

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1994  
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
18 SEPT 95

TITLE: Principles Of Deep Cover

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VOLUME: 5      ISSUE: Summer      YEAR: 1961

# STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



A collection of articles on the historical, operational, doctrinal, and theoretical aspects of intelligence.

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*Cardinal considerations in placing covert personnel abroad in quasi-permanent private citizen positions.*

## PRINCIPLES OF DEEP COVER

C. D. Edbrook

The simplest and therefore the most used device an intelligence service has for getting its unwelcome officers covertly into other countries is to assign them to cover jobs in its government's diplomatic missions, consulates, and other official representations there. The Soviet bloc services call this "legal" cover, most Western services simply "official" cover. Aside from providing for communications home, a secure place to work, and a measure of protection from prosecution for espionage, it has the advantage that the cover duties can usually be made light enough to leave most of the officer's time free for intelligence activity. The official position also opens the way to many useful contacts, although it precludes others. It has the accompanying disadvantage that the disguise is a pretty shabby one. It requires no Herculean counterintelligence effort to determine which foreign officials probably have intelligence connections; they can be kept deniable, but not really secret. Moreover, some kinds of intelligence activity cannot be carried out from an official position.

It is therefore necessary to supplement the "legals" with "illegals," the intelligence officers under official cover with operatives under "deep" cover, living as legitimate private citizens with such authenticity that their intelligence sponsorship would not be disclosed even by an intensive and determined investigation. These officers are sometimes career staff employees of the intelligence service and sometimes citizens of either the sponsoring or another country with a contract or agent relationship to the service. For the sake of simplicity we shall speak of them all as "agents," although they are in a different category from the indigenous agents recruited locally by a case officer. They do have an agent

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relationship to an official-cover case officer, for they must usually depend on the official-cover people—the “legal rezidentura” in Soviet usage, the “station” in ours—for their communications and administrative support and, at least in most Western practice, for direction and operational guidance.

Nonofficial cover is sometimes used for brief ad hoc missions and fixed-term operations, but the difficulties and advantages of really deep cover are felt most in a long-range operation of indefinite duration, one expected to continue as long as it produces useful information, perhaps through the full career of the agent. Infiltration into high circles of another government, an opposition group, a military clique, or an ethnic minority, or, for a Western service, penetration into an Orbit installation or the leadership of a Communist party are types of missions for which deep cover of indefinite durability may be required. It is the principles of this kind of cover that concern us here.

#### Primacy of the Objective

Because the deep-cover agent must usually devote a large share of his time to carrying on his ostensible legitimate occupation, his intelligence production is quantitatively small. He is therefore an expensive agent, justified only by the uniqueness of the information he produces or can be expected in long term to produce. The establishment of a deep-cover operation should consequently derive without exception from the objective to be achieved, not from the availability of the agent or the opportunity for cover. Although this principle should be self-evident, it is not in practice unusual that an intelligence service begins with an agent who wants a deep-cover assignment, tries various kinds of cover on him for size, and then, more or less as an afterthought, finds a plausible mission for him. Negligence of the objective through a preoccupation on the agent's part with the establishment of cover is another frequent fault. In one case on record a young man was permitted to spend four years exclusively building cover for himself, being required only to attend a university in the target area and then establish himself as a salesman there. By the time he was in a position to start producing he had lost interest in the intelligence objective and resigned.

*Importance for Planners*

Sometimes the unfailing symptoms of a big hurry to go nowhere in particular betray the fact that the planners of an operation have lost sight of its long-term objective. Some years ago the cover specialists of an agency were asked to produce immediately a "flexible cover" that would give an agent "mobility," not much work in the way of cover duties, and "a logical reason for interest in diversified local groups." It was not specified in what way the cover was supposed to flex, to what places the agent should be able to move, or in what kinds of local groups he should have an interest. There was available, however, a cover position in market research which seemed to meet these requirements and in which the agent had had some experience; but this would require him to take a month's training prior to departure, and it was therefore rejected. So he was put into free-lance writing, although he had had no experience in that field. The hope that an operation so thoroughly conditioned during its formative stage by an early departure date would somehow serve an intelligence purpose was of course a vain one: when old Mobile and Flexible came back two years later he had produced nothing.

The rational preparation and conduct of an operation can have no other guide than its purpose, and this purpose must therefore be defined at the outset. Mobility and flexibility may indeed be required by some assignments: a scientist or labor expert, for example, whose intelligence assignment requires him to meet target colleagues at professional conferences in a number of neighboring countries needs a cover job that gives him sufficient time and a plausible reason to attend these conferences. But other intelligence missions can be fulfilled only by agents whose cover work keeps them in a certain place, and there are on record cases in which a deep-cover agent has been unable to give the necessary attention to his operations because his cover job kept him constantly moving about. The end must determine the means.

The purpose should also be a worthy one. A deep-cover mission is not justified if it can do no better than wander along the fringes of an intelligence target, eliciting scraps of information and misinformation, or "collect operational infor-

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mation available in the normal course of cover work and spot potential agent material." It is wasteful to have a deep-cover agent doing the routine jobs that can be done just as well by an official-cover man or his ordinary local agents and informants. The targets that call for deep cover are those to which official government representatives lack access or in which they must conceal their interest or from which only an independent channel will elicit information not meant for official consumption.

The primacy of the objective does not imply that there is a rigid sequence in which cover and agent cannot even be considered until the objective has been determined. It means only that the intelligence objective should be established before the steps are taken that commit the service to the operation. The service's headquarters will have negotiated cover openings and its field stations will have spotted cover opportunities of various kinds without regard to any specific projected operations. There are also usually available some good agents for whom there is no suitable assignment at the moment. It is better that these cover openings and these agents should remain unused for the time being than be misused in the pursuit of an unworthy objective only because they are available. Experience shows that the successful operations are generally those in which the planners have arrived at a valid objective and made sure that the cover and the agent were suitable for the pursuit of that objective before going ahead with the implementation of the project.

