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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF

RODERICK M. HILLS
COUNSEL TO THE PRESIDENT
AND
DEPUTY TO PHILIP BUCHEN
COUNSELLOR TO THE PRESIDENT

THE BRIEFING ROOM

4:10 P.M. EDT

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the purpose of this, really -- and it is -- Rod's remarks, I think, will be embargoed until 7:30, which is the beginning of the news conference, which, I think, is what everybody wanted. The purpose of Rod coming out is to try to clear up some of the matters that were not cleared up satisfactorily on Friday or over the weekend or this morning.

I don't think Rod will be able to go to the substance of the report, but he will be able to clear up some of these scheduling and administrative problems that were raised.

MR. HILLS: Questions?

Q When is the report going to be released?

MR. HILLS: The President will release the report. The President intends to announce tonight his decision to release the report sometime tomorrow, when the first printing run has been completed.

Q Will there be any embargo on it at all?

MR. HILLS: There will be no embargo on the report that the Vice President and the Commission --

MR. NESSEN: Wait a second, Rod. Embargo means, what time can it be released. There will be several hours between the time -- at least several hours between the time it is handed out and the time it can be released.

MR. HILLS: We assume now the report will be ready in the morning, sometime before noon.

MR. NESSEN: We are just -- at the moment, the exact things are not worked out. One possibility is to hand it out about 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning for 6:00 p.m. release, but don't take that as gospel because it is not locked up yet. It partly depends on the press run.

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Q When will you know?

MR. NESSEN: Later this afternoon, I hope.

Q Will you explain the process by which it was decided that the assassination subject would not be covered exhaustively in the report itself?

MR. HILLS: The assassination materials, as you recall, were begun -- a collection of them was begun by the Commission staff sometime after the Commission began its study on domestic activities. The Rockefeller staff, from the beginning, had a different operation collecting evidence on the so-called, or alleged, assassination plot.

So far as our office is concerned and so far as the White House is concerned, we have always assumed that the materials collected with respect to assassination matters would be presented differently and in a different fashion. In fact, in late April, we assured the Church Committee that we had every reason to believe that they would have these materials in some form prior to June 6th. We did that because we were hoping to forestall the Church Committee from going over the same ground at the same time as the Rockefeller Commission was going over that ground.

It was not until the first of May that it became apparent to us that the Rockefeller work on the assassination plots would not be ready at any time significantly before June 6th. So that we have always assumed that the Rockefeller investigation of the assassination plots would be handled in a different package, if you will, than the report that was scheduled for June 6th.

Sometime between May 6th, or the first week in May, and Friday, the Rockefeller Commission decided that it was not going to be able to complete that report. At various times from May 1st, until Friday, it was suggested to us that the Rockefeller Commission, or some part of it, or the staff, might continue its work after June 6th.

Our best understanding is that roughly two weeks ago today the Rockefeller Commission decided that it would not do anything further in terms of the investigation beyond June 6th and that it would hand over to the President whatever materials they had accumulated as of that date.

The question of whether more or less would be in the report -- the report only states that certain materials are being handed over to the President simultaneously -- that question in our view was never a real question. In other words, we had always assumed that those materials which were really materials that were developed as a result of the President's request that they investigate this matter, in the course of their other investigation --

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Q Mr. Hills, once the President asked the Commission to investigate the assassination plots, which seems rather serious and significant to most Americans, why didn't he also ask them to complete that investigation?

MR. HILLS: Well, the staff of the Rockefeller Commission -- and, presumably, with the approval of the Commission, decided, from the outset, that the purpose of their investigation of assassination plots would be limited to those plots that had significant domestic activities. That self-limitation and its impact on the overall course of the investigation was not apparent to us until sometime after May 1st. Whether the report on the assassination plots is complete as to those matters which were self-limited -- in other words, whether having decided they were not going to investigate all the allegations of the assassination, but merely those that had sufficient domestic activities, is complete or not, we cannot say, as we have not seen the back-up materials.

My review of what they have is that it was substantial activity and they did a thorough job on what they decided to investigate. But by May 1st, it was quite apparent they did not have the time or staff to do what would be called a thorough examination by June 6th.

Q Mr. Hills, why do you keep saying that sometime around May 1st? What is there imprecise about the time that you cannot pin it any better than about, between May 1st and yesterday?

MR. HILLS: I can pin it quite specifically, so far as our involvement is concerned.

Q Can we deal in specific dates rather than generalities?

MR. HILLS: We have told the staff of the Church Committee that we believe we would be handing materials to them the first week in May regarding the assassination plots that had been collected by the Rockefeller Commission.

The first Monday in May -- and I cannot tell you what that date is -- we learned that we were not going to be able to do that.

Q How did you learn that?

MR. HILLS: We were told by the Rockefeller staff that the report would not be ready, and we asked for the report. It was about that time that we communicated to Senator Church and Senator Tower that we would not have those materials at the time we had told them we thought we would have them.

Q So then, every time you have used that phrase "sometime between the first week of May 1st and now," what you really mean is that Monday, the first Monday in May?

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MR. HILLS: That is the first time I learned that I was not going to be able to produce the materials that I thought I was going to be able to produce during that week.

Q Did the President know of it before you?

MR. HILLS: No, I am sure he did not.

Q When Mr. Lisagor asked you why the President did not ask the Rockefeller, or direct the Rockefeller Commission to complete this investigation of the assassination, you answered in terms of the Rockefeller Commission and its staff -- whereas, his question was "Why didn't the President, whenever he learned of this, tell the Rockefeller Commission; 'These are serious things. I want you to go ahead and finish them. Never mind the June 5th deadline?'"

