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The Unknowable CIA

CHRISTOPHER FELIX

FEBRUARY'S disclosures of secret subsidies by the CIA for the foreign activities of a wide range of private American organizations produced what Walter Lippmann accurately enough termed a "tremendous outcry." The *Washington Post* spoke of "disgust, dismay and distress...." The very tone of the news reports across the country reflected the conviction of reporters and editors that they were exposing something that definitely needed exposing. Mr. Lippmann himself, in three columns appearing on February 21, 23, and 28, made evident his own distaste for the "enormous deception," and his sympathy for what he called "a revulsion against the enormity of the corruption which has resulted from the cold war."

Mr. Lippmann's comments merited close attention. Although he found the subject "embarrassing and . . . disagreeable . . . to talk about," he nevertheless felt, in common with much of what was being said, that it is "so important that we cannot sweep it under the rug and try to forget about it."

Plainly, something was wrong. But Mr. Lippmann's analysis of the problem engenders more confusion than clarification. A careful study of the premises underlying his three articles leaves me convinced that they are largely unprovable and possibly irrelevant, and there is much

evidence to suggest that, together with his conclusions, they are quite simply mistaken.

In his column of February 23, Mr. Lippmann declared that "the root of the trouble" is the fact "that the Central Intelligence Agency has been used for much more than genuine intelligence work. It has been used as a propaganda agency, as a superior diplomatic foreign service, as an agency for clandestine intervention in foreign countries. The breadth of the CIA's authorized activities has not only generated the cloud of suspicion over American action abroad but it has spoiled the CIA as an intelligence agency here at home."

If one can accept this diagnosis, Mr. Lippmann's prescription follows logically. "There will be and there can be no solution to the problem," he wrote, ". . . unless there is a surgical operation which separates true intelligence work from the whole clutter of other activities. An intelligence agency should deal with espionage, research and analysis. The other activities, propaganda, intervention and dirty tricks, should not be in the intelligence agency."

The Second Oldest Profession.

The problem of the association—or disassociation—of secret political operations and intelligence is not, as Mr. Lippmann seems to suggest,

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a new one. Nor is it specifically an solely American. For the past century or more it has occupied many hundreds of competent minds, not only perceptive in the ways of power but responsible in some measure for its exercise in many lands.

Prior to that, the two functions were associated in a single person—an ambassador—and were an integral feature of diplomacy and the international scene. Don Bernardino de Mendoza, ambassador of King Philip II of Spain and Portugal at the court of King Henri III of France during the years of the great English-Spanish rivalry, did not restrict himself, for example, to reporting to his royal master the gleanings of his extensive espionage network on French military capabilities and dispositions and the development of French policy. He naturally assumed that it was also his duty to influence that development in such a way that the French tendency to come to the aid of England would not materialize. To that end he intrigued with the Duc de Guise, he bribed the Queen Mother, he spent time and money on the French petty nobles and merchants whose sympathies counted, and he secretly subsidized the organizers and instigators of the Parisian anti-Protestant mobs that in the end would defeat the King. He was thus able to immobilize France at the desired critical moment. He was in his day a very good ambassador. Neither he nor his many successors on the world diplomatic stage up to recent times—including some of the American Founding Fathers—felt obliged to separate their “genuine intelligence” functions from their secret political activities.

What has happened over the past century or more has been the gradual administrative separation of these two functions from professional diplomacy—for reasons as much sociological and technological as philosophical or moral. (There was, of course, the dubious contribution of “open covenants, openly arrived at,” which has complicated but not changed matters.) But what has been altered in this process are only the terms, and not at all the basic problems, of international intercourse, for the two functions correspond to compelling realities in

the responsible conduct of a nation's affairs.

The extent to which they may supplement modern diplomatic practice is determined, as it always has been, by the particularities of conflict in international relations and not the other way round. Russia's years of covert subversion of western governments and societies—to take an obvious example—was no more the reason for the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 than it was for the alliance of the United States and Great Britain with the Soviet Union against Germany.

