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CIA proper tool for foreign policy?

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MOSCOW, Idaho — Does the United States have any business sticking its nose — that is, its Central Intelligence Agency — into other people's politics?

President Dwight D. Eisenhower said yes. He told CIA operatives to engineer the ouster of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. They succeeded.

President John F. Kennedy said yes. He authorized the Bay of Pigs assault on Fidel Castro's Cuban dictatorship in 1961. It failed.

President Lyndon B. Johnson said yes. He OK'd repeated CIA plots to kill Castro. All failed, despite the use of Mafia hitmen and Cuban nationals.

President Richard M. Nixon said yes. He gave the CIA \$10 million to bribe Chilean congressmen not to ratify the election of President Salvador Allende in September 1970. The vote was ratified.

"We have witnessed government after government being overthrown in Latin America, all guided by the invisible hand of the United States," says Larry Birns, a foreign policy analyst.

"Not one of these so-called secret wars has ever been debated in a public forum or approved by vote of Congress," Birns said. "Not one."

Instead, U.S. presidents from Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan have used the CIA as their strong arm abroad, said Birns, moderator of last week's Borah Symposium at the University of Idaho.

Truman used the intelligence agency to save Western Europe from the Communist threat of the late 1940s, subsidizing leaders, political parties and unions in Germany, France and Italy.

From there, the CIA took its influence peddling across the globe: the Philippines, Vietnam, Iran, Guatemala, Chile, Cuba, Angola, Laos and most recently Nicaragua.

"The record of CIA intervention is dismal, with no clear successes and many disastrous failures," said Amos Yoder, UI political science professor and an organizer of the Borah conference.

This year's symposium zeroed in on CIA intervention in Latin America, with emphasis on Chile and Nicaragua.

The seven panelists, including former CIA operatives, Latin Americans and political analysts, raised a long list of questions. Few were answered.

Does U.S. support for the 10,000 troops fighting Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government constitute international terrorism?

Did the CIA engineer the overthrow and death of Chile's Allende in September 1973? What did the United States stand to gain by deposing Allende and installing Gen. Augusto Pinochet?

Does continued use of the CIA for intervention weaken this country's moral and political position abroad, and stimulate retaliation?

Should there not be more explicit legislation to control the CIA — to, as one participant said, "put a leash on the dirty tricks?"

William Colby, director of the CIA from 1973 to 1976, provided the defense of covert operations abroad.

"The CIA," Colby said, "enables our leaders to make foreign policy and defense decisions on the basis of knowledge rather than in the haze of ignorance and suspicion."

Jaime Barrios, a Chilean exile now living in New York City, provided the indictment.

The CIA-backed government in his native country has created "an economic wasteland ruled by coercion, intimidation and terror," Barrios said.

"The United States has robbed a whole generation of Chileans of the opportunity to determine their own destiny," he said. "La CIA has few friends in Chile."

The trouble started, Barrios said, when Allende won Chile's 1970 presidential election with 36 percent of the vote.

Nixon was incensed. Allende, said Nixon, was another Castro.

"During the two months following Allende's election, the CIA planted 1,000 articles in the Chilean press describing the horrors of socialist rule," Barrios said.

"Nixon funneled \$10 million into the operation, telling the CIA to assassinate Allende if all else failed," he said. "But on Nov. 4, 1970, Allende was installed by the Chilean congress."

The CIA, however, did not give up its campaign to destabilize Chile's left-wing government. Over the next three years, \$8 million in American money went into CIA operations in Chile.

Colby said the money went to the country's moderate political parties — those that supported trade unions and a free press.

"We were looking toward the elections of 1976," he said. "We rather hoped the centrist forces could recover their power. That effort, however, was pre-empted by the military coup of September 1973."

Barrios described a more nefarious involvement.

"I don't believe a word Mr. Colby has said," he told one Borah session. "The lies, misinformation and sabotage engineered by your CIA undermined Latin America's oldest democracy."

The September coup left as many as 20,000 Chileans dead and many thousands more in exile. Allende was killed at the presidential palace. Pinochet was installed as dictator.

"Chile under the junta has suffered a long tableau of human rights violations and total social control," Barrios said. "Pinochet says destiny gave him his job. I say the CIA gave him his job."

And the CIA will continue doling out control of Latin American countries as long as it is the covert arm of the president's foreign policy advisers, said Ralph McGehee, a retired CIA operative and critic of agency policies.

"The agency's task is to develop an international anti-communist ideology," McGehee said. "The CIA then links every egalitarian political movement to the scourge of international communism."

"As with Guatemala in 1954, the CIA starts covert actions by dragging a red herring across the trail. The Soviets are coming, the Soviets are coming."

"A Soviet threat somehow justifies all that follows."

"All that follows" includes assassination of foreign chiefs of state, the murder of thousands of suspected Viet Cong in South Vietnam and the current offensive in Nicaragua.

"What you're forgetting, though," Colby told McGehee, "is that this isn't a black-hat-white-hat situation."

"Let's look at the real facts," Colby said. "Mr. Allende was deposed because he tried to impose socialism on a well-established Chilean middle class."

"The military overthrew Allende, not the CIA."

"There also was a very close relationship between Mr. Allende and Mr. Castro. Castro planned to set

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up a training base for the expansion of his revolution in Chile."

Barrios fired back: "For the United States to spend even \$1 intruding into Chilean affairs is inexcusable."

Now there is the revolt in leftist Nicaragua — denounced as a CIA plot by Manuel Cordero, Nicaragua's deputy ambassador to the United States.

Operating out of neighboring Honduras and financed by the CIA, anti-Sandinista rebels have destroyed Nicaragua's only oil refinery, killed 1,500 people and left \$150 million in property damage, according to Cordero.

"The CIA's stated objectives are to attack Cuban facilities in Nicaragua," Cordero said. "The problem is, there are no Cuban facilities."

Asked Birns, "Isn't it true, though, that there are Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua?"

"Yes," said Cordero.

"How many?" Birns asked.

"It is against our policy to release any numbers," Cordero said. "Cuba reports sending 200 advisers to Nicaragua."

"Well, that's a lie for sure," Birns said.

"All we want," Cordero said, "is to be left alone — to work on rebuilding our economy and building a new political structure."

The U.S. government obviously sees the situation differently, said Colby.

But he no longer works for the CIA and has no information on current operations. And the agency refused to send a representative to the symposium.

Still, none of the panelists blamed the agency itself for the muddled history of covert intervention abroad.

"No one blames the technicians," said Birns. "But we do blame the presidents and cabinet secretaries. We blame them, but I'm not sure we can stop them."
