

THE CAMPAIGN

**George Bush
has been on the
scene of the biggest
political scandals of
the last two decades.
How does he
always get
out alive?**



**By Scott Armstrong
and Jeff Nason**

IF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES WERE EVALUATED by bipartisan panels of experts and chosen for office as they might be admitted to a graduate program in international affairs, George Bush's national security résumé would get him the job just as surely as Michael Dukakis's would get him sent back for remedial tutoring.

No other candidate has been exposed to so many facets of the national security world. Bush has served as a congressman, ambassador to the United Nations, envoy to China, and director of the Central Intelligence Agency. As vice president, Bush headed National Security Council groups on crisis management, drug interdiction, and terrorism. But Bush's record is a double-edged sword. Not just impressive entries on a résumé, it invites closer inspection.

That record is no distinguishable track of accomplishments. In fact, Bush's footprints are shallow when they are visible at all. For most of his career, Bush has been relegated to taking instructions rather than giving them, and his achievements are largely those of the people and institutions he served. His failures, too, reflect the failures of others.

As director of the Central Intelligence Agency in 1976, Bush became a Cabinet-level officer for the first time. For a year, Bush called the shots as intelligence czar in the Ford administration.

What happened during that year? And what did Bush do as the CIA's top man?

Company Man

Illustration by Carlos Llerena Aguirre



► **Orlando Bosch, an anti-Castro terrorist, was arrested in Costa Rica in 1976 when it was learned that he was planning to kill Henry Kissinger.**

According to former aides and a current high-ranking CIA official, Bush helped restore the CIA's damaged morale and reestablish ties with foreign intelligence agencies. He also effectively sheltered the Agency from congressional scrutiny.

In the process, though, Bush "virtually turned the store over" to those he was supposedly bringing under rein. During Bush's tenure, the message to the intelligence community was clear: Bush would look the other way, ignoring improprieties deemed necessary to get the job done.

Covert operators learned that the way to deal with Bush as director was to keep him "out of the loop" for information about operations that Congress might challenge. By the time he left the CIA in January 1977, Bush had also learned that "out of the loop" was a good place to be—especially if one had presidential ambitions.

Top Spy. If the appointment of George Herbert Walker Bush as director of the Central Intelligence Agency was not preordained, neither was it entirely accidental. As often happens in Washington, Bush's elevation to the post of the country's chief spymaster was typical Washington—a product, for the most part, of hardball partisan politics.

As Gerald Ford prepared to run for president in late 1975, he was an incumbent with practically no record facing plenty of obstacles. His pardon of Richard Nixon had turned into a

political tar baby. As if that weren't enough, the House and Senate had set up competing committees which were revealing, on an almost daily basis, news of abuses by the CIA.

White House political strategists had been counting on a public relations break from the sensational exposés swirling around the CIA. William Colby, Ford's director of central intelligence, had been lauded by congressional investigators for his cooperation with them. But the result of Colby's efforts—like attempts to shovel during a snowstorm—turned out to be a seemingly endless series of revelations: secret drug testing, spying on U.S. citizens, assassination plots against foreign leaders.

Even when these horror stories concerned events that had occurred under Democratic administrations, each revelation seemed to taint Ford. Colby—a symbol of past abuses—would have to be replaced.

Ford's aides sorted through a "final" list of possible successors to Colby, but they were unsure if any of the candidates could sufficiently reassure both the public and

Congress. They approached Edward Bennett Williams, a prominent trial lawyer and longtime Democrat, who turned down the offer. They then decided to offer the position to Elliot Richardson, whose reputation for independence and rectitude had been mightily enhanced by his resignation as attorney general during the Watergate scandal. Before Richardson could be offered the job, however, partisan politics intervened.

Ford needed, after all, to be nominated before he could turn his attention to the general election, and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller was too liberal to carry a Ford ticket through the Republican convention—especially with a strong right-wing challenge already promised by Ronald Reagan. Clearly Ford needed a conservative running mate, but as soon as he settled on Robert Dole his advisers feared that George Bush—already miffed at having been passed up for the vice presidency when Rockefeller was selected—could spoil their strategy.

Only five months after Bush had arrived as chief of the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing, some of the frequent visitors he had hosted there began leaking word that his first year in China would probably be his last. He had expressed interest in the post of secretary of commerce, but Ford worried that if Bush returned in such a domestically prominent role in January 1976, he would be free to challenge Ford or at least to take a shot at the vice presidency.

The Ford White House was genuinely interested in getting a Democrat or an independent Republican as director of central intelligence, but that prospect paled before the opportunity of removing a partisan Republican from the 1976 electoral sweepstakes. If they gave Bush the job, he would be forced to bow out of the 1976 race; so they decided to pull a switch: offer Richardson the top spot at the Department of Commerce and Bush the directorship of the CIA.

On paper, Bush was a reasonable, if political, choice. He

was a loyal Republican whose impressive dossier included membership in Skull and Bones, the prestigious secret society at Yale; a father who was a moderate Republican senator from Connecticut during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations; two terms in the House of Representatives from Texas; an unsuccessful but not embarrassing campaign against Lloyd Bentsen for a U.S. Senate seat in 1970; a tour as ambassador to the United Nations, in which he encountered every imaginable foreign affairs issue; yeoman service as chair of the beleaguered Republican National Committee, during the darkest hours of Nixon's agonized and gradually deteriorating defense; and, following the RNC, the stint in Beijing, where he was the visible manifestation of the slow-motion U.S.-China courtship.

Only those who worked closely with Bush knew that in the U.N. job he had deferred alternately to the State Department and to his own career staff. He loyally obeyed detailed instructions from Henry Kissinger as well. Similarly, only a few insiders knew how completely irrelevant he had been to U.S.-China policy. Every nuance of initiative had belonged to Kissinger. Despite Bush's public persona as a world statesman, until his job at the CIA he had actually been little more than a messenger carrying out orders for the Nixon and Ford administrations.

