

Expansion Of Covert Action Eyed

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By R. Jeffrey Smith
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CIA Director John M. Deutch and other senior intelligence officials yesterday raised the possibility that the Clinton administration may soon decide to expand the use of covert action, or clandestine operations, by U.S. intelligence agencies to try to influence activities in foreign countries.

If such a decision is made—and Deutch has privately endorsed it—the move would represent a major shift in U.S. intelligence policy, which in recent years has stressed the importance of merely collecting foreign intelligence rather than directly taking steps to intervene in foreign events.

What CIA officials primarily have in mind, according to the officials, are possible covert actions meant to subvert or interfere with groups engaged in drug smuggling, the spread of weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear arms, or international crime and terrorism. If the operations were successful, none could be traced to Washington, they said.

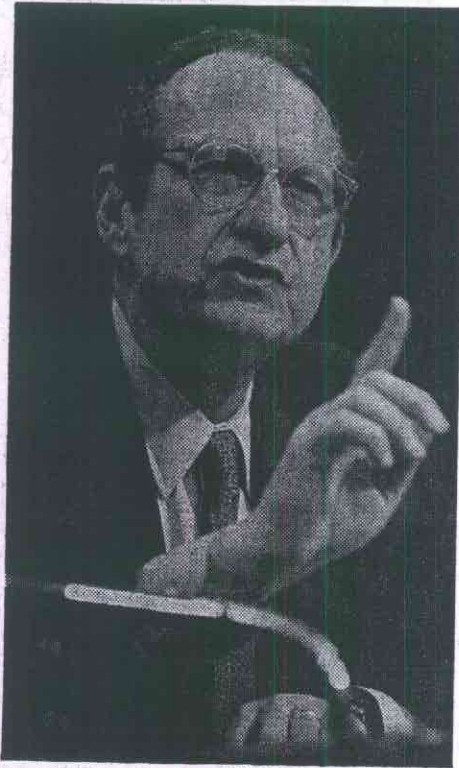
Covert actions such as these would be very different from the large paramilitary operations undertaken by the CIA in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s to undermine communist governments or halt subversion in Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia, the officials said.

"This is a subtle instrument, not a blunt instrument," a senior official said. "For 40 years, this tool has been geared toward traditional Cold War targets. Now, we are looking . . . to new targets . . . where the hand of the United States is not intended to be obvious."

The official, who spoke on condition he not be identified, said the CIA has decided "to offer the policymakers an opportunity to think about this possibility. This is a tool we have, and there may be an opportunity for aggressive use of this instrument."

Clandestine operations by the CIA and other intelligence agencies were sharply scaled back at the close of the Cold War, following a series of scandals caused by the public revelation of such secret activities as the covert supply of U.S. arms to Iran in a failed effort to rescue U.S. hostages and the mining of a Nicaraguan harbor.

The potential expansion of U.S. covert action



BY RAY LUSTIG — THE WASHINGTON POST

*"We have greatly reduced
our capability to engage in
covert action."*

— John M. Deutch, director of central intelligence

has recently become a hotly debated issue among U.S. intelligence experts. In the September-October edition of *Foreign Affairs*, Roger Hilsman, a former Columbia University professor and an assistant secretary of state for intelligence and research, argued that "covert action has been overused as an instrument of foreign policy and the reputation of the United States has suffered."

Deutch has approached the controversial subject of his agency's involvement in covert action gingerly in his public statements. But in a speech yesterday to the National Press Club that was more forthcoming than previous remarks, he

made a point of saying that "I believe . . . the U.S. needs to maintain, and perhaps even expand, covert action as a policy tool."

Deutch defined covert actions as "those activities [the] CIA undertakes to influence events overseas that are not intended to be attributable to the country." He noted that following the Iran-contra scandal and others involving U.S. activities in Central America, "we have greatly reduced our capability to engage in covert action."

He pledged that whenever covert action is undertaken by the CIA, it will first be "approved at the highest levels of the government" and subjected to a review process that includes "timely notification of appropriate congressional oversight bodies."

Deutch also disclosed in his speech that he has asked the heads of all U.S. intelligence agencies to provide him with both short-term and long-term budget plans that clearly delineate how their activities meet a series of intelligence objectives established by President Clinton last spring.

Deutch said his request is meant to help "assure that all elements of the community work in harmony."

Other officials said that even though Deutch lacks the legal authority to approve or disapprove the spending plans of other intelligence agencies, such as those within the Department of Defense, his influence with top policymakers in effect will give him substantial say over those budgets.