

What's Wrong With the CIA?

Power, arrogance, and the "inside-outside" syndrome are what's wrong, says a former CIA executive who is worried about the challenge to the traditions of representative government.

by Tom Braden

Washington, D.C.

We are gathered, four of us CIA division chiefs and deputies, in the office of our agency's director, an urbane and charming man. He is seated at his desk, puffing nervously on his pipe and asking us questions.

Allen W. Dulles is fretting on this morning in the early Fifties, as, indeed, he has fretted most mornings. You can't be in the middle of building an enormous spy house, running agents into Russia and elsewhere, worrying about Joseph McCarthy, planning to overthrow a government in Guatemala, and helping to elect another in Italy, without fretting.

But on this particular morning, Dulles is due for an appearance before Sen. Richard B. Russell's Armed Services Committee, and the question he is pondering as he puffs on his pipe is whether to tell the senators what is making him fret. He has just spent a lot of money on buying an intelligence network, and the network has turned out to be worthless. In fact, it's a little worse than worthless. All that money, Dulles now suspects, went to the KGB.

Therefore, the questions are somber, and so are the answers. At last, Dulles rises. "Well," he says, "I guess I'll have to fudge the truth a little."

His eyes twinkle at the word *fudge*, then suddenly turn serious. He twists his slightly stooped shoulders into the old tweed topcoat and heads for the door. But he turns back. "I'll tell the truth to Dick [Russell]," he says. "I always do." Then the twinkle returns, and he adds, with a chuckle, "That is, if Dick wants to know."

THE REASON I RECALL the above scene in detail is that lately I have been asking myself what's wrong with the CIA. Two

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committees of Congress and one from the executive branch are asking the question, too. But they are asking out of a concern for national policy. I am asking for a different reason. I once worked for the CIA. I regard the time I spent there as worthwhile duty. I look back upon the men with whom I worked as able and honorable. So for me, the question "What's wrong with the CIA?" is both personal and poignant.

Old friends of mine have been caught in evasions or worse. People I worked with have violated the law. Men whose ability I respected have planned operations that ended in embarrassment or disaster. What's wrong with these people? What's wrong with the CIA?

Ask yourself a question often enough, and sometimes the mind will respond with a memory. The memory my mind reported back is that scene in Allen Dulles's office. It seemed, at first blush, a commonplace, inconsequential episode. But the more it fixed itself in my mind, the more it seemed to me that it helped to answer my question about what's wrong with the agency. Let me explain.

The first thing this scene reveals is the sheer power that Dulles and his agency had. Only a man with extraordinary power could make a mistake involving a great many of the taxpayers' dollars and not have to explain it. Allen Dulles had extraordinary power.

Power flowed to him and, through him, to the CIA, partly because his brother was Secretary of State, partly because his reputation as the master spy of World War II hung over him like a mysterious halo, partly because his senior partnership in the prestigious New York law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell impressed the small-town lawyers of Congress.

Moreover, events helped keep power flowing. The country was fighting a shooting war in Korea and a Cold War in Western Europe, and the CIA was sole authority on the plans and potential of the real enemy. To argue against the CIA was to argue against knowledge. Only Joseph McCarthy would run such a risk.

Indeed, McCarthy unwittingly added to the power of the CIA. He attacked the agency and when, in the showdown, Dulles won, his victory vastly increased the respectability of what people then

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Former CIA Director Allen Dulles—A simple matter of fudging the truth.

called “the cause” of anti-communism. “Don’t join the book burners,” Eisenhower had said. That was the bad way to fight communism. The good way was the CIA.

POWER WAS THE FIRST THING that went wrong with the CIA. There was too much of it, and it was too easy to bring to bear—on the State Department, on other government agencies, on the patriotic businessmen of New York, and on the foundations whose directorships they occupied. The agency’s power overwhelmed the Congress, the press, and therefore the people.

I’m not saying that this power didn’t help to win the Cold War, and I believe the Cold War was a good war to win. But the power enabled the CIA to continue Cold War operations 10 and 15 years after the Cold War was won. Under Allen Dulles the power was unquestioned, and after he left, the habit of not questioning remained.

