

Impeded by Investigations and Reports, Officials of Agency Assert

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH

WASHINGTON, Nov. 9—Officials of the Central Intelligence Agency tonight repeated public avowals of diminished prestige and operational ability because of the various inquiries into intelligence operations, are convinced that the agency will suffer no serious loss of authority, and no erosion of its ability to produce professional intelligence estimates and reports.

Key agency officials do not expect either the Senate or House Select Committee on Intelligence to recommend a ban on clandestine intelligence activities. Instead, they believe the committees will seek to impose more stringent controls on such operations, a compromise they feel will be welcomed by the agency.

In a series of recent interviews, a number of agency officials also expressed surprise at what they said was the inability of the Senate committee, headed by Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, to generate public support for its inquiry.

"Frank Church was the first TV show to close this fall," one senior agency aide said.

Mr. Church and his senior aides took sharp exception to these views. They said that much of the committee's most important work was proceeding now in executive hearings and would, if consistent with national security requirements, be made public after the investigation ends next February.

All the agency officials interviewed agreed that the public criticism and official investigations following the published reports last December of widespread domestic spying by the agency had failed to hamper seriously its main function—the collection of worthwhile intelligence.

At one point last February, William E. Colby, the recently named Director of Central Intelligence, announced that what he called "operational" changes would be made to improve the agency's performance. He said that the changes would be implemented by the end of the year.

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week. "There are none."

He added, however, that agency officials were concerned about "the intangibles, that you

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don't know what you're missing—the defector who doesn't defect, someone who doesn't tell you a wonderful story."

"But it's hard to say that we've lost much because of that," the official said.

Sources cited the areas in which there is some impairment of operations. "Some American agents that provided cover for agents in the United States have curtailed their operations."

A small number of the large American corporations that permitted the C.I.A. to use foreign offices and branches for cover jobs have become less enthusiastic about permitting the agency to have direct access to employees overseas. The companies have requested that the agency conduct all its business with employees through a designated contact person.

Some of the agency's personnel have complained that the agency's morale has suffered from the investigations and a confusion about what is permissible in the field. Everyone now has to check back home with his field officer, and this is taking away operational initiative in spot developments, one source said. Some agency officials said, however, that they did not think it was a bad idea to have men in the field checking in with superiors in such cases.

There has been some reluctance by various officials and operatives in foreign intelligence services to cooperate. "Some of our old-line contacts don't want to show up in our hearings or in our press," one source said. "But it just means that it's a little bit more difficult to undertake an operation with friendly operatives." He added that such operations were still feasible.

There have been scattered instances of less cooperation at high-level government-to-government interchanges of information. One high-level Ford administration official said that the British intelligence officials "don't tell us where they got their information so we can evaluate the source, but only the information itself. The British have reported last

month that American officials were getting top-secret British information as being "on loan" to avoid the possibility of its being subpoenaed by Congress or the courts as "property" of the C.I.A.

But all the sources said that intelligence information, including the most sensitive material available, was still flowing in.

'Things Are Tougher'

"Things are tougher, that's true," one official said. "But I haven't seen any evidence that things are compromised in terms of being able to function."

One high-level intelligence official said that the United States and other intelligence services occasionally held back things from each other, but that that was nothing new.

One senior Ford Administration official, asked for his assessment of potential damage to intelligence operations, complained about the continued disclosure to Congress of internal documents relating to agency plots to assassinate foreign leaders and other clandestine operations. The official said he was concerned that future Presidents and intelligence chiefs might be restricted because of the fear that successors would make certain data public.

The official said he knew of no instance in which the agency's ability to produce intelligence had been adversely affected by the Congressional hearings.

One high-level agency source did say that one European politician had recently turned down covert financing of a political campaign. The official refused to supply further information, and it was impossible to gauge how widespread such refusals of secret aid were.

A Frequent Question

One agency official conceded that a factor in the dispute over how much, if any, damage had been done to C.I.A. operations in the last 10 months was that Congress had repeatedly asked the same question in recent hearings.

Last Wednesday, William Nelson, the C.I.A.'s director of operations, was asked by his views on the matter by Representative David C. Trean, Republican of Louisiana, during House hearings.

Mr. Nelson said that some American citizens and agents abroad had refused to cooperate for fear of being exposed. He said that "there has been a good deal of apprehension" in foreign intelligence services about continuing their relationships with the C.I.A.

"I don't want to overexaggerate this, however," Mr. Nelson added. "The agency is still functioning abroad, and I think functioning rather effectively."

A number of agency officials said that a major concern did develop over the publication earlier this year of "Things the Company," a book by Philo

Agee, a former spy who had been an active member of the agency and had written the book. The book had been published by a small publisher and had been widely distributed.