The intelligence objective, once chosen, is of course not immutable. Constancy of purpose is of vital importance in most long-range operations, but a service should be ready to make the most of any unexpected opportunity that permits it to raise its sights. In recent experience a deep-cover agent who had been sent to the field to work through locally recruited agents suddenly found himself in the entourage of a high-priority target; another, after one uneventful tour and a transfer under the same cover to another country, gained access to the inner circle of a very important target person. These agents were able to capitalize on their opportunities because their cover had been well prepared and they had been careful to preserve it during periods when operational prospects were not bright.

Nevertheless, one cannot rely on chance to provide an operation with purpose. The untimely termination of cover ventures intended to be long-range is often charged to the unsuitability of the agent or the inadequacy of his cover, but close examination may reveal that the faulty element is itself the result of an underlying failure of the planners to derive the operation from a worthy purpose clearly understood at the start by everyone concerned.

#### *Importance for Agent and Station*

A lack of specific purpose has a very disquieting effect on agent morale. Agents sometimes express the belief that adequate thought is not given by their contact man, the field station, or headquarters to the ultimate achievement that is desired from them on their project. Their remarks are generally to the effect that there is not a consistent plan or objective, that they are given the blanket advice "to get out and see what can be developed" with regard to practically any political party or government agency, that they are seldom given the opportunity to learn how, if at all, their activities are integrated into the overall area program or objectives, and that this is not a deliberate effort on the part of the field station or their station contact to keep them compartmented but rather an indication of the nonexistence of a long-range plan. Such impressions, even if groundless, are not conducive to vigorous and purposeful activity.

The field station has an essential role to perform in determining the objective as well as the means of a deep-cover operation in its area and it must share in the early planning. Chiefs of station should keep headquarters currently informed as to which long-range intelligence objectives they and their successors will need to approach through nonofficial cover, what kinds of cover would be the most effective in reaching those objectives, and what kind of agent would be professionally and personally suited for the cover job and the operational tasks involved. Headquarters, in turn, should consult the station in the early planning of a particular long-range cover project. Although a headquarters area desk will have a greater or lesser understanding of the field situation, its information may be dated or incomplete. The field station certainly has the most intimate knowledge of the problems

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and in addition will have more faith in the prospects of an operation and feel more deeply committed to its success if it has helped to shape it.

A few years ago an agent was placed under commercial cover and sent to the field "to assess the area for deep-cover and operational possibilities and to develop intelligence operations." There was a station in the area and it should have been able to assess cover and operational possibilities, but apparently headquarters had not discussed with it what objectives needed to be pursued through nonofficial cover and what type of agent would have a good chance of attaining them; no attempt was made to define the kind of operations the agent was expected to develop or to specify the nature of the targets he was to work against. This agent had neither business nor operational experience; yet he was expected to start a business in a country that had inhibitory laws on trade and on currency exchange, to make a difficult assessment of operational possibilities, and to seek out his own intelligence mission. The operation failed and was terminated after two years.

Collaboration between headquarters and the field station is needed in the early planning stage in order to bring together a broad central view of intelligence needs and an intimate knowledge of the local scene. These two complementary elements are required to give an operation a precise orientation toward a priority objective, and this objective must be determined early enough to insure that the cover and the agent are suited to it.

#### Preparing the Means

The period of preparation is one of commitment; it comprises a series of major steps which steer the projected operation along a course that becomes increasingly difficult to change or halt, until a point is reached where the service is committed to go ahead with whatever investment of funds and manpower may be required. These major steps have to do with the selection and preparation of the agent and his cover. Hasty preparations have no place in long-range operations. Haste is justifiable and even necessary in situations of urgency where one must work at top speed towards a short-term goal; in such cases security and durability are knowingly

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sacrificed to the extent required by the pressure of circumstances. But to be durable, cover must be genuine, and to be genuine it must be prepared at a pace consonant with the normal pace of the cover pursuit itself, not according to an operational timetable. This is the only way to avoid built-in causes of failure of all sorts—morale problems, administrative snarls, unsuitable agent, thin cover, and other security hazards.

#### *Durability of Cover*

The first requisite of cover is that it should convincingly explain the agent's presence in the area. This requisite becomes increasingly stringent with time, and to endure over the years a cover must be such as to appear logical in its own terms. There have been too many salesmen who did not sell, students who did not study, consultants who were not consulted, some of them living on a generous scale with large families, deluding themselves that all was well until perhaps the chief of station was queried by his cover boss, "Is so-and-so one of yours? He looks as phony to me as anyone I've ever seen!"

A few years ago an agent who had had medical training was sent to a city described in the project as "a historical mecca for graduate doctors." His cover occupation was the sale of medical supplies and his intelligence mission was to develop sources in the scientific field. One month after his arrival the station estimated that his cover would be good for at least nine years. After six months, however, the station requested his transfer because the cover was wearing thin. Now it came out that the day when the historical mecca enjoyed an excellent reputation for its medical facilities had long since gone. Something had obviously gone wrong with someone's objectivity; the tendency to overstate the merits of a project is particularly strong when it is first submitted for approval.

There had been warning indicators when this cover was being negotiated: two medical supply firms that had been approached had said they would not place their own men in that area because it would not be profitable, and one of them agreed to send the agent there only because the service wanted it that way and was willing to foot the bill. When a service

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chooses to ignore the counsel of old-line companies whose business it is to know what works in a certain place and what does not, it should be for compelling reasons and with an appreciation of the problems ahead.

