, captured by his Oval Office taping system, Nixon said, “Edgar Hoover told [John] Mitchell that our plane was bugged for the last two weeks of the campaign. . . Johnson had it bugged. He ordered it bugged.”⁷² Nixon believed the bugging was tied to Vietnam, just as Nixon himself would justify many of his actions under the aegis of national security, especially with regard to his Vietnam policy. “He had to have information about what we were going to say about Vietnam,” explained Nixon. In his memoirs, Nixon recalled a discussion he had with J. Edgar Hoover about wiretapping. “Tapping,” Hoover said, “was the only really effective means of uncovering leakers. He told me that tapping had been authorized by every President starting with FDR.”⁷³

Like Kennedy, Johnson used the CIA to conduct domestic spying, but on a much larger scale. Beleaguered by public protest against his Vietnam policy, Johnson became convinced that foreign communist elements were somehow involved in financing and facilitating the American antiwar movement. He ordered new CIA Director Richard

⁷⁰ Church Report, Book II, 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷² Nixon White House Tapes (hereafter NWHT), Nixon, John Connally—Oval Office, October 17, 1972, [<http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings/Nixon>], Conversation 801-24/802-1.

⁷³ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 387.

Helms, a long-time agency man dating back to the OSS years in World War II, to find evidence of such foreign connections. The program, called Operation CHAOS, was put into effect in 1967. It involved infiltrating and spying on anti-war groups in America, particularly on college campuses and among groups like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). It failed to uncover any foreign influence.⁷⁴

“The tendency of intelligence activities to expand beyond their initial scope is a theme which runs throughout every aspect of our investigative findings,” stated the Church report.⁷⁵

“United States intelligence agencies have investigated a vast number of American citizens and domestic organizations,” it continued. “FBI headquarters alone has developed over 500,000 domestic intelligence files.”⁷⁶ The committee also found that “millions of private telegrams” had been intercepted by the NSA between 1947 and 1975.⁷⁷

Warrantless break-ins were another commonly used tactic by both the CIA and FBI. Break-ins often targeted civil rights or antiwar leaders, or even foreign embassies. These so-called “black bag jobs” have been conducted by intelligence agencies since World War II. During the 1960s, “the FBI and CIA conducted hundreds of break-ins, many against American citizens and domestic organizations,” according to the Church Report.⁷⁸

One of the more bizarre examples of domestic programs sanctioned by the CIA was their experiments with human behavioral modification, or “mind control.” Designated Project MKULTRA, the program was no minor side-project to be ignored or dismissed by national security historians. Rather, it was an extremely far-reaching and well-funded operation that was carried out at locations all over the United States

⁷⁴ Church Report, Book II, 99-100.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Congressional investigations discovered that eighty-six universities and institutions were involved in tests that included the covert administration of the drug lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) on “unwitting subjects in social situations.”⁷⁹ However, the full extent of the program will likely remain unknown, because CIA Director Richard Helms destroyed most of the files related to MKULTRA in January 1973, at precisely the time when Nixon/CIA activities with regard to the plumbers and the Watergate break-in were coming under greater public scrutiny.⁸⁰

Yet there remain thousands of pages of records related to the operation, many of which reveal the nefarious nature of some MKULTRA’s subprojects. One such subproject was called Midnight Climax, and it involved experiments in sexual blackmail. The CIA used prostitutes to lure subjects to CIA “safe houses,” which were equipped with two-way mirrors and recording devices.⁸¹ Based on Congressional investigations, CIA records, and testimony by CIA employees, three such locations are known to have existed: in San Francisco, in New York, and in Marin County, California.⁸² Mind-altering drugs such as LSD were also used, usually administered surreptitiously by the prostitutes to the unwitting subjects.⁸³

It is also noteworthy that the CIA had extensive contacts and cooperation from within the American news media. This relationship would have an important impact on the evolution of the Watergate scandal. In October 1977, reporter Carl Bernstein of Watergate’s famed Woodward-Bernstein duo published a 25,000-word exposé in *Rolling Stone Magazine* that revealed the extent to which the CIA employed members of

⁷⁹ *Project MKULTRA, the CIA’s Program for Research in Behavioral Modification, Joint Hearing Before the Select Committee on Intelligence and the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research of the Committee on Human Resources, United States Senate, 95th Cong., 1st Session, August 3, 1977, No. 96-408, Hathi Trust Digital Library, [https://babel.hathitrust.org], 2-3.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 48-58.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

the press. In the previous twenty-five years, more than four hundred American journalists had “secretly carried out assignments for the Central Intelligence Agency, according to documents on file at CIA headquarters,” wrote Bernstein.⁸⁴ Further, top executives from the most prominent media companies in the United States had closely cooperated with the CIA, including Henry Luce of Time, Inc., William Paley of CBS, and Arthur Hays Sulzberger of the *New York Times*.

The line between national security and politics was blurred in this era of mass surveillance. As we have seen, there was a long history of misconduct and deception on the part of the national security establishment, most of it rooted in the idea that such actions were justified in the context of the cold war. But the opportunities for gaining political advantage in such a milieu were often too great to ignore. J. Edgar Hoover, for example, would often pass along information obtained through wiretapping to his political allies, or perhaps more often, hide it away in his “personal and confidential” file for potential use in the future. Political espionage was regarded as normal, if taboo, behavior. In a 1974 interview with the *New York Times*, former Senator William J. Fulbright, a long time opponent of Nixon and of the US’s Vietnam policy, said that “no one really approved of wiretapping, going back 50 years, but we all knew it was going on, and all accepted it—and a lot of other practices.” He concluded: “In their minds people don’t approve of covert CIA activities, and yet the majority of people say we’ve got to do it because the others are doing it.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Carl Bernstein, “The CIA and the Media,” [http://www.carlberstein.com/magazine_cia_and_media.php], originally published in *Rolling Stone Magazine*, October 20, 1977.

⁸⁵ Daniel Yergin, “Fulbright’s Last Frustration,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 24, 1974, 88.

Chapter 2: Backlash

“To me it always seemed absurd to question the government’s right to secrecy in some aspects of foreign and defense policy while in our national games we accept without a frown the catcher’s right to signal the pitcher from behind the batter’s back, or the secret council of the quarterback and his team to plan their next offensive move.” – Richard Helms¹

“All you guys in the media. All of politics has changed because of you.” –Lyndon B. Johnson²

“Nixon was determined to resist these trends. . . . Not only the conduct of a war but the sinews of national security were under assault.” –Henry A. Kissinger³

On January 20, 1969, President Nixon delivered his first inaugural address behind a partition of bulletproof glass. In the parade that followed, his limousine was accosted by protesters hurling rocks and bottles, shouting “Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh! Ho Chi Minh is going to win!” and, “Four more years of death! Four more years of death!”⁴ Such was the tenor of the preceding half-decade, in which one president had been assassinated, his successor driven from office by public hostility. Commentators had begun referring to a “sickness” in American society—high crime rates, upheaval, violence, and killing.⁵ It seemed as if the country was coming apart. Richard Nixon saw himself as the man who could put it back together. He would bring peace and stability to Vietnam and the world, and subsequently restore order and tranquility at home. This was his dream, to be seen

¹ Richard Helms, with William Hood, *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Random House, 2003), vi.

² Stanley I. Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 19.

³ Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), 202.

⁴ Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 359.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

as the great peacemaker. But two forces were now at odds in the United States which proved irreconcilable. The implacable secrecy of the national security state was confronted by a skeptical media and a mobilized public opposition. A large segment of the American people no longer trusted their government. As such, Nixon quickly found himself on the defensive. He believed that public unrest was a threat on multiple fronts. It threatened him politically, it endangered domestic stability, and it undercut his ability to conduct foreign policy, which hinged upon negotiating a settlement to the Vietnam war. The constant leaks of national security secrets to the media was a particularly troubling problem, and it caused government secrecy to become even more fortified. “It is an ironic consequence of leaking,” Nixon later wrote, “that instead of producing more open government, it invariably forces the government to operate in more confined and secret ways.”⁶ Nixon’s “secret ways,” the methods by which he chose to fight the war at home, would lead directly to the Watergate crisis.

Nixon came into office with elaborate plans for the future of United States foreign policy. He sought, along with his national security advisor Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, to create a more stable, interconnected world, in which the two rival superpowers could avoid the dramatic fluctuations between crisis and cautious optimism that had characterized the cold war since the Truman era. “Nixon and Kissinger aimed at a more pragmatic, realist approach to foreign policy, not one based on extreme focus on detail and processes, but on larger problems,” wrote John L. Gaddis.⁷ They sought a better working relationship with the Soviet Union and China—a “détente”—not as an end in itself, but as a process of stabilization, a way to reduce the chances of war and focus on areas of cooperation. “The only time in the history of the world that we have had an extended period of peace. . . is when there has been a balance of power,” Nixon said in a *Time Magazine* interview. “I think it will be a safer world and a better world if we have a stronger, healthy, United States, Europe, Soviet Union, China, Japan, each balancing

⁶ Nixon, *RN*, 390.

⁷ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 273.

the other, not one playing against the other.”⁸ Nixon would, of course, go on to achieve many of his goals in foreign policy, famously opening US relations with China and negotiating an arms limitation agreement with the Soviet Union in 1972—successes which bolstered his popularity and contributed to his reelection in November of that year.

But in 1969, the most immediate goal was ending the Vietnam war. That would be the Nixon administration’s first great achievement—cleaning up the mess caused by Kennedy and the Democrats. And it would be the foundation of the new world he hoped to build. “A settlement in Vietnam was the key to everything,” Nixon later wrote.⁹ Relations with the Soviets and the Chinese were tied to their willingness to help Nixon and Kissinger get out of Vietnam—part of Kissinger’s tactical approach of “linkage.” Bringing the war to a conclusion was also key to achieving peace at home, as social unrest stirred by Vietnam was reaching its most dangerous point, evidenced in May 1970 when several student protesters were killed by National Guard soldiers at Kent State University. But the US could not extricate itself from Vietnam unilaterally—that is, through immediate withdrawal. Nixon believed that such an action would have conceded defeat, it would have damaged US prestige and leadership around the world, and would have been an admission that the war was a mistake. His plan was “Vietnamization”—a gradual draw-down of US troops in Vietnam and an increased effort towards the training and support required for the South Vietnamese to defend themselves. “I wasn’t about to go down the easy political path of bugging out, blaming [the war] on my predecessors,” Nixon said in a 1977 interview with David Frost.¹⁰ He believed Kennedy and Johnson were correct in honoring the US commitment to South Vietnam, and he intended to honor that commitment as well, and to end the war in a

⁸ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁹ Nixon, *RN*, 391.

¹⁰ *Frost-Nixon: The Complete Interviews*, Part 3, “The War at Home and Abroad.”

way that would not reduce the previous five years of fighting to a waste of American lives and resources.

The situation at home made this difficult. It is crucial to understand that Nixon and Kissinger believed public unrest in the United States was helping the enemy in real, tangible ways, because it gave the North Vietnamese the impression that “they could win in Washington what they could not win on the battlefield.”¹¹ It compelled the North’s leadership to delay serious negotiations because they assumed public and political pressure would eventually force Nixon to withdraw US forces. “This threatened to put our nation and other free peoples into a precarious position,” Kissinger wrote.¹² “Political stability [around the world] would turn on whether the United States possessed power relevant to its objectives and was perceived as able to defend its interests and those of its friends,” he argued. “If the war in Vietnam eroded our willingness to back the security of free peoples with our military strength, untold millions would be in jeopardy.”¹³

The problem of national security leaks was at the center of Nixon’s domestic woes. Leaking was not a new phenomenon. In the context of the modern national security age, leaks had plagued every president since Truman. But the tumult and skepticism of the 1960s, and the the rise of a new muckraking spirit in journalism, had made the problem worse than ever before. President Kennedy had confronted the issue as early as 1961, in a speech to the American Newspaper Publishers Association. “The very word ‘secrecy’ is repugnant in a free and open society,” Kennedy said.¹⁴ But “in time of war, the government and the press have customarily joined in an effort based largely on self-discipline, to prevent unauthorized disclosures to the enemy.” Kennedy

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kissinger, *White House Years*, 196.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ John F. Kennedy, “The President and the Press,” Address before the American Newspaper Publishers Association, April 27, 1961, JFK Library Online, [http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/JFK-Speeches/American-Newspaper-Publishers-Association_19610427.aspx].

had recently encountered security leaks of the most egregious sort when several reports had appeared in American newspapers detailing the CIA's support for anti-Castro forces and their preparation for an invasion of Cuba only days before the Bay of Pigs invasion took place.¹⁵ Kennedy believed the leaks were partly to blame for the failure of the operation. But he was also in favor of a free press, and thus tried to convey the importance of a self-regulated media. "I am not suggesting any new forms of censorship," he said. "I have no easy answer for the dilemma I have posed. . . . But I am asking the members of the newspaper profession. . . to reexamine their own responsibilities, to consider the degree and the nature of the present danger, and to heed the duty of self-restraint which that danger imposes upon us all."

Kennedy never found a solution to this dilemma, nor did Johnson, or Nixon. "The leaks began almost with the start of my administration, and before long I experienced firsthand the anger, worry, and frustration that Johnson had described," recalled Nixon.¹⁶ He soon found that leaks were coming directly from the National Security Council, the group through which he had hoped to keep a more tight control over foreign policy. According to a CIA report, there were forty-five newspaper articles in 1969 that "contained serious breaches of secrecy."¹⁷

Nixon already had a proclivity for secrecy and distrust. Kissinger recounted how in his very first meeting with the then president-elect, Nixon had told him "he had very little confidence in the State Department. Its personnel had no loyalty to him. . . he intended to run foreign policy from the White House."¹⁸ He also "felt it imperative to exclude the CIA from the formulation of policy; it was staffed by Ivy League liberals who. . . were always pushing their own preferences [and] had always opposed him

¹⁵ Tania Long, "Anti-Castro Units Trained to Fight at Florida Bases," *New York Times*, April 7, 1961, 1.

¹⁶ Nixon, *RN*, 387.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 11.

politically.”¹⁹ Nixon immediately established a secret channel for dealing with the Soviets by authorizing Kissinger to meet directly with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin.²⁰ Talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris would also be conducted in secret by Kissinger.

In March 1969, in a stunning act of unilateral, secretive policymaking, Nixon ordered a massive bombing campaign to be carried out against communist forces in Cambodia, ostensibly a neutral country. The operation was kept completely hidden from the American public and from all but two members of Congress, Senators Richard Russell and John Stennis.²¹ “Our intelligence reports indicated that 40,000 Communist troops had secretly been amassed. . . just inside the Cambodian border,” Nixon wrote.²² He believed a new military strategy was necessary to get the North Vietnamese to negotiate. The bombing halt ordered by Johnson in 1968 had not worked, and the only other option was to bomb civilian population centers such as Hanoi, which would have provoked public outrage in the United States. But the Cambodia bombing unleashed outrage as well, when it was revealed by the *New York Times* on May 9, 1969. “The Cambodian bombing policy had worked well. It had saved American lives, the enemy was suffering, and pressure to negotiate was building,” Nixon argued. “The *Times* leak threatened everything.”²³

The President then ordered J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI to conduct wiretapping operations to uncover the source of the leaks. From 1969 to 1971, seventeen people were tapped, according to Nixon, including members of the press, the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon.²⁴ Still, the leaks persisted, and the antiwar movement continued to gain momentum. The Secret Service became so concerned

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 110.

²¹ Nixon, *RN*, 382.

²² Ibid., 381.

²³ Ibid., 388.

²⁴ Ibid., 389.

about the level of hostility in November 1969 that they surrounded the White House with a barricade of empty buses to prevent crowds of protesters from overrunning the heart of the United States Government.²⁵ A left-wing terrorist group called the Weather Underground began detonating bombs in government buildings all over the country. Nixon believed that “revolutionary terrorism” was becoming a serious threat to the United States.²⁶ He also came to believe that the antiwar movement was being directed and financed by foreign communist agents.

On June 5, 1970, Nixon held a meeting with the heads of all the major intelligence agencies—Richard Helms of CIA, J. Edgar Hoover of FBI, Lt. Gen. D.V. Bennett of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and Vice Admiral Noel Gayler of the NSA. He told them he “wanted to know what the problems were in intelligence-gathering and what had to be done to solve them.”²⁷ The report submitted by the group, which came to be called the “Huston Plan,” after Tom Huston, the White House aide whom Nixon placed in charge of the project, called for looser restrictions on domestic intelligence activities and more inter-agency cooperation. The plan would allow greater electronic surveillance, covert break-ins, infiltration of student groups—“in short. . . what the [FBI] had been doing for decades, but in closer coordination with the CIA and NSA, and with the secret imprimatur of the president of the United States,” wrote author Tim Weiner.²⁸

Nixon approved the plan. But only five days later he rescinded the order, because J. Edgar Hoover, whose FBI would have been crucial for the success of the project, refused to go along. Hoover “thought the possibility of public exposure was too great to justify the risks,” said Nixon.²⁹ Although the FBI had been involved in these

²⁵ Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 150.

²⁶ Weiner, *One Man Against the World*, 98.

²⁷ Nixon, *RN*, 473.

²⁸ Weiner, *One Man Against the World*, 98.

²⁹ Nixon, *RN*, 474.

types of activities for years, Hoover had scaled them back in light of increased scrutiny by Congress and the media. He feared that discovery of illegal FBI operations would lead to the onset of a scandal that would damage his legacy, just as he was coming to the end of his long career. "I knew that if Hoover had decided not to cooperate it would matter little what I had decided or approved," Nixon wrote.³⁰ And yet, as Nixon pointed out, "the irony of the . . . Huston Plan [was]. . . that the investigative techniques it would have involved had not only been carried out long before I approved the plan but continued to be carried out after I had rescinded my approval of it."³¹

The CIA Under Fire

The CIA had become a particular target of criticism among the press and within government, especially after the Bay of Pigs. President Kennedy was reportedly furious with the CIA over the failed invasion because he believed the agency had withheld important information about the planning of the operation. The Bay of Pigs not only damaged the credibility of the new president in the public's mind, but also the CIA's reputation within the government. "For the next nineteen years, no president would place his full faith and trust in the Central Intelligence Agency," explained Tim Weiner in his acclaimed history of the CIA.³² There were also fears that the CIA was not only excessively secretive and untrustworthy, but that it was too powerful and unaccountable. A *New York Times* article by Arthur Krock, published on October 3, 1963, discussed how some government insiders were skeptical of the CIA's motives and its apparent rogue behavior. "According to a high United States source [in Vietnam], twice the CIA flatly refused to carry out instructions from Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. . . [and] in one instance frustrated a plan of action Mr. Lodge brought from Washington

³⁰ Ibid., 475.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 206.

because the agency disagreed with it,” wrote Krock.³³ One official told a reporter in Vietnam that the CIA’s growth was “likened to a malignancy” and he was unsure “even if the White House could control [it] any longer.” The source went on to say that “if the United States ever experiences [an attempt at a coup to overthrow the Government] it will come from the CIA and not the Pentagon.”³⁴

Further criticism of the agency appeared when a book by journalists David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, published in 1964, argued that the CIA was at the center of a vast “Invisible Government,” which had come into existence as a result of the National Security Act.³⁵ “There are two governments in the United States today,” declared Wise and Ross. “One is visible. The other is invisible. . . [it] is the interlocking, hidden machinery that carries out the policies of the United States in the Cold War.”³⁶ They held that there were three main criticisms of the CIA: that it “conducts foreign policy on its own, that it runs its affairs outside of presidential and congressional control, and that it warps intelligence to justify its special operations.”³⁷ Such perceptions of the agency, propagated by its inherent secrecy and mystique, helped give life to notions that the CIA often worked behind the scenes to further some hidden or nefarious agenda.

A decade later, in 1974, two former CIA employees, Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks, published another book, called *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*. That book became the subject of a Federal court case in which the United States Government issued, and ultimately upheld, an injunction against the authors, which forbade them from publishing classified material because, among other reasons, as agency employees the authors had signed secrecy agreements to the effect that they would never reveal such information. The final ruling held that the manuscript would have to be submitted

³³ Arthur Krock, “The Intra-Administration War in Vietnam,” *New York Times*, October 3, 1963, 34.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, *The Invisible Government* (New York: Random House, 1964).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 350.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

to the CIA for approval before it could be published. Approximately 20 percent of the work was redacted by the agency.³⁸ The authors chose to publish the book without restructuring the manuscript in any way, and the result was a book with large blank spaces throughout, and the word “DELETED” inserted where material had been removed. Marchetti and Marks argued that CIA officials were the “holy men” of a powerful cult of intelligence that extended “far beyond government circles, [reaching] into the power centers of industry, commerce, finance, and labor.”³⁹ Its purpose was “to further the foreign policies of the US government by covert and usually illegal means, while at the same time containing the spread of its avowed enemy, communism.”⁴⁰

Thus, the CIA had reason to be concerned about public disclosures of its secrets and methods. It had been under fire for over a decade by the time of Watergate. As such, one can understand why CIA Director Richard Helms would have felt uneasy when President Nixon began requesting information about the agency’s darkest secrets, or when he began operating his own private intelligence team from the White House to search for secret information.

