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A New
Clandestine
Service:
The Case for
Creative
Destruction

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LET US START with an assertion with which all members of Congress and the Bush administration, including the current director of the Central Intelligence Agency, would agree: The Clandestine Service hasn't performed well against the Islamic extremist target. Now let us make another assertion that is harder to prove (few outsiders have had the opportunity to peruse pre-9/11 operational and intelligence-production files at Langley): The Directorate of Operations (DO)—responsible within the CIA for covert operations—performed poorly against all “hard targets” throughout the entire Cold War, if we measure performance by the CIA's ability to recruit or place intelligence-producing agents inside the critical organizations of hard-target countries or groups. In “spookese,” these assets are called foreign-intelligence, or FI, agents. The DO had some luck and accomplishment in handling hard-target “walk-ins,” foreigners volunteering information to the United States. According to former Soviet–East Europe (SE) division case officers,

all of the important Soviet assets we had during the Cold War were walk-ins. They came to us. We didn't recruit them, though occasionally CIA case officers turned would-be defectors into agents willing to commit espionage inside their homelands. The CIA didn't, of course, admit this datum to the Clandestine Service's junior-officer classes—or to anyone else—during the Cold War. It preferred to maintain the fiction that SE case officers, and operatives from other geographical divisions who prowled the diplomatic cocktail circuit, could find and recruit KGB or other Soviet officials willing to provide critical intelligence. But a former chief of the Soviet-East Europe division, Burton Gerber, once confessed that the few Soviets ever actually recruited—and Africa, where race-conscious Russians could feel very lonely, was probably the best hunting ground—had never been valuable.

To my knowledge—and I have spoken to numerous case officers from all of the operations directorate's geographic divisions and from the Counterterrorism Center—the recruitment myth/walk-in reality usually repeated itself against most hard targets the agency faced in the first fifty years after its founding in 1947. This operational hard fact leaves aside the question of whether the walk-ins and recruitments significantly improved our knowledge of the most lethal aspects of our enemies. In the case of the Soviet Union, the answer would have to be yes, certain key agents did provide highly valuable information, though it is certainly debatable whether any asset—even the most prized scientific sources reporting on Soviet avionics—changed the way the West arrayed itself during the Cold War. These assets never snatched victory from the jaws of defeat, but they probably gave air force planners more confidence in the superiority of their weapons and tactics over those of the Warsaw Pact. With respect to Iraq, Cuba, East Germany, North Vietnam, and North Korea, however, the answer appears to be a resounding no. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the first few years after the Islamic revolution, the CIA probably gets a "C," since for-

mer officials and officers of the old regime, who were kept on in the new, occasionally provided illuminating information about the post-revolution Iranian military, particularly in its fight against Saddam Hussein. After 1989, with the end of the Iraq-Iran war, the death a year earlier of Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, and the great Iranian “takedown,” in which Tehran demolished the CIA’s network inside the country, the scorecard on the operations directorate’s performance probably wouldn’t be passing.¹ Work against America’s likely next superpower adversary, Communist-now-Fascist China, would also probably get a failing grade. Case officers to whom I’ve spoken differ on this point, though none thinks the CIA’s operational work against Beijing should get high marks. At least one, an attentive Chinese-speaking ops officer who served in Beijing in the 1990s, believes Langley’s Chinese operations are thoroughly penetrated by Chinese counterintelligence. In other words, what the Soviet Union did to us in the 1980s, the People’s Republic is doing now.

It is not my intention here to work through the CIA’s operational history, focusing on the quality and impact of foreign intelligence provided by agency assets. That task would be enormously valuable for the institution—honest operational reflection is not a strong suit of the CIA and the small cadre of in-house, highly restricted CIA historians. The task would be even more important for outsiders, particularly for officials and staffers in the executive and legislative branches who are charged with overseeing and paying for Langley’s work. The CIA’s New Testament motto, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” is obvi-

1. For the best press commentary on the Iranian “takedown” and for the most insightful journalism on the travails of the post-Cold War Clandestine Service, see John Walcott and Patrick Duffy, “The CIA’s Darkest Secrets,” *U.S. News and World Report*, July 4, 1994. Although not without its inaccuracies, Walcott’s and Duffy’s reporting is easily the finest piece of mainstream journalism ever on the systemic problems of agency espionage operations.

ously essential for a functioning democracy, particularly for its secretive organizations that do not regularly benefit from the intrusive light of curious (well-meaning) outsiders. It is consistently astonishing to see how short the memories are of our elected representatives and their professional staffers. The CIA, whose case officers rarely read large active operational files, let alone defunct ones stored in the archives, nevertheless usually runs rings around White House or congressional officials who attempt, ever so gently, to query the agency about operational performance. Even senior staff at the White House don't want to know much about CIA sources and methods, for fear they could be blamed for revealing the identity of an agent or the existence of a sensitive operation. Truth be told, most members of Congress's intelligence oversight committees really don't like doing oversight.

Critical oversight is, by definition, adversarial, and most congressional members, Republican and Democrat alike, would much rather be collegial with each other and with the intelligence community—the natural patriotic reflex works in favor of the status quo. The hidden and massive world of classification also protects the agency against a vigorous congressional inclination to assess the bang-versus-buck value of America's clandestine human intelligence collection efforts. Furthermore, the paltry sums involved in funding the Clandestine Service have unquestionably encouraged a lackadaisical, trusting approach. But this is not to say that the Clandestine Service is underfunded. Some have argued that the DO's human intelligence collection—also known as HUMINT—is deficient in part because the United States spends too much money on technical intelligence. Those critics are, to put it politely, misinformed. When exuberantly funded—as HUMINT was in the 1950s, 1960s, 1980s, and post-9/11—the Clandestine Service is inexpensive to maintain. Yet the quality of HUMINT against hard targets that did not derive from walk-ins was mediocre to awful in the past and, according to active-duty officers, awful to nonexistent today. I have

never met a case officer who has said, “I couldn’t do this important operation because I didn’t have the money.” Not once. A few billion dollars goes a *very* long way in covert affairs. The agency, like any other bureaucracy, will always plead for more cash, even when operatives in the field have more money than they know what to do with.²

The Republican dig at Democratic presidential candidate Senator John Kerry, who pre-9/11 often voted against more money for the CIA, may have been politically astute, but on its face, it made no sense (to be sure the senator has never given any hint that he’s grasped the real, nonpoliticized troubles of Langley). Would that more Republicans understood that more money for the CIA is more often than not the equivalent of giving crack to a heroin addict. In fact, the CIA has *always* feared the critiques coming from the American Right more than those from the American Left because the Right has usually focused on Langley’s competence, not its operational ethics. A malevolent or “rogue” CIA has to be, by definition, a somewhat competent organization. In my experience, Republican staff members of the two intelligence oversight committees are more likely to approach the agency with greater skepticism and probing queries. Before 9/11, the only staff director of the Senate

2. Former CIA director George Tenet, politically the most astute director since Richard Helms, has probably been the most accomplished practitioner of the “If I’d only had more money” CIA school of congressional operations. When Tenet kept doing this line in 2004, after substantial post-9/11 increases in the agency budget, even the traditionally friendly ground of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, where Tenet once worked as the staff director, turned hostile and more openly dismissive of his promises. It is, however, an excellent bet that the Senate and House intelligence oversight committees will continue to give the CIA, particularly the DO, more money even though senior members of those committees may question the bang-versus-buck results. No one on the Hill wants to be accused of shortchanging American intelligence in the war on terror. During the Cold War, Democratic Senator Patrick Moynihan often trenchantly (sometimes unfairly) critiqued the CIA’s intelligence collection and analysis. Yet Moynihan *always* ended up giving the CIA the monies it asked for.

