

Colby defends aid in Italy and Angola

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Washington—William E. Colby, the director of central intelligence, strongly defended yesterday America's clandestine support of anti-Communist parties in Italy and Angola and protested publicity given covert operations by members of Congress who are informed in secret briefings.

At the same time, the Defense Department expressed concern that Soviet ship maneuvering off the West African coast could foretell expanding Russian activity in the Angolan civil war. The department saw the operations as a form of diplomatic pressure in behalf of Soviet-backed elements in Angola.

It was learned independently that a Soviet Kresta-class guided missile cruiser, previously off Morocco, has begun steaming southward, though intelligence sources did not know whether it intended to join a guided-missile destroyer and amphibious ship off the Angola coast. The White House said Wednesday it was "dismayed" by the presence of the Russian ships.

In his wide-ranging interview on the NBC-TV Today show—a performance that would have been almost unthinkable for a Central Intelligence Agency head a year ago—Mr. Colby asserted: "We have not spent a nickel in Italy in the past few months." He would not discuss, however, "plans and thoughts" for the future.

The question arose in light of published reports that the CIA means to funnel \$6 million to non-Communist groups, chiefly the Christian Democratic party, in Italy to aid efforts to keep the large Italian Communist party out of the government.

Rome's minority coalition collapsed Wednesday and Aldo Moro, the Christian Democratic leader, is remaining as caretaker premier while efforts are made to form a new government.

There was no way to tell from Mr. Colby's comments whether publicity about covert financial aid—for which an angry White House blamed members of Congress—had forced any change in plans. Mr. Colby said he was "not at liberty to discuss details of our activities" in regard to Italy.

He defended aid, however, to friends in countries where Communists seek control, likening it to economic and military help given countries and "several democratic parties" throughout Europe after World War II.

Disclosures of clandestine United States help to forces fighting the Soviet-backed faction in Angola set off a new wave of congressional restiveness about covert operations last month.

Noting that he is now required by law to brief six congressional committees on covert activities, Mr. Colby said almost everything they have been told has been "exposed in the press." This includes some actions done with "knowing approval" of committees and at least one, unspecified, at a committee's urging, he said.

As the people's representatives, Mr. Colby said, members of Congress have to be responsible for knowing things they can not publicize. "Otherwise we cannot run an intelligence service."

"We have totally lost our sense of proportion about the importance of intelligence" and the fact that the CIA's "few misdeeds" over its 28-year history have been corrected, Mr. Colby contended.

Asserting "There are no Americans fighting in Angola, period,"—which reiterated what other officials have stated—the CIA head said it was "totally absurd" to view aid in the former Portuguese colony as leading to a new Vietnam. The essential point, he said, was that the CIA could covertly help anti-Communist factions there without a commitment of American forces.

He called attention to the Soviet cruiser, destroyer, amphibious ship and oilers "off West Africa" in declaring that "There's no question about it—the Soviets are expressing their interest in that area." It was the "height of absurdity" to say the CIA should not help those resisting the Russians, Cubans and "the group they are manipulating and supporting."

The Defense Department's concern that ship operations could indicate increasing Russian activity in Angola was expressed by William I. Greener, the assistant defense secretary for public affairs. The concern was stated in the context of diplomatic pressure rather than of any large military significance represented by the Soviet ships.

Other sources reported that the Russian amphibious ship—with a normal complement of 100 to 150 infantrymen aboard—was expected to dock yesterday in Pointe Noire in the Congo for a four-day call. They said the destroyer probably would go into the same port January 18 for a similar visit.

The White House, meanwhile, said yesterday there was "no official word" that South African forces are to be withdrawn from Angola shortly, where they have supported the same factions backed by the U.S.

Ronald H. Nessen, President Ford's press secretary, would not say whether there was any "unofficial" indication, saying "this is not the place to confirm troop movements of a foreign country."

If published reports about South African withdrawals prove accurate, the pullbacks would coincide with the meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, of the 46 non-white African nations making up the Organization of African Unity. The emergency session is to deal with the Angolan crisis.