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Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters

9. Helms Prosecution

Q. Mr. President, Admiral Turner of the C. I. A. did a speech this week at Annapolis in which he said that the Attorney General would have to make a decision as to whether it would further the national interest to prosecute the case of Mr. Richard Helms or whether it would be better to waive the case in order to save the secrets. But the Attorney General said that he was going to consult you on this. I wonder if you can tell us your views on how you are reaching this decision as to whether certain material should be declassified for a possible trial in this case.

A. He has not consulted with me, nor given me any advice on the Helms question. I am familiar with it through reading in the press. I have no way to know yet the strength of the possible indictment or charges. I have no way to know yet the seriousness of the offense with which he will be charged, and I have no way to know yet the seriousness of possible damage to our own national security if massive revelations of intelligence techniques and documents are made either to ourselves or to our friends and allies.

When I get all this information then I would certainly consult with the Attorney General as to what action should be taken. I think it's a very serious thing for anyone to commit perjury before a Congressional committee or anywhere else. And the matter would not in case be treated lightly.

My understanding is that the Attorney General is now going over the data that have been presented to him. I think he will make a report to me and possibly a recommendation fairly soon. But until this moment he has not yet done so.