

CIA Terms Nixon Too Hard to Reach For Cover-Up Alert

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Former and present top officials of the Central Intelligence Agency have testified they did not attempt to alert President Nixon to White House requests to cover up the Watergate scandal because to reach the President, they would have had to go through the people who were requesting the coverup.

That situation was described yesterday by Sen. John L. McClellan (D-Ark.) after a closed hearing in which Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, testified for 2½ more hours about the CIA's role in domestic intelligence activities ordered by the White House.

Referring to Walters and his former CIA boss, Richard M. Helms, McClellan said:

"They pointed out that it was awfully difficult to get to the President, that to get to the President, they had to go through the same people who asked them to do it (block an FBI Watergate probe)."

Both Helms and Walters had previously testified that White House chief of staff H.R. (Bob) Haldeman asked Walters to visit former Acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III and request a halt to an FBI investigation into the "laundering" of a \$100,000 Republican campaign contribution through a Mexico City bank.

Mr. Nixon on Tuesday acknowledged he instructed Haldeman and White House aide John D. Ehrlichman to ask Walters to ensure that the FBI Watergate probe did not expose an "unrelated" CIA investigation or any covert activities of a special presidential investigating team called "the plumbers."

But, Mr. Nixon maintained, "It was certainly not my intent, nor my wish, that the investigation of the Watergate break-in or of related acts be impeded in any way."

McClellan said his Senate Appropriations subcommittee on intelligence operation repeatedly asked Helms and Walters why they failed to telephone or personally visit Mr. Nixon about their stated fears that some top White House officials were trying to use the CIA in a cover-up of Watergate.

these other CIA-related developments yesterday on Capitol Hill:

- The chairman of a House Armed Services oversight committee indicated that Walters has backed off from his written allegation that Haldeman said "it is the President's wish" that the CIA block part of the FBI Watergate probe.

- Rep. Lucien N. Nedzi (D-Mich.) said that Walters, who made the statement in a previously-disclosed memorandum, testified Tuesday that Haldeman may not have used the phrase. Walters testified, according to Nedzi, that he may have incorrectly inserted the reference to Mr. Nixon in the memorandum because "the thought was implicit in (his) mind."

- Current CIA Director James Schlesinger denied that he had ever been approached to doctor the records of Watergate conspirator James W. McCord, as suggested by McCord on Tuesday before the Senate Watergate investigating committee.

McCord testified that his lawyer, Gerald Alch, told him Schlesinger "would go along" with a request to falsify McCord's CIA personnel records to show that he was still employed by the agency at the time of the Watergate burglary.

Schlesinger, after testifying in a closed Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, said White House aides were "at least overzealous" in interpreting Mr. Nixon's orders to keep the CIA's covert operations from being exposed in the FBI investigation of Watergate.

Meanwhile, Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), acting chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he believes the Nixon administration is invoking national security in a case that "would appear more a case of national embarrassment."

Meeting with newsmen after a closed hearing, Symington asked a series of theoretical questions, including, "Did (the late FBI director) J. Edgar Hoover oppose the 'plan and a directive to strengthen our intelligence operations' partly because he felt said proposed plan might be unethical, illegal and unconstitutional?"

Symington also cited Walters' long association with Mr. Nixon, and asked why the President instructed Haldeman to deal with Walters instead of Helms.

McClellan said he would, for the time being, withhold his own reaction to Mr. Nixon's 4,000-word statement.

But an Armed Services Committee member, Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.), said, "I don't see how there could be any national security issue in Watergate."

Referring to Mr. Nixon's Tuesday statement, Jackson said, "All the President had to do was to get on the phone and call Helms . . . There was no need to have a conference, which turned out to be an effort to embrace Watergate in the CIA."

"The proposals made to the CIA . . . for it to engage in improprieties, wrongdoing and illegal acts—coming from the source that they did—were so shocking that the question arises whether the CIA should have gone directly to the President," McClellan said.

He noted that Helms refused to accede to the Haldeman request, adding, "If the CIA had, it would have compromised the agency and involved the agency in the cover-up of a crime . . . as an accessory after the fact."

Walters refused to discuss his testimony. However, when asked whether recent disclosures about CIA activities may have diminished the agency's effectiveness, he responded, "I would hope for the sake of the United States that it has not."

Meanwhile, there were