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Fallaci vs. Colby

What Did You Do to My Italy, Mr. Spy?



Oriana Fallaci, the Italian journalist, spent "one long Friday morning and a long Sunday afternoon" last month interviewing former CIA Director William Colby at his home here. She describes the encounter as an "exhausting and nasty fight between the spy and victim." But while her voice "trembled with rage," Colby was unperturbed — cool, controlled, polite — as he answered her accusations. She thought she saw anger occasionally in his blue eyes, but "his lips did not stop smiling, his hands would not stop pouring coffee in my cup."



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Fallaci: The names, Mr. Colby. The names of those bastards who took CIA money in my country. Italy isn't some banana republic of the United Fruit Company, Mr. Colby, and it isn't right that the shadow of suspicion covers a whole political class. Don't you think that Mr. Pertini, the president of the Italian Parliament, should have those names?

Colby: No, because our House has said by vote that those reports must remain secret. CIA should protect its associates and people who work for them. Of course the decision to give or not to give those names does not depend on CIA; it depends on the government of the United States and I am not speaking for my government; I'm speaking for CIA. But my judgment is no; my recommendation would be no. No names. It's the only thing I can do to maintain my agreement with the people I worked with . . . Those who feel covered by the shadow that you talk about only have to stand up and deny [involvement]. They only have to say. "It isn't true, we didn't get the money." It's fine with me. I cannot sacrifice somebody for this theory that somebody is under suspicion. I have promised those men to keep the secret and I

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must maintain it because, if I break my promise, when I go to someone new he'll say that my promise is no good. Why don't you ask the Soviet government for the names of the Communists who take Moscow's money in Italy? The Soviets are doing exactly the same.

Fallaci: We'll talk later about the Russians, Mr. Colby. Now let's talk about CIA. Tell me, please, if I came here, as a foreigner, and financed an American party, and 21 of your politicians, and some of your journalists, what would you do?

Colby: You would be doing an illegal thing and, if I found out, I would report it to the FBI and have you arrested.

Fallaci: Good. So I should report you and your agents and your ambassadors to the Italian police and have you all arrested.

Colby: I won't say that.

Fallaci: Why not? If it is illegal that I come here to corrupt your politicians, it is as illegal that you come there and corrupt my politicians.

Colby: I am not saying that you

would corrupt. I am saying that it is against our law for you to come and do that.

Fallaci: It is also against mine, Mr. Colby! And I'll tell you more: there is only one human type that is more disgusting than the corrupted one. It is the corruptor.

Colby: We don't corrupt at CIA. You may have a problem with corruption in your society but it was in existence long before CIA got there. Saying that we corrupt is like saying that we give money to do things for us. That isn't why we give money. We give money to help somebody to do what he wants and cannot do because he hasn't enough money. We are basically supporting the democratic countries and, of all the countries that should understand this, Italy should. Because the American assistance in Italy helped it from becoming an authoritarian communism for 30 years . . .

Fallaci: And the result of that

help, Mr. Colby, is that the Communists are now at the borders of government. Let's be honest: do you think all that money was well spent? Do you think that your intelligence has been acting intelligently?

Colby: Usually we don't spend money for foolishness. And you cannot judge things from one factor alone, like the last elections in Italy. Maybe American activities in Italy haven't been perfect, since World War II, but they have been useful. When I was in Rome, in 1953, people were riding Vespas. Now they are in cars. You live better today than you would have lived if you had had a Communist government in 1948. Or in 1960. The average Italian has a better life than the average Pole. So the American policies have not been a mistake in Italy. We did a good job. In Italy you always see things catastrophically. In 1955 Italians said that Italy was going to collapse, that the government was no good, hopeless. Now I

hear the same words I heard in 1955. But you did not collapse then and you will not collapse now because there are good Italians.

Fallaci: To what extent did your work take place within the American embassy? Does it still?

Colby: Very much. Sure. I used to work a lot with the embassy. I was political attache. We always work with the embassies. Most information we get through our embassies, of course.

