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# CIA has global media machine, ex-aides say

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WASHINGTON — "Our mighty Wurlitzer" is what Central Intelligence Agency personnel often call the agency's global propaganda machine, according to retired operative Ralph McGehee.

The machine is a huge, far-flung network of pro-American reporters, editors and news media owners in foreign nations who, for ideologic or mercenary reasons, help the CIA "play any propaganda anywhere in the world at any time," McGehee said.

Although the agency ended paid participation by U.S. foreign correspondents in 1978, except at the director's discretion, foreign reporters and media outlets play on at a price estimated at \$3 billion by Covert Action, Washington-based watchdogs of the intelligence community.

A Wurlitzer tune — in this case, unattributable propaganda intended to keep Col. Moammar Gadhafi off balance and deter Libyan-backed terrorism — apparently was part of the Reagan administration's disinformation plan against Gadhafi that was developed late last summer and revealed yesterday in a Washington Post article that also appeared in *The Inquirer*.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes insisted yesterday that no attempt had been made to provide disinformation to U.S. media, but would not comment about a White House memo quoted in the Post as calling for "foreign media placements" by the CIA as part of the destabilization campaign.

Speakes declined repeatedly to say whether CIA disinformation — that is, false and-or misleading information — was planted in foreign media.

It is a common CIA practice, according to both McGehee of Herndon, Va., and John Stockwell of Elgin, Texas, another former CIA agent. In 1976, the Senate Intelligence Committee estimated that 900 foreign journalists, or agents posing as journalists, helped the agency plant propaganda.

The phony news story "could be an article we'd write and just give to a reporter under contract," said McGehee. "Or we'd give them guidelines, saying, 'Here's the story we want generated; you write it in the local context.'

"Once you'd planted an article successfully, you'd clip it and airmail it around the world, get it placed in news media everywhere," he continued.

McGehee resigned from the CIA in 1977 after 25 years, mostly in the agency's directorate for operations.

Another player of the Wurlitzer was Stockwell, who supervised the agency's media campaign as chief of the CIA Angola Task Force in the mid-1970s.

"It's easy to crank out the stories," he said in a telephone interview. "The harder part is to create sources that check out. In Angola, we set up several stringers [free-lance reporters who served as local writers for many publications abroad] who would send a hot story, with pictures, or, if the boss came down to check it out, would wine him and dine him and send him home satisfied."

Mostly, the propagandizing worked smoothly and well, Stockwell recalled. His most celebrated coup, he said, was a false story carried worldwide that Cuban troops in Angola had raped numerous native women. ("Nobody was going to say it didn't happen," he said.) His biggest gaffe was an equally false story that 43 Soviet advisers had been captured in Angola, which drew dozens of un-

answerable inquiries. ("It died an embarrassing, slow death," Stockwell said.)

Both McGehee and Stockwell, author of *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story*, insisted that CIA propaganda efforts abroad often reappeared in U.S. media, in effect feeding disinformation to Americans. While CIA media director Kathy Pherson declined to comment, as usual, on agency operations, Speakes insisted that propagandizing of Americans had not occurred in the effort against Gadhafi.

"That's hard to imagine," said McGehee. "Back when I was a CIA analyst preparing studies, I recall drawing on what I assumed was genuine information. Years later, I'd find out that the sources I was using were agency sources. If the CIA can't protect its own personnel from what we called 'blowback,' how could it protect newsmen?"