

TRANSCRIPT

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CBS NEWS
2020 M Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20036

FACE THE NATION
as broadcast over the
CBS Television Network
and the
CBS Radio Network

Sunday, October 28, 1973 -- 12:00 Noon - 12:30 PM, EST

Origination: Washington, D. C.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Please credit CBS News' "Face the Nation."

RATHER: White House Chief of Staff General Alexander Haig, what has happened in the last 24 hours, a, in the meeting between the Egyptians and Israeli military men, two, in the efforts to resupply with so-called humanitarian needs the encircled Egyptian Third Army?

GEN. HAIG: Dan, we're very encouraged by the results of the discussions between the two sides on this particular issue, which, as you know, involves a very critical and severe humanitarian problem for the forces involved. There have been--I am told, just before this program--the movement of vehicles into the Third Army perimeter through the Israeli lines--and I think this is a major accomplishment, and is a very encouraging outcome of what have been almost revolutionary discussions between the two sides thus far.

ANNOUNCER: From Washington, D. C., FACE THE NATION, a spontaneous and unrehearsed news interview with the White House Chief of Staff, General Alexander Haig. General Haig will be questioned by CBS News White House Correspondent Robert Pierpoint; Helen Thomas, White House Correspondent of United Press International; and CBS News White House Correspondent Dan Rather.

RATHER: General Haig, you've talked of encouraging signs during the past 24 to 36 hours in the Middle East. But if the detente with the Soviet Union is as solid as the President has been claiming, why was what some are calling nuclear brinkmanship required in the Middle East?

GEN. HAIG: Well, I wouldn't characterize the events of the traumatic period you describe as a nuclear confrontation in any sense of the word, Dan. And I think there's been some misunderstanding with respect to the gravity of the situation. As you know, the Secretary

of State, in commenting on this in his press conference, pointed out that it was not indeed a serious confrontation in its degree of severity. On the other hand, I think the President also clearly pointed out, and with total consistency, that the stakes involved in the Middle East--that is, the vital interests of both the United States and the Soviet Union in that context--had the potential--had indeed the potential--for one of the most dangerous confrontations since the 1962 missile crisis. And I think it's important that the American people--and indeed the media--understand that while we were not in a confrontation configuration, the potential of a confrontation in that area of the world would indeed represent a matter of grave concern for the peace of the world.

THOMAS: General, in the absence of any official announcement for many hours, was the President aware that many people in this country really thought that troops were being called up to quell an internal disorder following on the tapes issue and the dramatic events of a week ago?

GEN. HAIG: No, Helen, I don't think that any of us involved in the very tense period that you describe thought for a moment that there would be any misinterpretation of where the problem area existed. For example, the President convened a meeting of the bipartisan leadership the morning of the alert, and it was discussed in detail with that leadership. There were no questions of the kind that you have just brought forth with respect to the attitudes of the bipartisan leadership. I think they understood the problem for exactly what it was--a problem of great potential danger for world peace and for the American people. And I was not aware of any of the kinds of concerns that you've

mentioned, until Dr. Kissinger's press conference when, I believe, Mr. Kalb raised that issue. It was not an issue that any of our legislators were concerned about when they were first confronted with the facts of the situation.

PIERPOINT: General Haig, that issue was raised by a number of people--not only Mr. Kalb--and perhaps one of the reasons it was raised--and I think Dr. Kissinger himself indicated this--was that strategists have expected the Soviet Union to probe this country because of the domestic weakness of this President. This is a problem that perhaps most of us recognize. Now if you agree with that analysis, are we going to have to face a series of probes by the Soviet Union as long as the domestic crisis continues?

GEN. HAIG: Bob, I think it's very important that we keep this whole issue in its proper perspective. There have been some ramblings on either side of extreme views. The first point I want to make is to re-emphasize what the President said to the American people on Friday night, and what I myself said to the White House press corps on Monday--that is, that the degree of turmoil in the body politic here in the United States was certainly not a controlling factor in whatever actions the Soviets or ourselves or the combatants themselves might take in a situation of long-standing difficulty. Nations aren't dominated by these kinds of considerations, but rather their own vital interests. And I think that's precisely what has occurred in the Middle East.

