

19 JANUARY 1976

Congress renews demand to keep an eye on CIA

By Dana Adams Schmidt
Staff correspondent of
The Christian Science Monitor

Washington

Congress wants a new oversight committee to be given prior information of covert U.S. activities abroad — but President Ford thinks Congress is too leaky a vessel to be trusted with such information.

This is the crux of the public debate that will begin anew this week in Washington as the search for resolving both the misuse of the CIA and abuses by the agency itself gains new momentum.

President Ford, who has been outraged by disclosure of CIA plans to help the Christian Democrats of Italy and by disclosure of the names of CIA officers prior to the assassination of Richard S. Welch in Athens, will put the emphasis on these aspects of the problem in his State of the Union address Monday (Jan. 19). A special message on the CIA and the intelligence problem generally will follow.

Sen. Frank Church (D) of Idaho, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, will follow on Tuesday with legisla-

tive proposals before Sen. Abraham Ribicoff's Committee on Government Operations. He will emphasize a need for an intelligence committee with power to prevent the involvement of the United States in dangerous and possibly counterproductive covert foreign adventures.

Senator Church is concerned about the possibility that the administration will seek something like an official secrets act, which would enable it at will to make secret whatever it saw fit.

Although there has been extensive liaison between the Senate and House intelligence committees and the White House through Presidential aide John Marsh, the differences between the two branches remain far-reaching.

The differences are summarized in the White House contention that to give a congressional oversight committee prior information on covert operations would raise constitutional problems. It would, in the White House view, make the committee a part of the executive branch, thereby violating the constitutional separation of powers.

Senator Church's reply is that the Constitution requires Congress to advise as well as consent, and that it cannot advise without prior information.

At present the administration informs subcommittees of no less than six committees of Congress — the Foreign Relations, Armed Services, and Appropriations Committees in each house — of the covert operations of the CIA. But after the fact, and in secrecy. Sworn to secrecy about something that has already happened, the congressmen have found themselves helpless to act until someone has leaked the secret information.

Senator Church's 11-man committee will propose that, when it is phased out on Feb. 29, its functions be taken over by a new committee of five Democrats and four Republicans.

This committee, either jointly with a House committee or in parallel operations, would become the sole recipient of intelligence briefings from the administration.

It would have the power of dissent.

If it differed from an administration plan to engage in some covert project, like the overthrow of the Government of Chile, it would first withdraw funds for that project.

If the administration persisted, using other funds, the committee could refer the matter to a secret session of the entire Senate.

Security would be easier to maintain because fewer legislators would be involved.