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The Secrecy Syndrome

In itself, the story of the Pentagon spying on Henry Kissinger is familiar bureaucratic politics. But the side effects of the story have high import.

They show the Nixon administration, once again, using the national security label as a cover-up device in the Watergate affair. They indicate that diehard right-wingers, not wobbly liberals, are the main source of national security leaks. They imply that Dr. Kissinger lied to a congressional committee.

At the root of the whole story is the terrific secrecy with which the President and Dr. Kissinger elected to conduct foreign policy. Those excluded from knowledge were not merely staffers down the line. The civilian heads of the Defense and State Departments were kept in the dark, as were the uniformed military leaders.

But a basic fact of bureaucratic life is that officials who need information and are used to getting it will find ways to gain access if they are suddenly included out. During the Johnson administration, for example, the President repeatedly tried to cut officials he deemed unfriendly to his Vietnam policy off the distribution list for high-priority cables. Almost invariably these officials found ways of getting the information they needed to do their jobs.

Precisely that seems to have happened to President Nixon and Dr.

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Kissinger. The uniformed military in the Pentagon, cut off from information they needed, found a way of getting it through lower-ranking military men on duty in the White House.

The story would have ended there except for two things. Some of the information bootlegged to the Pentagon found its way into the press, notably the column of my colleague, Jack Anderson. Secondly, the Pentagon information system was uncovered by the White House plumbers, the special investigating unit set up by the President which eventually played such a nefarious role in the Watergate affair.

The plumbers reported their discovery to President Nixon, apparently through General Alexander Haig, who was then serving as Dr. Kissinger's deputy. When the Watergate investigation began, the White House trotted out the incident, replete with hints of a Pentagon spy-ring as a "national security" reason for not continuing the investigation. That line was peddled to both the Senate Watergate committee, and the Special Prosecutor, then Archibald Cox.

At that point, investigative reporters



from a number of newspapers who were already looking into the White House claims about national security and Watergate began sniffing around the Pentagon spy story. The first to hit paydirt was a team headed by Jim Squires of the Chicago Tribune.

After checking with General Haig (now the White House Chief of Staff who told The Trib: "This story isn't going to do the country any good . . . but I don't think it will hurt the President" and the White House counsel, J. Fred Buzhardt, who did not discourage publication, The Trib broke the story. But what, in fact, does the story show?

First, that at least one of the so-called national security reasons for not pursuing the Watergate investigation is totally empty. The Pentagon spying operation involves no secrets critical to our survival as a country. It did not impress the Watergate prosecutors at all. Indeed, a big question is why the White House didn't reveal the details a long time ago.

Which leads to the second lesson of the story. The source of the press leaks which came as a result of the Pentagon spying were not the liberal intellectuals so suspect in the eyes of President Nixon. The purveyors of secret stuff, in this case as in a great many others, were the uninformed military. But their offense was covered up, presumably because the White House wanted to maintain good relations with their right-wing allies in the Congress and the country.

Finally, there is the question of Dr. Kissinger. One leader of the "plumbers group" which uncovered the Pentagon spy operation was David Young, a former member of Dr. Kissinger's staff at the National Security Council. In his confirmation hearings as Secretary of State designate, Dr. Kissinger testified that "I knew nothing about" Young's role with the plumbers.

But now a story put out with White House blessing indicates that Young was reporting back on at least some of his activities as a plumber to Kis-

singer's deputy, General Haig. The implication is that Kissinger indeed did know of the plumbers' operations. So the Secretary of State owes it to everybody to clear up this matter in public testimony at the earliest opportunity.

For after all, how does one, in General Haig's revealing phrase, hurt the country but help the President? Well, one way is to minimize Mr. Nixon's guilt by spreading the complicity to more respected figures.

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