



George Bush



Richard Helms



William Colby



Ray Cline

## Ex-Officials Assess the Damage Of Investigations and Exposés

# *The War on the CIA*

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**T**HREE FORMER directors of central intelligence — Richard Helms (1966-72), William Colby (1973-75) and George Bush (1976) — and a former deputy director of the CIA, Ray Cline, discuss the role and the problems of the intelligence agency in the following excerpt from *The Washington Quarterly*, a publication of Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies. The moderator is Michael Ledeen, executive editor of the *Quarterly*.

**LEDEEN:** Isn't there a lot of hostility to CIA right now?

**BUSH:** I think that there is an underlying feeling on the part of the American people that we must have clandestine services. Some things in an open society must be kept secret and I think there's more awareness of this fact coming back. I regret that I feel that some of the thrust of the legislation before the Hill is still flogging CIA for something that was long corrected, or that

never happened. The ethical and moral standards of the 1970s are often used to judge events in the 1950s. Things were different, and there has been change. I don't know how many politicians on the Hill with images still shining and bright would be untarnished if you used the 1970 ethic to judge their actions in the 1950s.

**LEDEEN:** You said that some of the alleged abuses never took place. Can you be more specific?

**COLBY:** Well, for example, let's take the worst one: assassination. One of the findings that the Senate committee came to after eight months of investigation was that no foreign leader had been assassinated as a result of U.S. officials' efforts. It wasn't for lack of trying in Castro's case, I hasten to confess. But that's the only case you can find of a concerted attempt. You can find a couple of preliminary steps taken against [Congo Premier Patrice] Lumumba, canceled within CIA when somebody in CIA objected to it.

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The other cases that we heard about, involving people being killed in various coups and uprisings and so forth, were done by local people in those countries for their own reasons. The CIA was absolutely not directly engaged in these assassinations.

**BUSH:** And yet the conventional wisdom is that the agency did and then fiction feeds on it. And you get movies and television programs and it has a very sinister kind of propagandistic overtone. I'll give you an example that happened on my watch: One of these rather ribald magazines described a purported destabilization effort against [Prime Minister Michael] Manley in Jamaica. Well, if the agency in 1976 had done any of the things that this piece suggested, I would have been fired, and they'd have found ways to slaughter my predecessor. You'd have had 25 congressional investigations. But it never happened. There wasn't any truth in it. And yet this was printed not as fiction but as fact.

**COLBY:** Look, if one of the employees is killed on the Belmont page: CIA EMPLOYEE KILLED. CIA has nothing to do with the case, but it's a good headline.

There are groups in this country that are obviously carrying on a campaign against CIA, including some ex-employees. I believe the KGB is running after us in this kind of uproar rather than managing and producing the campaign. They certainly are exploiting it, all over the world. You see it in Arabic, and in Spanish, things true and untrue. Printed by them, circulated through South America, Africa and Asia. There's a tremendous Soviet resource here, whether they invented it or merely exploit it.

**HELMS:** I am personally convinced that the agency got a bit overextended in the past in terms of covert action, but I would not like to see this capability done away with. The current war against the CIA, however, is something quite different from reducing covert action activity. Many of our critics want an elimination of any meaningful intelligence operation, and not just a housecleaning operation. I think this is demonstrated by the curious indifference in this country to the well-known fact that the Russians are carrying out a massive program of intercepting Americans' telephone conversations — right here! Now when CIA is accused of wiretapping without a warrant, there is a great public turmoil, yet when the Russians do the same thing — and on a far vaster scale — there is virtually no response. This demonstrates that many of our critics are not simply trying to defend American civil liberties, but are intent on attacking the intelligence community.

### Soviet Penetration?

**LEDEEN:** There is now some speculation that the CIA has been infiltrated by the KGB.

**COLBY:** When your major national magazines come out asking, "Have we gone too far," have we hurt ourselves too much, then naturally your attention is going to turn to the question of the weakening of the CIA. That's becoming the more interesting subject, and that is a reflection of the sense that the American people have that George was referring to.

