

# Countering Intelligence

**HONORABLE MEN: My Life in the CIA.** By William Colby and Peter Forbath. Simon & Schuster. 493 pp. \$12.95

**IN SEARCH OF ENEMIES: A CIA Story.** By John Stockwell. Norton. 285 pp. \$12.95

By **STEPHEN S. ROSENFELD**

**T**HESE TWO BOOKS, and the characters and careers of the two former Central Intelligence Agency men who wrote them, invite contrary moral and political judgments on the postwar era. Are you with former director William Colby, defender of the establishment's cold-war faith, who looks without apology or fresh insight at what has been wrecked and what has been redeemed in a long generation's pursuit of American-style world order? Or is your man John Stockwell, who embraced the anti-Communist cause just as it was peaking in the mid-1960s, only to burn out and defect in the following decade?

The reader who wants to make more than a cardboard choice has no easy choice. For all that one may now rue the excesses, if not the very existence, of the CIA and of the activist internationalism that it made possible, people like Colby can fairly claim to have contributed their share to the state of relative tranquility and advantage in which some of us now deplore the foundations of our good fortune. The agency, and by extension the whole national security apparatus, survive, if in truncated form, because even their most guilt-ridden and vindictive critics realize that they owe it a debt. To recognize that Americans have exaggerated the external menace and misused their power is not to say there is no menace and no need to use some power. Our society is in the process of reconstructing something of a national security consensus at about that point. That is roughly where Colby is.

Yet few among us would contend that the critics of power—and who has more standing (or greater personal

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**HIDDEN TERRORS.** By A. J. Langguth. Pantheon. 339 pp. \$10

By **LAURENCE STERN**

**T**ERRORISM IS A LAST resort, whether it is carried out by governments or guerrilla undergrounds. This book is a timely examination of two aspects of terrorism. One is the official terrorism of state repression. Its ultimate political tribunal is the torture chamber. The other goes under the name of revolutionary terrorism and is not kinder to the flesh or spirit of its victims. Its supreme forum is the network nightly news.

*Hidden Terrors*, by former *New York Times* correspondent A. J. Langguth, seeks to illuminate both systems of political violence in the person of Dan Mitrione, the American police advisor who was kidnapped and assassinated by Tupamaro guerrillas in Uruguay in 1970, several months after the Kent State killings.

Mitrione was portrayed by the film-maker Costa-Gavras in *State of Siege* as a proconsul of repression in Latin America, a Yankee Savonarola dedicated to rooting out and destroying leftist influences wherever he found them. Langguth's treatment is both more objective and more compassionate in describing how Mitrione, a son of working-class Italian immigrants and the respected police chief in his home town of Richmond, Indiana, became an instrument of American foreign policy in Brazil and Uruguay.

The book dismisses the strong suggestion in the film that Mitrione was involved with the CIA and had direct knowledge of the torture of political prisoners. "Costa-Gavras included in *State of Siege* every undocumented rumor about Dan Mitrione . . . because his aim was a composite indictment of U.S. policy throughout Latin America," Langguth writes.

In this book, Mitrione is presented as a dutiful father and husband, as a fair-minded cop who reprimanded his subordinates when they used unnecessary force in making arrests. He was lured by the prospect of advancing

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## Honorable Men

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compulsion) to be among their ranks than the former exercisers of power?—have not made their own contribution to our fortune, broadly conceived. That the United States seems to its privileged classes, or so I imagine, a place where the human spirit still has room to flex and expand is due in no small measure to the John Stockwells, who speak against the idea of corporate or institutional domination of our personal values, exchanging the comforts of status for charges of betrayal. I think our society is reconstructing something of an individual-conscience consensus at about that point, and that is where Stockwell is.

I don't want to choose, or feel a need to choose, between the two. Our society produces, even gorges upon, just such pairings. We enjoy the luxury of hosting ceaseless confrontations between the organization men and the mavericks; between those whose strength is building and getting along and those who do better at taking apart and going it alone; between those who practice more than a little self-deception and those whose failings run to self-indulgence: Colby and Stockwell.

