

Colby Claim Contradicted By Probe

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Central Intelligence Director William E. Colby assured President Ford last winter that the CIA's secret 20-year program to open the mail of U.S. citizens was coordinated "from its inception" with the FBI, but that claim is contradicted by the Rockefeller commission's findings.

Colby's description of the mail program was first provided to President Ford in a private six-page letter last December when the CIA's domestic spying activities first became controversial. That letter was made public Tuesday evening.

Colby told the President that the CIA had been secretly opening first-class mail in order to obtain intelligence data on Communist countries. "This program was initiated in 1953," Colby wrote, "and from its inception was fully coordinated with the FBI, which received much of its product."

The investigation of CIA domestic activities by the presidential commission chaired by Vice President Rockefeller reached a different conclusion about the CIA's coordination with the FBI. The Rockefeller report said the CIA had avoided telling the FBI about

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the program and did not inform it until five years later.

"In January, 1958," the Rockefeller report said, "the FBI approached the Post Office Department for the purpose of instituting similar coverage of mail to and from the Soviet Union. The Post Office Department brought the bureau's request to the agency's attention, and shortly thereafter CIA representatives told the FBI of the agency's on-going mail project.

Up to that time, the CIA had avoided telling the FBI of the mail project—and no materials derived from the project were disseminated to the FBI."

In general, Colby's six-page letter plus 58 pages of attached memoranda did not alter the general outlines of CIA domestic spying as it has become known in recent months.

The abrupt release of the secret documents was apparently related to a lawsuit brought by Morton Halperin of the Center for National Security Studies to obtain public access to the report.

Halperin's lawyer was scheduled to take a deposition yesterday from a CIA official, Charles A. Briggs, and was provided a copy of the Colby report in order to conduct the questioning.

Halperin, a former staff member of the National Security Council, said yesterday Colby's December letter to the President "is a cover-up, just an absolute cover-up compared to his January report and [compared] to the Rockefeller report and to the CIA's internal study of domestic activities."

The latter report Halperin

was referring to is a voluminous report produced by the CIA inspector general in 1973, which went into the details of what individual CIA officers had reported as improper activities within the agency, including plans to assassinate several foreign leaders in the early 1960s. That inspector general's report has not been made public, but Halperin has pending a formal request for it under the Freedom of Information Act.

Halperin said the CIA has promised to make available portions of the inspector general's report as they are declassified, but so far he has not received any of the material. He intends to file another lawsuit if the material isn't made public he said.

The Colby report assured President Ford that the CIA was not conducting the "massive" domestic spying which it was accused of in a New York Times article last December. However, Colby went on to describe a voluminous system for secretly collecting data on American citizens involved in dissident political groups.

The CIA surveillance, intended to determine whether any foreign adversaries were secretly directing antiwar agitation within the United States, was aimed at a broad

target, according to the attached memos.

The CIA documents also revealed for the first time that when the intelligence agency built its headquarters in suburban McLean, Va., in the

early 1960s, the agency paid construction workers to protect them against anyone planting electronic eavesdropping devices in building.

Colby's letter told the President the agency's domestic

activities included developing "paid informants among construction workers at the time of construction of the agency building to protect against the placement of electronic taps therein."