The Central Intelligence Agency

A Documentary History

Scott C. Monje
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Not so long ago, writing a documentary history of the Central Intelligence Agency would have been a futile endeavor. There were simply not enough documents available to be worth the effort. Histories and analyses—valuable as they are—have been compelled to rely heavily on self-serving leaks, faded memories of participants, or speculation. The situation is still far from ideal, yet the change has been tremendous. Eagerly or reluctantly, the CIA and other agencies have released a flood of information on the history of American intelligence. The end of the Cold War and the active use of the Freedom of Information Act by historians and civil libertarians contributed to this.

Symbolic of the change was the declassification in 2007 of the "Family Jewels" file—the result of an internal CIA effort in 1973 to discover whether it had been violating its own charter—after thirty-four years. Although it may sound oxymoronic, this was surely the most famous set of secret documents in the agency’s history. Many gaps remain, of course. More documents remain hidden than have come to light. Many of those that have been revealed, including the "Family Jewels,” contain more than a few holes inasmuch as selected words, phrases, and pages have been deleted prior to release. Yet, a process has begun. The time has come to take a first, tentative step at putting some of these documents together in a more or less cohesive narrative.

Any book on such a vast topic, even if it seems to be overly long, necessarily involves choices. In this case, some of those choices have been made for us. The CIA decides which records it will release to the public and which it will not. Clearly, the documentary record is not complete, although it is now probably fuller than that of any intelligence agency in history that was not attached to a defeated and occupied country.

We cannot know all of the ways in which the record is skewed because, well, that would be giving away secrets. We do know, of course, that the CIA will be reluctant to reveal current operations, so releases are biased in favor of the past. (On the other hand, certain political leaders of both parties occasionally reveal
selective portions of current secret evidence to bolster their positions. On occasion, some in the CIA may do something similar, especially when they decide that the revelations already occurring are not only selective but inaccurate or designed to blame the agency for policy failures.) Obviously, certain weapons systems cannot be discussed. Documents pertaining to the design of nuclear weapons or formulas for nerve gas will not be released, at least not intentionally, and that is fine. The divulgence of intelligence sources and methods or of the names of certain CIA employees is prohibited by law. In a sense, this is unfortunate—the definition of “methods,” in particular, is elastic and can be stretched to cover many things—but we will probably have to live with it. Presumably, a number of things have been kept secret because they are embarrassing or politically damaging, even though that is expressly prohibited as a criterion. Many of these are, no doubt, categorized as sources and methods.

We are also aware of another bias. The CIA is more reluctant to open its operational records, so the evidentiary base is skewed toward the analytical. In other words, the agency is generally more willing to discuss what it thought others were doing in the past than to disclose what it was doing. When it does release operational records, and it does on occasion, they are usually connected to an operation that is already fairly well known. This can be interesting, too, but it is clearly incomplete. It is possible that all the past operations are known and therefore the bias is specious, but this is not very likely.

In this book we shall try to give a sampling of document excerpts from throughout the CIA’s history that will be necessarily incomplete even in relation to the documents that are now publicly available. Some periods will be more heavily represented and others less so. We will not cover some of the most famous operations, such as Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), and the Bay of Pigs (1961), which have been thoroughly handled elsewhere. An unfortunate lacuna will be a lack of space devoted to the Soviet Union, which was the major focus of CIA attention for most of the agency’s existence. Perhaps, someday, that can be the subject of another book.

An effort has been made to incorporate both analytical and operational reports as well as critical internal reviews. Several chapters rely heavily on the “Family Jewels” collection, which focuses primarily on activities of the late 1960s and early 1970s that could be considered domestic in nature. On occasion, documents from other agencies, such as the National Security Council, will be offered when they discuss the CIA, include CIA representatives, or contribute to understanding a given situation. Chapters dealing with more recent events, for which fewer internal documents are available, make use of the declassified reports of Congressional oversight committees and official investigative commissions examining CIA and intelligence-related activities. The chapter dealing with the Iraq War examines both the intelligence and the way it was used by the administration in its argument in support of war. The background for the estimate on Iran’s nuclear program released in December 2007 is provided through open testimony on Iran before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. With luck, this book will contribute to an understanding of the CIA and what it does, and of the dilemmas associated with any secret organization in a free society.

