

RICHARD HELMS - JOHN BROSS INTERVIEW -- 5 MAY 1983

SIDE 1, TAPE 1

H: So you would like me to start over again, is that correct?

B: I'm afraid we ought to do that.

H: All right. What I wanted to say at the outset was that "Watergate" has many definitions. It tends to include a great many activities, but it is not clear in the minds of the public what should be included in and what should be included out. So, against that background, I simply wanted to say that the Agency had nothing whatever to do with the break-in at the Democratic National Committee Headquarters in Washington. This break-in was what started the whole so-called Watergate Affair since it was a break-in at the Watergate Hotel or apartment house. This is an important point in my mind, because allegations have been made that the Agency knew about the break-in before it took place, allegations that agents or people working at low-levels of the Agency knew about these activities but never reported to their superiors, allegations that the Agency is a large organization and that a Director would have no way of knowing what might have gone on down at the bowels of the Agency. All that notwithstanding, I have never seen any evidence or been given any evidence that indicated that anybody on the CIA payroll was involved in that break-in in the Democratic National Committee Headquarters. The Agency certainly knew nothing about the break-in before it took place, knew nothing about the planning for it and never consciously, at least, had anything to do with the cover-up -- trying to obscure or obfuscate what had actually occurred. Now it should be made clear that when one looked at the development of events, or the evolution of events, after

the burglary, or the break-in, whatever you prefer to call it, there were times where facts which later became known, were not known. And this certainly applies to one particular consideration, which was the laundering of money in Mexico, because in the famous meeting of June the 23rd [1972] with Ehrlichman and Haldeman, [when] references were made to Mexico, it was not known either to Walters or to me at that time what they were talking about in connection with Mexico. The laundering of money in Mexico came later. Therefore, when Walters was asked by Haldeman to go and see Gray about Mexico, neither he nor I on that afternoon knew what they were talking about in connection with Mexico. It may be alleged that we did have some hint or that we could have guessed, I simply do not accept that fact. How we would have known about this convoluted process of sending money to Minnesota, to Mexico and all over the place, is something I don't have a clue about; but I want to make the record absolutely clear that we knew nothing about it at that time.

Now, I think that covers, in a rather disjointed statement possibly, that the Agency was not involved in the break-in at the Democratic National Committee Headquarters. Now from that point forward if you want to widen the definition of what Watergate means and include in it other activities, then we would have to take each activity, specifically, to explain what the Agency's role was or was not. But, this it seems to me, is a good point at which to bring up another factor. The Agency has been accused of not having divulged everything it knew about all of the people involved in events which transpired subsequently, in an effort to help the law enforcement process. But you will recall that it was not long after the burglary took place, and not long after efforts were being made to get the burglars counsel

and money for their defense and all the rest of it, that the FBI, for the first time, at least in my knowledge, in its history began leaking information about the on-going investigation. And it was these leaks which persuaded me that the Agency was going to have to be very careful about who it allowed to testify to what events, under what circumstances, for the simple reason that once it got in the public prints that somehow an allegation had been made and supported by the Agency that Mr. X knew something about event Y, the CIA would be so involved in the on-going investigation that in the public mind at least it would never be able to extricate itself. It was for this reason that I counselled going very slowly, and referring to these various developments only when we were properly addressed by the proper law enforcement authorities, not when somebody threw a large net over the situation and in effect was inviting everybody to come forward and contribute. Another factor: I do not remember anymore whether, and this is a matter of public and acknowledged fact now, so it can be looked up in the record, whether Howard Osborn called me at my apartment in Chevy Chase on Friday night or Saturday night. In any event, it was around 9 or 10 o'clock of one of those evenings, to apprise me of the fact that there had been a break-in at the Democratic National Committee Headquarters, that the people had been caught and that Howard Hunt was involved. That same evening, I raised the telephone, asked for the White House operator and asked her to get me Patrick Gray on the phone, who at that time was Acting Director of the FBI. It turned out he was not in Washington, he was in some hotel in

* Helms and Osborn have testified that the call was on the evening of Saturday, 17 June 1972; the burglars had not been arrested until about 2 a.m. on 17 June.

