

Issues and Debates

C.I.A.'s Covert Role: Should the Agents

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 22— Prompted by new disclosures of covert operations of the United States Central Intelligence Agency in Chile, a growing number of Congressmen are demanding that such agency actions be curtailed or stopped altogether.

The involvement of the C.I.A. in subverting foreign governments deemed hostile to American interests has become fairly well known over the years—the buying of voters, the arming of plotters, the infiltration of labor unions and all the other “black” arts of intelligence.

The catalogue includes C.I.A. activities in Iran, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Bolivia, Berlin, Albania, Greece, Italy, the Congo, Indonesia and Indochina.

Covert operations of the Chile type have a long history, dating from the very inception of the “central intelligence group” on Jan. 22, 1946, under President Harry S. Truman. Within a short time American agents were buying up Italian parliamentary deputies by the dozen and using secret funds to help Italian conservative forces stop the Communist influence in trade unions.

The justification then, and almost always thereafter was to halt the spread of Communism and support free institutions.

What made the case of Chile different?

Background

When the highest Administration officials, including Secretary of State Kissinger, declared flatly last year that the United States was not involved in the military coup that overthrew President Salvador Allende Gossens of Chile, Senators and Representatives took them at their word.

Now, in light of new disclosures from secret testimony by William E. Colby, the Director of Central Intelligence, and other revelations in the press, it seems obvious to at least a score of legislators on Capitol Hill that they were at best misled and at worst lied to.

The furor over the Chile operations of the C.I.A. may also be related to the mood of the times—marked by the aftermath of the Watergate scandal and the strengthening of East-West détente. Both post-Watergate attitudes and the feeling that international tensions have eased appear to be conducive to the questioning of the reasoning behind covert intelligence operations.

At the heart of the current debate is the question whether the United States should have at this phase in its history a 16,000-member intelligence agency, with an estimated annual budget of \$750-million, functioning on a worldwide scale.



United Press International

Lucien N. Nedzi, head of the House Intelligence subcommittee, which has taken testimony on C.I.A. covert actions in Chile.

Administration Point of View

Reduced to its most simple form, as expounded by President Ford on Sept. 16, the United States is big in the intelligence field because the other side—the Communists—is big in it. It is a logic applied to the strategic-weapons race.

It was held justifiable in the late nineteen-fifties to monitor Soviet missile development with U-2 spy planes, a practice Nikita S. Khrushchev

Come Home?

damned in 1960 when a U-2 was shot down over the Soviet Union. Now both sides maintain similar surveillance with spy satellites, and the United States holds its efforts doubly justified.

In the Chile situation, a justification by United States intelligence officials was that the Communist powers, notably the Soviet Union and Cuba, invested a great deal in men and material in Chile on behalf of the Allende Government.

The President said: “Our Government, like other governments, does take certain actions in the intelligence field to help implement foreign policy and protect national security.”

The clincher followed: “I am reliably informed that Communist nations spend vastly more money than we do for the same kind of purposes.”

Mr. Colby, with wide experience in intelligence, applies a sophisticated line of argument. In the year since he became director of intelligence, he has told newsmen—on and off the record—and public audiences that properly conceived intelligence operations constitute an indispensable defensive weapon.

He is careful to distinguish between the three branches of intelligence: the gathering of raw intelligence material by secret means, the analysis and estimating of raw intelligence gathered both clandestinely and openly, and the deliberate actions taken to disrupt adversaries, whether they be constituted governments or other intelligence agencies.

Few domestic critics of the C.I.A. dispute the necessity for the secret gathering of intelligence—by human, electronic or photographic means. None dispute the need for analysis and estimation of adversary capabilities.

It is the nature and purpose of covert operations that have drawn the sharpest fire, especially from Con-

gress. Mr. Colby's response, made in public early in September and previously in private, is that the covert capability is a "useful dagger in the sheath" ranged among the multitude of other military and economic weapons available to the Administration.

The Critics' View

"I don't think the C.I.A. should be engaged in covert operations at all," Senator J. W. Fulbright, the Arkansas Democrat who heads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said last month. "I think it should be an intelligence-gathering operation. Their covert operations get involved in elections in foreign countries and we usually end up electing the wrong people."

Mr. Fulbright has joined a group of 12 Senators sponsoring a new bill that would create a 14-member joint Congressional committee to oversee the United States intelligence community.

The legislation was proposed by Senators Lowell P. Weicker Jr., the Connecticut Republican, and Howard H. Baker, the Tennessee Republican, who asserted last month that Congress had been remiss in exercising control of the C.I.A.

They were following up the protest by Representative Michael J. Harrington, the Massachusetts Democrat, that the Administration was telling one thing about the Chile operations in public hearings and a different, darker tale in private sessions with the House intelligence subcommittee.

Mr. Colby had gone into considerable detail about C.I.A. operations in Chile at an informal session last April of the seven-member subcommittee headed by Representative Lucien N. Nedzi, the Michigan Democrat. The subcommittee was exercising its authority to oversee C.I.A. operations.

In legislative practice, however, the intelligence subcommittee does not approve or veto the details of covert operations.

There is one more argument against covert operations of the Chile variety.

"They are stupid," said a retired C.I.A. official who participated in some. "The case of Allende is a classic example. He would have gone down the drain all by himself as any intelligent person could see. It didn't help him along."

Finally, there is a question of ethics, whether the ethics of individual C.I.A. operatives whose zeal might have carried them beyond their authority in places like Chile or Greece, or the ethics of

the United States as a nation.

At the beginning of the month, Senator James Abourezk, Democrat of South Dakota, submitted an amendment to the foreign aid bill that would have halted all covert operations by the C.I.A.

Before it was defeated,

68 to 17, Senator Abourezk said: "There is no justification in our legal, moral or religious principles for operations of a U.S. agency which result in assassinations, sabotage, political disruptions, or other meddling in another country's internal affairs, all in the name of the American people."