The JFK Assassination, Nixon, and the CIA

Perhaps the most catalyzing event for the public antipathy that developed in the mid-to-late 1960s was the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963. By that point, there had been several events on the international front that caused the public to be more aware of government secrecy, and of the fact that presidents could lie to them, such as the U-2 disaster in 1960, and the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961. But neither of those events was as shocking or traumatizing as the Kennedy assassination. And within a few years of JFK’s death, there was a growing sentiment among the American public that the full truth about the assassination had not been revealed, and that the

³⁸ Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 1974).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Warren Commission had been little more than a whitewash. “The Commission laid the groundwork for the cynicism that became deeply rooted in the late 1960s and 1970s—a profound distrust of the official government story about anything,” wrote political scientist Larry J. Sabato.⁴¹ Indeed, despite the veracity (or lack thereof) of the Warren Commission’s final report, issued in September 1964, it can be shown that the Johnson administration’s primary goal in forming the committee was not necessarily to discover the truth of Kennedy’s killing, but rather to calm public anxieties. On the Monday following Kennedy’s death—November 25—Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach sent a memo to the White House that stressed the importance of quieting public concern about the assassination. “The public must be satisfied that Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial,” he wrote. “Speculation about Oswald’s motivation ought to be cut off, and we should have some basis for rebutting thought that this was a Communist conspiracy or (as the Iron Curtain press is saying) a right-wing conspiracy to blame it on the Communists.”⁴²

In a taped telephone conversation between President Johnson and Senator Richard Russell on November 29, Johnson said, “we’ve got to take this out of the arena where they’re testifying that Khrushchev and Castro did this and did that, and kicking us into a war that can kill forty million Americans in an hour.” When Russell protested that he did not have time to serve on the committee, Johnson replied, “there’s not going to be any time, all you’re going to do is evaluate a report that Hoover has already made.”⁴³ Clearly, Johnson viewed the assassination as a serious national security crisis, and

⁴¹ Larry J. Sabato, *The Kennedy Half-Century: The Presidency, Assassination, and Lasting Legacy of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 138.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴³ Johnson Presidential Recordings, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Russell phone call, November 29, 1963 (Tape Number K6311.06, Conversation 16), Miller Center, [<http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings/lbj-k6311.06-16>].

reassuring the public that the right man had been caught (and then killed) was paramount.

But public doubts about the trustworthiness of the Warren Report persisted, fostered by best selling books such as Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgment* (1966) and Sylvia Meagher's *Accessories After the Fact* (1967), which criticized the report's many shortcomings and raised troubling questions. By 1967, the issue was prevalent enough that CBS aired a television special about the growing phenomenon of JFK assassination conspiracy theories, during which Walter Cronkite lamented that "there has been a loss of morale, a loss of confidence, among the American people toward their own government and the men who serve it, and that is perhaps more wounding than the assassination itself."⁴⁴ Kennedy's murder had important implications for the Watergate crisis. It set off the turmoil of the 1960s, leading to an era in which public confidence and trust in government reached unprecedented lows. Beginning with Kennedy, no president would serve two full terms in office until Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

Public antipathy regarding government secrecy and America's war in Vietnam reached new heights when the *New York Times* began publishing the Pentagon Papers on June 13, 1971. The top-secret history of the Vietnam war, written by military insiders, had been stolen from the national security think-tank RAND Corporation by former Pentagon analyst Daniel Ellsberg, who subsequently turned over the 7,000-page document to the *Times*. The Pentagon Papers revealed long-hidden secrets regarding the nature and extent of US involvement in Vietnam dating back to the Truman Administration.⁴⁵ Nixon was furious about the release of the report, which he considered a grave threat to national security. "In view of the *New York Times'* irresponsibility and recklessness in deliberately printing classified documents without regard to the national interest I have decided that we must take action within the White

⁴⁴ "A CBS News Inquiry: The Warren Report," *CBS*, June 1967. (The special is available in four parts on You Tube, [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWtb2JwzkM8>].)

⁴⁵ Neil Sheehan, "Vietnam Archive: Pentagon Study Traces Three Decades of Growing US Involvement," *New York Times*, June 13, 1961, 1.

House to deal with the problem,” wrote Nixon in a June 15 memo to his chief-of-staff H.R. “Bob” Haldeman.⁴⁶ It was shortly thereafter that Nixon ordered the formation of his secret intelligence team, the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), aka “the Plumbers,” headed by White House staffers Egil “Bud” Krogh and David Young, and also involving “former” CIA agent E. Howard Hunt, who was hired by Nixon’s advisor Charles Colson to do sensitive investigative work for the White House. The issue was not that the Pentagon Papers were damaging to Nixon, since they dealt with the history of the war under previous administrations, but that the problem of national security leaks in general was becoming such a serious crisis. “The classification law either applies or it doesn’t,” wrote Nixon’s Domestic Counselor John Ehrlichman on the same day. “The law is the law whether the subject is Vietnam, Iceland, or atomic bombs.”⁴⁷ But beyond the issue of law, Nixon sensed that a dangerous game was afoot. The leaking of classified information regarding the past conduct of presidents, or vice presidents—or the CIA—was of grave concern for Nixon, because he had secrets to hide as well. But it also opened up opportunities, because the Democrats also had secrets, and they could be wielded as political weapons by Nixon.

During a June 17, 1971 meeting with Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Kissinger, the Oval Office taping system captured Nixon ordering a break-in of the policy think-tank Brookings Institute to acquire copies of the Pentagon Papers or other related documents. “[Tom] Huston swears to God there’s a file on it and it’s at Brookings,” said Haldeman. “Bob, now, do you remember Huston’s plan? Implement it,” said Nixon. “I want it implemented. . . . Goddamnit, get in and get those files. Blow the safe and get

⁴⁶ Memo from Nixon to Haldeman, June 15, 1971, from the documentary history *From: The President: Richard Nixon’s Secret Files*, edited by Bruce Oudes (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 270.

⁴⁷ John Ehrlichman, “Outline for Remarks Re: New York Times,” in Oudes, *From: the President*, 273.

it.”⁴⁸ Nixon’s reaction to the Pentagon Papers, and his motivations for forming the SIU, were complex. On the one hand, he clearly had a concern for the national security aspect of leaking, if for no other reason than the threat it posed to his own foreign policy goals by way of furthering public criticism. On the other hand, there were obvious political motives as well, and one can see the pattern of how national security and politics often intersected in Nixon’s mind.⁴⁹ He believed the Pentagon Papers were part of some secret conspiracy to undermine his administration or his foreign policy. “I’m not so interested in Ellsberg, we have to go after everyone who’s a member of this conspiracy,” he said to Haldeman and Colson on July 2.⁵⁰ “There is a conspiracy and I’ve got to go after it.” Later that same day, Nixon asked his congressional liaison, William Timmons, if the House Internal Security Committee would be able “to conduct an investigation of this conspiracy.”⁵¹

Nixon’s belief that his political enemies were trying to sabotage his administration compelled him to seek further information about the foreign policy secrets of past Democratic administrations. He believed there were secrets which could

⁴⁸ NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Kissinger, Oval Office, June 17, 1971, in *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes*, edited by Stanley Kutler (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 3.

⁴⁹ Historian Ken Hughes argued in his book *Chasing Shadows* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2014) that Nixon’s chief concern was that the Pentagon Papers, or other documents, might detail his efforts to sabotage Johnson’s 1968 Vietnam peace talks through secret diplomatic channels. During the 1968 campaign, Nixon believed that Johnson’s bombing halt and peace negotiations were simply a political tactic to swing the presidential election in favor of Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey, and Nixon allegedly sent communications to South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu suggesting that he should not take part in the negotiations because Nixon could offer better terms if he was elected in November. Such a revelation would have been extraordinarily damaging to Nixon. If true, it would explain Nixon’s desperation to obtain copies of the Pentagon Papers by breaking into the Brookings Institute.

⁵⁰ NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman, Colson, Oval Office, July 2, 1971, in Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 16.

⁵¹ NWHT, Nixon and William Timmons, Telephone Conversation, July 2, 1971, in Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 20.

damage the Democrats and also shift the focus away from his policies in Vietnam. “We have to develop a new program, a program for leaking out information. . . do you know what I mean? Let’s have a little fun. . . . It takes the eyes off of Vietnam. It gets them thinking about the past rather than our present problems,” Nixon said to Haldeman and Kissinger.⁵² He even discussed the possibility of releasing classified information about Pearl Harbor in order to smear President Franklin D. Roosevelt.⁵³

But the President was especially interested in Cuba. The Bay of Pigs, in particular, was an area of constant fascination for Nixon. “I want to go to the Cuban missile crisis and I want to go to the Bay of Pigs,” he told Haldeman.⁵⁴ Not long after Nixon came into office in 1969, he sent a request to the CIA for “all the facts and documents the CIA had on the Bay of Pigs.”⁵⁵ According to Haldeman, the CIA refused to hand over the information. Haldeman recounted a conversation he had with John Ehrlichman at the time: “Those bastards at Langley are holding back something. . . the Commander-in-Chief wants to see a document relating to a military operation, and the spooks say he can’t have it,” Ehrlichman said. “What is it?” asked Haldeman. “I don’t know, but from the way they’re protecting it, it must be pure dynamite.”⁵⁶

As Haldeman wrote in his memoirs, he eventually came to believe that “in all those Nixon references to the Bay of Pigs, he was actually referring to the Kennedy assassination.”⁵⁷ Haldeman suspected that the many CIA attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro may have somehow backfired and led to the murder of JFK, perhaps by Cuban agents, or, as some assassination theorists have speculated, by rogue elements of anti-

⁵² NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman, Kissinger, Oval Office, July 1, 1971, in Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 8.

⁵³ NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman, Ziegler, Oval Office, June 24, 1971, in Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ H.R. Haldeman, with Joseph DiMona, *The Ends of Power* (New York: New York Times Books, 1978), 26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

Castro Cubans, the CIA, or members of organized crime.⁵⁸ Haldeman's memoirs were published in 1978, but it was not until October 2000 that a White House tape was released which seems to verify his suspicions.

On October 8, 1971—about four months after the release of the Pentagon Papers—Nixon held a meeting with CIA Director Helms at the White House. At issue was the information that Nixon had requested from the CIA regarding the Bay of Pigs and other topics, such as the assassination of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. “You probably wonder what the hell it’s all about, why are we interested in these things?” Nixon said to Helms.⁵⁹ The President explained that he needed to be aware of events in the past regarding the “Cuban confrontation” and “everything we have ever dealt with the Russians” because of upcoming negotiations with the Soviet Union. He was also worried about the increasing media scrutiny following the release of the Pentagon Papers, and he argued that he needed to be prepared in the event of further leaks that could damage either himself or national security in general. “When you get to the ‘dirty tricks’ department [a vernacular term for covert operations], which is what they [the press] are really concerned about. . . I know what happened in Iran. I also know what happened with Guatemala. I totally approve of both,” Nixon said. “The problem with the Pentagon Papers. . . is that only half the story leaked out and people were up in arms and so forth. . . the problem is that it impaired the whole security system of the United States.”

Then he appears to reference the Kennedy assassination: “I need it for defensive reasons. . . the ‘who shot John’ angle. Is Eisenhower to blame? Is Johnson to blame? Is Kennedy to blame? Is *Nixon* to blame? [emphasis added]” The phrase “who shot John” was an expression sometimes used by Nixon to imply that a situation was confusing or that it comprised conflicting stories. But in the context of this conversation, it seems

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ NWHT, Nixon, Helms, Ehrlichman—Oval Office, October 8, 1971, [<http://nixontapes.org/rmh.html>].

clear that it was in fact an elusive reference to what was indeed the seminal event of the time period as well as a central aspect of the issues being discussed. Helms sat quietly while Nixon continued to explain. The “who shot John” angle “may become a very vigorous issue,” Nixon said. “If it does, I need to know what is necessary to protect Langley [the CIA], intelligence gathering, and the dirty tricks department, and I will protect it. . . I’ve done more than my share of lying to protect it and I believe it’s totally right to do it.”⁶⁰

As we have seen, Nixon had legitimate reasons to fear that the Kennedy assassination might indeed become a “vigorous issue.” In addition to the growing public skepticism of the Warren Report, New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison had made national headlines in the late 1960s when he indicted a businessman named Clay Shaw, who had connections with the CIA, for alleged complicity in a conspiracy to murder President Kennedy. Although Shaw was ultimately acquitted due to lack of evidence, the episode showed that the assassination controversy was very much alive and that the case could potentially be reopened in the future. (Nixon’s concern was actually quite prescient, as the House Select Committee on Assassinations did indeed open a new investigation in the late 1970s.)

Nixon’s fear that he might in some way be implicated in certain aspects of the Cuban “dirty tricks” campaign was likely based on his involvement with covert operation planning as vice president under President Dwight D. Eisenhower. In his first book *Six Crises*, Nixon claimed he was a staunch advocate for covert action against Castro. “Early in 1960 the position I had been advocating for nine months finally prevailed, and the CIA was given instructions to provide arms, ammunition, and training for Cubans who had fled the Castro regime,” he wrote.⁶¹ A 1979 internal CIA history of the Bay of Pigs, declassified in 1998, contained an entire chapter on “Mr. Nixon’s Role” in the anti-Castro operations. According to the report, Vice President Nixon was “very interested in

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Nixon, *Six Crises*, 352.

supporting anti-Castro groups both within and outside of Cuba, including goon squads or other direct action groups.”⁶² Nixon had also recommended that the CIA utilize the services of Col. Edward Lansdale, a famous—or infamous—member of the Pentagon’s Special Operations Staff, who had directed covert programs in the Philippines and Vietnam.⁶³ Vice President Nixon was briefed on the CIA’s anti-Castro activities in March 1960, which at that time included “economic warfare” and references to “a drug, which if placed in Castro’s food would make him behave in such an irrational manner that a public appearance could have very damaging results for him.”⁶⁴ The report went on to state that “the author has found no other references to drugs or other types of attacks which were being considered upon Castro’s person. . . as a part of the Agency’s *official* program.”⁶⁵ It did note, however, that there were *unofficial* programs, but that “regardless of the reader’s biases regarding the former Vice President. . . the fact that he heard about this drug in the course of a briefing will not be construed to make him a member of a conspiracy to assassinate Castro and other of the Cuban leaders.”⁶⁶ Nixon was present at the National Security Council conference on March 17, 1960, when President Eisenhower “gave a formal ‘go’ to the Covert Action Plan of the Agency” against Castro.⁶⁷ (That fact alone would probably have been considered by Nixon as a political liability in 1971.) The report concluded that although Nixon was by no means “the architect of the Bay of Pigs,” he was “fully read into the plans that were being developed by the Central Intelligence Agency for the ouster of Fidel Castro.”⁶⁸

⁶² CIA Report, *Official History of the Bay of Pigs Operation, Volume III: Evolution of CIA’s Anti-Castro Policies, 1959-January 1961*, National Security Archive, [<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB355/>], 243-244.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 275.

Clearly, Nixon was concerned about his own political liability for the Cuban actions and any side effects they may have engendered. “I do believe I have a responsibility to protect my own flanks,” he said to Helms.⁶⁹ But Helms was not naïve, and he understood Nixon well. He was skeptical of Nixon’s intentions, afraid that he intended to use past CIA secrets to attack his political enemies, especially the Kennedys. Sensing Helms’ trepidations, Nixon did his best to reassure the director that that was not the case. “I am not talking to you as. . . one that’s out to get the CIA, that’s out to get Kennedy, out to get Johnson, the rest,” Nixon said. “I think it’s very harmful to the presidency, as an institution, to make it appear that a former president lied.” Of course, Nixon was being disingenuous at that point, because as we have seen, he had clear intentions of using any embarrassing information he might uncover to smear his political enemies. And yet, he seems to have also been convinced that he could do that while also protecting the CIA and the “dirty tricks” department.

Moments before Helms had arrived at the meeting, Nixon and Ehrlichman were discussing their position, and rehearsing lines that Nixon might say to Helms. Ehrlichman had already been in contact with Helms regarding the information requests, and Helms had provided him with some documents on the Bay of Pigs, but not everything. “I said, ‘this thing is on the front page now [the Pentagon Papers], and we cannot go along blindly not knowing what the actual facts are. Who did what?’ Now, that doesn’t mean we’re going to put them all out,” Ehrlichman said to Nixon. “No, I’m going to protect the CIA,” Nixon replied.⁷⁰ Later, after Helms had joined the meeting, Nixon assured him, “I am not going to embarrass the CIA,” and furthermore, “I believe in dirty tricks. I think we have got to do it. . . . We did the Chile thing, and we did a few other things, and *by God I hope we can do some more.*”

⁶⁹ NWHT, Nixon, Helms, Ehrlichman—Oval Office, October 8, 1971, [<http://nixontapes.org/rmh.html>].

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The “Chile thing” was Nixon’s reference to a failed CIA operation to prevent the election of socialist Salvador Allende to the presidency of Chile in 1970. Chile had long been considered a beacon of democracy in Latin America, but that, along with poor economic conditions, also made it susceptible to a socialist or communist takeover via the electoral process. The Kennedy and Johnson Administrations had spent millions of dollars on CIA efforts to prevent such an eventuality.⁷¹ In 1964, it had worked. The US-backed candidate, Eduardo Frei, narrowly defeated Allende. But under the Chilean Constitution, a president could only serve one six-year term. Thus, in 1970, Allende was again seeking the office.

In March 1970, Nixon authorized \$135,000 for the CIA to disrupt the Chilean elections, increasing that amount to \$300,000 by June.⁷² What the United States feared, Helms later wrote, was a “Castro-Allende axis” in Latin America.⁷³ Castro had been active in supporting communist movements in foreign countries, and US intelligence knew that he had been in contact with Allende. Nixon and Kissinger came to believe that a communist Chile would be a major cold war loss for the United States, and a political crisis for Nixon. “Truman had lost China. Kennedy had lost Cuba. Nixon was not about to lose Chile,” Helms later wrote.⁷⁴ A National Security Council report from July 1970 concluded that there were no “vital [US] national interests in Chile,” but that an Allende victory would be “a definite psychological setback to the United States and a definite psychological advance for the Marxist idea.”⁷⁵

The move against Allende seems at first to be counterintuitive in light of Nixon and Kissinger’s overall foreign policy philosophy, which stressed cooperation between countries, the acceptance of an emerging multipolar world, and the recognition that communism was no longer—if indeed it ever was—a monolithic conspiracy directed

⁷¹ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 231.

⁷² Richard Helms, *A Look Over My Shoulder*, 400.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁷⁵ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 232.

from Moscow. But Nixon's Chile policy is a window into the reality of the cold war in 1970, and the context in which the secrecy and illegal actions of his administration developed, leading ultimately, as they did, to Watergate. "Nixon and Kissinger responded to [Allende] with the outdated reflexes of the Cold War, not realizing the extent to which their own policies had made that view of the world obsolete," wrote historian John L. Gaddis.⁷⁶ "Like Kennedy, Johnson, and their advisers," he continued, "Nixon and Kissinger feared developments capable of embarrassing or humiliating the United States. . . . [they] did not entirely succeed, then, in eliminating *ideology* from their calculations of threat [emphasis added]."⁷⁷

The ideology of national security was still a leading force in US foreign policymaking during the Nixon years. The very existence of the national security apparatus was based upon the presence of an existential threat to US security or interests. The President, the NSC, the CIA and others were compelled to take action to prevent a communist victory in Chile because such an outcome would have been viewed as fundamental failure of US security strategy as it had been understood since the advent of the 1950 policy paper NSC-68. In addition, it would have been a major political failure for Nixon himself. In 1970 his foreign policy was not going well. He was under fire from the left for his Vietnam policies, and for his pursuit of détente had not yet come to fruition. His breakthroughs with the Soviet Union and China were still two years away. A communist victory in the Western Hemisphere was simply not acceptable.

But the operation to prevent Allende's election failed. A crucial part of the plan was the kidnapping of Chilean Commander-in-Chief General Rene Schneider, who was opposed to any military interference with the constitutional process. When the plan went awry, the plotters ended up ramming Schneider's car, shooting him three times, and leaving him to die.⁷⁸ Schneider's death, for which the Church Committee would

⁷⁶ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 285.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁷⁸ Dallek, *Nixon & Kissinger*, 236.

later assign much responsibility to the CIA, awoke indignation in Chile, and an outpouring of support for Allende, who ultimately won the Chilean presidential election in September 1970. In a November 5, 1970 memo, Kissinger wrote to Nixon: "The election of Allende as President of Chile poses for us one of the most serious challenges ever faced in this hemisphere."⁷⁹ Kissinger suggested continued action to undermine the Allende government. "Your decision as to what to do about it may be the most historic and difficult foreign affairs decision you will have to make this year," he wrote, "for what happens in Chile over the next six to twelve months will have ramifications that will go far beyond just US-Chilean relations."⁸⁰

The CIA continued covert programs against Allende by means of propaganda and support for his political opposition, and most likely the encouragement of another attempt at a military takeover. In September 1973, Allende was overthrown by a military coup d'état, resulting in his death and the ascent of repressive dictator Augusto Pinochet as head of the military junta.⁸¹ In addition, Congressional investigator Gaeton Fonzi, who worked for the Church Committee and for the House Select Committee on Assassinations, discovered that there was also a CIA plan to assassinate Fidel Castro while he was visiting Chile on a diplomatic trip in December 1971.⁸² This plot is outlined in a secret dossier, compiled by Cuban intelligence, documenting many of the known CIA attempts on Castro's life.⁸³ It was eventually given to the Church Committee by

⁷⁹ FRUS, Volume XXI, Chile, 1969-1973, Document 172, Kissinger memo to Nixon, November 5, 1970.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Jack Devine, "What Really Happened in Chile: The CIA, the Coup Against Allende, and the Rise of Pinochet," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2014), [<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/chile/2014-05-22/what-really-happened-chile>].

⁸² Lamar Waldron, *Watergate: The Hidden History* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012), 526.

