

Other Nations Engage In High-Level Taping

By Murrey Marder

Washington Post Staff Writer

The secret recording of presidential conversations is a practice that many nations employ for talks with their high officials, but never admit.

Among diplomats in Washington, American and foreign, spot checks indicated there was no great surprise yesterday about the fact that listening devices are used in President Nixon's offices. What did cause surprise, however, was that the practice was being unveiled on the public record and officially confirmed by the Nixon administration.

Once before in modern diplomatic history the United States caused an international sensation by officially admitting a clandestine practice that nations normally do not discuss openly — spying.

That was the celebrated U-2 reconnaissance plane affair of 1960, in which American pilot Francis Gary Powers was shot down over the Soviet Union. President Eisenhower's acknowledgment that he authorized such missions was invoked by Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev as justification for aborting the 1960 Paris summit conference.

By contrast, there was no indication yesterday that the disclosure that listening devices were regularly used to tape conversations in the White House would seriously disrupt the course of international affairs, in the judgment of administration officials.

Watergate hearing witness Alexander P. Butterfield expressed concern yesterday about "serious repercussions with regard to foreign governments." But U.S. diplomats, as well as a number of foreign envoys, generally looked on the disclosure yesterday as more of an awkward admission than as a cause for international disruption.

"Keeping a record is part of the game," said one foreign diplomat, "and the fact that you do it clandestinely doesn't really change the

game. What would worry me most is if the record gets into the wrong hands, and that what may be said about third parties would be spread around—that could be serious."

It remains to be seen, however, if all foreign nations similarly will take the disclosure in stride.

The Nixon administration declined to discuss in any way yesterday whether President Nixon's conversations with foreign heads of government were all automatically recorded in the White House, although Butterfield's testimony indicated that this was so. In addition, the letter from J. Fred Buzhardt, special counsel to the White House, which was read at yesterday's hearing, specified no exceptions in stating that "the President's meetings and conversations in the White House have been recorded since the spring of 1971."

If this is literally the situation, there would be recordings of conversations in the White House between President Nixon and such diverse visitors as Canadian

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, Norway's King Olaf IV, Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, Jordan's King Hussein, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, and West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, as well as Soviet Communist Party chief Leonid I. Brezhnev.

In many foreign capitals, security specialists said yesterday, it is standard procedure to tape-record conversations between major officials. One foreign diplomat recalled yesterday that in the Japanese foreign ministry he often was asked, "Do you mind if we tape the conversation?"—and was offered a copy of the tape.

Nevertheless, in the opinion of some security specialists, the knowledge—or suspicion—that a conversation is being tape-recorded does have an inhibiting effect on even some experienced officials.

