The Secret Team and the Games They Play

by L. Fletcher Prouty

"The hill costumes of the Meo tribesmen contrasted with the civilian clothes of United States military men riding in open jeeps and carrying M-16 rifles and pistols. These young Americans are mostly ex-Green Berets, hired on CIA contract to advise and train Laotian troops." Those matter-of-fact, almost weary sentences, written late in February by T.D. Allman of *The Washington Post* after he and two other enterprising correspondents left a guided tour and walked 12 miles over some hills in Laos to a secret base at Long Cheng, describe a situation that today may seem commonplace to anyone familiar with American operations overseas, but that no more than 10 years ago would have been unthinkable.

To take a detachment of regular troops, put its members into disguise, smuggle them out of the country so that neither the public nor the Congress knows they have left, and assign them to clandestine duties on foreign soil under the command of a non-military agency —it is doubtful that anyone would have dared to suggest taking such liberties with the armed forces and foreign relations of the United States, not to say with the Constitution, to any President up to and especially including Dwight D. Eisenhower. Indeed, the most remarkable development in the management of America's relations with other countries during the nine years since Mr. Eisenhower left office has been the assumption of more and more control over military and diplomatic operations abroad by men whose activities are secret, whose budget is secret, whose very identities as often as not are secret—in short a Secret Team whose actions only those implicated in them are in a position to monitor. How determinedly this secrecy is preserved, even when preserving it means denying the United States Army the right to discipline its own personnel, not to say the opportunity to do justice, was strikingly illustrated not long ago by the refusal of the Central Intelligence Agency to provide witnesses for the court-martial that was to try eight Green Beret officers for murdering a suspected North Vietnamese spy, thus forcing the Army to drop the charges.

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data when it seems appropriate to them with paramilitary plans and activities, e.g., training and "advising"--a not exactly impenetrable euphemism for "leading into battle"--Laotian troops. Membership in the Team, granted on a "need to know" basis, varies with the nature and the location of the problems that come to its attention. At the heart of the Team, of course, are a handful of top executives of the CIA and of the National Security Council, most notably the chief White House adviser on foreign policy. Around them revolves a sort of inner ring of Presidential staff members, State Department officials, civilians and military men from the Pentagon, and career professionals in the intelligence services. And out beyond them is an extensive and intricate network of government officials with responsibility for or expertise in some specific field that touches on national security: think-tank analysts, businessmen who travel a lot or whose businesses (e.g., import-export or operating a cargo airline) are useful, academic experts in this or that technical subject or geographic region, and, quite importantly, alumni of the intelligence service a service from which there are no unconditional resignations.

Thus the Secret Team is not a clandestine super-planning board or supergeneral staff but, even more damaging to the coherent conduct of foreign affairs, a bewildering collection of temporarily assembled action committees that respond pretty much ad hoc to specific troubles in various parts of the world, sometimes in ways that duplicate the activities of regular American missions, sometimes in ways that undermine those activities, and very often in ways that interfere with and muddle them. For example, when serious border troubles broke out along the northern frontiers of India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bhutan in 1962, the CIA brought in U.S. military equipment and manpower, including Special Forces (Green Beret) troops, to train Indian police, despite the fact that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had already sent to New Delhi for the same purpose a special team headed by General Paul Adams, founder and commanding general of the U.S. Strike Command. The CIA operators practically ignored General Adams and Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith in proceeding with their plans, and there is no evidence that the U.S. Congress ever knew the CIA was in the picture at all.

One source of the Team's power is the speed with which it can act. The CIA's communications system is so extraordinarily efficient, especially by contrast with State's, that the Team can, in a phrase that often gets used at such times, "have a plane in the air" responding to some situation overseas while State is still decoding the cable informing it of that situation. A few years ago, for example, while the strongest member of an Asian government that the United States was strenuously supporting (call him Marshal X) was lying sick in a Tokyo hospital, word came that a group of discontented young officers was planning a coup in his absence. In a matter of hours, thanks to the Team, Marshal X was on his way home in a U.S. Air Force jet fighter; he arrived at his office in plenty of time to frustrate the plotters. The power to pull off feats like that is more than operational power; it is in a real sense policy-making power. In this particular case it was the power to commit the United States to the protection and support of Marshal X, even though many officials who dealt with Marshal X's government on a workaday basis regarded him as the most obnoxious member of it. Calling back "a plane in the air" is not an easy thing to do, and the Team knows and benefits from this fact.