The cover with the best chance of enduring in any area is one that does not feed off the area but contributes needed skills or knowledge or a commodity that is lacking. In countries that are trying to develop economic autarchy the authorities may scrutinize the activities of foreign businessmen with severity, ruling that any foreign-owned or foreign-operated enterprise must benefit the national economic structure. Here agents involved in businesses that are not financially sound or have no significant volume of business are sadly out of place. But local firms may need citizens of another country to help them in their dealings with firms located in that country, and such employees would probably have greater freedom of movement and better access to local targets than those of the local branch of a foreign firm, as well as protection in case of expropriation or nationalization of foreign assets. Or non-commercial cover may be more desirable in some places: in newly independent countries, for instance, teachers or technicians may be more needed and welcome than business representatives, and the desire of the new governments to get them elsewhere than from the former colonial power may provide another nation with cover opportunities for its own nationals or for third-national agents.

The plan for long-range cover must take into account any likelihood of drastic changes in the area that could affect the viability of a particular type of cover. If there is such a likelihood, an agent cannot use cover whose survival depends on an indefinite continuation of the *status quo*. Aside from the hazards to commercial cover entailed in the trend towards economic autarchy, there may be political changes which would make it more difficult for Westerners, or citizens of a particular Western country, to move about. Such prospects call for timely preparations in the establishment of third-national cover agents in advance.

Finally, the most important element of cover durability is legitimacy. There are suspect covers just as there are suspect persons, and a cover cannot confer upon the agent a legitimacy it does not itself possess. A newly founded company

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once offered to cover any number of a service's agents as consultants in several underdeveloped countries, expecting that the service in return would subsidize its own early development. These consultants would have come under the scrutiny of the genuine foreign consultants who had been there for years, and the inevitable checks on the standing of the home office would have quickly exposed the masquerade.

#### *Cover and the Objective*

The function of explaining the agent's presence in the area, difficult though it is under unfavorable circumstances, is still only a part of what cover should do for an operation. Cover should always be considered in relation to the intelligence objective, and insofar as possible it should provide legitimate access to the targets being attacked. The ideal solution is achieved when the activities of the agent in doing his cover job provide the basis for the operational contacts desired. If this ideal arrangement is not possible, the cover should at least be compatible with the objective. Otherwise, there can be only competition and conflict between them.

One agent, married and with children, was recently reported to be working 30 hours a week for his cover firm and 40 to 50 hours a week for intelligence. The poor fellow was running himself ragged, neglecting his family, and even so not doing justice to either of his unrelated jobs. His cover had been chosen almost exclusively to establish him in the area, too little attention being paid to the operational opportunities it should provide. The two functions must be considered concurrently during the planning stage; if avenues to the intelligence objective are left to be improvised later, the agent's access, if he ever develops any, may be to targets already within easy reach through the official cover of the station, and his presence in the field, while adding to the station's problems, will not add to its resources.

There is also a security advantage in a close relation between cover and intelligence work. If the two occupations are unrelated, the operational comings and goings do not benefit from the protective interpretation that the known cover job should normally suggest to observers. The field station is in a position to know which specific cover pursuit can provide and explain operational contact with the target persons;

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in fact, the station would normally want to have an agent under cover only after finding it impossible, or unwise or inadequate, to recruit a person already in place in a similar situation.

Knowledge of the facts of the local situation will reduce the large amount of guesswork that often goes into the choice of a cover and thereby obviate the unreasonable demands that otherwise come to be placed on it. An agent was once sent to a colonial country to recruit agents within the European community, but two years later it was decided that his efforts should have been directed at the native groups. His cover did not permit him to make this about-face, and so the impasse was blamed on "rigid cover." A certain amount of latitude may be desirable in some forms of cover, and this latitude can be planned at the start to serve a known operational need, but latitude or flexibility in cover should not be used as a hedge against failure to study and interpret the pertinent facts in the first place and to select a cover in the light of those facts. The factors that enter into the establishment of cover that is both durable and operationally effective are numerous and intricate, and that is why it is risky to go ahead without the best knowledge of the field situation that the station can provide.

#### *Cover Arrangements*

Cover negotiations with a business firm afford the service a valuable preview of what kind of collaboration it can expect in the joint enterprise. If the firm wants the service to pay a disproportionate share of the business expenses, it is probable that its professed desire to contribute to government aims is specious and that intelligence interests will be pushed aside. There is no need for high cost in an agreement with a company already doing business in the area in question, particularly if the agent is already in place or is destined to go there. If the company goes out of its normal way and incurs additional financial expenses and risks, the service naturally has to bear a larger share of the burden; but if the company offers to place any number of agents in all sorts of positions without regard to the facts of business, it probably envisages a quick and generous bounty from the government rather than reasonable business profits patiently earned.

The cover negotiations can of course also give the company some idea of the seriousness of the service's intentions. If the service professes to need and want a sound and durable cover and at the same time proposes to use it to rotate a number of agents on two-year tours, the firm cannot be expected to think very highly of its long-range planning, or of its concept of cover, or of its practice of economy for that matter, and may be tempted to make the most of the opportunity for profits.

The agreements with the company should be as simple and clear as possible and understood in the same way by both parties. In addition, those arrangements that affect the agent should be clearly understood by him at the very start and be made known to the field station involved at the same time; otherwise the station case officer's meetings with the agent and his correspondence with headquarters will be taken up for a long time by the too common three-way debate on the substance and interpretation of the cover arrangements, to the detriment of the operation.

When a cover agreement is negotiated it should be decided early who in the company has to be made witting. If the matter is left for spot decisions to be made as arrangements develop, the number of people in the know will keep growing as one after another is brought into the picture to facilitate the solution of problems that arise. There is no assurance, of course, that the witting company people will observe the need-to-know principle, but the firm itself has an interest in keeping secret its connection with intelligence. The witting persons are more likely to maintain secrecy if they know that there are very few of them and if they realize the importance the service attaches to keeping that number small.

