

# Nixon Explains His Taped Cryptic Remark About

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WASHINGTON, March 11— Statements released today by lawyers for Richard M. Nixon provide the former President's first public explanation of a tape recorded conversation that played a major part in his resignation in 1974.

The conversation, on June 23, 1972, six days after the Watergate break-in, disclosed that Mr. Nixon had tried to block an investigation that eventually linked the burglary to Mr. Nixon's campaign committee. When the tape was made public two years later, it became known as the "smoking gun" evidence that forced the President to resign.

What has continued to puzzle investigators, however, are some of Mr. Nixon's cryptic comments on that tape about Richard Helms, who headed the Central Intelligence Agency at the time, and about the agency's attempted Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961.

In a series of written questions submitted to him last January by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Mr. Nixon was asked what he had meant when he told H. R. Haldeman, his chief of staff, that the Nixon Administration had "protected Helms from one hell of a lot of things."

## One Point Not Clear

In giving instructions to Mr. Haldeman in the June 23 conversation to secure Mr. Helms's cooperation in the Watergate cover-up, the President told his aide to remind the C.I.A. chief that a vigorous investigation of the break-in might "blow the whole Bay of Pigs thing, which we think would be very unfortunate—both for C.I.A. and for the country, at this time, and for American foreign policy."

Although it was publicly known at the time that several of the men arrested the previous week inside the Democratic offices had participated in the Cuban invasion, what has never been clear is the cause of Mr. Nixon's concern that "if it gets out that this is all involved, the Cuba thing, it would be a fiasco" and "would make the C.I.A. look bad."

In his answer to the Senate committee's question, made public by his lawyers today, Mr. Nixon said that his statement to Mr. Haldeman about having protected Mr. Helms had concerned the forthcoming

publication, by a former C.I.A. employee, of a book "which would, for the first time, reveal a great deal of classified information about the C.I.A."

Mr. Nixon wrote to the Senate committee that he discussed that matter with Mr. Helms in early 1972—he did not name the former employee in question—and that he had assured the director of his full support if the C.I.A. chose to take legal action "to prevent these disclosures."

"It was in light of this incident," Mr. Nixon recalled, that he made to Mr. Haldeman the statement that the White House had "protected Helms from one hell of a lot of things."

Some Senate committee investigators have privately speculated that Mr. Nixon's references to the Bay of Pigs invasion on the June 23 tape might have concerned the one major aspect of that operation that was not then publicly known—the C.I.A. plot, since disclosed by the intelligence panel, to assassinate Prime Minister Fidel Castro of Cuba coincident with the invasion.

## Eight Plots on Castro

Altogether, the C.I.A. conceived eight unsuccessful schemes against Mr. Castro's life between the April 1961, invasion and early 1965, although some of them were never set in motion.

According to the intelligence committee, Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, under whose Administrations they occurred, were advised of most of the plots after they had failed. But no evidence has been developed that Mr. Nixon was made privy to that information after taking office in January 1969.

None of the 77 questions put to Mr. Nixon by the Senate committee dealt directly with his knowledge or lack of knowledge of the Mr. Cas assassination plots against Mr. Castro.

But other evidence available to the intelligence panel has led some staff members there to speculate that Mr. Nixon had an opportunity to learn of the assassination attempts more than a year before the Watergate break-in.

For example, John D. Ehrlichman, who was Mr. Nixon's chief domestic aide, told the Senate Watergate committee in 1973 that Mr. Nixon had at one point asked him to secure from Mr. Helms a copy of a 1967 report by the C.I.A. inspector

general on the agency's involvement in the Bay of Pigs invasion.

According to reliable versions of Mr. Ehrlichman's testimony, which was not given in public session, Mr. Helms dodged the request and finally told Mr. Ehrlichman that he would have to speak directly with Mr. Nixon about the matter.

According to a report on the assassination plots made public by the Senate intelligence committee last November, the 1967 C.I.A. report was produced at the request of President Johnson after Drew Pearson, the syndicated columnist, first reported the involvement of V V AmerVdiV Government in plots against Mr. Castro's life.

According to the committee's report, Mr. Johnson was subsequently briefed on the plots that occurred in the Administration of President Kennedy, but not on those in his own.

Mr. Ehrlichman told the Watergate committee that, while he had no knowledge of the matters discussed between Mr. Nixon and Mr. Helms, the report on the Bay of Pigs affair that the C.I.A. subsequently gave him was not complete.

The question that has confronted Senate investigators, and that remains unanswered, is whether the material deleted from that report, and discussed privately between Mr. Nixon and Mr. Helms, concerned the assassination attempts.

## A Good Relationship

According to Fred D. Thompson, who served as chief minority counsel to the Senate Watergate committee, Mr. Ehrlichman asserted that, except for that single instance, the relationship between Mr. Helms and the White House had been a good one.

That assertion takes on added significance in view of Mr. Haldeman's response, on the June 23 tape, to Mr. Nixon's comment that Mr. Helms had been "protected" by the White House.

That's what Ehrlichman says," Mr. Haldeman is heard to say on the tape.

Mr. Haldeman has insisted that he has never known what lay behind Mr. Nixon's instructions to remind Mr. Helms, in securing his cooperation, that a full-scale investigation could "open the whole Bay of Pigs thing up again." Mr. Ehrlichman has declined to discuss his knowledge of the matter.

But whatever Mr. Nixon intended, Mr. Helms apparently understood. Later in the day

of June 23, Mr. Haldeman returned to the President's office to report on his conversation with Mr. Helms.

He told the director, Mr. Haldeman reported, that the Watergate matter "tracks back to the Bay of Pigs, and it tracks

back to some other leads run out to people who had no involvement in this," and that Mr. Helms had "kind of got the picture."

"He said, 'We'll be very happy to be helpful,'" Mr. Haldeman recalled on the tape.

15

Helms



Associated Press

Richard Helms meeting with President Nixon at the White House in 1973