Kissinger cabled Bush in Beijing with the offer of director of central intelligence on November 1, 1975. Bush consulted his wife, Barbara, before quickly accepting the offer.

Only two weeks earlier, Kissinger had been in Beijing to arrange for President Ford's December trip to China, but he hadn't mentioned the coming offer. During the visit, Bush got to accompany Kissinger to a meeting with Chairman Mao Zedong, whom he had never met.

Bush was thrilled when Mao took notice of him. "This ambassador is in a plight," Mao said, in apparent reference to Kissinger's overshadowing presence. "Why don't you come visit?"

"I would be honored," Bush replied, "but I'm afraid you're very busy."

"Oh, I'm not busy," Mao said. "I don't look after internal affairs. I only read the international news. You should really come visit." Back at the liaison office, Bush asked his staff whether they thought Mao was serious, but they told him Mao was just being diplomatic. As usual, Bush deferred to them and dropped the matter—only to wonder later if he had muffed an historic opportunity.

By the time Bush returned to Washington, key Republicans from the House and Senate had written asking him to withdraw his name from consideration for vice president, to prevent any implication of politicizing the CIA. As he prepared for confirmation hearings in mid-December, he began hearing from old friends that he had been "a damned fool to say yes" and give up his own political future. His Yale classmate and fellow Skull and Bones member Thomas Ludlow "Lud" Ashley, a House Democrat at the time, asked Bush, "What the fuck do you know about intelligence?"

"Ask me in six weeks," a confident Bush responded.

Going Home. In the next few weeks, Bush received a crash course. As he waited for confirmation by the Senate, the difficulties Colby had been confronting grew even more

dire. In early 1975, the Justice Department had opened a perjury investigation against former CIA director Richard Helms over his sworn statement denying Agency involvement in the 1973 military coup in Chile. Investigations of additional CIA activities and of at least a dozen other officials were already under way.

To counter the continuing congressional scrutiny and go on the offensive with the press, the administration unleashed Colby, who as outgoing chief had nothing to risk, on the Agency's critics, while Bush worked to establish a new, more cooperative relationship with Congress. The ammunition for Colby's attack on Congress and the press arrived on December 23, 1975, when Richard Welch, chief of the CIA's Athens station, was murdered on his doorstep. Colby immediately denounced *Counterspy* magazine, which he claimed had unmasked Welch.

The Agency's own internal investigation concluded that Welch's position and local home address were well known, and that he had been targeted in connection with his activities in Cyprus and Lebanon. But Colby broadened his complaint to include the "sensational and hysterical way the CIA investigations had been handled and trumpeted around the world"—painting the congressional committees with the same brush he had used, inaccurately, to tar *Counterspy*.

Moving In. Meanwhile, at the end of January, Bush was confirmed by the Senate. As he moved into the CIA's Langley, Virginia, headquarters, he took control of the most inbred bureaucracy in government. Room 7D5607 was an unattractive, cramped, L-shaped office. It had a square sitting area with a column incongruously placed in the middle, a cramped alcove housing the director's desk, and picture windows overlooking a panorama of the Virginia woods nearby.

In his first months on the job, Bush turned his energy away from the Agency. It seemed easier and more important, according to former aides, to change the CIA's relationship with Capitol Hill than to alter the Agency to satisfy the Hill. Bush's central charge would be to keep the House and Senate intelligence committees at bay.

The more hostile of the two, the House committee which was chaired by New York Democrat Otis Pike, soon gave Bush an unexpected opportunity. On February 11 and 18, 1976, the *Village Voice* published a copy of the suppressed, uncensored Pike committee report, later revealed to have



A bomb set by Chilean secret agents killed Michael Moffitt's wife and Isabel Letelier's husband in Washington, D.C., in 1976.

come to it through CBS correspondent Daniel Schorr. The CIA argued that the report contained information that endangered U.S. agents and seriously compromised the country's intelligence-gathering capability.

Overnight the political landscape shifted from support for investigations of the CIA to questions about the motives of its critics. Bush took advantage of the shift.

As principal Agency liaison to Capitol Hill, Bush initiated a friendly relationship with key Democrats and Republicans on the Senate Intelligence Committee. According to its staff director at the time, William Miller, Bush seemed cooperative and forthcoming, a respected "member of the club" who had regular access to the president. (In fact, according to former aides of Bush, although he regularly briefed the president, and had a permanent rotation in Ford's tennis foursome, he exercised less influence over President Ford than was often assumed on the Hill.)

On February 18, 1976, the Ford White House was able to catch the unsuspecting congressional committees by surprise. By issuing Executive Order 11905, "to establish policies to improve the quality of intelligence needed for national security [and] to clarify the authority and responsibilities of the intelligence departments and agencies," Ford preempted a statute whereby Congress could tell the executive what to do. Ironically, although this reorganization of the intelligence community would become one of the historic hallmarks of his service as the Agency's director, Bush had nearly nothing to do with it. The arrangements had been worked out over the previous six months by two Ford advisers.

The Senate Intelligence Committee, sensing that it lacked sufficient public support for further extending its inquiry, struck a secret arrangement with Bush and the CIA, according to two of the committee's senior staff members. Rather than move directly to a new oversight process, there would be an interregnum during which the committee would neither set specific reporting requirements on the Agency nor pass binding legislation. Bush would share information with the committee, with both parties understanding that a new, more cooperative oversight relationship would evolve over time.

Moving On. From Bush's point of view it was imperative to get the Agency back to business as usual. The most pressing priority was to restore the confidence and morale of the thousands of agents who felt that anything they did would be examined and criticized by Congress and the press.

Bush "took pride in the morale-building sessions . . . he considers this one of his real accomplishments. [I find that] a little strange," says his friend Lud Ashley, who spoke often with Bush about his experience as director of the CIA. It is unclear, however, even to his old friend, what else Bush did besides cheerleading.

