

## Good Company

It's time for the CIA and scholars to work together. Again.

*Chris Mooney*

"A day doesn't go by but somebody comes into my office and says, 'How do I get into the intelligence system?'" remarks Arthur Hulnick, a 28-year Central Intelligence Agency veteran who now teaches international relations at Boston University. This avid interest is a far cry from 15 years ago, at the height of Iran-Contra, when students nationwide were being arrested in connection with anti-CIA protests. Representing "the Company" on campuses in those days, Hulnick once had a pot hurled at him.

Hulnick's experience isn't an isolated one: Since last year's attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, student applications to the CIA have skyrocketed. The significance of this trend extends far beyond the narrow realm of intelligence recruiting. Post-September 11, students and professors alike have felt inspired to contribute to the national defense, part of the broader boom in civic engagement documented by Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam in this magazine. [See "[Bowling Together](#)," *TAP*, Feb. 11, 2002.] As a result, universities and the military and intelligence establishments are probably closer today than they've been since the late 1960s, when *Ramparts* magazine exposed the CIA's secret funding of the National Students Association.

According to numerous intelligence experts I interviewed, many of them academics and most of them in the political center or on the left, the current openness could help to finally bridge the huge gulf between universities and the national-security establishment created by Vietnam. There's no doubt this would be good for the CIA. More interchange with scholars would help combat the agency's notorious insularity and help ensure that it has access to the best experts on, say, Pakistan or Indonesia. In the longer term, one can even imagine a situation similar to the 1950s, when U.S. military and intelligence agencies worked with leading foundations to fund entire academic disciplines, such as area studies, dedicated to understanding the Soviet bloc and other key regions.

Such a project would undoubtedly evoke hisses (or worse) from that swath of the political left clustered around *The Nation* or South End Press (publisher of Ami Chen Mills' 1991 tract *CIA Off Campus*). These critics will point to grave Cold War abuses, such as McCarthyite purges of scholars suspected of Communist sympathies and the clandestine funding of research institutes at Harvard University, Columbia University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Yet covert funding and classified research on campus are hardly prerequisites for successful collaboration between academia and intelligence today. Indeed, largely because of prior abuses, full disclosure of intelligence funding now constitutes a broad academic norm. Furthermore, no one has suggested that *all* previous scholarship underwritten by the CIA is somehow corrupt or invalid. Some of it was seminal, and much of it was a lot more useful to policy makers than the scientific rational-choice paradigm currently prevalent in the discipline of international relations.

A more crucial point, though, is this: With due respect to anti-ROTC and "CIA off campus" movements of the past, it's hard to see how banishing military and intelligence agencies from university campuses does much good for either side. It certainly doesn't serve the cause of political liberalism, whose adherents, one would hope, would want to persuade the national-security establishment to *change* questionable policies rather than simply call for a boycott. "There's no scenario where the government is *not* going to try to have intelligence," explains Social Science Research Council President Craig Calhoun. "What one would want, then, is the most open intelligence possible, with the most diverse

points of view represented." And how do you get that? By making intelligence more scholarly.

To see why the CIA needs the help of university area and language experts, you first have to get beyond clichéd understandings of what the agency does. Sure, the CIA's Directorate of Operations engages in spying, deception and covert action. The agency as a whole, however, exists to provide the president and other government leaders with the best information available about what's happening in the world. To this end, the Directorate of Intelligence analyzes data, much of it unclassified, on various regions and such technical matters as the state of Russia's nuclear facilities. This is the CIA sector most in need of academic help. When the Directorate of Intelligence fails - as it did with respect both to predicting the Soviet collapse and foreseeing 9-11 - the cause is often inadequate or misguided analysis.

Academics don't always understand these divisions, and the secretive Directorate of Operations doesn't help matters. In the past, troublesome CIA covert actions such as coups in Iran and Guatemala have driven scholars away from the agency, despite the fact that CIA analysts needed their help. For this reason, Melvin Goodman, formerly head of the CIA's Soviet Third World Division and now a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy, argues that the agency will never truly be able to work with universities until its analysis and operations components are split. Yet with the Cold War's close, this obstacle may at least have become more manageable. After all, when it comes to covert operations, it's much easier for academics to condone taking out terrorist hideouts with unmanned Predator drones than to accept the toppling of elected governments.

And if the CIA has changed, so have the scholars who would be working with it. "The Vietnam generation is pretty gray right now," observes Richard Betts, who directs the Institute for War and Peace Studies at Columbia University and has consulted for the CIA. Younger scholars have fewer suspicions of the agency, and graduate students the fewest of all. Conversely, students who go on to staff the CIA in coming years will replace an old guard that well remembers being despised on campuses and even having headquarters shut down by protesters shouting, "Hey, hey, CIA, you're not going to work today!" Unless the prospect of war with Iraq grows much more controversial than it is now, neither the new CIA nor its academic compatriots will have to overcome such tensions.

One promising model for rapprochement between spies and scholars is the CIA's National Intelligence Council (NIC), which prepares national estimates on behalf of the entire intelligence community, including such Pentagon entities as the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency. On its unclassified Web site, the NIC notes that it has reached out to academics in a number of public reports "to enhance our analysis and challenge our views." The NIC also gathers various outside specialists under its Global Expertise Reserve Program, which was founded on the premise that "the Intelligence Community cannot be the 'world expert' on every topic of potential interest to senior U.S. leaders." The program fully recognizes that the vast bulk of information needed for intelligence analysis is already in the public domain. Academic participants therefore aren't required to get security clearances.