Select Committee on Intelligence who ever tried to use the committee to push aggressively for a reform agenda inside the CIA and the broader intelligence community was a Republican. Taylor Lawrence, a poor Southern boy with a Ph.D. from CalTech, had the self-confidence to challenge accepted practices in the late 1990s, when it was crystal clear to him and several other professional staff members that the Clandestine Service, among other American intelligence institutions, was in trouble. Too controversial for the intelligence bureaucracies and the always-collegial but stubbornly political Senate oversight committee, he failed and resigned—and the reform agenda went with him.

The constant refrain one regularly hears on the American Right that Bill Clinton destroyed, or greatly accelerated the decline of, the CIA is another unfounded critique. The Clandestine Service was a mediocre organization long before Clinton's election. Indeed, President Clinton's first director, James Woolsey, attempted to force the DO to develop standards to review the quality of agency assets—the first time any director had done so. Senior management and the rank and file of DO, however, quickly diluted in practice Woolsey's guidelines so that the old habits of recruitment and intelligence exaggeration and fraud continued.³

3. Woolsey made a similar bold attempt to force the declassification of defunct covert-action programs. Here, too, the bureaucracy didn't zealously comply. The 1953 CIA/MI6-sponsored coup d'état against Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mossadeq is an excellent case in point. A brief agency in-house history of this affair should have been quickly released. Langley had in its possession no other official recollection of the event. Nonetheless, the history remained classified. When this compilation ended up in the hands of the *New York Times* in 2000, the CIA Publications Review Board, according to an official in the review office, was furious. It had no right to be furious. The declassification folks at Langley were either negligent or in willful disregard of Woolsey's directive—or both. After the *Times*' publication, Woolsey remarked to me that his directive was intended specifically for this kind of historically rich documentation. One would be hard-pressed to find a more historically resonant covert action. It is possible the politically incorrect nature of this project may have had something to do with the institution's disinterest in declassifying it. Given the secrecy temperament, the bureaucratic depth, and the ahistorical ambiance of Langley, it would be

The standard critiques miss the mark. There simply is no such thing as a case officer who didn't try to recruit a Middle Eastern terrorist because of concerns about the possible legal blow back from associating with someone who may have engaged in criminal behavior. In addition, the press, retired case officers wanting to underscore their own hard-nosed credentials (and a history depicting the CIA as a more manly, competent place when they were "hitting the streets" as operatives), and a wide variety of folks on the right often can't resist putting the blame for the agency's many recent failures on an American overemphasis of technical intelligence at the expense of HUMINT, on politically correct human-rights sensitivities that mushroomed under Clinton, or on insufficient funding during the 1990s. In fact, these critiques are in no way justified by the intelligence reports, operational files, and firsthand experiences of the young case officers (those who did fewer than four tours) in the Reagan, Bush père, and Clinton years.⁴

unwise, however, to suggest too strongly that the CIA was resisting declassifying something that, in today's light, might seem embarrassing. More likely, CIA officials, not wanting to offend their British colleagues, who operate under the draconian British Official Secrets Act, ignored Woolsey's order. According to a historian in the CIA, the Review Board gave greater weight to British concerns than to the statutory authority of a CIA director to determine classification and public access. One thing is certain: Since its publication, there hasn't been the slightest hint of blow back against any Iranian or his descendent mentioned in the official history—the oft-used reason for why the clandestine service refuses to release its past even when CIA directors order it do so.

4. Senior DO officers at headquarters and in the field could, however, be fearful in their approaches toward dangerous targets. According to several case officers, countersurveillance teams deployed to protect operatives in meetings with possibly dangerous foreign agents and "developmentals" became more common in these years. Aggressive counterterrorist officers in the 1980s and 1990s could regularly encounter stiff resistance from headquarters or station management if suggested operational actions were too muscular (must never physically intimidate the other side) or likely to put an officer into harm's way. I can't recall of a single instance where a case officer died because he put himself into harm's way in a clandestine relationship with any terrorist organization. According to several CIA officers, no case officer has died since 9/11 in a clandestine operation against the Islamic terrorist target.

The principle problem during Clinton's presidency, as before and after, was the inability of case officers to meet Islamic terrorists, those who associate with Islamic terrorists, or even those who might remotely know those who associate with Islamic terrorists. In the Clinton era, under directors Woolsey, John Deutch, and George Tenet, case officers would have loved to be morally and legally challenged by the possible recruitment of a terrorist who might have had something to do with the death of an American citizen. Neither they nor in all probability the directors above them would have hesitated to move on such cases if there *had been* such cases. Clinton may not have cared all that much about the intelligence business—though he certainly gave the impression of having a rapidly growing interest after the embassy bombings in Africa in 1998. But Clinton's weaknesses in foreign affairs mattered not at all to counterterrorist case officers "on the street."

Read the press commentary on the CIAs of William Casey, James Woolsey, John Deutch, and George Tenet, and the well-being and ethos of these institutions look remarkably like what the press sees as the character of the director. There is a powerful hierarchical disposition in Washington, in both the government and the press, to judge a bureaucracy first and foremost by the men and women who lead it. This approach can have merit, particularly when dissecting institutions where there is an organic relationship between the leaders and the led—for example, in the military. In dealing with the CIA's Clandestine Service, however, it makes almost no sense. I had considerable admiration for William Casey, the determined, covert action-loving cold warrior. But when he was the director of central intelligence, Casey was irrelevant to the Clandestine Service's espionage ethics and the vast majority of espionage operations. Even with covert action where CIA paramilitary officers were not directing recoilless cannon-loaded needle-boats in the bays of Nicaragua, the influence of Casey was often *very* hard to detect. The bureaucracy dominated. In seven years of Iranian

operations, at a time in the 1980s and 1990s when Iranian operations often had the limelight inside the service, I'm hard-pressed to recall a single espionage operation that was shaped by a CIA director.

Serious historical reviews of clandestine intelligence collection against the Soviets, Chinese, Iraqis, Iranians, Egyptians, Cubans, French, or Congolese might make insiders and outsiders wiser about the nature of the CIA and keep White House and congressional officials from heaping praise on past or present agency work that does not merit it. As a former case officer, I can say that such praise was very dispiriting to officers—particularly during the 1980s and early 1990s, when egregious operational failures occurred regularly. What such officers wanted was outsiders to reprove the organization for its incompetence. That way our elected representatives *might* be less inclined to throw even more money at Langley each time it cocks up. Even if congresspeople or deputy national security advisers did not read these reviews—and these folks don't have much reading time—the critiques would still bubble through the bureaucracy and the press, engendering more healthy skepticism and humility.

But my objective here is different. I bring up the deficiencies of the past only to underscore the most urgent problems that now face us in constructing a CIA that has as its primary target Islamic extremist groups. Langley properly has a larger role than this—and I will discuss that role below—but a CIA that tries to reconstruct itself to battle al Qaeda and other Islamic militant organizations will surely become a better intelligence service against the Chinese, North Koreans, or Russians. As is the case with infectious disease doctors fighting AIDS, agency operatives building a Clandestine Service capable of penetrating Islamic radical groups are learning skills and operational truths applicable to any hard target. And if the Clandestine Service cannot wage intelligent efforts against hard tar-

gets—something it has not often done in the past—then it really doesn't have a particularly compelling reason to exist.

