

Tom Braden

Decision-Making and 'Covert Operations'

Book 10-12-74

This town is disturbed about what the CIA did in Chile and is asking itself where to place the blame and how to prevent something similar from happening again.

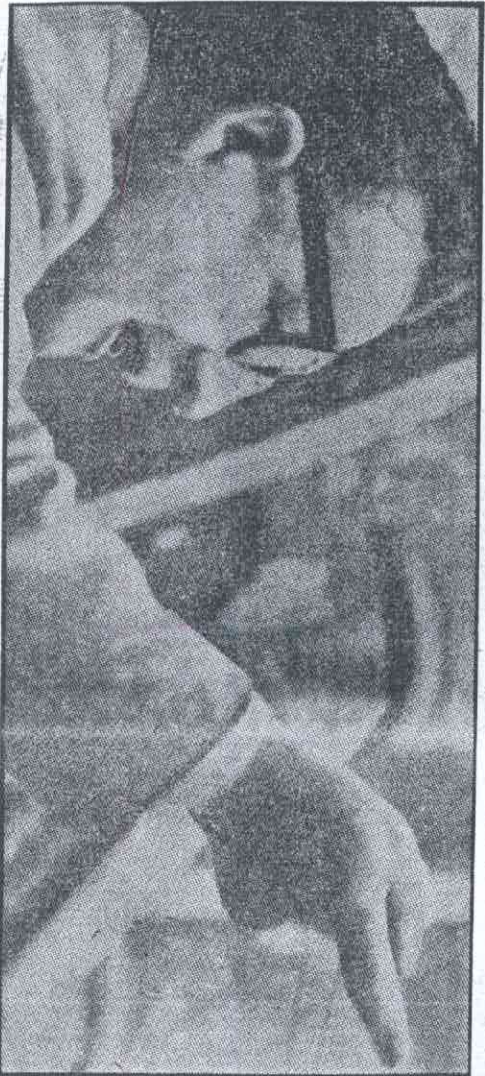
Some people—Sen. James Abourezk (D-S.D.), for example—are saying that so long as you have covert operators ready to operate somebody is going to approve a plan to use them, and that the best way to avoid future misadventures is to abolish the jobs of the operators and forbid the hiring of any more.

On the other hand, Sens. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) and Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.) think they can envision occasions when covert operations might be essential to the survival of the nation. What went wrong in the Chilean affair, they say, is that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger approved a plan which was not only not essential to the survival of the nation but not even conducive to the nation's good.

They have introduced a bill to give Congress an official oversight function on covert operations. But they are not very clear as to whether Congress should approve the operations in advance or merely be told about them after they are under way.

The ambiguity points up the weakness of their arguments. If Congress knows officially about operations in advance, Congress is responsible for a lot of dirty business, and no representative or senator wants to be so responsible. On the other hand, if Congress were merely told about covert operations after the fact, what good would that do?

There's a third aspect to the argument, and it is put forward by Sen. Frank Church (D-Ida.). Church spent



"The CIA paid for the truck strike which paralyzed the government and led to the death of Allende."

a lot of time last year investigating an earlier CIA effort in Chile—the campaign to defeat Salvador Allende at the polls. Obviously, he didn't probe deeply enough. At the same time he was getting testimony about a 1970 operation, the CIA was off on another one.

What irritates Church even more is that Henry Kissinger, whom he regarded as a friend, was a great deal less than candid with him when Church asked him questions about the downfall of Allende.

Kissinger kept repeating he knew nothing of the coup—without saying he knew a good deal about what

brought about the coup. He also told Church that the CIA intervention was limited to paying newspapers and radio stations which Allende was trying to put out of business.

Church took him at his word and then discovered that the CIA had also paid for the truck strike which paralyzed the Chilean government and led directly to the death of Allende.

What disturbs Church is the lack of trust as well as the lack of judgment. He's even willing to finesse the judgment. Perhaps, he says, Kissinger had reasons for the operation which are not now clear. But if so, why not explain them to key members of the

Foreign Relations Committee? Why dissimble to the very people who are trying to help him with detente in the Mideast?

Right after World War II, this country was asking itself whether a democracy could engage in covert operations. Experience since then seems to demonstrate that it can but only at the tremendous risk of judgment and government by the few. Chile is another example of that risk.

The question people are asking now is whether the decision-making group can be enlarged, the judgment made more responsible and the risks minimized.