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JUL 2 3 1974

Haig's Role in the Wiretapping

The latest bunch of material on wiretapping points the guilty finger at a figure who has up to now seemed peripheral. He is Gen. Alexander Haig, Henry Kissinger's former deputy at the National Security Council and now chief of staff at the Nixon White House.

Gen. Haig's name turns up over and over again when the dirtiest work is afoot. Anybody who wants to sort out Dr. Kissinger's role in the wiretaps will also have to make an assessment of what Gen. Haig did.

The most important case in point involves William Safire, the former White House staff man who now writes columns for The New York Times. Mr. Safire was a speechwriter for the President with special responsibilities in the economic field.

During the early part of his work at the White House, at least, he had no national security responsibilities. There was no national security reason for him to be the object of a wiretap. While those facts may not have been known to everybody in the administration, they were known—very much known—to Dr. Kissinger and the staff at the National Security Council.

But the records now released as part of the House Judiciary Committee's investigation of impeachment show that the tap on Mr. Safire was instituted by Gen. Haig. The request for wiretap authority on Mr. Safire was forwarded from the late FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover, to Attorney General John Mitchell on Aug. 4, 1969. It alluded to previous wiretap requests made on behalf of Dr. Kissinger by Haig.

It said that "Haig has now presented an additional request." The additional request was for Mr. Safire, and the reason given was that Safire had been in contact with another person whom the FBI was wiretapping. That other person was the British correspondent, Henry Brandon.

The Judiciary Committee staff, though fairly circumspect in accepting FBI documents at face value, apparently had no doubt about Haig's role. The staff report says that the wiretap on Safire was "requested orally by Haig." That Kissinger did not play a role in requesting that tap is further suggested by the fact that on the date of the tap he was with the President in Rumania.

The fruits of the Safire tap were, according to FBI summaries, sent to Dr. Kissinger on Jan. 15, 1970. But in his testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on his nomination as Secretary of State, Dr. Kissinger was asked by Sen. Clifford Case (R-N.J.) whether he had ever received "information as a result of the taps on" Safire. "No," he replied, adding that he was surprised when the New York Times called him on the subject.

So who did read the material forwarded by the FBI to Kissinger's office? Well, the obvious possibility is the man who the bureau says instituted the tap in the first place, Gen. Haig.

That possibility seems particularly strong because of Haig's role in some

other matters touching the tapping. Haig appears from FBI records to be the chief operational man in working out the arrangements for the taps. The Judiciary Committee report, for example, says that of the "four newsmen who were tapped, three were ordered by Gen. Haig."

The FBI report suggests that Haig was aware that the tapping was highly unusual, and that he had a role in making arrangements so that the records normally used for national security taps were not kept in the case of those ordered by the Nixon White House. In the FBI records, Haig is repeatedly quoted as saying of each successive tap he requested that "because of its sensitive nature, it should be handled on a need-to-know basis, with no record maintained."

Maybe Gen. Haig has merely been caught up in the bureaucratic lingo employed by the FBI. But an awful lot of other dirty stuff is connected with the Haig name. He apparently had a major role in the firing of former Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox. He figures deeply in the "plumbers'" investigation of the Pentagon "spy ring," where Dr. Kissinger's credibility is also in doubt.

A Senate Armed Services Committee investigation of the "plumbers" showed that Haig knew David Young, a former Kissinger staff member, was investigating the Pentagon "spy ring." Kissinger can only be right in claiming that he did not know what Young was doing on the hypothesis that Haig had kept him in the dark.

So if the Foreign Relations Committee truly wants to get to the bottom of the wiretapping business, it will not stop with a review of Dr. Kissinger's role. It will question Gen. Haig—and not so gently either.