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SUBJECT Interview with William Colby

MIKE WALLACE: William Colby's book, "Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA," is being officially published tomorrow morning. It is a totally different view of the Central Intelligence Agency from that expressed last week on 60 Minutes by resigned CIA officer John Stockwell.

Richard Nixon made Colby Director of the CIA in 1973; Gerald Ford fired him from the job in 1976. Colby headed the CIA during its most difficult years, years when it came under severe fire for abuses; excesses; crimes, in fact, committed by CIA officers in the name of this nation's security.

Bill Colby determined that if the CIA was to survive, the agency had to come clean with the American people.

You were fired by President Ford, weren't you, because you weren't tough enough, you weren't strong enough, you weren't willing to, forgive me, lie enough?

WILLIAM COLBY: Well, I wasn't going to lie. I had made that clear all along.

WALLACE: Right.

COLBY: But I think I was too responsive to Congress.

WALLACE: You were not a loyal member of the White House team, as far as they were...

COLBY: No. As he said later, he said that he wanted his own team, and I wasn't on it.

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WALLACE: And what was it that he wanted you to do that you apparently were unwilling or unable to do?

COLBY: Well, there were a number of his advisers who felt that I was responding too willingly to Congress, I was giving them information when I should have stonewalled them and refused to give them information.

[Montage of clips from Colby's congressional testimony]

WALLACE: Indeed, there were myriad requests for information, for documents, for secret memoranda, demands coming from reporters and congressional committees probing sensational stories of CIA wrongdoing.

MAN: Have you ever given an expensive gift to an American President?

MAN: Is there much covert activity against the USSR?

COLBY: The major work of the CIA is carried out in the four main directorates listed there. I will be discusing their work with you in great detail in executive session, including...

WALLACE: Henry Kissinger thought that you simply talked too much to the Congress. I think he...

COLBY: Right.

WALLACE: ...said, "Bill, when you go up there, you go to confession."

COLBY: Right.

WALLACE: Being a good Catholic.

According to Colby, Nelson Rockefeller also told him he was talking too much.

You write in your book, "I got the message quite unmistakably, and I didn't like it. The Vice President of the United States," Nelson Rockefeller, "was letting me know he didn't approve of my approach to the CIA's troubles, that he would much prefer me to take the traditional stance of fending off investigators by drawing the cloak of secrecy around the agency in the name of national security."

COLBY: I think that's correct. I think that was clearly what he was telling me.

WALLACE: And you thought it was necessary to go into all the detail about past misdeeds of the CIA because?

COLBY: To get rid of them and to demonstrate that CIA itself had corrected those a year and a half before.

WALLACE: Wasn't that naive?

COLBY: I don't think so. I think it was the only way to handle it, because, quite frankly -- and I think Kissinger came around to that view also. The recent why it wasn't naive is because there was no other way of handling it.

WALLACE: Because?

COLBY: Because the Congress was on a rampage of learning what was going on in the government. And this was a result of Vietnam and of Watergate, and the CIA was just the third in the row. And they would have torn us apart if I'd tried to stop them.

WALLACE: In your book, Mr. Colby, you blame the Congress and the press for performing irresponsibly: "Every admission I made of past mistakes was irresponsibly leaked by the Congress, ruthlessly exploited by the press, and emblazoned in sensational and misleading headlines."

COLBY: I think that's true; every new operation I reported that year, all the political, all the paramilitary stuff. And every such operation I reported that year leaked and became the subject of major headlines.

WALLACE: You will agree that the press had a good deal to look into: assassinations of foreign leaders and CIA complicity in that, dart guns; various activities which merited headlines, after all.

COLBY: Yes, I understand that. I understand that. But I don't think there was an attempt to put it in proportion. I think the talk of assassinations -- when you actually look at the record, and the Senate committee did for eight months and discovered that, really, no foreign leader had ever been assassinated by CIA. That's one of their findings. It wasn't for lack of trying in Castro's case, I might add.

And I don't agree with assassination. I'm against it.

WALLACE: And what about the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961, when he was Premier of the Republic of the Congo?

COLBY: No, sir. That's different.

WALLACE: Did not Sidney Gottlieb, who was in charge of all kinds of drug experiments, etcetera, of the CIA, did he not go to Africa bearing poison?

COLBY: There were preparations made for that kind of an action.

WALLACE: But a CIA man left Washington with the intention of assassinating Patrice Lumumba.

COLBY: I said there were preparations. That's exactly what I said. I said...

WALLACE: And the man on the spot said he wouldn't do it.

COLBY: And that the activity stopped, that the CIA activity stopped because of an objection of the CIA officer. That's what I just say.