⁸³ The Cuban Dossier is included in Waldron, *Watergate: The Hidden History*, Appendix IV, 740-753.

George McGovern in July 1975.⁸⁴ It is unclear how long McGovern had possession of the dossier, but he had long advocated for better relations with Cuba and had travelled there to meet with Castro in 1975. There is strong evidence to suggest that this Cuban dossier, or something like it, was a target in the Watergate burglary in 1972, as well as other break-ins carried out by the Plumbers, such as at the Chilean Embassy in Washington. In a 1974 interview—nearly a year prior to McGovern’s handing over the dossier to Congress—Watergate burglar Frank Fiorini (aka Frank Sturgis) said that “one of the things we were looking for. . . was a thick secret memorandum from the Castro government,” which contained “a sort of long beef about these ‘subversive activities’ against Cuba. . . [and] the various attempts made to assassinate the Castro brothers.”⁸⁵

Even if Nixon and Helms were not aware of this document in 1971, they would have been aware that questions about the US’s activities against Castro and Cuba were beginning to surface in the media. An article by the nationally syndicated columnist Jack Anderson in January 1971—nine months prior to Nixon and Helm’s October 1971 meeting—discussed details of the CIA assassination plots against Castro during the Kennedy years.⁸⁶ “The plot to kill Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, hidden for 10 years from the public, raises some ugly questions that high officials would rather keep buried deep inside the Central Intelligence Agency,” Anderson wrote. “Could the plot against Castro have backfired against President Kennedy?” he speculated, explaining that “the late President was murdered nine months after the last assassination team was caught on a Havana rooftop with high-powered rifles.”⁸⁷ Anderson was renowned for his ability to unearth secrets, and it was widely assumed that he had cultivated several contacts from within the government and the defense establishment. In fact, a memo from White

⁸⁴ Nicholas Horrock, “Maheu Says He Recruited Man for CIA in Castro Poison Plot,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1975, 1.

⁸⁵ Interview with Frank Fiorini, *True Magazine* (August 1974), 74.

⁸⁶ Jack Anderson, “Castro Plot Raises Ugly Questions,” *Washington Post*, January 19, 1971, D15.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

House investigator Jack Caulfield to Bob Haldeman, dated February 11, 1971, discussed how Anderson had recently boasted about having direct access to sensitive presidential memoranda during an appearance on the Dick Cavett Show.⁸⁸ “Anderson does, indeed, have access to intelligence digests, and he proves it on a daily basis,” wrote Caulfield.

If Anderson knew about the assassination plots, it was logical to assume that someone within the Democratic Party might have proof and could use it against Nixon. CIA officials denied the allegations reported by Anderson, and it would not be officially acknowledged that the CIA had indeed plotted to kill Castro and other foreign leaders until the Church Committee investigations in 1975. But the story was now out, albeit unverified, in 1971, which explains some of Nixon’s nervousness about the “whole Bay of Pigs thing.”

By mid-1971, the Pentagon Papers and other leaks, such as those by Jack Anderson, had both Nixon and Helms concerned about the new political reality. Their meeting in October of that year reveals much of their thinking with regard to national security secrets and leaks only eight months before the fateful early morning of June 17, 1972. First, it shows that Nixon was very worried from a political standpoint. He not only feared what information the media or the Democrats might have that could damage him politically, but he also strongly desired information with which he could attack his political enemies. Second, Helms understood Nixon’s motives, at least to some degree. He was worried that Nixon would recklessly leak information to smear his enemies without regard to the damage it might cause to the CIA, which was already a target of criticism and suspicion. “I want the president to have everything, but on the other hand I want you to understand this is not the kind of thing I gave out politically,” Helms said at one point in the discussion. He did hand over a report on the Diem assassination, but

⁸⁸ Memo from Caulfield to Haldeman, Re: Anderson Leaks and Alleged Access to Presidential Memoranda, in Oudes, *From: The President*, 215.

warned Nixon that it “doesn’t really give any balanced picture of what occurred. But it gives a whole lot of positions a lot of people took, including President Kennedy.”⁸⁹

Finally, Nixon was troubled by the effects that the phenomenon of national security leaking was having on his own policymaking and on national security in general. He clearly indicated his support for dirty tricks and his intentions to continue using them as part of his own strategy, as he did with the 1970 Chilean coup attempt, the 1971 Castro assassination attempt, and, of course, his own secret intelligence team, the SIU. Coping with security leaks, and the public hostility toward secret and illegal foreign policies, was at the forefront of Nixon and Helms’s concern in the Watergate era.

The Road to Watergate

The collapse of the cold war consensus and the growing distrust of government can perhaps be traced, at least on a basic level, to the shock and disbelief surrounding the Kennedy assassination. But subsequent developments had also been deeply rooted in the fabric of American society for decades, if not centuries. There is an inherent skepticism in American political culture, which traces back to the very way in which the country was created. And there were underlying frustrations and perceived injustices with regard to human rights, particularly civil rights, from which there developed a more complex moral understanding of the United States’ actions in the world. The public witnessed the horrors of war firsthand through the new medium of television nightly news, where the consequences of US action in Vietnam were laid bare for all to see. The influential theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once argued that the people of a nation should be wary of inherently justifying its actions on moral grounds, because although human societies would pursue their highest principles and ideals out of a desire to do good, it was inevitable that they would engage in immoral actions to achieve them.⁹⁰ With the

⁸⁹ NWHT, Nixon, Helms, Ehrlichman—Oval Office, October 8, 1971, [<http://nixontapes.org/rmh.html>].

⁹⁰ Raymond Haberski, *God and War: American Civil Religion Since 1945* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 17.

Vietnam war, the American people had to confront the reality that their country was committing immoral acts, albeit for some abstract principle of higher good. And yet, for many Americans, the traditional cold war paradigm that was offered as justification was no longer sufficient to account for the thousands of young American men being sent to kill and be killed in a poor Asian country ten thousand miles away.

This disconnect between public opinion and national security policy was at the core of the crisis that culminated in Watergate. Whereas US officials viewed the country's national interest as being interconnected with the rest of the world, the public in the 1960s recoiled and questioned the moral authority of the United States to act as global enforcer. Policymakers assumed that the public was reactionary and uniformed when it came to complex issues of global politics, and they relied upon a simplistic narrative that portrayed the United States as the ultimate good, acting in the world against the ultimate evil of communism. When this narrative framework began to falter as a means of persuading public opinion, or when the government's desired policies ran counter to accepted ethical or legal behavior, it became more expedient to conduct foreign affairs in secret rather than risk engaging in the messy democratic process of open, informed public debate. Of course, decisions to secretly overthrow foreign governments or assassinate foreign leaders could not possibly be debated in a public forum, because such actions were in violation of international law, and they undermined the very principles of justice and democracy that the United States espoused as its clarion call. But this is the paradox of US national security policy. The higher good of promoting American principles in the world often supersedes basic moral values or laws. Nixon was at the epicenter of this paradox. He was, in a sense, born of it, and he flourished in it. National security became his sword and his shield. Those who challenged US foreign policy were Nixon's enemies, and Nixon's enemies were America's enemies.

Chapter 3: Dirty Tricks

"These kids don't understand. They have no understanding of politics. . . Do you think, for Christ sakes, that the *New York Times* is worried about all the legal niceties? Those sons of bitches are killing me. . . . We're up against an enemy, a conspiracy. They're using any means. We are going to use any means. Is that clear?" —Richard Nixon¹

"Liddy's a Hitler, but at least he's our Hitler." —Gordon Strachan²

Following the publication of the Pentagon Papers and other leaks, the Nixon White House became immersed in the world of covert intelligence and clandestine operations, or, as Richard Helms has called it, the "secret world."³ Previous efforts to uncover suspected leakers of national security secrets through wiretaps had not been successful. The Huston Plan had failed to materialize due to the intransigence of J. Edgar Hoover, and Nixon did not trust or have faith in the CIA. The White House Special Investigations Unit, headed by Egil Krogh and David Young, became somewhat of a coordinating office between the various intelligence agencies (similar to how the Huston Plan was supposed to have functioned), but also took on an operational role in carrying out domestic intelligence actions. These programs were primarily conducted by two White House employees: former CIA official E. Howard Hunt and ex-FBI agent G. Gordon Liddy. Throughout the summer and fall of 1971, Hunt and Liddy orchestrated a number of illegal activities (not all of which are known), including a break-in at the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in Los Angeles and plans to assassinate columnist Jack Anderson. As 1971 drew to a close and the 1972 election season approached, the efforts

¹ NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman, Kissinger—Oval Office, July 1, 1971, in Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 8.

² Quoted in Jeb Stuart Magruder, *An American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 193.

³ Helms, *A Look Over My Shoulder*, 31.

of Hunt and Liddy were moved from the White House over to the Committee to Re-Elect the President (CRP), a political action group that was, for all intents and purposes, directed by the White House. It was in that context, then, that Liddy and Hunt developed plans for a political espionage program, called GEMSTONE, which was the basis for their break-in and wiretapping of the Democratic National Committee headquarters, first during Memorial Day weekend, 1972, and then a second time on June 17, 1972.

On the surface, the events leading to the Watergate break-in, the arrest of the burglars, and the final crisis of Richard Nixon appear fairly straightforward. Still, questions have persisted with regard to many of the details—who ordered the break-in? What were they looking for? Indeed, the mystery that still surrounds much of Watergate is one of the aspects that make it such a fascinating subject. And while these are important questions (which will be addressed herein), one thing is clear: President Nixon and his top aides were aware of, and sanctioned, the activities of Hunt and Liddy, and for that reason alone, Nixon was culpable and ultimately responsible for his own downfall. As the president's former political advisor Charles Colson later wrote in his memoir, "whether we—Colson, Mitchell, Ehrlichman, Haldeman, and yes, even Richard Nixon—knew about Watergate in advance . . . it made little moral difference. We had set in motion forces that would sooner or later make Watergate, or something like it, inevitable."⁴ Nixon eventually conceded as much. In his 1977 interviews with David Frost, he said: "I brought myself down. I gave them the sword, and they stuck it in." Yet, in typical Nixonesque fashion, he couched his admission with a veiled accusation intended to leave a measure of doubt as to whether he was the the culprit or the victim: "There are friends who say. . . 'there was a conspiracy to get you.' There may have been. I don't know what the CIA had to do [with it]. Some of their shenanigans have yet to be

⁴ Charles Colson, *Born Again* (Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen Books, 1976), 72.

told. . . . I don't know what was going on in some Republican and some Democratic circles."⁵

Self-serving as it may have been, Nixon's reference to the "shenanigans" of the CIA does have a basis in reality. Many historians and students of Watergate have argued that efforts to implicate the CIA in the affair are misguided, while others acknowledge that the agency did play a role, but that it is not clear to what extent. Was there a high-level conspiracy by a hidden cabal of CIA officials and political elites to remove Nixon from power? No such evidence has ever come to light. However, it is impossible to ignore the incongruities between many of the facts, as they are now understood, and the traditional, accepted narrative of Watergate. In fact, there is overwhelming evidence that the CIA had indeed infiltrated the White House and the Hunt/Liddy intelligence team, and that it was conducting its own intelligence-gathering operation of some sort. It is also clear that CIA activity, to some degree, influenced or directed the actions of the Plumbers/GEMSTONE group, leading up to, and including, the Watergate break-in.

E. Howard Hunt

E. Howard Hunt is central to understanding the various machinations, complexities, and intrigues that led to the Watergate break-in. Hunt officially went to work for the White House on July 6, 1971. He was hired by Charles W. Colson, Special Counsel to the President, who was, in reality, Nixon's chief political strategist and hatchet man. "My axe-wielding skills were often called upon to deal with government officials who leaked classified information to the press while so many secret negotiations were going on in Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow," Colson wrote in his memoirs.⁶ Colson hired Hunt in the aftermath of the Pentagon Papers fiasco, when Nixon and Kissinger were seething with anger and demanding action to stop national

⁵ *Frost-Nixon: The Complete Interviews*, Part 1, "Watergate."

⁶ Colson, *Born Again*, 57.

security leaks and to root out the conspiracy against the White House. Kissinger, especially, was furious. He had a tendency to come unhinged and display frantic outbursts of rage when he perceived that things were not going well. “There can be no foreign policy in this government,” he fumed on June 14, 1971, the day after the *Times* began printing the Pentagon Papers. “We might as well turn it all over to the Soviets and get it over with. . . These leaks are slowly and systematically destroying us.”⁷ Hunt’s job, ostensibly, was to be a sort of private investigator working for the White House, and after the creation of the Plumbers on July 24, he would become part of that group.

Hunt had spent twenty-one years in the CIA. He had played a major role in the CIA-led coup d’état against Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, and he had been heavily involved in the planning for the Bay of Pigs in 1961. Throughout the 1950s, Hunt held several high-ranking posts in the CIA, including chief of covert operations in the Balkans, as well as for the CIA’s North Asian Command.⁸ “He’s kind of a tiger,” Colson explained to Nixon in July 1971. “He spent twenty years in the CIA overthrowing governments.”⁹ In the early 1960s, he became head of covert operations for the agency’s Domestic Operations Division, which was responsible for domestic surveillance programs directed against dissident groups like the Black Panthers and the antiwar movement.¹⁰

Thus, by 1971, Hunt had put together a long career in planning, coordinating, and carrying out covert actions for the US Government. In short, he was a spy. “I was trained in the techniques of physical and electronic surveillance, photography, document forgery, and surreptitious entries into guarded premises for photography and

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ E. Howard Hunt, *Undercover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent* (Toronto: Berkeley Publishing, 1974).

⁹ Reeves, *President Nixon*, 339.

¹⁰ Jim Hougan, *Secret Agenda: Watergate, Deep Throat, and the CIA* (New York: Random House, 1984), 5.

installation of electronic devices,” he said during congressional testimony.¹¹ “I participated in and had the responsibility for a number of such entries, and I had knowledge of many others. . . . [and] from the time I began working at the White House. . . I engaged in essentially the same kind of work as I had performed for CIA.”¹²

After his arrest for the Watergate break-in, Hunt would argue that because he was under the impression that his actions were expressly authorized by the president of the United States, he was not involved in criminal acts, or at the very least, he was eligible for the same kind of legal protections that would be granted to a CIA officer who had been acting under orders. “I am crushed by the failure of my Government to protect me and my family as in the past it has always done for its clandestine agents. . . . I want to emphasize that at the time of the Watergate operation, I considered my participation as a duty to my country,” he said.¹³ “I cannot escape feeling that the country I have served for my entire life and which directed me to carry out the Watergate entry is punishing me for doing the very things it trained and directed me to do.”

Colson had met Hunt in the early 1960s when they worked together on alumni affairs for Brown University.¹⁴ The possibility of Hunt’s working for the Nixon White House had been discussed between them as early as 1969, but Hunt was still an active CIA employee until his retirement in May 1970, whereupon he joined the Washington public relations firm Robert R. Mullen & Company.¹⁵ Hunt found employment with Mullen through the CIA’s employee placement service, as Mullen often worked closely

¹¹ *Presidential Campaign Activities of 1972, Senate Resolution 60, Hearings Before the Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities*, United States Senate, 93rd Cong., 1st sess., 1973 (hereafter *Watergate Hearings*), Book IX, from the Mary Ferrell Foundation, [https://www.maryferrell.org/pages/Watergate_Documents.html], 3,662.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3,364.

¹⁴ Colson, *Born Again*, 58.

¹⁵ Hunt, *Undercover*, 144.

with the CIA; the agency used Mullen to provide cover for clandestine agents—ostensibly agents working abroad, but in Hunt’s case, perhaps domestically as well.¹⁶

In a telephone conversation on July 1, 1971, which was recorded by Colson and later given to the Senate Watergate Committee, Colson and Hunt discussed the Pentagon Papers and Daniel Ellsberg. “Do you think this guy [Ellsberg] is a lone wolf?” asked Colson. “Yes, I do,” Hunt answered—“with the exception of the Eastern Establishment, which certainly aided and abetted him.” To which Colson then added an even more ominous possibility: “But I’m not sure it doesn’t go deeper than that. . . . I’m thinking of the enemy [USSR].”¹⁷

Such was the type of conspiratorial thinking that was characteristic of the Nixon administration. It was part of the cold war mentality that had been so influential in shaping the careers of the men involved, dating back to the Soviet espionage scare of the late 1940s, the Hiss case, and the McCarthy period. The rise of the New Left in the 1960s seemingly presented a new threat, because now there was a social movement within the United States that could potentially harbor, or act as a vehicle for, foreign communist agents. Men like Hunt and Liddy believed that the radical left and the politicians whom they supported represented or sympathized with the communist enemy that America had been fighting for two decades. “We were deeply concerned by extremist elements: the yuppies, hippies, and zippies; the mob, the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] and the [antiwar] movement,” Hunt later wrote. He believed these groups were directed by a “countergovernment” whose purpose was “the destruction of our traditional institutions.”¹⁸

In his own memoirs, Liddy quoted from a speech given by Mark William Rudd, leader of the violent faction of the SDS, which became known as the Weather Underground: “We have to start tearing down this fucking country,” Rudd said. “We

¹⁶ *Senate Watergate Report*, abridged (New York: Carroll & Graff Publishers, 1974), 737.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

have to have a revolution in this country that is going to overthrow—like bombs, like guns, like firebombs. . . blowing up pig stations, blowing up banks,” he harangued.¹⁹ Liddy’s response: “That, to me, is war. I was ready. And willing.”²⁰

Like Lyndon Johnson before him, Nixon came to believe that foreign communist agents were involved in the antiwar movement. After all, social unrest was having a direct impact on his ability to conduct foreign policy, and also having a destabilizing effect on American society at large. The importance of this idea is often overlooked, understated, or presented as an example of Nixon’s irrational paranoia, because historians now know that there was in fact very little foreign influence, at least directly. However, it turned out that Nixon’s prognostication was not completely off base. According to an FBI report released in 1977, Cuban and North Vietnamese agents did provide limited support and “technical assistance” for the Weather Underground in the late 1960s and early 1970s.²¹ “Three years before militant members of the [SDS] split off to form the Weather Underground Organization in 1970, North Vietnamese and Cuban officials were influencing radical antiwar strategy through foreign meetings,” reported the *New York Times* article which first revealed the information.²² The *Times* went on to state that “the conduit for contact in the United States was a group of intelligence agents assigned to the staff of the Cuban Mission to the United Nations in New York.”

Although officials did not have any concrete evidence of such foreign intrigues during the Nixon years, they had a valid cause for concern regarding the possibility of foreign covert operatives for one very important reason: US intelligence engaged in the exact same type of activities in other countries. Hunt was well aware of this fact, as was Nixon, because they had been directly involved in overseeing such operations. As we have seen, since 1947 the United States had used espionage to influence foreign elections, had financed guerilla fighters, had employed propaganda to affect public

¹⁹ G. Gordon Liddy, *Will* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1980), 128.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “FBI Asserts Cuba Aided Weathermen,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1977, 1.

²² *Ibid.*

opinion, and had orchestrated coups d'état in foreign countries. It was logical, then, to assume that America's foreign enemies would use similar tactics against the United States if given the opportunity. The antiwar movement appeared as evidence that just such an operation was not only under way, but that it was being quite effective.

Connections: The CIA, Mullen & Company, and Howard Hughes

According to both Hunt and Colson, Hunt's first assignment for the White House was to research the 1963 assassination of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and the beginnings of the Vietnam war. The objective was to find evidence that President Kennedy had directly ordered Diem's killing, thereby making him responsible for the American escalation of the Vietnam war.²³ However, the documentary record indicates that Hunt was actually doing work for Colson much earlier than his "official" hiring in July 1971. In a White House memo from Colson to presidential aide George Bell, dated January 12, 1971, Colson wrote: "Put in a request immediately for Mr. and Mrs. Howard Hunt. . . to be after dinner guests. . . . Hunt was head of all our intelligence operations in Spain. . . [and] is beginning to take on a number of special assignments for us of a very sensitive nature."²⁴

This is an example of the type of obfuscation that consistently muddies our understanding of Watergate. Evidence often contradicts the written accounts of the participants. Even witnesses' sworn testimony under oath often omits important information or is outright false. What kind of work was Hunt doing for Colson prior to

²³ Hunt believed that, based on the documents he had uncovered, Kennedy *was* complicit in the Diem assassination, but he lacked the conclusive evidence to prove it. Thus, Colson told Hunt to forge documents in order to establish the proof that they believed did exist, but was missing from the documentary record. They planned on giving the documents to a magazine or newspaper, which would then print a story about them. However, the plan fell through because Hunt was unable to create forgeries that could withstand close technical scrutiny. The documents remained hidden away in Hunt's White House office safe until after the Watergate break-in (Hunt, *Undercover*, 179).

²⁴ Memo from Colson to Bell, January 12, 1971, Oudes, *From: The President*, 201-202.

July 1971? Another Colson memo from January 15, 1971, may provide a clue: “Bob Bennett, son of Senator Wallace Bennett of Utah, has just left the Department of Transportation to take over the Mullen Public Relations firm here in Washington. Bob is a trusted loyalist and a good friend. We intend to use him on a variety of outside projects.”²⁵ Bennett, as we will see, would play an important role in events to come. He was then head of Mullen & Co., the CIA front where Howard Hunt went to work in May 1970. This establishes an important link that is central to understanding the various machinations surrounding Watergate. Colson, Bennett, and Hunt were close associates, and were apparently working together on “sensitive outside projects” as early as January 1971.

