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RABORN IMAGE NO LONGER USEFUL TO WHITE HOUSE

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CPYRGHT (Peter Sereny Article: "News Commentary--'Changing of the Guard' at the CIA")

(Text) At his latest press conference, President Johnson announced that he has accepted "with regret" Admiral Raborn's resignation and has appointed in his place Richard Helms as the new director of CIA.

There are no official reasons given nor why the No. 1 U.S. spy chief had to disappear from the scene after barely 13 months in office. Initial commentaries therefore stressed that Raborn was no "expert" and lacked the foreign political knowledge necessary for his position. In contrast, his successor, the 53-year-old Helms, has worked in the American intelligence network since World War II, and has been the direct deputy for CIA chiefs in recent years.

Although this explanation is an obvious one, it is probable that President Johnson did not know this last April, when, to everybody's surprise, he appointed, of all people, outsider Admiral Raborn to head the CIA. People in the know in Washington then attributed the President's choice to the fact that Raborn was also a Texan who, in addition, was an influential Johnson agitator in the 1964 presidential election campaign both in the business world and among senators and who had military interests because of his official capacity with a California airplane company. Thus, with Raborn's appointment, Johnson wanted to kill two birds with one stone: Take the wind out of the sails of the congressional critics of the CIA, and insure through an "impartial" disciplined military man that the CIA would not start independent operations with which it could stab White House concepts in the back.

Raborn really had good connections, primarily in the defense committees of the two houses of Congress, which have never criticized the CIA; but, on the other hand, he had to defend it from the Foreign Relations Committee, which has a more "liberal" reputation. (By the way, CIA operations cannot be checked on by the Foreign Relations Committee.) At the same time, increasingly vehement attacks on a broader scale have been leveled at the CIA both in the U.S. Congress and by public opinion in recent months. More and more scandals have erupted--for example, in connection with the fact that the espionage organization has used several universities as cover organs for some of its operations abroad.

It has also come to light that President Johnson probably intended to foster a legend by the appointment of a "strong military man" a year ago because, although it is true that the CIA is some sort of a state within a state, it is also true that it is directly and jointly controlled on the highest level by representatives of both the White House and the State and Defense Departments. The controlling organ, the so-called group 54-12, is responsible to the U.S. President himself.

Thus, it is in fact a myth that the CIA can launch operations of world political significance without the knowledge of the U.S. President. Yet the establishment of such a myth has been undoubtedly advantageous to the White House, occasionally enabling it to shift its own responsibility onto the espionage organization.

Now that even the newspapers have recently drawn attention to these details, the image of Raborn in the role of the "strong military man" and "a factor loyal to the White House" has become obsolete. And since Helms has been, in any case, the "working director" for all practical purposes, Johnson's decision to raise the de facto head without any disguise to be the de jure head was the obvious one.