

STAT

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/09/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000301890016-7

**Page Denied**

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/09/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000301890016-7

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 99READERS DIGEST  
November 1986

# Congress Is Crippling the CIA

By  
ROWLAND EVANS AND ROBERT NOVAK

**Charged with "overseeing"  
U.S. intelligence, too  
many lawmakers, with  
too many political axes to  
grind, are leaking too  
many vital secrets.  
It's time to plug the holes**

**A**T 5 A.M. ON OCTOBER 11, 1985, a stretch limousine carrying Sen. Patrick Leahy (D., Vt.) pulled up to CIA headquarters in Langley, Va. Vice chairman of the powerful Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Leahy had asked for a full briefing on the *Achille Lauro* hijacking. But why before dawn?

Because Leahy had agreed to appear on the CBS "Morning News" at 7 a.m. to comment on the interception by U.S. pilots of the hijackers' plane. Following his meeting, Leahy, who now possessed every secret in the case, was driven directly to CBS studios in Washington. "It's a major triumph for the United States," reported Leahy. Then he made an extraordinary disclosure: "When [Egyptian President Hosni] Mubarak went on the news yesterday and said the hijackers had left Egypt, we knew that wasn't so. Our intelligence was very, very good."

Leahy had inadvertently tipped intelligence specialists from Cairo to Moscow that the United States had intercepted Mubarak's phone calls and heard that the *Achille Lauro* hijackers were still in Egypt. The conversations had been "read" by communications intelligence and flashed to computers in Fort Meade, Md., where the National Security Agency daily monitors thousands of intercepted voice signals.

The disclosure would bring Egyptian countermeasures to safeguard subsequent telephone calls. Every government in the world took note, and reacted by tightening security on communications. Leahy insisted to an incensed CIA director William Casey that Administration officials had publicly disclosed the hijackers' whereabouts the day before he went on TV.

This incident is one of many showing that the current era of Congressional oversight of the CIA is simply not working. Instead, the Senate and House Intelligence Committees have become conduits for classified information. CIA efforts to

thwart international terrorist actions or to lend support to anti-communist guerrillas are difficult enough, but keeping those operations secret has become nearly impossible. And vital intelligence-sharing by U.S. allies has been severely hampered by concerns in foreign capitals over the leakage of information passed to Washington.

**Pattern of Leaks.** Under the present oversight system, the 31 members of the House and Senate committees, plus more than 60 staff members, are informed of proposed covert operations. "Any one of these people who does not believe in an operation can appoint himself or herself to stop it," says Rep. Michael DeWine (R., Ohio). "All they need to do is call a reporter." Thus, the ability to make or break government policy is widely dispersed.

Congressional leaks concern Rep. Henry Hyde (R., Ill.), a member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He has bluntly scolded colleagues, reminding them that with Congress's "need to know" for oversight purposes "goes the overriding responsibility to keep much of that information secret."

The impact on U.S. relations with allies has been severe. Casey has testified that leaks "do more damage than anything else" to U.S. intelligence and to "our reputation and reliability" among allies. In fact, concern about American leakage has spread across the world, often disrupting U.S. policy. For

example, in 1984 Saudi Arabian officials were reported to have turned down a CIA request to help fund Nicaraguan Contras, saying privately they had no confidence the U.S. government could keep Saudi involvement a secret.

The current situation sharply contrasts with the discreet Congressional oversight of intelligence prior to the Watergate era. The Eisenhower Administration's covert actions in Iran and Guatemala were known by only a handful of bipartisan Congressional leaders, who breathed not a word. So were operations of the U-2 spy plane.

Until 1974, a small group of senior members of Congress worked with floor leaders of both parties as an informal oversight panel. They were briefed by the CIA director himself, usually without Congressional staff present.

But questionable domestic surveillance activities, assassination plans, and other abuses by the CIA in the 1970s led to the branding of the agency as a "rogue elephant," transforming that collegial atmosphere. A rapid politicization of intelligence marked the new era of CIA oversight. In 1982, for example, the Democratic-controlled House Intelligence Committee released a staff report asserting that the Administration was cooking intelligence to gain support for its policy in Central America. According to the committee's own intelligence consultant, former deputy director of the CIA Adm. Bobby

Inman, the report was "filled with biases," and in fact had been prepared at the specific request of committee members with a partisan ax to grind. Furious that he had not been consulted, Inman resigned.

A clear breach of secrecy occurred in September 1984 with press reports of a CIA briefing of the Senate Intelligence Committee that revealed our knowledge of a top-secret Indian proposal to make a preemptive strike against Pakistan's nuclear facility. Realizing its security had been compromised, the Indian government launched an investigation. The probe broke up a French intelligence ring that

Continued

had been an important supplier of information to the CIA.

At the same time, word leaked that the CIA knew China had provided Pakistan with atomic-bomb technology and was exporting nuclear material to Argentina and South Africa. So the CIA took no chances the next year when it discovered that China was holding nuclear-trade talks with Iran. The Senate was not informed as it reviewed a 30-year atomic-power agreement with Beijing.

