

Government Looks

Haig: Optimism at White House

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President Nixon and the reorganized White House staff are recovering from the crisis of Watergate and are carrying out the responsibilities of government, Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. said yesterday.

Speaking optimistically about future plans and programs, Haig nevertheless conceded that the hoped-for improvements in relations with the press and Congress are lagging because of Watergate.

But he said that when the President is able to make his Watergate defense—pre-

sumably, in the near future—and to begin holding regular news conference again communication with both the public and Congress definitely will improve.

Haig spoke in an interview on the last day of his service in the Army. After his appointment as White House staff chief on May 4 he resigned as vice chief of staff and yesterday his retirement from the Army after 26 years of service took effect.

Haig vigorously denied

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published reports that there is a hard-line group in the White House planning counterattacks against critics in Congress.

Characterizing the reports as "nonsense," Haig said such action would be contrary to the President's determination to try to build bipartisan support in both foreign and domestic policy.

Haig's upbeat report on White House activity is similar to other official comments in recent days. Speaking to 55 agricultural attaches from U.S. embassies abroad, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew said yesterday that the government is being carried forward despite Watergate.

"Government is proceeding here in Washington and new initiatives for peace are going forward," Agnew said.

The staff reorganization has been largely completed, Haig said. "The directions have been set and are accepted and understood by all, but there are many things that are going to take time to mature and blossom."

The President has been under restraint not to speak out on Watergate because of the investigations, but he will do so at the earliest opportunity after the first phase of the Senate hearings are completed, Haig indicated.

It originally was believed that the President would issue his statement as early as next week, but that was when the committee was expected to take a month's recess beginning this Friday.

With the committee planning to continue its hearings into next week and perhaps longer, the President may delay his report. But he still plans to make it public before going to California later this month, Haig said.

The decision to speak out on Watergate and then to hold regular news conferences has been made, Haig said. But the timing and forum for the statement have not been determined, he said.

In looking back over his nearly three months as

White House staff chief, Haig said new directions have been set, there has been a greater decentralization of power, a lowering of the profile of the White House staff, increased cooperation and communication with the Cabinet and agency chiefs, and planning for greater cooperation with Congress.

The appointments of Melvin R. Laird and Bryce N. Harlow as counsellors to the President with broad mandates in domestic affairs have strengthened the President's hand and will be a "great asset" to him in improving relations with Congress, Haig said.

"We have an awful lot of work to do to get legislation moving the way it should," he said. But he said the decision to try to work on a bipartisan basis has been made and that the legislative office under William E. Timmons has been enlarged and strengthened.

"I am optimistic that we can establish a relatively dramatic difference from the last few months," he emphasized.

The President has told the staff to be expeditors and facilitators of policy rather than directors, Haig said. That was a reference to the change decided upon after the departure of H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, both charged with keeping agency heads at arm's length, and dealing with them in an arbitrary manner.

Despite Watergate and despite the President's recent illness and his week-long meeting with Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev, the President has kept an extremely busy schedule, Haig said.

By the end of this week, Mr. Nixon will have met with 10 heads of government since early May, Haig said. In addition, he has held eight Cabinet meetings, met 27 times with Cabinet officers, met with 14 major congressional groups and 35 smaller groups, held five meetings with the Quadriad or Troika on economic matters and held many meetings with economic advisers, Haig said.