

C.I.A.'s Covert Role: Ford's Defense Runs Against

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President Ford helped revive a dying issue last night. That issue was whether it was proper for a democracy, using its intelligence agencies to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries.

News

Analysis

Mr. Ford, at a news conference, seemed to answer the question affirmatively. He acknowledged that the United States had made an effort to preserve an opposition press and opposition political parties in Chile during the rule of a Marxist President, Salvador Allende Gossens, who died in a military coup in September, 1973.

President Ford justified the effort, which was made during the Nixon Administration, by saying that it was "in the best interest of the people of Chile, and certainly in our best interest."

"I am reliably informed," Mr. Ford said, "that Communist nations spend vastly more money than we do for the same kind of purpose."

His response was presumably considered in advance. He had every reason to expect a question on the subject because of the recent disclosure that the Nixon Administration authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to spend \$8-million on covert activities in Chile between 1970 and 1973.

Indeed, Mr. Ford may have had the help of those who authorized those expenditures in framing his reply. In any event, he chose to defend the behavior of the old Administration rather than chart a new policy for his own.

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Cold-War Rhetoric Seen

Another kind of reply was possible. The President might have said that he was not responsible for past activities of the C.I.A., but would be responsible for its future behavior, and would accordingly review its policies and plans.

He did promise to meet with the Congressional committees that review the covert actions of the agency to see whether they might want to change the review process. Those committees, however, are not noted in Washington for vigor and skepticism.

Mr. Ford himself was a member of one of them for nine years when he was a Representative from Michigan.

His reversion last night to the reason and rhetoric of the cold war, however mildly expressed, led to speculation that his mind was still set in that mold.

"If it was good enough for Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon, then it's

Current Trend

good enough for Ford," one of the President's friends remarked today.

"That's the way he thinks." Even in an Administration that has been dedicated to openness and candor, President Ford was judged in Washington to have spoken with remarkable frankness.

"It is the first time in my memory that a President has come out flatly and said, 'We do it, the other side does it, and we do it,'" said Prof. Richard N. Gardner, a specialist in international law at Columbia University, speaking from New York.

Secret C.I.A. operations such as the overthrow of Premier Mohammed Mossadegh of Iran in 1953 and President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman of Guatemala in 1954, the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 and later operations in Laos have been identified when they became too big and notorious to be concealed.

However, none has ever been acknowledged as readily and fully as the Chile operation, although the acknowledgment was low-keyed.

It came, oddly, when such activities seemed to be going out of style. Eighteen months ago the Nixon Administration let it

be known that the clandestine operations of the C.I.A. were being curtailed.

MI Just last week, William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, said it was "clear that American policy today is different from when it was confronting worldwide Communist subversion in the nineteen fifties or Communist insurgency in the ninetee sixties."

"As a result," Mr. Colby told the Ford for Peace conference in Washington, "C.I.A.'s involvement in covert action is very small indeed."

Abandoning covert action entirely "would not have a major impact on our current activities or the current security of the United States," Mr. Colby acknowledged.

However, the capacity for such action may be needed in case of some new threat, he added, and it would be a mistake to "leave us with nothing between a diplomatic protest and sending the Marines."

There was a conspicuous difference in tone between Mr. Colby and President Ford, his new boss, but both seemed to take it for granted that the United States had the right to intervene in the affairs of other countries in its own interest.

When Mr. Ford was asked

what international law gave the United States the right to "destabilize the constitutionally elected government of another country," the President declined to talk about law, but said, "it's a recognized fact that historically, as well as presently, such actions are taken in the best interests of the countries involved."

Commenting on that, Senator

Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, who is a high-ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said today:

"It seems he declared that the United States respects no law other than the law of the jungle in its dealings with foreign countries. He equates us with the Russians. I thought there was a difference, and the difference is what it's all about."