

CIA: A Radical Change From Its Original Goals

By Robert J. Donovan

How did the CIA go wrong? How did it turn out to be radically different from what those who voted to establish it believed it would be? The answers to those questions will help shape whatever future restrictions are to be placed on the CIA.

The main cause of the miscarriage of the law creating the CIA was the cold war and the feeling it engendered that the end of achieving security against the supposed Soviet threat justified the means.

The law is the National Security Act of 1947, the principal purpose of which was not to create the CIA but to achieve the so-called unification of the armed services. The CIA was incidental to the larger goal of coordinating military policy and foreign policy.

Even so, members of the 80th Congress who voted for the act went out of their way to try to nail down the limits of the CIA's authority, and some of those old tigers would have been astounded at the things the CIA has done at home and abroad since the legislation cleared Congress and was signed by President Truman July 26, 1947.

Incredible as later events were to be, however, a rereading of the 1947 hearings almost suggests that the legislators of a generation ago instinctively feared what the CIA might get into.

Rep. Clarence J. Brown (R-Ohio) said that while he wanted the country to have the finest intelligence service, he did not wish the President—any President—"to have a Gestapo of his own." He inquired at a hearing whether the proposed CIA "might possibly affect the rights and privileges of the people of the United States."

"No, sir," replied Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, director of Central In-

telligence under a previous interim intelligence establishment. "I do not think there is anything in the bill, since it is all foreign intelligence, that can possibly affect any of the privileges of the people of the United States."

Officials of the Truman administration recognized the concern in Congress that a new-fangled operation with dangerous implications for a democracy might be in the making.

James V. Forrestal, then secretary of the Navy, assured a House committee: "The purposes of the Central Intelligence [Agency] are limited definitely to purposes outside of this country, except the collation of information gathered by other government agencies."

"Collation" was a clue to understanding what was being asked of Congress. The CIA was to be an organization for centrally gathering and coordinating information. The CIA was to collect, evaluate, estimate. There was only a passing hint—and that from Allen Dulles, later a director of Central Intelligence—that the CIA would conduct operations intended not to report on events that had happened, but to do things—such as pour money into Chile in a covert operation—to cause them to happen.

On Feb. 26, 1947, Truman submitted the National Security Act to Congress as a permanent arrangement for unifying the armed forces and coordinating military policy and foreign policy. Under the draft legislation that he recommended, the CIA would be established to replace the makeshift Central Intelligence Group. The CIA would be under the proposed new National Security Council, also included in the act.

In his letter of transmittal, Truman dwelt on military unification and did not even mention the CIA, let alone "dirty tricks," as the covert overseas operations came to be called.

Truman's draft was bare of any details on the duties of the proposed

CIA and simply provided for the transfer to it of the functions, personnel, property and records of the CIA. When the House took up the question, however, it decided to spell out in the new law the functions to be assigned to the CIA so that a President could not alter them without first obtaining approval of Congress. The House accomplished this simply by picking up the language of Truman's 1946 directive establishing the CIA and, without essential change, applying it to the CIA.

Most of the terms thus adopted were unexceptional.

Two other descriptions of functions transferred from the old CIG directive, however, were to have quite exceptional implications. One of these was to "perform such other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting national security," as might be directed by higher authority. The other was to take responsibility for "protecting intelligence sources and methods" from unauthorized disclosure.

These abstract, open-ended provisions became part of the National Security Act of 1947 and eventually came to be taken in the government as justification for activities that would have astonished the 80th Congress that had inserted the clauses.

The clause authorizing the CIA to perform other duties and functions related to intelligence was the loophole through which the CIA engaged in political and paramilitary operations abroad. The authority to assume responsibility for protecting intelligence sources and methods became the loophole for domestic activities.

These abuses did not come about automatically. With cold war tensions growing dramatically worse, the Soviet Union shook Washington to its foundations in February, 1948, by seizing complete control of Czechoslovakia through a coup by the Czech Community Party.