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4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

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SUBJECT CIA Activities

DAN RATHER: The House today passed and sent to the Senate a secret fiscal - '86 budget for the CIA and other intelligence agencies. Few details, few numbers, few explanations were given. We do know that, among other things, the CIA is engaged in a well-publicized secret war in Central America, a war commanded not by any Army general, but by a 72-year-old former Wall Street lawyer.

Pentagon correspondent David Martin profiles Casey's CIA.

DAVID MARTIN: Lights burn late at the CIA. This was one of the first buildings to go on alert last month when TWA Flight 847 was hijacked.

The U.S. rushed a 20-man counter-terrorist team to Sicily to prepare for a possible rescue mission. More than half the team came from the CIA. A rescue was never attempted, but the episode shows how deeply involved the CIA is in the battle against terrorism. That is only one of the battles to which the CIA is committing new forces.

CIA is nearing completion of its biggest buildup since the Vietnam War, a buildup run by William Casey, Director of Central Intelligence. His close ties to the President, combined with recorded increases in the intelligence budget, have made Casey perhaps the most powerful CIA Director since Allen Dulles.

WALTER HUDDLESTON: CIA Director Bill Casey is certainly of the old school, and he believes that the agency should be a force and should be an entity to deal with throughout the world.

MARTIN: This new building will double the size of CIA Headquarters, making room for more computers and people. In the last five years, there has been an increase of about 30 percent in the number of people working for the CIA. The CIA would like to hire even more.

Many of the new recruits come here, to "The Farm," a CIA training base complete with pop-up targets and its own private airstrip. Hundreds of new intelligence officers trained here have been sent overseas, many to Central America, Asia and Africa, areas which had been neglected for many years. So many new officers have been sent overseas, the CIA is having trouble finding cover jobs to mask their real occupations.

But Casey cannot build up a worldwide network of agents overnight, particularly when the CIA is still worried about running afoul of Congress.

SENATOR WILLIAM COHEN: I think it's too early to count it a success yet. I think they're still a little bit gun-shy, and I'm not sure that's all bad.

MARTIN: What the CIA learns overseas goes into classified intelligence estimates. The CIA is turning out three times as many now as in the 1970s. The analysts have scored some successes: predicting Yuri Andropov's rise to power, and spotting Mikhail Gorbachev early on as a real comer. But they were surprised by Argentina's occupation of the Falklands and by the ouster of the chief of the Honduran armed forces, a man the CIA depended on in conducting its not-so-secret war against Nicaragua.

Nicaragua is the CIA's most controversial operation, one in which the agency is not just spying, but actually trying to do harm to an unfriendly government, at one point even going so far as to mine its harbors.

There are scores of these covert operations going on around the world, ranging from support for dissidents opposed to Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, to arming of guerrillas fighting Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Covert operations have increased not only in number, but also in size.

HUDDLESTON: They involve many, many people, and also carry with them a considerable amount of risk if they are revealed, either the life of individuals or to the reputation and credibility of the United States.

MARTIN: Congress watches the CIA much more closely than it used to. But that alone does not guaranty successful operations. That will depend on the quality of the people coming

into the CIA and on the ability of whatever Administration is in power to make good use of the intelligence the CIA provides.