On the other hand, I would also emphasize that when a nation, friend or foe, calculates its relationships with the United States, it must take into account what it perceives as the unity, the durability

and the viability of our government. And in that context, I do believe it's an important time, in the juncture of this affair of Watergate, for all Americans--indeed, press included--to perceive most carefully the impact of their participation in the evolution of events. And I would hope that all of us would continually avoid what sometimes can be described as overly intensified reaction to a particular event of the moment, which in a historic perspective is going to be precisely no more than that.

PIERPOINT: Is that a very nice and articulate way of saying that there are certain questions you think we should not raise?

GEN. HAIG: Never. I think--you know my attitude on these subjects, Bob. I think the press has every right, and indeed every obligation, to ask hard questions; and we in our part have an obligation and an imperative to provide the answers to the press for the American people.

THOMAS: General, didn't the President really precipitate the kind of thing--the reaction and so forth of last Saturday night a week ago, when he fired Cox, and all of the ensuing reaction which you said you miscalculated completely? My question now is, is the President and Congress on a collision course in the question of naming a new special prosecutor, and what do you think is going to happen?

GEN. HAIG: No, I don't think that we're on a collision course, Helen, at all. There is a degree of partisanship involved in the current panorama, and there's hardly any question about that. But let me say a word about your reference to our miscalculation of the events of Saturday night. I think it's quite important that all of us understand just what these events were, just what led up to what I have

described and some of your journalist friends have described as the firestorm of Saturday evening. As I pointed out at a press briefing on Monday before the Washington press corps, the weekend preceding this situation, the President concluded--and quite painfully--that the time had come for him to abandon, in this particular instance, his long-held conviction that he had a responsibility as the President of the United States to protect the prerogatives of this office--not only for himself, but for future Presidents. But two events--two circumstances--led him to conclude that the time had come to put an end to what was now being described as an impending constitutional confrontation. These factors are this--first, there was a polarization occurring within our body politic; there were stories abroad to the effect that the Congress would hold the confirmation of Mr. Ford as the new Vice President in hostage to the Supreme Court determination of the tapes issue. This would be some four months in the future.

There were suggestions made that if the President were to go against the Supreme Court decision--incidentally, a prediction that he's already made to the American people he would not do--but if he were to do that, we would then be in a position in which Mr. Ford would not have been confirmed, and the President would have been posed with an impeachable dilemma. And in effect, the mandate of the American people of past November would be replaced by placing the Speaker of the House in charge of the government.

Now recognizing that this is a view held by a select few of intense partisans, but recognizing also that the stage was being set for an increasing confrontation environment, the President felt that the time had come to make a herculean effort to provide to both the

courts and the Senate Committee precisely what they had been asking for, and in other words, to remove the point of confrontation on this issue.

And secondly--and I'm sure that the situation in the Middle East, which we have been following, and the President has been following moment by moment since the October 6 battle started--that his realization that foreign leaders involved in this conflict could in some way have their own judgments influenced by the domestic situation, and increasing tension, and increasing fractionalization within our society on this issue--that it was to our international interest to try to solve and remove this problem. That is precisely what was attempted.

And I must say that the collective judgments of Senator Stennis, of Senator Ervin, of Senator Baker, and of the Attorney General--the then Attorney General of the United States--was that this was a very fair and very just solution to this agonizing problem. Now what was not anticipated--what was not anticipated by any of the participants in this negotiated settlement, was the position taken by Professor Cox, in which he himself, for his own reasons, decided that he could not participate in this kind of a compromise. And rather than resigning or perhaps accepting it for the moment and waiting for the next issue to arise to have his view prevail, he chose instead, before the entire Washington press corps, at one o'clock last Saturday, to challenge the President's order to him to cease and desist--not from obtaining the information which he had thus far claimed he needed, which was to be provided to him in this compromise--but rather to insist on a carte blanche ability, in the future, to demand further personal presidential tapes and memoranda covering presidential conversations.

