

There's More to the Story

CIA and the Plumbers

by Tad Szulc

Secret White House domestic and foreign intelligence operations conducted in the name of "national security" outside regular government channels have been much more numerous than is publicly known, and several of them have drawn on the resources of the Central Intelligence Agency despite repeated official disclaimers. They raise serious new questions about the role of President Nixon and the CIA in a number of events. The story of additional activities by the Plumbers and operations undertaken by the White House before and after the formal creation of this special unit in mid-1971, is likely to emerge in trials that follow a new series of indictments expected to be returned during January by Special Watergate Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

These undisclosed operations are said to include:

- ▶ Secret support, outside CIA channels, for the regime of Zambia's President Kenneth Kaunda late in 1970, to help him weather a conspiracy to oust him. The White House appeared to be concerned that Kaunda's overthrow by radicals, possibly including Chinese agents, might lead to the seizure of private US copper investments in Zambia. Kaunda reportedly received electronic equipment to tap the telephones and homes of Zambian officials he suspected of plotting. Coincidentally a nephew of the late President Eisenhower was shipping such equipment to Zambia.
- ▶ Burglary, or attempts at burglary, at the New York and Washington offices of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation, apparently in search of personal data on its top officials, including ITT's President Harold S. Geneen, and other sensitive documents.
- ▶ The use of CIA officials attached to the secret Anglo-American intelligence group located at the British Embassy in Washington to secure information on the background of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg after the surfacing of the Pentagon papers in June 1971. The White House bypassed the usual CIA channels here.
- ▶ Supply of equipment and false identification papers to the Plumbers' Cuban-American task force by CIA offices in Miami and San Francisco in support of the raid on the offices of Ellsberg's psychiatrist, the Watergate break-ins and other operations.

Jaworski, who has made it clear he will not be deterred in his investigations by White House invoca-

tions of "national security," is believed to expect a new breakthrough in the area of the Plumbers' operations after indictments are handed down by a Washington federal grand jury looking into the September 1971 raid on the Beverly Hills offices of Dr. Lewis Fielding, Ellsberg's psychiatrist. Among those expected to be indicted are John D. Ehrlichman, former head of the White House Domestic Council; former White House Special Counsel Charles W. Colson; G. Gordon Liddy, one of the Plumbers; and the three Cuban-Americans who carried out the Fielding raid: Bernard L. Barker, Eugenio Martinez and Felipe de Diego. Egil Krogh, Jr., who pleaded guilty last November 30 to a single charge of criminal conspiracy in the Fielding burglary, is regarded as the star witness for the prosecution, having discarded his "national security" defense.

Prosecutors hope that Krogh will "break wide open" the White House domestic intelligence operations. One source predicts that Krogh's testimony in a trial "may blow the White House out of the water," touching upon everything from the President's own knowledge of various operations to the role of the CIA. Hunt, sources say, will risk contempt of court if he refuses to testify. Ehrlichman, Liddy and Young were indicted earlier by a Los Angeles grand jury, but the California trial has been delayed until April 15 and may be cancelled because the Fielding break-in is now considered part of federal jurisdiction in Washington under the provisions of Title 18 of the US Penal Code.

New information available suggests that the White House was engaged in secret intelligence operations even before the publication of the Pentagon papers and other news leaks led, as alleged by the White House, to the establishment of the Krogh-Young-Hunt-Liddy special unit.

Aside from White House efforts to obtain information in 1969 on the Chappaquiddick incident involving Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, presidential aides are said to have launched private intelligence operations abroad, chiefly because of their distrust of the CIA under the former director, Richard Helms. For instance it is believed that the White House became fearful about Zambia—and the continued supply of copper—about the time the late Salvador Allende Gossens was elected president in Chile, in September 1970, and moved toward the nationalization of American copper companies there. Kaunda is believed to have been in serious danger in October 1970, and pressure on the

White House to act may have come from the copper companies.