Like all researchers in this field, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the National Security Archive at George Washington University, which is
responsible for making available most of the formerly classified documents presented here. Other documents are available through two important programs of the Federation of American Scientists (the Intelligence Resource Program and the Project on Government Secrecy), the general news media and various departments and agencies of the U.S. government, including the CIA itself.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Mary Curry of the National Security Archive and to Margaret M. Wood of the Law Library of Congress for help in finding resources and in explaining things. I extend my appreciation to Sandy Towers of Greenwood Press for her consistent enthusiasm and encouragement. I especially thank my wife, Audrey, and our daughter, Patricia, for their patience and understanding through the many months as I huddled over the computer and grumbled.

NOTES

1. On the flexibility of the concept of “methods” as a reason for classifying things, and also for the reasons that some publicly known facts may be subject to classification, see Joseph Weisberg, “The CIA’s Open Secrets,” New York Times (27 August 2007). Weisberg was formerly with the CIA Directorate of Operations.
2. See http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv.
Introduction: A Secret Organization in a Free and Open Society

It was an unusual event for an academic meeting, one marked by a certain degree of irony. On 21 June 2007, Gen. Michael V. Hayden, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, addressed the annual conference of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR). As a professional association, SHAFR had long championed ready access to historical government documents, whereas the CIA was the very embodiment of government secrecy. Yet Hayden—who had earned a master’s degree in history at Duquesne University in 1969—noted that he both respected and enjoyed the historian’s task. He allowed that the CIA had a social contract with the American people to explain to them, to the best of its ability, the things that it did on their behalf. In doing so, he also boasted of his agency’s openness: “No other intelligence agency in the world rivals our record on declassification.”1 Over the years, he noted, the CIA had reviewed and released some 31 million pages of previously classified documents, and it continued to receive 3,000 new requests each year for declassifications under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 1967.

The very nature of intelligence activities, however, creates problems in this regard. For a democratic society to hold its government accountable, it must know what the government is doing. This should be all the more important with regard to vital issues such as national security, which concerns questions of war and peace, life and death. Yet the very nature of intelligence activity requires that it remain secret. The CIA’s charter, the National Security Act of 1947, makes the Director of Central Intelligence responsible for “protecting intelligence sources and methods from unauthorized disclosure.” Thus, “a secret organization serving an open and free society,” as Hayden put it, faces a perpetual dilemma. It must “wrestle constantly with the twin imperatives of essential openness and essential secrecy.”

We must balance our responsibility to the public, and to history, to explain our actions and their impact, with our obligation to protect sources, methods, and
ongoing intelligence relationships. These are not simple, cut-and-dried issues. They
spark vigorous internal debates that ultimately require informed, yet subjective,
judgments. We have those debates and make those judgments knowing that mis-
takes can jeopardize American security, and, in some cases, place lives at risk. An
intelligence organization that fails to protect those who work with it—foreign intel
services and individuals—will eventually see sources dry up and cooperation di-
minish. So, as you can see, this is an existential question for us.

Hayden was correct, of course; the dilemma of a secret organization in an
open society is a very real one. Real as the predicament may be, however, it also
provides endless opportunities and temptations for abuse. The public must sim-
ply accept that the CIA will review the appropriate documents, make the
proper determination regarding what can and cannot be revealed, and then fol-
low that determination fully and without distortion. This may be problematic
when the information proves embarrassing to the agency, its director, or the pres-
ident of the United States—even when the law forbids such considerations—
or when revelations threaten to complicate diplomatic relations with other
countries.

Despite the enormous number of documents released by the CIA in recent
years, the agency’s history of declassification has been more uneven than Hay-
den implied. While the agency had just released some 31 million pages, it had
reportedly reviewed and declined to release about 70 million others.2 These pre-
sumably included some of the most sensitive and, therefore, most interesting.
Moreover, most documents that are released are first “redacted.” That is to say,
they are edited and left with gaping holes, usually without any indication of
what information was removed or why. In some cases, it is clearly the name of
an individual or a foreign intelligence service. In others, whole paragraphs or
entire pages may simply fail to appear.

