

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), 1976

In the aftermath of its investigations of the Intelligence Community in 1975-76, Congress concluded that its own oversight of intelligence had been lax. The Committee was created by the Senate in 1976 with a mission to:

- Oversee and make continuing studies of the intelligence activities and programs of the United States Government.
- Submit to the Senate appropriate proposals for legislation and report to the Senate concerning such intelligence activities and programs.
- Provide vigilant legislative oversight over the intelligence activities of the United States to assure that such activities are in conformity with the Constitution and laws of the United States.

Composition

The Committee has 15 Senators - eight from the majority party and seven from the minority. The Committee structure is intended to reflect the nonpartisan nature of intelligence and encourage the Committee to work in a bipartisan manner.

Access

While all Senators have access to classified intelligence assessments, access to intelligence sources and methods, programs, and budgets is generally limited to Intelligence Committee members (and to members of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee). By law, the President is required to ensure that the Committee is kept “fully and currently informed” of intelligence activities. This includes keeping the Committee informed of covert actions and any significant intelligence failure.

Limitations

Under certain circumstances, the President may restrict access to covert action activities to only the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Intelligence Committee, and the House and Senate leadership. By law, even in these rare cases, all Committee Members will be aware of such circumstances and be provided a “general description” of the covert action information that is fully briefed only to the leadership.

Committee Activities

- Hearings
- Legislation
- Investigations and Reviews
- Confirmations
- Analysis
- Daily Oversight

Source:

- The U.S. Intelligence Community: An Annotated Bibliography (Mark Lowenthal, Garland Publishing Inc., New York & London, 1994)
- <http://intelligence.senate.gov/about.html>