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TRANSCRIPT

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SUBJECT U.S. Involvement in Guatemala

DIANE REHM: Hello and welcome to the Diane Rehm Show on 88.5-FM.

In public testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee yesterday, acting CIA Director William Studeman denied his agency's complicity in the murders of an American and a Guatemalan rebel. While defending the agency's conduct, Admiral Studeman admitted that Congress should have been told earlier of the CIA's involvement with a Guatemalan colonel who is now implicated in the killings.

Last week President Clinton ordered a broad investigation of U.S. actions in Guatemala.

Joining me to talk about implications of yesterday's testimony and recent developments in the case: Jennifer Harbury, an American lawyer and widow of the slain Guatemalan rebel leader; and Melvin Goodman, professor of security at the National War College and former senior analyst at the CIA. Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner joins us by phone.

We'll take your calls during the next half-hour. Join us on 202-885-8850.

Good morning to all of you. Thanks for joining us.

MELVIN GOODMAN: Good morning, Diane.

JENNIFER HARBURY: Good morning and thanks for inviting us.

REHM: Jennifer Harbury, first of all, let me say how sorry I am of the news that you have now learned, and that is that your husband is dead. What did you learn from the testimony yesterday?

HARBURY: Unfortunately, from the testimony itself yesterday, I was not able to learn very much at all. I, of course, have been

informed by Congressman Torricelli that my husband was ordered executed by Colonel Alpirez, a School of the Americas graduate, the man who also ordered the killing of Mr. Michael DeVine, a U.S. citizen, back in '89. And also, Colonel Alpirez was on the CIA payroll for a long period of time, and certainly at the time of both killings. I have not able to learn where my husband's buried, when he was killed, or how I can obtain his remains.

REHM: Mr. Goodman, what was your reaction to the testimony that was taken yesterday? It was extraordinary in and of itself, in that it took place in public.

MELVIN GOODMAN: Yes, it was. The problem is we've learned once again that the world has changed but the CIA hasn't. The CIA has a great deal of difficulty in acknowledging that the Senate Committee on Intelligence is there for oversight purposes. And, of course, there was nearly a four-year period when the CIA was not reporting to the Oversight Committee.

We also see that the CIA was very slow to respond in terms of making their own judgments. They asked the Justice Department for a reading of the situation. They waited four or five months for the Justice Department to come back with a determination and still could not cut themselves off from an informant who they knew was involved with the use of terrorism.

And finally, we see once again the CIA hiding behind this mantra of "sources and methods." I don't think outsiders are interested in sources and methods. We're interested in how the CIA is doing its business. And when we look through windows, like the Ames affair and the Guatemalan affair and the politicization of intelligence, we see a lot of evidence that suggests they do not do their business in a fair way.

REHM: Admiral Turner, CIA does not, or does, do its business in a fair way?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, normally I agree with almost everything Mel Goodman says about the CIA. He's a very informed person. I happen to feel in this case that, from what I've learned, the CIA, once they determined that the colonel was involved in the killing of Michael DeVine, broke their ties with him. Though they did, as Melvin says, referred to the Justice Department and wait for a ruling from the Justice Department, because the Justice Department did not want them to sever their total relationship with the colonel until they determined whether they were going to prosecute the colonel in this country for breaking our laws.

They determined, in four or five months, that they could not bring him to trial here, and therefore they told the CIA to go ahead and sever their relationship with him. And it's my understanding that that relationship was severed. They did pay him

the money that he had previously earned and had been put into a reserve escrow type account for him. But that was not paying him for any more services from the time they broke off with him.

REHM: Mr. Goodman, do you want to comment on that?

GOODMAN: Well, yes. I have some problems with that.

DeVine was killed in June of 1990 and the CIA didn't break its relationship with Alpirez until the summer of '92. That is a two-year period. I don't think the Justice Department ever recommended breaking this relationship. This was a decision that the CIA made serendipitously, perhaps, about the time that Mr. Bamaca was also killed in the summer of '92.

My problem is that the CIA is so tightly involved in repressive regimes, in El Salvador, in Honduras, in Guatemala -- we've seen it historically -- that I think they have a lot of knowledge of the events that go on in these situations. I'm not saying they knew in advance or they knew at the time of, but they have ways of finding out intelligence in a very quick fashion in these regimes.

