

The Washi

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Russell and the CIA

In rebuffing what he calls the Foreign Relations Committee's effort to "muscle in" on the job of overseeing our intelligence effort, Senator Russell has based his case on the legislative history of the National Security Act of 1947. Since the Act establishing the CIA was originally channeled through the Armed Services Committee, the Senator argues, the central responsibility for overseeing the Agency falls on his committee. He then cites the Legislative Reorganization Act as his authority for this contention.

Even in the narrowly legalistic terms within which he has drawn his case, Senator Russell appears to be on somewhat tenuous ground. Section 136 of the Reorganization Act does provide for "continuous watchfulness" by standing committees of "the execution by the administrative agencies concerned of any laws, the subject matter of which is within (their) jurisdiction." But nothing in this or any other clause of the Act links the task of oversight to whether or not a particular committee handled the original legislation creating an agency. Senators Fulbright and McCarthy might well maintain that the subject matter of the National Security Act falls within the jurisdiction of Foreign Relations. If Senator Russell has a valid argument on this score, it lies not in the letter of the law but in the conventions of the Senate.

The task of oversight went as a routine matter to Armed Services as the original custodian of the Act and secondarily to Appropriations as the watchdog of expenditure. At the beginning, no one cared very much who exercised the overseer's role. The

United States was new to the intelligence game. Few in Washington imagined how big the CIA (and now, the Defense Intelligence Agency or DIA) would become. What has radically changed the situation in the years since 1947 is the gradual realization that a vigorous and consolidated intelligence effort—activist by its nature—inevitably becomes a major operating arm of our foreign policy. The Foreign Relations Committee is simply reflecting this belated realization in seeking to assert its proper interest in our intelligence activities.

Senator Russell has made no serious effort to dispute the existence of such an interest. He has laughed it off by saying that since "the size of the armed forces are largely determined by our foreign relations," his committee should regularly sit in with the Foreign Relations Committee.

But this blithely dodges the basic issue. The broad general relationship between defense and foreign policy is hardly comparable to the intimate connection between the CIA and our diplomacy. When the CIA seeks to manipulate the balance of internal political forces in a country it constitutes the business end, as it were, of our representation abroad.

The Senate has many precedents for recognizing a mutuality of interest among different committees in national security matters. One obvious example was the referral of the Eisenhower Middle East program in 1958 jointly to Armed Services and Foreign Relations. Senators Fulbright and McCarthy are making a modest proposal in seeking representation for their committee in the existing oversight process, and they clearly deserve the support of the Senate.