

CIA Activities: Focusing on the Wrong Issue

Recent discussion of CIA activities abroad has focused upon the wrong issue. If one accepts (as one must) that military action can sometimes be a rational step, then one must also accept that hostile measures short of war (such as subversion) also are rational measures. It is illogical, therefore, to argue that the U.S. should, never, under any circumstances, seek to "destablize" or, in plain words, undermine and destroy any other government. In a world where the activities of governments relative to each other are controlled by power and not by authority, virtually all seem to have some propensity to undermine some others. Arab governments undermine one another and presumably, would undermine the Israeli Government if they could. The Israelis must be presumed as well to undermine any governments they can. Bangla Desh exists, in part, because India collaborated in what was virtually—if not technically—the undermining of Pakistan. And, no doubt, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. each would undermine the other if they had the ability to do it and to get away with it.

The reported CIA activities are important and objectionable for other reasons.

1. They represent hostile acts taken with no evidence that the implications of those acts were considered maturely. Accordingly, while they might—if successful—achieve some immediate

purpose, there is no evidence that they actually served the interest of the United States in the international political arena, and that they might actually serve to injure that interest.

2. They represent a species of grossly unacceptable Executive action, without any indication that that action is approved by a substantial majority in Congress and the nation.

3. Moreover, to speak of this action as within presidential prerogative—if there is such a thing—or any other variant of presidential authority is to be technically right, but factually wrong. It is now clear that much of this action is beyond the scope of presidential review, in that it is contemplated, organized, initiated, and executed before the incumbent President (whichever one one means) has an effective opportunity to approve or to disapprove.

The principal issue, then, is whether de-stabilization is wise at a given time and whether it is properly authorized, controlled, conducted, and terminated when it is no longer approved or effective. What we cannot wisely contemplate, in short, is hostile action taken without mature consideration, outside any framework of authoritative political approval, on the motion of some self-initiating bureaucratic nucleus which cannot be called to account.

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