REHM: Ms. Harbury?

HARBURY: And just the fact that a large lump sum payment was made to Colonel Alpirez by the CIA approximately during the period, either just before or just after, but during the time period that they're telling me that my husband was executed without a trial, when he was a prisoner of war. That has very disturbing implications.

It's also very disturbing to me that, given those very serious implications, no one will tell me the date that that order of execution was given. When was the order executed? Right before or right after the money was given to him? I want to know.

REHM: Senator William Cohen said yesterday that he believed that the information was not merely withheld but that the agency, CIA, intentionally misled the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Is that your view Mr. Goodman?

GOODMAN: Oh yes. I think it's the only conclusion you can come to. If you look at the CIA's human rights report in '92, it is very misleading, and I would have to say dissembling, in the way it treats information it learned in Guatemala.

REHM: Admiral Turner, what is the balance that needs to be maintained with the public's right to know, or indeed the Senate Intelligence Committee's right to know, and the need for secrecy on the part of the CIA? How do you balance those two things?

TURNER: Well, they're quite different with respect to the public and with respect to the Congress. Because what we did in this country in 1976 was establish a system whereby the Congress acts as surrogates for the public with respect to the secret, legitimately secret activities of the CIA. And there certainly are legitimate secrets there. I think they exaggerate those secrets. I think they often take advantage of what Mel Goodman referred to earlier as the protection of their sources and methods to fail to say things in public that they could say.

But, given that, there's no excuse for the CIA not adequately informing the Senate Intelligence Committee in secret sessions about any of this material.

As to what they could say in public, it's very difficult for you and me to judge what that would have done, perhaps putting at risk the life of some of their own agents down there. So what you can tell the public is quite different from what you can tell the Senate. There's no excuse for not keeping the Senate or the House Intelligence Committee adequately informed.

REHM: Mr. Goodman?

GOODMAN: Well, I generally agree with Stan. And he's written a very good book on this subject. But the problem is you only put a source at risk if he is a sole source and an obvious source on a sensitive subject. In the case of Guatemala, we had multiple sources and it's clear that there were many, many CIA informants in the G-2 and in the Guatemalan military. So I don't think any specific agent would have been put at risk.

REHM: Can you talk briefly, Mr. Goodman, about why the CIA originally developed these informants and these covert liaison relationships?

MR. GOODMAN: Well, the pattern in Central America is clearly oriented toward Fidel Castro, and the obsession is with controlling Fidel Castro and controlling Cuba. And this is where the world has changed, but where the CIA has had difficulty in making changes. Most of the informants, most of the agents are organized around a principle of limiting the Marxist revolution in Central America. Therefore, there's a tendency to ignore terrorism, to ignore repressive regimes, to ignore situations in Guatemala where you need severe land redistribution. This is what is important to American national interests, not the kind of so-called intelligence collection we were doing in Guatemala.

REHM: Jennifer Harbury, you have undergone two hunger strikes, you have succeeded in at least bringing this information to the front pages of the nation's newspapers and getting the Congress to at last focus on it. What do you want to see happen now?

HARBURY: Well, first of all I would like to see all documents in my case and in a number of other very key cases declassified immediately, with necessary protections for those informants or those contacts who are not implicated in criminal acts. Because I don't think national security should ever be used as a shield to criminal behavior. After those documents are declassified, I would like to review them very carefully. I would invite the House and the Senate to do the same, and then hold intensive hearings on the misconduct of CIA and the State Department in Central America for the last 20 years. I think that very terrible things would be uncovered, based on my own experience for the last decade in Guatemala and based on my knowledge of things that came out of the Truth Commission in El Salvador. There's enough evidence already to warrant very intensive hearings.

I also intend to proceed legally against both institutions if the documents warrant it after I've been able to see them and review them very carefully. My goal is to make sure that -- given that there are 150,000 civilians dead or disappeared in Guatemala at the hands of the death squads that our government put into power in 1954, trained, funded and sheltered, often, as in the case of my husband's situation, and also given the 440 Mayan villages that have been wiped off the map, I intend to see that this never happens again.

REHM: Mr. Goodman, can you comment?

GOODMAN: Yes.

