

Following A Lawless Legacy

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A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Frank Church and his Senate committee continue to stalk the CIA. While appearing to carry on its investigations in secrecy, bit by bit the committee is convicting the agency in public.

The essential case against the CIA, and by extension former President Nixon and current Secretary of State Kissinger, is that by murder, bribery and other foul means they interfered

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In the domestic affairs of other nations, most notably Chile. Moreover, they committed these acts in a clumsy, inept way without congressional authorization and therefore somebody must be punished. The somebody in question will probably be former CIA director Richard Helms, who does not seem to have mastered the art of scrambling the evidence relating to who gave the orders to commit such crimes.

The conservative defenders of the CIA are in a difficult tactical situation. Assassination is not the open, virile American way of doing things, but they are delighted that the former Marxist president of Chile is in his grave.

Since the conservatives haven't found a way to protect the CIA, we can assume that Sen. Church will finally be able to hang Helms by his earlobes, and that a report will be issued saying the agency got out from under proper control and so new laws must be passed to bring it under closer supervision.

Only then will the CIA be allowed to put its cloak and dagger back on and resume its business of offing the heads of small states too stupid or too stubborn to understand whose sphere of influence they must dwell in. If it should work out that the CIA really is effectively prohibited from carrying on these dastardly functions then, in short order, another agency of government will take over those chores. We were

COMMENTARY, From B1

chopping off heads of states long before there was a CIA.

It is thought that American Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson played the role of a CIA station chief in connection with the murder of Francisco Madero, the president of Mexico, in 1913. As with the killing of Allende in Chile or Diem in South Vietnam, the evidence isn't conclusive, but it's persuasive.

Did President Taft know beforehand? Did President Kennedy? Did President Nixon? The documents suggest Taft did not. In democratic societies, where you have goo-goo

running around loose raising ethical questions, a wise President is an ignorant one.

American policy vis-a-vis Mexico in those years is instructive. With something in the order of about \$1 billion worth of Mexican investments by its citizens, the United States had backed a dictator there for years. The reaction to his overthrow by Madero was similar to the reaction to Allende coming to power in Chile six decades later.

The murder of Madero, a man given to making speeches about poverty and peons, did not secure American investments but brought on a civil war. Our policy, then as now, was a peculiar admixture of

self-deceptions, protection of investments and militant, evangelistic propagation of our democracy. Thus in the same 12-month period Woodrow Wilson, playing the epitome of the self-righteous American, announced to the world that, "I am going to teach the South American Republics to elect good men," and at the same time he was writing the British government that, "... the United States government intends ... to exert every influence it can exert to secure Mexico a better government under which all contracts and business concessions will be safer than they have been ... I hope that Sir Edward Gray [the Foreign Minister] will feel free to convey the contents of this letter

to ... British and Canadian investors ..."

What Wilson was trying to do is what the CIA would try to do later: manipulate matters so that Mexico would appear to have an independent, democratic government that would do exactly as it was told when it came to American economic and strategic interests. The upshot has a familiar ring: the seizure of the port of Vera Cruz by a naval squadron, disingenuous if not dishonest explanations to Congress, an American expeditionary force marching aimlessly around North Mexico for months, and finally the nationalization of many of the investments the American government sought to prevent.

Wilson could not find a Mexican politician who could both front for the United States and stay in power any more than Johnson and Nixon could in Vietnam. The same thing was tried in Cuba, not only under Eisenhower and Kennedy but also under Theodore Roosevelt, Taft and Wilson. Sometimes it works for awhile, and sometimes not at all. The methods are always the same: either outright military force or CIA-type tricks by stealth.

"If I should be elected President," Warren Harding said in 1920, "I will not ... misuse the power of the Executive to cover with a veil of secrecy repeated acts of unwarranted interference in the domestic affairs of

the little republics of the Western Hemisphere, such as in the last few years have not only made enemies of those who should be our friends but have rightly discredited our country as a trusted neighbor."

He was referring to CIA-ish activity carried out before the Cold War, before the Russian Revolution, back in the days when Lenin was living in a Swiss rooming house. No, neither international communism nor CIA lawlessness explains episodes like Chile. It is toward our policies in regard to these countries and our investments in them that we should look. Change the policies and you'll change the CIA soon enough.

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