

Books

“Administration” and the Death of Politics

W. R. Campbell

It is no special surprise that the vile practice of American politics during the last decade extended to attempts to gag the news media. There have been many efforts to prevent the publication of events which might compromise what politicians, insensitive to the irony of what they say, like to call the “integrity” of government. The books under review, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* by Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks (Knopf; 398 + xxi pp.; \$8.95), *None of Your Business: Government Secrecy in America*, edited by Norman Dorsen and Stephen Gillers (Viking; 362 pp.; \$12.50), and *The Mask of State: Watergate Portraits* by Mary McCarty (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 165 pp.; \$6.95), all deal with lying, deception, and leaks in connection with government activities.

Very few scholars, and no politician I know of, have come so close to stating what I think is at the base of U.S. covert activities as Richard Cottam did in his *Competitive Interference: Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (1967). Behind covert action the following system of beliefs can be detected; for the theorists of such actions these beliefs make them imperative.

At base is a widespread belief that a democratic society and its political processes are to be equated with the absence of comprehensive and intensive organization. Such organization strikes the American psyche as “socialist” and/or “totalitarian.” It is, in short, hostile to what is meant by freedom. Thus, it is believed, the American predicament is that we either must anticipate threats to our democracy while they are still “distant” so that they can be managed by the sorts of power readily available to a democratic government; or, in order to convince the public of the necessity of a policy, a threat must be allowed to evolve into an obvious menace. In that case the government can depend upon the general support of the people for policies equal to the given threat. The problem is that when a threat becomes so obvious, fundamental changes may be required in the way the society is organized or thinks about itself so that sufficient power is made avail-

able to meet it. This brings us to another central belief: organization is somehow equivalent to power.

In reading American “theorists” of international relations it is evident that U.S. behavior just prior to entering World War II provides the classic instance of gaining popular support for policy by allowing (especially with regard to the Japanese) a threat to expand into obviousness. The common estimate is that the lead-time required for reorganizing American society caused, in that instance, a theoretically unnecessary loss of life and, all things considered, allowed trends to become practically irreversible. With the development of modern technology, the lead-time a society has to reorganize itself for war has been cut to practically zero. This seems to leave policy-makers with several imperatives.

Given our commitment to democratic values, our society cannot be effectively organized for war. Yet effectively organized for war it must be. This paradox is resolved in part by virtue of the technological nature of modern warfare. The deployment of technology, as we learned in Vietnam, is not the same as the deployment of men. The political consequences of the two measures are quite different. Thus, at least with respect to a technologically commensurate enemy, it is possible to “depoliticize” the waging of war. Vietnam has been rightly called the “administration’s” way with war. When President Johnson, because of his imminent commitment of large-scale forces to Southeast Asia, needed to transform Vietnam into a people’s war, to nationalize it as it were, our activities in Nam had to be politicized. So he invented Tonkin. Still, Johnson only nominally politicized Vietnam after Tonkin. He continued to finance it apolitically; that is, he did not directly tax the American people, but allowed inflation to pay for the war. Administrators since Eisenhower have generally used inflation to pay for the defense establishment, so that the constant waging of war does not become a dramatic political issue. In the case of the CIA a significant part of its operating budget derives from its often very profitable “proprietaries.”

Given the technological orientation of our post-World War II defense establishment, its natural targets are countries capable of comparable development. Given the historical evolution of cold war mentality, however, we have to deal with countries like Vietnam. From this emerge the Special Forces, mercenaries, Air America, and other paramilitary units. John Kennedy established the Green Berets as an élite strike force *loyal to the President*. Kennedy’s advisors—just reread the essays cranked out by RAND in the late fifties and early sixties, and the Pentagon Papers—argued that in those countries

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not "covered" by our technologically oriented defense establishment trends might develop requiring a large-scale commitment of American troops, thus politicizing the waging of war. The answer was to monitor and nip such incipient developments in the bud. Such thinking produced a covert defense establishment. The establishment, organized in the Oval Office, was rationalized as being necessary to maintain democratic values.