That the United States, for obvious historical reasons, was finally confronted only in this century with the need to integrate these functions within its own government does not obviate the fact that they have nowhere ever ceased to exist. To dismiss them as mere manifes-



tations of “the corruption which has resulted from the cold war” with Russia during the past twenty years is not merely imprudent; it is to ignore the breadth of geography and the length of history.

THE PROBLEM, then, for which Mr. Lippmann offers a ready solution is really the technical one of where to house and how to administer these two functions.

When the CIA was established in 1947, it was limited operationally to secret intelligence and to “such other functions and duties related to intelligence” as the National Security Council might direct. By the following year the need for an agency for secret political operations was already felt; in the absence of one, such operations were constantly having to be improvised in the State Department and our em-

bassies. The decision then taken to house the two functions within the CIA followed an examination of the alternatives available, of the experience of other nations, and of the demands of U.S. law and custom. It is, of course, open to question whether this decision is still valid twenty years later. Mr. Lippmann has in effect concluded that it is not.

The “prime example” that Mr. Lippmann adduces for this conclusion is the Bay of Pigs fiasco, which he attributes to the fact that the same men “who were running the invasion had also to advise the President on its prospects.” The point is debatable at best. Besides ignoring, among other vital elements in the Cuban affair, a singular operational laxity, political incompetence, and a high-handed disregard for the classic principles of cover, the same point may be used to argue that the two functions were merely integrated too far down in the CIA bureaucracy.

Mr. Lippmann thus ignores a cardinal point that had a compelling influence on the decision referred to above—namely, the fact that the two functions of secret intelligence and secret political action are to a very large extent inextricable.

One of the rarities in that “genuine” intelligence whose necessity Mr. Lippmann concedes is an operation devoid of political connections or significance. When, after the Second World War, the U.S. government, first through the Army and later through the CIA, engaged in a working arrangement in Germany with the former Nazi intelligence chief on the Eastern Front, General Reinhard Gehlen, there may have been those on the U.S. side who considered this a “genuine” intelligence operation with no political implications. General Gehlen and his staff knew otherwise. They had succeeded where all the rest of the German political and military hierarchy had failed: they had brought about cooperative Allied and German action against the Russians. The achievement may be interpreted as one wishes; it remains a political fact.

Similarly, there is no political operation conceivable, whether it be a simple secret subsidy or a full-scale effort to overthrow a hostile government, that does not produce

"true" intelligence—usually in accordance. Whatever the form or scale of the operation, it is a connection with the adversary. Quite apart from the success or failure of the political objectives, it must be followed closely for its intelligence content—for what it reveals of the adversary's actions, techniques, interests, resources, and intent. (To conclude from this that U.S. students subsidized to attend an international youth congress must be trained as "spies," or even be used unwittingly as such, is fallacious: there are very considerable differences between the conduct of political operations and espionage.) As policy must deal with the political implications and consequences of intelligence operations, so intelligence is intimately concerned with the inevitable by-products of political operations.

THERE is thus a community of interests that accounts for the intimate association of the two types of secret operations. But there is a conflict of interest between them, too, that, however paradoxically, also suggests their inseparability. In 1947, for example, a purely political view of the arrangements made with General Gehlen would have held them to be highly questionable, if not self-defeating. (A purely moral view would, no doubt, have judged them reprehensible.) But from an intelligence standpoint, in view of the vastly outnumbered and inadequately informed U.S. forces in Central Europe, the arrangement was not only justifiable but necessary. When conflicts of interest of this kind occur, as they do constantly, decisions must be made. Once made, they must be followed. While it is possible for these decisions to be made by an interdepartmental committee, it is manifestly impossible for such a committee to execute them.

