

Statement Issued on Walters Testimony

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Statement by Sen. Stuart Symington, Acting Chairman, Senate Committee on Armed Services, in Watergate testimony.

In sworn testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee yesterday, Monday, May 14, the deputy director of the CIA, Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters, testified to a remarkable series of events:

On June 23, 1972, General Walters, who had been at the CIA about six weeks, said he was asked to go to the White House with CIA Director Richard Helms at 1 p.m. that afternoon. There they met with Mr. H. R. Haldeman and Mr. John Ehrlichman in the latter's office. General Walters said he was told by Mr. Haldeman that the Watergate incident might be exploited by the opposition, and that it had been decided that he, Walters, should go to the acting FBI director, Mr. Patrick Gray, and should tell Mr. Gray that if the FBI pursued an investigation of certain funds in Mexico, connected with the Watergate case, this inquiry would compromise certain CIA activities and resources in Mexico. Mr. Haldeman specifically bypassed General Walters' superior, Mr. Helms, in asking that only General Walters visit Mr. Gray.

General Walters further testified that an appointment with Mr. Gray was made for him immediately and that he went to see Mr. Gray an hour later. According to his testimony, he told Mr. Gray that senior people at the White House, whom he did not name, had told

him that pursuit of the investigations of Mexican financing would uncover some of the agency's clandestine activities. Mr. Gray reportedly responded that he was aware that the FBI and CIA do not uncover one another's sources and operations.

General Walters stated, however, that on his return to the agency he checked and discovered that investigation of the Mexican financial affair would not compromise any CIA clandestine assets.

General Walters testified further that Mr. John W. Dean III called him on the following Monday, June 26, and wanted to talk with him about the substance of his conversation with Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman the previous Friday. Mr. Dean reportedly said that General Walters could call Mr. Ehrlichman to insure that it was all right to talk with him. General Walters then called Mr. Ehrlichman who told him he could speak with Mr. Dean.

General Walters then testified that at 11:45 a.m. that same day, June 26, he went to see Mr. Dean. Mr. Dean reportedly received him alone. General Walters stated that he told Mr. Dean that after talking with Mr. Gray he had looked into the matter and that the agency was not compromised in any way in the Watergate bugging, and that there was no CIA involvement in the case.

Following this Monday meeting, General Walters stated that he returned to the CIA and told Mr. Helms of his conversation with Mr. Dean, and of his denial of

any agency involvement in the Watergate case. According to General Walters, Mr. Helms told him that he had handled the situation just right. General Walters also testified that he constantly checked with Mr. Helms during the following events and that Helms assured General Walters that he was acting correctly.

The next day, June 27, Mr. Dean reportedly called General Walters again, and General Walters again went to see him at his office. Mr. Dean reportedly asked if there was some way the CIA could go bail or pay the salaries of the individuals accused in the Watergate case while they were in jail. General Walters stated that he told Mr. Dean that there was no way this could be done, that any internal expenditure of funds by the CIA must be reported to the House and Senate Oversight Committees. General Walters stated that he told Mr. Dean that to spend funds in this way would implicate the agency, and that he, General Walters, was prepared to resign rather than to do this.

General Walters testified that the next day, June 28, Mr. Dean called him again, and that he went to see Mr. Dean for a third time. Mr. Dean reportedly asked if there could have been some CIA involvement that General Walters did not know about. General Walters said he stated that there could be. At one point in the conversation, according to General Walters, Mr. Dean asked if General Walters had any ideas, and General Walters replied, yes, that anyone who was responsible should be fired.

General Walters further testified that he told Mr. Dean that he would have no part in attempting to compromise the CIA in something in which it was not in fact compromised. He said that, if ordered to do so, he would ask to see the President and to explain to him how dangerous he thought such an action would be.

On July 5, General Walters received a call, according to his testimony, from Mr. Patrick Gray, the acting

director of the FBI. Mr. Gray, referring to his previous conversation with General Walters, reportedly said that he could not stop the investigation of the Mexican financing unless he received a letter from the director or General Walters stating that such an investigation would damage the agency's assets in Mexico. General Walters testified that he then went to see Mr. Gray the next day, July 6, and told him that he had checked this matter and discovered that such an investigation would not endanger any CIA assets, that the CIA was totally unconnected with the matter, and that the CIA had no interest in stopping any investigation. He then testified that he told Mr. Gray the story of his meeting with Mr. Halde-

man and Mr. Ehrlichman and that he had been told to convey his previous message to Mr. Gray. General Walters testified that he repeated to Mr. Gray his determination to resign if there was an attempt to compromise the CIA in this issue.

According to General Walters' testimony, he saw Mr. Gray again on July 12 at the FBI office, and gave him some additional information regarding material which had already been made available to Mr. Gray with regard to the CIA's contact the previous year with Mr. Hunt.

Finally, General Walters testified that in late January or early February, 1973, he told Dr. Schlesinger in a general way of the above matters. He testified that, shortly thereafter, Mr. Dean called Dr. Schlesinger and asked if the CIA could have returned from the FBI the package of material that had been sent to the FBI regarding the assistance furnished to Mr. Hunt the previous year. He testified that he, Mr. Colby, and Dr. Schlesinger discussed the matter and agreed that there was no way this could be done—that it would implicate the CIA in something it was not implicated

in.

General Walters then testified that he went to see Mr. Gray that morning—he did not have the date available—and told him of the request by Mr. Dean, and of the CIA's decision.

He testified that he thought he later went to Mr. Dean and told him also, that there was no way the CIA could have this material returned.

With respect to this testimony, I would like to say the following, based upon the facts we have uncovered to date:

“As I stated yesterday, it is clear that senior White House officials were deeply involved in attempts to enmesh CIA in the Watergate affair and thus take the pressure off those who were really responsible.

“Because of security clearance and questions with respect to verbatim release of statements which might affect legal proceedings, I do not know when the full transcript of our hearings can be made public. Under those circumstances, I thought this narrative account should be made public.

“It is very clear to me that there was an attempt to unload major responsibility for the Watergate bugging and coverup on CIA. Under these difficult circumstances and heavy pressures, I believe that Director Helms and General Walters, who was at all times operating with the approval of Mr. Helms, behaved very well with respect to this attempt.

“Our inquiry of this and other related matters is continuing and we expect to hear testimony from Mr. Helms this Thursday.”