

# Was Nixon Involved In the Watergate?



**Jack Anderson**

**T**HE QUESTION hangs heavily over the Watergate horror. How deeply is President Nixon implicated in the crimes of his subordinates?

The answer is known, of course, only to a few White House insiders who are disposed to protect the President. Nevertheless, we have sought them out.

Those privy to the Oval Office recall that the President was totally absorbed with foreign affairs during the Watergate gestation. He doesn't like to be distracted by minor matters when he is concentrating on a major problem, they say.

While G. Gordon Liddy was plotting the Watergate break-in and bugging in Attorney General John Mitchell's offices in early February 1972, the President was preparing for his Peking trip. He returned home on February 28.

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**T**WO DAYS LATER, the North Vietnamese struck with their surprise spring offensive. The President was wholly occupied with the military crisis in Vietnam throughout April while the Waterbuggers were recruited and equipped.

On May 8, he mined Haiphong Harbor, an act which he feared might cause the cancellation of his Moscow visit. This crowded out all other problems, aides recall, as he awaited the Kremlin's reaction and prepared for the summit meeting. He arrived in Moscow on May 22 as the Waterbuggers were reconnoitering the Democratic layout.

Throughout this period, say aides, su-

subordinates didn't bother him about politics.

Everyone who had access to the President remembers he was angry and surprised by news of the Watergate arrest on June 17. He exploded with expletives, they recall. The kindest word he had for those responsible was "idiots!"

He immediately assigned counsel John Dean, then a presidential favorite, to find out whether anyone in the White House was involved.

The President was more suspicious but less concerned about the campaign committee across the street at 1701 Pennsylvania avenue.

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**R**ICHARD NIXON places a high premium on loyalty. It simply didn't occur to the President, in the opinion of those who know him, that such trusted aides as Haldeman and Ehrlichman would deceive him.

Of course, no one knows what H. R. Haldeman or John Ehrlichman may have told the President in private. But there was never any hint around the White House, say our sources, that Mr. Nixon had any inkling of the payoffs to defendants to keep their mouths shut, the destruction of incriminating evidence and the obstruction of justice.

Our sources are convinced that Dean, Mitchell, Ehrlichman and Haldeman concealed from the President their alleged involvement in the illegal cover-up.