

# CIA Spooks Require Faith

By Robert Hunter

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IN THE Ashenden stories, Somerset Maugham put a human face on the British Secret Service. No matter that the Hairless Mexican killed the wrong man; this bumbling helped soften the image of a ruthless and ever-competent machine dedicated to doing His Majesty's dirty business, and made everything right.

Not so with the Central Intelligence Agency. No humor here; just the sense of a sinister and heartless manipulation of the democrats of a hundred countries, designed to support the new imperialism of those sons-of-Britain, the Americans.

What is myth and what reality? Since it was organized from the post-war remnants of the old Office of Strategic Services, the CIA has certainly had its fingers in many political pies, and has been accused of myriads more. Mossadegh fell in Iran; a Guatemalan coup replaced a left-wing regime; America was humiliated at the Bay of Pigs; a private American air force has fought the Laotian war, and Che Guevara was killed in Bolivia.

These events, which have all, rightly or wrongly, been attributed to the CIA, are the glamorous side of the business. But most of what the agency does is far more prosaic. It is basically an organization of fact-gatherers: academics who never teach a class; pedants who rarely parade their nuances in learned journals—and never with the CIA's imprimatur.

It has many of the world's most skilled linguists, the most patient archivists, the cleverest analysts of isolated data and, surprisingly, some of the most liberal people, politically, in Washington. Indeed, if the American government ever does come to accept that the Soviet Union is not preparing to launch a nuclear attack and that China is not populated with madmen, it will probably be because the CIA has succeeded in putting across its estimate of the situation.

## The Iceberg's Tip

THIS, OF COURSE, is a rosy view. Like any great, sprawling institution, the CIA does suffer from a great deal of intellectual myopia, the compromises of bureaucracy and the political philosophy dominating the coun-

try at any moment. And if anything, its reporting is usually dull, tedious, banal and sometimes dead wrong, as anyone will testify who has been privileged—or compelled—to read the Daily Digest and other classified reports that circulate about the government.

This part of the CIA—the part that is styled “overt”—is quartered in a large building across the Potomac from Washington, unmarked and unobserved. But the 8,000 or so particularly gray-faced men and women who work there are only the tip of the intelligence iceberg. It has been estimated,



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

*Richard Helms, the ebullient director of the gray-faced CIA.*

for example, that more than 100,000 people are actively engaged in the one function of gathering and interpreting information about Soviet military capabilities.

The CIA budget, too, is immense, although not one item appears anywhere in the compendia of federal expenditures, there is no congressional debate and few people know its true magnitude. By conservative estimates, more than \$1 billion of CIA money is hidden under other categories and another \$2 billion is spent on similar activities by other agencies—such as the National Security Agency—whose existence is never formally acknowledged.

Yet despite the secretive nature of the “intelligence community,” many CIA officials lead surprisingly public lives. Unlike the heads of MI5 and MI6, the director of Central Intelligence is a familiar figure at diplomatic

receptions; the agency has a listed phone number, and the day has long passed when junior employees went through the absurd ritual of telling people whom they met at Washington cocktail parties simply that they worked for “the government.”

## Another Department

ALL THIS is straightforward enough, and is hard to fault in any government. It is true that Francis Gary Powers did help disrupt the summit conference in 1960 by having the ill-luck to be shot down over Russia in his U-2 aircraft. But those reconnaissance flights, and the reconnaissance satellites later sent aloft by both Russia and America, have helped to slow down the arms race and to inspire mutual confidence that the other side is not building some new super-weapon in secret.

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Few people who take seriously the problems of running a government and a reasonably enlightened foreign policy would question the role that the CIA shares with other agencies in gathering and interpreting information; but they do argue against the operational responsibilities that shelter—under the same roof—what is popularly called the “department of dirty tricks.”

There is considerable justice in the view that the same bureaucrats who carry through policy should not have the right to gather the information needed to judge their actions. And since the ill-starred adventure at the Bay of Pigs, there has been a much greater effort throughout the American government to end this overlap of authority. President Kennedy reactivated his Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and all the bureaucratic strings were pulled much tighter.

