

Nixon Ordered Wiretaps on Aides

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Washington

President Nixon personally authorized the wiretapping of more than a dozen of his subordinates on the National Security Council and in the Pentagon beginning in 1969, reliable sources said yesterday.

The sources said that the wiretapping had been undertaken in response to a dispatch by William Beecher, published in the New York Times on May 9, 1969, and carried by the Times News Service, which reported for the first time that U.S. B-52 bombers were striking targets inside Cambodia.

A White House spokesman confirmed last night the report of presidential authorization.

"It was a national security matter," the spokesman said in a statement. "The procedure was approved by the President and authorized in individual cases by the Attorney General in coordination with the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

Well-informed government officials defended the President's authorization as necessary, in view of what they termed a serious security

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breach. Beecher's dispatch told how the bombing was being conducted without any public protest from Prince Norodom Sihanouk who was then Cambodia's chief of state.

Beecher's article was the first to indicate that the Nixon administration was expanding the Vietnam war.

DEFENSE

"The president's motives were honorable," one official said. "This had to be stopped and it (the wiretapping) turned out to be for the protection of the innocent." He was referring, he said, to the fact that most of those whose phones were

wiretapped were found to not have violated security.

Another government official aware of the wiretapping noted that it had been legal and added: "Hell, yes, I was aware that it was going on. To have done less would have been the highest order of irresponsibility."

Other government sources contended that at least three White House and Pentagon officials who were monitored turned out to be — as one put it — "blabbermouths" and eventually were eased out of their positions.

APPROVAL

Specific approval for the operation, which involved the tapping of home and office telephones, was granted by J. Edgar Hoover, then the director of the FBI, and John N. Mitchell, then attorney general.

Special FBI reports of the overheard telephone conversations were provided to Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser, and then to Colonel Alexander M. Haig Jr., one of Kissinger's key deputies who is now a four-star general and is the temporary White House chief of staff.

Among those tapped, sources said, were three aides to Kissinger — Daniel I. Davison, who left the government later in 1969; Anthony Lake, who quit over the Cambodian invasion in May, 1970; and Winston Lord, who will be leaving this week.

Lake and Lord served as special assistants to Kissinger and participated in many secret peace talks with Le Duc Tho, the chief North Vietnamese negotiator, and other North Vietnamese officials prior to last year's agreement.

DISCLOSURE

William D. Ruckelshaus, the acting director of the F.B.I., told a news conference Monday that records of 17 wiretaps placed on 13 government officials and

four newsmen had been found in a safe belonging to John D. Ehrlichman, the President's former chief assistant for domestic affairs. Ruckelshaus identified one of those overheard as Morton Halperin, who joined Kissinger's staff in 1969.

Sources in the executive branch said that the wiretap logs had been sent routinely to Kissinger's offices until May, 1970. At that time, one official said, there was a meeting between President Nixon, Hoover and H. R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, "to discuss these taps."

DECISION

"They agreed to continue them," the official added, "but they also decided to have all of the mail (the logs and other products of the wiretaps) go to Haldeman." The wiretap program itself was ended in February, 1971, other officials said.