

CIA Chief Defends Covert Activities

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Central Intelligence Agency Director William E. Colby yesterday defended covert activities and paramilitary operations abroad as an essential part of the nation's intelligence work.

Speaking in New Orleans to members of the Associated Press, Colby said such operations now constitute a "comparatively small proportion" of the CIA's efforts, but he declared they still "make a unique and important contribution to the safety of our country."

The CIA director asked for the help of the press in preserving what he called the nation's "good secrets." He said he believed, however, in exposure of "bad secrets"—or missteps of the past—as well as "non secrets," or known facts about intelligence which "in the old tradition would have been kept secret."

Colby did not offer any clear methods whereby the press could sort out whatever secrets it might come across, but he suggested at one point that the CIA would like to be consulted before publication.

"This does allow the presentation of good reasons to write the story so as to protect important secrets or even, in exceptional cases, to withhold it," he said.

Recently, Colby was temporarily successful in urging a number of new organizations to withhold stories about the CIA's raising of part of a sunken Soviet submarine even after the plan had been publicly mentioned by the Los Angeles Times.

Colby said that modern-day intelligence gathering now relies primarily on technological advances in a variety of fields from photography to electronics.

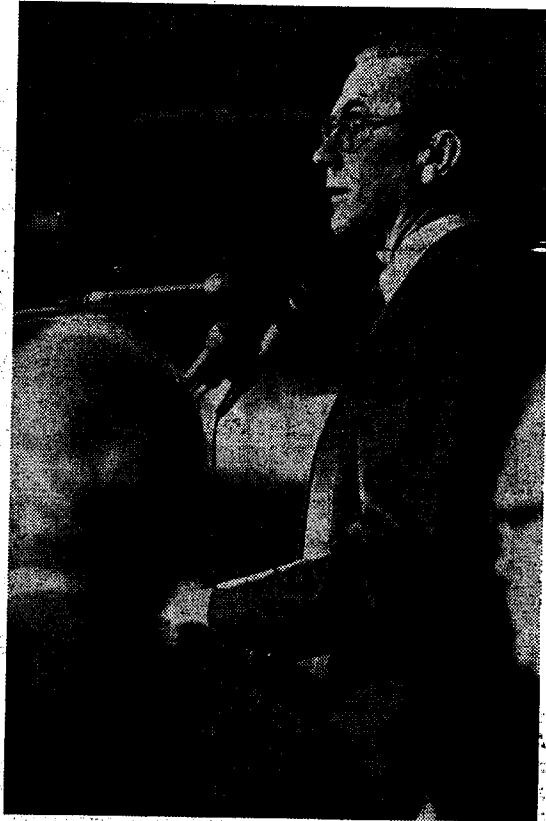
Some critics of the CIA have cited the same developments in arguing that the agency could well afford to abandon the more controversial fields of paramilitary and covert operations.

Clearly unwilling to give them up, Colby said that "some things cannot be learned by the inquiring reporter or even the spy in the sky. Sources within a closed or authoritarian foreign society can let us know its secret in these days of mutual vulnerability to warfare. . . And there are occasions in which some quiet assistance to friends of America in some foreign country can help them withstand hostile internal pressures before they become international pressures against the United States."

The CIA director has previously described paramilitary operations—such as the "secret war" in Laos—as "a little help to a few friends."

Colby said he still welcomes the current public inquiries and debate over the proper scope of the CIA's activities, but at the same time reiterated his fears that a "climate of sensationalism" is jeopardizing the agency's operations. He said some previously cooperative foreign officials have stopped dealing with the CIA or started to "constrict the information they provide us."

Meanwhile, the presidential commission investigating the CIA heard private testimony yesterday from Ford Foundation President McGeorge Bundy, who was President Kennedy's special assistant for national security affairs, and Lawrence K. White, a former controller and executive director of the agency.



Associated Press

CIA Director William E. Colby asks help of the press.

Though he declined to discuss most of his testimony, Bundy told reporters afterwards: "I was able to tell them that I knew of no effort to commit any assassinations during the Kennedy years."

Bundy added, however, he could not exclude the possibility that some officials may

have had discussions along the lines of "how nice it would be if such and such leader didn't exist."

The commission chaired by Vice President Rockefeller spent much of the day in executive session going over preliminary findings assembled by its investigative staff.