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A Long Look Back

Directors of Central Intelligence, 1946–2005

David S. Robarge

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Nineteen DCIs served through 10 changes in president, scores of wars, . . . a global recession, the specter of nuclear holocaust, and the arrival of international terrorism on US shores.
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For nearly six decades, the director of central intelligence (DCI) headed the world's most important intelligence agency and oversaw the largest, most sophisticated, and most productive set of intelligence services ever known. From 1946 to 2005, 19 DCIs served through 10 changes in president; scores of major and minor wars, civil wars, military incursions, and other armed conflicts; two energy crises; a global recession; the specter of nuclear holocaust and the pursuit of arms control; the raising of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Iron Curtain; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and the arrival of international terrorism on the shores of America and the war against it overseas. During that time, the DCIs participated in or oversaw several vital contributions that intelligence made to US national security: strategic warning, clandestine collection, independent analysis, overhead reconnaissance, support to warfighters and peacekeepers, arms control verification, encouragement of democracy, and counterterrorism.

The responsibilities of the DCI grew logarithmically after January 1946, when President Harry Truman whimsically presented the first DCI, Sidney Souers, with a black hat, black cloak, and wooden dagger and declared him the “Director of Centralized Snooping.”¹ At that time, the DCI had no CIA to run, no indepen-

dent budget or personnel to manage, no authority to collect foreign secrets, and no power to bring about a consensus among agencies. Maybe that is why Souers, when asked not long after his appointment, “What do you want to do?” replied, “I want to go home.”²

Then came the National Security Act of 1947, which set forth a description of the DCI's job:

There is a Director of Central Intelligence who shall . . . serve as head of the United States intelligence community . . . act as the principal adviser to the President for intelligence matters related to the national security; and . . . serve as head of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Two years later, the Central Intelligence Agency Act laid down the DCI's and the Agency's administrative rubrics. Over the next several decades, the DCI would directly manage thousands of employees and billions of dollars, and would have an important part in guiding many thousands and many billions more.

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¹ Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 164.

² Tom Braden, “The Birth of the CIA,” *American Heritage* 27 (February 1977): 10.

DCIs



Directors of Central Intelligence, 1946-2005

(In counterclockwise order, beginning at the left.)



RAdm. Sidney William Souers, USNR	23 Jan 1946	10 Jun 1946
Lt. Gen. Hoyt Sanford Vandenberg, USA (AAF)	10 Jun 1946	1 May 1947
RAdm. Roscoe Henry Hillenkoetter, USN	1 May 1947	7 Oct 1950
Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, USA	7 Oct 1950	9 Feb 1953
Allen Welsh Dulles	26 Feb 1953	29 Nov 1961
John Alex McCone	29 Nov 1961	28 Apr 1965
VAdm. William Francis Raborn Jr., USN (ret.)	28 Apr 1965	30 Jun 1966
Richard McGarrah Helms	30 Jun 1966	2 Feb 1973
James Rodney Schlesinger	2 Feb 1973	2 Jul 1973
William Egan Colby	4 Sep 1973	30 Jan 1976
George Herbert Walker Bush	30 Jan 1976	20 Jan 1977
Adm. Stansfield Turner, USN (ret.)	9 Mar 1977	20 Jan 1981
William Joseph Casey	28 Jan 1981	29 Jan 1987
William Hedgecock Webster	26 May 1987	31 Aug 1991
Robert Michael Gates	6 Nov 1991	20 Jan 1993
R. James Woolsey	5 Feb 1993	10 Jan 1995
John Mark Deutch	10 May 1995	15 Dec 1996
George John Tenet	11 Jul 1997	11 Jul 2004
Porter Johnston Goss	24 Sep 2004	21 Apr 2005 ^a

^aOn this date, John Negroponte assumed leadership of the US Intelligence Community as the first director of national intelligence. Mr. Goss, retitled "Director of the Central Intelligence Agency," continued to head CIA.



"It's a Very Hard Job"

After John McCone was sworn in as DCI in November 1961, President John Kennedy shook his hand and gently warned him that he was "now living on the bull's eye, and I welcome you to that spot."³ The bull's eye seems an appropriate metaphor, considering how often DCIs were the targets of recrimination and attack. George H. W. Bush called the job "the best . . . in Washington,"⁴ but arguably it also was the toughest.

