

Chapter 1

The Fundamental Issues

In announcing the formation of this Commission, the President noted that an effective intelligence and counterintelligence capability is essential to provide “the safeguards that protect our national interest and help avert armed conflicts.”

While it is vital that security requirements be met, the President continued, it is equally important that intelligence activities be conducted without “impairing our democratic institutions and fundamental freedoms.”

The Commission’s assessment of the CIA’s activities within the United States reflects the members’ deep concern for both individual rights and national security.

A. Individual Rights

The Bill of Rights in the Constitution protects individual liberties against encroachment by government. Many statutes and the common law also reflect this protection.

The First Amendment protects the freedoms of speech and of the press, the right of the people to assemble peaceably, and the right to petition the government for redress of grievances. It has been construed to protect freedom of peaceable political association. In addition, the Fourth Amendment declares:

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated

In accordance with the objectives enunciated in these and other Constitutional amendments, the Supreme Court has outlined the following basic Constitutional doctrines:

1. Any intrusive investigation of an American citizen by the government must have a sufficient basis to warrant the invasion caused by the particular investigative practices which are utilized;

2. Government monitoring of a citizen's political activities requires even greater justification;

3. The scope of any resulting intrusion on personal privacy must not exceed the degree reasonably believed necessary;

4. With certain exceptions, the scope of which are not sharply defined, these conditions must be met, at least for significant investigative intrusions, to the satisfaction of an uninvolved governmental body such as a court.

These Constitutional standards give content to an accepted principle of our society—the right of each person to a high degree of individual privacy.

In recognition of this right, President Truman and the Congress—in enacting the law creating the CIA in 1947—included a clause providing that the CIA should have no police, subpoena, law-enforcement powers or internal security functions.

Since then, Congress has further outlined citizen rights in statutes limiting electronic surveillance and granting individuals access to certain information in government files,¹ underscoring the general concern of Congress and the Executive Branch in this area.

B. Government Must Obey the Law

The individual liberties of American citizens depend on government observance of the law.

Under our form of Constitutional government, authority can be exercised only if it has been properly delegated to a particular department or agency by the Constitution or Congress.

Most delegations come from Congress; some are implied from the allocation of responsibility to the President. Wherever the basic authority resides, however, it is fundamental in our scheme of Constitutional government that agencies—including the CIA—shall exercise only those powers properly assigned to them by Congress or the President.

Whenever the activities of a government agency exceed its authority, individual liberty may be impaired.

C. National Security

Individual liberties likewise depend on maintaining public order at home and in protecting the country against infiltration from abroad

¹ Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (18 U.S.C. Secs. 2510–20) and Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. Sec. 552a).

and armed attack. Ensuring domestic tranquility and providing for a common defense are not only Constitutional goals but necessary pre-conditions for a free, democratic system. The process of orderly and lawful change is the essence of democracy. Violent change, or forcing a change of government by the stealthy action of “enemies, foreign or domestic,” is contrary to our Constitutional system.

The government has both the right and the obligation within Constitutional limits to use its available power to protect the people and their established form of government. Nevertheless, the mere invocation of the “national security” does not grant unlimited power to the government. The degree of the danger and the type of action contemplated to meet that danger require careful evaluation, to ensure that the danger is sufficient to justify the action and that fundamental rights are respected.

D. Resolving the Issues

Individual freedoms and privacy are fundamental in our society. Constitutional government must be maintained. An effective and efficient intelligence system is necessary; and to be effective, many of its activities must be conducted in secrecy.

Satisfying these objectives presents considerable opportunity for conflict. The vigorous pursuit of intelligence by certain methods can lead to invasions of individual rights. The preservation of the United States requires an effective intelligence capability, but the preservation of individual liberties within the United States requires limitations or restrictions on gathering of intelligence. The drawing of reasonable lines—where legitimate intelligence needs end and erosion of Constitutional government begins—is difficult.

In seeking to draw such lines, we have been guided in the first instance by the commands of the Constitution as they have been interpreted by the Supreme Court, the laws as written by Congress, the values we believe are reflected in the democratic process, and the faith we have in a free society. We have also sought to be fully cognizant of the needs of national security, the requirements of a strong national defense against external aggression and internal subversion, and the duty of the government to protect its citizens.

In the final analysis, public safety and individual liberty sustain each other.