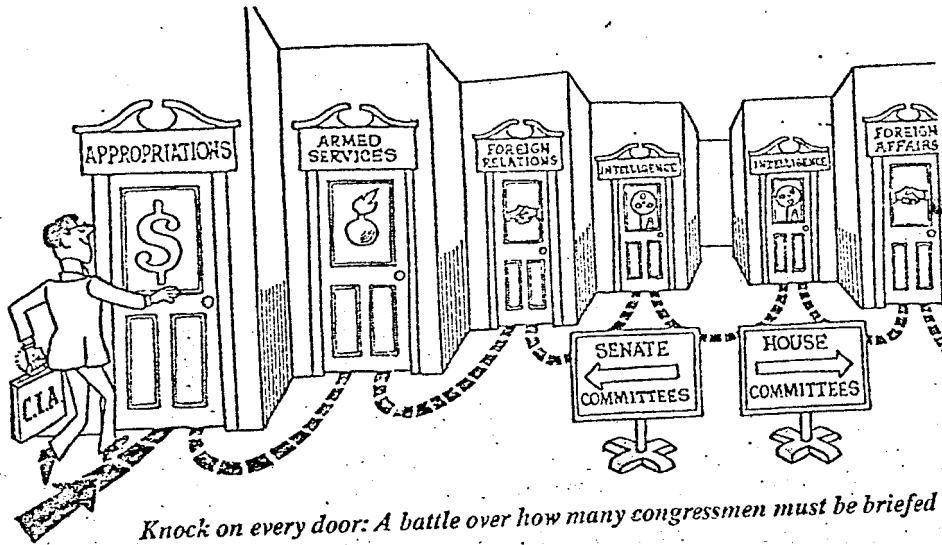


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Knock on every door: A battle over how many congressmen must be briefed

UNSHACKLING THE CIA

Could some secret plan by the Central Intelligence Agency have blocked the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan? Could an All-American James Bond have saved the Shah's throne in Iran, or at least prevented the taking of U.S. hostages? Not very likely. But with the U.S. on the defensive in trouble spots around the world, the CIA is fast regaining favor in Washington. Agency supporters are demanding that the CIA be "unshackled" and permitted wider latitude for covert operations. The new get-tough mood comes just when Congress is considering a new charter for the CIA—and a major fight is brewing over how much oversight Congress should have on CIA plans for covert activity around the world.

At the heart of the debate is the 1974 Hughes-Ryan amendment, which requires the President to approve in detail most CIA plans for covert operations. It also provides that eight Senate and House committees—with a total of more than 200 members—be informed of such operations in advance or soon after they get under way. The amendment was passed after dramatic disclosures about CIA "destabilization" plots against Chile and secret political intervention. Critics of the amendment now say it poses too great a risk of dangerous security leaks and thus has a "chilling effect" on covert action—the gray area that goes beyond diplomacy but stops short of open warfare. Informing so many Congressional committees, says one senior White House aide, is tantamount to "making a formal announcement in Lafayette Park." As a result, says another Administration security expert, "you don't even contemplate certain ideas because you have to share them with lots of people whose motives you're not sure of."

director Stansfield Turner claims that on a least one occasion, an allied intelligence service "withdrew a proposal for a joint action... beneficial to both nations" because of the Hughes-Ryan reporting requirements.

KNEE JERK: The White House wants to change the disclosure requirements of the law and make them part of the new CIA charter pending in Congress. The changes would limit CIA briefings to the House and Senate intelligence committees—which have only 27 members. The proposed new charter would also broaden the scope of covert operations that could be carried on without specific Presidential approval. "At one point, people wanted to write scores and scores of restraints," says one White House aide. "It was a knee-jerk reaction [to] all the abuses... a very important application of checks and balances. But now we need to put more balance into the checks."

Not everyone agrees. Among those most

operations to be able to ask the right questions... There is no eagerness here to be cut out of the conduit." What's more, many congressmen are outraged at the idea that they are leak-prone—especially when a number of serious intelligence leaks in recent years may very well have come from sources in the executive branch.

PRESSURE: Yet in the supercharged mood created by Iran and Afghanistan, some easing of the requirement for Congressional briefings is probably inevitable. What worries Senate Intelligence Committee chairman Birch Bayh and others is that other needed reforms will be lost along the way. "There is pressure to push ahead rapidly and that might mean having to set aside

some of the important provisions of a charter in the interests of giving the agency more latitude," said Kentucky Democrat Walter D. Huddleston, chairman of the intelligence subcommittee working on the new legislation. "But I would hate to have that happen because it would be awfully difficult to come back and win a full charter."

Aside from modifying rules on covert action, the proposed charter would put strict limits on intelligence operations targeted on U.S. citizens, and it would bar the CIA from hiring journalists, clergymen or academics as agents. On the other hand, one version of the charter would also limit the CIA's obligations under the Federal Freedom of Information Act; the CIA would have to respond only when U.S. citizens were seeking personal information about themselves. At present, the CIA must queries from foreigners as

Huddleston (left) and Bayh: Memories of past abuses



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