

Nixon, Top Aides Work On Two-Track Defense

By Lou Cannon

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President Nixon, silent for nearly three months in the face of damaging accusations about his own role in the Watergate case, yesterday worked with his top advisers on a two-track defense he intends to make public later this week.

According to White House officials, the President will issue a detailed "white paper" intended as a point-by-point refutation of charges made before the Senate Watergate committee that he ignored warnings that his own top aides had knowledge of the Watergate break-in and the subsequent cover-up.

At the same time Mr. Nixon will go on national television to urge support for his position that the nation set Watergate behind it and deal with urgent domestic economic issues.

The President last discussed the Watergate case publicly on May 22, and he has not held a press conference since March 15. He remained silent throughout the 37 days of Senate Watergate hearings on grounds that he did not want to make a "piecemeal" replay to the charges.

At least four witnesses—former White House counsel John W. Dean III, former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst, former acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray and Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen—testified of various warnings given to the President about the Watergate case.

Mr. Nixon is expected to admit to a lack of vigilance or of timely response on his

own part. But White House officials say he also will assert his own lack of complicity in the Watergate affair and couple this with an appeal to continue the "new American revolution" endorsed in his re-election landslide of 1972.

The exact timing of the Nixon defense was still uncertain, but Thursday is considered the probable day of the television address. The other possibilities are Wednesday or Friday.

Next Monday the President is scheduled to address the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in New Orleans and proceed from there to San Clemente, Calif. Officials said Mr. Nixon had not ruled out other speeches before presumably friendly audiences during the remainder of the month.

There was no word from the White House on the timing of the next presidential press conference, which press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler promised months ago. Some officials said it was probable that Mr. Nixon would hold his next press conference during his San Clemente visit after he has had sufficient time to weigh public reaction to his Watergate defense.

One of Mr. Nixon's Cabinet, officials, Interior Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton, said yesterday that he expects the President to be "very candid" when he makes his Watergate statement and to admit past mistakes.

Speaking before a group of businessmen in Salisbury, Md., Morton characterized the President as a man with

a "one-track mind" who ignored the Watergate scandal until "it just flooded in the door, so to speak, and there it was, to cope with before he realized it."

Morton said he and the President had talked candidly about how "this thing got away from him" during a visit of the Interior Secretary to San Clemente in April before the Watergate hearings began.

Within a week or so after the President makes his Watergate defense, the White House is also expected to issue a statement explaining the unresolved questions about the methods used to finance Mr. Nixon's acquisition of his six-acre San Clemente estate.

Industrialist Robert Abplanalp said in an interview with the Washington Star News published Sunday that no investment company was involved in the purchase. This appeared to contradict a White House statement of three months ago that an investment company had made the purchase.

However, deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren—who has become the chief White House press spokesman in the continuing absence of Ziegler from daily briefings—insisted that it was only a "semantical problem" and that no contradiction was involved. Warren said it "perhaps" would have been more accurate of him to use the term "joint venture" in describing what he had called an "investment company."

Warren said he knew the identity of the other person involved with Abplanalp in the joint venture but wouldn't reveal it because the White House wants to avoid "piecemeal stories." The White House statement, when it is issued, will "clear up once and for all" questions about the transactions, Warren said.

Meanwhile, Vice President Agnew flew back to Washington after spending four days at the Palm Springs, Calif., home of Frank Sinatra.

Agnew will fly to Denver on Wednesday for the dedication of a dam and a speech to the boilermakers' convention.

The Vice President will speak Saturday in Centreville, Md., on behalf of state campaigning for the congressional seat left vacant Sen. Robert Bauman, who is by the death of William O. Mills.