Hayden himself personifies the irony here. In his speech to the SHAFR con-
ference, he noted: “Of course, we cannot tell the American people everything
we do to protect them without damaging our ability to protect them. When it
comes to secret intelligence, public sovereignty and oversight reside in the Con-
gress.” The careful reader will note that he never specifically said that the Con-
gress is told either, although he clearly meant to leave his audience with that
impression. Sometimes, consulting Congress has meant informing the two rank-
ing members of the intelligence committee of each house and then telling them
that the matter is secret; they cannot effectively act upon the information or
even discuss it with their colleagues or staffs. That takes much of the meaning
out of “consultation.”

Before coming to the CIA, Hayden had been the director of the National Se-
curity Agency, where he initiated the warrantless wiretapping of communica-
tions between the United States and foreign countries following the terrorist
attacks of 11 September 2001 (“9/11”). Most members of Congress learned of
this program in late 2005, four years after it began. They discovered only in
April 2007 that legal questions surrounding an earlier version of the program
had nearly provoked the resignation of the attorney general, the deputy attor-
ney general, and the director of the FBI in 2004. The week after Hayden’s
speech at the SHAFR conference, the Senate Judiciary Committee found it nec-
essary to issue subpoenas to the White House in its years-long effort to learn
the details of the program and the reasoning behind it. (The subpoenas were ignored.) Even Congress, the repository of "public sovereignty and oversight," is not guaranteed timely and effective access to information.

The early beginnings of the CIA’s declassification program came in the 1970s, when the agency released some of the analytic records of its World War II predecessor, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Operational records of the OSS followed in the early 1980s. With this precedent in mind, the agency established its own voluntary Historical Review Program in 1985, as part of a deal with Congress exempting CIA operational records from FOIA requests. The agency’s various subdivisions, however, were reluctant to cooperate with the program, and its initial releases consisted not of documents but of previously classified internal histories written by the agency’s own staff historians.3

The heyday of CIA declassification came in the 1990s, in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War’s end. Director of Central Intelligence (later, Secretary of Defense) Robert M. Gates convened the Task Force on Greater CIA Openness, which in December 1991 recommended that the agency declassify and release certain historical documents that had been withheld from the public. Although the CIA’s initial reaction was to classify the task force’s recommendations as secret, it soon repented, published the recommendation, and began releasing documents. Notable was the publication of CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962, for a conference commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of that event.4 The Center for the Study of Intelligence, which had been established in 1974, was expanded at this time.

Then, President Bill Clinton, on 17 April 1995, signed Executive Order 12958, “Classified National Security Information,” which called on all government agencies to declassify historical records automatically if they were more than twenty-five years old. This was radical new thinking for the government in general, and especially for the CIA. But, as is so often the case, it came with some substantial qualifications. The main point, paragraph (a) in this instance, was followed by a lengthy list of exceptions in paragraph (b), several of which had direct and significant implications for the CIA. While all of them were understandable, and probably even necessary, they meant that significant gaps in the published record would remain. In part, the executive order reads:

Sec. 3.4. Automatic Declassification.

(a) Subject to paragraph (b), below, within 5 years from the date of this order, all classified information contained in records that (1) are more than 25 years old, and (2) have been determined to have permanent historical value under title 44, United States Code, shall be automatically declassified whether or not the records have been reviewed. Subsequently, all classified information in such records shall be automatically declassified no longer than 25 years from the date of its original classification, except as provided in paragraph (b), below.

