

Agent Slain As CIA Cut Greece Role

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ATHENS—"We noticed that the outside light was out," Richard Welch's wife told friends later as she tried to recall moments that preceded the murder of her husband in front of their suburban Athens home.

"If this had been Latin America, we would have been suspicious right away and would have told the driver to go around the block so Dick could check out the situation. But we were in Greece and thought such precautions were not necessary."

The carefully planned assassination of the Central Intelligence Agency's station chief in Athens has again put the spotlight on America's long presence in Greece and especially on the highly complex and still unresolved role of the CIA, whose activities have been deeply entwined in Greek affairs since the beginning of the Cold War.

Ironically, Welch had been assigned to Greece last July to reshape and scale down the CIA presence in Greece.

For many years, the CIA's chief interest here had been its close touch with the center of

See GREECE, A17, Col. 1

GREECE, From A1

ruling power in Greece. But in recent months, according to knowledgeable Greek sources, the CIA's principal efforts have been directed at Communist activities in Greece.

This changed direction of CIA interest here reflects the resurgence of Communist activity that has accompanied the restoration of democracy in Greece.

The Greek Communist Party, banned since the Greek civil war in 1945-48, is once again legal. According to highly placed Greek sources, the Communists, with aid from outside the country, have sharply stepped up their activities.

"They are pouring money

into the Communist press," one knowledgeable source said, referring to foreign Communist governments. Another source said that East German money was even finding its way into some non-Communist papers.

Against this background, and fed by the steady stream of disclosures from Washington about past CIA misdeeds, the CIA has become a whipping boy of the Greek press.

Numerous sources in recent interviews here seem convinced that Welch's killing was thus a symbolic retaliation against the CIA and its past here and not a personal vendetta or dispute among intelligence agencies.

Since the restoration of democracy in Greece 18 months ago, the United States has carried out general cutbacks in American operations here, including reductions in CIA personnel. As one source said, "For the first time we did not use the black bag" in the 1974 general elections. This statement indicates that the agency has been barred from engaging in Greek politics but, by implication, it also acknowledges that "black" CIA funds were used in previous elections.

Highly placed Greek sources confirmed that the CIA in Greece has adopted a low profile and that it is no longer meddling in political affairs. Indeed, these sources had no complaints about the agency's current operations and they give high marks to U.S. Ambassador Jack Kubisch's efforts to control all aspects of U.S. involvement here.

In the murky world of espionage, no hard information is available about the extent of Communist or American activities here. There have been numerous lists, however, published in the Greek press purporting to name U.S. and Soviet agents.

In the winter of 1974, Communist and then other Greek newspapers printed a list of alleged CIA agents in Greece, citing the "Swedish Press Agency" of Stockholm as the source. The list was largely inaccurate and appears to have been based on a book about the CIA published by the East Germans.

According to unimpeachable sources, the Swedish agency credited as the originator of the story does not exist and its address given

in the report was that of the Sheraton Hotel in Stockholm.

In May 1975 came an apparent counterattack. Anonymous letters were distributed here describing a newly arrived Soviet diplomat as a key KGB agent who had served in Cairo, Damascus

and Khartoum, places where the Soviets were trying to diminish U.S. influence.

In November, another anonymous letter published in the Greek press named seven alleged CIA agents, with Welch heading the list.

This list was far more accurate than previous ones and included biographical sketches, home addresses and phone numbers.

A few weeks later a list of KGB agents was distributed anonymously, apparently to counter the publication of the CIA list.

Whatever else these lists may have done, for the first time they gave public visibility to Richard Welch. Having arrived in Athens in July, Welch was not listed in the diplomatic directory and was largely unknown in the city. A Hellenic scholar at Harvard, he had served in Greece in the 1950s, then in Cyprus, 1960-64; then he spent 11 years in various posts in Latin America.

"Obviously," one highly placed source said, "if you want to kill a CIA station chief, if this is a symbolic attack on the CIA, you don't want to hit the man who is unknown. That's why you have to make him known and that's what the CIA letter did."

American sources are intrigued by the possible connection between Welch's assassination and the anonymous letters but they dismiss out of hand the idea that another intelligence outfit may have been involved in the killing. "The professionals just don't do this sort of thing," one source said.

If the murder was done by amateurs, observers believe that the assassins must be from the fringes of Greece's political life. There is no evidence, moreover, that Welch made any personal enemies here or in Cyprus.

"The first thing we did was to ask for a report from Cyprus," one senior Cabinet minister said. "We wanted to check whether he left any marks there. The report was negative."

Since the advent of the Cold War, the CIA has been deeply involved in Greek affairs. It helped establish the Greek central intelligence agency, known as KYP. More important, the CIA is known to have played a role in Greece's political life just before the 1967 military coup and to have worked against some politicians either through secret maneuvers with the Greek court or through financial assistance.

It is the agency's links with KYP and the military group that ruled Greece by force from 1967 to 1974 that have brought the United States, especially the CIA, under a huge cloud of suspicion. Virtually all Greeks have come to believe that the agency, somehow, in some way, not only supported the military junta but also encouraged it to undertake adventurous steps in Cyprus in July 1974 that led to the Turkish invasion there and caused deep national humiliation and continued political difficulties for Greece.

The agency established its presence here in the closing days of the Greek civil war. One former U.S. intelligence operative said, "They came in like gangbusters, setting up safe houses and jumping off points. Athens, I believe, was at one time the second biggest operation after West Berlin."

Many of CIA operatives here were Greek-Americans originally recruited into the Greek Battalion during World War II. Among those who served here in the 1950s was Thomas Karamessinis, who later became deputy chief of the CIA's covert operations. Some businesses owned by Greek-Americans were also reported to have been used for transmission of information.

Moreover, CIA Director Allen Dulles was a personal friend of Queen Frederika and the court was often used by the agency for political maneuverings.

Before the 1967 military coup, the CIA is reliably reported to have opposed liberal politician George Papandreu and to have been preparing to channel funds to his opponents. Many politicians here contend that the takeover by a group of colonels led by George Papadopoulos was accomplished with the full knowledge of the agency.

Papadopoulos was the Greek intelligence's liaison officer with the CIA station.

The seven years of dictatorship created a new mood of anti-Americanism here that became intensified when Papadopoulos was overthrown in November 1973 by a colleague, Brig. Gen. Dimitrios Ioannides, who instituted an even more repressive regime.

Sources said that during the Ioannides government, CIA station chief Stacy Hulse Jr. became the principal channel of communications between the two governments, perhaps because the then U.S. Ambassador Henry Tasca did not believe his job included communicating with "a cop." Ioannides, the strongest man in the junta, was formally chief of the military police.

During this period, according to the sources, there was a conflict between the ambassador and the CIA station, with the ambassador apparently believing he was not kept informed by the agency on its activities.

Whatever the role—if any—of the CIA in the Cyprus crisis, the coup against Archbishop Makarios followed by the Turkish invasion of the island and Greece's inability to respond provoked not only a major political crisis here but also a sense of national humiliation.

Since there has been no clearcut evidence of direct U.S. government involvement, the Greeks have latched on to the shadowy world of CIA that provides fertile grounds for all kinds of wild speculation.

The animosity toward the CIA is also attributed to the change of Greece's political climate from the one that prevailed when the Americans—and the CIA—were greeted warmly and praised for assisting non-Communist forces here. The new Greek generation does not remember the civil war but does remember the seven years of military dictatorship.