

Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-go-round — With Les Whitten

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WASHINGTON — There is startling new evidence that former CIA chief Richard Helms still hasn't learned the lessons of Watergate.

In faraway Iran, where he is now the U.S. ambassador, he has been conspiring with the Shah to suppress an anti-Shah newspaper in the United States, and he let Helms know he wanted an orderly reception.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department appears to be maneuvering strangely to save Helms from a perjury rap.

In the spring of 1973, the Shah was preparing for a July trip to the United States, and he let Helms know he wanted an orderly reception.

"It occurs to us," Helms cabled the State Department, "that GOI (Government of Iran) is putting us on notice and indirectly suggesting that we tidy up as much as possible anti-Shah elements in US to reduce or avoid untoward incidents or anti-Shah demonstrations during his forthcoming visit to US."

In the same confidential cable, Helms requested passport information about Nasser Afshar, the publisher of a stridently anti-Shah newspaper. Afshar happens to be an American citizen, and his newspaper, the Iran Free Press, is protected by the Constitution.

Yet the cable indicated that Helms not

only intended to pass on to the Shah the information about his critic but that the State Department had actually been exploring ways of putting Afshar's anti-Shah newspaper out of business.

Cabled Helms: "DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) said that embassy was generally aware of Afshar's activities in US, including Iran Free Press, and agreed that Afshar's performance was scandalous and his efforts to mount anti-Iranian campaign in US extremely unfortunate.

"In fact, in last two years embassy had several times raised with Department question whether Iran Free Press could be closed down. Matter had been carefully studied but lawyers had concluded that under US laws there was regrettably no basis for such action."

Although respect for the Constitution ultimately prevailed at the State Department, Helms at least found a way to keep the newspaper out of Iran. Afshar had mailed hundreds of copies of his tabloid to embassy employees in Iran. These copies often were smuggled into the streets of Teheran.

But Helms, in defiance of postal regulations, simply returned all the newspapers to Washington unopened. Each envelope was stamped with the notice: "Refused by addressee. Return to Sender." It is unlikely, of course, that all the addresses suddenly turned down

newspapers that they previously had been reading and circulating.

At the Justice Department, meanwhile, Helms is facing indictment for allegedly approving an illegal 1971 break-in in the Washington suburbs. CIA agents entered a photo studio run by Deborah Fitzgerald, a former CIA employee, and Orlando Nunez, a Cuban whom the CIA suspected of pro-Castro sympathies.

The CIA suspected that she had slipped information to Nunez from his CIA file while she was working for the agency. The break-in was authorized by Helms to find out what had been pilfered.

Justice Department attorneys have warned that the case against Helms is weak, that the trial will be held before a Virginia jury in the CIA's backyard and that the jury can be expected to be sympathetic toward Helms.

An acquittal could cause a sympathetic backlash for Helms, making it difficult to get a conviction on the more serious perjury charges. Yet the Justice Department is pushing ahead quietly with the dubious break-in case.

This has led some insiders to wonder whether the department is deliberately trying to abort the Helms prosecution by pursuing the doubtful misdemeanor rather than the stronger perjury charge. Helms swore before a Senate committee in 1973 that the CIA had not

given covert support to political factions in Chile and had not engaged in illegal surveillance in the U.S. The Senate has submitted evidence to the Justice Department that he lied on both counts.

Footnote: Another reason the Justice Department may be reluctant to nail Helms, according to published reports, is that he has threatened to take other important officials down with him. Helms reportedly has told intimates that he had briefed others about the CIA's covert operations in Chile, yet they let him go ahead with his denials at the Senate hearings.

SEARCH FOR SLOGAN: The Votes have started to pour in for the official bicentennial slogan. Here are the six finalists in the slogan search, which we began more than a year ago:

1. America is your past; you are her future.
2. America — the possible dream.
3. Honor the past, challenge the future.
4. Take pride in America's past; take a part in America's future.
5. Stand fast, stand tall, stand American.
6. Freedom's way — U.S.A.

Pick the slogans you think best expresses the bicentennial, write the slogan or the number on a stamped postcard and send to SLOGANS, USA, Box 1976, Washington, D.C., 20013. All votes must be postmarked no later than midnight, Feb. 16, 1976.