Experience shows that there are security problems both ways, from cutting in too many people and from not cutting in enough. The problem in both cases generally stems from a real or imagined urgency which prompts the service to interfere with the natural development of cover. For instance, it has an agent who is not very well qualified for the cover job and is not company-trained, perhaps not yet hired by the company; but he is ready to go! The personnel manager is cut in to hire him, a section chief is cut in to streamline his training, the field manager is cut in so that he will not expect

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too much from him, and so on. Or else the company president removes all obstacles by fiat without explaining anything to anyone; everyone is hostile and suspicious, and the operation is off to a bad start. Time is wasted in trying so desperately to save it: the agent often returns from an unworkable assignment without having done anything for the service.

#### *Career Contract Agents*

One of the most serious problems of many deep-cover agents has been the uncertainty about career that results from their dual status in the intelligence service and in their cover; they have felt the demands of both pursuits and the reassurance of neither. Some services have tried to protect their own interests by requiring that agents going into business firms waive at the outset, when the cover arrangements are made, any right to transfer to their cover firms for some years after resigning from the service, the firms for their part agreeing not to hire them for that period. Such a provision confines the agent to his intelligence career, in which, however, he may tend to have less and less confidence the longer he remains on the outer rim of the intelligence organization. In such circumstances it is probably wiser for the service to permit immediate transfer to the cover firm and maintain its operational relationship with the agent by means of contract.

In one such case a staff agent with three years of intelligence experience but still quite clean was placed in a cover job while yet young enough to be starting on a career without prior job experience. An intelligent, enterprising, and personable young man, he did excellent work for the cover firm for 28 months; he looked genuine to the general public, and his long-range intelligence prospects seemed good. But his intelligence performance, according to rigid standards mechanically applied, did not permit a promotion in the service. It was clear that he would be better off with the cover salary and allowances than with his service pay, and the discrepancy was likely to increase as time went on.

He was therefore transferred outright to the firm, which was happy to have him as a permanent employee, with a verbal assurance from the service that it would attempt to reintegrate him at a suitable grade if he should lose his job be-

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cause of his intelligence association or for some other cause not of his own making. He became a contract agent of the service, paid according to his usefulness and reimbursed for expenses incurred on its behalf. The release of this agent does not mean that intelligence interests will be sacrificed or that intelligence work will be only incidental, because he is a high-caliber young man with a bent for intelligence, and his motivation lies in the very nature of the work. It is unlikely that the service will ever lose him.

It is more the manner than the fact of separation from the staff of a service that deprives it of the work of trained and experienced officers. Once a good agent has found career opportunity and security in his cover firm, it is sensible to complete the transition and put an end to his equivocal status if the transfer stands to serve the interests of all concerned. Similarly, agents can be allowed or even encouraged to develop professional or other types of self-employed cover to the point that their economic security rests principally on their cover activity, buttressed by a stipend from the service and underwritten by the understanding that, if they do well operationally, they can be assured of a career in the service in case unavoidable circumstances destroy their cover.

This kind of arrangement has two great advantages: first, the cover takes on real depth and solidity as the years go by; and second, the service is freed from innumerable administrative headaches that may otherwise plague its cover operations. One of these administrative headaches is that dependable irritant to relations with the agent, the recovery of cover payments that exceed his service entitlement. One terminated agent felt so strongly about kicking back a Christmas bonus that he wrote to headquarters, saying he was willing to return the money to the cover company but would not turn it over to the service under any circumstances. When advancement in the cover firm is rapid and the difference between cover salary and service pay gets progressively larger, the administrative tangle becomes so frustrating that there have been serious proposals to freeze the cover salaries of agents while their colleagues are being promoted. Such an expedient would violate security as well as decency, and it would be unrealistic to expect an agent in such circumstances to give the cover job a proper effort.

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If in particular instances the interests of the service and the agent call for his retention on the staff although assigned to long-range cover duties, the career contract should be supplemented with special administrative provisions to assure him of service rights, benefits, and career opportunities comparable to those he would have on regular duty. The unorthodox nature of nonofficial cover requires destandardized practices and diversified personnel patterns. This diversification can be further advanced by greater use of natural cover.

#### *Natural Cover*

Many of the problems of deep cover are avoided when a service can recruit suitable agents already embarked on legitimate careers. A company president who claimed no intelligence experience once suggested out of common sense that instead of placing its man in his firm a service might better recruit one of his employees in the overseas branch in which it was interested. In another instance a government which needed information on the deployment and activity of certain air forces did not have to put a man under cover because its station in the area recruited one of its own citizens who represented a gasoline company and was in constant contact with key officials of the target air forces. This agent was able to develop the needed informants in the normal course of business.

Some companies are willing to furnish information on all the young men they recruit for their foreign branches and to make those selected as potential agents available for training with reasonable assurance that they will eventually be assigned where the service wants them. Similarly, some employers are willing to furnish biographic and evaluative information on their overseas employees for assessment and possible recruitment, and to arrange to bring back the recruits for a training period. The agents recruited in these ways would continue to pursue normal business careers and to expect from that source their salaries, allowances, bonuses, and promotions, as well as their financial security and their status in the community. They would be compensated equitably for intelligence services rendered, and there should be no termination problems or dual-status administrative difficulties.



