

CIA Asked To Clarify Helms Note

The CIA has been asked to clarify a June 28, 1972, memorandum from its former director, Richard M. Helms, suggesting that the FBI "confine" its Watergate inquiries in Mexico.

Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), ranking Democratic member of the Senate Armed Service Committee, made the request because of apparent discrepancies between the Helms memo and public testimony by Helms and other CIA witnesses.

It was understood that Helms was being contacted in Tehran, where he is serving as U.S. ambassador, for a clarifying explanation. Helms has been recalled twice from his post in Iran to testify on CIA involvement in the Watergate affair.

In the June 28 memo to his deputy, Gen. Vernon Walters, Helms left instructions for a prospective meeting with then acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III.

Helms advised Walters that he had instructed two key subordinates in the agency, who were unnamed, that the CIA is "attempting to distance itself from this investigation and that . . . I wanted no free-wheeling exposition of hypotheses or any effort made to conjecture about responsibility or likely objectives of the Watergate intrusion.

"In short," the memo continued, "it is up to the FBI to lay some cards on the table. Otherwise we are unable to be of help.

"In addition, we still adhere to the request that they confine themselves to the personalities already arrested or directly under suspicion and that they desist from expanding this investigation into other areas which may well, eventually, run afoul of our operations."

It was the last sentence of the Helms memo that appeared, particularly, to conflict with previously public testimony by Helms and Walters staunchly denying that FBI inquiries into Watergate issues in Mexico would expose or jeopardize CIA operations.

White House officials, within a week of the Watergate break-in, succeeded in obtaining a delay of more than two weeks in the FBI's investigation of Watergate break-in funds "laundered" through a Mexican bank—and traced ultimately to the Nixon re-election committee.

The delay was occasioned by President Nixon's concern, which he later acknowledged to be unfounded, that the FBI inquiries in Mexico could jeopardize covert CIA operations there.