



“They’re More Likely to Get Me Killed”

Date: 1964-09-28

Conversation: WH6409-16-5698

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Michael J. Mansfield

Start Time: 07:22

Duration: 01:53

Place: Mansion

SCENE SETTER: The Warren Commission report concluded that the Secret Service was inadequately staffed and equipped to investigate threats to the president and recommended that a Cabinet-level committee oversee presidential protection. In response, President Johnson told Senate Majority Leader Michael J. “Mike” Mansfield [D–Montana] that he would set up a blue-ribbon study group on the matter.

President Johnson: Now, between us, the Secret Service that covers me are fine and devoted and [a] dedicated group, but just honestly, Mike—I wouldn’t have this repeated to anybody—my judgment is that they—they’re more likely to get me killed than they are to protect me.

Michael J. “Mike” Mansfield: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: They’re just not heavy thinkers. They’re just like the average cop. And they don’t plan. [J. Edgar] Hoover’s the one that’s put me in—he doesn’t object to my shaking hands with high school kids or people along the fence at Billings, Montana. [*Mansfield acknowledges.*] But he does object to my riding down the street in a car that’s not bulletproof, because that’s where people hide. It’s not likely that an assassin’s going to be in with a bunch of high school band[s], but it is that he gets in a[n] upstairs window. Yet they had the stuff on [Lee Harvey] Oswald but didn’t give it to Secret Service.

So what we’re going to do, if y’all . . . if it’s all right to work out, I’m going to meet with them about, I guess, Wednesday or Thursday, maybe Wednesday. [*Snorts.*] I got to go to the SAC [Strategic Air Command] base for this NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] man [Manlio Brosio] tomorrow. And I’m going to call [C. Douglas] Dillon and them in and make Dillon the chairman of it.

Mansfield: Good.

President Johnson: And then have him try to . . . get [John A.] McCone to see that everything that comes in from any foreign country is very carefully handled. Get [McGeorge “Mac”] Bundy [to] take that from the President’s viewpoint, and kind of not be a super-detective but let him be the intelligence man for the White House Secret Service. And then pull the [Department of the] Treasury and the Attorney General together on how to coordinate those two groups of people.

End of excerpt.

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