

May 16, 1973, 5:39 p.m.

Richard Nixon and J. Fred Buzhardt

Oval Office 920-009

Audio: <http://nixontapeaudio.org/chron5/920-009.mp3>

[00:00:11.3]

Nixon: Mardian been reached yet?

Buzhardt: They found him. I was dealing with the Sullivan call and I was going to get with you in a minute.

Nixon: Fine. My feeling is that I guess you have got to check with — I guess Mardian can tell you. I think, Fred, the damn thing was rescinded. That is the [unclear]. I think [unclear] or something, you know what I mean? I cannot recall, but there is something there. Huston seemed to think so. He is looking, is that correct?

Buzhardt: That is correct. Also, the DIA may help. Somebody there thinks it was rescinded.

Nixon: They [unclear].

Buzhardt: They are now looking. I have them looking.

Nixon: If they can find one piece of paper—

Buzhardt: We are in business.

Nixon: Yeah. Where else? What about the CIA?

Buzhardt: CIA — I haven't gotten Schlesinger yet. He's somewhere they can't reach him, which is unusual.

Nixon: I mean, Walters is not going to do it.

Buzhardt: That's true, but Walters didn't know anything about this.

Nixon: Neither did Schlesinger.

Buzhardt: Schlesinger knows nothing about it but if he can find the right people to inquire of we might be a little better. Since Walters is a witness—

Nixon: I agree. I agree. I agree. Walters is a witness.

Buzhardt: Since Walters is a witness—

Nixon: Walters is a witness.

Buzhardt: —I think we shouldn't [unclear] anybody we know is going to be a witness.

Nixon: I am going to take Al and get him something to eat and out of his house for a little while. So, I—and he'll call you. Well, you have to go, too, don't you?

Buzhardt: No, I will be here.

Nixon: But I think if we can contain this a minute, we can handle it. I think this — I have a recollection that the Goddamn thing is — look, I know it was not an oper — it hadn't been in operation in two years! I just don't know—

Buzhardt: I am sure—

Nixon: I don't know how it went out of business. That is my point.

Buzhardt: I am sure it hasn't been operating legitimately in quite a while. I feel that is true.

Nixon: Without — as an operation, as a group. It had been operated — but it had an original authorization and then the question—

Buzhardt: Was terminated. But if we can't find a record of the termination — that would be our best bet, to find the record of the termination.

Nixon: But if you can't we'll say it was terminated.

Buzhardt: We will still have to say it was terminated.

Nixon: It was terminated.

Buzhardt: Right.

Nixon: And all the agencies will then say — they'll just have to back it up.

Buzhardt: That is the recollection of DIA. They are looking for the papers. I believe we will find the papers, Mr. President.

Nixon: DIA says they think it was terminated.

Buzhardt: They think it was terminated. They think that the mem — and they told me, independently from Huston—

Nixon: Yeah.

Buzhardt: —that they think the approval was recalled and that is what Huston said. He thought he recalled the approval you gave him. We are going to have to check this thoroughly with NSA and the reason is important is because, as you remember, that was the most aggressive group to go forward.

Nixon: NSA?

Buzhardt: NSA, and I suspect they are the only ones that did go—

Nixon: You haven't been able to reach them?

Buzhardt: They are on their way in here now — in traffic hour it takes a while to get from Fort Meade in here. But they will be here shortly.

Nixon: My God, tell them [unclear].

Buzhardt: So, I am going to find out.

Nixon: [Unclear]. I am just confident that I never heard anything on this. But, you know what I mean—

Buzhardt: Well, whatever their operations are, there is not a problem with them.

Nixon: Yeah. NSA, DIA — so forth and so on.

Buzhardt: DIA — he says they did absolutely nothing.

Nixon: Yeah. NSA probably did some electronic — Goddamn it! We will defend the hell out of that—

Buzhardt: We can defend that.

Nixon: —until hell freezes over. The problem with the memorandum is what it says in regards to the [Watergate] break-in.

Buzhardt: That is the only problem.

Nixon: Because it says "break-in." No, technically—

Buzhardt: It says "surreptitious entry."

Nixon: What?

Buzhardt: In the accompanying memorandum it says this is a forced burglary. That is our problem.

Nixon: The copy of the memorandum is from me?
Buzhardt: From Huston. No.
Nixon: For Christ's sake. It is his characterization of the thing. But the way we will have to say is that his characterization of a surreptitious entry meant electronic. He—
Buzhardt: It is made clear, Mr. President, in the memorandum. That is what is spelled out.
Nixon: Huh?
Buzhardt: This one is spelled out in the memorandum. So there is no—

[00:04:40.6]

[Portion redacted for national security — intelligence]

[00:04:50.5]