RATHER: General Haig, if Special Prosecutor Cox or any other Special Prosecutor is to get to the bottom of Watergate and related crimes, doesn't he have to have the carte blanche to call for such things as White House logs and the kind of memoranda that Special Prosecutor Cox said that he -- was an absolute necessity -- doesn't he have to have that kind of freedom?

GEN. HAIG: Dan, I'm glad you asked that question because I think there were some bad misunderstandings coming out of Professor Cox's press conference. First, I want to make it very clear, as the Attorney General has, and as we have repeatedly -- we've made a great deal of information and material available to Professor Cox and his investigating team from the outset. Now, secondly, I think the American people certainly got the impression that we've been intransigent on this issue since Professor Cox started his investigation. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have provided him with a full array of documentary evidence. Where the President has taken issue with Professor Cox has been on the subject of those limited documents involving personal discussions by the President himself and memoranda covering the substance of those discussions. All of the other data has been provided.

Now Professor Cox raised the question that he had never been able to get the logs of meetings between the President and Mr. Chapin and Mr. Hunt and Mr. Liddy and Mr. Strahan. Here again, Professor Cox knew very well there had been no such meetings, and he had been told that repeatedly by the President's counsel. And yet the American people were led to believe on Saturday that for some reason these logs were not being made available. There were no logs.

RATHER: Well, to get off the logs per se, for example, this very important conversation that took place in the President's office, connected with the so-called milk deal -- let's use the shorthand of the streets. Now that was a specific conversation that occurred at a specific time, there've been some very serious questions raised about whether contributions by the milk industry were given in exchange for limits on milk imports into this country. Now that isn't a log, that is a specific conversation which the President himself was involved. Now, that kind of memoranda -- is that available to a Special Prosecutor?

GEN. HAIG: That kind of memoranda, Dan, if I were to answer your question I would be joining in a hypothesis, which I would very strongly reject. First, let me say something about the milk price decision. That was a decision made by the President upon upon the recommendation of his staff and in coordination with the Congress. That was a decision that was made totally on those grounds and completely devoid of what I call external political pressure --

THOMAS: It was opposed by the Secretary.

GEN. HAIG: -- of the type or the kind you referred to. Now, secondly, there has been no request for any specific additional documents from Professor Cox which are in the area that you describe. So what we're dealing with here, and what a lot of the current anguish is surrounding, is a hypothetical question which has not arisen. And as the President said on Friday, he is confident and I am confident with a reasonable degree of good will that all of the information that the next Special Prosecutor will require will be made available to him in the form that is necessary for him to conduct his operations.

Under no circumstance would we ever be true to the preservation of the powers of the office of the President to permit any investigator a fishing, free range fishing expedition into the vital discussions that occur in the President's office, and then perhaps to make whatever play of that he might seem to think appropriate.

PIERPOINT: General Haig, if I may review just for a moment what you seem to have been saying, the miscalculation that you yourself first brought up and conceded, now, as I understand it, is simply that you and the President miscalculated what Mr. Cox was going to say in reaction to being fired. You don't concede that it was a miscalculation that the Attorney General resigned and his deputy resigned, that there was a storm of political criticism brought down on the head of the President. It seems to me that you've oversimplified this miscalculation to some extent. Are you really saying that the President was not aware that the country reacted very strongly against his actions?

GEN. HAIG: No, not at all, Bob. I think again you're putting words in my mouth that I would certainly not put there. Now let me just again repeat. On Friday morning, the President of the United States, the Attorney General, the President's legal counsel, and myself had concluded that we had a proposition, a compromise if you will, that would have met the legitimate requirements of all parties. No one, least of all the President, anticipated that Professor Cox would reject the proposal in the sense that he did reject it, and that is to publicly confront the President with a refusal to obey an order.

PIERPOINT: But what I'm trying to get at is, are you people politically realistic? Do you understand that, Cox aside, the

President himself faces now a serious political crisis in this country and it seems to me you're dealing with it in a kind of academic fashion, saying that it's all going to go away.

