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Helms Disclaims Spying Knowledge

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Ambassador Richard Helms has told a closed Senate hearing that he was unaware of any domestic surveillance conducted on Americans by the Central Intelligence Agency while he was its director, according to one senator.

"His surveillance stopped at the water's edge — overseas," said Sen. Gale W. McGee, D-Wyo.

Helms testified for three hours yesterday in a private session before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which questioned him at length on his past denials of CIA misconduct.

HELMS SAID, "I think I had a very fair and good hearing, and I had an opportunity to explain whatever discrepancies the senators felt had been hanging fire."

Neither Helms nor the chairman, Sen. John Sparkman, D-Ala., would discuss specifics of Helms' testimony. Sparkman promised that a transcript, edited for security reasons, would be made public, probably next week.

The closed-door session apparently focused more on the CIA's activities in Chile and other foreign nations

than on the charges that the agency spied on U.S. citizens in this country. "I don't think that question came up too much in this hearing," Sparkman said.

BUT MCGEE told newsmen that Helms had indicated to the committee that any such domestic surveillance had taken place without his knowledge and without his approval.

CIA Director William E. Colby has admitted the agency watched columnist Jack Anderson and a Washington Post reporter during the period when Helms headed the spy agency. The CIA also infiltrated about a dozen agents into protest groups.

The use of the CIA may have been spurred by White House dislike for the late J. Edgar Hoover as director of the FBI, which has the sole legal authority for counterintelligence inside U.S. borders.

McGee said, "The stubbornness of J. Edgar finally forced the White House to divert some of its requests to the CIA." But Helms had testified to the same committee in 1973 that he "totally and 100 percent resisted" White House efforts to involve the agency in this role.

McGEE, asked about Helms' candor, said, "There is nothing that has transpired today that has impugned his integrity as a witness."

Sparkman said, "He gave us a very full and frank explanation," but he avoided a direct reply to the question of Helms' consistency and candor.

Helms said, "Why don't we wait for the transcript" and told newsmen they could reach their own judgments then.

Helms said he will leave Washington Sunday to return eventually to Iran, where he has served as U.S. ambassador since 1973. Asked if he thought the CIA controversy might cost him his diplomatic post, Helms replied, "I don't know

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