

11-22-75
NYT

...and More Than Murder

It is particularly disconcerting that President Ford and the C.I.A. have seemed more intent on preventing the publication of the Senate committee's report than in reassuring the American people that the "aberrations" it documents are to be purged from any future intelligence operations.

Surely, a self-proclaimed "open Presidency" should not be party to a continuing cover-up of outrages committed in the name of the American people. Senator Frank Church, the committee's chairman, exposed the emptiness of the Administration's claim that it merely wanted to safeguard the persons cited in the report when he showed that, except for the Mafia connections, all names at issue had long been in the public domain.

It is precisely because the abuses are so grave that we share the concern expressed by Senator Charles Mathias Jr., a member of the committee, that the essential but narrow focus on the murder plots may obscure the larger areas of illegal C.I.A. activities—massive operations of domestic spying and interference with the rights and privacy of American citizens.

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While we support the committee's recommendation for legislation that would make any involvement in foreign murder plots punishable under Federal criminal law, the housecleaning must go considerably beyond such limited correctives.

Legitimate activities of intelligence, centered in the collection of up-to-date information concerning the strengths and weaknesses of any potential adversary or foreign threat to the nation's security are not at issue. They need to be shored up rather than weakened. But intelligence agencies have to be stripped of their surreptitiously acquired policy-making powers. Nothing is more dangerous to the conduct of foreign policy and the protection of domestic security than behind-the-scenes plotting by a politicized, out-of-control intelligence apparatus.

As we have argued on this page for twenty years, effective Congressional oversight is essential to forestall such outrages as have now come to light. The Senate report should be viewed merely as a beginning of a new determination not to destroy the intelligence agencies but to put them on a short leash to prevent them from straying beyond the legal and moral limitations essential to preserve a free and lawful society.