

Reports of Tapes In '68 Election



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THE HULLABALOO over the White House tapes has raised reports of another secret tape, which could settle a great historical controversy.

Excellent sources tell us that Anna Chennault, the Chinese widow of World War II hero General Claire Chennault, was picked up on tape as she allegedly lobbied with the South Vietnamese Ambassador to sabotage a peace conference on the eve of the 1968 presidential election.

This election-eve peace effort might have won the close election for Hubert Humphrey. Instead, Saigon issued a statement opposing the peace conference and refusing to participate. This made the abortive peace effort look like a last-minute political trick to save Humphrey from defeat. Humphrey now believes the Saigon statement cost him the election.

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WAS Madame Chennault responsible for disrupting the peace effort? The facts are in dispute, this much is acknowledged by all sources. Richard Nixon's campaign manager, John Mitchell, had asked Madame Chennault to keep the campaign informed on developments in Southeast Asia.

This quest took her to the South Vietnamese Embassy, where she spoke to then-Ambassador Bui Diem. Our sources claim the Embassy was bugged and her conversations were secretly taped. It is known that Ambassador Diem complained to the State Department that his Embassy was wiretapped.

The dispute is over what was said. Madame Chennault insisted to us that she

merely sought information but said nothing about boycotting the peace effort. Our sources swear she was recorded as warning the Ambassador that Humphrey would immediately pull U.S. forces out of Vietnam if he should be elected, that the Communists would take over the country and that government officials would be executed.

Her alleged statement to the Ambassador, given as a representative of Mr. Nixon, was communicated to Saigon. When Lyndon Johnson learned of the taped conversation, say our sources, he was furious. His anger became more explosive when a Nixon campaign aide, Robert Finch, accused President Johnson of announcing a peace conference before he had "gotten all his ducks in a row."

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THE ENRAGED LBJ, believing the Nixon camp had upset the ducks in Saigon, put through a phone call to Mr. Nixon. Our sources say that Mr. Johnson declared he was still President, accused Mr. Nixon of instructing Madame Chennault to sabotage the peace conference and threatened to expose the whole affair on nationwide television. Mr. Johnson petulantly referred to Finch as "this guy fink."

Before Mr. Johnson hung up, Mr. Nixon was able to mollify him. But the damage had already been done. The peace-disrupting statement from Saigon, issued the weekend before the election, was never repudiated. And Mr. Nixon defeated Humphrey by a close one per cent of the vote.