



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

Walters: "... something improper was being explored."

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Orders to Restrict FBI Probe Detailed

By Peter A. Jay

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The deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, testified yesterday he was ordered by presidential assistant H. R. (Bob) Haldeman to cite unspecified intelligence activities as a reason why the Watergate investigation should not be extended into Mexico.

Walters, appearing before the Senate select Watergate committee, said Haldeman told him on June 23, 1972, that the investigation of the Watergate arrests six days earlier could endanger covert CIA operations in Mexico and that Walters was to go immediately to L. Patrick Gray III, then the acting director of the FBI, and tell him so.

Walters testified before Gray at yesterday's hearing. His account of Haldeman's directive and subsequent pressure from then White House counsel John W. Dean III for CIA assistance in blunting the FBI's Water-

gate probe was similar in detail to Thursday's testimony by Richard M. Helms, director of the CIA and Walters' boss at the time of the Watergate investigation. Helms left the CIA and became ambassador to Iran.

Gray, in his opening statement, included a list of incidents about which his recollection differed from Walters'. But most of the differences appeared to be relatively minor, as were the few points at which Walters' testimony varied from that of Helms.

Walters, referring to memorandums he prepared at the time and has used in testimony earlier this year before another congressional committee in closed session, gave a detailed account of a series of three meetings he had with Dean on June 26, 27 and 28, 1972.

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Dean, he said, asked him if the CIA could provide bail money for the five men arrested during the June 17 break-in at the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee, or pay their salaries while they were in jail.

That conversation, he said, gave him "for the first time ... a clear indication that something improper was being explored." He said he told Dean he would have no part in any proposal that "would implicate the agency in something in which it is not implicated."

Walters said he had considered the original directive from Haldeman, given at a meeting also attended by Helms and presidential assistant John D. Ehrlichman, to be unusual. But he said he did not believe at that point that he was being asked to do anything improper.

"I presumed Mr. Haldeman had information that I did not have," Walters said, noting that at the time of that meeting he had only been with the CIA six weeks.

"Mr. Haldeman was a very well-informed man, close to the top of the American structure of government," he said, and it was possible Haldeman knew of "something in this investigation (that) would uncover assets of the CIA" in Mexico.

He said he thought it peculiar, however, that it was he and not Helms whom Haldeman asked to visit Gray. "I thought perhaps he thinks I am military, and a lot of people have the mistaken belief that military obey blindly," Walters said he thought at the time.

Walters, a graying, heavy-set man of 56, said that during his meetings with Dean he believes he might have inadvertently planted the idea that the Watergate burglary could perhaps be dismissed as a "caper ... (with) a strong Cuban flavor."

He said he advised Dean to remember that "scandals had a short life in Washington and other newer spicier ones soon replaced them. I urged him not to become unduly agitated by this one."

When Dean asked him if he had any ideas, Walters said, he replied that "everyone knew the Cubans (four of the five men arrested at the Watergate were Cuban-Americans from Miami) were conspiratorial and anxious to know what the policies of both parties would be toward Castro. They therefore had a plausible motive for attempting this amateurish job which any skilled technician would deplore."

At this point, Walters recalled, Dean said something to the effect that "this was the best tack to take but it might cost half a million dollars."

From this remark, Walters said, he realized that Dean "obviously thought I was suggesting that he could buy the Cubans." But because he was "so relieved at seeing him apparently abandoning the idea of involving the agency" in the Watergate affair, Walters said, he did not correct him.

Throughout the period beginning with the June 23 meeting with Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Helms and continuing through the three meetings with Dean

and several others with Gray, Walters said, he learned of no CIA activity that could be jeopardized by a thorough investigation of the Watergate affair.

He did say he told Gray, however, when he first went to see him on Haldeman's instructions, that "it would be best to taper off" the investigation in Mexico.

On June 23, the day of the meeting in Haldeman's office at the White House and the subsequent meeting between Gray and Walters, the Mexican implications of the Watergate case first began to appear publicly.

At a bail hearing for the five defendants that day, Assistant U.S. Attorney Earl Silbert alluded to checks drawn on a Mexican bank, totaling \$89,000, that had been deposited in the Miami bank account of Bernard Barker—one of the burglars.

The money was later found to be Republican campaign funds cycled through Mexico and Barker's account in a "laundering" process to conceal its source.

Helms testified Thursday that as he and Walters were leaving the meeting with Haldeman, he told his deputy to make certain when he met with Gray that he simply advise the FBI director of existing agreements for cooperation between the FBI and CIA. Walters was to make sure, Helms said he told him, not to involve the CIA in any way with the Watergate affair.

