

How Haig and Kissinger ran Watergate against the U.S.

by Kathleen Klenetsky

When Secretary of State Alexander Haig announced to the nation that "I'm in control here" mere hours after President Reagan had been wounded by a would-be assassin last March, most Americans were appalled. But to those who had carefully studied the pattern of American political developments particularly over the last decade, Haig's power grab took on overtones beyond the ex-general's overweening ambition and total disregard for the U.S. Constitution. To them, Haig's performance smacked of an attempt to replay the cold coup d'état which he and his patron, avowed British agent Henry Kissinger, had helped carry out against the presidency of Richard Nixon.

Far from being an "impartial campaign" to rid the U.S. government of corruption and the abuse of power, Watergate was a London-instigated plot to destroy America's constitutional institutions. No matter what Nixon's flaws may have been, he did nothing that could possibly be construed as an impeachable offense; it was Watergate itself which represented the real offense against the Constitution. It contravened all accepted constitutional procedures; it discredited the office of the Presidency, not simply Mr. Nixon personally; it weakened the morale of the entire nation; and it opened the door for Kissinger and a host of fellow British operatives and fellow travelers to consolidate their grip over the essential policy-making institutions of the United States.

The treachery of Haig and Kissinger

Although it was ultimately London which directed the Watergate proceedings from the top, it would have been impossible without the traitorous complicity of Haig, Kissinger, and their co-conspirators at the *Washington Post* and on Capitol Hill—especially among Democrats allied with the Kennedy family and such anglophilic conservatives as then Sen. James Buckley.

Working from a sophisticated psychological profile that stressed Nixon's paranoia both about the Eastern Establishment and communist infiltration of the United States (the latter exemplified by Nixon's complete misreading in the 1950s of Alger Hiss, whom he labeled a communist, when Hiss was actually working for the British), Haig and Kissinger manipulated Nixon into extending the Vietnam War—over the opposition of then-Defense Secretary Melvin Laird. This provided the impetus for an expanded anti-war movement, the development in the Nixon administration of a liberal anti-war "counter-government" (composed primarily of Kissinger protégés like National Security Council staffer Morton Halperin), and a series of major "leaks" to the press, including most importantly the Pentagon Papers. In turn, conditions were created under which Kissinger, with Haig in tow, could persuade Nixon that "national security" required countermeasures, including the wiretapping, break-ins, and other offenses for which Nixon was hounded from office.

The wiretaps

The Watergate scenario took off in earnest in May 1969, when Kissinger instigated a steady flow of intelligence leaks to his friends at the *New York Times*. The purpose was to convince Nixon that a nest of subversives intent on sabotaging his foreign-policy initiatives was operating from the White House itself. As soon as the first leak—an exposé of the U.S. covert bombings in Cambodia that Nixon had ordered at Kissinger's urging—appeared in the May 9 *New York Times*, Kissinger stormed into Nixon's office, accused Laird of the leak, and ranted that U.S. diplomacy was at stake.

Later that day, Kissinger got on the phone to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, demanding that taps be placed on the phones of suspect administration officials.

The individuals pinpointed by Kissinger for taps fell

into two categories. The first: trusted Kissinger aides, some of whom, like Morton Halperin, were being laundered into left-wing networks like the Institute for Policy Studies, to give a modicum of credibility to the Kissinger charge of a "counter-government."

The second category included aides to Laird and Secretary of State William Rogers, who were trying to stabilize the Mideast and Vietnam. The point of the latter category of taps was to insure that Kissinger knew in advance every policy-making initiative prepared by State and Defense, so that he could walk into NSC meetings with point-by-point refutations of every constructive proposal offered by Laird and Rogers.

Although Kissinger has always maintained that he was simply a passive participant in the wiretappings, the opposite is true. In addition to his four calls to Hoover May 9, Kissinger (either personally or through his top NSC assistant, Alexander Haig) requested a wide range of taps on people ranging from Rogers's closest aide Richard F. Pederson through Morton Halperin. Some of the taps were so patently absurd that by themselves they tend to blow Kissinger's cover. The cases of Morton Halperin and another NSC staffer, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, are exemplary: both men were long-time colleagues of Kissinger; Sonnenfeldt and Kissinger worked together as early as 1946, while Kissinger had hired Halperin to plan the entire restructuring of the NSC apparatus after Nixon's election in 1968. Indeed, Halperin was later forced to admit that Kissinger had warned him in advance that the FBI was placing a tap on his phone. So much for Kissinger's vaunted concern for "national security."