I would like to see the Aspin Commission, which is looking at the roles and missions of the CIA, set up a special subcommittee on the Directorate of Operations to scrutinize how they do their business, how they recruit their agents, and what are the objectives in terms of this recruitment and intelligence gathering. And also, I think we should give serious consideration as to whether we need to have CIA representation in Central America. We have national interests in Central America, in Guatemala. But I don't think these are national interests that the CIA is needed to address.

REHM: Admiral Turner, the CIA is already under a certain amount of scrutiny and even attack. This situation surely cannot help the outlook for the CIA.

What's your own reaction?

TURNER: My own reaction is that the CIA is being scrutinized by the Intelligence Committees, it's being scrutinized by the Aspin Commission, and that I'm glad it happened that these events have come to the surface and Ms. Harbury and others have brought them out at this time, because we do need to review the whole perspective of the CIA and where it's going and what it's doing.

And I think this will add to that. And I believe out of the fact that we we'll have a new Director coming in and these commissions and these investigations taking place, that we can over the next year or so develop some new ground rules, some new procedures for the CIA that will shape it in better directions.

REHM: How serious, Mr. Goodman, do you think these charges and these accusations that have recently come to light, how serious are they for the future of the CIA?

GOODMAN: Oh, I think they're extremely serious. Because what they have done is to remind us once again of the pattern of deceit we saw in El Salvador in the 1980s, when there was also a cover-up of very sensitive information. And also it now gives John Deutch, who will be confirmed later this month or in May, essentially a free ticket to come into the CIA and really change the way the CIA does its business and move out many of the people who were involved with this pattern of deceit in the past. That is extremely important.

REHM: I guess that's the question. Considering the long history of the CIA and the entrenched pattern of secrecy and the cloak of security, can the operations of the CIA truly be changed by any one person, Mr. Goodman?

GOODMAN: I think they can be changed by a powerful leader who's willing to make very severe changes in the organization. He will have to move people out of the organization. Director Woolsey did not do that.

REHM: Admiral Turner?

TURNER: Well, I'm biased in this because we didn't have any of these scandals on my time and Jimmy Carter's time, and I think it can be done. I think we did do it. The Director of Operations has got to be brought under control. I made a strong effort to do that and was resoundingly criticized by the press, by the CIA and lots of others for having tried that. But it was what was needed at that time; it's what's needed today.

REHM: Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner.

We're going to open the phones in just a moment, 202-885-8850.

* * *

REHM: Let's go first to Annapolis.

Michael, you're on the air.

MICHAEL: Hello, Diane. I'd like to thank you for bringing enlightenment to the area.

REHM; Thank you so much.

MICHAEL: I want to talk about the National Security Agency, located at Ft. Meade, Maryland and operating out embassies and military missions in Central America. Admiral Studeman was Director of the National Security Agency at the time they intercepted messages about Jennifer Harbury's husband. And now he's Acting Director of the CIA. He's culpable on both sides.

REHM: All right, Michael. Thanks for your call.

How do you feel about that, Jennifer?

HARBURY: I think it raises very, very serious issues. And again, I wish to see the documents. Why have they not been given to me?

REHM: To what extent to you believe those documents will be forthcoming, Mr. Goodman?

GOODMAN: Well, I don't know about the link between the NSA and the CIA. I think that we tend to overreach when we talk about the destruction of documents at NSA. I think that is a very difficult thing to do with the procedures out there. But I think there's going to have to be a lot of White House pressure on the CIA to get timely release of documentation. That is extremely.

REHM: Good morning, Larry. You're on the Diane Rehm Show.

LARRY: ...I worked at the agency covering Central America from roughly '86 through '89, wound up as the senior analyst out there. And I've got to really disagree with what Mel was saying. Mel's quite qualified to comment on the coverages of the Soviet Union. But in this case it was not the preoccupation with Fidel. There were really two preoccupations.

Number one, the military's threat to the civilian democracy. I know from what we were covering both in terms of the human reports as well as the analytical line that was being taken, there was no concern about the insurgency. That was not an issue.

REHM: Mr. Goodman, do you want to respond?

GOODMAN: Yes.

Well, that's clearly not true. The obsession that the CIA had on the operational side -- the operational obsession. I'm not talking about an intelligence analyst, such as this caller. I'm talking about the operational role, which really has less to do with intelligence and more with policy, was clearly oriented towards stopping so-called Marxist revolution. And again, this Marxist revolution concept is an overarching idea that in the case of Guatemala really had no meaning whatsoever.