What does the CIA have deployed against al Qaeda and other Islamic extremist groups overseas? According to active-duty CIA officers, the methodology of agency deployment today is essentially unchanged since September 10, 2001. Traditional stations and bases lightly camouflaged inside official U.S. facilities are responsible for most of the “street” work—that is, case officers posing as fake diplomats are the overwhelming bulk of the organization's frontline force. Needless to say, this “cover” is nearly useless in working the Islamic militant target. Diplomats and case officers are monitored in many Arab countries, and in serious countries with active Islamic militant organizations and competent internal security services—for example, Egypt or Jordan—any attempt to associate with Muslim activists would be noted almost immediately and viewed hostilely by the host government. The same would be true in much of western Europe, the launching platform of 9/11 and probably still the home of potentially the most operationally effective hard-core jihadists. This issue has greatly retarded the State Department from making contact with Islamic activists. Ditto for undeclared American case officers, who most likely are “blown”—known—to the host government in serious counterintelligence countries like Egypt, Jordan, or France. It is extremely difficult for agency officers, even with real, substantive, full-time State work to long maintain their cover against local employees—State calls them “foreign service nationals”—who dominate the administration in all embassies and consulates in the Middle East and Europe.

An agency officer under diplomatic or consular cover trying to associate with Islamic militants could also easily anger his official State “cover boss,” who could get scolded by the Foreign Ministry for allowing one of his officers to go where he ought not. It isn't unlikely that the protest could come through the “host” security service. In either case, CIA chiefs of station are usually loath to anger

senior American diplomats or the local security service, which can demand that station chiefs depart their posts. Senior CIA personnel abroad are inevitably married with kids, and they truly fear being declared *persona non grata*—to be “PNGed” is a dreaded verb at Langley. Quality of life is good for senior CIA officers, even in rather miserable Third World posts. The only way CIA officials can really save money given their low official salaries is to live abroad, where their rent, utility costs, and other day-to-day expenses are covered by Uncle Sam. Chiefs of station, who rule all U.S. operations within their countries, usually take a dim view of case officer activity that has a high probability of getting the station into trouble with the “host” service.

In the future, this problem of militant association may, just possibly, change, depending on how forcefully the Bush administration pushes its democracy-advocacy programs in the Middle East. If Washington were to go to the mat, demanding access to Islamic activists for U.S. diplomats, it might be conceivable that agency officers could occasionally get the opportunity to say “hi” to Islamic militants, though they would likely be constantly or periodically surveilled while doing so. Needless to say, this kind of access isn’t particularly helpful, even if the officers concerned have good knowledge of Arabic and the right higher education to converse productively with Islamic activists (and according to CIA officers working on the Middle East, the number of operatives currently serving who have such qualifications is few). Islamic activists come in many different stripes, and it would take considerable time for a talented case officer with unrestricted, unmonitored access to get some idea of the concentric social and intellectual circles connecting moderate Islamists with the harder core ones who might have valuable information about militants who are or could become operationally active anti-American jihadists in the Middle East, Europe, or the United States.

It is possible to dream up scenarios where “inside” State

Department-covered case officers could gain useful access to militant anti-American Islamist organizations: A case officer with consular cover meets a young Muslim male applying for a visa to study in the States and uses the consular leverage for repeated meetings. The young man volunteers information suggesting knowledge of radical Muslim circles, and the case officer recruits him with money and the undefined (and easily forgotten) promise of aiding him later to get to the United States. The young man then proves a valuable access agent cum would-be radical Muslim, developing good information on local al Qaeda membership, recruitment methods, and liaison relationships between radical Muslim groups and the host country's security service. This scenario is certainly possible, which is why consular-covered CIA case officers are essential tools in operations targeting Third World radical organizations. (Radical Muslims with European passports, however, do not need to apply for visas at U.S. consulates, as they may travel to the U.S. on the visa-waiver program.)

America's counterterrorist program cannot be built, however, on the random luck of CIA officers in U.S. consulates. The chances of the above scenario happening are small, though sufficient enough to ensure that all consulates in the Middle East and in other countries with large Muslim, especially Arab, populations have CIA officers inside the consular cadre—not just waiting in the wings and depending on State Department personnel to do the initial spotting and assessing of possible targets. (Consular officers are among the most overworked members of the Foreign Service, and they absolutely don't need to be tasked with security concerns that aren't properly their own.) European and African countries with substantial Arab communities—whose members may lawfully carry several passports—must have well-integrated CIA officers working and reviewing the nonimmigrant and immigrant visa lines—something that, according to active-duty case officers, is rare overseas today, despite the consular/security discussions provoked by 9/11. The

CIA has generally viewed consular cover as a backwater—the work is demanding, and few case officers want to exert such effort on behalf of the State Department when the odds of a recruitment are so small. Case officers, whatever their target, usually prefer the more prestigious, though usually even less useful, State Department political cover to “camouflage” their activities.

The problems of time-on-target and association plagued agency officers in the Cold War on most difficult but conventionally accessible targets. It is imperative for outsiders to understand the depth and surreality of these long-standing problems to appreciate how defective and self-delusional the Clandestine Service has been since espionage replaced covert action as the mainstay of its ethos in the 1950s. If you understand the mind-set and the routine methods during the Cold War, you will understand why Langley has so far successfully resisted pro-reform outside pressure and soul-scorching internal reflection since 9/11. Five decades of mostly bad habits, seen inside as the approved playbook for routine espionage operations, has made the Clandestine Service nearly impervious to criticism and internally driven reformation. Know the truth behind routine Cold War era operations—that they most often made no sense whatsoever—and you will also understand why only massive reform has any chance of changing the debilitating practices of the agency’s Directorate of Operations. If, however, you think that the DO did a decent job during the Cold War—and this is the preferred historical starting point for the CIA, which most establishment liberals and conservatives assent to with little hesitation—then it’s possible to believe that the agency can adjust to a post-9/11 world without that much internal bloodletting and trauma. Case officers are, after all, Americans, so this theory goes, and they thus will honestly cross-examine themselves for the good of the country. But see the past accurately, and you will understand that Americans, like everybody else, can, in closed societies, continuously and effec-

tively lie to themselves. Gradual change at Langley is no change at all.

So let us take another look at the past before we try to construct a new Clandestine Service. From the 1950s forward, the same scenario played out thousands of times, with case officers trying to target difficult but accessible targets. Consider France and South Africa (but one could just as easily consider other countries in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, or Latin America). I've picked these two countries because they don't represent nearly impossible targets—such as Soviets, North Koreans, Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, or Saddam Hussein's security and intelligence organizations, but they were nonetheless very difficult. A decent argument could be made that the CIA should not have spent much, or any, time trying to recruit sources in Cold War France or Boer-dominated South Africa, because both countries were democracies and, as such, revealed enough of their political souls and machinations for Washington to know more or less what they were doing. Both countries, whatever their obstreperousness and moral transgressions, were definitely not on Moscow's side.

Yet these targets were at least more important than the ones that occupied the time of most case officers in most countries. If what the CIA was doing in Paris or Pretoria could look silly, what Langley was doing elsewhere could look absurd. The remark of a senior Africa Division officer who questioned whether a junior officer needed to recruit twenty agents in his first year in a small, poverty-stricken west African state, when "five or six would have been quite sufficient," captures well the gluttony of agency work in easy hunting grounds where case officers could announce their CIA identities and watch a queue develop. In the macho, conspiratorial lands of Latin America, working for the CIA could be a rite of passage. In the Middle East, this same macho-mercenary-join-the-ruling-cabal attitude could also, depending on the country, play to your advantage. The former case officer Robert Baer wore his CIA iden-

tity like a multicolored strobe light: He could occasionally pick up worthwhile intelligence from Middle Easterners who wanted to have their own private channels to Washington. (This is not to suggest that Bob Baer wasn't also fun to be with, more fun than the often zealously conventional Americans who predominate in the Clandestine Service.)

