

On U.S. Intelligence

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By Hanson W. Baldwin

ROXBURY, Conn. — There is not much doubt that the K.G.B., the Soviet secret police, is gloating in Moscow.

In the last few months, exaggerated, inaccurate or irresponsible press accounts and self-serving politicians have greatly damaged United States intelligence organizations.

Some crippling restrictions already imposed are now being followed by extensive and numerous investigations into every facet of intelligence and counterintelligence, which may result in new and dangerous exposure of organizations, methods and personnel.

One of the most damaging and irresponsible leaks in United States intelligence history—the widely published accounts of the salvaging of the sunken Soviet submarine—already has occurred, with the media, in the name of freedom damaging the defense of freedom.

Nor is it encouraging that The New York Times allowed the columnist Jack Anderson to trigger its own actions. The consequent publication by The Times and all other media of a fantastic technological feat and an intelligence coup still incomplete could cause immense potential damage. One need only recall the broken codes of World War II, and, in recent history, the nasty surprises new Soviet weapons provided in Vietnam and in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

The current investigations, therefore—unless they are to be of great aid and comfort to those who would destroy the system of political freedom that makes such investigations possible—must concentrate on the constructive, not the destructive; on the future, not past.

They must avoid, at all costs, any more public exposure of secret intelligence methods, technology or personnel. No intelligence organization, even in a democracy, can be a completely open book if it is to be worth its cost.

But there are some key questions that require reassessment.

Are there, for instance, too many semi-independent intelligence agencies, each vying for power? Or does each have its important specialized role and does each act as check-rein on the others?

Should the director of Central Intelligence be given more power—to knock heads together, to merge, to allocate tasks? Or would this continue and expand an already dangerous centralization of power?

Intelligence and counterintelligence are twins. What, particularly, should

be the relationships between the Central Intelligence Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation, and who should do what in counterespionage and countersubversion?

It is easy to dismiss the Communist and radical and terrorist threats as bogeymen; yet the capability of Puerto Rican nationalists and radical Weathermen to bomb public places repeatedly without detection and the ability of so well-known a figure as Patty Hearst to remain hidden in an American underground speaks badly indeed for present and recent attempts of our intelligence services to combat espionage, subversion or even simple anarchy.

How does one define the thin line between freedom and license, security and repression, the "right to know" and irresponsibility? The political extremists and fanatics, in pursuit of revolution, believe that the ends literally justify any means.

United States intelligence agencies can never embrace such a concept, without ultimately aiding the hidden enemy. The adoption of such a policy—the ends justifying any means—would subvert our own institutions. Yet there is a nagging problem here; a threat exists and it cannot be met by mouthing shibboleths.

How should authority over our intelligence services at the top level be exercised? Intelligence is a tool of government; as such it can be turned by those who control it to good or evil purposes. Who should be the guardians of the good, who the monitors? The more people that get into the act the less secrecy. Congress is noted for its blabbermouth proclivities; if there is to be any secret intelligence it is clear that only a handful of Congressmen, picked for ability, judgment and discretion and devotion to the common good, can be kept fully informed.

Intelligence—facts, secrets, our own and the opposition's—means today and for the future, security—the difference between the life and death of a nation.

Granted the need, how then do you keep intelligence apolitical, freed from the ambivalent pressures of domestic politics, in a milieu such as Washington, which is highly partisan?

And, ultimately, the larger question—the unresolved residue of Watergate—how do you curb executive power without crippling it, and how do you operate a democratic government, or for that matter, any government, without secrecy?

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