Los Angeles. She eventually did get him on the phone, and I said to Gray that I understood that there had been this break-in at the Democratic National Committee and that I understood that Hunt was involved, and that I wanted him to be aware that Hunt had been employed at the White House by John Ehrlichman, and that, therefore, if there was some question about Hunt's activities, they were entirely under the aegis of the White House and that he had nothing whatever to do with the Agency anymore. Gray said fine, he understood, thank you very much, and that was the end of the conversation. I therefore thought I had a right to assume that Gray would conduct his investigation along such lines, and therefore I was surprised, frankly, when it developed in the ensuing days, if not weeks, that Gray suspected that somehow the Agency was involved in this burglary. And when we asked for information from the Bureau, or making an effort to cooperate in various ways, we seemed to get a very cold reception down there. It was this which led to a memorandum that I wrote to Walters, just before I took off on a two-week trip to Australia and New Zealand. In this memorandum, I made comment to the effect that since the FBI had not seemed to be cooperating with us, that we should, in turn, bide our time and just stick within the jurisdiction of our rights and their rights in Mexico and anyplace else. This was the memorandum which Archibald Cox, when he was testifying in Congress before leaving the Government, pointed out was in the record, had become available. He did not say, I believe at the time, who had written the memorandum; but this put a different complexion on the involvement of the Agency and the whole affair. Well this was not the intention of the memorandum. Obviously in writing it, I had no intention it was ever going to become public. It was an instruction or a guideline to conduct for a Deputy who had come on board within

recent weeks, was not thoroughly familiar with all the ins and outs of Washington maneuvering and I wanted him to simply hold hard and, at least until I came back, if events seemed to be taking the unfortunate course that they were, i.e., suspicion that the Agency was involved in this. It's been many years since those events, and I may not have the wording and the facts here all exactly correct, but the main thrust of what I want to say is that there was no cover-up involved here, there was no defense of the White House, there was no defense of CREEP, there was no defense of anybody. This was the Director of the Agency trying to protect the Agency from unwanted and unfair allegations. Now those are the principal points I wanted to make to start this session, John, because I think that bungling though my wording here may be, the essential facts emerge that no evidence has ever been presented [of Agency involvement,] and I attest to the fact that the Agency was not involved in this break-in or in the cover-up which followed.

B: Dick, let me ask you, if I may, two questions: one, the leaks that you referred to, were they from, to your knowledge, from the FBI or from the Department of Justice, or both, in your opinion?

H: Well, I don't recall anymore what I, what distinctions I made at the time, but something gave me the impression that it was the Bureau which was doing the leaking because they were the only people to whom we'd, who had access to certain information.

B: OK. Another question is that your communication, your telephone call to Gray, has not, as far as I can remember, been mentioned in any of the public discussion of this case. Did you include this in your testimony that?

H: No, it was something that for some reason, either I forgot it in various testimony or by this time Gray was under judicial inquiry or something because for some reason it was a long time before this telephone call became a matter of record. I think it got in the public record eventually, but I think by the time it did, things had sort of wound down and the interest in this whole affair was relatively minor.

B: Because one of the criticisms of the Agency was its alleged failure to advise somebody -- the Department of Justice, the FBI, it never was entirely clear, the White House possibly -- of your knowledge of the fact that Hunt and others working for the CREEP organization were in fact employed by Ehrlichman. Now, it seems to me that you have already advised the Director of the FBI about Hunt's relationship to Ehrlichman, and it seems to me an unreasonable burden to place on you to continue to make this information available to other people. What is your comment on that?

H: I don't have any really satisfactory, clarifying comment, except to say that this whole affair became so complicated in terms of allegations, arrests, White House involvement, FBI, Justice Department and so forth, that whether I forgot this episode or whether, at this time, there were so many investigations going on that I thought it might be difficult for Gray, I've forgotten now what motivated me not to roll it out and have the guns firing in various directions that I had done this. But the fact remains that I had and it became a matter of certainly knowledge in the Department of Justice and the FBI later. Now the question on the leaks of the FBI, I should have made one point, I think, when I was discussing that, that under J. Edgar Hoover, leaks like this had not occurred, normally. But under Gray, apparently, and since he was having some difficulty with his

confirmation and so forth, it could well be that the FBI agents didn't feel that they were under quite the same discipline that they'd been under before. But certainly this was a novel thing, as far as I was concerned, to have the FBI leaking parts of an investigation.

