

Helms Backs CIA Action, Cites President's Concern

1/17/75
By Michael Getler
Washington Post Staff Writer

Richard M. Helms, the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, testified yesterday that it was concern over possible foreign links to rising unrest in the United States in the early 1960s, plus the "express concern of the President" at that time, that led to CIA involvement in domestic intelligence operations.

Helms, now ambassador to Iran, headed the CIA for 6½ years until early 1973, the period in which most of the controversial CIA activity that has come to light in recent weeks took place.

The former intelligence chief, issuing his first public statement yesterday on the expanding month-long CIA controversy, conceded no wrongdoing by the agency during his tenure.

Instead, Helms sharply criticized some elements of the press for what he called an "irresponsible attack" on the CIA, "the principal allegations of which," he charged, "remain unsupported."

Helms testified behind closed doors yesterday before the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Central Intelligence, and a copy of his open-



RICHARD M. HELMS
... criticizes press

ing statement was made available to reporters.

The current CIA director, William E. Colby, who on Wednesday made available to another Senate committee an unprecedented accounting of CIA intelligence activities carried out in this country over the past several years, also testified yesterday.

Colby's statement denied that the CIA had engaged in "a massive, illegal domestic intelligence operation" that

See CIA, A16 Col. 1

is a clear violation of what our charter was.

Yesterday, Helms suggested that in 1947 President Johnson did express concern to the CIA that if help in gathering data on the antiwar movement. But neither Helms nor Colby—who made similar claims—thus far have provided specific documentation of such a presidential request.

Helms also defended the agency's activities in this country and within the CIA's normal times," he said.

"Few Americans would ever come within the purview of our foreign intelligence operations. That happened only when evidence appeared of their involvement with subversive elements abroad."

Then he went on, came the sudden and quite dramatic upsurge of extreme radicalism in this country and abroad in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Helms claimed that "by itself, this violence, this unrest, were of no direct concern to CIA. It became so only in the degree that the trouble was inspired by or coordinated with, or funded by, anti-American subversion mechanisms abroad."

"In such event, CIA had a real, a clear and proper function to perform, but in collaboration with the FBI. The agency did perform that function in response to the express concern of the President," he said.

Helms made no mention of CIA infiltration of groups in this country.

Helms claimed that "information was indeed developed, largely by the FBI and Justice Department, but also from some foreign sources as well, that the agitation here did in fact have some overseas connections."

Helms is the first official to make such a claim of linkage publicly. There have been conflicting reports about this made privately by other officials, and Colby referred several times only to "possible" links.

In a related development yesterday, it was learned that another member of columnist Jack Anderson's staff, Lee Whitten, was among the four journalists placed under surveillance by the CIA during 1971-1972 in what reportedly

was an effort to find out who was giving these reporters allegedly classified information.

Aside from Anderson and Whitten, there are indications that a third member of Anderson's staff also may have been watched by CIA agents.

Helms said in his statement that the press should have a healthy skepticism of things done secretly. But he also contended that segments of the press don't understand the role of the CIA and that these current "irresponsible attacks" on the agency "referred to pass unchallenged, could seriously damage our interests in a hostile world and undermine morale at the CIA."

He claims it took "responsible" elements of the press—not identified, some two weeks to make the subtle distinctions in the CIA's role, but did not explain why the administration itself made no attempt during those weeks after the initial press reports to try to put the agency's problems in perspective.

CIA From A1

has violated the agency's charter restricting it to collecting foreign intelligence.

Those charges were leveled at the CIA in a New York Times article of Dec. 22 that touched off the controversy and numerous congressional inquiries.

Colby's statement acknowledged that the CIA did maintain files on some 10,000 U.S. dissidents, that it had infiltrated some antiwar groups, opened some U.S. mail to Communist countries, and staged a few break-ins and telephone taps over a period of years.

While generally defending these actions by his predecessor, Colby conceded that at least some of them in hindsight, may be questionable.

Helms, however, made no such acknowledgement and the ambassador appears certain to be headed for some tough questioning in Congress.

Rep. Paul Findley (R-Ill.)

said in a House speech yesterday that Helms should not be permitted to return to Iran until he is cleared of any wrongdoing, and also charged that Helms had "greatly compromised his effectiveness" as ambassador.

Helms will also be questioned next week by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to determine if his testimony to that panel in 1973 for his confirmation to the diplomatic post is in conflict with new testimony.

At a February, 1973, closed hearing, Helms was asked about any earlier CIA activity aimed at keeping tabs on U.S. antiwar protesters and whether the White House had requested the agency to get involved.

Helms, according to the transcript, replied: "I do not recall whether we were asked, but we were not involved because it seemed to me that