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BACKGROUND
AND OPINION

Army Spying Forces Nixon and Laird to Take Strong Action

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BELIEVE it or not, there is something we can learn from Nikita Khrushchev's distorted, self-serving, half-truth account of the Cuban missile crisis.

It seems slightly fantastic that the former Soviet Premier, who lied 17 times to President Kennedy while he was spiriting offensive nuclear missiles into Cuba, could be saying things from which we can draw a timely and needed lesson.



THE
DRUMMONDS

Not about Russia — but about ourselves.

Khrushchev states in his recollections published in Life magazine that he withdrew Soviet missiles from Cuba because Attorney General Robert Kennedy told the Soviet ambassador that the President needed Khrushchev's "help" to prevent "the U. S. military from overthrowing him and seizing power."

We doubt that Robert Kennedy ever said that. If he did, it wasn't true. President Kennedy needed nobody's help, least of all Khrushchev's, to maintain civilian dominance in the government.

The best proof of that is the way Mr. Kennedy and Secretary of Defense Robert MacNamara put the Navy on a tight leash in operating the blockade that ended the crisis.

BUT it is entirely understandable that Khrushchev should construe the way he did whatever Robert

Kennedy may have said. The power and influence of the U. S. military must seem very great to the Soviet leaders, who have to keep their own military under constant surveillance.

Why, then, is this statement by Khrushchev that he "felt there was a danger that President Kennedy would lose control of his military" so pertinent to us right now?

It is pertinent because the American military has gotten out of control here in the United States for a time in one intolerable way and it has taken the strong words of President Nixon and the strong action of Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird to bring it under control.

We refer to the improper, outreaching activities of Army intelligence in putting American citizens, exercising their rights of citizenship and peaceful assembly, under military surveillance.

This surveillance reached to hundreds of people, those who engaged in it have testified, including Senator Adlai Stevenson 3d, former governor and now Federal Judge Otto Kerner, Rep. Abner Mikva, of Illinois, and many others.

Secretary Laird tardily discovered that this was being done and promptly acted to stop it.

Some apologists for this breach of the role of the military in the American democratic system sought to defend what was done on the theory that if the Army may have to be used in emergencies to maintain order, Army intelligence ought to be busy collecting information about citizens who might some time in the future breach the peace.

NO—NEVER. It is that kind of thinking that could lead to military dominance and to military dictatorship. That's like saying that because the police have to enforce the laws, they ought to help make the laws they enforce.

Let's not ever again leave the lines of military responsibility vague. There is only one area of intelligence affecting American citizens where the military has an internal role, that is, among members of the armed forces. All else belongs to the civilian agencies.

In our experience in Washington, our military leaders have shown faithful respect for civilian dominance. Two examples: as Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. Eisenhower pressed for civilian control over the Atomic Energy Commission when many in Congress advocated military control. The generals fought the war in Vietnam the way the civilians wanted, not the way they thought best.

This spasm of military spying on civilians is an aberration and is being rightly quashed by the President and Secretary of Defense.