**LEDEEN:** Is the agency penetrated?

**COLBY:** I would say, "No," but you always have to contemplate that possibility. That's why you have the compartmentation system, where you don't tell the people who are

working on the Soviet Union what's going on in Chinese operations and things of that nature. Sure, you assume the possibility of it, but we have had no public ones. No American Kim Philby has surfaced, and we have eliminated a lot of people before they got into the business because there are screening procedures. And, I might add, thanks in part to the polygraph, which has been very useful and very carefully used at CIA — not slapdash and automatic but very carefully used. That has helped us.

**LEDEEN:** People like [ex-CIA official-turned-author Vic-

tor] Marchetti say, for example, that it's more the logic of the situation than any evidence that leads them to launch this theory. They say look, the Germans are penetrated top to bottom, the Canadians have been penetrated, the British have had several famous cases. It's just unreasonable on the basis of logic to assume that CIA has not.

**BUSH:** Nobody is saying that there's nothing.

**HELMS:** There may be some sort of infiltration at the margins of agency operations, but I simply do not believe that there is anything at the top level of the CIA. Every director lives with the nightmare that some day he will come to work and have his assistant tell him that a foreign agent has been discovered in the agency. As a result, as Bill said, the system is compartmentalized, and great care is taken to check and recheck our security. As of the time I left the agency in February 1973, I am certain that there was no penetration at any significant level.

Virtually every other intelligence service in the West has been penetrated, and it is certain that the KGB has attempted to penetrate the CIA. But the Soviet Union just doesn't appeal to many Americans, particularly a group as intelligent as the people who work in Langley. But the agency must live constantly with the possibility of infiltration.

**COLBY:** I don't assume that it is not possible. Nobody runs the business assuming that there's no security risk at all there.

**CLINE:** [Former CIA director Walter] Bedell Smith was asked this. I remember when he first came into office, he said: I operate on the assumption there can be a penetration of the CIA and I will do everything to find it out. That's the reason we run scared, and it's because we operated on that assumption that as far as we could tell we never found one.

**LEDEEN:** How about double agents?

**BUSH:** Well, obviously we've had double agents but that's not officers of the agency.

**COLBY:** In other words, where we had an agent and the other side was using the same agent, there wasn't an officer of the agency involved; that kind of agent never gets inside the CIA as such.

**BUSH:** The great Soviet agents were recruited when the Soviet represented something ideologically. When they represented antifascism. That's when they got people like Philby. But the fact is that we just went through a period in which we had hundreds of thousands of our young people out screaming against their government. Now they were totally opposed to their government, but they weren't pro-Soviet. I might add that I think that part of that relatively favorable situation is due to a successful CIA effort in the 1950s to combat the nonsensical pretense that the Soviets

# The War Against the CIA



Members of the Rockefeller commission investigating domestic activities of the CIA as they conferred in 1975 before the start of a meeting.

represented peace. They had a major propaganda program, the World Peace Movement, and the World Peace Congresses and all that, and CIA was heavily involved in trying to help American citizens and friends abroad to contest that all around the world. We essentially won that ideological battle.

**COLBY:** We essentially won that battle and since that time the Soviets haven't represented anything positive at all. They've recruited a couple of young fellows in California and paid them \$5,000 or \$6,000 to steal information about weapons technology, but they are unable to project themselves convincingly as a political and social model for the future.

**CLINE:** Essentially in the late 1940s and 1950s the CIA played to the left-wing and left-center intellectuals in Europe through subsidies and by sending Americans to go over and talk to Europeans. It was an astonishingly benign covert political action which paid off. But you never hear anybody talk about that.

Yet, suppose the Soviets had won that.

## Assessing the Damage

**LEDEEN:** Can you evaluate the extent to which you think the intelligence community has been damaged in recent years?

**BUSH:** We have been damaged primarily by people with-

holding information that they would have given any reason they withhold it is because they think somebody might make it public. They trust the CIA in this regard, but they are not sure of the pressures that might be brought to bear on the CIA. I know this was true when I was director and it's hard to measure, because you can't evaluate what you're not getting very effectively. I think it's in this area rather than the effectiveness of the individuals involved in the CIA or the dedication of those individuals in spite of enormous pressures on them and on the institution that we are paying a price.