Having said this, I must tick off some striking similarities between Colby the apparatchik, a man pleased that his forgettable mien facilitated cover, and the appletart upsetter Stockwell, who wears now the same conspicuous cross on a chain that he wore in the Angolan bush. They were drawn initially to the CIA by the same largely unexamined anti-Communist enthusiasm, the same instinct for engagement at a tingling public-private intersection. They share an odd kind of age dysfunction: Colby, starting out, seems old in mental style, too easily the bureaucrat; Stockwell, getting older, seems un-grown up, uneasy at responsibility. They both enjoyed the "clandestine culture," manipulating other people secretly. They are one in their urge to justify their separate paths.

For Colby, whose book recounts his whole career from OSS parachutist to CIA director, one episode sums up his chosen life-style: the Phoenix program

to uproot the Viet Cong infrastructure (VCI) in South Vietnam. He still squirms under the label of assassin Phoenix gave him. Proud of the program's part in "bring[ing] an atmosphere of law and decency to the struggle against the VCI," he testified in 1971 that in three years some 17,000 VCI cadre had chosen amnesty, 28,000 had been captured and 20,000 killed. "But the word was 'killed,' not 'assassinated'—in combat actions. When he conceded in his straight-arrow way that some few VCI might have been assassinated anyway, he found himself permanently tarred.

Stockwell is unpersuaded. He says: "PHOENIX had been the cryptonym for the agency's terrorist program in Vietnam. Even the agency claimed PHOENIX had killed over twenty thousand people. . . ." I think this is one of those instances where gross unfairness has been done, by various elements including the press, to Colby. His perception of the Vietnam war as a worthy and winnable enterprise is dogged and pitiable. But on points of fact or operational analysis, as in respect to Phoenix, he seems to me sound.

Becoming director in 1973, Colby inherited the "family jewels," the 693-page list of agency abuses and questionable practices compiled and already ordered corrected by his predecessor, James Schlesinger. The storm that followed publication of leaked parts of that list was to Colby a redundancy, costly but bearable. Rather than "distancing" the agency from embarrassing revelations as Richard Helms had done, Colby fastened on a strategy of ample and often preemptive disclosure to spare the agency the even greater decimation he felt would be visited upon it if its secrets were extracted from it piecemeal by Congress and the press.

He approached this task as he had approached other CIA operations, looking to the power (now in the Congress) and acting accordingly. His candor overwhelmed, for one, Nelson Rockefeller, blind to Colby's special institutional interest in saving CIA. Henry Kissinger mocked the Catholic Colby's new habit of "confession" to Congress but later, to Colby's tight-lipped satisfaction, saw the light. Gerald Ford found his disclosure strategy politically burdensome and fired him. The CIA itself is not unanimous on the subject but I think Colby performed in an honest, effective and responsible way to bring the CIA in from the cold. In retirement he has continued, as with this book, to try to expand the political space the agency needs for its

work and self-esteem, and to bring the agency for the first time under a regimen of law—again, not because he loves the law but because he loves the CIA.

Stockwell's book centers on his service as task-force chief, an upper working-level job, of the agency's Angola operation in 1975-76. From the start he felt it was unwise and unnecessary to try with the inadequate resources at hand to block the Neto faction, which now rules. "Bureaucratic function lust" and the expectation of a "unique human experience" brought him aboard. The operation unfolded. There was much bungling, though perhaps nothing that an extra couple of hundred million dollars couldn't have overcome. We budgeted \$31 million to back our tigers; the Russians put ten times as much behind theirs, plus the Cubans, whose entry was invited, Stockwell believes, by our interven-

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tion. Our tigers lost, leaving Stockwell to ponder the folly of having a CIA to provide policy makers the "aggressive option," which he concludes is "the wrong game for a great nation." Certainly Angola makes his case.

