

NAVY LEAGUE DINNER  
New York, N.Y.

Monday, 13 November 1978

For a Naval officer who has been on detached duty, so to speak, for 20 months now, it is very nice to be back in the Navy family tonight and particularly with this warm and wonderful New York Navy League which is such an important part of that Navy family. I have thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of these past 20 months as Director of Central Intelligence, but I have missed the Navy.

I was rather surprised when the President called me in Naples to ask me to take this job. I don't suppose I should have been surprised, as I am the fourth admiral to have had the job. There has only been one Army and one Air Force type in the job. I still wonder if Presidents' think admirals are more intelligent or just better at skulking around in dark alleys?

Since becoming Director of Central Intelligence, I've resisted speaking with Navy audiences like this because I felt I should tend to my own last in intelligence.

Yet I was pleased to accept this invitation for two reasons. One is my great respect for Jack Bergen who invited me. As you know, Jack has worked tirelessly for the Navy over the years and has made the Navy more friends than anyone else I can think of. I know every one of you here appreciates that.

Secondly, as DCI I've seen and been grateful for the impact which groups like the Navy League can have and are having on the security of our country. Looking at the intelligence field over the last 12 months, I've seen a dramatic turnaround in public opinion as a result of the support groups like you are giving to us.

Twelve months ago I was being pilloried in the press for having reduced the bloated bureaucracy. The liberal press criticized me severely for firing some of those wonderful old spys they'd been praising so long. Twelve months ago anyone who had ever helped the CIA was suspect. The press clamored for their names to ensure that nobody missed receiving his scarlet letter.

While extremists will always criticize anything that the CIA does, in the past six to eight months I've seen a reversal of this attitude by the responsible press and the public in general. There is much greater recognition that, for this country to know what is going on around the world, we must have an effective intelligence organization. Your influence and clear understanding of this has played an important role.

There is, however, still adequate recognition that to do the job of national security requires that we be able to preserve necessary secrets. We are the most open society in history. There is little that we think or do that is not known to other people. Yet, if we are to be prepared to counter the inimical actions of other nations, we must be able to make some preparations in secret.

We cannot afford, for instance, to develop expensive military weapon systems or devices for collecting intelligence, and then disclose their particulars to countries against whom we may find it necessary to use them. In almost all cases, you can find some counter if you know enough about the basic system. We cannot afford to enter into SALT negotiations or other treaties if the terms on which we are going to negotiate are disclosed in advance.

We must also be able to act secretly if that seems in our national interest. One of the cardinal principles of our foreign policy since the founding of this Republic has been to eschew military conflict whenever our national objectives could be achieved by other means. We would prefer diplomacy, we would prefer negotiation, we would prefer to use economic leverage before resorting to military power. But, there are times when diplomacy, negotiation, or economic pressure simply will not work, and yet military intervention is undesirable or inappropriate. There are times when influence of any kind in a foreign country will not work if it is known to be coming from the outside, even though the results of that influence would be desirable for the country. At those times, it is extremely useful to be able to work quietly and secretly behind the scenes to help legitimate democratic forces which might not otherwise be able to withstand the pressures working against them.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Take an election in a democratic country where there is a serious challenge by the Communist Party. If we know from intelligence that the local Communist Party is

being financed and helped through the Soviet embassy, should we stand by and watch democracy unfairly crushed? Or should we help democratic leaders stand up to this pressure? I am not talking about rigging an election. I am talking about trying to bolster the democratic elements in making their own case to their public.

The answer is never clear cut. Each case requires a separate decision which must be made on a complex set of judgments. But there have been times in the past when valued allies have been able to withstand these kinds of pressures only because of our secret support.

Another instance is the growing problem of international terrorism. The Intelligence Community is very actively involved in countering terrorism today, world-wide. Here, we try to understand what is going on, and even to penetrate terrorist organizations. By getting someone accepted inside a terrorist organization, we can thwart their plans or otherwise influence what they do, but if we cannot conceal our hand in this game we might as well abandon our role.

Over the years, there have been some brilliant successes for our country in this area of covert influencing. Unquestionably, there is a reduced role for this kind of quiet, unattributed intervention today. Nonetheless, I still sincerely believe that we must keep, as an option, a capability to secretly influence events overseas.

Whether it's just gaining information or it's attempting to influence events, our intelligence activities today are under threat because of our lessened ability to keep secrets. In speaking to the

National Press Club recently, I pointed out an interesting juxtaposition in a morning newspaper. On the front page there were two stories. One was about the pending prosecution of two officials of ITT charged with perjury before Congress concerning events in Chile some years ago. The thrust of the story was that the Central Intelligence Agency was delaying or frustrating the prosecution of the case because of our reluctance to release necessary documents. Interestingly, next to this story was one about a murder trial in New Jersey in which a New York Times reporter refused to disclose some of his notes which the defendant claimed were necessary to prove himself innocent. That case was settled, the reporter went to jail for a time, but has never disclosed his notes.