LARRY: Mel, I challenge you to give me any evidence of that. Because I've traveled to Guatemala, I've been there both on TDY, I was in the station, I've talked to the people. I know what was being covered. I know where the focus was.

Now, clearly there's an element of Casablanca going on here with, you know, like the inspector who was just shocked and dismayed to find out that there was gambling in his establishment. For people to resurrect this image of the rogue elephant running about is, you know, frankly, I think, a little nonsensical. Because the shift -- you know, the CIA's not doing what it was doing in 1954 in overthrowing Arbenz. The CIA shift was in keeping track of what the military was up to.

There was not an insurgency problem in Guatemala, since at least '86. I mean the UNRG and the other groups had basically retreated into Mexico and were very inactive.

REHM: Mr. Goodman, last comment. Or Jennifer Harbury.

GOODMAN: I'll let Jennifer answer that one.

HARBURY: Well, I have been in and out of Guatemala now for a decade and I lived there for 2 years, '85 and '86. I heard the Guatemalan army nonstop reporting on the threat of the communist invasion from Cuba. You know, the Marxist uprising, etcetera. etcetera. I've also heard very similar language about the Marxist problem, etcetera, etcetera, from State Department officials and other U.S. officials. There was clearly always that obsession in Guatemala by our government. It was obvious. It's always been there. There's also obviously been a clear paranoia of the URNG forces.

Now, I assume, sir, that you have never been up to the volcano to actually visit any base camps. I have. I've also been throughout the underground interviewing different people for my books that I've written and the one that I plan to write on. And the idea that they've all retreated into Mexico is somewhat laughable. They have carried out combat far from villages since the mid '80s, since they learned in the early '80s that if you do combat near a village, that village will be massacred. For human rights reasons, they've fought farther away. As of 1990, they were very close to the capital, as a matter of fact.

REHM: In Germantown. Sam, you're on the Diane Rehm Show.

SAM: ...I have a question and a comment.

My questions is, specifically, how much U.S. taxpayer money is being spent on payoffs and training of military personnel in South America?

And secondly, I wanted to make a comment. I would like to express my disgust with the vile and morally reprehensible practice of supporting murderers and anti-democratic and anti-American personnel in South America. I don't think you support -- you oppose communism by building up fascist dictators. That's not the way that you build up South America. And I think a lot of the problems of illegal aliens coming into the U.S. stems directly from our own practice of creating such a difficult and dangerous environment in the Central America and South America region that these people are forced to come here

REHM: All right, Sam. Thanks for your call.

Admiral Turner, do you want to comment?

TURNER: Well, I think I'd like to reemphasize the point that it is my understanding that when the CIA learned of Colonel Alpirez's involvement in the DeVine murder, it was October 1991; and they stopped their relationship with him, put it on hold until the spring of '92, when the Justice Department cleared them to sever that relationship because we were not going to take legal action. I think the CIA's record here is not quite as bad as we're portraying. I don't want to try to condone it in its entirety because it's clear, and they have acknowledged, they've made a number of mistakes here.

When you are dealing in this underground world of intelligence agents, you're not always going to find the most upstanding people. What the agency has the difficult job of doing is sorting out those who are sleazy in their own way but are still useful to us and still are not below the standards that we can accept. The colonel clearly was. And I think that when they found out that he was, then they dropped him.

REHM: What about the matter of direct U.S. financial assistance to the Guatemalan military? Apparently, the overt assistance stopped after the killing of Mr. DeVine in 1990, but the covert financial assistance from the CIA continued even in the face of that.

Mr. Goodman?

GOODMAN: Right. This is a problem that's going to require a solution. The overt assistance stopped in under what the CIA calls a liaison relationship. They continued covert payments. Under the special understanding between the CIA and the Senate Intelligence Committee, the CIA does not have to brief the Oversight Committee on liaison accounts. This makes no sense to me whatsoever. And I don't know why the Oversight Committee would give up its authority in one of the most sensitive areas in which the CIA does business, especially when the Oversight Committee has no confidence that the CIA is acting with good judgment.

What comes out of this affair is very bad judgment, at the very minimum.

REHM: Well, you talked earlier about the kinds of changes that will need to take place at the CIA itself. What about the relationship between the CIA and the Senate Intelligence or Oversight Committees?

