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Casey Nears Decision To Slash Publication Of CIA's Research

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CIA Director William J. Casey is nearing a decision to curtail sharply the agency's publication of unclassified documents, but he will keep someone to answer the phone at the old public affairs office despite a new policy of curtailing outside contacts, according to CIA officials.

Publications policy has been under review at the agency since shortly after President Reagan named his campaign manager to run the intelligence organization. Casey has taken the position that his job is to keep the president informed – not the general public.

Officials say there have been several meetings to discuss whether to continue making CIA studies available to the public. These officials say the meetings are now close to producing a decision to cut back, or even halt, the practice of distributing the results of some CIA research – stripped of classified material – to other branches of the government, the press, universities and others.

Some officials raised the possibility that the State Department's bureau of intelligence and research might resume publishing limited kinds of research materials that it used to issue before the CIA became active in distributing documents. The bureau and the agency work closely together, and personnel often shift back and forth between them.

The CIA has made public two kinds of materials. One has been research aids that are simply handy compilations of openly available information, such as directories of government officials throughout the world. The other has been sanitized versions of the agency's research and analysis on subjects that are more obscure or that require secret sources, such as Soviet military expenditures or Chinese energy needs.

The agency also has one of world's best cartography units, which has issued outstanding atlases on specialized subjects, such as Soviet agriculture and polar regions. These and some of the other agency publications have been sold through government bookstores.

The publication of CIA materials expanded under Casey's predecessor as director, retired Adm. Stansfield Turner. The ruling to cut it back that officials expect Casey to make will probably reduce it to even less than was published before Turner, when the agency circulated some materials to universities but did not offer them widely in Washington.

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This office of public affairs became more active under Turner, who brought in a retired Navy captain to head it. As Turner's man, Herbert E. Hetu had been considered likely to be leaving the agency before long, but Hetu's own decision to depart has now been speeded up by cutting him off from direct access to the director.

A reorganization has dropped the public affairs office from being directly under the director to being three levels down. It will be a branch of a new external affairs staff, which also includes a downgraded legislative affairs office, that comes under a new office of policy and planning.

A veteran CIA man, Robert M. Gates, who was on loan to the Carter White House to work as an executive assistant to National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, will head policy and planning. Gates was also briefly an executive assistant to Turner when Turned was head of the agency's Soviet analysis division.

The public affairs staff will be cut roughly in half, officials said, but the same information officers will still be there to take questions. There will be, however, fewer and slower answers than ever from an organization that has always been cautious about passing out information.

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