MR. HILLS: On the first week in May, the report, obviously, was not complete. That is all we knew at the time. It became apparent, over the next week or two, that the limitations imposed by the staff on itself, in terms of the amount of people they had available to work on the assassination matters, in terms of the work they had done up until that date, that they did not have the capacity to do what would be regarded as a full investigation of the alleged assassination plots.

Q You mean, even if the time had not been extended?

MR. HILLS: The time could have been extended. The question of whether or not the President could have ordered them to stay in session or not and whether or not that would have been a fruitful exercise, given the time limits of the lawyers -- the lawyers that had come from private practice to work on the Commission -- the lawyers that had already extended their absence from their real lives, if you will, for a couple of extra months -- the Rockefeller Commission simply decided they did not wish to extend the life of the Commission.

Now, it was not until two weeks ago today, as I said earlier, that the Rockefeller staff and the Commission decided amongst themselves that they would not continue their existence beyond June 6th. The question of whether or not it would have been sensible for the President to say, "Nevertheless, I order you to stay in being," is a matter I cannot answer. I don't think that it would have been a sensible solution, given the limitations of the staff and given what they have done.

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Q Was there enough coordination between the White House staff, yourself and Mr. Buchen's operation generally, and the Rockefeller staff and the Rockefeller Commission, so that at some point you had enough knowledge of what they had found out about assassination attempts so that this matter could have profitably been brought to the President's attention for a Presidential decision, or did it rest somewhere where you did not know what they had and, therefore, the thing was never brought to the President's attention?

MR. HILLS: In other words, the White House staff stayed carefully away from the substance of the investigation of the Rockefeller Commission. The first time that we became involved with the substance of their investigation was about the first week in May when this promise which we made, or this expectation which we created in the minds of the Church Committee, as soon as it was apparent that expectation was not going to be reached we then engaged in an evaluation of what materials they had, along with their staff.

Q One final question: Didn't that evaluation lead you to believe that the -- putting it another way -- I gather from everything you say that that evaluation you just referred to did not lead you to the conclusion that the assassination investigation should be pursued; is that right?

MR. HILLS: No, quite to the contrary. As of the time it was apparent to us that the Rockefeller Commission was not going to be able to complete the matter, we after all had been engaged with the Church Committee in gathering materials throughout the Executive Branch, throughout Government, and from other witnesses. We have some notion of where the Church Committee is on the matter. We have now a specific notion of where the Rockefeller Commission is on the matter, and between that we are satisfied that the information important for this investigation, by combining the materials in both places, will be satisfactory.

Q Mr. Hills, you leave the country, though, with the impression that the Commission has not done its job, the Administration passing the buck to Congress.

MR. HILLS: The Congress, after all, was what called the Commission to investigate the domestic activities of the CIA. At the time that they first began their investigation of alleged assassination plots, there were far fewer public comments as to what the scope of those assassination plots were. Again, it was not until early May that it was apparent to us that the Commission had confined its investigation of the assassination plots, as I said earlier, to specific ones that had specific forms of domestic activity.

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Q Mr. Hills, who made the decision, sir, for them to investigate assassination plots in the first place? And then, who made the decision that it could be in a separate report? And who gave them permission to limit themselves as much as they did and not tell you all ahead of time they were doing it?

MR. HILLS: Anything the Commission staff did was done with the authorization of the Rockefeller Commission and not the White House.

Q But they could not have operated without being under the White House. You were just across the street, and they could have come back for further instructions.

MR. HILLS: They did not, apparently, have any questions in their minds as to what their authority and jurisdiction was.

Q You did not answer my question, sir. When was the date they decided, and who gave them authority to investigate assassinations?

MR. HILLS: I think you will have to check that in the public records. I don't have the precise date. Some time after the Commission was formed, they were asked by the President to extend their investigation of these assassination plots that had been reported in public allegations.

Q Then, if they were asked to do this by the President, obviously that would come back to the President to consult with him if they limited themselves in doing that.

MR. HILLS: If you recall, the first allegations of assassination plots involved substantial domestic activities; namely, the allegations that domestic criminal elements had been brought into the proposed assassination plots. So that it, in terms of what precise time in history the public allegations of assassination plots went beyond the limitations that the staff put on themselves, is unclear to me and I think is still unclear to the staff.

Q Who gave them the authority to have a separate report? That is rather unusual.

MR. HILLS: It is not a question of a separate report. It was a question of whether they would extend their investigation into these other matters.

Q No, they did have two reports -- one on assassinations and one on general. Who gave them authority to separate them?

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MR. HILLS: There is not, to my knowledge, and never has been, a separate report, so to speak. There was a separate investigation conducted, I think, with separate people. Mr. Belin, of the staff, engaged himself, as I understand it, in the investigation of the alleged assassination plots.

Q Then, you have no separate report on assassinations?

MR. HILLS: We have a separate summary of evidence which was forwarded to the President on Friday, and we have a number of back-up files which have been made available to the White House.

Q Mr. Hills, a few minutes ago you were asked the question, the point of it was, is the President dissatisfied? Is the White House dissatisfied with the report received from the Rockefeller Commission? Does he feel it is complete?

MR. HILLS: I think the President is satisfied that the significant evidence concerning the alleged assassination plots will be sufficient and will be satisfactory. That is a combination of what the Rockefeller Commission has provided to the President and, again, we have only seen the summary of the evidence. We have not read all the back-up files, so I cannot give you a categorical answer.

We have the results of the investigation that the various agencies of the Government have done as a result of the Church Committee investigation. We have our own Council's office review of various files and minutes of agencies of the Federal Government, and I believe the President will be satisfied when he has the results of all that evidence. I believe he will be satisfied. My guess is that he will be satisfied that the investigation is a good investigation, assuming that there are no other allegations newly found.

