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Admiral Stansfield Turner, Director, Central Intelligence

San Francisco Press Club: Address & Q&A

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[Introduction.]

DIRECTOR STANSFIELD TURNER: It's always a treat to be with the press, to have a chance to exchange ideas with you, because I happen to believe that our two professions, media and intelligence, have a great deal in common. We have in common the fact that both of our tasks are to find the facts and to interpret them to what's going on in the world; you, obviously, primarily, for the American public; we, primarily for the American government.

Beyond that, we have in common a recognition of the great importance to each of us of protecting our sources, our sources of intelligence, your sources of information. I admire newsmen who have been willing to go to jail rather than to disclose their sources. I can assure that we take very considerable risks, if necessary, to protect ours.

We have in common, besides that, the great understanding of the value of an exclusive. For you, it is an important edge over your competitors. For us, it may be an important edge for the President of the United States when competing or negotiating with others who do not share the same good base of information that he has.

There's also another way in which we have great similarities or interests in common. We must hope to possess some fundamental protections in the law if we're going to continue to be effective for our country. For you, probably the most fundamental protection is that of the First Amendment of the Constitution. For us, it is the ability to keep our reasonable amount of secrecy, without which we simply cannot function. It is here, of course, that sometimes our interests appear to collide. It may seem too much to you that we are ready and eager to dispense with the privileges of the First Amendment. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we are proceeding today

-2-

with very great caution in seeking new legislation that will help us with some of the very severe problems we have of maintaining our necessary degree of secrecy. We recognize that it's vital that in so doing, we not endanger, in any way, the constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and the other freedoms set forth in our Constitution. But at the same time, we recognize that in the 1980s, the United States faces problems around the world that underscore the importance of having good intelligence.

I say that because I happen to believe that the decade of the 1980s is going to be more precarious for this country than were the decades of the '60s and the '70s; first, because in the '80s, we will face, for the first time, a Soviet leadership that does not feel militarily inferior to the United States. This is a perception, regardless of whether it is a fact, and there is very little that even the Congress or the Pentagon can do to change that perception perceptibly in the better part of the decade ahead of us. And so that means that our diplomacy, our foreign policy has got to be structured on the basis of a perception by the Soviets of something like military parity with us.

What means I don't know specifically. But I do know that it means you can't just count on bullying or intimidating the Soviets. You've got to treat the relationship between this country and the Soviet Union in a different way under this circumstance. It is a new challenge to us.

A second reason the decade of the '80s will be different and more challenging is that I do not believe that the free countries of the developed world can expect the same continued high rate of economic growth we have become accustomed to in the past several decades. One reason is that, traditionally, economic growth in the developed countries has been tied to the rate and the growth of energy supply. We in the Central Intelligence Agency believe that the developed countries of the Free World will be lucky if they sustain a rate of growth of total energy supply -- natural gas, oil, coal, nuclear, thermal, solar, whatever it may be -- a total supply increase of 1 to 2% for the better part of this decade. And that may be optimistic. Thus the rate of energy increase will not sustain rates of gross national product growth of 4, 5 or 6%.

Beyond that, we forecast that in 1980, the OPEC countries will cream off the top of international trade something like \$127 billion. Oh, it's just a big number. Let me compare it, though, to 1978, in which the same number was \$3 billion. What has happened is that when they increased the price of oil 3 1/2 times in 1974, the OPEC countries generated a great surplus. That surplus by 1978 was worn down to \$3 billion by two devices. One, they bought more from us. But, two, we just ate into the rest of it by inflation. It's now going to be \$127 billion because

-3-

within the last 15 months the price of energy, the price of oil, rather, has gone up by 125%. And I would suggest to you that there are clear signs that OPEC is not going to let us eat the \$127 billion away by inflation in the future. We have a different challenge ahead of us.

