

Colby Said to Concede CIA Involvement in Death Plots

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The chairman of the Senate intelligence operations committee indicated yesterday that CIA Director William E. Colby is acknowledging CIA involvement in assassination plots directed against foreign leaders.

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) said the controversial subject was "probably the central issue" during secret questioning of the CIA director at a closed session of the committee that lasted more than three hours.

Allegations of CIA involvement in assassination attempts and schemes under investigation are believed to center primarily on Cuban Premier Fidel Castro and the late Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic.

Speaking guardedly, and at times with apparent unease, Church indicated that there was still no reason to think the CIA carried out any assassinations, but he said Colby's testimony amounted to more than "merely a general denial" of allegations concerning assassination attempts and conspiracies.

Church told reporters the session also produced a number of "surprises" for the committee. He said Colby's disclosures included "new information we did not have before," but Church said he was "not really at liberty to disclose them now."

The CIA director conceded that some of the covert operations brought up yesterday were "outside the law," Church said, again refusing to elaborate. He also said he did not intend to make any detailed public statements on the assassination issue simply "on the testimony of a single witness."

According to Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.), who recently visited Cuba, Castro himself has offered to supply documentation of CIA-sponsored attempts on his life. But Church said, "I think we can get all the information we need on this subject without having to rely on Mr. Castro."

Church has previously said that the CIA's denials of ever carrying out assassinations were "correct, but not complete."

"With this committee, he (Colby) must be complete," Church said yesterday. "I think he is undertaking to give us the complete story."

Colby had no comment beyond a hurried "no, no" when, as he left the committee room, he was asked whether he had finished his testimony. He will return on Friday for further questioning on various issues, including the controversial Phoenix program that Colby once directed in South Vietnam.

The Senate committee, Church said, is also trying to find out whether any of the South Vietnamese refugees

now in the United States participated in the Phoenix effort to uproot the Communist infrastructure in Vietnamese villages.

The closed Senate meeting came on the heels of an announcement of plans by the House intelligence committee for a preliminary round of public hearings on the CIA agencies next month.

Promising a hurry-up start and government intelligence to the delayed House inquiry, the committee's staff director, Searle Field, proposed the hearings as the best way to familiarize his committee's members with the agencies and to single out the alleged abuses of power that deserve the most thorough investigation.

The House committee chairman, Lucien Nedzi (D-Mich.), told reporters that he expects most of his initial hearings to be public. Director Field said "some sensitive matters" may come up, but the sessions will be devoted primarily to the general operations of each agency and the issues warranting the closest scrutiny.

Field gave his report to the committee at a hearing on the ground rules for the investigation. They were adopted on a voice vote with Rep. Michael Harrington (D-Mass.) dissenting.

Harrington wanted to give each of the committee's 10 members the right to designate a personal aide to inspect

the committee's records and keep the member posted on the course of the investigation.

The proposal was rejected by a vote of 8 to 2, with Rep. Ronald V. Dellums (D-Calif.) joining Harrington on the losing side. Harrington then proposed that each member have the right to name one person to the committee staff—as the Senate committee on intelligence operations has done—but this was rejected by the same margin.

As a result, only committee members and staffers appointed by the chairman will be able to inspect "sensitive" documents and records. Under proposed security regulations still to be adopted, the members of Congress would be confined to a special reading room and prohibited from even taking notes.

The only major change in the rules submitted for adoption yesterday was a move by Rep. Robert N. Giaimo (D-Conn.) to wipe out a provision prohibiting public use of any testimony or evidence taken in executive session without the full committee's consent.

Declaring that he and many other representatives had been fighting for years over various committee gag rules, Giaimo said he refused "to be bound by any committee in what I disclose to my constituents or the American people."