Walters said yesterday that he does not recall that brief conversation with Helms as "being quite as limiting as Mr. Helms mentioned. At no time did he tell me I was not to deliver the message I had been given."

Gray, in his account of the meeting with Walters that followed, said Walters did not tell him he was coming from the White House. "I understood him to be stating a CIA position, not a White House message," he said.

Earlier yesterday, Walters had responded to questioning on this point by saying "I believe to the best of my recollection that I told him (Gray) I had come from the White House, that I had talked to some senior people there."

This contradiction was but one of many between Walters and Gray in their testimony yesterday.

A major difference between the two concerned Gray's attitude toward the FBI investigation of the Watergate, already well under way by the time of the June 23 meeting.

In his memorandum about the first meeting, Walters wrote that Gray's "problem was how to low-key this matter (the investigation) now that it was launched."

Gray said that while "I may have said words to this effect to let him know that we would handle the CIA aspects of this matter with kid gloves," he never suggested that "the FBI investigation would be other than aggressive and thorough."

Gray also sought to rebut in his opening statement to the committee various other assertions made by Walters in his various memorandums. (Several of the memos, given to congressional committees in closed-door testimony earlier this year, were subsequently published in newspapers.)

Gray denied, for example, telling Walters—as the general's memos report—that he had told Haldeman and Ehrlichman that he would prefer to resign rather than order the investigation halted, but that he was afraid his resignation would be detrimental to the President's interests.

He said he had made such a statement, but not to Haldeman and Ehrlichman and not to Walters. He said he made it at an FBI staff meeting on June 28, and gave the committee an account of that meeting written by one of the participants, assistant FBI director Charles W. Bates. In the memo, Bates said:

"I pointed out that under no circumstances should we back off of any investigation at the request of CIA without forcing them to reveal completely their interest in this matter . . . the FBI's reputation was at stake as well as Mr. Gray's position . . . Mr. Gray made it plain he would not hold back the FBI in this investigation at anyone's request, including the President of the U.S., and if he were ordered to do so he would resign."

Both Walters and Gray appeared to agree that the FBI — or Gray personally — declined to halt its investigation into the Mexican aspects of the Watergate affair without a written request from the CIA. But the two witnesses described the discussion of such a request in very different terms.

Gray, like Bates, said only a written request from the CIA could halt the investigation, which they wanted to keep moving. Walters described Gray as saying reluctantly in a July telephone conversation that "unless he received a written letter from Mr. Helms or from me to the effect that the further pursuit of this investigation in Mexico would uncover CIA assets or activities, he would have to go ahead with the investigation."

On July 6, Walters said, he went to see Gray to discuss the matter further and told him about his three conversations with Dean.

"Mr. Gray seemed quite disturbed by this," he said, "and we both agreed that we could not allow our two agencies to be used in a way that would be detrimental to their integrity."

Reading from his memo, Walters said he told Gray that "I had a long association with the President, and was as desirous as anyone of protecting him. I did not believe that a letter from the agency asking the FBI to lay off this investigation on the spurious grounds that it would uncover covert operations would serve the President."

"Such a letter in the current (1972) atmosphere of Washington would become known and could be frankly electorally mortal."

Walters' reference to his association with President Nixon, he explained to the committee, was to an acquaintance that goes back to 1957. That year, Walters traveled with Mr. Nixon as an interpreter and translator during the then-Vice President's tour of South America.

He was with Mr. Nixon when the car in which they rode was attacked by a mob

in Caracas, he recalled, and still feels "admiration and respect for the courage and calmness Mr. Nixon showed at that time."

For the rest of his vice presidential term, Walters recalled, Mr. Nixon gave an annual party on the date of the Caracas incident.

He has traveled to Europe twice with the President, he said, but has not met with him personally since May, 1972, the day he was sworn in as deputy director of the CIA.

ally, he did not seek to meet with him and tell him about the Watergate cover-up.

"You saw what was happening on his staff to get two of the most important agencies in the United States involved in obstruction of justice," Talmadge asked. "Why did you not . . . go over and tell him frankly what was happening?"

Walters said that, in reporting to Helms and to Gray, he had done all he thought was required of him—as he did not believe

he had been actually asked to do anything improper.

"If I had been pushed, if I had been told to do something improper, I would have," he said. "I made that quite plain to Dean. He was exploring with me."

In his testimony before the committee, Walters was thoroughly neutral in his descriptions of his meetings with Dean.

