

Jan 17, 1964

CIA Asleep at Another Switch

The sick elephant known as our Central Intelligence Agency has been surprised again. This time it's the events in Panama.

The glutton has been feeding on the same hay that knocked the incredible overkill nuclear materials stockpiling program completely off its rocker: Secret billions, bad judgment and bureaucracy.



Our spy-shop has blown its top.

It should quit stalking through foreign political backrooms and committing our country, building its own empire. The CIA is now larger and far more costly than the entire State Department. And it's playing an immense and dreary part in our failures to win friends for the United States and our success in managing to lose those we had. The CIA should return to its limited spy function, and stay there, and also tend to its intelligence evaluation.

If Gen. William J. Donovan's Office of Strategic Services could conduct our total World War II global espionage throughout four years for \$135 million, what is today's muddled crowd doing with an estimated \$750 million a year? Quality? Not a single alien agent employed by OSS betrayed the trust. Today's outfit is turning in no such record as that.

* * *

A vast deterioration occurred after the Bay of Pigs debacle.

In Cuba, for example, as this column detailed in a series before the Oct. 22, 1962, "confrontation" with Khrushchev, the CIA became so infiltrated by Castro secret police that the ghastly betrayals anti-Red sources suffered forced them to shun the American intelligence service like a plague.

CIA operations there became, and remain, a recipe for distrust, if not panic. Meanwhile, as in Panama, the Berlin Wall took the CIA by surprise. So did Nehru's invasion of Goa, the Dominican revolution, the Cambodian backlash, etc.

A Congressional investigating commission defined intelligence as "all the things which should be known in advance of initiating a course of action." The acquisition of intelligence is one thing; the interpretation of it is

to the first two. And the agency has had some splendid successes under able station chiefs abroad. I could name many.

These unsung heroes compete against totalitarian (closed society) obstacles and four types of Sino-Soviet spies—the ideological fanatic, the conspiratorial spy, the venal tool and the entrapped traitor to America.

Its good men are too valuable and the CIA's true function is too important to be self-defeated by lush billions, petty ambitions and bureaucracy.

An American ambassador abroad is the commanding officer and everyone stationed under him is responsible to him. This includes the CIA. Where the CIA station chief is experienced and competent and not an empire builder or solo flyer there's no trouble. But the CIA has its own clandestine communications with Washington and the world.

It has incredibly vast, unaudited funds frequently used to erect mountains of research available elsewhere.

The CIA can duplicate anything, and do nearly anything, behind the secrecy cloak that protects it from timid Congressional committees and the public alike. This helps breed the too many free-wheeling Machiavellis whooping it up overseas like Tarzan, the Titan of the Treetops.

* * *

The really effective agents abroad widely agree among themselves that the Washington supervision is now a spaghetti-like maze of arm-chair bureaucrats.

These operate as something of a third force between the State Department and Pentagon. Thus when a CIA station chief in a country also stages end runs around the ambassador or goes off with his own venal collection of local bandits dripping with cartridge belts and guile, our national policy becomes uncontrollable.

Yet in creating this vital agency President Truman made it directly responsible to the President. The key to correction remains in White House hands. And this writer has a hunch President Johnson will use it.

As in the case of the overkill nuclear materials stockpiling binge, if Johnson turns hard on this sick elephant he can achieve another fine saving of perhaps half a billion dollars a year and put the out-of-hand agency back in the correct harness President Truman intended for which Truman recently warned