The recruitment of persons already employed or about to be hired by a firm would require fewer company employees made witting than the placing of a man from the service; normally it should be only one or two key officials. There would be none of the difficulties which the family of a converted staff employee has to face when it needs to adjust to a new mode of living. The greatest advantage of all, however, lies in the quality of the cover itself. Natural cover is the most convincing of all, and the best way to fool all the people all the time is to be genuine. Only on rare occasions, such as a cover reassignment, would there perhaps be a need to interfere discreetly with the normal course of events. The principal dangers, here as elsewhere, would be impatience and the real or fancied urgency of short-term goals.

#### *Cover Qualifications*

Once it has been decided what forms of cover can serve the intelligence objective, the task is to find an agent who has the qualifications for one of the possible cover jobs and who can, in addition, do the intelligence job that constitutes the sole reason for the undertaking. It is easy to hope for, but very difficult to find, the ideal agent who has dual qualifications. The problem, in fact, is often regarded as a dilemma: if the agent is already established in the cover company he never really gets the feel of intelligence; if he is an intelligence officer venturing forth into the business world, he is generally unconvincing in his cover life, and his tour of duty is of short duration despite original long-term plans; in the rare cases where the experienced intelligence officer has good cover qualifications, the service risks losing him to the cover pursuit, and sometimes does. Not quite a dilemma, this is a serious problem which can be solved only by making concessions.

If a cover operation is to endure, the agent's qualifications for his cover job must be unimpeachable. These qualifications are more exacting in some pursuits than in others and the amount of expertness required may be less for a young agent than for an older man, but no agent can be expected to succeed in his cover unless his cover preparation and performance are convincing in their own terms. For this reason, when the

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ideal agent with dual qualifications is not available for a particular long-term cover mission, cover and durability must take precedence over intelligence training and experience. A deficiency in these is not insuperable if the agent has the necessary aptitude for intelligence work. His training will have to be highly concentrated to suit his specific mission, and his experience will have to be gained on the job under the close direction of his case officer.

#### *Agent Aptitude*

Given a well-defined mission, a good cover, and an agent capable of living his cover effectively, an operation which is successful in terms of cover will still fail if the agent lacks the ability to perform his intelligence mission. In sacrificing intelligence experience to requirements of cover, therefore, it is vital not to sacrifice on the point of the agent's native ability to do a clandestine intelligence job. Many people are fascinated by espionage and like to talk about it, even in first person, but not so many are suited by character and temperament to engage in it. There are even loyal and patriotic businessmen who question the need for the clandestine collection of information; one company president being sounded out for a cover possibility quickly put an end to the exploration when he remarked that he did not "see the need for such devious methods." This is a rather widespread attitude among businessmen, who in their own highly competitive field nevertheless appreciate the importance of obtaining and safeguarding inside information.

On the other hand, there may be indications of an agent candidate's flair for intelligence work in the amount of shrewdness and discretion he shows in the conduct of his overt affairs. In any case he will have a lot to learn and need a lot of energy to learn it. A native ability for intelligence work entails not only the right attitude but also the necessary amount of drive; and the cover agent must possess the personal dynamism and resourcefulness needed to work effectively at the end of the line. The translation of an agent's native ability into the skills required by his mission is discussed in the next section of this article.

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## Conduct of the Operation

*Living the Cover*

Living one's cover is an around-the-clock job. It requires first of all that the agent in his cover work have as much competence and put out as much effort as his colleagues in comparable jobs. In certain instances special qualifications like language skill or area familiarity may compensate for other lacks, but he must conform to whatever pattern is established. Any departure from the norm provides factual justification for the instinctive hostility that rivals in a competitive field feel towards a newcomer; any special treatment obtained in order to get things done easily and quickly, such as a shortening of company training or protective intercession by the top management, will only intensify this hostility and arouse suspicion. And, of course, the agent himself must resist the very human tendency to surround himself with the mysterious aura of one engaged in special work.

Occupational interest is an important factor in living one's cover because competence and interest go together and each helps the other. It is only natural, moreover, that the agent should be expected to show an interest in the occupation he ostensibly has chosen as a career. A hobby can therefore be an indication of an agent's suitability for a particular cover position. One man with a passion for firearms was placed under cover as the representative of a dealer in small arms; wherever he was the conversation inevitably turned to guns, and his cover took care of itself.

There is an important corollary to the requirement for good performance on the cover job, and that is the need to live the kind of life that goes with the job. Here the demands on the agent are extended to his family, and the difficulties of living in accordance with cover status are generally greater for the family than for the agent himself. When there are young children there may be real hardships that should be anticipated. But it should be a prerequisite for any deep-cover assignment that the agent and his family be able to adapt themselves to the living conditions and social life of people in the cover situation.

The pull exerted by a privileged way of life is a constant danger among staff agents who have previously served under

official cover. No amount of cover work can hide such conspicuous breaches as access to PX supplies or a closer association with the official government colony than the cover occupation would normally bring about. Staff officers are often vehement in their professed desire to go out under non-official cover but, once there, unwilling to forego any of the amenities of official cover; they are probably not so much attracted by the challenge of the lone game as repelled by the regimentation at headquarters and the larger stations. A mature and stable staff officer under nonofficial cover once satisfied an almost compulsive urge to visit a bowling alley where he knew many of his former associates would be playing in a league; when the incident was raised with him later as a probable security hazard, he ruefully admitted his imprudence but explained that he just had to see someone with whom he could identify himself.

#### *The Right Case Officer*

There is a tendency at large stations to entrust the less active operations to the less experienced case officers, and long-range cover operations are of course seldom productive immediately. Operations that have prospects of quick and valuable intelligence dividends are often run as vest-pocket affairs by a top station officer or the chief himself; those that have no prospects of quick results are often delegated far down the line. Field stations are pressed with work and pressured to produce, but a station's chief should work out a reasonable distribution of its effort between immediate needs and long-term investment.

