

Opinion •

The CIA as Handy Conspirator

Paris.

ITALY'S President Francesco Cossiga has asked the government of Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti to investigate statements made on Italian state television that purport to implicate the CIA in Italy's right-wing terrorism of the 1970s.

It is an inherently implausible allegation. The destabilization of an

By William Pfaff

allied and conservative government seems a most unlikely American policy. The CIA denies involvement, which is no great help in Italy. What else would it be expected to say?

President Cossiga's request demands a serious response because the accusation was made by way of a state-controlled communications medium and because a CIA link with the "P2" Masonic Lodge conspiracy of the 1970s has long been the subject of Italian rumor. The Italian taste for conspiratorial interpretations of public events, while exotic, is not eccentric. Conspiracy theory responds to a certain Italian political reality, anciently rooted, by no means Florentine in limit. There are conspiracies.

What has rekindled Italian interest in this particular conspiracy was the unexpected reversal last week, by an appeals court, of the convictions of 13 people — including Licio

Gelli, Grand Master of the P2 Lodge — previously found guilty of participation in the 1980 bombing of Bologna's railroad terminal, when 85 were killed and 200 injured.

This is the fourth time in the last decade and a half that appeal courts have set aside convictions of supposed right-wing terrorists. Thus the assumption, by many Italians, of the continued existence in their state of a system of "hidden universal power," as *La Repubblica* puts it.

The CIA could itself benefit from the investigation Mr. Cossiga has asked. The agency has given too many hostages to the conspiracy theorists of the world, and should support clarification of the more egregious allegations of its inquiry. A recent renewal of the charge that it bore responsibility for the murder of thousands of Indonesians following the 1965 military coup in that country actually produced independent evidence that this was not true.

An aspect of the demonization of the agency by its enemies has been its identification as a "rogue" force, thus, implicitly, one which has escaped U.S. national responsibility. The record is less glamorous, showing that the CIA has rarely, if ever, been up to anything it was not directly or indirectly told to be up to by elected officials of government.

What it should be up to is another matter, raising the question of the standard to which one holds — or should hold — one's country. Is it a standard of expedience, of unqualified pursuit of national interest and advantage? Or does a proscriptive political morality exist within the civilization of which the U.S. and its allies are part? If so, moral judgements properly follow, on the conduct of intelligence agencies, and on larger matters as well.

The CIA could benefit from the investigation Mr. Cossiga has asked. The agency has given too many hostages to the conspiracy theorists of the world, and should support clarification of the more egregious allegations of its inquiry.

The CIA could benefit from the investigation Mr. Cossiga has asked. The agency has given too many hostages to the conspiracy theorists of the world, and should support clarification of the more egregious allegations of its inquiry.

The morality of nations' conduct is a subject of deep and enduring political and philosophical controversy. However I think few Americans would wish to defend doctrines of political amorality or moral nihilism. Yet people often attack the critics of national policy or actions in moral terms. I did so recently, with respect to the 1971 U.S. invasion of Cambodia, and as a result stand accused by the U.S. former U.N. Am-

bassador, Jeane Kirkpatrick, of having written out of "passion, confusion and pure malice."

There are many who believe that realism requires a nation — any nation — to live as the world lives. They say that to hold one's own nation to a higher standard of conduct than that of its rivals is sentimentalism and a positive danger to its survival. Thus, in Israel, where national survival has been the dominant issue for 40 years, many ask

why those who criticize Israeli policies should hold their country to a higher standard than they hold Hafiz al-Assad's Syria or Saddam Hussein's Iraq — as if the way Presidents al-Assad and Hussein acted were relevant measures of how Israel should act.

The counter-argument is that one must hold one's own country and its allies to a higher standard because their adherence to such a

THE SUN

Commentary

standard is one of the qualities that makes them worth defending. Historically, the American position has been that the American nation merits respect and defense because it was established for a moral purpose, as the Declaration of Independence explicitly states. I criticize policies of the United States in moral language because I have exceptional expectations of the United States. Others perhaps have not.

The argument that one must live as the world lives, as the English historian Herbert Butterfield has said, "is the vulgar doctrine that morality does not pay; its only purport is the reduction of good men to the standard of the worst." Indeed, morality does not "pay" in any material or expedient sense. Hence the vulgar doctrine is nonetheless a defensible one — if not one which most Americans seem likely to want to avow.

Yet what do these Americans really believe about national actions that contradict international law and the common morality? Panama's invasion is the latest case. It has been debated for its political fallout and the efficacy (or lack of same) with which it was carried out.

People ask whether General Noriega will actually be convicted, and what it will mean if he is not. The moral foundation for such an invasion has had little public attention, and the issues of law have only perfunctorily been addressed. Such matters are not part of the mainstream debate. I ask myself why.