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Presidential Testimony

President Nixon has at last emerged from his cavalier dismissal of the Watergate conspiracy as a "deplorable incident." Not only is it officially acknowledged to have been somewhat more than that; it was followed—the President finally concedes—by a deliberate operation to cover up parts of the conspiracy, a cover-up orchestrated from the White House, undertaken in its general lines if not in its details, with the President's knowledge and on his instructions, for reasons of national security that he is now attempting to explain.

The President's statements issued yesterday raise some basic questions of governance and require the most careful scrutiny. Fortunately, under the American system, the concept of "national security" is not something that can be finally determined by one man acting alone. When decisions are made on that basis by the executive branch, the courts and the Congress—the balancing branches of constitutional government—have many avenues of recourse to inquire into and judge those decisions.

Mr. Nixon's latest Watergate statements, in short, do not end the matter. They raise to a new level the national discussion of ends and means.