

JULY 1975

INTELLIGENCE IN A GOLDFISH BOWL

Lt. General Vernon Walters, Deputy Director of the CIA, says that the United States may be able to succeed in carrying out intelligence operations in a goldfish bowl. But he adds that if we do it will be like going to the moon. We will be the only ones ever to have done it.

General Walters made this remark at the American Security Council luncheon in Washington on July 23, 1975. News media treatment of his candid remarks on the CIA and the dangers facing America today is symbolic of what is wrong with the approach of important elements of the news media's coverage of the CIA investigation.

The Washington Star on the day following General Walters' talk carried three stories on the CIA, occupying 70 column inches of the paper (over half a page). The stories were headed: (1) "Did CIA Cause Colonel's Death?" (2) "CIA Panel Will Call Kissinger" (3) "Nixon Tied to CIA Effort in Chile." Not one word was said about General Walters' talk, even though *The Star* had a reporter present. *The New York Times* also ignored the story. *The Washington Post* devoted six inches to General Walters, burying the report in a story headed: "Clifford Urges Limit to CIA Activities." We were informed that both the AP and UPI carried stories

on the Walters' talk on their wires, but no paper we examined used their stories.

The only respectable report we found was in the conservative weekly, *Human Events*, which led its August 2 "Inside Washington" report with a 375-word story on the Walters talk.

The reporter who covered the talk for *The Washington Star*, Norman Kempster, told AIM that he did not do a story on it because Walters had not said anything new. It would appear that in the minds of some journalists the only thing that is newsworthy is material that is critical of the CIA. Statements that put our intelligence activities in proper perspective, defending what has been done, are simply not deemed to be worth reporting.

On February 3, 1975, a top reporter for *The New York Times*, Peter Arnett, stated in a talk at the Air War College, "It seems to me that this is going to be the year that the 'spooks' (CIA) get theirs, or they have to start answering questions. . . Many reporters that I know are starting to go to Washington and are trying to find all the security people, all the discontented CIA officers and others who could feed the grist for the mill to find the story of what went on. I think there are going to be some embarrassing stories about this in the next few months and the next year."

At that time, Reed J. Irvine, Chairman of the Board of AIM, made this rejoinder to Mr. Arnett: "I am afraid that the big story is one that the press is missing entirely. It may be that this is the year when we are going to destroy our internal security establishment, when we are going to destroy or greatly weaken our defense establishment, and when, indeed, we are laying the groundwork for the demise of democracy, or the citadel of democracy, the United States, because of the intent of the press to bring about an immediate end without thinking of the ultimate consequences."

Walters' Warning

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2

In his American Security Council talk, General Walters voiced a similar warning. Solzhenitsyn has, of course, advised us that we are faced with a very dangerous situation in the world, but this is not the message that usually comes from high government officials in these days of detente. Despite what Norman Kempster of *The Washington Star* says, it should be news when the No. 2 man at the CIA gives a Solzhenitsyn-like warning.

General Walters told his audience that the country was in "a tougher power situation than it has been since Valley Forge." The reason for this, he said, was that for the first time a foreign country has the "power to destroy or seriously cripple the United States."

General Walters pointed out that despite detente, the Soviets were deploying four new, different types of intercontinental missiles, with signs of a fifth on the horizon. They are building larger and more powerful submarines and increasing the number and improving the quality of their tanks. He said: "We see in all areas a tremendous military effort being made to modernize and improve the Soviet forces beyond what seems to me to be necessary for either deterrence or defense."

The General noted that the Doolittle Report on the CIA twenty years ago had concluded that the U. S. was faced with a ruthless and implacable enemy who was determined to destroy us by any means in their power. Asked whether we faced that kind of enemy today, General Walters said: "I think we are facing a *very* tough situation. I think the tactics may have changed, but I don't think the long-term goal has changed very much."

General Walters said that our position was especially dangerous because the people of the United States and most of the Western World failed to perceive the great threat posed by the growing military strength of the Soviet Union, giving it the superiority that might enable it to force its will on the rest of the world.

Asked if the CIA had failed to convey its perception of the danger to higher officials on the National Security Council, General Walters said: "We have simply conveyed the information. They must draw their conclusions from it."

The Attack on the Intelligence Community

While welcoming a responsible, constructive investigation, General Walters suggested that the current assault on the CIA is, in part, unfair and is also being promoted, in part, by people with ulterior motives. He emphasized the point that activities that were accepted twenty years ago are being condemned today. Standards would continue to change, and he feared that 15 or 20 years from now the CIA might be condemned for having *failed* to do things that it could not do given current attitudes.

General Walters noted that many people now expect the intelligence services to operate with a degree of parity that will not be reciprocated by our enemies. He said you were going to have a rough time if you fought by the Marquis of Queensbury rules when your opponent was using brass knuckles. The Doolittle Report had said that we would have to match the dedication and ruthlessness of our implacable foe. That is not a popular idea today, but General Walters pointed out that even our revered Founding Fathers recognized the need for covert operations. He said George Washington mounted three kidnap attempts on Benedict Arnold, and from 1772 to 1775, Benjamin Franklin used his position as assistant postmaster to run a mail intercept on the British. Personally he did not think it was a "dirty trick" to help democratic forces survive in a hostile environment.

Walters stressed that there was a need for secrecy. Harry Truman had said that he did not believe the best interests of the country were served by going on the principle that everyone had a right to know everything. Truman had also said that it did not matter to the United States whether its secrets became known through publication in the media or through the activity of spies. The results were the same.

General Walters said the CIA had been hurt and its ability to carry out its mission had been impaired by the attacks upon it. He said: "People who used to give us whole reports are giving us summaries, and people who used to give us summaries are shaking hands with us. People who used to help us voluntarily are saying don't come near me. This must be a delight to the America-is-wrongers. For the people who believe that the U. S. represents the best hope of mankind for freedom in the world, it is not an encouraging factor."

The Big Story

What is the big story today? Is it that a dozen years ago high officials, perhaps the President, plotted unsuccessfully to assassinate a foreign dictator? Is it that a decade ago the CIA accumulated information about Americans who were leaders in the effort to frustrate our very costly efforts to keep Southeast Asia from falling into the control of the communists? Is it that the CIA conducted 32 wiretaps in 27 years?

General Walters said: "We have spent an enormous amount of time rummaging through the garbage pails of history, looking at the '50s and '60s, but the question of whether we are going to continue as a free and democratic nation is going to be decided in the late '70s and '80s, and I hope we will spend an appropriate amount of time on that period, which is going to determine how we and our children live in the future."

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The news media are so absorbed in reporting the unending gossip, the tales of those disaffected employees that Peter Arnett said his friends were hunting down, that they have no time or space to consider what they are doing to institutions that are vital to our survival. The Washington Post, which buried General Walters' talk, devoted 24 column inches of text and 17 column inches of photos on July 12 to an unsubstantiated charge that Alexander Butterfield was a CIA "contact" in the White House. This was part of the lead front page story of the day. Three days later *The Post* published Butterfield's categorical denial of the allegation in a 12 column-inch story on page A-3.

It reminds one of a sheep dog chasing after hares while the coyotes devour the lambs.