

Ford Links Welch Death to Reports

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Athens Halts Press Coverage Fears for Other Agents' Lives

By Dusko Doder

Washington Post Foreign Service

ATHENS, Dec. 27—The Greek government today imposed a news blackout on the assassination of Robert Welch, the senior Central Intelligence Agency official in Greece, in a move suggesting growing official sensitivity about the incident.

The action, relayed by the Athens public prosecutor to the Greek media, prohibits publication here of any information surrounding the case. The ban does not affect foreign correspondents, however.

Welch's slaying continued to dominate public discussion here, and today's afternoon press was filled with speculation about the attackers' identity and their possible motives. The ban, the first instance of censorship since the restoration of democracy in Greece 18 months ago, was issued after the afternoon papers reached newsstands.

The government's move comes in the wake of widespread speculation here that the assassination was organized by extremist groups in an effort to embarrass Premier Constantine Karamanlis.

Police are reported to have raided the homes of an undisclosed number of anarchists, left-wing extremists and Greek Cypriots living here. The police drive reportedly has failed to turn up any clues about the attack.

Welch, 46, station chief for the CIA here, was one of the seven alleged CIA operatives in Greece whose names, addresses and phone numbers were published in the Athens press recently. Welch was gunned down Tuesday night in front of his suburban home by three men in what observers have described as a "professional job."

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By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

VAIL, Colo., Dec. 27—President Ford believes the murder of Central Intelligence Agency station chief Richard S. Welch in Athens this week is partly the result of publication of Welch's name as a CIA agent shortly before he was killed, White House press secretary Ron Nessen said today.

Nessen also said the President is concerned about the lives of other agents "whose cover may have been blown."

The press secretary made these comments while answering reporters' questions soon after an announcement that the President has waived various restrictions, so Welch can be buried in Arlington National Cemetery Friday.

Nessen announced that a government plane will be sent to Providence, R.I., to bring Welch's mother, sister and brother to the funeral. He said both of these measures had

been recommended by Democratic Sens. Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island and Gary Hart of Colorado.

The President, as quoted by Nessen, said the reason he waived the military restrictions on burial at Arlington was that Welch "certainly died in the service of his country."

Welch, 46, who also was special assistant to the U.S. ambassador to Greece, was shot by three masked gunmen outside his suburban Athens home Tuesday after an American embassy Christmas party.

He had been identified as a CIA agent in a Washington-based publication, Counterspy, which is critical of U.S. intelligence activities, and also in the English-language Athens Daily News.

Nessen declined to single out any publication in his

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News Ban Imposed In Greece

GREECE, From A1

During the past two years a number of U.S. embassy employees have been subjected to attacks such as car bombings. But no American diplomat was hurt in these incidents, which reflected a tide of anti-American feelings grounded in the widespread conviction that the United States, and the CIA in particular, had installed, supported and maintained the military government that ruled Greece for seven years until July 1974.

The CIA has been deeply involved in Greek affairs since the time of the Greek civil war. It helped establish the Greek intelligence agency, known as KYP, and the intimate contacts between the two organizations were reported to have been the principal channel of communication between the two governments during one period of the military dictatorship here.

The CIA is also accused of helping to organize a coup in July, 1974, against Cypriot President Makarios. The subsequent Turkish invasion of Cyprus and Greece's inability to challenge it has been a source of deep national humiliation.

Anti-American feelings, and specifically denunciations of the CIA, have been stimulated by a steady stream of disclosures of CIA misdeeds in Washington. According to some political observers, the congressional investigations of the agency have helped create a climate here in which the assassination of a CIA station chief had become a desirable objective of some extremist groups.

The Greek press has been at pains to suggest that the murder was not committed by Greeks. Some newspapers have suggested that the assassination of Welch was done by the Turks, Greece's traditional enemy. Others said Welch was a victim of in-

teragency struggle. The Daily Kathimerini strongly suggested that Welch had been assassinated by Americans.

Welch had served in Athens in the 1950s, under a different cover. He spent the period of 1960-64 in Cyprus and, before his assignment to Athens last summer, he served 11 years in Latin American countries.

Greek government leaders, including Premier Karamanlis, have gone out of their way to express regrets for Welch's death and it seems unlikely that the relations between the two countries would be affected by the incident. However, it has focused public attention on the CIA's large presence in Greece and raised questions about the future scope and form of its operations here.

The body of Welch is at an American airbase near Athens, awaiting the arrival of his 19-year-old son, who will accompany the body to Washington aboard a military aircraft that is to leave Athens Monday evening.

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briefing but both Counterspy and the Athens newspaper were mentioned in questions by reporters. When Nessen was asked if Mr. Ford thought the publication of Welch's name was responsible for his death, he answered: "Partly responsible, yes."

Nessen said in response to a question about congressional responsibility for Welch's death that he "did not mean for a minute to imply" Congress had any responsibility in the matter. But he said Mr. Ford "emphatically" is concerned that publication of other names will put the lives of other CIA agents in jeopardy.

"During various negotiations and discussions with committees on the Hill which wanted to reveal names, I think the White House made very clear, and so did Secretary (of State Henry A.) Kissinger and (CIA Director) Bill Colby, that the publication of agents' names could jeopardize their lives," Nessen said.

Nessen was asked about progress Mr. Ford is making on his plan to make some changes in the CIA and other intelligence agencies.

He said that before Mr. Ford left Washington Tuesday for his eight-day skiing vacation, his staff gave the President "a very large book" of recommendations. Mr. Ford is studying it and is moving toward decisions, Nessen said.

On another matter, Nessen announced President Ford will speak Jan. 5 to a national convention of the American Farm Bureau Federation in St. Louis.