

Senators Defy Ford, Reveal 30-Year Spy Setup

Washington

• Ignoring Ford administration protests, the Senate intelligence committee yesterday disclosed a highly secret arrangement by which U.S. spies, for 30 years, read up to 1.8 million international telegrams a year.

The release of information on the National Security Agency's "Project Shamrock" was the first time a Senate committee has acted on its own to disclose classified information that the

executive branch wanted to keep secret, committee staff members said.

The decision was attacked by Senators John Tower (Rep-Tex.) and Barry Goldwater (Rep-Ariz.) as completely unjustified and dangerous to national security.

White House press secretary Ron Nessen said President Ford regretted the committee's public discussion of the Shamrock operation.

Nessen said Mr. Ford "has

tried to act responsibly" to halt any possible abuses within the intelligence community and has made all pertinent information available to the committee and the Justice Department."

The disclosure was made and defended by Senator Frank Church (Dem-Ida.).

Some of the information disclosed yesterday already has been made public October 23 during a hearing held by the House Government Operations Subcommittee.

Church said the information demonstrates that Congress needs

to write a basic law governing NSA operations that would be similar to the legal charter intended to govern the Central Intelligence Agency.

Project Shamrock began in 1947 with the approval of President Truman and his top military and legal advisers, Church said. It involved the cooperation of three giant international telegraph companies — RCA Global, ITT World Communications and Western Union International.

Reading from a seven-page statement authorized by the committee in a 7-to-3 vote, Church said the agency has "screened about 150,000 messages a month for NSA analysts to review" from all of those available to it.

"Thousands of those messages in one form or another were distributed to other agencies in Q response to 'foreign intelligence requirements,'" Church said.

At the beginning of the operation, he said, the companies were told that agents would read only those telegrams related to foreign intelligence targets. But he said that when it ended, the NSA was reading the telegrams of many Americans as well.

"RCA Global and ITT World Communications provided NSA with the great bulk of their international message traffic, which NSA then selected for traffic of foreign intelligence targets.

"Western Union International sorted the traffic itself and provided NSA only with copies of the traffic of certain foreign targets and all the traffic to one country."

Church said that during a meeting in 1947 with Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, company representatives were promised that if they cooperated "they would suffer no criminal liability and no public exposure, at least as long as the current administration was in office."

Forrestal told the firms the arrangements had the approval of President Truman and Attorney General Tom Clark, Church said.

Project Shamrock was stopped suddenly last May, just when the committee began asking questions about it, Church said.

"I cannot assent to this action," said Tower, the committee's ranking Republican, after Church finished reading his statement.

Tower said disclosure might well harm the NSA, compromised its secret technology and help the Soviet Union.

Releasing the classified information serves no legislative purpose and might, if it sets a precedent, cripple or destroy the nation's intelligence-gathering capability, Tower said.

Church said he was authorized to make the information public after seeking a ruling from the Senate parliamentarian that disclosure did not violate Senate rules.

In making that finding, the parliamentarian said Project Shamrock apparently violated the 1934 Communications Act, and the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution which forbids unreasonable searches and seizures.

Church said that because Project Shamrock involved a "simple transfer of the telegraph traffic to the government" disclosure would not compromise any of USA's secret communications technology.

Associated Press