The 'plumbers' and Ellsberg

One of the most important aspects of the Watergate scheme was the Daniel Ellsberg affair. Without the Ellsberg-Pentagon Papers fiasco, there would have been no "plumbers' unit," and no handle for bringing down Nixon.

It is therefore notable that the operative chosen for this assignment had been trained at Cambridge, England (a well-known recruiting ground for British intelligence); then became a protégé and close friend of Kissinger's at Harvard. The two remained so intimate that even *after* Ellsberg had transformed himself from a nuclear superhawk into an anti-war liberal and was preparing the Pentagon Papers for publication while dashing off letters to the *Times* and *Washington Post* denouncing the Vietnam War, the two continued to meet regularly. There is even reason to suspect that Kissinger—who had prepared the outline for the Pentagon Papers project when it was commissioned in 1967—might have given Ellsberg access to some of this secret material that found its way into Ellsberg's exposé, which was published by the *Times* in June 1971.

Kissinger not only supplied the motivation for the plumbers' unit's creation, he also supplied its director. Two weeks after the Pentagon Papers broke, Kissinger transferred his appointments secretary, a young Cornell University graduate and former Nelson Rockefeller aide named David Young, to the White House basement to oversee the day-to-day deployment of the plumbers' staff. As chief liaison to the unit, Kissinger assigned Alexander Haig.

(Although Kissinger would later deny any knowledge of Young's White House activities, he was forced to admit in sworn testimony before the Senate that Young was kept on the NSC payroll a full two years after he had transferred from that unit to the plumbers. And new evidence obtained by former *New York Times* reporter Seymour Hersh and published in the May issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, shows that Haig was directly receiving progress reports on the plumbers' activities from Young, while Kissinger was known to be concerned that Young might reveal Kissinger's hand in the plumbers' unit and related operations.)

The immediate task assigned to the plumbers was to "plug the leaks" which Kissinger claimed were jeopardizing U.S. secret diplomacy with the Soviets. This inevitably led to the bungled break-in of Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office. Meanwhile, the plumbers were busy making plans to bungle another break-in—Democratic Party headquarters at the Watergate Hotel itself—and set the stage for the public phase of the Nixon Watergating.

Kissinger and Haig seize power

It was the break-ins, devised and carried out by Kissinger's plumbers, that inaugurated the final phase of Watergate.

In April 1973, Nixon aides Haldeman and Ehrlichman, along with Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, were forced to resign after testimony at the Ellsberg trial implicated them in the burglary of Ellsberg's psychiatrist. On April 30, Nixon surrendered the Attorney General's office to Elliot Richardson, a Boston Brahmin with close ties to the George Bush-James Baker wing of the Republican Party and a leading member of the Club of Rome. With the office came the license to appoint a special Watergate prosecutor. Richardson promptly named long-time Kennedy ally Archibald Cox to the post. Four days later, Haig replaced Haldeman, and was soon officially named White House Chief of Staff.

On May 17, the special Senate panel headed by Sam Ervin opened its hearings into Watergate, and Cox was sworn in.

From this point on, Nixon operated in a "controlled environment," increasingly isolated from outside advice and more and more dependent upon the "options"

offered by Kissinger and Haig, who by now were essentially running the government. The two began to place their own people (or, more properly, fellow Anglophiles) in key positions of influence. James Schlesinger (a protégé of both Kissinger and Daniel Ellsberg) took over Defense after Laird was forced out. Kissinger himself finally wrenched the State Department away from Bill Rogers, and was sworn in as Secretary of State on Sept. 19. Three weeks later, war broke out in the Middle East.

