

Panel Boosts Funding For Covert Operations

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The House intelligence committee has increased "marginally" the roughly \$27 billion President Clinton has proposed to spend next year on the nation's intelligence agencies, allocating additional funds to modernize interception of worldwide telecommunications and revitalize the CIA's clandestine spy service, according to a statement the panel released.

One of the beneficiaries of new spending would be the National Security Agency (NSA), which has relied chiefly on space-based satellites or ground-based antennas for its eavesdropping, one source said yesterday. Based at Fort Meade, Md., NSA now "needs new computers and new tools to get into the new data streams that are crisscrossing the world," this intelligence expert said. Some of the funds for new NSA equipment are to come from reductions in spending next fiscal year by the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), the multibillion-dollar organization that builds and manages the intelligence satellite program, sources said.

Clandestine human intelligence programs run by the CIA's Directorate of Operations (DO) were another priority identified by the House panel for more funding in its markup of the

Intelligence Authorization Bill for the fiscal year starting Oct. 1. The agency's spy service, reduced after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, has been in public disrepute since the 1994 arrest of the spy Aldrich H. Ames.

CIA Director George J. Tenet and deputy director for operations Jack Downing have been pressing Congress for more funds to rebuild the directorate and reestablish agency posts in places such as Africa, where almost all the CIA stations were closed down over the past six years.

For much of the 1990s, another source said, reducing the DO was an easy way to save money because it was cheaper to have case officers back in Washington, a change that automatically sliced the number of operations and agents run overseas. "They gutted activities," this source said, "and put us in danger of being less than a global service."

In seeking more funds for CIA human intelligence, Tenet and Downing have noted that some supporters of terrorism operate in African countries such as Sudan. CIA officials have told Congress that by having case officers operating in certain African countries, there is a better chance to track terrorists and of Chinese and Russian activities there and in other countries.

The House panel, as part of its plan for "revitalizing" the Directorate of Operations, has recommended small increases in funding to hire additional personnel over coming years for operations that are long-range rather than short-term, sources said. With operations directed at targets such as terrorism and arms proliferation, one veteran CIA official said new personnel requirements call less for recent college graduates and more for older personnel with language qualifications and overseas experience who could be transferred into the agency.

Rep. Porter Goss (R-Fla.), chairman of the intelligence committee and a former CIA clandestine officer, said yesterday the panel saw "the need for concerted focus on signals intelligence, human intelligence, all-source analysis and our covert action capabilities."

Only marginal amounts of money were added for hiring new analysts, sources said.

The panel's ranking Democrat, Rep. Norman D. Dicks (Wash.), said the bill "marginally exceeds the president's budget request" and provides investment "in areas where technological advances or lack of emphasis have weakened our capabilities."

Tenet yesterday appeared in closed session before the Senate intelligence panel to discuss the agency's espionage and covert action programs. That committee, which is expected to mark up its version of the authorization bill next week, also has made additional funding for NSA one of its goals, according to sources.