

Colby Opposes Disclosure Of CIA's Annual Budget

By Timothy S. Robinson
Washington Post Staff Writer

Former CIA Director William E. Colby has testified that the disclosure of the agency's budget for a single year would set a precedent for an annual release of the figure and in turn would harm national security.

Comparing the dollar amount spent yearly on CIA programs to the "missing piece" in a jigsaw puzzle sought by intelligence agencies of other countries, Colby said foreign economic analysts could use the information to determine the CIA's spending priorities.

Colby also described as inaccurate published estimates of the CIA's budget as being \$750 million a year. His testimony came in a deposition taken in an American Civil Liberties Union lawsuit seeking disclosure of the intelligence agency's expenditures in fiscal 1974 and its budgetary spending authority in 1976.

Colby made it clear that disclosure of the budget would not reveal the full scope of its operation, since funds are often transferred to and from other government agencies to finance public and covert CIA projects.

However, he said he considered the CIA's budget alone important enough to be kept secret. He said the U.S. intelligence community had used similar figures

from other countries to make estimates of "certain important things," which he would not describe.

Colby's defense of the CIA budget secrecy was the strongest and most detailed he has made publicly, according to attorneys involved in the litigation. He been subject to "substantial" fluctuation over the last 15 years.

While saying that "intelligence today is more and more the study of open material" and that even the President's State of the Union message is useful to foreign intelligence agencies, Colby said the CIA still does "secret work."

"We are not just reading copies of Pravda around here," Colby said. "We are looking a little more vigorously than that for information held by closed societies."

"... I think we have a problem of protecting this democracy of ours and in the process we need to run some secret operations, and run them," he said.

The Rockefeller commission that studied the CIA had recommended that portions of the CIA budget be made public. The House of Representatives last October rejected an attempt to make the appropriation public.

Colby was questioned by ACLU attorney John H. F. Shattuck at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., on Feb. 17. Colby left the CIA Jan.

30 and was replaced as director by George Bush. The deposition was filed yesterday in U.S. District Court here in the Freedom of Information Act suit brought against the CIA by former National Security Council aide Morton Halperin.

The former CIA director said he "hardened" his position against any disclosure of the agency's budget while he was serving as the director.

He cited the case of the Atomic Energy Commission, which issued a total budget figure in 1947 that amounted to one line and 25 years later was issuing 15 pages of detailed explanations of its budget.

Instead of starting a disclosure precedent, Colby said, he preferred that only the congressional oversight committees be kept aware of the agency's budget.

He added that he thinks the American intelligence community "is in great danger of too much exposure."

Colby, who is writing a book on his government service, said there probably would be no immediate effect on national security if the agency's budget for one year was announced. But, he added:

"I think they [foreign intelligence agencies] would just take that back and start doing some studying. They might study for three months or they might study

for six months and at that time they might start turning electronic gadgets on or off or they might start following people around, they might start covering things up that were left open.

"There are a whole variety of things. They might go out and sail around the sea in different places than they were in the past—various things."