To the degree that the defense of the country is located in the office of the President, Presidents will deceive the public about covert operations. They do this not merely to maintain the cover of such operations but to protect "society" against the "politicization" which could make it necessary to compromise the very values which "justify" covert operations in the first place. Many such operations are peculiarly subject to "moralizing" and thus to sharp polarization of the society.

The people in charge of covert operations try to convince the public that their activities were and are responsive to, not the cause of, the problems of international relations. I, for one, do not believe them for a moment. I remember, for example, that while Dean Rusk was the author of the domino theory, he did not produce it in connection with Southeast Asia but way back in the late 1940's when he was working with Loy Henderson against the prospective birth of Israel. His expectation was that the birth of Israel would so alienate the Arabs that avenues would successively be opened for Soviet penetration of the Middle East.

Hannah Arendt has made much of the fact that the foreign policy theorist—at least as presented in the Pentagon Papers—made little or no use of what has proved to be the very reliable intelligence available to policy-makers. Marchetti and Marks show the same behavior, in spades, on the part of the CIA's Clandestine Services. But perhaps such ignorance is inevitable. Theorists fear facts. For the theorist of foreign policy the abstraction is everything. To divine emergent negative trends and give battle—to give the devil his due—is their high devotion.

As Marchetti and Marks show, the most devout inevitably find themselves in the President's office. The President, we learn, is the head of a vast covert apparatus, the policies and actions of which are more often than not decided without the knowledge of, or even despite, the representatives of the American people. They show that Presidents have consistently and considerably expanded the powers and operations of the CIA—especially regarding the Clandestine Services and the Plans Directorate—by secret executive order, an option made available by the Congressional act which established the Agency.

In truth, the American people and their representatives do not know just what it is that the CIA has been mandated to do. Thus it became a practically

unencumbered instrument of the Presidential will. The fifth item in the Congressional act creating the entire national security system listed under the functions of the CIA is its duty to perform, under the direction of the National Security Council, "such other functions [besides the primary ones of *advising* the NSC on intelligence matters and *correlating* and *evaluating* intelligence related to national security] and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council may from time to time direct." On this slim base Presidents have authorized the CIA to engage in covert intelligence *gathering* and covert *operations*. Thus the NSC, chaired by the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, has, since the late 1950's, evolved procedures which provide continuing authorization for CIA operations at home and abroad. Today the Secretary of State is also NSC chairman. This makes for an especially dangerous mix, permitting direct access to the CIA by State and resulting in a reversal of primacy between the two institutions. One likely consequence is a further "depoliticization" of even our overt foreign policy.

Marchetti and Marks describe superbly the structure of this most responsive of the instruments of Presidential will. There is, however, one particularly interesting error, an error characteristic of former Agency people. It is especially troubling in view of Mr. Ford's recent assertions that the CIA was not directly involved in the coup which overthrew the Allende government in Chile. The authors claim the Agency overthrew Mossadegh in Iran in 1953. If this statement means that we directly overthrew Mossadegh—and that was the claim falsely made by Dulles and Kirkpatrick when they lobbied other government agencies for support in their plan to overthrow Arbenz in Guatemala—it is untrue. The U.S. did schedule a coup on 25 Amordad (August 16), but it failed—miserably. The coup that actually brought Mossadegh down on 28 Amordad was without CIA involvement. What happened was that the perpetrators of the successful coup, confused regarding our "attitude" toward Mossadegh, could not make up their minds whether or not to risk offending us. Their confusion and frustration were assuaged on 25 Amordad. Once the conspirators had been "authorized" by U.S. actions, they felt free to topple the Iranian prime minister. Thus, in spite of its direct and dramatic involvement against Arbenz and, later, Trujillo, the Agency usually acts indirectly by "authorizing" or providing support for indigenous elements that have been targeted as likely agents to rid us of intractable officials. This is what happened in Vietnam with Diem. The same thing in Chile with Allende. The U.S., as Mr. Ford said, did not carry out the coup against Allende. But it is clear that the coup was "authorized" by the U.S.

The target of Clandestine Services is, as Marchetti and Marks show, no longer our major opponents. Special operations are now carried out in the Third World. Operations in the Third World are aimed at making sure that trends do not develop in such a way as to promote a major confrontation between the great powers. Such a confrontation would presumably require the reorganization of American society. Given the recent revelations about U.S. activity in Chile, I suspect the lessons we learned from Vietnam are just the opposite of the ones generally supposed. If anything, it is likely that our special operations will increase, especially in this Hemisphere.