Ironically, however, the test of intellectual purity has not been applied as rigorously to the CIA's competitors. The Defense Department and its many military offshoots also devote large resources to knowing the enemy, and there is far less concern to see that responsibility for information and action are kept separate. The Vietnam war is an excellent example of this. The blunders that have occurred in that war from bad espionage involve the military more than they do their civilian counterparts at the CIA.

### Tool and Scapegoat

**B**UT IN ALL, it is fair to say that very little if anything that is done by the CIA today goes contrary to the wishes of the President and his immediate advisers. Many people think that it is bad enough that the President can sometimes act in secret and with considerable impact, but it is necessary to separate this concern about American behavior in general from perennial worries that the CIA, as the established villain, will run amok.

Again, after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, it suited President Kennedy and his hagiographers to emphasize the bad advice given by the CIA. Here was a recognized scapegoat whose involvement softened criticism of executive decisions. Surely, the argument ran, even the President could not be expected to be proof against the agency's machinations?

This incident illustrates what may be the most important fact to bear in mind about the CIA: What it actually does or does not do is far less important than what it is *believed* to do. Like a belief in religion or witchcraft in other times, belief in the potency of the CIA provides a point of stability in a disorganized world.

It is far easier to accept that evil is being done consciously than to understand it as the simple product of human fallings. Good intentions gone awry are far harder to tolerate than the knowledge that a conspiracy is truly afoot. One doesn't have to be paranoid to gain a certain comfort from suspicions of conspiracy; and the few times that the CIA actually does gain direct publicity—almost always when a job has been bungled—merely confirm them.

The political impact of this desire to believe in the CIA's skulduggeries is considerable—however many thousands or millions of conscious agents one must assume to exist for the agency to be involved in all the actions attributed to it. This was made quite clear recently on BBC Television's “Line-Up,” when Michael Dean interviewed Andreas Papandreou, the most publicized leader of the Greek resistance-in-exile.

Papandreou recounted in some detail the nature of the CIA plot to overthrow the democratic government in Athens and install the colonels, and completed his narrative with quotations from a top-secret meeting of the American National Security Council.

Perhaps this is all true. But even if it is, what does it say for the strength of Greek political life and institutions?



Must we believe that every Greek of political influence is employed by the Americans? Or were the Greeks so lax in developing their political institutions that an order from the CIA—or whatever—could indeed produce what we see in Athens today?

### Deliciously Sinister

THE EFFORT by many Greeks today to pin most if not all of their troubles on the Americans is only one example of the force exerted by the conspiracy theory of history. Indeed, there is a certain appeal in the truly sinister and secret operation that is lacking in the more obvious one.

