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Secret Operations And Public Policy

By Marquis Childs

GIVEN the order of battle, there should be little doubt about the outcome of the Senate hassle over the Central Intelligence Agency. The Senate establishment, led by its most conspicuous member, Sen. Richard Russell of Georgia, holds the CIA in fond embrace and is determined to repel all invaders.

But there are doubts; and, if the 14-to-5 vote in the Foreign Relations Committee is a portent, Russell may have to use all his skill at parliamentary maneuver to put down the revolt. It is a test that will show whether the interlocking directorate—between the Senate establishment, the intelligence apparatus and the Armed Services—has the muscle to keep out interlopers.

Partly, of course, it is a personal feud. The challenge comes from members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who are convinced they should be represented on the top-secret joint supervisory committee overseeing the CIA's operation. This pits Chairman J. William Fulbright and his critical view of the Vietnam conflict against Russell, who, as chairman of the Armed Services Committee, goes down the line for the Administration.

But the controversy is more than a personal vendetta or even a dispute over Vietnam. The issue is the use of American power with roots deep in the American temperament. The isolationism of the first decades of this century grew out of a conviction of America's special destiny and the imperative need to stand free of the power struggles of the corrupt old world.

IN THE RECENT Senate exchange those arguing for supervision by members of the Foreign Relations Committee—three to be added to the six from Defense and Appropriations—were not saying the CIA is inefficient. On the contrary, they passed out generous bouquets for CIA performance.

The argument was that the CIA exercises a direct influence on foreign policy and, therefore, should come under the scrutiny of Senators concerned with that field. Not so, say Russell and the members of the supervisory committee, who contend that the agency has solely an operating function and does not intrude on policy-making.

While the CIA maintains its sphinx-like silence in public, the Senate establishment unquestionably speaks for it. The reason for wanting to keep the number of Senators overseeing CIA operations to a minimum goes beyond the increased danger of security leaks

inherent in an enlarged committee, although this is the argument chiefly stressed in public. What disturbs the CIA is the likelihood that Senators with a conviction of their expertise in the foreign field would want to call the shots.

The tug of war over the CIA is aggravated by a spate of news stories putting the intelligence agency, which Fulbright says has more employees than the State Department, in a dubious light. The climax came with a suit filed by the widow of an applicant for a CIA job who claimed her husband was drugged during the examination for the post and died as a consequence. Drugs plus cloak-and-dagger stuff made an unbeatable sensation.

THE LAWSUIT that has caused genuine concern is that in which the CIA insisted in a Baltimore court that the right of secrecy prohibited any response to a claim by a Latvian emigre that he is the victim of a calculated CIA slander which pictured him as a "Communist agent." This suggests one of the unhappiest aspects of the CIA operation, which is the role it plays with refugee groups in this country.

When Nikita Khrushchev came to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1960 and wildly shouting refugee groups greeted his every appearance, it was reported that the CIA had a lot to do with the organizing of these demonstrations. New York City has ever since been trying to get \$3 million out of the Federal Government for the extra cost of police protection for Khrushchev and the other heads of government who drew such an uproar.

Few knowledgeable observers would disagree with the criticism that the CIA grew too fast and luxuriantly in the postwar years. Coming out of the wartime Office of Strategic Services, the agency carried into another era many of the freewheeling habits of a cloak-and-dagger operation sanctioned by the urgency of war.

The basic question often lost sight of is whether a corollary of American power must be a highly organized intelligence operation. If the answer is "yes," then this must be a secret operation with congressional intervention kept to a minimum.

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