

TELCON
Mel Laird/Kissinger
9:38 a.m. - 8/10/73

K: Hello.

L: Hi, Henry.

K: Mel, how are you?

L: Pretty good. How are you doing?

K: O.K. Mel. I just wanted to check base with you before the newspapers start picking at everyone on the hearings yesterday on Cambodia.

L: Well, they're dumping everything, you know. They've even got those memos between Al and a colonel over at - in which, you know, Wheeler sent me a memorandum on - which we would start on using some bombing in South Vietnam and then carry it over into the sanctuaries.

K: Yes.

L: And that cover story was worked out between your staff and the Joint Staff. There were several discussions on it and I approved it. I don't deny that.

K: Well, Schlesinger claims they gave nothing except one look at an Execute Order.

L: No, they gave them the memorandum, too, and the Execute Order. The Execute Order doesn't have my initials on it, the memorandum does.

K: What memorandum is that?

L: Explaining the 42 strikes. They gave them a memorandum from Wheeler to me asking me to go to the President and get approval of 42 strikes in Cambodia in a two-day period.

K: But what's the reasoning? Why did they do that?

L: It's a memorandum from Wheeler to me asking me to go to the President. And then a day later on the bottom of the memorandum I say "Approved. MRL", because the last paragraph said we want you to take this immediately to the President.

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- K: But why did they do that?
- L: I don't undetstand it, Henry. I don't understand what's going on here. I think they think they are a new team and because they are a new team they want to start clean. Now the President was the Commander-in-Chief back at that period, too. I don't understand - you can't be a completely new team, you know.
- K: I couldn't agree more with you, Mel. I'm shocked at this thing. I called Schlesinger yesterday and I said, "I do not think it is a good idea to turn over military orders to these committees."
- L: Well, once you start you will have to give them all. Now they are going to have to give -- I understand they have two of the memorandums now of conversations between Al and some colonel over there. Now they came before the memorandum came up to me. You know what I mean, Henry?
- K: Well, I don't know about these conversations.
- L: Well, those things ^{shouldn't} be released anyway, Henry.
- K: And in any event you know these staff conversations go on all the time. I bet you didn't know what the colonel said necessarily and I didn't know necessarily. You know, we see the final product.
- L: Well, you know it - and the final product - you know - but it - but even the final product shouldn't be sent over in verbatim. You know what I used to do when they wanted those things? I'd have Fred Buzhardt go through them and paraphrase certain parts. You know what I mean?
- K: Certainly.
- L: But now they're giving them the raw material.
- K: Are you sure they did it because Schlesinger swears they didn't.
- L: Well, from what I understand. I am going to have a press conference here in Chicago at 12:00 and I just talked to Baroody and Baroody says they have the original memorandum plus the original Execute Order. The Execute Order doesn't have my initials on it but the memorandum covering the Execute Order does and they even have that with my initials on it. And this was given to them openly.
- K: Well, that's nuts. Don't you think that's nuts?

- L: Why sure. I don't know what they are trying to prove. I am not sure. I don't care. I can ride it out. Henry. That doesn't bother me, but I just --
- K: No, but Mel it is going to hurt the country. I mean, we didn't do anything wrong, for the love of Pete.
- L: Well, you're never going to be able to do anything anymore around here, Henry.
- K: I agree.
- L: Now, if you just want to drive everybody up and if you're going to start giving out orders, Execute Orders, Operating Orders, all the confidential memorandum and everything else, we might as well close the Department of Defense down, there is no use having any deterrent.
- K: I couldn't agree more.
- L: You might as well just forget about the Defense Department, cut back your weapons, do away with your budget.
- K: Are you going to say that?
- L: That's the way I feel.
- K: Are you going to say it?
- L: Well, I feel like saying it, I'll tell you that. I don't like to take on the people that are there, though, that's my problem.
- K: Well, let me raise hell with Schlesinger. But what we ought to do is be more aggressive about the original decision. What happened?
- L: Yes, but no one will defend that. I will.
- K: I know it, but these @*%¢* over there are acting as if it happened on the moon.
- L: Yes, but what is the use of having a Department if you can't utilize some of the assets?
- K: Well, you were always for Schlesinger. I know that.
- L: Yes, I know that. I was for the other man, too. You know that, too.
- K: Oh well, that other guy --

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- L: I held out on that when they wanted to do that after Dave Packard. I just wouldn't do it.
- K: He is a disaster. Why do you think he is doing it?
- L: Well, they want to be clean. They think that will help them with their budget. Well, there's no use having a budget if you, well, I'll talk to you about that sometime.
- K: Well, but, are you going to defend the original decision or how are we going to do it?
- L: Of course I am. I did it on the Today Show. I thought I had it quieted down. I'm going to do it again today in Chicago but --
- K: I mean, we saved American life. There were North Vietnamese troops there. The government of the country we were bombing were asking us to do it. What the hell - one sometimes thinks we are in a madhouse.
- L: Yes. See, they opened it up again yesterday, though, by putting out those orders. You saw the paragraph they raised hell about?
- K: Yeah. But that's not a falsification of records.
- L: No, that has nothing to do with a falsification.
- K: That was a press story and how the hell are you going to keep it secret if you are going to put it out if you don't have a press story?
- L: You put out - the tone of the story was that we wouldn't deny we were in Cambodia, we would just say that we were hitting and there would actually be some hits in South Vietnam.
- K: Yeah. But the only thing is we shouldn't all start pissing all over each other and one guy says --
- L: Well, my wife said the thing for me to do, there is only one thing for me to do and that is to get the hell out of the whole darn business.
- K: No.
- L: And I think she's right.
- K: Well, I think it would be a disaster, Mel.

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- L: But, I mean, you know, getting dumped on like this and having people in the Administration send over original messages and stuff like that, I don't understand it.
- K: But I'm calling -- Are you going to be there for awhile? I'm going to call --
- L: I'm leaving. I'm going to be at the -- I got to go down to this legislative leaders' meeting in five minutes. And then I got a press conference at the Drake Hotel at 12:00 and I am going on that Cupp(?) TV show, starting at 2:00, taping it for Saturday night.
- K: I'm going to call Schlesinger right now and I'm going to raise unshirted hell.
- L: I'll be at the Blackstone Hotel after 12:00.
- K: Your time?
- L: 12:00 my time. Yes, that's 1:00 your time.
- K: O.K. I'll call you.
- L: Alright.
- K: Good! Bye.