WALLACE: You say that the brutal murder of Richard Welch, your station chief in Athens, in December of '75, the main cause of that, you write, "was the sensational and hysterical way the CIA investigations," by the Congress and the Rockefeller Commission, "had been handled and trumpeted 'round the world."

So, in effect, you blame Richard Welch's death on the American press, the Congress and the Rockefeller Commission.

COLBY: I blame it on the sensational quality of the way the investigation was handled. Yes, I do. It did stir up those terrorists in Greece to decide to kill the chief of station in Greece.

WALLACE: Colby has no solid proof to back up that charge. But although Welch was by no means the first CIA officer to have been murdered, the Administration made his burial a media event. And the resulting strong public reaction dulled the appetite of many congressmen for further CIA probes. And the CIA emerged from the congressional probes intact.

COLBY: We did save the important secrets. We saved the names of the people that worked with us around the world. We did protect the sensitive technology. We protected what you journalists like to protect, your sources. But we did not protect the activities of the agency, generally; and I think that was the necessary trade-off.

WALLACE: Twenty years ago, a group that grew out of the Hoover Commission had this to say about covert operations that you people would get involved in: "Hitherto acceptable forms of human conduct do not apply. If the U.S. is to survive, long-standing American concepts of fair play must be reconsidered. We must learn to subvert, sabotage, and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated, and more effective methods than those used against us. It may become necessary that the American people be acquainted with, understand, and support this fundamentally repugnant philo-

sophy."

COLBY: That really was the thought process at that time. It's almost incredible to consider those words today. But in the period of the Cold War...

WALLACE: It's the charter, in effect, under which...

COLBY: Winston Churchill told the intelligence services to set Europe ablaze. He wasn't subtle about it. And that was the atmosphere in which CIA was formed.

WALLACE: And under those circumstances, CIA became a cult, elitist.

COLBY: I think, under those circumstances, I believe the number of things that CIA did that were wrong are really few and far between for an organization launched in that direction with words like that.

WALLACE: You say that your strategy as head of the CIA, Mr. Colby, was to be guided by the Constitution and to apply its principles. That seems to say, "Unlike some of my predecessors."

COLBY: Well, I don't think anybody expected you to in the previous years. I don't think the congressmen expected you to. CIA wasn't out of control. The problem was it was too much under the control of Presidents; and, secondly, that the Congress didn't do its job of supervision, over the 20-odd years. Congressmen are quoted on the floor of the Senate -- Senator Saltonstall said that he didn't want to know any more than he absolutely had to know about the activities of CIA. And Senator Stennis, as late as 1971, said, "If you're going to have an intelligence service, you're going to shut your eyes and take what's coming."

WALLACE: Uh-huh.

COLBY: He was implying there's no way to run it in a normal way.

And this was the ancient tradition of total secrecy about intelligence. That had to be resolved someday. It just happened to happen while I was sitting there.

WALLACE: What limits do you feel should be put upon the CIA's intervention in the internal affairs of foreign countries?

COLBY: Well, I think there are certain activities that CIA should not be allowed to conduct: assassination, torture, things of that nature. No. Those are absolute limits that we should not ever go over.

On the other hand, the kind of political support, paramilitary activity; the kind of propaganda work, covert propaganda work in some areas, that sort of thing...

WALLACE: Chile.

COLBY: Chile. That should be decided by a procedure, going through the Executive Branch. I think then it should be subjected to the independent review of the other branch of the Constitution, the Congress, through the Select Committees.

WALLACE: Colby says he also has no compunction about the CIA using such tactics abroad as bribery.

COLBY: Bribery, paying. Sure. I don't have any problem with that.

WALLACE: You say you have no problem with bribery. Take South Korea. U.S. military aid is vital to that country; they feel that way. By your ground rules, then, the Koreans are justified in attempting to bribe members of the U.S. Congress to support pro-Korean legislation.

COLBY: I think we have to distinguish here something -- legality from morality. Now, obviously, CIA operations abroad are illegal in the country in which they're taken.

WALLACE: So South Korea's Tongsun Park is a hero in South Korea, or could be considered a hero to South Korea and a criminal to the United States.

COLBY: Well, we've had -- Nathan Hale was hanged, you know; and he's one of our national heroes.

WALLACE: So the Koreans, morally, are on good ground, as far as their country is concerned, when they try to bribe a member of the U.S. Congress.

COLBY: You're dealing with a fact of the international state system. I think they made a mistake, but I wouldn't get morally uptight about them.