Another source of the Team's power is its ability to manipulate "need to know" classifications. One way to make sure that there is little opposition to your proposed activities is to fail to tell those who might oppose them what those activities are; even men with high-ranking policy-making jobs and the

appropriate Top Secret clearances often are kept in the dark about Team plans. Thus Adlai Stevenson, ambassador to the United Nations, was not informed about the Bay of Pigs invasion plans until the very last minute when rumors about it began to appear in the press; and even then Tracy Barnes, the CIA man sent to brief Stevenson, gave him a vague and incomplete picture of the operation.

"Need to know" also can be bent in the other direction in order to secure the support of potential allies and further those allies' careers. Members of the Secret Team who favored the election of John F. Kennedy over Richard Nixon played a very special role in the 1960 election campaign. Nixon presided over the National Security Council and therefore knew in detail the plans for the Bay of Pigs operation. Senator Kennedy, as an outsider, was presumed not to know those highly classified details. However, he did know. In his book, *Six Crises*, Nixon wrote that Kennedy was told about the invasion by Allen Dulles during the traditional CIA briefing for candidates; but there was more than that to the story, it appears.

A former staff member from the Office of the Secretary of Defense recollects that during the summer of 1960 he went to the Senate Office Building to pick up and escort to the Pentagon four Cuban exile leaders, among them the future commander of the Bay of Pigs invasion team, who had been meeting with Senator Kennedy. Those men were supposed to be under special security wraps, but certain CIA officials had introduced them to Kennedy; thus making sure that he knew as much about the invasion as Nixon—if not more, as the result of a personal relationship that Nixon did not have with the Cuban refugee front and the Americans who were secretly helping it. When the candidates appeared on television together during the crucial campaign debates, Nixon, abiding by security restrictions, limited himself in his discussion of the government's plans for Cuba. This official control did not apply to Kennedy. He could and did ad-

vocate overthrowing the Castro government. Nixon's frustration and anger at Kennedy's tactics were evident on the TV screen. Many observers believe that that confrontation over Cuba was one of the moments during the debates when Kennedy scored most heavily – and of course most observers credit Kennedy's performance during the debates with his narrow victory in the election.

That Kennedy's connection with the Cuban refugees before his election was anything but casual or fortuitous was demonstrated more than two years later in the Orange Bowl in Miami, before a national television audience, at a welcome-back celebration for the ransomed prisoners from the Bay of Pigs. At one point during the ceremonies, the President walked over to the group of returnees and threw his arm around the shoulders of one of them. If those watching thought he had chosen his man at random, they were mistaken. The Cuban he embraced was his old friend from the summer of 1960, Manuel Artime, the commander of the invasion brigade.

Kennedy's election was a big boost for Secret Teamwork, but an earlier and bigger one had been the appointment of Allen Dulles as Director of the CIA in 1953, after two years as Deputy Director. At that time the agency was not permitted by the National Security Council to build up a big enough force of men and materiel to permit it to carry out operations on its own. In other words, whenever the CIA wanted to do anything on a large scale, it had to secure assistance from, and therefore share authority with, other agencies, chiefly the Departments of State and Defense. Slowly Dulles changed these conditions. One way he did it was to give intelligence activities intellectual and social credibility by surrounding himself with men from industry, finance, and academia.

The CIA always had been a haven for Ivy League people and Dulles made it even more so. It was not unusual to find the Director, perched on a hassock in his living room, wearing a V-neck sweater and tennis shoes, with a racquet on the floor beside him, discoursing on the latest cables from his agents around the world to a similarly clad group of disciples, many of whom may not have known that meanwhile back at the office workaday CIA officials were wrestling with such mundane problems as how to introduce Special Forces men into Bolivia and Colombia, or whether it would better serve the interests of the United States to dispose of a certain counterspy with poison or a garrote.