B: OK. Many of the questions which I'm about to ask you have been, all of them have been covered in previous testimony, I think, with the possible exception of the statement which you've just made about advising Gray to the effect that Hunt worked for Ehrlichman. But apart from that question, I think all of these have been handled in one way or another in previous appearances. So I will run through them and ask you for whatever comment you wish to make, without planning to get into any tremendous detail about any of these questions. What are your present thoughts about the Nixon Administration's attempt to expand surveillance of leftist groups? This includes the creation of the Huston Committee and relations with the FBI.

H: Well, my recollection and understanding as far as that goes of the objective of the so-called Huston Committee was an effort on the part of President Nixon to get J. Edgar Hoover, in effect, off his duff, if you want to put that in quotation marks, with respect to what was going on in the domestic segments of the United States. Nixon felt that Hoover was falling down on the job in having penetrations and reporting on various peace movements and other activities of what he regarded as organizations trying to destabilize domestic tranquillity in the United States. One of the things that immediately came up in connection with the Huston Committee Report when it was made was that the Agency was getting outside its charter and getting increasingly involved in the domestic area. This was not true. The Agency was asked to participate in this Committee, and it carefully confined itself to

its own charter -- in other words, to our activities overseas. And if one reads the Committee Report carefully, one will find no reference to the fact that CIA is getting increasingly into the domestic area. Now what happened to the Huston Committee Report was quite simple. For some reason, after the Report was made under the Chairmanship of Mr. Hoover, he then went to John Mitchell, the Attorney General, and complained about the findings of the Report. Why President Nixon had never told John Mitchell that he was going to convene this group, I don't know. But Mitchell then came down and talked to the President and persuaded him that the recommendations should not be implemented. So, President Nixon's efforts to get Hoover to do more work in the domestic area, aborted. Now, one of the things that obviously became very controversial about the Report was the effort to do more in the field of examining mail and things of that kind, and Hoover didn't want to be pushed into that and it was for that reason, undoubtedly, that he was so vociferous in defeating the recommendations of the Committee that he himself had chaired. Obviously the Agency, at that time, had a letter opening program. It was not expanded, we did not make any efforts to target any other groups. There was simply an effort to get the FBI more interested and more involved.

B: Let me go on to

H: Is that enough?

B: Yes, that's fine. Let me go on to the question of how did the existence of the so-called plumbers' organization first come to your attention?

H: Well, my first recollection about what later became known as the plumbers, they certainly weren't known by that title to me in the early days,

was that I was asked in a meeting in the White House to collaborate with David Young who, I was told, had been taken on by John Ehrlichman to look into the question of leaks in the White House and in the Government, generally. David Young, I believe, at one time had worked for Henry Kissinger. In any event, he was a stranger to me until he was presented on this particular day. I said obviously we would be glad to cooperate in his efforts, and that I would see that he was put in touch with Howard Osborn who was the Agency's Director of Security, and that he would be his point of contact in matters of this kind. I was well aware of the instruction from the law of the National Security Act of 1947, that it enjoined the Director to be concerned about protecting sources and methods of intelligence from unauthorized disclosure. So that a collaboration in this effort to run down leaks did not seem to me to be out of place. But the Security Office of the Agency seemed to be the right place to lodge it. Now that brings me to the time that Osborn came to me and said that he had had a request from the White House for a psychological assessment of Ellsberg. I forget what Ellsberg's first name was, but in any event that the

B: Daniel.

H: Daniel Ellsberg. I was reluctant to have such a psychological profile done, but on the other hand it did not seem to me to be excessively out of line, particularly if it was not used in any nefarious scheme or devious ways, because Ellsberg had become a very prominent figure as a result of the Pentagon Papers and there was a lot of feeling that he had behaved very badly in connection with turning them over to the press. In retrospect, it was mistaken of me to have permitted this psychological profile to be written. I should have said, "No, we will not do this, since the man involved is an

American citizen." But the line on matters of this kind was certainly at that time rather wavy, and this did not seem to me to be as egregious an action as it was later thought to be by many of the civil libertarians.