Several case officers have told me that when "developing" Cold War Frenchmen and South Africans, the officers could at least pretend they were doing something worthwhile. Unlike the seldom-seen Soviets and Communist Chinese, they could at least wine and dine these targets with greater regularity. But knowing why individual case officers and the Directorate of Operations chased various targets isn't important now. Knowing the structure and method of standard agency operations then is important, since past practices still define the service. The agency's fight against bin Ladinism will continue to be more myth than reality because Langley cannot escape these deficient, though easy, tactics. Never in public, and rarely in private, can senior agency officers, who, after all, attained their in-house "glory" in a thoroughly defective system, admit that these practices failed.

But what follows, boiled down to its basics, is a nuts-and-bolts description of the Cold War agency at work. There were differences here and there. "Denied-area" operations—that is, what occurred behind the Iron Curtain and in other countries where case officers confronted totalitarian security services or where the environment was considered too hazardous or politically impossible for CIA stations and bases to operate—do not involve case officers "on the street . . . developing" foreigners. But what follows is what happened when the Clandestine Service was trying to be serious against what it considered serious, accessible targets. The agency that gave us this charade, the mid- to senior-grade officers who sustained it, are the folks who today are supposed to penetrate rad-

ical Islamic groups who would, if they could, detonate weapons of mass destruction inside the United States.

The debilitating, mundane past: An American operative under diplomatic cover in Paris or Pretoria, who had access to select French or South African officials at their respective foreign and defense ministries, had an impossibly difficult time gaining ministry-wide access because the diplomatic cover had to fit established work assignments and patterns. A case officer cum diplomat working the Asian portfolio couldn't just wander off and start paying house calls on foreign counterparts working, say, Soviet or European issues once the case officer discovered that his primary counterpart was a faithful Frenchman or South African, not at all interested in an extracurricular relationship with the CIA. Real American diplomats could get very mad if they found CIA officers poaching beyond their assigned domains, which CIA officers would regularly try to do, because the odds would be infinitesimally small of finding a diplomat willing to engage in espionage on behalf of the United States in the exact foreign ministry office to which the case officer would have cover access. And expanding the pool of possible targets rarely much increased the odds of a recruitment of a serious first- or second-world official. Frustrated case officers were advised to troll any nonofficial locale imaginable to compensate for the lack of workable official access. "Just sit in the cafés and bars nearest to the foreign and defense ministries and try to meet people" was the *serious* advice given by a performance-award winning senior operative to a hapless, quintessentially American junior case officer tasked to recruit European officials.

Ambitious case officers with "integrated" State Department cover would often just abandon their diplomatic portfolios and hunt anywhere they could hope to find someone "recruitable."⁵ It was

5. For press commentary on post-Cold War CIA operations in France, see Edwy Plenel, "Paris dénonce l'espionnage de la CIA en France," *Le Monde*, February 23, 1995; Laurent Zecchini, "Les États-Unis démentent avoir espionné en

not at all uncommon to find rapidly promoted officers with a long string of recruitments whose access to power and classified information was at best marginal. Such officers often developed into a fine art form intelligence reporting that oh-so-slightly advanced the political coverage of the local press, which inevitably made agency reporting read like State Department telegrams, except not usually as soundly sourced or as well written. Among the 10 percent of the case officer cadre that has always done 90 percent of the recruitments—in other words, the leadership of the Clandestine Service—the malady of these “cheap recruitments” has been endemic.

The above frustrations were less when CIA case officers would spot, assess, and try to develop these targets and others outside of the foreigners’ home countries. Such “targets of opportunity” worked at their embassies or consulates. Professional etiquette and formalities were more flexible—a sophisticated officer could more easily associate with a wider variety of official nationals of another country—but problems of prolonged association often remained. The odds of finding somebody *serious* who was willing to engage in espionage on behalf of America still remained quite small. Hence, again, the need to recruit foreigners of less value. Thousands of such assets have been put on the books. My personal favorite—and

France,” *Le Monde*, February 24, 1995; Craig R. Whitney, “French Official Demands Inquiry on Spy Leak,” *The New York Times*, February 24, 1995; Tim Weiner, “CIA Faces Issue of Economic Spying,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 1995; Weiner, “CIA Confirms Blunders During Economic Spying on France,” *The New York Times*, March 13, 1995; and “CIA Spying in France,” editorial in *The International Herald Tribune*, February 24, 1995. I’ve spoken to several CIA officials who had knowledge of the “Paris flap,” including a conscientious official in the Inspector General’s office. They all described the mishap as a perfect storm of recruitment-hungry, dishonest case officers, poor tradecraft, and consistently bad operational judgment on the part of several CIA station chiefs. Press reporting on the affair tended to depict the agency as engaged in serious stuff gone awry, which certainly can happen in espionage. The opposite was true: It was worthless case officer busy work caught red-handed by the politically opportunistic bad boy French interior minister, Charles Pasqua.

it is enormously difficult to choose among the dozens that I gained knowledge of while working two geographic divisions and their corresponding headquarters' desks—was an Iraqi hotel clerk recruited in a European country during the first Gulf War. The agent was recruited as an “access agent” to Iraqi officials, though the asset appeared to have contact only with backpacking American and European tourists. Headquarters actually issued a commendation to the recruiting officer, who would have had some difficulty locating Iraq on the map, for his contribution to America's war effort. A cash bonus followed. (A review of citations, awards, and cash bonuses given to agency officers and stations during the first Gulf War would be an eye-opening voyage through the Directorate of Operations.)

Imagine a Russian diplomat, periodically under FBI surveillance, wandering the halls of the U.S. Senate buildings trying to find a valuable congressional employee willing to commit espionage on behalf of Mother Russia and you can have a different perspective on traditional CIA operational methods for most “unilateral” case officers (operatives who are not openly declared to the “host” security service). Spying for America is admittedly more morally appealing than spying for Russia, but the home-country patriotism working against America in states with profound cultural identities has always been problematic, and with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the appeal of the United States to Western-oriented foreigners as a bulwark against Communism and Soviet malevolence has vanished. During the Cold War, the CIA could never intellectually and operationally come to grips with the global incongruity of its massive “inside” case officer deployment and cover and the true paucity of valuable foreigners susceptible to recruitment pitches by CIA officers. Any attempt to assess this disconnect—to have a thorough historical review, target by target, of the gross number of case officers deployed and the quality of intelligence collected from recruited assets—could have possibly brought the entire house down. Cynicism is rampant in the CIA's Clandestine Service, as it

appears to be in other Western intelligence services, in great part because the reality of intelligence collection is so vastly less than its promise. The British author John Le Carré, a former intelligence official, may be a morally purblind, mean-spirited left-winger, but he often captures well the cynicism that comes with the trade—the intensity with which case officers can despise their own dishonest organizations.