While seeming to be quite different, these are analogous problems of protecting sources. If either newsmen or intelligence agencies did not honor the private relationships with sources which we depend on for inside information, both the sources and our information would vanish.

Newspapermen feel very strongly about protecting their sources; they are very quick to criticize us for wanting to protect ours.

Let me assure you that I recognize that secrecy in government is a potentially harmful practice. Too much secrecy can staunch the flow of necessary information and can impede justice. On the other hand, the inability to keep some secrets can increase the country's vulnerability and can cripple our ability to collect intelligence at all.

We as a nation must return to an understanding that some level of secrecy is legitimate even in our open society. It's easy to assume that public officials use secrecy primarily to cover up wrongdoing. It is also easy to accept every whistle-blower as a hero. But, as with all generalizations, they are apt to mislead, and that can be dangerous. When we emphasize criticizing and tearing down society more than we do building it up, we are in for problems.

We should recognize that there is a need for some privacy in every business, in every newspaper, in every one of our private lives. The need is no less great on the part of the government. But, because intelligence is a risk-taking business and because there is so much more at stake if the wrong things are kept secret, there must be some way that you can be sure what is being kept secret is not wrongdoing. Here the Intelligence Community does not ask for a passe-partout.

Out of these past several years of intense public criticism, a series of checks has been forged that will assure the public that we are not abusing the sensitive trust that we have, nor abusing the privilege of secrecy.

How have we gone about this? A series of mechanisms have been created to check on the day-to-day activities of intelligence organizations.

The most revolutionary change in American intelligence in the past three years has been the establishment of an oversight process external to the Intelligence Community itself; resident in both the Executive and

the Legislative Branches. This oversight process checks on whether intelligence activities are in fact being carried out as they should.

The first oversight activity is the Intelligence Oversight Board. This Board has been in existence for over three years. It presently consists of former Senator Gore, former Governor Scranton, and Mr. Thomas Farmer of Washington. They work for the President of the United States directly. Anyone who believes that improper intelligence activities are being conducted can communicate with them; they will investigate those allegations and report their findings to the President.

Beyond this, for over two years in the Senate, and over a year in the House, we have had Select Committees on Intelligence dedicated exclusively to overseeing the intelligence process. The relationship between these committees and the Intelligence Community is cooperative and helpful, but it is definitely one of oversight and supervision. We report to these committees regularly, and are clearly accountable to them for what we do.

Even in this short span of several years, the Intelligence Community has come to recognize the positive values of Congressional oversight. Ultimate accountability is essential to responsible action. And where the stakes are high, where risks must be taken, and where patriotism is a driving motivation, it is salutary to know that you must account for what you do.

As a result of this oversight, I believe we are being more judicious. We are thinking not only of the benefits, but of the risks of intelligence activities before we take them on.

But, oversight too can be overdone. Too much and we could end up with intelligence by timidity and lose everything. That is not happening now, but I believe we must be alert and tread that fine line carefully; gaining the benefits of accountability, but not losing out to timidity.

The Congressional oversight committees today are developing new legislation which will codify these guidelines and procedures in Charters. I strongly support this activity.

In the first place, it will give us a legal foundation. Beyond that, it will provide the intelligence officer on the street in a foreign country, and those of us in headquarters, with a set of standards, a set of guidelines as to what is expected of us and what is not.

What does all this add up to? Well, it means that we are in the midst of an exciting and important, I would even venture an historic time in American intelligence. We are creating a new, uniquely American model of intelligence; a model that is tailored to the standards and the values of our country, but a model which at the same time is designed to ensure that we can have effective intelligence capabilities.

We are not there yet. In my view, it will take several more years for these procedures to settle out and these charters to be enacted and carried out. But I believe that we are on the right course and that we are generally finding a good balance between the risks of too much oversight, which can lead to leaks and problems of timidity, and enough oversight to assure the American public against potential abuses.



Throughout the process, the support of the American public and the understanding of the American public in what we are trying to do and in the importance of the intelligence function for this country will be very important.

I depend on you in the Navy League for some of that support. Although you are dedicated to a strong and effective Navy, I know, too, that you are dedicated to the broader goal of a strong and effective nation. That includes the Army, the Air Force, and the Intelligence Community as well.

Through your example and influence I look for a greater understanding on the part of the American public of the significant changes which have taken place in the Intelligence Community of the United States; and of the job we are trying to do. Thank you.