
Behind the News

Is U.S. intelligence community to commit 'kinder, gentler' assassinations?

by Scott Thompson

Although President George Bush promised a "kinder and gentler" America during his presidential campaign, it is notable that his Director of Central Intelligence, William Webster, and Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, have opened a debate in the major press as to whether or not the U.S. intelligence community can murder or else kidnap foreign heads of state during "gunboat diplomacy" coups d'état of the sort recently attempted against Panama's Gen. Manuel Noriega. The outcome of this debate threatens to plunge the United States once again into becoming the engine of global "chaos and confusion" that it last became during the Kissinger years, when coups and assassinations against Western heads of state were the order of the day, while the U.S. intelligence community was assigned to act as a sort of "Murder, Inc."

DCI Webster started the debate in an interview with the *New York Times* on Oct. 17, when he called for a reassessment of an Executive Order issued by President Gerald Ford in 1976, that had been implemented by Presidents Carter and Reagan, which ruled out U.S. government involvement in assassinations. Webster made it clear that he wanted to be empowered to conduct coups d'état, where "deadly force" might be employed to eliminate a "dictator." "It could very well make a difference in the next one [coup], because the likelihood for the next plotter planning that he may probably have to take Noriega out is real," said Webster.

Webster seems unable to grasp that the CIA's "cowboys" have not been able to engineer a successful coup, because in the global depression it is still possible to launch a covert action to destabilize a nation, but impossible to restabilize the situation instantly thereafter, as previously happened. The reason, quite simply, is that under the conditions of physical economic breakdown of the last decade, coup-style destabilizations result in quagmires resembling the "Thirty Years War" situation that erupted in Central America, after a series of U.S. coups in Nicaragua, Panama, and elsewhere. Or else, the descent of a "New Dark Age" as happened after President Carter and his National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski created in the Middle East with their decision to topple the Iranian Shah and play the "fundamentalist card."

It is notable that DCI Webster is a holdover from that very same Carter administration, when President Carter and the so-called "Liberal Establishment" of the Congress worked in league with the bankers of David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission, forerunner of the Project Democracy which installed a secret government in the Reagan-Bush administrations, partly by mounting coups to destabilize alleged "dictators," many of whom simply believed in national sovereignty. The only recent "success" of these Project Democracy gunslingers has been the State Department-led People Power coup that toppled Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos.

National mission or bankers' errand boys?

Leaving aside this important "technical adjustment" in the global strategic situation that makes coups turn into bleeding sores, there is another problem that arises from involvement of the U.S. intelligence community in missions of the sort that Webster now advocates in Panama. The republican West Point tradition, which characterized especially the U.S. military intelligence services, has become a mere ghost of itself, as Presidents have given the intelligence community missions that only serve the major banks' view of national interest.

Immediately before DCI Webster's public call to be able to kill foreign leaders like Gen. Manuel Noriega, Webster had given a speech on Sept. 19, 1989 before the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, where he said that it was no longer the East bloc that are our enemies, rather economic warfare must be run against our allies. This is precisely the line of the bankers' Project Democracy employed by Webster's predecessor, William Casey, who turned the awesome national technical means the U.S. had developed during the Cold War, against Ibero-American heads of state who sought to save their countries from International Monetary Fund genocide under the debt crisis starting in 1982-83. Starting with the 1982 eruption of the debt crisis in Mexico, when Mexican President José López Portillo fought for his nation's sovereign rights, Casey and his sidekick Leo Cherne, who is vice-chairman of the powerful President's Foreign Intelli-

gence Advisory Board, set up a Third World Debt Task Force which targeted the full range of intelligence capabilities previously employed against the U.S.S.R.—ranging from the electronic intercept capabilities of the National Security Agency to the psychological warfare experts of the Central Intelligence Agency—against any Third World leader who protested that an attempt to pay the inflated debts would mean so much austerity that their populations would die.

Now, Webster, himself a product of David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission stranglehold upon the executive that began under President Carter, stated that he would employ more such economic warfare, because "our political and military allies are also our economic competitors." Citing in particular Japan and Western Europe, Webster elaborated a mission for U.S. intelligence that would make "the connection between economics and national security" ever greater.

