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The born-again

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CIA

By Peter R. Kornbluh

IT is time for a new national debate on the propriety of CIA covert operations. The international uproar over the CIA mining of Nicaraguan ports, derailing the Reagan administration's effort to get \$21 million more from Congress for its clandestine war against the Sandinista government, has raised larger questions about the meaning of such activities for other governments, and our own: Do covert operations against foreign governments further U.S. national security interests? Does secret CIA intervention promote American values abroad? And, are these activities compatible with the democratic principles and ideals that serve as a foundation for American society?

These issues have been debated before. Ten years ago, in the wake of Watergate and Vietnam, press revelations that the CIA had conducted assassination missions against foreign leaders, illegally spied on American citizens, and engaged in the overthrow of the democratically elected government in Chile, ended the national quiescence on covert operations that the agency had enjoyed throughout its postwar history.

The Church committee

The secrecy on which CIA agents and policy-makers had depended to hide their activities from the American public was shattered; the dark side of U.S. foreign policy was exposed. "Covert action," the late Sen. Frank Church, who chaired the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence which examined the history of the CIA's cloak-and-dagger activities, later observed, was revealed to be "a semantic disguise for murder, coercion, blackmail, bribery, the spreading of lies, whatever is deemed useful in bending other countries to our will."

A new public awareness of this sordid realm of U.S. foreign policy led to a national re-evaluation of the CIA. In 1974, Congress established oversight committees to monitor and restrict future covert actions. Less than a year later Congress took an unprecedented step, voting to stop

CIA operations ordered by Henry Kissinger in Angola.

The CIA had fallen from grace. Its decline was symbolized by the Carter administration's prosecution of former agency director Richard Helms for lying under oath to a Senate subcommittee about CIA intervention in Chile. On Nov. 4, 1977, Helms became the first intelligence chief in American history to be convicted of perjury charges. "You now stand before this court in disgrace and shame" the judge told Helms, who had pleaded no contest.

But when President Reagan awarded Helms the National Security Medal for "exceptionally meritorious service" last October, he became a symbol of the CIA's resurgence under the Reagan administration. Indeed, "The Company" is back in business.

Under the Reagan administration, the CIA has expanded its operations around the globe. The agency's budget rose 25

percent in 1983 (as compared with the Pentagon's 18 percent), making it one of the fastest-growing major departments in the U.S. government. Some of that money is being used to recruit fresh blood into the ranks of covert operatives. "CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY . . . for those who want a different definition of SUCCESS," read prominently placed advertisements in major U.S. newspapers. These jobs offer "unique overseas assignments that challenge your every talent."

Among those assignments is Central America, where the agency has mounted its largest paramilitary war in more than a decade. "Special activities" — a euphemism favored by CIA director William J. Casey — also have been conducted in the Middle East and Africa. Casey is reported to be such an enthusiast for covert operations that he has secretly flown around the world to supervise his agents in action.

But if the CIA has been resurrected it has not been reformed. Up to its old dirty

Continued

Continued on Page 8C