WALLACE: The impression that one gets from a good deal of what you hear in Washington right now is that the intelligence community is waiting it out; that the American memory, in the Congress and in the people, of misdeeds of the CIA is growing dim; and that the intelligence community has every intention of going back and operating in much the same way, five years from now, three years from now, that it did over a period of 10 years, when...

COLBY: Oh, that's just not so. I mean the fact is that you've got two public presidential executive orders issued in the

last couple of years, on one of which I helped write, which make very clear that there are certain limits to CIA's activities, that we will not engage in certain activities that may have occurred in the past but are not going to be repeated in the future.

WALLACE: A footnote on professional courtesy among spies from William Colby.

You used to be a case officer, Mr. Colby. If a CIA case officer has a flat tire in the dark of night on a lonely road, he will not hesitate to accept a ride from a KGB officer, and likely the two of them will detour to a local bar for a friendly drink.

True or false?

COLBY: I know of at least one occasion where a CIA officer met a KGB officer under somewhat similar circumstances.

What's wrong with that?

WALLACE: Professional to professional.

COLBY: Yeah.

WALLACE: He knows who you are, you know who he is.

COLBY: Right. So?

WALLACE: You're foot soldiers from...

COLBY: You're both serving your own nation.

WALLACE: That interview was conducted a couple of weeks ago. After it was over, William Colby gave us leave to use his answers to some other questions we had put to him about CIA involvement in Angola, to use those answers in a broadcast we did last week on 60 Minutes.

In that program, John Stockwell, a resigned CIA agent who has written a book about the agency, alleged that William Colby, as head of the CIA, misled the Congress about the true story of CIA involvement in a secret war in Angola. Colby denied those allegations.

But we could not tell Colby's then about Stockwell's role in our broadcast because Stockwell's book was being published secretly, without prior clearance by CIA.

After viewing last Sunday's broadcast, Colby asked that he be given a chance to respond.

COLBY: Frankly, I would not have gone on the same program

as a book such as that. I wouldn't want to be a party to helping to promulgate a book of that nature, written by an officer who violated his pledge to submit to the agency.

I believe that you can't run an army if every lieutenant decides which order to follow. You can't run an intelligence service if every junior officer decides which secret to keep.

WALLACE: Would you have said anything different in answer to any of the questions that I put to you? Because I did tell you that it was a program about Angola...

COLBY: No. On the merits of the case, I stand by what I've said, of course. I stand by the fact that I deny that I misled Congress. And I described the basic thrust of our program in Angola.

WALLACE: Yet Colby stopped well short of accusing Stockwell of lying.

COLBY: I wouldn't say he made up any of this. I think he may characterize things differently; and there are two ways of characterizing the same event, as you well know, many times.

WALLACE: How is the intelligence community hurt by revelations like those of Stockwell?

COLBY: Well, I think the climate of sensation, hysteria has convinced a lot of people around the world that we can't keep secrets. There are foreign intelligence services who I know have cut down on the kind of information they previously shared with us, when they thought we could keep that information secret. And now fear that they're going to read it in the papers the next day.

We have had people who have needed our help in certain countries who have not dared to take our help, because, again, they're afraid that it will come out as some kind of bribery, unquote, even though it would just be help to them to do what they wanted to do.

WALLACE: Were you the head of the CIA still, Mr. Colby, what would you do about John Stockwell?

COLBY: The first thing I'd do is try to get a law which punished ex-employees for reveal -- or employees -- for revealing real secrets. Now, I would have that a very limited law which only applied to CIA employees who undertake the obligation to keep the secret.

Secondly, I would require that the secret be screened by an impartial judge to make sure it's a real secret and not a cover-up of some wrongdoing.

WALLACE: The rationale that Stockwell gives for having broken his oath of secrecy to the CIA is that, he says, he was told certain things when he joined CIA which proved not to be true: no drugs, no assassinations, no immoral dirty tricks. And when he learned what he learned later about CIA, he felt himself released from that oath.

That basically...

COLBY: Well, that's great rationalization, because I'm sure if Mr. Stockwell joined CIA -- I don't know when he joined, several years ago -- he read enough spy stories and novels and other accounts of the invisible government and all the other books written in the early '60s about CIA that he knew roughly what kind of an organization he was joining.

WALLACE: In other words, you feel...

COLBY: And if he says that suddenly it doesn't turn out to be the Boy Scouts, I think he was asking a little much. And he's not relieved of that obligation.

WALLACE: As for the truthfulness of Stockwell's charges, that question could best be resolved by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Stockwell testified before them secretly almost a year ago. Their investigation into his allegations is now virtually completed, but the committee has yet to decide how much, if any, of their findings should be made public.