

# Exploiting 'National Security'

Before the Kissinger controversy dwindles into a semantic squabble about whether he "initiated," "authorized" or simply "acquiesced" in the wiretapping of 13 of his National Security Council staff members and four of their supposed journalistic confederates, it is worth trying to define the real issue in the dispute.

It is not a question of Dr. Kissinger's personal "honor" or even whether his signal services to the country and the world are to be sacrificed to those "unnamed sources" he says are engaged in "defamation of character."

The essential question is what standard of conduct—and honesty—the citizens of a democratic society can expect from officials exercising great responsibility in an era of extraordinary domestic and international pressures.

To capture the context of that essential question, it is necessary to recall what caused the great concern about "leaks" which led to the acknowledged wiretapping of 17 government officials and journalists.

The story that has been pinpointed as triggering Dr. Kissinger's anger was a May 9, 1969, article in the New York Times by William Beecher, reporting that American B-52 bombers had begun raiding Vietcong and North Vietnamese camps and supply dumps inside Cambodia without protest from the Cambodian government.

It was on the day that article appeared that the late FBI director J. Edgar Hoover wrote that Dr. Kissinger had complained of "an extraordinarily damaging" news leak and urged him to use "whatever resources I need to find out who did this."

Neither then nor later did the administration dispute the accuracy of the article.

What made Beecher's article "extraordinarily damaging" was that it revealed that American military operations were being conducted in a supposedly neutral country, with the acquiescence of its supposedly neutral government, but without the knowledge or sanction of the American people or Congress.

Not until four years later, in July of 1973, did the Nixon administration admit—after an Air Force officer had revealed the secret to Congress—that the bombing had started in 1969 and the invasion was required because the military results were "not satisfactory."

Because of that cover-up, of which the wiretaps were a part, Mr. Nixon was able, on April 30, 1970, to justify sending American ground troops into Cambodia.

The Cambodian bombing cover-up was of a piece with the previous decep-

tions of the American people and Congress by the Johnson administration—starting with the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

By 1969, the expensive lesson should have been learned that a democracy like ours will not support a foreign policy whose origins are cloaked in secrecy and whose costs—in lives and dollars—are concealed from the people who must pay them.

But Dr. Kissinger, by his own statements, has not learned that lesson. When Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk said he would allow the bombing if it could be kept secret, no one in the American government apparently told him ours was not a country that could conduct 3,620 heavy bomber raids on a country with which we were officially at peace.

Instead they joined a conspiracy of silence aimed at keeping the American people in ignorance—and wiretapped those who tried to get out the truth. Dr. Kissinger sees nothing wrong in this.

A year ago, when the falsification of reports to Congress was revealed, he said that neither he nor the President "ordered nor was . . . aware of" the deception.

Even now, Dr. Kissinger is blind to the conflict between this behavior and democracy. "I recognize that national security has been abused in recent years," he said in his Salzburg news conference, "but because there have been abuses does not mean that there was not justified concern by honorable people. It did not occur to me in expressing my concern that this might lead to the burglary of a doctor's office."

It is hard to know what to make of such a naive remark from such a sophisticated person. But it is obvious that a government that is so convinced of the superiority of its own wisdom, and so distrustful of its own people that it will not make its policy public, will always find ways to rationalize the most extreme measures to protect what it regards as "secrets."

If a man of Dr. Kissinger's stature and reputation is allowed to justify such tactics, on the grounds that his service to the nation sanctions any measures he chooses to defend, then we may be sure that worse men—of lesser scruple—will exploit his precedent in years to come.

He has posed a vital issue: Will we allow "the best and the brightest" officials to use police state tactics in order to deny the American people the truth about the policies being conducted in their name?

Just because Dr. Kissinger is who he is, it is vital that the Congress and the country tell him the answer is "No."