Thirdly, I would suggest that in the 1980s the mechanisms for handling military, political, economic problems are going to work in different ways than they have in the past. For instance, our NATO and our Japanese allies are very sound politically, very prosperous economically, and they clearly want to have a larger voice in the councils of our alliances. For instance, the lesser developed countries of the world that produce raw materials are going to be much more intent in the '80s on producing what is in their best interests, what suits their economies, their needs, not just ours. This does not mean that our alliances need be weaker. This does not mean that there need always be strained relations with the lesser developed countries. But I do believe it means that we are going to have to change our patterns of diplomacy. We're going to have to be more astute, more foresighted, and, in turn, to me that means we're going to have to have better information, better intelligence upon which to base the decisions in foreign policy for this country.

This brings me back to the issue of the First Amendment. Can we do that? Can we have better intelligence, better secret intelligence, and still respect the provisions of the Constitution that we've been talking about? I believe so. But I believe, first, it's going to require some changes in the way we in the intelligence community go about our business. Beyond that, I think it's going to take some new legislative support to enable us to function effectively within respect for all the constitutional provisions.

Let me start by describing a few of the changes we have already made in how we go about doing our business because of this outlook. First, if we're working in some foreign country to trace the flow of narcotics, and we're on to a foreign narcotics trafficker, suddenly we find that he or she has perhaps an illegal, or even a legal association with some American citizen, we have to drop the case, because we may intrude on the privacy of an American, or we may confuse the intelligence apparatus of our country with the law-making apparatus.

Secondly, an actual case that came across our path a short time ago was that of a rebellion in a lesser developed country, one in which we had a very particular interest. We were having considerable difficulty keeping track with the course of this rebellion and what was happening. Suddenly, we realized that the best information we were receiving were ham radio transmissions of an American missionary reporting what was going on in his area. Well, we asked ourselves and our lawyers "Was this

-4-

an electronic surveillance of an American citizen?" We debated it, debated it, and finally came up with the answer that as long as he was using a ham band and method of transmission, gee, that really gets to be a semi-public matter. It was not. But if he shifted his style or his technique or his frequency in an effort to be private -- and that was a good possibility, because his neck was out in making these transmissions -- we would then consider that he wanted privacy, and we would have had to drop off of the circuit and lose that bit of information.

Now the obvious result of rules and procedures like these are that the speed and flexibility with which we can respond to crisis situations is reduced somewhat. You know, very often fundamental issues of constitutional law are debated between my legal staff and that of the Attorney General in the midsts of an operational crisis. I want to hasten to assure you that the Attorney General's people have been very cooperative with us in coming to quick resolutions of these issues so we could proceed with our business. But you can imagine it does have some dampening effect, some flowing down of the process on us.

In most instances, we can adapt reasonably well to these circumstances. However, because the issues are often very complex, because my people in the field are generally not lawyers, it can have an effect of inducing over-caution by our people in the field. The more complex the legal standards with which they must comply, the more the chance is that the intelligence officer's initiative will be dulled. Today, our operators in the field are almost forced to drop any operation which could involve an American citizen. This, in turn, can reduce our flexibility in crisis situations which might involve the lives or the property of American citizens.

And yet let me add that I personally feel that these costs that I have described of insuring the rights of the American citizen under the Constitution are bearable and are worth it to us as a nation. There is, however, another cost, a cost that has arisen out of recent years of focus by the American public on the intelligence process which are neither bearable nor are worth it to our country. This is the cost of the reduction in our ability to keep our secrets. Today, there's a lot of talk about unleashing the CIA. That's not what we need, and that is not what we want; that's not what we're asking the Congress to legislate for us. What we do seek, what we do need is to be able to protect our legitimate secrets better, secrets of how we collect our information, our sources; secrets of what information we have. Our effectiveness is very highly dependent upon our ability to keep secrets. In four specific areas, we need legislative help in order to better be able to control our secrets.

Unfortunately, much of the publicity on these requests

-5-

for legislation has misunderstood their intent. I would like to take a minute on each just to describe to you what we are asking for and why.

The first concerns covert action. As you know, that's not really an intelligence function. It's the effort by the United States to influence the course of events in a foreign country without the origin of that influence being identifiable. About three years ago, covert action was simply a dirty word, and some people were trying to legislate covert action out of our capabilities. In recent months, a year, I've seen the American public and the American press more and more ask the question, "Isn't there something we can do to exert our power, our influence in a foreign country short of military action?" Yes, there is. It has limitations. But covert action does have a proper place in our diplomatic portfolio.