The DCI really did not "direct" something called "central intelligence." He was responsible for coordinating national collection and analysis, but he lacked the authority to do so, faced formidable competitors in other agencies, and had no constituency to support him. He had to walk the knife's edge between politics and politicization, and was the handy scapegoat for intelligence missteps often committed or set in train years before. And he had to deal with the reality that, as Allen Dulles wrote, "Intelligence is probably the least understood and most misrepresented of the professions."⁵

³ White House press release, "Remarks of the President at the Swearing-In Ceremonies of John McCone," 29 November 1961, Executive Registry Files, Job 80B01676R, box 8, folder 7. The subhead quotation is John Deutch's, in Charles E. Lathrop, *The Literary Spy: The Ultimate Source for Quotations on Espionage and Intelligence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 118.

⁴ Stansfield Turner, *Secrecy and Democracy: The CIA in Transition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 24.

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The purpose for establishing the position of DCI and the CIA under law in 1947 was to help avoid another Pearl Harbor surprise by taking strategic intelligence functions from the confines of separate departments and elevating them to the national level. The DCI was to have been the only adviser to the president with even a chance of presenting him with unbiased, nondepartmental intelligence. The seemingly straightforward phrases in the National Security Act, however, only gave the DCI the potential to be a leader of the Intelligence Community. Whether a given DCI came close to being one was a result of the interplay of personalities, politics, and world events. With line authority only over the CIA, the DCI depended on his powers of bureaucratic persuasion and, most vitally, his political clout at the White House to be heard *and* heeded. Richard Helms often noted that the secretary of defense was the second most powerful person in Washington—except, perhaps for a few first ladies—whereas the DCI was “the easiest man in Washington to fire. I have no political, military, or industrial base.”⁶ Moreover, the DCI's showcase product—national-level analy-

⁵ Allen Dulles, *The Craft of Intelligence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 5.

sis—often carried the implicit message, “Mr. President, your policy is not working.” Presidents often have unrealistic expectations about what the CIA's espionage and covert action capabilities can achieve, and they usually did not appreciate hearing from their DCIs that the world was complicated and uncertain. No wonder R. James Woolsey said his version of the job's description could be written very simply: “Not to be liked.”⁷

DCIs in Profile

Allen Dulles once told Congress that the CIA “should be directed by a relatively small but elite corps of men with a passion for anonymity and a willingness to stick at that particular job.”⁸ While Dulles's advice may be applicable to the heads of the Agency's directorates and offices, hardly any part of his statement was borne out over the history of the DCI's position. Elite, yes; but neither small in number nor anonymous—many were well known in their various pursuits when they were nominated. And even if they were willing to stay for the long haul, few did. In late 1945, an interdepartmental committee that was developing a plan for a national-level intelligence agency recommended that its director be appointed for a

⁶ Trudi McC. Osborne, “The (Really) Quiet American: Richard McGarrah Helms,” *The Washington Post*, 20 May 1973, C2.

⁷ Lathrop, 117.

⁸ “The Silent Service,” *Time*, 24 February 1967, 16.

DCIs

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The average time DCIs served was just over three years.

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long term, preferably not less than six years.⁹ Testifying to Congress in early 1947 about the proposed National Security Act, Dulles asserted that appointment as DCI “should be somewhat comparable to appointment to high judicial office, and should be equally free from interference due to political changes.”¹⁰

The reality of a DCI's tenure was otherwise. The average time they served was just over three years, and only five DCIs stayed at least four. It is a tribute to the DCIs and all the intelligence profession-

als they led under 11 administrations over nearly six decades that they were able to accomplish as much as they did despite all the bureaucratic disruptions.

The frequency of these “regime changes” at the CIA must further be considered in light of the fact that most new DCIs had next to no time to settle in and read in. Over half had to face foreign policy or intelligence-related crises within their first month. These included: the Chinese invasion of North Korea in 1950; the death of Stalin in 1953; the US military incursion into the Dominican Republic in 1965; France's withdrawal from NATO and a marked upsurge in the Cultural Revolution in China in 1966; the Yom Kippur war and

