

3 Oct 69

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Invisible Government

The Central Intelligence Agency, this nation's super-secret cloak and dagger outfit, has been described, and rightly so, as an "invisible government," accountable to virtually no one and operating with almost complete autonomy outside the established channels of foreign policy, specifically the State Department.

Since the revelation of its role in the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion during the administration of President John F. Kennedy, however, the agency, not surprisingly, has been in the news more and more.

It has been criticized in two best-selling books, in magazine articles and newspapers for fomenting revolution abroad, attempting to infiltrate the Peace Corps, subsidizing the National Students Association, and for using at least one major university, Michigan State, as a front for its operations in Vietnam.

And, it is in Vietnam that the heavy hand of the CIA has been revealed once again, this time in connection with the killing of a South Vietnamese civilian accused of being a double agent.

The United States Army brought charges against eight Green Beret

soldiers in connection with the slaying. On Monday, however, the charges were dropped. In a terse announcement, Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor said the CIA had refused to provide witnesses, making it impossible to try the eight men fairly. Secretary Resor said the CIA refusal was made "in the interest of national security."

It is scarcely surprising that the charges were dropped and a trial headed off. The CIA obviously was not anxious to stand trial in public. Public sympathy in the country, moreover, clearly was on the side of the eight Berets, who, it appeared, were being made scapegoats in an incident for which the CIA was responsible.

After the Bay of Pigs, President Kennedy was always suspicious of the CIA, and on more than one occasion expressed the fear that it might take over the elite Green Berets corps which he created.

Undercover operations, while not particularly palatable in a democratic society, are nonetheless a stark reality of the Cold War era. Reality or not, however, they should be closely supervised, lest the integrity of our democratic form of government itself be lost.