

Walter Pincus

# 'CIA Isn't the Only Problem Child'

While attention is focused on the alleged domestic spying of the Central Intelligence Agency, perhaps it would be wise to step back and take a look at the activities at home and abroad of the entire U.S. intelligence community.

Consider, for example, the National Security Agency, a multi-million dollar super-secret organization that intercepts electronic messages around the world. It was established in 1952 by a presidential Executive Order. There is no law prohibiting NSA from listening to American citizens. In fact, no law prevents NSA from intercepting messages in the United States. It has always been taken for granted, however, that NSA has confined its targets to foreign intelligence transmissions.

By 1970, however, NSA, like the Central Intelligence Agency, apparently was directing some of its attention to American citizens. According to a top secret document introduced at the Senate Watergate hearings, NSA was monitoring wireless cables "of U.S. citizens using international facilities... on a restricted basis." The information so obtained was "particularly useful to the White House," according to the same document. In fact, it was the recommendation of the drafters of the document that NSA's monitoring of Americans be broadened.

NSA has an Army-run installation some 20 miles south of Washington near the hunt country of Virginia. The antennae fields that mark overseas NSA listening posts exist there also. What are they listening to so close to the nation's capital?

I cite this bit of information about NSA to make the point that by 1970, a multi-billion-dollar, multi-headed, bureaucratically competitive U.S. intelligence community, designed originally to fight international communism, was looking around for new enemies. Even Richard Nixon wanted to cool down the cold war, which meant that CIA, NSA, the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), established in 1961, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation—all of which had expanded rapidly over the previous 10 years—had to find new justifications for their budgets and new uses for their "talents."

Police power, especially when it is exercised in secret, is dangerously intoxicating. Security agents, whether

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employed by the CIA, FBI, NSA, the Pentagon or some local police force, are not always qualified to distinguish between legitimate protest and illegitimate violence; between radical dissent and subversion. The distinctions are vital in a democracy. Moreover, intelligence operations carried on in the normal course abroad—indiscriminate wiretapping, letter-opening, break-ins or clandestine infiltration—are illegal when carried out within the United States, even if the ultimate purpose of security for the government is the same.

As obvious as these thoughts should have been in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were not uppermost in the minds of those in power in Washington. J. Edgar Hoover's FBI initiated its "cointelpro" operations. Through fraudulent means and direct pressure, FBI agents sought to destroy the livelihoods and reputations of individuals and domestic organizations. The military began its civilian files and NSA's electronic nets gathered in overseas cables sent by Americans. If current news stories are even partially accurate, CIA also did its share.

Tom Charles Huston, Richard Nixon's White House aide handling domestic intelligence, wrote in a July 1970 memo that the heads of CIA, NSA, DIA and the FBI met with him in June

that year. "All were delighted," Huston said, "that an opportunity was finally at hand to address themselves jointly to the serious internal security threat which exists." The resultant Huston plan called for a variety of domestic intelligence activities to be undertaken—several of which were illegal on their face. Wiretapping was to be intensified; restrictions that previously existed on mail coverage (the covert opening of letters) was to be relaxed; and surreptitious entries or break-ins were to be permitted.

The Huston plan was supposedly withdrawn in August 1970 soon after its approval, thanks primarily to the opposition of FBI Director Hoover. Ironically, Huston noted that Hoover's prime objection was "concern about possible embarrassment to the intelligence community from public disclosure of clandestine operations." Huston went on to point out that the NSA Director Admiral Noel Gayler and DIA chief General Donald V. Bennett "were greatly displeased by Mr. Hoover's attitude." CIA Director Richard Helms, whom Huston feared would refuse to take part in the domestic intelligence program, turned out to be "most cooperative and helpful."

Bit by bit, some secret domestic intelligence activities of these agencies have been publicized. Sen. Sam Ervin held extended hearings in 1971 on the Army's domestic spying. The Ellsberg trial revealed that CIA equipment assisted the California burglars. The Watergate hearings brought to light the Huston plan. Hoover's "cointelpro" program was confirmed thanks to a newsman's lawsuit and subsequently scrutinized by a Justice Department that did not want to expose what had happened in the past for fear of alienating present Bureau agents. Most recently, after a series of newspaper stories, CIA Director William Colby has, like FBI Director Clarence Kelley a few weeks earlier, sought to assure the public that whatever did happen will not happen again. Such reassurances are meaningless.

How is the truth to be discovered, and what is to be done when it is? Neither the executive nor legislative branches are qualified to undertake a thorough but necessarily closed-door study of CIA, NSA, DIA and FBI. The White House, which has covered up for all these agencies in administration after administration, is mistrusted. The

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Congress, whose oversight committees have served primarily as their defenders, is just not competent for the task. The recently established blue-ribbon Ford commission, with Vice President Rockefeller as chairman, has too narrow a membership and too limited a mission. Allegations of domestic spying by the CIA are a small part of the overall problem.

What is required is a broader presidential commission with membership from Congress and the executive branch, perhaps even including officials from the intelligence agencies involved. The majority, however, should be drawn from outside government. Since the staff work on such an inquiry is most important, its selection and makeup should be made by someone of the caliber of a John Doar—whose work proved so satisfactory in the House Judiciary impeachment hearings.

CIA is far from the only problem child among this country's secret services—and it is time some group studied them all and redefined their roles and missions.