

005-050

Date: 1971-06-13

Participant: Richard M. Nixon

Participant: Alexander M. Haig

Start Time: 12:18

Place: White House Telephone

SCROLLER TITLE: "But It's a Pentagon Study, Huh?"

SCENE SETTER: On the day after his daughter Tricia married Edward Cox in a Rose Garden ceremony at the White House, President Nixon learned from Deputy National Security Adviser Alexander M. Haig Jr. that the *New York Times* had published a trove of materials from a secret Defense Department study of the Vietnam War—what the press would later dub the "Pentagon Papers."

President Nixon: Hello.

White House Operator: General [Alexander M. "Al" Haig [Jr.], sir. Ready.

President Nixon: Hello.

Alexander M. "Al" Haig Jr.: Yes, sir.

President Nixon: Hi, Al. How—what about the [Vietnam] casualties last week? You got the figure yet?

Haig: No, sir, but I think it's going to be quite low.

President Nixon: Mm-hmm. Mm—

Haig: It should be as [unclear]—

President Nixon: Should be.

Haig: —as last week or better.

President Nixon: Yeah, could—should be less than 20, I would think. Yeah.

Haig: So it'd be very—

President Nixon: They—when do you get that? Do you—will you know?

Haig: We don't get it officially till Monday afternoon [*President Nixon acknowledges*], but we can get a reading on it.

President Nixon: Right. Well, Monday afternoon officially? Well, let's wait till then. Fine. OK. Nothing else of interest in the world today?

Haig: Yes, sir, very significant. This goddamn *New York Times* exposé of the most highly classified documents of the [Vietnam] war.

President Nixon: Oh, that! I see.

Haig: That—

President Nixon: I didn't read the story. But you mean that was leaked out of the Pentagon?

Haig: Sir, the whole study that was done for [Robert S. "Bob"] McNamara and then carried on after McNamara left, by [Clark M.] Clifford and the peaceniks over there. This is a *devastating* security breach of the greatest magnitude of anything I've ever seen.

President Nixon: Well, what's being done about it, then? I mean, I didn't—

Haig: I called—

President Nixon: Did we know this was coming out?

Haig: No, we did not, sir.

President Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: There are just a few copies of this—

President Nixon: Well, what about the—

Haig: —12-volume report.

President Nixon: Well, what about the—let me ask you this, though: What about the—what about [Melvin R. "Mel"] Laird? What's he going to do about it? Is—

Haig: Well, I talked with him [*unclear*]

President Nixon: Now, I'd just start right at the top and fire some people. I mean, whoever—whatever department it came out of, I'd fire the top guy.

Haig: Yes, sir. Well, I'm sure it came from [Department of] Defense, and I'm sure it was stolen at the time of the turnover of the administration.

President Nixon: Oh, it's two years old, then.

Haig: I'm sure it is, and they've been holding it for a juicy time, and I think they've thrown it out to affect Hatfield-McGovern; that's my own estimate. But it's something that—it's a mixed bag. It's a tough attack on [John F. "Jack"] Kennedy. It shows that the genesis of the war really occurred [*President Nixon acknowledges*] during the '61 period.

President Nixon: Yeah, that's Clifford. [*Slight chuckle.*] Yeah, I see.

Haig: And it's brutal on President [Lyndon B.] Johnson. They're going to end up in a massive gut fight in the Democratic Party on this thing.

President Nixon: Are they?

Haig: It's a—there's some very—

President Nixon: But also, massive against the war.

Haig: Against the war.

President Nixon: But it's a Pentagon study, huh?

End of excerpt.

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