As he settled into the CIA job, Bush continued his pep rally approach to personnel management. Bush's perception of his responsibility was to deliver information to the president, but not to implement policy or linger at the table as a decision-maker. He considered himself "out of the loop" for major foreign policy decisions. For those around Ford, this role helped set up Bush as a buffer with the Hill; he was the honest broker, not a player calling the shots.

While Bush had done little before but accept instructions

from Washington, he now sat at the Cabinet table. But what he brought to the table was largely what those deputies under him recommended or insisted upon. There were few opportunities to exercise his own initiative. If Bush had been deferential and loyal to his staff in previous jobs, he became downright obedient to those he was supposedly overseeing in the new job at Langley.

With the lingering odor of past abuses stifling support for new adventures, Bush's year at the CIA was one in which few new initiatives were undertaken in the covert operations wing of CIA headquarters. "I doubt there were any covert operations at all during Bush," one Agency veteran comments, adding that Bush's tenure was "largely ineffective aside from damage control. He didn't seem to have any particular interest in intelligence."

One of the Agency's current ranking officials says Bush "had no lead in directing the Agency, especially on the operations side." In general, this official added, the director is kept insulated from the operations side of Agency activity. "The director spends so much time explaining to the people that he has little to no time to look at what we, in the operations division, are doing." (Bush would make 51 appearances on Capitol Hill during his year at the CIA.)

Some of the problems he'd inherited concerning covert operations lingered on. The Senate committee wanted to know more, for example, about what was going on in Angola, since the Senate had prohibited any financial support to Jonas Savimbi's rebel forces there.

Bush's greatest asset in successfully carrying the Angola ball forward turned out to be his delicate balance of knowledge and ignorance. In the beginning, he was able to honestly report that, to his knowledge at least, the Agency was abiding by official admonitions against further U.S. covert involvement.

The CIA had narrowly averted an investigation the previous December, when Deputy Director for Operations William Nelson testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the Agency was sending arms to Angola, which was the opposite of what the CIA had previously claimed. Now, with Bush at the helm, the Agency assured and reassured Congress that aid had indeed been cut off.

One continuing problem was the revelation of CIA manipulation of public opinion in this country. Case officers from the Lusaka, Zambia, station had planted false propaganda in the U.S. press in late September 1975 that Soviets were in Angola advising government forces. In fact, there was no evidence for this claim, but the Agency continued planting disinformation about Cuban soldiers committing nonexistent atrocities. In February 1976, a CIA-sponsored free-lance journalist reported falsely in the *Washington Post* that South Africans were not assisting Savimbi.

The CIA continued to deny to congressional committees that arms were still being shipped to the Angolan rebels when, in fact, they continued to be shipped, through allies in the region. As each new detail about illegalities and improper aid was revealed, Bush first denied, then admitted the CIA wrongdoing, quickly adding that he had just learned the news.

When Bush went to the Hill for closed-door briefings, he shared only a portion of the little he had learned about the

2305

Angola situation, and then only in generalities. Here, according to those who attended the briefings, he was at his best—sincere and cooperative. When necessary, Bush brought along those of his aides who were more familiar with the matter at hand. He soon found he was not easily second-guessed by any of his audience on the Hill.

Offering committee members greater detail than they had heard before, and patiently listening to their advice, Bush worked to restore a foreign policy of secret consensus between the administration and key Republicans and Democrats about a policy of containing Soviet and Cuban expansion in southern Africa. One by one, the elected officials bought into the plan. According to two senior government officials who were involved, limited actions in Angola were on once again, justified as necessary to phase out the larger, earlier operations.

By spring, Bush felt he had the Agency back on solid ground with the congressional oversight committees, but there was one lingering obligation—alleviating the residual resentment in Congress toward certain Agency personnel. Bush knew changes had to be made, but he decided to allow the career bureaucracy to guide him in his appointments to the upper echelon of the Agency. From the time of his confirmation, Bush relied principally on E. Henry Knoche, a CIA veteran who helped coordinate Colby's and Bush's responses to the congressional committees.

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ently; he says Knoche knew "where the bodies were buried or half-buried."

Bush also turned to William Wells, a career covert operator who had graduated a few years ahead of him at Yale, and made him the new deputy for operations. A month later, on Wells's recommendation, Bush appointed Theodore Shackley to be associate deputy director for operations. A third career covert operator, John Waller, assumed the post of inspector general, the sensitive position responsible for monitoring internal improprieties.

Professionals in the ranks were split over the changes. Some—particularly analysts and post-Vietnam War in-house critics—thought the fox had won a new long-term lease on the henhouse. Others, particularly those serving in operations, thought the correct message was being communicated: covert actions are specialty items—it takes specialists to run them; it takes specialists to investigate them.

New Problems. Throughout the fall of 1975 and into the spring of 1976, rumors and news (*Continued on page 42*)

Photograph by Patricia de Arcoyne/SYGMA

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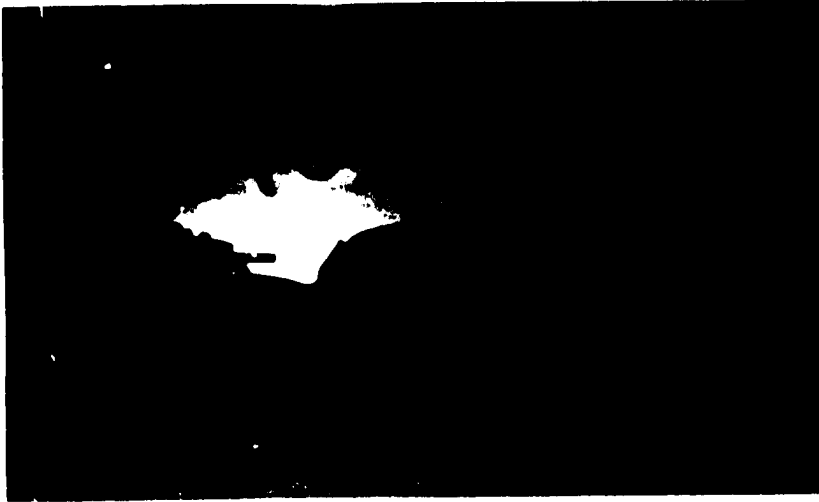
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25



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BUSH

(Continued from page 25) stories about a new strain of intelligence abuses surfaced on Capitol Hill. This time, the reported abuses had been committed not by the CIA, but by intelligence agencies of regime-friendly to the United States. A standard feature of the internal-security apparatus of each of these allies—Argentina, Chile, Iran, Israel, the Philippines, South Africa, South Korea, and Taiwan—had been their harassment of opposition figures, both domestically and in the United States. Some of these countries' intelligence operatives, especially the Koreans, were courting members of Congress with campaign contributions, outright bribes, and favors ranging from ersatz antiques to party girls.

