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White House Aide Declines To Testify on Stealth Leaks

Associated Press

Acting on President Carter's orders, a White House national security aide refused yesterday to appear at a congressional hearing on news leaks about Stealth technology, for making warplanes relatively invisible to enemy radar.

David Aaron, deputy White House assistant for national security affairs, had been called by the House Armed Services Investigations subcommittee to testify on an allegation that he leaked the Stealth information.

Aaron sent a sworn statement denying he was the leaker but did not show up to testify.

Rep. Samuel S. Stratton (D-N.Y.) said the subcommittee probably will subpoena Aaron.

White House counsel Lloyd Cutler told the panel in a letter, "The president has directed Mr. Aaron not to appear before your subcommittee in a public hearing at this time.

"When, and if your subcommittee has some credible evidence before it to support the charge against Mr. Aaron, the president will review the situation as it may then exist."

Retired Adm. Elmo Zumwalt told the subcommittee Sept. 16 that two White House officials, whom he would not identify, had told him Aaron leaked the information published by The Washington Post Aug. 14.

Zumwalt also testified the sources told him Carter directed that Stealth

information be leaked as part of his reelection campaign, to counter criticisms of a failure in defense policy.

Stratton, the subcommittee chairman, said only the president, not his counsel, can invoke executive privilege, and that it can be invoked only against disclosure of the president's consultations with his advisers.

"If this involves a conversation in which the president told Mr. Aaron this Stealth information should be made available to the press, then this would be covered by executive privilege," Stratton said.

Stratton's subcommittee is investigating news leaks of the technology and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown's announcement Aug. 22 that the technology existed.

Brown said he was forced by the news leaks to confirm the program's existence but is keeping technical details secret.