

Ford Says Justice
To Probe CIA Data
Report's
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By William Greider
Washington Post Staff Writer

President Ford announced last night that the Justice Department will investigate for possible prosecution material from the Rockefeller commission's report on the Central Intelligence Agency, including its separate classified summary on alleged assassination plots against foreign leaders.

Mr. Ford said that he will make public today the 299-page report on CIA domestic spying, which includes some 30 recommendations for reforms. But he said he is keeping secret a separate 80-page summary on the commission's assassination plot investigation because it is "incomplete and involves extremely sensitive matters."

The President sought to rebut suggestions that his administration is "covering up" the volatile question of whether past officials under Republican and Democratic Presidents authorized CIA assassination attempts aimed at such foreign leaders as Cuba's Fidel Castro, the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo and the Congo's Patrice Lumumba, among others.

"I'm convinced that with Attorney General [Edward H.] Levi we have a man whose going to carry out his responsibility on the broadest basis," Mr. Ford said, "and prosecute fully, if necessary." In addition, the classified material will be provided to the House and Senate committees now investigating the CIA.

"There's not going to be any possibility of any cover-up because we're giving them the material from the Rockefeller commission and any other material developed in the executive branch," he promised.

At the same time, Mr. Ford expressed his own frank reluctance to air the particular details of the allegations and perhaps tarnish the reputation of leaders long dead—Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, among others.

"We shouldn't be Monday-morning quarterbacks, if I can invent a cliché," Mr. Ford said, "I think it's better for history to pass judgment rather than contemporaries."

Whatever transpired in the

See CIA, A7, Col. 3

CIA, From A1

early 1960s, within government intelligence circles, Mr. Ford said, "Under no circumstances do I want to sit in 1975 passing judgment on decisions made in difficult times by honorable people. I think historians can better make those judgments."

The President appointed the eight-member Rockefeller commission back in early January in order to remedy the public controversy surrounding the CIA, but the conclusion of the commission's work seems to have engulfed the President himself in dispute. In his outdoor news conference in the White House Rose Garden last evening, more than half of approximately 20 questions involved the CIA investigation and the White House handling of it.

The President claimed that he had no role in the Rockefeller commission's decision to keep its findings on assassination plots separate and secret from its main report, but he agreed with it. "I did not tell the Rockefeller commission that it should not proceed further," he said, but the group decided to restrict its report to its original subject—the allegations that the CIA has spied on U.S. citizens at home, opened mail, infiltrated domestic political organizations and conducted other activities of questionable legality.

The report being made public today will help restore confidence in the intelligence agency, Mr. Ford asserted, particularly when various legislative and administrative reforms are made.

"The net result will be that we'll have a strong, effective and proper CIA," the President predicted.

When the subject of the CIA was exhausted, Mr. Ford managed some comments on foreign policy and the domestic economy.

He renewed his commitment to keeping American's 38,000 troops in South Korea. "I think it's highly desirable under our mutual defense treaty with Korea," the President said, "to maintain a military presence in South Korea. We now have approximately 38,000 troops there. I think it's keeping the peace in Korea."

The economy, he said, looks brighter now, despite the unemployment rate over 9 per cent, and cited last month's employment increase of 450,000 jobs and the declining rate of inflation.

"We've had a lot more good news than we've had bad news," he said.

When the Justice Department begins its investigation, it would be limited to prosecuting federal crimes, such as illegal use of federal employees or materials. If the CIA shipped arms illegally, for instance, that might be an eligible offense, according to Roderick Hills, counsel to the President for intelligence matters.

A state government, however, could prosecute officials for a conspiracy to commit a murder, if the planning and preliminary steps were taken within its boundaries, even though the killing itself was to be carried out in a foreign country, Hills noted. Such offenses usually are not subject to a statute of limitations.

"One can safely assume," Hills said, "that the Attorney General will not confine himself to federal law. If he finds material that suggests a violation of state law, he would transmit that material to the appropriate state authorities."

Earlier, in a briefing for the press, Hills sought to dispel suspicions that the White House had suppressed the Rockefeller commission's 80-page summary of its investigation of alleged assassination plots.

Hills said the eight-member commission decided on its own two weeks ago that it could not completely cover the subject and so the collected material, compiled by executive director David W. Belin, has been submitted to Mr. Ford separately.