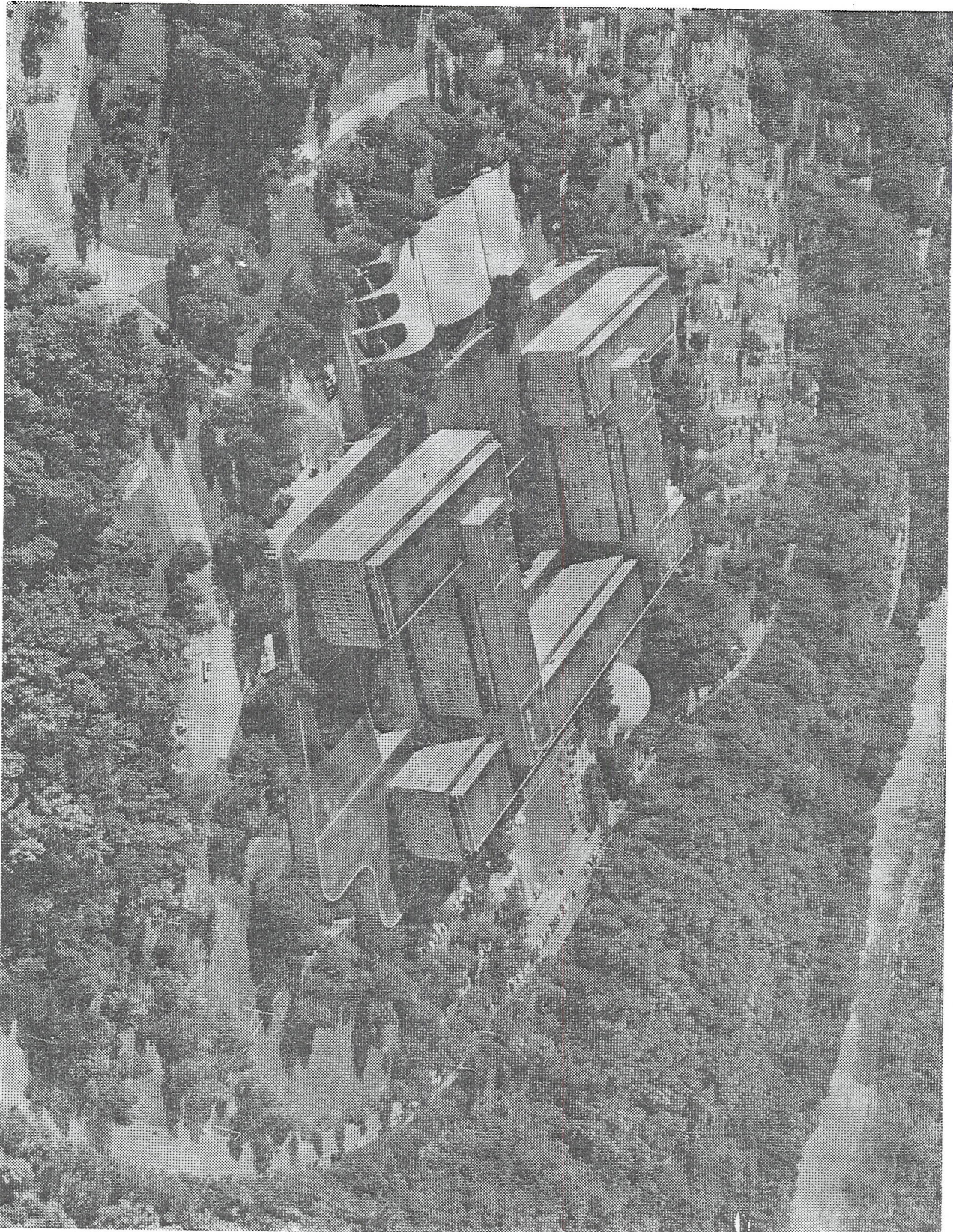
But Helms, on Thursday, suggested that Walters was at least slightly annoyed at being called up by Dean

Before that, Walters spent more than four years as the defense attache at the American Embassy in Paris. He speaks eight languages, he told the committee in response to a question, and has also served as an interpreter for Presidents Truman, Eisenhower and Johnson.

Near the end of his testimony yesterday, Walters asked by Sen. Herman E. Talmadge (D-Ga.) why, since he knew the President both personally and profession-

three days in a row and summoned to the younger man's White House office.

And Gray, in his opening statement yesterday, described Walters at their meeting on July 6 as leaning back in his chair, putting his hands behind his head and saying "that he had come into an inheritance and was not concerned about his pension, and was not going to let 'these kids' kick him around any more."



An aerial view shows the headquarters complex of the Central Intelligence Agency, which is situated at Langley in Fairfax County.

By Ken Felt—The Washington Post