

Mexican Episode Involved

5/15/73
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Three of President Nixon's highest-ranking White House aides sought to persuade the Central Intelligence Agency to call off—on national security grounds—an FBI investigation into the Watergate scandal's "Mexican Connection."

This testimony was given to a closed session of the Senate Armed Services Committee yesterday by the CIA's deputy director, Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, it was learned.

Walters said the proposal was made to him at a White House meeting to which he was summoned by presidential aides H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman and John W. Dean III.

The CIA official, who is expected to be summoned imminently before a federal grand jury to tell the story, said the then CIA Director Richard M. Helms refused to go along with the plan and the White House was so informed.

The case involved the \$100,000 or more in Nixon re-election funds that were "launched" through a Mexico City bank and ended up ultimately in the safe of Maurice H. Stans, chief presidential fund-raiser in 1972.

Walters, according to qualified sources, testified that the three White House advisers told him they wanted the agency to tell the FBI that an investigation of the Mexican money would jeopardize CIA operations.

When he relayed the suggestion to Helms, said Walters, the former director decided that there was no basis for the request to the FBI.

The Mexican money incident was one example of what one authoritative source described as a "continuing pattern" of White House efforts in 1972 to involve the CIA in Watergate cover-up activities, as

depicted in yesterday's testimony.

Walters was accompanied to the hearing by outgoing

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CIA Director James R. Schlesinger, Director-designate William E. Colby, the CIA's present director of clandestine operations, and Marine commandant Gen. Robert E. Cushman Jr., who preceded Walters as CIA deputy director.

Acting Armed Services Chairman Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) said he was

surprised to learn of Haldeman's implication in the case.

"The CIA was asked to provide help on other matters beyond the Ellsberg case by the White House staff," Symington said after today's closed session. "We found out that Haldeman was very heavily involved."

Dean had been implicated in secret testimony Friday dealing with White House

pressures on the agency, it was learned.

The time sequence of the attempted intercessions was not clear. They occurred, according to one qualified source, "at a time when these guys were frantically trying to get off the hook and get other guys on the hook" — presumably after disclosure of the Watergate break-in last June 17.

Both Symington and Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) praised the CIA for standing up to the alleged White House pressures to assist in covering up the Watergate trail.

One of the subjects covered by the committee in its questioning of the CIA witnesses was a memorandum to federal prosecutors by convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr., who said he had been urged by his previous counsel to claim that the Watergate break-in was a CIA operation.

The lawyer, Gerard Alch of Boston, denied in an interview last week that he had made any such proposal to McCord. The attorney said he merely asked McCord about possible CIA im-

plication because, on the basis of government-produced evidence, McCord had once intimated that the break-in team consisted of CIA employees.

It was disclosed last week that Ehrlichman in July, 1971 had asked then CIA Deputy Director Cushman to give undercover assistance to Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt for an undisclosed mission that even Hunt would not divulge to the CIA. The assistance, spy equipment and secret phone numbers, were provided. The mission, it turned out, was the burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis Fielding of Beverly Hills, Calif.

The names of Haldeman and Dean had not come up in the course of last week's public revelations.

Senators who attended yesterday's closed session were extremely reluctant to divulge details. "We are dealing with what may well be serious criminal violations by high-ranking officials," commented one committee member. "Whatever we say now could probably jeopardize any future criminal prosecutions."