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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I have today established a Commission to ascertain and evaluate any facts relating to activities conducted within the United States by the Central Intelligence Agency that give rise to questions as to whether the Agency has exceeded its statutory authority. I will soon be naming a distinguished group of members to serve on this "Blue Ribbon" Panel.

In the world in which we live, beset by continuing threats to our national security, it is vital that we maintain an effective intelligence and counterintelligence capability. This capability is fundamental in providing the safeguards that protect our national interests and help avert armed conflict. The Central Intelligence Agency has had a notable record of many successes in this field, but by the nature of its operations, such successes and achievements cannot be divulged publicly.

It is essential in this Republic that we meet our security requirements and at the same time avoid impairing our democratic institutions and fundamental freedoms. Intelligence activities must be conducted consistently with both objectives.

To that end, in addition to asking the panel to determine whether the CIA has exceeded its statutory authority, I have asked the panel to determine whether existing safeguards are adequate to preclude Agency activities that might go beyond its authority and to make appropriate recommendations. The Commission will immediately have the benefit of the report already furnished to me by Director W. E. Colby of the CIA. The Justice Department is, of course, also looking into such aspects of the matter as are within its jurisdiction.

I am aware of current plans of various Committees of the Congress to hold hearings on matters similar to those which will be addressed by the Commission. Whether hearings are undertaken by existing oversight Committees, or should the Congress deem a joint House-Senate Committee to be the best approach to avoid a proliferation of hearings, it is my strong hope that the Committees consider the findings and recommendations of the Commission.

I am confident that through the cooperative efforts of the Executive Branch, particularly by the new Commission, and of the Congress, the results will be beneficial both to our national security and to the traditions and institutions of this Republic.

Moreover, I am writing to those Department and Agency heads who are responsible for the overall intelligence activities of the United States as related to our national security and to the conduct of our foreign policy, for the purpose of emphasizing that they are at all times to conduct their activities within the scope of their respective statutory authorities.

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