

Post 7/2/78 In Defense of the CIA's Purpose

After nearly 35 years of association with the U. S. intelligence community, including 23 years service with the CIA, I must say that nobody has yet stated in public what it is really like to the great majority of those who work on the inside and who are not spies or clandestine operators.

It is the most exhilarating intellectual challenge that western civilization has devised since the great Renaissance. In the best tradition of Copernicus, Darwin, and Einstein, we were charged by the Congress of the United States with the mission of understanding the human world outside the U. S. and the uses that the human world makes of the physical universe around us. But we were not left alone to tackle that super-human task. The world itself imposed an extra challenge; i.e. much of the world tries to hide what it is doing or to mislead us concerning its meaning. In other words, we were given an almost impossible task and told to do it in spite of everything that others could do to impede our progress.

In our efforts to meet this double challenge we have tried every analytical tool that could be developed by the intellectual community and devised many ingenious programs for the collection of the facts needed in our analysis. Among them were clandestine operations of incalculable value.

The atmosphere inside the CIA and other intelligence organizations has been that of a crusade — a crusade searching for the truth. This atmosphere of search for intellectual truth was made possible by the highest standards of personnel security. An effort was made to hire those who

seemed to be the brightest and the most intellectually responsible. In addition, because we knew that we had all been carefully screened, we were confident that we were dealing with people who had no hidden motives.

Security screening did not produce a nice smooth population of people who thought alike. We were all strong personalities who were competing for what we thought was right. The result was a constant debate, but it was a debate that we knew that we could trust. The truth was not always obvious and we sometimes made mistakes, but we knew that nobody was going to get personal gain from winning a specific argument. He would get ahead only if he were demonstrated to be right over an extended period of time. In addition, we knew that nobody was secretly trying to distort or mislead the debate for hidden political motives. An argument might be advanced by partisans for a specific weapons system or a specific policy, but such arguments were advanced openly.

The atmosphere of intellectual freedom was exciting. During the McCarthy era, for example, we felt complete immunity to the witch-hunt hysteria. In our intellectual sanctuary, we did not have to develop the tough hides and sharp claws that public exposure seems to require. Now, unfortunately, some people have seized on some peripheral activities that could be made to seem sensational and are using them in a way that can only damage our search for the truth.

If the press is our counterpart among the public in this search for truth, then the press must try to understand that the mission of CIA is to

get and report the truth to our duly constituted leaders in spite of everything that ignorance and willful distortion can do to frustrate us.

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In the Letters to the Editor column in the June 23 Post, two letters were grouped under the heading, "The CIA: Security at What Price?" The first letter, by John J. Rumbarger, indicates that the security of the United States is not one of his major concerns. I see no point in commenting further on his ideas.

The other letter, by Margaret E. Marthens, suggests that the writer is confused. It might help if she used a time-tested process called "thinking." I know a little about the price of national security. I learned it in World War I, when many of my comrades who weren't as lucky as I was paid that price; and my sons got a bit of indoctrination in the subject in World War II. She suggests that security and a "taut ship" are incompatible with human decency. I always thought that they were inseparable.

I am all for civil rights and human decency but the right of the people of the United States to be protected against enemies abroad and at home is paramount. It was failure of the German people to keep tabs on a "kooky" paperhanger that brought on World War II. I hope the United States will know right where to pick up the "kooky" paperhangers in this country if the need should arise.

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