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Our Intelligence Apparatus

A fatal flaw shadowed the Rockefeller commission on the Central Intelligence Agency from its first days. Not that a fix was in to whitewash the agency and smear past Democratic Presidents, as some seem to believe.

On the contrary, President Ford paid too much attention to persons in the press and television determined to blacken the intelligence community. As a result, he gave the wrong mandate to the wrong commission, and he is stuck with a report which only proves the need for more serious inquiry.

The starting point was a story in The New York Times which asserted that the CIA had undertaken massive domestic surveillance in violation of congressional proscriptions against such activity inside the United States. Without apparently realizing it, President Ford accepted that diagnosis as the heart of whatever might be wrong in the intelligence community.

He established a commission dominated by persons with broad political and foreign policy experience. To these practical men, he gave the narrow mandate of looking into activities by the CIA "within the United States which rise to violations of the charter." As staff director he visited upon the commission David Belin, a lawyer highly sensitive to moral questions who had served Mr. Ford on the commission investigating the assassination of President Kennedy.

Within a week the Rockefeller commission received from the CIA the so-called inspector general's report — an account of various CIA transactions prepared in response to questions from a former director, James Schlesinger. There were deletions in the inspector general's report, and the commission speedily determined that the deletions dealt with the matter of assassinations.

At first the commission was disposed to exclude that issue from consideration on the grounds that it had nothing to do with domestic surveillance. But President Ford himself, in an apparent effort to put the assassination question out of bounds, mentioned it to a group of visiting editors. In response to the resulting howl, Mr. Ford then included the assassination item on the commission's agenda. The commission delegated Mr. Belin to look into the issue of whether the assassinations had anything to do with domestic actions by the CIA.

Mr. Belin plunged into the assassination question with zest and largely on his own. Because they had domestic implications, he went deep into charges



Associated Press

Rockefeller with his commission's CIA report.

that the Kennedy administration had plotted to assassinate Fidel Castro of Cuba and Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. Because they had no domestic associations, he went much less deeply into charges regarding assassinations of President Diem of South Vietnam and President Lumumba of the Congo.

Meanwhile the commission bowled along. Vice President Rockefeller, not fully cognizant of Mr. Belin's work, indicated the report would show no great violations of the charter by the CIA. He and his staff indicated that the full report would be turned over to the President and then made public as a matter of course.

But the White House legal staff was aware of Mr. Belin's work. It was clearly not definitive and to them it looked to raise more questions than it answered about a highly emotional subject. So they raised the issue with the commission, and eventually worked out the compromise whereby only the report on domestic surveillance becomes public at this time.

What all this proves is that domestic surveillance is not the heart of what is wrong with the intelligence community. On the contrary, domestic surveillance and the assassinations both come from a larger, parent problem.

The basic fact is that the intelligence community was born and given increase during the period of intense

cold war. The struggle against international communism looked to many people like a do-or-die affair. Within that context it seemed legitimate to read the mail of American citizens suspected of helping the enemy, and to take extreme measures against heads of foreign governments thought to be helping the enemy, and to take extreme measures against heads of foreign governments.

Now, however, the struggle against communism has given way to detente. Far from playing dirty tricks on the reds, the chief intelligence function is to monitor compliance with various agreements in arms control and other areas. The North-South struggle has replaced the East-West struggle in intensity, and a major intelligence requirement is for better information on political and economic events in the underdeveloped world.

The intelligence community has not adjusted well to these changes. Hence the continued cold-war zealotry of so many intelligence operatives; hence the failure of the correct CIA estimates on Vietnam to get through at the top; hence the constant fight between the analysts and the dirty-trick artists, and between the military and civilian specialists. The task ahead is to accomplish the adjustment. The best that can be said for the Rockefeller report is that it points in that direction.