Q Mr. Hills, why is it, if the President has stated that assassination is definitely not the policy of the Ford administration, why is it that this is classified information? Why doesn't he release this separate summary of evidence because this is what it seems to me the news media would like to have? I think the public would like to know about this. Why release part of this finding and not the other?

MR. HILLS: I am sure you would agree it would be unfortunate to release any evidence of any kind that was incomplete and perhaps misleading.

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Q You think it is incomplete?

MR. HILLS: It is by the Rockefeller Commission definition, incomplete in that sense. It is also clear that the Church Committee, which has progressed into this area quite substantially, is involved in this matter.

The President will wish to review the materials he has collected and will indeed review those materials with the Select Committee in accordance with the procedures we have with respect to all other material, and the final question as to how an accurate statement can be made about all this will just have to await the completion of that review with the Select Committee.

Q Mr. Hills, there is a suspicion abroad that the White House would really rather have the Church Committee decide whether to make public material on assassinations, either because it involves the Kennedy brothers in some way and Edward Kennedy may be an opponent of the President's in 1976, or because it involved Eisenhower Administration activities of the same party as the President's. Can you tell us whether any of these considerations weighed into the manner in which this report has been handled and whether, indeed, the White House would rather have the Church Committee make this material public?

MR. HILLS: Those considerations did not weigh at all in the decision not to make the materials that had been passed on, the summary of evidence, if you will, that had been passed on to the President on Saturday, public. The very nature of the allegations, the very nature of the public allegations, as well as the statements that have been made, both before the Rockefeller Commission and the Church Committee and in the media, are such that it is very easy to cause someone to be blamed for something that cannot be proved.

There have been public statements by witnesses before the Rockefeller Commission that are broader than the statements they have made under oath to the Rockefeller Commission, I am told. I have not read the statements to the Rockefeller Commission, but I have read the summary of their evidence. And it would appear to me there have been public statements by witnesses that would suggest a greater degree of blame, if you will, on officials of prior Administrations, than the official record would establish.

The danger of providing an incomplete report, or providing evidence before the President has had an opportunity to be consulted with the Chairman and Vice Chairman and, perhaps, other members of the Select Committee, is very great, so that, in this area, particularly in a matter involving obviously oral conversations between various persons high in the Administration as to what exactly was meant by them, as to what blame, if any, should lie with a given person, is far too great to take a chance with.

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I think the decision to produce the materials for the Select Committee and to make a decision with the Select Committee, as to how those materials should be evaluated, how they should be judged, is the proper course of action for the President to take.

Q Mr. Hills, would you indicate specifically, in step-by-step, how the assassination item got on the agenda of the Rockefeller Commission, and particularly could you comment on the reports that the President himself first raised it in discussion with --

MR. HILLS: I am sorry, I don't understand that last part of the question.

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Q The general question is, you have said this was somehow in the public dialogue and in response to vague rumors and allegations, the President ordered the Commission to deal with the question of assassination.

MR. HILLS: The President asked the Commission if it would be willing to undertake this investigation.

Q Can you give us a step-by-step account of how did that happen and particularly address yourself to reports that before the rumors were about on assassination, the President himself had discussed it with people in the news media?

MR. HILLS: I cannot tell you what the President said to any members of the media, but I can tell you that at a date which you can determine quite easily from public record the President asked the Rockefeller Commission to examine the allegations that had been made concerning assassination plans. The Commission agreed to do so. The Commission, however, from the start accepted the point that the allegations involved domestic activities, and if you recall, the original allegations of assassination plots were substantially limited to allegations of criminal elements that had been used.

Q I don't recall that at all. My impression is that the first allegations were very, very general and wild.

MR. HILLS: Let me try it this way: The first specific allegations were of the use of criminal elements in cooperation with the CIA or with other governmental agencies in plotting the assassination of a given foreign leader, and the Rockefeller Commission began its investigation on that premise.

Now, at what time in history it became apparent to them that they had to limit it that way or whether indeed they had to limit it that way, I cannot say. All I can say is that as of May first they had so limited it, and from that date forward they were dealing with the issue for themselves as to whether or not they should extend their own life.

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Q We are asking why the President wants a half truth on the question of the assassination? Why doesn't he want a thorough investigation?

MR. HILLS: I am sure the President -- in deed I can state that the President will ask for a different investigation if at the time he has assimilated all the evidence we have in the Executive Branch on this matter, he feels it is a half truth. As I say again, we have been investigating this matter from three different aspects. The Rockefeller Commission has been doing it. We have been heavily involved at the same time with the Senate Select Committee involving many of the same allegations.

We at the White House have been investigating the private records and documents that are available, and I have no reason to doubt but that the President will have a full understanding of what went on in connection with the alleged assassination plots.

I cannot say, of course, that there may not be some other specific item that will jump up that we have not uncovered, but as of now, looking at the public record of the assassination allegation, and looking at the material that we have gotten from the Rockefeller Commission, the material that has been generated as a result of the Church Committee investigation, I believe the President will have a complete report.

Q Mr. Hills, why didn't the President give his own Commission extra time and extra staff and let them complete the job that he himself had asked them to undertake? Wouldn't that have been the easiest answer to it?

MR. HILLS: Well, I think the first question for the President was what did the staff and what did the Rockefeller Commission wish to do, and what capacity they had to do it. Again, you have a staff, I believe, of twelve lawyers involved with a number of men who came from private life, and the lawyers largely came from private life to begin an investigation that was to have over two months ago. They had already extended their life for two months. Whether or not the people involved in that investigation could continue their investigation for a period sufficient for a complete investigation had to be balanced, I think, in their minds against the President's and our decision as to whether or not the President would have a complete report. In my judgment the President will have.

