

CIA Resisted Lengthy Cover-Up Effort by White House, Hill Account Reveals

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The Central Intelligence Agency resisted an extraordinary series of pressures by top White House aides to assist in a cover-up of the Watergate scandal over an eight-month period beginning in June, 1972, Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) revealed yesterday.

These pressures became so intense that the CIA's deputy director, Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters, warned former White House counsel John W. Dean III that he would resign and demand an audience with President Nixon if he were ordered to "compromise" the agency in the Watergate case.

This new account of White House intercessions in the Watergate investigation was disclosed by Symington based on testimony by Walters on Monday to the Senate Armed Services Committee and a deposition given by the CIA officials to federal prosecutors yesterday.

The White House officials implicated by Walters' testimony are Dean, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, former acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III also became implicated in the efforts, according to Symington.

"It is very clear to me that there was an attempt to unload major responsibility for the Watergate bugging and cover-up on CIA," Symington said. The three aides, he added, "were doing everything in the world to obstruct justice."

The narrative began on June 23, 1972, less than a week after the celebrated Watergate break-in, when Walters and former CIA Director Richard M. Helms were summoned to the White House to meet with Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

Haldeman warned that the Watergate incident "might be exploited by the opposition" and he directed Walters to tell Gray that any investigation into channeling of Watergate funds through Mexico would endanger CIA activities and resources in that country.

"Mr. Haldeman specifically bypassed General Walters' superior, Mr. Helms, in asking that only General Walters visit Mr. Gray," Symington noted.

An immediate appointment was made by the White House with Gray and within an hour the acting FBI director and Walters were sitting down into a face-to-face meeting.

Walters, according to the testimony, told Gray that "senior people at the White House, whom he did not name, had told him that pursuit of the investigation of Mexican financing would uncover some of the agency's clandestine activities." Gray answered that he was aware the FBI and CIA "do not uncover one another's sources and operations," according to the Symington account.

But when Walters returned to the CIA he was told, Symington believes by Helms, that an FBI investigation of the Mexican fund "laundering" operation would not endanger CIA covert resources.

Three days later Walters was summoned to the White House, this time by Dean, to discuss the scheme for calling off the FBI investigation.

Walters went to see Dean after confirming with Ehrlichman "that it was all right to talk with him," Symington related. He told Dean that "the agency was not compromised in any way in the Watergate bugging, and that there was no CIA involvement in the case."

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Helms told Walters on this occasion and in the ensuing developments that "he had handled the situation just right," according to the Symington account.

The following day, June 27, Dean again called Walters.

"Mr. Dean reportedly asked if there was some way the

CIA could go bail or pay the salaries of the individuals accused in the Watergate case while they were in jail," Symington said.

"General Walters stated that he told Mr. Dean that to spend funds in this way would implicate the agency, and that he, General Walters, was prepared to resign rather than to do this."

Dean summoned him a third time the next day, Walters related.

"Mr. Dean reportedly asked if there could have been some CIA involvement that General Walters did not know about. General Walters said he stated that there could not be," according to the account.

"Mr. Dean asked if General Walters had any ideas, and General Walters replied, yes, that anyone who was responsible should be fired."

It was at that point that Walters told Dean, according to Symington's statement, that if he were ordered to implicate the CIA "he would ask to see the President and to explain to him how dangerous he thought such an action would be."

The next call to Walters—about a week later—came from acting FBI Director Gray. Gray said he could not stop the FBI inquiry into the Mexican fund conduit without a letter from Helms or Walters "stating that such an investigation would damage the agency's assets in Mexico." Walters replied that the CIA "had no interest in stopping any investigation."

He repeated to Gray his determination to resign if there was an attempt to compromise the agency, Symington related.

There is a sharp divergence in the testimony of Walters and Gray on the meeting that took place between the two men in early July.

Gray claims that Helms told him the CIA had no interest in the Mexican matter but that Walters asked the FBI to postpone interviews with two key witnesses. Gray's claim was reported in a digest of his testimony to the Senate's Watergate investigating committee, according to the Associated Press.

One of the witnesses alluded to by Gray was reported to be Manuel Ogarrio, the Mexican City lawyer who allegedly "laundered" a \$100,000 check through his bank, proceeds of which ended up in the safe of Nixon fundraiser Maurice H. Stans. These funds figured in bankrolling the Watergate and other operations of the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

The next important contact with Dean, related Symington, was in late January or early February, 1973. At that time the White House counsel called the new CIA director, James R. Schlesinger, and asked the CIA to retrieve from the FBI material bearing on the September, 1971, burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office by Watergate conspirators E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy.

Schlesinger and former CIA Deputy Director Gen. Robert E. Cushman Jr. acknowledged last week that the agency provided Hunt and Liddy with spy equipment that was used in the Ellsberg burglary in 1971.

Top CIA officials decided that "there was no way" to comply with Dean's request—"that it would implicate the CIA in something it was not implicated in." The decision was made by Walters, Schlesinger and incoming CIA Director William E. Colby.

"It is clear," said Symington, "that senior White House officials were deeply involved in attempts to enmesh CIA in the Watergate affair and thus take the pressure off those who were really responsible."

Symington said he could not explain why the alleged White House cover-up pressures on the CIA did not surface until 11 months after they were first applied to Helms and Walters.

He said he was not aware of any effort to report the series of events to the prosecutors in the Watergate case, the various CIA oversight committees on Capitol Hill, or to bring the matter to the direct attention of President Nixon.