

Voice of America Curbed on Broadcasts

By William Claiborne
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The Voice of America news staff has been instructed by government officials not to broadcast Watergate disclosures that are attributed to unidentified sources.

The order has touched off what one high VOA official termed a "vehement difference of opinion" between the government-operated radio network and its parent agency, the U.S. Information Agency.

It has also resulted in distress in the newsrooms of VOA, where the partial gag on Watergate is viewed as an obstacle to covering a major story that free nation newspapers all over the world are reporting fully.

The instructions prompted

VOA editors to kill a story on Sunday that it had already sent to its outlets. The story, published in The Washington Post and The New York Times, quoted "reliable sources" as saying that former presidential counsel John W. Dean has told federal investigators that he discussed the Watergate cover-up with President Nixon on at least 35 occasions between January and April of this year.

James Keogh, director of the USIA, said he had ordered the VOA attribution policy and that it will remain in effect.

"My guidance has been to cover the Watergate story factually, but do not use rumor, speculation, hearsay or

anonymous accusation." Keogh said he felt the Dean story fell within the latter category.

"You have to realize that this is a very sensitive thing for us—the impression that the foreign audience gets," said Keogh. "It's difficult for people to understand what we're doing. In some countries, they might get the impression of something conspiratorial about this (the broadcasts themselves)."

Keogh said the VOA had been instructed to explain that the Watergate affair is "interplay between a free press, the executive branch and the legislative and judicial branches of government."

Although Keogh's com-

ments seemed to preclude a reversal of his policy, the deputy director of VOA, William D. Miller, said, "We are still discussing this, and there are differences that are unsolved."

Miller said there is still a basic question of interpretation involved in weighing each new Watergate disclosure.

"One man's rumor is another man's fact," said Miller. "There is a vehement difference of opinion; as of now, we stand on our (story) file."

Examination of the files over the past four months has shown that the VOA covered the Watergate case thoroughly and impartially, drawing upon its own repor-

tage and unattributed accounts carried in newspapers and by commercial networks.

In one March commentary, it praised the press and Chief U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica for bringing to light many of the case's disclosures.

However, staff members at the VOA said the current unrest over the network's attribution policy came to a head on Sunday and that the Keogh instructions have been "expressed in stronger terms" in the past several days.

One VOA executive said he received indications last Friday that the Watergate policy would be more strictly enforced.

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of Watergate Story

Staff members in the VOA newsroom said that the overnight shift wrote a broadcast based on The Post and The Times stories about Dean and that the story was sent to VOA transmitters in Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia for beaming to all points of the globe.

However, at 11 a.m. on Sunday, according to the staffers, an advisory was sent out instructing all foreign VOA editors to "make no further use" of the Watergate story.

The story "kill" was based on a note left by the duty editor that day to the effect that "Mr. Keogh won't allow VOA to carry unnamed sources," according to one staff member.

Finally, at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, VOA sent a rewritten Watergate story that began with a White House denial of The Post and Times stories.

Miller said the story "kill" was made because "somebody misinterpreted the instructions we had." He said when senior editors realized what had happened, they re-instated the story, leading with the White House denial.

Keogh said yesterday unattributed stories in newspapers can be picked up by the VOA when they are followed by specific denials. "If an accusation is important enough to warrant a denial, it's a different thing," he said.

Staff members said the

VOA also was not permitted to broadcast a Watergate story that ran Monday in The Times and on Tuesday in The Post until the White House had officially denied it. The story based on memoranda written by Central Intelligence Agency deputy director Vernon Walters indicated the White House regarded Watergate as a "political bombshell" and not as a national security threat.

The staff member said there has been no organized effort in the VOA newsroom to get Keogh to change his mind, but added that some newsmen have been trying to tell the USIA that "you can't go wrong if you tell it like it is."