

Kissinger Details Role In Wiretaps

By Marilyn Berger
Washington Post Staff Writer

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee yesterday that President Nixon first discussed wiretapping with him as a method to deal with leaks of sensitive material at a meeting in the White House around April 25, 1969.

Kissinger had told the committee during his confirmation hearings last September that the meeting had taken place on May 9, the date a major story appeared on the secret bombing of Cambodia. According to senators present at yesterday's closed-door meeting, Kissinger had searched his memory in order to be able to provide additional facts and said that while he was not absolutely sure of the date, yesterday's closed-door meeting, points to the likelihood that that White House meeting took place on April 25.

Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) said the April 25 date would be more consistent with Kissinger's description of his role in the wiretapping program. According to the testimony given yesterday, the use of wiretapping was generally agreed upon in April. Thus when the major leak appeared in a story by William Beecher in the New York Times of May 9 Kissinger could call J. Edgar Hoover, then director of the FBI, to ask, as Hoover wrote in a memorandum of that date, "Whether I could make a major effort to find out where that came from." Three days later a wiretap was placed on the telephone of Morton Halperin, then a member of Kissinger's National Security Council staff.

Kissinger, according to senators present, told the committee that he attended only part of the meeting which he recollects must have been on April 25. When he was called in the President was already meeting with Hoover and Attorney General John N. Mitchell. The meeting lasted 45 minutes, according to reports of the Kissinger testimony, and then continued later without Kissinger at Camp David, over dinner.

Kissinger did not go into detail with the committee about the leaks that led up to the April 25 meeting, although members present said he was prepared to do so. But in his earlier testimony at the time of his confirmation Kissinger referred to the leak of the substance of a National Security Council meeting on the Middle East and another about the shooting down of the EC-121 reconnaissance plane off the shores of North Korea. At that time Mr. Nixon had been in office only three months.

As Kissinger left yesterday's hearing following more than three hours of testimony he made no statement to the press. Asked whether he knew at the time that his name had appeared on the FBI documentation requesting the wiretaps Kissinger said he had not been aware of it.

Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) said following the meeting that Kissinger's credibility "remains unimpaired." He added: "Any inconsistency in the idea of initiating and participating (in the taps) has been resolved."

Muskie said of Kissinger's testimony: "I think it hangs together remarkably well."

Kissinger had requested that the committee reopen hearings when FBI reports were leaked from the House Judiciary Committee in June which named the secretary as the initiator of the wiretaps. He had said during his September confirmation hearings that his role had been limited to supplying names of persons with access to sensitive classified information for a program already approved.

In an emotional press conference in Salzburg, Austria on June 11 Kissinger threatened to resign unless questions raised about his credibility were cleared up.

A number of senators on the committee said a meticulous inquiry was under way into Kissinger's role. The questions asked were characterized as "tough" and included those raised in a column that appeared today in the New York Times as to whether the taps were part of a program of domestic political spying or really one to root out national security leaks.