The NIC provides a good model for "cloak-and-gown" relations in another sense as well. It's often in less-traditional intelligence spheres that academics have the strongest advantage over insiders; consequently, that's where their input is most needed. Thus, recent unclassified NIC reports have focused on "The Next Wave of HIV/AIDS" and "Information Technology in Africa." Similarly, the CIA's Directorate of Science and Technology has worked closely with academics under its MEDEA program, providing

ecological data from hi-tech satellites to environmental scientists. Public health, information technology, the environment -- these topics, while certainly having a clear intelligence import, also prove that intelligence-academic collaboration isn't just about cloak-and-dagger. Rather, it's ultimately about assessing the state of the world.

Despite these positive indicators, many academics I consulted cited immense inertia at the CIA when it comes to opening up to outsiders, particularly those that lack security clearance. "The intelligence agencies are a little bit like a gawky teenager who's trying to go out on his first date," says Columbia's Robert Jervis, former head of the American Political Science Association and also a frequent CIA consultant. The left-wing magazine *Covert Action Quarterly* recently blazoned "CIA infiltrating the academy" on its cover (a reference to the renewed agency presence at the Rochester Institute of Technology), but this seems precisely backward. In many ways, it's the academy that's banging down the CIA's door.

The agency may be so slow to respond because it got rid of its academic coordinator in the mid-1990s. Now Directorate of Intelligence components must conduct their own outreach, but Jervis worries there's little incentive for doing so. There may even be a disincentive: Because academia tends to be more dovish in its national-security outlook, Yale University intelligence expert Bradford Westerfield suggests analysts may feel hesitant "to appear to be reaching out to too many suspect outsiders." The more politicized the subject matter - with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict being the extreme case - the more this will matter.

Another intelligence scholar, Jefferson Adams of Sarah Lawrence College, also observes that the CIA has done little to shore up its Officer in Residence program, which sends CIA representatives out to campuses to teach, conduct research or simply serve as a resource. Adams describes a recent interchange that he attended at the CIA's headquarters in Langley, Va.: "I was making a very strong proposal that the CIA officers in residence ought to continue ... that's a very good way to get the CIA on campus. They have such a nonchalant attitude toward the program. And whether it's phased in or out, they have terrible PR."

They also have a knee-jerk tendency toward secrecy, one of the greatest obstacles to be overcome if academic-intelligence collaboration is to flourish. Last year, for instance, the left-wing group Public Information Research tried to learn the names, universities attended and years of all previous CIA officers in residence. The CIA turned down the group's Freedom of Information Act request. But if the agency won't even release the names of officers it has sent to universities, academics have every right to feel wary.

Scholars who receive security clearances for CIA work have to sign a lifetime agreement allowing the agency to review anything they later write on intelligence or topics they've studied in a classified setting. The purpose is mainly to prevent the inadvertent disclosure of classified information, but some consider this a serious threat to academic freedom. Thus, in the mid-1980s, following a Harvard scandal over undisclosed CIA funding to several professors, the *Boston Globe* editorialized, "The scholar who works for a government intelligence agency ceases to be an independent spirit, a true scholar."

If the CIA and academe are going to work together, one would hope the agency would give ground on publication review. "There are a number of people saying, 'Look, when it comes to working with academic people, let's waive those requirements,'" says University of Georgia intelligence historian Loch Johnson. But even without CIA concessions, it would be a mistake to take too absolutist a position on academics with security clearances. For one thing, professors should be free to decide whether they want to help their governments. And in any event, the *Globe's* stance grows weaker and weaker the

closer the nation comes to facing war or collective danger, in which case it's positively desirable for academics to work for the government. Thus, even before 9-11, universities such as Harvard did not draw the line at individual security clearances but rather at conducting classified research on campus. And rightly so: A wide range of cloak-and-gown interaction can flourish without converting each lecture hall into a war room.

Another oft-cited worry about CIA-academic relationships involves potential effects on the attitude of people abroad toward American scholars. Foreign governments aren't likely to want to let them into their countries if they're going to be debriefed by the CIA as soon as they return home. And if enough U.S. professors work with intelligence agencies, suspicion could fall on all of them.

To minimize this risk, it would be best for academics to interact with intelligence most often in unclassified settings, so that they're not just talking to the CIA but to their peers and whoever else might want to listen (foreign governments and scholars included). But, again, one shouldn't be too puritanical. Individual professors should disclose their activities to their universities and in publications but should not shoulder the entire weight of the academy's collective reputation.

A final stumbling block for the intelligence-academic relationship involves discrimination. As *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported, the CIA now insists that only American citizens can work on research that the agency funds, whether classified or unclassified -- a policy that MIT and the University of California have refused to accept on the grounds that it excludes graduate students and faculty from abroad. This controversy closely parallels the recent flare-up at law schools nationwide over allowing military recruiters on campus so long as the Pentagon maintains its discriminatory "don't ask, don't tell" policy. These disputes are serious, but unlike those of the 1960s, they're less about sweeping political disagreements than about core educational principles. Stanford University law professor George Fisher, a leading critic of military recruitment as long as "don't ask, don't tell" persists, emphasizes that there's nothing antimilitary about his position.

Academic-intelligence relationships will never be problem free. But at present, the benefits greatly outweigh the costs. Indeed, whether the problem is discriminatory policies or a black-and-white approach to complicated international situations, we should hold out hope that the input of university scholars could push the national-security establishment in the right direction. As Steven Aftergood, director of the Project on Government Secrecy at the Federation of American Scientists, notes, "In the past there has been concern that CIA relations could have a corrupting effect on academia. But the flip side is that those relationships could have a subversive effect on intelligence." Of course, by "subversive" Aftergood isn't talking about overthrow of the government. He sees university scholars as less inclined to put up with unscientific polygraph testing or arbitrary secrecy requirements and, most important, as unwilling to defer to authority. "As they say, the lowliest undergraduate can criticize the most esteemed professor," he says. "That freewheeling approach can only benefit the musty halls of intelligence."

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