(b) An agency head may exempt from automatic declassification under para- graph (a), above, specific information, the release of which should be expected to:

(1) reveal the identity of a confidential human source, or reveal information about the application of an intelligence source or method, or reveal the identity of a human intelligence source when the unauthorized
disclosure of that source would clearly and demonstrably damage the national security interests of the United States;
(2) reveal information that would assist in the development or use of weapons of mass destruction;
(3) reveal information that would impair U.S. cryptologic systems or activities;
(4) reveal information that would impair the application of state of the art technology within a U.S. weapon system;
(5) reveal actual U.S. military war plans that remain in effect;
(6) reveal information that would seriously and demonstrably impair relations between the United States and a foreign government, or seriously and demonstrably undermine ongoing diplomatic activities of the United States;
(7) reveal information that would clearly and demonstrably impair the current ability of United States Government officials to protect the President, Vice President, and other officials for whom protection services, in the interest of national security, are authorized;
(8) reveal information that would seriously and demonstrably impair current national security emergency preparedness; or
(9) violate a statute, treaty, or international agreement.

While some information was excluded from automatic declassification, it was still subject to a process of systematic declassification review to determine whether declassification might be permissible in individual cases. There was also the mandatory review of items specifically requested under FOIA. (Mandatory review, of course, does not mean mandatory declassification and release.) It is noteworthy that the lengthy executive order also specified the following among the limitations on the government’s ability to classify information:

Sec. 1.8. Classification Prohibitions and Limitations.
(a) In no case shall information be classified in order to:
   (1) conceal violations of law, inefficiency, or administrative error;
   (2) prevent embarrassment to a person, organization, or agency;
   (3) restrain competition; or
   (4) prevent or delay the release of information that does not require protection in the interest of national security.

The initial enthusiasm for declassification at the CIA, such as it existed, faded quickly. Through the early and mid-1990s, successive directors pledged to declassify and release the documentary record of eleven major covert operations in France and Italy (1940s–1950s), North Korea (1950s), Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Indonesia (1958), Tibet (1950s–1960s), the Congo (1960s), the Dominican Republic (1960s), Laos (1960s), and Cuba (1960s). Yet only documents related to Guatemala and the Bay of Pigs operation in Cuba were released officially, while Iran documents were leaked unofficially. In mid-1998, it was announced that, while a declassification program would continue, budgetary limitations would not permit the review and declassification of documents for the remaining covert operations.5

At the same time, while the Department of State and the Department of Energy were aggressively releasing documents, the CIA and the Department of Defense were openly resisting pressure to broaden their declassification
programs. At no time did the agency promise to release information about any operation whose existence was not already known to the public. Indeed, when records were released, they concerned operations (such as Guatemala and the Bay of Pigs) on which wide-reaching details were already available through leaks, Congressional investigations, or previous FOIA releases.

The official mood regarding openness began to shift during the Clinton administration, in 1998–1999, owing to concerns that the Department of Energy had inadvertently released some documents related to the design of nuclear weapons. This concern was then made salient by accusations of possible espionage by Wen Ho Lee, a U.S. government scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory who occasionally visited the People’s Republic of China. In October 1998, Congress passed the Kyl-Lott Amendment (officially titled “Protection against Inadvertent Release of Restricted Data or Formerly Restricted Data”), permitting the Energy Department to remove sensitive weapons-related material from public repositories. Under this program, 5,508 pages of documents were reclassified and removed from public shelves.

Quite aside from the issue of arms-related information, however, by 1999 the CIA was increasingly less cooperative in turning over papers for publication in the State Department’s regular documentary series Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS). That autumn the CIA, the Justice Department, the Defense Department, and the three military services complained that State was releasing material in which they had “equity” (by virtue of the interdepartmental nature of the intelligence process) without their permission. These agencies, although lacking any specific Congressional authorization, then began reviewing released documents and withdrawing them from public shelves.

The process of reclassification apparently accelerated under the administration of President George W. Bush and in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. In October 2001, the process was formalized in a secret memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the CIA. The MOU was made public in 2006.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION AND THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding is to establish standard procedures to handle instances where classified or sensitive information containing possible Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) equities may have been inadvertently or improperly released. The goal should be to protect CIA equities while resolving the issue as expeditiously as possible in a way that will not draw unnecessary public attention to the steps taken to correct the problem. It is in the interests of both the CIA and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) to avoid the kind of public notice and researcher complaints that may arise from removing from the open shelves for extended periods of time records that had been publicly available.

