

CIA Doublespeak Cloaks Propos

By George Lardner Jr.
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At a breakfast with reporters last March, Edwin Meese III, counselor to the president, stated flatly that the Reagan administration would not permit the CIA to spy on U.S. citizens here at home.

"The White House is absolutely opposed to the CIA becoming involved in domestic spying," Meese said. "We are not going to put the CIA into domestic espionage or the FBI into foreign intelligence."

Now comes a proposed executive order that would allow the CIA to

It would eliminate the current rule saying that a document should not be classified unless its unauthorized disclosure would cause "identifiable damage" to the national security.

It would make the "Top Secret," "Secret" and "Confidential" stamps mandatory rather than discretionary.

And it would turn the existing reasonable-doubt standard upside down by telling officials to keep information secret whenever they have a "reasonable doubt" about the need to do that.

So what's going on here? Is the Reagan White House saying one thing and doing another? Has Ed Meese changed his mind?

The answer appears to be straight out of George Orwell's Ministry of Truth. The proposed executive order for the CIA and the other intelligence agencies, according to administration officials, does not really mean what it says. Nothing in it, according to administration officials, would expand the CIA's ability to engage in domestic espionage.

Criticisms of the draft decree, by the same token, are being assailed from the highest quarters as despicable "propaganda." News stories regarding CIA domestic spying have been labeled "deliberately misleading." The publicity, as Orwell's Newspeak dictionary would put it, has been "doubleplusgood" and in need of "rewrite fullwise."

"As soon as all the corrections which happened to be necessary in any particular number of the Times had been assembled and collated, that number would be reprinted,

the original copy destroyed, and the corrected copy placed on the files in its stead. This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters. . . . Day by day and almost minute by minute, the past was brought up to date."
Orwell, 1984.

As for the proposed presidential

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infiltrate and influence domestic organizations, to conduct covert operations in this country, and to "collect, retain or disseminate information" about law-abiding Americans for a variety of new reasons.

Meese also held forth earlier this year on another topic involving U.S. intelligence: government secrets and their classification.

"I think there is way too much classification," Meese told The Washington Post in an interview published in July. "... I think that's one of the problems of government—that is, the overclassification of documents. You really should only classify something if its revelation would actually harm national security."

Now comes the somewhat refined draft of another executive order, this one for handling national security information.

proclamation to establish new classification practices, that, too, officials say, is being misread.

"I'm not saying you're going to have less classification under this order," says the man in charge of the drafting, Steven Garfinkel, director of the executive branch's Information Security Oversight Office. "But from my perception, the draft order is not intended to increase the material that's classified by any appreciable amount."

The key word is "intended." Apparently, Garfinkel is expecting gov-

als for Homespy and Datahide

ernment classifiers to continue to act pretty much the way they've always acted, classifying about as much as they usually do—which is to say too much. Garfinkel said many of the proposed changes from the existing order, issued by President Carter in 1978, were made primarily to get around court rulings and litigation "problems" concerning what should

mittees, is expected to be signed by the president at any moment.

At briefings for the committees, CIA officials have reportedly insisted that their plans for domestic activities are really quite modest and limited. But they have yet to offer a clear explanation of why the language in the proposed orders that has leaked out thus far has been so broad.

"They just say, 'well, that's what our lawyers worked out,'" said a congressional source.

Democratic lawmakers have expressed alarm. Sen. Walter D. Huddleston (D-Ky.) wrote the president of his concern that, under the draft submitted for congressional comment, "CIA activities in the United States have the potential to increase drastically." House Intelligence Committee Chairman Edward Boland (D-Mass.) said the proposal would tread on "longstanding tradition and policy" against CIA spywork in this country.

GOP lawmakers appear to have picked up the CIA theme that the changes have been "exaggerated" in the press and that the House and Senate intelligence committees will be ever ready to ward off any excesses. "Trust us" is the underlying theme.

Huddleston, on the other hand, was under the impression that the White House, or at least Ed Meese, was on his side, the side of restraint. A veteran of the Church committee investigations of the mid-'70s that focused on a stunning, and uncontestable, catalog of CIA misdeeds, Huddleston, in his letter to the pres-

ident, specifically cited Meese's remarks at the March breakfast.

Meese could not be reached for comment. His spokesman, Jim Jenkins, said "there is a conflict between what he has said and the drafts that are circulating," but it is not at all clear that Meese sees it that way.

Witness, for example, this exchange at a presidential luncheon with out-of-town editors Oct. 17. One editor asked how the proposed executive order, and other changes in the works, squared with Reagan's pledge to "get the government off the backs of the people."

The president let Meese do the talking. "I'm sorry. I'm eating," Reagan explained.

"Let's talk about the CIA, because that's easy," Meese declared. "There is absolutely nothing in the proposed intelligence order which will expand the ability of the CIA to engage in domestic spying. That is totally false, and it's propaganda being put out by some staffers on the Hill who were part of Frank Church's infamous intelligence committee that was so destructive of our intelligence authorities some years ago."

It seems there are quite a few people in town who just don't know how to read.

"*'Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.'... It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. 'Reality control,' they called it; in Newspeak, 'doublethink.'*" Orwell, 1984.

remain classified and what should not.

But then doesn't the new proposal have at least the potential of vastly increasing the amount of classified documents in the government's domain? Garfinkel was asked.

Garfinkel said he would not rather not say.

The classification order is still weeks away from Reagan's desk. But the new order on intelligence activities, perhaps revised as a result of criticisms and suggestions from the House and Senate intelligence com-

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