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If a central committee emerge during the investigation which were initiated by the ouster of Mr. Colby, the end, it was repeated, was about a loss of morale in the agency because of the widespread public criticism of its clandestine overseas activity.

Some officials, though, discounted the significance of morale inside any Bureau. One high-level Administration official said that morale had been bad inside the State Department for 25 years, but they still do their job.

But those officials who were bothered by a loss of morale said that President Ford's summary dismissal of Mr. Colby, who had been Director of Central Intelligence since 1973, had created a uniting surge of sympathy for Mr. Colby in the agency.

One Colby associate said that the director initially planned to leave the post last Wednesday but later agreed to stay through the end of the year — after signing 70 supergrade promotions that had been authorized to award the promotion ceremony.

More than 500 senior C.I.A. officials gathered Wednesday for a ceremony in the auditorium on the agency's grounds near Washington.

"Colby walks in," one eyewitness recalled, "and all of a sudden everyone jumps up and applause begins. It lasted five minutes, with Colby trying to shut it off. Now everyone [inside the agency] is saying that Colby died for our sins."

Colby Praised

Mr. Colby has been widely praised for his consistent efforts to cooperate with the various investigating committees that were set up this year, although his approach is known to have angered many associates and friends of Richard Helms, who was director of the C.I.A. when it was engaged in domestic spying.

One mild demurrer to the general praise for Mr. Colby's candor came from Representative Otis G. Pike, Democrat of Suffolk, who is chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. Mr. Pike said that during a hearing on the agency's own operations, he and his colleagues are asked the right questions, you will give an honest answer. You do not make it your business to ask the right questions.

The House and the Senate have been widely praised for their

...said: "You had the... potentially disas... And yet by... and by... the material out... the agency has finally come... into the 20th century. They... now know that acts of wrong... doing must be turned over to... the Department of Justice."

A number of agency men... praised Mitchell Rogovin, a... Washington lawyer hired by... Mr. Colby to aid the agency... in its presentations before Con... gress.

Sources said that Mr. Rogovin... constantly and successfully... urged Mr. Colby and others... to turn over voluntarily... evidence of wrongdoing as a... means of keeping the Congres... sional investigations on the de... fensive.

"Part of the problem of being... in our culture," one middle-le... vel agency official said in ex... plaining why many in the ag... ency were reluctant to make any... information public, "is that... compartmentalization is one of... the fundamental disciplines—... the idea is to limit the damage... in case the K.G.B. [the Soviet... secret intelligence service] pe... netrates the agency. This be... comes part of the ritual, and... some of the things we thought... would be abhorrent to the... American public [upon disclo... sure] "are things the people... have to put up with day after... day."

Raw Files Provided

One official said in an inter... view two weeks ago that Jus... tice Department officials were... being provided with direct ac... cess to the agency's raw files... At least one Justice Depart... ment inquiry, into allegations... that Mr. Helms committed per... jury while testifying before... Congress, is known to still be... under review.

Other agency officials also... expressed the view that the... relatively few new issues raised... thus far by the Congressional... committees were based entirely... on documents and evidence... supplied by the agency.

Nothing has been unearthed... by the committee that hasn't... been discovered by the agency... and stopped," one source said... Senator Church said today... in a televised interview that... his committee's report would... contain "some new inform... about the agency's assassina... tion plot.

The official added that the... basic working document uti... lized by the blue-ribbon com... mission set up by President... Ford and headed by Vice Pres... ident Rockefeller for its investi... gation and report in June was... the internal C.I.A. dossier on... domestic abuses assembled in... May 1973 at the request of... James R. Schlesinger, then the... C.I.A. director, who was dis... missed last week as Secretary... of Defense.

Some agency officials specu... lated that the Schlesinger re... port did not include all the... agency's domestic wrongdoing... but they doubted that the intel... ligence committees would be

able to develop significant new... material.

...operatives, the Schlesinger... report has been denounced as... the "vomit report," a reference... to the fact that agency em... ployees volunteered much of... the information about the... domestic violations to Mr... Schlesinger's office. There are... still some men in the agency... a highly reliable source said... who pride themselves on "hav... ing stronger stomachs."

There is no evidence that... Mr. Colby or any other official... has authorized further inquiries... into domestic wrongdoing, al... though the existence of such... attitudes is reported to be wide... throughout the agency.

Two middle-level C.I.A. offi... cials who are now serving in... key managerial positions in the... agency expressed disappoint... ment in the public proceedings... of the Church committee.

Some Basic Questions

"A lot of basic questions... about intelligence and its need... haven't been aired, and that's... too bad," one said. The other... complained that the Church... committee had not begun to... examine publicly the "fund... amental" issue of covert op... erations.

