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Played by the Mighty Wurlitzer

The Press, the CIA, and the Subversion of Truth

Brian Covert

A journalist in the US specializing in national security issues, Ken Dilanian, found himself under the harsh glare of the media spotlight in September 2014, when it was revealed that he had been collaborating with press officers of the United States government's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the shaping and publishing of his news stories for the *Los Angeles Times*, one of the most influential daily newspapers in the nation.

An exposé by the *Intercept* online magazine showed how, in private e-mail messages to CIA public affairs staff, Dilanian had not only shared entire drafts of his stories with the agency prior to publication, but had also offered to write up for the CIA on at least one occasion a story on controversial US drone strikes overseas that would be “reassuring to the public” and “a good opportunity” for the CIA to put its spin on the issue.¹

And Dilanian was not alone. Other e-mail messages, though heavily redacted by the CIA, showed that reporters from other major US news organizations likewise had cooperative relationships with the agency.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic Ocean that same month, a veteran journalist in Germany was blowing the whistle on his own profession. Udo Ulfkotte, a former news editor with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one of the largest newspapers in Germany, revealed how he had cooperated over the years with the German Federal Intelligence Service and the CIA itself in the planting of false news stories as a “non-official cover” and a media “propagandist.”²

That cooperation, which he claimed was approved by his bosses at the newspaper, included putting his own byline on news stories that had originated with intelligence agencies (such as an article about former Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi allegedly building poison gas factories), and accepting free travel and other gifts.³ It was understood by reporters for major news companies in other European countries as well, Ulfkotte said, that cooperating with agencies like the CIA could boost a reporter's career: "You don't bite the hand that feeds you. That's where corruption starts."⁴

But that corruption is nothing new. The close ties between the institution of the press and the premier spy agency of the USA date back nearly seventy years to the time of the CIA's establishment. Officially, those ties were known from the late 1940s onward as the agency's "Propaganda Assets Inventory"—an institutional Rolodex of sorts, with companies and individuals that could be counted on to cooperate with the CIA. Within the agency, those propaganda assets were known more casually as a part of a "Mighty Wurlitzer" network.⁵ This top-secret intelligence version of the famous movie theater organ used academics, artists, labor union members, students, and many others to be played at will as part of the soundtrack for what the CIA saw as a cultural war with America's enemies abroad during the Cold War period.

Members of the US and foreign press, with their direct access to mass audiences, were considered to be especially valuable tools and allies in that cultural war. The CIA's Mighty Wurlitzer, at its peak years later, reportedly had hundreds of institutions and individuals of the press being played at its fingertips, and could boast, in the words of one CIA official, of having "at least one newspaper in every foreign capital at any given time."⁶

Relations between the news media and the CIA over the past seven decades, in fact, have extended far deeper than have ever been reported by the US news media, researched by academia, or admitted to by the American government. This retrospective report attempts to fill in some of the gaps of that obscured history, drawing on news archives, public and private documents, and the author's original investigation—along with the work of the relatively few journalists and scholars who have tried to bring the truth of the issue before the public over the years.

While not totally exhaustive in scope, this report does bring together for the first time a number of the stories and events that have escaped close scrutiny in the wide shadow of the CIA, and that have long been shelved or shunned by the US news media.

“THE UBIQUITOUS HARRY KERN”

Among the CIA’s many Cold War–era assets in the US news media, few have moved through the ranks of high governmental and corporate power, both within the US and abroad, and still operated well below the radar of the watchdog American press for decades, than a top editor of *Newsweek* magazine by the name of Harry Frederick Kern.

In the immediate postwar years following Japan’s defeat in World War II, Kern, in his capacity as the foreign affairs editor for *Newsweek*, played a leading role in reversing the official “reform” policies for Japan that were being carried out by the occupation forces under US General Douglas MacArthur—policies that included breaking up Japan’s financial-industrial combines, the *zaibatsu*, that were closely allied with the Japanese military during the Pacific war against the US and its allies, and putting leading Japanese figures in prison as suspected war criminals and accomplices in the war effort.

Kern did this through a barrage of negative coverage of the US occupation of Japan in the pages of *Newsweek*, while serving at the same time as chief organizer for the American Council on Japan (ACJ), a New York–based lobby group made up of ultraconservative elements within the US government and military and on Wall Street that vowed to “safeguard and promote the best interests of the United States” in Japan.⁷ The goal of Kern and the ACJ was nothing less than to slam the brakes on Washington’s reform policies for Japan, which they viewed as a socialistic revival of New Deal–type policies that could potentially keep Wall Street from recouping its massive prewar investment losses from Japan.

Working closely with the ACJ early on in getting its message out was Wall Street attorney Frank Wisner, who would soon become the chief architect of the CIA’s Mighty Wurlitzer network of media assets and front companies.⁸

Through persistent lobbying on both sides of the Pacific Ocean, Kern and the ACJ managed in a short time to help change the direction of the US occupation of Japan, and by the end of 1948 a “reverse course” had overtaken the earlier reform plans as a cornerstone of the Truman Doctrine under US president Harry Truman, putting Japan squarely in the US politico-economic sphere of influence.⁹

Allen Dulles was named CIA director in 1953, and it was not long before Kern and the new CIA chief were addressing each other directly on a first-name basis on matters far beyond Japan. In one exchange in 1955, Kern, writing on *Newsweek* letterhead, broached with Dulles the idea of newly creating “a real crusading anti-Communist paper in Arabic” as a way to counter Soviet propaganda in the Middle East region.¹⁰ Kern closed the letter with a request to meet Dulles personally in Washington to pass along to him “a most interesting and provocative proposal” from the Saudi Arabian ambassador in the US involving “questions of [foreign] policy.” The letter indicates that Dulles and Kern were to meet a couple weeks later in the presence of a “Mr. Roosevelt”—most likely Kermit Roosevelt, Jr., a CIA official who had played a key role two years before in a CIA-sponsored coup that restored the former shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to power.¹¹

In 1956, after a long and eventful career as a senior editor at *Newsweek*, Kern shed his journalistic cover and went into business on his own as a political fixer and economic broker, putting his old contacts on Wall Street and in Washington to good use. He started a New York-based consulting firm, Foreign Reports Inc., that focused on governmental and corporate clients in Japan and the Middle East, especially the oil-producing nations of Iran and Saudi Arabia.¹²

