Levi Was Suspicious Of Wiretap Process

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LOS ANGELES, Nov. 18 (UPI)—Attorney General Edward H. Levi suggested today that his predecessors as head of the Justice Department may have "automatically" approved FBI requests for warrantless "national security" wiretaps.

Levi, who set up procedures to ensure the surveillance is necessary and involves foreign agents, said he began to have suspicions about earlier practices when he took office Feb. 2, 1975.

"Just as I was settling into my chair and observing the handsome wood paneling in the office, an FBI agent appeared at my door without announcement," Levi said in remarks prepared for the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

Levi said the agent requested a warrantless national security wiretap and waited for Levi to sign it.

"But I thought it was a bit unusual that I was expected to sign so automatically, if that really was the expectation," Levi said. He said his approval was required by a standing executive order.

"I asked the agent to leave the request with me—I think, perhaps, to his surprise—so that I could consult other officials in the department," Levi said.

Levi said he has set up a group to review wiretap requests before they reach him for a decision.

Court warrants are required for "domestic security" wiretaps—ones that do not involve foreign agents.

The FBI conducts the domestic surveillances as part of its criminal investigations but usually the national security wiretaps are conducted for the Central Intelligence Agency.