

Washington

Presidents Nixon and Johnson received private reports from the National Security Agency on what prominent Americans were doing and saying abroad, apparently obtained from electronic eavesdropping, the New York Times reported yesterday.

Present and former government officials told the Times that the reports were not matters of national security and did not go to the Presidents through the normal intelligence channels.

Instead, the sources said, the reports were sent directly from the agency to the Presidents and marked for "White House distribution only," to prevent their being circulated to other intelligence agencies.

The House and Senate intelligence committees are reportedly investigating the allegations. Several sources raised the question whether it was a proper use of the security agency's facilities to gather and make such reports. They said there also were questions of improper intrusion on the privacy of the Americans involved. A spokesman for the security agency refused comment on the report.

In one case, a source reported, the agency dispatch informed President Johnson that a group of Texas businessmen involved in private negotiations in the Middle East had claimed a private relationship with him to improve their bargaining position.

Another source said Mr. Johnson had received details about Senator Robert Kennedy's personal activities and night life in Paris from intelligence sources. The source could not confirm if the information came from the security agency.

President Nixon received similar reports, particularly on businessmen, a third source said. There is no indication the practice was exclusive to either Presidents Nixon or Johnson.

A personal aide to President Ford said privately that he believes Mr. Ford "would not tolerate this practice" and that to his knowledge, no such reports had been delivered.

The sources familiar with the private reports said they appeared "unsolicited" and were "gossipy" in nature.

At a closed session of the House Intelligence Committee several weeks ago, officials of NSA were questioned on how this material was obtained. One account of their testimony indicated that NSA picked up information of what Americans might privately say to foreign governments by

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intercepts of Russian communications until the NSA received orders in 1969 to use the same sensitive methods and procedures to monitor the communications of U.S. anti-war leaders, the sources said. It could not be learned who issued the orders.

The NSA also monitored communications of "Chicago Seven" defendants Abbie Hoffman and David Dellinger and former Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver, the sources said.

All these persons traveled extensively abroad and in this country during 1969 and 1970. Cleaver, for example, visited Cuba, Algeria, Sweden and North Vietnam during this period.

Virtually all of the intercepted messages were short and involved travel plans or appointments, the sources said.

Under another less sensitive code designation, the NSA also obtained and circulated information on the personal life of the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Dr. Martin Luther King's successor as the head of the Southern Christian

Leadership Conference, the sources said. It could not be determined how the NSA came by this information.

Those familiar with the monitoring programs said the conversations involving top Soviet leaders would come in one moment and those of the anti-war personalities the next.

"What Brezhnev and Jane Fonda said got about the same treatment," one source said.

The National Security Agency is in charge of protecting communications security and U.S. message codes while attempting to intercept and break the messages and codes of foreign powers.

The NSA director Lieutenant General Lew Allen Jr., said through a spokesman that he would have no comment on this story.

One source within the intelligence community said the communications intercepts were confined to international cables. Two other sources, however, said the NSA also intercepted a limited number of domestic communications as well.