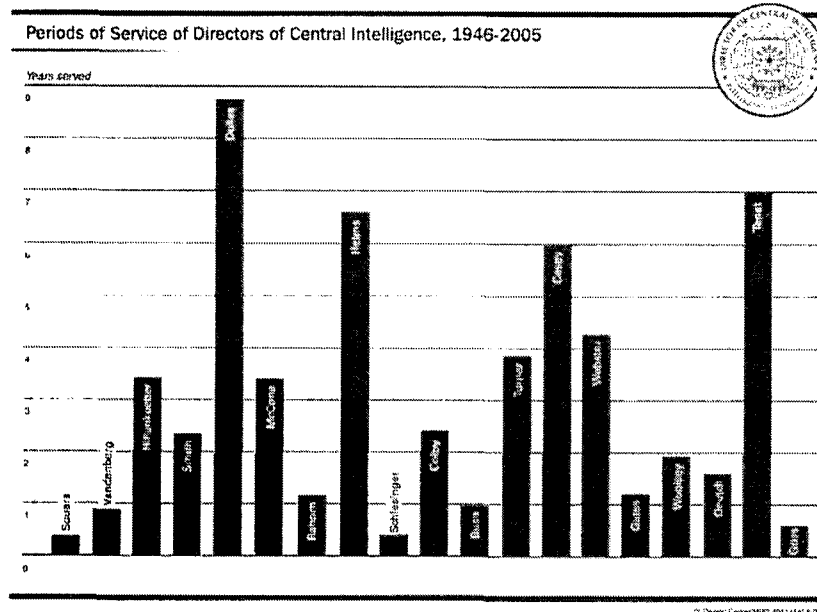
the fall of the Allende regime in Chile in 1973; the publication of the leaked Pike Committee report in 1976; the breakdown in the SALT II talks in 1977; a military coup attempt in recently democratized Spain in 1981; the assassination of the Lebanese prime minister in 1987; the official breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991; and a deadly terrorist attack in Egypt in 2004.

In other instances, major events immediately preceded the DCI's arrival: the signing of the Vietnam War peace accords in 1973 and the terrorist shootings outside the CIA headquarters compound in 1993. Soon after his appointment in 1950, Walter Bedell Smith said, “I expect the worst and I am sure I won't be disappointed.”¹¹ Most subsequent DCIs likewise were not. Perhaps the best advice they could have received from the presidents who picked them was, “Be ready to hit the ground running.”

Who were the DCIs? President Eisenhower called the CIA “one of the most peculiar types of operation[s] any government can have” and said “it probably takes a strange kind of genius to run it.”¹² Whatever the validity of that characterization, these are the salient demographic facts about the 19 DCIs:¹³

⁹ “Preliminary Report of Committee Appointed to Study War Department Intelligence Activities,” 3 November 1945, document 42 in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945-1950: Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), 102.

¹⁰ Statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 25 April 1947, National Security Act clipping file, folder 29, CIA Historical Intelligence Collection.



¹¹ Lathrop, 110.

¹² Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 227.

¹³ Most of the following biographic data comes from *Directors and Deputy Directors of Central Intelligence* (Washington: CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1998).

- They were born in 14 different states. Most hailed from the Midwest (nine) and the Northeast (seven). One was born in the Southwest, one in the West, and one overseas.
- They attended 21 different colleges, universities, and graduate or professional schools. Eight finished college, and ten others went on for post-graduate degrees. One, "Beetle" Smith, completed only high school. Considering that he ended his public service with four stars and an ambassadorship, he could be called the Horatio Alger of DCIs.
- Before their appointments, the DCIs came from a variety of walks of life, some from more than one. Six were from the military, eight had been government officials and/or lawyers, three had been businessmen, and four came from politics, academe, or journalism. All three branches of government were represented, as were three of five military services.
- Two-thirds of the DCIs had direct experience with intelligence in military or civilian life before their appointments. One served in the OSS (William Casey), two in the CIA (Robert Gates and Porter Goss), and three in both (Dulles, Helms, and William Colby).
- The DCIs' average age at the time of their appointment was slightly under 55. The youngest was 43 (James Schlesinger); the oldest was 67 (Casey).

Historians and DCIs

An inconsistency exists between the fairly extensive bibliography on DCIs and historians' evaluation of their personal contribution to US national security. Nearly as many biographies have been written about DCIs as about comparable members of the American foreign policy community—the secretaries of state and defense, the presidents' national security advisers, and the chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, the 19 heads of the largest agglomeration of secret services in what used to be called the Free World generally have not been perceived as being nearly as influential as most of their counterparts.

Historians have regarded a number of secretaries of state and defense—notably George Marshall, Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, and Henry Kissinger—as major players in the diplomatic and military developments of their times, as is at least one national security adviser, Kissinger. The DCIs are another matter. Only two, Dulles and Casey, usually are considered to have had an impact rivaling that of the other top foreign policy officials in the administrations in which they served. The rest rarely get mentioned in most foreign affairs surveys (although Helms and Colby may come up when the Agency's "time of troubles" in the 1970s is discussed). Even in overviews of the CIA and the Intelligence Community, only a handful—Hoyt Vandenberg,

Smith, Dulles, McCone, Casey, and possibly Helms—are portrayed as making noteworthy contributions to the way the US government conducts intelligence activity.