Q What is more important, that or some private lawyer going back to some private case?

MR. HILLS: Well, Mam, we have very little control over whether those people are or are not going back to their private lives.

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Q Why did the President not learn of this limitation until May 1st?

MR. HILLS: When we say learn about the limitation, the extent to which the Rockefeller Commission was going to complete the investigation was not known until two weeks ago. The fact that the report was not going to be ready in the first week of May, as we had originally anticipated, was indeed known on May 1st.

Q Then when did he not learn of it until two weeks ago?

MR. HILLS: Because it was only two weeks ago the Rockefeller Commission, by some action taken among themselves, decided to provide the President with the materials they had collected as of June 6.

Q Mr. Hills, isn't it true that the definition of how this Commission would investigate assassinations was worked out with your office, under the original charter and, in fact, you sought out a definition of how you could investigate foreign assassinations under a theory that the crime of conspiracy may have been originated within the United States?

MR. HILLS: Yes, I think that is quite correct.

Q When did that happen?

MR. HILLS: That was, of course, shortly after the Commission did indeed state that it was willing to investigate these matters.

Q So the White House approved the limitations which the Commission put on its investigation?

MR. HILLS: The limitations, of course, are not precise until you see what they investigated. The simple limitation is quite clear, that they were going to investigate assassinations, because of the alleged domestic activities that were part of the alleged assassination planning. But when the report was done, or when the report was in its stages, some time between May 1st, and two weeks ago, it was apparent to the staff and to the Rockefeller Commission, themselves, that they had not gathered the evidence necessary to give a full report.

Now, we don't know today exactly what evidence is in their files and we won't know until after we have reviewed that evidence and looked at the evidence that has been gathered as a result of the Church Committee report, as to whether it is sufficient for the President's purpose.

Obviously, one has to accept the possibility that when, after you are finished with that, the President may have to ask for a further investigation, and I can assure you that he will, if it is not a complete investigation.

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Q Mr. Hills, what exactly has been turned over to the President, in this area of the assassination plots, by the Rockefeller Commission?

MR. HILLS: The Rockefeller Commission has turned over a summary, a typewritten summary of evidence.

Q How many pages?

MR. HILLS: Typewritten, less than 100, between 75 and 100 pages.

Q It has been referred to frequently as an 82 or 86-page document.

Mr. Hills, is it 86 pages?

MR. HILLS: I don't know if they numbered the pages of the index or not. That is my problem, but it is in that range.

Q Mr. Hills, on the follow-up investigation, the allegations are that people in the Government participated in a conspiracy to commit a murder within the United States. There is no statute of limitation, as far as I know, on that crime. Why doesn't the President simply turn over this 85 pages to the Justice Department and tell them to pursue it the way they would any other allegation?

MR. HILLS: The President will announce tonight his intention to turn over all the materials gathered from the Rockefeller Commission, both on the issue of the alleged assassination plots and on the matter of the domestic surveillance activities generally to the Attorney General and, of course, the Attorney General will pursue that matter and the Attorney General will investigate whatever the Attorney General thinks should be investigated.

Let me say, again, that as you know from the media, several administrative officials, Administration officials, have appeared before the Church Committee and reported to the Church Committee as to what they know about the alleged assassination plots. We, of course, have that evidence that has been gathered in that connection.

Q Mr. Hills, Mr. Nessen tells us about regular meetings with the Vice President. Why didn't the Vice President keep the President posted about these problems that you have outlined?

MR. HILLS: I am not sure what posting you are concerned about.

Q You say he did not learn about it until two weeks ago. Why didn't the Vice President keep the President better informed on this? Do you think he could have?

MR. HILLS: Roughly -- sometime, I think on Tuesday or Wednesday of that week -- let me back up a minute and tell you that, of course, each person has their own concern. Our own concern has been from the start to make certain that the assassination allegations were fully investigated and finally investigated at least to the extent that it is within human capacity to do so.

From our perspective, we look in two directions. We look to the Senate Committee for which we have been doing considerable work. We also are aware of the Rockefeller Commission activities. Our concern has always been as to whether the Senate Committee investigating this matter and the President would have a complete report. Sometime in May, it became apparent first of all to the people in the Rockefeller Commission, and soon thereafter to us, that we would not have a complete report from the Rockefeller Commission on assassinations by June 6th. That is one part of the ingredients; one set of ingredients that make up the question of whether or not we will have a full report. We are investigating today the assassination plots in connection with the Church Committee investigation.

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Q Mr. Hills, you seem to make it sound like the White House and the President were operating closer, working more closely, with the Church Committee and the Senate than they were with the Commission that was entirely a creature of the President and the White House. Is that a proper impression? Why the arm's length relationship with the Rockefeller Commission?

MR. HILLS: I don't think there is any difference. The fact is that the Select Committee of the Senate has a far broader scope from the beginning to its investigation. They are not investigating simply assassination allegations. They are, as you know, investigating all allegations of covert activity, irregularities, all activities of the CIA throughout the world.

The scope of the investigation is far broader. The staff is considerably larger. They have gone into many more agencies with greater depth than the charter of the Rockefeller Commission, which was to investigate the domestic activities of the CIA.

So that whereas the Rockefeller Commission was investigating the given plot, for example, with respect to a foreign country, the Church Committee at the same time was investigating the entire range of activities in the Federal Government with respect to that same country. It is a far more energetic matter, from our standpoint.

Q Is any of the material which will be released by the President tomorrow -- what we would call the first 304 or 6 pages -- does any of that at all deal with political assassinations or are political assassinations entirely separate from that 87-page addendum?

