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Reform by Resignation

By resigning as Director of Central Intelligence, George Bush has set an example that should be followed by two other similarly placed officials. I have in mind Gen. George Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Clarence Kelley, director of the FBI.

Like Bush, both men head troubled institutions that can only be rebuilt in an atmosphere of confidence over a long period of time. Like Bush, both men have reason to know that they lack the confidence of the incoming administration to the point where they can no longer serve effectively.

Consider, first, the case of Bush. He became director at a time when the CIA was under widespread public attack because of its ambiguous role in Watergate, Vietnam and a number of other unsavory episodes.

Bush took the post as a reformer, determined to continue the cleanup of the agency. He believes he has made some progress. But he knows—as Bob Woodward's latest revelation about CIA bugging of lawyers representing Micronesia in its negotiations for independence demonstrates—that reform still has a long way to go.

During the campaign, comment by various associates of Gov. Carter—though not by the Governor himself—made it plain that Bush, as a once-prominent Republican politician, would not easily be accepted by the new administration. Bush did not quibble about details of who said what and when to whom. He realized he would not be able to continue the work of rebuilding the CIA, and he simply stepped down.

Gen. Brown is in a similar position—though with a much larger personal re-

sponsibility for the troubles of his institution. The basic problem with the Joint Chiefs lies in their relationship with the civilian authorities in the Pentagon and the White House.

Gen. Brown's predecessor, Adm. Thomas Moorer, participated in the establishment of a separate communications line (wrongly called the "Pentagon Spy Ring") between the Chiefs and the President's national security adviser, then Henry Kissinger. The purpose of that communications link was to short-circuit the civilian authority in the Pentagon. The Chiefs, in other words, violated on a continuing basis the principle of civilian authority.

Gen. Brown has carried that violation a step further in a series of off-the-cuff comments on, among other things, Britain, Iran and Israel. In making these comments, Gen. Brown has not been acting as the agent of military policy which is his true role. On the contrary, without any authority, he has been saying things damaging to the foreign policy of the President he was supposed to serve.

Jimmy Carter and even more his running mate, Walter Mondale, both made it plain during the campaign that they have no use for Gen. Brown or his notions. It is also my impression that by blabbing so much, Gen. Brown has lost credibility among knowledgeable congressmen. In any case, by hanging on to his post now, Brown can only make matters worse for the President-elect, for himself and for the Joint Chiefs.

Kelley is, if anything, even more visibly the author of his own troubles. He came to the FBI at a time when it was reeling under revelations of improper—

and in some cases illegal—behavior in several different areas. His aim, undoubtedly, was to refurbish the bureau. But it has become apparent to almost everybody that Kelley has not been able to assert himself and his views over the FBI. Indeed, at one point he himself acknowledged that he did not know whether or not the bureau was currently engaged in burglaries.

President-elect Carter used some of his toughest campaign language against Kelley and his acceptance of minor personal services from the FBI. Though Carter has not said he would fire Kelley, it is common knowledge that associates of the President-elect are conducting an active search for a new FBI director. Indeed, several leading candidates—including former assistant attorney general John Doar, and Tom Bradley, the black mayor of Los Angeles—have already emerged. So if Kelley doesn't jump, he is certain to be pushed.

No doubt the three cases are not entirely similar. Unlike Bush, an outsider who has not come under criticism for CIA misdeeds, Gen. Brown and Kelley are professionals in military and police work. They are under fire, and apparently feel the need for vindication.

But personal self-indulgence cannot apply to positions as sensitive as the leadership of the Joint Chiefs and the FBI. What applies especially—as partisans of the bureau and the professional military are the first to insist—is honor. The honorable thing is to do the selfless deed of resignation so that new men can get on with the necessary job of rebuilding institutions vital to the national health.