

Dear Ed,

12/31/71

I have read Richard Barnet's excellent piece on the CIA in the NYReview. It is, I think, by far the best thing of its sort I've seen and is, in every element I can consider myself competent to evaluate, exactly correct.

In the context of The Pentagon Papers and the CIA's role in SEAsia, I attribute one weakness to it, not making it explicit that the CIA "liberals" were opposed not to overall national objectives but to efforts to achieve these objectives that in its view could not succeed. It has no objection to what we are doing in SEAsia and may have had a deciding role in fixing that as national policy. It just isn't as loony as the military or as hidebound, blind, unimaginative or whatever as the diplomats. It opposed both strategic and tactical schemes it felt would fail, not their objectives.

As with the Warren report, which is inherently incredible, and with the "evidence", which cannot survive the most rudimentary analysis, it is relatively easy for them to be against specific measures. However, given the chance to use their own means, they also failed, and that miserably. Barnet understates the Laos thing, for example, much too much. This assume importance in one element of the new CIA campaign he ignored. Marchetti even parroted it this a.m. on the ~~CBS A.M. NEWS Today~~ ^{CBS A.M. NEWS Today} where he was interviewed and was pretty good on most things. "They do only what they are told", he argued. False. They control what they are told and they do the opposite of what they are told by even the President. Their whole private-army deal in Laos was contrary to JFK's explicit policy.

When I read what Barnet wrote about genuine research and thinking in Washington as compared with spooking in the various lands, I thought of several incidents from my own past. In one case I sat on a ~~desk~~ country desk yet couldn't read that language. A revolution was in progress. Their stuff was crap. They couldn't even get the identifications of the major figures in the major parties straight and often reported them exactly wrong. Yet I was able to sit there and think and accurately forecast a change in the army (government side) control and give the name of the man who would become boss. Everybody was impressed as hell, but I thought it was so simple. Had I not, my neck would not have gone out that far.

They were not wrong in the Dominican affair. They were making policy, and succeeded.

Another and minor flaw is the overemphasis on the storybook types, who he says were inherited from OSS and are now disappearing. Attrition. In the long run, I think the greater harm was from the OSS pseudo-liberal scholars like Sherman Kent, to name one of the more prominent ones of the too many who went into the research, straight intelligence end. Their political prejudices and preconceptions shaped what remains. Corrupt scholarship. In making his legitimate point I think he missed an important one.

Another that does not detract from his fine exposition is how common it is for success to be a disaster. Controlling who would control the governments in Laos and Cambodia, for example, where the Agency worked its will. How much worse of we are in even terms of their objectives. And how this plays into the neanderthal military schemes. Were every American to leave Vietnam tomorrow, the same problem would remain. Add Thailand.

I haven't seen Barnet recently, but I spent some time with two of his associates. They have been deceived by what he says of CIA opposition to tactics in Vietnam and by the absence from the papers available to Ellsberg and then not suppressed by the Times. The CIA or any other intelligence agency could have been expected to see to it that what could hurt would not be kicking around outside its own safes. The picture of them is thus distorted in their favor, witness the Salandria misinterpretation.

But it is a great piece.

Thanks for sending it,