

Vast GOP Undercover Operation Originated in 1969

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The Watergate bugging and the break-in into the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist were part of an elaborate, continuous campaign of illegal and quasilegal undercover operations conducted by the Nixon administration since 1969, according to highly placed sources in the executive branch.

There are more instances of political burglaries, buggings, spying and sabotage conducted under White House auspices that have not yet been publicly revealed, according to the sources.

Although the undercover operations became most intense during the 1972 presidential campaign, such activities as the Watergate bugging and the break-in in the Ellsberg case, which previously had appeared to be isolated, were regarded in the White House as components of a continuing program of covert activity, according to the sources.

The clandestine operations, the sources said, were at various times aimed at radical leaders, student demonstrators, news reporters, Democratic candidates for President and Vice President and the Congress, and Nixon administration aides suspected of leaking information to the press.

The sources said that many of the covert activities, although political in objective, were conducted under the guise of "national security," and that some of the records relating to them are believed to have been destroyed. Some of the activities were conducted by the FBI, the Secret Service and special teams working for the White House and Justice Department, according to the sources.

Most of the activities were carried out under the direct supervision of members of President Nixon's innermost circle, among them former-White House deputies H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman and John W. Dean III; former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, and former Assistant Attorney General Robert C. Mardian, the sources said.

Although most of the clandestine operations are shrouded in secrecy, they are known to include:

- The use of the Secret Service to obtain information on the private life of at least one Democratic presidential candidate in 1972.
- The possession of Sen. Thomas Eagleton's confidential health records by Ehrlichman, former White House domestic affairs chief, several weeks before the information was leaked to the news media.
- The use of paid provocateurs to encourage violence at antiwar demonstrations early in the first Nixon administration, and again in the 1972 presidential campaign.
- Undercover political activities against persons regarded as opponents of the Nixon administration. The activities were conducted by "suicide squads" in the FBI—a bureau term for teams of agents engaged in sensitive missions which, if revealed, would be disavowed by the FBI and the White House.
- The use of paid-for-hire "vigilante squads" by the

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White House and Justice Department to conduct illegal wiretapping, infiltrate radical organizations for purposes of provocation and engage in political sabotage.

The "vigilante squads" were made up of professional wiretappers and ex-CIA and ex-FBI agents.

One such "vigilante squad," under the supervision of former White House

aides E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy, conducted the Watergate bugging in 1972 and the break-in at the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in 1971. The Watergate grand jury reportedly is examining other undercover activities by the squad, including another burglary that the team is suspected of committing.

According to one highly placed source in the executive branch, undercover operations by the Hunt-Liddy squad were transferred from the White House to the Committee for the Re-election of the President under an arrangement worked out by Haldeman, then chief of the White House staff, and John Mitchell, then Attorney General.

The transfer of the squad from the White House to the re-election committee in late 1971 and early 1972 was made to gear up for the upcoming presidential campaign in which "dirty tricks," spying and deceptions would be a basic part.

Two persons occupying high positions in the Nixon administration have told The Washington Post that other "vigilante squads" were established by the White House and Justice Department to conduct supersecret political operations.

Some records relating to the Nixon administration's broad program of cover activities are believed to have been destroyed in the immediate wake of the Watergate bugging arrests last June 17. Other records were destroyed last month, when it became apparent that some of the activities might come to light in the renewed grand jury investigation of the bugging and related matters, according to one source.

To prevent further disclosure of the activities, the sources reported, the White House has promulgated "national security" guideline for use in the Watergate investigation that are designed, at least in part, to prevent testimony about the undercover operations by those with knowledge of them.

Several sources described the political espionage and sabotage conducted by the President's re-election committee, including the Watergate bugging, as the logical extension of covert operations established long before.

"Watergate was a natural action that came from long-

existing circumstances," one high-level participant in many of the undercover activities observed. He added: "It grew out of an atmosphere. This way of life was not new . . . There have been fairly broad (illegal and quasilegal) activities from the beginning of the

administration. I didn't know where 'national security' ended and political espionage started."

According to this source, the activities were aimed at whatever individual or groups the White House perceived as a threat at any given moment. "First it was radicals," he said, "then it was reporters and leaking White House aides, then the Democrats. They all got the same treatment: bugging, infiltration, burglary, spying, etcetera."

As one example, this source cited the 1971 FBI investigation into the background of CBS News correspondent Daniel Schorr. The investigation, the source said, was personally ordered by Haldeman.

At the time that it was publicly revealed that the correspondent was under investigation, the White House said that Schorr was being considered for a job in the administration—an assertion that administration officials have since conceded was untrue.

In addition to the use of the FBI for such intelligence-gathering purposes, the White House used the Secret Service in the 1972 campaign to investigate the private life of at least one Democratic presidential candidate, according to reliable sources.

The sources reported that the Secret Service—or perhaps a single agent acting alone—provided the White House with regular reports on private activity of the candidate.

In addition to receiving Secret Service reports on such matters, the White House twice considered leaking stories to the news media about the activity, the sources said.

A spokesman for former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson has acknowledged that Colson received such information on a candidate's private life but denied that the data came from the Secret Service.

The Secret Service's role in collecting such information represents the second time that agency has been re-

ported to have engaged in intelligence-gathering against political opponents of the White House.

On Nov. 4, The New York Times reported that Nixon campaign aides and the White House received information about confidential meetings held by Sen. George McGovern, with potential financial backers.

Jack Warner, spokesman for the Secret Service, said last week that an investigation last year concluded that there was no evidence to support The Times report.

