

Ford ready to order Haig back in Army

WASHINGTON — President Ford is prepared to use his authority as commander-in-chief to reinstate Alexander Haig as an Army general despite strong opposition from within the military establishment, the Chicago Sun-Times has learned.

Although Pentagon officials have said that opposition by to-level Army officers would force Haig into private industry, White House officials and other Ford associates said the President wants his White House chief of staff back in uniform.

"The President doesn't have to fight with the military over this," said a White House source. "If it comes to that, he just orders it."

According to close associates, the President "likes Haig very much and has great respect for his ability. He feels Haig was ill-used by Nixon and does not want to see his career ruined."

A Ford associate said, "the President believes Haig merely was following Nixon's orders and doing what he thought was his duty to

his country and his commander-in-chief" during Nixon's Watergate crisis.

"He also thinks that in the final weeks of Nixon's presidency, Haig rendered great service to the nation — whether you believe that Haig masterminded Nixon's ouster or merely gave advice that led Nixon to resign."

The administration is known to have sounded out U.S. allies in NATO about the possibility of Haig's becoming the alliance's supreme military commander.

"If Haig does not get that job, it will be only because of opposition from the allies," said a Ford associate, "and not because of opposition from the military. The President, after all, is commander-in-chief."

Soundings in Europe reportedly have turned up opposition only from Holland, while West Germany has given Haig its okay.

A Ford associate said: "The Dutch aren't important in this. What the Germans think is." The 300,000-man U.S. force in Europe

is primarily stationed in Germany, and Germany is by far the largest contributor to NATO's European force.

Military opposition to Haig centers on charges that he has been too heavily involved in politics.

Not only was Haig deeply involved in Watergate — as a defender and adviser of Nixon, at first, and then as a maneuverer for Nixon's ouster — but his career was advanced through political assignments, rather than military ones.

Haig moved from colonel in 1969 to four-star general in 1972 without holding a military job. During that period he was assistant to Kissinger on the National Security Council staff in the White House.

In 1972, he was promoted from two-star to four-star general and named Army Vice Chief of Staff, jumping 243 more senior army generals. He returned to the White House in 1973 to be presidential chief of staff. He retired from the army in doing so.