B: You were kept generally informed of Hunt's requests for support from the Agency, I gather. There was a David Young incident which you have mentioned. There was a request of a lock picker, I believe, though I'm not familiar with that personally -- I mean I don't remember testimony relating to that -- and there was also the request for paraphernalia, technical support and all that kind of stuff, including, I believe, a request for a secretary. All of which finally led you, as I remember it, to ask that the relationship with Hunt be discontinued. Is that substantially correct?

H: Yes, except that I remember absolutely nothing about a request for a lock picker. I think that if I had known about such a request I would have been disturbed by it. The things that I did know, was informed about, since you will recall these requests were all made of General Cushman

B: Right.

H: Rather than directly to me, were things that seemed all right, particularly if someone in the White House was going to want a wig, or something of this kind, that there wasn't any particular reason not to give it to them, because we had never been told that this was going to be something that would be used internally. We'd never been told what it was wanted for. It was just one of these things that had been requested of the Agency because the Agency had the means of providing it, and it was not until the request came along from Hunt for the transfer of a secretary that he had once had in

Paris to him at the White House, that I said to Cushman, "This has got to stop. We're not going to have our people pulled out of operational jobs and sent down to the White House, so you just tell Hunt we won't do this. And unless he's got some other compelling reason for requests of the kind that we'd been receiving, I would like to withdraw from giving him anything." And I don't believe that after that time the Agency did provide him with anything. But this has been, these things have been the subject of so many hearings on Capitol Hill, or in Congress, that I'm certain that the record is full of what in fact actually happened.

B: Oh I'm sure that is true. I think the point that I would like to pin down is this question: Did anybody in the White House, Ehrlichman or Colson or anybody else, approach you, individually, in support of Hunt's requests for support, for technical support, in any amount? These requests were all conducted through Cushman? Is that right?

H: As best as I recall, none of them came directly to me.

B: Did Colson ever approach you at all?

H: No.

B: Well, that's enough of that. You have told us when you first heard of the Watergate break-in, and what you did, and that you had notified Gray about the fact that Hunt was working for Ehrlichman. When did you learn of the involvement of McCord and of various Cubans, formerly employed by CIA, in the break-in?

H: My recollection is not at all clear on that point. I do recall the problem with certain anonymous letters which were sent to some officer of the Agency, because I was later criticized for not having turned these anonymous letters over to the FBI or the Justice Department or some law

enforcement organization. It later turned out that these anonymous letters were written by McCord. I think that somebody looking at them at the time could have guessed that it was McCord, but they were anonymous letters. I did consult with Lawrence Houston, who was then the General Counsel of the Agency, about my obligation to turn over such anonymous missives to the law enforcement authorities and he felt that we were well, that the Agency was well within its rights in not doing so. I believe that legal authorities would argue or debate about the validity of that, but my decision was not to do it because it struck me that it would be ensnaring the Agency again in this affair in a manner that it would be very hard for it to extricate itself, particularly in the public's mind.

B: I presume that a fairly diligent effort was made to determine what the various Cubans involved in the Watergate break-in were doing, and what their relationship, past and present, to the Agency was? The question is whether or not

H: Yes, I don't think that there's any doubt that once the investigation of these affairs got underway, that every effort was made to find out about the Cubans and the people that had been in touch with us and the whole Martinez business as to whether he was privy to these matters, whether he had an obligation because he had been given some money by the Agency for some other kind of work, whether he had properly conducted himself. But I don't recall the details of these matters at this late date and I'd just rather not even attempt to unravel them.

B: OK. The June 23rd [1972] meeting with Ehrlichman and Haldeman and Walters has been reviewed and reviewed many times and there's no point of really going into exactly who said what to whom, but I would be curious to

get your reaction to the question as to why the request to approach the FBI was made to General Walters rather than to you.

