

CIA Reform: How Much Is Enough?

by George C. McGhee

The recent report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities provides an excellent basis for congressional action to reform the CIA. The President's *own* recent reorganization of the agency, however, ignores key issues that must be dealt with by Congress.

The very word *intelligence* is prejudicial in its own favor. Everyone agrees that a government should base its activities on the best available intelligence. The Central Intelligence Agency, which, as its name implies, has been the focal point for such activities within our government, has been brought into serious question. Yet it has important responsibilities which are vital to national security and must be continued. How do we separate the good in the CIA from the bad? How can we clarify, in the public mind, the difference? How can we build a new intelligence structure which can perform the essential functions with public confidence? In my view, the President's executive order has not answered these questions.

The present agency was spawned by the Second World War. It was created at war's end as a "grab bag" not just for the intelligence activities of the Office of Strategic Services but for a varied group of other covert activities. Protected by wartime security, these operations had not been under normal moral, legal, or resource limitations. In retrospect, it was, I believe, a mistake to have included such diverse operations under one umbrella. It was particularly misleading to call it an intelligence agency. Obviously, much of what it did went far beyond any ordinary definition of that term. Moreover, it provided continuity for wartime methods and objectives. War was succeeded by "cold war," with little change in outlook.

It should be understood, of course, that the CIA does not have a monopoly on intelligence. The Pentagon has its Defense Intelligence Agency. The Department of State, comprising some 7,500 people in Washington and 16,000 abroad, is in itself an enormous intelligence-gathering organization, not limited to its Bureau of Intelligence and Research. There is no obvious cutoff point between what should and what should not be done by the CIA. The agency has engaged in many activities, such as

support for the National Student Association, because it could get the funds from Congress and State couldn't.

Nevertheless, as we continue to develop our overall intelligence capability, I believe we should also perpetuate an independent intelligence agency as a normal arm of government. There is, of course, the supporting theory that intelligence estimates by such an agency will be more objective in assessing the success or failure of policy. There is also the need for expertise and continuity in particular specialties which can perhaps best be provided by an independent agency. A case in point is the analysis of aerial photographs from satellites.

It must be emphasized, however, that most CIA intelligence gathering is, like satellite photography, quite open and aboveboard. Only the results need be kept secret. Many data are obtained from passive radio intercepts made by the military National Security Agency. Provided one has a place to put one's aerial intercepts are an accepted tool. Often, however, in the search for intelligence, the line of legality must be breached. Covert means must be employed. Calculated risks must be taken. Spies are used. Someone is paid off. Forced entry is made. We must also protect ourselves—through counterespionage—from similar activities by other governments. In a dangerous world this is an accepted "gray" area in which all nations must compete, including, under appropriate restraints, our own intelligence agency.

BEYOND THIS, however, as everyone knows, the CIA has been engaged in a wide range of covert activities which do not constitute intelligence collection at all; indeed, they are separated by a deep chasm. What I speak of, of course, is the whole array of covert *operational* activities, or "dirty tricks." This includes all secret attempts to manipulate the rest of the world in our favor. This is what was on trial before the Church committee and world opinion. It is these activities which have, by association, blemished CIA's legitimate intelligence function. The principal rationale, moreover, for putting them under the same roof, i.e., that the same agents do both, is not believed to be overriding. Results could be more objectively analyzed by an intelligence successor to the CIA if the two arms were separated, yet closely coordinated.

I was amazed when I came back into the State Department in 1961, after an absence of seven years, to learn the extent to which the CIA had become involved in covert activities all around the world. The Bay of Pigs operation, which lay ripe for plucking on the drawing board, was only one of many. I considered most too risky for the possible meager gains involved. We were operating in many countries. Some were close allies whose friendship we were risking. We were still supporting democratic parties in Western Europe long after the countries involved had recovered economically. Most of our operations were relatively unimportant to our national security.

When a government agency goes operational covertly, there is, of course, a variety of choices. You start by subsidizing foreign magazines and newspapers to influence popular opinion, then progress to support for political parties and discreet bribes to officials. In the past little attention has been paid to such activities; however, this is only the start. With know-how and funds available, you attempt to control elections, bring about the fall of governments, or even assassinate political leaders. On the macroscale this leads to what is, in effect, undeclared war. It was an open secret that in Laos the CIA for years ran a war involving large-scale air and ground forces. The CIA was deeply involved in Vietnam before our military took over.

Where do such activities start and end? What is their proper role? How can they be controlled? I believe that responsibility for covert operational activities must be separated from the intelligence function. These operations must also be reduced greatly in scope. They must constitute the exceptional rather than the usual instrument of policy. Any decision to employ them must take into account the long-range impact on United States and world opinion. People all around the world are now convinced that the CIA is manipulating their governments and people. Americans abroad are suspect as being under "cover" for CIA—our embassies, our companies, our professors, and our tourists. We are paying a high price for marginal gains.

Authority for covert operations must stem from our highest authority—the President—even if he may not always be forced to admit it. Those directing the operations must also be responsible to the Congress, preferably through one joint committee of the two houses. Every

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effort must be made to maintain secrecy. Guidelines must be set. Most Americans would insist, as a minimum, on a total taboo on assassination—and on undeclared war, that is, one not first approved by Congress. The joint committee itself could decide what should be approved by Congress as a whole. The agency devoted exclusively to intelligence should be an open operation, staffed by professionals. It should need little "cover." Covert operations beyond intelligence should be conducted by some new, anonymous agency reporting directly to the President. Any undeclared wars tacitly approved by Congress should be run by a branch of the military, upon whose expertise it would draw.

Most important, however, we must understand that today's world cannot be manipulated by us in such an obvious way. A prominent CIA official once bragged to me that their operations had saved 13 countries from communism. He did not mention countries where we are considered the enemy as a result of abortive CIA operations. We win dubiously in Chile, but we lose in Cambodia. We give Soviet arms to the Kurds and use the resulting appearance of Soviet intervention to justify furnishing arms to Iran. We give arms to Holden Roberto in Angola, and when the Soviet-backed Popular Front appears stronger, we feel compelled to raise the ante. What is cause and what is effect? How do you win such a game?

I recently heard a leading English journalist berate America for sabotaging our CIA just when it could have won the struggle against communism in Portugal. Does anyone really think a few million dollars can control the destiny of 10 million people?

If we are to produce the open and wise policies that will earn for us the place in the world we deserve, we must first rid ourselves of the delusion that we can win by the cheap and easy way of covert manipulation. At the same time, we must regroup and reform our varied intelligence activities—building what is appropriate into an independent and a respected arm of our government. When we venture into the murky area beyond, we should do so under new auspices, strict guidelines, and complete responsibility—not just to the President but, through the Congress, to the American people. For it is they who will have to pay the price of any failures, as they have done in Vietnam. □