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United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
(PURSUANT TO S. RES. 400, 94TH CONGRESS)
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

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IN REPLY PLEASE REFER TO Q#4515

Admiral Stansfield Turner
Director of Central Intelligence
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D. C. 20505

Dear Stan:

The Committee has just completed its review of the report on Covert Action in Angola, 1975-1976. You will receive a copy of that report under cover of a separate letter. The report takes into account the additional documents made available by the Executive Branch and is the result of a thorough review of the total available documentary record. I would like to take this occasion to reflect on the lessons learned in the process of writing the Angola report, and more importantly on the relationships between this Committee and the intelligence community in general.

The Angola covert action took place in another era, under a different leadership, and in a time when the relationships both formal and personal, were of a different order, but were under severe criticism and were clearly changing rapidly. Angola is an interesting case for both of us to consider because it straddles the old way of conducting relationships between the Legislative and Executive branches with regard to covert action, and the present procedures. Although the Hughes-Ryan Amendment was in effect, the performance of Congressional oversight committees was uneven. Some were passive; others did not want to go into any detail; while other committees wanted every detail. The pattern of informing Congress prior to the Angola period was that a small handful of legislators were informed in very general terms. There was, for the most part, an implicitly close and trusting relationship. Clearly the old oversight relationship was inadequate in almost every respect. As I reflect on

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the Angola experience, it is my view that the agency was under intense pressures from both the Executive and the Legislative branches. The leadership of the Executive branch preferred a highly compartmented secretive approach, and the legislature was moving very rapidly from one of passivity to aggressive detailed interest in all matters concerning covert action. But looking at the Angola experience overall, one cannot say that the Congress, through its appropriate committees, was fully and currently informed. Rather, what the Congress learned was by dint of extraordinary effort on its own part; field investigations by concerned Senators and staff, and by extraordinary efforts to root out the record.

That experience is behind us. The Select Committee on Intelligence and the intelligence community under your direction have been working out a close, trusting but objective relationship. I would like to reflect on some general principles that could usefully pertain in studies and inquiries of this sort in the future.

First, there should be full and complete and prompt access to all information. If there is a problem with any document or documents you should let Bill Miller or me know immediately and we can jointly resolve the difficulties that may be involved.

Second, if the inquiry might call into question the performance of a particular unit I would think it reasonable to put a group onto the question which has no direct connection with these events. In the Angola affair, if I may make comment, those whose actions were under scrutiny were also those who were preparing the responses to the Committee for documents and were involved in the interpretation of events of the time. I think you would be better served, and the Committee would be better served if an independent group could be appointed to carry out inquiries. Perhaps a unit from the Inspector General's staff or from your own personal staff would be appropriate for this kind of task.

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Third, on the part of the Committee, I think it useful, whenever possible, to review with you prior to the issuance of any report such findings as we may have arrived at. This will generally be necessary because it is inevitable that document requests will not be completely met because of a lack of understanding with what is desired. No matter how much good will there may be, misunderstandings can and do and will arise, and these misunderstandings can lead to incompleteness and possible distortion unless there is a full and forthright exchange of views.

I want you to know that it is my firm belief both as Chairman of this Committee and as an individual Senator, that under your leadership the agencies are performing under the law and in accord with regulation. We both know that from time to time there will be intelligence failures, and there may be occasional illegalities or improprieties that will require vigorous, in-depth objective scrutiny. In my view, however, the major contribution that we can make to the process of strengthening our national intelligence system is to provide an independent and I hope objective critique of various aspects of the intelligence community's performance. In order to perform this necessary function well we both must work together to assure that the information that is necessary for the Committee to carry out this function, whether documents, briefings or on the spot reviews is provided promptly and is full and complete. I know this has been your declared purpose and objective, and I write these observations not in any criticism, but with a view to making some suggestions that will strengthen our mutual efforts to support the nation's intelligence system.

With kind regards,

Sincerely,

Birch

Birch Bayh
Chairman

Stan —
It's good working with you!
Birch

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