A growing number in the post-Watergate Democratic Congress found this pastiche of human rights abuses and influence peddling particularly unattractive. Continued unrestrained activities of these foreign intelligence services threatened to undermine congressional and public confidence in the Agency once again.

To make matters worse, reports had been forwarded to Bush about preparations by Cuban-American veterans of the CIA's Miami station—including some who remained on the informant payroll—to attack pro-Castro targets. Previously viewed as freedom fighters, these Cuban-Americans had become reckless terrorists, over whom the CIA had lost all control.

In June, four Cuban-American organizations joined together to form CORU, or the Command of United Revolutionary Organizations. CORU was formed to build political support for overthrowing Castro, and its members began working directly with the intelligence agencies of the right-wing regimes in Chile, Paraguay, and Nicaragua.

After a CORU meeting at Bonao, a mountain resort in the Dominican Republic, consistent reports of planned bombings and political assassinations filtered back to the CIA. Within six weeks, bombs exploded at the Cuban United Nations mission in New York, and at four other locations in the hemisphere. The first terrorist war in the Americas was under way, and it was being waged by agents trained and paid by the CIA.

The CIA had never acted to restrain "friendly" intelligence agencies and was reluctant to preempt Cuban-American anti-Castro activity. The acts—including illegal ones—were occurring mostly outside the United States. And even when these acts were plotted inside the United States, they were officially the FBI's responsibility.

Besides, unless the Agency continued to

look the other way, it would be forced to open a Pandora's box of more congressional investigation. Hoping to avoid months or years of additional inquiry, Bush's closest aides arranged to keep him as free as possible of "irrelevant details," thus maximizing his ability to deny there was a problem. Reports of Cuban-American activity were handled routinely as FYI items within the bureaucracy below, and rogue operations were seldom reined in. There were, however, exceptions to this rule.

In February 1976, the CIA blew the whistle on Orlando Bosch, a Miami pediatrician and anti-Castro organizer. Bosch was detained by Costa Rican police for plotting to assassinate Henry Kissinger. The plot was reportedly organized because Kissinger had been conducting negotiations to improve relations with Cuba.

The CIA also intervened when officials learned the Chilean Intelligence Service (DINA) was planning to use Cuban ex-CIA agents to assassinate Chilean exiles in Portugal and France through a regional counter-terrorist organization known as Operation Condor. Headed by Chile, Operation Condor included agents from Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, and Uruguay dedicated to tracking down "subversives" throughout the hemisphere. The details of the plot were passed to the CIA's intelligence liaisons in Portugal and France, and they squelched it.

In these cases, Bush's CIA proved capable of averting attacks planned by its friends. Unfortunately for targets of similar plots, the Agency did not develop any systematic way of dealing with such terrorist threats.

Assassination Abroad. On June 16, 1976, U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Francis E. Meloy, Jr., his driver, and the embassy's economic counselor were assassinated on their way to a meeting with Lebanese president-elect Elias Sarkis. President Ford convened an emergency meeting in the White House Situation Room to focus on the potential danger to other Americans in Lebanon.

The crisis group—Ford, Bush, Kissinger, National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, Deputy Defense Secretary William Clements, Jr., and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff George Brown—was convened four times in the next four days.

On this rare occasion, Bush moved beyond the role of information-provider, feeling that the murder meant a "new, more dangerous level of terrorist activity in Beirut." This would warrant ordering Americans to evacuate, a move Kissinger opposed. Ford agreed with Bush; a navy task force moved in and evacuated 166 people.

Bush was thrilled with his expanded role. He went back to the Agency, anxious to follow through with more information. For the first time in his career he was really a center-stage actor on a par with Kissinger. Bush wanted to know what the Agency could do to react to this new terrorist threat.

The analytical side of the CIA had little that could help Bush. The National Security Agency had soaked up millions of conversations from special listening posts and satellites around the world, and it was beginning to process all this material through its new Cray advanced computers. But the results were largely useless, according to a ranking intelligence official at the time, because Bush and his predecessors had not heeded warnings that the expanded technological take of signals intercepted would be left unprocessed if the funds for analysis were not vastly increased.

Bush, who had been granted the additional responsibility—for the first time in CIA history—to control the budgets of all intelligence agencies, had deferred this decision, like so many others. There was virtually nothing the Agency analysts could immediately do to assess, or help combat, the terrorists in Lebanon.

So Bush turned instead to the clandestine operators who routinely collect human intelligence abroad. Within the clandestine service side of the Agency, the Meloy assassination raised serious questions. Most intelligence from Lebanon came from three sources: Mossad, Israel's intelligence service; SAVAK, Iran's intelligence service; and a limited group of Lebanese Phalangists and assorted rightists who had been managed out of the Athens CIA station by Richard Welch.

In general, the ability to keep up files on opposition parties, dissidents, and expatriate political factions in any country depends largely on the cooperation of the host government. With Richard Welch's murder the previous December, the Agency had become more dependent than ever on information from Israel and Iran.

U.S. intelligence officials felt they needed to be able to reciprocate to get effective cooperation. The Korean CIA was interested in Korean dissidents in the United States; SAVAK wanted to know the movements of the Shah's opposition; Mossad wanted every available piece of information on Palestinian political maneuvers in Washington; the Philippines secret police needed reports on anti-Marcos forces; and so forth.

