

ILLEGIB

■ BUSH'S C.I.A.

# The Same Old Dirty Tricks

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**D**irector of Central Intelligence, 1976-77. That's a line in George Bush's résumé that he and his surrogates like to flaunt. But his year at Langley is never discussed in detail. In his autobiography, the Vice President mentions little of what happened while he was in charge of the Central Intelligence Agency, reinforcing the general impression that he was a caretaker who managed to raise spirits at an all-but-catatonic C.I.A. by loyally defending its interests in bureaucratic tugs of war. But there is plenty of material in the public record to show that while he was at the wheel, the Company was far from moribund.

Thirteen years ago the U.S. intelligence community was in a panic. Watergate and various press reports begat a presidential commission and two Congressional committees, which aired the Central Intelligence Agency's dirty laundry in public. America was treated to a string of revelations, absurd and serious: assassination plots, potions that defoliate beards, an illegal C.I.A. domestic spying operation, drug experiments conducted on unwitting subjects. The public pillorying of the C.I.A. and the baring of its darkest secrets—what insiders call the family jewels—led to a loss of face for the spooks and a free fall in Company morale.

Enter Bush, the Republican with the golden résumé. Bush was serving as U.S. envoy to China when he received the nod in November 1975. After being confirmed on January 27, 1976, he held the C.I.A.'s reins for 356 days. (His agency ties may have begun years before; see Joseph McBride, "George Bush, C.I.A. Agent," *The Nation*, July 16/23.)

Bush did spend much of his time as director trooping to and from Capitol Hill. By his own count, he made fifty-one appearances before members of Congress. But during the time he was in control at the C.I.A., the agency was not, as current mythology would have it, comatose. With Bush at the helm, the C.I.A. bungled operations in Angola and Iran. There is evidence it intervened in Jamaica before the 1976 elections there. The agency was caught bugging Micronesian officials. As the nation's number-one spy, Bush met with Manuel Noriega. He suppressed crucial evidence regarding the assassination of Orlando Letelier, former Chilean Ambassador to the United States. Bush also carried on the C.I.A. tradition of using journalists as spies. Most important, Bush opened the agency's door to a collection of right-wing ideologues determined to press the C.I.A. into adopting a more hawkish view of the Soviet Union.

Angola was the Nicaragua of the 1970s—attracting would-be Rambos and obsessing U.S. policy-makers eager

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for a cold war win. After Portugal announced in late 1974 that it would withdraw from its colony, civil war erupted between various nationalist groups. The C.I.A. jumped into the fray, backing Jonas Savimbi's Unita and another faction against the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (M.P.L.A.). By August 1975 the Company had pumped \$24.7 million into its secret war, according to John Stockwell, who served as chief of the agency's Angola Task Force. Congress rebelled. In December the Senate passed the Clark Amendment (named after Iowa Senator Dick Clark), cutting off almost all C.I.A. expenditures in Angola. The House followed suit, and on February 9, 1976—ten days after Bush had moved into his office at the C.I.A.—President Ford signed the amendment into law. Bush inherited the covert action in its dying days.

Despite the presidentially-approved ban, the C.I.A. tap wasn't shut off immediately. Stockwell, in his account of the affair, *In Search of Enemies*, notes that after February 9 the agency sent an additional twenty-two flights from Zaire to a rebel airstrip, delivering 145,490 pounds of weapons. That month, Bush's C.I.A. also began making, in Stockwell's words, "generous payoffs to anyone who had been associated with our side of the Angolan war." The payoffs were sloppy. The C.I.A., Stockwell says, passed almost \$2 million to President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, most of which he was supposed to dole out to rebel leaders now abandoned by the C.I.A. Mobutu pocketed the cash. The C.I.A.'s former allies "were left starving," Stockwell writes.

The Angola program was a failure. What was Bush's response to its ignoble end? He requested that the task force produce recommendations for awards for the more than one hundred people who had worked on the operation. "Writing these commendations was the ultimate challenge of my 'professionalism,'" Stockwell says.

The shoddy disengagement from Angola at this time was not the only agency mess over which Bush presided. On August 28, 1976, three Americans were shot dead while driving through Teheran. They were working on a top-secret C.I.A. program called IBEX, a \$500 million electronic and photographic surveillance project for intelligence collecting in the region, including the Soviet Union. From the start IBEX was plagued with corruption and cloaked with intrigue. According to a *Washington Post* story by Bob Woodward, a month before the assassinations U.S. Ambassador to Iran Richard Helms, a former C.I.A. chief, sent a handwritten note to Bush complaining about the project and asking Bush to check out allegations of corruption

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associated with IBEX. According to an American who visited Helms, the Ambassador told the C.I.A., "He was totally washing his hands of the responsibility. It would all rest on the CIA—if it failed it was going to blow up on them. They could do what they wished." After Helms sent his missive, "diddley was done" at the C.I.A., an intelligence community source familiar with the IBEX project says. Under Bush, the program—which some experts considered a boondoggle that wouldn't work if it was ever finished—proceeded.

