

Kissinger Threatens to Resign Unless Cleared in Phone Taps; Says His Credibility is at Issue [5 cols.]

EMOTIONAL PLEA

JUN 12 1974

Secretary Denies Any Evidence Contradicts Earlier Testimony

NYTimes

By JOHN HERBERS

Special to The New York Times

SALZBURG, Austria, June 11 —Secretary of State Kissinger, in an extraordinary news conference at which he appeared choked with hurt and anger, said today he would resign unless he was cleared of allegations that he participated in "illegal or shady activity" in Government wiretapping of individuals.

The surprise development came on the eve of President Nixon's trip to the Middle East and seemed to threaten what

Text of the Kissinger news conference is on Pages 34, 35.

is widely believed to be one of the purposes of the journey —to divert public attention from Administration scandals.

Mr. Kissinger, who flew here last night with Mr. Nixon for the trip, was so upset over charges that he improperly initiated wiretaps on persons suspected of national-security leaks during the first Nixon term that he called the news conference to deliver his ultimatum and to ask the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to reopen an investigation of the case.

Ultimatum Presented

"I do not believe it is possible to conduct the foreign policy of the United States under these circumstances when the character and credibility of the Secretary of State is at issue," he said, his voice shaking. "And if it is not clear up, I will resign."

Mr. Kissinger seemed determined to put to rest the persistent allegations in Washington that he had instigated wiretaps of 13 Government officials and four newsmen from 1969 to 1971 and that he had foreknowledge of the formation of the White House investigative group known as "the plumbers" in 1971.

He said he stood by his September testimony to the Foreign Relations Committee in which he said he only provided names of individuals with access to sensitive information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation but did not ask for the wiretaps to be instituted. Mr. Kissinger also denied again that he had any idea of the activities of the "plumbers."

Although Mr. Kissinger had informed the President that he planned to defend his conduct publicly today, Mr. Nixon and other officials on the trip seemed to be caught by surprise at the threat to resign. Ronald L. Ziegler, press secretary and assistant to the President, said Mr. Nixon would be very reluctant to ac-

Continued on Page 35, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 8

cept a Kissinger resignation.

Mr. Ziegler issued the following formal statement:

"The president recognizes Secretary Kissinger's desire to defend his honor against false charges and the Secretary's strong feeling that he be able to carry out his responsibilities unencumbered by the diversions of the kind of anonymous attack that has so poisoned our national dialogue. As far as the President is concerned, he is sure that those in the United States and in the world who seek peace and are familiar with Secretary Kissinger's contributions to international trust and understanding share his view that the Secretary's honor needs no defense."

Meeting at Palace

The news conference was held at Kavalier Haus, one of the charming old buildings in the palace complex on the edge of Salzburg, where President Nixon and his party were resting before the Middle East trip, which will begin tomorrow with a flight to Cairo.

At midday, with no warning of what was about to happen, reporters were loaded on buses, driven to the spacious palace grounds and seated in a large drawing room to await Mr. Kissinger. When he appeared, shortly after 1 P.M. (8 A.M. New York time) it was immediately apparent that something was wrong. He was frowning and his every step seemed heavy as he stationed himself at a microphone before a tapestry of a medieval forest. There was none of his usual jocularly with reporters.

It was known in Washington before he left yesterday morning that the Secretary of State was brooding over leaks of documents and interpretations by unidentified sources to the effect that he had played a much more important role in the wiretapping of Government officials and reporters early in the first Nixon term than he had acknowledged to the Foreign Relations Committee at his confirmation hearings last year.

Stress From Negotiations

He had clearly had been under physical and mental stress, having completed 34 days of negotiations in the Middle East that brought agreement on a disengagement of Israeli and Syrian forces.

At a news conference last Thursday, when Mr. Kissinger expected to be asked questions only about his Mideast diplomacy, he reacted angrily to questions about the wiretap allegations. Yet no one was prepared for today's outburst of emotion. During 70 minutes of monologue and response to questions, Mr. Kissinger did not smile once. His indignation seemed to rise as the news conference progressed. His voice broke and his face was stern.

Actions Defended

"The fact of the matter is that the wiretaps in question were legal, they followed established procedures," he said. He made these specific denials:

¶That his office received any reports from the taps of "extra marital affairs or pornographic descriptions." He termed as "outrageous" reports that such information was received, but he did not identify the source of the reports.

"Last Thursday," he said in an extemporaneous opening statement, "a number of you commented on the fact that I seemed irritated, angered, flustered, discombobulated. All these words are correct. After five weeks in the Middle East I was not thinking about the various investigations going on in the United States."

He disclosed that on Sunday he sent a letter to Senator J. W. Fulbright, Chairman of the For-

ign Relations Committee, requesting a new review of the wiretapping charges. Then he read the contents of the letter, which said in part:

"The innuendoes which now imply that new evidence contradicting my testimony has come to light are without foundation.

"All the available evidence is to the best of my knowledge contained in the public and closed hearings which preceded my confirmation."

Since sending the letter, he said, there had been "many more articles and more are undoubtedly in the process of preparation." But he never mentioned which newspapers or news agencies originated the accounts, nor was he specific about what they said.

However, under the circumstances, he explained, "it is not appropriate for me, as Secretary of State, to go with the President to the Middle East without having a full discussion of the facts as I know them, keeping in mind only that I do not have all my records here with me."

Involvement in Taps

His protracted explanation that followed, nonetheless, was an acknowledgement of deep involvement in the telephone taps. It was a case, he said, of choosing the lesser of two evils.

"I find wiretapping distasteful. I find leaks distasteful, and therefore, a choice had to be made. So, in retrospect," he said, "this seems to me what my role has been."

Mr. Kissinger said that early in 1969 he was so disturbed by a series of "egregious violations" of national security matters, or leaks of classified information, that he expressed his concern to the President, who then ordered, on the advice of the then Attorney General, John N. Mitchell, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation director, J. Edgar Hoover, "the institution of a system of national security wiretaps."

Mr. Kissinger's office then supplied the names of persons to be tapped.

¶That he had any recollection of saying, as the late Mr. Hoover quoted him in a memorandum, "Keep up the investigation and if you find somebody, we will destroy them," referring to security violators. Even if true, he charged, his remark had been distorted in the press.

¶That he was responsible for creation of the "plumbers" group, set up in 1971 to stop national security leaks. He said he never heard of the operation and if he was told about it on a helicopter in Southern California in the summer of that year, as has been charged, the engine noise apparently drowned out the words.