In the CIA of Porter Goss, the “head count”—the need to show recruitments or progress toward recruitments for a case officer’s annual performance report—remains the most assured way for rapid case officer promotion. The CIA tenaciously denies that agent recruitments—“scalp counting”—is *the* key to success and that case officers engage in “cheap recruiting.” When I first wrote about this debilitating problem in the *Atlantic Monthly* in February 1998—“Can’t Anyone Here Play This Game”—some senior CIA officials anonymously or off the record conceded that recruitment exaggeration and fraud had been a problem in the Directorate of Operations (a senior official from George Tenet’s office came to see me and said so directly). They always added, of course, that things had changed. “George Tenet is really making the DO a much more effective organization” were the words of Tenet’s messenger.⁶

6. It is important to note that Goss *is* making major changes in personnel overseas. According to active-duty CIA officers, the director has already removed several chiefs of station and other senior personnel abroad, causing one senior case officer to call this effort a “purge.” The early “rotation” of personnel appears to be preceding one geographic division at a time, with all divisions scheduled for similar reviews. However, according to CIA case officers, this purge is not happening because of concerns over recruitment exaggeration and fraud or a desire to fundamentally change the DO personnel, management, and cover structure overseas. According to one officer, Goss is just “trying to shake things up” by recalling senior personnel from areas of insufficient operational activity. As most “big” stations and bases in Europe and East Asia divisions *really* don’t see that much unilateral operational activity—even using the DO’s loose understanding of what worthwhile operational activity is—such purges could potentially touch many officers. Removing one chief of station or base and replacing him or her with another case officer, raised in and loyal to the “old school,” who will

But Tenet didn't do that, and neither is Porter Goss. Talk to active-duty case officers who are not vested in the system, and they'll quickly tell you that this institution-destroying problem is alive and well because the DO organizational structure overseas and its methods of operation are unchanged. My Cold War era description of how CIA stations routinely operated is, *mutatis mutandis*, applicable to different targets in the twenty-first century. The cover and structure of how officers are stationed remains the same: The majority of CIA officers overseas do not, 24/7, chase the Islamic terrorist target, and those who do usually do so using tried-and-true methods that operationally (and morally) bankrupted the agency during the Cold War. According to active-duty operatives, counterterrorist-focused case officers must still make their ends meet by playing the traditional espionage game, always hunting for the "target of opportunity," somebody they can describe to station management and headquarters as a worthwhile "developmental" or recruitment. As standards remain low in the CIA, this isn't particularly difficult: Tagging these recruitments as "access agents" to hard targets is a time-honored favorite inside the service. Legions of assets were so put on the books during the Cold War. According to CIA officials, case officers are now starting to do the same with foreigners who, in agency operational cables at least, have access to Islamic terrorist targets.

As in the past, operatives today cannot afford to focus exclusively on a difficult, elusive target, for fear of becoming noncompetitive with their colleagues who are not primarily working the counterterrorist beat. Counterterrorist-focused case officers overseas are, again, similar to Soviet–East Europe division case officers

work in overseas "inside-officer" stations and bases that, by their very nature, maintain the "DO culture," will accomplish little. It is likely that Goss's efforts will actually feed the directorate's constant hunger for easy recruitments, as new station and base chiefs, and the attentive foot soldiers below them, energetically try to create more work.

of yesteryear. They could not afford to work exclusively the SE target, either behind the Iron Curtain as denied-area officers servicing “dead-drops” and occasionally meetings agents or in the other area divisions trying to meet Soviet and East Europeans at cocktail parties, sporting events, and expatriate British pubs.

In other words, the Islamic terrorist target has become for the Clandestine Service what the Soviets were during the Cold War: the seldom met, let alone recruited, enemy who justifies a global service vastly too large for it to be honest and effective. The myth of recruiting Soviet and hard-core East European and Cuban targets sustained the institution’s esprit de corps and made it easier for case officers to deceive themselves about their espionage profession.⁷ The myth of recruiting counterterrorist agents against al Qaeda and other militant Islamic organizations is now developing. The success

7. For an amusing description of how the CIA has changed its focus to terrorism, see Lindsay Moran’s commentary on CIA case officer training in *Blowing My Cover: My Life as a CIA Spy and Other Misadventures* (Putnam Adult, 2004). Confronting totalitarian security services is out at “the Farm,” the agency’s training facility in rural Virginia; terrorists are in. There is nothing in theory wrong with this. However, what is notable about Ms. Moran’s junior-officer experience is the continuing mediocrity of the espionage training: the laughter-provoking badness of the spy instructors and the Farm’s management. Al Qaeda has replaced the KGB; otherwise, *plus ça change, plus ça reste le même*. What good junior officers have discovered when they leave the Farm is that case officers at headquarters and overseas aren’t necessarily better than the professional “failures” they had as instructors. The Farm is the first important step in the conditioning of officers to accept the operational surreality of the whole institution. Ms. Moran is also a good read about the frustration and uselessness that many case officers—the thoughtful ones—feel when they look at the mediocre foreign-intelligence agents they recruit and run. Ms. Moran was overwhelmed with this malaise post-9/11, given the pettiness of what she was doing and the urgency and seriousness of the threat against the United States (see, in particular, Moran, pp. 270–288). Feeling frustrated and useless has always been a common theme among educated case officers who take their jobs seriously. The sensation is dulled somewhat when case officers have fun in their work—when operatives, particularly male operatives, are enjoying themselves and occasionally feeling the adrenaline surge, they tend to believe that the work they’re doing is serious and important to the nation.

of using counterterrorism to increase agency funding and staffing is already proven. The odds are very good that the agency will now see several more decades of intelligence malfeasance without serious reflection and internal reform. The 9/11 Commission utterly failed to take on the Directorate of Operations, as it also failed to dissect the operational problems of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, which issued the so called Robb-Silberman Report (named after the cochairs, former Senator Charles Robb and former federal Judge Laurence Silberman) did a somewhat better job, recognizing systemic problems within the Directorate of Operations and making serious (though often inadequate) recommendations on how to improve the performance of the Clandestine Service.⁸ However, the

8. Though the Robb-Silberman report is easily the most serious effort yet by Washington to review the intelligence collection performance of the Directorate of Operations, it still suffers, as did the 9/11 Commission's recommendations, from a top-down view of the CIA. The report is critical of traditional CIA clandestine intelligence collection techniques post-9/11 and understands that "new platforms for human intelligence" need to be strengthened (the sometimes awkward bureaucratic language of the report, I am told, abates in the classified version, where there is a more detailed discussion of the inadequacy and failures of "inside" case officers against specific targets and why, in particular, the nonofficial cover cadre needs to become more prominent in CIA operations). Yet the report fundamentally fails to grasp the capacity of the Directorate of Operations to corrupt the efficacy of its recommendations. The report envisions "Target Development Boards," "Innovation Centers," and operationally savvy "Mission Managers" all coming together to provide an "integrated . . . strategic management of [human] collection" for the entire intelligence community. With more centralized planning and management, all under the watchful eye of the new national intelligence director, operations will benefit from greater synergies—putting better talent on the right spot at the right time, and underscoring and correcting weaknesses more quickly.

To quote from the report: "The Target Development Board will then study all available collection capabilities from across the Community to the intelligence 'gaps' we have in our understanding of Country X's program. If collectors come up short in filling these "gaps," the Mission Manager may recommend more aggressive collection techniques involving higher risk strategies. Because it is a standing entity, the Target Development Board will be able to quickly revisit pri-

report's issuance was largely upstaged by the illness and death of Pope John Paul II: It did not, and is now not likely, to generate the attention and public pressure that such reports require to galvanize action against resistant, accomplished bureaucratic power players. (With the possible exception of the Pentagon, the CIA, which has always been dominated by the Directorate of Operations, is the most politically adept bureaucracy in Washington.) The publicity-devouring 9/11 Commission also had already sucked up most of the oxygen in the capital necessary to sustain a serious intelligence debate.

Congress and the White House are unlikely once more to work up the self-flagellatory energy to severely question Langley about its operational prowess unless we get hit again inside the United

ities in response to changing events, and adjust the collection strategy correspondingly." Sounds fine in theory. In reality, these new offices are going to be staffed by CIA case officers—or Pentagon case officers schooled by Langley (and Robb-Silverman wants to *increase* Langley's control of case officer education). Robb-Silverman somehow envisions these new entities as existing outside of the Directorate of Operations—the report, without exploring the origins of the DO's culture, understands that the culture is toxic—but within the CIA.

This is a meaningless bureaucratic division. Senior and midlevel case officers raised in the Clandestine Service's defective system will *immediately* take over Robb-Silberman's new CIA.

