

Watching the Watchers

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, April 1—The recent disclosures about extensive Government spying on private citizens raises a practical question: Why not a domestic intelligence advisory board to help the President maintain a balance between the security of the nation and the rights of its citizens? In short, a counterpart in the domestic intelligence field to the excellent committee of distinguished citizens now serving as President Nixon's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board?

The foreign intelligence board was originally proposed by the Hoover Commission and established by President Eisenhower on a limited basis in 1956, when it was discovered that separate intelligence operations were spreading from the State and Defense Departments into other agencies of the Government without effective coordination and often without the knowledge of the President himself.

When President Kennedy stumbled into the Bay of Pigs disaster in Cuba in 1961, he revived this board and gave it wider powers to supervise the operations of all foreign intelligence gathering agencies. No such protection has been provided for the President and the people in the domestic intelligence field, however, despite the fact that the F.B.I., the armed services, and other arms of the Government, aided by all the new technological means of gathering, storing and retrieving information, have been increasing their surveillance over private citizens.

Much has been written about both the dangers of subversion and crime on the one hand, and the dangers of unregulated Government snooping on the other, but the question now is what can be done about it? The Government clearly has a duty to preserve "domestic tranquility" and needs to gather accurate information to prevent or detect serious crimes or threats of rebellion, but this dilemma cannot be resolved either by relying on what the Justice Department calls the "self-discipline" of the intelligence community, or by abolishing secrecy.

Intelligence operations, as a distinguished and experienced lawyer here has pointed out, are not the same as the usual methods of public scrutiny. Giving the Congress or the public access to the security files could in many ways do greater harm to the rights of individuals than the present policy of rigid secrecy.

At the same time, the recent disclosures about the F.B.I.'s use of informers, telephone operators and postal employes on university campuses, and the close surveillance of individuals who attend antiwar demonstrations or go to the Soviet Union for a few days clearly indicate that relying on the self-discipline of J. Edgar Hoover is scarcely the answer to the problem.

Paid informers have the perspectives and prejudices of their trade. They are trained to gather and use information, not to weigh its value or worry too much about the civil liberties of the

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people. Also, officials at the top of the Government who use this kind of information don't always have time to police the methods used by the snoopers or the means to check the accuracy of the information or limit its distribution.

Even if the Congress takes the armed services out of the business of spying on private citizens and politicians at home, there will still be a need for some kind of organization to supervise the projects and methods used by the various intelligence agencies, and here the instructions to the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board suggest a useful guide.

It was instructed to advise the President concerning the objectives, conduct, management and coordination of the various activities making up the national intelligence effort; to conduct a continuing review and assessment of intelligence and related activities; and to report to the President on its findings, appraisals and recommendations.

More important, in his Executive order establishing the board, President Kennedy instructed the heads of all foreign intelligence agencies "to make available to the board any information with respect to foreign intelligence matters which the board may require," and provided the board with an adequate independent staff to help meet its responsibilities.

The evidence is that this system worked well, first under Dr. James R. Killian Jr. of M.I.T., later under Clark Clifford before he became Secretary of Defense, and now under Admiral George W. Anderson (retired).

Much depends, however, on the independence, integrity and knowledge of the members of the board, and particularly on the confidence and cooperation of the President. In President Kennedy's case, he regarded the board not only as a protection to the nation, but as a means of knowing what was going on, and therefore as a protection for himself and his Administration.

He did not, however, have a similar advisory committee in the domestic intelligence field, nor does President Nixon today. In fact, even Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina, who has been looking into this problem, still does not know who was supervising the Army's domestic spying operations.

"I doubt," said Jerome B. Wiesner, the new head of M.I.T., "that anyone is aware of the full extent of the surveillance and information collection activities that go on in this nation," and nobody yet has come forward to remove his doubts.

The President, however, has the power to create an advisory committee without delay and is now considering doing so. All he has to do is sign the appropriate Executive order, and this would have the support of almost everybody in the capital, with the possible exception of J. Edgar Hoover.