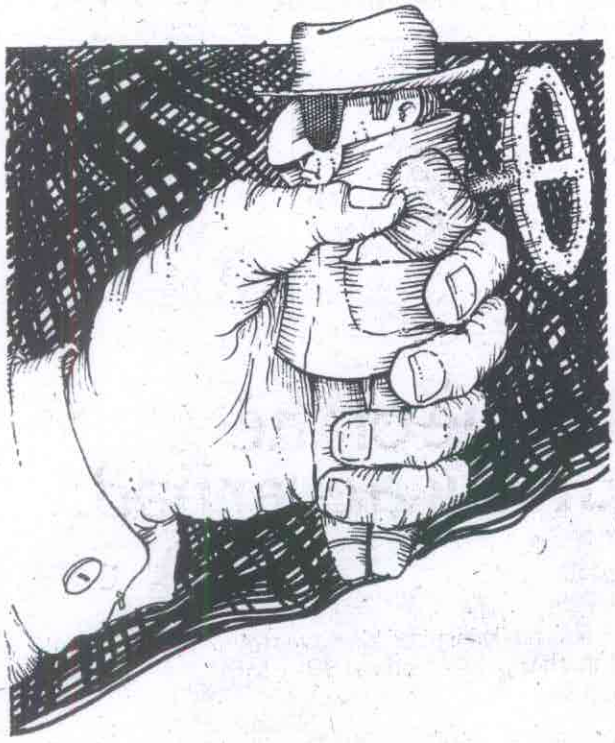
CIA: Silent



By John Twohey—The Washington Post

By Laurence Stern

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FROM THE ONSET of the Cold War to the outbreak of Watergate, covert warfare has been a silent partner of American foreign policy.

It was, in the beginning, a morally simple proposition for most Americans. The world was divided into two political hemispheres, one Free and one Communist. The two systems confronted each other around the globe. The rules of engagement were that anything went — preferably short of all-out war.

In the back alley combat of the Cold War years, the Central Intelligence Agency emerged as the secret team with the capability for bribing unions and chiefs of state, for training private armies and — if need be — for toppling governments.

Its leadership was composed of men who fought bravely and well together during World War II, many of them veterans of General William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan's Office of Strategic Services. They were, on the whole, sons of the American establishment —

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products of comfortable homes, good private colleges and a shared sense of dedication to what they perceived to be traditional American values and unstinting opposition to the common threat: communism.

One of these men was William Egan Colby, a man of meticulously gray quality, who jumped behind enemy lines in Nazi-occupied Europe, who planned and administered the deeply controversial "pacification" program in South Vietnam and who rose patiently through the secret bureaucracy of the CIA's directorate of operations (more popularly "dirty tricks") to the top job, director of central intelligence.

He finds himself today at the center of one of those recurrent public storms which engulfs the CIA when it stumbles by mistake out of the cold into the footlights of public attention.

THE CONTROVERSY centers more on whether the United States should abandon its covert warfare capability and concentrate instead on the intelligence-gathering mission for which it was chartered in 1947.

"This is a legitimate question," Colby acknowledged during a recent teach-in on CIA covert operations conducted on Capitol Hill. He concluded, however, that the answer is no. "I can envision situations in which the United States might well need to conduct covert action in the face of some new threat that developed in the world."

President Ford was less qualified in his last press conference. Asked whether, under international law, the United States has a right to subvert governments such as the one headed by the late Salvador Allende in Chile, the President said in effect: Sure, everyone does it.

Until Watergate the perception of most Americans of political espionage were formed by films and novels set in exotic foreign capitals against a background of creaky rattan and slow whirling fans.

But the Watergate tapes, with their revelations of "enemies lists," buggings, wiretappings, political fund laundering and the like, gave us a mild taste of how things are on the wrong end of a covert warfare capability.

Before Watergate, the Vietnam war had eroded public confidence in the presidency and sewn distrust of the unbridled growth of the executive branch. The CIA has been, in effect, a President's army.

Also, the Nixon-Kissinger policy of detente with the Communist superpowers muddled the neat, bipolar view of the world in the early years of the CIA.

And so, when new details of the U.S. secret war against the Allende government in Chile surfaced recently, well over a year after the CIA role in Chile first came to light, the conditions were ripe for a backfire of public and congressional indignation.

President Ford did little to assuage the growing clamor of criticism with his declaration that the covert political operations against Allende were "in the best interests of the people in Chile . . ."

Secretary of State Kissinger put it with even more brutal directness during a meeting of the National Security Council's super-secret "Forty Committee" on June 27, 1970—some two months before Chile's presidential election.

"I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people," said Kissinger, the architect of the American detente policy, according to unchallenged classified minutes of the proceeding.

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