As a result of legislation and the intelligence reforms of the previous year, though, the CIA was flatly banned from conducting any domestic surveillance, including watching foreign opposition movements based in the United States. In short,

the CIA had less and less to share with its counterparts abroad.

The information Bush wanted could be obtained, the CIA's clandestine operators assured him, but only if Bush made it clear that the CIA would not crack down on "co-operative" intelligence Agency activities and report their plans or the information they shared to the FBI.

At that point, according to a still-active CIA official, Bush made a tactical judgment, one of the few clear choices of his career. He wanted to concentrate on collecting more information on terrorist activities around the world. But in order to get it, the CIA had to cooperate with friendly foreign agencies operating in the United States. No further pressure would be brought to bear on rogue operations of "co-operative" intelligence agencies. He would try to find ways to help them rather than to curtail their activities.

That was the backdrop when the U.S. ambassador to Paraguay, George Landau, cabled the CIA on July 28 to say that he had just issued special U.S. visas to two Chilean military operatives who had been issued fake passports by Paraguayan intelligence officials. The two claimed they were heading to Washington to meet with CIA Deputy Director Vernon Walters, among other things. In a separate courier pouch, Landau sent photocopies of the passports to Walters. Back from the CIA came a "service message" acknowledging receipt of his cable and stating that it had been "delivered to George Bush, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency . . ." (In a 1980 interview with one of the authors, Bush denied that he ever saw this memo, claiming he had been on a trip to China at the time.)

On August 4, the CIA forwarded a response on behalf of the recently retired Walters to the U.S. ambassador in Paraguay, stating "that he was unaware of the visit and that his Agency did not desire to have any contact with the Chileans." The ambassador revoked the visas. Two days later the CIA sent the photographs accompanying the visas back to the State Department.

This series of transactions meant little to anyone in the CIA except those in the clandestine service who had followed Operation Condor, the counterterrorism program that the Agency would block later that year from assassinating Chilean exiles in Portugal and France. The cooperation between intelligence operatives of two member nations—Paraguay and Chile—meant they were probably gearing up for an action in the United States.

The situation became even more ominous when the CIA learned from a telephone call in late August that the two

agents were in Washington. But under the guidelines for dealing with "cooperative" intelligence organizations, there was no reporting mechanism to track this information and alert the director.

Direct CIA Involvement. Meanwhile, other ominous information was circulating inside the CIA. On September 7, 1976, a former CIA officer named Kevin Mulcahy had called Theodore Shackley, the associate deputy director of operations. Mulcahy reported that another former CIA agent, Edwin Wilson, was training Libyan terrorists in explosives and was providing the timing devices for detonators. Wilson was getting the devices from William Weisenburger, the CIA's technical expert, and from an Agency supplier, Scientific Communications. Wilson and another former CIA officer were shipping firearms to Libya, and they were planning to ship Redeye missiles. Most significantly, Wilson was coordinating his clearly illegal activities through Thomas Clines, Shackley's former subordinate in several CIA assignments.

Shackley knew Wilson well and had used the intelligence Wilson derived from his trips to Libya. Shackley filed a memo with his boss, William Wells, describing in flat terms what Mulcahy had said. Wells turned the matter over to the CIA's inspector general, John Waller, who then dispatched a deputy, Thomas Cox, to see Mulcahy.

Cox was troubled by Wilson's activities. Active CIA personnel were involved, and former agents were still using their contacts in the commission of illegal acts. Mulcahy and others believed the activities had been authorized or semiofficial "off-the-books" activities (for which the Agency went outside normal channels, using private operatives who maintained a lower level of accountability and increased deniability). And Tom Clines, himself suspected of wrongdoing, had conducted two interviews as part of the investigation. A record of serious compromise was building. Clearly a larger investigation was called for, but Cox was put on hold.

In consultation with Bush's office, the inspector general's office made a strategic decision. On September 17, they turned over the preliminary information offered by Mulcahy and those they had interviewed to the FBI.

Clines, along with other CIA officials, knew that Mulcahy had gone to the FBI. On September 20, Clines reported that a Cuban-American former CIA agent still used from time to time by the Agency, Rafael "Chi Chi" Quintero, had sought Clines out the day before. (Quintero would reemerge, along with Clines, as a participant in the Iran-contra scandal.) Quintero complained that Wilson had recruited him for what

Quintero had thought was to be an Agency hit on the international terrorist "Carlos." Like Mulcahy, Quintero had assumed that the CIA was simply "going off the books."

When Quintero and three other Cuban-American former agents went to Geneva to meet with Wilson, they learned the target was to be an expatriate Libyan. Quintero stalled so that he could check with Clines. Clines reported the Quintero visit to Inspector General Waller. Wilson, notified of this report by Clines, returned to Washington to put his own memo on record complaining of the unreliability of Mulcahy's charges.

Despite Wilson's protest, these new allegations about proposed assassinations using present and former CIA agents, and about current CIA employees and contractors providing explosives, were too dramatic to sit on. A full internal investigation was needed to determine how exposure of Wilson's activities might damage the CIA's other operations.

Both Shackley and Clines knew about Wilson's activities and could expose his role in Libya. But this was precisely the downside to an internal investigation into "off-the-books" activities; they would also be required, in any honest investigation, to nose around a raft of related "off-the-books" activities, including Wilson's support for extraordinarily sensitive programs such as the navy's undersea surveillance of Soviet submarines. The results of the entire internal inquiry would surely have to be reported to Congress.

A new round of damaging self-examination was not a pleasant prospect for Bush. He had recently spoken publicly about the Agency's success in overcoming its adversarial relationship with Congress. "How we can ferret out corruption has given way to the more serious question of how we can get better intelligence," Bush said on ABC's *Issues and Answers*. Oversight, Bush said, was no longer to see if "everybody at the CIA is a bunch of crooks," but to improve the quality of the job the intelligence agencies were doing. Bush dreaded the prospect of having to watch the adversarial relationship reemerge. Any indication that the CIA was operating "off the books" would surely spawn precisely that reaction.

