

Panel Monitors CIA News 'Plants'

By Walter Pincus

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The Central Intelligence Agency maintains a top-secret coordinating committee with the State Department and the United States Information Agency to make certain key policymakers are not taken in by exaggerated or false news stories planted by the CIA's covert propaganda network, according to intelligence sources.

The propaganda coordinating committee meets only when a major CIA covert media project is about to break, and even then, according to intelligence sources, only a handful of officials are informed.

"If too many are told," one former agency official said recently, "the project may not remain secret. And with covert media projects, we are never certain the planted material will surface publicly. We only hope so."

Although the group provides warnings for high government officials, no similar protection exists for the American public—a situation that has drawn the attention of the House and Senate committees investigating the CIA's covert journalistic operation.

CIA Director William E.

Colby told the House committee that any pickup of CIA-generated stories by American news organizations "is a purely incidental effect of the activity which is conducted abroad with its objective abroad and with its impact abroad."

According to former top CIA officials, it was just such an "incidental" effect of a covert propaganda operation that led to establishment of the coordinating committee.

In the early 1960s, these officials say, the agency was using its resources in the Far East to create irritations between the Soviet and Chinese governments.

At that time, the two Communist powers were beginning to have disagreements but were far from the open break that subsequently took place.

CIA-sponsored radio stations on Taiwan and elsewhere in Asia broadcast as though they were in China and would attack a Russian leader. The broadcasts, monitored in Hong Kong, would be replayed in the unwitting world media.

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CIA News 'Plants' Monitored

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On one occasion, a CIA agent was infiltrated into China with a false story about the Chinese leadership. The story was picked up by Chinese fleeing the mainland and, according to a former CIA official, passed on as true when the refugees got to Hong Kong.

The story thereafter was carried by international news services and the USIA's Voice of America, which broadcast it round the world.

Only after CIA officials in Washington informed VOA that the story was false was machinery set up to keep key officials informed of the CIA's covert news operations.

"Contamination," the agency word for domestic U.S. distribution of its overseas propaganda efforts, has gone beyond pickup of news stories.

Another Far East covert operation involved reprinting entire issues of mainland Chinese newspapers after first removing one story and replacing it with a false one written by CIA employees. The real newspapers, held up in cooperating post offices, were then replaced by the doctored ones and mailed to subscribers all over the world.

At a recent Senate intelligence committee hearing, Sen. Walter Huddleston (D-Ky.) asked a former CIA official, David Phillips, if there were instances "where we have been the victims of our own (CIA) media efforts within this country."

"That has happened," Phillips replied.

In 1973, after CIA had reviewed its past use of journalists, an operational regulation was drafted to bar covert propaganda operations if they risked influencing American public opinion directly or indirectly. However, according to congressional sources who have read the regulation, it has loopholes that have permitted CIA-generated

articles to continue to come into the United States.

After 1973, for example, the CIA continued to subsidize a London-based news feature service called Forum World Features. Begun in 1966, it supplied six articles a week to 150 newspapers in 50 countries, according to the feature service's 1974 promotional material.

The Washington Post and other U.S. newspapers, for example, received the weekly service by mail with the understanding they would pay for anything that was used. Most of Forum's output consisted of legitimate articles but a few were on subjects the CIA wanted publicized. One such article distributed in 1974 was "KGB in the Middle East: What are the Soviet spies up to now?"

In April, 1975, Forum abruptly closed down after a London weekly disclosed its CIA connections.

A former top CIA official denied operations such as Forum World Features violated the 1973 regulation. "We try to concentrate on the behavior of (U.S.) enemies in the world," he said. "We're preventing suppression of truth . . . information that doesn't pay off. That's why CIA must do it."

The congressional committees are also concerned about the continued employment of American journalists by the CIA and the possibility they may be used to influence public opinion in this country.

Although the agency in 1973 said it discontinued the employment of full-time staff members of American news gathering organizations, CIA Director Colby told the House intelligence committee in November that about 30 part-time employees and American free-lance writers were still under contract.

Colby said they were used "primarily for intelligence gathering" and also to "make contacts with people that are

difficult for an official of an embassy or American mission to get in touch with."

It was only on limited occasions, Colby said, that these journalists would be used for "planting stories," and then only in the foreign press.

The use of part-time American journalists creates a thorny problem for both the CIA and news gathering organizations.

Colby, for example, has consistently refused to tell the Associated Press and United Press International if any of their several hundred part-time reporters (called stringers) around the world also work for the agency.

Both organizations have a policy that forbids their employees from taking funds from an intelligence gathering agency but they are not sure it is effective.