Marchetti and Marks point out that governmental secrecy is hardly ever aimed at its proclaimed target. For example, the secrecy surrounding the bombing of North Vietnam was not aimed at those on whom the bombs were falling, no matter what racist assumptions we make regarding the innate intelligence of the Oriental. And, since Canada, Mexico, and most of the European countries had news people in Hanoi, the secrecy could hardly have been aimed at them. Clearly the government did not want the American people to know. Kissinger and other members of the Nixon team never tired of telling us, albeit indirectly, that what the U.S. was doing in Vietnam would have made many Americans so angry that they would have likely "interfered" with the normal functioning of government, thereby giving aid and comfort to an enemy who was counting on such "interference."

Above all, Kissinger and Nixon wanted to depoliticize the war. They wanted to turn it back to being the Administration's war. In that they have succeeded. The war goes on, just as JFK intended it should—covertly, viciously, interminably, apolitically.

The war continues because the President and his advisors honestly believe that its prosecution is in the best interests of America. Their belief has to do, I think, with something which began in the Kennedy Administration. With the growth of policy science, executives no longer make judgments; they now make decisions, based on what appears to be a very precise calculus.

The psychology of this calculus can, I think, go a long way toward explaining the Nixon phenomenon. For Nixon was really, as he has been in so many things, the reduction to absurdity of a mentality first promulgated by Robert McNamara. That mentality tainted the Kennedy Administration, colored the Johnson Administration, and characterized the Nixon regime.

The philosopher Peter Bertocci points out that perhaps the best way to explain the emergence of moral sentiment is phenomenologically. For example, if we are able to calculate—whether realistically or not—the most likely consequences of alternative

courses of action, we decide among them on the basis of presumed cost efficiency. We perform, that is, a cost-benefit analysis. Having decided on the relative merits of alternative courses of action, it seems stupid to entertain performing the less efficient alternative. Our clear duty as rational human beings is to perform the alternative which will maximize benefits. Now, the sharper we are able to discriminate among the "probable" benefits of alternative courses of action, I suspect the more acute will be our sense of duty to perform the most efficient alternative. By this sort of calculus there will tend to develop the belief on the part of the one who manipulates it that he really knows what is the best course of action: It would appear to be stupid, uncourageous (recall Kissinger's calls to tragedy), and irresponsible to do otherwise—it would, in fact, be political. This is the mentality that generates and supports what Marchetti and Marks call "the cult of intelligence."

In this light it should come as no surprise that recent executives have attempted to depoliticize American government. (Nixon, remember, referred to us as children). More and more the American people are asked to trust, to have faith in, their governors. Nixon had a secret plan for ending the war—trust him. How the war was won was his business. His responsibility to the American people was limited to the end for which he was elected; it did not include the means. From the first Mr. Nixon chose to prosecute the war, not as President of the United States, but as Commander-in-Chief of U.S. forces. The President has certain inhibiting responsibilities to the Congress; the Commander-in-Chief is free to act.

In her very perceptive book Mary McCarthy says that the publication of the Pentagon Papers planted in Mr. Nixon "a doubt of the inviolability of his person and the office, and of the principle of 'confidentiality' about which he evidently had deep-rooted feelings." It is not surprising that Mr. Nixon's feeling for confidentiality was so deep-rooted. The Presidential calculus had to be protected. The necessary war against Communist penetration of the Third World had to be kept out of politics. The American people ought to concern themselves with ends, not means. Mr. Nixon "could not tolerate the *sight* of an opponent, even the most harmless and peaceful demonstrator with a sign." The Presidential calculus provided a moral certainty that was nothing short of vengeful.

