

STAT

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Dear Greg:

You were very kind to send me a copy of Covert Action which I have read with great interest. It is certainly a comprehensive and well informed analysis of very complex issues. It is an impressive effort for which you deserve congratulations. You certainly have mine.

If I may venture a comment on your treatment of the role appropriate for Congress in the oversight function Congress appears as pretty much of a monolith. In assessing the possible consequences of expanding Congressional intrusion into the conduct of day to day intelligence activity it seems to me important to remember the obvious: Congress is not monolithic and the harm done by maverick members of Congress -- Senator Helms for example. So far the Congressional committees have held the line commendably. The possibility for harmful politically motivated intervention nevertheless remains a problem.

The ultimate question, however, is whether Congressional involvement, as it has developed recently, in the intelligence process has added much to the over-all coherence and continuity of American foreign policy. The record to date at least suggests that it has not.

Where you and I basically differ, I think, is with the purpose for which covert action operations were mounted in the past and should be at least considered in the future. Before trying to explain what I mean by this I will comment briefly on a couple of statements in the book which seem to me to cast CIA in a needlessly or excessively pejorative light.

A minor but to me important point is that Wisner was never Bissell's boss. People forget that Bissell had already achieved a towering reputation in the Maritime Commission but more importantly in the

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administration of the Marshall Plan before he arrived in CIA. He came in as an advisor to the DCI and was then charged with the organization that created the U-2 and was responsible for overhead reconnaissance. He went from there to replace Wisner as DD/P.

There were, it seems to me, a number of factors other than CIA's enthusiasm for the operation that contributed to the Bay of Pigs fiasco. I am no expert on this affair, but I don't believe Arthur Schlesinger is either.

The principal reason for failure was the spongy nature of the decision making process through which it developed.

Kennedy inherited the Brigade from his predecessor. In deciding to go ahead he appears to have been strongly influenced by reluctance to face the political consequences of having all those angry Cubans around if the Brigade were disbanded.

It is my impression that Allen Dulles was content to go along with it because he was satisfied that Eisenhower would never have permitted it to fail and assumed that Kennedy wouldn't either. I can't prove this but I believe that there is an unpublished article of Allen's kicking around somewhere that states this as his view. There were, of course, carrier elements of the navy lying off Cuba at the time of the landing that would have been only too happy to intervene. Thus, from CIA's point of view, there may well have been reasons for optimism about the chances of success other than illusions about the strength of the opposition to Castro inside Cuba. The point here is not what Eisenhower would or would not have done -- simply that there was plenty of room for illusions.

Whatever chances of success there may have been were seriously eroded by the decision to change the landing place from the Escambray Mountains to the Bay of Pigs. This was done at Kennedy's insistence and probably would have been a good time for those involved, CIA and the military, to strongly urge cancellation of the operation.

Then there was the cancellation of the second air strike, at Adlai Stevenson's initiative, but for which the Brigade might have had a fair chance of establishing a tenable lodgement area.

The Bay of Pigs therefore does not seem to me to serve as a particularly relevant example of "Overwhelming the message" -- though I see your point. What it really is is a good example of the inability of the U.S. Government to make up its mind.

I am reminded of a remark of Bukovsky's in response to a question as to what the Soviets think about the Americans "A superpower given to high moral rhetoric but unable to see which side its bread is buttered! I sometimes feel that the USA is either too

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virtuous or too infantile to deal with the affairs of this sinful world. The two may even be connected."

The estimate on terrorism is something which I personally know a good deal about. What actually happened was that the first draft of the estimate, prepared by CIA I believe, was so bland that even Bob Inman, no cold warrior, described it as reading like a brief for the defense. Other elements of the Intelligence Community were violently opposed and were promoting the extreme right wing position represented by Claire Stirling. Casey then appointed Lincoln Gordon (Harvard '33, Summa Cum Laude, Ambassador to Brazil in the Kennedy Administration, former President of Johns Hopkins), who was then working as part of a small group in CIA on estimates, to take over personal responsibility for negotiating an acceptable estimate on this issue. I think the final estimate was a successful resolution of a complicated problem based on available evidence.

As far as I know Claire Stirling's sources for her article and book were largely officials of European security services and not stories invented by CIA covert propaganda. I say all this because to me the manipulation of intelligence estimates for political purposes is the ultimate sin against the Holy Ghost. The only areas where there seems to be some evidence that Casey's personal views may have been imposed on analytical judgements involved statements which he has been alleged to have made about the capabilities of the Contras. In those cases, of course, one has the question of whether intelligence judgements, or something involving an objective judgement of capabilities, should be made by the Agency or individuals responsible for an operation.

Now as to my argument concerning the basic purpose of covert operations at least as it was understood by many of us in the Agency. Many of us had served in OSS promoting and supporting the efforts of European resistance groups to liberate their countries from German occupation. I might say parenthetically that none of us ever believed that this liberation was going to take place without military intervention. Resistance groups could make life difficult for the Germans but their ultimate mission was to support a conventional military assault.

Most of us therefore were dejected, but not I might say surprised, to wake up in 1948 and find that the Soviets were occupying about as much territory as Hitler had ever conquered and were conducting aggressively hostile political probes into Western Europe and the Middle East.

The objective of American covert action operations from Iran to Nicaragua, was I think to meet a (possibly inaccurately or excessively) perceived threat of Soviet expansion. The objective

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of the Bay of Pigs operation was not to promote democracy or collect just debts, it was to prevent Cuba from becoming a sanctuary into which the Soviets could introduce brigades or missiles or which could be used as a submarine base.

