

The Katzenbach Paper

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Sept. 19—The United States should abandon all covert operations in foreign countries except the gathering of intelligence. That proposal is made by Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, the former Attorney General and Under Secretary of State, in an article just published in Foreign Affairs.

"Specifically," Katzenbach writes, "there should be no secret subsidies of police or counter-insurgency forces, no efforts to influence elections, no secret monetary subsidies. . . ."

The Katzenbach paper is a remarkable one apart from that striking recommendation. It comes from a man whom the left has criticized as too establishment-oriented but who in fact combines a highly original mind with careful and wise judgment.

What makes this article important is that it relates American foreign policy to the crisis of confidence in government, taking a large historical view. Katzenbach rejects the revisionist proposition that policy in the postwar years was built on bad motives. But he also rejects the notion, expressed wishfully by Henry Kissinger, that foreign policy can be separated from the domestic sickness of Watergate.

Since the war, he says, the making of foreign policy has become more and more secretive and concentrated. Katzenbach traces a number of the influences: the postwar atmosphere of crisis in opposing conspiratorial Communism, the growth of the military role, the tendency of the public when it feels endangered by the outside world to put its trust in the President.

"Unfortunately," Katzenbach notes dryly, "Presidents are inclined to think this blind trust in their wisdom is wholly justified." He adds the shrewd point that Presidents also became captives of public anti-Communist passion, so that they dared not "lose" any foreign territory and resorted to Presidential action unauthorized by the normal processes of law.

The Bay of Pigs is an example. Katzenbach notes that when that invasion of Cuba failed, President Kennedy took public blame only for the failure, not for the attempt: "He felt no need to apologize for undertaking so extensive a covert activity on Presidential authority alone."

Then came Vietnam. President Johnson followed the form of law by asking Congress for authority in the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. But there was no real candor; and as Congressional and public dissent made things increasingly difficult, secretiveness and deception increased.

That history suggests that the excesses of the Nixon years—the Watergate crimes, the secret bombing of Cam-

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bodia—had roots in the past. Secrecy had increasingly become, Katzenbach argues, a way "to avoid the difficulties inherent in our political system and hopefully to present the public with triumphant *faits accomplis*."

Then what had happened gradually as a convenience "was converted into constitutional principle by Mr. Nixon." To an unprecedented degree the Nixon Administration excluded the public, Congress and even official Government channels from foreign policy consultation or information. Katzenbach concludes:

"Even without Watergate, personal diplomacy, conducted in secret, without public understanding or solid institutional foundation within the government, should be insufficient basis for a viable foreign policy. And if, as I believe, Watergate has destroyed confidence in the President's credibility, much more is now needed."

The remedies that Katzenbach suggests all are designed to restore confidence in American policy and policy-making. Their common theme is greater openness to discussion and criticism.

Congress is naturally one part of the problem. Katzenbach has no illusion that it can easily be made a participant in foreign policy: It can be parochial, obstructive, uninterested. But he rejects even reliance on select committees and private consultation. Today, he says, "there can be no substitute for a general rule of openness with the Congress." There must also be "far greater openness within the executive branch itself," he says.

Katzenbach calls most strongly for reducing the whole role of secret information in foreign policy. The system of classifying documents has not worked and should be drastically cut back, he argues; "bloated concepts of national security" should be dropped. And then he urges the abandonment of covert operations abroad, saying that their usefulness is outweighed by the fears they arouse and the impossibility of controlling them.

"However difficult and complex our foreign policy may be," he concludes, "there is no license to free it from the mandates of the Constitution or the constraints of public views, interests and wants."

It is difficult to summarize all this in a newspaper column. The attempt seemed worthwhile because the Katzenbach paper provides an essential framework for the rethinking that Henry Kissinger—and all of us—must now do about the means and ends of American foreign policy.