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'GOOD' AND 'BAD' SECRETS

CIA director William Colby sat down with *NEWSWEEK's* Evert Clark and Bruce van Voorst last week for his first interview since the domestic-spying scandal—and, true to his calling, he sometimes dodged and betrayed no trade secrets. Excerpts:

Q. Looking back at the recent troubles, do they suggest you have reached the point where there should be a full-fledged review of the agency's functions?

A. Various reviews of the agency's activities are of course already taking place and I would be delighted if they can clarify some of the gross misunderstandings of intelligence. I think that the image of intelligence in the normal observer's mind is very heavily that of the traditional intelligence spy, whereas intelligence today is far beyond that in terms of what it really is and what it does.

Any kind of review that increases public understanding of the real nature of intelligence today I think is very welcome, because then things fall into proportion.

Q. Is it possible, given your clandestine operations, to let Congress in on everything?

A. We've done it for years.

Q. Do they really know everything?

A. Well, we've done it in varying detail for varying things, let me put it that way. In other words, when we go up for appropriations presentations every year, we obviously summarize ... But you'll get the question how many people do you have in country X, and we'll answer it. Or, what kind of activities are you doing in country Y, and we'll answer it ... Now we haven't gone into every detail, no.

Q. Does the fact that today's spy is no James Bond mean that there's less need for secrecy in some areas?

A. Oh, we need secrecy. There are some "traditional" secrets that don't need to be secret any more ... There are some "bad" secrets—mistakes we've made, things that have gone wrong, sure. But there are some "good" secrets, necessary secrets ... We have people whose lives and reputations depend on our secrecy. We have technical systems whose effectiveness can be annulled if it comes out we are doing a particular thing.

Q. Does détente, the changing diplomatic atmosphere, make your job any easier?

A. The openness of relations with countries obviously helps the modern intelligence business because this business is based upon the flow of information. The more information that

can flow normally, the less you have to go after in the hard way ... At the same time, of course, there is a certain lessening of the intensity of feeling that I think led to a much tighter discipline about our own secrets at the time when we were under major threat. And I think that people who twenty years ago would not have talked to a newsmen, today will ... Actually, quite frankly, I think that's one of the crying needs we have for legislation right now—some better protection of our secrets, I mean, because the present legislation is just hopeless ... We're talking about the question of how, and consequently whether, you can run an intelligence service in our free society.



Wally McNamee—Newsweek
CIA chief Colby: 'A difficult time'

Q. Is that question becoming even more serious to you?

A. It does become serious when the stuff leaks out and when ex-employees are free to tell what they knew ... I think it's terrible, frankly, because this puts people's reputations in bad shape, it puts people in physical danger.

Q. Would you go further and suggest that we have a British-like system restricting what is printed?

A. No ... It could only apply to people who consciously join the intelligence business ... It would not apply to the journalist or any publisher.

Q. Speaking of being hurt abroad, are there measurable ways of defining whether what's happened already has influenced the agency's operations in liaison or recruiting?

A. We have some pretty clear indications. I can't give you any numbers but we have had individual

agents who have said, "Thanks, but no thanks. I really have to quit." And we've had various foreigners who have spoken to me about their concern about whether we can keep their secrets. The next step on that is they start to hold up on the sensitivity of what they give you ... It's a very difficult time for the people in the agency. Most of the accusations are grossly overblown and exaggerated, and the problem [is] how can we keep our secrets ... in this state of constant hullabaloo ...

I mean ... take my time—what is my time really supposed to be spent on? It's supposed to be spent on what's going on in the Soviet Union and China and all those places around the world, and making sure that this information is funneled and accurate and considered and gets to the right places. And you know [instead] I spend a substantial part of my time bouncing around with problems like Watergate, the Chile exposé, the Marchetti thing [ex-agent Victor Marchetti's book, which the CIA tried to censor]—and now this.

Q. I'm still very much concerned with this whole question of gray areas because it's my impression, even from what little we've picked up from the Colby report, that the agency has done some questionable things.

A. I think you have a spectrum from something which is, you know, absolutely clear—there's no question about your ability to do it—to something over here which is absolutely wrong, no question about it, it's criminal action. Now, some of the things that are alleged may have been in between—you begin to get a little policy judgment. Well, it's a bit wrong, but is it really? You need a criminal intent to actually be at fault, and if you did it under certain circumstances, you know, nobody in his right mind would prosecute or do anything.

Q. But I've been told that your report concedes the possibility that things were done, and I read possibility to mean again a question of interpretation.

A. Well, not to talk about the report, because I really can't talk about that, but what I could say is that in the 25 years' history of this agency, just like the 25 years' history of almost any other agency or corporation or even perhaps publishing house, various things happened that maybe shouldn't have happened, you know, but they're exceptional, few and far between, that kind of thing.

Q. But you think that the agency has recovered from whatever might have gone on and that you're quite able now to face up to Congress and investigation.

A. Yes.