

How Nixon Justifies His 'Paranoia'

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Former President Nixon, portraying himself as a latter-day Lincoln engaged in an ideological civil war, said last night on television that he had been obliged to act forcefully against dissident Americans in order to extricate the nation from the Vietnam war.

"Call it paranoia," he said, his chin jutting defiantly, "but paranoia for peace isn't that bad."

In the third installment of his nationally televised conversations with David Frost, the former Presi-

dent chronicled, without apology, his decisions to use wiretaps, burglary and harassment of political "enemies" as complements to his secret Southeast Asian diplomacy.

Using phrases that were by turns sullen, bitter and defensive, he accused the anti-war movement of having prolonged American involvement in the war, said the Democrats who became Vietnam doves after leaving earlier Democratic administrations were "hypocritical" and "sanctimonious," la-

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beled Daniel Ellsberg a "punk" and said his major regret about his conduct of the war was that he had not moved "stronger, sooner" militarily in Cambodia and Laos.

The case that Nixon made, under tenacious and sometimes openly skeptical questioning by the English interviewer, amounted to the defense Nixon might have offered against a formal charge of abuse of power had his resignation in 1974 not halted impeachment proceedings against him.

Among the central elements of the rationale Nixon offered for a series of attempts to use covert espionage techniques against American citizens and the powers of government agencies against political opponents were the following:

- Having inherited a Southeast Asian conflict and disdaining "that easy political path of bugging out," Nixon said, he sought to combine military pressure with diplomacy through Moscow to prod North Vietnam toward peace negotiations.

- Although the surprise American invasion of Communist sanctuaries in neutral Cambodia in May, 1970, ignited mass opposition to his approach, the former President contended that it had been among the "most effective operations of the war."

- Faced with leaks of sensitive government information, Soviet unwillingness to impose restraints on Hanoi and a resurgent domestic peace movement, Nixon said he had been compelled, to "gamble" that he could mobilize support from the "great silent majority" through what Frost called the politics of polarization.

- The former President insisted his underlying motive in setting government agencies against dissidents had been to convince Hanoi that he would not yield to the protesters and thereby lose the war in Washington, "as the French lost in 1954 in Paris rather than in Dien Bien Phu." He quoted Le Duc Tho, North Vietnam's chief peace negotiator, as having consented to bargain in earnest in early 1973 because, "We've decided that President Nixon is not going to be affected by the protests."

- As he told it, Nixon had been forced to try to plug continuing leaks of sensitive material by taking

such extra legal steps as creation of the White House "plumbers" investigative unit, development of a master plan to eavesdrop on dissidents and sanctioning, after the fact, the burglary by the "plumbers" at the Los Angeles office of Ellsberg's one-time psychiatrist.

The defense Nixon outlined for his conduct seemed, in some respects, more disquieting and revealing than his dramatic apology in the first of the Frost telecasts two weeks ago for having "let the American people down" by lying, disregarding his constitutional oath and abetting the Watergate cover-up.

As the New York Times reported yesterday in a preview of last night's telecast, Nixon theorized that he had inherent power as President to violate criminal laws

in pursuit of domestic tranquility and diplomatic objectives.

"When the President does it, that means that it is not illegal," he said.

As one illustration of the point, Nixon said that he had "no recollection" of having authorized the fire-bombing of the Brookings Institution in Washington — a plan that was aborted in 1971 by John W. Dean III, the former White House legal counsel — but that he "would have taken very strong methods" had he been convinced that the private think-tank was preparing to make public sensitive national security documents.

Moreover, while he minimized the scope of the covert actions his administration took against American citizens and professed to be unable to recall what he knew of

some misdeeds, Nixon readily conceded that he tended to be "paranoiac" — a description he was first to inject in the conversation — about his political opponents.

"Am I paranoiac about hating people and trying to do them in?" he said to Frost. "And the answer is, at times, yes. I get angry at people."

Among the targets of his wrath, he made clear, had been the late President Kennedy, who, Nixon complained, had never invited the Nixons to dine at the White House; officials of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations who "got us into the war" and, having left government, "turned totally around and they stirred up the demonstrators," and the protesters circling the White House whose epithets he could hear "even if I had plugs in my ears."

Nixon said he had tried to check his personal venom and that it had to be understood "in the context of the times." Suggesting that there was "a love-hate complex in all of us," he cited a vindictive reaction by Henry A. Kissinger, the former secretary of state, to the 1969 disclosure of the secret bombing campaign over Cambodia.

"Now, Henry's not a mean man," Nixon said. But he said that Kissinger had exploded when it was suggested the source of the disclosure might have been one of his own aides. Mimicking Kissinger's German accent, the former President quoted him as having said, "I vill destroy them."

Kissinger always has contended that he was a reluctant participant in the wiretapping, in some cases for up to two years, of 13 government officials and four journalists, which the White House initiated soon after the 1969 episode Nixon recounted.

"We felt this way," Nixon said, "because the people on the other side were hypocritical, they were sanctimonious and they were not serving the best interests of the country. This is why, I must say, Henry and I felt so strongly about it. And call it paranoia, but paranoia for peace isn't that bad."

In its 1973 report recommending Nixon's impeachment, the House Judiciary Committee said it had found "clear and convincing evidence that Richard M. Nixon has not faithfully executed the executive trust but has repeatedly used his authority as President to violate the Constitution and the law of the land."

As he and his defenders said at that time, Nixon said in partial defense last night that his conduct had been comparable to that of his predecessors.

He said it was "hypocrisy" to hold him to a different standard because "two wrongs do not make a right ... Two wrongs make two wrongs."

Moments later, in an approach that appeared to stun his questioner, Nixon likened his unilateral suspension on criminal liability to Lincoln's conduct during the Civil War a century earlier.

"But there was no comparison, was there, between the situation you faced and situation Lincoln faced?" Frost asked.

"This nation was torn apart in an ideological way by the war in Vietnam," Nixon replied, "as much as the Civil War tore apart the nation when Lincoln was President."

Frost continued to demur, while Nixon, whose spokesmen always had insisted he was impervious to the demonstrators massed outside the White House grounds, acknowledged that he had felt besieged inside.

"Nobody can know," he said, "what it means for a President to be sitting in that White House working late at night, as I often did, and to have hundreds of thousands of demonstrators around charging through the streets. No one can know how a President feels when he realizes that his efforts to bring peace, to bring our men home, to bring our POWs home, to stop the killing, to build the peace — not just for our time but for time to come — is being jeopardized by individuals who have a different point of view as to how things are to be done."

Nixon's defense last night was in sharp contrast to his denunciation in 1973, when he was trying to cling to the presidency, of the abuses of power for which Frost was seeking an explanation.

"Instances have now come to light in which a zeal for security did go too far and did interfere impermissably with individual liberty," Nixon said in an Aug. 15, 1973, television address placing the blame on "a few overzealous persons."

"As we look at Watergate in a longer perspective," Nixon added four years ago, "we can see that its abuses resulted from the assumption by those involved that their cause placed them above the reach of those rules that apply to other persons and that hold a free society together. That attitude can never be tolerated in our country."