From what I can learn, the White House dispatched its own unidentified agents to the African country to help Kaunda neutralize his enemies. What remains unclear is whether there was a link between that intervention and a contract held by a Washington public relations man and an outstanding Nixon fund-raiser, to supply Kaunda with bugging and other electronic equipment. The man is Michael Doud Gill, nephew of Mrs. Mamie Eisenhower, who served in 1968 as assistant chairman of United Citizens for Nixon-Agnew. Gill, a friend of President Kaunda, said in a recent newspaper interview that the Zambian had fears of the Chinese who exert considerable influence in neighboring Tanzania. Speaking of the equipment supplied to Kaunda, Gill said that "they were bugging their own officials." Gill's contract came to light in September when his former partner, Marshall Soghoian, was charged in Washington, DC with acting as an unregistered foreign agent for Zambia. Soghoian is free on an unusually high \$100,000 bond pending grand jury investigations. Gill said Soghoian had stolen his contract with the Zambians.

The alleged burglary attempts at ITT offices occurred in 1971 and 1972 as a form of "double insurance" after the corporation offered one million dollars in contributions to the CIA to prevent the inauguration of President Allende in Chile and \$400,000 to the Republican Party in connection with an antitrust suit.

I have been told that "in case of complications, the White House people wanted to have in their hands a lot of personal information about Geneen and others." Testimony before the Senate Watergate Committee by former White House investigators, the Plumbers' forerunners, showed that investigations of personal habits of those of interest to the White House was a frequent procedure. But it cannot be excluded that the Plumbers also looked for incriminating documents concerning 1971 meetings between top administration figures and ITT officials, which resulted in the corporation's success in avoiding antitrust action after its purchase of an insurance company. It should be recalled that in 1972 Hunt was sent to Denver by the White House to persuade Dita Beard, the ITT lobbyist, to say that her

memo on the secret deal was a forgery.

Perhaps the most complicated aspect of the Plumbers' operations was their relationship with the CIA. Helms, William F. Colby, the agency's present director and other senior officials have denied in public and in executive sessions before congressional committees that there was any "involvement" with Watergate. Instead they charged White House officials sought to use CIA for the subsequent cover-up. But discrepancies and contradictions raise the question whether the CIA's denial might not have been a "technical denial."

The first discrepancy involves dates. In his May 22 speech President Nixon said that the first meeting he held with Ehrlichman and Krogh for the purpose of setting up an operation to prevent news leaks was on July 24, 1971. But the record of the Watergate hearings showed that Ehrlichman first called General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., then CIA deputy director, as early as July 7 to arrange for a visit by Hunt. Cushman and Hunt met on July 22. Hunt, a CIA veteran (and a friend of General Cushman, who attended Hunt's retirement party the year before), had come to ask CIA help for a "one-time" interview with an unspecified person. The CIA gave him a wig, a speech-alteration device, a small camera, a tape recorder and two sets of false documents. Later, on Hunt's request, the CIA also provided Liddy with false documents.

As it is now known, Hunt was part of a larger operation designed to uncover compromising information about Ellsberg. This was the reason for the Fielding raid. The White House was convinced that Ellsberg may have had access to other classified materials after he made the Pentagon papers available to the press, and that he might be turning them over to the Soviet government. This suspicion, I am told, led the White House to turn to the British for a secret check on Ellsberg's activities during the year he spent at Cambridge University in 1953. The notion at the White House was that Ellsberg may have had contacts with Harold (Kim) Philby, the British intelligence operative who turned out to be a key Soviet espionage agent.

Ehrlichman arranged for the Hunt interview with Cushman about the same time he turned to the joint Anglo-American intelligence group in Washington for information on Ellsberg's Cambridge days. The joint intelligence group functions under an agreement providing for temporary service by CIA agents with MI-6, the British intelligence service, and vice versa. Normally intelligence requests from the US government to the joint group go through CIA headquarters. In this instance, however, Ehrlichman contacted the group directly through a CIA representative. MI-6 passed on the request to MI-5, the British counterespionage agency. The answer on Ellsberg was negative. It is not known whether the CIA official in question apprised Helms of the Ehrlichman request. Investigators think, however, that it is significant that Ehrlichman was acting in the Ellsberg case almost three weeks before

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Nixon, according to his own statement, gave the go-ahead on the Plumbers' unit. The suspicion arises whether secret domestic intelligence operations may not have been initiated even earlier. According to one version, the White House obtained information on April 17, 1971, that Ellsberg was preparing to turn the Pentagon papers over to the press. The first installment was published in *The New York Times* on June 13.

