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SUBJECT Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner Interviewed

FRED FISKE: Among the most difficult problems to resolve is the maintenance of a vitally important intelligence apparatus, with its need for secrecy, while continuing to respect freedom and the right of citizens in a democratic society to know what their government is doing. It's that delicate balance that Admiral Stansfield Turner deals with in his book Secrecy and Democracy: The CIA in Transition. It's published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

Stansfield Turner is a full Admiral, an Annapolis graduate, was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, held many important command positions in the Navy. His last, Commander-in-Chief of NATO's Southern flank. He was appointed Director of Central Intelligence by his Annapolis classmate Jimmy Carter, and served in that capacity for four years.

Very nice to see you again, Admiral.

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Fred, always nice to be back.

FISKE: I read your book with great interest. It's really excellent reading.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Thank you.

FISKE: In spite of the fact that the CIA have you a hard time in its approving it.

ADMIRAL TURNER: They didn't defang the book from its message. They just made it difficult for me to get agreement with them, and it took a lot of my time in writing it. And in a

few places the reader has to put up with a euphemism which is a very thin veil over the real word that ought to be there. Like, for instance, the initials of a particular foreign intelligence organization. They wouldn't let me put the initials in.

FISKE: Really?

ADMIRAL TURNER: It appears in the press...

FISKE: First initial K?

[Laughter]

ADMIRAL: No. They do let me talk about the KGB. But this is a friendly one. And although it's well known in that country, the particular intelligence service doesn't like to have its name mentioned, and we kowtow to them, which is not in the interests of the American public. It isn't against our security to not mention the name of this foreign intelligence service. It's ridiculous to say that is classified information.

FISKE: So they delayed you for some considerable period of time.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. I estimate that ten percent, at least, of my working time on this book was consumed by arguing with the CIA. And that's a very expensive matter. I was on this book two and a half years, Fred, and ten percent of that is costly.

FISKE: Was it nitpicking, for the most part?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Absolutely. I contend that it was, first, arbitrary and, second, arrogant.

For instance, I could not quote myself from an unclassified speech I gave when I was Director of Central Intelligence. That's ridiculous. It's in the public record. It's in the public domain. I stood up in public and said it. And they wouldn't let me put a quote from that in my book.

FISKE: As a former Director, you were in a position to call William Casey and say, "Hey, this is nonsense." Did you do that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I appealed a number of these arbitrary decisions. And the arrogance I referred to came on the final appeal. I said to them, "Here are a couple of issues that I just believe are ludicrous. If you think they're classified, let's take it to a judge. Let's go to the courts and somebody adjudicate between us." Because my understanding of our

constitutional process is that the Founding Fathers set up the courts and the legislature as a check between an arbitrary executive and the citizen.

They refused to go to court, and instead said, "We're sorry you feel the way you do. Go ahead and do what you feel you have to do." They almost invited me to publish the information that they claimed was secret. Then they said, "But we'll reserve the right to take whatever action we think." That is, they threatened to sue me.

I'm too patriotic a person, Fred. I'm too interested in security for our country to set a bad example for other people. So I left the material out, and it's unfortunate. But I think it's arrogant when the Executive Branch of our government won't let anybody oversee what they're doing, not even the courts.

FISKE: You said on the final appeal. Does that mean on the appeal to the Director himself?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, it went all the way to the White House.

FISKE: Isn't that interesting?

ADMIRAL TURNER: It was decided, in my understanding, the basic issue, down in the -- well, I don't know the President himself was in on it, but the staff of the White House.

FISKE: So I imagine you were personally affronted, among other things.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I'm very affronted that I've been treated this way.

FISKE: Several weeks ago I had the pleasure of interviewing Mrs. Rosalynn Carter.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Hmmmm. Wonderful person.

FISKE: Yes. And she indicated that she and the former President were affronted by the fact that they have not been treated with the courtesy that former Presidents have been treated.