The fact is that even within a single agency there is no ideal solution to the conflict of interests between the two functions, and this being the case, their highly sensitive relationship to diplomacy dictates their association under one roof. Both types of operations are, in effect, a kind of vanguard of diplomacy, reflecting the underlying realities of international relations

sometimes well in advance of their translation into current news. The establishment by French Intelligence, for example, of a special unit for the surveillance of Americans long antedated President de Gaulle's expulsion of Allied forces from France. Similarly in 1965, the tacit Soviet co-operation with western secret services to try to prevent Zanzibar from falling under Chinese influence (both western and Soviet influence on the island had been declining since the 1964 revolution) came before the open clash of Rus-



sian and Chinese interests over Vietnam. In sum, both secret intelligence and secret political action continue to be related intimately—and universally—to the conduct of foreign affairs. If there are still American ambassadors who do not know this, their numbers are dwindling.

A Confusion of Categories

The separation of secret political operations from "genuine intelligence" was only the first part of Mr. Lippmann's solution. The second part, although it was foreshadowed in the first two columns, became explicit only in the final article on February 28. It was to do away with secret political operations.

"Secret propaganda would be abolished," Mr. Lippmann wrote on

February 23. "In the rare cases where intervention was a vital necessity," he added somewhat offhandedly of a very complex business, "it could be set up secretly enough in the Defense Department." He concluded: "As to the dirty tricks," a pejorative term he has favored for a decade and a half, "like bribing a politician somewhere abroad, the American republic will survive if such dirty tricks are not performed."

Setting aside the oddity of Mr. Lippmann's choice of the Defense Department to handle political intervention (in the event of a separation of the two functions, surely it is "genuine intelligence" and not political intervention that should be assigned to the Pentagon), the real significance of his solution lies in his complete misunderstanding of the nature of secret political operations.

Mr. Lippmann's three categories—secret propaganda, intervention, and "dirty tricks"—are more rhetorical than real. If they are meant seriously, they are an astounding oversimplification, amounting to a parody of the reality. His charged and contemptuous phrase "bribing a politician somewhere abroad" is a case in point: it reveals that Mr. Lippmann has never been in close proximity with the frequently delicate and sometimes rending complexities of political life "somewhere abroad." It also underscores, ungenerously, a risk that unfortunately too often accompanies foreign co-operation with American interests: in times of peril the guide is a stalwart hero and friend; but once the danger has vanished, he becomes a menial who was bought. One wonders in which of his three categories Mr. Lippmann would place the CIA's secret subsidy of summer camps for children in a part of the world where, as it happened, they played a valuable political role?

The point is certainly not that secret political operations are eleemosynary undertakings. It is that they are as varied as the interests of diplomacy itself and are an integral part of the full range of diplomatic action. Their secrecy is not arbitrary, but the result of a tacit understanding between the practitioners of international politics. They are, for the most part, con-

ceived under the authority of Prime Ministers and Presidents as a means of avoiding precisely those open confrontations in which "intervention," overt or covert, sadly becomes "a vital necessity." If Mr. Lippmann's prescriptions were fulfilled, their reappearance on the American scene—but with far less co-ordination and control—would be only a matter of time.

In support of his proposal to abolish secret political operations, Mr. Lippmann presented a further argument. "The question before us today," he wrote in his final article, "is whether the activities of the CIA which are outside genuine intelligence, that is to say its black propaganda, its interventionist operations, its 'dirty tricks,' are truly in the national interest." Mr. Lippmann answered that they are "self-defeating."

This conclusion, and all that flows logically from it, rests on a premise central to Mr. Lippmann's whole approach. "I venture to argue," he continued, "that black propaganda, secret interventions, intrigue and subordination are incompatible with our own society. They are the methods of a totalitarian state and without a totalitarian environment of secrecy and terror, they are unworkable."

This is a vast premise. To some extent, its validity rests on accepting the charged language. (Does "intrigue" really mark a state as "totalitarian"?) For the rest, it depends on brushing aside the fact just noted that, whatever their variants and however spare their use, such operations are a common feature of relations between states. To ignore this fact is to evoke an unreal world exclusively divided between the vice of totalitarianism and the virtue of "our open society." The Israeli kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann from the territory of a friendly sovereign state did nothing to advance the cause of international law; but did it really make of Israel a "totalitarian state"? Are we to believe that, because some of our oldest, best, and most civilized allies also have regular and not infrequently successful recourse to these techniques, the lives of their citizens are really passed in an "environment of secrecy and terror"?

