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Control the CIA

In Ghana leaders of the government which overthrew Kwame Nkrumah are carefully giving assurances to other African nations that the American central intelligence agency had nothing to do with their coup. It was their own idea and they carried it out. The assumption by many Africans these days is that the CIA is active in most coups. This is undoubted nonsense but it does indicate how unsavory a reputation the CIA has in that and other parts of the world. That reputation has been built in large part by Communist propagandists, who always seek an American scapegoat. But the CIA has been involved in enough scandalous undertakings, many of which have come a cropper, so that it has helped provide a foundation for the reputation.

Articles written by New York Times reporters and published in The Journal have summarized the CIA's activities, its history and its widespread cloak and dagger projects. Some involve espionage games that border on the silly. Some have been highly dangerous. Some have entered the field of policy where the CIA has no business. Undoubtedly, good has accrued to the country through some CIA work, but that kind is seldom made public. We hear about the failures.

The articles proved once again that the CIA badly needs some controls by outsiders — say a committee of congress that would operate like the joint committee on atomic energy. Such a proposal has been made by a number of congressmen, including Representative Zablocki (D-Wis.). There are other possible methods of control. But some control should be provided, and quickly. We are letting an intelligence agency play roles in security and foreign policy far beyond wisdom. This is especially true as we are a democratic nation. It is time it be stopped.