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CIA: 'The President's Private Army'

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Despite all the findings and recommendations of the Senate and House investigations of the CIA, it is a good bet that it will continue to be the President's private army.

The congressional committees succeeded in uncovering almost unbelievable abuses in the covert operations of the entire intelligence community, and they have made a number of constructive recommendations for reform, but the question of how to rein in a willful President remains unresolved. Perhaps there is no sure-fire way of resolving it or, if there is, Congress hasn't the nerve to impose it.

The multimillion-word record of the congressional inquiries disclosed plenty of prereading by the agency, but most of the major violations and most of the major extralegal activities have now been traced back to White House pressure of one kind or another over the last two decades, regardless of whether the Democrats or Republicans were in power.

The CIA has often been denounced for its "black" operations, including overthrowing or trying to subvert governments we didn't approve of in Iran, Guatemala, Chile, Greece, Laos, South Vietnam and Cuba, among others. The CIA did the planning for the initial Bay of Pigs invasion, but it was John F. Kennedy who put it into effect. All the other operations were also ordered by the White House.

William Colby, the former director of the CIA, had the candor to tell Congress how the CIA used millions of dollars in efforts to undermine the duly elected Chilean government several years ago. At the same time, however, he revealed he was carrying out a formal decision of the White House for the Forty Committee.

The White House has consistently gone to great pains to conceal its pressures on the CIA, the chief reasons being that the pressures were often motivated more by political than security considerations, as in former President Nixon's efforts to subvert the agency in the Watergate coverup. The full story of the CIA's assassination activities is still clouded, but all the evidence indicates these initiatives were essentially White House specials.

It is not easy even for the most courageous CIA directors to resist the determined President when, in the name of alleged national security, he wants something done that may seem improper, reckless or possibly illegal. Who is the director to challenge the Commander-in-Chief?

In any case, as Richard Helms, the former head of the CIA, discovered, un-

cooperative directors can readily be replaced. Helms, who ended up as U.S. ambassador to Turkey, informed the Church committee that in his opinion "there is no way to insulate the director of Central Intelligence from unpopularity at the hands of Presidents or policymakers if he is making assessments which run counter to administration policy...."

So much attention has been focused on the agency's sensational covert operations that little notice has been taken of how the White House can also influence and subvert the CIA's important function of providing intelligence estimates on which critical decisions are supposedly made. The evidence shows that a number of key CIA estimates, ranging from Soviet missile capability to the effect of U.S. bombing on Cambodia, were either doctored or suppressed to accommodate White House policy.

John Guzenga, former chairman of the board of estimates, told the Church committee that a CIA director "who does his job will, more often than not, be the bearer of bad news. When intelligence people are told, as happened in recent years, that they were expected to get on the team, then a sound intelligence policy relationship has in effect broken down."

But Mr. Ford has made it clear that he is going to resist every effort by Congress to tie his hands. In that respect, he is no different than other Presidents. Mr. Ford tried to beat Congress to the punch by appointing his own tame intelligence investigating commission. So did Lyndon Johnson almost 10 years ago when there was an earlier demand for curbing the CIA.

The 1967 Johnson study, headed by then Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, was really intended not to study the nation's intelligence community but to shield it, according to a finding of the Church committee, which said the White House "carefully limited the mandate of the Katzenbach committee's investigation."

Katzenbach himself told the Church panel "that his committee was designed by President Johnson . . . to head off a full-scale congressional investigation. All covert relationships were to be excluded from the investigation."

For most of its 200 years, the United States got along all right without anything resembling the CIA. But Presidents love the agency. As long as they have their multibillion-dollar private army, they can always throw their weight around covertly, should Congress forbid them to do it openly.