Langley has rarely not known what the truly important targets are supposed to be. A Target Development Board will just repeat the targets that the CIA knows it *ought* to hunt seriously. The CIA has always had "mission managers"—chiefs of station and base have always directed junior officers toward these targets (and other more reliable ones that guarantee case officer and station head counts). It would also be a demanding task to count up all the "innovative" operational cables DO management has sent out encouraging case officers to "think outside the box." Point: The headquarters, and especially overseas bureaucracy, makes the culture and the men and women of the Directorate of Operations. Until this bureaucracy is gutted—which means at first firing, not hiring, large numbers of case officers and radically rebuilding the way *most* case officers are deployed overseas—the many good ideas within the Robb-Silberman report have little chance of producing a more effective clandestine human intelligence collection program against America's hard-target enemies.

Given the influence and bureaucratic agility of the DO within the CIA, the Robb-Silberman report is much more likely to encourage the directorate's worst instincts and habits, not curtail them.

States on a 9/11 scale. Terrorist strikes outside the United States, on embassies, U.S. naval vessels, or American corporations, aren't likely to produce the heat necessary to change the status quo.

But Americans *are* Americans. If the CIA, or more likely outsiders with authority over Langley, ruthlessly conducted internal audits of recruitments and intelligence production, the system might possibly change by exposing the fictions—principally the recruitment myth—that have been used to support senior case officers and enable them to silence internal questioning and critics. Nobody really wanted to go there during the Cold War because both Republicans and Democrats had more or less accepted the agency's version of its own role in the battle against Communism. Even after the Cold War, a thoughtful, historically inclined, and intellectually curious CIA director like James Woolsey couldn't bring himself to severely probe CIA failings since he viewed the agency, and the Directorate of Operations in particular, as a national trust. This disposition is a natural one in Washington, especially among the elite of the foreign policy establishment. It combines well with a sense of self-preservation: What CIA or national intelligence director wants to publicly gut the organization that gives him pride of place among other senior officials? Who wants to go to work, knowing that he must fire hundreds of irremediably ineffective CIA employees to resuscitate the institution and endure savage press criticism for his actions? Confronted with policies they don't like, CIA officers will leak against CIA directors and presidents. Confronted with a director determined to transform Langley, they will leak nonstop to journalists always eager to find active-duty sources. (Those of us who have served in the Clandestine Service know well how seldom journalists actually have active-duty operational sources.)

The headlines are predictable: "New CIA Director Damages National Security" or "Novice CIA Chief Destroying Spy Networks Overseas" or, the worst, "Spy Professionals Defend CIA Against Neoconservative Director." And Langley always deploys a defense

that an amazing number of journalists, congresspeople, executive-branch officials, and their staffers repeatedly fall for: “We’ve changed since these (disgruntled, embittered, noncompetitive) officers left the service.” The Public Affairs office of the CIA and the authorized leakers from the “seventh floor” (the director’s floor) shamelessly dump this line to the press. This routine is sometimes paired with controlled guided tours of CIA headquarters. A *Washington Post* journalist who had the intel beat once remarked to me that a senior case officer was walking him down Langley’s hallways pointing to the cipher-locked doors. “If you only knew what great work was going on behind them,” the CIA official volunteered. Frustrated and dependent upon the CIA for most of his access to Langley, the journalist wanted to be skeptical, but he didn’t know how. Within a short period of time, his reporting disposition inclined him to give the Clandestine Service a *big* benefit of the doubt.

Inside the CIA, journalists who officially have the intelligence beat are rarely admired by good officers because the media usually give more weight to the official, “seventh-floor” line than they do to “dissident” commentary. (These journalists often fairly retort that working-level case officers won’t talk to them, which is almost always true, so they inevitably become dependent on official leaks or retired senior case officers who are usually leaking on behalf of active-duty senior brethren.) Good and bad case officers are usually united in their distaste for the press. And the agency, particularly since 9/11, regularly hooks journalists who ought to know better with access to CIA paramilitary personnel. A look at the major newsmagazines after the beginning of the war in Afghanistan gives a good idea of how effective this tactic is. The discussion of pre-9/11 al Qaeda operations, or the lack thereof through most of the 1990s, receded. The sexiness of CIA paramilitary officers came to the foreground. The death of one paramilitary officer in a Taliban prison rebellion further shifted the limelight. The war in Iraq and the CIA’s prewar assessments of Saddam Hussein’s WMD programs

moved the spotlight unfavorably, but the possibility remains omnipresent that a CIA paramilitary operation in Afghanistan or elsewhere could again change the barometer. CIA paramilitary actions have certainly had their successes—as have DO espionage operations—but they are fundamentally different from the routine counterterrorist and noncounterterrorist espionage work that occurs at headquarters and in CIA stations and bases abroad. This work—not the special ops—has always defined the agency and the so-called “DO culture.”

In vain in the 1990s did former “dissident” ex-case officers suggest that American bureaucracy, particularly secret bureaucracy, was not magically exempt from Max Weber’s rules and insights. Secret bureaucracies more stubbornly resist change than all others because they can more effectively insulate themselves. If that *Washington Post* journalist had been able to secrete himself behind the doors of Langley’s Counterterrorism Center before 9/11, he would have seen that, contrary to what George Tenet was discreetly telling selected members of the press, Osama bin Ladin and al Qaeda had very little to fear from the Clandestine Service. If journalists today could get behind those same doors, they’d find methods, if not attitudes, little changed. The war in Afghanistan and the security-service dragnets put into place post-9/11 in many countries have done enormous damage to al Qaeda and other Islamic militant organizations with a jihadist edge. But this success owes *very* little to what case officers call “unilateral intelligence operations”—efforts by the DO, without any liaison with a foreign-security or intelligence organization, to develop sources within radical Islamic groups.

Add up all the factors against change at the CIA, and it ought to be clear that we are now stuck with a moribund Clandestine Service. Whatever revolutionary impetus existed post-9/11 has evaporated. President Bush’s decision to retain the services of George Tenet, a want-to-be DO operative with exceptional political skill, and the utter failure of the 9/11 Commission to deconstruct

the service and its decades-old problems ended the opportunity to radically alter the way Langley does its work. If the United States gets attacked again by Islamic holy warriors, it's possible, assuming the magnitude of the strike is horrific, that the reform of the Directorate of Operations might again become a topic of serious debate. Americans, at least Americans outside the government, are inclined toward change and well tolerate painful corporate restructuring. With the image of a nuclear mushroom cloud over New York City, Americans would surely embrace a good deal of creative destruction at Langley.

Let us suppose that a revolution in Virginia was possible without another 9/11. What would a more operationally effective clandestine service look like?

First and foremost, it would be much smaller and overwhelmingly weighted in favor of the nonofficial cover officer, always known in the trade as a NOC (pronounced "knock"). The CIA would still have stations and bases abroad located within official U.S. facilities, but their focus would no longer be on the recruitment of foreign agents. Even the biggest stations ought to have just a handful of officers: a station chief, who would primarily be a liaison officer with the host country's security and intelligence services and who would have absolutely no control over NOC operations in his or her country; a deputy, who also would be essentially a liaison officer; a nondeclared consular-covered case officer who never did liaison work would be necessary in posts where visas had a decent chance of offering avenues into radical Muslim or Middle Eastern communities; and a communications specialist and an administrative assistant to make up the rest of the typical station. The CIA would have to make a special case—and the bar should be *very* high—for nondeclared "unilateral case officers" working under official, non-consular cover. There may well be compelling reasons for such operatives here and there, particularly on a temporary basis, but the congressional oversight committees and the White House

should assume that Langley will try to bloat the size of its required workforce.