Would it be safe to say, based on what you have to say in your book, that you've received the same sort of lack of courtesy?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, yes. And in much more than this. I mean the whole Reagan Administration approach to any of us who

served in the Carter Administration is we have to be traitors to the country. I mean I was treated scandalously, in my opinion, in the turnover between Administrations and the way -- the whole approach to what I had to offer in terms of telling them about where we stood and so on. It was not very gentlemanly.

FISKE: Mrs. Carter said that the President consulted with the former Presidents and had facilities for them at the White House. And, of course, he was not invited.

You speak in your book about having met with four former Directors.

You were not consulted.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I will say that in the months between the election and the inauguration, I had two meetings with Bill Casey and did try to give him what advice I could. So I was not unconsulted. Since then, there's been no contact.

FISKE: Your book comes at a very propitious time, with all the delays, what with the Walker spy case and the dispute over aid to the Contras and the renewed debate about congressional oversight. It seems that the timing is excellent.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, of course, I think the timing happens to be very propitious. But these issues are going to crop up again and again.

The problem of reconciling the necessary secrecy of intelligence with the necessary openness of our democracy is always going to be with us. And we'll always find one or another issue that has to be resolved over and over again because there's no clear rules for these borderlines between how much secrecy and how much democracy. So I think the issues raised in the book are issues that will not pass with time. They will be with us. And what I'm simply trying to do is explain to the American public how during the Carter Administration we tried to find a new balance between secrecy and democracy.

You see, just before we went into office, there were all those investigations of American intelligence that hurt it very badly. Why did we have those? We had them, I believe, because in the first 30 years after World War II there was such emphasis on secrecy of intelligence that the intelligence people weren't held accountable. Nobody checked on them.

Fred, even as honest a persons as yourself, if you're not being held accountable, you do things a little less judiciously. You maybe cut a corner here and there. And that's what happened. And the mistakes that were made without accountability

by not only the CIA, but other intelligence organizations in our country were uncovered, as they almost always will be in a democracy like ours. When they were uncovered there were the investigations. The end result was that our intelligence virtually ground to a halt. The professionals were afraid to take any more risky actions because they might get in more trouble.

Well, so what we proved was in 30 years with no accountability, we had no intelligence. And our job in the Carter Administration was to follow some initial steps in that direction by President Ford and institute some procedures for accountability. We established rules for what had to be cleared with the White House, and the Congress set up two committees to oversee intelligence. And learning to work with those and still preserve the secrets was a delicate task.

We worked it out, I think, quite well. And by the end of the Carter Administration, the professionals in the CIA had become reasonably reconciled to the idea that you could share enough with the Congress to give them an oversight role, and yet not so much that you were likely to give away the secrets. It worked reasonably well, and I think was a good foundation for this job of reconciling secrecy and democracy.

FISKE: You have a very strong feeling that we are retrogressing in that area?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No matter what one thinks as to whether the Reagan Administration has made good or bad changes to our intelligence activities, the appearance that we have today of the CIA being out of control, the accusations in the media that it's doing things like mining the harbors of Nicaragua illegally, the accusations that it's supporting manuals for assassination of people, the accusations that it supported a group in Lebanon that subsequently went on and killed 80 people in an attempt to kill one terrorist, the accusations that the product of our intelligence is politicized for the purposes of the President -- whether these are true or not -- and some of them may not be -- if the American public and the American Congress again become disillusioned, cynical about their CIA, it's going to hurt it seriously, like it was hurt by those same accusations in 1975. I don't think it could survive another round of that kind of criticism.

FISKE: It would be unfortunate, because in this day and age, if we're to avert nuclear war, we must have an intelligence service that we can depend upon.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Even more than that, Fred. We used to

always look on intelligence as sort of a first line of defense, to prevent Pearl Harbors and nuclear wars and prevent bad things happening to us by getting some warning. Today our intelligence is so capable of getting information that we can take the offense with our intelligence. We can negotiate arms control treaties today because we know we can verify them. We can take good positions on our economic strengths in dealing with the rest of the world because we can find out what the rest of the world is doing economically. We can predict the harvests in other countries and not have to put up with famines and so on. There are a lot of things we can do to make our country more offensive, a stronger country by using this intelligence.

