

Kissinger Defends Credibility on Taps

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Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger sought once again yesterday to defend his public credibility in the controversy over his role in the 1969 to 1971 national security wiretapping episode.

He told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that President Nixon was under a "misapprehension" if he said that Kissinger ordered the wiretapping of White House subordinates and newsmen.

The secretary had been asked by Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) about unpublished White House transcripts quoting the President as saying that Kissinger asked that the taps be instituted in 1969.

If Mr. Nixon's statement on Feb. 28, 1973, implicated Kissinger in the ordering of the wiretaps, Kissinger said, then it must have been based on a "misapprehension on the part of the President."

was reported in an unexpurgated version of the transcripts circulated to members of the House Judiciary Committee.

President Nixon is reported to have told John W. Dean III, then his White House counsel, in a discussion of Kissinger and the wiretaps that "Henry (unintelligible) . . . At least I know not because I know that (sic) I know that he asked that it be done. And I assumed that it was. . ."

Kissinger yesterday stood by previous sworn statements to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he did not initiate the requests for wiretaps.

"My role," he said, "was in supplying names as part of a program instituted by the President, the Attorney General and the director of the FBI to protect the national security."

Muskie introduced the wiretapping issue on an apologetic note in an otherwise convivial

three-hour exchange that centered on foreign aid. "It is a subject that I don't find pleasant," said Muskie in raising the matter.

The 1969 to 1971 wiretapping has cast something of a pall over what had promised to be a triumphal homecoming for Kissinger from his diplomatic successes in the Middle East.

Fundamentally at issue in the controversy is whether Kissinger misrepresented his role in various sworn accounts of the episode. His position has been that he forwarded the names of subordinates who might be exposed to sensitive material which figured in a series of news leaks early in the Nixon administration.

But he maintains that he did not request the wiretaps placed on some of those he named. The White House yesterday lent its endorsement to Kis-

linger's version of these events. White House spokesman Gerald L. Warren said, "That is an accurate description of the secretary's role."

Members of the House Judiciary Committee said Thursday that FBI evidence presented to them reveals that both Kissinger and his then-deputy, Alexander M. Haig Jr., specifically requested wiretap surveillance against individuals.

Kissinger, in a news conference Thursday, said that former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and former FBI acting Director William D. Ruckelshaus "supported" his testimony, delivered at his confirmation hearings in September, 1973.

Richardson told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at a closed session on Sept. 10 that "FBI records indicate that there were requests for wiretaps of identified individuals, in one case by Dr. Kis-

singer and in two instances, on his behalf by then-Colonel Haig."

The former Attorney General also observed, however, that the FBI reports had to be weighed with "Dr. Kissinger's own recollection of what occurred, as to which, of course, he is a better witness than we are. . ."

Whatever Kissinger's recollections may have been, the FBI records appear to conflict directly with Kissinger's assertions that he asked for no wiretaps.

At his Thursday press conference, under a barrage of questions on the wiretapping episode, Kissinger modified his position to say he made no "direct" recommendation for wiretaps of subordinates and newsmen.

Ruckelshaus, in a deposition in the suit against Kissinger by one of the wiretap targets, former National Security Council staffer Morton Halperin, said that the Halperin tap

was requested by Haig on behalf of Kissinger.

It was also learned yesterday from Senate sources familiar with the FBI investigation that Haig, in May, 1971, requested that the taps be removed. He was still operating as Kissinger's deputy Haig, according to these sources, made the request to former FBI White House liaison man William Sullivan.

This is the first suggestion that Kissinger's office played a role in turning off as well as initiating the wiretaps of 13 government officials and four newsmen.

At his press conference Kissinger angrily asserted, in response to a question, that he has not retained an attorney to defend him in any possible perjury action growing out of the discrepancies in the various accounts of his role in the wiretaps. "I have not retained counsel," he flared, "and I am not conducting my office as if it were a conspiracy."