



Viewpoint — by Julian Bond
Fred Park Klatsko

Keeping CIA secrets . . .

If Sen. Daniel Moynihan, D-N.Y., has his way, we may never again know the details of plots and illegal acts by America's secret services.

Future Congressional review may determine whether the failed hostage-rescue attempt in Iran intended to use nerve gas. But Sen. Moynihan's proposed exemptions for the CIA will expressly prohibit journalists and ordinary citizens from learning:

— "Design, function, deployment, exploitation or utilization of scientific or technical systems for the collection of foreign intelligence or counter-intelligence information."

— Special activities, like overthrowing governments, or intelligence activities, such as spying on Americans abroad.

— Background checks, such as investigations of academics or journalists as potential sources.

— Intelligence or security contacts with foreign governments, such as when the CIA asked foreign services to investigate Americans abroad.

Naturally, the CIA doesn't want all this information released. Our professional spies argue that the administrative burden of processing Freedom of Information Act requests is too great, that little information of consequence is released, and that the existence of public access to some CIA information compromises the intelligence gathering process.

The administrative burden is expensive — \$2.6 million a year — but hardly a great price to pay to learn that the CIA routinely violated its charter by spying on Americans at home, maintaining files on law-abiding citizens, and testing dangerous drugs on unwitting subjects.

And it is undeniably useful to learn of the CIA's plans to murder foreign heads of state, their covert and illegal operations on American college campuses, their introduction of LSD into the American consciousness, and their mind control programs.

Only if a case could be made that FOIA requests had compromised the intelligence gathering process — or that our secret services had an unblemished record of providing accurate, precise information before the CIA, became subject to FOIA scrutiny in 1974 — would the public understand the agency's reluctance to release its secrets.

The CIA argues that its sources — foreign intelligence agencies, foreign governments, and American informants — fear the FOIA will harm the confidentiality of their covert relationship with the CIA.

But this argument rings hollow from an agency that abandoned its files on local agents when it fled Saigon, deserted the agents it had infiltrated into North Vietnam.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

and the failed rescue mission in Iran give added ammunition to those who want the cloak of secrecy to cover the CIA's dagger once again. But neither past performance nor present behavior can justify hiding a sorry record of misinformation gathered abroad and criminal acts at home.

John Blake, former acting director of Central Intelligence for the CIA, testified in 1976 that:

"... there is an inherent tension between the needs of an open society and the requirements of a secret intelligence operation. I feel very strongly that these two opposing needs must be reconciled. Let me be frank. The 1974

amendments to the FOIA and the ensuing public interest constituted a somewhat traumatic experience for a national intelligence officer who had been trained and indoctrinated to conduct his work in secrecy. These amendments required a considerable adjustment in attitude and practice.

"I am proud to say that my colleagues have worked very hard during these past 30 months to make the act work according to the letter and spirit. We have been able to make the necessary adjustment. I am pleased to report that, in fact, I think the Agency is better off for it."

And so are we all.
Newspaper Enterprise Association