That consensus may derive from conceptions of the proper place of intelligence practitioners in the foreign policy process. Intelligence, the premise goes, should be detached from policy so as to avoid cross-corruption of either. If intelligence services have a stake in policy, they may skew their analyses or become aggressive advocates of covert action. The Intelligence Community must remain a source of objective assessment and not become a politicized instrument of the incumbent administration. As heads of the Community, DCIs should be "intellocrats" who administer specialized secret functions, not to benefit any departmental interests but to advance policies set elsewhere in the executive branch—specifically, the White House.

The DCIs reported to the National Security Council and truly served at the pleasure of the president. Indeed, much of every DCI's influence was directly proportional to his *personal* relationship with the chief executive. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, after incoming presidents began choosing "their" DCIs in 1977, the non-partisan stature of the DCI diminished and, along with it, his independence. The general rule of "new president, new DCI" did not always translate into greater

DCIs

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influence. The president's national security adviser and the secretaries of state and defense usually still had more access to the Oval Office.

The situation was not much different at Langley. Directors came and went, but bureaucracies stayed. When DCIs tried to “clean house” (Schlesinger and Stansfield Turner) or manage through loyalists from previous jobs (Turner and John Deutch), the result was administrative disarray and low morale. For these reasons and more, no DCI ever had a chance to become as autonomous as J. Edgar Hoover at the FBI, or to be assessed as having more than an episodic impact on US foreign policy achievements.

A Leadership Typology

Can DCIs, then, be regarded as *leaders*, as opposed to heads of organizations or chief administrators? Was US intelligence noticeably different because a certain individual served as DCI? Did DCIs have—*could* they have had—a leadership role commensurate with that of their counterparts at the Departments of State and Defense? One way to begin answering those questions is through serial biography and group analysis. In contrast to clandestine services officers, however, DCIs have not been examined in such a fashion. They do not fit into categories like “prudent professionals” and “bold easterners,” and they lack the sociological homogeneity needed

to be thought of, or to think of themselves as, a network of “old boys” or, in William Colby's words, “the cream of the academic and social aristocracy.” Biographers attached those labels largely to former operators in the Office of Strategic Services who joined the early CIA and then stayed on—a situation that applies to only three DCIs (Dulles, Helms, and Colby).¹⁴

This heterogeneity does not mean, however, that the DCIs cannot be analyzed collectively. At least some aspects of the many models applied to political and corporate leaders can be used with the DCIs, although empiricism or utility may suffer—complex personalities and

complicated situations are sometimes made less square to fit more easily into the models' round holes, or so many different holes are created that comparisons among individuals become too hard to draw.

A straightforward approach to the DCIs would take into account the institutional and political limitations on their authority, the objectives they were appointed to accomplish, and the personality traits they exhibited and managerial methods they used during their tenures. What were the directors told to do (*mission*) and how did they go about doing it (*style*)? With those questions addressed, an evaluation of their effectiveness can be made. How well did the DCIs do what they were expected to do, given their authorities, resources, and access (*record*)? What “types” of DCIs, if any, have been most successful (*patterns*)?

Using this perspective, five varieties of DCIs are evident. The first is the *administrator-custodian* or *administrator-technocrat*, charged with implementing, fine-tuning, or reorienting intelligence activities under close direction from the White House. Examples of this type have been Souers, Roscoe Hillenkoetter, William Raborn, Woolsey, Deutch, and George Tenet. Usually appointed at a time of uncertainty about the Intelligence Community's roles and capabilities (the late 1940s and the mid-1990s), these DCIs tried to maintain stability in the CIA's relationships with other Community

¹⁴ See Stewart Alsop, *The Center: People and Power in Political Washington* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); Burton Hersh, *The Old Boys: The American Elite and the Origins of the CIA* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992); Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, “The Socio-Educational Composition of the CIA Elite: A Statistical Note,” *Journal of American Studies* 19:3 (December 1985): 421–24; Robert E. Spears, Jr., “The Bold Easterners Revisited: The Myth of the CIA Elite,” in Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones and Andrew Lownie, eds., *North American Spies: New Revisionist Essays* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 202–17; and William Colby and Peter Forbath, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 180.

agencies, Congress, and the public. Their main goal was to do better with what they already had, and to avoid distractions and scandals. Except for Raborn, all of these administrators had experience with intelligence affairs, but they were not intelligence careerists. Some had a very low-key style, almost to the point of acting like placeholders and time-servers (Hillenkoetter, Raborn). Others energetically pursued administrative changes designed to make the CIA and the Community more responsive to policymakers and better adapted to a new political environment (Deutch, Tenet).