The UPI stringer in Quito, Ecuador, for example, who also writes for that city's leading newspaper, was listed in Philip Agee's "CIA Diary" as a person through whom in 1963 Agee, then a CIA agent, occasionally placed propaganda. In a telephone interview, the stringer confirmed he was mentioned in Agee's book but said Agee's "impression" of his role was wrong.

Rod Beaton, president of UPI, said he was unaware of Agee's allegation, and added that the stringer had a "good reputation" and that UPI would "have one of our key people check it out."

It is also possible that stringer-CIA agents are on the payrolls of major newspapers and television networks.

Agency officials were unhappy in 1973 when forced to give up connections with full-time journalists. During the 1950s and 1960s, many reporters undertook full or part-time CIA projects. In the Communist bloc countries and the Soviet Union particularly, journalists were almost the only agents the CIA had.

The CIA, according to one

official, now does not want to close out the use of stringers. "How are we going to collect intelligence," he asked recently, "if you have a diminishing permissibility for cover?"

As for the argument that the CIA involvement compromises American news organizations, one former top agency official with experience overseas responded, "Don't tell me about the glory and purity of the press. I'm not impressed."

Last year, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) circulated among news media executives a prospective bill that would require government agencies, such as the CIA, to publish in the Federal Register the names of any journalists hired by contract. The aim was to halt the practice by exposure without barring reporters by law from taking such employment. To Kennedy's surprise, most executives who responded opposed the idea.

Colby also told the House committee that two of the CIA's former full-time journalist-agents carried on both roles with the approval of their employers.

CIA Morale Overseas Plummet

By Michael Getler

Washington Post Foreign Service

BONN, Jan. 16—The mushrooming publication of names of U.S. Central Intelligence Agency employees serving abroad has caused a marked decline in the already low morale of agency personnel overseas.

Western intelligence officials in several overseas locations, most of whom were still trying to stiff-upper-lip the CIA's public image problems just a few months ago, now privately acknowledge that there has been a dramatic drop in morale in recent weeks that is not only affecting the agency's ability to gather intelligence but that is causing severe personal strain as well.

"It's like Berlin right after the war," one veteran official said. "You suddenly start driving with one eye on the rear view mirror. The nervous tension slips back into your life and you bring all that home with you to the family at night."

Interviews in recent weeks with a number of officials close to the U.S. intelligence service indicated that the year-long expose of CIA wrong-doing by Congress and the press had already created serious problems, not just in the office, but at home for an increasing number of agency workers.

The concern most often mentioned was about teenage children who now questioned how their father made a living and why, even if he wasn't a spy, did he work for the CIA.

That kind of problem, rarely discussed openly, has now been heightened for many families with the publication of names of CIA employees, most of whom are not spies, but who now feel the threat that an assassin or terrorist could strike haphazardly at their family.

Under different circumstances, the publication of employee names or addresses would be viewed with concern but not alarm, sources say. It has, in fact, happened before in some countries.

But the murder of CIA

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station chief Richard Welch outside his home in Athens on Christmas Eve "has given rather dramatic proportions to this thing. Publishing names is a very, very bad thing to be doing now. It's becoming fashionable and it's going to generate another murder," one senior official said.

The expectation that more murders will follow is widely shared by other intelligence officers.

"Nobody's panicked," said another veteran officer, "but the thing is gnawing away at us. The impact is beginning to show. The congressional review, the whole hoopla for more than a year now, was having a wearing-down effect. Now, rightly or wrongly, there is the new element of danger due to Welch and the publishing of names. There has been a quantum increase in depression and concern and nobody seems able to help or to stop what is undoubtedly ruining our ability to gather intelligence."

Another source said, "It's like they are using the (congressional) assassination report almost as a backdrop to the attempts against us. The agency has really been shattered. We are going to need a lot of forthright executive support to recover."

Where the CIA's most recent troubles will lead, in terms of its ability to operate overseas, is in doubt. Some officers feel that the widespread disclosure of employee identities will almost certainly serve to drive the agency underground.

"One can only stop it by doing a better job of hiding CIA personnel," says one officer.

The job of providing and keeping up a good cover, or hidden identity, however, takes an enormous amount of time, several sources say. This takes away from the time an agent can spend gathering intelligence and would weaken CIA abilities, they say.

Many of the veteran CIA employees are already known to their counterparts around the world. Officials acknowledge that a "Who's Who in the CIA" published in

1968 in East Germany and compiled by Communist intelligence identified many old timers well before the current rash of disclosures.