MR. HILLS: The report of the Rockefeller Commission, which I believe is 299 pages, to be precise, will have only one paragraph stating that simultaneously with the reports the Commission has turned over all the materials it has collected on the subject to the President.

Q The reason I asked that is because my understanding was -- and I could have been wrong -- that a section of the initial report would deal with allegations of CIA links to the Kennedy assassination. Was that dealt with in the first report, or the second report, or not at all?

MR. HILLS: The allegations and the degree of the investigation of the Rockefeller Commission as to the Kennedy assassination is a matter dealt with in the report that the President will make public tomorrow.

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Q My question is: Can I assume that is because that is a matter of such gravity that President Ford wanted to assure or reassure the American public on that situation? That being the case, why isn't the matter of political assassination of foreign leaders of such gravity that the President would want to make it clear or reassure the public on the same issue? If you include the Kennedy thing in the first part, why not the second?

MR. HILLS: To the extent that the Rockefeller Commission decided that it wished to comment upon or relook at any evidence involved in the Kennedy assassination, that was entirely a decision of the staff of the Rockefeller Commission. The President at no time suggested he was dissatisfied with the Warren Commission report. So you will have to judge for yourself as to whether or not the revelations -- or the statements, is a far better word for it -- the observations in the Rockefeller report with respect to the Kennedy assassination warrant the label you just put on them. I would say it does not warrant that label.

Q You described three investigations that have been going on -- Rockefeller Commission, Church Committee, and then you described the Council's office as doing something you described as a separate investigation.

Would you explain the scope of your investigation, the authority for it, and how you expect to deal with the conclusions; and if you can, what the conclusions are?

MR. HILLS: All requests for information in either broad or specific form from the Select Committee goes directly to each of the individual agencies.

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Q You did not answer that question.

MR. HILLS: I am trying to answer the question.

Q Let him finish.

MR. HILLS: The question is, if they are specific, if they say, "Please give us a copy of a given report," it is easy for that report to be transmitted to the Church Committee, or read by the Church Committee. But for the most part, the Church Committee has asked for information concerning various things. Those various things quite often involve more than one agency of the Federal Government. Our job has been to coordinate the investigation of the Church Committee to make certain that any evidence bearing on the request is examined, is brought forward and is transmitted in whatever procedures we have agreed upon with the Church Committee so that the mere fact that the Church Committee has asked for something means that this Administration is forced to investigate the matter to make certain that all materials asked for are indeed transmitted.

Q Mr. Hills, I am not sure that you answered my earlier question.

Did the White House intentionally treat the Rockefeller Commission at arm's-length, where it was not constantly apprised of what it was doing in providing it with instructions as to what it was supposed to be doing?

MR. HILLS: Not at all. The Rockefeller Commission was in regular contact with our office, asking for materials, and in the same manner that the Church Committee was, the Rockefeller Commission secured those materials.

Q When you discovered, then, that the Rockefeller Commission was not going to be able, or was not going to complete the report on assassinations, why didn't you ask them to go back and do it?

MR. HILLS: The simple answer is that, sometime in May, or sometime after the extent of their investigation was apparent, I did inquire as to whether or not it would be possible to expand the study satisfactorily.

On several occasions, Mr. Belin did, indeed, extend his inquiry. I cannot tell you when either Mr. Belin or the Rockefeller Commission decided that they could not complete the report in a fashion satisfactory to them. I can think of three or four areas specifically in which we asked Mr. Belin to extend his recovery, and to my knowledge, he did, in those matters, respond to our request.

Often we had information of requests from the Rockefeller Commission that caused us to suggest that Mr. Belin ask the same questions, and the reverse was true on a couple of occasions.

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Q Mr. Hills, was the opposite true?

MR. HILLS: Yes, the opposite was true.

Q You asked Mr. Belin not to investigate or to layoff or to not bother to go into there? Did that ever happen?

MR. HILLS: The opposite was never true. Certainly, so far as our office is concerned and, to my knowledge, anybody in this Administration.

Q Is it true the reason the Rockefeller Commission did not want to go ahead is that they were busy wanting to get back to their private lives?

MR. HILLS: No, I don't think so at all. I think the Rockefeller Commission had completed an extensive investigation of the assassination reports. The Rockefeller Commission was also very well aware of the extent to which the Church Committee and our office was pursuing the same matters in conjunction with the Senate inquiries. I think they made a judgment, which, I think, is a sound judgment, from their standpoint, that rather than try to put together a new staff, or rather than ask their existing staff to continue their life, the President would be fully informed on these matters. I trust he will be.

Q Mr. Hills, if the President did not make the decision, or if it was not the White House saying, "Knock it off," then how did Vice President Rockefeller and other members of his Commission staff end up misleading the press as to the inclusion of the assassination data in the main report?

MR. HILLS: I cannot answer that, obviously, because I appreciate the ambiguity that occurred last week. But when the Vice President, I believe, on the second of June, held up a sheaf of papers and had his picture taken, which was in the Washington Post -- he had a sheaf of papers, a report, that was approved on the night or day of June 2nd. And that sheaf of papers did not include any materials on assassination other than this paragraph that said the other materials would be transmitted.

I cannot answer the ambiguity, and I can't answer the misapprehension that was created. The purpose of this briefing is to assure you that it was what I have said it was, a misapprehension.

Q The White House absolutely did not order the investigation terminated?

MR. HILLS: Categorically not.

Q Or the information deleted?

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MR. HILLS: Categorically not. As I say, our interest and your efforts, from May 1st on, has been to have the broadest effort made possible, so that we could comport with our primary motives, which is to complete the investigation from all sources of this matter so that the matter can be fully investigated, as I said earlier, to the extent possible by human beings.