Particularly useful to Dulles in his empire building were businessmen and educators who traveled frequently, and therefore were well qualified to assist in the collection of information for "the old man." The fact that a number of such volunteers ended up serving time in communist prisons never seemed to deter new ones. In Dulles's view the information these people provided, although often helpful, was the least of their value; they were influential men who, because they had put in some time as "Agents," would always have a soft spot in their hearts for the Agency.

Of course Dulles did not increase the CIA's influence as much as he did just by image building. He was an organizer and a clandestine operator of great ability, and between the end of the Korean war and the election of John Kennedy, he had begun building the Team – with the CIA usually calling its signals, of course – and it had had a number of substantial successes. Overthrowing the Mossadegh government in Iran was one; overthrowing the Arbenz government in Guatemala was another – although perhaps from a connoisseur's point of view the latter operation was a bit on the blatant side. Perhaps the most brilliant of all was the spectacular building up of Ramon Magsaysay from an obscure army captain to the President and national hero of the Philippines. This latter feat was mostly organized by Colonel Edward G. Lansdale of the CIA, via the Air Force, a

public relations genius of the old selling-iceboxes-to-Eskimos school.

Lansdale conceived the idea of making Magsaysay into the savior of his country from the communist "Huks" by recruiting, and paying with CIA funds, a few bands of Filipino soldiers who, every night or so, would put on peasant clothes, invade some villages with much ado, and then allow themselves to be driven out again by the intrepid forces under Magsaysay's command. Not infrequently after such an episode, the stage "Huks" and the loyalists would rendezvous in a nearby grove or field and re-enact the evening's performance to the accompaniment of much hilarity and beer. All of which, perhaps it need be emphasized, is not to say that Magsaysay was a faker or a figurehead; on the contrary, it is a mark of Lansdale's skill that he chose as the central figure in his hero-making exercise, a man with the attributes of a genuine hero.

Dulles was as adept at domestic as at overseas manipulation, and, during the Eisenhower years, when the CIA was being partially restrained, he recruited to the Team a number of frustrated young Army officers who were chafing against very nearly the same restraints. After Korea, Mr. Eisenhower and the Republicans had vowed "never again" when it came to committing American troops to battle in "brushfire " wars, especially on Asian soil, and turned to reliance on nuclear weapons as the core of American defense policy. This meant to the CIA that it could not get the troops it often would have liked to have to further its plans. It meant to the Army that the Air Force would receive the lion's share of professional opportunities and glory and, beyond the eternal matter of service rivalries, that by declining to fight any battles smaller than nuclear ones, America was giving up its capacity to influence any events smaller than apocalyptic ones. Such bright and eloquent generals as Matthew Ridgeway, James Gavin, and particularly Maxwell Taylor argued this case vigorously. Their notion was that it was essential for the United States to have a special counter-insurgency force prepared to put out brushfires around the world. Obviously, Dulles shared this view, if indeed he hadn't been one of the first to advance it. Kennedy, the activist, also agreed, and so it is no wonder that many leading members of the Secret Team favored him over Nixon, the Vice President in a non-activist administration though probably himself less of a non-activist than his boss. By the same token, it also is no wonder that the Secret Team, especially by gaining control over the Special Forces, fared well after Kennedy's election. For when the action came, under Kennedy, it was the Special Forces which got the first call.

The Army Special Forces had been formed after World War II. In event of a Russian invasion, the 10th Special Forces in Germany were to be sent into Eastern Europe to create and sustain partisan movements behind the lines. With a small headquarters and reserve unit maintained at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the Special Forces in 1960 consisted of only 1,800 men, poorly equipped and inadequately trained. William Pfaff, a consultant to the Hudson Institute and a member of the Special Forces reserves, described them as being "composed of self-consciously uprooted men, emotionally and intellectually detached from the mainstream of civilian society but also from that securely bland and sentimental Southern institution, the American Army itself." Under the rubric of counter-insurgency and nation-building, these men soon became CIA mercenaries.