Now in 1974, Congress passed the Hughes-Ryan Amendment. It requires that each time the President approves a covert action, I must then notify up to eight committees of the United States Congress about this. Now I assure you that it's very difficult to recruit volunteers to undertake a highly risky covert action operation if I have to admit to them that I'm going up on Capitol Hill to tell some 200 people about it.

[Laughter.]

It's nothing against the Congress. It's that I don't want to tell 200 people at the CIA if they don't really need to know.

Now I understand and appreciate the reasons the Congress passed the Hughes-Ryan Amendment in 1974. It was an initial effort to put some controls on this area of our activity. It may have been very necessary; it may have been very desirable then. Since then we have instituted a very rigorous set of oversight procedures both within the executive and the congressional branches of our government. One of these procedures is two committees of the Congress dedicated exclusively to intelligence oversight. What we are asking for in legislative relief here is to notify only those two committees of our covert action; not to escape congressional oversight and scrutiny of the covert action process, and, in point of fact, not even to substantially reduce the number of committees that know. Because on the two intelligence committees, there are representatives of the other six committees. So if they have a legitimate jurisdictional need to know about a covert action activity, there will be members of their committees who can so inform them.

We think this is an important step, however, in bringing covert action back into the realm of the feasible.

-6-

The second area we want relief in is from the Freedom of Information Act. The problem here is much more one of perceptions than of fact. It is a perception of our foreign sources, of the foreign intelligence agencies with whom we cooperate, because they are not persuaded today their identities and the information they give to us will or can necessarily be kept secret under the Freedom of Information Act requirement.

Now in point of fact, it can. We do not need, under the law, to release information about our sources through the Freedom of Information Act process. But that right is constantly being challenged in the courts. And our agents keep wondering will you keep on winning those court cases. And as long as they perceive that there is a risk to them from the Freedom of Information Act if they work with us, our operations will continue to be hampered.

Now we do not ask for a blanket exemption from this act. What we ask for is an exemption for information pertaining to our sources of collecting intelligence. We want to be able to assure those sources that they are specifically exempt. This, of course, is an area of intelligence work that should be better understood by you of the media than by any other audience with whom I make this plea.

The third area is a problem of very serious personal concern to me. It concerns the deliberate, callous disclosure of the identities of our people and our sources overseas. It's unreasonable, in my opinion, to ask Americans to work for the CIA abroad, especially in the lawless climate that exists today where our people's lives are frequently on the line by the very nature of the work that they do, if we cannot at least protect their identities from our enemies.

[Applause.]

Yet we are in a position today where people like Philip Agee, whose avowed purpose is to destroy the Central Intelligence Agency, can do these things with impunity. You'll all recall the case of Richard Welch, our chief of station in Athens in 1975, who was murdered shortly after the disclosure of his identity. You are all well aware that five weeks ago in Jamaica one of Agee's cohorts, Louis Wolf, went on television, showed the pictures of 15 employees of the American Embassy, gave their names, their telephone numbers, their addresses, their license plate numbers. Two nights later the home of one of them was bombed and machine-gunned. Two nights after that there was an abortive attack on still another one.

It makes no sense for me to call for better intelligence, on the one hand, and then not take steps to provide elemental protection to those who are going to collect that intelligence for

-7-

our country. There is, of course, the obvious risks to the officer and his family. Beyond that there is the sacrifice to his career when he is exposed. We, the nation, have lost a great investment in this individual. The replacement of compromised officers sometimes takes us years to effect.

In addition, once an officer's identity is disclosed, our adversaries are much more capable of analyzing his past associations and his places of employment and uncovering still further the officers of the CIA.