The next type is the *intelligence operator*—DCIs who were current or former professional intelligence officers tasked with devising, undertaking, and overseeing an extensive array of covert action, espionage, and counterintelligence programs in aggressive pursuit of US national security policy. Three DCIs fit this category: Dulles, Helms, and Casey. The presidents they served had no qualms about using all of the US government's clandestine capabilities against America's adversaries, and they relied on their DCIs' knowledge of and experience with operations to help them accomplish that end. The DCI as intelligence operator may have emphasized different secret activities depending on individual backgrounds and predilections, and the targets they worked against. For example, Dulles and Casey were devotees of covert action, while Helms preferred to work

with espionage and counterintelligence. Because of the prominent place clandestine affairs had in American foreign policy when they served, this type of DCI generally served longer by far—seven years on average—than any other type.

The high level of secret activity during those long tenures recurrently produced operational mishaps, revelations of “flaps,” and other intelligence failures that hurt the CIA's public reputation and damaged its relations with the White House and Congress. The Bay of Pigs disaster under Dulles, the ineffective covert action in Chile under Helms, and the Iran-Contra scandal under Casey are prominent examples. As journalist James Reston noted during the Agency's dark days in the mid-1970s, DCIs who came up through the ranks might have known more about what CIA should be doing than outsiders, “but they are not likely to be the best men at knowing what it should not be doing.”¹⁵

Failures, indiscretions, and other such controversies in turn have led to the departures of those intelligence-operator DCIs and their replacement by *manager-reformers* charged with “cleaning up the mess” and preventing similar problems from happening again. There have been two kinds of manager-reformer DCIs. One is

¹⁵ Renze L. Hoeksema, “The President's Role in Insuring Efficient, Economical, and Responsible Intelligence Services,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 193.

the *insider*—a career intelligence officer who used his experience at the CIA to reorganize its bureaucracy and redirect its activities during or after a time of political controversy and lack of certitude about its direction. Two DCIs functioned as manager-reformer insiders: Colby and Gates. Colby, an operations veteran with a career dating back to the OSS, sought to rescue the CIA from the political tempests of the mid-1970s and to regain some of the Agency's lost prestige through his policy of controlled cooperation with congressional investigators and targeted termination of questionable activities. Gates, a long-time Soviet analyst who had worked on the NSC in two administrations and also served as deputy director for intelligence, moved the Agency into the post-Cold War era after a period of undynamic leadership.

The other type of manager-reformer is the *outsider*, who was chosen because of his experience in the military, business, government, or politics to implement a major reorganization of the CIA and the Intelligence Community, or to regroup and redirect the Agency, especially after major operational setbacks or public conflicts over secret activities. Six DCIs were manager-reformer outsiders: Vandenberg, Smith, McCone, Schlesinger, Turner, and Porter Goss. Collectively, they were responsible for more major changes at the CIA (or its predecessor, the Central Intelligence Group [CIG]) than any other category of director. For example, under Vandenberg, the CIG

DCIs

acquired its own budgetary and personnel authority, received responsibility for collecting all foreign intelligence (including atomic secrets) and preparing national intelligence analyses, and coordinated all interdepartmental intelligence activities. Smith—in response to intelligence failures before the Korean War and to infighting among operations officers—centralized espionage and covert actions, analysis, and administration by rearranging the CIA into three directorates and creating the Office of National Estimates. In effect, he organized the Agency into the shape it has today.

Schlesinger and Turner facilitated the departure of hundreds of clandestine services veterans in their quests to streamline the Agency's bureaucracy, lower the profile of covert action, and move the CIA more toward analysis and technical collection. Goss was the only one in the group who had previously worked at the Agency, but he was selected because he headed the intelligence oversight committee in the House of Representatives. Taking over during imbroglios over collection and analytic failures connected with the 9/11 terrorist attacks and assessments of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, he set about revamping the Agency's work on international terrorism. Most DCIs in this category were far more concerned about achieving their objectives quickly than about angering bureaucratic rivals or fostering ill will among subordinates. Largely because they accomplished so much—or

tried to—and did not worry about whom they antagonized along the way, some of them were among the most disliked or hardest to get along with DCIs.