As a sweeping generalization, Mr. Lippmann has obliterated all distinctions between power achieved and expressed by brutality, which is totalitarian, and the responsible exercise in secrecy of duly bestowed and delegated authority, which is not.

As We Are—or Were?

An analysis of Mr. Lippmann's reasoning shows it to bear a marked resemblance to the familiar doctrine of Original American Virtue. With evident satisfaction, Mr. Lippmann pointed out on February 21 that "The noises you hear around the CIA," meaning, of course, the public clamor of outrage and denunciation, are the accompaniment of a process in which "the older and more permanent features of the American scene are reappearing." These features were not specified. But in the context it is clear that they were obscured after the CIA was authorized to engage in secret political operations, and that they were not so obscured before that. The language used to contrast the two periods ("the enormous deception" as against "we are ourselves again") reveals Mr. Lippmann's major premise to be that, in our international conduct, we have fallen from the moral heights which are our more normal habitat.

It is true that popular tradition tends, in retrospect, to endow American statesmen of earlier generations with the aura of a certain rectitude. It is said, for example, that Henry L. Stimson, confronted as Secretary of State in 1929 with the fruits of a code-breaking operation, refused to read "other people's mail." But there is a legitimate question whether this apparent rectitude was also real, or whether, even if real enough in a period of limited U.S. involvement abroad, it can in fact be characterized as one of the "permanent features of the American scene." We know that from 1940 onward, as Secretary of War, Mr. Stimson was brilliantly served by and grateful for his access to "other people's mail."

Mr. Lippmann makes a partial allowance for the necessity "to fight fire with fire," and for the claim that "we were then at war and that all is fair...." etc. (Only partial, for

he declares that the present events "show that something is wrong with the argument.") Presumably, this argument would cover the secret connivance of the French poet and playwright Beaumarchais, the French government, the American Continental Congress, and its agents Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane in the false trading firm of Hortalez & Cie, to whose efforts the American victory at Saratoga was due. And since we are concerned here with the moral aspect, what are we to make of the subsequent refusal of Congress for more than half a century to reimburse the heirs of Beaumarchais for his considerable out-of-pocket expenses? Above all, what are we to make of our promotion of the Panamanian Revolution of 1903, and the role therein of the New York law firm of Sullivan & Cronwell, which acted on behalf both of its client, the French canal company, and of the U.S. government—then without a CIA?

HEWING CLOSELY to his insistence on moral significance, Mr. Lippmann also wrote that "the United States government has compromised professions and institutions on whose purity the hope of American freedom depends." The validity of this statement depends in part on the acceptance of a notion peculiarly American: It is that a nation is composed not of the people and their government but of the people against their government. Many other peoples are just as assiduous as Americans in guarding against encroachments by government on their liberties, but few among them would give serious allegiance to the recent declaration by the newly elected governor of California—"Government is still the greatest threat to freedom in our lives."

There are other questions as well. Is the financial association of private organizations and professions with government—particularly for limited purposes, and even if hidden—really impure? And is it really on the "purity" of these institutions and professions that "the hope of American freedom depends"?

In this connection Mr. Lippmann notes: "If the students and professors went abroad openly on government expense accounts, neutral

opinion abroad would no longer have treated them as free men and as essentially different from the paid agents of tyranny." Actually, if this were true, the reason might rather lie in the fact that we have so insistently proclaimed that it is true. British lecturers traveling under the auspices of the government-supported British Council are not in fact dismissed by audiences abroad, neutral or other, as "paid agents of tyranny" or their equivalent. If Russian, Chinese, Bulgarian, or perhaps even Fionosan delegates to a student conference are regarded as such by their audience, the fact that their expenses are paid by their governments is the least of the reasons leading to that conclusion. The element of secrecy adds little to the equation. Was "The Beautiful Blue Danube" musically impure and its composer a "paid agent of tyranny" because—as Dominique Aulcères recently reminded the readers of *Le Figaro*—its first great success, which occurred in Paris exactly one hundred years ago, was part of a secret arrangement between the Austrian embassy and the editor of *Le Figaro* to popularize a Franco-Austrian alliance against Prussia?

