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CIA Halting Use Of U.S. Reporters As Secret Agents

From News Services

The CIA has officially announced it will no longer hire newsmen working for American publications to serve as its eyes and ears around the world.

It also promised, without identifying them, to phase out those newsmen currently maintaining ties to the intelligence agency. But it will continue to accept information from such sources voluntarily.

The agency's announcement yesterday was the first time it had acted publicly to close the door on seeking out a specific source of intelligence gathering.

The agency order noted that it also would bar recruitment within the clergy, but that, in fact, there was no current "secret or paid contractual relationship with any American clergyman or missionary."

The action was taken, senior intelligence officials said, in response to growing criticism of the CIA's use of news media personnel and the buying of information from American newsmen. There also have been complaints from religious groups over reports that the CIA once used missionaries for intelligence gathering.

IT WAS THE first public action of George Bush, the new CIA director.

In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson barred the CIA from secretly funding private American voluntary organizations. The agency was prohibited from recruiting agents from members of the Peace Corps by an executive order.

In 1973, then-CIA director William Colby halted the secret retaining of five full-

time journalists with major American publications and they were phased out by 1974, Colby publicly confirmed this year.

But Bush's order goes far further. "Effective immediately," a statement issued by the director's office said, the "CIA will not enter into any paid or contractual relationship with any full-time or part-time news correspondent accredited by any U.S. news service, newspaper, periodical, radio or television network or station."

The CIA statement said that the current news reporters with CIA ties would be phased out of the CIA connection "as soon as feasible."

IT SAID, however, that the agency would accept information voluntarily offered by members of the news media or the clergy.

A senior intelligence agency official told the New York Times that "less than 20 persons will be affected by the order." He said the order also would end the practice of sending CIA employes abroad under the "cover" of being accredited representatives of American news organizations.

The order, another official said, did not bar the CIA from recruiting employes of foreign news organizations.

"It is the agency policy not to divulge the names of cooperating Americans. In this regard the CIA will not make public, now or in the future, the names of any cooperating journalists or churchmen," the statement said.

Bush's statement said the agency did not believe that its use of people in news and religion was improper, but that it recognized the unique position of religion and press freedom in the Constitution and that it would ban the recruitment "in order to avoid any appearance of improper use by the agency . . ."

THE FIRST strong indication that the CIA had infiltrated the American news media came in 1973 when Colby disclosed details to the Washington Star about agency use of "stringers" and the five staff reporters. These details were confirmed last month in a report of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, which has not been made public.

The CIA has also formally refused to tell the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence the names of indi-

vidual reporters or news organizations.

During the past weeks, however, it has been charged that one intelligence officer posed as a CBS correspondent, that another CBS correspondent secretly fed information to the CIA and that an ABC correspondent in Hong Kong was recruited to help CIA officers contact a Chinese Communist official.

Executives for eight of the nation's leading news organizations say the CIA assured them that none of their reporters were among the full-time journalists said to be doubling as agents in 1973.

HOWEVER, most of these executives said they were unable to obtain similar assurances about CIA contacts with part-time journalists or stringers.

Executives for the New York Times, the Associated Press, the Wall Street Journal, Time, Newsweek, ABC News and CBS News said in recent interviews with the AP that they had received assurances from Colby that no one on their staffs was also on the CIA payroll following the November, 1973, story in the Star that revealed the extent of agency contacts with journalists.

Colby has since acknowledged that he was the source of that story.

The Washington Post said it received similar assurances early this year.

Executives for NBC News could not recall making an inquiry, while editors at United Press International said the CIA refused to respond to its initial request.