

Security, Not Silence

By A. Searle Field

MYSTIC, Conn.—National silence is not the same as national security. Unfortunately, that was not the message from the House of Representatives when it suppressed the House Intelligence Committee's final report and then investigated those who had uncovered the United States' misdeeds.

National security is not guns and secrets. It is the quality of our people, the strength of our national character, and the integrity of our leaders. We cannot be secure if we lack the courage to test actions undertaken in our name. By this standard, the House substituted an act of insecurity for national security by retreating to a silence that is a national shame.

Our report did not reveal secrets; it revealed policy. It did not name agents, because names were not under investigation. It revealed no secret techniques, because technical matters were not at issue. It was written to be published, by patriotic people.

Scare tactics that intimidate elected representatives and prevent them from reporting on the conduct of unelected executives cannot be tolerated, without a fearful silence next time.

Our committee tried to report that the United States undermined democratic elections in Italy in 1972 with bribes and dirty tricks. If this seems academic, consider that many of the same officials who rigged the Italian election planned the Watergate operation a few weeks later.

We uncovered a decision by Richard M. Nixon and Henry A. Kissinger to involve the Central Intelligence Agency in a war by the Kurds against Iraq four years ago without telling Congress or the Secretary of Defense (never mind the American people). Even so, the House ended up investigating those who asked questions, rather than those who made war in back rooms.

Congress often finds silence more comfortable. Oversight committees are notable for their hindsight and being out-of-sight. We revealed that in some recent years not a single congressman or senator showed up to hear the C.I.A.'s annual program review, that one C.I.A. oversight committee had no staff, and that crimes reported to it were never investigated. What happened? We were investigated!

Exposing sordid conduct by prominent officials brought threats of violence against me as well as my wife and son. But the inquisition by the

House Ethics Committee following Daniel Schorr's publication of our committee's final report was far more threatening. They photographed my house, questioned friends about my wife and social occasions at my home, asked details about phone calls that they somehow knew about, interrogated colleagues I had not seen for years. Others were questioned about their sexual relationships.

The Ethics Committee did not want facts; they wanted a scapegoat. I had no evidence of who gave Mr. Schorr our report, so committee members argued with me, insulted my testimony, questioned my patriotism, compared me with Watergate conspirators, misled others about my testimony, and then forbade me to speak publicly. When I refused to falsely accuse their chosen scapegoat, a "committee source" leaked that there were "discrepancies" in testimony by top staff members and implied that all of us were suspects. That was untrue.

The Ethics Committee people did not leak that we had been denied an open hearing, that I had been denied seven requests to eat during 10 hours of testimony, or that they had demanded that I reveal conversations with my attorney. Even though our staff had uncovered corruption and law-breaking by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, every Ethics Committee investigator was an ex-F.B.I. agent of long standing. Some of these former agents are currently associated with F.B.I. men who may go to jail as a result of our work.

Sound fair? When our staff had asked the House for lawyers to protect us from a witchhunt—as CBS and the C.I.A. had done for their employees—we were turned down. We were easy targets, without current ties to power. Every staff member was interrogated privately and forced to testify publicly. No one from the White House, the Defense Department or the F.B.I. ever testified publicly before the Ethics Committee. Three people were called from C.I.A. and one from the State Department.

Was a leak the problem, or unpleasant news? To those who, as a last resort, say everybody else, especially the Russians, keeps lawless conduct secret, I would point out that we expect our people to rise to greatness, not emulate those who practice lesser forms of conduct.

A. Searle Field was the staff director and chief counsel of the House Select Committee on Intelligence (the Pike Committee).