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Should the C.I.A. Abandon Dirty Tricks? 'A Legitimate Question,' Says Its Boss

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

WASHINGTON—A former high-level Central Intelligence Agency official, in a recent conversation, said, "There's no question we've gotten into trouble and disrepute in this country and in other countries. But I think history will show that covert action was really a very liberal idea, perhaps even an idealistic concept aimed at the stabilization of pluralism and the diversity of society in Eastern Europe."

He was talking about the good old days.

The enemy, Communism, had not yet begun to buy American wheat, aircraft and computers; "nation building"—the C.I.A.'s clandestine effort to help create and support non-Communist governments—had yet to collapse into a series of military dictatorships; and national security still was a concept in which men like Daniel Ellsberg believed and for which they were willing to go to war.

The mystique is gone and now the C.I.A.'s covert activities, the so-called "dirty tricks" department, are in question. How did it all start and why have Presidents and Congressmen of both parties let it continue?

The Enemy Was Monolithic

The C.I.A. was formally organized in the cold war days of 1947 and plunged into action during the era of the Berlin Airlift, atom spy trials and the Army-McCarthy hearings. The worldwide enemy was the Russian secret intelligence service, the K.G.B., once described by former C.I.A. director Allen W. Dulles as "more than an intelligence and counter-intelligence organization. It is an instrument for subversion, manipulation and violence, for secret intervention in the affairs of other countries."

For Mr. Dulles, who headed the C.I.A. throughout most of the 1950's, the issue was clear. He told a Senate committee: "We must deal with the problem of conflicting ideologies as democracy faces Communism, not only in the relations between Soviet Russia and the countries of the West but in the internal political conflicts with the countries of Europe, Asia and South America."

What one writer has described as the "false bottom world" of the C.I.A. was created in the late 1940's and 1950's. Secret Congressional authorizations led to secret arms caches and operational bases throughout Europe and Asia; hundreds of operatives—perhaps thousands—were recruited and trained, provided with new identities and turned out "into the cold"; dozens of C.I.A.-controlled corpora-

tions ranging from airlines to press syndicates were boldly put into action.

Only a few of the C.I.A.'s overseas operations in the past 25 years are known, but such activities have been instrumental in the failure and success of governments and politicians throughout the world. When former C.I.A. agent E. Howard Hunt was asked during the White House "Plumbers" trial this June what he had done during his 20-year career, he replied jauntily, "Oh, subversion of prominent figures abroad, the overthrow of governments, that sort of thing."

A partial list of covert operations, as described by private but informed sources and in such thoroughly documented works as "The Invisible Government," the first C.I.A. exposé written by journalists David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, include the following:

- In 1949, the C.I.A. supported more than 10,000 Nationalist Chinese troops who fled to Burma after the People Republic of China was established. The Nationalist Chinese troops, with C.I.A. financing, eventually became heavily involved in the opium trade.

- Earlier, there had been a joint paramilitary operation with British intelligence in Albania in which hundreds of agents were parachuted into that country in hopes of triggering a revolution. The mission failed.

- In the 1950's, the agency provided support for Philippine Defense Minister and later President Ramon Magsaysay's campaigns against the Communist Huk guerrillas. A main figure in that successful operation was Edward Lansdale, who, operating undercover as an Air Force colonel, later emerged as an important C.I.A. operative in the early days of the Vietnam war.

Oil Was the Beneficiary

- In a major success in 1953, the C.I.A. organized a coup d'état that overthrew the government of Premier Mohammed Mossadegh, who had nationalized the Iranian oil industry, and thus kept the Shah of Iran in power. A direct result of that overthrow was the first negotiated contract between Iran and American oil companies that gave the U.S. firms a 40 per cent share of the agreement.

- A year later, the agency helped overthrow the Communist-dominated government in Guatemala of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. President Eisenhower later confirmed that he had approved the United States' role.

- In 1958, the C.I.A. utilized a secret air force of B-26 bombers to support rebels attempting to overthrow Indonesian President Sukarno. President Eisenhower insisted American policy was "careful neutrality" towards Indonesia, and said an American C.I.A. pilot who had been shot down and captured during the invasion was a "soldier of fortune."

- In the Congo, the C.I.A. financed Cuban exile pilots and another fleet of B-26 bombers to suppress a revolt against the central Congolese government. The agency eventually sided with Joseph Mobutu, who became president.

- In the early 1960's, the agency was reportedly heavily active in Ecuador in another as yet undisclosed clandestine operation. In a book to be published later this year in London, former C.I.A.

official Philip B.F. Agee alleges that he and five other agents were able to obtain political and economic control over Ecuador's labor movement, a step that eventually led to the overthrow of a non-Communist civilian government by a military dictatorship. "It was a tribute to what a six-man station can do," Mr. Agee wrote of the efforts of his group. "In the end, they owned almost everybody who was anybody."

- In 1967, a team of C.I.A. agents was sent to Bolivia to help track down Ernest "Che" Guevara, former aide to Fidel Castro, who was leading Bolivia's guerrilla movement. After Mr. Guevara was captured and killed, a Bolivian cabinet officer announced that he had been on the payroll of the C.I.A. for two years and subsequently released Guevara's diary.

Finally, there is Chile, where the full story of C.I.A. involvement is only now being learned.

The Agency Does Other Things

These are hard days for the men who run the C.I.A. In recent public statements, there has been repeated emphasis on the agency's other important missions—the typical collection and academic analysis and interpretation of raw intelligence data. But that function has never been in serious dispute; many C.I.A. officials were privately pleased with the publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 because the agency's skeptical reports throughout the 1960's from Vietnam were shown to be by far the most accurate and reliable of any of those being made.

What is very much in dispute for at least a number of Senators and Congressmen is the need for clandestine operations based on a psychology and rationale that they consider an immoral and dangerous anachronism. In place of monolithic Communism, the C.I.A. is now met with fierce nationalism, the same nationalism that has been a factor in the détentés so carefully being worked out by the world's big powers.

The C.I.A.'s clandestine operations reportedly still involve more than one-third of the agency's 16,500 employees and more than half of its \$750-million annual budget. That expenditure of men and money seems paradoxical in view of the recent—and remarkable—admission by the C.I.A.'s highest official that national security would not be jeopardized if all clandestine activities were cancelled overnight.

In a speech 10 days ago, William E. Colby, a long-time clandestine service operative who was appointed C.I.A. director last year, declared: "It is advocated by some that the United States abandon covert action. This is a legitimate question, and in light of current American policy, as I have indicated, it would not have a major impact on our current activities or the current security of the United States."

Mr. Colby argued, nonetheless, that he could "envisage situations in which the United States might well need to conduct covert action in the face of some new threat that developed in the world."

For many C.I.A. officials, past and present, however, the only important and visible new threat is the one facing the agency on Capitol Hill. And there are a few who believe that unless the intelligence service begins its own house-cleaning, the Congress will—as one former high-level C.I.A. man said—"throw out the baby (intelligence) with the bath water (clandestine operations)."

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