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CIA Sought Anti-Truth Spy Drugs

Washington

The Central Intelligence Agency tried to find drugs to help captured Cold War spies lie, even when they were under the influence of so-called truth serum, declassified documents show.

The 1952 project never found the foolproof antidote desired, but it did conclude that a first-class spy would continue, on account of his nature, to lie, even when injected with sodium pentothal, or truth serum.

The CIA documents, provided under Freedom of Information Act suits brought by a number of news organizations, supplement thousands of pages already released on the secret MK-ULTRA research project into mind and behavior control in the 1950s and '60s.

They show that the CIA went

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to exotic lengths, at the height of the Cold War and the Korean conflict, to combat the suspected Soviet, Chinese and North Korean ability to "brain-wash" U.S. agents.

A 1952 interoffice CIA memo said five drugs within a class known as "central nervous system stimulants" would counteract to a limited extent the effects of sodium pentothal.

"These drugs have, however, certain limitations which more or less preclude their successful application in clandestine-type activities," the memo said.

It said the captured agent would have to administer the anti-truth drugs to himself just before or just after his interrogators used the sodium pentothal on him.

"This would be difficult to accomplish," it noted.

"Such drugs would have to be secreted on the person and administered (such as pills) externally. It is believed that a thorough search of an agent would disclose any such secreted drugs."

Also, the report said, the captors would presumably keep administering more sodium pentothal "until the patient evidenced the desired reaction."

In that case, it concluded, the wiliest captured spy could not possibly consume enough anti-truth pills "and still remain alive."

Nonetheless, the researchers reported a bright side to things — namely, that truth serums do not always work if the subject has enough built-in resistance, as might be the case with an agent who really lives his false "cover" identity.

"It is believed that if agents were well versed in their cover and

the security of such cover," the report said, "it would be exceedingly difficult to extract sensitive information from them while under the influence of truth serums."

The newly released documents also show that the CIA, just the year before in 1951, had been trying to develop better lie detectors.

One machine tested was a mind-scrambler known in scientific terms as "an aural side tone delay device."

The person under questioning would wear earphones and hear a simultaneous playback of his words as he spoke. But the playback would be delayed a beat just on those responses where interrogators thought he might be lying, so as to produce a weird, selective echo effect inside the head. The effect in one case resulted in an immediate confession from a subject.

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