Another important link to the Mullen-CIA-White House connection was the reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes. In the 1950s, Hughes had given a \$205,000 “loan” to then-Vice President Nixon’s brother, Donald Nixon, ostensibly to help support his struggling restaurant business. This had been revealed in an article by Jack Anderson shortly before the 1960 presidential election, and Nixon had long believed it played a role in his defeated that year.²⁶ But Hughes was a prolific financier of political aspirants, and it made no difference which side of the aisle they were from. He had extensive interests involving his numerous business enterprises and personal eccentricities, and he constantly sought to gain influence in Washington. And in early 1971, the Nixon White House was beginning to turn its focus to the relationship between Hughes and Lawrence O’Brien, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee. O’Brien had been on retainer as a “lobbyist” for Hughes since the late 1960s—a relationship that continued during his tenure as DNC Chairman.²⁷ Nixon believed such a scandalous scenario was apt political ammunition, if he could only figure out a way to use it. A

²⁵ Memo from Charles Colson to Roy Goodearle, January 15, 1971, Oudes, *From: The President*, 202.

²⁶ J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years* (New York: Viking, 1976), 112.

²⁷ *Senate Watergate Report*, 540.

memo from Nixon to Haldeman dated January 14, 1971—the same time period as the Colson memos concerning Bennett and Hunt—reads: “It would seem the time is approaching when Larry O’Brien is held accountable for his retainer with Hughes.”²⁸ White House Counsel John Dean was given the assignment to look into the matter, and he later reported that, through Bob Bennett, he found that O’Brien had indeed been placed on retainer for Hughes by former Hughes associate Robert Maheu.²⁹

Bennett was in a position to have this information because Mullen & Co. had since taken over O’Brien’s role as Hughes’s Washington representative. Indeed, the Hughes Tool Company was one of Mullen’s largest accounts. This transition occurred because Howard Hughes had recently fired Robert Maheu, who had served as Hughes’s top lieutenant for years, because he believed Maheu was mismanaging Hughes’s Nevada hotel and casino holdings and perhaps embezzling money.³⁰ Hughes’s subsequent hiring of Mullen & Co. also seems to have been connected to Hughes’s association with the Mormon Church. Hughes apparently had a strange affection for Mormons, and employed many Mormons in top positions within his companies. In fact, a purported copy of Hughes’s will was produced by the Mormon Church in 1976, which bequeathed to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints one-sixteenth of Hughes’s estate—over \$100 million (the will was later determined to be a forgery by a Las Vegas jury).³¹ Incidentally, the Mormon Church was also one of Mullen & Co.’s major clients, and Bob Bennett was himself a Mormon.

Thus, the break between Howard Hughes and Robert Maheu also severed the Hughes-O’Brien relationship, and brought Hughes closer into the White House-CIA orbit. However, it also posed a problem for Nixon, because Maheu was aware that his

²⁸ Memo from Nixon to Haldeman, January 14, 1971, Oudes, *From: The President*, 202.

²⁹ Memo from Dean to Haldeman RE: Hughes’s Retainer of Larry O’Brien, January 26, 1971, Oudes, *From: The President*, 208-209.

³⁰ *Senate Watergate Report*, 522, 607.

³¹ Wallace Turner, “Purported Will of Hughes Found at Mormon Office,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1976, 1.

eccentric boss had given Nixon \$100,000 in cash sometime after the 1968 election.³² The money had been delivered directly to Charles “Bebe” Rebozo, Nixon’s closest personal friend, who managed Nixon’s financial and real estate affairs in Florida, and who also had close ties to organized crime. Rebozo later told investigators that he kept the money in a safe deposit box and never actually gave it to Nixon, specifically because he was afraid that, in the wake of the highly publicized Hughes-Maheu split, the contribution might become public.³³ So in 1971, Nixon had reason to be concerned about Larry O’Brien, Robert Maheu, and Howard Hughes. Though Nixon wished to exploit the O’Brien-Hughes retainer, he also had to be careful not to expose his own special relationship with the controversial magnate.

The nature of that relationship is not exactly clear, aside from the fact that Hughes indeed gave money to Nixon. By all accounts, however, Nixon did not reciprocate by granting Hughes any particular favors. Robert Maheu testified in 1974 that Hughes was angry at the Nixon administration because the president would not halt the testing of nuclear bombs in the Nevada desert.³⁴ Nixon did offer to meet with Hughes, but only in order to explain the necessity of continuing the tests. Bob Haldeman wrote in his memoirs that he “never knew [Nixon] to do any special favors for Hughes.”³⁵ “Quite the contrary,” he continued, “when Hughes objected violently to the nuclear testing in Nevada, Nixon ordered the testing to go forward, even though Hughes was enraged.”³⁶ However, it seems likely that Hughes must have received some favor for his 1950s loan to Donald Nixon while Richard Nixon was vice president, otherwise he would not have been so interested in making further contributions to the Nixon

³² *Senate Watergate Report*, 607.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ “Maheu Says Nixon Angered Hughes,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1974, 27.

³⁵ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

campaign.³⁷ Indeed, in addition to the \$100,000 in cash that Hughes delivered to Rebozo, he gave another \$150,000 to the CRP Finance Committee in 1972.³⁸

It is important to note that Hughes also had a relationship with the CIA. Like the Mullen Company, Hughes's companies often served as cover for CIA operatives abroad.³⁹ In addition, many of the top executives in Hughes's businesses were former CIA officials. The most well known collaboration between Hughes and CIA was a top-secret program called Project Azorian. Its purpose was to raise a sunken Soviet submarine from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean in the early 1970s. Hughes's company Global Marine Development, Inc., received a \$350 million-dollar contract to build a specially engineered mining ship called the *Glomar Explorer*, which was designed to retrieve the submerged vessel.⁴⁰ (The project partially succeeded; part of the lifting mechanism broke during the retrieval, and half of the submarine also broke away and again sank to the ocean floor).

Hughes's man Robert Maheu is yet another compelling link between Hughes and the CIA, as well as to organized crime. He had also been directly involved in the CIA plots to assassinate Fidel Castro. Maheu was an ex-FBI agent who opened a private investigator business in 1954. It was in that role that Maheu often took on jobs for the CIA, serving as a "cut out"—an entity through which intelligence services could coordinate clandestine missions without becoming directly involved. According to the Church Committee's *Report on Assassinations*, "a former FBI associate of Maheu's was employed in the CIA's Office of Security and had arranged for the CIA to use Maheu in several sensitive covert operations in which 'he didn't want to have an Agency person or a government person get caught.'"⁴¹ In 1960, the CIA had asked Maheu for help in

³⁷ Some historians speculate that Hughes received favors from the Justice Department regarding his airline and casino companies.

³⁸ *Senate Watergate Report*, 606.

³⁹ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 113.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Church Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 74.

recruiting certain underworld figures, namely, the Mafia, to carry out the assassination of Castro.⁴² Maheu had thereupon contacted Johnny Roselli, a high-level Mafioso who worked for Chicago's top crime boss Sam Giancana in coordinating mob activity in Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Roselli, Giancana, and the powerful Godfather Santo Trafficante Jr., who controlled organized crime in Miami and Cuba, undertook several attempts to kill Castro at the behest of the CIA.⁴³ Thus, Maheu was in a position to know a lot of secrets, not only with regard to the Nixon-Hughes relationship, but the CIA's dirty tricks as well.

The CIA and the Plumbers

In April 1971, Hunt traveled to Miami, he said, on business for the Mullen Company.⁴⁴ However, it happened that his trip coincided with a ceremony commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Bay of Pigs invasion—an annual gathering popular among Miami's Cuban exile community. There, according to Hunt, he contacted former CIA operative and Bay of Pigs veteran Bernard L. Barker, ostensibly for the purpose of “catching up” with an old friend.⁴⁵ Hunt wrote in his memoirs that Barker, who was Cuban-American, holding citizenship in both countries, introduced him to Eugenio Martinez and Felipe De Diego, two other Cuban exiles who had worked with the CIA in the past and were still very much interested in overthrowing the Castro government.⁴⁶ These men—Barker, Martinez, De Diego—along with others, would later be involved in the break-ins of Dr. Louis Fielding's (Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist) Los Angeles office and the DNC's Watergate office.⁴⁷ It is important to recall that Hunt's trip

⁴² Ibid., 75-77.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Hunt, *Undercover*, 144.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ These are the only two burglaries that were ever admitted to and/or acknowledged during the Watergate Hearings. Yet, we know that at least one other burglary was committed, at the Chilean embassy in Washington, as well as a planned burglary of *Las*

to Miami occurred two months *before* the release of the Pentagon Papers—the event which would often be pointed to as the catalyst for his hiring by the White House.

According to Eugenio Martinez, who later wrote an article for *Harper's* magazine, Hunt—or “Eduardo” as he was known to the Cuban exile community—had clearly come to Miami on a recruiting mission.⁴⁸ “He wanted to meet with the old people. It was a good sign. We did not think he had come to Miami for nothing,” wrote Martinez.⁴⁹ The Cubans believed in Eduardo. He was somewhat of a mythical figure among the anti-Castro Cubans. He told them, Barker later testified, that they would be part of a “national security” team, above the FBI and the CIA, and that they would, in turn, receive assistance from the US Government in overthrowing Fidel Castro.⁵⁰ “To us, this was our prime motivation,” said Barker.

Thus, Hunt was in Miami, apparently assembling the group of Cuban operatives who would comprise his covert break-in team, months before Richard Nixon is first heard on the White House tapes ordering a break-in at the Brookings Institute. “They [Brookings] have a lot of material [regarding the Pentagon Papers] . . . I want them [Hunt et al.] to break in and take it out. Do you understand?” Nixon said to Haldeman on June 30, 1971.⁵¹ “Yeah. But you have to have somebody to do it,” Haldeman replied. Nixon: “That’s what I’m talking about. Don’t discuss it here. You talk to Hunt. I want the break-in. Hell, they do that. You’re to break into the place, rifle the files, and bring them in.” Clearly, Nixon was well aware of E. Howard Hunt, and the fact that he—or “they”—specialized in surreptitious entries, even before Colson officially hired Hunt as a White

Vegas Sun newspaper editor Hank Greenspun’s office. It is suspected that there were in fact several others. For example, in his interview with *True Magazine*, Watergate burglar Frank Sturgis said, “We got *busted* at Watergate. We did not *begin* there. We had carried out other assignments, successfully. . . .” [emphasis in original] (*True Magazine*, August 1974, 74).

⁴⁸ Bernard Barker and Eugenio Martinez, “Mission Impossible,” *Harper's*, October 1974, 51.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Watergate Hearings, Book I, 360.

⁵¹ NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman—Oval Office, June 30, 1971, in Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 6.

House consultant on July 7, 1971. It seems likely, then, especially given Nixon's knowledge of Hunt's Bay of Pigs involvement (as will be discussed later), that Nixon had long been acquainted with Hunt, probably since 1960, when Nixon was vice president and Hunt was working on the Cuba problem for the CIA.

What type of break-ins might Hunt have committed prior to July 1971? This remains unclear, although one possibility involves the April 1971 break-ins of the offices and residences of two Chilean diplomats. On April 5, 1971, the Manhattan residence of Chile's United Nations Ambassador, Humberto Diaz-Casanueva, was burglarized, and "sensitive papers" disturbed, presumably in the process of being photographed. Then, on April 11, a similar break-in occurred at the office of the Chilean Development Corporation President, Javier Urrutia.⁵² There was yet another burglary at the office of Chilean UN official Victor Rioseco in New York on February 10, 1972.⁵³

Although it has not been established that Hunt's team was behind these three burglaries, Nixon's references to Hunt as someone who did surreptitious entries makes for a compelling case, especially because we know for certain that Hunt *was* responsible for at least one such break-in: the Chilean embassy in Washington, D.C., on May 13, 1972. Nixon discussed this break-in during a taped conversation with White House Counsel Fred Buzhardt a year later, on May 16, 1973: "When you get, for example, to the break-in of the Chilean embassy, that thing was part of the burglars' plan as a cover. . . those assholes are trying to have a cover for a CIA cover, I don't know. I think [John] Dean concocted that."⁵⁴ But Nixon's understanding of the reasoning behind the break-in seems strange. The Chilean ambassador, Orlando Letelier, said that files had been disturbed, and it appeared the intruders were "seeking sensitive government

⁵² Michael C. Jensen, "Chilean Break-ins Puzzle Watergate Investigators," *New York Times*, May 29, 1973, 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ NWHT, Nixon and Fred Buzhardt—Oval Office, May 16, 1973, in Douglas Brinkley and Luke A. Nichter, *The Nixon Tapes: 1973* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), 687.

documents.”⁵⁵ Also, Nixon was being disingenuous with Buzhardt, who had recently been named White House Counsel after the firing of John Dean. Nixon told Buzhardt that he had never authorized any break-ins, which was demonstrably false.

Burglaries at foreign embassies were not unusual. In fact, it was common practice for the FBI to conduct break-ins at embassies in order to steal secret encryption codes for the NSA.⁵⁶ One possibility is that the Chilean embassy break-in was related to the CIA’s ongoing efforts to overthrow the Allende government. This would indicate that Hunt’s team was part of a sanctioned CIA program that Nixon was actually aware of.

A second, perhaps more likely, possibility is that, as Frank Sturgis claimed in his interview with *True*, they were looking for the secret Cuban dossier that catalogued all of the CIA’s attempts to kill Fidel Castro.⁵⁷ “We knew that this secret memorandum existed. . . because both the CIA and the FBI had found excerpts and references to it,” said Sturgis. “The whole memo ended with a proposition, from the Cubans to the Democratic leadership; if McGovern got elected president, and if he then stopped the ‘subversive forays’ against Cuba, then Castro would be willing to deal with the McGovern administration.”⁵⁸ Sturgis’s understanding of the Cuban document, and the reason for its importance, might have been skewed. Hunt had led his Cuban operatives to believe that the Castro regime was actively supporting McGovern, whose election allegedly would be detrimental to the cause of Cuba’s “liberation.” “There’s a report. . . that Castro’s been getting money to the Democrats,” Hunt would later explain to Barker. “[McGovern] is Hanoi’s favorite, too, and if McGovern’s elected he’ll simply pull out our troops and to hell with everything else.”⁵⁹

Hunt’s activities for the White House prior to July 1971 notwithstanding, it is clear that he was also working, in some capacity, for the CIA, even if on an unofficial or

⁵⁵ Michael C. Jensen, “Chilean Break-ins,” 17.

⁵⁶ Liddy, *Will*, 201; also, James Bamford, *Body of Secrets*, 432.

⁵⁷ Frank Sturgis interview, *True Magazine*, August 1974, 74.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Hunt, *Undercover*, 213.

unsanctioned basis. It was not uncommon for CIA officers to “retire” from the agency and remain closely associated with or even carry out assignments for the CIA. For example, according to Hunt’s own memoirs, he had falsely “retired” from the agency on two occasions before 1970—first in 1960 to work undercover with anti-Castro rebels, and again in 1965 to write spy novels intended to deceive the KGB.⁶⁰ When he left the agency in May 1970, he was completely aware that his new employer, Mullen & Company, served as a CIA front company.⁶¹ In fact, Director Helms was a close friend of Hunt’s and had helped him secure the job at Mullen, according to an internal CIA history of Watergate that was declassified in 2016.⁶² But the document most obviously indicative of Hunt’s continued use by the CIA is an agency memorandum dated October 14, 1970—subject heading: “E. Howard Hunt—Utilization by Central Cover Staff”—which states that Hunt’s covert security clearance was extended by the CIA after his retirement.⁶³

Further, a CIA employee named Rob Roy Ratliff, who worked as a liaison officer for the National Security Council, gave a statement to the House Judiciary Impeachment Committee on January 17, 1974, in which he claimed that he had witnessed Howard Hunt sending packets of documents to the CIA through the NSC liaison office.⁶⁴ “Hunt had frequently transmitted sealed envelopes via our office to the Agency,” wrote Ratliff. “We had receipts for those envelopes but were unaware of their contents.” Hunt’s friend Charles Colson also came to believe that the CIA was somehow still connected to Hunt during the time in which he was working for the White House. In 1974 Colson told

⁶⁰ Ibid., 134.

⁶¹ Ibid., 142.

⁶² CIA Report, *Watergate History, 1973-1974*, Internet Archive, [[https://archive.org/details/ CIA Watergate History](https://archive.org/details/CIA_Watergate_History)], 12.

⁶³ *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities*, Report No. 93-981, 93rd Cong., 2nd sess., June 1974, at Mary Ferrell Foundation, [https://www.maryferrell.org/pages/Watergate_Documents.html], 1121.

⁶⁴ This document is reprinted in its entirety in Jim Hougan, *Secret Agenda*, Appendix V: CIA Documents, 328-329.

Haldeman that “he was absolutely convinced that the CIA ran the whole Watergate operation from the beginning.”⁶⁵ Colson would have been in a better position than perhaps anyone to evaluate Hunt’s activities and motives.

But there was also another member of the plumbers, or of the Cuban contingent, who was in fact an active operative of the Central Intelligence Agency. Eugenio “Rolando” Martinez had worked for the CIA since the early 1960s. He was a legendary boat captain, having run 354 missions between Miami and Cuba for the CIA.⁶⁶ According to the CIA’s own report, during the time in which he was working with Hunt and Liddy, Martinez was still a paid “informant” for the CIA, and yet at another point in the report he was referred to as an “agent.”⁶⁷ The Senate Watergate Committee later discovered that Martinez regularly reported to a CIA case officer in Miami, and that he had told the officer about his activities with Hunt.⁶⁸ When the CIA’s Chief of Station in Miami informed CIA headquarters of Hunt’s activities and Martinez’s involvement, he received a reply from the CIA’s Deputy Director of Plans advising that he should not “concern himself with the travels of Hunt in Miami, that Hunt was on domestic White House business of an unknown nature and that the Chief of Station should ‘cool it.’”⁶⁹ On June 19, 1972—two days after Martinez and the other burglars were arrested at the Watergate building—the CIA was informed by an operative that Martinez’s vehicle was parked at the Miami airport and that it contained “compromising documents.” The CIA provided this information to the FBI on June 21, 1972. The Watergate Committee’s *Minority Report on CIA Involvement* notes that “our staff has yet to receive a satisfactory explanation as to the aforementioned time lag and an accounting of agency actions during the interim.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 139.

⁶⁶ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 97.

⁶⁷ CIA Report, *Watergate History*, 15, 138.

⁶⁸ *Senate Watergate Report*, 753.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 755.

The Ellsberg Break-in

The first admitted break-in that Hunt and Liddy carried out was the September 1971 break-in at the office of Dr. Louis Fielding in Los Angeles, California. Fielding was a psychiatrist who had once treated Daniel Ellsberg. The plumbers were seeking Fielding's file on Ellsberg in hopes that they could use it to complete a psychological profile of Ellsberg that was being compiled by the CIA, and perhaps discover some evidence with which to discredit him in the press. The plumbers were in fact working closely with both the FBI and the CIA in the investigation of Ellsberg, although they believed the FBI's performance was lacking.⁷¹ The CIA's Watergate report stated, regarding Ellsberg, that "the seriousness with which the US Government viewed the leak and publication of the Pentagon Papers was shared by this Agency" (an odd choice of words, as one would generally consider CIA as part of the US Government).⁷² The report went on to explain how the Pentagon Papers contained "repeated references to Agency engagement in covert paramilitary operations," and, furthermore, that "the collective totality of Agency material in the Pentagon Papers would tell any sophisticated or professional outsider a very great deal about how the Agency goes about doing its business."⁷³

Thus, the CIA and Nixon had a mutual interest in Daniel Ellsberg. In fact, the entire operation against Ellsberg can be described as nothing less than a joint White House-CIA venture. The plumbers had the written approval of John Ehrlichman to carry out the break-in. The CIA's Technical Services Division (TSD) provided Hunt and Liddy with items such as false identification, disguises, a high-tech camera, and, according to Liddy, a "CIA 9mm assassination piece."⁷⁴ Also, the CIA Office of Medical Services (OMS) was directly complicit in creating the psychological profile of Ellsberg.⁷⁵ However, the CIA's report stressed that these were not "official" CIA operations, nor were they run

⁷¹ Liddy, *Will*, 150.

⁷² CIA Report, *Watergate History*, 2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁷⁴ Liddy, *Will*, 165.

⁷⁵ CIA Report, *Watergate History*, 47.

through normal channels, and that assistance was provided only at the request of the White House. “The agency’s right hand did not know what its left hand was doing,” explained the report, and “not even Director Helms. . . was aware of Hunt’s participation in the profiles matter.”⁷⁶ But this is a clear example of the kind of compartmentalization and deliberate obfuscation used by intelligence services to cover their operations. It is unthinkable that Helms would not have been aware of the plumbers’ efforts given his close relationship with Hunt, the presence of Martinez on the break-in team, the seriousness with which the CIA viewed the Ellsberg matter, and the extensive operational support provided to Hunt by the agency.

On the night of September 3, 1971, Hunt and Liddy kept watch outside while the team of Barker, Martinez, and De Diego broke into Dr. Fielding’s Los Angeles office. Liddy wrote the name “Ellsberg” on a piece of paper and gave it to the break-in team, telling them to find and photograph any documents bearing that name.⁷⁷ But according to Hunt, Liddy, and Barker, no files on Ellsberg were found. The mission was a failure. Strangely, despite the disappointing outcome of the operation, Hunt and others later recounted how the team celebrated afterward by drinking champagne.⁷⁸ “At least the operation had been ‘clean,’” Liddy wrote. “We decided to celebrate that, at least with the champagne.”⁷⁹

But it seems odd that Hunt, who, by his own account, had overseen many such surreptitious entries in the past, would have been in such a celebratory mood given that an operation on which he had spent much time and money had not been successful. Interestingly, according to the one of the burglars, the team in fact *did* find the Ellsberg file in Fielding’s office. Felipe De Diego later said under sworn testimony before a House

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Hunt, *Undercover*, 172.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Liddy, *Will*, 168.

committee that the file had been discovered and photographed by the burglars.⁸⁰ Fielding also claimed that the file had been in his office at the time of the break-in, that he found it lying on the floor among other files, and that it had apparently been “fingered” through.⁸¹ If the document was found, it was never turned over to the White House.

