

A Report New

Tapes Hurt Nixon

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Unreleased White House tape recordings contain information potentially damaging to President Nixon, according to informed White House sources, and have compounded the problems of his defense against impeachment and removal from office.

If Mr. Nixon is to save his presidency, the sources said, he must devise a new strategy that takes into account the contents and tone of the

64 recorded conversations now being turned over to U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica, and the conclusions that will be drawn from them.

According to two of the sources, the President's personal review of the tapes, which could become public soon, has not encouraged him.

As a result, they said, the President is now being

Back Page Col. 2

From Page 1

urged by key aides to adopt a new defense posture in which he would acknowledge some degree of participation in the Watergate coverup while stressing that he had no intention of breaking the law.

At least four of the recorded conversations strengthen the case against the President already developed by the House Judiciary Committee, according to one high-level White House source.

"All hell will break loose when they come out," the source said, but he refused to discuss the substance of information contained on the tapes.

In addition, other White House sources said last week that the tapes contain more gaps and unexplained silences, some of which occur in the midst of critical conversations.

Despite what one source described as the President's "depressing" review of the tapes in the past week, White House aides said this weekend that they expect Mr. Nixon to launch a new public defense and that his strategy will become known this week.

"He'll come out fighting," one source predicted, adding that key members of the White House staff have been ordered to make a detailed review of all the evidence against the President and develop a rebuttal.

White House aides describe such an upcoming initiative by the President in terms of a last-ditch effort to reduce the margin of impeachment in the House (now conceded as a certainty by presidential assistants) and to bolster Mr. Nixon's deteriorating support in the Senate—particularly among key Republicans and Southern Democrats.

The 64 undisclosed conversations are considered crucial in this effort because of the virtual certainty that they will be subpoenaed by the Senate as evidence in any trial of the President. And, both publicly and privately, influential senators have warned the White House that failure by the President to surrender the tapes to the Senate would almost automatically assure his conviction and removal from office.

According to several White House sources, consideration is now being given to imminently releasing either edited transcripts or some of the information on the new tapes to the dwindling number of Republican defenders of the President in Congress.

The 64 taped conversations involve the post-Watergate period between June 20, 1972—three days after the Watergate break-in

—and June 4, 1973. All but one of the conversations involve discussions in Mr. Nixon's office or on the telephone with Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Dean or former special presidential counsel Charles W. Colson. The other conversation is a Nov. 15, 1972, meeting among several presidential aides without the President.

According to four different White House sources, any new strategy adopted by the President is likely to differ markedly in tone and substance from the narrow anti-impeachment defense conducted by Mr. Nixon's chief counsel, James D. St. Clair.

Two well-placed sources in the White House said yesterday that the President is going to have to acknowledge wrongdoing, then temper such retrospective judgment with a candid explanation of his motives and objectives.