

## A Shrinking Circle

# The Aides Nixon Turns To

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### Washington

A few days ago, former General Alexander M. Haig Jr., his eyes red from lack of sleep and his face drawn with fatigue, observed that he had never known military combat to be as arduous as being President Nixon's right hand man in recent weeks.

"It is not only the Watergate matters," he told a visitor to his office in a conversation that was interrupted four times by presidential summons. "The Middle East crisis has taken even more of my time."

As the President's troubles have worsened, Mr. Nixon's tendency to rely for advice and help on a small circle of men seems to have increased, and a major part of the burden has fallen to the man who has been the President's chief of staff since May 4.

### THREE

Day after day, according to White House announcements, Mr. Nixon spends his time chiefly with Haig, Ronald L. Ziegler, his press secretary, and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger.

The narrowness of Mr. Nixon's day-to-day contacts has become a matter of growing concern to a number of Republican leaders in Congress and to some White House aides who feel they have little influence as the President's public support has declined and demands for his resignation have increased.

There has been a current of unrest among some White House staff members, who say they fear that in many ways Mr. Nixon is right back where he was in April before the departures of H.R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, who were widely accused of isolating the President.

Haig has taken a different tack, urging a more open administration and decentralization of authority. But Mr. Nixon, they say privately, has persisted in his habit of restricting his contacts.

An example of how this



ALEXANDER HAIG  
Chief of the staff

has damaged the President: according to testimony in U.S. District Court, Mr. Nixon knew more than a month ago that two of the nine Watergate tapes sought by the court could not be found, but he apparently did not inform his chief counsel who was defending his position in court.

### EXAMPLE

Professor Charles Alan Wright, in telling a news conference on October 23 why Mr. Nixon had decided to turn over the tapes, made a statement that turned out to be untrue. Following is a

portion of the exchange:

Q. What you have said here about the tapes supporting the President is based upon what the President told you, and not upon you hearing the tapes.

A. Exactly so. I have the old-fashioned American habit of believing Presidents of the United States.

Q. Will you produce the documents called for in the subpoena?

A. Everything called for in the subpoena will be produced.

One week later, other White House lawyers went into court and said two tapes called for in the subpoena would not be produced because they never existed.

Stephen B. Bull, a special assistant to the President, testified last Friday that Mr. Nixon told him on September 29 that the two recorded conversations were missing.

### CHANGES

Meantime, as the controversy over the tapes and other issues have been the center of attention, a number of changes have taken place in the White House staff.

A number of high officials who became disillusioned with their jobs and planned to leave were persuaded by colleagues to stay on grounds of loyalty. To leave at this time, they were told, would make it appear that the administration was cav-

ing in.

Some middle-level officials are leaving, however. One young man, who makes \$36,000 a year and who joined the White House staff in 1971, has mailed out a resume in search of a new job.

### MORALE

"Morale at the White House plummeted," he said, after Mr. Nixon fired Archibald Cox as special Watergate prosecutor and Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson resigned. He said a number of his colleagues decided to leave.

He no longer believes in the President, he said, and has decided the "moral stature" of the White House is gone. He thinks the President is suffering from strain.

In terms of the new initiatives on policy matters, the young man said the presidency is "at a standstill." He added, however, that the federal bureaucracy, which is not dependent on presidential inspiration, continues to function without much change.