

The massive, bipartisan report by the Senate's special committee on the Central Intelligence Agency's covert plots against foreign leaders removes all doubt that this arm of the United States Government was involved in activities which are inexcusable by any standards of international morality and diplomatic expediency—and which must be eliminated from all future intelligence operations.

Blame for the criminal activities exposed in the report cannot be assigned to any one Administration or political party. The plotting against leaders of the Dominican Republic, the Congo, Cuba, South Vietnam and Chile spanned a period of more than ten years and four Presidencies. Its common denominator was the existence of an amoral secret bureaucracy that operated with the full knowledge of the C.I.A. high command. As these agents of conspiracy and murder used or dispensed their lethal weapons, they were never given the slightest reason to doubt that they enjoyed the sanction of the highest authority within the C.I.A. and beyond.

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In the aftermath of these outrages, it matters little that, as the agency claims, no actual deaths were attributable to direct C.I.A. action. Even if native dissidents actually pulled the trigger, the encouragement and support given to such political murders by American agents clearly implicates the United States and undercuts its moral authority in international affairs. It is disingenuous to say that the guns given to members of a military junta in Chile were intended only to facilitate the abduction, but not the murder of General Schneider. Placing weapons in the hands of political goons constitutes complicity in murder.

American officials who entered into an alliance between the C.I.A. and the Mafia, were guilty of nothing less than subverting the Federal drive against organized crime. It is inconceivable that those who engaged the underworld as hired guns in foreign intelligence would not realize that such an assignment would give the Mafia's high command at home a kind of implied security blanket for its own domestic operations.

It is some—but small—consolation that none of these gangster-like exploits was proven to have been authorized directly by any occupant of the White House. When Presidents, whether carelessly or deliberately, expressed the view that certain foreign political leaders were "unacceptable" to the United States, they should have anticipated the response by a covert sector of the intelligence community whose business was to plot murder. If on the other hand they did not know of the existence of such assassination units, the heads of the C.I.A., who did know, were incredibly irresponsible in withholding such information from the President, thus allowing the intelligence apparatus literally to get out of control.

...and More Than Murder

It is particularly disconcerting that President Ford and the C.I.A. have seemed more intent on preventing the publication of the Senate committee's report than in reassuring the American people that the "aberrations" it documents are to be purged from any future intelligence operations.

Surely, a self-proclaimed "open Presidency" should not be party to a continuing cover-up of outrages committed in the name of the American people. Senator Frank Church, the committee's chairman, exposed the emptiness of the Administration's claim that it merely wanted to safeguard the persons cited in the report when he showed that, except for the Mafia connections, all names at issue had long been in the public domain.

It is precisely because the abuses are so grave that we share the concern expressed by Senator Charles Mathias Jr., a member of the committee, that the essential but narrow focus on the murder plots may obscure the larger areas of illegal C.I.A. activities—massive operations of domestic spying and interference with the rights and privacy of American citizens.

While we support the committee's recommendation for legislation that would make any involvement in foreign murder plots punishable under Federal criminal law, the housecleaning must go considerably beyond such limited correctives.

Legitimate activities of intelligence, centered in the collection of up-to-date information concerning the strengths and weaknesses of any potential adversary or foreign threat to the nation's security are not at issue. They need to be shored up rather than weakened. But intelligence agencies have to be stripped of their surreptitiously acquired policy-making powers. Nothing is more dangerous to the conduct of foreign policy and the protection of domestic security than behind-the-scenes plotting by a politicized, out-of-control intelligence apparatus.

As we have argued on this page for 20 years, effective Congressional oversight is essential to forestall such outrages as have now come to light. The Senate report should be viewed merely as a beginning of a new determination not to destroy the intelligence agencies, but to put them on a short leash to prevent them from straying beyond the legal and moral limitations essential to preserve a free and lawful society.