Spying on the White House

Considering the continued association of Hunt and the plumbers with the CIA and the presence of Martinez as a “mole,” it is clear that, at the very least, the Agency was fully aware of the plumbers’ clandestine activities. Further, it defies credulity to assume that the CIA was not actively involved in monitoring the White House’s activities, and probably taking advantage of their agents’ positions to advance their own agenda. The CIA had the ability not only to monitor White House activity, but to influence their thinking through the relationship between Howard Hunt, Bob Bennett, and Charles Colson. The Ervin Committee later discovered through testimony that the CIA in fact maintained a file on Hunt’s activities called the “Mr. Edward” file, but that it was kept outside the agency’s normal filing system. The committee requested this file but was denied access.⁸² As author James Rosen wrote in his biography of John Mitchell, “faced with mounting evidence that officials in the White House had set up their own covert operation unit. . . CIA acted as any intelligence organization would.”⁸³ Indeed, had the CIA allowed the plumbers to proceed unimpeded and unchecked, “targeting anything and anybody in Washington, utterly beyond the watch or influence of the

⁸⁰ R.W. Apple and *New York Times* staff (editors), *Watergate Hearings: Break-in and Cover-up* (New York: Bantam, 1973), 69

⁸¹ Hougan, *Secret Agenda*, 47.

⁸² Senate Watergate Report, 748.

⁸³ James Rosen, *The Strong Man: John Mitchell and the Secrets of Watergate* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 282.

nation's premier spy agency," it would have been a tremendous intelligence failure from the agency's perspective.⁸⁴

It was also not unprecedented for the CIA to place operatives within other governmental departments or agencies. For as Bob Haldeman explained in his book, "a phenomenon in Washington rarely discussed is the active hostility among government agencies—complete with spies and 'plants'—at the expense of the country."⁸⁵ A 1973 report by the CIA's Inspector General stated that the agency had a long-standing practice of placing agents in other departments, which included "detailing employees to the immediate office of the White House and to components intimately associated with the 'Office of the President.'"⁸⁶ The paper was released following reports from the House Select Committee on Intelligence that it had "discovered evidence in CIA files of 'infiltration of the executive' by its employees, including one who had access to the Oval Office during the administration of President Nixon," reported a *New York Times* article on the matter.⁸⁷ The CIA denied that they placed agents inside other departments without the consent of the department heads. However, retired Air Force colonel Fletcher Prouty, who worked as a liaison between the Air Force and the CIA for years, said that is not always true. He believed, in fact, that the operative who was "intimately associated" with the Oval Office was Nixon's aide Alexander Butterfield, who also had a background in the Air Force as a liaison with the CIA (and who would eventually be the man who revealed the existence of the White House taping system to the Ervin Committee).⁸⁸ Haldeman also suspected that Butterfield was a CIA mole, arguing that Butterfield was the only other person besides himself and John Ehrlichman who could be classified as being an "intimate component" of the Oval Office.⁸⁹ (Haldeman also

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 107.

⁸⁶ "CIA Report Says Aides Worked at Other Agencies," *New York Times*, July 12, 1975, 1.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 109.

noted that Nixon secretary Rose Mary Woods believed Butterfield had been a spy as well.)

If the CIA was spying on Nixon, as it appears they were, it would not have been the only case in which elements of the national security apparatus were conducting espionage against the White House. Most likely, it was common practice. But it was exacerbated by the excessive secrecy with which Nixon pursued his foreign policy goals, cutting out, as much as possible, other departments such as State and the Pentagon. J. Edgar Hoover had warned Nixon that the Army Signal Corps, which ran White House communications, would sometimes listen in on “supposedly secure” telephone calls.⁹⁰ According to Haldeman, Nixon suspected that Defense Secretary Melvin Laird was receiving inside information from eavesdropped conversations, because Laird knew about a certain phone call with an admiral that Nixon had not told him about.⁹¹

Then, in December 1971, the plumbers sent shockwaves through the Oval Office when they discovered the source of a damaging leak that revealed Nixon and Kissinger’s secret “tilt toward Pakistan” during the India-Pakistan War, which was part of their long-term strategy for opening up relations with China. The leak, it turned out, had come from a military spy ring that was being directed from the very highest levels of the Pentagon.⁹² Jack Anderson had revealed the top-secret information in his column on December 16, 1971. He claimed that Nixon, “apparently because of a personal rapport with Pakistan’s President,” was allowing India to fall under Soviet control.⁹³ The truth was more complex. Nixon did not get along well with India’s president, Indira Gandhi, who viewed India as an independent, neutral nation. And it was through Pakistan, which had a relationship with China, that Nixon and Kissinger were conducting their secret

⁹⁰ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1994), 86.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Seymour Hersh, “A Military ‘Ring’ Linked to Spying on the White House,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1974, 1.

⁹³ Jack Anderson, “US Moves Give Soviets Hold on India,” *Washington Post*, December 16, 1971, G15.

talks regarding a presidential visit to China. When war erupted between India and Pakistan in 1971 over the independence of East Pakistan (Bangladesh), the Nixon administration publicly took a neutral stance. But secretly, Nixon and Kissinger were concerned that India might overrun West Pakistan, and they began tilting their support to the Pakistanis.⁹⁴

The Anderson leak was astonishing to the White House. It was, in many ways, even more damaging than the Pentagon Papers because it concerned a current foreign policy situation, rather than the secrets of past administrations. Even more astonishing, however, was the revelation of where the leak had originated. The plumbers discovered that a Pentagon-based spy ring had, in effect, infiltrated the National Security Council, and their agent was stealing documents from anywhere he could find them—burn bags, desk drawers, even Henry Kissinger’s briefcase.⁹⁵ The agent was a Navy yeoman named Charles Radford, who worked in the Pentagon liaison office to the NSC. Radford was operating under the express authority of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Moorer. Radford, it turned out, was also a friend of Jack Anderson.

Upon discovering the source of the leaks, Nixon was outraged. The country’s top military official was directing an espionage operation against the president—a development that unnervingly echoed the 1964 film *Seven Days in May*. Yet, after some discussion with his advisors, Nixon realized that he could not prosecute Moorer or go public with the scandal. “Prosecuting is a possibility for the Joint Chiefs,” Nixon suggested initially.⁹⁶ “I agree with you,” replied Mitchell, adding, “but we have to take it from there as to what this would lead to if you pursued it. . . . You would have the Joint Chiefs aligned on that side directly against you. . . . I think the important thing is to paper this thing over.” Nixon concurred: “And the Joint Chiefs, the military, et cetera,

⁹⁴ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 879-918.

⁹⁵ Haldeman, *Diaries*, 386.

⁹⁶ NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell—Oval Office, in Brinkley and Nichter, *The Nixon Tapes: 1971-1972* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 331-33.

cannot become our enemy. We cannot have it. And also, we can't have this goddamn security problem!"⁹⁷

Killing Jack Anderson

In the wake of the Anderson-Pakistan leak and the Moorer-Radford affair, the plumbers undertook to develop what was undoubtedly their most reprehensible plan (that we are aware of). Journalist J. Anthony Lukas wrote in his history of Watergate that "Hunt has told former CIA associates that in December [1971] or early January [1972] a 'senior White House official' ordered him to assassinate [Jack] Anderson. He says he arranged to obtain a poison that would leave no traces, but the assassination plan was abandoned at the last moment."⁹⁸ G. Gordon Liddy confirmed the story in his memoir, *Will*, although he claimed that the "White House official"—whom he presumed to be Charles Colson—had only told Hunt to "do something" about Anderson, and it was Liddy himself who suggested killing him.⁹⁹ Hunt and Liddy met with a CIA agent named "Dr. Gunn," and inquired about using the psychedelic drug LSD to cause Anderson to act erratically in public and thus discredit him. But Gunn said that, in the CIA's experience, the drug was too unpredictable.¹⁰⁰ They decided the best course of action was to have a group of Cubans kill Anderson and make it appear as a random Washington street crime.¹⁰¹

Fortunately for Anderson, the plan was aborted. But it shows the lengths to which the White House was prepared to go to quell the endemic leaking of national security secrets. In Liddy's odd memoir, he provided some rationalization as to why he would have been willing to go through with the murder. "I fail to see the distinction between killing an enemy soldier in time of declared war and killing an enemy espionage

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 105.

⁹⁹ Liddy, *Will*, 207-210.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

agent in a 'cold' war, or even killing certain US citizens," he wrote.¹⁰² "For example. . . were I given instruction from an appropriate officer of the government, I would kill Philip Agee [a former CIA agent who had published an exposé about the agency] if it were demonstrated. . . that his revelations have led directly to the death of at least one of his fellow CIA officers, that he intended to continue the revelations, and that they would lead to more deaths."

Liddy's reasoning further demonstrates how the clandestine nature of the cold war, the ideology of national security, and the premium placed on secrecy had blurred the battle lines with regard to who and what the United States was actually fighting against. Indeed, in a sense, the front line in the cold war was not the Iron Curtain or the 17th parallel in Vietnam, it was in the hearts and minds of American citizens, and Americans themselves were often viewed as the acceptable targets, as were certain political candidates of the wrong side.

¹⁰² Ibid., 210.

Chapter 4: Watergate

“Let me say this: I had spent most of my adult life abroad involved in activities that were quite clearly illegal under US law, but which were not only encouraged by our Government abroad, we trained people extensively for it, paid large sums of money, for just the type of expertise that I had acquired and was now asked in some small respects to exercise in behalf of the executive branch of the Government.” –E. Howard Hunt¹

“I leave the question to rest as a part of a great mystery the significance of which may one day overshadow even Watergate: the manipulation of this nation by members of an intelligence agency.” –H.R. “Bob” Haldeman²

Sometime in November 1971, there began to be a serious push by high-level White House officials to establish a “political intelligence” apparatus for the Committee to Re-Elect the President (CRP). These officials included John Mitchell, Bob Haldeman, John Dean, Charles Colson, and, most likely, President Nixon himself. The man selected to lead this intelligence unit was G. Gordon Liddy, who on November 24, 1971, was moved into the job of General Counsel to CRP.³ This was how the ostensible “national security” programs being run by Hunt, Liddy, and the plumbers were transitioned into a patently political use for the White House. As Haldeman detailed in an interview for the BBC documentary film *Watergate*, “I have a copy of a memo. . . that says, ‘The Attorney General [Mitchell] discussed with John Dean the need to develop a political intelligence capability,’” adding that “John Dean did in fact move himself into the whole area of political intelligence.”⁴ Liddy himself recalled that “John Dean said the best way I could

¹ E. Howard Hunt testimony, *Inquiry into the Alleged Involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Watergate and Ellsberg Matters, Hearings before the Special Committee on Intelligence of the House Committee on Armed Services, 94th Cong., 1st sess., May 1973-July 1974*, Hathi Trust Digital Library, [<https://babel.hathitrust.org>], 507.

² Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 109-110.

³ *Senate Watergate Report*, 72.

⁴ *Watergate*, Part 1: “Break-In”, BBC Documentary, 1994.

serve the president in the 1972 campaign year would be to become the political intelligence chieftain. That what he wanted was a full intelligence plan.”⁵

Hunt was also brought into the fold. He told Charles Colson in January 1972 that he was now spending most of his time working with Liddy on their political intelligence plan, called GEMSTONE, and Colson agreed that was the best course of action.⁶ Hunt and Liddy worked closely together in developing the GEMSTONE program. It included plans to kidnap antiwar protesters and sequester them away in Mexico; to set up a houseboat off the coast of Miami (where the Democratic Convention was to be held) in which electronic surveillance equipment and prostitutes would be used to sexually blackmail Democratic staffers; and to use an airplane equipped with high-tech eavesdropping equipment to spy on certain mobile targets.⁷ Hunt was able to secure the aid of the CIA in constructing elaborate, high-quality charts outlining Liddy’s GEMSTONE plan, so that Liddy could use them when he presented the plan to Attorney General John Mitchell, who was scheduled to become director of CRP in March.⁸ This fact alone demonstrates that the CIA would have had full knowledge of Hunt and Liddy’s activities—they had the literal blueprints.

Another man who joined Liddy’s team in early 1972, and who would be central to the Watergate break-ins, was former CIA agent and electronics expert James W. McCord Jr. Liddy needed someone experienced in wiretapping, and he found McCord readily available, as McCord was already working for CRP as a security officer. Like Howard Hunt, McCord was a 20-year veteran of the CIA. He had been head of CIA’s Physical Security Division as well as its Technical Security Division. Upon retiring from the agency in 1970, he opened a private security business called McCord Associates. He was first hired to serve as security officer for CRP by White House consultant and

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hunt, *Undercover*, 189.

⁷ Liddy, *Will*, 198-199.

⁸ Ibid., 193.

political agent John Caulfield in October 1971.⁹ Caulfield, a former New York police detective, had been brought into the White House by John Ehrlichman in April 1969. He had conducted various sorts of political intelligence assignments for the White House, such as once placing Senator Ted Kennedy on around-the-clock surveillance.¹⁰ Caulfield had actually developed his own political intelligence plan in 1971, called “Sandwedge,” but it had been rejected because White House officials did not think he was up to the task.

Liddy’s original plan was also rejected by Mitchell after he was first presented with the project on January 27, 1972. Also present at this meeting were John Dean and Jeb Stuart Magruder, the deputy director of CRP. Although Dean had told Liddy that the program would be well-funded—“half a million, for openers”—Mitchell believed it was too expensive, too extreme, and needed to be scaled back.¹¹ He told Liddy to tone the program down and to burn the charts.¹² Liddy ultimately reworked GEMSTONE twice until it was mostly a surveillance operation—wiretapping, photography of documents. Gone were the plans involving kidnapping and prostitution. He was finally able to secure approval with a budget of \$250,000 in March 1972.¹³ But exactly who *gave* that approval has been one of the most enduring controversies of the entire Watergate saga. Magruder later claimed that Mitchell gave his approval during a meeting at Key Biscayne, Florida, on March 30, 1972, but details of Magruder’s story often changed, and many researchers find his account unreliable. Mitchell denied ever having given his authorization, and claimed that he made it quite clear that he did not want to hear anything else about the plan. This also seems spurious, however, because Mitchell could have put an end to the planning of GEMSTONE after the first meeting on the subject,

⁹ James W. McCord, Jr., *A Piece of Tape: The Watergate Story: Fact and Fiction* (Rockville, MD: Washington Media Services, 1974), 11.

¹⁰ Reeves, *President Nixon*, 67.

¹¹ *Senate Watergate Report*, 76.

¹² Rosen, *The Strong Man*, 264.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 78.

had he chosen. Another man who was present at the Key Biscayne meeting was Fred LaRue, a friend of Mitchell and consultant to President Nixon. LaRue always held that Mitchell did not give approval, suggesting that it was not something that had to be decided at that time.¹⁴

Whether Mitchell gave approval or not, it is clear that Magruder was receiving pressure from higher authorities. Around mid-March 1972, Hunt took Liddy to see his friend Charles Colson and complained to him that they were having difficulty in getting their operation approved.¹⁵ Colson then called Magruder and told him to get the ball rolling with Liddy's plan.¹⁶ This incident is important, for obvious reasons, but specifically because it is an example of how E. Howard Hunt, through his friendship with Colson, was able to influence events. Nearly a year later, during a now-famous White House conversation between John Dean and President Nixon, Dean referenced this Colson incident in the course of explaining to Nixon how Watergate had come about. "How did it all start, where did it start? It started with an instruction to me from Bob Haldeman to see if we couldn't set up a perfectly legitimate campaign intelligence operation over at the Re-Election Committee," said Dean.¹⁷ Then, after discussing Mitchell's reticence about the plan, Dean recounted how "Liddy and Hunt apparently came to see Chuck Colson, and Chuck Colson picked up the phone and called Magruder and said, 'you all either fish or cut bait. Uh, this is absurd to have these guys over there and not using them. . . ." Nixon: "[Did] Colson know what they were talking about?" Dean: "I can only assume, because of his close relationship with—" "Hunt," said Nixon.¹⁸

Thus, by spring 1972, Liddy had approval and funding for GEMSTONE through CRP. Dean was acting as a sort of "intelligence liaison" between the White House and CRP, and Magruder was the man at CRP who was communicating decisions to Liddy.

¹⁴ Ibid., 270-275.

¹⁵ *Senate Watergate Report*, 78.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ NWHT, Nixon, Dean—Oval Office, March 21, 1973, in Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 247-248.

¹⁸ Ibid., 249.

And yet, it was through influence from Hunt's friend and Nixon's close political advisor Charles Colson that Magruder was pressured into soliciting approval for the operation from Mitchell, who may or may not have ever actually given it. It was a tangled web indeed, and one can easily understand why, after so many years, many aspects of Watergate remain a mystery.

The Greenspun Burglary

While Liddy and Hunt were developing their plan for GEMSTONE and awaiting Mitchell's approval, a series of events took place that re-opened concerns about Howard Hughes, Robert Maheu, and Larry O'Brien. On January 24, 1972, Jack Anderson wrote in his column that he had "documentary evidence" that Hughes had delivered \$100,000 in cash to President Nixon through Nixon's friend Bebe Rebozo.¹⁹ Then, on February 3, the *New York Times* reported that Hank Greenspun, publisher of the *Las Vegas Sun* newspaper, had copies of hundreds of memos written by Hughes to his former lieutenant Robert Maheu.²⁰ Greenspun was a friend of Maheu's, and Maheu had given the documents to Greenspun for safekeeping after his break with Hughes. Greenspun kept the documents in a locked safe in his Las Vegas office. According to Hunt and Liddy, in their memoirs and in Hunt's sworn testimony, Bob Bennett—Hunt's Mullen & Co. boss—had told Hunt about Greenspun's possession of the Hughes memos sometime in late January, and asked Hunt to convey that information to Liddy.²¹ Gordon Liddy thereupon informed Magruder of the documents, after "independent information. . . tended to verify Bennett's report"—by which he presumably meant the February 3 *Times* article.²² Magruder later claimed that it was Mitchell who, during a February 4 meeting about GEMSTONE, first mentioned the Greenspun/Hughes memos and

¹⁹ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 179.

²⁰ Wallace Turner, "Hundreds of Copies of Hughes Memos Are Readily Available in Las Vegas," *New York Times*, February 3, 1972, 19.

²¹ Hunt, *Undercover*, 194; Liddy, *Will*, 204.

²² Hunt, *Undercover*, 194.

inquired about a possible operation to retrieve them, though his account conflicts with those of everyone else involved.²³

Nonetheless, Hunt and Liddy did receive authorization from Magruder to undertake the mission, and in mid-February they flew to Los Angeles to meet with a representative from the Hughes Tool Company.²⁴ As Hunt explained, the Greenspun burglary was essentially a joint CRP-Hughes operation. The memos in Greenspun's safe were said to have contained derogatory information about Senator Edmund Muskie, who was running closely with Nixon in the polls at this time. Also, Hughes and Maheu were in a court battle over certain financial dealings while Maheu and Greenspun were political allies in Nevada. "I was told. . . that Greenspun was believed to have documentary information concerning corruption among high Nevada officials and that. . . this information would benefit the Hughes organization," wrote Hunt. "Thus, Bennett suggested, there was a commonality of interests between CRP and the Hughes Tool Company."²⁵

The man whom Hunt and Liddy met in L.A. was Ralph Winte, an ex-FBI agent who worked as head of security for Hughes Tool Company. The team developed a plan to break into Greenspun's office, remove all the papers from his safe, and then fly to Central America on an escape plane provided by the Hughes organization. Once there, they would divide the documents among each side accordingly. However, according to Hunt and Liddy, the plan fell through. Hughes would not provide the plane because it was "too expensive," an absurd excuse considering the money Hughes had previously been willing to spend in order to gain political influence. Thus, based on this account, Greenspun's safe was not broken into. But Liddy wrote that he did not believe Hughes's excuse, and he "concluded that the real reason was that Hughes figured out there was something in the Greenspun safe that he didn't want us to see."²⁶

²³ Magruder, *American Life*, 180.

²⁴ Liddy, *Will*, 205.

²⁵ Hunt, *Undercover*, 194.

²⁶ Liddy, *Will*, 205.

