

# PRESIDENT LINKED TO TAPS ON AIDES

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Nixon Said to Have Backed Action in '69 in Effort to Plug Security Leaks

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WASHINGTON, May 15—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 today.

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

A White House spokesman confirmed the report of Presidential authorization tonight. "It was a national security matter," the spokesman said. "The procedure was approved by the President and authorized in in-

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dividual 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 breach. Mr. Beecher's dispatch told how the bombing was being conducted without any public protest from Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who was Mr. Beecher's article was the first to indicate that the Nixon Administration was expanding the Vietnam war.

"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 whose phones were monitored turned out to be—as one put it—"blabbermouths" and were eventually eased out of their positions.

### 3 Aides Were Tapped

Specific approval for the operation, which involved the tapping of home and office telephones, was granted by the late J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and John N. Mitchell, then the Attorney General.

Special F.B.I. reports of the overhead telephone conversation were provided to Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Mr. Nixon's National Security Adviser, and then Col. Alexander M. Haig Jr., one Mr. Kissinger's key deputies who is now a four-star general and is serving as the temporary White House chief of staff.

Among those tapped, sources said, were three aides to Mr. Kissinger—Daniel I. Davidson, who left the Government later in 1969; Anthony Lake, who quit over the Cambodian in-

vasion in May, 1970; and Winston Lord, who will be leaving this week.

Mr. Lake and Mr. Lord served as special assistants to Mr. Kissinger and participated in many secret peace talks with Le Duc Tho, the chief North Vietnamese negotiator, and other North Vietnamese officials prior to the peace agreement that was reached early this year.

William D. Ruckelshaus, the acting director of the F.B.I., told a news conference yesterday 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. Mr. Ruckelshaus identified one of those overheard as Dr. Morton Halperin, who joined Mr. Kissinger's staff in 1969.

### Meeting Described

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

"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.

"We found out what we wanted to find out," one source said. "We found the people who were the weak links." He described the taps as being very productive. "They were a couple of guys who could have been prosecuted," he added, "but we just let them go out of the Government."

Mr. Lake, reached on vacation in Edgartown, Mass., said he was "disgusted" to hear that his phone had been tapped while working for the Government. "It's an invasion of privacy," he said. "I can't think of any grounds for them to have done that."

Mr. Lord, reached in the White House, said he had only learned from Mr. Kissinger a few minutes prior to the call that his phone had been tapped. He had no comment.

Mr. Davidson could not be immediately reached.

Mr. Halperin acknowledged in a telephone interview that he had been told by Mr. Kissinger that his security clearance had been protested by the Central Intelligence Agency and the F.B.I. The agencies complained that he had neglected to mention a trip to the Soviet Union while filling out a form. "As I told him [Mr. Kissinger] many times," Mr. Halperin said, "I had reported that trip three times previously and four times afterward."

Mr. Halperin quoted Mr. Kissinger as telling him at one point that he had been "advised not to hire any of the people" he hired.

### Complaints Noted

After The Times dispatch on the Cambodia bombing was published, Mr. Halperin noted, he was told that three top Government officials—Secretary of State William P. Rogers, then Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird and Mr. Mitchell—complained to the President that he was the source for the article.

"Kissinger told me I was under suspicion for that," Mr. Halperin said. "I interpreted that at the time as meaning that they were mad at the leak because they were trying to keep from the American public that, while the Administration was claiming it was withdrawing, in fact it was escalating the war."

"Of course I told him I was not [the source]," Mr. Halperin said, "and of course he can find out if he wants to because Beecher is now a Pentagon official." Mr. Beecher left The Times last month to become a deputy assistant Secretary of Defense for public affairs.

Mr. Halperin, who is associated with the Brookings Institution in Washington, said that despite the suspicion and the wiretapping, he remained on the National Security Council until September, 1969, when—despite urgings from Mr. Kissinger—he resigned.

Mr. Halperin said he continued to serve as a consultant to Mr. Kissinger until the spring of 1970, when he resigned in protest over the American and South Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.