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The Tragedy of the CIA

The crisis of the Central Intelligence Agency that may wreck its effectiveness with tragic consequences for the nation can be traced back to a secret, politically inspired command from a troubled President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968.

Johnson's order to CIA stemmed from his political fear of anti-Vietnam dissidents, eroding his presidency and endangering his Vietnam policy. He wanted CIA to establish a link between the Soviet KGB or other Communist intelligence apparatus and violent anti-war activity in the United States. No link was established, but the CIA's legal counterintelligence operations fatally overlapped into the forbidden area of internal security.

Now that this overlap has been revealed, the CIA's ability to fulfill vitally necessary functions in a still dangerous world is deeply compromised.

There never was real substance to Johnson's fear of a link to foreign agents, an American intelligence expert told us, "and the CIA bitterly resented his order." While pursuing LBJ's command diligently until the anti-war movement died out, CIA never once established "conclusive evidence" of foreign control over any American student dissidents.

But in his zealous pursuit of the elusive link, CIA's Counter-Intelligence Counter-Espionage chief, the super-conspiratorial James Angleton, went to extremes. Known American anti-war agitators, including the notorious

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Weathermen, were placed under surveillance during contacts with leftist student leaders in Europe and then kept under CIA surveillance when they returned to the United States.

This surveillance, including bugging clandestine anti-war meetings, created a huge file of names which was stored routinely in secret CIA vaults in Langley, Va.

Much of this stemmed from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's bitter feud with CIA, choking communications between the two agencies. CIA specialists say there was often "no bureaucratic way" to turn domestic surveillance over to the FBI once an anti-war activist returned to the United States. Instead, Angleton's counter-intelligence agents continued the job started abroad.

A full briefing on the "worst case" examples of this highly illegal CIA activity was given more than a year ago to congressional watchdogs by William Colby, then newly appointed CIA di-

rector. Since these abuses had occurred years before, no public airing was demanded.

The reason: A full-fledged CIA scandal in the midst of Watergate (which itself tainted the agency) would severely damage the CIA and most particularly its counter-intelligence operations.

Now, that damage to CIA's credibility and efficiency in the wake of The New York Times expose is in full bloom, ironically abetted by the ouster of Angleton and the sympathy resignations of his high command: Ray Hocco, William Hood and N. Scott Miller.

Angleton's suspicious conspiratorial nature had brought him into high-level disfavor long ago. Yet, that aspect of his personality was essential to his invaluable connections with such foreign intelligence agencies as the West German BfW, the British MI-5, the French Deuxieme Bureau — and, most inti-

mately, the Israeli Intelligence Service.

Angleton's single most valuable post-war helix—the first Western copy of Khrushchev's historic 1956 attack on Stalinism at the 20th Soviet Party Congress—resulted directly from his secret contacts with Communist and Israeli agents.

Such brilliant exploits tend to be shrugged off today as relics of another world. But intelligence experts here say dismantling the top echelons of Angleton's operations alone will prove priceless to the Soviet KGB and immensely costly to the United States.

That, however, is but the first cost of CIA's tragic errors of the late 1960s. CIA's scandal, following a blackened eye from its Chilean operations, now threatens to close off not only foreign intelligence sources but routine information from traveling American citizens—invaluable the past 20 years.

In addition, morale at CIA today is at gut-level, morale with recruitment endangered. Worst of all, CIA's credibility as a light ship — vital to every aspect of its work — has been grievously undermined.

The first results of this will show up early in the new Congress. Efforts that have failed in the past to cut down CIA may now succeed. To a generation that never knew the cold war, that will be welcome. In truth, it may cost this country dearly in the grim world of 1976.