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Rebuilding the CIA

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The rapidly worsening impact both at home and abroad of congressional investigations is rushing White House reorganization of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), including sacking Director William Colby, with grave obstacles immediately encountered.

The original plan had been to await recommendations of Senate and House investigators before moving into major reorganizations of the government's intelligence community.

That sensible timetable could not withstand the pulverizing impact of the sensational disclosures now being carried from congressional hearing rooms to every corner of the world. Thus, even as gory revelations continue, the White House is beginning its first effort to restore some credibility to the shattered remnants of American intelligence: a reshaping of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (FIAB). Even that first step, however, is confronted with monumental difficulties.

The most recent catalyst forcing the White House into a public start on reorganization was last week's front-page picture of Colby's poison-dart gun. The photo, carried all over the world, lent juicy credence to the CIA as a kind of International Murder, Inc.

"I was appalled," one White House official told us. Another presidential adviser said the fact that Colby was specifically asked by the Senate CIA Committee, headed by Sen. Frank Church of Idaho, to bring the gun with him was not a mitigating factor. "Colby shouldn't have done it," the adviser added. "That picture alone just about doubled all the damage done to the United States since Congress started investigating."

Colby's impossible position as CIA director during the exhumation of every closet skeleton accumulated in

the agency's 28-year history is fully recognized in the White House. Nevertheless, Colby's policy of "let it all hang out" boomeranged badly last week. His tenure as CIA director has accordingly been shortened and an active search is now under way for a successor from outside CIA ranks to start the awesome job of restoring some respectability to the shattered agency.

Indeed, Colby's original prepared statement for the Church committee last week included what higher officials thought was a blanket admission of agencywide culpability in fail-

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ure to destroy toxic poisons. Colby agreed, in the statement actually given the committee, to narrow the blame to bureaucratic inefficiency.

The key political need in the reorganization now quietly under way by White House planners is to establish confidence and credibility. The first likely step will be a presidential order beefing up the moribund FIAB and giving it direct oversight over all CIA operations.

But even in this comparatively easy phase of the top-to-bottom reorganization, President Ford is encountering serious problems. His first choice to head a strengthened FIAB was George Shultz, former Secretary of the Treasury who now heads Bechtel Corporation, an international contracting firm.

Mr. Ford wanted Shultz, now a FIAB member, to become its chairman for two reasons: First, his great prestige in Western Europe, where CIA dismemberment raises doubts about the sanity of the U.S. government; second, his acceptability to U.S. politicians.

As of this writing, Shultz is adamant in refusing to accept the post, held the past five years by retired Navy Adm. George Anderson.

Beyond Shultz' refusal is the lack of consensus outside the White House as to how much oversight authority should be given the new FIAB. Although a secret meeting of the nine-member board last Tuesday was never announced, it is no secret in the White House that board members are highly unenthusiastic about large, new oversight responsibilities. The main purpose of Tuesday's all-day meeting was to discuss the new oversight role proposed by the Rockefeller Commission on CIA activities.

Outside intelligence experts, for example, worry about harsh congressional reactions if Mr. Ford attempts to broaden the advisory board's role as a safety valve on the CIA's secret operations or even over its intelligence analysis. The mood of Capitol Hill is, at best, to keep its own tight control over the agency—or, at worst, to deny the CIA any future clandestine operations role at all.

Yet, Mr. Ford is convinced he cannot wait longer to begin the painful rebuilding of integrity in America's intelligence operations. One place he can start without seeking new legislation is the FIAB.

But while Congress continues to tear this nation's vital intelligence system apart, the administration is finding that putting it back together is excruciatingly difficult.