If we don't have a good CIA, we're going to lose tremendous opportunities.

FISKE: You mentioned intelligence gathering in the field of economics. It's one of the things that you espouse especially. But you've met resistance to that, haven't you?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, yes. Some. But we have been moving over the last 20 years away from the initial post-World War II preoccupation of our intelligence with first the Soviet Union and secondly the Soviet Union's military power. Those are still terribly important to us. But we're now interested in 159 countries around the world because we have some involvement with almost all of them. But our involvement with most of them is economic and political, not military.

So we've had to expand American intelligence and make its horizons much broader.

FISKE: Interestingly, because the CIA is the kind of organization it is and because many of its activities are secret, and in the past some of them have been unnecessarily secret, it's become a whipping boy. There are some people abroad, some groups abroad who, predictably, blame everything untoward that happens on the CIA.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

FISKE: And unfortunately, a great many people throughout the world are willing to accept it. And even more unfortunately, a substantial number of Americans are willing to accept it.

How do we deal with that kind of thing?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, we tried to deal with it in the four years I was there by restoring the image of the CIA within our country, by making it clear, first of all, that we were operating under these new controls, under this new oversight.

Secondly, I tried to open up the CIA to the public more, so they understood what we did and appreciated it and realized it was basically a very fine organization.

Now, you cannot open it up to the extent of telling who your spies are or how your satellites operate. But you can take the final product, the information that you've digested from the spies and the satellites and you can declassify a lot of that and make it available to the public, and they get some idea of what you're doing and how good it is.

Unfortunately, most of that has been thrown overboard in the last four years.

FISKE: In your book, Secrecy and Democracy, you say citizens of a country are the very best agents. That's understandable. The Soviet Union, then, should have really benefited considerably from the activities of this Walker group, shouldn't they?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. Now, what I was trying to point out, in sort of a tutorial about what espionage is all about in chapter five of my book, is that contrary to the James Bond image of our spy novels, the CIA, the American officers really don't do a lot of the risky type of spying work. Why? Because in a foreign country it generally takes a foreign national who speaks the language, knows the culture, but who has the contacts, who can gain access to the building or the room or the person that you want to get some information from.

So our CIA people do what we call recruit other people to do the actually risky spying work for us. Our people are called case officers. The other people we recruit are called agents. And most of the James Bond work is done by these foreign agents.

Now, on the other side, when the Soviets spy against us, at the bottom of that they've got to find an American to be their agent. And an American like the Walkers, who had legitimate access to the secrets, but who was willing, for one reason or another, to give them away, to be a traitor to his country. It's unfortunate that we've had this case with the Walkers, and they could have done some considerable damage.

FISKE: It must be especially painful to you, not only as a former Director of Intelligence, but as a naval man.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. I'm very ashamed that we have so many career Navy people involved in this. And I'm disappointed that the Navy itself wasn't more alert to note what was going on here.

FISKE: Last night, when I was discussing this with my listeners, some of them put forward the view that, somehow or other, we Americans are becoming less patriotic, more venal, more concerned with our own individual benefits. I argued that there's hardly enough evidence to support that. We're a nation of 235 million people, and four or five so far have been named in this. But a great many were willing to believe that. Do you?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I don't, really. The young people of our society today are more inquiring. They demand more information before they'll make up their mind on matters. I think you and I, when we were told salute the flag and say aye-aye, pretty much did so. I think today they say, "Why?" And a lot of people interpret that as being unpatriotic. I'm not sure that it is. I think it's not all bad that they want to understand what's going on.

Let me tell you a little sea story. One day when I was Director of the CIA my office received a phone call. And I tell this story in my book, and I think it's significant. The phone call was from a young man who was in what we call boot camp at the CIA. He was getting his initial training to become an officer. And he said, "There are five us down here who want to meet the Director."

Well, it's pretty unusual for a recruit to say, you know, "I want to go up and see the boss."

So the staff asked him, "What's your complaint?"

