

Ford Backs Contacts Between CIA, Clergy

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President Ford favors continued contacts by the Central Intelligence Agency with foreign clergymen and U.S. missionaries abroad, a White House official said in a letter made public yesterday.

"The President does not feel it would be wise at present to prohibit the CIA from having any connection with the clergy," chief White House counsel Philip W. Buchen said in the letter to Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.).

Releasing the Nov. 5 letter, Hatfield contended that the use of churchmen by intelligence agents dishonors America and should be stopped. He is introducing legislation to forbid contacts between the CIA and missionaries.

Such CIA activity "tarnishes the image of the United States in foreign countries, prostitutes the church and violates the First Amendment separation of church and state," he said.

In another development, CIA Director William E. Colby accused House Intelligence Committee Chairman Otis G. Pike (D-N.Y.) of "frightening people" by saying U.S. intelligence is incapable of predicting an attack on America.

"I can tell you right here and now there is not going to be one in the near future," Colby testified.

For the first time, he listed what he called intelligence successes, asserting that U.S. intelligence should not be dismantled now as American defenses were following World War I.

He said "we did very well" in predicting the fall of Vietnam last spring, said U.S. intelligence detected construction of the first Soviet aircraft carriers so that they did not "fall by surprise as Sputnik did," and said the size of the current Soviet grain crop was generally predicted.