Nonofficial-cover operations cannot be mass-produced and run by the book; each one has its own character and its own problems, and each requires the right case officer for the right agent if it is to have any real chance of success. The case officer's task is to develop and maintain the agent's effectiveness, and he cannot succeed in this task without the agent's absolute confidence in his competence and reliability. He must have the necessary experience, maturity, and personality to deal with that particular agent. He is generally the agent's sole link with the service; in fact, in the agent's mind he is the service, and his merits and failings are extended to the service as a whole. His whole manner with the agent must

suggest that he has no duty more important than that of directing and supporting the agent in his mission. The operational practices whose importance he wants to impress upon the agent he must teach by his own example and not by precept alone. Finally, he must have a well-balanced combination of imagination and judgment in order to deal with the constant novelty of deep-cover situations and problems.

It is also important to provide for the availability of the same case officer for a relatively long period of time, because ~~nonofficial cover operations are more vulnerable than~~ any other kind to the disruptive effect of frequent case officer rotation. It is a frequent complaint of agents that with each change of case officer there appears to be a change in emphasis and guidance, and inasmuch as the case officer is the sole channel for the agent's direction, there is no corrective for this impression of inconsistency. When a case officer must be replaced, the transition should be planned well enough in advance not only to permit the choice of a successor well qualified professionally and personally to direct the particular agent but also to allow this successor to get the feel and tempo of the operation. The agent will not fear that the operation is apt to be swayed by the whim of his immediate handlers if the new case officer introduces any necessary changes after a smooth period of transition.

#### *Clandestine Contact*

The procedure for initial contact with the agent should be decided before he is in place, and it must be compatible with the ultimate purpose of the operation; if the agent's cover is to endure, he has to be handled as a sensitive agent from the very start. A continuous clandestine relationship is needed from the outset to condition the agent properly for his role; it will help keep his clandestine mission ever present in his mind despite the demands of cover work, and it will sustain his morale by demonstrating the importance the case officer attaches to the security of the operation. The regularity, the relative frequency, and the average duration of case-officer contacts necessary to the successful development and maintenance of a long-term mission require that most if not all of them be clandestine meetings under safe conditions.

Whether or not there should be overt contact and what sort of overt contact would be advantageous are problems that involve a number of factors. The best bet is to keep the relationship entirely clandestine until both case officer and agent can analyze these factors and make an informed decision. It is necessary to restrain the tendency toward carelessness that often characterizes the period of cover establishment, when the agent more or less abstains from aggressive intelligence activity. The tendency to feel complacent is all the greater when the political atmosphere is relaxed, but the situation can change quickly and it may then be too late to tighten up.

The factors that should influence the decision to surface or not to surface the contact lie in the nature of the environment and of the intelligence mission itself. In areas where contact between the nationals in question or between them and local persons is commonplace, an occasional overt contact may serve to avert suspicion in case one of the clandestine contacts is accidentally exposed. Many successful operations are handled in this manner. In other areas, overt contact between case officer and agent may not be advisable. The agent's mission may be such as to make overt contact inadvisable in any circumstances, for instance one in which he is acting the part of a political renegade.

There is another consideration that should enter into the decision whether or not to surface, even in the most favorable operational climate. Case officers under official cover who have a large number of legitimate overt contacts may feel that one more will appear equally innocent to all onlookers. But not all onlookers will add the same figures and reach the same totals, and it may be that this one relationship will arouse the curiosity of certain persons and lead them to probe beneath the surface; it is always possible to chance upon the right conclusion from a partial set of facts. There are generally valid arguments both for and against surfacing. A wise decision requires a knowledge and appraisal of the fine points involved before the irrevocable act is committed.

Once a decision to surface has been reached, the cover situation of the two principals should determine the manner of the surfacing. It should be done in such a way as to appear

natural and to minimize any suspicion of contrivance. One agent and case officer who had children in the same school and participated in school support activities formed a nodding acquaintance susceptible of further development. Some agents find legitimate reason to consult the case officer in his official cover capacity. Others meet their case officers at the homes of mutual acquaintances. Still others may have to contrive a meeting if their overt positions do not provide a ready logical justification for their encounter.

There is also the question of frequency of overt contacts. One chief of station avoids all but the rarest social contact with his covert agent because, he soundly reasons, the counterintelligence opposition, if alerted, would probably never hear the contrived explanation but only note the fact of meetings. Another case officer reports that some close friends whom he saw several times a month were wrongly suspect to the opposition, whereas his deep-cover agent, whom he very rarely saw overtly, was apparently considered clean. If these officers should relax and slide into the habit of careless contact, they might soon reach a point of no return: once government interest in an agent is suspected the damage cannot be undone.

#### *On-the-Job Training*

It is important to maintain regular contact with the non-official-cover agent from the very start, even though he may not yet be fully embarked on his intelligence mission. The case officer must condition his agent to live according to his cover status, within his ostensible cover income, and be sure that he does not allow himself telltale benefits such as the acquisition of PX commodities to which he is not normally entitled. The period when the agent establishes his cover is the critical time when his attitude towards his twofold job takes shape. Too often an agent is allowed to occupy himself solely with cover work for a long time; afterwards it is always difficult, and in some cases it is impossible, to revive his interest in intelligence. The cover job, for lack of competition, quite naturally occupies the agent's full time and interest, and the longer one waits the more difficult it is to superimpose a second job.

Furthermore, the case officer has an operational interest in the successful establishment of cover, that necessary prelude to active operations. One case of agent neglect during this early period had consequences even worse than a drift away from the intelligence objective. Two agents were placed together in the same cover office, told to build cover, and left pretty much to themselves. They developed a bitter hostility toward each other which the station was either unaware of or unconcerned about. Headquarters repeatedly heard of the flareups only through the company president. This very cooperative person must have gained a poor opinion of the kind of supervision exercised by the service, and the agents themselves could not have helped making the inevitable comparison between the commercial and the operational management.