But Kern’s movements abroad were not going unnoticed. In 1966, ten years after he had left *Newsweek*, the British embassy in Cairo, Egypt, cabled its Foreign Office back in London that Kern “runs an intelligence machinery for the oil companies in the [Middle East] region and cooperates in this with the CIA,” noting Kern’s efforts in helping to boost the image of King Faisal, the anticommunist monarch of Saudi Arabia.¹³

The US government was also keeping track of the former journalist. “The ubiquitous Harry Kern has appeared coming from Saudi

Arabia where he has apparently sought to persuade King [Faisal] to underwrite a major Arab public relations campaign in the US,” read a confidential memo from the US embassy in Cairo to the Department of State in Washington, DC, a few years later. Kern also discreetly passed on to US officials at that time the concerns of the Japanese government over severe oil restrictions on Japan due to Egypt’s closure of the Suez Canal.¹⁴

Kern’s connections extended as far as the White House in Washington, DC. In November 1976, shortly after Jimmy Carter’s election as US president, Kern relayed to the president-elect a direct message from the crown prince (and future king) of Saudi Arabia concerning ongoing peace talks between Israel and Palestine.¹⁵

Kern eventually branched out from the international oil consulting business to include the burgeoning US military aircraft industry overseas. It was not uncommon at the time for Kern to be seen visiting the posh Copacabana nightclub in Tokyo, where some of the most famous American singers of the day performed.¹⁶ The VIP-only club was reputed to be a hotbed of espionage in those days, attracting as it did political leaders and corporate executives from around the globe, including representatives of leading military aircraft manufacturers from the United States seeking to secure ever more lucrative deals with the government of Japan.¹⁷

One of those military aircraft makers, the New York-based Grumman Corporation, became the focus of a major scandal in Japan in 1979, and Harry Kern soon became a familiar figure to the Japanese public as a parliamentary investigation unfolded and his role in the scandal was revealed. News media in Japan reported that an unusually high 40 percent commission was supposedly meant for Kern by Grumman’s Tokyo agent, the Nissho Iwai trading firm, for each Grumman Hawkeye E-2C plane sold to Japan’s military. That commission, it was reported, was ostensibly to be passed on by Kern to one or more Japanese government officials to help secure the Grumman aircraft deals.

In March 1979, as the Grumman scandal continued breaking wide open in Japan, Kern made a discreet overture to the White House to have the official Japanese investigation shut down. Declassified documents show that Kern contacted Zbigniew Brzezinski,

then National Security Council (NSC) advisor to US President Carter, and requested a personal meeting with Brzezinski concerning the Grumman scandal.¹⁸ In a meeting in Washington, DC, with NSC aide Nicholas Platt soon afterward, Kern warned that he would talk if he were forced to clear his name in the Grumman scandal. This included, Kern said, possibly releasing evidence that could implicate prominent Japanese political figures as well as US embassy officials based in Tokyo regarding the sale of Grumman aircraft to the government of Japan.¹⁹

According to Platt, Kern suggested that the US government might be able to avert a full-blown political crisis with the Grumman investigation in Japan by “influencing the Japanese judiciary to close the case.” Platt responded that Kern’s role in the Grumman affair was “not an appropriate White House matter” and that it was best left up to the proper legal channels to handle in the US and Japan. Kern disagreed, saying “this was more than just a judiciary matter.”²⁰

In the end, no public official in Japan was ever implicated in the Grumman scandal and no American linked to the US military aircraft maker, including Kern, was found guilty of any wrongdoing.

Records show that Kern was merely slowed down, not stopped, by the Grumman scandal and the extensive Japanese media coverage of his secretive activities. Within a few years Kern was actively back in the military aircraft game with the help of Samyr Souki, a former *Newsweek* colleague and ex-press spokesman for the Egyptian embassy in Washington, DC. Documents obtained by the author indicate that by 1984, Kern and Souki were secretly pitching to Japanese officials the benefits of buying F-20 Tigershark fighter jets made by the Northrop Corporation, a leading US military aircraft manufacturer. At one point, Kern, then based in Washington, DC, and Souki, based in Paris, France, acted as intermediaries for a Northrop vice president in the US to directly make his company’s sales pitch in Japan for the American-made jets.²¹

No evidence has surfaced to date that the “ubiquitous” Harry Kern had any kind of contractual relationship with the CIA; he appears to have served the spy agency over the years more in an advisory role as a high-level informant. In any case, Kern’s special place among CIA media assets would go unreported by his former peers in the US cor-

porate press for decades, before finally catching up with him amidst a flurry of exposés of the CIA that broke out in the 1970s.

BRAINWASHED

As the postwar years of the 1940s gave way to the 1950s, the Mighty Wurlitzer media propaganda network created by Frank Wisner, the ex-Wall Street lawyer now serving as a CIA deputy director, was being operated out of a harmless-sounding section of the CIA called the Office of Policy Coordination. By 1952, Wisner's office had more than 2,800 operatives working in forty-seven CIA stations around the globe, with a budget of \$82 million and rising. Wisner, by all accounts, had a particular obsession to "orchestrate" news reports through his Mighty Wurlitzer network.²²

Prominent at that time among the many US and foreign journalists who secretly lent their professional services to Wisner's Wurlitzer was Edward Hunter, a New York-based veteran news correspondent with legitimate war-reporting credentials behind him. It was Hunter who first introduced a new and frightening word—"brainwashing"—into the American lexicon in a newspaper article in the *Miami Daily News* of Florida in September 1950, just a few months after the US entered the Korean War.²³ In explaining the Chinese reeducation camps of the time, Hunter came up with this new word by taking the two Chinese characters for "wash" and "brain," and injecting them with a political bias that did not exist in the original Chinese meaning of the word *xi nao*.

