

# CIA Won't Declassify Files, Blames Budget

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By GEORGE LARDNER JR.  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Central Intelligence Agency has shelved plans to release records on significant Cold War covert actions of the 1940s, '50s and '60s that past CIA directors had pledged to make public.

The current CIA director, George J. Tenet, said in a six-page statement that he was forced to make the decision because the agency could not "under current budgetary limitations" afford to meet all "the demands for declassification" confronting it. He said statutory obligations, such as the release of records about the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy and papers needed for State Department histories, would have to come first.

His announcement drew a flurry of complaints about the CIA's performance to date in meeting what Tenet described as its "responsibility to the American people, and to history, to account for our actions and the quality of our work."

"Nobody believes them any more," said historian Anna Nelson, a member of the Kennedy Assassination Records Review Board. "The real problem at the CIA is the way they declassify, deleting information that can easily be found in the public arena, sometimes on the front pages of *The Washington Post* and the *New York Times*."

The historical declassification projects, which Tenet said he was postponing indefinitely, were set in motion by former directors Robert M. Gates and R. James Woolsey. The subjects covered include secret efforts to derail Communist parties in France and Italy in the 1940s, CIA support for Indonesian rebels in the 1950s and 1960s, and the U.S.-backed coup in Iran in 1954.

Tenet said the volume of records was so great in some of these cases and the amount of information that could be released so limited in others that he had decided to give higher priority to the declassification of other materials, such as the National Intelligence Estimates on the former Soviet Union.

Other historical projects, covering

guerrilla actions in the Korean War, operations in Laos in the 1950s, and assassination plots in the Congo in the 1960s, would be undertaken "as soon as resources are available," Tenet said.

Page Putnam Miller, a member of the CIA's advisory Historical Review Panel, said, "The statement basically says, 'We'll get around to it when we can.' That's really disappointing."

Tenet said the CIA was following through on other projects, dealing with the Bay of Pigs debacle in 1961 and the coup in Guatemala in 1964. He said 1,800 pages on Guatemala were sent to the National Archives last year and as many as 17,000 more "are being processed for release."

But historian Nelson said the Guatemala files proved her point. She said they include a CIA history of the coup that is so heavily censored it does not contain any mention of the United Fruit Co. Some historians believe the coup was prompted by Guatemalan plans to nationalize unused United Fruit land.

Tenet said "top priority" must be given to declassification of the papers for the State Department histories and the Kennedy assassination records, as required by law. He said the public needs the histories "to judge for itself the contribution made by the Intelligence Community to the successful conduct of the Cold War."

CIA reluctance to acknowledge about 15 covert actions between 1964 and 1968 has been holding up publication of about 12 volumes of the histories. David Patterson, general editor of the series, said short narratives have been approved for more than half of the secret operations and CIA documents about them may be forthcoming.

"We are bound by law to publish a complete and accurate record," Patterson said.

Tenet said the agency has also started a review of 40 million to 60 million pages of CIA policy and analytical documents under a 1995 executive order calling for the declassification of records 25 years and older by the year 2000. The agency, however, is treating 90 million pages from its covert-action Directorate of Operations as exempt.