

Shah Link to Nixon Campaign Hinted

By Jack Anderson

For six months, we have been investigating the strange relationship between President Nixon and the shah of Iran. There have been whispers, all vehemently denied, that the shah funneled money into the Nixon campaign by way of Mexico.

Our inquiries, including overseas calls to Teheran, Geneva, Bonn, Mexico City and other far-away places, have got the Iranians in a dither.

Suddenly, we found Iranian officials were expecting our calls, before we made them. Then the distinguished and decent former Secretary of State, William Rogers, telephoned us in the shah's behalf.

He cautioned us kindly that we were chasing wild rumors. He called back twice, with more categorical denials. Then his law firm followed up with a telegram to United Feature, which distributes our column.

The story we were investigating was "implausible and totally baseless . . ." the telegram charged. "We strongly urge that this story not be published."

We can hardly resist publishing a story that the shah is so anxious to suppress. It all started six months ago when a former high Iranian official came to us with the allegation

that the shah had routed hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Nixon campaign.

The source admitted he had turned against the shah. His information, therefore, must be regarded with skepticism. The Iranian embassy flatly denied the story; the White House denied it; Bill Rogers denied it. And we certainly can't prove it.

But we have uncovered some curious circumstances that are worth relating. First, we contacted another prominent Iranian who, quite independently, told us the same story. The money had been routed, he said, through Mexico. But he, too, admitted he was opposed to the shah.

Then we learned from Swiss banking sources that the shah had transferred more than \$1 million from his personal, numbered accounts in the Schweizerische Bank Gesellschaft to the Banco de Londres Y Mexico in Mexico City.

It also struck us as an interesting coincidence that other Nixon campaign money had been laundered through a Mexican bank. When the FBI began to check into this, it seemed to upset the White House more than any other phase of the Watergate investigation.

The President's two most trusted aides, H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, tried to

use the Central Intelligence Agency to head off the FBI. CIA director Richard Helms and his deputy, Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters, were summoned to the White House. They were instructed to inform the FBI that the Mexican probe was interfering with the CIA's operations.

Not long afterwards, Helms was suddenly named ambassador to Iran. Yet his predecessor in Teheran, Joseph Farland, had scarcely settled down in the job. Clearly, the President wasn't displeased with Farland's performance. For the President tried to placate him by offering him his choice of four other ambassadorships.

Although Farland refused to speak to us for the record, sources close to him told us he was "greatly amazed" and "grief-stricken" at being removed. He not only felt it might be misinterpreted as a blot on his career but he was beginning to enjoy the new assignment. His departure was so "emotional," said our sources, that he was moved to tears.

Why was the White House so concerned about the FBI investigation of cash laundering in Mexico City? In light of the other Watergate revelations, this would seem to be a fairly insignificant detail. And why did Helms agree to tell the FBI that the Mexican investigation could

jeopardize a CIA operation?

We checked with Watergate investigators who said they had detected no trace of Iranian money in their probe of the Mexican connection. But they had picked up hints that something is still lurking in the background which has yet to be revealed. "It is all very mysterious," said one Senate investigator.

None of this proves, of course, that the shah's money ever reached the Nixon campaign. But the intriguing relationship between the President and the shah deserves closer examination.

Footnote: As another piece of the puzzle, the shah announced last July 25 after conferring with the President at the White House that Iran had struck an oil deal with Ashland Oil. Ashland's president, Orin Atkins, has confessed that his firm illegally contributed \$100,000 incorporate funds to the Nixon campaign.

Spokesmen for both the White House and the oil company deny reports that the President personally put Atkins and the shah together at Blair House, where visiting dignitaries are quartered. The Ashland spokesman told my associate Joe Spear only that Atkins was in Washington during the shah's visit.