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Nixon-Papers, Nix trip, Casualties

Nixon-Security Papers 400

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WASHINGTON AP — President Nixon, whose administration was disturbed by release of the Pentagon Papers, made known Thursday his decision to speed declassification of many historical documents and to tighten security on other papers that could affect national security and the confidence of other countries.

John D. Ehrlichman, assistant to the President, said Nixon believes that past practice has resulted in classification of a number of documents that did not have to be classified in the national interest and that too many people in the past had the legal right to impose classification and too many were privy to too many secrets.

He said the basic aim is "going to be to classify fewer documents in the future but to classify them better."

While instituting a government study of the whole security classification system, Ehrlichman said, Nixon will expand his request for more funds from Congress "to speed the process of declassification." He said Nixon has asked for a study of how significant historical events like World War II, the Korean War, the Lebanon action in the Eisenhower administration and the Bay of Pigs and Cuban missile crisis of the Kennedy era can be acted on now.

Ehrlichman said that the publication of the leaked Pentagon Papers—a study tracing U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war—had resulted in communications from the representatives of a number of foreign governments who were worried that delicate negotiations might be imperiled by breach of confidences. He did not name any specific countries or individuals.

So far in its studies, Ehrlichman said the administration is leaning toward a system that would routinely scrutinize documents after a certain time period and "the presumption would be in favor of declassification" unless someone came forward to show a reason to act otherwise.

"The burden of proof is now in the other direction," Ehrlichman said.

Ehrlichman said that the key factor in negotiations is "a climate of confidentiality." And in his own dealings, Ehrlichman said President Nixon restricts information on a "need to know" basis.

Ehrlichman said that this system has worked very well for the President and has "resulted in very few incidents of any breaches of confidence."

The aim of the study committee, which includes all areas of government and is headed by William Rehnquist, assistant attorney general and director of the office of legal counsel in the Department of Justice, is to determine how to set up a system of classification and declassification.

The study will focus on setting up a system that would provide for declassification if documents involved, in Ehrlichman's words, "will not jeopardize current intelligence sources and not . . . imperil our current relations with other governments or seriously and needlessly embarrass foreign citizens."

He said the system will seek to avoid classification simply for the purpose of covering up mistakes by individuals.

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