

TITLE: How We Are Perceived

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~~SECRET~~*Outrageous questions***HOW WE ARE PERCEIVED**

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As the Central Intelligence Agency approaches its 40th birthday, those of us in the clandestine service tend to view ourselves as performing important functions which are extraordinarily helpful to senior levels of the US government. We know that we go to great lengths to abide by the intent as well as letter of US law. We also know that we are one of the most carefully audited institutions of the government—fiscally as well as behaviorally. We draw considerable satisfaction from the knowledge that a long sequence of presidents, national security advisers, ranking ambassadors, and informed senior military officers have held us in the highest regard, placed great value on our product, and relied on us to acquire foreign intelligence and carry out covert action directives. Indeed, we function in the certain knowledge that the Directorate of Operations is cost-effective (we save the government more than it costs to sustain us) and is at the forefront of virtually all activities involving international matters of real concern to our government.

As one of the relatively few clandestine service officers who have the opportunity to talk to and be questioned by new junior officers from the Department of State and the US Information Service, I have been exposed to questions about the Agency (particularly the clandestine service) that bespeak a perception of us and our role within the US government which is dramatically different from the one that we have of ourselves. It came as a shock to learn that there seem still to be large numbers of well read and presumably intelligent US citizens who perceive that we are assassins, blackmailers, exploiters of sex and illicit drugs as well as the creators of our own foreign policy separate and distinct from that of the Department of State. Apparently, many see little difference between the Directorate of Operations and the KGB, believing that at the core we, like they, are basically secret police. Others of our soon-to-be colleagues abroad believe that we will monitor their activities and maintain files on each of them. Some articulate the fear that a refusal to cooperate with us will have an adverse impact on their careers. They believe that our case officers must surely be psychologically scarred from career-long tussles with morality. They presume they will disagree with various CIA activities in their countries of assignment and want to know what their "dissident channel" will be for those inevitable disagreements.

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Some of the more outrageous questions we have been asked are:

Secret Police: "Does the CIA often try to pressure State or USIS officers into performing secret duties?" "Does CIA look into our personal lives as a matter of routine?" "To what extent should I expect

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my personal life to be scrutinized by CIA?" "Should we expect to be tested by CIA during our overseas assignment?" "Is the major function of the CIA to report on foreign nations and their policies or to observe and detect leaks by US government employees?" "What does INTERPOL do and what is the relationship between CIA and INTERPOL?" "How could CIA overlook someone like Ron Pelton and allow him to sell information to the Soviets?" "What is the CIA role in disciplinary action taken against Foreign Service officers?"

Assassins: "How does CIA justify using assassination?" "Approximately how many assassinations has CIA attempted and how many US citizens have been killed or 'disappeared' by CIA?" "Does CIA officially admit its complicity in the assassination of Salvadore Allende?" "Has the Agency ever killed one of its own when it appeared that he might defect?" "Are there limits to the activities the CIA will undertake in the pursuit of 'the national interest' and, if so, who determines those limits?" "Does the Agency always believe the end justifies the means in achieving its objectives?" "What percentage of CIA operatives leave the organization for admitted moral or ethical reasons?" "Can you name any 'bad things' that Soviet espionage agents do that we do not?" "Has there been an increase in CIA-sponsored terrorism in the past five years?"

Self-Image: "What does your wife think of your job?" "What made you decide to be a CIA agent?" "Do you have a college degree?" "Did you join the CIA because you did not pass the Foreign Service exam?" "Don't you feel any reservations about serving in an organization that will instruct you to sleep with people?"

Other, less outrageous questions betray these young officers' sense of personal or professional concern at our presence amongst them. For example:

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Professional Rivalry: "Aren't we competing for the same information with all the rules of the game weighted in your favor?" "We share our information with you, but do you share your information with us?" "Since we identify our sources to you, why don't you identify your sources to us?" "How can we keep from losing our sources of information to you when you can pay them and we can't?" "Do you use our sources without our knowing it?"

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Fortunately, the picture is not as bleak as those questions, which come up again and again in one form or another, would indicate. Other questions make

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The Impact of Exposures: "How effective is Soviet propaganda?"
"How can you function with all of the media attention that has been
focused on you?" "Have congressional investigations and media cov-
erage damaged the ability of the CIA to gather information from
individual as well as from foreign intelligence services?"

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It is disappointing that, even among our supporters, there seems to be little appreciation for the critical need and role of integrity, discipline, and creativity in the work of the clandestine service. Many seem to believe that we have a bottomless well of resources (money as well as people) and engage in the recruitment process without regard to cost or even value. These new officers are frequently astounded to discover that we are driven by objectives, that we have limits on funding, and that we are tightly accountable for our resources and the quality of our product. Many have to be explicitly told that we cannot and do not pick up the phone and talk to our agents. Few have any sense of the discipline implicit in the exercise of tradecraft.

These questions and the attitudes that underlie them are reflections of what can be read in great volume these days about the Agency as a whole, and the clandestine service in particular. And these young people are, in the main, bright, motivated, and well read. They tend to be 30 years old with one or more advanced degrees. But understandably, given the entry requirements they had

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to meet, they are relatively long on education and short on life experience. Also, they are apt to place more reliance on the printed word than on interpersonal communications—at least according to the Meyers-Briggs tests they all take. There is no gainsaying their deep interest in foreign affairs and profound concern about the image of their government. The questions these young men and women raise are most probably echoed elsewhere both within and outside the government.

How can it be that perceptions about us differ so radically from reality in the minds of many of these well educated, presumably objective young individuals? It is, I believe, pertinent that one of the Soviet propaganda objectives for the past two decades has been to turn "CIA" into a dirty word. The Soviets have had considerable help from persistently prurient (and sometimes misinformed) US media. The leaks, accurate or inaccurate, together with some of our acknowledged missteps, have made the job of the KGB propagandist easier. Even so, it is safe to say that the Soviet propaganda machine has been tireless in carrying out its self-appointed role as our principal public relations outlet.

What can or should be done about these distorted views of our nation's clandestine intelligence service? Clearly, we cannot go out on the lecture circuit and attempt to convince the public at large that there really are tight ethical standards in the spy business and that the fact that we were given the charter to break the laws of foreign countries places more demand on us—not less—for integrity, morality, and ethical standards.

There is, however, a whole of a lot we can do within the cleared foreign affairs community. The "no comment" and stiff upper lip are normally appropriate for dealing with the public; but this approach is not useful or adequate in-house. By "in-house" I mean across the entire gamut of cleared foreign affairs specialists that populate the US Foreign Service, the military intelligence community, and our own analytical corps. Misperceptions within these entities can and should be corrected. Specifically:

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We must share professional attitudes with our analytical brethren in the Washington arena, and create opportunities to reach out to them.

We have the options of keeping mum and allowing the misperceptions to grow, or of tackling them head-on. I am hopeful that the current candid approach by DO senior management will continue and will spread to the rest of the clandestine service. We have only ourselves to blame if we do nothing to set the record straight.

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