He said, "We haven't any complaint. We want to make a career of this organization. And if we're going to do that, we want to see what kind of people run it."

FISKE: How about that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: And so I had lunch with these five young people, all by myself. And they were marvelous. When I asked them why they were there, why had they joined the CIA -- the first one was a lady. And I said, "Jane, why are you here?"

She said, "Well, I was a lawyer downtown in Washington."

And I said, "Wait a minute. You were a lady lawyer in Washington, D.C., and you've now come into the CIA at something like \$15,000 a year," when, you know, lady lawyers are in high demand.

"Yes," she said. "I like being a lawyer, but I was doing the same thing, sort of, and I was stuck in an office. And I want to be where the action is and I want to do something for my country."

When I finished going around that table I was almost crying because of the sincerity of these people to want to do something important and contributory to their country. But they wanted to know what kind of an organization it was. They didn't want to just plunge in and say, "Well, I've heard the CIA is good." They wanted to assure themselves before they got fully committed that it was run by honorable people, that it was going to be a good career for them. And that's not all bad. But it can't be misinterpreted as lack of loyalty, lack of patriotism.

FISKE: You mentioned the James Bond types. A great many people have the impression that everybody in the CIA is a James Bond type. And when you came there as Director, and you had not been in the intelligence community before that, you ran into some people in the organization who thought like James Bond types, and you had some considerable difficulty in changing the thinking and persuading them that it was far more important to analyze information that was gathered frequently by more technological means than to be James Bond.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, there's a lot of confusion over this. And again, I tried to elaborate or explain this in my book because people need to understand that over the last 20 years, in addition to the revolution of introducing oversight, that we've already talked about, there was a second revolution in American intelligence. And that is that by the mid-1970s the amount of information being collected by technical systems, like satellites, far exceeded that being collected by human spies.

Now, this by no means put the spies out of business. It just changed the way they operate. Because today who would risk the life of a spy, an agent, to get information you could obtain at almost no risk through a satellite photograph, for instance.

So, today what you do, you use the spies to fill the gaps in the information that you cannot get. And you cannot get a lot of information from the technical systems. But you then focus these human agents more towards those specific gaps. It makes them even more valuable.

FISKE: You rely on them for interpretations, I suspect.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, partly; but mainly to go out and -- for instance, a satellite photograph can't tell what you and I are doing in this room. It can't see in here. So if somebody wants to know what we're up to, they've got to find some other technique. And it may be a good idea to get an agent to listen in on us or sit in the corner or talk to somebody who listens to what we said. You know, there are other -- or put a bug in here and listen to it.

So, the problem we had in the mid-1970s was to get the

spy people to adjust to this new environment and to refocus their effort.

It's a proud, capable bureaucracy in the CIA that does this kind of work. And I can assure you that most proud, capable bureaucracies don't change easily. So there was resistance, Fred. But it's pretty well behind.

FISKE: You think that some of that resistance, some of that mind-set was related to the fact that several of the previous Directors had in fact been espionage types rather than analyst types.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. The analysis people in the CIA have always been second fiddle. And I did my best to elevate them; not to bring down the espionage types, but to bring up the analytic types.

It does you no good to collect all this data by spies and by satellites and not have really expert people to interpret it. And they're the ones who should be the driving force in an intelligence agency because they're the ones who talk to the Presidents and the Secretaries of State and say, "What do you need?"

And then they say, "What have we got?"

And then they say, "What are we missing?"

And they go to the spies and the satellite people and they say, "Here's what we most need."

In short, they've got to be the driving force in the whole system. If they don't start it down the right track, the collectors, the spies are going to collect information about Country X, and the analysts are going to be studying Country Y. And we're not going to bring them together.

Unfortunately, the espionage branch of the CIA is a bit too independent and it's more interested in doing what it thinks is important, which may be Country X. But what the President may want is an analysis of Country Y.

FISKE: You came from the Navy to the CIA. The Navy is a bureaucracy, as well.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

FISKE: And I'm sure that in your various commands you attempted to effect change.