H: I always assumed that the reason General Walters was picked was that he had just recently been made Deputy Director of Central Intelligence; he had only been there a few weeks, and that Haldeman and Ehrlichman and possibly President Nixon himself, felt that since he was obliged to them for the appointment, he would do their bidding more obediently and with less argument possibly than I would have done. My recollection is that General Walters, at that time, said to me that they were "punching my ticket." In other words, that he having come on board, he was now being asked to pay for his new appointment by carrying out their wishes. This explanation seemed perfectly logical to me and I don't think that one has to look much further for the reason.

B: General Walters made a, what to me is a somewhat curious statement, himself. He said that he believed because he was a military man and because military men are more accustomed to unquestioning obedience than civilians, the request was made to him, which seems to skip the fact that he was actually working for you at the time.

H: Well he never, I never heard him make any comment like that, contemporaneously. That may have been something that occurred to him later.

B: Obviously.

H: But to go on with that particular meeting, neither Walters nor I, as I said earlier on this tape, had any idea what this Mexican business was all about, and I think that one is being rather imprudent, if when a President asks that something be done, that you fail to do it unless you have a good reason for not doing it. And since we were unaware of what

the Mexican implication was, Walters was carrying out in effect a Presidential request to do something and that Walters would have a perfect right, as I would, to believe that possibly the President had knowledge that we didn't have. This happens constantly. Nobody sits at the center of things as much as the President. So when Walters and I went downstairs, he was leaving for the FBI and I was going back to the building, we had a chat for a moment at my automobile, in the West Executive Avenue there, and I said, "I don't know why they want you down to talk to the FBI about this Mexican business, but just remember that there's a delimitation agreement between the Agency and the FBI and that they have people in the Embassy, the FBI have agents in the Embassy in Mexico, and we have agents in the Embassy in Mexico. And they have clearly defined duties which they perform and we have clearly defined duties that we perform, and let's not get these mixed up; have this in your mind when you go and talk to these people."

B: Did the thought occur to you that the President might be using CIA facilities or people in Mexico on a direct basis or something like that?

H: I just didn't know what he had in mind. Anymore than I knew what, why it was that Haldeman raised the whole issue of the Bay of Pigs in that meeting. It seemed to me totally irrelevant, I didn't understand what he was talking about and I didn't like the tone of it, sort of threatening tone.

B: It was a curious remark. I forget at what point General Walters advised Gray that CIA would no longer pose any objection to FBI inquiries in Mexico, but it was early in July, I think it was on the 6th of July

H: It was about three weeks later, I believe.

B: Three weeks later, and at that point, again I'm not clear, and I'm not sure how clear the record is as to who made that decision. Did you make the decision?

H: Yes.

B: And you made that after your return from the trip.

H: My recollection is that it came after my return from that trip to Australia and New Zealand, and that when he reported to me that nothing had been found, through Agency channels, of our involvement with anything improper in Mexico, that it seemed to me that since we'd had a chance to investigate, to find out that whatever the President was talking about we didn't know anything about it, and that it did not involve the Agency, this was time to cork off any intimation that we wanted the FBI to stop their investigations.

B: As I remember it, you did traces, or the Agency did traces, on two individuals, who were alleged to have CIA connections.

H: That's right.

B: And I've forgotten the names of

H: I've forgotten the names of those individuals but we didn't find any connections of the Agency with these individuals.

B: And that was one of the things that led you to conclude that any further interference would be unjustified.

H: That's right. That is correct.

B: Would you care to comment on your present recollection of any further meetings between CIA officials and representatives of the White House, which involved or resulted from the request or proposals which in retrospect were designed either to obtain money for bail or to suppress or mislead

investigations by the FBI?

H: Yes, in the week following the June 23rd meeting, I believe it was Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, John Dean called General Walters and asked him to come down to the White House for a conversation. In these meetings, Dean was attempting to get the Agency to use its unvouchered funds as bail money for the Watergate break-in burglars, or criminals or men or whatever you want to call them. Before each of these meetings, Walters and I had a meeting. After these meetings we had a meeting, in other words, we were constantly in touch during these three days. And the point that I want to make here is, that I made it abundantly clear to Walters on any and all occasions: (a) that the Agency would not put up any money of any kind for bail money or bribery or anything else in connection with this burglary; and (b) that I didn't care what kind of pressure was put on, if it ever became known that the Agency was involved in something of this kind, it would absolutely ruin the Agency in the eyes of the American public and we would be finished, and that I wanted to be absolutely unequivocal about this. So General Walters was never under any misapprehension about my instructions to him or how I felt about this matter.

