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The Invisible Government

The authors of "The Invisible Government", David Wise of the New York Herald Tribune and Thomas B. Ross of the Chicago Sun-Times, admit that Communist subversion and espionage pose a unique threat to the American people and their government. They accept the necessity under certain circumstances for secret American efforts to prevent Moscow and Peking from gaining control of new territories. But in this work they are not directly concerned with the nature and extent of the Soviet and Chinese subversive apparatus. The real villain makes a very brief appearance on the stage and then vanishes. The authors profess to believe that our own government's secret attempts to meet the Communist challenge constitute so real a threat to our own freedoms and democratic processes that they must be exposed in as detailed and dramatic a way as possible. If the Soviets profit from these revelations, as they will, the authors apparently think that such self-inflicted wounds must be endured in their battle against excessive secrecy.

Broadly stated, their thesis is that the U.S. "intelligence community" with the CIA at its heart has grown so big in men, money, and power that it has become an invisible government threatening the very freedoms it was designed to defend. The CIA, they claim, conducts its own clandestine foreign policy, and even the President, to whom the Agency is nominally responsible, has been unable to control it. The State Department, both in Washington and in the field, is powerless to exert policy direction because

its Ambassadors are kept uninformed and are habitually by-passed by CIA operatives. The Congress, they insist, has voluntarily abdicated its legislative role and supinely votes huge secret funds without any adequate knowledge of how the money is spent.

If all this were true, American democracy would certainly be in serious trouble, and the alarm professed by Messrs. Wise and Ross would be justified. But is it true? Strangely enough, even the authors themselves provide an ambiguous answer to this question which is so central to their major thesis. They concede the existence of certain institutional arrangements which would appear to give the President and his principal foreign policy advisors the very kind of close policy control over secret operations that they ought to have. Early in the book, the authors mention the existence of a "Special Group" which makes the major decisions regarding ~~classified~~ ^{SUCH} operations and which is so secret that it is "unknown outside the innermost circle of the Invisible Government." The reader must wait with baited breath for 255 pages before he learns that the members of this sinister cabal are McGeorge Bundy in the White House, Secretary of Defense McNamara, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs and McCone as Director of CIA. These are just the officials that one would expect the President to have chosen to advise him on matters of high ^{FOREIGN} ~~classified~~ policy and they are far from invisible. Having ~~reluctantly~~ conceded the existence of such a supervisory body, the authors - in order to prove their thesis - try to demonstrate

the ineffectiveness of the Special Group. Without revealing how they come to their conclusions, they assert the Group meets in "a highly informal way without the elaborate records and procedures of other high Government committees." There is no "outside analysis" and "little detached criticism." At another point, the Group's members are castigated for being too occupied with their other duties to perform their supervisory function adequately. The impression is left that the President and the Secretary of State are not even informed of their secret decisions. One must have a very low opinion of the sense of responsibility and competence of the men in these key Government positions to believe they behave in so cavalier a fashion. And yet if one does not believe this, the authors' whole portrayal of an irresponsible and invisible government becomes inherently incredible.

Similar treatment is accorded the Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities of the Eisenhower Administration and the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. They are dismissed as superficial facades with the remark that "Both committees were composed of part-time consultants who met only occasionally during the year." The unwary reader might conclude from the use of the past tense in this sentence that the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board is extinct. Actually it is very much alive and its membership is no secret, having been announced in a White House release of April 23, 1963. The present Chairman is Clark Clifford and the other members are William O. Baker, James H. Doolittle, Gordon Gray, Edwin H. Land,

William L. Langer, Robert D. Murphy, and Frank Pace. These are able experienced men who take conscientiously their duty of advising the President on the workings of the intelligence community, and it would't have taken much journalistic initiative to find this out. They have a right to resent being dismissed as "vener." In his last public reference to the CIA at the time of the Diem crisis in Vietnam, President Kennedy stated, "...I can find nothing, and I have looked through the record very carefully over the last nine months, and I could go back further, to indicate that the CIA has done anything but support policy. It does not create policy; it attempts to execute it in those areas where it has competence and responsibility...I can just assure you flatly that the CIA has not carried out independent activities but has operated under close control of the Director of Central Intelligence, operating with the cooperation of the National Security Council and under my instructions...." The impression grows that Messrs. Wise and Ross are determined to ignore or denigrate any evidence that the supervision of American intelligence activity is in responsible hands.

