

Gangsters in power; lawbreakers making rules

By Carla Binion

"You got gangsters in power and lawbreakers making rules./
When you gonna wake up and strengthen the things that remain?"
Bob Dylan

November 18, 1999 | CIA operative James Jesus Angelton was asked by a Senate investigating committee in the 1970s why the CIA had defied a direct presidential order to destroy the agency's cache of poisons and biochemical weapons. Angelton said, "It is inconceivable that a secret arm of the government has to comply with all the overt orders of the government." (1)

Did the framers of the Constitution intend that a secret arm of the government, unaccountable to any authority but itself, would someday take power in this country? Did the Constitution's creators have in mind that this secret arm of government would someday wage covert wars, funded without lawful appropriation, without Congress's consent (an action expressly forbidden in the Constitution)?

Ronald Reagan's foreign policy thrived on covert action. Congress had cut off funding for the CIA's Central American war. Oliver North then funded a private army, a secret arm of the government, with gun sales. He stockpiled arms and shipped them to the Contras and to a sworn U. S. enemy, Iran, in defiance of U. S. law.

The CIA's director of covert action, Clair George, said that kind of secret operation is "a business that works outside the law... a business that is very hard to define by legal terms because we are not working within the American legal system." (2) Let's see, who else operates outside the legal system -- the Mafia, gangsters, organized crime in general? Even Secretary of State George Schultz told Reagan it would be "an impeachable offense" to try to get money for the Contras from other countries after Congress refused to provide the funds. (3)

Reagan didn't listen to Schultz. Instead he went on to finance his secret war by cutting deals with dictators and selling weapons to a foreign enemy. On June 30, 1985, Reagan said Iran was part of "a confederation of terrorist states ... a new international version of Murder Incorporated." On January 17, 1986, Reagan wrote in his diary: "I agreed to sell TOWs [tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided antitank missiles] to Iran." (4) Reagan's "Murder Incorporated" reference showed he thought he was dealing with a "mob" flavored confederation.

When Reagan came to power in 1981, the CIA's budget doubled, and covert action increased. By 1986, two congressional committees (successors to the Church and Pike committees) found that the Reagan administration had evaded and ignored the intelligence reforms enacted since the

1970s. The committees found that Reagan had lied to the overseers. (5) However, the CIA has operated as a secret arm of the government before and since the Reagan administration.

The Church and Pike committees in the 1970s found that CIA operatives had defied their own charter by spying on Americans. The committees also found that the CIA had conducted illegal drug experiments on U. S. citizens and that one scientist had killed himself because the CIA put LSD into his drink. The Church committee revealed that the CIA had placed the names of 1.5 million potentially "subversive" Americans into a computer database; that the CIA had opened files on over 7,000 Americans during its domestic spying operation; that the CIA and FBI together had opened 380,000 letters. (6) The CIA domestic spying was an effort to subvert legitimate political dissent and suppress legitimate political expression among Americans.

The CIA justifies its covert, often bloody, operations by claiming they promote democracy or help "stabilize" the world. The New York Times reported in November, 1992, that between 1986 and 1991, the CIA was secretly spending about \$1 million a year arming and training a military intelligence network in Haiti. Congress had moved to cut off U. S. military aid because of human rights abuses by Haiti's military government. (7)

Three heads of the CIA-funded intelligence service in Haiti worked to block the return to power of the Rev. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's democratically elected president. If CIA-backed wars support "democracy," why did this one involve human rights abuses and the overthrow of a democratically elected leader?

CIA efforts to subvert Chile's democratically elected president Salvador Allende involved the same tactics. The Agency's long history of destabilizing democratic leaders and installing dictators belies its claim that it promotes democracy. Its record of sponsoring proxy wars and revolutions belies its claim it promotes world stability.

We need a new vision for national and world security. Bill Greider, National Editor at Rolling Stone magazine, formerly with the Washington Post, says we need foreign policy leaders who accept the fact that playing global cop and "scurrying from one bonfire to another" is not in America's long-term interest. That kind of behavior, says Greider, sets us up to collect resentment and enemies around the world, inviting "a moment of miscalculation" when America gets "scapegoated as the arrogant bully." (8)

A CIA that continually makes the world an offer it can't refuse engenders distrust at home as well as abroad. The operatives of the secret arm of the government, the CIA, are shortsighted. Jefferson, Franklin and the other creators of the Constitution were not. They knew any lasting form of government, one with any modicum of respect for its people, would have to be founded on checks and balances, the rule of law, and accountable leaders. The system the founders had in mind wasn't "Utopian" or perfect, but it was preferable to the Mafia-like free for all created by the secret arm of the government, the CIA.

Bob Dylan once wrote the lyric: "You got gangsters in power and lawbreakers making rules./ When you gonna wake up and strengthen the things that remain?" Good question, Bob.

Notes:

- (1) Church Committee hearings, Vol. 2, p. 72, September 23, 1975.
- (2) Clair George's testimony in closed session of the Iran-contra committees, Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair, Appendix B, Vol 12, pp. 1-164 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988).
- (3) Tim Weiner, BLANK CHECK; The minutes of the June 25, 1984 meeting at which Schultz delivered his warning as reproduced by the Iran-contra committees.
- (4) Weiner, BLANK CHECK
- (5) Kathryn S. Olmstead, CHALLENGING THE SECRET GOVERNMENT, 1996; U. S. Senate and House Select Committee Reports.
- (6) Ibid.
- (7) Weiner, Engelberg and French, "CIA Formed Haitian Unit Tied to Narcotics Trade," New York Times, November 14, 1992).
- (8) William Greider, FORTRESS AMERICA, 1998.

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