



# 'Operation Chaos': Files on 7,200

## Antiwar Groups, Dissidents Were Targets of 'Improper' Program

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The Central Intelligence Agency "unlawfully exceeded" its authority by spying on thousands of Americans in this country under a highly secret program code named "Operation Chaos."

President Ford's CIA commission, in findings revealed yesterday, disclosed that the agency spread such a wide net in this "improper" operation that the names of 300,000 Americans and their organizations ended up in a computerized index.

Within that 300,000 total, the report said, the CIA developed 7,200 separate "personality files on citizens of the United States."

The original objective for Operation Chaos, the report noted, was to see if foreign nations were behind some of the antiwar demonstrations and other dissident activities in the United States.

But the commission said, the operation ran out of control during its six-year horizon of life—from August, 1967, to March, 1974—and intruded into domestic surveillance beyond the agency's charter.

"Although the stated purpose of the operation was to determine whether there were any foreign contacts with American dissident groups," the commission concluded, "it resulted in the accumulation of considerable material on domestic dissidents and their activities."

"The accumulation of domestic data in the operation exceeded what was reasonably required," the commission continued, "and thus was improper."

"Some domestic activities of Operation Chaos unlawfully exceeded the CIA's statutory authority," the

commission concluded, "even though the declared mission of gathering intelligence abroad as to foreign influence on domestic dissident activities was proper."

Richard M. Helms, director of the CIA from 1966 to 1973, issued a statement on Dec. 24, 1974, that "categorically denied" that the agency while under his direction conducted "illegal domestic operations" against war protesters.

The commission report summarizes testimony it heard that alleged that Helms played a direct role in Operation Chaos—even to issuing a directive ordering CIA field executives worried about going beyond their charter to cooperate.

The report supports past statements by James J. Angleton, former head of CIA's counterintelligence operations, that he did not run any special group spying on Americans.

Said the report: "The available evidence indicates that the chief of counterintelligence had little connection with the actual operations of Chaos."

"According to a CIA memorandum in May, 1969, Director Helms specifically instructed the chief of the operation [Chaos] to refrain from disclosing part of his activities to the counterintelligence chief."

Helms himself, the report said, told the commission "that he could recall no specific directions he gave to the Chaos group chief to report directly to him."

Former President Johnson provided the initial impetus for Operation Chaos in 1967 when he asked the CIA to investigate whether foreign influences were behind racial disorders in the United States.

The CIA responded by



JAMES J. ANGLETON  
"little connection"

setting up a special team eventually sealed off from the rest of the government in what the report called a "walled basement area."

The CIA reported it could find no foreign connection with racial and antiwar disturbances in the United States but was given more presidential assignments that pushed the agency deeper into domestic surveillance.

One CIA paper entitled "Restless Youth," the report said, "concluded that the motivations underlying student radicalism arose from social and political alienation at home and not from conspiratorial activity masterminded from abroad."

Helms, in delivering another version of that paper to Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger on Feb. 16, 1969, attached a memorandum which said student unrest is "more within the charter of that agency" and "would prove embarrassing"

should "anyone learn of its existence."

Tom Charles Huston, staff assistant to President Nixon, wrote the CIA on June 20, 1969 that Nixon wanted the agency to prepare a report "on foreign communist support of revolutionary protest movements in this country."

Helms, according to the commission report, responded by stepping up the activities of Operation Chaos—including a directive to heads of CIA directorates on Sept. 6, 1969, telling them to cooperate in the program.

Even though the agency kept Operation Chaos as secret as it could the report said, 14 CIA officials wrote two memoranda in 1971 challenging "the propriety of the project."

Helms, according to the report, demanded anew that his executives cooperate in Operation Chaos. By 1971, the operation had a staff of 51 people.

The report noted that the files and computerized index of 300,000 Americans and organizations are still intact and the CIA is holding them pending completion of the current investigations.

The commission recommended that the CIA destroy files with no foreign intelligence value at the close of the current congressional probes of the agency or as soon thereafter as permitted by law.



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