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The War Over Secret Warfare

It was one thing for Dwight Eisenhower to try to save a summit by taking responsibility for the 1960 U-2 spy-plane incident, and there wasn't any way John Kennedy could have denied America's involvement in the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco. But it was an altogether different matter when Gerald Ford admitted at his press conference last week—in a way no President ever had before—that the CIA had been deeply involved over a period of years in a clandestine effort to oppose a foreign government. Ford then went on to endorse the CIA operation against Marxist President Salvador Allende as “in the best interest of the people of Chile” and dismissed questions about the morality of such activities with the explanation that “Communist nations spend vastly more money than we do for the same kind of purposes.”

“It is the first time in my memory,” said Prof. Richard N. Gardner, one of America's top experts on international law, “that a President has come out flatly and said: ‘The other side does it, and we do it.’” But Ford's effort to appear candid before the American people did nothing to stem the growing controversy in Washington over the CIA. And new revelations later in the week of the scope of CIA covert operations in Chile fueled the mounting debate.

Monster: While much of the surface anger was directed against the spy agency—with lawmakers like Sen. Frank Church talking of the need to “control the monster”—there was little in the latest disclosures that truly surprised many congressmen. And it was clear that the CIA was in fact only a pawn in a much larger domestic political game. For Congress was clearly hoping to use this latest controversy to further reduce the power of the White House. As the battle unfolded, concern was expressed in several foreign capitals about the potential impact on Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who as head of the secret 40 Committee authorized the CIA's Chile activities (NEWSWEEK, Sept. 23). Kissinger, already under fire for his handling of the Cyprus crisis, was accused of deceiving a Senate subcommittee panel on “the extent and object of the CIA's activities in Chile.”

Certainly, it appeared that neither Ford nor Kissinger was truly candid in

suggesting that the CIA had merely been providing financial aid to Chile's opposition newspapers and political parties. For according to intelligence sources, the majority of the \$8 million allocated for CIA covert operations in Chile from 1970 to 1973 was actually used to subsidize strikes by truckers,



Anti-Allende rally: What did the CIA's money buy?

shopkeepers and taxi drivers that crippled the Allende government and plunged Chile deeper into chaos. And many analysts believe those strikes made the coup that toppled Allende inevitable.

Along with the new details about Chile, other reports began to appear last week of CIA involvement in unseating the governments of other countries. Former CIA agent Philip Agee, 39, now living in England, told NEWSWEEK's John Barnes of his involvement in bringing down two successive governments of Ecuador when the regimes refused to toe the U.S. policy line. In 1961, Agee re-

lated, the CIA decided to “destabilize” the government of President José Velasco Ibarra when he refused to break diplomatic relations with Cuba. A coup eventually followed, but to the CIA's distress, Velasco's successor, Carlos Julio Arosemena, proved equally obstinate on the Cuba question. “We again applied destabilizing tactics,” Agee said. “Arosemena finally backed down and cut relations with Cuba. But it was too late, and he was overthrown in 1963.”

Despite an assertion by CIA director William E. Colby that the CIA's covert operations have declined tremendously since the cold war days, there is still an impressive number of U.S. spies out in the cold. More than a third of the CIA's 16,500 full-time employees work for the clandestine branch—currently called the “Directorate of Operations”—and an estimated 1,800 of these are directly involved in so-called “dirty tricks.” Reports on the agency's covert operations around the world all find their way to the “head shed”—the seventh-floor office at the CIA's Langley, Va., headquarters of director Colby.

Target: Like most of his predecessors, Colby came up through the clandestine side of the CIA and close associates describe him as fundamentally an “operations-oriented” director. Most of the covert political operations he directs today are in the Middle East and Latin America. For with détente, the CIA sharply cut back the number of covert operations targeted against East Europe and the Soviet Union. And the technological explosion in intelligence gathering of the 1960s reduced the need to use agents to collect information on these countries.

The CIA has also made a major effort in recent years to improve the covers used by agents abroad. Under an agreement worked out in the early 1950s, most CIA operatives posed for almost two decades as State Department officers, AID officials or employees of the U.S. Information Agency. Many still use this kind of cover, but the Soviets have long since become adept at scanning American Embassy staff lists and picking out the spies. So in 1968, a special CIA unit was set up to put deep-cover “assets” in place. Some agents now even pose as missionaries.