1. When NARA is notified by CIA or another agency, or otherwise becomes aware that CIA documents containing classified or sensitive information, or other government agency documents containing sensitive or classified CIA equities may have been inadvertently or improperly released in records that were reviewed for declassification by NARA or another agency and made available to the public, NARA will notify CIA immediately and hold those
records off the open shelf for a period of 30 days following CIA receipt of notification to give CIA an opportunity to investigate the extent of the problem.

2. CIA will attempt to resolve the exposure within 30 days after it receives notification from NARA. If CIA informs NARA that it cannot resolve the issue within 30 days, NARA and the CIA will agree upon a date by which the CIA will resolve the exposure.

3. If CIA has not resolved its concerns by the agreed upon date, NARA can require an explanation of the CIA’s inability to resolve the issue within the agreed upon time limit. NARA can further require an update on CIA’s progress monthly until resolution is reached. If a final determination is not reached within six months, NARA will withdraw the documents in question and return the rest of the files to the open shelves. CIA may review such documents that are returned to the open shelves, for additional withdrawals, on a box-by-box basis.

4. If after examining the records, CIA finds that there has been no improper release of classified or still sensitive information, CIA will promptly inform NARA that the records can be returned to the open shelf.

5. If CIA finds that information containing classified or still sensitive CIA equities has been improperly released, CIA will tab these documents. The tabs will include the justification for continued classification or withholding.

6. NARA will withhold the tabbed documents in accordance with the justification cited on the tab. The place markers inserted for withheld documents will not contain any reference to CIA removal of the documents or any reason for the withholding of the documents. The common generic descriptor “intelligence document” shall also not be used.

7. NARA will not attribute to CIA any part of the review or the withholding of documents from this exposed collection. Researcher requests for withheld documents shall be accepted for processing by NARA and researchers shall not be directed to CIA for response. NARA will contact CIA regarding such requests, and will act as a surrogate for CIA in dealing with requestors of these withheld documents.

8. When examining documents at NARA, whether for declassification purposes or investigation of an inadvertent release, CIA personnel will follow NARA requirements for the handling of archival records and will take care to preserve the integrity of the records.

9. NARA staff will provide training for CIA personnel and contractors in NARA requirements and procedures for the handling and preservation of archival documents.

10. NARA will inform CIA immediately if CIA personnel or contractors are mishandling or rearranging archival records. CIA will take prompt action to correct such problems including, if NARA deems necessary, requiring personnel to take refresher training in handling and preserving archival records.

11. NARA will inform CIA immediately if NARA personnel or contractors have mishandled classified information. NARA will take prompt action to correct such problems including, if CIA deems necessary, requiring personnel or contractors to take refresher training in handling classified information.

This Memorandum of Understanding is subject to amendment by agreement of both parties.

In August 2001, the Bush administration initiated a review of the 1995 executive order mandating automatic declassification, although the newly revised
order was not issued until 25 March 2003. A great deal of the document—perhaps a surprising amount, given the administration’s reported penchant for secrecy—remained unchanged, including all the prohibitions listed in section 1.8 against classifying embarrassing information. One change was delaying the deadline for clearing the backlog of classified material to the end of 2006. (It already had been delayed from 2000 to 2003 by Executive Order 13142 of 1999.) The release of documents by the tens of millions did, in fact, commence at the end of 2006. Another key difference pertained to the issue of reclassification. The Clinton document said, “Information may not be reclassified after it has been declassified and released to the public under proper authority.” The new version said:

Information may be reclassified after declassification and release to the public under proper authority only in accordance with the following conditions:

1. The reclassification action is taken under the personal authority of the agency head or deputy agency head, who determines in writing that the reclassification of the information is necessary in the interest of national security;
2. The information may be reasonably recovered; and
3. The reclassification action is reported promptly to the Director of the Information Security Oversight Office.

