

Nixon 'Shift' Predicted on Watergate

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Washington

President Nixon is expected to defend himself against increasing allegations on his involvement in the Watergate coverup by saying he was misled by his former principal deputies, H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, according to White House and other government sources.

Instead of broadly claiming non-involvement, the sources said, the emerging White House position will acknowledge misjudgments on the President's part and indicate they resulted from misinformation and unauthorized action by Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

This represents a major shift in the President's position, expressed in his nationally televised speech on April 30, when Mr. Nixon described Haldeman and Ehrlichman as "two of the finest public servants" he has ever known.

Informed yesterday of the expected change in position of the President, John J. Wilson, attorney for Haldeman and Ehrlichman, said: "What's he (the President) been doing for us lately?"

Wilson said he had not heard of any change in White House position and would have no comment on the information in the Washington Post story. He reasserted the innocence of his clients.

COUNTER

The change in strategy is specifically designed to counter charges by former presidential counsel John W. Dean III that the President, Haldeman and Ehrlichman

all knowingly participated in the White House coverup of the Watergate bugging and other illegal intelligence-gathering operations, the sources said.

Some of Dean's charges already have been leaked to the public through investigators and associates, and he is scheduled to begin nationally televised testimony before the Senate Watergate committee tomorrow.

One reliable government source confirmed a report in yesterday's New York

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Times that Dean is expected to testify that among other things, he was told by former White House aide Egil Krogh that the President approved the 1971 burglary into the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

SPEECH

In his May 22 statement on the domestic security programs of the White House, Mr. Nixon specifically denied advance knowledge of the Ellsberg burglary, although he authorized a White House investigation of the leaking of the Pentagon Papers.

Reflecting the President's new position, one White House source said yesterday: "If the Dean charges are too devastating, and there is no reason to think they won't be, the President plans to come forward and acknowledge overwhelming negligence on his part, but will still deny criminal knowledge."

Previously White House sources said, the President had been expected to stand by Haldeman and Ehrlichman and blame Dean for the Watergate coverup.

CONVINCE

However, charges by Dean and others against Haldeman and Ehrlichman have convinced the President that he must abandon support of his former principal deputies.

"The charges and the evidence are too much (against Haldeman and Ehrlichman)," one high-level source in the executive branch said. "They've been cut down to nothing and the President can't stand with them (any longer)."

Two White House officials have asserted in recent weeks that they are sure the President is innocent of any crimes, though the tangled web of the Watergate and Mr. Nixon's close association with many of the central figures makes it difficult to prove.

INNOCENT

J. Fred Buzhardt Jr., who came from the Defense Department in May to be special presidential counsel for Watergate matters, recently told a reporter: "Beyond the shadow of a doubt the President is innocent..."

I have strong feelings about this and we'll prove it."

Other White House officials say that the President feels he not only has to protect his own reputation but that of the office of President, and that includes avoiding joining in extensive public debate of charges and countercharges.

White House sources said that the President would not explicitly accuse Haldeman and Ehrlichman of criminal activity. Rather, as one source suggested Sunday, the President "can make a statement — it can be done in a phrase by the press secretary — to leave the clear impression that they've been abandoned."

In his April 30 speech, Mr. Nixon did just that with Dean by praising strongly the public service of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, while mentioning, almost as an aside, that "counsel to the President, John Dean, has also resigned."

White House sources made it clear at the time that Dean had, in fact, been fired.

MITCHELL

The President also similarly disassociated himself from former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, who has been extensively implicated in Senate testimony thus far. The dissociation was effectively accomplished when Mitchell visited the White House in April and was not able to see the President personally. Instead he saw Ehrlichman, a long-time foe of Mitchell in administration power struggles.

Although Haldeman and Ehrlichman were Mr. Nixon's closest aides, cutting

them off would not mean repudiating Mr. Nixon's first administration, the sources said.

"Thank God it's not Henry Kissinger," one source said, referring to the White House belief that the heart of the first Nixon administration was the foreign policy initiatives of Mr. Nixon and Kissinger.

LEGAL

The expected shift in the President's strategy also would entail preparing what White House sources described last week as an increasingly narrower "legal defense," designed solely to demonstrate that Mr. Nixon has not acted criminally in the Watergate affair.

The new defense abandons the previous White House position that the President was far removed from events leading to the Watergate bugging and subsequent coverup, according to high-level sources in the White House and elsewhere in the executive branch.

Instead, the White House is expected to demonstrate that Haldeman and Ehrlichman constantly misconstrued the President's orders and requests.

One White House source reported the President's current position as follows: "It's a last-ditch effort, but one he is entitled to as a citizen. There is a presumption of innocence provided by the system. If there is a case against him, it is going to have to be proved."

STATEMENTS

White House sources said that the President is going to make few, if any, more statements on Watergate and predicted that he would react publicly only to what one high-level source called a "extraordinary situation."

Such a situation is virtually assured of developing this week as Dean, the 34-year-old former presidential counsel, appears before the Senate's Watergate investigating committee to give at least several days of nationally televised testimony that is expected to touch on the President.

The sources described Mr. Nixon as alternately angry, depressed and feeling increasingly isolated and un-

der siege from investigators. They reported that the President is still shaken by the departure of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, which has left him distrustful of others.

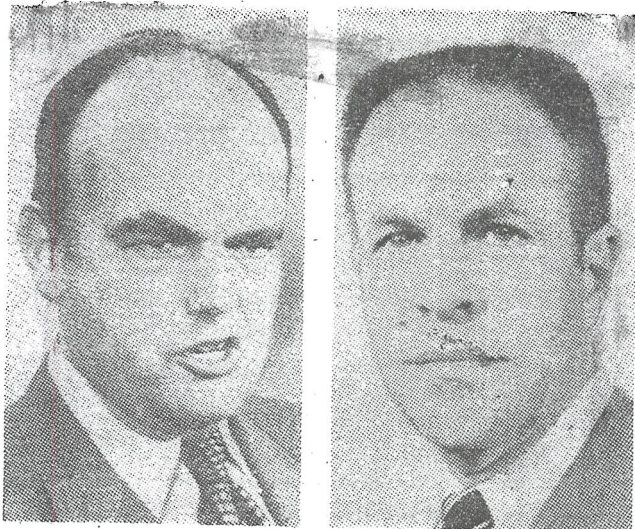
EVIDENCE

Even among those who are advising him on Watergate, the sources reported, Mr. Nixon has refused to fully discuss his own role in the case.

The sources described the President as extremely upset about Attorney General Elliott P. Richardson's recent comments that the evidence is "inclusive" as to whether the President knew in advance about a 1971 burglary into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Another, and more immediate, problem for the White House is that John Dean is expected to testify this week that all actions he took in the Watergate coverup beginning last summer — actions detailed by Magruder in his testimony last week — were explicitly ordered by either Haldeman or Ehrlichman.

Justice Department and Senate sources also have said that Dean will testify that he had about 35 conversations this year with the President about the coverup, discussions Dean has told investigators occurred before the President announced that he knew of and was investigating a coverup.



JOHN EHRLICHMAN

H. R. HALDEMAN

The new position would let the blame fall on them