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Colby, William
Conference

C.I.A. Chief Says Covert Activities Aren't Vital

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 13—William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, said today that there would be no "major impact" on the nation's security if the United States ceased all cloak-and-dagger operations against foreign countries.

"The current status of the world is such that we do not appear to be threatened at this time," Mr. Colby told a conference on the Central Intelligence Agency and covert activity. "The Capitol will still stand whether any particular action does or does not take place."

The C.I.A. director spent more than three hours making a speech and answering often hostile questions from the panelists and audience at the two-day conference, sponsored by the newly formed Center for National Security Studies.

Against Curtailment

He made it clear, both in his prepared address and during the question-and-answer session, that he did not wish to see the agency's clandestine operations curtailed. Those operations, officially known as covert actions, have been the focus of dispute this week in Congress because of the disclosure that the C.I.A. was authorized to spend more than \$8-million from 1970 to 1973 in an effort to make it difficult for President Salvador Allende Gossens of Chile to govern.

More than \$7-million of the authorized funds was spent.

"I think it would be mistaken to deprive our nation of the possibility of some moderate covert action response to a foreign problem and leave us with nothing between a diplomatic protest and sending in the Marines," Mr. Colby said in his prepared address.

Later, in response to a question Mr. Colby declared that "these days, in view of the world situation and our policies, we're not spending much effort" on clandestine activities.

"We're keeping our powder and musket dry," he said.

Mr. Colby's statements acknowledging that clandestine operations were not vital to the nation's security did not seem to indicate any impending change in the Ford Administration's approach to such activities. The C.I.A. director was apparently giving a candid assessment of the value of such activities—as viewed by him today.

When a panelist, Richard J. Barnet, author and former Kennedy Administration aide, asked whether he could envision any national security threats that would justify covert activity in Latin America, Asia or Africa, Mr. Colby said, "There are some, yes."

"By security of the United States," he repeated, "I do not mean that the Capitol will fall by night. There are certain things that today are not an immediate danger to the United States but could become so."

Discussing Chile, Mr. Colby again denied that the C.I.A. played any direct role in the overthrow of the late President Allende. "We did look forward to a change in government," he said to caustic laughter from the crowded Senate hearing room, "but by elections in 1976."

Although he had announced that he would not discuss any specific details concerning the C.I.A.'s clandestine involvement in Chile, Mr. Colby all but specifically confirmed that the agency had been heavily involved.

Insisting that Congress had been kept informed about the clandestine activities there, Mr. Colby declared, "I can't say that every dollar the C.I.A. spent in Chile was individually approved [by intelligence committees], but there was a series of discussions."

He took note of a letter, published last week, describing the agency's activities in Chile between 1964 and 1973 that had been written earlier this year by Representative Michael J. Harrington, Democrat of Massachusetts. "At various times during that period," Mr. Colby said, "the major steps were brought to the attention of the chair-

man or various members of those committees."

His account of the congressional overview was challenged by Mr. Harrington and another member of Congress attending the conference, Senator James Abourezk, Democrat of South Dakota. Mr. Abourezk questioned whether the C.I.A. was providing up-to-date briefings about current clandestine operations to the Congress; Mr. Harrington urged a broader, and more critical, Congressional overview of C.I.A. activities.

In an obvious rebuke to those who advocated more C.I.A. disclosure to Congressional committees, Mr. Colby complained that what he termed "the leak" about the Chilean involvement "raises the dilemma of how we're going to supply the Congress with such delicate information without its disclosure."

"This is a matter, of course, for the Congress to decide," he added.

Throughout his long appearance today, Mr. Colby expressed little emotion and remained calm, even when confronted with personal denunciations and accusations that he had lied. The sharpest response from the audience came during a series of questions about his participation in the Vietnam pacification program and his direct role with Operation Phoenix, a C.I.A.-involved program designed "to root out the Vietcong infrastructure" that has been widely criticized. It has been charged that the program resulted in the deaths of more than 20,000 Vietnamese.

"How many did you kill?" one youth shouted from the audience.

"I didn't kill any," Mr. Colby responded.

At one point, panelist Daniel Ellsberg, who has said he was responsible for turning over the Pentagon Papers to the press in 1971, delivered a lengthy summary of the C.I.A.'s involvement in Watergate, provoking an exchange with Mr. Colby that provided no new information about the known involvement of the agency in the break-in at the office of Dr.

Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Earlier, in response to a question from Dr. Ellsberg, Mr. Colby had acknowledged that the C.I.A. may have had advance information about the impending coup d'état in Chile that was not forwarded to the Allende Government.

Mr. Colby, who had agreed to attend the two-day conference before the press disclosures of the covert activities in Chile, pointedly noted in his prepared remarks that such activities were conducted "only when specifically authorized by the National Security Council." "Thus," he added, "C.I.A. covert actions reflect national policy."

A number of high officials have told The New York Times this week that much of the impetus for the clandestine policy against the Allende Government was supplied by Secretary of State Kissinger, who was serving as former President Nixon's national security adviser in 1970.

Arguing today in favor of covert actions, Mr. Colby said that "a sovereign nation must look ahead to changing circumstances."

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