Thornburgh supports kidnaping and murder

Among Webster's strongest supporters in this bid to turn the U.S. intelligence community into a "Murder, Inc.," has been Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, whose tenure at the U.S. Justice Department also saw the granting of what the Oct. 14 *Los Angeles Times* called "the President's snatch authority." This legal directive, issued on June 21 under the title, "Authority to the FBI to Override Customary or Other International Law in the Course of Extraterritorial Law Enforcement Activities," had been prepared by Assistant Attorney General William P. Barr of the Office of Legal Counsel at the request of Attorney General Thornburgh. Basically, it would give the FBI the right to enter a country like Panama surreptitiously, in order to kidnap Panama Defense Forces commander Gen. Manuel Noriega.

Ironically, Attorney General Thornburgh forgot to mention this new power to President George Bush, who, when he was questioned about "the snatch authority," responded: "I'm embarrassed to say I don't know what it is you're . . . I'll have to get back to you with the answer to your question. Marlin [Fitzwater], will you take care of that?"

Revelation of "the snatch authority" brought instant condemnation around the world. A leading expert on international criminal law, Edward M. Wise of Wayne State University, noted: "Without local consent, I don't see that it's any different from sending an army across the borders. It counts as an invasion. I don't think there is anything that is a more clear violation of that country's sovereignty and international law." Said former Justice Department prosecutor Lawrence Barcella, "There is the danger that a foreign country, with whom we have good relations, might lodge a diplomatic complaint or might even issue a kidnaping warrant" against the FBI.

Only a few days after it was revealed that Thornburgh had empowered the FBI to be a "snatch squad," on Oct. 17, Independent Counsel Lawrence E. Walsh accused Thornburgh of thwarting the Iran-Contra prosecution of former Costa Rica CIA station chief Joseph Fernandez "through

unjustifiable delaying tactics" that are designed to "tie this case in a knot of endless litigation." Walsh's criticism of the Attorney General was contained in a request asking the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Virginia to rescind an order issued Oct. 13, that allows the Justice Department 30 more days to decide how it will handle a dispute over the release of classified information, specifically six documents all of whose content has otherwise been known to the public.

Jury selection in the Fernandez trial was abruptly halted in July, when the Attorney General sought to intervene in the case, but a three-judge appellate panel rejected that intervention, whose intention had been to give the Justice Department a checkmate upon the trial judge's discretion involving release of classified information. Apparently, it was the Attorney General's intention to derail the remaining Iran-Contra trials by capitulating to "graymail" over the disclosure of national security information sought by the defendants during discovery.

All the king's horses and men

While President George Bush was apparently ignorant of his Attorney General granting the FBI the right to kidnap fugitives abroad, the President has certainly supported DCI Webster in his demand for a reinterpretation of the 1976 Executive Order that bans U.S. intelligence involvement in coups that might result in murder of the incumbent head of state. Certainly, Kissinger clone Gen. Brent Scowcroft, who is President Bush's national security adviser, stated on Oct. 18, that, "We [at the White House] certainly are in agreement with everything Judge Webster said yesterday" in his *New York Times* interview. But, then, General Scowcroft came in for a drubbing for his mishandling of the Panama coup attempt, and he has been desperately trying to shift the blame for President Bush's "Bay of Pigs" onto the congressional intelligence committees, which, he claims, hamstrung the White House's ability to act.

Likewise, White House press spokesman Marlin Fitzwater seemed to support the call for clarification on the use of "deadly force" in coups, when he said: "We're saying we're opposed to assassinations. The prohibition and executive order stands. But there's clarification needed on other kinds of activities, and we want to discuss it with Congress. What he [Webster] said was that there are interpretations and discussions and understandings with the Hill that should be reconsidered in light of their impact on coup activities. I would say we certainly are in agreement with everything Judge Webster said."

The real test of whether the Bush administration will deliver a "kinder and gentler America" depends on whether the President decides to dump the Trilateral Commission's bully boys—DCI William Webster and an Attorney General who supports kidnaping by FBI law enforcement officials—and replaces them with level-headed professionals.