Assassination At Home. On September 21, a devastating bomb (of the type the FBI believed Wilson was selling) exploded under the Chevelle sedan of former Chilean Ambassador to the United States Orlando Letelier, killing Letelier and Ronnie Moffitt, a colleague from the Institute for Policy Studies, where Letelier worked. By the end of the day, institute spokespeople were accusing the Chilean intelligence

service of the crime.

Within a week, the FBI received a declassified cable about Operation Condor. The cable, which was shared with the State Department, raised the distinct possibility that the Letelier assassination was an Operation Condor plot, and made reference to the practice of member countries dispatching secret teams to do each other's dirty work.

Eugene Propper, the assistant attorney general in charge of investigating the case, asked for a meeting with the CIA. To his surprise, he discovered that he would actually be meeting with CIA Director George Bush himself.

On October 4, 1976, Propper and J. Stanley Pottinger, the assistant attorney general for civil rights, met with Bush and his general counsel, Anthony Lapham. "Look," Bush told them, according to Propper's account in *Labyrinth*, a book he wrote with Taylor Branch, "I'm appalled by the bombing. Obviously we can't allow people to come right here into the capital and kill foreign diplomats and American citizens like this. It would be a hideous precedent. So, as director, I want to help you. As an American citizen I want to help. But, as director, I also know that the Agency can't help in a lot of situations like this. We've got some problems. Tony, tell him what they are." Bush said, turning the conversation over to his handpicked general counsel, who had been at the Agency a mere four months.

The first bar to CIA cooperation, Lapham told Propper, was that the Agency couldn't afford to have sources pulled into court as witnesses. Secondly, "we got torn to pieces last year for domestic intelligence, so now everybody over here is gun shy about reporting on Americans or any activists in this country. We can't do it. That's strictly out. The liberals don't like some things we do and the conservatives don't like others, and the rule book is now, we stay clean by keeping out of criminal stuff and domestic stuff. You've got a murder here in the States. That's both. That makes it tough."

Lapham allowed that if the case were "a security matter" it would be different. But to determine that it was, they would have to investigate it as a domestic crime. Lapham convinced Propper that they needed an exchange of letters between the CIA director and the attorney general that would put the CIA on firm legal grounding. And Bush concluded the meeting by adding, "If you two come up with something that Tony thinks will protect us, we'll be all right."

For Bush, there were larger stakes in an agreement. He still had other information about Wilson to disclose. If he did not tell

2326

the FBI soon and conduct his own internal investigation, he ran the risk of earning himself a scandal for covering up.

Two days later, a Cubana Airlines jet en route to Kingston exploded shortly after takeoff from Barbados's Seawell Airport, killing all 73 people aboard, including 24 members of the Cuban fencing team. Fidel Castro immediately blamed the CIA. In Miami, a man with a Hispanic accent called the *Miami Herald* saying he represented Operation Condor and claiming credit for the bombing. A Miami radio station also received a call from a woman who claimed the bombing had been carried out by CORU, the violent Cuban-American group bent on overthrowing Castro.

Within two days, Venezuelan police arrested two CORU leaders, Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles, in connection with the bombing. Confessions from two other men who admitted planting the bomb, in addition to evidence gathered at Posada's villa, had led to the capture of the CORU leaders. (Bosch was the Miami pediatrician who had been arrested the preceding February to squelch a plot to kill Henry Kissinger. Posada would reemerge in 1985 in a CIA counterterrorism operation in El Salvador. That operation would be headed by Felix Rodriguez, who was originally recruited for the job through Vice President Bush's office.)

CIA operatives knew, from information supplied by several former agents who were now members of CORU, that the charges were accurate. But if the CIA conducted a full-scale investigation of CORU, or even pulled together all the information it had available, it would certainly lead to another year of hearings about the operation of the CIA's Miami station—a hub of Agency activity—not to mention the Wilson and Letelier matters, both of which appeared to have CORU links.

Lapham followed up quickly with Propper over the next few days to iron out a cooperative agreement with the Justice Department. The attorney general, having found indications in the criminal investigation that foreign agents might have been involved, requested that the director report on any aspects of the murders that might relate to the security of the United States.

In addition, at the CIA's request the agreement stated that if the Agency found anything indicating criminal activity, it would turn that information over to the Justice Department, as required by law. The CIA would provide "relevant" information. Justice could not use this information in court unless it could be independently obtained from a second source. If something from the CIA was crucial to the Justice Department's case, the president would decide whether it could be used.

The provisions of this new agreement ensured that the CIA would not investigate in the field or pull together information, but would, instead, turn over discrete bits of information for the FBI to pin down. There was, however, no language which required that the CIA tell the FBI or Justice Department what the details meant. And the CIA knew that the FBI's institutional pride would not permit it to ask the Agency to explain things very often.

This seemingly benign addition to the agreement appeared to Propper to be a minor afterthought. Of course the Justice Department should investigate criminal activity; that made sense. What Propper had no way of knowing was the extent to which this agreement would be treated, inside the Agency, as an escape hatch.

The implication of the suggested language had shifted from a bland dictum that the CIA "turn over" indications of criminal activity to a more resolute proclamation. Now, the CIA would not itself investigate matters that might involve criminal activity; it would instead hand over its raw data about bewilderingly complicated cases to the FBI and the Justice Department.

The impact of this agreement in the wake of the assassination and bombings was enormous. By simply turning materials over to the FBI and the president's Intelligence Oversight Board, the CIA could avert an internal inquiry. By ducking the responsibility to investigate internally, Bush and Lapham assured that the least amount of information harmful to the Agency could possibly surface. (Lapham claims that his only intention was to clear the way for CIA cooperation with the attorney general.)

The effect of these developments was to ensure that investigations slowed to a sluggish pace. In the Letelier murder investigation, for example, the CIA did not tell Justice Department investigators anything about the Chilean agents, or their stopover in Paraguay, for more than two years.