As one looks around the world today there continues to be, mutatis mutandis, the same widespread and potentially menacing Soviet presence. The Soviets continue to sit uneasily on a huge empire in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. In your book I think you suggest that their own covert action programs haven't worked so well. However, not always initially on their own initiative, they have moved into areas and established relations with regimes to whom they are giving substantial military support in places like: Yemen, Ethiopia, Angola, Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam, and their presence is notable in many other places of strategic interest to the United States.

The purpose of covert action operations therefore, as far as I am concerned at least, has been to counter the intrigues and encroachments of a powerful hostile regime.

Now assuming the truth of all this, as I do, what are we to do about it? Before even attempting to answer this question let me introduce a number of caveats.

One is that in fact you are quite right in asserting that these operations were not always designed to meet a clearly defined Soviet threat. Great pressure was brought by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson on the Agency to support the non-communist left in South America -- hence the successful support of Frei's candidacy in Chile. Moreover Dickey Bissell had somewhat of a penchant for social engineering -- promoting social and economic development for its own sake -- a perfectly legitimate objective of American policy but perhaps somewhat ultra vires for an intelligence agency.

I am not trying to say that confrontation with Soviet Russia will necessarily be the primary cause or justification for military or covert action in the future.

Quite obviously current developments in Russia have to be factored into an assessment of the Soviet threat and could possibly result in a fundamental change in our relations.

The emergence of national centers of expansion and/or aggression with formidable military capabilities, other than Soviet Russia, is of course a possibility that could dramatically affect the direction and dimension of American foreign policy.

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I am inclined to agree with most of your criteria concerning the prerequisites for success in any large scale covert action intervention. Certainly success is unlikely to attend intervention based solely or primarily on support for a notional opposition to a regime that we wish to overthrow or neutralize (the Brigade or possibly the Contras). There will always be dilemmas surrounding issues comparable to the question of whether support for the Contras was a good idea. I have no basis for a judgement about the Contras or whether they represent a politically viable force. I was impressed by an article in the London Economist not long ago which said of three possible choices: do nothing, military intervention or support for the Contras they would support the Contras. This I understood to be because of the writer's concern about the massive military build-up which the Sandinistas have undertaken based on money and equipment provided by the Soviets supported by Soviet, Cuban and such like advisors.

One can not entirely exclude the possibility of a future requirement for some kind of large scale covert or quasi covert paramilitary action.

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What is inevitable, however, is that the next decade will be filled with threats and incidents involving terrorist action against the United States and its allies. Countering these threats will certainly involve, and probably stretch to their limits, the full range of our intelligence resources.

As to my recommendations:

- (1) I would devote every possible effort to developing some national consensus about the objectives of American policy and the real threats thereto. This means doing everything possible to improve intelligence analytical capabilities including reassociating academia with the process.
- (2) A strong capability to undertake covert action where it is decided that such action is needed and can receive appropriate support and security should be retained in CIA.
- (3) I would take stern action to remove from the lexicon of discussion of covert action all references to morality. I am not quite sure at what point in history American moral abhorrence of the idea of interfering in the affairs of other countries is supposed to have developed.

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President Polk invaded Mexico and appropriated Arizona, etc., etc. without occasioning much moral furor (pace Abraham Lincoln). We pursued Aguinaldo, exterminated the indians, acquired Panamanian territory and re-invaded Mexico with perfect equanimity.

Wilsonian democracy is all very well but this is an untidy world in which difficult decisions with serious strategic implications and enormous potentialities for human suffering must be resolved on a rational basis. Covert action, like military intervention, is an option to be resorted to only after serious assessment of these consequences.

Americans should not be overburdened by a feeling that they have a monopoly on virtue and morality. There exists what amounts to an American genius for tolerance, compassion and ultimate common sense. It is the institutional framework which makes the exercise of these qualities possible that we are trying to preserve and protect. It is important to remember, however, that America is a nation capable of great emotional swings -- from the patriotism of World War II to MacArthur to Vietnam.

The essential tasks of intelligence analysts and decision makers is to evaluate as accurately as possible the reality of the dangers and opportunities in international development which may threaten or enhance the durability of the American community.

- (4) I would leave CIA alone, support it as it is and not fiddle around with its organization or charter both of which have developed after much careful thought and review.

Judge Webster is very highly qualified by character, temperament and experience to run the Agency and coordinate the Community. Bob Gates is an extremely able and intelligent officer with years of experience with intelligence and foreign affairs. They make a competent, indeed impressive, team and I hope they will be there long after a new president assumes office.

Bob incidentally has an article in the coming issue of Foreign Affairs which should be interesting reading.

Forgive a long dissertation but these days everybody has to make some comment on covert action. I do not think that you and I

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are far apart in our approach to the problem.

Many thanks again for sending me your book.

With warm regards and best wishes,

Sincerely,

John A. Bross

P.S. For many years there has been much talk about the desirability of a quasi public foundation to promote friendly organizations with a capacity for influencing public opinion abroad as recommended by the Katzenbach Committee

Getting Congressional support for such an idea is something else. NED was finally established, after much hard work by a number of people, early in this Administration but is probably destined to sail on politically stormy seas (given the ease with which any one project of real political or social significance can be swamped in the appropriations process. The German foundations function in a sort of political equilibrium -- the SPD supports their programs and the CDU theirs.

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