

'Bombshell' Over Watergate Promised



Jack Anderson

SENATOR HOWARD BAKER (Rep-Tenn.), the Senate Watergate matinee idol, has been dealing behind the scenes with embattled, ex-White House aide Charles Colson in a joint effort to implicate the Central Intelligence Agency in the Watergate break-in and cover-up.

Although Colson pleaded the Fifth Amendment at the Senate hearings, he has collaborated quietly with Baker's top committee aide, Fred Thompson, in the desperate attempt to shift more of the Watergate blame to the CIA.

Colson has also been in touch with the White House on the CIA angle. This has aroused suspicion that the Baker-Colson maneuver may be a White House ploy to divert public attention from President Nixon's own Watergate role.

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SOURCES close to Baker hotly deny that his CIA investigation is a diversionary action. They say he is hard at work on a detailed report, which they promised will be a "bombshell." From hints we have gotten of memos in Baker's possession, "bombshell" is a fair description of what he has discovered.

For months, Baker has dallied with the idea that the CIA really engineered the celebrated break-in at Democratic headquarters for vague "national security" reasons and then pulled strings to hush it up. But he has never seemed to be able to get his theory to jell.

What finally persuaded him he was right, our sources say, was the admission by the CIA on January 29 that tapes of CIA conversations were destroyed during the Watergate period — after Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (Dem-Mont.), had specifically requested that they be preserved.

At Baker's instigation, former CIA chief Richard Helms, now ambassador to Iran, was hauled before the committee a week ago under the most secret conditions.

In addition to Baker and Thompson, the session was also attended by chairman Sam Ervin (Dem-N.C.), counsel Sam Dash and a few trusted aides. Also present, surprisingly, was Senator Stuart Symington (Dem-Mo.), who heads the Senate's hush-hush CIA oversight subcommittee.

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FOR FOUR HOURS, Helms was grilled about the CIA's part in the Watergate events. We have learned the secret transcripts show that Baker's questions were aimed at uncovering a hidden CIA involvement.

Baker seemed convinced, for example, that Helms personally ordered the tapes destroyed. Our sources say that Helms skillfully parried Baker's questions and did not incriminate the CIA.

Once the hearing was over, Baker and Thompson fell to work on the report.