In news and opinion articles, books, and even testimony in the US Congress, Hunter played a leading role in the brainwashing scare that seemed to pervade American society in the 1950s. He raised public fears about what he called a new, insidious weapon of thought control and manipulation on a mass scale never seen before: refined techniques practiced by the governments of China and other enemies of the USA of literally washing people's minds clean and reformatting their brains with the ideology of communism. The ultimate target of such brainwashing, warned Hunter, was the American people.²⁴

Unbeknownst to the public at large at the time, however, Hunter had worked for the psychological warfare division of the Office of

Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA, for two years during World War II.²⁵ After the war, he was employed by the CIA in its Office of Policy Coordination (home of the Mighty Wurlitzer operations) for at least one year.²⁶ This apparently included a stint as a reporter at the Hong Kong bureau of *Newsweek* magazine at a time when Hunter was doing research for his first book, *Brain-washing in Red China*, published in 1951. Hunter's status as a CIA agent was reportedly known at the time by the *Newsweek* foreign affairs editor in New York, the esteemed Harry Kern.²⁷

Hunter's writings on brainwashing, while generally gaining little traction in the US scientific community, nevertheless fed right into the CIA's push to fight a new "brain warfare" front against America's enemies in the early 1950s, as declared by then CIA director Allen Dulles, and motivated the agency in ensuing years to delve even more deeply into secret mind-control experiments of its own.²⁸ But it was the US corporate news media that played the most critical role of all by widely reporting on and giving much-needed credibility to Hunter's unscientific, sensational accounts of brainwashing to an unknowing American public.

In the 1960s Hunter publicly aligned himself with the extremist "radical right" political movement in the USA that spoke openly of violent overthrow of the government under President John F. Kennedy.²⁹ It was not until Hunter's death in 1978 that his past CIA employment was finally reported by the Associated Press wire service (in contrast to the *Washington Post*, which neglected to mention any such employment in its own obituary on Hunter).³⁰ Today the CIA's website refers to the late Hunter as a "journalist and onetime CIA officer," and a collection of his old brainwashing-related Chinese propaganda materials is still preserved by an American consortium of university libraries.³¹

So, was the big brainwashing scare of the 1950s part of some CIA propaganda campaign? It is entirely possible, though the available evidence so far remains inconclusive. What is certain is that the term Edward Hunter conceived and publicized through the American media, "brainwashing," remains deeply embedded in popular culture around the world many years later.

WORKING THE MIGHTY WURLITZER

The New York Times was an especially rich source of media assets and friendly informants for the Mighty Wurlitzer in the 1950s, from the very top of the company all the way down through the ranks of news reporters. Among the most valuable of them was Julius Ochs Adler, general manager of the *Times* and nephew of a past owner of the paper. As such, Adler oversaw the business side of the newspaper's operations and had direct access to the editorial side at the highest levels as well.

Adler also happened to be a close personal friend of CIA director Allen Dulles, going all the way back to their undergraduate years together at Princeton University decades earlier. Dulles and Adler dispensed with formalities in business letters, addressing each other on a casual first-name basis as "Julie" and "Allie."³² When the *New York Times* published an editorial in early 1953 praising US President Dwight Eisenhower's "excellent choice" in appointing Dulles as director of the CIA, Adler bubbled with delight, and Dulles asked him to personally thank editor-in-chief Charles Merz and "my other friends at the *Times*"; Adler promised he would.³³

Adler served the role of CIA informant on at least one occasion, when he passed along to Dulles information about members of the National Council Against Conscription, a US antiwar group formed in the 1940s. Dulles and Adler then made plans to meet soon afterward in Washington, DC, to further discuss the matter privately.³⁴

Meanwhile, in the *New York Times* newsroom, regular beat reporters were being actively sought out for recruitment by CIA officers. *Times* reporter Wayne Phillips, for one, was approached in 1952 by CIA agent Richard Suter with an offer to help get the reporter transferred to a new overseas posting in Moscow, Russia, through a "working arrangement" that the agent claimed the CIA had in place with Arthur Hays Sulzberger, then publisher of the *New York Times*. Phillips turned the offer down.³⁵

The CIA had much better luck that same summer with Donald Allan, a *Times* city reporter in his late twenties, who took up the CIA's offer and soon announced his departure to his editors, never telling them that he was recruited by the CIA. Allan was secretly dispatched

by the agency to Rome, Italy, where he took day jobs with other major American news companies (which had their own histories of cooperating with the spy agency) to protect his deep-cover work as a CIA agent by night.³⁶

Higher up the editorial ladder, James Reston, a prominent *New York Times* correspondent and former US government propaganda officer during World War II, founded his own news magazine, the *Reporter*, together with Max Ascoli, an immigrant scholar from Italy. The New York-based biweekly magazine, with an editorial stance that was both liberal and anticommunist, featured the writings of liberal and conservative authors, scholars, and political figures of the day.

Unknown to most readers and subscribers, however, was the fact that the *Reporter* was a reliable asset for the CIA. Before and after Allen Dulles joined the spy agency, the magazine's staff were sending prepublished proofs of stories to Dulles for his checking in advance. "It is generous of you to give it a once-over for us," *Reporter* managing editor Philip Horton wrote to Dulles of one particular article about the Nuremberg trials of World War II, "and we appreciate it enormously."³⁷ Before joining the *Reporter*, Horton had earlier served as the first CIA station chief in Paris, France.³⁸

Ascoli, cofounder of the *Reporter*, sent to Dulles the prepublished proofs of a particularly controversial story about China that the magazine was planning to run. Dulles, in his official capacity as CIA director, later made a pitch to the head of the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the most influential think tank in the US, to allow Ascoli to join the organization as a regular member.³⁹

"Mysterious Doings": The Harkness Series

By 1954 the CIA was coming under fire for the agency's role in the coups against the governments of Iran and Guatemala, as well as from red-baiters of the political Far Right in the US who suspected the CIA was hiring communist spies as agents. A natural choice for the CIA, then, was to turn to the US corporate press for help.

News media companies and individual journalists up to then had been mostly used by the CIA for propaganda purposes against a common enemy abroad: the scourge of communism. In a marked

change of direction, the press was now to be used by the CIA to also protect and promote the spy agency's image at home in the USA. Doing the first honors were Richard Harkness and Gladys Harkness, a famous husband-wife media team.

Richard Harkness was well known to many American TV viewers at the time as Washington, DC, news correspondent for the NBC television network, to his journalistic peers as president of the Radio and Television Correspondents Association, and privately to CIA director Allen Dulles as a personal friend. Gladys Harkness had credentials as a past writer for the United Press wire service and as an NBC correspondent. The series that the Harknesses set out to write together for the *Saturday Evening Post* weekly magazine offers a rare inside look into the workings of the CIA's Mighty Wurlitzer media network of that time.