**HELMS:** This question is a little difficult for me to judge, because I've been out for over five years now, and I have stayed strictly away from the CIA except for a few specific requests about legal matters. But it seems clear that some serious damage has been done. When a complex organization like CIA runs well, it encompasses every aspect of intelligence. And although the various aspects are shrouded from each other in a variety of ways and although the entire operation is shielded from outsiders systematically, there is an overall coherence to the operation. This internal coherence is often difficult to define, but there is no doubt in my mind that you cannot seriously weaken one part of the organization without throwing much of the rest of it out of kilter. It is then hard to know if you've put it back together again properly, and it will be years before we know

how successful the current leadership has been.

Clearly, there have been some changes in the way business is carried on, and I'm concerned about some of these. I am not convinced that the abolition of the Board of National Estimates was entirely a good decision, even though I assume our estimates are probably quite adequate. I've already expressed some of my misgivings about the limitations put on counterintelligence. Third, I'm constantly surprised by the quantity of leaks and comments that appear about the technical data we have acquired on the Soviet Union. I am convinced that we should not be telling them so publicly how much we know about their operations.

I quite agree with George that many of our liaison sources may become loath to turn over data to us, for fear of subsequent leaks. And I am profoundly concerned about the constant attacks on the integrity of the CIA, because if the public acquires the misimpression that the employees of the agency are second-class citizens, it will become impossible to recruit first-class people.

## Covert Action

**LEDEEN:** Is covert action necessary?

**BUSH:** Some covert capability is essential. It should be sparingly used and properly supervised and properly conceived; heads of various departments must meet and discuss it with the president. It must then be reported to the Congress. In my view, there are too many committees of Congress involved, and I favor more consolidated oversight. But covert action is necessary and it's very much misunderstood. Quiet support for a friend is probably more of what covert action is really about than harassing some opposition someplace; much more of it, I'd say.

**COLBY:** As Clausewitz said, war is an extension of policy by other means, and in a world of state sovereignties you're going to have problems with other countries. Some of those could be met by alliances, and some of them have to be met by deterrence and sometimes you have a danger of having to meet those problems with your armed force. But sometimes a preliminary covert support of some group in that country can avoid problems. Now we referred earlier to the great success in Western Europe. Western Europe had three

problems in the postwar period: a nondemobilized Soviet army that was met by NATO; economic collapse as a result of the war, met by the Marshall Plan, and a very energetic political, subversive campaign, founded, funded, directed from Moscow through the Communist parties, the trade unions, the youth groups, cultural groups and so-called peace movements of that time. When I was in Italy in the 1950s, we estimated that the Communist movement was receiving something like \$40 million a year from the Soviet side. The question was, where and how are you going to meet that kind of challenge, and we did. We met it with programs of covert support, not to the right-wing forces of Europe, but to the center democratic voices of Western Europe, the Socialists, Christian Democrats, and things of that nature. That kind of a program, I think, contributed to the successful defense of Western Europe against that Soviet-sponsored subversive campaign.

Many of the free institutions of the earth exist today in part as a result of that kind of secret CIA support; and I think that support was effective, and it had to be secret. The reason it couldn't have been open is that the official aid had to go through government, the local government in which

the Communist parties were members or were at least in their legislatures. They would have blocked any such aid to the democratic political groups, the labor groups, and so forth of Western Europe. Therefore, that aid had to go through secret ways, and it was effective and did the job.

Now you can look around the world and you could find some cases where we shouldn't have done it in retrospect, the best example of which in my mind is the campaign against Sukarno in Indonesia in 1958. You can find some of the programs done badly, the best example of which is the Bay of Pigs. But if you keep an overall score card, you come up with a pretty good one, even with the events that have come up publicly.

Item: The question in the Philippines in the early 1950s was whether it would be run by the leaders of a left-wing rebellion or by a bunch of corrupt quislings. CIA's assistance went to the decent, good leader of the Philippines, Mag-saysay, who became president and put down the rebellion. Unfortunately he was killed in a plane crash but we did get over that period.