Arthur Schlesinger, in his book *A Thousand Days*, recounts that President Kennedy "made anti-guerrilla instruction a personal project." After reading Colonel Lansdale's report on guerrilla operations in Vietnam (where Lansdale had been busily and quite successfully helping Ngo Dinh Diem become a savior of his country à la Magsaysay), Kennedy asked his special assistant Walt Rostow, fresh from the CIA-run Center for International Studies at MIT, to check

into what the Army was doing about counter-guerrilla training. The President read Mao and Che Guevara and told the Army to do likewise. Kennedy instructed the Special Forces to expand its anti-guerrilla operations. Lansdale and his associate, Samuel Wilson, wrote new texts on counter-insurgency for Fort Bragg. After a visit to the training center, Kennedy, over opposition from the Army bureaucracy, revivified the Special Forces, and training centers were organized in Panama, Okinawa, Vietnam, and West Germany. "In Washington," writes Schlesinger, "Robert Kennedy, Maxwell Taylor, and Richard Bissell pushed the course. Roger Hilsman, drawing on his wartime experience in the hills of Burma, and Walt Rostow, analyzing the guerrilla problem as part of the pathology of economic development, carried the gospel to the State Department."

Fort Bragg and the regional centers were opened to foreign trainees. Ostensibly, the foreign officers represented the uniformed services of their countries, but actually some of them were handpicked by their nations' intelligence organizations and then had to be approved by the CIA. Under the guise of military aid programs, these men attended the Special Forces School at Fort Bragg. Officers came from over 60 countries, representing, among others, such surprising nations as South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Portugal, the Netherlands, Jordan, Bolivia, Sierra Leone, and Haiti.

A Green Beret-CIA team trained the Bolivians who captured Che Guevara. They have trained Iranian police, Chinese forces on Taiwan, King Hussein's élite paratroops in Jordan, and troops in South Korea. The CIA-Green Beret team has undertaken special training missions in Liberia and in the Congo. And currently Green Berets are advising the troops of Haile Selassie in the Ethiopian province of Eritrea. Under somewhat similar Army-sponsored programs the CIA provided for the training of a number of Tibetans. A *Washington Post* reporter who visited Fort Bragg in the summer of 1969 wrote that the Special Forces "anticipate endless 'insurgencies' in the underdeveloped countries of the world—from Africa to Latin America. And they are counting on American intervention in many of these situations." "In a way, we're a kind of Peace Corps," the training director of the Green Beret center explained.

After the Bay of Pigs, which some people vainly hoped would end large-scale, paramilitary CIA clandestine operations, President Kennedy appointed a board of inquiry to review the fiasco. Its members were Admiral Arleigh Burke, Allen Dulles, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, and General Maxwell Taylor. General Taylor, dissatisfied with the role the Eisenhower Administration had assigned to the Army, had retired from the service after his tour as Army Chief of Staff to write *The Uncertain Trumpet*. While serving on the board of inquiry, he became close friends with Robert Kennedy. Dulles and Bobby Kennedy recommended him for the post of Special Military Advisor to the President, and the President later named him Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In those posts, by playing the game with the CIA, especially with respect to Vietnam, Taylor was able to preside over a major rebirth of the Army. The Vietnam build-up, whose beginning was engineered by the CIA, ultimately meant the abandonment of Eisenhower's exclusive reliance on Strategic Air Command and missile strategy in favor of the policy Taylor wanted—of developing a capacity to meet brushfire situations with conventional ground forces, Army forces naturally.

The most important respect in which Taylor played the Secret Team game was to acquiesce in giving the CIA operational control of the Green Beret forces in Vietnam and Laos. The CIA took full advantage of this unprecedented situation, which saw the agency in control of those forces at least through 1963, by using it to stimulate inter-service rivalries. The rivalries led to an increase in

the build-up, and the build-up led to more power for the Secret Team. Because of the favored position of the Army's Green Berets, the other services thought it would be wise for them to have Special Forces of their own in Vietnam. The Air Force had a number of specialized aircraft and crews left over from the Bay of Pigs operation; these were organized into the nucleus of Special Air Warfare units and hurried to Vietnam to work with the CIA.

Not to be outdone by the Army and the Air Force, the Navy created special units known as SEAL (Sea-Air-Land) teams and sent them to Vietnam to work with the Agency. Since the Navy did not have the kind of small boats required for some of the action there (and perhaps because President Kennedy had been a PT-boat man), the Navy ordered a flotilla of PT-boats from Norwegian shipbuilders and had them delivered directly to Vietnam to join other small boats which were transferred from the U.S. Coast Guard—all to support potential clandestine naval activities and to keep up with the other services in the favor of the Agency.

