

Tower Opposes New Unit On Intelligence Oversight

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Sen. John G. Tower (R-Tex.) broke from the bipartisan consensus in the Senate intelligence committee yesterday by opposing the creation of a new, permanent intelligence oversight committee as "a premature and simplistic solution."

He urged instead that oversight functions be carried out by the Armed Services subcommittees of the Senate and House which had traditionally monitored the CIA and the other intelligence agencies on Capitol Hill. Tower is the second-ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

In a statement which runs counter to the majority of his Republican and Democratic colleagues on the intelligence committee, Tower said he considered the proposal for a new oversight committee "premature" because President Ford had indicated he will deal with intelligence reorganization issues in a message to Congress.

"It is simplistic," Tower continued, "because it

assumes that intelligence activities can be neatly divorced from other activities of the affected agencies and departments..."

Tower followed other senatorial witnesses before the Senate Government Operations Committee who spoke out in favor of a new oversight committee to curb future abuses of the intelligence community such as those which have reverberated through Washington for more than a year.

The proponents of an oversight committee included Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) who first proposed a joint intelligence oversight committee 21 years ago.

The intelligence community, said Mansfield, "will continue a mystery... unless and until Congress chooses to change its policy and to exert some degree of scrutiny and vigilance, to perform some measure of oversight, to extract a commitment of ongoing accountability."

The majority leader's call for a new oversight panel in the Senate was echoed by Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, Sen. Abraham A. Ribicoff (D-Conn.), chairman of the Government Operations panel, Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.) and Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (R-Conn.).

Mansfield endorsed a provision in the still-secret draft bill of the Senate intelligence committee calling for the rotation of one-third of the members of the proposed oversight panel each two years.

He counseled against the creation of a committee "manned by some elite few who gained admission outside the ... normal selection process... and in the end so impotent that it would itself become a creature if not an active conspirator within the community over which it must exert scrutiny."

The issue of advance notification to Congress of covert operations, included as a provision of the draft bill, has created even deeper divisions of opinion on Capitol Hill. The White House is known to regard prior notice to Congress on covert

operations as a violation of constitutional principle.

Republican members of the Senate intelligence committee, notably Tower and Baker, have objected to the draft provision.

Tower was described by a spokesman as having grown increasingly skeptical over the past few weeks of the possibility of establishing a "leak proof" special intelligence committee.

Church has argued that the most serious leaks of intelligence material were by the CIA operatives.

The Government Operations Committee yesterday began several weeks of hearings from members of Congress, administration officials and intelligence experts in the private sector to gather a testimonial base from which to draw up intelligence oversight legislation.

Weicker, a member of the intelligence law drafting committee, warned that if Congress does not act this year "nothing will happen" in the strengthening of intelligence oversight despite all the revelations of intelligence community transgressions that have filled the news media over the past year.