

'BLIND MICE' OVERSIGHT BOARD DUPED BY CIA, THE PRESIDENT SAFIRE, WILLIAM. **Journal Record** [Oklahoma City, Okla] 13 June 1987.

▣ **Abstract (summary)**

Nobody will admit this publicly, but the foreign intelligence advisory board and oversight board have been feuding for years. The advisory board thinks the oversight board is lazy and ideologically hidebound, while the advisory board feels that [Leo Cherne]'s advisory group was reshuffled in late 1985 to spare William Casey from criticism.

The oversight board smells a rat, or mole, at the way Casey chose to have the CIA's Inspector General report to the advisory board about two half-hearted investigations: first into the Yurchenko embarrassment, and then into the CIA's self-protective handling of the Howard defector episode: the FBI wound up taking the rap for letting a Soviet spy escape to Moscow.)

What concerns us now is the circumvention of [W. Glenn Campbell]'s wrongdoing-oversight board in late 1985. At that time, as Bill Casey was secretly turning the National Security Council into a reporting-free operational arm of his CIA, the head of clandestine services, Clair George, refused to brief PIOB on covert action.

▣ **Full Text**

WASHINGTON - While lips were smacking at the incipient appearance of Fawn Hall, another administration witness came before the Iran-contra panel to testify about a legal opinion he had written.

Bretton Sciaroni had held in the summer of 1985 that the National Security Council was not ``involved in intelligence activities'' that the Boland Amendment restricted.

The young lawyer was savaged on his credentials: he had flunked four bar exams, finally squeaking through in Pennsylvania. This had been his first legislative opinion. He was derided for having believed Oliver North and Paul Thompson, counsel for the National Security Council, when they assured him the council was clean.

The attorney did not say that his opinion had been reviewed line by line by his three bosses at the President's Intelligence Oversight Board, one of whom is Charles Meyers, head of the Denver office of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, and until 1981 dean of the Stanford Law School.

However, the committee was eager to discredit any critic of the amendment, and concentrated on the inexperience

of the witness; perhaps the congressmen did not want to look further and do battle with his old-pro superior. Having ridiculed the young lawyer who did no wrong, the intrepid committee went on to fawn all over Miss Total Immunity of 1987.

The wonder to me was that the oversight board did any investigating at all. That little-known board, derogated in this space last week as "the three blind mice," has been kept in the dark by the Central Intelligence Agency and by the president it was supposed to serve.

The president has two separate boards to provide him with independent advice about spookdom.

- Best known is the prestigious President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, headed by Anne Armstrong and Leo Cherne, starring Henry Kissinger, Jeane Kirkpatrick and Clare Boothe Luce. That board evaluates the quality of intelligence work and handles assignments like assessing the electronic penetration of our Moscow embassy.

- The other is the three-man oversight board assigned by Executive Order 12334 to report "directly and exclusively to the President on a confidential basis" any evidence of intelligence wrongdoing. With a one-person staff, namely Sciaroni, it relies on the CIA Inspector General to turn over all evidence of possible illegality.

The oversight board's head is W. Glenn Campbell, guiding light of the Hoover Institution at Stanford, a stalwart conservative academic and gentleman about whom two things are immediately apparent.

- He is not the country singer.

- He is not an unfoolable and powerful old Washington hand with the clout to overcome bureaucratic obstacles, such as the late Ambassador Robert Murphy, who first headed the board.

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What concerns us now is the circumvention of Campbell's wrongdoing-oversight board in late 1985. At that time, as Bill Casey was secretly turning the National Security Council into a reporting-free operational arm of his CIA, the head of clandestine services, Clair George, refused to brief PIOB on covert action.

The oversight board protested to Casey: "Who decides this?"

Casey: "I do."

Campbell: "You don't have the authority."

Bill Casey, to avoid carrying the dispute to the president, briefed the board himself on some covert actions - but not on the Iranian arms deal. At that time, I think significantly, Inspector General John Stein, who had previously been Clair George's boss at CIA, asked to be reassigned overseas; his last briefing of PIOB was Nov. 3, 1985.

Soon after, President Reagan broke his understanding with the board and concealed from the oversight board the arms-to-Iran "finding."

Deputy Director John McMahon quit the next month. That was some winter for the shattering of oversight.

By giving a false illusion of watchfulness, the oversight board does more harm than good. The president should give that board investigative power, and appoint members he cannot easily mislead - or close the whole thing down.

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