Documents show a close coordination between the Harknesses, the *Post* editorial team, and the CIA, from the interview access to Dulles through to the taking of photographs and editing of the story's rough draft.⁴⁰ In August 1954, as the series was being prepared for publication, *Saturday Evening Post* managing editor Robert Fuoss assured Dulles's top aide that CIA officials would have a chance to preview the story before it went to press: "[Y]ou lads can be sure of seeing the piece by one route or another."⁴¹

Dulles was "somewhat surprised" to hear that the original story had been stretched out to three parts, and contacted author Richard Harkness at a mountain ranch in rural Wyoming (where the Harknesses were then on vacation), asking to see the expanded story drafts if any sensitive changes had been made. Richard Harkness telegraphed Dulles back, reassuring the CIA director that the *Saturday Evening Post* planned to publish the stories "virtually as you read [them]," and asked Dulles to contact the chief editor of the *Post* to give the CIA's official security clearance on the story. "And now, for those mountain trout!" Harkness gleefully closed in a letter to Dulles.⁴² The serious work of a watchdog American press would have to wait for another day.

When the series finally did get published in the *Saturday Evening Post* a few months later, it was heavily promoted by the *Post* and advertised widely in print media across the US as the "first exclusive report on the CIA."⁴³

Running in three consecutive issues of the *Post* from October 30 to November 13, 1954, under the title of “America’s Secret Agents: The Mysterious Doings of CIA,” the series of lengthy stories set something of a high-water mark for CIA-press collaboration up to that time. Reading less like a journalistic scoop and more as dictated stenography, the Harkness series in the *Post* cited at great length the agency’s successes in its coup operations abroad and in foiling communist infiltration of its own ranks at home. For the grand finale, part three of the series was devoted exclusively to Allen Dulles, covering everything from his childhood to his heroic World War II service in the OSS to his most efficient running of the CIA as the agency’s “master spy.”⁴⁴

EXPOSED

The first in-depth journalistic account of a world most US citizens knew little about—the intelligence and espionage apparatus of the nation, with the CIA at its center—was published in 1964 in a book titled *The Invisible Government* by newspaper reporters David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, shining a media spotlight on some very uncomfortable places for the CIA and sparking renewed public criticism of the agency.⁴⁵

Within the CIA, according to a confidential memo from around that time, the “rising clamor” in the air prompted CIA officials to review the way they had been utilizing the press in the past.⁴⁶ That confidential 1965 memo listed the names of twenty prominent American reporters, editors, and media company owners with whom high-ranking CIA official Ray Cline had been meeting and briefing for some years. (Cline, then a deputy director of the agency, had been the CIA’s chief analyst during the Cuban missile crisis three years earlier in 1962.)

Among those listed on the memo as having had regular contact with Cline and the CIA were Katharine Graham, then publisher of the *Washington Post* newspaper and *Newsweek* magazine; Chalmers Roberts, the *Post*’s chief diplomatic correspondent, and other *Post* editorial staff; columnist C. L. Sulzberger of the *New York Times* (nephew of former *Times* owner Arthur Hays Sulzberger), and other *Times*

editorial staff; and Walter Lippmann, originator of the term “Cold War,” who was then a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*. Two media assets who were especially active in CIA covert operations—columnist Stewart Alsop, then with the *Saturday Evening Post*, and his older brother Joseph Alsop, a columnist with the Publishers’ Newspaper Syndicate—were also on the list, along with journalists representing the NBC television network, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time* magazine, *Fortune* magazine, *US News & World Report* magazine, and the United Features Syndicate service.

The only person on the list of twenty media elites who was meeting with CIA official Cline as a “regular official contact” for on-the-record briefings was Joseph Alsop. All the others were contacted unofficially and discreetly: a “quiet cultivation” of sources, as Cline put it in one case.⁴⁷

Ramparts Revelations

It was the more radicalized US independent/alternative press of the 1960s, namely the San Francisco-based monthly magazine *Ramparts*, that stepped into the corporate media void in March 1967 to take the first in-depth look into one aspect of the Mighty Wurlitzer propaganda network. *Ramparts* revealed the CIA’s fifteen-year bank-rolling of the United States National Student Association (NSA), a federation of American college and university student governments formed in the late 1940s, and the domestic funding of the NSA by CIA-affiliated foundations.⁴⁸

A year after that groundbreaking *Ramparts* investigation, the magazine came very close to busting another CIA operation wide open—this time a media front company across the ocean in Europe that was a vital part of the agency’s Mighty Wurlitzer media network.

A young American writer in his mid-twenties by the name of Daniel Schechter, who had been studying at the London School of Economics and was allied with the antiapartheid South African exile community in Britain, was investigating a story in 1968 for *Ramparts* about Forum World Features (FWF), a London-based news syndication service that supplied several articles a week to about 150 newspapers in fifty countries, including to major press companies in the

USA. Schechter was convinced at the time that FWF was part of the CIA's larger and more well-known front organization, the Paris-based Congress for Cultural Freedom.⁴⁹

The British director of FWF met with Schechter, showed him all the company's glossy promotional materials, and even escorted him to the company's genuine-looking business office in downtown London to see for himself. Schechter's suspicions were apparently assuaged, and he did not pursue that story for *Ramparts*.

But if he had continued digging, Danny Schechter the Media Dissector (as he was popularly known in later years⁵⁰) would likely have struck gold, since Forum World Features was perhaps the CIA's most prized media front company at the time. FWF had already passed out of the hands of the CIA-sponsored Congress for Cultural Freedom by then, and was being secretly funded at that point by John Hay Whitney—an American multimillionaire who had served in the past as US ambassador to Britain and as publisher of the *New York Herald Tribune* newspaper—through a CIA “proprietary” firm that was legally registered in the US state of Delaware.

The former vice president and treasurer of the London-based Forum World Features at one time had, in fact, been a career CIA officer from the US named Robert Gene Gately. He had earlier worked undercover in Tokyo for both the US magazine *Newsweek* and *Asia Magazine*, a Hong Kong-based publication. Later transferred to the CIA station in Bangkok, Thailand, Gately went on to become an expert of sorts on terrorism and something of a “legendary” CIA covert-operations figure in conservative American political circles.⁵¹

Opening Closets of the Past

A sign of what was in store for the CIA in the 1970s came early on in the decade when Seymour Freidin, a respected news veteran then working as London bureau chief for the Hearst Newspapers media chain in the US, became the first American journalist to be outed by colleagues in the news industry as a CIA operative.

