

Nixon Aides Worry About Statement

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High-level members of the President's staff have expressed doubts that Mr. Nixon's most recent statement on the Watergate will have the desired effect of stemming damaging disclosures in the case and are now concerned that it may have raised more questions than it answered, according to four White House sources.

In addition, those sources reported, the President's most senior aides are particularly concerned about charges they expect to be made against the President by former presidential counsel John W. Dean III.

The White House, according to the sources, is apprehensive that Dean will allege that President Nixon had knowledge of the Watergate cover-up while it was occurring. The sources reported that high-level presidential advisers do not know exactly how Dean might support such a charge, but are deeply worried that his account may appear credible to investigators and the public.

In assessing the effect of President Nixon's 4,000-word statement issued Tuesday evening, the most optimistic view offered by White House sources yesterday was that it might provide the President with "a little breathing room," in the words of one official.

At best, the sources said, the statement provides a base from which Mr. Nixon can build his case in the future.

Although the President defended his decision to declare certain "national security" matters off-limits in the Watergate investigation, some White House sources predicted yesterday that the public would be skeptical of Mr. Nixon's disclaimer that "it is not my intention to place a national

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security 'cover' on Watergate."

In addition, all the sources agreed that it was extremely unlikely that either the Senate's Watergate investigating committee or federal investigators would defer to the President's judgment of what matters constitute national security concerns that must remain secret.

In the face of the Senate hearings and the impending disclosure of the documents taken from the White House by Dean before he was fired, the sources said that the President decided last week-end to issue some statement less as a counterattack than as a cushion to deaden the impact of the continual Watergate disclosures.

"It's an interim statement. We just couldn't sit back," one middle-level White House source said.

In terms of significance, another White House official said, the statement came as close as the President has come to accusing his two former top aides, H.R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, of letting him down and perhaps participating in the Watergate cover-up.

One source said: "There was some opinion here to throw Haldeman and Ehrlichman over the side completely, but the President couldn't bring himself to do that because of that old, very close relationship."

Government investigators now say that there is sufficient evidence to show the involvement of Haldeman and Ehrlichman in the Watergate cover-up going back to several weeks after the June 17 arrests in the Democrats' Watergate headquarters.

The sources made the following points about the situation in the White House:

- The President is unlikely to hold a press conference until reporters who cover the White House stop shouting at press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler. White House officials say they are afraid that the President, who has always been treated respectfully at press conferences, might be subjected to the same treatment against the background of Water-

gate.

- No decision has been made on how else to deal with the news media. One official said: "One day we're our same, old secretive selves and then the next day the word is to open the door."

- Two sources said the President is "angry" about the developments in the Watergate. Moreover, the entire matter has hampered

the conduct of all White House business. "It's oppressive with everyone reading the newspapers and watching Senate Watergate hearings on the tube," one source said, adding that only the most pressing business is being handled.

- White House officials are hopeful that the damaging effects of Watergate may be somewhat offset by positive results in Dr. Henry Kissinger's Paris peace negotiations and the upcoming visit of Soviet party chief Leonid Brezhnev. However, members of the President's staff say there is concern in the White House that the public is becoming so disturbed about Watergate that it might mistakenly regard historic diplomatic progress as a cosmetic public relations move by Mr. Nixon.

According to White House sources, Gen. Alexander Haig, the acting White House chief of staff met with about 25 to 30 members of the President's staff and gave them copies of Mr. Nixon's statement shortly before it was released.

"Everybody sat in the room and read it very quietly," one of those present said. There were a few technical questions about the statement, the sources said, and Haig asked for no suggestions and received none.

"Nobody said this is the greatest thing ever done," that's for sure," said one source. "But there was no talk that this is a disaster either."

Two of the sources pointed out that, in a one-page summary accompanying Tuesday's statement, the President did not specifically deny knowing of attempts to involve the CIA in the Watergate operation or of

any "illegal or improper campaign tactics."

The President said in that summary that "at no time did I attempt, or did I authorize others to attempt" to involve the CIA, but he did not address the question of whether he had knowledge of such activities.

Similarly, he said he "neither authorized nor encouraged" any "illegal or improper campaign tactics," but did not raise the question of whether he knew about them.

White House aides expressed concern over these two points because in contrast, the President specifically denied knowledge of the Watergate bugging itself, the cover-up, offers of executive clemency, payments to the Watergate defendants and the break-in at the office of the psychiatrist to Pentagon Papers defendant Daniel Ellsberg.