

Break-in Probe And FBI, CIA

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"In short . . .," wrote CIA Director Richard Helms in a memo to his aide, "it is up to the FBI to lay some cards on the table. Otherwise, we are unable to be of help."

Helms' terse instruction was delivered to Vernon Walters, then his deputy director, on June 28, 1972, for guidance in dealing with the FBI. Thus, 11 days after the Watergate break-in, the nation's two secretive agencies—the FBI and CIA—were locked in an antagonistic struggle over how far the FBI should go in unraveling the crime.

The Helms memo surfaces publicly for the first time in Book II of the House Judiciary Committee's evidence, released yesterday, covering the period from June 17, 1972, to Feb. 9, 1973. It lays out the facts—most already published—on the alleged attempts of the White House to interfere with the FBI investigation of the break-in.

It pinpoints the ambiguities in Helms' position. He was under pressure from the White House to tell acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray that the pursuit of campaign money coming from Mexico might uncover secret CIA activities in Mexico.

June 23, at a meeting, Helms told White House aides H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman there was no CIA involvement in Watergate and that the FBI investigation could not jeopardize any CIA activities.

According to Walters' testimony, however, Haldeman kept insisting that Helms warn the FBI about prospective trouble arising from its investigation in Mexico.

Helms' June 28 memo—written five days after the meeting at the White House—gives a different glimpse of Helms. In his memo to Walters, he wrote:

"In addition, we still adhere to the request that they [the FBI] confine themselves to the personalities already arrested or directly under suspicion and that they desist from expanding this investigation into other areas which may well, eventually, run afoul of our operations."

Helms has never publicly explained the discrepancy between this memo and his testimony last summer that no CIA operations would be jeopardized.

One explanation in Helms's behalf was supplied last fall by CIA Director William E. Colby. Colby said in a memo to a Senate committee that

Helms had in fact been disturbed about FBI leaks when he proposed the agency's investigation be limited.

Helms also was concerned about an FBI "fishing expedition into CIA operations" when he laid down the guidelines to Walters, Colby asserted.

The House committee evidence also provides a crucial link to President Nixon in the attempts to have the CIA restrict the initial FBI investigation of Watergate in June 1972.

Walters had written a memo in which he quoted Haldeman as saying "It is the President's wish" to involve the CIA. Walters later changed his recollection and said he was not sure Haldeman had made such a statement.

However, in secret Senate testimony made public yesterday, Haldeman says Walters' initial recollection was correct.

In testimony of May 31, 1973, before the Senate Appropriations subcommittee, Haldeman said, "I find it quite probable that General Walter's Memorandum [memorandum of conversation] is more accurate than his subsequent cycles of revisions, and that I probably did say, 'It is the President's wish' because I believed then and I believe now that it was."

The Judiciary Committee narrative also focuses on the story of F. Howard Hunt, the former CIA employee who helped plan the Watergate break-in and whose antics with borrowed CIA equipment alarmed the agency's top brass.

It picks up his story in July, 1971, with an account of a telephone call from Ehrlichman to Gen. Robert Cushman, then deputy CIA director, in which Ehrlichman insists that Hunt is working for the President and is to have "carte Blanche" treatment at the CIA.

That phone call has been hotly disputed. Ehrlichman has testified—as recently as this week in federal court—that he could not remember making the call.

However, a secretary's notes on the phone call are part of the committee's evidence. According to those notes, Ehrlichman told Cushman:

"I want to alert you that an old acquaintance, Howard Hunt, has been asked by the President to do some special consultant work on security problems. He may be contacting you sometime in the future for some assistance. I wanted you to know that he was in fact doing some things for the Presi-

dent. He is a long-time acquaintance with the people here. He may want some help on computer runs and other things. You should consider he has pretty much carte blanche."

Still another CIA memorandum reproduced by the Judiciary Committee indicates that Hunt's activities very quickly aroused officials' fears that he would embarrass the agency. It is an affidavit from an unnamed CIA official assigned to the Executive Office Building.

The official noted that Hunt had been checking out CIA equipment, including a sophisticated camera fitted into a tobacco pouch, and even had an associate outfitted with agency gear without getting approval from the top. The official wrote his superiors: "The agency could suffer if its clandestine gear were discovered (being) used in domestic secret operations."

But the centerpiece of Judiciary's Book II is the repeated appearance of evidence that Haldeman, John W. Dean III and others in the White House attempted to divert the FBI investigation of Watergate by implying it would unearth CIA secrets.

The Walters memorandum, suggesting that Haldeman tried to use the CIA to block the FBI probe, is crucial to the narrative. The large amount of documentation involving Haldeman's statements indicates the Judiciary Committee staff believes the statements are evidence for impeachment of the President, whose name Haldeman invoked.

Walters wrote that at the June 23 meeting in the White House Haldeman repeatedly warned that the FBI investigation "might lead to some important people." He coupled that, Walters said, with a claim that CIA activities in Mexico — despite Helms's denial — might be endangered.

Haldeman was reluctant to comment on that when questioned by a Senate Appropriations subcommittee in execu-

tive session, in May 1973. A copy of that testimony was published yesterday by the Judiciary Committee. Responding reluctantly to questions by Chairman John L. McClellan (D-Ark.), Haldeman at first dismissed the account as Walters' own "characterization" of the conversation.

McClellan: "Is his characterization of the conversation wrong, or correct?"

Haldeman: "I have no material conflict with it."

McClellan: "Then you said that, or something like that, I would assume, unless you state otherwise."

Walters also wrote in his memorandum that Haldeman said the affair was becoming "embarrassing."

In his Senate Appropriations subcommittee testimony, Haldeman said he could not recall describing the investigation as embarrassing.

Despite Helms' disavowal of a threat to the CIA in the investigation, Walters recalled that he went to see Gray after the June 23 meeting and told the acting FBI director that continued probing "might uncover some covert activities of the Central Intelligence Agency."

The immediate question was whether FBI agents would interview Mexican lawyer Manuel Ogarrio, through whom some campaign contributions had been laundered, and a Minnesota businessman, Kenneth Dahlberg, whose contributions had been traced to the Miami bank account of one of the Watergate burglars.

On June 28, five days after the crucial White House meeting, Gray ordered agents to proceed with the Mexican interview. The next day, Gray switched courses. He ordered the interview in Mexico canceled and told the Minneapolis field office to stop trying to interview the businessman.

Gray said he canceled both interviews after receiving another telephone call from Dean, who urged him to hold off the interviews because of national security reasons.



Sketch by David Suter for The Washington Post