As the Watergate scandal was unfolding in the nation's capital, Jack Anderson, investigative columnist for the *Washington Post*, exposed journalist Freidin as a highly paid undercover operative for the elec-

tion campaigns of Republican Party presidential candidate Richard Nixon in 1968 and 1972—and before that, as a “valued informant” paid by the CIA at a time when Freidin was working in Europe as a news correspondent in the 1950s and 1960s. Freidin had reportedly gone as far as helping out with sensitive negotiations in Switzerland between then-US President Eisenhower and Russian leaders at the Geneva Summit of 1955.⁵²

Shortly after the Anderson stories broke in the *Washington Post*, then CIA director William Colby, in an effort to put the agency’s own preventive spin on any further damaging disclosures, leaked to the *Post*’s rival newspaper, the conservative *Washington Star-News*, the outlines of an even bigger story: that at least forty full-time news reporters, freelance journalists, and correspondents for trade publications were still on the CIA’s payroll or were secretly cooperating with the spy agency in some way.⁵³

Though it listed none of those journalists by name, the *Star-News* story noted that most of those paid reporter-agents were American citizens working in various cities around the world as freelance “stringers”—contributors to major news outlets as a cover for their spy work—and that the CIA intended to keep using them as assets in the future. CIA director Colby, however, issued a new directive that immediately cut off the paid services of a handful of regular staff employees of major US news organizations whose identities, if publicly exposed, could “seriously compromise the integrity of the American press and possibly cripple its ability to function overseas.”⁵⁴

When Stuart H. Loory, a university journalism professor and former White House correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, decided to write up a more comprehensive report on CIA-press relations, he was warned to stay away from such a story by both CIA sources and his colleagues in the press. Loory persisted, and ended up getting the first real exposé of the CIA’s Mighty Wurlitzer media network, which he identified as such, published in 1974 as the cover story of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the respected bimonthly journal serving as the voice of the American media establishment.⁵⁵

It took a few more years, but by summer 1977 the American news media started opening their own closet doors in earnest, and when they did a host of skeletons came tumbling out.

Independent journalists Joe Trento and Dave Roman broke open a new angle of the media-CIA story when they reported on extensive cooperation with the CIA dating back to the 1950s by the San Diego-based Copley Press Inc. company, which then owned nine newspapers in the US, including its flagship *San Diego Union* and *San Diego Evening Tribune* papers, and a subsidiary newswire company, Copley News Service (CNS).⁵⁶

CNS had no less than twenty-three of its news staff on the payroll of the CIA over a two-decade period, it was reported, with the company also providing news-gathering credentials to CIA and other agents as part of their cover. The company's owner, the late right-wing publishing scion James Copley, had founded the news service back in the mid-1950s for the express purpose of helping the CIA with intelligence-gathering activities—as “the eyes and ears” against “the Communist threat in Latin and Central America” for “our intelligence services”—as a personal favor to then US President Eisenhower.⁵⁷

Bernstein's Big Story

The final breach of the dam holding back the decades-long secrets of the press's ties with the CIA came a couple months later in October 1977 when Carl Bernstein, still riding high on his acclaimed reporting on the Watergate scandal for his former employer, the *Washington Post*, and his two books on the subject with *Post* colleague Bob Woodward, filed the most in-depth report to date on the CIA's Mighty Wurlitzer media network. Bernstein's 25,000-word story was published in the New York-based magazine *Rolling Stone* as a thirteen-page spread, headlined “The CIA and the Media.”⁵⁸

Bernstein cited about 400 journalists as having worked in some way or another with the CIA over the years—about ten times the number that the agency had officially admitted to up to then.

Among the notable exposures in Bernstein's report was that of Harry Kern, the “ubiquitous” ex-*Newsweek* magazine foreign affairs editor who had played a leading role in helping to secure Japan's postwar alliance with the US. CIA sources told Bernstein that Kern's dealings with the spy agency had been extensive, and Malcolm Muir, the former editor-in-chief and president of *Newsweek*, confirmed that

Kern (along with Ernest Lindley, the magazine's Washington, DC bureau chief) "regularly checked in with various fellows in the CIA."⁵⁹

Kern's past ties to CIA director Allen Dulles and his brother, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, were also confirmed, but Kern denied any formal working relationship. "To the best of my knowledge, nobody at *Newsweek* worked for the CIA," Kern told Bernstein. "The informal relationship was there. Why have anybody sign anything? What we knew we told them [the CIA] and the State Department. . . . When I went to Washington, I would talk to [John Foster Dulles] or Allen Dulles about what was going on. . . . We thought it was admirable at the time. We were all on the same side."⁶⁰

The CBS television network was confirmed by Bernstein as having been the CIA's most valuable broadcast media asset. William Paley, as CBS president, and CIA director Allen Dulles worked out a system of collaboration that was then passed down through the ranks of other CBS executives and editors, and dutifully carried out: a system of CBS providing cover for CIA employees, including at least one well-known overseas correspondent, Austin Goodrich, and several stringers; giving CIA officers full access to the CBS film library and to raw video outtakes; and even setting up a private phone line between CBS and the CIA.⁶¹

Although Bernstein did not go into much detail about his own former employer, the *Washington Post*, he did report in *Rolling Stone* that *Post* publisher Philip Graham was told by the CIA, upon the newspaper's purchase of *Newsweek* magazine back in 1961, that the magazine was sometimes used by the spy agency for cover purposes. Which probably would not have bothered Philip Graham much anyway, since he and his wife, Katharine Graham (future publisher of the *Post*), had been the best of friends with CIA official Frank Wisner, the architect of the agency's worldwide Mighty Wurlitzer propaganda network, and his wife Polly.⁶²

But out of all the CIA's press company assets, as reported in *Rolling Stone*, the most valuable one was undoubtedly the *New York Times*. Under secret arrangements between *Times* publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger and CIA director Dulles, around ten CIA employees were provided cover as editorial staff members of the newspaper from 1950 to 1966.⁶³ Sulzberger had signed a secrecy agreement with the

CIA in the 1950s, telling only a select few of the *Times* editorial staff about the company's cooperation with the agency.

