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CIA's Secret Superstaff Overseas

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The Central Intelligence Agency built up an undercover bureaucracy abroad that for a time had almost as many employees abroad as the State Department's Foreign Service, according to informed sources.

Shortly after the advent of the Kennedy administration, sources said, the CIA had 3700 employees operating under diplomatic or other official U.S. titles overseas while the State Department had 3900 bona fide employees working abroad.

The CIA officials were known in U.S. government circles as

"CAS"—Controlled American Sources. Their proportions in U.S. embassies abroad were sometimes startling.

Fifteen years ago, one source said, for example, 16 out of 20 people in the political section of the U.S. embassy in Vienna really belonged to the CIA.

In recent years, another source said, the CIA contingent abroad has been drastically reduced, partly because of the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco, but also because of the growing clout of the multi-billion-dollar National Security Agency, whose technological eyes and ears are considered much more reliable.

"You'd be surprised at how few people in the CIA has overseas these days," this source said. Although the figure can sometimes jump dramatically with the inception of new covert operations, this source said the current total was "less than half" of the 3700 officials reported on the CIA's secret roster in mid-1961.

Shortly after the CIA was established in 1947, a special study group headed by then deputy CIA Director Allen Dulles warned in a still secret report against using State Department cover as an answer to all its problems.

The report, sources said, indicated that the CIA even then had been making what the State Department considered excessive demands for official slots. The study group reportedly recommended that the CIA, however, steadily increased its requisitioning of official government positions.

By 1961 as a consequence, according to sources, the spy agency had some 1500 people abroad under State Department cover and another 2200 under other official U.S. covers, such as Defense Department civilian personnel.

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