I remember the time I walked over to the State Department to get formal approval for some CIA project involving a few hundred thousand dollars and a publication in Europe. The desk man at the State Department balked. Imagine. He balked—and at an operation designed to combat what I knew for certain was a similar Soviet operation. I was astonished. But I didn’t argue. I knew what would happen. I would report to the director, who would get his brother on the phone: “Foster, one of your people seems to be a little less than cooperative.” That is power.

THE SECOND THING that’s wrong with the CIA is arrogance, and the scene I’ve mentioned above shows that, too. Allen Dulles’s private joke about “fudging” was arrogant, and so was the suggestion that “Dick” might not *want* to know. An organization that does not have to answer for mistakes is certain to become arrogant.

It is not a cardinal sin, this fault, and sometimes it squints toward virtue. It might be argued, for example, that only arrogant men would insist on building the U-2 spy plane within a time frame which military experts said could not be met. Yet in the days before satellite surveillance, the U-2 spy plane was the most useful means of keeping the peace. It assured this country’s leaders that Russia was not planning an attack. But if arrogance built the plane quickly; it also destroyed it. For surely it was arrogant

to keep it flying through Soviet airspace after it was suspected that the Russians were literally zeroing in on overflying U-2s.

I wonder whether the arrogance of the CIA may not have been battlefield-related—a holdover from World War II machismo and derring-do. The leaders of the agency were, almost to a man, veterans of OSS, the CIA’s wartime predecessor. Take, for example, the men whose faces I now recall, standing there in the director’s office.

One had run a spy-and-operations network into Germany from German-occupied territory. Another had volunteered to parachute into Field Marshall Kesselring’s headquarters grounds with terms for his surrender. A third had crash-landed in Norway and, having lost half his men, came up, nevertheless, blowing up bridges.

OSS men who became CIA men were unusual people who had volunteered to carry out unusual orders and to take unusual risks. Moreover, they were impressed, more than most soldiers can be impressed, with the absolute necessity for secrecy and the certain penalty that awaited the breach of it.

But they had another quality that set them apart. For some reason that psychologists could perhaps explain, a man who volunteers to go on an extremely dangerous mission, alone or with one or two helpers, is likely to be not only brave and resourceful but also somewhat vain. Relatively few men *volunteered* to jump into German or Japanese territory during World War II. Those who did volunteer were conscious that they were, in a word, “different.”

Once these men had landed behind the lines, the difference took on outward symbols. They were alone, Americans in a country full of French or Greeks or Italians or Chinese. Often they were treated with great respect. Sometimes, as mere lieutenants, they commanded thousands of men. At a word from them, American or British planes came over to drop supplies to these men. They earned the love and respect that conquered people felt for the great democracy called America. Inevitably, they began to think of themselves individually and collectively as representing the national honor.

Is it not possible that men who have learned to do everything in secrecy, who are accustomed to strange assignments, and who think of themselves as embodying their country, are peculiarly suscepti-

ble to imperial Presidencies such as those of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon? Have they not in fact trained themselves to behave as a power elite?

TO POWER AND TO ARROGANCE add the mystique of the inside-outside syndrome. That scene in the director's office defines the problem. Dulles was leveling with his assistants, and they were leveling with him. An agent or a station chief or an official of the CIA who didn't level—who departed in the slightest degree from a faithful account of what he knew or what he had done—was a danger to operations and to lives. Such a man couldn't last a day in the CIA.

But truth was reserved for the inside. To the outsider, CIA men learned to lie, to lie consciously and deliberately without the slightest twinge of the guilt that most men feel when they tell a deliberate lie.

The inside-outside syndrome is unavoidable in a secret intelligence agency: You bring a group of people together, bind them with an oath, test their loyalty periodically with machines, spy on them to make sure they're not meeting secretly with someone from the Czech Embassy, cushion them from the rest of the world with a false cover story, teach them to lie because lying is in the national interest, and they do not behave like other men.

