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# Destroy the Monster

By Tom Wicker

The disclosure that the Central Intelligence Agency hoarded a supply of deadly poisons in direct contravention of Richard Nixon's order to destroy such poisons in 1969 is only one more bit of evidence that this agency is a Frankenstein's monster that must be destroyed.

There are several ways to explain the stockpiling of shellfish toxin and cobra venom against express Presidential orders. First, the poisons might secretly have been ordered preserved by Mr. Nixon himself. Or the top command of the C.I.A. might have made the decision to retain them, for reasons of its own. Finally, lower-level authorities within the agency might have disobeyed their own immediate superiors and saved the poisons against some real or imagined needs.

It does not mean much that the C.I.A. itself apparently disclosed the retention of the poisons to the investigating committee headed by Senator Frank Church of Idaho. It could be, of course, that the present C.I.A. command has only recently discovered the cached poisons, as is being contended; but given this agency's record of subterfuge, concealment and distortion of the record, it is just as easy to suppose that the disclosure was made only because of recent inquiries into C.I.A. activities, and the possibility that the truth would have been uncovered anyway.

However the matter is viewed, few incidents could more dramatically disclose the dangers of this many-chambered house of deceit, fear, power and secrecy. If Mr. Nixon ordered the poisons secretly preserved against his own stated policy of renouncing bacteriological warfare, then he should not have had a secret agency able and willing to do his bidding. If the agency took it upon itself to contravene Mr. Nixon's declared policy, it could only have done so because of the power and autonomy derived from its ability to operate in secrecy.

If lower-level officials disobeyed their own superiors as well as Mr. Nixon and stockpiled the poisons against national policy, then as Senator Church has said there was an incredible "looseness of command and control within the C.I.A."—a laxity all the more frightening because if the agency's top officials cannot control their underlings, then there is no way to impose outside political control on the agency itself.

That is why the illicit stockpiling of the poisons—whatever use might have been intended for them by whoever was responsible—is one of the more frightening disclosures about this

shadowy agency. It is reminiscent of the report that when James Schlesinger, while briefly the C.I.A. director, ordered a halt to all questionable counterintelligence activities in 1973, agency security officials increased the numbers of his bodyguards. If they feared for his safety *within* the agency, then what might not uncontrolled agents be capable of *outside* the C.I.A.?

Illicit domestic spying, secret and loosely controlled experiments with drugs, connections to the underworld, plots that may or may not have been authorized to kill various foreign leaders, now the hoarded poisons—such abuses are the inevitable consequences of great power, essentially unchecked, cloaked in the mystique of national security, and authorized to operate in secrecy. No amount of Congressional oversight could have prevented the stockpiling of those poisons, or their possible illicit use; and whatever may yet be disclosed about the assassination plots, and who may have authorized them, it is clear that they *could* have been and perhaps were undertaken on the agency's own initiative.

Such secret power is intolerable in an open, democratic society. Just as

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C.I.A. "covert" techniques came to be employed in domestic politics by the White House "plumbers" under Howard Hunt, so might even more dangerous C.I.A. tactics and attitudes, spawned in the dark atmosphere of an anything-goes operation waging secret wars in the name of national security, further contaminate the national life.

Enough is already known of the Church committee's findings—it is plausible to suppose that there is more to be disclosed—to support a recommendation that the C.I.A. as now constituted be abolished. Then, its presumably able and useful sections devoted to the straight collection and analysis of intelligence could be reorganized into a successor agency unburdened and unsullied with "covert" operations and vast secret powers to overturn governments, harass other nations, subvert or kill their leaders, and thwart their legitimate aspirations. Such powers not only have no place in a decent society; but if permitted will almost inevitably be turned against the society that grants them.

To the extent that covert operations of some kind may be legitimate and necessary, surely an overpowering secret agency is not required to carry them out. Depending on the nature of the case, some small, efficient unit within the State Department or the military would be sufficient, and infinitely easier to control.