When word of the Chinese nuclear aid leaked out, Senate Minority Whip Alan Cranston (D., Calif.) was outraged that the Reagan Administration "systematically withheld, suppressed and covered up" the information. Said a CIA official, "We have a very serious source problem in Beijing," meaning the agency feared compromising its

sources there by giving the information to Congress.

Another leak took place on November 3, 1985, when the Washington *Post* trumpeted secret CIA operations to subvert Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's regime in Libya. This leak immediately followed Secretary of State George Shultz's briefing of the two oversight committees, during which he implored the lawmakers to observe security on this matter of extraordinary importance. U.S. intelligence sources say the disclosure probably cost the life of at least one Egyptian operative involved.

**Political Dynamite.** The greatest seepage of classified data has been on the subject of Nicaragua, and it has transformed what was intended to be a covert operation into an overt operation subject to floor debate. Nearly every detail of U.S. plans on Nicaragua has been passed to the public through the Senate and House Intelligence committees.

Typical was last spring's bending of the rules by the Democratic majority of the House committee to produce unfair and inaccurate "evidence" against Administration efforts to get \$100 million in aid for the Contras. In explaining why the committee voted against aid, the Democratic majority wrote: "It continues to be the assessment of the U.S. intelligence community that only U.S. forces could truly resolve the conflict in Nicaragua on a military basis."

The statement was loaded with

political dynamite. Was the CIA warning Congress that at the end of the Contra road lay use of U.S. troops? Certainly not. The explosive assertion, which had not been cleared by committee Republicans, was simply untrue. It was based on a hypothetical response in secret session eight days earlier by John McMahon, then CIA deputy director, who was not addressing that issue specifically and who was speaking only for himself.

The distortion and misuse of McMahon's secret testimony was a flagrant violation of committee rules that specifically forbid public dissemination of any information obtained in a closed hearing.

Within a week Majority Whip Thomas Foley (D., Wash.) responded to President Reagan's weekly radio address plugging for Contra aid by citing the Intelligence Committee report.

The next day McMahon wrote the committee chairman that in fact "the most recent intelligence-community assessment on this issue judged that military pressure from the Contras would be a key factor in bringing the Sandinistas to the negotiating table." But it was too late. McMahon's "secret testimony" had already evolved as a centerpiece of a campaign by Democrats to kill Contra aid.

**Reckless Comments.** Public debate over supposedly secret CIA operations has given Intelligence Committee members unanticipated exposure and influence. The effect of just one man in a system so sensitive to abuse is shown by the impact of a major new player in the Capitol Hill intelligence game: Sen. Dave Durenberger (R., Minn.), who became chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee under its rotation policy in January 1985. Durenberger has engaged in highly publicized denunciations of the CIA, proving as gossipy and hostile as his counterparts in the 1950s were silent and supportive. Casey charged that Durenberger's committee was performing its oversight work in an "off-the-cuff" manner, producing "repeated compromise of sensitive intelligence sources and methods."

The House Intelligence Committee requested a joint meeting in the fall of 1985 with Durenberger's panel. Quiet please, counseled House members; the turmoil you're creating could boomerang against us. Rep. Edward Boland (D., Mass.), former House committee chairman, read the riot act: "I do not believe that it is helpful or appropriate for members of Congress who sit on oversight committees to regularly or recklessly comment on intelligence matters."

In 1976 then-CIA director William Colby had cautioned that from a security standpoint "the fewer members on an oversight committee the better." But Congress opted for separate Senate and House panels with large memberships and large staffs, including many individuals with no experience in intelligence or national security.

When Daniel Inouye (D., Hawaii) became the first chairman and Barry Goldwater (R., Ariz.) the first vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, their agreement on the need for secrecy led them to forbid any interviews by staff members. It worked for a while. But no chairman can long prevent unauthorized secret conversations between staffers and journalists.

Sen. Lloyd Bentsen (D., Texas), a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, put the case bluntly. "Leaks to make political points often have a devastating impact on achieving foreign-policy goals or on developing defense capability. Our efforts should be redoubled to identify and punish those who leak."

**Large Order.** Bentsen's concern demonstrates the necessity for reform. Given the importance of national intelligence collection and the need for secrecy in intelligence operations of all kinds, the CIA must be able to conduct its work beyond public inspection while

**Continued**

still under Congressional scrutiny.

The most-needed reform is the replacement of existing intelligence panels with a single House-Senate committee composed of responsible senior members with experience in national-security affairs. This oversight committee should be prohibited from any policy role, and its members and staff should be held to the strictest standards of silence.

Rotation of chairmen and members, which prevents continuity and probably contributes to irresponsibility, should end. It takes years to become experienced in the arts of intelligence and to fully appreciate the demands for secrecy.

Finally, new Senate and House rules should prevent any member of the new joint committee from appearing on television or other public forum to discuss ongoing CIA operations.

These changes are a large order. But the state of the current relationship between the CIA and Capitol Hill requires immediate attention for the sake of the national security.

---

Reader's Digest Roving Editors ROWLAND EVANS AND ROBERT NOVAK are nationally syndicated columnists who have been covering the intelligence scene for more than 30 years.