Fallaci: But it isn't only through embassies that CIA works abroad. We all know that SID [Italian Secret Service] is the pied-a-terre of CIA in Italy. Now tell me, Mr. Colby, what right do you have to spy on me at home and use the secret service of my country? What right do you have, for instance, to control my telephone there?

Colby: I get news from around the world. There is nothing wrong with trying to understand what is happening in the world, what people are doing or thinking. It isn't a matter of invading others' privacy. It's a matter of looking to see if you have a pistol to shoot me or another weapon to hurt me, and prevent it. You ask if a nation has the right to conduct clandestine intelligence activities in other nations? Well, there is a law in every country that says no, and almost every country does it. So do I have the right to try to find out what happens in order to protect my country? Yes, I morally have it. Though it is illegal.

Fallaci: . . . Mr. Colby, I am trying to make you admit that Italy is an independent state, not a banana republic, not a colony of yours. And

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Fallaci: If all your information is like that, Mr. Colby, I understand why CIA makes itself ridiculous so often. But here is what I want to know from you who claim to fight in the name of democracy: Having won the elections democratically, did Allende have the right to govern his country? Yes or no? . . . Don't be silent, Mr. Colby. Do answer, Mr. Colby.

Colby: Didn't Mussolini win elections? Didn't Hitler become the chancellor of Germany in an election?

Fallaci: This is what I call bad faith. You know very well that those were not free elections, Mr. Colby. And you cannot, just cannot, compare Allende with Mussolini and with Hitler. This is pure fanaticism, Mr. Colby!

Colby: I am not fanatic. I believe in a Western liberal democracy.

Fallaci: Mr. Colby, you portray the CIA as an association of Boy Scouts mainly occupied reading books and speeches in some library. Let's be serious. To begin with, you are spies.

Colby: One moment. Yes, in the old image, intelligence used to be spying. Mata Hari and so on. Today intelligence is an intellectual process of assembling information from the press, radio, books, speeches. Which is why we're called Central Intelligence Agency. All this information is centralized and studied by people who are specialists in various fields. And then there are electronics, computers, technology. In the last 15 years technology has so changed intelligence that we don't need to spy to get secrets to give to generals to win battles. Intelligence is far beyond that. It is a technological phenomenon. We used to wonder how many missiles the Soviets might have. Today we don't wonder; we count them. . . .

Fallaci: Mr. Colby, CIA may be that partly. But it also is something worse, something dirtier. I mean a political force that secretly organizes coups and plots and assassinations. A second government that punishes whoever is against the interests of the United States in the world. Moving is much nobler than that.

Colby: What you are talking about is 5 per cent of our budget. Only 5 per cent goes for any kind of political or paramilitary activity. And this is an activity that is necessary in the world we live in because a little help in some countries to some friends can avoid a serious crisis later. In the '50s this was 30 per cent of our budget. In the '80s, if the world goes on facing totalitarian developments, we might go back to that 30 per cent again or more. But now it is 5 per cent, and all this excitement is about that 5 per cent. Which is legitimate because isn't it easier than to defend ourselves with bombs and soldiers? Isn't it easier to help some political group?

Fallaci: Yes, but the point isn't financing here and there, or corrupt-

ing here and there to protect your interests that are not always noble interests. The point is the assassination of foreign leaders, Mr. Colby!

Colby: In 1973, long before this excitement started, I issued a directive against assassinations. I have turned down suggestions of assassinations on several occasions . . . saying that assassination is wrong. But there are people who will say to you that if Hitler had been assassinated in 1938, the world would be better.

Fallaci: Lumumba was not Hitler, Mr. Colby. Castro is not Hitler.

Colby: Well, Castro allowed the Soviet Union to place nuclear missiles in Cuba, which put American cities under nuclear threat.

Fallaci: And because of this you kill Castro.

Colby: In Italy, at the time of the Renaissance, there were many people inside and outside the church who discussed the rights and wrongs of tyrannicide. And discussion had started long before the Renaissance; it isn't new. Yes, this assassination business did not occur in America yesterday, it's been a political tool for centuries. How did the princes die in the various states of Italy? How did Caesar die? Don't, as an Italian, stand on moral lessons on this. I don't accept moral lessons from you.

