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Colby: CIA Leaks Cost U.S. 'Contacts'

• Second of four articles based on an exclusive interview with CIA Director William Colby.

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WASHINGTON — America has lost 50 foreign contacts and its intelligence operations have been "very badly" hurt in the past few weeks by the leakage of secret information given to congressional committees.

This was disclosed by William Colby, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, in an exclusive interview with The Hearst Newspapers.

Last year Congress enacted a law compelling the CIA to report its covert operations to six committees. Almost everything reported to those committees, Colby said, been leaked to the news media and spread around the world.

"We have lost something like 50 of our foreign contacts," he added. "It's not the numbers that is important. It's the quality of the services rendered."

"Some of our best contacts have cut off their relationship with us. They have said they just cannot continue to work with us because of our inability to keep secrets. Many of these people are very worried about the situation."

"Some of the foreign intelligence agencies which have cooperated closely with us have reduced the level of information they give us. They limit the sensitivity of the information they had previously shared with us."

"I am, quite frankly, very upset about this. Up to a few weeks ago I had hoped we might get through this situation without any serious damage to our foreign sources and friends. That we could say to them: 'We haven't exposed you and we haven't exposed individuals.'"

"Unfortunately, the erosion in the past few weeks of all the secret reports to Congress has frightened a lot of our friends around the world. I have to say our position has gone very badly in the past few weeks in terms of confidence requirements."

Colby recalled reading a recent column in the London Daily Telegraph which said, in effect: "What is America doing to itself? Come, we don't mind you playing around, but don't destroy the single best hope in the world," meaning a strong America with efficient intelligence services.

gate and Vietnam experiences caused Congress to turn the spotlight on secrets in government — and the biggest secret operation is, of course, the intelligence business.

While the investigation of the CIA revealed some misdeeds, which the director attributes to an "excess of zeal," he thinks the American people have been given a "totally false image" of what is generally recognized as the world's best intelligence service.

"If you asked the average American citizen in 1975 to associate the word CIA with something, you would probably come up with assassination and the dart gun," Colby said. "But we never assassinated anyone and the dart gun never was used."

"If you read the Senate report rather carefully, you will note that we did take steps to try to bring about the demise of two individuals, neither of whom died as a result." Colby was referring to Cuban dictator Fidel Castro and Congo leader Patrice Lumumba.

"There were certain other activities that involved people getting killed in the process of a coup or something like that but they were not assassinated by us. You come down to the fact that we did not assassinate anybody. To create the impression that our business is plotting assassinations gives a totally false image of the CIA."

The 56-year-old, St. Paul-born, CIA veteran, whose intelligence work dates to 1944 when he parachuted behind the German lines in France to join a resistance group, was appointed director in May 1973.

Formerly head of the CIA's clandestine (covert) operations, otherwise known as the "Department of Dirty Tricks," Colby thinks the good things achieved by the agency's covert work have been ignored while attention has been focused on some illegal activities which he admits were wrong and should not be allowed to happen in the future.

However, he points out the wrongdoing was mostly due to an excess of zeal encouraged by a long time presidential and congressional policy towards the intelligence service of: "Do it and don't tell me."

"That was dangerous," he said. "I believe one of the reasons we did get into trouble was because we were not supervised. There should be active supervision by responsible people, but the leakage of secrets and confidential information concerning intelligence activities must be plugged."

With regard to the covert operations, which represent in terms of cost only 5 per cent of the CIA's functions, Colby suggested people look at the record.

"It is popular to point to the Bay of Pigs and things like that," he said. "The impression is created that these covert operations were all a disaster, but the facts are different."

"For example, Western Europe in the late 1940s was faced with three grave

economic threats: Marshall Plan threat represented Communist and Soviet-sponsored movements. They by CIA operation Democratic to essentially work

Q — Do you see a major role in Latin American countries?

A — "Yes, Europe. In the expression was going to Latin America great romantic all Latin America a totally hostile continent."

"How did we meet that threat? With a political program through the OAS (Organization of American States) — with an economic program through the Alliance for Progress, and with CIA assistance."

"As a result, Latin America is not hostile to the United States today. Guevara and revolution did not sweep like wildfire through Latin America. I am not saying that CIA did it alone, but it made a major contribution as part of a national program on a strategic level."

"The Bay of Pigs was a mistake. It didn't work. It went wrong. But to characterize the CIA's operations in Latin America as the Bay of Pigs is just plain wrong also. A lot of things the CIA did were very successful."

"I don't mean the overthrow of Chilean President Allende. We did not overthrow President Allende. What the CIA did in Chile was to try to support the democratic forces there, as we had done in Western Europe."

"President Allende exacerbated the situation with his economic policies, with his pressures on the middle class and on the country to the extent that finally the military overthrew him. We had nothing to do with that coup."

"Over the years there was only one time when we went out with the idea of trying to overthrow him. In 1970 there was a period of about a month in which we were looking around to see what we could do at the specific direction of our President. All we were trying to do there was to help the democratic forces with a view to free elections."

President Allende got himself in a position where the Chilean congress, the supreme court and the controller general all issued statements saying the president was operating outside the constitution. Imagine what would happen in this country under such circumstances."

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