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THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE Agency, precluded by Congress from engaging in domestic operations 26 years ago, operates under a top-secret charter from the President's National Security Council that may directly conflict with its congressional mandate.

The secret charter, in the form of National Security Council Intelligence Directives or "Enskids," is known only to a few high-level operatives in the intelligence bureaucracy and fewer, if any, member of Congress.

The "Enskids" take advantage of loopholes in Congress' 1947 National Security Act to permit CIA activities not authorized when the agency was created by the statute.

"The secret charter," said a congressional expert on CIA operations, "is a curse."

"We must have publicly confirmed what authority is given to the intelligence community in this country."

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THE CONTROVERSIAL "Enskids" apparently spell out in specific terms just what authority is granted for covert operations overseas and just what CIA can do in the United States — even though the National Security Act specifies that the agency is not to be involved in intelligence activities at home.

Disclosures in the Watergate scandal have resulted in new concern that Congress has failed over the years to properly oversee CIA operations.

Publication of secret White House documents revealed that a 1970 intelligence plan — approved by President Nixon, then canceled five days later — involve the CIA in discussions of a widespread scheme for spy-on domestic "targets."



Though memorandums written by White House aide Tom Charles Huston cited the cooperation of then-CIA Director Richard Helms in putting together the plan, some sources argue that the documents failed to show CIA had agreed to become involved in the White House operations for domestic spying.

Nevertheless, a former CIA analyst who is now an intelligence expert on Capitol Hill said, "Helms never should have participated in discussions like that, and when the subject was raised he should have walked out."

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ACCORDING to sources familiar with operations of the agency, CIA activities in the United States include recruitment and assistance of students from "Third World" countries attending colleges and universities in the United States.

Such activities are euphemistically termed "building future assets," establishing relations with students who stand to become figures in government in their home countries.

It is also widely believed that CIA infiltrates U.S. peace groups in order to gain access to countries like China, North Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba.

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It is fairly common knowledge that the agency also operates a domestic contract service which interviews some Americans, mainly businessmen, who return from abroad with potentially useful information.

The CIA also has been connected with giving training to a number of police departments.

Much of the domestic CIA activities is reported to be carried out from offices in downtown Washington, no more than a block from the White House, rather than at the agency's headquarters at Langley, Va.

Disclosure that John D. Ehrlichman, President Nixon's former domestic affairs adviser, had solicited CIA assistance for men plotting the burglary of the offices of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, has triggered three congressional investigations of possible agency involvement in the Watergate affair and related matters.

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SENATOR William Proxmire (D-Wis.), who recently renewed efforts to get disclosure of CIA's secret budget, has launched a campaign to obtain release of the secret "Enskids."

Professor Harry Howe Ransom of Vanderbilt University, an authority on the CIA, has called for creation of a nongovernment commission to carry out a major investigation of the entire U.S. intelligence apparatus.

Calling the 1970 plan drawn up in the White House "scandalous" Ransom said in an interview that a major reorganization may be called for, including changes in the authority of the FBI and CIA.

He said there are legitimate questions as to whether release of the "Enskids" would jeopardize the national security.

"But we don't know what the basic structure of our national intelligence apparatus is. But the 'enemy' probably knows, and in the long run, disclosure is the better risk. The worst thing is that the law is being violated in secret."