Buzhardt: [Unclear] domestic disturbances—
Nixon: Alright. Fine.
Buzhardt: —and with respect to the selected internal security targets to find out much the same thing. What they are doing — what they're planning—
Nixon: This would be the Weathermen and things like that?
Buzhardt: They name them: the Weathermen, the SDS—
Nixon: Good.
Buzhardt: —the Black Panthers—
Nixon: That's [unclear].
Buzhardt: —and all of the organizations are described and their capabilities are given. All of it is laid out.
Nixon: Yeah, and there they'll find out there what—
Buzhardt: That's right. What they are up to.
Nixon: Well, my own view — is although I still think, Fred — is to play them as separable instances. I know the Krogh incident is separate. I know that it wasn't — is Krogh—
Buzhardt: Oh, yeah. The record so indicates.
Nixon: He operated from here, and with my total approval. My total approval. My approval [laughs] didn't include the burglary. But my point—it was stupid, but nevertheless Krogh is a great guy [unclear]. I was totally aware of it, as was everybody else in this shop. But when you get down to, for example, the break in of the Chilean Embassy — that thing was a part of the burglars' plan —
Buzhardt: That's right.
Nixon: — as a cover-up.
Buzhardt: That's true.
Nixon: Those assholes were trying to have a cover — or a CIA cover, I don't know. I think Dean concocted that. Do you—

Buzhardt: I suspected he concocted — and it may come out that he concocted more than what we now know about, Mr. President. And—

Nixon: [Unclear].

Buzhardt: All indications are now that things got badly askew and by his statement and documents I can only assume he was unaware of evidence of the turn off of this thing, or withdrawal of approval—

Nixon: If there was one.

Buzhardt: If there was one, and that he thought that he had a cover—

Nixon: A cover for everything that he had done.

Buzhardt: —for everything that he had done, in the form of a document that would give him the cover of presidential approval. And I can't help but feel, you know—

Nixon: But I don't think he needed it for that. Because I don't — because he's with that fellow [unclear] Watergate [unclear]. He says — go ahead —

Buzhardt: I'll tell you, I'm going to meet with him, Mr. President.

Nixon: Be careful.

Buzhardt: I really think what happened is probable—

Nixon: You mean he would say that the Watergate thing was approved because of this?

Buzhardt: I anticipate—

Nixon: If this was [unclear]?

Buzhardt: —that they might. I anticipate they might. He — because you know, we've heard the stories of the reason, we've read in the papers that McCord had said the reason there were going in was to find out their connections with the dissident groups and the demonstrators. Now, if Dean is using this as a cover, particularly if we can find a memorandum of withdrawal or something of this, it cuts him off at the water. I suspect, looking at the date, you see Dean didn't get this document back till the summer or spring of '72. He probably didn't recognize the utility of it at the time to his activities until much later.

Nixon: [Unclear]. He didn't even know the document existed?

Buzhardt: He probably knew it existed but he didn't have this copy of it probably.

Nixon: When? Until when?

Buzhardt: Until '72. I don't know. You see, it is not clear how much of material was sent to him by Sol Lindebaum.

Nixon: But when did that come to him? In March of '72?

Buzhardt: March of '72. He probably didn't even think of this document as a cover until long after the incident occurred and the heat got on him. I suspect he really didn't think of it as a cover perhaps until the week that he really made the break, when he was looking desperately for something to cover with.

Nixon: Yeah, but if he [unclear] March of '72. This fellow sent this over to Dean in March of '72.

Buzhardt: He sent over a memorandum that said I am enclosing documents. Now I don't know how many of those documents were enclosed—

Nixon: [Unclear]. You mean—

Buzhardt: —how many of these documents were actually enclosed with Lindenbaum's memorandum. But I suspect that sometime around the time he went to Camp David, he was desperate. He looked in the files and found this document, thought he needed a cover, and took it on the outside. And from there on in he found a smug out.

Nixon: Let me say this, however, document did not authorize non-governmental activity.

Buzhardt: No, sir.

Nixon: Now that's where he has no cover for that.

Buzhardt: Yes.

Nixon: This didn't authorize any non-governmental activity at all. It is bad as it is.

Buzhardt: Right.

Nixon: Goddamn it! I bet you this has been knocked off though. I—

Buzhardt: I [unclear]—

Nixon: I recommended it was knocked off in the summer of that year. It was about two or three—

Buzhardt: That's true.

Nixon: —months only. Goddamn it, can't Huston even remember that?

Buzhardt: He thinks it was.

Nixon: Huh?

Buzhardt: I told him—

Nixon: Did he volunteer?

Buzhardt: Yes, sir. He volunteered.

Nixon: But can he—is there anybody else you can check with? I mean, I don't know as we have [unclear]—

Buzhardt: He is looking at his own files. I think we will find it in one of the agencies. One of the agencies will probably have it.

Nixon: You better. Hell, that's one time we have to find something.

Buzhardt: We are going to look.

Nixon: Assuming we do, we could cut these boys right off on the pass.

Buzhardt: Then we can really lay it in the woods.

Nixon: Lay it in the woods—

Buzhardt: And let them have it.

Nixon: —and cut them off on the pass. Ok. We'll call you when we get back.

Buzhardt: Alright, sir.

Nixon: [Unclear].

Buzhardt: Meanwhile, I'll go on digging and hope to have some more information for you.

[00:10:50.3]

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