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In this rare interview with Director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency William Casey the chief of that important arm of our government tells CONSERVATIVE DIGEST that he feels like the conductor of a great orchestra

Director Casey Of The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency

BY JOHN REES

WILLIAM JOSEPH CASEY, born in New York in March 1913, was graduated from Fordham University in 1934 and received his law degree from St. John's Law School in 1937. He went to work for the Research Institute of America, now headed by Leo Cheme; joined the Navy after the attack on Pearl Harbor; and became Chief of Intelligence Operations in the European Theater of the O.S.S. After the war, Casey practiced as an attorney and taught tax law at New York University for fourteen years. In the Nixon and Ford Administrations he served as Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission; Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs; President and Chairman of the Export-Import Bank; and, on the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. When he resisted unwise policy, as he often did, he resisted as a conservative guerrilla but behind closed doors.

During the Carter years, Bill Casey was in business as a member of the boards of several corporations, and in 1980 he became campaign manager for his old friend Ronald Reagan.

In January 1981, Casey took over the directorship of the Central Intelligence Agency. He found a demoralized agency which his predecessor, Admiral Stansfield Turner, had all but eviscerated in an effort to appease an implacably hostile "post-Watergate" Congress. At the time Casey moved into the Director's office the C.I.A.'s resources were at an all-time low. America's allies were reluctant to share key information and were nervous about

cooperating because of a river of leaks from our Freedom of Information Act and other sources — many apparently originating with the House and Senate Intelligence Committees.

Under Admiral Turner, the C.I.A.'s operational capacity had been savaged. That America's capacity for covert action was an essential element in America's defenses had been forgotten. Forgotten too was its role as a buffer to make it unnecessary whenever possible for the United States of America to commit troops to defend its interests.

There was a great outrage when Ronald Reagan was campaigning for his second term in 1984 and said that the erosion of U.S. intelligence in the Carter years may have contributed to the success of terrorism in Beirut. But many professionals in the intelligence community believe that his remarks were thoroughly justified. The self-serving Stansfield Turner was quoted as saying that the President must be wrong because the C.I.A. didn't cut a single operative overseas. A number of anti-Communist C.I.A. veterans who were forced out during his incumbency still express anger and disbelief that Turner made such a claim. One of these veterans reported that, in Western Europe alone, the C.I.A.:

- Lost much of its intelligence-reporting ability in West Germany;
- Lost many of the Greek-speaking component at the Athens station;
- Lost experienced intelligence analysts from the Paris station;
- Lost its chief of station in Madrid; and also

- Lost the key operative who had helped to prevent a Communist takeover in Portugal.

In other areas, some of the most experienced men in covert operations from Africa to Central America — men with invaluable and irreplaceable networks of sources — were lost to us. These men did not take early retirement, they were fired. And, according to our inside C.I.A. sources, the books were altered to show that they left voluntarily. Considerable arm-twisting was applied to induce those who had received pink slips to accept this arrangement.

The loss of such veterans (about 320 in Turner's 1977 "Halloween Massacre" alone) did devastating damage to the C.I.A.'s operational capacities. All of this damage had to be repaired by William Casey and Ronald Reagan. For example, a number of the C.I.A.'s best "assets" had simply refused to deal with relatively inexperienced case officers assigned to them in place of their previous handlers. Others played double games. In one notable case that came to light only recently, a C.I.A. source in a West European Socialist Party became an effective conduit for deception relating to Central America and other areas — and wasn't identified as such for several years, since he had correctly recognized the inexperience of his new control.

The C.I.A. and the broader U.S. intelligence community needed a man at the helm with the respect and trust of the President, the confidence and independence of mind to overcome the lethargy of an intelligence bureaucracy

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and an image of integrity and personal authority. President Reagan chose Bill Casey, who since his appointment has had to withstand a vicious campaign of vilification that does no justice to his considerable achievements in reviving a moribund intelligence community and supplying it with authentic leadership.

Casey is a man with a profound understanding of the shape and continuity of Soviet secret operations against the West, a man who (unlike some of the younger bureaucrats around him) understands that until you have mastered the history of the Comintern or the "Trust," you remain a novice in the Great Game. Here is a man whose uncompromising anti-Marxism has now thoroughly offended the complacent One Worlders at the Council on Foreign Relations. And with good reason. Determined to put America's intelligence house in order, he has to a great extent succeeded.

Unusual among the very top administrators, Casey has taken a personal interest in intelligence matters in world crisis spots, particularly Central America and the Caribbean. As a former "operations man" with a wealth of personal experience in the realities of intelligence work in the field, he has not only worked as Director of Central Intelligence, but as the *de facto* chief of the Central American and Caribbean sections of the C.I.A.

Obviously, Mr. Casey's support for the Freedom Fighters in Nicaragua and Afghanistan will continue to draw intense fire from those on the left in Congress, and no doubt there will be attempts to revive the anti-C.I.A. witchhunts of the mid-1970s. However, strong leadership from Director Casey will resist these new efforts to cripple the Agency's operational capabilities and to deny the United States that vital "third option" in the contest with the Soviet Union and its surrogates. That option is a means of projecting power that goes beyond traditional diplomacy but stops short of war.

Q. Overall, Director Casey, how has the morale of the C.I.A.'s intelligence officers and employees changed since you took charge?

A. I think morale has risen greatly in the past five years. You can see this by talking with Agency officers at home and overseas or just by walking the halls here in our headquarters. Two years ago, I asked everyone to submit ideas about a search for excellence,

and the response was the kind of terrific outpouring that only takes place in an organization with high morale. Our retention rate is well above that of a similarly sized organization in the private sector, and better than the government average. We've been able to rekindle a spirit of professionalism, and you can see that professionalism in the high quality of the information we collect, analyze, and deliver to policymakers.

Q. What are some of the major misunderstandings that the general public holds regarding the C.I.A.'s fundamental mission and activities?

A. I'm afraid the public tends to be misled about our mission by the huge variety of "spy fiction" that is available and by some biased reporting about the Agency. We are in the information business. The overwhelming majority of our effort is devoted to the collection, analysis, and delivery of intelligence information to key policymakers and to counterintelligence abroad. Unfortunately, almost all the public attention is focused on missions the Agency is authorized to carry out as a component of U.S. foreign policy. This is a small part of our activity. Some people still believe the C.I.A. engages in all sorts of illegal activities without any constraints, but the truth is that we are one of the most carefully scrutinized and regulated agencies in the government. Everything we do is done at the direction of the President and the National Security Council; we keep the Congress well informed, and we scrupulously observe U.S. laws and Presidential directives that regulate our activities.

Q. Are intelligence operations alien to the American tradition?

A. Quite the contrary. John, we've always had some kind of intelligence activity in this country. Even before the Revolutionary War, George Washington was involved in collecting intelligence for the British about the French and their Indian allies. During the Revolutionary period, Benjamin Franklin arranged for the French to provide weapons to George Washington's freedom fighters and John Jay operated an intelligence net. After the War of 1812, Secretary of State Daniel Webster regularly employed spies against the British. Both sides used spies in the Civil War, and the Union forces took advantage of such new techniques as sending up observers in aerial balloons to see what was going

on behind Confederate lines. I could document a great deal more about the role of intelligence in our history — the Agency maintains a collection in its library of more than 20,000 volumes about the history of intelligence gathering.

Q. What is the state of your relations with the U.S. media and the academic foreign-policy community?

A. Our relations with the mass media can sometimes be contentious, because they want to publish every imaginable detail and we obviously cannot say too much about what goes on inside the Agency. We need to protect our sources of information and intelligence mechanisms, and so we attempt to obtain the media's voluntary cooperation in that regard. After all, we protect their freedom as well as our own and that of all Americans.

We also work against hostile intelligence services overseas that are constantly trying to penetrate our organization and our government. We have to be circumspect about our capabilities in that area. Nevertheless, we try to be as forthcoming as we can with the mass media and the public within the constraints under which we operate. We never lie to the press or try to mislead the media. And we have no desire to impinge on freedom of the press. But, if we are going to be able to carry out our mission, we do have to be protective of the lives of our sources and of our sensitive and expensive collection systems.

You also ask about relations with the academic community. These are really quite good. We rely on scholars around the United States to help us interpret world events, to give us advice on a variety of technical issues, and to challenge us constructively and offer a broad variety of perspectives. Some academics have expressed reservations about working with the Agency — and some are clearly hostile — but we are not going to twist anyone's arm to work with us.

Our Director of Intelligence, Bob Gates, who has been nominated by the President to be Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, made a speech at Harvard in February outlining the ways in which we deal with academics, and the response on the part of scholars has largely been positive. We have no desire to restrict or censor the work academics do for us, except that

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we must protect any secret information to which they may have had access. We also must bear in mind the impact some types of research may have on U.S. foreign policy if C.I.A.'s interest is revealed. The best academics seem to understand that, without C.I.A. and others out there defending the American way of life, their own academic freedom would vanish in a hurry.

