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Need Seen for Intelligence Agencies' Independence

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The chairman of a House intelligence subcommittee warned yesterday that the CIA and the rest of the nation's intelligence agencies may be in danger of being "co-opted by the policy-makers at the White House."

Rep. Charlie Rose (D-N.C.) said a special staff study of intelligence reports and assessments of El Salvador and Nicaragua in recent years suggests the need for a stiffer resolve and posture of independence on the part of the U.S. intelligence community.

The 47-page study sets out what Rose called examples of "sloppiness, overstatement or inaccuracies" that should be warning enough of the need for more care and objectivity.

The full House Intelligence Committee decided at a closed session Monday to make the report public despite objections from the CIA, the National Security Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency.

A draft copy obtained by The Washington Post and cited in yesterday's editions was a toned-down version prepared by minority staffers.

The committee ordered release of a more strongly worded and detailed majority study on a voice vote that Rose said was "pretty much along party lines."

The report praised U.S. intelligence reports and estimates in Central America in a number of areas, such as the CIA's mid-1978 prediction of the downfall of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua.

But the study by the Oversight and Evaluation subcommittee staff said it had also found certain weaknesses, including intelligence reports and presentations that suggested greater certainty than the evidence

warranted, that relied on "some unquestioned and sometimes contradictory assumptions," and that accepted Salvadoran government descriptions when there was ground for skepticism.

The subcommittee staff said it also noticed a tendency to view information from non-intelligence sources "simply as material to be countered" rather than examined objectively.

The report was published with a disclaimer stating that "it does not represent the views of all members of the committee," but Rose told reporters that "it certainly represents my views and, I would say, the views of the majority."

The report took issue with the administration's complaints earlier this year about news stories of a massacre in the El Salvador's Morazan province. Congress was told two U.S. Embassy officers were sent out to investigate the stories and "no evidence could be found to confirm that government forces systematically massacred civilians" or that the numbers killed remotely approached those cited in press reports.

The embassy investigators, the House staff study emphasized, "never reached the towns where the alleged events occurred."

The subcommittee's ranking minority member, Rep. C. W. (Bill) Young (R-Fla.), protested the release of the report and said he considered it "extremely biased."

Rose said he stood solidly behind it.

"What I hope this says to the intelligence community," Rose told reporters, "is 'fellas, you do a great job but be careful you don't get co-opted by the policy-makers at the White House. It is far more important that you retain a degree of independence and aloofness from the political process. If that doesn't happen, there is going to be a loud call from the Congress that we construct real independence between the administration and the intelligence community.'"

Spokesmen at the White House and the CIA said they had no comment.