Given the impetus of this recent Jamaican incident, there seems to be a good prospect that we will get some relief legislation through this session of the Congress. I hope so. It's been controversial, and it will continue to be so. I've watched the legislative history over the last six months. The debate in the Senate has raged from one extreme to the other. Early in the game, one senator stood up and said it was just not possible to punish private citizens who had no direct and authorized access to this classified information that was being disclosed. Recently another senator stood up and said that some risk to our civil rights were acceptable because, quote, "it is not possible to have an ongoing intelligence capability and a totality of civil rights protection."

The consensus legislation that is now drafted is somewhere in between. It is very narrowly crafted so as not to infringe the fundamental freedoms of speech and of the press that we all stand for. The legislation, as drafted, would first apply to persons who have had authorized access to classified information and then disclose it. But it would also apply to anyone who discloses protected intelligence identities if he or she does so as part of a deliberate effort to impair or impede the foreign intelligence activities of our country. That is a very big requirement.

Lastly, we need legislative relief in an area that is known as "gray mail," a situation in which a defendant or his attorney will demand that the government produce all matter of perhaps irrelevant classified information in the course of a prosecution. Unfortunately, there've been cases when such disclosure was of greater damage to the United States than would have been a withdrawal of the prosecution, and we have had to withdraw. A gray mail bill has been proposed by the Attorney General and passed by the United States Senate. Hopefully it will pass the House within the month.

In brief, this bill would enable the government to prevent the unnecessary disclosure of classified information during discovery or trial by allowing the prosecution to obtain pre-trial rulings on issues of relevance and by providing the court with alternatives to dropping the case in the event that the government still decides that it could not, for reasons of national security, adduce this necessary classified information. The alternatives,



-8-

for instance, might include the judge as stipulating that certain facts are true, or dismissing a particular count, or excluding the testimony of a particular witness. All in all, we simply ask for some way in which to provide the classified information to the court in a manner that will not lead to its disclosure if that's going to be of great harm to the United States, yet, at the same time, protect the rights of the accused.

Let me sum up by saying that we, you in the media, we in the intelligence profession, as Americans face a dilemma together. But it's one that particularly touches on your responsibilities within our national framework. On the one night, we're all striving for an open society, one in which the government processes are as open as possible. On the other hand, we all recognize the necessity for an essentially secret intelligence service in order to prevent our country from being surprised and threatened from without. The issue is, can the ideals and the necessary co-exist?

I believe they can. I believe they must. The issue is not one of leashing or unleashing the Central Intelligence Agency. The issue is whether we can equip our intelligence agencies with both the legal and the practical tools to do their jobs effectively in a changing world environment and, at the same time, require them to adhere to the legal, to the ethical standards that our country desires.

I believe this can be done. I believe we can achieve both objectives. On the one hand, the institution of rigorous oversight procedures of both the executive and congressional branches of our government over the past three years has, I believe, proved that the American citizen can insure and feel comfortable that the intelligence activities of our country are conforming with national policy and that they will be accountable to the people through their elected representatives. On the other hand, with the growing understanding and support of the American public, and with the passage by the Congress of the legal remedies I have described to you, I believe that we can continue to be the most effective intelligence service in the world.

We are moving surely, steadily in the right direction. But we are not yet there. I ask you who are in a profession not at all dissimilar from ours -- I ask you for your understanding and your support, not just support for enactment of the legislative remedies that I've mentioned, but your support for the maintenance by this country of a strong intelligence capability so that we can learn about, interpret and or see events in foreign countries, because I believe we will very much need to do that throughout this precarious decade of the 1980s that lies ahead of us.

Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

-9-

CHAIR: Admiral Turner, I find it difficult to believe that this could be put more eloquently than you did this afternoon. Thank you very much.

We have a lot of questions. If we don't get around to your question, it's not because the Admiral does not want to answer it. It's just that I think we have a lot of questions. And if we don't get around to yours, don't fret about it.

Admiral, what is your estimate of the percentage of women employed by the CIA compared to men, and how active are you in training women for assignments out of the clerical category? What is the entry [words inaudible] the agency for the job assignments and what type of career role is available?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Women are about 45% of the agency, but they are not nearly that high a percentage of the professional corps. We have a very strenuous equal opportunity program, upward mobility program for all minorities within the agency. I do have to say to you in all candor that we have severe limitations on us as to how rapidly we can make this move.