The case officer's concern with the period of cover establishment is not only protective, that is to avoid cover pitfalls and prevent the agent from losing interest in intelligence. This period must also, and principally, serve to prepare the agent for the tasks ahead. The nature and extent of the preparation needed will vary from case to case, depending on the agent's prior experience and training and on the trade-craft and reporting demands of his intelligence mission. Formal training, valuable as it is, is only a preparation for experience, not a substitute for it, and the case officer will have to develop the results of any pertinent past training the agent may have had into practical skills.

First of all, the case officer must keep abreast of the agent's cover problems and progress in order to blend matters of operational import into his activity at the right time and in the proper gradation. At the same time he must make sure that the agent understands his mission thoroughly, for that is the entire purpose of the operation, anything else being only a means to the end. He must see to it that the agent gets sufficient practice, to the point of perfection if necessary, in the particular tasks that his mission will require, such as observation, elicitation, and assessment, practice that can be done in the normal course of cover work. The product of these exercises should be submitted in the form of reports—biographic reports, target data, general information reports, and written assessments. The agent may need technical skills, some of which, like photography, can be practiced as a



hobby, and some, like secret writing, only in seclusion. Whatever skills he needs he must master, for there should be no major deficiency in the makeup of the long-term agent. Conversely, however, his training should not be loaded with non-essentials.

The agent should regularly report his contacts, some of whom may be of interest to the station whether or not it plans for him to use them. He must be trained to transmit information accurately and completely, and he must appreciate the importance of operational data in the evaluation of his information. He must be alert to the by-products of his work toward his own objective, such as spotting information and other operational leads. He must understand the complementary purposes of cover—to protect the agent and expose the targets—and he must learn to use his own cover safely and effectively. These fundamentals will naturally have been covered in his briefing and training, but the case officer needs always to bear in mind that an agent who lives in isolation can in a surprisingly short time become oblivious of the most elementary principles of tradecraft unless they are kept constantly before him.

A long-term nonofficial-cover agent, we have noted, must have the right attitude towards clandestine work and the necessary drive to keep going without constant prodding. There is much that he can do by himself in preparing for his mission, and if he is to become conversant with all aspects of the situation related to his intelligence mission, no amount of briefing can make up for his own lack of initiative. It is up to the agent, with appropriate station support, to acquire background information and keep up with overt developments in his field of intelligence interest, so that he can recognize the significance of his requirements and of the information he collects to fulfill them. If his objective, for instance, is the penetration of a political group, he should find information easily available on its leaders present and potential, its sources of support, its stand on important issues, its allies and enemies, its relationships abroad, the divisions within its ranks, and so on; and he must of course also be familiar with the wider national background in which the group operates.

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All this information is indispensable for the agent's performance of his mission, but it is important even in the preparatory stage when he discusses with his case officer his intelligence objectives, his ideas with respect to attaining them, and his progress in working his way closer to his targets. The intelligence tasks and discussions of this early period will work toward the necessary correlation in the agent's mind of his cover occupation with his intelligence mission, and they will sharpen his alertness to possible intelligence significance in whatever he hears or sees. He should reach the point, as one officer expressed it, where he views his whole environment "through intelligence eyeglasses."

At the same time, the exercises and discussions will provide a running gauge of the agent's competence and enable the case officer to keep currently planned a workable progression of intelligence tasks. This progression should nourish the agent's confidence and self-reliance and help him advance smoothly to the point where he can develop and handle his own sources of information, the primary skill of an intelligence collection officer. There are instances where the progression of tasks does not quite achieve this desired result; in these, the case officer may further ease the agent's transition to active operations by turning over to him a secure going operation if there is a suitable one at hand in the general sector of his intelligence mission.

#### *Intelligence Support*

A long-range intelligence agent under nonofficial cover is not a lone operator in the sense that he can be expected to work without direction. For reasons of security he must be able to stand a considerable amount of isolation from the service, but it should be clear to him that this isolation is an operational necessity, not the result of neglect or oblivion. His morale has to be maintained over the years, and the morale of a good agent can be sustained only by the inner feeling that he is doing a valuable job as an integral part of the service. This feeling cannot be instilled by reassuring words; it can come only from the agent's own day-to-day recognition of the value of his mission and his work in furtherance of the

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broader missions of the station and even of the service as a whole. An agent once pictured his uneasiness in these terms:

"The rule is followed that there is no use showing the agent any material that does not concern his project. He has little opportunity to call on someone else for advice. It is unlikely that he will ever hear what happens to the information he turns in, or whether headquarters found it useful or not. He is in the unfortunate position where his shortcomings are open to almost instant scrutiny and not hidden by the mass of work in an office."

Too narrow an interpretation of the need-to-know principle can demoralize the man at the end of the line. In the interest of his effectiveness no less than of his morale, the agent must be given a sufficiently well-rounded interpretation of his progress; and that means that the case officer himself has to be well informed on the station's general operational program and performance in order to discuss the agent's work with him in its wider context. The agent should also receive currently, beyond the usual requirements and target information, any background data and any general guidance that will help him recognize operational opportunities outside of his assigned tasks and propose new approaches to his own objectives. If he receives anything less than all-out operational support, the expensive deep-cover agent will be working at a fraction of his capacity.

Furthermore, the considerable amount of time and effort required to keep a good agent primed for his best performance is not so much an operational overhead as an investment; not only should it yield a better intelligence product, but it should also develop and maintain a sound initiative in the agent and enable him to become less dependent on his case officer for day-to-day guidance. In short, nothing is more important to the agent than timely evaluations of his performance and production, and there is no better stimulus and guide for improvement. If it is at all possible, an occasional secure contact with the station chief would contribute to the agent's sense of belonging and it would be a shot-in-the-arm for him to hear from the top man a few well-informed remarks about his work and its value. The goal of intelligence support of the long-term agent is to keep him constantly oriented and inspired towards his informational objectives.