Once-private documents show that Dulles—before, during, and after his time at the CIA from the early 1950s to the early 1960s—had indeed enjoyed a close personal and professional relationship with the reigning Sulzberger family of the *New York Times*, corresponding on a first-name basis and meeting regularly over the years with *Times* publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger, and with his son (and future *Times* president/publisher) Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, and his nephew C.L. Sulzberger, the *Times* columnist.⁶⁴

The Times Follows Up

Stung by the exposures in Bernstein's *Rolling Stone* article, the *New York Times* responded a couple months later by publishing its own in-depth investigation of CIA-media ties at home and abroad in a series of lengthy stories that was carried over three consecutive days on the paper's front page. While obviously intended as a face-saving measure for America's newspaper of record, the detailed research and investigation by reporter John M. Crewdson and other *Times* staffers nevertheless delivered a devastating blow to the wall of secrecy long surrounding the CIA's assets in the press.

Titled "CIA: Secret Shaper of Public Opinion," the series reported how for three decades the CIA had been actively engaged in an "unremitting, though largely unrecognized" effort to manipulate foreign opinion in favor of US policy in other nations. The news media played an important role in that effort, the *Times* noted, with the CIA having owned or financially subsidized more than fifty newspapers, news services, radio stations, and other periodicals, both in the USA and abroad, for propaganda purposes or to provide a believable cover for CIA agents.⁶⁵ Since World War II, an estimated thirty to one hundred US journalists for various news organizations had worked concurrently as paid undercover intelligence agents for the CIA, at least a dozen unpaid journalists for major companies were used as "valued sources of information or assistance" for the CIA, and a dozen others were full-time CIA officers secretly working abroad as credentialed employees of US press companies.⁶⁶

Especially in European and Asian countries, the *Times* reported, the CIA had set up a number of its own proprietary newspaper companies and invested lots of money in other legitimate newspapers. “We ‘had’ at least one newspaper in every foreign capital at any given time,” according to an anonymous CIA official, adding that in cases where newspapers were not owned outright or subsidized heavily by the CIA, they were infiltrated with agents who could influence which news stories got published and which ones were not printed.⁶⁷

As one CIA official explained in the *Times* series, the agency had initiated many of its past working relationships with journalists with a promise of “eternal confidentiality”—that their identities would be protected forever. The agency intended to keep that promise, and would continue to refuse to talk about its past media connections “in perpetuity.”⁶⁸

All in all, the *Times* series concluded, more than 800 news and public information organizations and individuals, not to mention a dozen or so US publishing houses that printed many of the estimated 1,000 books subsidized or produced by the CIA, could be counted as part of the CIA’s international “communications empire” at its peak in the 1960s.⁶⁹

At the end of the series, the *Times* published an editorial criticizing the CIA’s past use of the press: “Practically as well as philosophically, this was wrong,” the newspaper acknowledged. The editorial welcomed the recently announced policy by CIA director Stansfield Turner that henceforth, barring the occasional exception, the CIA would no longer use journalists formally employed by US news companies as paid CIA agents and that CIA officers could no longer join news media companies as cover to hide their spying activities.⁷⁰ At the same time, the CIA intended to continue using “unpaid relationships” with journalists or others working in the press on a voluntary basis.

INQUIRIES AND INVESTIGATIONS

The longstanding CIA-media links were an open secret for decades in official circles in Washington, DC, but it was not until the independent/alternative and corporate press in the US began exposing those links to the light of day in the 1970s that the US Congress felt com-

pelled to look into the situation. Several major congressional investigations and other internal reports in the 1970s and 1990s dealt specifically with the issue of the press and the CIA.

The Pike and Church Committees

The first official look into the Mighty Wurlitzer media network as a part of the worldwide covert operations of the CIA began in a big way in 1975 with two congressional investigative bodies: a US House of Representatives intelligence committee chaired by Otis Pike (D-New York) and a US Senate intelligence committee led by Frank Church (D-Idaho).

But from the start, both committees gave the press-CIA relationship comparatively short shrift in their hearings, despite that relationship being a key component of the CIA's international clandestine operations.

The Pike Committee devoted only a dozen paragraphs throughout its extensive report to CIA manipulation of the press, with the contents mostly rehashing what had already been reported elsewhere or admitted to by the CIA.⁷¹ The committee's final recommendation was that US foreign intelligence agencies should be barred from paying journalists to be spies and from using media companies for purposes of cover—except in cases of “the occasional or casual furnisher of news stories or articles to the news media.”⁷²

Pike, the committee chairman, refused to go along with the CIA's attempts to censor or otherwise influence the overall direction of the committee's investigation, and in the end paid the price for it. The committee's final report was printed up in early 1976 but suppressed by the US House of Representatives before it could reach the public. Though most of the report was leaked at the time to the New York-based *Village Voice* newspaper by *CBS News* reporter Daniel Schorr, the Pike Committee report in its entirety still remains officially unreleased today.

Unlike the Pike Committee, the Senate intelligence committee chaired by Frank Church acquiesced to the CIA's censoring of information and various other conditions and managed to get its final report published.⁷³ The Church Committee did confirm that at least fifty American journalists or other employees of companies had had a secret working relationship with the CIA. Those US journalists were part of a much

larger “network of several hundred foreign individuals around the world who provide intelligence for the CIA and at times attempt to influence foreign opinion through the use of covert propaganda.”⁷⁴ Under the new rules on CIA use of the press by then CIA director Stansfield Turner, the Church Committee noted, fewer than half of those fifty American journalists would be terminated as CIA assets.

