

Huston Says Nixon Unaware of Spy Acts

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

Former White House aide Tom Charles Huston said yesterday that President Nixon was apparently unaware that some of the illegal and improper domestic activities he was asked to approve in 1970 had been going on for years in the CIA and the FBI.

Testifying before the Senate intelligence committee, Huston said he, too, had been ignorant of such operations as the CIA's illegal mail intercepts when he recommended them to Nixon as part of a stepped-up campaign of spying on dissidents.

"If we had known all these tools were being used and still not getting any results, it might have changed the whole approach," Huston said.

Nixon approved the "Huston plan" on July 23, 1970, but revoked it five days later at the insistence of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Attorney General John N. Mitchell, the committee was told.

Chairman Frank Church (D-Idaho) said the episode showed clearly that the government's intelligence agencies have operated as "independent fiefdoms" that tell neither the President nor each other of their illicit operations.

"The President and Mr. Huston, it appears, were deceived



TOM CHARLES HUSTON
... "If we had known"

by intelligence officials," Church said. "Even though the President revoked his approval of the Huston plan, the intelligence agencies paid no heed to the revocation. Instead, they continued the very practices for which they had sought presidential authority."

Huston said he now realized that the expanded domestic intelligence program he advocated as a White House aide was wrong and dangerous, but insisted that the turbulence of

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domestic dissent made it seem much more so in the years ago.

"We were talking about bombs, we were talking about assassins, we were talking about snipers," he asserted at one point. "I felt something had to be done."

Tapping his fingers impatiently at first, Huston, now an Indianapolis lawyer, gradually relaxed and grew more expansive. The committee's questioning was gentle as he testified in public for the first time since the controversial program came to light in 1973 with the unfolding of the Watergate scandal.

Huston denied the notion that he had somehow twisted the arms of the intelligence agencies into backing the controversial proposals, which he has said included "clearly illegal" features such as burglary and mail intercepts.

However, "I didn't know half the things" that the government agencies had already been doing, he said. These include the CIA's mail openings, the FBI's Comintelpro program for harassing political activists and the CIA's "Operation CHAOS" which involved domestic spying in violation of the spy agency's charter.

Huston said he did not think Nixon was aware of these activities either, although he could not rule out the possibility that the President might have learned of them from some other source.

The Huston plan was devised in the summer of 1970 after Nixon summoned the directors of the FBI, the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency to the White House and told them he wanted better information on domestic dissenters. An interagency committee headed by William Sullivan of the FBI drafted the plan presented to the President after some three or four meetings, Huston recalled.

He said proposals were kept from Hoover until the last minute, "because bureau personnel felt he would refuse to go along with it" but thought he might acquiesce if the

other agencies had already approved.

The 34-year-old White House ex-aide said Hoover voiced objections anyway, both to Attorney General Mitchell and in a series of footnotes that he insisted on including in the report. Adm. Noel G. Taylor, director of the NSA, and Gen. Donald Bennett, head of DIA, WERE BOTH "very upset," Huston recalled.

The FBI conducted dozens and sometimes more than 100 burglaries a year, most of them directed against the Communist Party, extremist groups, and other targets that would come under the heading of security cases. But it stopped the so-called "black bag jobs" in 1968, reportedly on orders from then Attorney General Ramsey Clark.

Huston said he was finally notified by Nixon White House Chief of Staff H. R. HALDEMAN that the President had withdrawn his approval of the program at the behest of Hoover and Mitchell. "I understand Mitchell felt it was not the kind of thing we ought to be doing," Huston said.

Huston insisted that he never had the President's political enemies in mind — or anything but genuine national security interests — when he devised the plan. "I didn't care who thought the President was a louse," he said.

But he said he sees now, in light of the Watergate scandal and the operations of the White House "Plumbers" how easy it is to move from spying on "the kid with the bomb to the kid with a picket sign to the kid with a bumper sticker for the opposing candidate."

problem facing the church, Huston said, he felt the real committee is how to rein in the intelligence agencies in the future so that they are accountable to the White House and the public while preserving enough of their independence so they can resist being used for political purposes.