However, someone did in fact break into Greenspun's office. This was discussed by Nixon and his aides in April 1973. "Did they really try to get into Greenspun's?" asked Nixon. Ehrlichman: "I guess they actually got in." Nixon: "What in the name of Christ, though, does Hank Greenspun got to do with Mitchell or anybody else. . . Hughes?" Ehrlichman: "Yeah, Hughes." Nixon: "Hughes on whom?" "Well, you know the Hughes thing is cut into two factions. . . Senator Bennett's son, for whom Hunt worked, represents one of those factions," said Ehrlichman. Nixon: "Yeah. So he ordered the bugging?" Ehrlichman: "They think it's a bag job." Then Haldeman said, "They busted his safe to get something out of it."²⁷

Hank Greenspun himself claimed in an article in 1986 that someone had indeed attempted to burglarize his safe. "Someone did take a crack at the safe and came through a window," he wrote. However, Greenspun claimed that they failed to get the safe open, only managing to "crack the cover." "I did have the information they sought as did Bob Maheu," Greenspun added. "Maheu told them if they wanted information, all they had to do was ask. I suppose my answer would have been the same. They didn't have to break into my safe."²⁸

The significance of this episode is twofold. First, it shows the extent to which people within the Nixon White House—perhaps Dean, Colson, Mitchell, or even the president—were very concerned with and/or interested in information regarding Howard Hughes and Robert Maheu, and, perhaps by association, Lawrence O'Brien. Second, it once again demonstrates how the Hunt-Bennett-CIA group had the ability to influence or manipulate the operations of the CRP team, which was ostensibly being led by Liddy. Nixon seemed to understand this as well, when he said, "So *he* [Bennett] ordered the bugging?" Hunt and Liddy both agreed that it was Bennett who first

²⁷ NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman, Ehrlichman—Executive Office Building, April 14, 1973, in Brinkley and Nichter, *The Nixon Tapes: 1973*, 414.

²⁸ Hank Greenspun, "Where I Stand," *Las Vegas Sun*, November 16, 1986, [<http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2000/jul/01/where-i-stand-hank-greenspun-nov-16-1986-seeds-of-/>].

suggested the Greenspun break-in. Obviously, Bennett had an interest on behalf of his client, Hughes, to retrieve the documents from Greenspun. But there was also good reason for both Nixon and the CIA to be interested in these memos. As we have seen, Hughes and Maheu had extensive connections with the CIA. Not only did Hughes help provide cover for CIA agents, his company Global Marine Development was involved with the Soviet sub project. In addition, Maheu had been directly involved in the CIA-Castro plots, a fact that had been revealed by Jack Anderson in a column on January 18, 1971. "To set up the [Castro] assassination, the CIA enlisted Robert Maheu, a former FBI agent with shadowy contacts," wrote Anderson. "[Maheu] later moved to Las Vegas to head up billionaire Howard Hughes's Nevada operations."²⁹ Anderson's article also explained how Maheu had recruited John Rosselli, "a ruggedly handsome gambler with contacts in both the American and Cuban underworlds," to coordinate the assassination. It is important to recall that, at this time, the CIA-Castro plots had not been acknowledged by the CIA. In fact, the agency denied them vehemently.

Investigators for the Senate Watergate Committee would later begin to piece together the ways in which the CIA-Castro plots might have been related to the Watergate affair. An undated memo from investigators Terry Lenzner and Marc Lackritz to Senator Sam Ervin explained the connections between the Nixon administration's interest in Larry O'Brien and the CIA-Castro operations. "The significance of Anderson's column on January 18, 1971, was that *on the same day*, Haldeman requested Dean to find out what he could about the Hughes-Maheu-O'Brien relationship [emphasis in original]," wrote Lenzner and Lackritz (the Haldeman-Dean memo in question was discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis).³⁰ The investigators noted that in a follow-up memo John Caulfield advised John Dean to "check into CIA, FBI, and IRS files on Robert

²⁹ Jack Anderson, "6 Attempts to Kill Castro Laid at CIA," *Washington Post*, January 18, 1971, B7.

³⁰ Memo from Terry Lenzner and Marc Lackritz to Senator Ervin, Subject: Relevance to S. Res. 60 of John Rosselli's testimony about his CIA activities, in Waldron, *Watergate: The Hidden History*, Appendix I, 730-732.

Maheu. . . to avoid a ‘counter-scandal.’” Further, they found that Assistant Attorney General Will Wilson had shown the Justice Department’s “highly sensitive” file on the Castro operations to Attorney General Mitchell in January 1971. Mitchell had then personally telephoned Maheu on January 19—the day after the first Anderson article—and Maheu was subsequently interviewed by Wilson and Asst. Attorney General Henry Peterson on January 27.³¹

The Lenzner/Lackritz memo concluded that “the obsession of the [Nixon] Administration with keeping tabs on Larry O’Brien in 1971 and 1972 was in part motivated by a fear that Maheu would impart some of this sensitive information about the [Castro] plot to O’Brien.” They continued: “these concerns could have been a possible motivation for the break-in to the offices of the DNC and Larry O’Brien by four Cuban-Americans on June 17, 1972, especially since their directions were to photograph any documents relating to Cuban contributions or Cuban involvement in the 1972 Democratic campaign.”³²

ITT and Larry O’Brien

On February 21, 1972, President Nixon made history when he became the first United States President to visit China. The People’s Republic of China had been isolated from the U.S. since Mao Tse-Tung’s Communist victory in 1949 drove the US-favored nationalists from power. Since then, China had been a virtual alien land. Nixon’s visit there was a major foreign policy breakthrough, but it was also a carefully orchestrated media coup. With the Democratic primary elections about to begin, Nixon placed himself at center stage in the one role that he envisioned for himself above all others, the great elder statesman. The China trip was a major success for Nixon, and for US-China relations in the decades that followed. His approval ratings spiked in the

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

aftermath of the trip, and it doubtless contributed to his overwhelming victory in the November 1972 election.

But on the day that Nixon returned from China, February 29, 1972, another major scandal broke, once again as a result of Jack Anderson's reporting. Anderson revealed the existence of a secret memo written by a Washington lobbyist named Dita Beard, in which Beard described a deal between her client, International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT), and the Nixon Justice Department. According to the memo, ITT would pay \$400,000 toward funding the 1972 Republican Convention in San Diego in return for favorable treatment from the Justice Department with regard to an anti-trust lawsuit that ITT was facing.³³ The ITT scandal had been simmering for a while. Speculation surrounding the \$400,000 deal had surfaced in 1971, but Anderson's column seemed to offer solid evidence. And it provided ammunition for the Nixon administration's harshest critic on the issue—Larry O'Brien.

A *New York Times* article from December 1971 described O'Brien's activism with regard to the ITT issue. "Mr. O'Brien wrote to Attorney General John Mitchell demanding an explanation of the Justice Department's out-of-court settlement of an I.T.&T. merger case eight days after San Diego was selected as the 1972 convention site," the *Times* reported. "O'Brien was riding the [ITT] issue hard, as he should have as Democratic Chairman," Haldeman later wrote. "Nixon decided, as always, to counterattack."³⁴ The Nixon White House was desperate to contain the ITT situation. In late February, Colson dispatched Hunt to Denver, where Dita Beard had been hospitalized for an illness of some sort. Hunt's assignment was to visit Beard under an assumed identity (which was provided by the CIA) and attempt to solicit a retraction from her.³⁵ Beard did eventually publicly deny writing the memo, claiming that it was a forgery, but a subsequent analysis by the FBI found that it was authentic. The ITT

³³ Jack Anderson, "Secret Memo Bares Mitchell-ITT Move," *Washington Post*, February 29, 1972, B11.

³⁴ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 154-155.

³⁵ Hunt, *Undercover*, 198-206.

controversy persisted through 1972, but was soon to be overshadowed by the Watergate scandal itself.

The First DNC Break-in

May 1972 was an eventful month. On May 2, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was found dead at his home, having passed away sometime during the night. Nixon appointed L. Patrick Gray as Acting Director of the FBI, pending a confirmation hearing to make him the official director. This had an impact on the Watergate affair in several ways, namely because Associate Director Mark Felt was angry that he was passed over for the job. But the FBI had been beyond Nixon's control while Hoover was alive. Thus, Gray was a political appointee, an opportunity for Nixon to place a loyalist as head of the FBI. Gray was indeed a Nixon loyalist; Felt was not, and as the Watergate scandal began to develop, it was Felt who would secretly provide inside information for journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, and it was revealed by Woodward in 2005 that Felt was the famous "Deep Throat."³⁶ Nixon had managed to anger a powerful faction within the FBI, which, just as the CIA, would turn against him when he needed them most.

On May 15, Alabama Governor George Wallace was shot in Maryland while campaigning as a Democratic candidate for president. Wallace survived, but was paralyzed from the waist down. The would-be assassin was a troubled twenty-one-year-old from Milwaukee named Arthur Bremer. Charles Colson came up with the idea to send Hunt to Bremer's apartment in Milwaukee to see if he could find anything linking him to the Democrats—or to George McGovern, who was now the presumptive

³⁶ It has been argued by several researchers, including *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee, that Deep Throat was in fact a fictional character created for Woodward and Bernstein's book *All the President's Men*, and that no such individual existed. It appears that Deep Throat was an amalgamation of several inside sources, Felt among them. Alexander Haig and Bob Bennett have been pointed to as other likely candidates.

nominee—such as “leftist” literature.³⁷ According to Liddy, Colson’s plan was to actually *plant* the evidence in Bremer’s apartment.³⁸ Nonetheless, the idea was soon abandoned after Hunt complained that police would be watching Bremer’s residence and it would be impossible to get in.

On May 20, Nixon embarked on his historic visit to Moscow for a week-long summit with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, during which they worked on issues such as arms control and trade agreements. It was the second act in Nixon’s masterful diplomatic performance, the coup de grace that he hoped would seal the 1972 election, especially if the Soviets would agree to help him end the war in Vietnam.

It was while Nixon was away in Moscow, on May 27—the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend—that Liddy’s CRP intelligence team made their first surreptitious entry into the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate building. Two prior attempts had been made during that weekend, but the burglars had failed to gain access. Then, late Sunday night, Liddy and Hunt directed the operation from a Howard Johnson’s hotel room across the street, while James McCord, Bernard Barker, and their cohort of Cuban operatives broke into the offices. McCord allegedly placed two wiretaps inside the offices: one on a switchboard connected to Larry O’Brien’s phone, and another on a phone belonging to the office of Spencer Oliver, Executive Director of the Association of Democratic State Chairmen. According to McCord, the Oliver tap was incidental. He chose it at random because Oliver’s office was in a good position to transmit a signal back to the Howard Johnson’s hotel room where the listening post would be set up.³⁹ In addition, the burglars exposed two rolls of 35mm film on documents from the offices. Liddy wrote that the photographs had been of material from O’Brien’s desk, and that Barker had also taken “Polaroid shots of [O’Brien’s] desk

³⁷ Hunt, *Undercover*, 216.

³⁸ Liddy, *Will*, 225.

³⁹ McCord, *A Piece of Tape*, 25.

and office before anything was touched so that it could all be returned to proper order before leaving.”⁴⁰

Two central questions—who gave the order to go into the DNC, and why?—have been at the heart of the Watergate mystery for four decades. That these questions still plague students of Watergate is quite astonishing given the amount of research and investigation that has been conducted on the affair, and that virtually everyone involved has at some point written an account of the events.

The simple explanation for the confusion is secrecy. In particular, it was the compartmentalization of knowledge that kept most of the people involved from seeing the full picture of what was taking place. This was due to two reasons: First, the desire by those directing the plan to remain as detached as possible so that they could deny culpability in the event that the operation was blown. And second, because not everyone involved had the same agenda. Indeed, as the following discussion will show, there were multiple agendas by different actors, or at least different understandings of what the actual mission was.

One thing is clear, however: it was Jeb Magruder who relayed to Liddy the command to break into the Watergate. According to Liddy, Magruder called him in for a meeting towards the end of April 1972. By that point, GEMSTONE had been approved, and for the past month, Liddy, Hunt, and McCord had been making arrangements, buying equipment, and so forth. But a break-in at the DNC was not part of the initial plan. Liddy wrote that it had been discussed with Mitchell and Magruder in passing, as a *potential* target in the future, but that the priority targets were the Democratic Convention headquarters in Miami, and the headquarters of the McGovern campaign. But at their late-April meeting, Magruder asked: “Gordon, do you think you could get into the Watergate?”⁴¹ Magruder then told him to wiretap Larry O’Brien’s phone and

⁴⁰ Liddy, *Will*, 233.

⁴¹ Liddy, *Will*, 219.

office, and to photograph any documents that they could find. “It’s important,” he said.⁴²

Magruder later wrote that at the March 30, 1972, meeting in Key Biscayne, which is when he said Mitchell gave the approval for GEMSTONE, they—Mitchell and Magruder—had decided upon O’Brien’s office at the Democratic headquarters in the Watergate building for the operation’s first target. “We discussed the targets of the wiretapping program, and it was agreed that Liddy should go ahead with the wiretapping of Larry O’Brien’s office at the Watergate,” he wrote.⁴³ Magruder did say that he thought “Mitchell came close to rejecting the Liddy plan.” “I know he approved it only reluctantly,” he added. “It was another of what I called his throw-away decisions, made under pressure to please the White House.”⁴⁴ But Mitchell later testified that he did not approve the plan, and certainly did not delineate any specific targets, such as the DNC offices. Mitchell never waived in that assertion. Magruder, however, changed his story many times in the years that followed. During an interview with authors Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin for their 1991 book *Silent Coup*, Magruder said that it was in fact John Dean who had told him to order Liddy into the Watergate.⁴⁵ And yet, during an interview for the 1994 documentary film *Watergate*, Magruder stated that it was Charles Colson—when Colson called him to push for approval on GEMSTONE—who told him to “get Liddy’s project to bug Larry O’Brien’s phone. . . off the ground.”⁴⁶

It also appears that pressure to approve GEMSTONE was coming from Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman. During a December 10, 1972 conversation between Nixon and Haldeman in which they discussed the cause of the break-ins, Haldeman said, “Mitchell set this apparatus up. . . then we started pushing. . . . I asked why we weren’t getting

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Magruder, *American Life*, 195.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin, *Silent Coup: Removal of a President* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1991), 134.

⁴⁶ Interview with Jeb Magruder, *Watergate*, BBC Documentary Film, 1994, Part 1.

the obvious stuff, like tape recordings. Not bugs and stuff, but public speaking. . . so that we would have on record what Humphrey says about McGovern and all that stuff.” He continued: “I pushed hard on that, but they weren’t getting it,” and “the reason [Liddy] started this bugging stuff was because Magruder was lashing him about getting information.”⁴⁷ Haldeman then mentioned a possible motive for the DNC break-in: “Mitchell was pushing on them, he was convinced there was this--” “Paper,” Nixon interjected. Haldeman: “Secret papers. And financial data that O’Brien had.”

The mention of “secret papers” is compelling. It could be evidence that one of the targets of the DNC break-in was the Cuban dossier regarding the Castro assassination plots. Mitchell was aware of the Justice Department’s file on the plots, which showed the connection to Robert Maheu, and thus to Larry O’Brien. As we have seen, Frank Sturgis later told an interviewer that the burglars were looking for that document, and Bernard Barker testified that they were searching for any documents that linked the DNC to “the foreign government that existed on the island of Cuba.”⁴⁸

Regarding the “financial data that O’Brien had,” there are a few possibilities for what specifically this could have been in reference to. First, there was the \$100,000 contribution that Maheu had given to Rebozo for Nixon. Because Larry O’Brien was the erstwhile lobbyist for the Hughes organization, Nixon assumed that anything Maheu knew, O’Brien knew. Second, there was the fact that, as he had written in a January 1971 memo, Nixon wanted to “hold O’Brien accountable for his retainer with Hughes.”⁴⁹ Clearly, he would have been eager to acquire proof of the Hughes-O’Brien relationship, especially in light of O’Brien’s persistent criticism of the White House regarding the ITT affair. Third, one cannot discount the possibility that, as the Cuban burglars claimed, they were looking for evidence of financial contributions from Cuba to the Democrats. And finally, according to John Dean in a 2009 interview, the plumbers had received a tip

⁴⁷ NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman—Oval Office, December 10, 1971. Tape 384, Conversation 4, File B, www.nixonlibrary.gov.

⁴⁸ Watergate Hearings, Book 1, 360.

⁴⁹ Oudes, *From: The President*, 202.

that the Democrats were involved in a fundraising kickback scheme in Miami, and they were trying to find documentary evidence of it.⁵⁰

John Dean's story has, like Magruder's, also changed. In his memoir, *Blind Ambition*, he claimed that he did not know why the break-in was ordered. He recounted a conversation he had with Charles Colson while they were in prison, in which he wrote himself as saying, "It's incredible. Millions of dollars have been spent investigating Watergate. A President has been forced out of office. Dozens of lives have been ruined. We're sitting in the can. And still nobody can explain *why* they bugged the place to begin with."⁵¹ Then he added, "It's unbelievable that Bob Bennett has waltzed through this thing. He's got the answers to a lot of unanswered questions."

The Second DNC Break-in

Following the successful Watergate break-in, James McCord set up a listening post in a room at the Howard Johnson's hotel, in which the signals from the wiretaps could be picked up and monitored. The man whom McCord tasked with monitoring the taps was an ex-FBI agent named Alfred Baldwin. But right away, Liddy learned of problems with the wiretap monitoring operation. First, the bug on O'Brien's phone was not working—probably, McCord said, due to interference from the building. Second, the bug that *was* working was picking up little information of value. This was the wiretap on Spencer Oliver's phone, which was mostly being used by secretaries to talk about their private lives. Finally, Liddy learned that McCord and Baldwin were not actually recording the conversations being intercepted, but rather, Baldwin was taking detailed notes, which McCord was then editing into reports that he would provide Liddy.⁵² This distressed Liddy greatly, as he had been under the impression that the wiretaps would

⁵⁰ Luke Nichter, "In New Finding, John Dean Argues that the Origin of Watergate was 'a Tip' Received by President Nixon," [<http://www.nixontapes.org/job60.html>].

⁵¹ John Dean, *Blind Ambition* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 391.

⁵² Liddy, *Will*, 235.

produce recordings. According to McCord, the reason for this was that certain pieces of his equipment were not compatible with his recording device.⁵³ This logic seemed spurious to Liddy, who knew McCord to be an experienced professional in electronic surveillance who had been given \$65,000 from CRP funds to purchase equipment for the operation.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, McCord maintained that no recordings could be made, and if they were, Liddy never received them.

In early June, Liddy gave Magruder the first batch of “intelligence” gathered from the DNC break-in. These included the supposed photographs from O’Brien’s desk and transcripts of intercepted telephone conversations. “I studied the material and soon realized it was worthless,” Magruder wrote.⁵⁵ “The telephone calls told us a great deal more than we needed to know about the social lives of various members of the . . . staff, but nothing of political interest.” Magruder also claimed that he showed the material to Gordon Strachan, assistant to Haldeman, to “let the White House know we had made the promised entry.”⁵⁶ This is significant, because if Strachan was aware, one would assume Haldeman was also informed. And Haldeman was Nixon’s closest confidant in the White House.

Again, there are differing accounts regarding what happened next. Magruder wrote that he showed Liddy’s material to John Mitchell, who then called Liddy in for a meeting. Mitchell said to Liddy, “this stuff isn’t worth the paper it’s printed on.” Liddy then told Mitchell that one of the wiretaps, the one on O’Brien’s phone, was not working, and promised to get it taken care of. And that was the end of it. Liddy, on his own, decided to go back into the DNC and correct the problem.⁵⁷

Liddy’s account is much different. He claimed that he never spoke with John Mitchell about the material from the break-in, only to Magruder. On June 9, Magruder

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ McCord, *A Piece of Tape*, 18.

⁵⁵ Magruder, *An American Life*, 209.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 210.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

asked Liddy if he could go back into the DNC and replace the defective bug. "I told him that I could, but it would mean another entry, one that had not been budgeted," wrote Liddy.⁵⁸ They left the matter undecided. Then, on Monday, June 12, Magruder called Liddy to his office once again. He asked Liddy about the number of filing cabinets in the DNC suite and their locations relative to O'Brien's office, and whether they were locked. According to Liddy, Magruder soon became agitated and said, "here's what I want to know," and, as he swung his hand down and slapped the lower left part of his desk, "I want to know what O'Brien's got right here!"⁵⁹ Liddy knew what Magruder meant immediately. That particular area of Magruder's desk was where he kept derogatory information on the Democrats. This led Liddy to conclude that "the purpose of the second Watergate break-in was to find out what O'Brien had of a derogatory nature about us, not for us to get something on him or the Democrats."⁶⁰

There was indeed a much greater emphasis on photographing documents for the second break-in. "They wanted everything photographed," Liddy later recalled in an interview. "And I said to myself, 'my lord, what was supposed to be now a quick 5-minute in and out repair mission is a multi-hour photo recon mission.'"⁶¹ Eugenio Martinez said that "when they asked us to go for the second mission they told us to get another 50 rolls of film."⁶² There are two possibilities for this focus on extensive document photography. First, the object of the burglary was to simply capture as much information as possible in the hope that they could find something useful. Or second, they were looking for something specific and thought the best course was to cast a wide net in hopes of finding it. A third possibility, perhaps most likely, is that it was a combination of both. However, as will be discussed below, someone certainly had a

⁵⁸ Liddy, *Will*, 236.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Interview with G. Gordon Liddy, *Watergate*, BBC Documentary, Part 1: "Break-in."

⁶² Interview with Eugenio Martinez, *Ibid.*

specific agenda of sorts. It was not known to everyone involved, and it was related to the desk of Spencer Oliver's secretary, Ida "Maxie" Wells.

Thus, on the night of June 17, 1972, Liddy and Hunt once again set up their command post in the Howard Johnson's hotel across the street, while McCord's surveillance man Alfred Baldwin also kept watch from his hotel room, which had a direct view of the Watergate building. McCord, Barker, Sturgis, Martinez, and a Cuban lock-and-key expert named Virgilio Gonzalez made another entry into the DNC headquarters. A security guard named Frank Wills discovered tape on the locking mechanism of a stairwell door and called the police. It was the second time he had removed the tape; the first time he had assumed that it had been left by a maintenance man.⁶³ Moments later, police officers arrived at the Watergate. Baldwin apparently failed to notice them because they were in an unmarked car and wearing plain clothes. After making their way to the sixth floor, the police officers discovered the break-in crew in the DNC offices, and placed them under arrest.