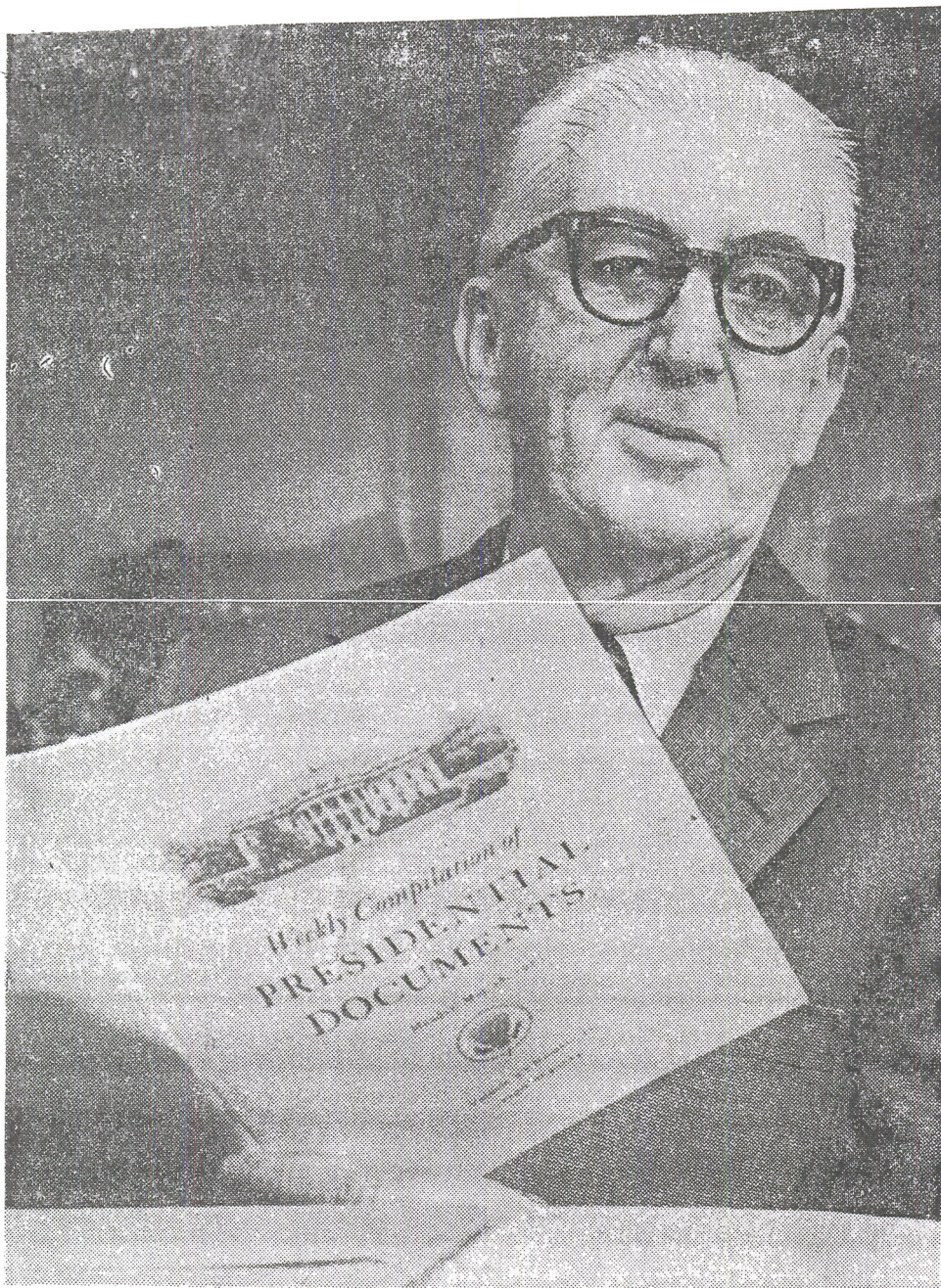
"Many people tend to clam up when someone tells them they are going to be taped," said one administration security specialist. "This is just a psychological thing," he said, "causing some speakers to choose each word doubly carefully."

The disclosure that the taping of conversations in the President's office is a standard practice may explain, in part, a source of diplomatic puzzlement about the recent summit talks between President Nixon and Soviet leader Brezhnev.

President Nixon relied on a Soviet interpreter, Viktor Sukhodrev, in his private discussions with Brezhnev, with no American interpreter in the room. Many U.S. diplomats privately regarded that as a hazardous practice. When the question was raised with White House Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler he defended the President's dependence on the Soviet interpreter with the explanation that "it is simply that Viktor is skilled enough that he can serve as an interpreter for both sides."

That reply failed to dispel the disquiet about the practice, for the two leaders spent nearly 10 hours "alone" with only Sukho-

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By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

White House counsel Richard Moore concluded his testimony yesterday.

drev present, according to the original White House account. Presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger later told newsmen that "I was present for most of those 10 hours and I talked to the interpreter when I wasn't present." Ziegler also said that President Nixon regularly made memos of the talks following his meetings with Brezhnev.

Even so, diplomats noted privately, that procedure still made U.S. officials dependent on the Soviet interpreter for at least portions of the literal conversation.

Taping of the Nixon-Brezhnev conversations in the White House would supply part of an exact record of discussions during that summit meeting, but the talks also continued at San Clemente, and on occasion the two leaders also talked outdoors, there and at Camp David, Md.