What the Church Committee never told the public, however, was just how much it had compromised in its dealings with the CIA. Frank Church and his committee decided not to question any reporters, editors, publishers, or broadcasting executives whose names surfaced during its investigation, and likewise, the committee made no mention in its final report of about 400 journalists (identities protected by the CIA) who had worked closely with the agency in the past. The Church Committee report also downplayed the influence of the CIA-press relationship on actual news content in the US, and the influential role of news media owners and executives who made that relationship possible.⁷⁵

In February 1976, just before the Church Committee issued its final report, the *Washington Post* ran a front-page exclusive by its national security affairs reporter, Walter Pincus (himself a CIA operative back in the late 1950s and early 1960s), in which the CIA, under then director George H. W. Bush, announced it would no longer use any reporters who were formally accredited with an American news organization as paid assets for the agency, but left a loophole for reporters in other countries as well as freelancers and other contributors to be used by the CIA.⁷⁶

The Church Committee, to its credit, did recommend in its final report that the CIA be prohibited by law from using journalists with US news organizations as paid assets, yet mentioned nothing about the CIA using foreign news companies or reporters as assets.⁷⁷ Despite its many shortcomings regarding the media-CIA relationship in particular, the Church Committee investigation did have one long-term effect: it marked the beginning of the end of the thirty-year-long tryst between the US corporate press industry and the CIA under the umbrella of the Mighty Wurlitzer propaganda network.

The Aspin and Huddleston Hearings

The ink was barely dry on the Church Committee's report in early 1976 when a renewed public outcry over the *Rolling Stone* exposé by Carl Bernstein the following year led to a whole new investigation in Congress. But this time, for the first time ever, the specific target of the inquiry was to be the press and the CIA. Taking its cue from the title of Bernstein's article, a House of Representatives intelligence subcommittee chaired by Les Aspin (D-Wisconsin) convened a fresh round of hearings in Washington, DC, under the official title of "The CIA and the Media."⁷⁸

During a series of six public hearings from December 1977 to April 1978, the Aspin Subcommittee took public testimony from current and past CIA directors and officers, from US ambassadors stationed abroad, and from working journalists in the field. Aspin set the tone of his hearings at the outset: the proceedings would be about determining "the proper relationship between the media and the CIA"—not about revealing the identities of journalists still working for the CIA or uncovering more of the agency's past abuses of the press.⁷⁹

Ray Cline, now retired as a CIA deputy director, claimed in his testimony before the subcommittee to have "exchanged views and information with literally hundreds and hundreds of American journalists as well as many foreign ones" over three decades. Cline testified that "it is entirely natural that there should be close relations" between the CIA and the press.⁸⁰ For their part, the journalists who testified at the Aspin Subcommittee hearings, representing several major American news companies, were unanimous in rejecting the idea of a press-CIA working relationship.

The hearings closed with testimony by then CIA director Stansfield Turner, who reconfirmed his recent directive of November 1977: barring the occasional exception (to be decided by him), both accredited journalists and freelance stringers for US news companies would no longer be used as paid CIA agents, and CIA officers could not use US news companies as cover for their covert operations. But, Turner added, "I don't think there is a . . . great danger here to the US public if we have a relationship with foreign media people."⁸¹ And any "unpaid relationships" between the press and the CIA would continue as before.

At the end of it all, the historic Aspin Subcommittee hearings, as the first US congressional inquiry devoted solely to the issue of the press and the CIA, were concluded with no investigation even attempted into the CIA's long history of media manipulation and no official recommendations made about preventing such manipulation from happening again in the future.

In the Senate, meanwhile, the CIA-press connection was being taken up as only one part of a series of public hearings, headed by Walter Huddleston (D-Kentucky) of the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, concerning the power wielded by the CIA under the proposed "National Intelligence Reorganization and Reform Act of 1978."⁸² Among the heavyweights testifying at the bill's series of Senate hearings were three former directors of the CIA and a host of well-known journalists associated with major media companies such as the Associated Press and United Press International wire services, *CBS News*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*.

There was a general consensus among those media people against any kind of formal working relationship with the CIA in their profession. One journalist who chafed under the notion of Congress further tightening any rules concerning CIA-press relations was Philip L. Geyelin, then editorial page editor for the *Washington Post*. Geyelin, during his testimony to the committee on behalf of the American Society of News Editors, admitted that back in 1950, as a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, he had taken a one-year leave of absence from his company to work for the CIA.⁸³

In the end, no final recommendations were ever made in the Senate bill specifically concerning relations between the press and the CIA. The bill eventually proved to be too controversial all the way around concerning the expanding powers of the CIA, and never went any further than the committee hearings.

CIA Openness Task Force

Thirteen years later, in 1991, newly appointed CIA director Robert Gates, in a bid to quell criticisms of his past record with the CIA and to help clean up the agency's public image, set up a "Task Force on Greater CIA Openness" to promote a kinder, gentler spy agency.

The task force soon sent to Gates a fifteen-page internal memo-

randum listing various areas of focus for the agency's Public Affairs Office (PAO), the CIA's face to the outside world, showing that the CIA of the 1990s had lost none of its old charm when it came to actively working over the American press:

PAO now has relationships with reporters from *every* major wire service, newspaper, news weekly, and television network in the nation. This has helped us turn some "intelligence failure" stories into "intelligence success" stories, and it has contributed to the accuracy of countless others. In many instances, we have persuaded reporters to postpone, change, hold, or even scrap stories that could have adversely affected national security interests or jeopardized sources and methods.⁸⁴

The task force suggested that the CIA give more background briefings to "a greater number of print and electronic media journalists. . . . Keep PAO as the conduit for these efforts and ensure that media across the US, not only those in the Washington, DC area, are aware of our program." The agency's public affairs staff was also advised to invite journalists to CIA headquarters in Virginia—both to give occasional guest lectures to CIA employees as well as to receive an "unclassified background briefing" from the CIA in times of major international events, such as the Persian Gulf War.

CIA director Gates, in his response to the agency's moves toward more openness, agreed with all the news media-related recommendations except for one: "CIA should not give groups of reporters unclassified background briefings when there is a major international event."⁸⁵

Council on Foreign Relations Report

A few years on, in early 1996, the influential Council on Foreign Relations set up its own task force to reappraise the various restrictions on the CIA that were supposedly keeping the agency from doing its job more effectively. The twenty-eight-member CFR task force included several ex-CIA officials, as well as past and current representatives of the elite American media establishment.

The CFR's task force report, *Making Intelligence Smarter*, was released soon afterward.⁸⁶ It called for more "risk-taking" in CIA operations abroad to give the agency the needed tools to better do its clandestine work, including, the report vaguely said, reviewing the "limits on the use of non-official covers for hiding and protecting those involved in clandestine activities." According to the head of the task force, CFR president Richard N. Haass (a former senior member of the National Security Council under past US President George H.W. Bush), those "non-official covers" referred to the use of journalists and their news organizations, as well as members of the clergy and their religious organizations, as cover for CIA covert operations.

