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CIA Colors The News, Sources Say

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The Central Intelligence Agency's network of agents and intelligence officers in news organizations around the world has often had the effect of influencing news reports received by Americans both here and abroad, according to present and former intelligence officers.

These sources said that although the CIA had not set out to provide misinformation to the American people, its infiltration of news organizations had frequently had that effect.

William E. Colby, who stepped down as CIA Director, late last month, said in a recent interview that the agency was "not engaged in an effort to manipulate the American press," although he also acknowledged that some CIA-generated misinformation might trickle back to this country.

However, a series of interviews with other former intelligence officers disclosed that the infiltration of foreign-based news organizations and the publishing of books and papers had resulted in CIA-engendered news flowing regularly to the American public.

Two former intelligence officers said that possibly the most damaging practice had been the CIA's "planting" of stories in the foreign press, many of which were based on "misinformation." The stories, designed to confuse and disrupt Communist opponents, often ended up in the American press, these sources said.

As one source described the process:

"You place a story in Bangkok, for instance, in a small paper, maybe one with CIA support, and it gets picked up by a larger paper and then, possibly, by a foreign news service or Paris Match. The next step will see it used by Reuters or an American news service and coming back to the United States."

There is no total count of the number of newspapers or reporters that the CIA has financed abroad, but former intelligence officers say that cultivation of journalists is extensive.

For instance, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in its report on Chile that one important aspect of the CIA's operations had been recruitment of journalists working for El Mercurio, the Santiago daily newspaper that is the largest in Chile, as well as television and radio stations. These journalists contributed to local news reports that were often picked up by the American press, the report said.

It also said that the CIA had been able to send to Chile more than a dozen operatives disguised as journalists, and that these operatives actually wrote for foreign news publications.

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