And it wouldn't be that hard to verify CIA requests. A critical review of past intelligence reporting from that post would quickly reveal whether "inside" fake-diplomat case officers had produced serious reporting from "developmentals," or sources recruited by operatives working under official cover. The congressional oversight committees and the White House could create a small standing organization of intelligence-report reviewers—an independent non-CIA inspector general for human intelligence collection. Assuming the reviewers had basic competency, they would rapidly see whether unilateral reporting from a given post had substantially added to our knowledge—that is, it did not mirror State Department reporting or offer commentary remarkably similar to that given in newspapers such as *al-Quds*, *al-Hayat*, *Sharq al-Awsat*, or the *New York Times*. (Competent reviewers on al Qaeda and Islamic extremism should have a background in the Middle East, some should be fluent in Arabic, and none should be detailed from the agency.) If Langley couldn't demonstrate a track record of high-quality reporting from "inside" officers, then further staffing at the stations in question should be rejected.

The objective here is to break the back of the bureaucracy that has maintained the Clandestine Service recruitment myth for nearly fifty years. If we do not destroy this employment and governing structure within the Directorate of Operations, then the service will not be able to heal itself and develop operations that have greater odds of penetrating Islamic terrorist networks. Even if the CIA, under pressure from the outside, were to form a special, unconventional operations unit devoted to Islamic extremism, the effort would be for naught because institutionally the DO would co-opt or smother it. The headquarters DO management, formed in the old, now parallel system, would still control it. Conventional personnel policies would still guide the ambitions of the case officers tempo-

rarily assigned to it. The overseas outposts of this unit would still be terminally hamstrung by “inside officer” culture, cover, and leadership. As bureaucratically and politically appealing as it might be to start small—to try to build a new Clandestine Service within the old one—mechanically, it just doesn’t make sense.⁹ The “old” Directorate of Operations will win. To improve our odds against Islamic holy warriors and to allow for smaller, more creative, intelligent counterterrorist units to form, a full frontal assault on the DO is required.

Shrinking the size of stations and bases is both the easiest and most essential reformatory first step. With this reduction in force, Congress and the White House would reduce the size of the DO by about a half. Such a reduction would, of course, be paired with a thorough review of case officer deployment at headquarters and domestic stations and bases, which also accounts for a fairly substantial amount of personnel. Stateside DO work entails many different functions. Historically, ethically sensitive types, who wanted to avoid the integrity-crushing recruitment imperative of the DO overseas, or real operational losers—alcoholics, sloppy womanizers, case officers guilty of truly gross negligence abroad, and the mentally challenged—usually provided the DO compliment for CIA outposts across the country, including the Farm. At home, like abroad, the CIA should prove to outsiders that staff officers actually contribute to the CIA’s primary intelligence collection missions.¹⁰

9. This is essentially what the Robb-Silberman report is recommending through the creation of a Human Intelligence Directorate within the CIA but outside the Directorate of Operations. The objective of this new directorate would be “to serve as a national human intelligence authority, exercising the responsibility to ensure the coordination of all agencies conducting human intelligence operations on foreign soil.”

10. Shutting down the Farm as *the* training facility for nonparamilitary operatives would, by itself, make agency espionage training more serious. A real junior-officer program would exclusively use major cities—the more frustrating, the better—in the United States and abroad for all espionage training.

Again, this isn't that hard to do. In theory, Langley has had a large number of officers, spanning several different offices, working the Islamic terrorist target since September 10, 2001. According to Tenet, the agency was working hard on this menace years before. This work should be verified. Also, the intelligence production from headquarters-based officers (since the end of the Cold War, the CIA has been basing an increasing number of intelligence-collecting operational officers in ever larger task forces, centers, and country desks at Langley) should be reviewed. If the number of officers grossly exceeds the valuable information produced—and according to active-duty CIA officers, there is no connection whatsoever to the number of officers working the al Qaeda beat and the clandestine intelligence produced—then start firing case officers. A serious review of personnel would quickly show that the clandestine service is vastly overstaffed with “inside” operatives. The number of these officers at headquarters and in stations and bases working against the Islamic terrorist target is simply surreal given the poor utility of these officers against this target. Truth be told—and active-duty CIA officers who actually do have the right qualifications to work the Middle Eastern beat are scathing in their critique of the current DO cadre—the number of case officers with the right language and educational skills to work the Islamic radical target are too few to cover counterterrorism, let alone any other issues in the Middle East (for example, Iraq). And the pruning of operatives working the counterterrorist beat should be repeated for all priority targets.

Review the way the Clandestine Service has handled North Korea, pre- and post-war Iraq, Iran, the Peoples Republic of China, and other countries of somewhat less magnitude that are nevertheless critical to the generation of Islamic extremism, for example, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. If the methods have not made sense—and in most cases, outsiders will discover that the Directorate of Operations has been neither particularly creative nor successful in

approaching these targets—then responsible case officers should be superannuated.

Given how little case officer support is required to sustain overseas officially covered case officers—who cannot, in any case, usually chase, develop, and recruit anyone useful against the Islamic extremist target—the support and management structure the DO has developed is massive. What is truly striking about the operations directorate today is how bureaucratically top heavy it has become given the size of the Clandestine Service, which is, in total number, a relatively small corporation. The State Department, a much larger organization, has a *slightly* more advanced case of this bureaucratic malaise: Foreign service officers and the civil servants in the department spend vastly more time “feeding the beast”—the in-house, mercilessly vertical paper machine that is Foggy Bottom—than conveying information about foreigners. As the Clandestine Service continues its decades-old evolution toward becoming a barely covert version of Foggy Bottom, the paper-pushing headquarters hierarchy has become an excellent vehicle for rapid career advancement (where “scalp hunting” abroad was once the sine qua non for the ambitious). In particular, the impressive growth in the CIA of the case officer cadre dealing with foreign intelligence and security services in the past ten years has further diminished the early agency’s frontier, antibureaucratic “cowboy” ethic, which was virtually dead before.

To put it simply, the “inside” highly bureaucratized DO culture has to be replaced with a personnel system geared overwhelmingly to nonofficial cover officers. Where today NOCs represent a *very* small slice of the DO force, in a Clandestine Service aimed first and foremost at the radical Islamic target, NOCs ought to represent at least one third to one half of the directorate. They should be the overwhelming majority of all “unilateral” case officers. Remember: We don’t need an army of nonofficial cover officers. During the Casey years, the CIA hired too many NOCs and deployed them over-

seas with often astoundingly bad business cover that usually didn't have much to do with targets chased. Senior "inside" case officers outside the Soviet-East Europe division have rarely ever cared much about cover—it gets in the way of "scalp hunting"—and they have dominated the operations directorate since its founding. This mentality bled over into the subordinate NOC force, where its senior officers, like their "inside officer" counterparts, usually attained their higher ranks by playing fast and loose with recruitments. When the CIA tries to deploy a nonofficial cover operative into an extremely dangerous environment, where the officer has an excellent chance of being killed or imprisoned for life if caught, using a cover legend of being a Band-Aid bandage salesman (and the agency hadn't even done a market survey to see whether imported Western Band-Aids were needed), you know your dealing with a mentally exhausted organization. Most NOCs currently serving are unquestionably unqualified to serve in the CIA. As mediocre as "inside officers" have usually been, NOCs have been worse. Virtually the entire NOC force should either be retired or fired.