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Q Mr. Hills, it seems apparent that the President has chosen to allow the Church Committee to play the major role in this investigation. Otherwise he would have, it seems to me, have asked the Rockefeller Commission to stay on.

Now, why?

MR. HILLS: I think I have not stated it affirmatively enough. The Rockefeller Commission has done a considerable amount of work on the alleged assassination plot. They have provided the President with a very thorough investigation of a very substantial percentage of the allegations that we have seen in the public press. Comparing their investigation to what it appears, the Church investigation to be, it is substantially complete. There are no glaring omissions. There are no foolish avoidance of certain courses of the investigations. The question in the President's mind, I suppose more specifically, the question of whether the Counsel's Office should have recommended that the President urge the Rockefeller Commission to continue, was based upon whether or not we believed that the materials available to the White House now, plus the materials provided by the Rockefeller Commission do provide a satisfactory position for the President.

We intend very soon to begin transmitting to the Church Committee evidence that they will need to complete their investigation and we are in practically daily contact with them. It has been, I think, a productive relationship to try to find leads and suggest ideas.

We have exchanged notions as to how to explain one matter and another. It has been in very many respects a joint investigation to try to find the relevant evidence.

Q You said a minute ago that the characterization of the Kennedy assassination that somebody had put on, does not warrant that label.

What label did you have reference to?

MR. HILLS: I think whether or not it was so important.

Q He said it was reassuring.

Q My question was, if the Kennedy assassination was important enough to be dealt with in the first part of the report, why couldn't there have been some reassurance on the alleged assassination of attempts at foreign leaders, also included in there? I was not putting any label on it. It was just weighing it, too.

MR. HILLS: I think it is quite a different thing, as to whether or not they Rockefeller Commission had found any reason to doubt the authenticity of the Warren Commission, which as you know, was one of the most extensive investigations in the Nation's history.

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Q That is questionable.

MR. HILLS: It is another thing to deal with brand-new investigations involving a wide range of governmental action. Let me say, again, that the limitation on trying to investigate a given assassination plot in the context of what may have been a wide range of governmental activities, in connection with a foreign country, is a very limited investigation by its own nature.

In other words, to try to find out what happened as to an alleged assassination plot with respect to any given foreign country, is only one part of this country's overall relationships and activities with respect to that same country. So that, the context, even if -- let me try it this way -- the context of the assassination's allegations all by themselves do not present even those matters in a broad light as much as they, in terms of the Church Committee report, which has investigated in great detail all activities of the CIA and all activities of our intelligence communities, with respect to the countries whose leaders have allegedly been subject to assassination plots.

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Q Mr. Hills, at the risk of perhaps borrowing someone else's phrases, I would like to get at, if I can, as specifically as possible, just what the President knew and when he knew it. We know that he asked the Rockefeller Commission to do this investigation. They said, yes, they would.

The upshot is they have not done what he wanted and he does not seem to care, so when did he first find out, what did he say? Did he talk to Rockefeller? What did he tell him? What answer did he get?

MR. HILLS: I don't know whether the President and the Vice President discussed this matter. The President, in terms of his advice from our office, was aware of the fact that materials being transmitted from the Rockefeller Commission on June 6th would not be, in the judgment of the Rockefeller Commission, a full report, approximately 10 days ago.

Q You mean you knew on May first or the first Monday in May, and you did not tell him until two weeks ago?

MR. HILLS: No, on the first Monday we knew we would not have a completed report in the first week in May. It was not until 10 days ago that we knew that the Rockefeller Commission had decided that in its judgment its report is not complete.

Q What did he say when you told him that 10 days ago?

MR. HILLS: I think the question is the kind of advice and the kind of observations we make, the question has always been are we getting the evidence concerning the alleged assassination plots. For some time, as early as May, I think our office has been satisfied that we are getting most of the evidence concerning that alleged assassination plot. Certainly, in terms of investigation of the Church Committee, the allegations in the public newspaper, the media, appear to us to be rather well investigated.

Q Let's stick to one question. My question, if I can just finish it -- the President found out about 10 days ago from you personally or from your office -- it is not clear which -- you will tell us?

MR. HILLS: It is not clear to me quite honestly, but at that time we were discussing it, Mr. Buchen and myself, Mr. Wilderott, who was working on this investigation.

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Q And at this time somebody in this group told him he won't get that assassination stuff?

MR. HILLS: No, he was told quite to the contrary, that the assassination materials gathered by the Rockefeller Commission would be turned over to him.

Q That the report would be not completed, though; that the assassination reports would not be completed by the Rockefeller Commission?

MR. HILLS: The material being transmitted would not in the judgment of the Rockefeller Commission be a complete report.

Q And he expressed no dissatisfaction with that. He did not try to get a Presidential investigation finished?

MR. HILLS: Well, let me say this: The effort of the Rockefeller Commission has been expended. That effort is being evaluated by us and investigated. It is certainly possible ---

Q My question did not deal with that. Answer my question. Did he express any dissatisfaction?

MR. HILLS: His concern has been, I want to make certain the allegations are fully investigated and I want you to assure me it is.

Q The answer is no, he did not express dissatisfaction?

MR. HILLS: He expressed concern to make certain that the allegations were fully investigated.

Q Mr. Hills, I take it that you are trying to imply here that the White House has adequate information on assassination attempts, so adequate that the Rockefeller Commission need not complete its report. Is that what you are trying to tell us?