B: A sort of wrap-up question: how would you respond to the allegation that CIA was assisted or at least acquiesced in the initial stages of the White House's cover-up? Say up to 6 July 1972?

H: Well I can just simply say that the CIA did not participate in any "cover-up" unless some actions which the Agency took, which unwittingly may have contributed to the cover-up, in fact, did so. But I recall clearly that no Agency actions were taken which related to anything that we understood to be a cover-up. But part of this, I think, is due to the fact that

people were using knowledge acquired later, which was then related to earlier events, on the assumption that the Agency knew more than it knew. But by the time a cover-up was being talked about in Washington, and all of these facts had come out, that didn't alter the fact that there were many weeks in there when the Agency was totally unaware of (a) what was behind this burglary; (b) why it was conducted; (c) where this money came from, or any of the other factors involved.

B: Well

H: In other words, the Agency was not privy to internal, Governmental information. The Agency became informed of these events at the same time as the public did through the newspapers.

B: Well another question is, to whom would you have relayed or reported information such as Hunt's connection with Ehrlichman, the attempts to get CIA to intervene with the FBI investigation in Mexico, which might have cast some suspicion as to what was actually going on? To whom would you have reported this in this piece-meal developing sort of fashion?

H: Well, even in retrospect, I don't know who I would have talked to about these things because I think it became clear that officials at the top-level of the Government, if not the President himself, knew about these matters to a greater or lesser degree, depending on who they were, and that Gray's behavior toward the Agency, after I had tipped him off in the early stages as to where I thought the problem in this whole affair was, made me very uneasy about whom I could have any confidence in, if I had to come up with something on a fiduciary basis and this is just another reason why I was very reticent and insisted on everybody in the Agency being reticent about volunteering information about these affairs.

B: Did it ever occur to you to do what Gray did rather inartistically, or tried to do, and that is, talk to the President directly about this?

H: I never discussed with the President anything relating to, related to these matters. It's an interesting point you raise, because I want to expand on it. (BRIEF INTERRUPTION) Talk about what?

B: The question was whether you (END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1)

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

H: Well, I don't know where it stopped.

B: Well, you said that when you came back from Tehran you stopped to see Al Haig.

H: Stopped in to see Al Haig who while I was away had become the President's Chief of Staff replacing Haldeman, who had resigned. When I got into Haig's office, after quite a long wait, he said to me that the President wanted to see me. And I said, "Well that's nice. What does he want to see me about?" Because I had not been very long in Tehran, up to that point. And Haig said, "He wanted to talk to you about this Watergate business, which you remember his having had a conversation with you about earlier." And I said, "No, Al, I have never discussed with President Nixon anything about Watergate or anything related to the burglary at the Watergate or anything else." Haig said, "You never did have a conversation with him?" I said, "I never did." "Well," he said, "He contends that you did indeed." And I said, "Well, look here, my recollection is that I never did. And on Monday, I'm going to be testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in open session, and I'm going to be under oath. And whether it was Executive or whatever it was, I'm still going

to be under oath, and I'm going to have to say this if the question has arisen. Have you seen the President? What did you talk about, and so forth." So Haig said, "Well please wait here a minute and let me see about this." And so he disappeared down the hall at the White House and about five or ten minutes later he reappeared and said, "Well you're not going to have to see the President." And I said, "All right." So I mention this because it sets, in a certain framework, the fact that I never did discuss these matters with President Nixon.

B: I suspect I know the answer to this question but let me ask you for the record, at least, what your present thought would be as to what the President would have done had you approached him and expressed concern about what appeared to be various attempts to use the Agency to cover up, protect the people who were actually involved in the burglary?