"If you have new information," Warner said, "let us have it and we will reopen our investigation. This type of activity would be unprecedented, and if at any time an investigation reveals that a Secret Service agent was identified with this activity, he would be judged unsuitable for the Secret Service."

Seven investigative sources and Nixon administration officials have told The Washington Post recently that Colson and Haldeman were the prime movers behind the extensive undercover campaign

mounted on behalf of President Nixon's 1972 re-election, although other high officials were also involved.

Much of that secret campaign of spying, sabotage, deception and other "dirty tricks" was designed to help secure the Democratic presidential nomination for Sen. McGovern, considered by the White House to be President Nixon's least formidable opponent.

One former high official in the Nixon administration said: "It was a campaign that went astray and lost its sense of fair play. Secrecy and an obsession with the covert became part of nearly every action. It all turned to mud, and I'm sorry to have been a part of it."

As examples of the other tactics employed in the Nixon campaign, sources in the White House, the Committee for the Re-election of the President and investigative agencies have cited the following:

- Well before they were leaked to the news media, former presidential adviser Ehrlichman obtained copies of Sen. Thomas Eagleton's health records. It could not be determined how Ehrlichman obtained the records, which Eagleton, as Democratic vice presidential candidate, refused to supply even to his running mate,

Sen. McGovern.

According to The Post's sources, Ehrlichman received copies of the records, which showed that Eagleton had received electric shock treatments for nervous exhaustion years before the Missouri senator received the Democratic vice presidential nomination.

(Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark has said that Eagleton's health records were in the FBI files, and reliable sources said that material from the FBI files was provided to White House and Nixon campaign aides during last year's election campaign by former Assistant Attorney General Mardian.)

- Fred V. Malek, a former White House aide and deputy manager of the Nixon re-election committee, ordered establishment of a network of persons to gather information in nearly all of 50 states on the campaign of Sen. McGovern.

Field operatives in the project had a code-word contact—the name "Viola Smith"—at the Nixon committee for transmitting the information by telephone to a group at Nixon campaign headquarters known as the "McGovern Watch." In addition, written reports would be mailed to the Nixon committee on forms marked "confidential" and containing space for details about staff changes, speeches and polls in the McGovern campaign.

Malek acknowledged he wrote a memorandum on "Intelligence on Future Appearances of McGovern and Shriver" but denied that the memo was intended to set any covert activities into motion. The memo, obtained by The Washington Post, advises persons in the field to call "Viola Smith at 202-333-7220 to advise her of information that you learn of."

DeVan L. Shumway, a spokesman for the Committee for the Re-election of the President, acknowledged yesterday that he requested two reporters to supply information about Sen. McGovern's campaign schedule to the Nixon committee.

Shumway said that the two reporters, whom he declined to identify, turned down the request because "most of my friends in the news business are honorable." He said he approached the reporters under orders from Jeb Stuart Magruder, the former deputy Nixon campaign director.

- Colson organized at

least 30 groups of Nixon supporters to "attack" network news correspondents through write-in, telephone and telegram campaigns to their local stations, according to Tom Girard, a former Nixon committee press aide.

Girard, now a correspondent for Westinghouse Broadcasting, Inc., said he quit the Nixon committee last May because he was "appalled" at Colson's proposal, made during an election strategy meeting on May 3, 1972. Republican sources in two states said they actually participated in a phone-in campaign to complain about an ABC commentary that was critical of President Nixon.

- One Democratic presidential contender sought legal advice after he established that members of his family were being investigated and followed. A former official in President Nixon's campaign acknowledged that the Committee for the Re-election of the President was responsible for ordering the surveillance.

- Watergate conspirator Hunt had phony flyers printed advertising a free-beer rally for New York City Mayor John Lindsay, a Democratic presidential candidate during the Florida primary election last March. The flyers were distributed in the black neighborhoods in Florida. Hunt also had reprints made of a Newsweek article critical of Sen. Edmund Muskie's wife. The reprints were distributed in New Hampshire before the primary there.

- Former Assistant Attorney General Mardian, who became political coordinator of the Nixon campaign, had two spies in the McGovern campaign who reported directly to him, according to other campaign officials. In addition, two Nixon campaign aides on loan from the Republican National Committee posed regularly as newsmen to obtain routine data about McGovern trips and speeches.

- Ken W. Clawson, deputy director of communications for the White House, assisted a reporter in locating the alcoholic brother of one of the Democratic presidential candidates — for a news story that apparently never was published.

- Magruder, the deputy Nixon campaign manager, offered from \$5,000 to \$10,000 to several writers in an attempt to persuade them to assemble a critical book about Sen. McGovern's early

life in South Dakota. The project was eventually abandoned, according to several sources.

- William Rhatigan, a former assistant to Colson, said that he is "sure" telegrams of support were sent by the Nixon committee to the White House after Dr. Henry A. Kissinger's Oct. 26 "peace at hand" speech declaring that the Vietnam war was virtually over.

Rhatigan, now an aide to White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, said he also understood that Colson used campaign funds to set up Vietnam veteran groups to support the President. The groups had the appearance of being volunteer organizations. Mel Stevens, a consultant to the Veterans Administration, was lent to Colson to set up a pro-Nixon veterans group that also used government money, according to White House and Veterans Administration officials.

What has been described by Nixon committee sources as an "obsession" with secrecy and manipulation extended even to the minutest details of the campaign. "Nothing was left to chance," one former White House aide observed.

As an example, several Nixon campaign officials cited White House orchestration of the Republican

National Convention last August.

"We couldn't control what the (television) networks did completely," one official said, "but we came close. When they weren't paying attention to what was going on at the speaker's platform, we'd shut off the lights in the convention hall to force the cameras to the podium."