The CIA and covert actions
US operations: illegal, widespread

By Norman D. Sandler and Robert C. McFadden

The CIA Watergate, and Eltbody

On June 17, 1972, five men illegally entered the offices of the Democratic National Headquarters in the Watergate Hotel, armed with cameras and electronic surveillance equipment.

Within 48 hours, Richard Helms, then Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was awakened "in the wee hours of the morning" by a telephone call from a CIA security officer. Helms was informed that the men under investigation in connection with the Watergate break-in had CIA connections and one was still on payroll.

The CIA did not plan the Watergate break-in. Nixon supporters on the Senate Watergate Committee last year found it attractive to suggest the mission had been a retaliation for the broke White House - that is, a President - in suggesting and authorizing the Watergate operation.

The CIA did play a significant role in events leading up to the Watergate break-in and in the subsequent cover-up that swept through the Executive Branch for almost two years.

It is known, for example, that the CIA provided Hunt with materials used in the planning and perhaps execution of a burglary at the offices of Dr. Fielding.

The assistance given to Hunt was discussed at the highest levels of the CIA, although Helms later testified under oath and other CIA officials denied that they had anything to do with the matter.

Senator [John] Sparkman: Do you say you know nothing about the action that was going on so far as Dr. Elberg and Dr. Fielding were concerned; is that right?

Mr. Helms: Yes, sir.

Senator Sparkman: You had no knowledge of it?

Mr. Helms: Absolutely none, Senator Sparkman.

Senator [L.] Fulbright: The Agency was aware that Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy were preparing to commit a crime, were they not?

Mr. Helms: They were, not to the best of my knowledge. I never heard anybody at the Agency mention any such thing... The best of our knowledge, no crimes were committed, nobody had given us or anyone else any indication that anything undetected was afoot.

During a lengthy discussion at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia earlier this year, the agency was told by one Agency official that CIA involvement in Watergate went beyond its legal authority. "The provision of Howard Hunt, at the time it was known, was sui generis... " The prohibition of Howard Hunt, at the time it was known, was sui generis..."

The CIA clearly intended that any domestic operations be conducted within the boundaries of the law, and that the Agency's actions be subject to the scrutiny of the courts and the Congress. The Agency's actions in Watergate were, in fact, subject to the scrutiny of the courts and the Congress.

The Agency denies reports that it is an intelligence agency, the KGB. Then-Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms in a series of affidavits that he submitted to the Senate said that he had no knowledge of the matter, and that he had no reason to believe that the Agency had been involved in Watergate.

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