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Questioning Haig's Role

Critics of Gen. Alexander Haig Jr. have asked Sen. John Stennis to hold hearings before his Armed Services Committee on the former White House staff chief's appointment by President Ford to be supreme allied commander in Europe. The NATO post, unlike that of army chief of staff which Haig turned down, does not require Senate confirmation—at least that is what Department of Defense lawyers have ruled. But this is a major appointment, and if there are doubts, a Senate committee hearing would give Haig an opportunity to answer questions about the role he played in the Nixon White House.

If such hearings ever come about, the senators who would cross-examine the general had better bone up on their man. Three Haig appearances — before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the Nixon so-called "national security" wiretaps, before Judge John Sirica's inquiry into the missing and erased White House tapes, and at the trial of Daniel Ellsberg—

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show that Haig has a highly selective and disciplined memory and is adroit at devising a version of events that, in those instances, neatly served the Nixon administration by providing less than the whole truth.

On July 30, 1974, Haig testified under oath before Sen. J. W. Fulbright's committee. With not much enthusiasm, the committee had agreed to look into Henry Kissinger's part in the 1969-71 wiretapping of White House aides, government officials and newsmen. The day of Haig's appearance, the House Judiciary Committee gave final approval to the three impeachment articles, one of which referred to wiretapping as an example of Mr. Nixon's abuse of power. After reviewing more than 100 FBI wiretap reports that had been sent to the White House, the committee majority found the wiretapping had been used to gain domestic political intelligence and not merely information relevant to national security. Haig said he had no individual responsibility for the wiretaps: "I never viewed myself as anything but an extension of Dr. Kissinger . . . I would never presume to do anything in this area that I had not discussed with him or had specific authority for."

FBI records list Haig as the requester of taps on 12 of the 17 individuals concerned. He said he only received orders to tap four individuals directly from the President on one occasion,

May 2, 1970, at the time of the Cambodian invasion. Haig gratuitously added that he believed that Kissinger was with the President "or had just left him" when Mr. Nixon called. Haig also testified that "all other names that I ever conveyed were names given to me by Henry." He was just the errand boy.

When the senators got down to specific names, Haig again danced away from responsibility. The first four who had been tapped were National Security Council staff members Morton Halperin, Daniel Davidson and Helmut Sonnenfeldt, along with Gen. Robert E. Pursley of the Pentagon. Though Haig is listed on the records as the one who brought the four names to the FBI on May 10, 1969, Haig said he "did not consider that I was bringing any names over then. I was confirming a program that had already been approved at the highest level by the director (J. Edgar Hoover) . . . I think quite frankly those names came from the director because they expressed, they represented his concern regarding a number of people on Henry's staff." That statement is supported both by Kissinger and, to a degree, by other facts. Where the new Haig/Kissinger version of events gets thin is when it comes to Gen. Pursley. Haig and Kissinger knew Pursley was aware of the secret Cambodian bombing. Hoover was not. So Pursley was substituted by Haig, and the FBI records confirm that. That fourth man Hoover originally wanted to tap, London Sunday Times correspondent Henry Bran-

don, was subsequently tapped beginning May 29, 1969. And though Haig's name was on the request for that tap, as well as one initiated two months later on then White House speechwriter William Safire, Haig swore he did not ask for them. "They are . . . puzzling to me," he testified.

Both Haig and Kissinger blanked out on the May 13, 1970, taps on the phones of Anthony Lake and Winston Lord, Kissinger's past and present personal assistants. Kissinger said he did not remember requesting them and Haig, who is listed in the FBI records as bringing the names to the bureau, also could not recall doing so—but he added that if he had, Kissinger would have given him the names.

Haig's involvement in the tapping program, now that the impeachment issue has been shelved, needs clarification, as well as another aspect of his activities stemming from that program.

In April 1973, Haig, then army vice chief of staff, appeared in uniform at the trial of Daniel Ellsberg. He was to counter the testimony of Halperin, who had appeared on behalf of Ellsberg. Outstanding at the time of Haig's appearance was the trial judge's order that the government turn over any

wiretaps on Ellsberg and those of his consultants, of whom Halperin was one. Haig had not only reviewed the Halperin tap as a member of Kissinger's staff, but he also was probably aware of Ellsberg's calls picked up from the tapped Halperin phone.

On the stand at the Ellsberg trial, Haig coolly attempted to discredit Halperin's prior testimony by stating the former NSC aide never had access to the most sensitive information on the Vietnam negotiations. This was not the first time Haig had shown interest in the Ellsberg case. In Decemebr 1971 he sent a memo to Nixon aide John Ehrlichman citing information he had received that Ellsberg planned to use his trial as a political event. Haig wondered "if it wouldn't be the better part of wisdom to seek to have the trial delayed until after November" and the presidential election.

How much was Haig involved in efforts to keep the White House tapes from becoming public? And in what way were his actions just "an extension of Richard Nixon"? Less than a month after Haig replaced Haldeman as White House chief of staff, Haig, according to a June 4, 1973, White House tape, was urging the President to attack former White House counsel John Dean, calling Dean a "son-of-a-bitch" and agreeing that Haldeman could handle any problem associated with the famed March 21, 1973 conversation between Dean and the President.

In late September 1973, it was Haig who arranged for Nixon's secretary, Rose Mary Woods to go to Camp David to type up transcripts of the tapes, assisted by Nixon aide Steve Bull. When Bull was unable to locate two of the subpoenaed, conversations, it was Haig to whom he passed on that information.

Early the following month it was Haig who went to Sen. Stennis to ask that Stennis serve as a verifier of the tapes, in a plan that eventually led to the dismissal of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox. Haig, according to Stennis aides, never told the Mississippi senator that any tapes were missing. In November 1973, at the height of the White House campaign to have Mr. Nixon overcome his critics by telling the "truth" with "operation candor," it was Haig who took responsibility for withholding from the President the news that there was a gap on one tape. Mr. Nixon assured GOP governors that day there were no more bombshells coming. It was also Haig who suggested to a group of congressmen that former Attorney General Elliot Richardson may have been drinking during negotiations that led up to the Cox firing.

Is Haig to be taken on faith, by the Congress, by the public, by NATO? It would be better to have a full accounting from him of his past conduct. The Senate Armed Services Committee has the responsibility to order that accounting.