GEN. HAIG: It's hard for anyone who is in the vortex of this so-called storm you're describing to deal with it in an academic fashion, or to be oblivious to the kinds of pressures that have developed, and least of all the President, and least of all, me. What I do want to point out and emphasize very clearly is that what the President entered into was a very forthcoming and judged to be very fair outcome to a difficult situation.

PIERPOINT: By whom?

GEN. HAIG: Now--by all of the responsible players in this particular confrontation, with the exception of Professor Cox. Now, when Professor Cox determined to move against the directions of the President, it was then that the issue of Elliot Richrddson's future tenure first came into sharp perspective, and he, for his own reasons, which I understand -- I don't necessarily share them but I certainly understand, decided that his own commitment, his personal commitment at the time of his confirmation before the Senate Judiciary Committee required him as a matter of conscience not to be the instrument of the order to separate Professor Cox.

THOMAS: General, that commitment was given to the Senate on behalf of the President, so it was the President's breach of faith, but to get to the Special Prosecutor again, you don't see any conflict with Congress, with both trying to name a Special Prosecutor? And also, will a new Special Prosecutor have to pledge not to take the President to court, if he needs more tapes, more memoranda, and so

forth -- in order to get the job, I mean?

GEN. HAIG: Well, first, let me not let your little zinger go by, Helen, with respect to the President's abrogation of any commitment. We have throughout this exercise, in full consultation with Attorney General Richardson and the President's legal counsel, been extremely careful to insure that no advice was given to the President which would place him in a position contrary to the dictates of law. And we have yet to do so, and I think even Professor Cox has expressed that very clearly. Now, with respect to the future prosecutor, we all recognize that this issue has become intensely political in character, and like any political issue, where the stakes are the goodwill and the understanding of the American people, and indeed perhaps even the reins of power in this government -- no issue of that character is going to be devoid of controversy and high tension struggle by the parties involved. And we expect this to be a very partisan and a very difficult debate in the weeks ahead. But I am also confident that the American people, who supported this administration and its objectives and goals, will recognize the partisan character of this debate, and that the steps that we will take in the days and weeks ahead to appoint a Special Prosecutor with the kind of independence the President described on Friday, will more than meet the criteria which the American people will set for themselves, and I have great confidence in their ability to come out --

THOMAS: You still haven't answered the question, General. Will the new prosecutor have to pledge not to take the President to court?

GEN. HAIG: I don't think the new prosecutor will have to make any pledge of any kind, nor do I think he should, and if he were the

type that would feel encumbered in that way, he's perhaps not the man that we would want.

RATHER: General, we're inside the three minutes to go mark now. I'd like to ask you whether the President agrees with the American Bar Association Board which -- in what was described to us as an extraordinary meeting -- agreed I think unanimously that a Special Prosecutor should be appointed by the Congress?

GEN. HAIG: We of course welcome the views of the American Bar Association. We recognize the very keen views of its current President, and he's not been the least bit averse to air them publicly in recent days. At the same time, no President, no President, can run this great republic by being the victim of a viewpoint of a particular advocate of a particular point of view, and I don't think President Nixon is going to feel encumbered by that recommendation. He might not ignore it either.

RATHER: You spoke of what you considered to be the intemperance of some of the reporting, as the President did in his news conference the other evening, and certainly no one would argue with yours and or the President's right to criticize the press, but the New York Times says this morning, and I quote, The intemperance of President Nixon's news conference assault on the media in general and on television in particular did much to undermine the impression he was seeking to create of a President in full command of himself -- end of quotation. Would you agree that that is a fair statement?

GEN. HAIG: Dan, I've been with this President for the past six months and in some very, very difficult situations, and I can assure you that the kinds of pressures that impinge upon this President

during this Middle East crisis, which has been really the dominant focus of his attention and of ours in the White House, have been matched by a degree of calm and leadership and decisiveness on the part of the President which every American citizen can be extremely proud and very confident that their government at this time is in good hands.

RATHER: Thank you, General Alexander Haig.

ANNOUNCER: Today on FACE THE NATION, General Alexander Haig was interviewed by CBS News Correspondent Robert Pierpoint, Helen Thomas of United Press International, and CBS News Correspondent Dan Rather.