GOODMAN: Well, I think the Oversight Committee is going to have to get more zealous. It's -- partly, it's the fault of the CIA and Studeman's passive voice of things slipping under the rug, rather than being swept under the rug. But you've never had the Oversight Committee, to me, being rigorous enough in demanding oversight, in demanding accountability and responsibility. So there's going to have to be more energy on both sides of this fence for the relationship to work.

REHM: In Howard County. Good morning, Leslie. You're on the air.

LESLIE: Yes, good morning. Diane, thank you very much. This is wonderful. We really needed this.

And Jennifer, thank you so much for what you have done for all of us Latin Americans who have been following the issues for so long and have been so upset about the way the U.S. has responded. The U.S. Government, I would say.

To me -- and I have three quick comments I would like to make.

The first one is that it is un-understandable to me, it's hard to understand how an institution like the CIA continues to exist, knowing, like we have for so many years, that it has been responsible for the mining of harbors, like in Nicaragua; the overthrowing of sovereign -- of democratically elected governments, like in Chile, in Guatemala and so on. This, to me, reflects something terribly wrong within the U.S. Government.

REHM: All right. Okay.

LESLIE: Okay.

And the one point that I want to bring up is that it bothers me terribly, as a person from the Third World, that the U.S. Government only moves when one of its citizens has died or has been hurt. This doesn't take anything away from Jennifer. because she's speaking for the voiceless. But the way the news are reflected and presented, the U.S. Government only moves when its people get hurt. It doesn't bother them that 150,000 or so has disappeared.

REHM: Leslie, I appreciate your call.

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Ms. Harbury?

HARBURY: I also very much appreciate Leslie's call.

And I agree with you, Leslie. It hurts me very, very much to think that my husband, who grew up starving on a coffee plantation, starving and illiterate, was then able to spend 17 years under bombing and gunfire, losing everyone that was close to him, and then be tortured to death in a secret prison; and the only reason anyone even knows his name is because I can stand up and hold his photograph. I, a white person from the United States. Why is it that, when no one would have even noticed in his own right?

That hurts me also. I agree with you.

REHM: Mr. Goodman, her earlier question: Why does the CIA continue to need to exist and operate in the post-Cold War world?

GOODMAN: Well, I think you need an independent Central Intelligence Agency to make assessments and estimates and evaluations of international affairs. That must be done. The problem to me is larger and its looking at American foreign policy in South America, because there is a lot of behavior on the part of the United States that consistent with colonial behavior. And the CIA has grown up under this national security system that allows colonial attitudes to dominate its policy in South America and in Central America.

So, we have to make major changes in policy before we can make major changes in the agency. The agency is only part of a much larger problem,.

REHM: Do you think many more revelations will be forthcoming here, in terms of both the Harbury -- her husband's case, as well as that of Michael DeVine?

GOODMAN: Well, the Guatemala case is not unique. We saw this in El Salvador and we've seen this in Honduras. So I would not be surprised, once the CIA got into its files and looked at the work of its informants and its agents overseas, that there was a lot of knowledge of repressive practices and terrorism. That would not be surprising to me.

REHM: Admiral Turner, what do you expect to be forthcoming here in the next few months?

TURNER: I think there will be more disclosures. I think what's happened here, Diane, is there are two functions in the CIA. There's the intelligence function -- collection information and analyzing it, interpreting it -- and then there's what we call covert action, which is interfering in the events of other

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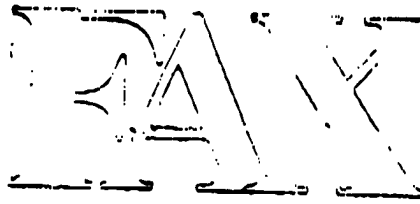
countries. And we've been talking largely about the latter today.

When the Reagan Administration came in 1981, they went wild with covert actions, and we're now reaping the unfortunate results of that. And I think we'll probably find, if the Senate and the House Intelligence Committee dig into it, that there were more activities in other Latin American countries under the name of covert action that we really would not like to have had happen and we don't want have continued today.

REHM: Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner; Melvin Goodman, professor of security at the National War College and a former senior analyst at the CIA; and Jennifer Harbury, widow of a slain Guatemalan rebel leader.

Thank you all so much for joining me morning.

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