Fallaci: Caesar was not killed by an American. He was killed by some Romans. The Medici, in the Renaissance, were killed by the Florentines, not by Americans. And Pericles erected monuments to the Greek who killed the tyrant, not to the Americans who killed a Cuban in Cuba.

Colby: I tell you that this has always happened and I say that it is difficult for any country to give moral lessons to another.

Fallaci: By God, Mr. Colby! It is you who claim to be more moral than others. It is you who introduce yourselves as the Angel Gabriel sacrificing for democracy and freedom.

Colby: Maybe our morals are not perfect but they are better than others. American policy is regarded all through the world as a pillar of freedom. There are a few things,

over 28 years, that we shouldn't have done. Like opening the mail. Yes, there was a period in the '50s when we opened the mail to and from the Soviet Union. And we shouldn't have done it, though one can understand why. There were Soviet spies running all over America. However, we shouldn't have done it and . . .

Fallaci: Come on, Mr. Colby, I am not talking about opening letters! I talk about murdering people!

Colby: CIA has never assassinated anybody. Including Diem. Saying that CIA does assassinations all the time is unfair. There were a few occasions in which we wanted to try, and none of them worked.

Fallaci: Even if you spoke the truth, Mr. Colby, which I doubt, isn't it shameful enough for CIA to plan such projects like Al Capone?

Colby: People do it all over the world. Lots of different countries, whether it's wise or not. Personally I was always against it. People came to me with such proposals and I said: "You will not do it." But I recall that Jefferson said: "The tree of freedom has to be watered every 20 years by the blood of tyrants."

Fallaci: In other words, once in a while is all right. Are you religious, Mr. Colby?

Colby: Sure I am. I'm a Catholic and a rigid one.

Fallaci: One of those who go to church every Sunday?

Colby: Yes, sure.

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Fallaci: One of those who believe in Hell and in Paradise?

Colby: Yes, sure. I believe in everything the Church teaches.

Fallaci: One of those who love people as Jesus Christ wanted?

Colby: Yes, sure. I love people.

Fallaci: Let's talk a while of the Pike report, Mr. Colby. Because, if in the Church report CIA sounds so bad, in the Pike report it looks rather ridiculous. Is it true, as Pike remarked, that, if America were to be attacked by another country, CIA would not know of it in advance?

Colby: The House Committee re-

port is totally partial, totally biased, and done to give a false impression of CIA. The Church report, that is the assassination report and the Chile report, well . . . I think they were reasonably fair. Yes, fair reports. Also the Rockefeller commission's report is a fair report. Pike's report is not a fair report. And that Pike remark . . . it's nonsense. He did not publish things we did right. He chose what we had done wrong. For instance, in the spring of 1973 we told our government that, unless there is movement on a political level, there probably will be war in the Middle East. And we helped our government follow everything that was happening. On October 5th in the evening we made an assessment: "There are certain signs that indicate that there shouldn't be a war. In balance we think that there will not be a war." Well, this was a mistake. Why did we make that mistake after having given good advice? Well, we don't have a crystal ball, we don't know 100 per cent what is going to happen.

Fallaci: Let's face it, Mr. Colby. Saying that war is not going to happen when it's about to happen doesn't reflect very well on what you portray as the "best intelligence in the world." Nor was it the only case. Take Portugal, for instance. You hadn't the vaguest idea that the army would overthrow Caetano.

Colby: We did know something, despite Pike's report. We knew that there was unrest and dissent in the army. We reported it. But, as with the Arab-Israeli war, one may know the general background, and then make a mistake on little things. The fact is that Mr. Pike takes the little things. The fact is that Mr. Pike takes the little thing and applies it to the whole. It isn't true, as he says, that we had a total ignorance of the Portuguese situation . . . People see CIA under every sofa. People see CIA all the time, even in a contest for the best sheepdog. We really haven't the time to be in every village. It is reasonable to think that, later, in Portugal, we had to work harder on what was happening.