Key Evidence and Unanswered Questions

The story of Watergate from this point is well known. Yet, there are important elements of the case that remain unexplained—many of which point strongly to some measure of CIA involvement. As investigators and journalists began to uncover the burglars' CIA-connected pasts as well as their ties to CRP and the White House, it became clear that something was amiss. However, there was no proof that President Nixon or his immediate subordinates were directly involved. The White House damage-control plan was to promote the narrative that Liddy was a CRP employee who had gone

⁶³ There has been much consternation regarding this taped door. The tape was placed by McCord, who knew that his first taping job had already been removed by someone, which should have sent up a red flag that the operation was in danger of discovery. It is often argued that this was evidence of a deliberate attempt by McCord to sabotage the break-in. After discovering that the first tape had been removed, the burglars had a brief meeting and discussed whether or not to carry on with the mission. McCord told Liddy that he believed they should, and so Liddy decided to continue (Liddy, *Will*, 244).

too far, and that no one except for the seven men arrested had been involved. This plan would work, as long as none of the burglars talked. With Liddy, this was not a concern. He had an extraordinary sense of loyalty and duty. He refused to implicate any of his principals during his trial and did not testify at the Watergate Hearings; and because of his refusal to cooperate, he served the longest prison sentence of anyone else involved. Liddy has also been considered one of the more reliable witnesses to the Watergate affair. In order to assure the silence of Hunt and the others, the White House paid out large sums of hush money and gave them promises of clemency. This worked for a time. The Watergate affair remained a relatively minor story, and President Nixon won reelection over George McGovern by a landslide in November 1972.

But by early 1973 the wall of secrecy had begun to crack. On February 7, the Senate voted 77-0 to establish a committee to investigate Nixon's 1972 campaign. Later that month, acting FBI director L. Patrick Gray admitted during his Senate confirmation hearings that he had been given sensitive material from E. Howard Hunt's White House office safe by John Dean, and that he had destroyed the files without reading them, acting on a suggestion by Dean. The next major breakthrough came with a startling admission by James McCord. McCord had become disgruntled over what he perceived as efforts to implicate the CIA in the Watergate break-ins. His attorney was in fact trying to persuade him to testify that the entire operation was a CIA mission.⁶⁴ On December 31, 1972, McCord had sent an "anonymous" letter to John Caulfield stating that "if [Richard] Helms goes and if the Watergate operation is laid at the CIA's feet, where it does not belong, every tree in the forest will fall. It will be a scorched desert."⁶⁵ McCord said in an interview later that, "I had told my family that I had made a mistake in participating in the first place, and the only way to set it straight was to ask my Lord's forgiveness, and to tell the truth at the propitious time. My family kept asking me at

⁶⁴ McCord, *A Piece of Tape*, 53.

⁶⁵ *Senate Watergate Report*, 127.

various times. . . , ‘well is this the most propitious time?’”⁶⁶ Apparently it was on March 21, 1973. McCord wrote a letter to the presiding judge in the Watergate case, John Sirica, in which he admitted that there were high-level White House officials involved, and that they were pressuring him to keep quiet. McCord’s revelation ignited the spark that exploded the Watergate affair into the most serious political scandal in American history.

There is no documented evidence that, in writing his letter, McCord was acting on any other premise than his own volition. In his memoir, McCord described various scenarios that had led him to believe that there was some sort of collusion between the prosecution, the defense, and the CRP lawyers to present Watergate as a CIA operation, and this disturbed him greatly.⁶⁷ McCord, however, is a mysterious figure. Like Hunt, his 20-year career with the CIA leaves one to question where his true loyalties lay. It is clear that he never told all that he knew about Watergate, including his own role and that of the CIA. For example, the Senate Watergate Committee discovered that on the night of the Watergate arrests, a CIA operative named Lee R. Pennington went to the home of James McCord and destroyed files that might have shown a link between McCord and the CIA.⁶⁸ In fact, Pennington and McCord’s wife burned virtually every piece of paper in McCord’s office. According to witnesses, the fire was so large, or, in haste the fireplace had not been properly prepared, so that the walls in the house were blackened by the smoke and had to be repainted.⁶⁹

Another unexplained matter involving McCord was the presence of an associate of his, a man named Louis James Russell, at or around the Watergate on the night of the final break-in. Russell was an ex-FBI agent and private investigator. He had worked for the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in the 1950s, and at the time of the Watergate break-in, he worked for James McCord’s security company, McCord

⁶⁶ Interview with James McCord, *Watergate*, BBC Documentary, Part 3, “Scapegoat.”

⁶⁷ McCord, *A Piece of Tape*, 48-53.

⁶⁸ *Senate Watergate Report*, 740.

⁶⁹ Hougan, *Secret Agenda*, 228.

Associates.⁷⁰ Russell was interviewed by the FBI during their investigation of the break-in. He conceded that he was having dinner at the Howard Johnson's restaurant across the street from the Watergate on the night of June 17, but that he had not seen McCord, Hunt, or any of the other burglars.⁷¹ However, he did admit to having dinner with James McCord on the night before, but claimed that nothing relating to the Watergate burglary had been discussed.⁷² McCord later claimed under sworn testimony that Russell had not been there on the night of the break-in, and when asked if Russell was in any way connected to the bugging, he said, "absolutely none, in no form whatever."⁷³ According to author Jim Hougan, when Hougan sought to interview James McCord about Lou Russell, McCord's attorney responded that "McCord refused to discuss Russell under any circumstances, and that, moreover, he would not discuss Watergate with any writer who so much as expressed interest in Lou Russell." Further, Hougan wrote, McCord's attorney informed Hougan that he was "instructed. . . to threaten suit against me, and to say that both Alfred Baldwin and 'the Pennington family' would also bring suit should I choose to write about Russell."⁷⁴

The significance of Russell was that, in addition to working with McCord, he was apparently associated with a Washington prostitution ring that was operating out of the Columbia Plaza Apartments, near the Watergate building.⁷⁵ "[Russell's] life was devoted to booze, whores, and anti-Communism (roughly in that order)," wrote Hougan. Russell was friends with some of the prostitutes at the Columbia Plaza, and had told a friend that he was involved in a wiretapping operation to record "intimate conversations between prostitutes and the politicians at the DNC."⁷⁶ Russell died in 1973, and

⁷⁰ FBI report, WFO serial number 139-166-744, 27. [<https://vault.fbi.gov/Watergate>], PDF file 18, page 20.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Watergate Hearings, Book 1, 218.

⁷⁴ Hougan, *Secret Agenda*, 185.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 118.

suspicions regarding his involvement or connection with Watergate have never been substantiated by documented evidence. Many aspects of such theories, however, can be verified. For example, there was indeed a call-girl service at the Columbia Plaza Apartments. On June 10, 1972, the *Washington Post* reported that a Washington attorney named Philip M. Bailey had been indicted on charges of “transporting and procuring women for prostitution.” The *Post* article stated that “Bailey was running a call-girl type operation that involved women from Capitol Hill and at least one from the White House,” and that “the clients included prominent Washington attorneys and business men and, in at least one case, a lawyer working for the White House.”⁷⁷

Bailey has since told investigators, such as authors Jim Hougan, Len Colodny, and Phil Stanford, that there was a similar call-girl operation being run from within the DNC headquarters in the Watergate building, specifically, through the telephone of Spencer Oliver, and that the individual who was helping facilitate it was Oliver’s secretary Ida “Maxie” Wells.⁷⁸ The theory that has been put forth by these authors is that John Dean’s then-girlfriend (now wife), Maureen Biner, was associated with this operation, and was in fact a close friend of its lead proprietor, a prostitute named Heidi Rikan. When Dean learned of Bailey’s arrest, he became concerned that discovery of the DNC call-girl ring would lead to implication of his girlfriend, and then of himself. Thus, it was John Dean who ordered the second break-in, to acquire evidence locked inside Maxie Wells’ desk drawer. Further, the theory goes, McCord and Russell were involved, presumably for the CIA, in monitoring this call-girl operation for blackmail purposes.

Many elements of this story, such as Russell’s activities and Bailey’s account, cannot be wholly verified. However, there is evidence enough to conclude that some

⁷⁷ Jim Mann, “Lawyer is Indicted in Hill Call-Girl Ring,” *Washington Post*, June 10, 1972, A1.

⁷⁸ See Hougan, *Secret Agenda*; Colodny and Gettlin, *Silent Coup*; and Phil Stanford, *White House Call-Girl: The Real Watergate Story* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2013).

aspects of the theory are authentic, that there was some type of call-girl operation within the DNC, that McCord and probably Hunt were aware of it, and that the primary target of the second break-in was the desk of Ida Wells, even though this was not known to most of the people involved, including Liddy. This fundamentally changes our understanding of Watergate, because it demonstrates that there were multiple agendas at work simultaneously, one of which was not explored during the course of the Watergate Hearings, and is generally not included in the “orthodox” narrative of Watergate.

When the burglars were arrested inside the DNC, Eugenio Martinez, the CIA informant, was found to be in possession of a desk key. According to FBI files, it was later discovered through process of elimination that the key opened the desk of Ida “Maxie” Wells.⁷⁹ Upon interviewing Wells, the investigating agent found that the only two keys which Wells was aware of were both accounted for, and thus Martinez had somehow come into possession of a third copy.⁸⁰ Martinez has never fully explained his possession of the key, though according to Colodny and Gettlin, he told them during an interview for their book that it had been given to him by E. Howard Hunt.⁸¹ Where Hunt got the key has never been explained.

G. Gordon Liddy has since argued that he was an unwitting pawn in the Watergate affair. In an interview for a 1992 television documentary, Liddy said, “the orders I received were to break into the office of Larry O’Brien. . . and to put in two bugs, one on his telephone. . . and the other, a room bug. And to photograph anything that was lying about. Those were the instructions that I gave to Mr. Hunt.” “Those

⁷⁹ FBI serial number WFO 139-166-356, [<https://vault.fbi.gov/watergate>], PDF file 87, pages 161-164.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Colodny and Gettlin, *Silent Coup*, 159.

instructions were not carried out," he concluded. "Someone had countermanded them. They didn't go anywhere near Mr. O'Brien's office [emphasis added]."⁸²

Liddy is now a proponent of Colodny and Gettlin's thesis from their work, *Silent Coup*, which argues that John Dean ordered the break-in to obtain evidence of the call-girl ring. In the early 1990s, Dean sued Colodny, Gettlin, and their publisher for defamation. The suit was settled out of court with both sides claiming victory. Dean, of course, vehemently denies the call-girl theory. Ida Wells also brought suit against Liddy after he continued to speak publicly about the theory, which implicated her as an accomplice of the call-girl ring. Wells argued that the only evidence directly tying her to the alleged call-girl operation was the testimony of Philip Bailey. But a United States Court of Appeals found in 2002 that there was evidence that "sufficiently corroborated Bailey's statements about Wells' involvement in call-girl activities," and it included among its findings the existence of Martinez's key, and that "conversations of a sexual nature had been intercepted by the tap on Oliver's phone."⁸³

Like the presence of Wells' desk key on the person of Eugenio Martinez, the nature of the telephone calls received by Alfred Baldwin through his monitoring station was kept out of the Watergate Hearings. Anthony Lukas first reported in his 1976 book *Nightmare* that "so spicy were some of the conversations on this phone that they have given rise to unconfirmed reports that the telephone was being used for some sort of call-girl service catering to congressmen and other prominent Washingtonians."⁸⁴ In fact, the lead prosecutor in the Watergate trials, Earl Silbert, came to believe that due to the nature of the telephone calls, the Watergate burglars, especially Hunt, were attempting to gain information to use for blackmail. In a report submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee for his confirmation as US Attorney, Silbert wrote in 1974 that

⁸² Interview with G. Gordon Liddy, "The Key to Watergate," A&E Investigative Reports, 1992.

⁸³ United States Court of Appeals for Fourth Circuit, *Wells v. Liddy*, No. 01-1226, March 1, 2002, [<http://www.ca4.uscourts.gov/opinions/Unpublished/011266.U.pdf>], 9.

⁸⁴ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 201.

“Baldwin had told us that McCord wanted *all telephone calls recorded*, including personal calls. . . many of them being extremely personal, intimate, and potentially embarrassing [emphasis added].”⁸⁵ That Silbert specified that the calls were recorded is compelling, since McCord told Liddy that no calls were ever recorded. Silbert continued, “we also learned that Hunt had sometime previously met Spencer Oliver at. . . [Mullen & Co.] and opposed his joining the firm because he was a liberal democrat. Therefore, one motive we thought possible was an attempt to compromise Oliver and others.”⁸⁶

Oliver was not the only person who used the phone in his office. Because he often traveled, his office was usually vacant, and others would use his phone to make personal calls. According to Baldwin, people using the phone would often say, “we can talk, I’m on Spencer Oliver’s phone.”⁸⁷ Because the wiretap on Oliver’s phone was illegal, evidence acquired from it could not be used in open court, and much of the material from Baldwin’s depositions is still sealed. However, in 2012, after a petition from historian Luke Nichter, the court unsealed a considerable amount of material from the Liddy trial, although it remains heavily redacted. During an *in camera* hearing regarding the testimony of Baldwin, the prosecutors—Silbert and Semyour Glanzer—discussed the ways in which Baldwin might describe the phone conversations:

Glanzer: Baldwin will say that one of the individuals who often used the phone was Ida “Maxie” Wells, secretary of Spencer Oliver.

Court: [REDACTED]

Glanzer: That is correct, Your Honor. And then I was going to ask him, “Can you tell us just in a general way the subjects were of the calls [LONG REDACTION]. . . He would say some of the calls dealt with [REDACTED].

⁸⁵ Earl J. Silbert, *Nomination of Earl J. Silbert to United States Attorney, Hearings Before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session Part 1, April-May, 1974*, Hathi Trust Digital Library, [<https://babel.hathitrust.org>], 65.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Lukas, *Nightmare*, 201.

...

Glanzer: And then we were going to ask, "Did Mr. McCord express an interest in certain kinds of calls?" And the witness would say, "Yes." Then, "and what types?" And he would say [REDACTED].

...

Glanzer: If I asked him, "You mentioned that conversations were of a [REDACTED—two or three words] and what did they deal with?" He would then go and say that, well, they were calls that dealt with [REDACTED—five or six words] participants in the conversation. He might even say that [LONG REDACTION].

Court: Would he mention any names and the *places the people were going to or*— [emphasis added]

Glanzer: No, he wouldn't. We have asked him to eliminated that.

Court: All right.

Glanzer: But he does know the [REDACTED].

Court: These conversations were over Mr. Oliver's phone?

Glanzer: Yes, Your Honor. This is one phone, Mr. Oliver's phone. Various people are using the phone.⁸⁸

Alfred Baldwin was ultimately barred from testifying in Liddy's trial after an appeals court upheld an objection from Charles Morgan Jr., attorney for Spencer Oliver.⁸⁹ As a result, Silbert was not able to argue sexual blackmail as a motive in the

⁸⁸ Transcript of In Camera Hearings Involving the Testimony of Alfred Baldwin in the Trial of US vs Liddy, January 9, 1973, National Archives Online, Box 1, 205A, [https://www.archives.gov/research/investigations/watergate/us-v-liddy.html], 972-977.

⁸⁹ Colodny and Gettlin, *Silent Coup*, 240.

Liddy trial. But the only logical reason for Morgan to object to Baldwin's testimony was that it would contain material damaging or embarrassing to Oliver or other DNC employees. However, based on the evidence, we can draw a number of conclusions crucial to our understanding of the Watergate break-in: (1) That the wiretap placed on Oliver's phone was intercepting telephone calls of a sexual nature, and one could easily infer from the transcript above that they included the arrangement of sexual liaisons between individuals; (2) that McCord was specifically interested in these types of conversations and may have even recorded them; (3) that Ida "Maxie" Wells was somehow involved in these arrangements and that her desk was a *specific target* of the second break-in; and (4) that Liddy was completely unaware of any of this information.

The significance of these findings cannot be overstated. It demonstrates the existence of a second "track" or agenda involved in the Watergate operations. From the White House perspective—that is, whoever was pushing for the Watergate break-ins, whether it was Colson, Nixon, Haldeman, or Mitchell—the goal was clearly to obtain information on Larry O'Brien, for a number of possible reasons that have been addressed above. That was also the stated goal of G. Gordon Liddy, the supposed leader of the group. Liddy was under the impression that McCord would be placing not only a wiretap on O'Brien's phone, but an actual "room bug" that would pick up all audio from inside his office. He had given McCord \$30,000 specifically for the acquisition of this device.⁹⁰ And yet, the only known wiretap that ever functioned was the one placed on the phone of Spencer Oliver, and the only proven target of either break-in was the desk of Ida Wells. In fact, according to FBI files, no wiretap was ever found anywhere inside the DNC except for the one on Oliver's phone.⁹¹

Further, it is compelling that Baldwin claimed that McCord was aware—and specifically interested in—the phone conversations dealing with sex, because no one at

⁹⁰ Liddy, *Will*, 236.

⁹¹ FBI serial number 139-4089-1452, [<https://vault.fbi.gov/watergate>], PDF file 35, page 51.

CRP or at the White House ever received any information regarding these types of calls. Indeed, Liddy, Magruder, and others claimed that the so-called “intelligence” produced by the Watergate operation was worthless. Thus, it appears that, just as with the Ellsberg break-in, any “valuable” information obtained in the course of the operation was withheld from its ostensible benefactors. All of the individuals who were apparently involved in this “secret agenda”—Hunt, McCord, and Martinez—were connected in some way to the CIA.

The Smoking Gun, the Bay of Pigs, and “a lot of hanky-panky”

Six days after the Watergate arrests, on June 23, 1972, Nixon and Haldeman had a conversation in the Oval Office that would ultimately be used, over two years later, to prove Nixon’s complicity in the cover-up—the so-called “smoking gun.” Nixon and Haldeman concocted a plan to have the CIA ask the FBI to stop the investigation of the Watergate break-in, claiming that it might uncover CIA secret projects. That Nixon was attempting to stifle the investigation for self-serving purposes is obvious, and he later admitted as much. But certain aspects of his reasoning concerning the CIA, the Cubans, and E. Howard Hunt are important because they show that he was aware of these broader connections and how he believed they might have been related to Watergate. Nixon seemed to believe that he and CIA Director Helms in fact had a common cause with regard to the Watergate investigation, because there were certain secrets which, for the good of Nixon, Helms, and “national security,” would best be kept under wraps.

On June 23, Haldeman said to Nixon: “the only way to solve this is to have [Deputy CIA Director Vernon] Walters call Pat Gray and just say, ‘stay the hell out of this. . . this is business here we don’t want you to go any further on.’ That’s not an unusual development.” Later in the conversation, Nixon told Haldeman what he should say in order to convince the CIA to cooperate: “Say, ‘Look, the problem is that this will open the whole, the whole Bay of Pigs thing, and the President just feels that’ . . . just say that

this is sort of a comedy of errors, bizarre, without getting into it, ‘the President’s belief is that this is going to open the whole Bay of Pigs thing up again.’”⁹²

In another conversation later that same day, Nixon expanded upon his thoughts concerning Hunt and the Bay of Pigs. “Hunt. . . knows too damn much and he was involved, we have to know that,” Nixon said. “[If] it gets out. . . this is all involved in the Cuban thing, that it’s a fiasco, and it’s going to make the. . . CIA look bad, it’s going to make Hunt look bad, and it’s likely to blow the whole Bay of Pigs thing, which we think would be very unfortunate for the CIA and for the country at this time, and for American foreign policy.”⁹³ In an earlier conversation regarding Hunt, Nixon said, “he worked for the CIA. He worked on the Bay of Pigs. I mean, he’s done a lot of things. . . .” Haldeman: “You’ve got to be careful of pushing that very hard, because he was working on a lot of stuff.”⁹⁴ Then, also on June 23, Nixon commented: “Of course, this. . . Hunt, . . . that will uncover a lot of. . . you open that scab there’s a hell of a lot of things in it that we just feel that this would be very detrimental to have this thing go any further. This involves these Cubans, Hunt, and a lot of hanky-panky that we have nothing to do with ourselves.”

Nixon understood Helms and the CIA’s sensitivity with regard to the leaking of CIA secrets. “I remembered the visible concern on [Helms’] face less than a year earlier over the possible publication of a book by two disaffected CIA agents [see Chapter Two],” Nixon wrote in his memoirs. “Helms asked if I would back up legal action by CIA, despite the fact that that there would be cries of suppression. I had told him that I would.”⁹⁵ Nixon claimed that he was not sure what, if any, role the CIA had in Watergate at the time, and was simply looking for leverage with which to get the CIA to help cover up the case. He knew the Bay of Pigs was a particularly delicate area for Helms. “I saw

⁹² NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman—Oval Office, June 23, 1972, in Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 69.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ NWHT, Nixon, Haldeman—Executive Office Building, June 21, 1972, in Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 51.

