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CIA Says Spy Stories Peril Agents

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Washington

CIA Director William Colby testified yesterday that the "almost hysterical excitement" about alleged domestic spying by his agency has made American undercover agents abroad fear for their lives.

Colby told an open congressional hearing that "these last two months have placed American intelligence in danger."

News reports and official investigations have made overseas agents fear for their lives, sent CIA morale into a nosedive, and frightened firms away from accepting CIA contracts, Colby said.

"The most hysterical excitement that surrounds any news story mentioning CIA . . . has raised the question whether secret intelligence operations can be conducted by the United States," Colby said.

Colby was particularly critical of the New York Times, which printed on December 22 the first alleged disclosures of illegal CIA domestic spying.

Colby said Times reporter Seymour M. Hersh "mixed and magnified two separate subjects" — legal activities and "those few activities" that may have been illegal.

"The sensational atmo-

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sphere surrounding intelligence, however, encourages oversimplification and disproportionate stress on a few missteps rather than on the high quality of the CIA's basic work," Colby said.

"A number of our individual agents abroad are deeply worried that their names might be revealed with resultant danger to their lives."

Colby told the Defense Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee that public fears that the CIA is becoming like the Nazi Gestapo or the Soviet KGB are unfounded.

"It is very clear that the KGB runs a different kind of life and we in CIA don't want any part of it," he said.

The rights of U.S. citizens are "paramount" and must be respected by the CIA, Colby acknowledged under questioning by Representative Robert N. Ciano (Dem-Conn.).

The CIA is under investigation by a presidential panel headed by Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller and special Senate and House committees following published reports it had conducted wide-ranging domestic surveillance of American dissidents in violation of its charter.

Colby said CIA "missteps were few and far between" but acknowledged the agency had kept files on four congressmen associated with the anti-war movement in the late 1960s.

Two of the files were destroyed in 1974, one is inactive, and one concerns a congressman since deceased, he said.

Past mistakes had been overblown by the press, he said, resulting in "a great deal of trouble in foreign op-

erations."

He also said that publication of a book in England by ex-agent Philip Agee had resulted in the harassment of a CIA employee and his family. "His daughter has been driven out of school."

Colby vowed he will use the full extent of the law to prevent publication of the book in the United States.

Scholars and businessmen had contacted him, concerned that their cooperation with the CIA might be disclosed in the present series of hearings, he said.

Of eight firms recently



AP Wirephoto

WILLIAM COLBY
Morale nosedive

asked to bid on CIA contracts, only one had responded, Colby said.

"There may have been occasions when CIA may have exceeded its proper bounds. They were undertaken in the belief that they fell within the agency's charter to collect foreign intelligence or to protect intelligence sources and methods," he declared.

Colby called for "sober and reasonable" investigations by Congress and said he hopes they will be conducted in secrecy so ongoing operations will not be jeopardized.

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