

Ford Abhors U.S. Role in Coups, Plots

By Stephen Isaacs

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President Ford said yesterday that he "abhors" the thought of American government officials being involved in assassination plots and coups d'etat abroad.

In the wake of the Senate intelligence committee's report Thursday detailing CIA and other official participation in such plots, White House press secretary Ron

Nessen said the President "absolutely abhors government officials' being involved in those kinds of things, and he has forbidden officials in his administration from being involved."

Nessen refused to be more specific than to say that "he has in mind his own plans" for stopping such involvement and "they will be made public when they are ready."

He reminded reporters that files on individuals' involvement in the plots had been turned over to the Justice Department for review.

While Nessen would not detail what plans President Ford is considering, other White House aides have said in recent months they might include reorganization of the Central Intelligence Agency, appointment of a CIA inspector general who would be independent of the agency's leadership, and a different form of executive branch panel to watch over the CIA's activities.

While Nessen was briefing reporters, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger was himself appearing before a closed session of the intelligence committee.

The committee's report portrayed Kissinger as playing a strong role in a 1970 Nixon administration plot to disrupt Chilean politics and the government of Marxist leader Salvador Allende.

Kissinger appeared before the Senate committee for more than two hours, in what he later told reporters was a review of the "the general problem of control of covert operations."

"I think there can be tighter control by the executive branch," he said, adding that he strongly favors a legislative oversight committee to work closely with the executive branch "as it develops covert operations."

Asked if he felt covert operations should be taken out of the CIA, Kissinger paused, and then said, "I would think not."

Reporters asked Kissinger if he was still trying to deny his and President Nixon's involvement in Chilean politics, in view of the committee's report that they investigated the CIA's activities.

At first he said, "I have testified at great length before the committee and they have the full record of these operations and I don't think it's appropriate for me to go into any public session."

When reminded that he and former President Nixon have disavowed any involvement in Chilean activities, the secretary said, "We have stated repeatedly that the military coup in 1973 was in no way supported by the United States. We had no contact with any of the people that carried out the military coup."

Reporters reminded him then that the committee's report was talking about activities in 1970, not 1973.

"The report is another matter," Kissinger said. "That's all I have to say."

With that, Kissinger turned and walked away.

World Bank president Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense under

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Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, talked briefly with a reporter by telephone.

The report suggests that one participant in a high-level meeting on Aug. 10, 1962, e recalls McNamara's suggesting the group "consider the elimination or assassination" of Castro. But most participants, and the minutes, do not recall McNamara as having said that. McNamara refused yesterday to add to his own denials of having made the statement.

He said he has read the conclusions of the committee's report and said he agrees "with the two major conclusions of the committee, first that neither I nor any of my senior associates in the Kennedy or Johnson administrations authorized either the assassination of any political leader or the preparation of plans for any such action.

"Secondly, with hindsight, it appears we should have taken the initiative to investigate whether any such actions were under way in any part of the government, and to issue positive instructions to prohibit them.

"The lesson is that our successors must pursue such investigations."

At the Justice Department, where some 10 names of present or former government officials are said to have been referred for possible prosecution in connection with the coup and assassination plots, no one would comment yesterday on the status of the investigation.

In June, Attorney General Edward H. Levi labeled the department's investigation "high priority" and told reporters then he was "shocked" by some of the material that had been forwarded to him by the Rockefeller Commission, which also reviewed CIA activities.

The Justice investigation is in the hands of the head of the Criminal Division, Assistant Attorney General Richard L. Thornburgh, who is said to be leaning "strongly" toward prosecuting some of the officials.