Such actions resulted in a considerable clandestine build-up of forces in Vietnam long before the official escalation took place. And of course, once those forces were there something had to be done with them.

For example, the Air Force contribution consisted of units of C-123 medium transport aircraft. However, there already were plenty of medium transports in Vietnam—Caribous, under Army control, that had been flown there via the Atlantic, not having enough range to cross the Pacific. Consequently, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara had a squadron of C-123's converted at considerable cost to become defoliant sprayer aircraft. It may be too much to say that the defoliation program would never have been undertaken if those C-123's hadn't been sitting idly in Vietnam, but there is no doubt that their presence gave the program considerable stimulation.

The CIA is most adept at working in and around and through all levels of the U.S. government. No one, not even the majority of Agency personnel, knows the full extent of Agency manipulations within the governmental structure. The Agency can obtain what it desires in any quantity, and often for no cost. During the depression years of the 1930's, Congress passed a law which was known as the Economy Act of 1932 and, as amended, it is still on the books. This act, whose purpose is to save money and discourage needless spending, permits an agency that needs material to purchase it at an agreed price from another agency by an accounting off-set without spending "new money." For example, the Department of Agriculture can buy surplus tractors from the Army at a price agreed upon by both parties, even if it is only a dollar each. (Since most such equipment is declared surplus, whether it is or not, by the selling agency, the price usually is low.) By means of authority of this kind, the CIA has learned how to "buy" from all agencies of the government, primarily from the Department of Defense, a tremendous amount of new and surplus equipment and to take over bases at home and abroad for its own use without appearing to have spent substantial funds and many times without the selling party knowing the true identity of the buyer.

This method of budgetary by-passing works something like this: The Agency creates an Army unit for some minor purpose which the Army and the Defense Department are willing to agree to. The unit is listed on the Army roster as, say, the 1234 Special Supply Company, Fort Wyman (fictional name), New Jersey. This small and inconspicuous unit is mostly manned by regular Army personnel but will have a few Army personnel who are actually CIA employees with reserve status, and a few CIA career employees. It can serve as a supply receiving point for holding Agency material prior to overseas shipment. After 1234 has been operating for a time and ap-

pears to be a bona-fide Army unit, not only to the rest of the Army personnel at Fort Wyman but also to the real Army people who are serving with it, it will begin to requisition supplies of all kinds and amounts from the Army. This procedure continues for a time, then the unit will begin to requisition in a normal manner items from the Navy and the Air Force. Cross requisitioning is acceptible practice in all services today. The Navy and Air Force will charge the Army for the items transferred and the Army, having records on the validity of the unit, will honor the charges. It is easier for the CIA to requisition Air Force items using an Army or Navy unit than an Air Force unit, because the services monitor their own units more carefully than those of another service. Therefore, the CIA keeps a number of service units on tap at all times. With these hidden sources of supply, the CIA often can build an arsenal and support clandestine operations in some foreign country without the Department of Defense, much less the Department of State, ever knowing it—though presumably Defense could find out if it took the trouble to scrutinize carefully the activities of its various 1234's.

It was this power and freedom to move forces and equipment quickly without the usual review by proper authority that made possible the first entry of troops and equipment into South Vietnam in the early Sixties. In order to mount a particular operation it considered important, the CIA needed 24 helicopters and it obtained White House permission over strenuous objections from the Pentagon to have them sent to Vietnam. Sending 24 helicopters anywhere automatically means sending 400 men as well, counting only pilots and gunners and mechanics and cooks and clerks and bakers and the rest of the immediate establishment. If the intention is—and the intention always is—to give those 24 helicopters real support, then it involves sending 1,200 men. Moreover, the statistics are that, in any helicopter squadron, because of maintenance servicing requirements, only half the machines will be operational at any one time. So if 24 operational helicopters are needed, 48 will have to be sent, which means 2,400 men. But if you're sending a supporting force involving 2,400 men, then the support for *them* PX's, movies, motor pools, officers' and enlisted men's clubs, perimeter guards to protect all this, and so on and so on—becomes really extensive, and thousands more men get attached to it. And so it goes. "Twenty-four helicopters" can, in fact did, ultimately mean a full-scale military involvement.

