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Uneasy Feelings About CIA Dealings

Now that all those involved, both here and abroad, have had their say about the latest CIA "black" operation, the country is left with the uneasy, disheartening feeling that there is still a long way to go in reining in the headstrong intelligence agency that often is referred to as our "invisible government."

Despite all the promises of reform and the establishment of a new congressional watchdog committee, plus the inauguration of a new and supposedly concerned administration, it appears that the CIA has continued to operate in its old free-wheeling way.

It also appears that President Carter and Sen. Daniel Inouye, chairman of the newly-created Senate Intelligence Committee, are less disturbed over the CIA secretly paying off various heads of state, than they are over the leaks that exposed the undercover activity.

That was also the reaction of former President Ford over earlier leaks and press exposes that revealed, among other things, CIA plots to kill Cuba's prime minister, Fidel Castro, subversion of an elected government in Chile, and the covert compilation of dossiers on hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens.

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), chairman of the committee that spent most of 1976 investigating intelligence abuses, says he thinks "Carter has reacted the way his predecessors would have in concluding that the principal problem is to confine the leaks." And he adds, "Once we put an end to this hanky-panky (referring to payoffs to foreign leaders) then we don't have to worry about leaks."

Even before Ford, former President Nixon was so wrought up over leaks that he went to unprecedented lengths in an effort to suppress the celebrated top secret "Pentagon Papers" on the grounds that publication would dangerously threaten the security of the nation. The Supreme Court overruled him; publication turned out to be a long-needed, valuable education of the American public on the Vietnam war; and, as we now know, the nation's safety was not jeopardized at all.

Carter's effort to discourage The Post from reporting that the CIA over a period of years had secretly paid millions

of dollars to Jordan's King Hussein, recalls a similar incident involving former President John F. Kennedy and the New York Times in another CIA undercover operation—the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961.

When Kennedy heard that the Times had learned about the scheme and was about to publicize it several days before the planned invasion, the editors agreed on a censored version. After the crisis was over, Kennedy confided to one of the editors that if the paper had gone ahead with the full story, the ill-fated invasion would no doubt have been called off—thus saving him and the nation from what he regarded as his worst mistake.

While President Carter sees nothing "illegal or improper" about the payoffs to foreign leaders, the special Intelligence Oversight Board, set up by former President Ford to review CIA cov-

ert activities, took a critical view, and so informed Mr. Ford, who alas did nothing about it.

The final judgment on propriety, however, rests with the American people. It is not hard to imagine what the public reaction in this country would be if the situation were reversed and it was discovered that the President of the U.S. was in the secret pay of a foreign government. The demand for impeachment would be deafening.

Mr. Carter's Justice Department, in fact, is even now reportedly preparing to prosecute a flock of congressmen for allegedly accepting money from South Korean agents, whose government has received hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. military and economic aid, and other benefits from Congress.

King Hussein has no apologies for his arrangement with the CIA—code-named "No Beef." He insists the money was not for his personal use, but to fund intelligence activities. If that is so, why did President Carter abruptly stop the payments after they were revealed? Hussein himself says he has "not been advised about its suspension," which leaves another loose end to be tied up.

In any case, a lot of U.S. money has

gone to the King, and, in justification, it is said that he is our best source of intelligence in the Middle East. If so, maybe we ought to change informants, for our government has been caught off-guard in some of the major crises of the region, including the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the ensuing oil embargo against the U.S.

During that conflict, Washington was "surprised and disappointed" when Hussein sent some of his armed forces, largely American-equipped, to the side of Syria. The U.S. State Department feared that would "serve to prolong the war."

In the end, Hussein's forces played only a passive role, but in 1975 Jordan and Syria agreed to form a permanent Joint High Commission to coordinate military, economic and cultural policies, which was seen as "an aggressive alignment" against Israel.

Last year, Washington reportedly warned Hussein that Jordan stood to lose millions of dollars in military and economic aid if he went through with plans to make a deal with Moscow for an anti-aircraft missile system which he then had not been able to get from the U.S. Nothing finally came of the Russian deal, but the incident showed the King ready to do business with the Communists if it suited his purposes.

Nevertheless, Sen. Inouye was not disturbed when his intelligence watchdog committee was informed about the secret CIA payments to Hussein. One official familiar with the operations of the committee is quoted as fearing it could end up looking like the CIA's "poodle."

For 30 years, that has been the unfortunate history of previous congressional oversight committees, so it won't be too surprising if the Inouye group carries on that timid tradition. It will, though, be a sorry day for the U.S.

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