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Insight and Outlook

By Joseph Kraft

Left in the Cold

Well-founded misgiving on the role of the Central Intelligence Agency has inspired new sentiment for a congressional watchdog committee. But that is like prescribing pills for an earthquake.



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The trouble that afflicts the CIA is the same trouble that afflicts the military services and

the section of the State Department that heads up in Secretary Rusk. Their careers are products of tension with the Soviet Union. They comprise a Cold War Establishment.

Not surprisingly, they have trouble adjusting to the change in the international climate that has been at work since about 1958. Their bureaucratic interest is to not come in from the cold. Increasingly at odds with reality and with enlightened opinion, they more and more tend to set up impenetrable barriers of self-defense.

THE CIA is simply the most spectacular example of the general phenomenon. At the high tide of cold war in the 1950s, it had a special place in the sun. Because its director, Allen Dulles, was the brother of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, the agency had immediate, informal and easy access to the highest quarters on all matters of foreign policy.

From the universities and law firms, Dulles brought to the agency a second wave of bright and dedicated people to serve under the first wave that had been washed into intelligence work during World War II. He carved out for the agency a special role as a fourth arm of foreign policy responsible for para-military operations.

Several of these operations, notably one in Iran, were brilliantly successful, as was the development of the U-2 reconnaissance aircraft.

In at least some countries abroad, the CIA station chief came to count for more than the Ambassador. A huge CIA headquarters was built near Washington. All in all, for the CIA the Double Dulles era was a golden age.

THE CHANGED international climate that coincided with the end of the Double Dulles era featured Communist pluralism and a shift to the underdeveloped

world as the chief testing ground in the struggle for primacy. Instead of having to meet known and massive Communist threats, the agency, in the new environment, had to cope with shadowy movements, capable of turning either toward nationalism or communism.

But instead of switching to more subtle tactics, the agency in operations in Indonesia, Singapore, Cuba and in the Dominican Republic acted as if it still faced the same old challenge from monolithic communism. And when these operations turned sour and drew criticism, operation self-defense came strongly into play.

For instance, the agency put out stories on a Soviet department of disinformation, thus implying that all criticism was merely Russian propaganda. It fostered, if nothing more, the publication of spy diaries stressing the value of espionage, and the danger of peaceful contacts with the Soviet Union. It put out economic statistics designed to show that the Soviet Union was in so much trouble that it made sense not to try to develop East-West trade.

Leadership tended to develop along similar lines. The CIA is not really under control of its director, Adm. William Raborn, who has proved to have no flair for the job. It is being run by Deputy Director Richard Helms, a career professional, intelligent and sophisticated, but an organization man who has spent 20 years at CIA headquarters, managing flaps and defending bureaucratic interests.

GIVEN THESE formidable self-defense mechanisms, it is foolish to imagine that a congressional group working part-time with only the most limited knowledge of the present to say nothing of the past could exert any impact on the agency.

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What is required is a far more formidable enterprise—a long-term confidential study made under an undoubted presidential mandate by a panel including representatives of the Executive, the Legislature and the public, with a staff drawn from past officials of the agency who can go through files knowing what to look for.

To be sure, no President likes to accord that kind of mandate to groups not under his control. Still, the countervailing argument is very strong. If the President is not himself the prisoner of the Cold War Establishment, most of the rest of us are.

Their self-defense tactics are a principal reason why it is almost impossible to generate meaningful discussion, and in that way sound opinion, on a subject of such vital public concern as the war in Vietnam.

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