Finally, there are the *restorers*: George Bush and William Webster. Like the manager-reformer outsiders, they became DCIs after the Agency went through difficult times—they succeeded Colby and Casey, respectively—but they were not charged with making significant changes in the way the CIA did business. Instead, they used their “people skills” and public reputations to raise morale, repair political damage, and burnish the Agency's reputation. Bush, a prominent figure in Republican Party politics, went to Langley to mend the CIA's relations with Congress and use his amiability to improve esprit de corps and put a more benign face on the Agency. Webster, a director of the FBI and former federal judge, brought a quality of rectitude to an Agency mired in scandal and helped raise its stature in the Community and with the public.

Some DCIs gave early, strong signals about how they intended to run the Agency, as when Casey brought in Max Hugel—a street-savvy, by-the-bootstraps businessman from Brooklyn with no intelligence experience—to shake up the Directorate of Operations. Sometimes, DCIs gave smaller, but no less telling, signs. On one of his early trips overseas, McCone was in a European capital when an Agency duty officer called late at night to say that a

“FLASH/DCI EYES ONLY” cable had just arrived. The message's contents were so sensitive that whoever delivered the printed copy had to retrieve it and destroy it. The duty officer took the cable to McCone at the hotel where he was staying. The DCI, wearing a bathrobe, read the contents and put the paper in his pocket. The duty officer asked for it back, saying he was supposed to retrieve it for disposal. McCone unfolded the cable, held it up, and asked the officer to tell him who sent it. Reading the “From” line, the officer replied, “Director.” “Right,” McCone said, “and I'm the Director.” He put the cable back in his pocket and said good night.¹⁶

Some DCIs were affable; some were bland; some were blunt. “Beetle” Smith greeted the attendees at his first staff meeting with these words: “It's interesting to see all you fellows here. It'll be even more interesting to see how many of you are here a few months from now.” Schlesinger informed Agency veteran John McMahon and his superior, Director of Science and Technology Carl Duckett, at 9:30 one morning that he had just appointed McMahon to head the Office of Technical Service. Thinking of the time needed for a smooth transition, Duckett suggested, “How about if he starts at the first of the month?” Schlesinger answered, “How about at 10:00?”¹⁷

¹⁶ Author's conversation with Harold Bean, 30 October 2001.

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And the contrasts continue. Some DCIs tried hard to be true directors of the Intelligence Community, even though the jobs of the DCI as Community manager and head of the CIA historically were competing, not complementary, roles.¹⁸ Others chose to run the Agency primarily and went about their Community functions as an aside. Some DCIs emphasized analysis over operations and intensely scrutinized the Directorate of Intelligence's products. Others placed operations over analysis and reveled in war stories rather than estimates. According to Richard Lehman, a senior officer in the Directorate of Intelligence, Allen Dulles "had a habit of assessing estimates by weight. He would heft them and decide, without reading them, whether or not to accept them."¹⁹ Some directors were hard charging, strong willed, and ambitious, with mandates and agendas for change; others went about their work in a quieter, nonconfrontational fashion; and a few barely left a mark. Some DCIs tried to resolve the Agency's "culture wars" between the "spooks" and the scholars, and between the so-called "prudent professionals" who ran spies

and the "cowboys" who did covert action—but most left that internal sociology alone. Some sought a policymaking role; others spurned it. And while some DCIs were inclined to convey perils and forebodings to their customers, others were more helpful at clarifying ambiguities and assessing alternatives.

Out of the Shadows

One defining characteristic of the DCIs was that they were the most *unsecret* heads of any secret agency in the world. DCIs lived in the nebulous zone between secrecy and democracy, clandestinity and openness. They headed the world's first publicly acknowledged intelligence service. While some countries guard the identities of their intelligence chiefs, the DCIs were public figures, held to account for what the CIA, and to some extent the Community, did and did not do. The whole process of vetting a prospective DCI was uniquely transparent among intelligence services. His confirmation hearings usually were open, and more than a few times were used for partisan purposes and political theater. That phenomenon is not recent. The first controversial confirmation was John McCone's in 1962—the first in which any senators voted against a DCI

nominee. After that, two other nominations received significant numbers of "no" votes (Colby and Gates), and four had to be withdrawn (Theodore Sorensen, Gates, Michael Carns, and Anthony Lake).²⁰

The contrast between the two worlds in which DCIs existed—secret and public—fell into stark relief from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, when the relationship between intelligence and democracy in the United States underwent a sea change. Statements from two DCIs of that period capture the magnitude of the change. After he was appointed DCI in 1966, Helms said, "I think there's a tradition that the CIA is a silent service, and it's a good one. I think the silence ought to begin with me."²¹ In 1978, Colby, looking back on the "time of troubles" he had recently suffered through, said that such a "supersecretive style of operation had . . . become incompatible with the one I believed essential."²²

After that, pragmatic openness became the DCIs' watchword in dealing with their political monitors. As the Cold War foreign policy consensus shattered for good, DCIs increasingly had to contend with all the various organs of accountability: special commissions, watchdog groups, the courts,

¹⁷ Lathrop, 110. John McMahon, oral history interview by Fenton Babcock, 4 December 1997, 25. (Transcript in CSI Oral History Program files.)