⁹⁵ Nixon, *RN*, 640.

that Howard Hunt would give us a chance to turn Helms's extreme sensitivity about the Bay of Pigs to good advantage. . . if the CIA would deflect the FBI from Hunt, they would thereby protect us from the only White House vulnerability involving Watergate that I was worried about exposing—not the break-in, but the political activities Hunt had undertaken for Colson."⁹⁶

On the afternoon of June 23, Haldeman and Ehrlichman held a meeting with Director Helms and Deputy Director Vernon Walters at the White House to try to enact Nixon's plan. According to Ehrlichman, "when Haldeman hinted that the trail might lead to the Bay of Pigs, Richard Helms yelled like a scalded cat. 'We're not afraid of that!' he said with more animation than I'd ever seen in that urbane gentleman before."⁹⁷ Haldeman provided a similar account in his memoir. When he mentioned the Bay of Pigs to Helms, there was "turmoil in the room," wrote Haldeman. "Helms gripping the arms of his chair leaning forward and shouting, 'the Bay of Pigs had nothing to do with this. I have no concern about the Bay of Pigs.'"⁹⁸

Helms's account differs slightly. He always held that, as he wrote in his memoir, the "CIA had no connection whatever with Watergate."⁹⁹ By the time of the meeting with Haldeman and Ehrlichman, Helms had already assured acting-FBI Director Pat Gray that the CIA was not involved. Now, he was agitated that the White House wanted him to return to Gray and say the opposite. When Haldeman seemed to threaten him with the Bay of Pigs, Helms wrote that "I responded vigorously—though not quite as explosively as Haldeman later claimed. 'The Bay of Pigs hasn't got a damned thing to do with this,' I said. And what's more, there's nothing about the Bay of Pigs that's not already in the public domain."¹⁰⁰ This, of course, is false. Based upon Helms's October

⁹⁶ Ibid., 641.

⁹⁷ John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 350.

⁹⁸ Haldeman, *Ends of Power*, 38.

⁹⁹ Helms, *A Look Over My Shoulder*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 10.

1971 meeting with Nixon, he should have understood quite well the types of concerns Nixon had about the Bay of Pigs, the Diem assassination, the Chilean coup attempt, and other “dirty tricks” becoming public. He would have also known that by “Bay of Pigs,” Nixon was in fact referring not only to the failed invasion of Cuba in April 1961, but to the operations surrounding it, specifically the Castro assassination attempts, which were *not* in the public domain at that point.

Nonetheless, despite Helms’s professed doubt, he agreed to go along with the plan. According to the CIA’s internal history, Walters met with Gray and told him that “while the Watergate investigation had not touched any Agency projects[,] its continuation might,” particularly if investigations were “pushed south of the border.”¹⁰¹ Of particular concern to Gray and the FBI was an \$89,000 check from a man named Kenneth Dahlberg which had been laundered through a Mexican bank. This money had in fact been an illegal contribution to CRP that had been given to Bernard Barker to be laundered into cash through his connections in Mexico. The FBI had thus far been able to trace the cash found on the burglars back to this bank.¹⁰² On July 5, Gray telephoned Walters and told him that unless he received something in writing from the CIA, the FBI was going to continue with their investigation of Dahlberg and the laundered money. Gray had received assurances from the White House that the FBI was free to pursue an investigation of Watergate. Walters said “he could not tell Gray to cease future investigations on the grounds of compromise of national security and even less could he write anything to that effect.”¹⁰³ As such, Gray notified Walters that he would continue with the investigation, and that he had told Haldeman and Ehrlichman that the investigation would go forward.

What appeared to be happening was that no one at the White House or at the CIA was willing to give a written order to suppress the FBI’s investigation. To have done

¹⁰¹ CIA Report, *Watergate History*, 81.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 101.

so would have suggested guilt. Further, the CIA was correct in the sense that they had no direct “official” connection to the Watergate case, and that the FBI’s investigation of the money laundered in Mexico was not likely to trespass on any CIA operations. However, a memo written by Helms to Walters on June 28, 1972 stated that “we still adhere to the request that they [FBI] confine themselves to the personalities already arrested or directly under suspicion and that they desist from expanding this investigation into other areas which may well, eventually, run afoul of our operations.”¹⁰⁴

In fact, the CIA did have secrets to hide with regard to Watergate. As we have already seen, the CIA refused to hand over their secret “Mr. Edward” file pertaining to Hunt’s activities to the Ervin Committee [see Chapter Three], and when Senate investigators asked to interview Eugenio Martinez’s CIA case officer, they were told he was on an “African safari.”¹⁰⁵ Moreover, in January 1973 Helms ordered the destruction of all files related to the CIA’s MKULTRA mind control programs, including those dealing with its sub-projects involving sexual blackmail, as well as all tapes and transcripts from the the CIA’s central taping system.¹⁰⁶

Hunt’s Mullen & Co. boss Robert Bennett was also involved in helping the CIA divert attention away from the agency. A CIA memo from March 1, 1973 noted that “Bennett felt he could handle the Ervin Committee if the CIA could handle Hunt.” Bennett claimed he had a friend who had intervened with Ervin on the matter. Further, the memo stated that Bennett was protecting the CIA by “feeding stories to Bob Woodward who was ‘suitably grateful,’” and that “Woodward was making no attribution to Bennett” and was “protecting Bennett and Mullen & Co.”¹⁰⁷

The point here is not to argue that the CIA was to “blame” for Watergate, nor is it to exonerate the wrongdoing of President Nixon. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the

¹⁰⁴ CIA Report, *Watergate History*, 96-97.

¹⁰⁵ *Senate Watergate Report*, 742.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 744; Project MKULTRA report, Senate Select Committee, 2-3.

¹⁰⁷ *Senate Watergate Report*, 740.

agency was involved to a degree that certainly affected events, and if we remove the CIA and its various entanglements and connections from the narrative of Watergate, we simply are not perceiving the full view of what took place. More than any other agency in the United States Government, the CIA represents the kind of national security secrecy that has been a primary theme of this study. The CIA's involvement in Watergate and the events leading up to it is demonstrative of the ways in which such systemic government secrecy played a role in triggering the United States' most serious political crisis, which changed the course of American history.

Chapter 5: Fallout

“If, for example, the president approves. . . an action because of the national security or in this case because of a threat to internal peace and order of a significant magnitude, then the president’s decision in that instance allows those that are carrying it out, to carry it out without violating a law.” –Richard Nixon¹

“Where do we draw the line? If you’re saying that presidential fiat can in fact mean that someone who does one of these black bag jobs, these burglaries, is not liable to criminal prosecution, why shouldn’t the same principle apply to somebody who the president feels, in the national interest, should murder a dissenter?” –David Frost²

President Nixon never waived in his assertion that, on a fundamental level, he had not committed any serious crimes. “We must recognize that one excess begets another, and that the extremes of violence and discord in the 1960s contributed to the extremes of Watergate,” Nixon said during a televised address to the American people. The date was August 15, 1973—fourteen months after the initial Watergate arrests. “In the 1960s,” Nixon argued, “individuals and groups increasingly asserted the right to take the law into their own hands, insisting that their purposes represented a higher morality.” It was a blatant attempt to suggest that the crimes of Watergate were instigated by the New Left, while simultaneously acknowledging that, yes, government officials had committed unethical and illegal acts, but only in efforts to protect the nation’s security. “Instances have now come to light in which a zeal for security did go too far and did interfere impermissibly with individual liberty,” he conceded. “It is essential that such mistakes not be repeated.”³

Two months later, on October 20, 1973, the political crisis of Watergate reached perhaps its most critical point when Nixon ordered Attorney General Elliot Richardson to

¹ Frost/Nixon: The Complete Interviews, Part 3: “War at Home and Abroad.”

² Ibid.

³ President Nixon’s Second Watergate Address, August 15, 1973, [<http://watergate.info/1973/08/15/nixon-second-watergate-speech.html>].

fire special prosecutor Archibald Cox, because Cox had issued a subpoena demanding that Nixon turn over copies of his White House tape recordings. Richardson refused and resigned in protest, as did the Deputy Attorney General, William French Smith. The third man in line at the Department of Justice, Solicitor General Robert F. Kennedy, complied with Nixon's order and fired Cox. FBI agents, acting under presidential orders, sealed off the special prosecutor's office and seized all of its files. It appeared to many that a fascist takeover was underway.⁴ "The country tonight is in the midst of what may be the most serious constitutional crisis in its history," reported an NBC anchorman.⁵ Nixon had openly and explicitly blocked the Justice Department from carrying out the law of the United States for what seemed to be his own benefit.

"Whether we shall continue to be a government of laws and not men is now for Congress and ultimately the American people to decide," said Archibald Cox in a press statement.⁶ The people decided, in large numbers, that it was time for Nixon to go. Letters calling for his impeachment or resignation poured into Washington. Politicians and publications, including *Time* magazine, piled onto the "impeach Nixon" bandwagon en masse. From that point, Nixon's presidency was effectively dead in the water. He would hold on for almost another year, battling the courts over possession of his tapes, until finally, on August 9, 1974, facing certain impeachment after the discovery of the "smoking gun" tape, Nixon resigned from office.

For the American people, Watergate was, ironically, somewhat of a unifying phenomenon. By the time of Nixon's resignation, millions of citizens agreed on one thing: that the government was corrupt and could not be trusted, and that the people must reassert their democratic authority and constitutional rights. Throughout the summer of 1973, as enthralled Americans religiously watched the live televised coverage of the Senate Watergate Hearings, the true extent and nature of the Nixon

⁴ Perlstein, *Invisible Bridge*, 188.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

administration's depravity became apparent, and it was astonishing. Political slush funds and illegal campaign money; bribery, break-ins, and cover-ups; political espionage that included wiretapping and plots to engage in kidnapping and sexual entrapment—it was a virtual laundry list of illegality. A May 28, 1973 Harris poll found that 81 percent of respondents believed corruption was a serious problem in Washington.⁷

But the argument that Nixon articulated in his August 15 speech—that the “extremes of the 1960s” had contributed to the “extremes of Watergate”—was not entirely wrong. As we have seen, the social and political unrest of the 1960s and early 1970s did in fact play a central role in triggering the types of activities from the Nixon administration that culminated in the Watergate break-in. Indeed, those actions had already been employed by the US Government against “dissidents” since nearly the start of the cold war. However, it had been the extremes of the cold war that had largely given rise to that environment. Nixon had insisted that a sense of “higher morality” mobilized the radical left into a movement that destabilized society and government. Yet, there was no greater example of evoking a sense of higher morality than that of the concept of national security itself. Thus, it had been a sort of vicious cycle: the mentality adopted by national security officials at the onset of the cold war—to protect America's interests *by any means*—had led to systemic government secrecy and illegal activities, which had engendered a social backlash in the 1960s, leading to even more stringent government secrecy and illegality in response to stated fears of communist subversions.

In the end, Nixon accepted his ultimate responsibility for the fiasco that removed him from power, but only in the sense that he had failed to control his subordinates, and that he was wrong to have allowed the cover-up of Watergate to go forward. Nixon's major mistake, from an administrative perspective, was that he believed he could bring illegal domestic spying under the direct control of the White House, and still rely on the FBI and the CIA to help keep these operations hidden, or to protect him when they were exposed. This obviously was not the case. It is often argued that he

⁷ Ibid., 109.

became so obsessed with power that he was unable to distinguish between political enemies and actual enemies of the state, or between political intelligence and secret police-style domestic surveillance. Perhaps this is true, but as this study has shown, illegal covert actions did not begin with Nixon. Nor did they end there.

The desire to achieve and maintain political power is also not a trait unique to Nixon. American politics is inherently a power struggle—between parties, people, ideas, and control over the future direction of the country. Ultimately, Watergate was also caused by power struggles, not only between political rivals and among government agencies, but between the government and the people. But it was a power struggle that revolved around secrecy, the ability to carry out secret policies with secret methods, and to withhold secrets from the public.

With Watergate, the American people were exposed to the dark underside of government and politics in their country. The influence of organized crime, financial corruption, political dirty tricks, domestic surveillance, and the seemingly unchecked power of the intelligence community were all placed under a microscope by congressional committees and intrepid journalists. With Gerald Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon, the new president attempted to bring an end to the distrust and cynicism that had developed as a result of Watergate. "Only I, as President, have the Constitutional power to shut and seal this book," he said.⁸ Preventing Nixon from standing trial would ensure that many of Watergate's remaining secrets would never come to light. But America was not ready to seal the book. What had been seen could not be unseen. Various congressional inquiries in the mid-1970s uncovered decades of illegal activities and abuses by the CIA and other intelligence agencies. Richard Helms's worst nightmare came true as CIA secrets, including the Castro assassination plots, were openly paraded in full view of the American public. Helms himself was convicted in 1977 of lying to a

⁸ President Gerald Ford address concerning the Pardon of President Nixon, September 8, 1974, [<http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/ford.htm>].

Senate committee about the CIA's activities in Chile; he received a fine and a suspended sentence. Numerous reforms were put in place to limit the power of the CIA, such as oversight committees in both the House and Senate, the creation of the US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (or FISA Court), and an executive order by President Ford that reorganized intelligence oversight and banned the assassination of foreign leaders.

But these reforms ultimately had little impact. With the re-intensifying of the cold war in the early 1980s, President Ronald Reagan rolled back many of the limits placed on the CIA with his own Executive Order, 12333. Richard Helms was rehabilitated when Reagan awarded him the National Security Medal in 1983. In an ironic congratulatory letter from Nixon to Helms, the former president wrote: "The attempt to castrate the CIA in the mid-seventies was a national tragedy."⁹ The Iran-Contra scandal of the mid-1980s dwarfed Watergate in terms of its implications for democratic control of the country's foreign policy. The CIA and President Reagan's National Security Council expressly ignored the will of Congress in secretly selling weapons to Iran and giving support to counterrevolutionary fighters in Nicaragua. It was a clear example of how government secrecy was not curtailed but was in fact expanded in the years following Watergate.

The legacy of Watergate has been a growing awareness among the American people of government secrecy, yet little in the way of meaningful reform to address the issue. Public trust in government has never fully recovered from the damage done by Watergate. While the resignation of President Nixon was heralded as a great victory for democracy, the broader institutional problems that led to Watergate are still deeply entrenched in the American political system and the National Security State. One only needs to consider the massive program of electronic surveillance overseen by the NSA, or the now-common use of aerial drones by the CIA to carry out targeted assassinations overseas, to realize the extent to which these issues remain relevant in the present day. There is no question that a certain level of secrecy is necessary in order for a

⁹ Helms, *A Look Over My Shoulder*, vi.

government to effectively react to security threats and to formulate diplomatic strategies. But questions with regard to what the boundaries of that secrecy should be, and who is responsible for establishing them, continue to be crucial ones for American democracy, both in our understanding of the past, and for some time to come.

Bibliography

Articles

Bernstein, Barton J. "The Road to Watergate and Beyond: The Growth and Abuse of Executive Power Since 1940." *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Spring 1976): 58-86.

Bernstein, Carl. "The CIA and the Media," [http://www.carlbernstein.com/magazine_cia_and_media.php], originally published in *Rolling Stone Magazine*, October 20, 1977.

Crapol, Edward. "Some Reflections on the Historiography of the Cold War." *History Teacher* Vol. 20, No. 2 (February, 1987): 251-262.

Devine, Jack. "What Really Happened in Chile: The CIA, the Coup Against Allende, and the Rise of Pinochet." *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2014), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com>.

Greenspun, Hank. "Where I Stand." *Las Vegas Sun* (November 16, 1986), <http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2000/jul/01/where-i-stand-hank-greenspun-nov-16-1986-seeds-of-/>.

Hanyok, Robert J. "Skunks, Bogies, Silent Hounds, and the Flying Fish: The Gulf of Tonkin Mystery, 2-4 August 1964," *Cryptologic Quarterly* (Internal NSA Publication) Vol. 19., No. 4 (Winter 2000), National Security Archive, [<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB132/relea00012.pdf>].

Books

Ambrose, Stephen E. *Nixon: The Education of a Politician*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987.

Apple, R. W., and *New York Times* staff, eds. *Watergate Hearings: Break-in and Cover-up*. New York: Bantam, 1973.

- Bamford, James. *Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency*. New York: Anchor Books, 2002.
- Brinkley, Douglas, and Luke A. Nichter, eds. *The Nixon Tapes: 1971-1972*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.
- _____. *The Nixon Tapes: 1973*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015.
- Colodny, Len, and Robert Gettlin. *Silent Coup: The Removal of a President*. New York: St. Martin's, 1991.
- Dallek, Robert. *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*. New York: Harper Collins, 2007.
- Gaddis, John L. *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1972.
- _____. *The Cold War: A New History*. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- _____. *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Hogan, Michael J. *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Hougan, Jim. *Secret Agenda: Watergate, Deep Throat, and the CIA*. New York: Random House, 1984.
- Hughes, Ken. *Chasing Shadows: The Nixon Tapes, the Chennault Affair, and the Origins of Watergate*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014.
- Isaacson, Walter, and Evan Thomas. *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986.
- Kutler, Stanley I. *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes*. New York: The Free Press, 1997.
- _____. *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.
- Leffler, Melvyn P. *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992.

- Lippmann, Walter. *The Public Philosophy*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1955.
- Lukas, J. Anthony. *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years*. New York: Viking, 1976.
- Marchetti, Victor, and John D. Marks. *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*. New York: Albert A. Knopf, 1974.
- Moynihan, Daniel P. *Secrecy: The American Experience*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Oudes, Bruce, ed. *From: The President: Richard Nixon's Secret Files*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.
- Perlstein, Rick. *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014.
- _____. *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*. New York: Scribner, 2008.
- Reeves, Richard. *President Nixon: Alone in the White House*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.
- Rosen, James. *The Strong Man: John Mitchell and the Secrets of Watergate*. New York: Doubleday, 2008.
- Sabato, Larry J. *The Kennedy Half-Century: The Presidency, Assassination, and Lasting Legacy of John F. Kennedy*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr. *The Imperial Presidency*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973.
- Stanford, Phil. *White House Call-Girl*. Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2013.
- Thomas, Evan. *Being Nixon: A Man Divided*. New York: Random House, 2015.
- Waldron, Lamar. *Watergate: The Hidden History: Nixon, the Mafia, and the CIA*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012.
- Weiner, Tim. *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*. New York: Anchor Books, 2008.

_____. *One Man Against the World: The Tragedy of Richard Nixon*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2015.

Williams, William Appleman. *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972.

Wise, David, and Thomas B. Ross. *The Invisible Government*. New York: Random House, 1964.

Diaries and Memoirs

Acheson, Dean. *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*. New York: Norton, 1969.

Colson, Charles. *Born Again*. Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen Books, 1976.

Dean, John. *Blind Ambition*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976.

Ehrlichman, John. *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982.

Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Waging Peace: The White House Years, 1956-1961*. New York: Doubleday, 1965.

Haldeman, H.R. *The Haldeman Diaries*. New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1994.

_____, with Joseph DiMona. *The Ends of Power*. New York: New York Times Books, 1978.

Helms, Richard, with William Hood. *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency*. New York: Random House, 2003.

Hunt, E. Howard. *Undercover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent*. New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1974.

Kissinger, Henry. *The White House Years*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979.

Liddy, G. Gordon. *Will*. New York: St. Martin's, 1980.

Magruder, Jeb Stuart. *An American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate*. New York: Atheneum, 1974.

McCord, James W. *A Piece of Tape: The Watergate Story: Fact and Fiction*. Rockville, MD: Washington Media Services, 1974.

Nixon, Richard. *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978.

_____. *Six Crises*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962.

Truman, Harry S. *Years of Trial and Hope, 1946-1952*. New York: Doubleday, 1956.

Films

Frost/Nixon: The Complete Interviews DVD, Liberation Entertainment, 2008.

Watergate. BBC, 1994.

The Key to Watergate. A&E Investigative Reports, 1992.

Government Documents

Central Intelligence Agency. *Official History of the Bay of Pigs Operation, Volume III: Evolution of CIA's Anti-Castro Policies, 1959-January 1961*. National Security Archive. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB355>.

Central Intelligence Agency. *Watergate History*. 1973-1974. Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/CIAWatergateHistory>.

Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Watergate File Collection*. FBI FOIA Library. <https://vault.fbi.gov/watergate>.

U.S. Congress. House. *Inquiry into the Alleged Involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Watergate and Ellsberg Matters, Hearings before the Special Committee on Intelligence of the House Committee on Armed Services, 94th Cong., 1st sess., May 1973-July 1974, H.A.S.C. No. 94-4*.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders, an Interim Report of the Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities*. 94th Congress, 1st sess., November 1975, S. Rep. 94-465.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities*. 94th Cong., 2nd sess., April 1976, S. Rep. 94-755.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Presidential Campaign Activities of 1972, Senate Resolution 60, Hearings Before the Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities*. 93rd Cong., 1st sess., May-June 1973.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Project MKULTRA, the CIA's Program for Research in Behavioral Modification, Joint Hearing Before the Select Committee on Intelligence and the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research of the Committee on Human Resources*. 95th Cong., 1st sess., August 1977, S. Rep. 96-408.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Senate Watergate Report*, abridged version. New York: Carroll & Graff, 1974.

U.S. State Department. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945-1950, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*. Edited by C. Thomas Thorne Jr. and David S. Patterson. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996.

U.S. State Department. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume X, Vietnam, January 1973-July 1975*. Edited by Bradley Lynn Coleman. Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010.

U.S. State Department. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXI, Chile, 1969-1973*. Edited by James McElveen and James Siekmeier. Washington: Government Printing Office, 2014.

Presidential Recordings

Nixon White House Tapes. Richard Nixon Presidential Library. Virtual Library. <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/tapeexcerpts/index.php>.

Nixontapes.org. Edited by Luke A. Nichter. www.nixontapes.org.

Richard Nixon White House Recordings. Miller Center. University of Virginia. <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings/nixon>.