Much as in the military, in our profession, with some exceptions, it's difficult to bring people in laterally. You don't start a spy at the top. And therefore, we are dependent upon our strenuous efforts over the last few years of bringing more minorities in at the bottom and do everything we can to accelerate their upward movement, because we can't, with a few exceptions, as I say, bring them in from other professions.

You come into the Central Intelligence Agency because you have excelled in something. I'm often asked by fathers and mothers "What should my son or daughter study at college in order to qualify?" And I say have him or her study what he is she is best at and likes and enjoys. We employ almost every academic profession on the campuses, everything from psychiatry to English majors to political science, to economics, and so on. So do well at what you're good at and like and enjoy and show that you are above the norm, and we'll be very interested in you. We're particularly interested in young people who go out from college and have a few years of experience in the business world someplace and then realize that they'd like to do something even more exciting and challenging.

Q: Has your policy regarding recruiting news people for the CIA changed since the American Society of Newspaper Editors' convention this spring?

DIRECTOR TURNER: No. Our policy is that we will not engage a member of the American media in the process of collecting intelligence information, and we have not so engaged members of the American media since early 1976. At the same time, I would

-10-

not deny to you as members of the media your right to volunteer to support us in any way that you feel appropriate.

Q: If Russia is an enemy, why does the United States' policy favor SALT II? Why do we continue to aid Russia with grain shipments, truck and fertilizer plants, and all sorts of technology, all on easy credit?

DIRECTOR TURNER: The questioner raises an interesting point I'd like to stress, and that is that it's important that the intelligence agencies of your government stay clear of taking sides on what are known as policy issues such as these, because if we advocate SALT or we advocate trade or no trade with the Soviet Union, we then are suspect when we produce intelligence that maybe reinforces that position. So we try to call the shots as we see them on SALT without advocating it or opposing it.

I testified in great detail before the Senate of the United States on just how well I could do may part of SALT II, which would be checking on the Soviets, telling what they were doing, if they were possibly trying to cheat. Similarly, on the question of trade with the Soviet Union, it is our input; that is, to tell how important it would be to the Soviets to get a computer of this capacity, what is their computer status at this point, or is this kind of a production capacity, and what are they getting from other countries; does it make a difference; if they are turned down by the United States, can they just walk nextdoor and obtain it? We make those inputs regularly; we don't pass value judgments on it.

Q: Admiral, what are the CIA options in Iran if the Prime Minister elects not to free the American hostages?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Well, I would be candid with you that the options in Iran are very limited. You've watched all the forms of pressure that we've tried to apply, the attempts at a rescue effort, and we unfortunately have not been successful. It is my personal feeling that there are half a dozen or slightly more separate power centers in Iran. There's Khomeini himself. There is his personal entourage. There's the President, Bani-Sadr. There's a newly elected Majlis, or Parliament. There's about to be a Prime Minister. There's the Islamic Republican Party headed by Ayatollah Beheshti. And where the hostages are is as a pawn between these various power groups, each of them trying to use the hostage issue to further its power position within the country. Unfortunately, I don't in the near term foresee a coalescence of enough power by any several of these groups to resolve the issue.

Q: Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti had an NSA report in April saying Billy Carter is about to receive money from Libya. Was he unduly cautious in withholding that report....?

-11-

DIRECTOR TURNER: When I came to your good city, I went down to Pier 39. I had dinner at a Chinese restaurant. When I pulled out my fortune, it said "You will win prizes in contests testing your ability to answer questions."

[Laughter and applause.]

If I answer a question about an ongoing Senate and Justice Department investigation, I'll win the prize.

[Laughter.]

Q: The position of Director of Central Intelligence in theory should coordinate all U. S. intelligence functions. The non-CIA organizations still have specific autonomy. Do you see any change toward true centralization?

DIRECTOR TURNER: In 1978, President Carter signed an order giving me two special authorities to do the coordination better. One was the control over the budget of all of the intelligence activities, whether housed in the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, the FBI, or wherever.