Fallaci: . . . There is another

thing that puzzles me when you say that CIA is the best intelligence in the world. Is it really? Hasn't KGB been more successful than you?

Colby: Oh, no. Besides, it's so different, you can't compare. Most of the work of KGB, for instance, takes place inside the Soviet Union: they are the FBI, the CIA, the state police, the Carabinieri, everything. And most of its effort is there. Well, when they used to spy here they had some good operations, some very impressive ones. I mean the atom spies. When they recruited a young lady from the counterespionage section of our Department of Justice, for instance. She told them everything we knew about their spies, and this was a good operation indeed. And when they put a bug inside the shoe of one of our diplomats. That was very impressive too. Very. You know, those people are serving their government and I disagree with their philosophy, but about their professional side I must say that they can do a good job.

Fallaci: Mr. Colby, who wanted you out of CIA? Was it Kissinger?

Colby: No. Kissinger has always been a great supporter of intelligence and, though sometimes I agree with Kissinger and sometimes I disagree, we are not enemies . . . I am out of CIA because the President indicated that he wanted to offer me another job and . . . The President may have many reasons why he wants somebody else as head of CIA. It is his privilege. He is the President, not me. Make a change? Fine . . . Then the President offered me many jobs, good jobs, but I said that I could help more if I write a book about what intelligence really is. As I am doing. One on CIA and one on Vietnam.

Fallaci: And you do not feel bitter.

Colby: Not at all. I do not feel like a scapegoat.

Fallaci: Sure. What could shake your icy imperturbability? You never show your emotions, do you?

Colby: I am not emotional, I admit it. Just a few things bother me. For instance, what happened when I was nominated and some people put posters around Washington — posters illustrated with a very poor picture of me, by the way. They called me a murderer. And my children had to live with that. But it didn't really bother me. Not much. Oh, don't watch me like that. You're looking for something underneath which isn't there. It's all here on the surface, believe me. There is nothing behind or underneath. There are not two or three layers. I told you: I'm religious, I'm conservative . . .

Fallaci: Do your children ever call you "reactionary" or worse?

Colby: No. We have different views. They were against the war in Vietnam. We discuss things at the dinner table. And I admit that . . .

Fallaci: . . . you like Nixon?

Colby: I voted for him. He appointed me. And I think that, in international politics, he did a splendid job. Splendid. Just think of China, of the SALT agreement.

Fallaci: Just think of Chile, of Cyprus. Mr. Colby, I'm exhausted. Only when I interviewed [Portuguese Communist party chief Alvaro] Cunhal did I suffer as much as I did today with you.

Colby: Tell me, tell me: what kind of fellow is he?

Fallaci: I told you. In the end, a type like you.

Colby: What?

Fallaci: Yes, a priest like you. Oh, Mr. Colby! You'll never know how much you two resemble each other. Had you been born on the other side of the barricade, you would have been a perfect Stalinist.

Colby: I reject such a statement. But . . . well . . . it might be. No, no. It might not. And I am not a priest. At the most, I'm a puritan.

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you don't admit it. I am also trying to explain to you that you cannot be the policemen of the world.

Colby: After World War I we said that the war had been wrong and badly fought, and we had a period of innocence. We reduced our army to something smaller than the Rumanian army, 150,000, and we decided to have an open diplomacy, and the secretary of state dissolved the intelligence service, saying that gentlemen don't read others' mail. And we thought that we were going to live in a world of gentlemen, and that we wouldn't involve ourselves any more in foreign affairs. Then we had problems rising in Europe. But we did not intervene. And we had problems in Manchuria, it was too far away. But we did not intervene. Then Spain. And we were neutral.

But it did not work very well, no, and we had economic problems, authoritarian leaders who believed they could dominate their neighbors. And then came World War II, and after World War II we did as we had done. In 1945 we dissolved our intelligence service, the OSS, and we said: Peace

again. But the cold war started and it was obvious that Stalin was . . . becoming a threat in Greece, in Turkey, in Iran. And we learned the lesson. And we applied the lesson. We collected our security again, and we attempted to contain the expansionist Soviet Union through NATO and through the Marshall plan and through CIA. Liberals and conservatives together, both of us convinced that we had to help. I was one of those liberals. I had been a radical when I was a boy and . . .