On Oct. 10, Vice-President Agnew was forced to resign as a result of a "get-Agnew" investigation undertaken by Richardson's Justice Department. The stage was set for Nixon's impeachment or overthrow.

From Oct. 22 to 25, Kissinger and James Schlesinger, all alone in the White House Situation Room, held a rump NSC meeting and declared a worldwide nuclear-war alert. Nixon was not involved in the decision. From here on, Kissinger acted as though he were the President of the United States and Commander in Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces.

As Chief of Staff, Haig took over the organization of Nixon's legal defense, widely conceded to be one of the most incompetent mounted. No staff was ever organized: the legal arguments were an unmitigated disaster; and Nixon's lawyers were continually handing over material to the prosecution that could only damage the President's case. As early as November 1973, Nixon's attorney, Fred Buzhardt, a Pentagon lawyer whom Haig had known since West Point, called on the President to resign—even though Gerald Ford had not even been confirmed as Vice President.

By July 1974, the Watergate schemers were moving in for the kill. But they wanted Nixon to resign rather than go through with the impeachment proceedings, for fear that the latter could backfire in the President's favor. This wasn't so easy to accomplish. As pressure began to build on Nixon to resign, he responded by insisting that to do so would be unconstitutional. When Haig went to Nixon at the end of July and told him point-blank that he should resign, Nixon replied that he would "let the constitutional process run its course."

Realizing that they needed a more subtle tack, Kissinger and Haig overnight created the myth of the "smoking gun" tape in an effort to convince Nixon he had no choice but resignation. Haig argued that this tape proved Nixon's guilt and would make his case before the Senate untenable. Nixon brushed off Haig and his lawyers, telling them "It's utter nonsense to make such a big deal as this."

On Aug. 5, Nixon totally shocked Haig and Kissinger by convening a cabinet meeting to announce that he was determined to see it through: "My view," he said, "is that I should not take the step that changes the Constitution and sets the precedent for the future. . . . I

have not found an impeachable offense and therefore resignation is not an acceptable course." He then stated he would hold an "economic summit" to tackle the growing problem of inflation. Republican National Committee head George Bush implored Nixon to hold off on the summit. Nixon angrily snapped back, "No, this is too important a problem."

After the meeting broke up, Kissinger spent two hours trying to make Nixon change his mind and resign, arguing that the Soviets would use the impeachment proceedings as an occasion to launch foreign-policy adventures. Nixon refused to accept Kissinger's advice.

Later that evening, Kissinger and Schlesinger completely usurped presidential authority by putting the U.S. military command on an "internal alert" and ordering all commands not to accept any orders coming from the White House without the countersignature of the Secretary of Defense.

In the face of Nixon's adamant refusal to step down, Kissinger and Haig resorted to a final piece of treachery. Unbeknownst to the President, Haig had already had the White House staff type up unedited transcripts of the "smoking gun" tape. The transcript was then sent to Nixon's closest supporters in Congress and the Republican Party. As news of this supposedly devastating tape began to circulate, panic began to spread, a panic compounded by the fact that it was the President's own Chief of Staff who was pulling the rug out.

Haig then began to bring the remaining Nixon loyalists to the White House, where he told them that an anti-impeachment fight would be futile, and that Nixon must be forced to resign in order to save the party. On Aug. 7, Haig brought Rep. John Rhodes and Sens. William Scott and Barry Goldwater to the White House to inform the President that he had lost his political base of support. Earlier, George Bush had sent Nixon a letter urging him to resign.

These were the final blows. The President submitted his resignation to none other than Henry Kissinger. London's cold coup had been effectively carried out against the U.S. government. And the two men most responsible for that, as well as for all the offenses for which Nixon took the fall, were left unscathed by the media and by the official bodies constituted to investigate Watergate. Kissinger sold himself to Gerry Ford as an indispensable foreign-policy adviser, while Haig deployed to Europe to head up the NATO forces and to prepare his own future political career.

The worst part of the Watergate tragedy is that, as Nixon had warned, it set the precedent for future operations against U.S. Presidents. All the elements for "Reagagate" are already being put into place. And Reagan is surrounded by the same people who were instrumental in Watergating Nixon.