

TELCON

Bill Safire/Kissinger/John Knutson

12:35 p.m. - 8/3/73

K: Hello.

S: Henry, I'm sitting here with John Knutson a reporter for the New York Times. There is an important question I'd like you to answer for him. I'd like to put him on now and ask him to ask it without using me as a middle man.

K: OK.

S: John.

JK: Dr. Kissinger, I have some information on excellent authority that among the 17 wire taps that you requested was one on Mr. Safire's phone.

K: One, I did not request any wire taps at all. That is Point 1. I knew about them and I gave the names of some people in specific categories. What are the ground rules here? This is not for quotation.

JK: No, I should think its' not on the record. We can make it deep background.

K: Secondly, to the best of my knowledge in this group there were no wire taps on Bill Safire and I can say the only slight disclaim I have to make is the newsmen's wire taps were in no way brought to the attention of my office. So I can say certainly Bill Safire's telephone was not tapped as part of that particular operation. Now whether the Ulasewicz and Caulfields; therefore the "plumbers" about whose existence I didn't know, did it, that I cannot judge.

JK: You say you suggested some 17 names, is that right?

K: As I explained to the press, there were three categories among the government officials. Those who ~~were~~ had unfavorable information in their security files; those who were discovered by investigation and those who had access to the documents that were leaked where we supplied the names of the people who had access to the documents.

JK: And Mr. Safire did not fall into the third category?

K: Mr. Safire did not fall into the third category and to my certain knowledge he was not part of the national security wire taps that were initiated in 1969 which are the only wire taps of which I have any knowledge.

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- JK: Do you know the names of the 17 individuals?
- K: No, I know the names of the government people involved - most of them.
- JK: But there are one or two of them that you don't have knowledge of.
- K: It is inconceiveable to me that Safire was part of it -- if he was I would have no knowledge of it. It is possible that there were people being tapped that I didn't know about, yes.
- JK: Would General Haig perhaps know?
- K: What General Haig knows, I know. It is not conceiveable to me that the NSC office knew about it so if Safire was tapped it was as part of a totally different thing, not connected with that original batch. You have to understand that after the original batch my office had no connection with any internal security operation so it would have had to be in another group if it happened, which I don't know. But I can say that emphatically.
- JK: Well, we have a contradiction. I'm not sure how it's going to be resolved.
- K: The only thing I can say is if there's a contradiction it must have been done in channels through other orders.
- JK: My source claims that Safire was in the group of 17.
- K: If he is then somebody put people into that group that I didn't know about. . . on the governmental side. That I do not believe. I have never seen anything to indicate that.
- S: Let's follow that up a moment. On the 17 there were 13 in the government and four . . . Let's take the 13 in the government.
- K: That's right, you were not part of that.
- S: You can go down in your mind of those that you know were among those 13.
- K: That's right. There was no conceiveable you could have been in that category. The group that was decided by the President, the Attorney General, Haldeman and Hoover - this is what I have, the only group I have any knowledge of.
- S: What you're suggesting now is that a few of those 13 - if you can only identify 10 to yourself, then there is a possibility of the ones that you do not know I could have been one.

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- K: It is possible that orders were given since the authority was from Mitchell. I think if the authority came from Mitchell it is possible that somebody could have requested Mitchell to authorize a wiretap that I did not know about. Or it is possible that some of these extra curricular activities were conducted -- that you were a part of those , like Caulfield or the 'plumbers'. Do you see what I mean?
- S: Right. Who would know?
- K: You can see whether Haig knows as a result of what he's learned in his new job. I have had occasion to review the records in my office. Those records confine to the 1969 authorization and I know that you're not part of those.
- S: How can you know that, Henry?
- K: I know you're not part of the group that I had knowledge of. I do not know whether either is part of the 1969 authorization and what is part of other programs -- direct orders were given of which my office was not aware.
- S: There's one thing that puzzles me. Is it possible that I'm one of those 13?
- K: That I think is impossible.
- S: You can't know that because you don't know all 13.
- K: The reason I don't think it's possible is because at that time the only discussion concerned newspaper leaks of classified documents to which you didn't have access. In that original group there was no way you could have figured. Now it is possible that some other enterprise was started and that I couldn't judge and it is even possible that they may have added names directly just between Hadman and Mitchell.
- S: To the 17?
- K: I don't know 17 or . . .
- S: Or to the 13 plus the 4; everybody's been operating on the 17. You're telling me I was not one of those 17. Maybe I was 18th.
- K: I don't have any of the reports here. The FBI has all the reports. If it was done as part of the so-called National Security Council operation.
- S: You're telling me it was not done as part of that.

- K: It was not done as part of the National Security operation of which I was familiar. I have to repeat I cannot know what else may have been done. I just cannot believe it. But a lot of things happened that I couldn't believe.
- S: Right. Check your memory, is there anything looking back might lead people to believe
- K: On the basis of my knowledge I would consider it totally impossible and preposterous. I have never heard the President question you, never heard Haldeman talk this way; the only reason I'm not saying it flatly is because I've seen so many things happen that I would have thought impossible but I hadn't the least suspicion that it could be true.
- S: OK. John, do you have any more?
- JK: No, I think you've been very thorough. I'm going to have to go back to my original source, but I take you at your word. OK.
- S: Many thanks for returning the call.
- K: I will check with Haig, but I cannot conceive it.
- S: Why don't I call Haig right now.
- K: Why don't you call Haig.
- S: What do you think is the quickest, best way to do it -- for me to call Haig or for you to check?
- K: I'll check Haig and get him to call you within ten minutes.
- S: Great.