

# The admiral and his new-look CIA

## Stansfield Turner after the first 20 months

by Stu Cohen

The *ad in Juris Doctor*, a respected journal for young lawyers, could have been placed by any government agency. It sought "people-oriented individuals with drive, enthusiasm and motivation for public service." The employer put a premium on foreign-language training and an understanding of international affairs.

There was one caveat. Potential applicants were advised. Duties require living abroad and working in a foreign environment, at times under hardship conditions. And it was clear that more than amoebic dysentery was at stake. The advertiser was the Central Intelligence Agency.

The public search for new officers represents a significant departure for an agency that has traditionally done its recruiting with considerably more discretion. But the ad does not indicate that the CIA is at a loss for good applicants; indeed, in the economic hard times of late, the agency has been able to pick and choose from among highly qualified and committed prospective employees, a spokesman told the *Phoenix*. And CIA press chief Herbert Hertz said at a recent luncheon in Boston: "In the last year we had 30,000 serious applications for 12,000 jobs."

No, the understated ad was simply an example of the new way of doing business at the "born-again" Central Intelligence Agency. Its new director, Admiral Stansfield Turner, has been in power for 20 months, and the changes he has wrought have been both dramatic and intensely controversial within the "intelligence community." If only the outlines of those changes are clearly visible to the public, it is nonetheless obvious that the CIA under Turner's direction is a very different agency from the one previous spymasters ran.

One such change was implicit before Turner's name was painted on the office

door. The new director was hired with a new title — not merely Director of the Central Intelligence Agency but Director of Central Intelligence, honcho of all of the spy agencies, including the FBI, the National Security Agency, the individual military services' intelligence outfits and the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. For the first time in a generation, the US has a spymaster in the true sense of the term. Below the president, where intelligence matters are concerned, the buck stops at Stansfield Turner's desk.

The last individual to hold an analogous position was also the first to do so, Allen Dulles. In the period immediately after the passage by Congress of an "Intelligence Charter" in the early '50s, Dulles coordinated the work of all existing intelligence-gathering agencies, then separate groups. Indeed, between the Dulles brothers — Allen and Secretary of State John Foster — the entire conduct of American foreign policy, open and covert, was the province of one family in the post-war years.

That control, and the tight ship run by Allen Dulles, so infuriated the chiefs of the other intelligence units that Dulles's successor, General Walter Bedell Smith, was chosen from among the disaffected; at the same time, his position was redefined to take control over other agencies from him and his successors. Until now.

In a recent *Phoenix* interview, Turner diplomatically played down the idea that he controls other agency chiefs. "I'm really just the first among equals," he said, using the words he has repeated in virtually every interview over the previous 20 months. It's one of the admiral's favorite stock phrases; another is his description of the new, streamlined covert-operations division as "an

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essential arrow in our quiver.

But there are only a handful of canned phrases in statements by this refreshingly candid public speaker. His volubility — indeed, his very presence on the lecture circuit — is an astonishing change. Richard Helms and William Colby, his predecessors, were given to public statements that were clipped, oblique and few: mostly, one imagines them in conspiratorial gatherings of four or five insiders. Turner is out there taking the shots as they come, from audiences fair and foul (by his lights). And while he may be only the first among equals, he is definitely the only one of the equals who has taken to the public podium. He is, in effect, the government's "point man" on all intelligence matters.

While he was in Boston, he taped a *Good Day!* show, held private meetings with the editorial boards at the *Globe* and *Monitor*, spoke before a World Affairs Council luncheon (read fair), addressed a forum at Harvard's Kennedy School (read potentially foul), met privately with graduate students at the JFK School and ate dinner with their dean, Graham Allison — and started early enough the next morning to have breakfast with Harvard President Derek Bok before

returning to Washington. Moreover, Turner made room for additional discussion with other journalists, including this reporter.

Although Turner extemporized at each public gathering and fielded a wide range of questions, there was a single theme that ran through all of his public utterances in Boston. There has been "too much secrecy in the past." On the other hand, there is an irreducible quotient of "security" that the agency (and government in general) must maintain in order to work effectively. His most novel argument draws an analogy between the CIA's role in the government's ITL bribery and perjury case and that of *New York Times* reporter Myron Farber in the recently concluded New Jersey murder trial of "Doctor X." It is an interesting and provocative analogy, logical and tightly reasoned. If you agree with the premises, the argument is irrefutable; if you disagree, it falls flat.

