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After Investigating U.S. Intelligence

By William E. Colby

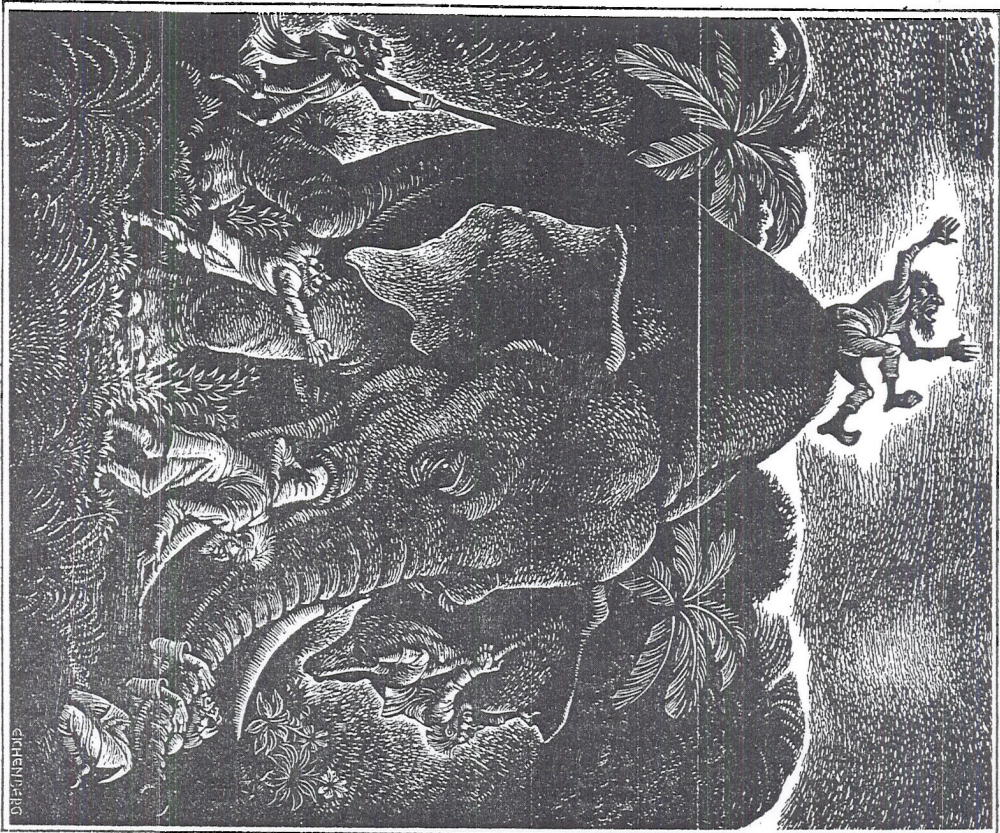
WASHINGTON—A year of unprecedented investigation of United States intelligence has ended. It has not been the first investigation. Others followed Pearl Harbor, the Bay of Pigs and the exposure of Central Intelligence Agency assistance to foundations and voluntary associations. But those were conducted, as other nations do, by special boards of inquiry that made their investigations and took testimony in secret.

This year's investigations looked into the secret recesses. But they also brought the klieg lights of television to them as they probed. They did not result only in a final set of conclusions and recommendations.

Were they necessary? Were they effective? Were they damaging? Did something new emerge? The final assessment cannot yet be made, but I believe they have provided the foundation for a new meaning for the much-abused initials C.I.A.—constitutional intelligence for America.

Necessary? After Vietnam, Watergate and sensational allegations that a rogue elephant was loose threatening our citizens and our good name—certainly. The public would no longer "shut your eyes" (as one member of Congress once suggested) to intelligence. And it would not be satisfied with a covering of "national security." Some public review and exposure was indeed necessary.

Effective? Yes. The investigation was facilitated by intelligence's own tools at itself. In 1973 it looked back for any "questionable activities" in its past, and directed that they be corrected for the future. On several occa-



Wood Engraving by Fritz Eichenberg

sions it criticized its own performance to find ways to improve itself. These self-examinations were made available to the investigating committees, which then checked them independently, and with sworn testimony, to find that indeed they were comprehensive.

Damaging? Yes, to a degree. The

which to assail our country and its friends for years to come.

And selective exposure of some of intelligence's own self-criticism gave a totally false impression of American intelligence as a whole.

But intelligence did essentially succeed in protecting its individual sources and its sensitive relationships with foreign intelligence services from exposure, at the price of running battle with committees and staff members.

Did something new emerge? Yes. Intelligence has traditionally existed in a shadowy field outside the law. This year's excitement has made clear that the rule of law applies to all parts of the American Government, including intelligence. In fact, this will strengthen American intelligence. Its secrets will be understood to be necessary ones for the protection of our democracy in tomorrow's world, not covers for mistake or misdeed. The guidelines within which it should, and should not, operate will be clarified for those in intelligence and those concerned about it. Improved supervision will insure that the intelligence agencies will remain within the new guidelines.

The American people will understand and support their intelligence services and press their elected representatives to give intelligence and its officers better protection from irresponsible exposure and harassment. The costs of the past year were high, but they will be exceeded by the value of this strengthening of what was already the best intelligence service in the world.

William E. Colby was Director of Central Intelligence.

"The C.I.A. is going to come out of this better off because everyone will think things have been dug up and investigated." (Statement attributed to unnamed "Senate aide;" from context, a member of the staff of Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.)
 NYP 10 Nov 75,
 Seymour Hersh,
 this file

Other refs noted with column by Anthony Lewis,
 NYP 25 Feb 76