But chances are that new officers coming into the field will be given much better cover, it is felt, which will not allow them to be picked so easily out of State Department registers or embassy telephone books.

If there are other murders, some sources feel, people will leave the agency, as some reportedly already are on the brink of doing. But others feel there will be a protective conservative backlash, not only in the United States but even in Western countries where there is little sympathy at the moment for the CIA.

Although many individual disclosures over the past year of CIA domestic surveillance and assassination plotting have been more startling, the impact of the Welch murder and publication of hundreds of names, primarily by leftist publications, seem to be the straw that is breaking the back of CIA morale in the field.

In France and England, where more than 70 CIA names have been disclosed in

each country, there is little danger felt by CIA people.

The problem is much more serious in countries such as Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy. There are strong anti-American feelings afoot in these areas and political assassination is viewed as possible.

A similar fear exists here in West Germany, where no alleged CIA names have been published but where a troublesome but small band of terrorists operates.

Informants acknowledge that most of the names disclosed are in fact CIA employees, although a number of inaccuracies are said to have appeared on published lists, especially among the 44 names and addresses of alleged CIA agents in France published thus far by the leftist magazine Liberation.

There is concern in several U.S. embassies that in the rush to publish, legitimate diplomatic corps employees are being wrongly identified as CIA agents. There is also frustration at what is viewed as a public failure to understand that only a relatively small percentage of CIA employees are engaged in spying while most serve as analysts or liaison men with allied intelligence services.

Some serious pessimism is surfacing about the future, at least among some intelligence veterans.

One senior officer explained: "There is obviously some cold warrior in us because most of us still believe that the objective of

the Soviet Union has not changed in 30 years and that objective is to get the United States out of Europe. Right now, they are getting some help."

"It has surely put a crimp in the elan, the willingness of officers to meet and take advantage of an opportunity at any hour or place. A lot of us have dealt with defectors and even saved some people's lives, and it's been done with the conviction that the information helped maintain the vitality of the Western alliance.

"Now," he went on, "that commitment appears to have worn away, everything the West does is corrupt and wrong in the press. What is that huge Soviet army in East Germany going to do? That's a legitimate question that even the left-wing journalists blowing these names would also be interested in if the Russians ever took off for the West."

CIA men generally say there is really very little they can do to protect themselves, other than the extra adrenalin that flows just from being alert in times of tension.

"You can't go to work in a convoy and you can't take three goons with you everytime you have to meet someone," one explains.

Intelligence officials, including non-Americans, are wearying of the contention that what is happening now is part of a civic-minded attempt to curb agency activities that undermine American democracy and the governments of other countries.

Most officials see it as the work of the left wing and their sympathizers among disgruntled former CIA and foreign service employees.

The principal figure is Phillip Agee, formerly of the CIA, whose book "Inside the Company: CIA Diary" was published in Britain last year.

However, according to Phil Kelly, one of the journalists on the British publication Time Out, which has published some 65 alleged CIA names, Agee's assistance was only incidental in their case.

Kelley said Time Out's identification of CIA people in England was based mostly on techniques published by former foreign service officer John Marks in a November, 1974, article in the Washington Monthly called "How to Spot a Spook."

Kelley said Agee helped the Time Out reporters "refine their methods."

In Paris, Liberation claimed it came up with its list through the embassy directory, various identification codes and the help of other journalists in London and Washington who were "fed up with the clandestine activities of their government around the world."

The reference to other journalists was widely assumed to mean the Fifth Estate group in Washington that publishes the magazine Counter-Spy.

In France and England, the disclosures did not create much of a political stir or much reaction in the general press. In both countries, there seems to be a widespread view

that the CIA remains an American problem and there is reluctance among politicians to rush to its defense because of its poor image.

England's Manchester Guardian, however, in an editorial this week, called for a distinction between CIA's dirty tricks and "efforts to change other nations' governments for them," which it strongly condemns, and the agency's function as a collector of information, which the newspaper says necessarily must be done.

In Spain, disclosure of alleged agents this month came not from a fringe publication but from the country's most widely read weekly news magazine, Cambio 16.

Italian Paper Lists Alleged CIA Names

From News Dispatches

ROME, Jan. 16—La Repubblica, a leftist newspaper that began publication three days ago, today printed what it claimed to be the name of the CIA station chief in Italy and seven of his associates.

The article was signed by Steven Weissman, who identified himself as a former editor of Ramparts magazine.

In Athens, Politika Themata printed the names of 14 Greek-Americans allegedly working for the CIA. The magazine is owned by Yannis Horn, publisher of the Athens News, which earlier identified Richard Welch as CIA chief in Greece.