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WILLIAM COLBY: intelligence can be an addition to peace

William COLBY, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1973 to 1976, was in Moscow for the first time last week as a participant in a two-day press seminar sponsored by New York University's Center for War, Peace and the News Media. His tenure with the CIA was marked by tension over Vietnam, and a period when the organization came under increasing fire from both the American public and the Congress. He now serves as a legal and political consultant to various organizations.

In an exclusive interview with Moscow News, Colby speaks with reporters Andrei BEZRUCHENKO and Wendy SLOANE. "Intelligence tells you what's happening, and then you can negotiate," he claims. "It's an addition to peace, if you do it right."



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William Colby.

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WE UNDERSTAND THIS IS YOUR FIRST TIME IN THE SOVIET UNION. HAD YOU THOUGHT OF TAKING PART IN SUCH A VISIT IN THE PAST?

Well, obviously I've studied the Soviet Union for many years, and have tried to look in from the outside to know what it is like. I have always wanted to visit your country, but on my previous jobs it really wasn't very convenient. But I am a very strong believer that an intelligence officer should visit the country he studies, so that he can get a sense of what the people look like and the circumstances of the towns and countryside. It helps you to interpret what is happening, the reality as distinct from what the reports tell you. I have sent our analysts on ordinary tourist trips here in the past. They don't do anything they shouldn't do but they just go on their own, to look. Sometimes the authorities knew that they worked for the CIA and sometimes they didn't, I don't know, one way or another, they just came and acted as tourists. I tried to see if I couldn't arrange somehow for Mr. Andropov to visit the United States—somebody with those responsibilities, I think, should visit the country that he's obviously concerned about.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE KGB? DO YOU CONSIDER THEM TO BE YOUR ALLIES?

No, they're not our counterpart, because the KGB has internal responsibilities, your borders, your secrets, protection of your high authorities. We divide those into different organizations in America. We have had our successes, we've had our failures, they've had their successes, they've had their failures.

SO THE KGB IS NOT YOUR ENEMY?

No. Any intelligence service is going to do what its government tells them. And if its government maintains a good relationship with another government, then the intelligence services will retain a friendly one. Intelligence services today are a very important element to successful arms control, of the verification problem, and it is responsibility of the CIA to measure the compliance to the SALT agreement, the ABM treaty, all the other treaties.

WE WERE INTERESTED IN WHAT YOU SAID AT THE SEMINAR TODAY ABOUT THE SOMEWHAT DIMINISHING ROLES OF INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES. DO YOU THINK THAT THE PRESENT TIME IS MORE CONDUCTIVE TO DOING THINGS OPENLY?

Absolutely. Things are carried in the front page of Pravda and Izvestia that we wouldn't have dreamed of, wouldn't have known five or ten years ago. You have to then evaluate what the information means. We've always had that as the central part of our intelligence system, the analysis.

FOR MANY YEARS, SOVIETS HAVE HAD A CERTAIN IMAGE OF THE CIA. ARE YOU SURE THAT EVERYTHING YOU DID

WAS PROPER, DURING ALL THE YEARS YOU WERE HEAD OF THE CIA?

Any intelligence service is going to do what its government tells it to do. If the government says to support somebody in the intelligence service, we'll do it.

WERE THERE TIMES WHEN YOU FELT ANY PERSONAL CONFLICT BETWEEN WHAT THE GOVERNMENT TOLD YOU TO DO AND WHAT YOU WANTED TO DO?

No, I could work it out.

HOW DID YOU WORK IT OUT?

Well, I objected to some things, and said, no, we don't do that. And we also have a situation now, and your KGB is going to come into this one, where we not only have to do what our President tells us, but we have to report it to our Congress, to committees of our Congress. And if they don't like it, they are going to tell you so and stop you. They will say no, I don't care if the President says you can do that, you can't do it. In some situations we have supported right-wing people where they have been opposed by left-wing people who were supported by the Soviet Union.

WHY?

