

Helms Says He Didn't Tell Nixon About Bids to C.I.A.

NYTimes

By MARJORIE HUNTER MAY 17 1973

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 16 — Richard Helms, former Director of Central Intelligence, was quoted today as saying that he felt White House requests for his agency's assistance in the Watergate affair had been improper but that he never told President Nixon of his concern.

Mr. Helms, now Ambassador to Iran, was questioned for more than three hours today by a Senate Appropriations subcommittee that is investigating the Central Intelligence Agency's involvement in the Watergate and Pentagon papers cases.

His testimony was not made public and he refused to answer questions as he emerged from the hearing.

Senator John L. McClellan, Democrat of Arkansas, who is chairman of the investigating panel, said later that Mr. Helms had expressed concern over repeated attempts of White House aides to involve the C.I.A. in the Watergate affair.

Asked if Mr. Helms had conveyed his concern to the President, Senator McClellan replied:

"No. He did not feel at that

time that he should go to the President about it. He did not want the C.I.A. involved."

Mr. Helms had told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee earlier this spring, at his confirmation hearings on the ambassadorial post, that the intelligence agency had not been involved in the Watergate affair.

Since then, however, other present and former officials of the agency have told Congressional committees that the agency provided assistance to the White House in two incidents involving the Pentagon papers case and was approached other times by White House aides in apparent attempts to cover up events involving the break-in of Democratic headquarters at the Watergate complex last year.

Mr. Helms confirmed the reports of other C.I.A. officials, but under questioning he also defended his earlier denial of the agency's involvement in the Watergate affair.

"He did not relate these events to the Watergate," Sen-

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ator McClellan said. "After all, this Watergate is a very broad-based thing," said Senator Milton R. Young of North Dakota, ranking Republican of the subcommittee.

Asked if Mr. Helms had known that White House requests for C.I.A. assistance were part of an attempted cover-up, Senator Roman L. Hruska, Republican of Nebraska, replied: "He didn't and, in fact, they weren't. The so-called Mexican laundering operation did not relate in any way to the bugging of Democratic headquarters."

The Mexican "laundering" incident involved Nixon re-election campaign funds that had been channeled through a Mexico City bank and later used to finance various operations connected with the Watergate affair.

Nixon Aides Involved

Lieut. Gen. Vernon Walters, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, told the Senate Armed Services Committee earlier this week that two White House aides, H. R. Halde- man and John D. Ehrlichman, had asked the agency to call off an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation into the "laundered" campaign funds in the interest of national security.

General Walters also told

that committee that John W. Dean 3d, recently dismissed as counsel to the President, had asked the C.I.A. to pay the bail and salaries of the men involved in the Watergate break-in. The request was believed to be an attempt to get the agency to provide a "cover" for the operation.

Senator McClellan said that Mr. Helms told the subcommittee today that he felt these White House requests were wrong and had insisted that the C.I.A. not become involved.

'Reluctantly' Granted

But the Senator said that Mr. Helms had admitted that he approved earlier a request of another White House aide for preparation by the agency of a "personality assessment" of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, who was later indicted on charges involving his copying and making public the Pentagon papers on United States involvement in Vietnam.

Senator McClellan said that Mr. Helms "did not think this quite proper" but that he "reluctantly" granted the request because it had come from the White House.

Senator McClellan said that he felt that the C.I.A. had violated the National Security Act by becoming involved in the Ellsberg case. The law forbids the agency from engaging in internal security operations.