

Johnson Reportedly Told F.B.I. to Check on Agnew

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WASHINGTON, June 26—President Johnson ordered the Federal Bureau of Investigation to investigate Spiro T. Agnew shortly after he was elected Vice President in

November, 1968, reliable Government sources said today.

The sources said that Mr. Johnson made the request—calling for a check of Mr. Agnew's long-distance telephone calls—after receiving a wiretap report that purported to link the Vice President-elect with what the White House considered to be South Vietnamese sabotage of negotiations in Paris in 1968.

Mr. Agnew's office said the Vice President would have no comment on the F.B.I. inquiry, which did not confirm the White House suspicions. A full report on the 1968 incident, it was learned, has been provided to the Senate Watergate committee.

On Nov. 1, 1968, four days before the Presidential election, President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam reversed his public stand and announced that he would not participate in the Paris talks.

Ordered Embassy Wiretap

Sources close to President Johnson confirmed today that he ordered a national security wiretap on the South Vietnamese Embassy in Washington after—as one former high-ranking Democrat said—"it became clear that this new group [the Republicans] were behind the breakdown in the peace talks" that became critical in the waning weeks of the 1968 election.

Richard M. Nixon won the election by fewer than 500,000 votes from Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota.

The first public mention of any unusual surveillance in con-

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nection with the 1968 Presidential campaign arose during yesterday's testimony by John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel, before the Senate Watergate committee.

Mr. Dean described a meeting on March 9, 1973, with President Nixon at which the President "told me that he was convinced that he had been wiretapped in 1968." Mr. Nixon also urged him to find out what had happened, Mr. Dean said.

In his testimony today, Mr. Dean said he received a list early this year of possible political abuses by the F.B.I. during previous Administrations from William C. Sullivan, a former F.B.I. official, who reportedly retired last week from a Justice Department post. Mr. Dean said the list had been classified by Mr. Sullivan and offered to turn it over to the Senate committee.

A former F.B.I. official said today that the order to investigate Mr. Agnew was personally given by President Johnson to J. Edgar Hoover, then the F.B.I. director, on Nov. 6, the day after the election.

The official said that the suspected link to Mr. Agnew had been supplied by Mrs. Anna Chan Chennault, widow of Lieut. Gen. Claire Lee Chennault, and an outspoken opponent of the pending Paris talks.

Mrs. Chennault was overheard on Nov. 2, the official said, reassuring a high South Vietnamese Embassy official that his Government's interests lay in not accepting any peace terms before the election. Asked by the South Vietnamese whether Mr. Nixon knew what she was doing, Mrs. Chennault replied, according to the source, "No, but our friend in New Mexico does."

On Nov. 2, Mr. Agnew was campaigning in Albuquerque, N.M.

President Johnson specifically asked the F.B.I., a source in the Government said, to investigate the following: "Did Agnew contact Anna Chennault on Nov. 2 in Albuquerque?"

Agents discreetly checked out five long-distance telephone calls placed that day by Mr. Agnew, the source said, none of which went to Mrs. Chennault. Three of his calls were made from his campaign plane and two calls from a pay phone at the Albuquerque airport, an F.B.I. report subsequently noted.

The report, sent on Nov. 13 to President Johnson, also noted that Mr. Agnew had made no long-distance phone calls from his hotel rooms, the source said.

Despite that information, a former close associate of President Johnson recalled today, the President remained convinced that "someone in the other group" had been working behind the scenes to persuade the South Vietnamese to delay the Paris talks.

An Angry Call

Theodore H. White, in "The Making of the President 1968," wrote that the President made an angry telephone call to Mr. Nixon shortly before the election to complain. The Johnson associate confirmed Mr. White's account, and added that the President felt that the Republicans had "run the peace talks off the rails."

Mrs. Chennault had become a target of Johnson Administration suspicion earlier that fall, sources said, and was placed under surveillance by the F.B.I. At one point, agents learned that she had been given a code name—"Little Flower"—by the South Vietnamese Embassy in an attempt to disguise her activities on their behalf, sources said.

Mrs. Chennault, now an official of her late husband's airline, the Flying Tigers Line, was unavailable for comment. An aide reported that she had left early today on a business trip to Saigon.

In July, 1969, when Mr. White's account of her role in the 1968 campaign was published, she called it an "insult" to her integrity and the integrity of the South Vietnamese.

"Some day when the right time comes," she said, "all the facts will be made known."

Mr. White also wrote that the role of Mrs. Chennault and the apparent link to the Republicans almost became a ma-

ajor campaign issue in the few days before the election. But according to Mr. White, Vice President Humphrey, despite the urging of his staff, refused publicly to accuse the Republicans of interfering with the Paris talks in the belief that Mr. Nixon did not know of or authorize such activity.

Mr. Humphrey, who won back his Senate seat in 1970, confirmed that he had restrained his staff.

"I simply couldn't believe that Mr. Nixon or anybody could possibly play any politics that would jeopardize the peace talks when the country was in such agony over the war," Mr. Humphrey said.