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The odd career of our new man at the United Nations.

AMERICA'S TOP MESSENGER BOY

BY MICHAEL MASSING

THE SENATE confirmation hearing last May for Vernon A. Walters, nominated to replace Jeane Kirkpatrick as ambassador to the United Nations, lasted exactly 48 minutes. Most of them were given over to flattery and deference. Democrat Joseph Biden, for one, could hardly contain himself: "I have only been here going on 13 years," he said, "and I think you are about the most fascinating guy who has ever appeared before us. . . . You are a man of extraordinarily broad range. Yours is a career that is something the novelists make up." Walters's nomination sailed through without dissent.

This was the fifth confirmation hearing in Walters's long career, and all have been equally pro forma. Vernon "Dick" Walters, now 68 years old, commands respect. He was with Harriman in Paris at the birth of the Marshall Plan, with Truman at Wake Island when he confronted MacArthur, with Nixon when his car was attacked by angry mobs in Venezuela. He smuggled Henry Kissinger in and out of Paris during his secret talks with the Chinese and North Vietnamese. And, as deputy director of the CIA from 1972 to 1976, he was one of the few Nixon appointees to emerge from Watergate with his reputation intact.

Over the last four years Walters has traveled to 108 countries in his job as ambassador-at-large for the Reagan administration. From Mengistu Haile Mariam to the pope, Walters undertook the administration's most sensitive diplomatic missions. When Roberto d'Aubuisson threatened to get out of hand in El Salvador, it was Walters who went to straighten him out. And when Fidel Castro expressed his willingness to talk with the United States, it was Walters who was dispatched to meet him.

Personally as well as professionally, Walters seems larger than life. Fluent in seven foreign languages, he has frequently been called on to translate for presidents. On visiting a foreign land, Walters has been known to arrive early and ride the buses for a day in order to pick up the

Michael Massing wrote "CBS Under Siege" in the May 6 issue of TNR. He writes frequently on foreign affairs.

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