

Hill in Quandary on CIA Briefings

Secrecy Rules Limit Efforts to Act on Covert Activities Data

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Two weeks ago, CIA Director William E. Colby went to Capitol Hill to complete briefing six committees about three covert operations recently approved by the Forty Committee of the National Security Council.

One project Colby described to the legislators was the planned \$25 million expansion of the covert paramilitary operation already under way in Angola. The two others involved still secret contributions to political parties and candidates in two West European countries.

Under a 1974 amendment to the foreign assistance act, a presidential finding that each such operation "is important to the national security" has to be reported to Congress "in a timely fashion" before it can be funded.

The purpose of the amendment was to give committee members information on what the Central Intelligence Agency is doing overseas. With that knowledge, some legislators hoped, Congress might be able to stop projects they thought unwise.

In practice, however, the Colby briefings have caused problems for the House and Senate members who receive them because, short of breaking their oath to keep the information secret, there appears to be little or nothing

they can do about the operations disclosed to them.

Each congressional committee entitled to be briefed on CIA activities has adopted a different system for handling the highly classified information.

Until recently, for example, the House Appropriations Defense subcommittee kept no transcript. Three panels that do—the House International Relations Oversight subcommittee and the House and Senate Armed Services committees—frequently permit Colby to go off the record. Thus anyone reading the transcript later would not find important names and figures.

The Senate Appropriations' CIA subcommittee keeps a transcript of its briefings but does not let other committee members know when a briefing has taken place.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has adopted a system whereby Chairman John J. Sparkman (D-Ala.) and ranking Republican Clifford P. Case (N.J.) are briefed by CIA Director Colby with a stenographer and the committee's chief of staff, Pat Holt, present. Members are then informed that Colby appeared and can ask Holt to pass on what Colby disclosed.

Under a little-publicized procedure, however, the Office of Management and

Budget since 1974, according to two Senate aides, has required that CIA certify the briefings of Congress have taken place before funding of a project is begun.

Briefing on the Angola paramilitary operation is reported to have begun on Capitol Hill in July. But, according to one source, the information provided then was so general that the scope of the operation was not apparent.

One of those who received an initial briefing was Sen. Case who said recently he is bothered by the system. "I don't know if I should take some initiative in getting others interested," he said.

The Senate Foreign Relations African subcommittee chairman, Sen. Dick Clark (D-Iowa), was one senator who did ask about Colby's July briefing to Sparkman and Case.

He learned there was something going on in Angola, but he learned more in August when he visited Zaire. There, he watched as an American arms shipment landed, destined for Angolan units across the border.

Clark talked to leaders of the three competing Angolan factions and came back to Washington determined to do something about the growing U.S. covert operations.

He requested a CIA and State Department briefing of

his subcommittee and at that closed session, voiced his objections. In September he learned Sparkman and Case had been told the Angola paramilitary operation was expanding to \$20 million.

Clark decided he wanted the full Foreign Relations Committee briefed so that a wider protest might be generated. Just before that closed session took place, a second increase in the covert activity was disclosed by Colby to the Capitol Hill committees. At the full committee session, Clark led objections to the operation as described by Colby and State Department Under Secretary Joseph Sisco.

Within days of that session, news stories appeared about the Colby briefing and the covert operations in Angola.

Both State Department and CIA officials complained to Chairman Sparkman about the leaks, but he did nothing about them.

With the news stories out, Clark introduced an amendment to cut off military assistance to Angola without himself ever having to disclose directly what he knew

On the House side, however, there were no leaks. "No one wanted to take the Mike Harrington route," one congressman said.