For this article, I submitted several questions in writing to Bush, including queries on the IBEX affair. He refused to respond to any of them.

No charge better explodes the myth that the C.I.A. was idling in neutral under Bush than the allegation that the Company actively worked to destabilize Jamaica right before the divisive elections of 1976. The government of Prime Minister Michael Manley, which had turned toward "democratic socialism" after he was elected in 1972, was up for re-election, and the campaign was marked by much violence. Manley suggested the C.I.A. was behind the bloodshed. But little evidence of agency meddling surfaced at the time. A year later, two investigative journalists, Ernest Volkman and John Cummings, citing interviews with several unnamed senior intelligence officers, maintained in *Penthouse* that C.I.A. intervention had been extensive. Volkman and Cummings reported that C.I.A. officials and assets assisted the smuggling of weapons to the island, while conducting a full-fledged covert campaign against Manley. The operation, allegedly the handiwork of Henry Kissinger, was kicked off shortly before Bush arrived at Langley, Volkman and Cummings said, and continued throughout 1976. Senior intelligence officials told the pair that an estimated \$10 million was spent trying to overthrow Manley and that three failed assassination attempts against Manley had occurred with C.I.A. knowledge.

"I think we should tread very carefully on governments that are constitutionally elected," Bush said during the Senate hearings on his nomination as Director of Central Intelligence. In an interview with Volkman and Cummings, one U.S. intelligence official noted, "I'm certain the original plan for Jamaica made no mention of assassination, but anybody with half a brain realizes that when you're dealing with fanatical people in a volatile situation, assassination simply becomes another option. . . . and while nobody in government ordered anything like that . . . we let it happen, because it suited our purposes."

Bush's C.I.A. was embarrassed by the revelation that the agency was conducting electronic surveillance against representatives of Micronesia, a U.S. colony that was negotiating its future status with the United States. According to Woodward, who broke the story, the C.I.A. had been snooping on the Micronesians for the previous four years to

learn their private negotiating strategy. The C.I.A. contended that even though agency surveillance of U.S. citizens is illegal, the Micronesians were legitimate targets because they were foreigners. "It's a disgrace," one Justice Department official told Woodward. "To look at this issue in narrow legal terms is to miss the 'Ugly American' quality."

Bush also continued the controversial practice of using journalists as informants. In February 1976, Bush made a pledge: "Effective immediately, the C.I.A. 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." (At the time of Bush's announcement, the C.I.A. was employing about fifty members of U.S. media organizations.) This categorical-sounding statement was widely interpreted to mean the end of the agency's subvention of journalists. But in April, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities revealed that the C.I.A. intended to keep on its payroll more than twenty-five journalists or other representatives of news organizations.

The select committee expressed its "concern that the use of American journalists and media organizations for clandestine operations [was] a threat to the integrity of the press."

Had Bush lied in February? Well, not exactly. The key word in his declaration was "accredited." The C.I.A. interpreted it to mean only journalists who are issued credentials as correspondents. That left available for recruitment freelance reporters and news executives. Bush merely was showing that he could be as slippery as the next spook. He did the same in July, when he admitted in an affidavit that C.I.A. files contained information on Americans living overseas who had been targets of surveillance and break-ins. But in his statement, filed in connection with a lawsuit brought by the Socialist Workers Party against the C.I.A. and other agencies, Bush would neither confirm nor deny that C.I.A. agents had conducted the break-ins and eavesdropping, and he did not indicate whether the government had discontinued its spying on Americans abroad.

While at Langley, Bush had the pleasure of meeting Manuel Noriega. When recently deposed by attorneys for the Christic Institute, Donald Gregg, Bush's national security adviser and a C.I.A. veteran, said Bush as Director of Central Intelligence had a lunch conference in Washington with several Panamanian officials, including Noriega. It is unclear precisely what skulduggery Noriega was up to at the time. But, according to investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, the United States then possessed "hard evidence" linking Noriega to drug dealing and other criminal enterprise. U.S. intelligence, Hersh reports, knew that Noriega was directly involved in the gruesome killing of the Rev. Hector Gallegos, a priest who helped peasants organize a cooperative market. Gallegos was thrown, alive, from a

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helicopter. What did Bush know about Noriega's shady actions before meeting with him? Did he broach the subject with Noriega or any of the other Panamanians? Did Bush as director turn a blind eye, as successive Administrations have done, to Noriega's brutality?