The second was the authority to pack the collection elements -- the satellites, the listening posts, the human agents -- to tell what they were going to do. Now it's very important for the country that we do have close coordination in this area of collecting intelligence. It is either very expensive for technical equipment or it is very risky for human agents. And therefore, the President has stressed my authority to coordinate and control that. I think it is working quite well.

On the other end, the other half of intelligence is doing something with, analyzing, interpreting the information that is gathered by all of these sources. And here we want autonomy of the Defense Intelligence Agency and the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence Research, and other analytic organizations within the community, because no two individuals will interpret the same information precisely the same. And we must have competing and differing views come forward, lest a mental block by any one of us becomes the accepted wisdom and it happens to be wrong.

So we are, I think, on a good course today of tighter integration effected by the President's Executive Order on the collection side, and a continued emphasis on diversity and competitive analysis on that side.

Q: Admiral Turner, [words inaudible] a curious comment on the possibility that Russia will in some manner or other take over 8% of Saudi Arabia during the period between November, 1980 and January, 1981, during our [words inaudible]....

-12-

DIRECTOR TURNER: You're asking me for a crystal ball look into the future. I don't think that is the probability for a period of time. We are, of course, very concerned at the possibility of the Soviets establishing a stronger position nextdoor in Iran, where the situation, as I've described to you earlier, continues to deteriorate with all these power centers. And that in itself would be a very serious thing for the United States. It's a reason why we hope there is going to be a resolution somehow of the hostage issue so we can go back to a more normal and supportive relationship with Iran.

Q: Admiral Turner, usually -- this is about -- it is about quarter to 2:00. Usually by this time a hasty retreat has been beaten by many people to the door. But I haven't seen one person get up and leave yet. And you better not.

[Laughter.]

The CIA played a significant and effective role in the replacement of the government in Chile seven years ago. Do we, or can we have assurances that they are doing their best to undermine the present regime in Iran?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Now that I know you're all volunteers to stay here....

[Laughter.]

We have talked a fair amount about the covert action capabilities, the need for relief from the Hughes-Ryan Amendment to make them more effective. I do not talk in public about specific operational activities. But I assure you we do have a covert action apparatus that is available on call of the President, and with oversight of the Congress.

Q: Time -- time is going apace. [Words inaudible.] Did the White House suggest more cabinet level media involvement in events like the [words inaudible]?

DIRECTOR TURNER: I have felt since taking over this job 3 1/2 years ago that I had an obligation to the American public, particularly in view of the intense amount of criticism that took place between 1974-'77, '78, past activities of the CIA. And I felt that there was an opportunity to let the American public know more about what we do and what we do not do. So I've made a practice of periodic speaking engagements, sometimes with the media, as here, on some college campuses, like Stanford a few years ago, sometimes to groups of businessmen or civic groups. I've found it valuable to us, getting a feel for what people are thinking about us, what their concerns are about the world. I think that change in public attitude towards intelligence and the CIA in the last several years is very heart-

-13-

warming to us. It makes us feel much more a part of the overall governmental process of our country and feel much more support from the public.

We have tried over these past several years through our release of unclassified information to the public to do more also to support you directly. We now find that when we produce a classified piece of intelligence, we look at it and ask ourselves "Is it of value to the American public if we remove from it information that has to be kept exclusive or information that's related to our sources?" And if it is, today we publish it. We try to help the public realize the return on their investment in us.

And all that may, on the one hand, of course, may seem to be contrary to what I've been saying to you largely today, that we're trying to again establish our barriers of secrecy. But it really is not, because if we have too many secrets, if we keep things in the classified category that could be released to the public, it's like somebody said, if everything is secret, nothing is secret.

So we're trying, on the one hand, to share more with you in forums like this. On the other hand, we're trying to take that part of our profession which must be kept as secret as you must keep your sources and put a tighter ring around it. It is essential that we do that. It is the greatest threat to our intelligence capabilities in this country today. But it is also, I think, very worthwhile for us to be here, to share more with you, and I've really enjoyed this and appreciate it.....

[Applause.]

Thank you very much.

[End of speech and Q&A.]