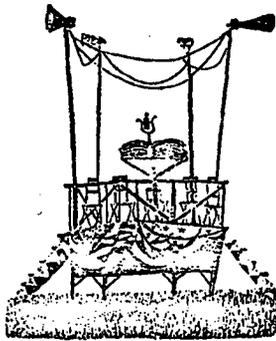
It seems to me that purity is a concept of doubtful utility in human affairs, and that integrity, which is both real and attainable, is more to the point. An intellectual may abandon his purity in accepting money from his government, if that is the locally prevailing ethos. But he does not thereby have to sacrifice his integrity. All depends on the man. An intellectual whose integrity cannot withstand the assault of a government check will in all likelihood be unable to preserve it in the face of the blandishments of almost any affluent advertiser.

The Domino Effect

A major weakness of the moral approach to these matters is that it blocks off more pertinent avenues of inquiry as to what went wrong. Mr. Lippmann opined (one might almost say exulted), "As we are ourselves again it becomes self-evident that we cannot play international games as if we were a totalitarian society. For the men who carried out the operation [the National Student Association subsidies]—as good

men as we have—were not capable of enough deviousness to deceive everyone and enough terrorism to suppress all doubt." Perhaps. But a number of other possibilities suggest themselves.

Contrary to what Mr. Lippmann believes, the success of secret political operations abroad (even those of totalitarian states, if they are not to be "self-defeating") does not depend on "terrorism." It depends, among other things, on ingenuity and thoroughness in devising cover, which properly should embrace even the possibility of disclosure. As it happens, many persons familiar with such matters have for years viewed with alarm the fragility and sloppiness of the funding arrangements for just those operations which have lately been uncovered. As a British observer commented,



"A persistent problem with CIA operations is that not enough thought is given to what might happen when they are exposed."

Anyone familiar with the personalities involved will fully endorse Mr. Lippmann's characterization of Richard Helms as "an admirable director of the CIA." He might even agree in general that Helms's subordinates are "as good men as we have." But this does not exclude the possibility of those subordinate rivalries, even vendettas, which flourish in any bureaucracy. Are we entitled to conclude that the rapid sequence of disclosures of other operations following on that concerning the National Student Association was entirely due to an automatic domino effect? There are

precedents for speculating about the ramifications of rivalry within the CIA.

There is also the question whether these operations were allowed to drag on, with their flimsy cover arrangements, past their need or usefulness. (Some years ago, the initiator of these operations, now dead, surveying their flourishing growth, remarked sadly, "And to think that we set these up as emergency operations.") However, there are two sides to the question: a number of the operations exposed in February were in fact terminated at various times during preceding years. But the absorption in moral problems allows neither side to be intelligently considered.

A FINAL DIFFICULTY with Mr. Lippmann's hoisting the banner of Original American Virtue in the present case is that, being essentially offensive to others as well as somewhat shakily grounded, it invites impolite and often unanswerable rejoinders. In contrasting the relatively bland reception accorded the New York *Times*'s April, 1966, series of articles on the CIA and the reaction to the recent less systematic exposures, Mr. Lippmann found the explanation in "the Big Thaw, which has been under way in Europe for several years, and has now reached America." Where panic and fear do not prevail, he declared, "the old and real character of the people will not stay suppressed. This is one of the characteristics of a people who have been habituated to freedom so long that it is part of their very nature."

The response was soon forthcoming. The Parisian weekly *L'Express*, which normally quotes Mr. Lippmann with mixed glee and respect on the subject of Vietnam, and which has been one of the leading critics of the involvement of the French intelligence service in the Ben Barka affair, took note in its February 27 issue of Mr. Lippmann's analysis. "And suddenly," scoffed *L'Express*, "the danger past, this puritan and democratic country is indignant over the impurities to which until now it preferred to close its eyes. America henceforth feels itself sufficiently secure to have, once again, clean hands."