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The Watergate Affair Was War, Not Politics

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The Watergate scandal, it is clear by now, is different—truly different, different in kind—from all the scandals that have preceded it in American history. It is this difference that makes Watergate so frightening.

All those other scandals—Credit Mobilier, the Whisky Ring, Teapot Dome, Sherman Adams and his vicuna coat, Bobby Baker and his wheeling and dealing—were motivated by greed, an emotion effortlessly understood by almost all of us. But although the Nixon campaign was awash with \$100 bills, none of the Watergate men seems to have stuffed large quantities into his pockets. They seem to have been motivated by more complex emotions—by a certain self-righteousness, by fear, by a

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special kind of political-ideological hatred.

As a result, the people who were running the President's election campaign were not really running the kind of campaign this country has known since the party system was founded. They were not practicing politics. They were making war, a special kind of war. The kind of war they were making has been made between nations for a long time now, and it is still being made. But this special kind of war has not before been made within a nation, certainly not within this nation.

The spiritual ancestor of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, better known as CREEP, is OSS. Gen. William Donovan's Office of Strategic Services, in which this writer served for a while, was this country's first serious attempt to wage war by covert and unconventional means. OSS was patterned on the British Secret Services, and the Central Intelligence Agency has in turn been patterned on OSS. In fact, all the world's secret services, including Russia's KGB, have four main missions.

In OSS they were called S.I. (Secret Intelligence), S.O. (Secret Operations), M.O. (Morale Operations) and X-2 (Black Propaganda—in the KGB it is called "Department of Disinformation"). These branches overlapped and competed bitterly, of course. But in general, all OSS covert operations fitted into one

category or another.

So did CREEP's covert operations. The ludicrously bungled Watergate break-in itself, for example, was a classic combined operation between S.I. and S.O. The letter to The Manchester Union Leader during the New Hampshire campaign accusing Sen. Edward Muskie of sneering at "Canucks" was a classic X-2 operation. So was the faked telegram from President John Kennedy to the Saigon mission, calling, in effect, for the assassination of Diem.

The burglarization of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist was essentially an S. I. operation, as was the much earlier attempted burglarization of the office of the doctor who was treating John Kennedy for Addison's disease. If either had been successful, it would no doubt have been used as part of a major morale operation.

The operation in which CREEP arranged to flood the White House with telegrams supporting the President's Vietnamese policy was of course a morale operation. (It might have been named Operation Gub-Gub, after the pig in "Doctor Dolittle's post office" who, to bolster his own morale, sent himself numerous letters, filled with banana peels.) Another morale operation was that in which homosexuals were allegedly hired to give ostentatious support to Senator McGovern.

The basic mission of Donald H. Segretti, whose services were generously rewarded by Mr. Nixon's private lawyer, Herbert W. Kalmbach, was to head an intelligence network—what

the French and many intelligence officers call a *reseau*. Segretti was clearly also expected to do some morale operations work.

One even recognizes in the people who have surfaced in CREEP some of the same sort of people as in wartime OSS. There were many brave and good men in OSS, as well as many creeps. Curiously enough, in another time, G. Gordon Liddy would have been regarded as among the bravest and the best.

Like all secret services, OSS was compartmentalized, so that if one operative was captured and broken by the Gestapo, for example he could not betray the whole *reseau*. Agents who went behind the lines in Europe were given "death pills," to give them an option to being broken by the Gestapo.

In all secret services, it has to be as-

sumed that any captured agent can in time be broken. But there were a few—a very few—captured OSS agents who remained unbreakable, and they were regarded as true heroes. In the case of CREEP, the stubbornly silent G. Gordon Liddy seems to be the only operative to fall into this category.

His closed mouth and sardonic salute when he was condemned to a long jail term somehow recalled to this writer's mind the magnificently childish *beau geste* of one of the first OSS agents in Germany. He mailed a postcard, in English, to Adolf Hitler, Wilhelmstrasse, Berlin: "Dear Hitler: F— you. An American IN GERMANY."

In wartime, G. Gordon Liddy would have been festooned with decorations rather than slapped into jail. As so often in wartime, his stubborn silence

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did no good. As the pressure mounted, other members of the *reseau* cracked—James McCord, Jeb Stuart Magruder, John Dean III. Perhaps CREEP should have distributed some death pills as a precaution.

The Watergate operation has provided a giggle or two, as OSS did in its day. But Watergate is a deadly serious business all the same, as deadly and as serious as this reporter has seen in a quarter century of covering politics. For Watergate has been an attempt to alter the very nature of the ancient American political system.

Politicians have played tricks on each other since politics was invented. But this is not politics; this is war.

The special form of warfare waged by OSS against Adolf Hitler was morally justified by the moral necessity to destroy Nazism. The more limited and circumspect form of warfare waged by the CIA against the KGB, and vice versa, is also justified by hard necessity. But to transfer such secret-service techniques, on an obviously planned and organized basis, to the internal American political process is a genuinely terrifying innovation.

Any person proven to have used these techniques should not only be punished by the law; he should be banned forever from participation in American politics. Every sensible American—including, as he has said in a fine speech, George McGovern—deeply hopes that Richard M. Nixon is not such a person. But if the Niagara of evidence, which will surely now result from the breaking of the CREEP *reseau*, conclusively proves the contrary, Mr. Nixon, who has been a good President in many ways, must resign, or be impeached.