The Washington Post
AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1967 PAGE A12

The CIA: A Case of Addiction

Shortly after the CIA's fiasco at the Bay of Pigs, a leading figure in the Kennedy Administration who was asked to perform a dispassionate post-mortem observed that this country's foreign policy, over a dozen years of intense Cold War strain, had come to rely on what he called "two kinds of dope."

"When all the usual, conventional political remedies failed," he said, "the first impulse has usually been toward foreign aid—to try to buy our way out of trouble. The last resort has been to dump the mess on CIA."

The result, he concluded, was that the Intelligence organization, whi[illegible] manned by men of exceptional competence, was being asked to perform all manner of outlandish—and in some cases impossible—missions to recoup the mistakes of Cabinet Secretaries and Presidents. Cuba, for one example, was a terminal case when it was handed to CIA.

What we are witnessing—and may be witnessing on an ever-widening scale—are the ravages of this addiction laid bare. The case of the National Students Association doubtless began innocently enough in the grim Cold War atmosphere of the late 40s and early 50s, when communism and McCarthyism were both riding high. Communist groups were grabbing for control of international organizations of all sorts—student, professional, labor. Private American groups, affiliated to these international bodies, lacked the money and in many cases the know-how with which to fight back, and many were leftist-oriented, by American standards, which ruled out open United States Government support in the McCarthy age. Congress, moreover, would have wanted any Government-backed delegation to follow the Government's line with fine fidelity. (Ironically, those who are covertly subsidized and don't know it are more likely to be faithful to their true feelings.)

So the clandestine tack was almost irresistible, what with all those unvouchered CIA funds for which no public accounting need be made. For this same reason, long after the need for deception passed, it was tempting to continue along the covert route, rather than battle Congress for more money for the State Department's restricted budget.

Covert operations are seductive in this, and other ways. When they work, they can work remarkably well, as testified to by any number of unsung and unsingable successes, and some, such as the overthrow of Iran's recalcitrant, uncooperative Mossadegh, which have come to light long after the fact. But success has a spoiling effect, carrying with it a false sense of security. Complacency sets in. Ends begin to justify whatever means. Moral issues evaporate. So does simple prudence. Who bothered to check up on the U-2 flight plans (another stunning intelligence success) as the day drew near for the abortive Big Four summit meeting in May, 1960? Who

is now asking whether the program of aerial reconnaissance over Cuba, and the contingency plans on hand in case of mishap, are still as valid now, given possible improvements in Soviet antiaircraft technology, as they were when the go-ahead was last reviewed.

If addiction is what's involved, the cure suggests itself. It lies not in banning all covert activity, any more than drug addiction argues for banning medically supervised use of barbiturates. The cure lies in tight control. The first move, long advocated by this newspaper, ought to be a clean break between CIA's intelligence-gathering and its "operations," or as they are better known, "dirty tricks." Intelligence data can too easily be bent into a compelling argument for this or that covert project when the two are conducted under one roof. Secondly, covert operations need the closest sort of case-by-case supervision by the White House and by men in the regular departments, whose main concern isn't dirty tricks, but the day-to-day, aboveboard conduct of foreign policy in a way which takes into account the Government's moral standing at home and abroad.

But even this is not enough; covert operations corrupt everybody involved in time. The eye becomes jaded, the sense of outrage dulled; what's been done before becomes the norm. Nor can the watchman's role be played by Congress, where pragmatism is rampant and morality too often expressed in terms of an Adam Clayton Powell or a Bobby Baker; where practical politics has a covert quality of its own.

What's really needed, beyond a fresh start to wipe away as much as possible the stigma past conduct has cast on almost every private institution in the land, is a new kind of control mechanism, capable of bringing to bear a chronically jaundiced eye. This probably means a panel whose personnel is constantly changed to refresh its innocence. The old establishmentarians won't do; too many of them were involved in the prescription which produced the addiction. Indeed, the search for unsullied individuals or even categories, in the present atmosphere, becomes nearly ludicrous. Would you believe a lighthouse keeper, an Arctic explorer, or perhaps a forest ranger or the headmistress of a young ladies finishing school?

One might begin by assembling a panel from the ranks of the unwitting and reconciled past members, over the years, of NSA.

Where the Administration cannot afford to begin—much less end in an age where credibility has become a household anxiety—is with the old, familiar palliatives of an in-house review, or even the threadbare standby of a one-shot inquiry by distinguished private citizens. Shocking revelations call for shock treatment, however agonizing the wrench of withdrawal may turn out to be.