In his 1987 autobiography, George Bush doesn't explain these developments, making only an oblique reference to four Latin American nations which he reports ceased their cooperation with the Agency when stories about the existence of Operation Condor first surfaced. There is no reference to the harassment, surveillance, and violence directed by "friendly" intelligence agencies at people living in the United States. There is no explanation for the failure to control CORU, or for stalling tactics in the Wilson case. And there is no justification offered for the CIA's refusal, until after Bush left office, to significantly assist in identifying and capturing those responsible for the assassination of Orlando Letelier.

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15

► **Bush was not happy when he learned that the attorney general had declined, for the second time, to prosecute Bob Woodward of the Washington Post.**

Leaving The CIA. Bush's tenure at the CIA would end at Carter's inauguration, but until the end Attorney General Edward Levi continued pursuing criminal cases against CIA officials and demanding CIA documents. Most disturbing to the Agency was the accumulated evidence to be used in a possible prosecution of former CIA Director Richard Helms for lying to Congress about the Agency's involvement in the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende.

Although the CIA's own three-person team had recommended in December 1974 that Helms be prosecuted, the Agency managed to drag its heels until after Bush took office. But in March 1976, former Ambassador to Chile Edward Korry forwarded a letter to Levi directly contradicting what Helms and several other witnesses had told the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Helms's lawyer, Edward Bennett Williams, used his position on the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board to argue against an indictment, according to a knowledgeable official. To indict Helms would be unfair, Williams claimed, because his client had not wanted to mislead or lie to the committee but only to honor his sacred oath to keep the CIA's secrets. And Bush interceded to argue that the outgoing administration should drop the Helms case rather than leave him to the mercy of the new Democratic administration.

In this case, as in others, Bush found himself at odds with the Justice Department. He was also unhappy when the department, despite the CIA's request, declined for the second time to prosecute *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward, according to an official in the department at the time.

On December 12, 1976, Woodward had

published the first account of CIA electronic surveillance of government representatives from Micronesia. It was Bush's job to protect the CIA's sources and methods; he believed Woodward and his sources had violated the Signals Intelligence Act, which makes it a felony to "knowingly and willfully" publish "in any manner prejudicial to the safety or interest of the United States" any classified information concerning codes, ciphers, communications intelligence activities, or equipment used in cryptographic or communications intelligence.

When Bush had first arrived at the CIA, a series of cases designed to find, and punish, reporters and their sources was already being pushed forward by Secretary of State Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft. These three men, despite the reservations of outgoing CIA Director William Colby, had urged Attorney General Edward Levi to prosecute four journalists—*New York Times* reporters Seymour Hersh and Nicholas Horrock, *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward, and free-lancer Tad Szulc.

But Levi and his staff, along with White House lawyers and political staffers, were reluctant to prosecute. They had serious doubts that the Signals Intelligence Act applied to the activities of journalists. They also worried that the political climate, still heated from Watergate and the intelligence scandals, would make prosecution look like an attempt either to intimidate or to punish the very journalists who had uncovered many of those scandals.

Levi asked Bush to release sufficient sensitive information concerning the published revelations on Micronesia to convince a jury that their publication had truly damaged the national security. Bush balked; the stakes were too great for the CIA to confirm its role. As he had before, Levi said he would not and could not go further without it.

At the end of December, Levi wrote Bush insisting that the CIA declassify and release the evidence about Helms and Chile that the prosecutors needed, or explain why it was being withheld. Inexplicable holes in documents were unacceptable. Levi cited "the president's stated position on this matter" in calling for prompt release of the missing materials. His staff made it clear to Bush's aides that they thought the CIA's attitude "casual" and "cavalier" and that the Agency was, in effect, obstructing the investigation, according to former aides to both Bush and Levi.

Levi's irritation grew as he heard from the prosecutors that the Helms documents had been provided only reluctantly, and that they tended to be poor-quality copies. Even

in the Letelier murder investigation, in which the agreement between Levi and Bush had been most explicit, little useful material had been included in the tons of cables and peripheral reports that had been passed to the FBI.

There were other irritations as well. The CIA had provided few relevant documents about Wilson and the Miami Cubans. Then, in the midst of another investigation—of Park Tong Sun, the Korean businessman accused of influence-peddling in Washington—more problems came up. According to a still-active Agency official, the CIA file on Park disappeared inside the Agency for several months, only to reappear without some of the more important cables about members of Congress who had received payoffs and about the CIA officers closest to Park. (The CIA's chief of station in Seoul, Donald Gregg, later became Bush's national security adviser when he was vice president.)

Still, according to Bush's account, and that of others involved in the dispute at the time, Levi brought his differences with the CIA to a head over a relatively minor espionage case—that of Edwin Gibbons Moore II, a former CIA agent caught by the FBI trying to sell classified information to the Soviets. When the Justice Department began prosecuting Moore, the CIA refused to turn over some of the documents, particularly CIA telephone books. The CIA argued that the Soviets would thereby get the most valuable and damaging information, including the names of undercover personnel. The Justice Department countered that it needed all the material, but it would make public only a small portion.

According to documents recently released under a Freedom of Information Act request, debate continued through several phone calls and meetings until Levi and Bush agreed to let the president resolve the dispute. On January 17, three days before Jimmy Carter's inauguration, they wanted to see Ford, coolly discussing the case in Brent Scowcroft's office. Levi, scheduled to appear before the Supreme Court later that day, was dressed in a morning suit, white tie and tails. He argued that if there was to be a prosecution it must be based on evidence that showed true damage to the national security.

Bush argued to the contrary: let the Justice Department make do with what information the CIA was willing to provide—a handful of older classified documents. These would do no damage if introduced into the court record. That was a good way to lose the case, Levi pointed out. Since they would do no damage if released, it was difficult to argue that they required classification to protect the national security. To win meant showing damage and thus creat-

ing the damage.

