

2 C.I.A. Officials Say That Nixon Did Not

WALTERS, HELMS GIVE THEIR VIEWS

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President Had Said He Was
Advised of Possibility of
Involvement by C.I.A.

By MARJORIE HUNTER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 23—Key officials of the Central Intelligence Agency say that President Nixon apparently made no effort to inquire directly if the Watergate break-in involved covert C.I.A. operations.

Lieut. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, deputy director of the agency at the time of the break-in, told a Senate subcommittee today that the President had not asked him if the agency was involved in the Watergate.

Richard Helms, director of the agency at the time of the Watergate break-in last June 17 also told a Senate committee earlier this week that he had no conversation with Mr. Nixon during that period.

President Nixon, in his statement issued yesterday, said that within a few days after the break-in, "I was advised that there was a possibility of C.I.A. involvement in some way."

Adviser Not Identified

The President's statement then continued:

"It did seem to me possible that, because of the involvement of former C. I. A. personnel, and because of some of their apparent associations, the investigation could lead to the uncovering of covert C.I.A. operations totally unrelated to the Watergate break-in."

In his statement, the President did not say who had "advised" him of the possibility of C.I.A. involvement.

General Walters's comments on not having been asked by the President about the agency's involvement came in answer to a question posed during his appearance today before a Senate Appropriations subcommittee headed by Senator John L. McClellan, Democrat of Arkansas.

"The general told us that the President did not talk to him about possible C.I.A. involvement," the Senator said later. "He did tell us, however, that the President had called him about another matter shortly after his return from Moscow, but it had nothing to do with Watergate."

Mr. Nixon visited Moscow in May of last year several weeks before the Watergate break-in.

Earlier Testimony Recalled

General Walters, in a number of other appearances before Congressional committees in the last two weeks, detailed alleged efforts by three top White House aides — H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman and John W. Dean 3d — to involve the C.I.A. in covering up the Watergate affair.

'Ask Them If Agency Had a

Both the general and Mr. Helms said that the White House overtures had been rejected.

General Walters was named deputy C.I.A. director by Mr. Nixon late last spring. He had served as official interpreter on foreign trips made by Mr. Nixon as Vice President in the nineteen fifties.

According to the general's earlier testimony, efforts of the three White House aides to involve the C.I.A. in the Watergate cover-up had centered on him, not on his superior, Mr. Helms.

He told of being called to

the White House, along with Mr. Helms, six days after the Watergate break-in and told by Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman that the "Watergate incident was causing trouble and was being exploited by the opposition."

General Walters testified that he had been told that "it had been decided at the White House" that he go to L. Patrick Gray 3d, then acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to try to persuade him to halt an F.B.I. investigation of Nixon campaign funds "laundered" through a Mexico City bank.

A "memorandum of conversation" written by General Walters following that meeting — and disclosed earlier this week by Congressional sources — said that at one point Mr. Haldeman had turned to the general and said, "It is the President's wish that you go to see Mr. Gray."

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Watergate Role

Not Sure Now

While not denying that he wrote that memorandum to himself shortly after that meeting on June 23, General Walters indicated in testimony to several Congressional committees this week that he was not sure Mr. Haldeman made any such statement invoking the President's name.

Mr. Helms, questioned earlier this week by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said that he did not recall hearing the President's name mentioned during that White House meeting.

However, Mr. Helms said that it did "strike me as odd" that Mr. Haldeman had passed over him by requesting his deputy, General Walters, to confer with Mr. Gray about halting the F.B.I. inquiry.

Mr. Helms further testified that he said at that meeting that he did not believe any C.I.A. interests would be jeopardized by continuation of the F.B.I. investigation.

Mr. Helms was relieved as director of the C.I.A. last November and named Ambassador to Iran.

General Walters, in earlier testimony, also told of being asked by Mr. Dean to provide a "cover" for the Watergate defendants by placing them on the payroll and paying their bail. He said that he had rejected that, too.

Meanwhile, James R. Schlesinger, now director of the C.I.A., said today that President Nixon had never talked to him about any effort to involve the agency in the Watergate case.

Mr. Schlesinger, who was nominated recently by Mr. Nixon to be Secretary of Defense, also denied today that he had ever been asked to testify falsely that James W. McCord Jr., a defendant in the Watergate break-in case, had been returned to the C.I.A. payroll to conduct the burglary.