Fallaci: *For Christ's sake! How could you change that much?*

Colby: Clemenceau said that he who is not a radical when he is young has no heart; he who is not conservative when he's old has no brain. But let me go on. NATO worked. The containment of Soviet expansionism worked. The subversive plans of the Communists were frustrated. It wasn't the right against the left. It was a democratic solution. We decided that we would go any distance to fight for freedom. And in the course of this

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there were some situations in which local leaders were somewhat authoritarian or more authoritarian than people liked.

Fallaci: From Gen. Franco to Caetano, from Diem to Thieu, from Papadopoulos to Pinochet, without counting all the fascist dictators in Latin America, the Brazilian torturers for instance. And so, in the name of freedom, you became the supporters of all those who killed freedom on the other side.

Colby: Like in World War II when we supported Stalin's Russia against a greater threat. We work now in the same way we worked with him then. In the '50s wasn't communism the biggest threat? If you support some authoritarian leader against a Communist threat, you leave the option that the authoritarian state could become democratic in the future. With the Communists, the future offers no hope. I mean, I don't see any scandal in certain alliances. One makes an alliance in order to face a bigger threat. My government recognizes Pinochet's Chile as the legitimate government. True. But don't I accept that 200 million Russians live under Soviet communism? Pinochet is not going to conquer the world. Nobody is worried about Pinochet.

Fallaci: I'll tell you who's worried about Pinochet, Mr. Colby. The Chileans, first, who are imprisoned and persecuted and tortured and killed by Pinochet. Secondly, those who really care about freedom. Thirdly, the countries that are afraid to become a second Chile. Like mine.

Colby: You're so wrong in choosing Chile. If you read carefully the Senate report on Chile . . . you'll find that from 1964 we helped the demo-

Fallaci: . . . Had you answered with a lie . . . ?

Colby: I don't lie! And I suffer when they accuse me of lying . . . Sometimes I refuse to give information, sometimes I keep a secret; but never lie. My Congress won't let me, my press either. The head of intelligence in America cannot say that it is not true when it's true. Our intelligence is under the law, not outside the law . . .

cratic center parties against a man who said that he was associated with Castro and the Communists. CIA had no part in overthrowing Allende in 1973. Read my denial in the Senate report when I say: "with the exception [of] about six weeks in 1970."

Fallaci: Sure. November 1970 when Nixon called Richard Helms and ordered him to organize a coup to overthrow Allende, who had just won the elections.

Colby: It only lasted six weeks . . . And we did not succeed . . . We had no part, later.

Fallaci: Really? Tell me about the financing of the strikes that ruined Allende's government, Mr. Colby. Tell me about the interventions through ITT.

Colby: Well, we gave a little bit of money, yes. A tiny amount that, I remember, was about \$10,000. We gave it through other people. I mean we gave it to a group that passed it to another . . . The rest of our program in Chile was to support the central democratic forces from the threat of the left. The Senate committee has found no evidence against us, except in 1970. It wasn't our policy to overthrow Allende in 1973. We were looking to the elections of 1976 where we hoped the democratic forces would win. Certainly we did not help Allende but we are innocent of that coup. The coup came from the fact

that Allende was destroying the society and the economy in Chile, from the fact that he was not acting democratically as the Supreme Court of Chile and the Congress of Chile and the controller general said when issuing statements that Allende was outside the constitution. Even the free press had been suppressed by Allende . . .

Fallaci: What, Mr. Colby, are you out of your mind? But you cannot falsify history like that. The opposition press tormented Allende till the end.

Colby: The opposition papers had lots of difficulties under him. And saying that Allende was democratic . . . well, it is your opinion. There are his own words when he said that he wanted to suppress opposition. He was an extremist. And an oppressor. I have good information.