So let the case be lost, Bush insisted. The psychological and financial trauma of being prosecuted would be punishment enough for Moore. They could decide later on what specific evidence would be used. Bush was adamant that no agent's name be compromised to help the prosecution. Even the nonsensitive names in the phone books opened those individuals to recruitment by the KGB, Bush said.

Once more, Levi launched into a lecture about constitutional safeguards. Defendants must be allowed to know the nature of the accusations (and thus the evidence) against them, just as they have the right to be confronted by the witnesses against them. The CIA's continuing refusal to turn over materials the Justice Department needed "smacked of a Watergate cover-up," Levi told Bush.

These words hit hard, and the memories of his time at the Republican National Committee were suddenly fresh in his mind. Bush's patience gave way. "We'll be taking it to the president in a few minutes," he said, his voice rising. "Why don't you tell him that—in just those words." These events were not "Nixonian," he added.

In the end, Moore was prosecuted under Levi's terms. But Bush was successful in stalling, if not in actually preventing, the prosecutions of those associated with the CIA's role in Chile, the Wilson affair, and the assassination of Orlando Letelier. Eventually, these cases would be acted upon more vigorously by Jimmy Carter's director of central intelligence, Stansfield Turner. When Turner began his own internal investigations of the incidents, however, he would find Bush's closest aides to be among those most resistant to his efforts.

A decade later, Bush included a most curious version of the Moore story in his autobiography. There, he described the case as his "biggest fight to protect CIA sources." In Bush's account, his angry objection to the Watergate reference intimidated Levi, causing him to cave in.

The author of Bush's autobiography, Victor Gold, says that the emphasis on the Moore case was his own choice, an editorial decision to liven up the book. Gold acknowledges he had never heard details about Bush's role in the more important cases—Helms, Wilson, and Letelier. Bush's spokesman, Steven Hart, says he cannot speak about those cases: "Before my time. Only the vice president knows the answers." But Bush has repeatedly refused to be interviewed about the ins and outs of his days as CIA director, emphasizing his oath to protect "methods and sources," and he declined again, for the purposes of this article, to answer questions.

But our review of interviews with former

aides and current officials, as well as a careful examination of the record, suggests that more often than not while director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Bush played the role of a cheerleader and a front man—willfully ignorant of unpleasant news. He ignored repeated signals that rogue, "off-the-books" operations by former agents were out of control, leading to Agency acquiescence in illegal activities.

Bush was even more palsied in dealing with other countries' intelligence agencies, which were illegally harassing, wiretapping, beating, kidnapping, and intimidating their exile populations in the United States.

In 1976, after Bush decided not to restrain "cooperative" foreign intelligence agencies, rogue operators became involved in blowing up an airliner, assassinating a former Chilean diplomat in Washington, attempting assassinations here and abroad, and smuggling arms.

Whether Bush was fully aware of the details or not, it was this aspect of his tenure at the CIA which set the stage for the Iran-contra scandal. Although accounts of his response vary, this much is clear: Bush failed to conduct prudent internal inquiries, failed to purge the CIA of rogue connections, and failed to proscribe such behavior in unequivocal policy pronouncements.

Out of the Loop. Bush now claims that as vice president he was kept in the dark about such important Reagan administration initiatives as trading arms to Iran for hostages and illegally funding the Nicaraguan contras. He has claimed that he first learned the importance of the details of the scandal from Senator David Durenburger in December, 1986—one month after the rest of the country found out about it in a televised press conference held by then-Attorney General Edwin Meese.

How could he have missed the unfolding disaster? "I was at the army-navy football game," Bush says of one key meeting where the policy was discussed. And he has no recollection at all of a second meeting at which Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger argued vehemently against selling missiles to Iran. His staff suggests that he may have taken a washroom break.

When CBS anchorman Dan Rather pestered Bush with questions about the lameness of these responses in their now-famous confrontation last January, Bush insisted that he had been "out of the loop" on Iran policy and contra funding. "Uh, may I explain 'out of the loop'?" the vice president added. "No operational role."

That was a curious thing to say, because no sophisticated observer expects high-

level officials to have day-to-day operational roles in the implementation of policy. But "out of the loop" in terms of knowledge about the administration's policy? As chief of the National Security Council's Crisis Management Team since 1981, and as vice president, Bush was privy to the same information provided to the president.

With Bush's record as the backdrop, though, his explanation is more understandable. Bush has been on the scene of the nation's biggest political scandals, from Watergate to Iran-contra, and he is one of the few survivors. His unique combination of engagement and ignorance actually helped him navigate treacherous waters as the director of the CIA.

When the Democrats began taunting, "Where was George?" at their convention last July, it was a clear signal that this mixed record of experience, including his relationship with the national security world, had become a pivotal issue in the presidential campaign.

For those who have worked most closely with Bush, it seemed a silly taunt. His colleagues in the intelligence community almost uniformly describe Bush as a straight-shooting supervisor—dedicated, articulate, amiable, thoughtful, honest, and loyal. But even his stoutest supporters readily admit, if pressed, that Bush is also deferential in the extreme.

During the Nixon and Ford administrations, he proved willing to delegate virtually every aspect of major policy decisions, and their implementation, to a coterie of career professionals. He also learned how to insulate himself from the fallout when disaster struck.

A careful review of the voluminous investigative record of the Iran-contra scandal clearly demonstrates that there were only eight individuals, out of the hundreds involved, who were actually "in the loop" of detailed information about both the arms-for-hostages deal with Iran and funding for the Nicaraguan contras.

One—William Casey of the CIA—is dead. Five of the others—Robert McFarlane, John Poindexter, Oliver North, Richard Secord, and Albert Hakim—have pleaded guilty or been indicted for their involvement in the loop. One is leaving office on January 20, 1989.

And the last, George Bush, hopes to take office on that day.

Scott Armstrong and Jeff Nason are respectively executive director and Iran-contra analyst at the National Security Archive. The views expressed here are the views of the authors and their sources and do not reflect the views of the National Security Archive.