The Clandestine Service needs a small, highly focused NOC cadre aimed at targets where it can make a difference. Against the jihadist target, nonofficial cover officers are really the only vehicle for penetrating Muslim radical organizations. Unlike "inside" officers, they can set up Muslim front organizations—charitable or educational societies aimed at attracting the kind of Muslim fundamentalists who have joined violent militant groups. They can much more naturally find prospective Muslim agents, who might possibly get close to, or join, radical Islamic associations that feed holy warrior organizations. Unlike "inside" officers, they can conceivably directly approach radical groups as prospective Muslim recruits. NOCs can come at these organizations from several different angles: as Muslim Arab-Americans, as John Walker Lindh white converts, as Black American-born or converted Muslims, as Joseph Padilla-type Hispanic converts, or as third-country (French, En-

glish, Mexican, Canadian, African, or Chinese) Muslims angry at the United States. Properly chosen and properly trained, nonofficial cover officers can hit these organizations worldwide. The mission will certainly be dangerous, which will be part of the appeal to the young men and women who would join this new NOC force. If they stay alive, case officers in this work cannot expect to last long. The option for nonofficial officers to retire with a full pension as early as forty would not be unreasonable. The world of Islamic militants is unavoidably a young person's domain. Starting salaries for such operatives should be in the six figures—a beginning salary of \$250,000 would be appropriate given the high risks involved and the difficulty the CIA will have attracting and keeping Americans with the right qualifications. The agency is an “exempted service” precisely because national security is not an area where civil service regulations should apply. Egalitarianism—the public service sentiment that says case officers should not make more than diplomats, soldiers, or U.S. senators—has no place in an organization trying to penetrate groups that want to nuke the United States.

Again, the CIA will need all the help it can get to attract the right kind of young men and women. Admission standards must be demanding. For example, the British Indian Civil Service required successful applicants to have first, and occasionally second, degree university awards in the hardest subjects. It did not like, for example, to take honors students from Middle Eastern language programs because it did not consider a first in Arabic to be as reliably rigorous as a first in Ancient Greek. Anyone who conquered the classics was assumed to be capable of mastering Persian, the administrative language of both the Indian Moguls and the British. English pedantry aside, this type of elitism—at all times mixed with an American appreciation for practical experience and an un-American appreciation for youthful lives spent abroad—couldn't hurt the CIA. But it won't save it. Only destroying the bureaucracy and operational ethics of “inside” case officers can salvage the

place. But higher admissions standards would go a long way to building a meaningful esprit de corps in the all-critical early years of a case officer's life.¹¹

Setting high standards for everyone is key. The CIA's mission is to penetrate radical Islamic groups. The White House and Congress ought to set demanding objectives and then hold case officers, particularly senior case officers, to them.¹² There is a wide variety of Islamic fundamentalist organizations. Some are more aggressively ecumenical than others. Some are dangerous. Some aren't. Many, if not most, may offer some valuable information in America's battle against holy warrior Islam. Give the CIA's counterterrorism units a sliding time scale for penetrating these organizations (not much time would be required to get inside the Pakistani-headquartered Tablighat; years might be required to secrete someone into the al Qaeda-allied, Europe-based *Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*). Regularly review the agency's work and start firing case officers who fail to advance the mission. Good case officers may occasionally get unfairly punished, but the odds are excellent that worthless operatives will be removed from service in much greater numbers. If we are in a war, we should have wartime

11. Higher admission standards won't overcome the in-house security inquisitors, polygraphs in hand, who often, through the best of intentions, stand guard against the CIA, attracting an ethnically mixed, religiously diverse, well-traveled junior officer cadre. The fiasco of Aldrich Ames, a white-bread American mole for the Soviets, supercharged Langley's counterintelligence sensibilities. A parochial admissions system got worse. The idea of preemptive counterespionage—weeding out potential trouble as early as possible—took over the institution. Counterintelligence branches of intelligence services are rarely staffed with men and women of cosmopolitan background. Too much deviation from certain accepted American norms can make your chances of getting into the CIA exiguous. If left unchecked by agency management, or outsiders who have the authority to interfere, counterintelligence officers can easily become too zealous for the institution's own well-being.

12. The Robb-Silberman report should be complimented for trying to go in this direction. Concerning standards and the Directorate of Operations, the 9/11 Commission is mute.

standards for achievement. From 1941 to 1944, the U.S. Army demoted and spit out an enormous number of incompetent officers. From September 11, 2001, to today, how many CIA operatives have been fired for failure to penetrate radical Islamic organizations? The odds are that the answer is “zero.”

What must be avoided at all costs is President Bush’s planned 50 percent increase in the size of the Clandestine Service. There are very few good recommendations to come out of the 9/11 Commission, and hiring more case officers was one of the worst. And the Robb-Silberman report goes even further in recommending the “bigger is better” ethic for American espionage.¹³ If one reviews the CIA’s operational messes over the past forty years, the Casey years would probably win as the period of the most damning *espionage* failures. Casey didn’t directly have anything to do with the awful performance of American intelligence, particularly counterintelligence, during his tenure. But there is a very good argument to make that Casey’s and President Reagan’s decision to flood the CIA with cash and new personnel—when I entered in 1985, old-timers regularly referred to the Casey years as “a new golden age,” the best since the 1950s—accelerated Langley’s rot by massively expanding

13. Inside the classified Robb-Silberman report, this commission offers “statistics showing how badly outgunned our human intelligence collectors are, at precisely the time when the most is expected of them. Although we make few recommendations that we believe will require substantial budget increases, we do believe that this is an area where increased funding for the purpose of expanding human intelligence forces would be appropriate.” Now, it would be inappropriate for me to enumerate exactly what are the personnel resources of the Directorate of Operations, but its total number of case officers is, assuming the cadre were qualified for its primary missions and deployed intelligently overseas, surely too large, not too small, for the tasks at hand. As the operations directorate had vastly too many people “officially” allocated to Soviet–East European targets during the Cold War, it has too many operatives now aimed at the terrorist target. Espionage is not a military operation: The odds of success don’t improve with bulk. If this weren’t true, the CIA would have done a *vastly* better job against a wide variety of Cold War and Middle Eastern targets.

the case officer cadre and, with it, recruitment and intelligence-reporting exaggeration and fraud.

This hunger for recruitments reached its ugliest crescendo in the great Iranian takedown of 1988 to 1989 and in the Cuban doubles fiasco, where Cuban intelligence successfully dangled and turned probably every single CIA asset in Cuba. The Cuban fiasco stretched over at least two decades, but there is good reason to believe that the successes of Cuban intelligence increased significantly in the 1980s when CIA case officers, especially those from the Latin America division, became ever-more greedy in their quest to recruit Cubans and get promoted.¹⁴ The Iranian roll-up, which was probably the most lethal mess the CIA had experienced since the covert-action nightmares of the early Cold War in Eastern Europe and China, and the Cuban counterespionage coup were the unintended by-products of Casey's commendable desire to improve America's intelligence capabilities. Porter Goss and George W. Bush will inevitably add fat to the same fire unless they first overturn the rule and bureaucracy of "inside" case officers. America's war on Islamic militancy was a godsend to America's secret bureaucrats. The Cold War gave them a sustaining myth for forty years. For a decade, they lived without a replacement. The war on terror has now given them another, and rest assured they will run with it. It's a very good thing for the United States that we are likely to win this war, as we won the last one, because of American might and the global appeal of democracy. If we had to depend on the CIA, Islamic radicals and rogue states would have *much* better odds.

14. See on CIA being duped by Cuba and East Germany, Michael Wines and Ronald J. Ostrow, "Cuban Defector Claims Double Agents Duped U.S." *Washington Post*, August 12, 1987, A8. According to the former ranking minority member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, "almost all" recruited "East German 'agents' were found to be 'doubles'" as well (Bud Shuster, "HiTech vs. Human Spying," *Washington Times*, February 11, 1992, F3).