

As We See It

U.S. Assassination Plots Abhorrent Use of Power

THE IDEA that assassination of foreign leaders would ever become an instrument of American policy is abhorrent.

But there it is finally, laid out in all the ugly details by the Senate Intelligence Committee. The government of the United States, at very high levels, made plans to murder the leaders of foreign countries with which we were not at war.

The facts, as the country has now learned them, contain some of the most terrible ironies.

For example, on the day that President Kennedy was killed in Dallas, the CIA was providing an agent in Cuba with apparatus to poison Fidel Castro. At the same time, an envoy from the late president was meeting with the Cuban premier in an attempt to improve Cuban-U.S. relations.

The excellent work of the Church committee shows that the breakdown of morality and the humanistic tradition within the American government knew no single political party or administration.

This report by the Senate committee may well mark a watershed in American history.

Reading the transcript, it is easier to understand how the scandalous abuses of Watergate could take place. Governments that would condone murder of foreign leaders easily slipped into criminal acts and abuses against American citizens.

The committee was unable to find that any president had directly ordered the assassination of any specific foreign leader. But what did take place was even more telling in showing the breakdown of morality within the U.S. government.

For example, the committee found that President Nixon had personally ordered that all steps be taken to prevent the late Salvador Allende Gossens from becoming president of Chile.

The CIA, which received that order directly, considered Gen. Rene Schneider Cherreau of Chile an obstacle to the White House

desire to prevent the election of Mr. Allende. The CIA took part in plans to kidnap the general and supplied arms to leaders of a planned coup in Chile. The general was kidnapped and killed, but not, according to the committee's findings, as a result of the CIA planning.

The point, however, is that time after time, an order by the White House to take care of a situation was construed by the CIA to include the authorization to use whatever means were possible—including assassination.

This trend was carried to the point, in the case of Premier Castro, of forming alliances between the CIA and the most criminal elements of the American gangster world.

Coupled with the abuses of Watergate, the illegalities of the FBI, the IRS and other government agencies, these revelations show the extent to which we have allowed our values to become compromised. Individual officials of the CIA and other government agencies were involved in these senseless assassination plots to be sure, but they believed mistakenly that they were carrying out policy in the name of national security.

It is true that much of this sordid business began in a different time and context, during the Cold War, when officials in the CIA and elsewhere felt it incumbent to counter the "dirty tricks" of our enemies.

But none of it has done us any good; our foreign policy has not been one iota more successful because of these assassination plots and would not have been had any of them been carried out.

What must be done now is for the Congress and the people to regain control of our institutions, for the Church committee's recommendations of new laws prohibiting such plots to be approved, and for the leaders of our government, present and future, to understand and prevent the dangerous threat to a free society implicit in such immoral deeds.