

Controlling the C.I.A.

Espionage has always been among the most sordid of professions, and the cold war has made it more so. The New York Times survey on the clandestine operations of the Central Intelligence Agency has provided a chilling indication of the range of intrigue—from bribery and the buying of elections to coups and military action by proxy—into which the United States has been plunged by the need for countering Communist subversion.

The enormous scope of these activities and their explosive nature make it essential, though peculiarly difficult, for this democratic nation to assure that such activities serve its true interests. The primary responsibility for controlling the Government's clandestine arm abroad clearly lies with the Administration itself. Reforms instituted since the Bay of Pigs disaster undoubtedly have led to a useful tightening-up. But the dimensions of C.I.A. operations and their secrecy make it difficult for normal checks and balances within the Administration to function effectively. Regional experts in the State Department, who are best informed about their areas, often are not consulted about C.I.A. projects. Abroad, the C.I.A. operatives have their own communications and codes, limiting the ability of the Ambassador on the spot to supervise their activities even though he is theoretically in charge.

All this places a heavy burden on the C.I.A.'s director—and the handful of outside officials named by the President to check on the agency's work—in assuring that American foreign policy is implemented, rather than altered in clandestine operations.

The Congress cannot substitute for the Administration in this task. But there is little excuse for the complete abdication of Congressional responsibility that has characterized the intelligence field. In six major government studies and 150 Congressional resolutions since the war—all testifying to the existence of informed concern—there have been repeated proposals for improving the Congressional role. But nothing has come of any of it.

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The four Congressional subcommittees, drawn from the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees, that occasionally question C.I.A. officials have functioned less to investigate or "control" the C.I.A. than to shield it from its critics. The choice of members of these subcommittees, extraordinarily enough, has been substantially influenced by the C.I.A. itself. There is a clear need to add knowledgeable Congressional experts in foreign affairs to these groups, as proposed by Senator Eugene McCarthy.

A permanent Congressional "watchdog" committee—similar to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy—has frequently been proposed, notably by the Hoover Commission during the Eisenhower Administration. Perhaps broadening the present subcommittee structure represents an adequate substitute. Senator McCarthy, a former advocate of the "watchdog" committee, evidently believes so—or thinks that no more can now be obtained.

But this and many other questions about the American intelligence community deserve thorough examination. A small, select committee of independent-minded members of Congress is needed to investigate the problem.

Is it possible that the very size and efficiency of the C.I.A. lead to "back alley" operations that may not be the most effective—or honorable—instruments of American purpose? While some of these methods may be justifiable against a cold war enemy, should they be employed in allied and neutral countries? Should the agency responsible for clandestine operations also manage intelligence evaluation, particularly the 80 to 90 per cent of intelligence that comes from analysis of open sources?

Most important, firm Administration control of the C.I.A., while vital, is not sufficient to the American system of government. The Administration itself needs legislative scrutiny in this field. Neither in defense nor diplomacy nor in atomic matters, where secrecy also is essential, has it ever been suggested that Congressional advice and consent are unnecessary. Far more significant than whether the C.I.A. is right in subverting this or that government abroad is the question of whether exclusive Executive control of the intelligence community does not subvert the American system of government itself.