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How the CIA Planted

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For most of the three decades of its existence, the Central Intelligence Agency has been engaged in an unremitting — though largely unrecognized — effort to shape foreign opinion in support of United States policy abroad.

Although until recently the CIA counted a number of U.S. journalists among its paid agents, with a few notable exceptions they do not appear to have been part of its extensive propaganda campaign.

Instead, the agency has channeled information and misinformation through a once-substantial network of newspapers, news agencies and other communications entities, most of them based overseas, that it owned, subsidized or otherwise influenced over the years.

Recent attention given the CIA's involvement with the press has been focused on reports that the agency employed American reporters as agents and numbered others as sources of information or "assets" useful to its operations.

The recurring allegations have led the House Select Committee on Intelligence to schedule hearings on the matter, beginning tomorrow, and prompted the New York Times to survey the CIA's relationships with American news organizations.

The CIA has refused every appeal for details of its secret relationship with American and foreign journalists and the news-gathering organizations that employed them, even though most have been brought to an end.

One CIA official, explaining that such relationships were entered into with promises of "eternal confidentiality," said that the agency would continue to refuse to discuss them "in perpetuity."

But in interviews with scores of present and former intelligence officers, journalists and others, the scope and substance of those relationships became clearer. Among the principal features that emerged were the following:

- The CIA has at various times owned or subsidized more than 50 newspapers, news services, radio stations, periodicals and other communications entities, sometimes in this country but mostly overseas, that were used as vehicles for its extensive propaganda efforts or as "cover" for its operatives, or both. Another dozen foreign-based news organizations, while not financed by the CIA, were infiltrated by paid CIA agents.

- According to a number of former CIA officials, the agency's broad campaign of propaganda was carried out with the awareness that

News 'Fit to Print'

the bogus news stories it planted might be treated as genuine by the American media, which they sometimes were.

According to the former officials, the agency has long had an "early warning network" within the U.S. government that advises diplomats and other key officials to ignore news stories that have been planted by the agency overseas. The network, they said, has worked well, with only occasional failures.

But there is no such mechanism for alerting newspapers, magazines and broadcasting stations in this country as to which of the foreign dispatches that come chattering across their teletypes are distorted or, in a few instances, altogether false. There is, the former officials say, simply no practical way of letting Americans know that some of the stories they read over their morning coffee were written not by a foreign correspondent but by a CIA officer in a corner of some

American embassy.

- Nearly a dozen American publishing houses, including some

of the most prominent names in the industry, have printed at least a score of the more than 250 English-language books financed or

produced by the CIA since the early 1950s, in many cases without being aware of the agency's involvement.

- Since the closing days of World War II, more than 30 and perhaps as many as 100 American journalists employed by a score of American news organizations have worked as salaried intelligence operatives while performing their reportorial duties. A few others were employed by the American military and, according to intelligence sources, by some foreign services, including the KGB, the Soviet intelligence agency. Another dozen employees of American newspapers, wire services and news magazines, though never paid, were considered by the agency to be valued sources of information or assistance.

- In the last 30 years, at least a dozen full-time CIA officers have worked abroad as reporters or non-editorial employees of American-owned news organizations, in some cases with the approval of the organizations whose credentials they carried.

The agency's favorite medium for launching what it terms "black" or unattributed, propaganda has always been the foreign-based media in which it has had a secret financial interest, or the reporters and editors overseas who were among its paid agents. At one time, according to agency sources, there were as many as 800 such "propaganda assets," mostly foreign journalists. Asked in an interview last year whether the CIA had ever told such agents what to write, William E. Colby, the former CIA director, replied, "Oh, sure, all the time."

Most often, former officials have said, the CIA's propaganda consisted of factual accounts that the agency felt were not being widely reported, or of essentially accurate accounts with some distortions or embellishments. But one authoritative former official said that "there were outright fabrications, too."

And some former agency employees said in interviews, that some CIA propaganda efforts, especially during the Vietnam War, had been carried out with a view toward their eventual impact in the U.S.