The revised executive order reconﬁrmed the role of the Interagency Security Classiﬁcation Appeals Panel (ISCAP) in the declassiﬁcation process. Nonetheless, it granted the director of central intelligence the authority and responsibility to protect information regarding sources and methods by vetoing ISCAP decisions in those areas. In addition, the revised order gives certain ofﬁcials the right, in an emergency, to “share” classiﬁed information with unauthorized individuals without that information then being considered declassiﬁed. According to NARA, this is to permit unhindered cooperation with state and local authorities in the context of homeland security. Interestingly, all the powers of classiﬁcation and declassiﬁcation granted to the president in the original order are also explicitly extended to the vice president in the revised order, no doubt reﬂecting the unusually prominent policy role of Vice President Dick Cheney.

Between 2001 and 2006, the CIA and ﬁve other agencies reclassiﬁed some 9,500 documents (totaling more than 55,500 pages) that had already been made available to the public. At least eight of the documents had already been published, either in print or on microfiche, as part of the State Department’s FRUS series.

The clandestine reclassiﬁcation project went unnoticed until December 2005, when Matthew Aid, a visiting fellow at the National Security Archive (a nongovernmental research center at George Washington University) found that documents he had already used were no longer available in collections of NARA, the ofﬁcial government archives. Researchers familiar with the documents deemed some of them mundane, while others were conceivably embarrassing to the agency. Still available on the public shelves, however, were various manuals explaining how to engage in sabotage or assemble explosives as well as technical documents regarding chemical and biological weapons. The revelation by Aid prompted a review of the declassiﬁcation standards by NARA’s Interagency Security Oversight Ofﬁce (ISOO).
THE “FAMILY JEWELS”

With that background, many were surprised by the announcement at the June 2007 SHAFR conference that the CIA was releasing the “Family Jewels” in response to a FOIA request made by the National Security Archive fifteen years earlier. The “Family Jewels” file was easily the most famous and most sought-after collection of secret documents in U.S. intelligence history, even though many of its secrets had long been public knowledge.

The 693-page collection had been assembled in the era of Vietnam and Watergate, and it eventually triggered the era of the Congressional intelligence investigations. The order to collect the documents was given on 9 May 1973 by James R. Schlesinger during the seventeen weeks he served as DCI before being named secretary of defense. It came in response to a newspaper report about the trial of Daniel Ellsberg, which revealed that a former CIA operative, E. Howard Hunt, had burglarized the office of Ellsberg’s psychiatrist with CIA equipment on behalf of the Nixon White House.

David Robarge, chief historian at the CIA, believes that William Colby himself contributed to misconceptions about the nature of the documents with exaggerated descriptions in his memoirs. If the gravity of the misdeeds was in fact exaggerated, and people may differ on that, that raises another potential question. Did the exaggeration—in some minds, glorification—of the CIA’s past misdeeds contribute to public and official acceptance of later, larger-scale misdeeds as merely more of the same? The test of this, however, has been compromised. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 bequeathed such an atmosphere of menace that the public call has been for even more direct action, for the unleashing of the CIA. Controversies focused not on unauthorized or illegal deeds, but on deeds incompetently or insufficiently done. Indeed, whereas in the 1970s Congress was outraged to discover that the CIA had engaged in assassination plots, after 9/11 Congress derided the agency for not having sought authority to assassinate Usama bin Laden or, barring that, for not “taking advantage of ambiguities” in the authorization it did receive to do it anyhow. The CIA Office of Inspector General found itself explaining to Congress that “CIA managers refused to take advantage of ambiguities” and that “this position was reasonable and correct.”

Now, at least, the public can see firsthand what is in the “Family Jewels,” or almost. Like many declassified documents, this collection has been heavily redacted. In this case, the entire first document, approximately two and a half pages, has been redacted. Not even a title appears. Well, not completely blanked out: Each page has been marked “Secret: Eyes Only,” and on each page this designation has been crossed out in ink because, after all, the document has been “declassified.” Likewise, page 260 of the file consists of a letter to Schlesinger, dated 29 May 1973, from House Armed Services Committee chairman F. Edward Hebert. It reads:

Dear Mr. Schlesinger:

Attached is correspondence from [—about half a line deleted—] which is forwarded for information and whatever action might be appropriate.

