

CIA to release 1970s documents on agency's crimes

Bill Van Auken
23 June 2007

The US Central Intelligence Agency is preparing to release a set of documents compiled more than 30 years ago detailing the agency's involvement over the previous quarter century in crimes both at home and abroad. These included assassination attempts against foreign heads of state, covert spying on newspaper columnists and other US citizens, the infiltration of left-wing groups and the testing of mind-alerting drugs on unwitting American subjects.

The CIA's current director, Gen. Michael Hayden, announced the decision to release the documents, known within the agency as the "family jewels," at a conference in Washington Thursday of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations.

"Much of it has been in the press before, and most of it is unflattering, but it is CIA's history," said Hayden. "The documents provide a glimpse of a very different time and a very different agency."

On the contrary, the issues raised in the report—assassinations, domestic spying, kidnappings and torture—are all too familiar to anyone following the activities the CIA and other US security agencies have carried out in the name of the "global war on terrorism."

The 693-page document was compiled in response to a 1973 directive issued by then-CIA Director James Schlesinger ordering senior agency officials to provide an accounting of all CIA activities that had been conducted in violation of the agency's charter, which specifically bars it from carrying out domestic operations.

Schlesinger's order to catalogue these illegal activities was prompted by the arrest of two longtime CIA operatives—E. Howard Hunt and James McCord—in connection with the break-in at the Democratic Party's Watergate offices. The Watergate crisis exposed broader agency involvement in the so-called "dirty tricks" carried out by the Nixon administration against its political opponents.

It was under these conditions, and in the wake of Richard Nixon's resignation, that Schlesinger's successor at the CIA, William Colby, assembled the record of the so-called

"skeletons" in the agency's closet and presented them to President Gerald Ford.

While some of the material in the document had previously been leaked and much of its contents were publicly exposed in the course of House and Senate investigations of the agency—the Pike and Church committees—in the mid-1970s, the CIA had until now steadfastly refused to release the material.

There is little doubt that what is to be made public will be carefully vetted for material that could still incriminate living participants in the crimes of that period, not least of them former secretary of state Henry Kissinger, who remains a key advisor of the Bush administration.

In his speech to the historians' conference, Hayden cautioned: "Remember that nothing about intelligence and declassification happens without human intervention. We do not—we cannot—just kick these things out the door. We have to examine each and every page through the real-world security prism I mentioned. It takes time. It takes care. It takes talent."

In conjunction with Hayden's announcement, the National Security Archive at George Washington University posted on its web site a series of documents. These include a summary of the "family jewels" prepared for the US Justice Department and memorandums of conversations between Colby, Schlesinger, Kissinger and Ford on their implications and on how to protect the CIA and the administration itself from the political consequences.

The summary was provided to the Justice Department in December 1974 after a front-page article by Seymour Hersh appeared in the *New York Times* under a banner headline, "Huge CIA operation reported in US against antiwar forces, other dissidents in Nixon years."

In an attempt at organizing damage control over the revelations, the CIA, the Justice Department and the White House initiated discussions of the document assembled by the agency.

Among the crimes cited by Colby in his presentation to DOJ was the forcible three-year confinement of a Soviet

defector, which Colby acknowledged “might be regarded as a violation of kidnapping laws.”

He also acknowledged multiple episodes of CIA spying on journalists in an attempt to discover their sources. Among those targeted was Jack Anderson and his assistants—including the current right-wing Fox News anchor Brit Hume—*Washington Post* national security reporter Michael Getler and two syndicated columnists, Robert Allen and Paul Scott.

Also included in the report were break-ins at the homes of former CIA employees and covert mail openings of letters to and from the Soviet Union and China.

Colby also acknowledged the CIA’s participation in assassination plots against Cuban President Fidel Castro, Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba and Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. Colby claimed that the CIA played no active role in the assassination of either Lumumba or Trujillo, but admitted to a “faint connection” between the CIA and the latter’s killers.

The CIA director also admitted that the agency had engaged in spying upon and infiltrating antiwar organizations and other left-wing opponents of the government in the 1960s and 1970s, amassing the names of some 10,000 people active in opposing the Vietnam War.

Also acknowledged was the use of “unwitting” American participants in experiments using drugs being tested for use in interrogations as well as the testing of polygraph and wire-tapping equipment on subjects in the US.

The memorandum of the conversation between Kissinger and Ford portrays the then-secretary of state and architect of some of Washington’s bloodiest crimes as apoplectic. He warned the president that the *Times* story on massive domestic spying represented “just the tip of the iceberg.” As to the facts not included in the story, he said, “If they come out, blood will flow.” As an example, he pointed to the role played by Robert Kennedy (the former attorney general and president’s brother) in personally directing the assassination campaign against Castro. The implications, he added could be “worse...than Watergate.”

Kissinger noted, the “Chilean thing” was not in Colby’s report, hinting darkly that it was kept out as “sort of a blackmail on me.”

In the 1973 Chilean coup, Kissinger and the CIA played the decisive roles in organizing the military overthrow of an elected government and the subsequent reign of terror in which tens of thousands of Chileans were murdered and tortured.

Indeed, this and other crimes were not included in Colby’s “family jewels,” presumably because the CIA hierarchy believed that they did not represent a violation of the charter under which the agency was founded in 1947.

The coup in Chile was only one in a long series of bloodbaths, coups and dirty wars organized by the CIA in Iran, Guatemala, Indonesia, Congo, Vietnam, Afghanistan and many other countries.

Hayden’s attempt to cast the limited number of crimes that found their way into the dossier compiled by Colby as relics from some distant and long-surpassed era hardly stands up to scrutiny. Indeed, the release of documents dating from nearly 35 years ago almost has the character of a distraction from far more current and serious crimes being carried out presently.

There is ample evidence that the agency has seldom been involved in as much criminal activity as it is today, while the limited restraints placed upon the national security establishment following the revelations of the mid-1970s have been largely swept aside since 2001, with the enactment of the USA Patriot Act and the assumption of ever-more-sweeping powers, including massive domestic surveillance, by the Bush White House.

In his remarks at the conference in Washington, Hayden acknowledged that the press of increased operations had slowed down some of the agency’s declassification work. “The ops tempo we have maintained since 9/11—and must continue to maintain—is unmatched in our agency’s history,” he said. “The good news here is that we’re producing great stuff for future historians.”

What will this “great stuff” include? Among the current “ops” that have been at least partially exposed is the CIA’s involvement in the illegal abduction of alleged suspects, and their rendition to secret prisons in many parts of the world where they have been subjected to torture and in some cases murdered. CIA agents have been indicted and brought to trial in Italy for one such “extraordinary rendition.”

In addition, CIA death squads and assassination teams have been deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and elsewhere.

It is unlikely, to say the least, that the agency is preparing the release of documents detailing these criminal activities. As Hayden told his audience of historians, “Of course, we cannot tell the American people everything we do to protect them without damaging our ability to protect them.”



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact