

NEWSWEEK
22 September 1986

Reporters and the CIA

They keep in touch—but at arm's length



JOHN PHILBY

A tame courtship compared with the KGB's game: *Philby*

Exactly what are the relations between American reporters and the CIA? Although U.S. officials confirm that Nicholas Daniloff had no intelligence ties whatsoever, his ordeal has churned up that sensitive question—and the answer isn't always simple. Clearly, there is no comparing the KGB's systematic use of journalists as full-time spies and the CIA's occasional, informal cultivation of newsmen. Moscow is also the place where reporters are *least* likely to knowingly contact CIA agents, precisely because of the danger of getting framed. Elsewhere, however, U.S. correspondents have traded tips with intelligence sources. While those exchanges have become more guarded since the anti-CIA backlash of the 1970s, America's "spooks" and "hacks" still find ways to keep in touch while staying at arm's length.

By the KGB's standards, the CIA's courtship of journalists has never been very ardent. Stanislav Levchenko, a former KGB officer who defected to the West in 1979, estimates that at least half of

Soviet reporters are paid intelligence agents. Philip Knightley, a British writer who has done extensive research on the KGB—particularly on its notorious "turning" of British official Kim Philby—says *all* Soviet newsmen are required to pass on information. Often, the size and perks of the Soviet press corps are clues to their real function. In Beirut in the late 1960s the Tass bureau rarely produced articles and its correspondents almost never attended briefings or covered breaking news. But the bureau had six staffers (compared with three for United Press International) and the Tass bureau chief drove a new Citroën DS 21.

'Symbiotic relationship': While it has never engaged in that kind of exploitation, until a decade ago the CIA did cut deals with reporters. And at the time, both parties were quite receptive to those arrangements. David Atlee Phillips, a former CIA agent who worked under journalistic cover in Chile, says he knows of only a few other reporters who actually joined the agency. "In 98 per-

cent of the cases," he says, "it was a symbiotic relationship." Occasionally older reporters, some of whom had served in World War II or Korea, passed on tips out of a sense of patriotic duty. Columnist Joseph Alsop once captured that sentiment, saying he had helped the CIA from time to time and was "proud to have done it." Other reporters simply regarded intelligence agents as more informed and reliable than other U.S. officials. Just before the fall of Saigon, for instance, U.S. Embassy officers were telling newsmen that the North Vietnamese had no chance of taking the city—while the spies were advising them to pack their bags and evacuate their families.

For its part, the agency once found journalists useful for a variety of purposes. It asked some to carry out "drops," just like case officers. Mostly it traded for information and access—sometimes with cash, sometimes with other information. As former CIA Director William Colby puts it: "What we used them for was to get to places

and people others couldn't get access to, without using the CIA flag." The only thing the agency didn't ask its journalistic contacts to do was report disinformation. "The rule we had," says Colby, "was that you didn't say anything about what they should write to their home editors."

The rules began to change, however, in the mid-1970s. Ex-CIA agent Philip Agee published a book naming scores of intelligence officers under embassy cover. Suddenly spies around the world stopped returning reporters' phone calls. Congress also began to pressure the CIA to clean up its abuses. In 1976 the Senate intelligence committee released a report disclosing that the agency had covert relations with about 50 journalists or employees of U.S. publications. It didn't name names. The New York Times subsequently published a story identifying several reporters and the organizations they worked for.

'Life or death' exception: Later that year George Bush, then head of the CIA, issued a regulation barring any direct ties between the agency and American news organizations. When Adm. Stansfield Turner replaced Bush in 1977, he distributed a one-page memo restating that position and adding one caveat empowering the director to make exceptions in what he considered "life or death" situations. Today, Langley officials refuse to discuss the ties-with-journalists issue. But privately sources confirm CIA Director William Casey STAT affirmed the Turner orders.

Since the crackdown both U.S. spies and journalists have become more cautious about their dealings. NEWSWEEK's Jerusalem bureau chief Milan J. Kubic reports that when he first arrived in Israel, he called the CIA station chief in Tel Aviv, whose name he had gotten from another journalist. The officer nervously denied any agency connection and hung up. Israeli intelligence sources also insist that for the last 10 years they haven't discovered any links between U.S. correspondents in Israel and the CIA. When London bureau chief Tony Clifton visits Washington, some CIA sources he knows from the Third World refuse to see him. If they hadn't already, many reporters have also adopted Clifton's rule for dealing with CIA officers:

STAT

STAT

tell them only what you were already planning to print.

American correspondents in Moscow have become particularly circumspect. As recently as five years ago a group of reporters in the Soviet capital regularly played touch football against U.S. Embassy staffers, a game both sides jokingly referred to as "spiers vs. liars." Because of the risk of getting branded as CIA agents, the joke is now wearing thin. The journalists assume—as do their counterparts the world over—that some embassy officials are CIA officers and that some of their discussions with the embassy will be reported to Langley. But most correspondents avoid trying to figure out who the intelligence agents are. The embassy encourages this see-no-evil relationship, refusing to say anything about espionage cases. At a briefing last week in Moscow, an official even declined to talk about the CIA rule against ties with reporters. "We just don't comment on intelligence matters," the official said.

Bugged offices: Because the Soviets are perfectly capable of planting evidence to make Americans look like spies, Moscow correspondents are also on constant alert against setups. They assume that their offices, homes and cars are bugged. They carefully screen unfamiliar Soviets who ask for meetings to complain about lost

apartments, denied visas or relatives sent to the gulag. Since Daniloff's arrest, Moscow reporters have become even more vigilant. Some are agreeing to meet fewer Soviet strangers. Others see them only in their offices. Even with longtime acquaintances they are on guard. As Anna Christenson of UPI puts it, the Daniloff affair "adds a horrible edge of suspicion to a meeting. You're always thinking, 'Maybe the KGB got to them'."

To avoid more Daniloff cases, some U.S. reporters want Washington to press Moscow for stronger guarantees of press freedom. One possibility would be a strengthening of the 1975 Helsinki accords, which assure reporters of the right to travel between East and West and to work freely. "I can see the necessity," says The Washington Post's Gary Lee, "of the Soviets and the Americans having very specific rules on how to work [as a correspondent]." But Moscow reporters are also determined not to let Daniloff's framing intimidate them. As one of them puts it, "If we did that, we would all be writing about the 'Red October Potato Farm' and its new harvester." American correspondents aren't about to start reporting disinformation instead of news—and that is what will always set them apart from the journalistic apparatchiks of the KGB.

MARK WHITAKER with RICHARD SANDZA
in Washington. STEVEN STRASSER in Moscow.
TONY CLIFTON in London and MILAN J. KUBIC
in Jerusalem