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Army Hits F.B.I. on Riot Inquiry

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Pentagon officials said recently that an unsuccessful attempt was made in the spring of 1969 to have the Federal Bureau of Investigation take over from Army investigators the task of looking into the prospects of riots in major American cities.

"The Army was willing to provide manpower during actual crises," one official said, "but we felt advance investigations involving civilians belonged to a civilian agency. We weren't successful in getting them to do it."

Another Defense Department source said, "The Justice Department was unable to get the F.B.I. to be sufficiently responsive."

Apprised of these assertions, a Justice Department spokesman declared:

"As far as the Department of Justice is concerned, there have been no requests by the Army that the F.B.I. assume its investigations of cities where riots might occur. The F.B.I. does conduct such investigations for the Department of Justice."

Pentagon officials say the rejection by the F.B.I. came in the course of drawing up a memorandum of understanding between the Defense Secretary and the Attorney General specifically defining each department's responsibilities in the civil disturbance field.

In those discussions, conducted at a high level, Pentagon sources said, the Army attempted to insert language that would have turned over principal responsibility for civil disturbance intelligence to the F.B.I. It was turned down, the sources insisted.

The contentions that the Army was rebuffed in its effort to turn over a large part of its civil disturbance investigative work to the F.B.I. come when the Pentagon is under fire from Congress and the news media over the extent and character of Army intelligence activities within the United States.

Recent news articles have alleged that military intelligence operatives had built up computerized data banks on suspected trouble-makers and had eavesdropped on telephone conversations in at least one instance at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

Ervin to Lead Inquiry

The extent of military inquiries into supposed radical political groups is being inves-

tigated by Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights. The subcommittee plans hearings early next year.

Interviews with a number of Defense Department and Army sources disclosed that about 1,200 Army investigators were at work around the country, some of whom have apparently taken initiatives that were neither approved nor even known to top officials in Washington.

An example of this was a crew of Army men who grew beards, painted a van with the name of a nonexistent television news company, and stationed themselves outside the main auditorium during the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, and at various outdoor rallies there, to take pictures of "suspicious individuals."

One recent news report asserted that Army investigators had apparently intercepted a telephone message to Senator Eugene J. McCarthy of Minnesota at the Democratic convention in 1968. Mr. Jordan said he knew of no such intercept, then or any other time, but was investigating the report.

Officials said that a number of reforms intended to remove the Army from such activity, has been put into force. They include a prohibition of any such covert intelligence without the specific advance approval of the Undersecretary of the Army.

'No One Else Was Around'

In an appearance today before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird conceded that Army intelligence operations had been active at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions in 1968.

Other sources said that each of the three armed services had provided about 200 men assigned on temporary duty to the Secret Service to help protect Presidential contenders.

"This followed the assassination of Bobby Kennedy," one official said, "and Congress passed a resolution that all candidates be protected. But the Secret Service didn't have nearly enough manpower."

Commenting on the over-all question of the role of Army Intelligence in domestic activities, Robert E. Jordan 3d, general counsel of the Army, said in an interview:

"I honestly believe we drifted into this area without quite realizing what we were getting into and because no one else was around to do the job.

"I'm convinced that no one

intended to spy on individuals or control civilian life in any way. But I also believe that some of the things begun, if expanded, sure as hell posed a real risk."

Sources said the roots of this Army involvement reach back to the Detroit riots in the summer of 1967 when Army troops were dispatched to the city to restore order.

"There were so many rumors and unsubstantiated reports that nobody really knew what was quite happening," says one official involved in that event.

In the spring of 1968, after the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Army troops were rushed to Chicago, Washington and Baltimore to put down civil disturbances and the Army was put on notice that it might have to send additional troops to Detroit, Pittsburgh and Memphis.

After that, the Army was told to prepare plans to send as many as 10,000 troops each to 25 cities simultaneously.

But to plan for the special training, movement and deployment of as many as 250,000 troops at one time was regarded as a monumental task.

"How could we predict where our troops might have to go, where the potential trouble spots were?" one official asked. "No one cared so much who the troublemakers were, but how serious was the potential for riots in different cities?"

At that point, the Army Intelligence Command at Fort Holabird, Md., was given the

mission of using its 1,200 field investigators to work up a series of studies showing where ghetto discontent was greatest and where relations between ghetto dwellers and local police were bad.

Until that time, the investigators were primarily engaged in routine security clearances of military and defense industry personnel with secret and top secret clearances.

"Many of these young men," Mr. Jordan says, "were operating on their own initiative in a way that was hard to control from Washington. They tried to anticipate any questions we might ask and have answers ready."

Pentagon sources said that most of the background information gathered by the military sleuths came from talks with local policemen and F.B.I. agents and from local newspaper clippings.

Nearly a year was devoted to developing information on potential trouble spots, Mr. Jordan said. In February of 1969, he said, he and David McGiffert, then Under Secretary of the Army, concluded that the ability of the Army to forecast riots was poor and that the activity was "potentially dangerous" and "might make people fearful."

It was at that juncture that the Army issued an order barring covert investigations in civil disturbance cases without the personal approval of the Under Secretary.

And it was at about the same time that the Justice Department was urged to get the F.B.I. to assume a substantial share of the work from the Army, sources said.