

Colby Hedges Assurance

New CIA Head Vows To Shun 'Watergates'

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By Laurence Stern

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William E. Colby, President Nixon's choice to head the Central Intelligence Agency, gave Congress a carefully hedged assurance yesterday that he would keep the agency out of domestic affairs and Watergate-type involvements.

He appeared before the Senate Armed Service Committee in open session — a rare if not unprecedented occurrence for the operating head of the CIA—to testify on his nomination.

Acting Committee chairman Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) was the only member on hand for what was billed as an examination "in depth" of the CIA's operations and policies.

Colby breezed through 90 minutes of prevailingly friendly questioning by Symington. His wife and three children were on hand for the ceremonial interrogation.

He acknowledged that the CIA had erred in authorizing the preparation of a psychiatric profile of Daniel

Ellsberg and in providing cameras, tape recorders and "safe house" facilities to Watergate conspirators E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy.

But Colby said he could not rule out the future preparation of psychiatric profiles on American citizens or the providing of agency facilities and equipment to White House employees.

"I can envision a situation in which it would be appropriate for the agency to help a White House official without its coming to public notice," said Colby.

The underlying concern expressed by Symington was the degree to which Colby would sanction CIA activities directed against American citizens in areas of domestic operation.

Colby, a clandestine operative for most of his 22 years in the CIA, reiterated the claim made by former director Richard M. Helms that the agency's activities

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By Larry Morris—The Washington Post

CIA's Colby: Covert operations can't be "very big."

No 'Watergates,' CIA Head Pledges

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are not targeted against American citizens.

He told Symington, however, that there were some requirements for CIA operations within the United States: maintaining its Langley headquarters, recruiting and investigating its own employees, maintaining contacts with "a large number of American firms" for overseas information, and interviewing U.S. citizens for information they may have on foreign operations.

The United States, he also noted, is a base for the collection of foreign intelligence. It is sometimes necessary, said Colby, for agents "to appear not as CIA employees but as representatives of some other entity."

Under the agency's charter, the 1947 National Security Act, it is stated that "the Agency shall have no police, subpoena, law-enforcement powers or internal security functions" in the United States.

But the 1947 statute contained a loophole which has served as a charter for special foreign and domestic operations. It says that the agency shall "perform such other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council may from time to time direct."

Colby himself cited this language yesterday as the basis for the CIA's conduct of the war in Laos, in which the agency organized and managed a clandestine guerrilla army of some 30,000 Meo tribesmen and also provided aerial support services.

"The initiation of CIA activity in Laos was a matter that did require the use of intelligence techniques . . . It was important that the U.S. not be officially involved in the war," Colby explained to Symington.

At this point Symington bridled, saying the agency's role in Laos "has done nothing to enhance the reputation of the CIA."

Colby answered that the

agency was following national policy in Laos. With the present thrust of policy, he said, the United States is unlikely to become involved in such a large-scale clandestine role.

"A covert operation can't be a very big one," Colby assured. "It stops being covert when it gets very big. The Bay of Pigs is an example of that."

Colby invited Congress to amend the CIA's charter by adding the word "foreign" before the word intelligence in the 1947 act to provide a further safeguard against intrusion in the domestic sector. Such a change would not, however, cancel the agency's role in special operations decreed by the National Security Council.

Since the disclosure of efforts, both successful and unsuccessful, to involve the CIA in Watergate-related affairs, there have been widespread demands on Capitol Hill for a thorough review of the agency's operations. Concern was focused most urgently on the question of whether the CIA has been operating, contrary to its charter, in domestic matters—as in the Ellsberg profile case.

If he were ordered to carry out what he considered an improper activity for the CIA, Colby assured Symington, he would quit.

At the outset of the hearing Colby was asked to comment on a story that appeared in The Observer of London which charged that the CIA engineered the 1967 coup by the Greek junta. Colby replied that the agency did not "engineer" the coup but that he could not conclusively answer whether or not Greek President-designate George Papadopoulos was ever on the CIA payroll. "We worked with him from time to time in his official capacity," said Colby.

Sitting beside Colby in the hearing room was John Maury, the CIA's congressional liaison man, who was the agency's station chief in Athens when the coup was staged. Maury was not asked for his recollections.