Did you meet a different kind of resistance in the CIA

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from what you met in the Navy, due to the fact that CIA types operate differently?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. Now, there's bureaucratic resistance in all organizations that are large, like the Navy and the CIA. But the element of secrecy gave a different tone to it in the CIA because there is this great sense of dedication, and there's a good sense of dedication on the part of the CIA people. They feel, in part, because what they do is so secret, that they have a very special mission for our country. And they come, then, because of the secrecy, to believe that only they can understand what is needed in intelligence.

It is a particular art, but it isn't so arcane that you or I, with a little effort and study, can't understand it.

FISKE: You have a quote in your book from Jim Angleton, who for many years was in charge of counterintelligence, and about whom you have many criticisms. But the quote is to the effect that no outsiders will ever be able to understand what we here in the CIA do.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

FISKE: Was that a widespread attitude?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, yes. And that was a very strong attitude.

Now, I certainly want to say that there are a lot of naval officers who don't think anybody outside the Navy can understand the Navy. But, you know, Secretaries of Defense are, by law, civilians, and they have to run the Navy. And Directors of Central Intelligence, heads of the CIA, aren't always civilians, aren't always non-intelligence professionals, but they more frequently than not have been. And they can run intelligence, too.

You have to apply normal management practices, leaving some of the technical decisions, obviously, to the technicians, to the people who know it. I would never think of telling the espionage people whether they should make contact with an agent by walking down the street and brushing past him and whispering to him or by dropping a note in his mailbox, or whatever you might do. That is a technical decision that they have to make. But I could, and did, evaluate the risks of making contact with that man, and was the end result going to be worth that risk?

FISKE: Admiral Turner, let's leave out the KGB and the intelligence services of the authoritarian nations. They can operate in a manner which is not acceptable to us. But many of

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the Western democracies have effective intelligence-gathering agencies, and we don't hear the same kind of criticism from them.

Is it that their people, the populations, the citizens in those countries are more sophisticated about intelligence than we are?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No.

FISKE: Or is it that they do things differently?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No. It's that they're having the same problems we are and they're getting the same criticisms.

FISKE: Are they?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Not as big a splash as we.

There's a big scandal in Great Britain right now about excessive tapping telephones, infiltrating of labor organizations for what could appear to be political rather than intelligence purposes. Yes. A former member of their counterintelligence organization, called MI-5, has just blown a whistle and made a TV documentary that makes a lot of accusations. They have not been proven yet, but it seems very clear that they're going to have some new form of controls and regulations over there.

The Canadians have just revamped the whole works up there. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police has been denuded of some of its former intelligence responsibilities, and they've been put in another organization.

The Australians have had a major reorganization.

The Germans, in 1978, formed a committee of the Bundestag to oversee their intelligence.

The Italians have restructured intelligence to make it more responsive and under the control of the Prime Minister.

What we have done has been more extensive, much more publicized. But everybody else is beginning to follow in this direction of putting some form of controls, some form of check on their intelligence activities.

FISKE: We just haven't heard much about it in our media.

ADMIRAL TURNER: No. It doesn't get a lot of play here.

FISKE: Talking about the media, you deal with the CIA

and its relation with the media. And it's hard to appreciate, to understand for a period the CIA used people in the media to help the nation. They used academics, professors, experts in various fields who had substantial expertise to contribute that could be very helpful to the nation.

As a result of some of the difficulties, the criticisms that came 15 years ago, or so, both of those groups separated themselves from the CIA, almost as though to deal with it would be to deal with another country.

I have never -- while I don't condone the wrongdoing, you concede that there was substantial wrongdoing by the CIA, and you've talked about it in your book. I don't condone that wrongdoing. I criticize it as harshly as anybody. But I recognize that intelligence gathering is of enormous importance to our nation, and I don't see anything wrong with an American cooperating in the interest of his nation's security.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, bravo. I'm all for you, Fred.

The argument that the media often make is that it will compromise their integrity if they're doing something on the side that is not known to the public. Maybe they will write their stories differently if they're paid by the CIA on the side. You're a media person and you wouldn't, yourself, enter into an agreement that you thought would compromise your integrity and your basic work. And some people might be compromised, some might not. But those who would be compromised shouldn't join. They shouldn't do that. The rest of the media who want to be patriotic to their country -- you know, if you have information that could help your country, it's a shame not to give it to the people who need it in our country. You know, we might pay a spy and risk his life to get it. And some person in our own family, be it in the media, might have that information and not share it with us. It's a shame.

FISKE: Has that changed any from the low point, with regard to media people or academics? It's even more hard to understand about the academics, because some of them have enormous amounts of background. I've had people on this program, for example, who are enormously experienced in the affairs of Central America or of the Middle East, and so on, and their expertise could be invaluable.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

FISKE: But many of them are reluctant to give it to the CIA, almost as though it were an unpatriotic act.

ADMIRAL TURNER: It's very difficult to understand.

There are still many academics who are perfectly willing to deal with the CIA, and I really respect them and I drew on them a great deal. But there are those campuses, those situations in which if an academic deals with the CIA, he's in trouble with his peers.

I tell the story in my book of a friend who was on a New England college campus, a liberal school, and I tried to get him twice to come work with the CIA for a year on a sabbatical. And he finally decided it was just too risky to his basic career to do that.

That's unfortunate because there's nothing that hurts his profession -- he's a better professor if he goes back from the CIA. He's really seen how things operate a lot more clearly than you do from a purely academic perspective. He may not be able to share all the secrets he learns with his students, but he can share the idea that he has seen decisions being made in our government, and that they're not made like the textbooks say. They're made in lots of different ways. And he can be a much richer professor for the experience of having been in the CIA, or even just consulted with it and helped it.

FISKE: Admiral, among the difficulties that you discuss in your book regarding the conduct of intelligence gathering in a democratic society is the fact that while the negatives come out, the mistakes that are made, the bad decisions, the experiences, for example, in Iran and Lebanon and in Guatemala, that the successes can't be discussed.

ADMIRAL TURNER: It's a cross the poor people in intelligence bear. Most of their failures somehow get out and get publicized. Many of their successes just can't be told.

There's only one real story that I couldn't get into my book, and that was a tremendous success. And I do have to admire the CIA that even though it was a success, they thought it was secret. I thought it was marginal and that I could write it in a way that didn't hurt our secrecy. But they turned it down because even though it would have improved their image around the world, they still thought it was secret.

And that's hard, of course. And it's hard on individuals.

Again, I tell a story in the book about a man who did a very heroic thing for the CIA and I gave him a medal. But I gave it to him with only four other people in the room, and you know, because there weren't many people in the CIA knew he'd been where he was, doing what he was doing. So you can't pat him on the back in public. He can't take the medal home and hang it in his

den because a lot of people don't even know he works for the CIA.

FISKE: You conceded the CIA's involvement in the Mossadegh overthrow and in Iran and the action in Guatemala against Arbenz. Most Americans are persuaded that the CIA was instrumental in the coup that overthrew Salvador Allende in Chile, and you flatly deny that in your book.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I base that largely on the Church Committee's thorough investigation of it in 1975-76.

There's no question, now, that the CIA, with presidential authorization, was working, first, to try to prevent Allende's election, and secondly to prevent his inauguration once elected. But -- and even though they worked with some of the groups that later caused problems down there and led to the overthrow, I don't believe there's evidence that they precipitated, planned or participated in the planning for the overthrow, the military overthrow of Allende.

FISKE: Well, as Director of the CIA, you wouldn't have to look for evidence. You should have the facts.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I wasn't there at that time.

FISKE: Well, don't you have access to the records, or didn't you at the time?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes, of course I did. I didn't spend a lot of my time in those four years doing history, however. I did those historical things that were important to making my present decisions.

So I'm persuaded from what I did see on the inside, although I didn't study every dossier, as well as the Church Committee report, that there was not an intentional move by the CIA to kill and overthrow, or overthrow and kill Allende.

FISKE: Well, there's lots more that I would like to discuss with you, but I would like to involve our listeners at this point.