They do not come home from work and answer truthfully the question, "What did you do today, darling?" When they chat with their neighbors, they lie about their jobs. In their compartmentalized, need-to-know jobs, it is perfectly excusable for one CIA man to lie to another if the other doesn't need to know.

Thus it was ritual for Allen Dulles to "fudge," and often he didn't have to. Senator Russell might say, "The chairman has conferred with the director about this question, which touches a very sensitive matter." The question would be withdrawn.

Another technique for dealing with an outsider was the truthful non-response. Consider the following exchange between Sen. Claiborne Pell (Dem., R.I.) and Richard Helms. (The exchange was concerned with spying on Americans, an illegal act under the terms of the law that created the CIA.)

Senator Pell (referring to spying on anti-war demonstrations): "But these all occurred within the continental shores of the United States and for that reason you

had the justifiable reason to decline [to] move in there because the events were outside your ambit."

Mr. Helms: "Absolutely, and I have never been lacking in clarity in my mind since I have been director, that this is simply not acceptable not only to Congress but to the people of the United States."

"Various committees now investigating the agency will doubtless find error. They will recommend change; they will reshuffle. But they will leave the monster intact."

No doubt that answer was truthful. No doubt Helms did think that domestic spying was not acceptable. But he was doing it, and he didn't say he wasn't.

Finally, of course, there is the direct lie. Here is another excerpt from 1973 testimony by Helms:

Senator Symington (Dem., Mo.): "Did you try, in the Central Intelligence Agency, to overthrow the government of Chile?"

Helms: "No, Sir."

Symington: "Did you have any money passed to the opponents of Allende?"

Helms: "No, Sir."

Helms was under oath. Therefore, he must have considered his answer carefully. Obviously, he came to the insider's conclusion: that his duty to protect the inside outweighed his outsider's oath. Or to put it another way, the law of the inside comes first.

ALLEN DULLES once remarked that if necessary, he would lie to anybody about the CIA except the President. "I never had the slightest qualms about lying to an outsider," a CIA veteran remarked recently. "Why does an outsider need to know?"

So much for the lessons of memory. Power, arrogance, and the inside-outside syndrome are what's wrong with the CIA, and to some extent, the faults are occupational and even necessary tools for the job.

But the events of the Cold War and the coincidence of Allen Dulles's having such enormous discretionary powers enlarged occupational risks until they became faults, and the faults created a monstrosity. Power built a vast bureaucracy and a ridiculous monument in Langley, Va. Arrogance fostered the belief that a few hundred exiles could land on a beach and hold off Castro's army.

The inside-outside syndrome withheld the truth from Adlai Stevenson so that he was forced to make a spectacle of himself on the floor of the United Nations by denying that the United States had anything to do with the invasion of Cuba. The same syndrome has made a sad and worried man of Richard Helms.

It's a shame what happened to the

CIA. It could have consisted of a few hundred scholars to analyze intelligence, a few hundred spies in key positions, and a few hundred operators ready to carry out rare tasks of derring-do.

Instead, it became a gargantuan monster, owning property all over the world, running airplanes and newspapers and radio stations and banks and armies and navies, offering temptation to successive Secretaries of State, and giving at least one President a brilliant idea: Since the machinery for deceit existed, why not use it?

Richard Helms should have said no to Richard Nixon. But as a victim of the inside-outside syndrome, Helms could only ask Watergate's most plaintive question: "Who would have thought that it would someday be judged a crime to carry out the orders of the President of the United States?"

A shame—and a peculiarly American shame. For this is the only country in the world which doesn't recognize the fact that some things are better if they are small.

We'll need intelligence in the future. And once in a while, once in a great while, we may need covert action, too. But, at the moment, we have nothing. The revelations of Watergate and the investigations that have followed have done their work. The CIA's power is gone. Its arrogance has turned to fear. The inside-outside syndrome has been broken. Former agents write books naming other agents. Director William Colby goes to the Justice Department with evidence that his predecessor violated the law. The house that Allen Dulles built is divided and torn.