I have not so far mentioned the particular charges Stockwell has emphasized while promoting his book. They are greatly overblown. He has charged that contrary to policy and word the United States colluded with South Africa in Angola, but little material in his book supports the charge and much material undercuts it. He has charged that Colby misled Congress on Angola, though in the book Stockwell concedes that he never knew just what Colby told Congress about the operation. Anyway, this charge is absurd: Colby, briefing relentlessly according to law, gave Congress the sword it used to kill the operation. His other charges are nickels and dimes.

*Honorable Men* is a plea for a blessing. *In Search of Enemies* a demand for an indictment. They represent the poles of a profound and necessary argument we continue to have about ourselves. □

# Hidden Terrors

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his career and serving his country as a police advisor abroad. Fighting communism must certainly have had greater allure than an indefinite future of breaking up family quarrels and locking up drunks in Richmond.

More broadly, Langguth is writing about the processes of intervention in Latin America during the 1960s. For those who are fixated politically on the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy record, it is useful to remember that the larger portion of the 1960s when Democrats were in the White House were banner years for Washington-assisted government-toppling around the world.

Langguth treats his material more as a novelist than as a political journalist, though he is a journeyman practitioner in both forms. He shuttles his narrative from subject to subject and capital to capital in building toward his verdict. The principal Americans who figure in the plot are Mitrione, renegade CIA agent Philip Agee, who left for Latin American assignment at about the same time as Mitrione, and former U.S. ambassador to Brazil Lincoln Gordon. They represent the range of American presence between the diplomatic and espionage services.

Langguth's sympathies are clearly with the underground insurgents, some would say terrorists, who are followed one by one into the special interrogation centers where they matriculate politically in torture rooms.

Though Mitrione's story, ending in the assassination, is the central dramatic vehicle, his role was essentially a minor one, a foot soldier in U.S. government efforts to control events. A far more important player was Ambassador Gordon, who governed the American mission in Brazil during the crucial period of the coup d'etat against Joao Goulart, the cowboy leftist president targeted as unreliable by the national security establishment in Washington.

The suspicion in Washington, shared by Gordon, was that Goulart, although already in power, intended to pave the way for a Communist government in Brazil. This created a serious semantic dilemma for the U.S. policy makers, as Langguth points out.

"Because men who already hold their country's highest office rarely

overthrow their own government, there was no word Gordon and his advisers could find to describe what they accused Goulart of plotting. It fell to the ambassador to invent a term, and he took pride in its aptness and ingenuity," Langguth writes. "Anyone working from beneath a government to overthrow it was engaged in 'subversion.' Therefore, Goulart's plot was 'superversion.'"

With considerably more detail than has yet been in print, Langguth describes the network of anti-government organizations in Brazil which became the conduits for CIA funding and black propaganda activity directed against Goulart.

Gordon, now a senior fellow at Resources for the Future, acknowledged many years after leaving Brazil that the United States had covertly financed candidates in Brazil's 1962 elections. The figure of \$20 million has been circulated, although the only authority for that sum of which I am aware is former CIA man Agee. Gordon has repeatedly denied the central role Langguth ascribes to him in the plotting of Goulart's overthrow.

It is regrettable that the events in Brazil, insofar as U.S. involvement is concerned, have not been subjected to the sort of scrutiny that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, headed by Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho), applied to events in Chile during the early 1970s. Nonetheless, Langguth makes a convincing case based on interviews with U.S. officials and Brazilian principals that the American ambassador and his military attache, Vernon A. Walters (later to become the CIA's deputy director), were in close touch with the Brazilian military leaders who were planning the successful coup d'etat against the country's elected president in the spring of 1964.

As a piece of literary workmanship, Langguth's book wobbles about discursively on its axis—the Mitrione affair. But there is an impressive amount of reporting in it to sustain a point of view that the author takes no pain to hide. □