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The Land of the Free

CIA

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By Tom Wicker

LISBON—While planning the coup that overthrew Portugal's 48-year-old dictatorship on April 25, the young army officers primarily responsible had no intention of letting the United States have the faintest inkling of what was afoot. They were convinced that if the Central Intelligence Agency knew a coup was even being talked of, the agency would promptly inform the D.G.S., Portugal's secret police, with which the C.I.A. had close and cordial ties.

Yet, in Spain, which now eyes free Portugal both uneasily and hopefully—according to one's political outlook—across their common border, a long-experienced former diplomat recently delivered himself of the opinion that the United States must have given its approval in advance for the Portuguese coup. Otherwise, he said confidently, the United States never would have permitted the dictatorial Caetano regime to be overthrown.

There was a lesson in that for Spain, he continued. If there was to be genuine change toward a democratic regime after the death of Francisco Franco, or movement toward such a regime before Franco's death, the United States would have to be convinced that such a development in Spain was in the best American interest. Washington simply would not permit democracy in Spain unless that point was made in advance.

A younger Spaniard, deeply involved in clandestine activities for a more democratic regime, took a darker view. Citing what "everybody knows," that the C.I.A. had over-

thrown the Allende Government in Chile, he remarked gloomily that the United States probably would never allow Spain to have democracy.

This kind of thing is deeply disturbing, even shocking, to an American who would like to think of his country as the champion of democracy and freedom everywhere.

The point is not whether the C.I.A. really did overthrow Allende, or whether the agency would in fact have betrayed the Portuguese coup to the D.G.S.; and explanations that the United States ought logically to welcome more democratic regimes in both Spain and Portugal, since that would ease the domestic political burden of alliances with these countries, do not alter the case. The fact is that many people abroad believe the United States is the enemy of freedom, and that it uses the C.I.A. relentlessly and efficiently to oppose democratic movements everywhere.

It is a sort of instant or ready-made paranoia. When the American Ambassador to Portugal, Stuart N. Scott, paid the first diplomatic call on Gen. António de Spínola after the coup in Lisbon, and again paid the first call on the general after he was named Provisional President, the United States did not get all the expected credit for welcoming the advent of democracy in Portugal. Instead, Communists and others spread the word to willing listeners that the calls had been to protest the coup; and this was widely believed.

To a great extent, the United States has no one to blame but itself for this state of affairs. The wheel has come full circle from the kind of American

thinking that, in the fifties and sixties, suspected a Communist plot behind every political development in the world. From the Iran of Mossadegh twenty years ago to the Chile of Allende in 1973, there have been ample facts and plausible reports of C.I.A. involvement in the overthrow of governments and the propping up of dictators—all augmented by the implacable set of American policy in Southeast Asia for the last fifteen years—to account for the world's paranoia.

Just recently, Mario Soares, Portugal's animated new Foreign Minister, was telling funny stories about his fruitless efforts, as leader of the outlawed Socialist party during the Salazar and Caetano regimes, to make some kind of contact with the American State Department. "Never got higher than a third secretary," he recalled. When one young American Foreign Service officer made an engagement for dinner with Mr. Soares's family in Lisbon a few years ago, the American had to call and report with embarrassment that the American Ambassador of the day had forbidden him to keep the date.

So when Mr. Soares became Foreign Minister a few weeks ago, he did not even try to approach the State Department directly; he asked his friends, Harold Wilson of Britain and Willy Brandt of West Germany, to put him in touch. They did, and no doubt. Mr. Soares will soon be getting red-carpet treatment in Washington; but he has not forgotten—and probably won't—the years when no one but third secretaries paid attention to him.