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Helms Set Killing Ban In '72 Rule

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Former Central Intelligence Agency Director Richard M. Helms, who angrily denied this spring that the agency was responsible for any foreign assassinations, issued a directive in March, 1972, banning such undertakings.

The Helms directive, which was issued more than a year before a CIA housecleaning prompted by the Watergate scandal, was disclosed by CIA Director William E. Colby in testimony prepared for delivery before a House intelligence subcommittee June 12.

The testimony was never delivered because of the resignation that day of House intelligence committee Chairman Lucien N. Nedzi (D-Mich.), but the substance of Colby's testimony was made available to reporters by the CIA this week.

According to the testimony, Helms ruled out any assassination efforts in 1972, directing that "no such activity or operation be undertaken, assisted or suggested by any of our personnel."

Subsequently, after a 1973 in-house investigation of CIA misdeeds, Colby expanded on the ban in August, 1973, with an order decreeing:

"CIA will not engage in assassination nor induce, assist or suggest to others that assassination be employed."

There was no explanation of what prompted the Helms directive. It came some three months before the Watergate break-in and before efforts by the Nixon White House to enlist the CIA in the Watergate cover-up.

Colby cited the decrees in an effort to suggest that current CIA policy on the issue was quite clear and that public exposure of such matters today would do no service to the United States. To the degree that they warrant congressional investigation, he said he felt they should be explored only in closed sessions.

The chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, Frank Church (D-Idaho), said yesterday he disagreed that the public interest would not be served in focusing on the CIA's past.

"The past is very much at issue here," Church told reporters following an executive session of the committee. "We need to know what went on and the degree to which assassination was an instrument of foreign policy. We need to know because we want to find remedies that will prevent this from happening again."

Administrative directives, such as those issued by Colby and Helms, are not sufficient, Church maintained.

Helms denied on April 29 that the CIA was responsible for any foreign assassinations in remarks to reporters following an appearance before the Rockefeller commission. He did not deny that there might have been discussions of such efforts within the CIA, but left the impression it never went beyond the talking stage.

While the Senate committee continued its investigation, House Democratic leaders marked time in hopes of patching up the House intelligence committee dispute between Nedzi and committee Democrats who have been dissatisfied with his leadership.

Nedzi was sustained at chairman this week by an overwhelming House vote. His most outspoken critic on the committee, Rep. Michael Harrington (D-Mass.) confirmed yesterday that he has agreed to give up any claim to a seat on its subcommittee investigating the CIA in hopes of keeping the committee together.

"Something had to be given up in order to keep the committee going," Harrington said in light of efforts to abolish the panel. The efforts appear to have died down for the moment, however.

House Democratic caucus chairman Phillip Burton (D-Calif.) praised Harrington's move as "generous" and voiced hopes that harmony on the committee could be restored. Burton was critical of the House Armed Services Committee vote this week rebuking Harrington for leaking information last year on the CIA's controversial Chilean operations. Burton said he was puzzled that the issue should be brought up now after being ignored for many months.