THE END IS NOT IN SIGHT. Various committees now investigating the agency will doubtless find error. They will recom-

mend change, they will reshuffle, they will adjust. But they will leave the monster intact, and even if the monster never makes another mistake, never again overreaches itself—even, indeed, if like some other government agencies, it never does anything at all—it will, by existing, go right on creating and perpetuating the myths that always accompanied the presence of the monster.

We know the myths. They circulate throughout the land wherever there are bars and bowling alleys: that the CIA killed John Kennedy; that the CIA crippled George Wallace; that an unexplained airplane crash, a big gold heist, were all the work of the CIA.

These myths are ridiculous, but they will exist as long as the monster exists. The fact that millions believe the myths raises once again the old question which OSS men used to argue after the war: Can a free and open society engage in covert operations?

After nearly 30 years of trial, the evidence ought to be in. The evidence demonstrates, it seems to me, that a free and open society cannot engage in covert operations—not, at any rate, in the kind of large, intricate covert operations of which the CIA has been capable.

I don't argue solely from the box score. But let's look at the box score. It reveals many famous failures. Too easily, they prove the point. Consider what the CIA deems its known successes: Does anybody remember Arbenz in Guate-

mala? What good was achieved by the overthrow of Arbenz? Would it really have made any difference to this country if we hadn't overthrown Arbenz?

And Allende? How much good did it do the American people to overthrow Allende? How much bad?

Was it essential—even granted the sticky question of succession—to keep those Greek colonels in power for so long?

We used to think that it was a great triumph that the CIA kept the Shah of Iran on his throne against the onslaught of Mossadegh. Are we grateful still?

The uprisings during the last phase of the Cold War, and those dead bodies in the streets of Poland, East Germany, and Hungary: to what avail?

But the box score does not tell the whole story. We paid a high price for that box score. Shame and embarrassment is a high price. Doubt, mistrust, and fear is a high price. The public myths are a high price, and so is the guilty knowledge that we own an establishment devoted to opposing the ideals we profess.

IN OUR MIDST, we have maintained a secret instrument erected in contradiction to James Madison's injunction: "A popular government without the means to popular information is a farce or a tragedy, perhaps both."

As I say, the investigating committees will prop the monster up. I would suggest

more radical action. I would shut it down. I would turn the overt intelligence function over to the State Department. Scholars and scientists and people who understand how the railroads run in Sri Lanka don't need to belong to the CIA in order to do their valuable work well.

I would turn the paratroopers over to the army. If, at some time, it becomes essential to our survival to mount a secret attack upon a foe, the army is capable of doing it, and, with some changes in command structure in order to bypass bureaucracy, the army could do it as swiftly and secretly as the CIA. Under the command structure of the Department of Defense, congressional oversight would be possible. Then, if the army got caught fielding a secret division in Laos, and if the American people did not want a secret division in Laos, the American people would know where to turn.

I would turn the psychological warriors and propagandists over to the Voice of America. Psychological warriors and propagandists probably never did belong in a secret agency.

And, last, I would choose a very few men to run spies and such covert operations as the passage of money to those in other lands who cannot afford to accept American support openly. But I would limit covert operations to passing money to "friendlies."

I would house these spy masters and money-passers in some obscure tool shed, and I would forbid, by law, any of them from ever calling himself "director." They would not work for the CIA. Because I would abolish the name CIA.

As their chief, the President should choose for a term of six years some civilian who has demonstrated staunchness of character and independence of mind. I would make him responsible to a joint committee of Congress, as well as to the President, and I would not permit him to serve more than one term.

THUS, WE MIGHT get rid of power. Without power, arrogance would not be dangerous. Thus, too, we could prevent the inside-outside syndrome, so essential to secrecy, from making a mockery of representative government.

As for the house that Allen Dulles built at Langley, we might leave it standing empty, our only national monument to the value that democracy places upon the recognition and correction of a mistake. □



"You're darn divine right!"