Because there wasn't anybody else to support. And otherwise it was a matter of letting the Soviet-supported people take over the country. I worked in Italy for five years between 1953 and 1957. At that time Italy was a great battleground, not violence, but politically, between the Communist party, the Communist trade unions, the Communist cooperatives, the Communist intellectual groups and all the rest of them. And the Soviet Union was supporting them. The question was, will it ever become a Communist country? If it did, it would have been a disaster to NATO, the whole hope to strengthen Western Europe. We were resolved no, so in that case we did not support the right-wing, we supported the center, the Social Democrats, the Christian Democrats, the Liberals, the Republicans, but not the right wing. We supported them to meet the challenges put up by the Communist movements. If they had Party Congresses, we could have Party Congresses, if they could have publications, we could have publications, if they had a youth group, we could have a youth group. And intellectual groups, we could have intellectual groups. That's what the political struggle over Italy was all about. It wasn't a violent one—war—but it was a subversive one. We stopped it.

I was in Vietnam before I was there, we were supporting the South Vietnamese government to try to strengthen its defenses against the North Vietnamese attacks.

DO YOU THINK WHAT YOU DID IN VIETNAM WAS RIGHT?

I just finished writing a book a few months ago about the Vietnam war. I think we made some mistakes in the way we did it, but I think that the idea was proved by what happened since

the Communist victory. Almost two million Vietnamese have left the country as refugees, they don't want to live in that society.

SO THE VIETNAM WAR AS AN IDEA WAS CORRECT?

Yeah, we did it wrong, we did it wrong. I think we should have been supporting the people in the villages against the so-called people's war and we really insisted on fighting a soldier's war, whereas Ho Chi Minh and his friends said that they were fighting a people's war. When we finally got a strategy going to mute that level of the war, the political level in the rural communities, we were wrong. But then the Americans were so disgusted at the whole experience that we gave up and we left, and the North Vietnamese won by invading, not politically, they invaded with regular troops.

DO YOU THINK THE CURRENT CHANGES TAKING PLACE IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE SOVIET UNION NOW CAN SERVE AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR WHAT THE UNITED STATES DID IN VIETNAM?

I don't think they relate particularly. I think of the changes in Europe, what is going on is a successful program of containment in Europe over the last 40 years. In the 40's we said that we have to seriously prevent the further expansion of Stalin's communism into the rest of the world. And eventually things will change if we just stop it and go on further. Well, it took 40 years for the eventual but we avoided it. For example, when President Eisenhower won, you then had the Hungarian revolt. He restrained, and he said that it may be tough on the Hungarians, but we do not want World War Three. It was a proper decision at that time to keep a sober, serious containment, but not to go into adventure.

DID THE CIA HAVE ANY HAND IN THE EVENTS IN HUNGARY AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA?

No, essentially not. One of my bosses in the CIA really became mentally unstable after the Hungarian revolt because he was so disgusted that here was this opportunity to help the Hungarians and his orders were no, to stay out, and he did.

DO YOU THINK THE CIA IS ACTIVE IN EASTERN EUROPE?

We can't even keep up with it. Eastern Europe went all by itself. The CIA did start up one of the programs that had results: Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Liberty. Those were originally started up as CIA programs. The fact was that we did support those and get them started, but then in the last ten years, like many other CIA programs, they have been turned over to the open world, and Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Liberty have no connection with the CIA anymore, they are run entirely separate.

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WE HAVE READ IN SEVERAL WESTERN NEWSPAPERS THAT THE KGB HAS TAKEN PART IN ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN SOME SOVIET REPUBLICS. DO YOU BELIEVE THE CIA HAS HAD ANY PART?

I doubt it. As I already said, the CIA does what the government wants it to do. And the United States government now wants to support President Gorbachev solve his problems. We would never want to do anything to harm Gorbachev and his plans for the future.

IS IT IN THE INTEREST OF THE CIA TO SUPPORT GORBACHEV?

It's not in the interest of the CIA, but in the interest of the United States. I think if Mr. Gorbachev can get a hand on the economy and firm up the political system, then the Soviet Union can really succeed. If it remains a closed society with a dead economy it's going to fail, and that's dangerous to everybody.