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### *Maintenance of Purpose*

We have already stressed the fact that the agent must have a clear understanding of his mission at the outset and that he and his case officer must keep it constantly in mind. Headquarters and the station must have the same understanding of the purpose of the operation, they must both agree to it, and if this purpose is a valid one they should stick to it. The temptations to redirect cover operations are many and varied; they should be examined thoroughly and, unless the change is unquestionably for the better, they should be resisted. There is no surer way to bewilder the agent than to force him repeatedly to change his course, and often there is no more certain way to doom the operation. A radical change in target, as for example from one ethnic group to another, will be wholly incompatible with the pattern of activity already established by the agent, and it may be incompatible with his basic cover.

Frequent organizational and personnel changes in a service bring a succession of officers with differing views into control of cover operations, and some new officers are prone to make changes before they fully understand the intent of their predecessors. Sometimes deep-cover operations are diverted and exposed for the sake of expediency: the chronic urgencies in some unsettled areas lead, sometimes justifiably, to the commitment of cover resources to purposes for which they were not originally intended. Much less justified are those purely administrative urgencies which prompt a service to throw a nonofficial-cover agent into a routine and perhaps insecure operation because someone is needed and he happens to be at hand. Operations in which such hasty resort is made to expediency are usually characterized by general laxity: the natural limits of the cover are overstepped, the elements of risk are glossed over, and tradecraft is ignored. One long-range agent who was well established in his cover and had obtained good access to targets was assigned to replace a departing case officer in charge of an operation that was already compromised; he had to be withdrawn from the area a few months later. The agent was lost without benefit to the operation. Long-range operations demand consistency.

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*Progress and Production*

The unorthodox nature of the deep-cover agent entails a need to judge his work by different standards from those used in evaluating the performance of persons under official cover. Even among themselves deep-cover operations differ from one another, and their value cannot be determined by any common criteria. Some operations officers, who may complain loudly when deep-cover operations are put through the budget wringer along with the rest of the wash, are still prone to measure their value with the same yardstick they use for other agent operations, that is production statistics. Some officers, on the other hand, may go to the opposite extreme, treating the agents as sleepers and demanding patience and the long-range view without giving any inkling of the time and manner of the awakening.

The right view, of course, is in the happy medium, a position easier to state than to define. The long-range agent should not be pressured to produce as soon as he is in place, but except in rare cases he is not a sleeper, exempt from all operational performance. In the preceding section we have described tasks he can perform from the very start, tasks that will contribute to his training and experience, maintain his interest and morale, and sometimes be of immediate value to the station. These tasks will also hasten the day when he becomes truly operational. If no intelligence production is expected in the early stage, there must still be progress, and the operation should be judged by the operational headway it makes toward its objective, according to an estimate of reasonable expectations outlined in advance.

A premature demand from headquarters for production may change the case officer's concern from operational progress to project justification, he may as a result direct the agent towards readily accessible targets, and the operation will have acquired a new purpose—its own survival. A long-range intelligence operation deserves headquarters' patience; but headquarters in turn is entitled to progress, and eventually to production. There is no place in a mature service for the epitaph over a terminated operation that it had been "extremely valuable as experience" although it had produced

nothing or for the consolatory view of a malingerer agent that he is not producing but "his cover is excellent."

The goal of clandestine intelligence operations is the collection of clandestine information. If there is a major defect in an operation, that is if it is apparent that it cannot and will not become productive, it should be terminated in order to give the case officer time to develop better operations. To the question, when should one expect production to begin? there is no single answer, because circumstances vary with the operation. But if the persons most closely concerned with an operation cannot give an approximate date it is probably not progressing towards production. There is a natural reluctance to end a going operation, even if it is not going anywhere. It was once reported in the review of an operation that "a kind of operational inertia set in, and it was easier for all concerned to let the operation run than to terminate it and sort out the pieces." But to prolong an unsuccessful venture on mere hope or through force of habit is an expensive exercise in futility.

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Long-range cover operations will always be difficult to prepare and to maintain, and there is never a certainty of success. They are always vulnerable in the sense that one weak element can nullify the excellence of all the others, and even the soundest cover operation can be destroyed by pure bad luck. But although one can never be sure of success, the odds against it can certainly be reduced. They can be reduced by not persisting in doing things the hard way. The recruitment of suitable agents already under natural cover and the transfer to career contract agent status of staff agents who make good with a cover organization can limit the use of staff agents in long-range cover operations and spare much of the grief that stems from their morale problems and their tight-fitting, buttons-in-the-back administrative suit, with salary adjustments, bonus kickbacks, covert tax returns, and so on.

Chances of success can be improved in a more basic way by keeping in check the habits and the tempo that sometimes ooze over from official cover practices to nonofficial cover, with lamentable results. Nonofficial cover requires, not the mechanical efficiency of the assembly-line worker, but the pa-

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tient inventiveness of the artisan, and an official-cover carry-over is especially harmful to operations intended for long-term coverage of sensitive targets. A repetition of previous mistakes is generally the result of congenital haste and a fondness for short cuts: long-term cover operations allow few concessions to expediency.

This paper has laid particular stress on planning and preparation because the early period is decisive; after a certain point the die is cast and little can be done to improve or redirect an operation. And yet, though totally sterile, it may continue for years, at great expense and constituting a time-consuming treadmill for the case officer in whose lap it falls. That is why long-range cover operations require patient and painstaking effort from start to finish.

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