H: I can only assume that the President would have treated me as he did others and that is, he would have lied to me. [Laughter]

B: That's a good answer. [More laughter]

H: But I think in conclusion here, it's interesting to philosophize for just a moment. President Nixon was distrustful of the CIA. It started back in, I believe, in the campaign in the '60's against John Kennedy, when Nixon felt that the so-called missile gap, which he accused the CIA of having invented, was indeed the reason for his defeat. Certainly, he was also distrustful of people that seemed to have so-called Georgetown connections and he had not known me before he reappointed me to be Director of the Agency. I am quite certain, although I can't prove it, that some of his close advisers, at the time he reappointed me, thought that this was not a good idea on his part, that he probably should have brought in his

own man. Therefore, there was a feeling in his coterie that if I was going to be continued on, maybe there should be a limitation on how long I was going to be continued on. In any event, these uncertainties at the beginning seemed to disappear somewhat as time went on, as he got used to having me around, as he got used to seeing that, critical though he was of certain things the Agency did, at least it was doing its best as far as anybody could see to support him. And as a matter of fact it's interesting in retrospect, but what I told Kissinger from the day he came into office with Nixon until I left for Tehran in 1973, I did just as I told Kissinger I would do, and that was that the Agency would be supportive of the Presidency, that there would be no knifing or back-cutting or anything of that sort, that the Agency was a service organization, it would do its job as objectively and fairly as it could, and it would not take sides in political disputes. In short, it intended to be a good intelligence organization. I said, "That's been the track record up to now and that will be the track record as long as I'm there." And when one looks at it in retrospect, it was exactly what the Agency did, so that despite his criticism and sometimes his feeling that the Agency was not up to doing the job that he expected of it, Nixon had nothing but good service from the organization. And his criticisms, even in retrospect, went to certain mistakes that the Agency made and there were a couple of things that we didn't do very well. On the other hand, nobody expects a perfect performance out of any Governmental organization. Nixon was very critical of all of the Executive Branch of the United States Government. He was constantly making fun of the State Department or of the Air Force or of the Agency or of the Department of the Interior. Whatever was on

his mind at the time he would simply make denigrating observations, the general net of which was that the only real brains in Washington were himself and other people around him in the White House. And if one thinks that this is possibly an exaggerated description of the way Nixon conducted himself, all one has to do is look at what he did after he was re-elected in 1972. He set up an arrangement whereby all aspects of Governmental work were under some individual or other inside the White House. He added counselors, if you will recall, for financial and economic matters, and a counselor for housing and other things, so that right under him he had the ~~entire~~ whole Executive Branch. And then he planted his chosen people in the departments so that they would report to him on what was going on. So his distrust of the organization that he was supposed to be the head of was manifest. He had no reason to distrust the Agency. In later years, General Walters, when he was out of office, when Nixon was out of office, Walters told me that he continued to be critical of things that the Agency had done and that Walters had seen him in San Clemente on one occasion and had simply pointed out to him that he was wrong about these things. What President Nixon's feeling today about the Agency is, I don't have any idea. But it is possibly the ultimate irony of his life, or of his, well certainly of his Administration, that the dumb choice that he made of trying to cover up the break-in of the Democratic National Committee Headquarters was so much more stupid than anything any of his Cabinet officers or Agency heads perpetrated during his time in office, that his denigration of these people and of their activities stands as a monument to his own stupidity.

B: This brings us back to a question that we have discussed before and

that is to what degree President Nixon's dissatisfaction with the cooperation that he was receiving from you and from the Agency on the issue of the Watergate and the cover-up of the Watergate break-in, to what extent that dissatisfaction was the reason for his decision to replace you with Jim Schlesinger. In this connection, somebody called my attention, it was Ken McDonald, to a statement in Kissinger's book, first book, as follows: "After his electoral victory, Nixon fulfilled his long-standing plan to move out CIA Director, Richard Helms, by appointing him Ambassador to Iran."