Unfortunately, McCarthy still thinks that the public reaction to Watergate is heavily laden with guilt feelings over Vietnam. She argues that "those most prominent now in the pursuit of the truth about Watergate (i.e., about the character potentialities of the President; what may he still be capable of?) were not, to say the least, among the leading opponents of the war in Vietnam." "Judge Sirica, most of the Senators of the [Ervin] Committee, and Gold-

water must be fairly representative of that almost consistent majority that answered 'Approve' when asked by pollsters for their opinion of U.S. policy in Vietnam." But if Sirica and Goldwater are representative of the type she has in mind, we can see clearly, both from their actions and from their statements, that it was to the means employed by Mr. Nixon that they took exception.

All in all, McCarthy goes too far in implying that Watergate was not really the issue that exercised those she supposes supported the war. If we are to infer from her argument that Watergate is not really an issue worthy of the moral indignation evidenced by, say, Sirica and Goldwater, then I would think her perverse. If that is what she means and if she is right, more the pity that Sirica, for example, did not stand to be counted among the opponents of the war. In fact, his outrage at Watergate hardly needs to be explained by recourse to psychoanalytic hypotheses. Better to take the *prima facie* evidence. Sirica is morally sensitive to matters such as Watergate; he is numb when it comes to issues like Vietnam.

The book edited by Dorsen and Gillers is indispensable for the informed citizen. Articles survey the practice of secrecy from the federal to local governments, and suggest how we can challenge some of its more noxious consequences.

Few of the articles are more upsetting in these economically troubled times than the essay by Albert Gore. Former Senator Gore tells us how Wilbur Mills did dirt to the average taxpayer by using the secrecy granted legislators voting on tax measures. Mills, Wallace Bennet, and Russell Long saw to it, in 1969, that the marginal rate on earned income was lowered from 70 to 50 per cent. This reduction would benefit only taxpayers whose income was above the 50 per cent tax bracket. As Gore then pointed out, the compensation of the chairman of the board for General Motors amounted, in 1968, to about \$795,000; with that amount of "earned income" the adoption of this measure would provide a tax cut for him of approximately \$90,000 per year. Were representatives compelled to vote such provisions in full view of an adequately informed public, one wonders whether they would have been gotten away with.

All these books suggest that by and large American government is politicized and open to the public, especially during nonelection years, only by virtue of the leaks perpetrated by one power broker or another in an attempt to generate a constituency. Competing constituencies are then used in intragovernmental competition for scarce resources. The same holds true in executive relations with the legislature. The tendency is for neither the legislature nor the people to be consulted regarding courses of action taken by the executive; both are manipulated. Only exceptionally are people or leg-

islature able to cope with the Executive branch.

Reduced to its simplest terms, lying, deception, and secrecy are practiced to eliminate politics. Politics I understand to be that activity which distributes socially important and scarce values; this is done according to the relative merit perceived by a concurrent majority, which is, in turn, produced by the publicly reasoned claims of minorities that assert a vested interest in the values being disputed. If, then, we equate politics with democracy, it becomes apparent that there exists an inverse relationship between democracy and deception, lying, secrecy, and so forth. The more we have of one set of these values the less we have of the others. It follows that any attempt to justify lying, deception, and secrecy by claiming they are necessary for the survival of democracy is sheer sophistry.

It may be objected that such a position is utopian, that the exigencies with which governments must operate will not permit the politicization of certain issues if survival is taken to be a primary value. The choice is then made to appear to be between survival and politics. But I have argued only that politics is *about* the distribution of scarce social values. That is not to say that politics is the same thing as their distribution. On the contrary, it is entirely possible for politics to be retrospective. Indeed, it is often retrospective. Typically, the government appropriates scarce social resources, and then the governors defend their decisions at the next election; or, in the interim, before Congress, the press, and the courts. The practice of secrecy is tantamount to eliminating such retrospective politics.

If there were a justification for lying and deception in the course of "prospective politics," that justification becomes "inoperative" in the course of retrospective politics. I would also suggest that secrecy is even more pernicious than lying and deceiving. The suggestion that it is contrary to the national interest to investigate the past in pursuit of information a public requires if it is to *realize* politics in intelligent judgments is tantamount to suggesting that politics should be eliminated in the national interest. To disallow politics in the name of the national interest is to substitute "administration" for the democratic process with which we claim to identify ourselves. It was Karl Marx who wanted to supplant bourgeois democracy with the "administration of things."

Coming

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THE NECESSARY UTOPIA