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Changing Moods About Intelligence Gathering

America seems to swing between extreme moods in its policy about its foreign intelligence systems. Most, if not all, nations have them and take them for granted, but not we in the U.S.A.

The current "revelations" about the CIA have shocked and confused many Americans. This is not the first time such a reaction emanated from Washington. When Henry L. Stimson became President Coolidge's Secretary of State after World War I, he smashed the intelligence service built up laboriously after that conflict, and closed its cryptographic office. He was quoted as saying in explanation, "Gentlemen don't read other people's mail." This moment was presumably the 20th century nadir of U.S. secret intelligence.

Its zenith may have been reached during World War II when Franklin Roosevelt became so impressed with the work of General "Wild Bill" Donovan's OSS that he contemplated a post-war peacetime espionage agency which would combine the OSS, the FBI, Army G-2, Navy ONI, the Internal Revenue Agency, the Secret Service, and even part of the FCC. (See for details E. H. Cookridge's "Gehlen - Spy of the Century," Random House, New York, 1971, p. 131.) In those dim dark years nearly half a century ago it was the isolationist, anti-Democratic, Roosevelt-hating Chicago Tribune that mysteriously obtained and printed government documents to embarrass the government. It even printed U.S. war plans on the eve of Pearl Harbor. (This service to the public has now been taken over by The Washington Post.) It was the Tribune's story about Roose-



Henry L. Stimson

velt's intended intelligence consolidation order which destroyed the plan which that paper called "a combined American Gestapo and OGPU which would pry into the lives of citizens at home."

The OSS was disbanded by President Truman in somewhat the spirit of Secretary Stimson, but was eventually to achieve great power in its reincarnation as the CIA. Nevertheless, it never reached the heights of power and prestige which FDR apparently planned for it.

Let us hope we do not swing back to the naive mood attributed to Secretary Stimson nor contemplate again the excesses planned in the flush of World War II victory. The fact remains, however, that we need a world wide intelligence service, and a good one, in this troubled world. How can a president today make wise choices about world affairs without the best facts and intelligence it is possible for our government to assemble?

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