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## INTELLIGENCE:

## Four Little Words

In the months since its illegal domestic operations were first disclosed, the CIA and its sister intelligence agencies have stoically endured a steady drubbing from Congress and the press—and for a time last week, it looked like more of the same. The Senate select committee led by Frank Church revealed yet another CIA misdeed: the agency had apparently violated a direct Presidential order and secretly retained a stash of lethal poison. The Church committee's counterpart in the House quickly followed suit, releasing a top-secret report that found U.S. intelligence to have been "starkly wrong" in reading the outbreak of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. This time, however, the CIA counterattacked, accusing the House committee of releasing the kind of documents that could endanger the nation's security.

The controversy over the missing poison dated to a 1970 order by Richard Nixon that all stockpiles of material used in chemical and biological warfare be destroyed. Despite that, a recent CIA inventory turned up a small container of cobra venom and eleven grams of saxitoxin—a nerve poison extracted from butter clams—reportedly capable of killing 20,000 people. No one was quite sure what the CIA had in mind for the poison, though most agreed it was designed for individual killings (or even suicide pills for CIA agents themselves) rather than wholesale targets.

The broader question was who in the CIA had deliberately disobeyed the President. One former agent hunched that Nixon had secretly told the CIA to keep the toxins, but agency director William Colby conceded to Church that a violation of Presidential orders had taken place. The likelihood was that some mid-level official had done it on his own. But whether it was a subordinate or the director himself made little difference, according to Church. He said: "stricter outside controls were required."

No War? If the Senate committee had scored against the CIA, the agency itself soon scored against the House committee. To prove his claim that U.S. intelligence had failed to predict the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Rep. Otis Pike of New York released a Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) document issued on June 6—hours after the outbreak of hostilities—that concluded: "Mobilization of some personnel, increased readiness of isolated units and greater communications security are all assessed as parts of the exercise routine. . . . There are still no military or political indicators of Egyptian intentions or preparations to resume hostilities with Israel."

Colby charged that publication of four words—"and greater communications security"—might have jeopardized U.S. intelligence "sources and methods," presumably some inside line on Egyptian communication procedures. Pike dismissed that argument as invalid. And he was furious when the White House sent an assistant attorney general to reclaim all classified documents—or exact a standard pledge that the committee would not declassify any material without executive-branch approval. "That's exactly what's wrong," stormed Pike. "For decades other committees of Con-

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# Mary McGrory

## Four Little Words And CIA's Failures

Four little words from a classified document, we were told, could endanger national security.

Gerald Ford, who prides himself on his even temper, threw something like a fit over them. He stamped the presidential foot and said the House Select Committee on Intelligence must forthwith return to him all the classified documents he had so generously sent up to them.

The four little words, which were eventually disclosed by the CIA, provided no enlightenment. "And greater communications security" doesn't sound like a phrase to signal the end of western civilization or even complicate the life of an agent in the Balkans.

But against Rep. Otis Pike, D-N.Y., the chairman of the committee, the four words were the only stones the President could throw.

PIKE IS going after the wrong thing in his investigation. He is not beguiled by assassinations, poisonings and other reprehensible covert activities. He is going for the agency's throat. He is examining its very reason for being, its performance in intelligence activities.

He is compiling a litany of failures in spying, which is what CIA defenders say it does best.

Pike has found out that their record has been lamentable: CIA failed to foretell the Arab-Israeli War in 1973, the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the coup in Portugal, the Arab oil embargo, the Indian nuclear explosion and the Tet offensive in 1968.

The four words that caused the commotion occur in a classified document which is called "A Preliminary Post-Mortem Report on the Intelligence Community's Performance Before the Arab-Israeli War." The agency morosely concludes that agents of both the Defense Intelli-

gress have not done their job, and you've loved it." Not only would the panel retain the contested papers, Pike indicated, but it issued a new subpoena—for Vietnam war documents—returnable this week.

That seemed to prefigure a major court test. But Pike, whose committee franchise expires next January, was reluctant to lose the time in litigation, and the intelligence community seemed fearful of setting a legal precedent for Congressional declassification. The likeliest outcome seemed to be some sort of negotiated settlement in which Congress would continue to probe, but more cautiously, while the White House continued to provide the witnesses and documents.

—SANDRA SÁLMANS with ANTHONY MARRO in Washington

gence Agency and the CIA were "simply, obviously starkly wrong." On the morning the Egyptians marched, the Watch Committee was still receiving reassurances from agents warning of nothing more serious than "small-scale action."

Last Thursday, in executive session, the committee members and Mitchell Rogovin, CIA Director William E. Colby's counsel, haggled for two hours over release of the spooks' classified failures. Rogovin insisted on the deletion of 13 words, including the fateful four. By vote of 6 to 2, the committee, decided that the American people had a right to know about "and greater communication security," which any alert ham operator could have noted at the time.

IN EVERY case, Rogovin insisted that publication would "endanger sources and methods."

At the committee's defiance administration panicked. An emergency meeting was held in the office of White House counsel Philip M. Buchen. A counterattack was launched: An assistant attorney general, Rex E. Lee, was chosen to go up to Capitol Hill and instruct Otis Pike in his responsibilities.

It was a suicide mission. Pike is not the kind of man who quails at the sight of a representative from the Justice Department or pales at the suggestion that he is violating House rules and the Constitution.

Lee bravely spoke of the "necessary accommodation between the executive and the legislative," reproved Pike for a "serious breach in the use of classified information in an improper manner."

He urged, in those paragraphs Pike allowed him to complete, "a return to the traditional approach" — "the same way that for decades other committees. . . ."

Pike landed on him. "That is what is wrong, Mr. Lee," he said, "For decades other committees of Congress have not done their job and you have loved it."

ADVISING Congress, Pike continued in the same biting tone, has meant that "the executive branch comes up and whispers in one friendly congressman's ear or another friendly congressman's ear, and that is exactly what you want to continue and this is exactly what I think has led us into the mess we are in."

By concentrating on the supposedly defensible aspect of the intelligence community's activities, Pike poses the greatest threat to CIA's continued existence. He may not endanger "sources and methods." He endangers survival. Evil is forgivable on Capitol Hill; incompetence is not.

Even the agency does not defend what Frank Church's Senate committee is looking into. Colby and company don't mind those ex-post-facto examinations of the indefensible, and have cooperated, with an occasional show of reluctance.

But when Pike reveals they're not even doing what they're supposed to do, he's telling CIA's darkest secret. No wonder four words were used as an excuse to try to close down his dangerous prying.