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House Panel Yields On Separate Bill on CIA Covert Actions

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In a move that seemed to weaken chances for a new charter for the CIA, the House Intelligence Committee decided yesterday not to try to block enactment of a separate law governing covert agency operations.

Several members voiced misgivings over the adoption of piece-meal bills to strengthen the CIA's hand; but the committee was plainly unprepared to recommend a bill of its own for covert activities.

The proposed new rule for the CIA's covert operations, providing for much more secrecy, was adopted last month by the House Foreign Affairs Committee as part of this year's foreign aid legislation.

It would restrict reports to Congress about covert actions to the House and Senate Intelligence committee, and allowed the president to avoid prior notice whenever he deems it essential.

Yesterday was the deadline for intervention by the House Intelligence Committee before the foreign aid bill moves to the House floor.

Rep. Edward Boland (D-Mass.) suggested that the committee seek a delay of four to six weeks so it could report out its own rule for covert actions as part of a "scaled-down charter" for the CIA and the rest of the U.S. intelligence community.

He said he was confident the committee could have a charter read by then.

The Republicans disagreed. Rep. J. Kenneth Robinson (R-Va.) said he and the four other GOP members of the 14-man committee did not feel it possible "to report out a revised charter within a certain time."

Comprehensive charter legislation has been bogged down since its introduction in the Senate in February, partly because of the Carter administration's opposition to a prior-notice rule for covert actions. The Senate Intelligence Committee has been attempting to come up with a scaled-down "mini-charter" that would resolve this and other issues, but markup sessions have been repeatedly delayed.

On the House side, several Democrats on the Intelligence Committee complained that the exceptions to prior notice, which the Foreign Affairs Committee approved March 12, were much too broad.

In the end, however, the committee agreed, without formal vote, on a proposal by Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.) to write a report posing no objection to the separate law but reminding the House at the same time that the Intelligence Committee may come up with another version later as part of a charter.