¹⁸ See Douglas F. Garthoff, *Directors of Central Intelligence as Leaders of the U.S. Intelligence Community, 1946-2005* (Washington: CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005).

¹⁹ Richard Kovar, "Mr. Current Intelligence: An Interview with Richard Lehman," *Studies in Intelligence* 43 2 (1999-2000): 27.

²⁰ Gates was nominated twice. His name was withdrawn during contentious hearings in 1987.

²¹ John Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 614.

²² Colby, 334.

DCIs

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the media, and, most importantly of course, Congress. Later DCIs could scarcely imagine the halcyon days of their predecessors' dealings with Capitol Hill in the 1950s, when oversight was really overlook. It is hard today to envision what it was like in 1956, when Senator Richard Russell, the CIA's longtime friend and protector, said that "If there is one agency of the government in which we must take some matters on faith, without a constant examination of its methods and sources, I believe this agency is the CIA."

In those days, the DCI briefed Congress a handful of times a year at most and almost always left with a figurative, if not literal, blank check. One of the Agency's legislative counsels, John Warner, told of an encounter he and Dulles had with one of the CIA subcommittees in the late 1950s:

It was sort of a crowded room, and [the subcommittee chairman, Representative] Clarence Cannon greets Dulles [with] "Oh, it's good to see you again, Mr. Secretary." He thinks it's [Secretary of State John] Foster Dulles, or mistakes the name; I don't know. Dulles, he's a great raconteur. He reminds Cannon of this, and Cannon reminds him of that, and they swap stories for two hours. And at the end, [Cannon asks,] "Well, Mr. Secretary, have you got enough money in your budget for this year [and] the coming year?" [Dulles replies,] "Well, I think we are all right, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much." That was the budget hearing.²³

The era of congressional benign neglect ended during the period 1974-80, with the adoption of the Hughes-Ryan Amendment requiring a presidential finding for covert actions; the Church and Pike Committee investigations; the establishment of the House and Senate permanent oversight committees; and the passage of the Intelligence Accountability Act mandating that Congress be "promptly and fully informed" of covert actions. After that flurry, the DCI relationship with Congress was altered forever. For a few eventful years, Casey tried to stand as the immovable object against the irresistible force. As Robert Gates observed, Casey "was guilty of contempt of Congress from the day he was sworn in."²⁴ The trend was soon back on track, however, and by the year 2000, Agency officers were briefing Congress in some fashion an average of five times a day, and the DCI's frequent testimony on the Hill was a headline-grabbing event.

²³ John S. Warner, oral history interview by Woodrow Kuhns, 27 September 1996, 48. (Transcript in CSI Oral History Program files.)

²⁴ Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 213.

The First Customer is Always Right

Historically, the most important factor in the life of the DCI was his relationship with the president. The CIA is more of a presidential organization than any other in the US government—a special quality that was both a boon and a bane to the DCIs. Presidents have their own peculiar appreciation of intelligence and their own way of dealing with the CIA and their DCIs. We have had presidents experienced with intelligence, or who were fascinated with intelligence or with certain kinds of secret information or operations. Other presidents had little experience with intelligence, or did not care about it, or did not like it or the CIA. As former Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Richard Kerr aptly put it, "a number of administrations . . . started with the expectation that intelligence could solve every problem, or that it could not do anything right, and then moved to the opposite view. Then they settled down and vacillated from one extreme to the other."²⁵

Presidents' relations with their DCIs often followed a similarly erratic course. Some began by regarding the DCI as their senior intelligence adviser and saw him regularly. Occasionally that degree of contact continued; more often, it did not. Other presidents preferred from the start to have

²⁵ Richard J. Kerr and Peter Dixon Davis, "Ronald Reagan and the President's Daily Brief," *Studies in Intelligence* 41 2 (1997): 31.

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**The DCI often served
 at the clear *displeasure*
 of the president.**
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their national security advisers function as their principal intelligence officers. A few presidents at least made a bow toward giving their DCIs authority over other Community departments, but in most cases the Community's center of gravity meandered between CIA Headquarters, the Pentagon, Foggy Bottom, and the West Wing.