As the Chilean disclosures illustrate, one of the clandestine tasks of CIA

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agents is distributing large amounts of under-the-table money. Millions of dollars are secretly channeled each year to a broad spectrum of influential foreigners ranging from politicians to priests. Over the years the CIA has become increasingly expert at getting the maximum bang for its buck. Knowledgeable observers say the CIA was probably able to turn the \$8 million allocated for use against Allende into \$40 million worth of escudos through black-market dealings.

For all the furor over the CIA's activities, Ford was on solid ground in stating that the U.S. is hardly alone in the spy game. The Chilean operation pales beside the attempt by the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB) to foment a revolt in Mexico in the late 1960s. And the Russian spy agency is reliably credited with playing a major role in the coup that ousted Afghanistan's King Mohammed Zahir Shah in July 1973, and replaced him with Sardar Mohammed Daud, a long-time friend of Moscow. Officers of the KGB and its military counterpart, the Chief Intelligence Administration (GRU), fill as many as 80 per cent of the diplomatic posts in Soviet embassies in many African and Latin American nations. And the KGB also utilizes the intelligence services of Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Cuba.

Thugs: While Communist-bloc intelligence activities steadily expand, the roles of Britain's M.I.6 and France's Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage (SDECE) have been contracting. Britain's M.I.6 today concentrates on Ireland and Ulster. And the French agency—always scorned in the elitist intelligence community as a gang of thugs—hasn't had a triumph since it engineered the expulsion of the entire U.S. Embassy from Malagasy three years ago. But some new intelligence services have begun to play an increasingly important role. Since 1972, Israel's Mossad is credited by European police with assassinating more than thirteen Arab terrorists, including several top members of Black September, and is reported to be aiding the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq. And the Brazilians have developed an active intelligence agency which is now nervously regarded in Latin America as a potential "coup maker."

Despite the competition, Congress is of a mind to impose some new checks on the CIA. Eleven senators introduced a bill last week to create a Joint Committee on Intelligence Oversight, which would take over responsibility from the handful of Congressional elders now charged with the task. There is nothing novel about the effort to establish genuine Congressional control over the CIA. But the bills have always been defeated when CIA supporters argued that overseers would be the source of leaks that would imperil national security.

Certainly, in view of the almost daily leaks of new details of the CIA's role in Chile, that would seem a valid concern. And CIA director Colby, while on record

as willing to report to such a joint committee, is known to be worried that the intelligence agency's effectiveness is being seriously undercut by disclosure of its secret operations. Several agents out in the field, *NEWSWEEK*'s Bruce van Voorst learned last week, have already resigned, and one foreign intelligence agency has reduced its cooperation with the CIA for fear of what will appear in U.S. newspapers. And a former top CIA agent insisted that Congressional supervision of CIA covert activities is impossible. "You have to trust a small group of dedicated men," he argued, "and let them operate as they see fit."

But in the post-Watergate atmosphere of Washington, trust is a commodity in short supply. Arguing that it is necessary to plan operations in secrecy hardly seemed a course likely to win much sympathy for the CIA. For while most lawmakers are willing to concede the need to gather intelligence about other nations' intentions, many clearly feel the White House shouldn't be secretly trying to topple foreign governments. Sen. James Abourezk announced plans to introduce an amendment to the foreign-aid bill this week outlawing the "dirty-tricks branch" of the CIA.

While the prospects of Congress asserting increased control over the CIA appeared the strongest in years, some veteran lawmakers feel the current furor will fizzle as others have in the past. "The evidence all points to the need for a watchdog committee," Sen. Mike Mansfield declared, "but I doubt there's much chance of it." But chairman Thomas Morgan of the House Foreign Affairs Committee vowed: "This is our one chance to get oversight of the CIA, and we're going to get it." And he appeared to have a lot of backing in the view that the time is now. "We've spent two years cleaning up our own house," said Sen. Walter Mondale. "It's time we start applying this same yardstick to our activities abroad."

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