With best regards.

Sincerely,

/signed/
F. Edw. Hebert
Chairman
What follows, pages 261–265 of the file, is completely blank. Yet this document, too, is presumably listed as having been released in redacted form.

One further question comes to many minds: Why did the CIA choose to release the package at this time, thirty-four years after it was assembled and fifteen years after the National Security Archive submitted its FOIA request? The reason could be related to the fact that the automatic declassification program that President Clinton put in place in 1995 finally came into effect at the end of 2006, although the agency has rejected the declassification of tens of millions of pages of other documents and is, generally speaking, within its legal rights to do so. Some commentators have called the release of the “Family Jewels” a distraction, an effort to draw attention to the controversies of past decades at a time when the CIA and other intelligence agencies are accused of engaging in similar activities again, on a far larger scale. It was noted that the agency had still not released the results of its internal review of intelligence failures related to the terrorist attacks of 2001, which had been completed in 2005, even in an unclassified summary or redacted form. As a result, in the following month, July 2007, Congress mandated the release of a declassified summary of that report, and the CIA complied in August.

THE FUNCTION OF INTELLIGENCE

The purpose of intelligence, simply put, is to provide necessary information to government decision makers. Since much information can be gathered by conventional means, ranging from diplomacy to journalism, the focus of intelligence activities is usually on information related to national security that other governments are trying to conceal. It is then integrated with information from open sources to create a more complete picture of the capabilities and intentions of foreign governments or other entities, such as revolutionary movements or terrorist organizations.

The information passes through a set of steps identified as the intelligence cycle. The normal procession is planning and direction, collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination. Planning and direction take account of policy makers’ information requirements, given a particular set of threats, concerns, or objectives. Collection is the gathering of information, whether by means of clandestine agents, electronic eavesdropping, satellite photography, or the careful perusal of public sources. Naturally, different means may be more or less appropriate to a given task. Satellite photos will reveal a great deal about missile silos or large-scale troop movements but very little about the intentions of political leaders or the actions of small groups of terrorists. For the latter, spies and informers inside the target organization (“human intelligence”) are more useful. During the Cold War, U.S. intelligence tended to rely most heavily on the technical means, leaving a notable gap in human intelligence capabilities in the post–Cold War environment.

Once gathered, the bits of information must be processed. Film must be developed, intercepted messages must be translated, and codes must be deciphered. Next, the processed information must be analyzed. Expert analysts examine the disparate bits of information, calculate the value and reliability of the sources, try to distinguish the relevant (“signals”) from the distractions (“noise”), see how the relevant parts fit together, and attempt to decipher
whether there is a hidden message and, if so, what it is.\textsuperscript{20} Finally, the result is disseminated to policy makers, who, many analysts insist, too often simply ignore it or “cherry-pick” the parts they like to support their preferred policies.

In addition to revealing “secrets,” of course, intelligence agencies are also expected to resolve “mysteries.” A secret is information that others are trying to keep from you. The task is to find out what they already know. Mysteries are questions to which there are no real answers: What will a given dictator decide to do when he finally makes up his mind? Will a certain government fall? How will a particular leader react to a range of likely or unlikely events? Will an insurgency grow stronger or weaker with time? No one really knows; no amount of wiretapping or satellite photos will disclose the truth. This task calls for a somewhat different set of analytical talents, using both public and clandestine information and relying heavily on the analysis of trends and the laws of probability.

Error may be introduced at any stage of the intelligence cycle. Even the relatively straightforward opening stage of laying out the goals rarely seems to happen in a clear, concise, and useful manner. The key point to remember is that intelligence always deals with uncertainties. This is more obvious in cases involving mysteries, but it is also true of secrets. Much evidence is ambiguous and subject to multiple interpretations. True signals are often indistinguishable from noise until after the fact. Thus, the preconceived notions or preferences of analysts may easily shape the interpretation that emerges. The way an analyst “connects the dots,” to use a phrase much in vogue these days, may in fact tell us more about the analyst than about the dots. Human intelligence is the most valuable resource when analysts are trying to determine the intentions of a foreign leader, but sometimes sources are mistaken, vague, unreliable, self-interested, or downright deceitful; and sometimes they are truthful and accurate but unconvincing. Perhaps the best that can be said of the intelligence task is that trying is likely to produce better results than not trying.