A few DCIs were close to their presidents; some had cordial, businesslike relationships; some had only infrequent contact; and some had no relationships to speak of. From the start, DCIs had to overcome assorted barriers—physical, administrative, psychological—in their interaction with the presidents. Lawrence “Red” White, the Agency's longtime director of administration, recalled the time when Dulles told Eisenhower about a possible location for the headquarters building. “We're thinking of tearing down that old brewery [where the Kennedy Center is now] and building it right there.’ Eisenhower went through the roof. He said, ‘You are not going to build that building in the District of Columbia. This town is so cluttered up now, you can't get from one end to the other, and you are going to get out of town.’”²⁶ Then there were the ways presidents chose to run their White Houses: Eisenhower with his rigid military staff struc-

ture; John Kennedy and his loose agglomeration of ad hoc working groups and catch-as-catch-can meetings with advisers; Lyndon Johnson's congressional cloak-room approach, in which the “real deals” were made in informal settings outside the National Security Council; and Richard Nixon's notorious “Berlin Wall” of advisers—Henry Kissinger, H. R. Haldeman, and John Ehrlichman—who controlled access to the Oval Office.

DCIs sometimes could work around those kinds of obstacles, most notably by changing the look and content of the daily briefing product—the *Central Intelligence Bulletin*, the *President's Intelligence Checklist*, and the *President's Daily Brief*—and developing more flexible and responsive methods for providing current intelligence and answers to taskings. But even with those improvements, DCIs found it extremely hard to surmount the psychological barriers some presidents erected. What was a DCI to do when Johnson said that “the CIA is made up of boys whose families sent them to Princeton but wouldn't let them into the family brokerage business;” and told Helms, “Dick, I need a paper on Vietnam, and I'll tell you what I want included in it.”²⁷ Or when Nixon returned a

thick package of *PDBs* given to him during the transition period unopened, called Agency officers “clowns,” and asked, “What use are they? They've got 40,000 people over there reading newspapers.”²⁸

The DCI often served at the clear *displeasure* of the president, who directed him to act and then often tried to deny—not very plausibly—that he had anything to do with the outcome. Bill Clinton remarked that cutting the intelligence budget during peacetime was like canceling your health insurance when you felt good.²⁹ But chief executives have not always been the best stewards of the resources of the Agency they have so often called on to help implement—and, in more than a few cases, salvage—their foreign policies.

It should be noted, however, that closeness was not an absolute good for the DCIs or a solution to some of these difficulties. Some DCIs paid a cost for being too close, or trying to be. They wore out their welcomes, or became too committed to the success of covert actions, or were accused of

²⁶ James Hanrahan, “Soldier, Manager, Leader: An Interview with Former Executive Director Lawrence K. ‘Red’ White,” *Studies in Intelligence* 42 3 (1998): 8–9.

²⁷ Lathrop, 174, 339.

²⁸ John L. Helgerson, *Getting to Know the President: CIA Briefings of Presidential Candidates, 1952-1992* (Washington: CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1995), 91; Richard Helms, with William Hood, *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Random House, 2003), 410; Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 201.

²⁹ Lathrop, 344.

DCIs

politicization, or became linked with controversial policies. It was not an automatic benefit for the Agency or the DCI for him to be able to say, as William Casey did, "You understand, I call him Ron."³⁰

Honorable Men

At the cornerstone laying ceremony for the Original Headquarters Building in 1959, President Eisenhower said:

In war, nothing is more important to a commander than the facts concerning the strength, dispositions, and intentions of his opponent, and the proper interpretation of those facts. In

³⁰ Kovar, 36.

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Throughout, the DCIs
were ‘honorable men,
devoted to [the
nation’s] service.’
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*peacetime, the necessary facts . . . and their interpretation are essential to the development of policy to further our long-term national security To provide information of this kind is the task of the organization of which you are a part. No task could be more important.*³¹

For almost 60 years, the DCIs carried out that task in war and peace, in flush times and lean,

³¹ "Our First Line of Defense": Presidential Reflections on US Intelligence (Washington: CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1996), 19.

amid accolades and scorn. No one of their various leadership styles insured success. Their standing and accomplishments depended on circumstances they could not influence: presidential agendas, world events, and domestic politics. On occasion, with the right conjunction of circumstances and personalities, DCIs reached the inner circle of the national security apparatus; more often, they did not. Throughout, however, they were—in Richard Helms's famous phrase—"honorable men, devoted to [the nation's] service."³²

³² Richard Helms, "Global Intelligence and the Democratic Society," speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 14 April 1971, 13, DCI Files, Job 80R01284R, box 1, folder 6.