Public appearances aside, what is the shape of Turner's born-again CIA?

To begin with, it's a lot leaner.

Turner's major activity has been described officially as "necessary personnel readjustments." To those

readjusted, the process amounted to a purge, one which was particularly effective at rooting out the old boy's network in covert operations that had dominated the dark side of the agency for the last 25 years. Judging from the names of those officers forced into retirement when Turner started making the cuts, covert operations was the preserve of those whose careers stretched back to the wartime Office of Strategic Services (the "honorable men" of William Colby's recent best-seller). What's more, Turner is correct in his contention that these men's dominance of covert operations created a unit mentality, encouraging undercover operations even when they were unnecessary. (This is also the outline of his argument against taking covert operations away from the CIA and vesting that responsibility in another agency — that doing so would create in the new unit a predisposition toward secret operations to safeguard the agency's appropriations and *raison d'être*.)

At the same time, Turner very clearly states in public that covert operations are not part of the CIA's intelligence-gathering function. "It is an attempt to influence the political climate in another country, without the source of that influence becoming known." That we have a right (indeed, a duty) to do so at times is one of those first premises the admiral relies upon when building his case.

It is not known exactly how many former spooks were given their walking papers upon Turner's accession, but the number is conservatively estimated to be in the range of 300 to 500, many of them on the covert side. Significant "adjustments" were also made in the counterintelligence branch, the unit that spies on spies. Cuts and personnel shifts in counterintelligence are regarded as particularly important because of the controversy that has grown up in the last few years around the branch's long-time head, James Angleton, who was fired by Turner's predecessor, William Colby. Angleton contended (openly and through a myriad of leaks to the press) that the US government had been penetrated by the Soviets at a very high level. He also said that the identity of the KGB "mole" would have been discovered if he had not been fired. According to recent reports, Colby himself has taken to saying, with no intent to be funny, "I am not a mole."

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Turner decided not to rehire Angleton, who had been compromised by the public debate. But the new director did move a man he calls "one of my oldest and most trusted aides," Tom Williams, into the counterintelligence slot. Do the reports of a mole give him pause? Turner said he's "convinced" the stories are false, but feels that the public debate they've caused justifies an increasingly important and visible role for counterintelligence. There will be, he made clear, no let-up in spying on the spies.

Turner must have known he would be facing a decidedly mixed reception at the Kennedy School. His open feud with Harvard President Bok over the university's guidelines for faculty contracts with the CIA virtually guaranteed him some hostile questions. (In the event, several observers noted, there were fewer than expected.)

The argument between Turner and Harvard is simple. The university requires that any faculty member who engages to do work for the agency report this fact to the dean of his or her faculty (public disclosure is not an issue, only notification with the Harvard community). Turner contends that this rule is clearly discriminatory, since it applies to no other agency, and refuses either to ratify the guideline or to enforce it from his end. "If a Harvard professor chooses to keep his CIA contract secret from the university, we will not require him or her to abide by the guideline as a prerequisite for doing the job contracted for," he told the Kennedy School audience. In answer to a related question, he replied testily, "We have our rules and you have yours; you wouldn't want — believe me — to be bound by ours, and we refuse similarly to be bound by yours." Although this was evidently the matter under discussion at the Bok-Turner breakfast, neither side was issuing any communiqués, and it is reasonable to assume that no agreement was reached. It is clear, however, that Turner's real objection is not to the guidelines as they stand but to possible later versions that

would force the university to publicize the faculty-CIA work.

This sort of trouble with one academic community is, of course, not to be compared with the storm of criticism faced by Turner's predecessors. That's what being born again is all about. In the time since Turner was chosen to head the CIA, we can point to no new scandal, no new abuse of power like the ones revealed by Sen. Frank Church's Select Committee on Intelligence. Which does not mean that none has occurred, just that none has come to light.

Turner, for one, refuses to state categorically that no covert operations have been conducted recently. He would say that the relevant committees of Congress would have been notified, in accordance with the proposed (but not yet passed) legislative charters for intelligence agencies, if any had been undertaken.

Turner may be the most open and "accessible" Director of Central Intelligence in more than a generation, but openness is not enough to prove that the bad old days are gone. This is the fundamental question that comes out of any assessment of Stansfield Turner's first 20 months: given the CIA's history, why should we believe what we are being told, no matter how candid it seems? It will take more than good faith and public lectures to persuade America that the CIA has truly been born again.