As noted earlier, the main purpose of intelligence agencies is to provide information to decision makers, but that is not all that intelligence agencies do. Although the role was not spelled out in its founding legislation, the CIA, early in its existence, assumed the task of running covert operations, or “special activities.” Imbued with a spirit of gung-ho enthusiasm for fighting the Cold War and equipped with a network of clandestine agents stationed around the world, the CIA was the place to go when government leaders decided they needed an option “between doing nothing and sending in the Marines.” The agency involved itself in the postwar electoral politics of Italy and France in order to prevent a Communist victory and then went on to organize and support a series of attempted coups, revolutions, civil wars, insurgencies, and counterinsurgencies.\textsuperscript{21}

Calculating a realistic balance of successes and failures among covert operations is difficult to do given the veil of secrecy that still obscures so much of the history. It is customary for agency officials to claim that everyone knows about their failures but no one knows about their successes, because these remain secret. It appears that it is, in fact, a history replete with failure, possibly because presidents who do not really understand the nature of covert operations turn to the CIA for a miracle when everything else has failed. Impossible tasks are unlikely to fare well. Even known successes have sometimes proved counterproductive in the long run, including the successful overthrow of the Mossadegh government in Iran in 1953 (contributing to animosity toward the
“American shah” and the Islamic revolution of 1979), the successful overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1954 (which contributed to decades of civil war in that country and stoked anti-Americanism throughout Latin America), or the successful arming of anti-Soviet Islamic militants in Afghanistan in the 1980s (which contributed to the rise of the Taliban and al-Qa’ida). When political leaders initiated covert action, only to see it fail spectacularly, they often avoided responsibility afterward by allowing the CIA to be depicted as a “rogue agency” operating on its own.

THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY AND THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

It is worth noting that the CIA is only one piece of the overall United States Intelligence Community (IC). Moreover, it is far from the largest agency in terms of budget or personnel. Most intelligence agencies, and an estimated 80 percent of the overall intelligence budget, are subordinated to the Department of Defense, and of all the departments of the executive branch, that department has generated the most resistance to institutional reform. In all, sixteen agencies are considered members of the IC, the oldest being the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI, 1882) and the youngest being the Coast Guard Intelligence and Criminal Investigations Program (CGICIP, 2001). The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was separated from the IC in 1981 to avoid risking the improper mixing of intelligence and law enforcement functions, only to be readmitted in 2006 to deal with the growing overlap among drug-trafficking, revolutionary, and terrorist organizations. (See Appendix B for a list of IC members.)

The CIA is perhaps the most comprehensive member of the community, in terms of its range of interests, intelligence collection, and analysis. The CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) are experienced in conducting all-source analysis. On the other hand, the three largest agencies in terms of budget and personnel—the National Security Agency (NSA), the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), all part of the Pentagon—are highly specialized. The NSA is concerned with signals intelligence (SIGINT), the exploitation of foreign communications for intelligence and counterintelligence purposes. The NRO deals with satellite reconnaissance. Spy satellites were once considered so controversial that the mere existence of the NRO was officially acknowledged only in 1992, more than thirty years after its establishment in 1961. Also making use of satellites, the NGA concerns itself with imagery and mapping. Beyond the official IC, there are offices that primarily keep track of the community’s intelligence products in search of information relevant to their parent organizations’ concerns, such as the Office of Intelligence, Security, and Emergency Response within the Department of Transportation.

Prior to 2004, the CIA had an especially central role in the community; the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) was both the administrative leader of the CIA and the nominal leader of the IC as a whole. In a commonly used corporate analogy, the DCI was both the chief executive officer of the CIA and the chairman of the board of the IC. This meant that he (or, theoretically, she) was expected to coordinate intelligence functions across agencies, but the position was given little real authority outside the CIA itself.