Q. How can C.I.A. respond to critics when fundamentally everything it undertakes is secret?

A. What is secret about intelligence, basically, are the sources and methods we use to obtain information. This means that much of what we do contains at least some classified elements. As a result, the Agency can seldom

answer its critics because for security reasons it can rarely tell the whole story. Much of the criticism is ill-founded, and some is so "far-out" that it doesn't deserve a response. There is a tradition in intelligence that we are supposed to be a silent service, so for the most part we have to rely on others to take up cudgels in our defense.

Q. To what extent has trust and cooperation with Allied intelligence changed?

A. I'm not going to discuss relations with our Allies as this is a sensitive subject and should remain under wraps. I can say that relations with our friends continue to be good.

Q. How do you view the adversarial positions taken by so many in the House and Senate? Are criticisms of C.I.A. related more to questions of Administration policy, or are they more on fundamental concepts of intelligence such as covert action?

A. We've usually had good relations with the Congress. We provide both Houses with an enormous amount of intelligence because they are highly interested in foreign-policy matters. Our relations with the Oversight Committees are also good, in spite of what you may have read in some press accounts. We do believe in the oversight process and assign some of our best people to make it work. We recognize that many things that go on up on the Hill are due to partisan political activity, and that some of the criticism of the Agency is really aimed at the White House.

I believe the Members of the Over-

sight Committees have generally been responsible and helpful colleagues. There have been some exceptions, however, and some material has gotten into the public media that should have remained in the vaults. We don't like the political posturing and we certainly don't approve of using the press as a forum to debate intelligence issues. Nonetheless, I think I can say that our relations with the Congress generally remain useful and productive.

Q. In the field of combatting international terrorism, Mr. Director, what is your agency's role? With respect to states that sponsor terrorist groups, what are the key problems?

A. The C.I.A.'s role in combatting terrorism involves providing information to our national leaders about who the terrorists are, where they are, how they operate, and what they intend to do. If we can! This is a tough nut to crack, because these groups tend to be hard to penetrate, and they operate outside the bounds of normal international affairs. As you may know, the State Department has the lead in dealing with efforts to stop or interdict terrorists, and we provide our information to State and the military, both of which would be involved if the President decided that some sort of counter-terrorist activity were necessary.

Q. Say, against Libya?

A. You are correct in suggesting that Libya is heavily involved in supporting and training terrorists — but it is not alone. In fact, state-sponsored terrorism is one of the more frightening developments in international relations in recent years. A number of countries have provided training sites and operational bases for terrorists — Iran, Cuba, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia come to mind — and we also have learned that the proceeds from narcotics traffic from South and Central America as well as from the Far East help to provide funding for terrorist groups.

Q. Has the U.S. effort to combat terrorism been a factor in the way C.I.A. campus recruiters are regarded by college students? How do students now regard a career in intelligence, and what is the most basic requirement — foreign-language skill, a degree in political science or history... what?

A. Our recruiting program both on and off college campuses has been a real success story in the last few years. Our recruiters have faced some disruption at certain schools, but this has not deterred those who are seeking a career with us. In fact, some students have told us that the demonstrators do not represent the mainstream of student opinion, by any means, and that many of these demonstrators are not even students.

College students today are increasingly patriotic and interested in careers that can make a difference in the world — with us and with the military services — and the response to our campus presentations, and other recruiting drives, has really been overwhelming. Young people today bring us some different skills than in the past — technological and scientific backgrounds, or computer capability. Their enthusiasm is inspiring. We recruit people from all sorts of disciplines, and with all sorts of backgrounds. We are looking primarily for those who are interested in work related to the affairs of the United States in the foreign environment. I should point out that we are extremely selective in our hiring procedures, and that only about one percent of serious applicants ever make it through the process.

Q. Finally, William Casey, how do you hope your term as Director of the C.I.A. will be remembered?

A. I'm not sure how long people will remember me personally, but there are some things that I will be able to look back on with considerable pride. Among these is the rebuilding of our capabilities abroad. We have also been able to establish a new sense of mission during my tenure, and our new building, due to be completed next year, is a symbol of the general upgrading of our resources and the support we have from both the President and the Congress. But people are the most critical ingredient in intelligence. In some ways, I feel like the conductor of a highly professional and competent symphony orchestra — I can give the beat and perhaps lead the orchestra to play a bit louder or softer, but in the end the quality of the music depends on the musicians. Americans can be proud of the fact that their intelligence "musicians" are the best in the world.