MR. HILLS: We cannot make that judgment until we have reviewed all the interviews and all the files of the Rockefeller Commission to see whether or not any leads, any allegations, have been left uncovered. We cannot do that until we have reviewed all that material, but we have reason to believe from all the materials that have been gathered from the three sources I mentioned earlier, that the investigation indeed is complete.

Q That is answering my question in the affirmative, isn't it?

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MR. HILLS: Absolutely. It is our best judgment today that the material that has been gathered from the sources will provide a complete investigation. Now, the evaluation of it, the final judgment as to whether or not there are some matters that need to be investigated and who can best investigate them, those are matters that remain, but I feel confident of this -- that if we find the Rockefeller Commission has gone down a road that should be gone down further, that the President will not hesitate to ask those gentlemen to come back and finish that aspect of it, but we are in no position to judge how best to complete it until we have evaluated all the material we have.

Q What is your thinking about the best means of making the public aware of the truth or falsity of the allegations that have been leveled?

MR. HILLS: My best judgment?

Q Yes.

MR. HILLS: I don't know that. I think that, as in all matters, one discusses them with all other people similarly involved and I don't know for example whether we will ever be able to know with any reasonable degree of certainty as to what orally might have been said by some persons to other persons. As I said before, we have had public allegations reported in the media that go beyond the recorded interviews of those same people. You know the Church Committee has stated that it is going to investigate those people. They will make those transcripts available to us as we will make transcripts available to them, and we will be able to decide to what degree of certainty we can know what happened with respect to these matters.

Q Mr. Hills, I have a follow-up. Do I interpret what you have said to mean that of all the investigations that are going on, the most complete may well be, at this point, your investigation rather than the Rockefeller Commission's or the Church Committee's, that you may have gathered more information, seen more documents than anyone else?

MR. HILLS: Of course, we have the advantage of everybody else's work although we don't have by any means all the information in the Church Committee.

Q Has the President been informed of what you have found?

MR. HILLS: We have kept the President, I think, entirely up to date on any matters that we have found. Obviously, we may hear a rumor in the morning which we try to investigate or we try to find some rationalization of it before. But we regularly report to the President on the state of information. Let me say, I cannot at all be certain as to what the Church Committee has in some of its interviews, but they have been fairly candid with us in terms of where they are going and what they have and I think we have a reasonably good idea and we will be comparing notes very soon.

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Q Mr. Hills, you are familiar with the substance of those investigations. Is it true that the origin or the plots, at least, as far as the allegations go, originates, not in the Kennedy Administration, but in the Eisenhower Administration?

MR. HILLS: It is quite true that the investigation of the alleged assassination plots go back -- the allegations go back before the Kennedy Administration.

Q My second question is, does that have anything to do with why you all don't want to publish this material?

MR. HILLS: Not at all. The issue, as I said with some certainty, if I may, is that the nature of the allegations, no matter how long the investigation goes on, will leave ambiguities as to the role some people played in these matters. That is in the nature of trying to investigate how any Administration works at a given time as to any matter. So that, we have uncertainties about it.

The material will, again, as I said, be available, first of all, to the Attorney General for his investigation as to potential criminal activity and possible prosecution, if that is appropriate after his investigation, and will be available for review by the Senate Select Committee, all of it, whether it goes back to 1959 --

Q Mr. Hills, will the Senate Committee be allowed to release this information to the public that it is going to get?

MR. HILLS: The Senate Committee, as you well know, is quite independent on its own rights and privileges with respect to what it does, and I cannot speak at all.

Q What strings are you putting on it? You are keeping back some of the material as being classified? You are not giving that to the Church Committee, right?

MR. HILLS: There is bound to be classified information in connection with the Church Committee. As of now, we have no outstanding complaints from the Church Committee, as to any level of classification.

Q No outstanding complaints, but what are you keeping back and what is the legal basis for your not declassifying this material at this point?

MR. HILLS: For one thing, the investigation is not complete by the Church Committee.

Q I am talking about the material you have from the CIA.

MR. HILLS: We have no request from the Church Committee for any action with respect to declassification. We have no request from the Church Committee that any material they have which may be in some form of classification, should be made public. We have really nothing more from the Church Committee than an assurance that before they make a decision to declassify any document, they will seek our opinion on it.

Q Mr. Hills, do you plan to leave in doubt in any way that the Rockefeller Commission corroborates the Warren Commission reports on the Kennedy assassination?

MR. HILLS: Do we plan to leave in doubt?

Q Do you?

MR. HILLS: I do not personally. I believe the Rockefeller Commission has spoken firmly with respect to that matter --

Q In what way?

MR. HILLS: -- and sees no room for doubt as to the authenticity of the Warren Commission.

Q Mr. Hills, have you made a tentative judgment? That is, has the White House made a tentative judgment that disclosure of the assassination material would somehow affect the legitimate national security interests?

MR. HILLS: I don't see how that judgment can be made until the President has had the opportunity to consult with the Senate Committee that is investigating this matter.

Q I said a tentative judgment.

MR. HILLS: No, it would be quite incorrect to call anything a tentative judgment. After all, we have only had the raw material for a few days, that the Committee has received. It is obviously a matter which any President would have to consider in an investigation such as this, but, I think, today, I must say to you, I think, today, the primary concern, if you want a list in descending order, is the ability to be certain about who did what. It is quite easy to talk in terms of some activities, but it is very difficult to follow a change of command in any Administration. And so, if you would ask what the primary concern is, I think the primary concern is the lack of precision in trying to trace the command, if you will, of the Administrations 15 years ago.

Q Mr. Hills, has the investigation proceeded to the point where you can now say with a certainty that assassination plotting did take place, regardless of who it was in the government that did it?

MR. HILLS: I think it would be quite inappropriate for me to characterize it at all. I can certainly say there was a sound basis and a sound need for the investigation.