There are also persisting questions about Bush and the agency's conduct before and after the Letelier assassination. In September 1976, Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt, an American, were killed in a car-bombing on Washington's Embassy Row. According to John Dinges and Saul Landau's account, *Assassination on Embassy Row*, Bush and other top C.I.A. brass kept critical information from the Assistant U.S. Attorney handling the case. Two weeks after the killing, Bush agreed to provide material to the F.B.I. "But the CIA withheld . . . the information that Deputy Director Vernon Walters, a few weeks before the assassination, had learned about a covert mission to Washington by two Chilean intelligence officers" who were members of the assassination team, write Dinges and Landau. Bush, they declare, had personally read a cable reporting the Chileans' secret trip. When the two officers arrived, an employee of the Chilean Embassy in Washington called Walters at Langley. Did Bush, Walters or anyone else try to figure out what the Chileans were up to? Dinges and Landau say there is no certain answer to that question.

"It is quite beyond belief," they write, "that the CIA is so lax in its counterespionage functions that it would simply have ignored a clandestine operation by a foreign intelligence service in Washington." Either it was lax or it was something much worse—complicit in Letelier's murder. As the two authors reasonably argue, any warning to the Chileans by the C.I.A. or the State Department would have scuttled the assassination mission.

The agency's failure to turn over promptly the evidence of the hit team's presence in Washington, Dinges and Landau show, delayed the criminal investigation. Instead, Bush's C.I.A. pushed the line that the Chilean military junta was innocent. "The CIA has concluded that the Chilean secret police were not involved in the death of Orlando Letelier," *Newsweek* reported three weeks after the slaying. Bush, *The Washington Post* reported, shared that view. Two and a half years later, the head and two officials of Chile's secret police were indicted for Letelier's murder. So much for Bush's 1976 assessment.

Exactly what Bush the spymaster knew and did about IBEX, Noriega, Letelier and Jamaica is not easy to pin down. Like Ronald Reagan, Bush is not a hands-on, detail-oriented manager. A recent *Washington Post* profile of Bush portrayed him as a C.I.A. director disengaged from substance, a great equivocator who ran away when confronted by a difficult issue. But one crucial decision he actually did make. That was to turn over the agency to a group of conservative hawks, who contaminated its analysis of Soviet power.

In June 1976, Bush handpicked seven conservatives to draft their own version of the annual intelligence estimate of Soviet strategic intentions. His chief criterion for selection was that the appointees have a pessimistic view of Soviet aims. Those who passed muster included Richard Pipes, a professor at Harvard; retired Lieut. Gen. Daniel Graham, who would go on to form the pro-Star Wars lobbying group Americans for the High Frontier; and Paul Nitze, then the godfather of Washington hawks. Bush handed the group—dubbed Team B—the same highly classified raw intelligence data used by the C.I.A.'s in-house experts.

Before Team B, cranky conservatives inside and outside the intelligence community had complained that the C.I.A. had gone soft on the Russians by wrongly concluding that the Soviet Union desired strategic parity with the United States, not superiority. Leading the charge was Maj. Gen. George Keegan, who in 1976 was head of Air Force intelligence. Keegan for years had claimed the Russians were preparing to attack the United States.

Team B and the agency's analysts clashed. It was "an absolute disaster for the C.I.A.," one intelligence officer said in 1976. And the result was predictable. The hard-liners found that the Russians were indeed striving for superiority over the United States. Bush adopted their views as official C.I.A. policy. This "more somber"—in the agency's lingo—estimate, completed in December 1976, helped shape U.S. and Soviet relations for the coming years.

"The so-called Team B report has had dramatic and continuing impact on the defense debate in the United States, especially in Congress," wrote Arthur Macy Cox, a former C.I.A. and State Department official, in 1980. "But the Team B findings . . . are based on misinterpretations of the facts." Team B, for instance, asserted the Russians had doubled their military spending, but, as Cox noted, this view misrepresented C.I.A. intelligence showing that the share of the Soviet gross national product devoted to military expenditures was twice as high as the 6 to 8 percent previously estimated. This meant not a doubling in military spending but that "Soviet defense industries are far less efficient than formerly believed," in the words of a C.I.A. report. Bush and Team B had engaged in statistical legerdemain. The Team B affair was a boon to future Reaganites. It paved the way for the hawks who did battle with Jimmy Carter and then found a home—and jobs—in the Reagan Administration.

Back in 1976, Bush knew that the talents and experience of a spook are not necessarily what most Americans look for in their presidential candidates. "As far as future prospects for elective office were concerned," he writes in his autobiography, *Looking Forward*, "the CIA was marked DEAD END." He probably still correctly reads the popular attitude about working in the C.I.A.: Someone has to do it, but it's a dirty job. No doubt that's why he chooses not to talk about Angola, IBEX, the Letelier murder and the other above-mentioned episodes. Hence, the convenient myth. Nothing happened at the C.I.A. while Bush the cheerleader was in command. Sounds like a pretty good cover story. □