This impression is further strengthened by the description of the role of Congress. They concede that the CIA budget and program is subject to review and approval by special sub-committees of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees and of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. But this Congressional scrutiny is dismissed as inadequate with the charge that these sub-committees "are controlled by the most conservative elements

in Congress, men who are close personally and philosophically to those who run the "Invisible Government." The authors go on to state the case for a joint Congressional watch-dog committee, which is the one specific institutional reform they have to propose. To date, the Congressional leadership has opposed this move on the ground that it would make it more difficult to maintain essential security.

What will be the effect of this book beyond its influence on possible future debate regarding the need for a Congressional watch-dog committee? If it is widely accepted at its face value within the United States, it can only reduce public confidence in the intelligence services and make it more difficult for them to recruit the able men and women we shall need in the difficult days that lie ahead. The lurid descriptions of past events in Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, Iran, Guatemala, and Burma seem designed to prove that on the clandestine fronts of the Cold War the American is typically a reactionary, unscrupulous blunderer. The massive Soviet involvement in these situations is ignored, as is the nature of the hard choices that American statesmen had to face. The CIA should not and cannot rise to its own defense but there is enough evidence of selective bias to alert the careful reader. A representative example is the chapter which purports to describe the desperate efforts of the Peace Corps to prevent itself from being infiltrated by CIA. The leaders of the Peace Corps are described as being so fearful that the CIA will disobey Presidential directives and attempt to infiltrate that they take the most

elaborate precautions. The implication is clear that the CIA's irresponsibility is such that these precautions were necessary. Only at the end of the chapter will the reader notice a brief sentence admitting that no single case of such attempted infiltration was ever discovered.

A second effect of the book will be to expose for the first time certain individuals and organizations as having intelligence connections and thus sharply increase their vulnerability to Soviet attack. A spokesman for the publishing firm, Random House, has been quoted as claiming that nothing was used that had not appeared in public print before. But in the first chapter, the authors boast that "much of the material has never been printed anywhere else before." They insist that they have stayed "within the bounds of national security." They appear to have reserved to themselves the right to decide what those limits are. Such an attitude raises serious questions as to the responsibility of the journalist in a free society in a time of cold war. ~~In Great Britain, which is second to none in its devotion to liberty, there exists an Official Secrets Act under which these authors could have been tried and sentenced to prison and the book's publication prevented. Such a law in this country is not desirable, but in its absence the American journalist carries an even heavier responsibility than his British counterpart.~~

By far the most damaging consequence of this book will be its exploitation abroad by the propaganda apparatus of the Soviet and Chinese regimes. The CIA has understandably been for a long

time a primary target of the Soviet KGB and everything from forgeries to full-length books have been inspired by the Soviet propagandists in their efforts to destroy the reputation of all American intelligence operations and undermine their effectiveness. The KGB technicians must find it hard to believe their good luck in finding so much useful ammunition between the covers of a book printed by a reputable American publisher and written by two ~~controversial and Communist~~ ^{American} journalists. It will be reprinted and replayed from one end of the world to the other. It will be discreetly left by the Russian ambassador on the desk of the wavering neutralist premier and excerpts will be broadcast in every language from Swahili to Burmese. Because much of this material has been printed before does not reduce the value to the Soviets of having it gathered in one volume and under such genuine American auspices.

Already - on 23 June - excerpts from the book that appeared in Look Magazine on 16 June were reprinted in Izvestia and Komsomolskaya Pravda. TASS distributed the entire Look article to the Soviet provincial press on 24 June. Havana Radio on 25 June quoted from this book in attacking the assignment of Alexis Johnson to Saigon on the ground that he is a conspiratorial member of the Special Group. The process is only beginning.

The problem of balancing freedom and security has been an ancient dilemma for free and democratic states in their long struggle to survive against totalitarian aggressors. This book may serve to dramatize the problem but it does not provide any deep insight or new solutions. It has been written not to enlighten but to shock and to sell.