

The Haig Appointment

Post 9/20/74

TO THE QUESTION of why President Ford chose to grant Richard Nixon a full pardon when he did, another question may now be added. It is: Why did President Ford appoint Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., Mr. Nixon's principal aide in the later cover-up years, commander-in-chief of U.S. forces in Europe and thus Supreme Allied Commander in Europe? For what reason were these august honors and responsibilities bestowed upon Gen. Haig? It is interesting to note that when you put these questions to knowledgeable people around town there are certain answers you *don't* get. Few people seriously argue, for example, that Gen. Haig, whose spectacular rise to the rank of four-star general came as a consequence of his White House staff service, is uniquely qualified for the job. It is generally conceded that there are military men better qualified for it than he.

How, then, did the appointment come about? This is among the questions the Senate Armed Services Committee would do well to look into. Evidently there are some contradictions and ambiguities in the statutes covering this particular appointment, the result being that it can be claimed that no confirmation process is required. (Indeed, the absence of such a clear requirement for Senate confirmation hearings is widely alleged to be one reason Gen. Haig chose the NATO post, rather than try for that of Chief of Staff of the Army which does require Senate confirmation.) But even if the weight of the law does not mandate an inquiry by the Senate, it seems to us that the legislators have a keen and legitimate interest in getting a few things con-

cerning the general on the record, if not an actual obligation to do so. And it also seems to us that Gen. Haig should be eager to give Congress the courtesy of responding fully and freely to any questions it might have. This, after all, we are repeatedly told, is a new day so far as the exercise of congressional responsibility is concerned. And the accountability of the executive branch for its actions has also come into a new and highly welcome vogue.

So we see no reason why the Senate Armed Services Committee should not set about to answer to its own and the public's satisfaction those questions that are most troublesome or puzzling or both about the sudden elevation of Gen. Haig to the top NATO military post. And these, we would add, have to do with much more than the implications for the Army of Gen. Haig's leapfrogging success or his particular suitability as a soldier and diplomat for the job. To be blunt about it, they have to do with Gen. Haig's involvement in the clandestine, involuted and deceptive politics of the White House over the past several years.

We say "several years" advisedly, since Gen. Haig's involvement in the mess generally known as Watergate predates his 1973 return to the White House to become Mr. Nixon's chief of staff: Gen. Haig was intimately involved in the profligate and unsavory wire-tapping activities that marked the early Nixon years. What was his precise role and responsibility in that? The questions only begin there, for upon his return to the White House and despite professions that he would be engaged in relatively antiseptic, apolitical



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managerial duties, he quickly enmeshed himself in Richard Nixon's campaign for survival at any cost. A certain amount of conniving, enemy-smearing and duplicity seemed to go with the job. When Gen. Haig presented Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott with some very misleading material concerning Richard Nixon's alleged innocence and John Dean's alleged unreliability as a witness, for example, did he know that the material was misleading? Did he set out to dupe Sen. Scott, that is, or was he duped himself? What part precisely did he play in developing the tactics of ousting Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and, consequently, Attorney General Elliot Richardson and Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus? How did it come about that the subpoenaed White House tapes under his jurisdiction as chief of staff were subject to so many mishaps and disappearances? How was it possible that he could be so close to Mr. Nixon and the evidence of Mr. Nixon's wrongdoing and yet not be aware that anything was gravely wrong until early August of 1974?

At the very least, the acuity of this man now scheduled to take on one of the most sensitive and powerful and important jobs in the world is called into question. A step beyond that one reaches questions concerning his judgment and sense of priorities and values. All this still remains one step short of an opinion on his motives and good faith throughout his ill-starred White House service. It is true that Gen. Haig's promotion to four-star general was approved by the Senate a couple of years ago. But it is hard to think of a public official who has enjoyed a richer, fuller intervening two years than he—two years of activity that seems to us to demand exploration before he can be pronounced the right man for the job he has just been given. If Congress fails to undertake that exploration, with a view to resolving—one way or the other—the doubts people have about his fitness for this job, it will have said a great deal about its own seriousness of intent in the matter of reasserting its neglected prerogatives.