H: Well that was in Kissinger's second volume, and I always interpreted that to mean that Kissinger had learned at some point that the coterie right around Nixon, the Haldemans, Ehrlichmans, possibly John Mitchell, I don't know about John Mitchell, had wanted to get rid of me and that this seemed the appropriate time to do it. So I think his reference to "long-planned" probably goes back to what somebody may have told him about their feeling at the time that I was appointed. Because it's one of the interesting footnotes to history, that when I went to Camp David on November the 20th, [1972] and was told by Nixon I was being replaced, he never mentioned Watergate, he never mentioned any derelictions of any kind, he praised my performance. He simply said he wanted to make changes etc. and at that time it was the first time the question of my being made an ambassador was ever raised. In other words, when I went into the room to see Nixon and Haldeman, there was no intention of appointing me as an ambassador. It just developed in the course of the conversation that we had. The next day I was at the White House, and Kissinger who had been away on November the 20th, asked me what had transpired at Camp David, and I took a deep breath because I was wondering a little bit just how to present the conversation that I had had with Nixon

to Kissinger, when Kissinger rather snappishly said, "Well, if you don't want to tell me, I'll call Haldeman and find out." So it was clear that Kissinger had not known that at that session, that the President was planning to replace me.

B: What is your present feeling or thought as to the extent of How much President Nixon's resentment, if it was resentment, about the failure of the Agency and you to cooperate in the cover-up, how much do you think that accounted for, or influenced, his decision to relieve you?

H: I have no way of judging that.

B: It might have been a factor.

H: It might have been a factor, it might not have been a factor. Maybe he was planning to make the change after the election, if he won. In any event, I simply don't know.

B: At what point, these are quick questions, and are totally subjective, probably impertinent. At what point, if ever, while you were DCI did you become convinced that the White House had organized the Watergate burglary?

H: I don't recall anymore when that light dawned. I believe from the beginning I thought it was CREEP -- The Committee for the Re-election of the President -- that was behind it, and that there was direct White House involvement I don't believe occurred to me until much later.

B: And the involvement of President Nixon, personally, dawned on you at some point but it sort of crept up

H: I have no recollection.

B: Do you want to express any view as to what the purpose of the Watergate break-in was?

H: No, I've heard various conjectures made, but I don't know which of those conjectures was accurate. I've never been told by any authoritative person what was behind it. It always seemed to me to be a rather stupid action. And I think a lot of politicians thought it was rather stupid for the simple reason that nobody could think of anything that might have been in the Democratic National Committee Headquarters that would require such extreme actions. In other words, to steal the papers. What were those papers? And I have no idea.

B: You've already told me that the President did not give any indication of displeasure or resentment at your role in the Watergate. Was there any evidence of resentment on the part of Haldeman or Ehrlichman or Colson or anybody else in the White House? Did they convey to you a feeling of displeasure on the part of the White House with?

H: No, there was never any expression of displeasure by Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and as a matter of fact I don't ever recall having really had any conversation with Colson. And as a matter of fact, while I was waiting to make up my mind about going to Iran as ambassador, I got a couple of calls from Haldeman asking me if I had made up my mind, that the President was anxious for me to take the assignment, would I please let them know as soon as I could. And also when there was an interregnum between my leaving the Agency rather suddenly, because Schlesinger got sworn in as Director much earlier than I, at least, had anticipated, because they wanted to have a mass swearing in of new officials all on one day at the White House. I, by that time, had not been confirmed in my appointment as ambassador and it was Haldeman who actually helped work out an interim arrangement whereby I could get some pay until I actually got on the State Department payroll.

B: Well, Dick, I know that Bill Casey will be very grateful to you for giving him and us this review. I think it will be very helpful to have this all together in one place to supplement what is a very voluminous public record. So many thanks.

H: Not at all and I hope it's useful. I'm sorry that some of my comments may seem rather jumbled but I imagine that after transcript is made that some minor editing ought to get it straightened out, but if you would put this together with the remarks that I made in Studies In Intelligence over there, which I think flesh out some of these points, I think you've got a reasonable record of my recollection, at least in 1983 May, of what went on in connection with Watergate.

B: These will be supplemented, our conversation today will be supplemented not only with the Studies In Intelligence review but also the David Frost interview, which we have, and, of course, Congressional records and the Rockefeller Commission Report.

H: Excellent.

END OF TAPE