As far as the CIA's subsequent role is concerned, most investigators are willing to accept Helms' and Colby's technical disclaimer that the agency was "not involved" in Watergate, although they wonder how much the CIA knew about Plumber operations in general.

In October Barker, Martinez and Virgilio R. Gonzales, three of the five Watergate raiders, swore that they knew that equipment for the Fielding and Watergate burglaries as well as false documents for all of them were supplied by the CIA. These claims are contained in affidavits filed in support of a motion, later denied by Judge John J. Sirica, to be allowed to change their pleas from guilty to not guilty in the Watergate affair. A source close to the investigation says that "it would be incredible for them at this late date to commit perjury" in affidavits seeking a favorable court decision.

Barker, a former CIA employee, said in his affidavit that "it appeared to me that the equipment, disguises and fake identification papers that were used in the [Fielding] operation were the type that were used and prepared by the CIA, and at some point Mr. Hunt confirmed my belief and advised that this equipment had been provided by the CIA." Speaking of the Watergate raid, Barker said that "As was the case with the Fielding office entry, fake identification papers that were used in the Watergate entries had been prepared by the CIA." Martinez, who still was on a CIA monthly retainer at the time of the Watergate break-in, said in his affidavit that "equipment which was used during the operation which included mechanical equipment, disguises and false identification papers were the type I associated with the CIA and I was told by Mr. Hunt that the agency had supplied the equipment."

It is of course possible that Hunt was lying to his own men to make it appear that the CIA was behind all the Plumber operations. But there is no question that the CIA provided false papers to the Cuban-Americans through its "Green Light" group in Miami. The "Green Light" group, a section of the CIA station in Miami headed by William Davis, specializes in screening Cuban refugees from the island to determine whether they may be engaged as agents to be infiltrated back to Cuba. It has ample facilities for clandestine work. Eugenio Martinez worked for "Green Light." Neither Helms nor his associates were ever asked by the Senate Watergate Committee whether the CIA had provided false documents to the Cuban-

Americans, in addition to the papers CIA gave Hunt and Liddy. Helms has indirectly denied that the CIA provided the Plumbers with burglary equipment, but sources claim it did come from the agency's office in Burlingame, a suburb of San Francisco. Helms testified that he learned about the Fielding break-in only last May and that "I was assured by the CIA that equipment given Hunt was not used in the break-in."

It is possible that the CIA's top echelon simply chose to look the other way after supplying the Plumbers with their needs on the theory that in dealing with the White House, "What you don't know, doesn't hurt you." It is also possible that Helms, personally distrusted by the White House, was kept in the dark by subordinates. Nixon claims *his* subordinates failed to inform *him*. There is no other explanation for the CIA's apparent lack of interest in Hunt's activities after he had requested assistance from General Cushman. Hunt, after all, had been a fairly important CIA official and his involvement in national security areas on the White House's behalf could not have failed to arouse professional interest in the agency. In his testimony, however, Helms insisted the CIA became interested in Hunt and the others, all former CIA employees, only *after* Watergate. Cushman testified that it would be unlikely for the CIA to provide aid without the clearance by headquarters. This, then, leaves officially unanswered the question of where the Cuban-Americans got their false documents found on them after they were arrested at Watergate.

Investigators reject published allegations that Martinez kept the CIA informed throughout of the Plumbers' operations. They believe that the agency may have been willing to provide support for them, but eschew any knowledge of what they did—at least in the initial stages. On this controversial point, Martinez' sworn affidavit throws new and interesting light: "... I broached the name of Mr. Hunt with my [CIA] supervising agent sometime around the time of the Fielding office entry. The subsequent response I received from my supervising agent indicated to me that he had not been informed by his superiors and accordingly, that I was not supposed to disclose any information about these operations to him."

At this point if Martinez is telling the truth, the CIA was indeed looking the other way. But Martinez goes on: "At some point, either shortly before the first Watergate or between the first and second Watergate entry, my supervising agent in the Miami area made an inquiry of me with respect to any information I had regarding activities of Mr. Hunt." This contradicts directly Helms' testimony. Martinez said he refused to answer on national security grounds. But a few days later, on June 17, 1972, the CIA had its answer about Hunt. Other answers about the Plumbers—and about the innumerable contradictions in the Watergate matter—should emerge when Krogh & Co. begin to testify.