Washington Post national security affairs reporter Walter Pincus, the admitted past CIA operative, soon came out with an exclusive story, leaked by the CIA: the agency, using an "exceptions" clause in CIA policy dating back two decades, had been using journalists all along since the 1970s as part of its spy operations.⁸⁷

The ever-vigilant American news media and prominent US press-support organizations were caught totally off guard by the news. Exceptions for reporter-spies? What exceptions? But for those in the US corporate press who had bothered to look, the two-page CIA in-house directive—approved in November 1977 by then CIA director Stansfield Turner around the time of the congressional Aspin hearings on the CIA and the media—had been on the record ever since then. The final paragraph of the so-called Turner Directive, stating that the final judgment on using the press for spy purposes rested with the director of the CIA, read simply, "No exceptions to the policies and prohibitions stated above may be made except with the specific approval of the [Director of Central Intelligence]."⁸⁸ It was a loophole big enough to drive a truck through and the CIA had done just that, right under the noses of the US watchdog press.

Howls of surprise and indignation arose in the US corporate news media and from press-support organizations. Both houses of the US Congress, feeling the heat from the press and the public, were forced once again to address the issue.

Representative Bill Richardson (D-New Mexico), a member of the House Intelligence Committee, chose to push a bill through Congress that strictly prohibited the CIA by law from using members of

the American press as paid assets in any clandestine operation. But just before the bill was passed into law, Richardson inserted an additional “waiver” into the bill to allow a US president the power to override that restriction when necessary.⁸⁹

The Richardson bill was a partial victory at best for freedom of the press. Now the CIA director and the US president were the only ones who could legally decide when to allow CIA agents and American professional journalists to work together in CIA covert activities. But even bigger, decades-old loopholes were left untouched by the bill: the CIA’s longstanding use of accredited journalists in foreign countries and freelance journalists as spies.⁹⁰

Senator Arlen Specter (R-Pennsylvania), chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, chose to convene a one-day hearing on the issue a couple months later in July 1996. Then CIA director John Deutch testified before the committee that he was opposed to any kind of outright ban on the CIA and the press working together, and he maintained the right to use “exceptional waivers” in some cases when the CIA would need the secret services of an American journalist.⁹¹

At the end of the day, the Senate hearing in 1996, like most of the other congressional inquiries since the 1970s, concluded with no formal recommendations of any kind—and marked the last time that the US Congress would bother looking into the critical issue of the CIA’s relationship with the news media.

COMING CLEAN

The last rites were being pronounced in the late 1970s and early 1980s over the CIA’s Mighty Wurlitzer media network and its once-powerful sway over the workings of the press, both internationally and domestically in the USA. “Much of the Wurlitzer is now dismantled,” the *New York Times* reported, while within the CIA, the Mighty Wurlitzer was considered “now silent.”⁹²

But the reverberations continued long after the propaganda machine had given up its ghost. The 1980s found the CIA still using some journalists as part of its covert operations.⁹³ A sitting director of the CIA, William Casey, was serving as a major shareholder in a media company that bought out the much larger ABC television net-

work.⁹⁴ And Katharine Graham, board chairwoman and chief executive officer of the *Washington Post*, stood on the stage of the CIA auditorium at agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia, and assured her audience that she understood their pain.

“It’s an inescapable irony of democratic government that official secrecy is necessary to preserve liberty,” Graham said. “We live in a dirty and dangerous world. There are some things the general public does not need to know and shouldn’t. The government must have a classification system and should discipline employees who violate security regulations.”⁹⁵ Graham defended the role of a free press in society, but also acknowledged that the *Post* had occasionally censored its own news stories on national security grounds at the US government’s behest.

Fast-forward to 2014, and a *Los Angeles Times* reporter is exposed as cooperating with the CIA in the shaping of news stories, while a veteran journalist in Germany boldly blows the whistle on the lingering ghosts of the CIA’s Cold War–era propaganda network. That old network may be for the most part downsized or dismantled, but all the available evidence today points to an ongoing relationship between the CIA and the press that is as well-connected as ever in the digital age.

The year 2017 marks seven decades since the establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency. It also marks more than twenty years since the last serious look into the press and the CIA was taken by the US Congress, and forty years since the last significant exposures of that relationship by the American independent/alternative media and corporate press.

The kinds of activities that were at the core of the CIA’s media propaganda network of the past—paying US journalists as a part of spy operations or having CIA agents secretly work for US news companies—are today barred under the CIA’s own internal regulations and by law. But two people have the power to brush those restrictions aside and allow the official use of US journalists as spies: the director of the CIA and the president of the United States. The CIA’s use of professional journalists in countries outside the US and the use of freelance journalists (American or otherwise) as media assets is considered allowable, as is the use of any journalist on an unpaid, voluntary basis.

The whole story of the CIA and the US news media remains untold today, wrapped in a collusion of silence by a Fourth Estate that does not want to air its own dirty laundry and risk losing even more credibility among the public, by a Congress that is reluctant to confront and curtail the clandestine operations of the nation's most powerful spy agency, and by a CIA that has vowed to keep its media assets off-limits to public scrutiny "in perpetuity." While it is clear that the CIA has brazenly played the press under its former Mighty Wurlitzer media network, it is equally clear in the light of recent history that the institution of the free press in the USA has been more than willing at times to be played.

Major media institutions like the *New York Times* are quick to point an accusatory finger at other parties when it comes to improprieties, but are slow to confess and admit to their own. But the onus today is now on such elite media organizations to come clean once and for all about the "inseparable relationship" (as the *Washington Post* termed it) between the CIA and the press, and the disreputable role played by the American news media in the past in corrupting the free flow of factual information and subverting the truth in both the United States and countries around the world.⁹⁶

The traditionally close relationship between the media and the CIA is about much more than an ethical lapse here or a conflict of interest there: it goes straight to the heart of what an independent-minded, responsible, and open press should and should not be in any nation. Nearly seventy years after the original creation of the Mighty Wurlitzer propaganda network—after all the exposed secrets, congressional hearings, task force reports, and hidden histories—the time is ripe now for a full accounting of that network, with nothing less than the existence of the press as a pillar of democratic societies at stake in the twenty first century.

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