Even though Hills said the commission did a "very

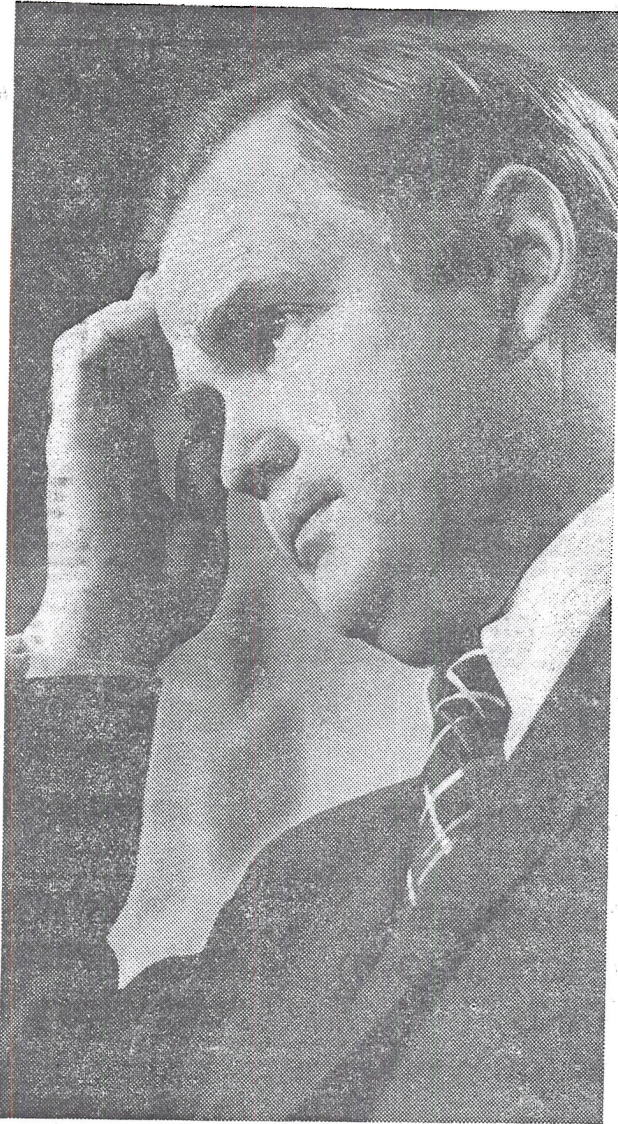
thorough" investigation which uncovered significant evidence on alleged assassination plots, the material still has much ambiguity and unsettled leads "which would be incomplete and perhaps misleading," if made public, Hills said.

"The very nature of the allegations is such that it is very easy to cause somebody to be blamed for something that is not true," Hills said. "There have been public statements by witnesses which would suggest a greater degree of blame on individuals in prior administrations than the official record of their testimony."

Hills acknowledged that the allegations have placed the origin of the assassination planning in a Republican administration—under the late Dwight D. Eisenhower—and not exclusively in the Democratic administration of the late John F. Kennedy. He denied that political sensitivities had anything to do with the decision to keep the material secret.

"It is quite true," Hills said, "that the investigations, the allegations go back before the Kennedy administration."

As for the ambiguities of drawing conclusions, Hills warned, "It's quite easy to talk about such activities. It's very difficult to trace a chain of command. The primary concern is the lack of detail in trying to trace a chain of command of who did what in an administration 15 years ago."



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Roderick Hills: Material "perhaps misleading"

His remarks suggest that the Rockefeller investigation did establish the existence of official discussions and actions leading toward attempted assassinations of foreign leaders, but it failed to pin down precisely whom the orders came from and whether the plots were genuinely authorized through regular channels.

The presidential aide insisted that the subject would not be dropped by the Ford administration, now that the Rockefeller investigation has been concluded. He said his own office in the White House will continue to assemble evidence and to cooperate with the Senate committee and the Justice Department.

"I feel confident of this," Hills said. "If we find the Rockefeller commission has gone down a road that should be gone down further, the President won't hesitate to call these gentlemen back to continue."

Much of the suspicion was generated, Hills acknowledged, by remarks from Vice President Rockefeller, who kept saying in recent weeks that the subject of CIA assassination plots would be covered in his report even though the commission had supposedly decided in private to delete the matter.

"It was very upsetting to us," Hills said.

"I appreciate the ambiguity which happened last week," he said. "I cannot answer the ambiguity. I cannot answer the misapprehension that was created. The purpose of this briefing was to lay to rest the misapprehension."