

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

OGC Has
Reviewed

President Ford
Richard Helms, Ambassador to Iran,
former CIA Director
John O. Marsh, Counsellor to the President
Philip W. Buchen, Counsel to the President
Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, Deputy Assistant
to the President for National Security Affairs

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

DATE AND TIME:

Saturday - January 4, 1975
12:37 - 1:00 p. m.

MORI/CDF
C03195587

PLACE:

The Oval Office
The White House

SUBJECT:

Allegations of CIA Domestic Activities

President: Dick, you and I have known each other a long time. I have only the most admiration for you and for your work. Frankly, we are in a mess. I want you to tell me whatever you want. I believe the CIA is essential to the country. It has to exist and perform its functions. We will have a Blue Ribbon Panel look into these charges. It will investigate the domestic activities of the CIA.

Helms: Why not add the FBI? They overlap, and you may as well get to the bottom of it.

President: I will consider it. Secondly, though, the commission will look at the Colby report and, thirdly, make recommendations to me. It is a good commission. I hope they will stay within their charter, but in this climate, we can't guarantee it. It would be tragic if it went beyond it, because the CIA needs to remain a strong and viable agency. It would be a shame if the public uproar forced us to go beyond and to damage the integrity of the CIA.

I automatically assume what you did was right, unless it's proved otherwise.

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Helms: I have been in the service 32 years. At the end all one has is a small pension and a reputation -- if any. I testified in Watergate; I didn't dump on President Nixon and I stuck to the truth. I intend to fight this matter. I welcome a Blue Ribbon Panel.

At the base is Congressional oversight. No Congress wants to join hands with the Bay of Pigs, etcetera; it's bad politics. The CIA is the President's creature.

If allegations have been made to Justice, a lot of dead cats will come out. I intend to defend myself. I don't know everything which went on in the Agency; maybe no one really does. But I know enough to say that if the dead cats come out, I will participate. I think the mood of the country is ghastly. I feel deeply for you, Mr. President. I am a member of your team and I don't intend to foul the nest if I can avoid it.

The basic allegation -- that we spied on dissidents -- stemmed from the charge to me to discover if there was any foreign connection to the dissidents. I never permitted any spying on any Congressmen. The business of the files is ridiculous; if you get a name, of course you make a record and open a file in case it is relevant thereafter.

President: I have no doubt about your total integrity, and, in fact you did a good job running the Agency. What we are trying to do is look into the charges and protect the functions of the Agency with a Blue Ribbon group which will operate responsibly. I hope you understand my position. You have my pledge that everything I do will be straightforward. I plan no witch hunt, but in this environment I don't know if I can control it.

Helms: I will help you, Mr. President. I believe in the Agency and its mission.

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