

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS
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HISTORY OF CIA PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Born in 1947 of a war-proven need for intelligence coordination, the Central Intelligence Agency was accepted implicitly in its early years as essential for national security. Few questioned its activities, let alone its existence, in a nation preoccupied with its own post-war emergence as the premier world power.

But as peacetime normalcy returned and Agency activities expanded, the American press and public turned their attentions inward, and the CIA fell under increasing public scrutiny. In its first four years CIA had no individual officer formally designated to deal with public queries, but in spring of 1951, current Director of Central Intelligence General Walter B. Smith appointed Colonel Chester B. Hansen—a former public relations aide to General Omar Bradley—as the Agency's first “spokesman.”

Hansen, called back to Air Force duty after less than two years in this capacity, was followed by a succession of press officers whose official titles changed as their duties grew broader. CIA moved into the public affairs area with no little trepidation. The sensitive nature of the Agency's business made exchanges with the press necessarily limited, and often as much time was spent deflecting media queries with the standard “no comment,” as answering them.

Hard as it tried, however, the Agency could not avoid the spotlight. Indeed, the public affairs function at CIA developed largely in response to a need for crisis handling—a kind of *ad hoc* evolution by “flap.” Colonel Hansen dealt with a 1952 uproar over alleged Communist penetration of the CIA. Colonel Stanley J. Grogan inherited Hansen's troubles with Senator Joseph McCarthy, who continued to press the charge that the CIA was infiltrated by Communists. Grogan also found himself dealing with public and congressional criticism for CIA activities in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954), along with the U-2/Gary Powers incident (1961) and the ill-fated Bay of Pigs landing (1962).

Grogan was succeeded by Paul M. Chretien, who encountered a new series of “flaps” over exposure of CIA operations in Vietnam at the time of the 1963 coup and Diem assassination, former President Truman's public repudiation of CIA covert action, and acknowledgement by MIT's Center of International Studies that it was originally subsidized by CIA in 1953.

Chretien's successor, Navy Commander George F. Moran, fielded inquiries about accusations in 1966 from Singapore's Prime Minister that the Agency had attempted to bribe his intelligence authorities six years earlier, and prepared to cooperate with a Senate investigation of the Agency, called for by Senator Eugene McCarthy. Moran's successor, Joseph C. Goodwin, handled charges from *Ramparts* magazine that the Agency had infiltrated and financed the National Students Association. Angus Thuermer, who replaced Goodwin in 1971, had his own hands full with the 1972 ITT-Chile story and the Watergate break-ins, as well as the Rockefeller, Church and Pike committee reports. Andrew Falkiewicz, Thuermer's successor, also had his share of crises in a very short term.

CIA press officers sometimes did have the more enjoyable task of handling inquiries on CIA successes, notably CIA's role in the Cuban missile crisis of September-November 1962 and the Agency's accurate reporting on the six-day war between Israel and the Arabs in 1967. But for the most part, as President Kennedy told CIA employees in 1961, "Your successes are unheralded—your failures are trumpeted." CIA press officers frequently were forced to adopt a defensive posture in dealing with the press and the public.

In the 1970's there has been growing perception that CIA has a critical public affairs function extending beyond the traditional handling of media queries provoked by controversy. As public interest in the Agency has increased, the number of personnel required to handle that interest has grown accordingly, and their tasks and responsibilities have changed. Admiral Stansfield Turner, in setting up a special office designated the Public Affairs Office in 1977, with Herbert E. Hetu as its head, made the Agency's first formal acknowledgement that CIA's public affairs function had assumed identifiable significance and proportion.

Thus, CIA Public Affairs today has expanded in many areas: media responses, arrangements for public appearances by the Director of Central Intelligence, pamphlets and brochures, background briefings for the media, chairing of the Publication Review Board for manuscripts to be published outside the Agency by employees or former employees, handling of public inquiries, and providing advice to Agency departments on matters involving the public.

The Public Affairs Office still has the responsibility, as does every CIA component, of protecting intelligence sources and methods, and of maintaining secrecy where secrecy is necessary. But no longer is the office encouraged to say as little as possible about the Agency. The once traditional two-man office charged with answering media queries with a "no comment" has become an expanded office intent on informing the public as extensively as possible about CIA, within the bounds of necessary security.