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# Welch Death May Figure

By Laurence Stern

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The fatal shots fired in suburban Athens Tuesday at U.S. intelligence officer Richard S. Welch may figure importantly in the battle of public opinion in which the Central Intelligence Agency is now engaged in Congress.

CIA Director William E. Colby made it clear last week that Welch's death might be employed as an object lesson in pressing the agency's side of the impending argument over new guidelines for the conduct of the national security bureaucracy.

It is an argument that Colby and others at the CIA's Langley headquarters feel is now being dominated by the opposition in congressional hearings and in the press.

Colby, a professional manipulator of political process in faraway countries in his past CIA roles, now faces the final and supreme contest of public opinion in his career. This time the battleground is at home in Washington.

Colby took time out Wednesday to perform a chore that no one would expect the head of the U.S. intelligence

## Church Denies Panel Disclosed Agents' Names

Associated Press

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, says his panel has not in any way disclosed the names of any agent or source of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Church commented after a former colleague of slain CIA agent Richard S. Welch said Congress must share the blame for Welch's death.

Mike Ackerman, a former CIA case officer who left the agency in May, said inquiries by the Senate committee should have been conducted without so many public disclosures of sensitive information.

"The gentleman is misinformed, since the committee has made no disclosures of information received from any source that could possibly jeopardize the life of any CIA agent," Church said in a telephone interview from Boise.

Church added that Welch's death Tuesday in Athens should not curtail congressional investigations of the intelligence community. He said he had not known before the slaying that Welch was a CIA agent.

establishment to occupy himself with. He personally denounced a press release issued by Fifth Estate, a group of radical, young pamphleteers who have been heckling the intelligence system for three years from a scruffy suite of offices adjoining Dupont Circle.

Fifth Estate had issued its statement in response to what it charged were unattributed attacks in newspapers by the CIA's press spokesman, Angus M. Thuermer, and overt claims by retired clandestine operations officer David Phillips that Fifth Estate was responsible in part for the murder of Welch.

In the statement, Fifth Estate denied responsibility and said, "If anyone is to blame for Mr. Welch's death, it is the CIA that sent him there to spy . . ."

### News Analysis

The significance in what might otherwise pass for a routine Washington public relations skirmish is that Fifth Estate, whose members include Vietnam veterans and former government intelligence officers, was the first left-wing institution of the post-Vietnam war era to devote itself full time to muckraking the intelligence community.

It publishes revelations gathered from the foreign press and other sources on U.S. intelligence operations in a quarterly magazine, "Counterspy," which seems constantly at the brink of financial collapse.

Among the information published in recent issues was that Welch was CIA station chief in Peru. He subsequently had been moved to Athens, which was unknown to the editors of Counterspy.

Fifth Estate describes itself as an "adversary organization" that seeks to blow the whistle on abuses of

power by national security bureaucrats in the U.S. and abroad. Its political line, reflecting the view of one of its mentors, former CIA covert operations case officer Philip B.F. Agee, is that the CIA has become a tool of repressive elites in many countries of the Third World.

It is not surprising that the CIA should fix its sights on Fifth Estate in pressing its case that the publicizing of agency operations and personnel has gone too far. From the agency's standpoint it is also far more palatable to make the case against an obscure left-wing group on Dupont Circle than a congressional select committee on Capitol Hill.

Colby denounced Fifth Estate for what he called its "irresponsible and paranoiac attack" on employees of his agency. Colby, who is due to be replaced by former U.S. envoy to Peking George Bush, has asked Congress for legislation that would permit the CIA director to punish employees by filing criminal charges for passing out secrets and strengthen the government's injunctive powers to keep the press from publishing such secrets.

At the same time, the House and Senate committees on intelligence will propose new legislative directives intended to prevent future abuses of and by the CIA under today's standards of what is improper.

If the conflicts that have surfaced between executive and legislative branches are any guide, the new congressional round on CIA legislation will precipitate further notes of confrontation between the administration and congressional Democrats as background music to the 1976 presidential campaign.

A major point of contention will certainly be the issue of how far congressional committees, news media or political advocacy groups

# in Hill Battle

should be permitted to go in revealing the supposed secrets of the CIA and other national security agencies.

The answers depend to some extent on the political and institutional interests of the beholder. Nonetheless, there are boundaries to the argument and some factual underpinnings that are likely to become obscured in the rhetoric and emotion of the debate.

At one pole of the dispute is the Agee position, which calls for exposure of American agents abroad in order to "neutralize," as he puts it, "the CIA's support to repression" in countries where it can significantly control political processes through covert funding, electoral manipulation or espionage.

The trend toward exposure reached almost armchair hobby proportions with the publication in *The Washington Monthly* magazine in Nov., 1974, of "How to Spot a Spook" by former State Department intelligence officer John Marks.

Interest in the agency and its works has grown to such a point that handsome lecture fees can be commanded by defenders and critics of the agency who now ride the Chautauqua circuits either solo or in contrapuntal debating groups.

President Ford and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger have, with Colby, staked out another parameter of the argument by calling for minimal disclosure of operations or identities. President Ford, for example, asked the Senate intelligence committee to keep secret its report on assassinations while

Colby urged the Senate panel not to publish any names of CIA officials involved in the assassination schemes in order that they and their families not become targets of reprisal.

The committee ignored both requests, though it deleted most CIA names on its own initiative. Despite Colby's entreaties, it did publish 12 CIA names in the assassination report.

Security leaks have been a major obsession of Presidents, especially Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon. But it has yet to be demonstrated that there have been any major security breaches in the press of material that has not been available to foreign governments through other channels.

Furthermore, a good deal of the obsession with secrecy (the secret bombing of Cambodia is one notable example) seems to have been more concerned with preventing disclosure of executive actions that would not stand the test of domestic public opinion rather than preventing leaks of vital strategic information to hostile foreign powers.

Ten years ago the professional identity and duties of any but the top three or four officers of the CIA was unknown outside of immediate kin and close social peers. Today it seems that everything but the agency's classified telephone directory has been thrown into the public domain. Yet there has been no finding or claim that the agency's emergence from the closet has substantially weakened its intelligence-gathering capability.