

Sparing the home front from CIA manipulations

By Pat M. Holt

THERE is commotion again in academia — this time at Harvard — about the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The question is how far a university should allow its faculty to go in doing research or other work for the intelligence community.

Harvard should not be discouraged from periodically reexamining its purity, but the problem is broader and deeper. It is how to focus the CIA's attention abroad and keep it out of the United States.

When the CIA was created in 1947, Congress thought it disposed of that problem by flatly prohibiting the agency from engaging in any domestic activities. In retrospect, that seems like a burst of naiveté. We have since learned things are not that simple. Even with good faith on all sides, there are many gray areas — and many shades of gray.

There are many reasons for keeping the CIA out of our domestic affairs, but the one that concerns us here is that it should not be allowed to manipulate, or otherwise influence, public opinion and the political process.

Congress had the same fear when it created the United States Information Agency (USIA). That agency is also prohibited from doing in the US what it does abroad. Not many presidents would be able to resist the temptation to turn the USIA or CIA loose in campaigns to build domestic political support for presidential policies.

In one of the Harvard instances, the CIA paid a professor \$107,430 to write a book on Saudi Arabia. There were two conditions. The payment was not to be revealed (except presumably to the Internal Revenue Service), and the CIA got to clear the book in advance. One wonders how many books on Saudi Arabia have earned \$100,000 for their authors. This one may have set a record.

Whether the professor should have done it is a matter for him and Harvard. What is important from the point of view of public policy is that clearly the CIA should not have done it. The book has been published by the prestigious Harvard University Press. It will be consulted by scholars and others, none of whom would have known (except for a fortuitous leak) that it was secretly paid for and approved by the CIA. No possible legitimate intelligence objective was thereby served.

The CIA might well argue that secrecy was indicated to avoid identifying the agency with the author's point of view, especially if he were critical of the Saudi government or its officials. This begs the question. This is something the CIA should not have done in any event. There are other agencies of the government (the National

Endowment for the Humanities, the Department of Education) properly in the business of subsidizing scholarship. It is a lame excuse to plead that the CIA has a great deal of money and the other agencies do not.

The CIA has a bad, and in many respects undeserved, reputation in academia. As its affair with Harvard demonstrates, it brings many of its troubles on itself. It has too many unavoidable problems to create unnecessary ones.

These difficulties are by no means confined to academia — or to the CIA, for that matter.

A number of years ago, a CIA official wrote an article on Vietnam for Foreign Affairs magazine. It was published under his real name, but he was not identified as working for the CIA. Did it matter whether he wrote it at home or at the office?

At one time or another, the CIA has subsidized various publications abroad. Sometimes articles in these foreign publications are innocently quoted in American publications as representing significant foreign opinion. All they represent is the opinion the CIA wants foreigners to hold.

When Salvador Allende's socialist regime in Chile was giving the Nixon administration sleepless nights, the CIA planted editorials and columns in newspapers throughout Latin America and elsewhere viewing Allende with frantic alarm. The cumulative effect was to make other Latin American opinion seem more anti-Allende than in fact it was.

One wonders if something similar is now going on with respect to Nicaragua and the "contras." People in Congress have charged that contra leaders have been supported, and even coached, in lobbying.

According to the widely respected magazine Aviation Week & Space Technology, the Defense Department is deliberately publicizing false information about certain weapons programs in an attempt to mislead the Soviet Union.

If the report is true, then the department is also misleading Americans, including those who, as members of Congress, appropriate money to pay for the weapons. There is a law against this. It is said there are guidelines whereby the truth goes to those who need to know. But who needs to know is determined by the Defense Department, and in any case the record does not inspire confidence in the department's candor.

Way back in the Kennedy administration, an assistant secretary of defense for public affairs (the official whose job ironically is to dispense public information) asserted the government's right to lie. Not many people are that forthright about it, but there are plenty who act as if they think it is all right to deceive. For those on the receiving end, there is not much difference.

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