

Bush, Helms Blow Out 50 Candles at CIA Party

By Walter Pincus *9/18/87*
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Former president George Bush and retired CIA director Richard M. Helms provided an unusual one-two punch at the agency's 50th birthday party yesterday.

Before an appreciative crowd of 4,000 CIA retirees, Bush described his time as director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1975 to 1977 as second only to being president. He brought roars when he called those who want to dismantle the CIA "nuts," and attacked the "Beltway press" for making every intelligence failure into a crisis.

"They will take something bad—the uncovering of a treacherous mole," Bush said of press coverage of convicted spy Aldrich H. Ames, "and use that to tear down the entirety that is the CIA."

Helms, the first CIA professional to head the agency and still looked upon as the grand old man of the intelligence community, provided a more thoughtful criticism of today's intelligence operations and ended with a request that it was time "to take a hard look at the numbers of people employed by CIA, or put another way, at the size of the bureaucracy it has developed over the years."

Broadening his approach to the entire intelligence community, where the Pentagon controls over 85 percent of the annual \$30 billion budget, Helms said, "A serious case can be made for sharpening the focus on important targets and by

reducing the number of hands, or layers if you like, through which every operational decision or analytical disagreement must pass."

Bush, however, drew the most demonstrative reaction with self-deprecating humor and his sharp attacks on the agency's enemies, past and present.

"I'm out of government," Bush declared, "like a lot of you guys, out of work and happily out of the press."

He recalled that the agency was under fire in 1975 when he arrived, battered by congressional investigations that disclosed assassination plots, domestic spying and experiments with drugs on unwitting subjects. "The entire agency ... was demeaned by the universally negative press" and "roundly insulted by untutored, aggressive staffers from two committees of Congress."

Despite those times, however, Bush said that the agency "flourished [and] thank God it did." He said as president he depended on the agency's intelligence product and that of the entire community "and I'll always be grateful to you."

Bush closed with the podium-thumping declaration: "To those who say we no longer need CIA, I say you are nuts. To those who want to dismantle CIA or put it under some other department, State Department or anybody else, you are nuts too."

Helms spoke of the agency's early successes and the traumas caused by Vietnam, which he described as creating for 10 years "a recurring nightmare." He said, "Emotions ran

high, probably still do, but loyalty prevailed to the sad end."

Perhaps reflecting his tradition on the intelligence analysis and human operational side, Helms described as "a fallacy" the efforts of technical gadgeteers, with their space satellites and other electronic collection devices, to disparage human spying.

"Gadgets cannot divine man's intentions," Helms said, adding that "there is no substitute for old-fashioned analysis performed by old-fashioned brain power any more than there is a substitute for sound judgment based on adequate facts."

Saying his call for a look at cutting the size of the intelligence community was not a plea for a quick fix, Helms added that "excellence in performance is the prerogative of comparatively few human beings. ... It is not numbers of people who will produce good intelligence; it is quality, teamwork, leadership."

Appearing before the vocal crowd with Bush and Helms were other former CIA directors, including Robert M. Gates, John M. Deutch, R. James Woolsey, and Stansfield Turner. The widow of the late William E. Colby, Sally Shelton Colby, also was on hand.

When Helms stood alone for a picture with CIA Director George J. Tenet, at 44 the youngest leader the agency has ever had, one longtime agency observer remarked, "It was like watching a passing from the old to the young."

Helms later said he felt "an era has ended, and [Tenet] is going on to new avenues."