Everyone knows that Air America,

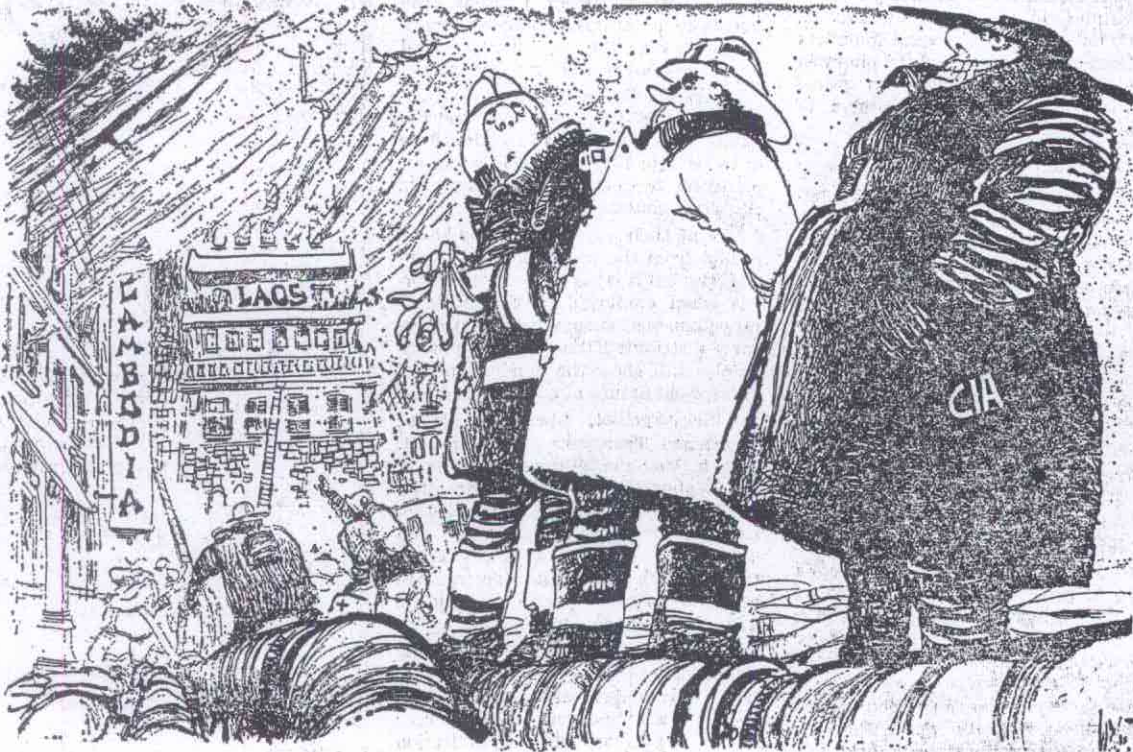
which forms the backbone of the anti-communist air war in Laos, is directly financed by the CIA. Yet this knowledge has never produced an outcry, or even much interest, largely because the whole affair is conducted with minimum secrecy and maximum routine and boredom.

Compared to the killing of Che Guevara—widely believed to be the work of the CIA—the fighting in Laos is far more important in terms of current politics and lives lost, but it is totally lacking in those elements that make for a basic confrontation between good and evil. For the purposes of theater, and the politics that depend on it, Guevara's death symbolizes this kind of

confrontation perfectly. Indeed, his life and work would be incomplete unless he had been killed in this or some similar way.

This sense of the conflict between good and evil was also present in the most celebrated instance of CIA involvement in Great Britain: the funneling of money through the Congress for Cultural Freedom to the magazine *Encounter*. The hue and cry from that affair have subsided, but the moral issues that were raised have still not been adequately settled.

A number of authors, and some individuals who had helped with the editing in entire innocence of the secret source of funds, were horrified to dis-



Wright in the Dayton Daily News

"There he is again."

cover who had actually been making possible the publication of their views. These men and women had written what they believed, and were in no way influenced by the character of their ultimate benefactor. Can it be said that they were suborned?

Likewise, do articles written for a magazine that has been compromised by the CIA have no value? Do they lose the significance which the authors thought they were imparting to their work when they produced it?

This is not really a question about the nature of the sponsoring institution—whether one that serves the ends of a government, or one like the great foundations that give out money amassed by devious means in the past—but of the secrecy with which it is done. At heart, it is a question of man's striving to secure the right to know what forces are shaping his life, to know how far he is a free agent.

#### A Guidepost Warped

THE ANGER directed at the CIA was not eased by the irony of the CIA's choice of what is considered at least by Americans to be a left-of-center publication. If anything, it intensified this anger, particularly on the part of those who needed to measure their own radical progress against their image of CIA activities.

There was also a sense that the bargain with the devil had been unfairly struck. It is one thing to sell one's soul willingly; it is quite another to do so, even if the temporal payment is made, without being able to share in the awareness of complicity with evil. To be used by a capricious god may be tolerable if everyone is in on the secret, but what could be worse than to be denied the sweetness that comes from the knowledge of sin?

Perhaps this is the way an agency like the CIA must operate, and certainly this fresh evidence of duplicity only reinforced the comforting belief that conspiracy does, indeed, abound. As such, the CIA has a value in the realm of drama, in the realm of the morality play, whatever its impact on the world's policies.