The CIA also knows how to get research and development contracts it initiates transferred to the Department of Defense when it comes time to make quantity purchases of the new equipment, and then, once DOD has spent the money, requisition that equipment back through outfits like 1234. Something very much like this happened with the M-16 rifle, which, as the result of the Team's machinations, is now a standard infantry weapon. The reasons the CIA first wanted the M-16 developed are obscure, though perhaps one of them is that it is a "NATO caliber" piece and therefore does not rely on American-made ammunition, and perhaps another is that it is small and light and therefore suitable for use by guerrillas and counter-guerrillas. In any case, a decision was made that the M-16 was needed in quantity by the CIA for certain operations in Asia, and Fairchild, the aircraft company, was given a research and development contract. At the time, the CIA was unable to elicit any interest at all in the project from the Army, which was fighting a rear-guard action against Secretary McNamara's decision to close its venerated Springfield Arsenal; it refused to look at a weapon that had not gone the Army Ordnance route. However, the CIA was able to push the M-16 through the office of the Secretary of Defense, over the head of the Army, and then induce the Air Force to put in a procurement order for 60,000 of the M-16's. Not long after the Air Force re-

ceived delivery of the 60,000 rifles, they vanished mysteriously somewhere overseas.

The CIA is careful to maintain close relations with industry. It has been especially friendly for many years with Lockheed Aircraft, which developed the U-2 spy plane, and many other military contractors. The CIA was involved with the support of the Helio Corporation of Bedford, Massachusetts– a firm that produces a Short Take-off and Landing plane that has been very important to CIA-Green Beret operations over the years in Laos. (The founders of the firm are two former professors, Arthur Koppen, who used to head the aeronautics laboratory at MIT, and Lynn Bollinger of the Harvard Business School. Bollinger flew into Laos with early Green Beret teams which had established contacts with the Meo tribes.) Some plants manufacture equipment solely for the Agency; they are, of course, provided with elaborate covers.

The Agency's operatives appear in the organizations of many other government agencies. A visitor to the overseas office of a Military Advisory Group that presumably has a staff of 40 might find a hundred men working in the MAAG compound; these are CIA people whose salaries are paid by the Agency so that budget reviews in Washington will not reveal their existence. These people are in addition to the large number of military personnel carried on its budget for the ostensible purpose of cross-training; and this does not count the Special Forces troops that may be attached to the Agency in certain countries. Sometimes the official military may be unaware of the activities of supposed members of its own MAAG groups or other military organizations. In similar fashion, as revealed by *Los Angeles Times* reporter Jack Foisie, the CIA is using the State Department's AID program as a cover for clandestine operations. In Laos, the number of agents posing as civilian AID workers totals several hundred. They are listed as members of the AID mission's Rural Development Annex. There is also a Special Requirements Office in the AID compound which provides supplies for CIA clandestine operations.

The military aid given to a foreign country is carefully tailored by military planners and is related to what is given to other countries in the region. However, a foreign air force chief of staff, for example, may wish to have a squadron of modern reconnaissance aircraft for his country's use. He contacts the local CIA station chief and explains that he would employ these aircraft on missions of interest to the Agency. The Department of Defense might have turned down the request, but the local commander will press his claim with the CIA. The Agency might want to have the added services and will take the request to the Agency headquarters in Washington –and the country will get the squadron of modern reconnaissance fighters. Such a scenario is not unlike very recent transactions that have taken place between the U.S. and Taiwan.

In sum, during the last decade the White House's National Security Council apparatus and the CIA – particularly its operational side which now has nine overseas employees to every one on the intelligence-gathering side –have grown enormously both in size and in influence. More and more foreign-policy decisions are being made in secret, in response only to immediate crises rather than in accordance with long-range plans, and all too often with very little consultation with professional foreign-policy or military planners. More and more overseas operations are being conducted in secret, and ad hoc, and with very little control by professional diplomats or soldiers. And the one organ of government that, on behalf of the people that elected it, should be monitoring these goings-on, is today as ignorant as the public because Congress submitted to secrecy on a grand scale years ago when it authorized the CIA. It is hard to imagine how or when the Secret Team can be brought into the open and made publicly accountable for its actions. ■

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