A more senior intelligence... official wondered whether what... he felt was the failure of the... Congressional investigations to... deal with the more substantial... issues would not provoke yet... another inquiry into intelli... gence in some future Con... gress.

"The Senate had the staff... one agency source said, "but... it got too bogged down in... the assassinations."

He said that... the Church committee... fix firmly a schedule of public... hearings on the... covert... activities in... at least \$8 billion was... prevent the... Senator... Allende... in 1970... and, failing that, to attempt... to make it more difficult for... Mr. Allende's... by a military... in... September... 1973 and was... killed... or committed suicide.

A number of... believe that the... intelligence committee has publicly... examined more basic questions... dealing with the capability of... the C.I.A. to make accurate... intelligence assessments.

One former... said: "The... after... the... goes after the..."

The... committee was... known to... in an... intense... over Senator... Church's... to... extensive... public... on the... C.I.A.'s role in Chile.

Opposition on Panel

Sources close to the commit... tee said that opposition from... Republicans and some Demo... crats on the nine-member panel... had prevented Mr. Church from... going forward this week with

full-scale public... As... of last Friday, the... said, the... had been unable... to agree how long the hearings... if public, should last and which... witnesses should be summoned.

Defenders of the Senate com... mittee, including Mr. Church,... concede that the public hear... ings have failed to arouse... strong public interest, but they... insist that the committee... should not be judged until it... completes its work.

A number of sources said... that the assassination report... scheduled to be released in... two weeks, reaches no definite... conclusions about who author... ized what in Cuba, Chile, the... Congo and the Dominican Re... public. The report, however, is... said to contain the most de... tailed information ever as... sembled outside the C.I.A. on... how covert operations are ini... tiated and carried out.

Mr. Church is known to be... sensitive to the charges that... he sought to obtain personal... publicity by publicly investigat... ing such seemingly dramatic... but less significant issues as... the failure of some low-level... agency official to destroy lethal... toxin stocks after a direct Pres... idential order to do so in late... 1969.

The Senator said in a recent... telephone interview that such... accusations were "groundless" and added: "The assassination... matter would have been unpre... cedented box office. It would... have been the most sensational... hearings held in this century. I... was against bringing this out... because I thought it would have... caused damage" to the nation.

'Headline-Grabbing' Denied

"It's just unconscionable to... turn around and say that the... committee is headline-grab... bing," Mr. Church added.

Similarly, William G. Miller, staff director of the Church... committee inquiry, said in a... telephone interview that 30 in... vestigators and attorneys had... been working since early this... year on what he said was one... of the central issues in the... investigation: Are you going... to have covert operations and... under what conditions and... what controls?

Thus far, Mr. Miller said, the... staff dealing with that issue... has been meeting privately and... may be forced to conclude its... work with relatively little in... formation made public.

Mr. Miller conceded that "the... things that have been made... public are not as important... in the long run, but it takes... a lot of maturity and strength... to realize that the way you... get to the gut issues is to... handle them in executive ses... sion."

He added that the Senators... on the committee had to mak... decisions and attempt to bal... ance "what the public should... know against national securi... ty."

"In every major area of in... quiry," he said, "the more in... formation there is, the greater... the sense of having to weigh

carefully the issue of secrecy... versus national security."

He described the committee's... major goal as ensuring that... the nation got a new legislative... charter for regulating the ac... tivities of its needed intelligence... agencies.

"We're trying to put intel... ligence within the constitution... al framework," he said. "That's... the major work of the commit... tee, and it won't be seen until... February."

Differing Views Voiced

Other Senate staffers, in... cluding some senior members... of Mr. Church's committee, ex... pressed differing views.

"The committee has not been... willing to hang tough and fight... the Administration" on access... to documentation, one commit... tee said. "It's frittered away... the psychological and moral... leverage you journalists gave... them [early this year]—when... everyone was afraid of a cover... up."

Another committee source... complained that Senator... Church and Mr. Miller "have... the notion that if you go quiet... ly in the end you'll come up... with some worthwhile reme... dies" for the intelligence com... munity.

"People will say you're ter... ribly responsible, but that's only... because you haven't found out... anything," one source said.

What... was a real... cause... the... of domestic... abuses, the source said, the... committee was "manhandled" by... the agency. It never sub... poenaed or threatened to sub... poena documents, and it... "didn't go beyond what was... reported by journalists."

Another Senate aide with... experience in high-level na... tional... matters de... scribed... widely circulated... newspaper... photographs of... Senator... Church... holding a... C.I.A.... during a public... hearing as "the essence of... the Church approach."

"There was a way to do the... job but it wouldn't have got... ten headlines," the aide said... "The C.I.A. is going to come... out of this better off because... everyone will think things... have been dug up and investi... gated.

"It was the best chance... Congress ever had."