

AVOWS INNOCENCE

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Suggests Aides May Have Attempted an Illegal Cover-Up

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WASHINGTON, May 22 — President Nixon conceded today that there had been "wide-ranging efforts" in the White House to conceal some aspects of the Watergate case, but he said those actions had stemmed from his legitimate interest in protecting national security.

In a 4,000-word statement, Mr. Nixon declared he had no

Text of Nixon statement is printed on Page 30.

intention of resigning from the Presidency, saying:

"I will not abandon my responsibilities. I will continue to do the job I was elected to do."

As for his own part, the President reiterated his own innocence in the burglary of the Democratic National Committee office on June 17, 1972, and its cover-up, but he said that he had asked his associates not to let the investigation of the case disclose covert intelligence operations conducted in the interest of national security.

"I wanted justice done with regard to Watergate," the President said, "but in the scale of national priorities with which I had to deal — and not at that time having any idea of the extent of political abuse which Watergate reflected — I also had to be deeply concerned with ensuring that neither the covert operations of the C.I.A. nor the operations of the special investigations unit should be compromised."

'Beyond My Directives'

And he suggested that his closest associates, H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, who resigned April 30, may well have carried his instructions on protecting the national security to illegal attempts to cover up the episode.

"With hindsight," the President said, "It is apparent that I should have given more heed to the warning signals I received along the way about a Watergate cover-up and less to the reassurances."

"It now appears that there were persons who may have gone beyond my directives, and sought to expand on my efforts to protect the national security operations in order to clear up any involvement they or certain others might have had in Watergate," Mr. Nixon said.

As evidence of his determination to have wrongdoing exposed, the President softened his previous positions on executive privilege. The right to remain silent will not be claimed, he said, in regard "to any testimony concerning possible criminal conduct or discussions of possible criminal conduct."

The statement was released late this afternoon in an atmosphere of great tension that has been building in the White House as the Watergate disclosures have mounted. It was issued, the President said, because of "grossly misleading

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impressions of many of the facets as they relate both to my own role and to certain unrelated activities involving national security."

The President's statement went much further than he had before in conceding White House involvement; it presented a marked contrast to the White House posture of flat "no involvement" of only one and one-half months ago, and it contained new, and more humble, acceptance of responsibility. He said:

"To the extent that I may in any way have contributed to the climate in which they took place, I did not intend to; to the extent that I failed to prevent them, I should have been more vigilant."

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, in a heated session with reporters following the release of the statement, said the President would appear before the press in "the very near future" to answer further to the Watergate charges.

Leonard Garment, the new White House counsel, said one reason for releasing a detailed statement today was to meet "the legitimate concerns" of political leaders of both parties that the President should be less seclusive and secretive.

The President and his aides seemed to be signaling an end to a period of passiveness on Mr. Nixon's part in the Watergate affair, a posture uncharacteristic of Richard Nixon in past crises. Mr. Garment said, so complicated and involved was the Watergate case and related matters that it had taken a long time to sort out the facts and, in effect, build a legal case for the White House.

Today's statement constituted an outline, with some of the details still vague, that is expected to be followed in building a defense for Mr. Nixon in the weeks and months ahead.

First, the President sought to separate his own moves in protecting national security from the Watergate burglary and other illegal activities that stemmed from both Watergate and the investigative efforts for security.

He acknowledged that in 1969 "a special program of wiretaps" had been set up to prevent leaks of secret information important to the new President's foreign policy initiatives. He said there were "fewer than 20 taps" and these were terminated in February, 1971.

In 1970, the Administration was concerned about a wave of bombings, explosions, campus disruptions and other violence sweeping the nation in connection with antiwar protests and decided a better intelligence operation was needed, he said. He appointed J. Edgar Hoover, then director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as chairman of an interagency in-

telligence committee to prepare recommendations, he recalled.

On June 25 of that year, Mr. Nixon said, the committee submitted a report that included recommendations for resuming "certain intelligence operations that had been suspended in 1966." "These in turn had included authorization for surreptitious entry—breaking and entering, in effect—on specified categories of targets in specified situations related to national security," he went on.

But he said that on reconsideration Mr. Hoover opposed the plan and it was never put in effect.

"It was this unused plan and related documents that John Dean [former White House counsel] removed from the White House and placed in a safe deposit box," he said.

The White House has asked for the document back on the ground it contains top secret matters on national security.

The President also acknowledged that in 1971, amid concern about continued leaks in foreign policy matters, a small intelligence unit called "the plumbers," was set up. It was this unit that was responsible for the burglarizing of the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Mr. Nixon said his decision to set up the unit came during the week following the publication of the Pentagon papers by The New York Times. "There was every reason to believe this [publication of the papers] was a security leak of unprecedented proportions," he said.

"It created a situation in

which the ability of the Government to carry on foreign relations even in the best of circumstances could have been severely compromised," he added.

He said he "looked to John Ehrlichman for the supervision of this group."

Mr. Nixon said he told a member of the unit, Egil Krogh Jr., "that as a matter of first priority, the unit should find out all it could about Mr. Ellsberg's associates and his motives."

"Because of the extreme gravity of the situation, and not then knowing what additional national secrets Mr. Ellsberg might disclose," he said, "I did impress upon Mr. Krogh the vital importance to the national security of his assignment. I did not authorize and had no knowledge of any illegal means to be used to achieve this goal."



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Television monitors were used yesterday because of the size of the Caucus Room, where hearings are being held

"However, because of the emphasis I put on the crucial importance of protecting the national security, I can understand how highly motivated individuals could have felt justified in engaging in specific activities that I would have disapproved had they been brought to my attention."

There have been reports that Mr. Nixon, citing national security, twice opposed the release to the Ellsberg trial court of information regarding the burglary of the Los Angeles psychiatrist. The President said today that when the matter was brought to his attention he directed that the information be transmitted to the court.