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June 24, 1988

Dear Bill:

Enclosed for your information is a copy of an article on your June 14 speech before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, as carried on our Wireless File the same day.

This article was transmitted to 206 posts in 127 countries. It will be translated where appropriate and released to the media in each country. Thank you for this contribution to our public affairs efforts overseas.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

Charles Z. Wick  
Director

The Honorable  
William Webster  
Director  
Central Intelligence Agency

U S I A W I R E L E S S F I L E

THIS IS THE "HOUSEWIRE," THE CENTRAL EDITION OF THE USIA WIRELESS FILE. IT IS PREPARED DAILY BY THE AGENCY'S PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS SERVICE. ARTICLES FROM THE HOUSEWIRE ARE COMBINED WITH OTHERS OF SPECIAL REGIONAL INTEREST TO FORM THE FIVE REGIONAL EDITIONS -- AFRICA, EAST ASIA/PACIFIC, EUROPE, LATIN AMERICA, NEAR EAST/SOUTH ASIA -- THAT ARE TRANSMITTED OVERSEAS.

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 CONGRESSIONAL REPORT, TUESDAY, JUNE 14 (390)  
 (Covert activity bill)

ARMACOST, WEBSTER ASSAIL BILL ON COVERT REPORTING --

Under Secretary of State Michael Armacost and Central Intelligence Agency Director William Webster told the House Foreign Affairs Committee June 14 that a law requiring the president to notify congressional leaders within 48 hours of any covert intelligence operation would be both unconstitutional and unwise.

Armacost told the committee that a bill under consideration to mandate notifying the speaker of the House and the Democratic and Republican leaders of the House and Senate in that time limit is too rigid, and that President Reagan's senior advisers would recommend a veto if the measure were passed by the Congress.

"In our view, the...requirement may not be reasonable in those very rare instances where extremely sensitive operations require the tightest possible security to protect the lives of U.S. and foreign nationals," Armacost said.

"It is possible that the success of the operation may depend on the cooperation of a foreign government that has conditioned its support on delaying notification of an operation," Armacost declared. "The 1980 Iran rescue mission and the role of the Canadian embassy in assisting our people in Iran are specific cases where advance notification could not be given.

"In addition," he continued, "the Justice Department has concluded that the 48-hour requirement would infringe upon the president's constitutional authority."

Webster also said the bill unnecessarily codifies reporting procedures already in place at the White House. "While a presidential directive is not the same as legislation, I am not persuaded that new legislation at this time is the best way to address the concerns that members (of Congress) have," he asserted.

Democratic Representative Lee Hamilton -- who chaired the House Iran-contra investigating committee -- disagreed sharply. He said that notifying a few key members of Congress offers minimal chance of a damaging security leak.

"That risk appears to me to be extremely small," Hamilton said. "If this bill said that the president must notify 535 members of the Congress, then I would agree with you.

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"But, what you are saying, in effect, is that you don't trust the leaders of the Congress," he said. "That is an extraordinary claim.

"The benefit here outweighs what I see as the risks," Hamilton said.

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