Item: President Kennedy had a problem in Laos in 1962 and 1963. He had just made an agreement with 14 other nations that everybody was going to keep their hands off. They were all going to withdraw forces and stop their paramilitary support, and we did. So did the other 13 nations, but the North Vietnamese left the 7,000 troops they had there, and withdrew the grand total of 40 men. In a few months the North Vietnamese troops began to push the Laotians around again and President Kennedy didn't know what he was going to do about it. A protest wasn't doing any good. The Soviets didn't want to have any part of it. They weren't willing to use their influence on the Vietnamese, if they could have. We didn't want to send our forces there. So what was President Kennedy to do? He asked us to give some quiet help which wouldn't embarrass the Soviets because it would be quiet. CIA organized the so-called "secret army" in Laos to resist the North Vietnamese efforts to take over the country.

We kept Laos comparatively free for many years (while the North Vietnamese forces grew from 7,000 to 70,000 men). When we withdrew our forces from Vietnam, we made an agreement with Hanoi that achieved the objective we sought at the beginning in the 1962 agreement: the recognition of a neutral and independent Laos, an agreement by all parties to withdraw their forces and end their assistance to paramilitary forces within Laos, and a coalition government of the three main forces in the country. And the total of CIA people sent to Laos was only about 300. We then withdrew and stopped all our aid. The North Vietnamese withdrew only one of three or four divisions. That's all. And in a very few months, they began to push again and this time there wasn't a request for CIA help and Laos was overrun in about six months. It is now a dictatorship dominated by North Vietnam.

Now I think that's a pretty good story and I can see, thinking about the 1980s and the 1990s as we face problems such as we are seeing in Africa today, that there may indeed be occasions when we can again go back to doing what we did for a while successfully in Angola. It was a very quiet activity opposing the consolidation of political control by a communist regime dependent on the Soviet Union. Our covert assistance was exposed in the United States Congress, and the Congress at that time was all confused about it, what with the fall of Vietnam, the CIA investigations and the echo from Watergate. So Congress said stop, and in a very few weeks, the communist-supported groups took over all of

Angola and they're now serving as a base for further extension of violence and extremism into the rest of southern and central Africa.

### The CIA in Chile

**LEDEEN:** I'd like to ask you about the CIA's role in Chile.

**COLBY:** If you will read the Senate staff report (which is a rather heavily editorialized treatment) you find that CIA was engaged in Chile from 1963 to 1970 and in that time it spent a number of millions of dollars there. Almost all of that went to center democratic forces, Christian Democratic and nationalist forces, free media and things of this nature. It was designed to enable them to stand up and to have a political program and win the elections against Allende's program of working with Castro to spread the Cuban revolution to the rest of Central and South America, and turning the area hostile to the United States. In the first five or six years it worked: it won the elections and supported a lot of different movements, and things like that. Then there was a conscious decision by our government not to support the two parties, these moderate center parties, in the elections of 1970. Their vote was split, and Allende got a plurality for his Marxist coalition.

**CLINE:** We were getting out of covert action.

**COLBY:** I think that was it, and that's what you get as a result. You get Mr. Allende.

**HELMS:** Contrary to popular belief, the Nixon administration wasn't very interested in any action in Chile in 1970. Despite several warnings from the agency, they just didn't get excited about the elections, and they awoke quite late in the day to the threat Allende represented. Then came the famous meeting of Sept. 15 when the president told us to "stop that guy."

**COLBY:** Then the president gets very upset, concerned, turns to the agency and says, go down there and see that he doesn't get inaugurated. That was a legal order at that time, so the agency saluted and went down, flailed around all over the place, and did a lot of frantic things for a period of six weeks which failed. Then the agency went back with the remaining millions of dollars over the following three years in a program — not right-wing — supporting the Christian Democrats, nationalists, free media, some other organizations, political groups, and so forth, designed to try to keep them alive and keep them moving. We supported them, aiming at the election of 1976. In 1973, they missed by two seats a chance to get a two-thirds majority in the legislature which would have given enough to compete with Allende legally and constitutionally. The Chamber of Deputies, the Supreme Court, and the comptroller general all denounced Allende for operating outside the constitution. Nonetheless, CIA stayed away from the military and in the spring of 1973, CIA sent instructions to its people to stay away from the military because if there was going to be a coup we sure didn't want it to be a CIA coup. CIA had nothing to do with the military coup that overthrew Allende in 1973. We wanted an election and wanted Allende to be turned out in a constitutional process. Chile would have been a lot better off if that had worked.