Q Is there any recommendation in the Rockefeller report dealing with future government positions on political assassination of foreign leaders?

MR. HILLS: The President has said, unequivocally, that his Administration will not condone, permit, or allow, matters to be carried on with respect to this matter.

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Certainly, the recommendations of the Rockefeller Commission on their face -- and since I have only seen them since last Friday, I cannot tell you whether or not there are other matters to be considered -- but certainly, on their face, they would seem to fully protect, to the extent that any recommendations in any Executive or Congressional action can do so, protect the Nation and the world, if you will, against any further plots with respect to political assassination.

In other words, the structural changes that the Rockefeller Commission recommends with respect to the CIA and other aspects of our intelligence community certainly deal with the question of assassination. The President will make it quite clear, so far as he is concerned -- he has sufficient ideas of what happened in the past, and now, to make it clear, first, that political assassination will not be part of the policy of this country, and, second, that he will make changes that are necessary to see that they are not carried on by somebody else without his consent.

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Q Is it fair to say now, then, you started off here with a Rockefeller blue ribbon commission that was going to assure the public that they had looked into all the alleged wrongdoings of the CIA and found some wrong doing and then on balance make their recommendations, and that report now is incomplete in this assassination plot area and it is an area that has narrowed to you finding out and informing the President as opposed to informing the public, and letting the public know what is going on in this area?

MR. HILLS: It would be quite inaccurate for me to characterize how this matter will be further discussed publicly or how it will be further investigated. I am confident of this: we will be certain that the investigation is as complete as it can reasonably be made.

Q But for the President, not for the public; is that right?

MR. HILLS: For the President, first of all, and in conjunction with the Senate Select Subcommittee.

Q Mr. Hills, you mentioned structural changes in the CIA. This is, I take it, contained in the Rockefeller Commission report?

MR. HILLS: Yes, there are over 30 specific recommendations.

Q Thirty specific recommendations as to the structure. What about the intelligence community as a whole?

MR. HILLS: Many of the structural changes apply to other branches of the intelligence community.

Q Mr. Hills, a minute ago you were asked the direct question, did assassination plots take place? And you answered there was a sound basis and a sound need for the investigation. But last week the Vice President who headed the Commission said that what law violations did take place were not major and I have some difficulty reconciling those two statements in my mind.

You read the material, you read a summary, as I understand it. Are these not major? That is, are these minor violations of the law or are they in your opinion, as Mr. Church says, major matters?

MR. HILLS: Allegations of alleged assassination plots obviously involve matters of major policy significance to this Government. I believe in the first place that the Vice President was speaking about the report which relates to the domestic surveillance activities in general that they investigated, and comparing the conclusions of their recommendations with the allegations of massive domestic surveillance activities by the CIA, I believe that to be so.

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I believe in the second case you are dealing with a perspective of President Ford today as to what he believes is proper and appropriate for the policy of this Government, a matter on which he feels very strongly.

The question of second-guessing Administrations 15 years ago as to what their concerns may have been and what their problems may have been is a different issue in which I believe the President will be reluctant to engage. I don't believe he will want to be a Monday morning quarterback with respect to those matters. That does not mean he is not concerned about what went on. Obviously, he must be to be concerned that the steps he takes now will reasonably protect the country against people doing the same thing today.

Q What does that mean -- he is not going to accuse the past at all if there is wrongdoing?

MR. HILLS: I only said I believe this President would be reluctant to second-guess Administrations 15 years ago.

Q Why would he be second-guessing if it was against the law?

MR. HILLS: In the first place, we are assuming a point which will be in the final analysis up to the Attorney General to decide.

Q Will the President leave the decision on publishing the assassination materials to the Church Committee, or will he make that decision himself?

MR. HILLS: In the first place, the President can only make that decision. No one else can make that decision with respect to what he does. The Church Committee similarly will have to make its decision as to what it wishes to make public.

Q Will he wait on the Church Committee before he makes his determination on whether to make it public?

MR. HILLS: I certainly believe he will consult with the members of the Select Committee before he makes any final decision.

Q Mr. Hills, you said earlier, "We have reason to believe the investigation is complete." You also said ---

MR. HILLS: I think I said specifically will be complete.

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Q You said it is a substantial investigation and so forth. Yet, on the most important aspect of this investigation, you say that the material received in the separate summaries is incomplete and misleading. I am a little confused.

MR. HILLS: I said it is susceptible of being misleading.

Q Then, could you give us any reason to believe the President's intent is not to dump this in the lap of a Democrat, i.e. Church?

MR. HILLS: I can assure you the President has no intention of dumping the matter into anybody's lap.

Q Mr. Hills, does your office have assassination materials that have been turned over neither to the Church Committee nor to the Rockefeller Commission?

MR. HILLS: As of today, I believe we have been gathering materials. Let me start a different way. We have been gathering materials. Let me give you a specific example.

During the course of the investigation, the Rockefeller Commission has asked for files and minutes of various other agencies of Government in the Executive Branch. As is the case with every agency, it is necessary for those agencies to respond and they have responded. On occasion, the Rockefeller Commission has come back to us, staff has come back to us and said, "Would you assure yourselves there are no other materials relevant to this matter?"

The Church Committee staff has done the same thing, so I believe that at any given time in history today we have considerable materials that we are assimilating for transmission to the Church Committee in various stages, and that is always so.

Q But you won't hold it permanently without giving it to either?

MR. HILLS: All materials we are gathering will be made available to the Senate Select Committee's review.

Q Thank you, Mr. Hills.

MR. NESSEN: That is all embargoed for 7:30.

END

(AT 5:15 P.M. EDT)