



Press Releases & Statements

DCI Statement on Declassification

July 15, 1998

The core of my job as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) is to mobilize the collection and analytical capabilities of the Central Intelligence Agency and the other U.S. intelligence agencies to ensure that our national leaders have the information necessary for informed policy decision making. Although much of our work must be done in secrecy, we have a responsibility to the American people, and to history, to account for our actions and the quality of our work. Accordingly, I have made a serious commitment to the public release of information that with the passage of time no longer needs to be protected under our security classification system.

Indeed, the CIA, like all agencies of the U.S. Government, is charged by Executive Order 12958 with instituting declassification programs to provide for the timely release of information it had previously classified. While intelligence information often retains its sensitivity for many years--even decades--there will eventually come a time when the information produced by such sources and methods can be released to the public without harm to the national security. While the Executive Order provides us authority to protect the identity of our confidential human sources indefinitely, and we must take care not to violate the confidence of any foreign government who chooses to work with us, the goal of our declassification program is to identify and release as much of the information as we can, as soon as we can, without harm to our national security interests.

Growing Demand for Information

I suspect, in fact, that the public has relatively little appreciation of the extent to which the CIA is already involved in declassification efforts.

- We declassify records requested by the John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Review Board.
- We declassify records requested by the State Department for its Foreign Relations of the United States series.
- We declassify records in response to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. And the public is probably unaware that not only are we required to answer requests from American citizens and corporations, but also from foreign nationals and foreign organizations as well.
- We declassify records in response to special requests from the Executive Branch and Congress, to include documents pertaining to POW/MIA matters, foreign human rights abuses, Gulf War Veterans illnesses, Nazi gold, and a myriad of other topics under investigation by Executive agencies or congressional committees at any given time.
- And we are reviewing for declassification all nonexempt records 25-years old or older. In the case of the CIA, this amounts to some 40-60 million pages of classified materials.

None of this is easy. There are no shortcuts here. It takes experienced, knowledgeable people sitting down with each document and going over it page by page, line by line. There is no alternative. We take our obligation to protect those who have worked with us in the past very seriously. We also have to consider the impact of release on our ongoing diplomatic and intelligence relationships. A mistake on our part can put a life in danger or jeopardize a bilateral relationship integral to our security.

Suffice it to say, the demands for declassification review far exceed the capabilities of the personnel who are available under current budgetary limitations to perform it. This forces us to make choices in terms of what information will be reviewed first. In setting these priorities, the Agency is guided by its responsibilities under the law and Executive Order, as well as by the policies established by the DCI.

Agency Releases

As a result of these efforts over the past five years, a significant amount of material of historical importance has been declassified:

- Over 227,000 pages of records on the assassination of President Kennedy have been released to the National Archives and Records Administration.
- Over 500 National Intelligence Estimates and more than 11,000 pages of finished intelligence on the former Soviet Union have been released; we expect to release another 100 Soviet NIEs this year.
- About 1,800 pages have been released on the Guatemala covert action and approximately 3,000 pages are ready for release on the Bay of Pigs.
- We have released over 4,000 pages from our intelligence journal, Studies in Intelligence, and have reviewed over 14,000 pages for the State Department's Foreign Relations of the United States series.
- An additional 31,000 pages of materials on various subjects have been released since 1992, including history source documents, monographs, and histories.

Improvements:

In order to improve further our ability to review and release information, effective last October, I established the Office of Information Management (OIM) to serve as the umbrella organization and focal point for all declassification and release programs within the Agency. I have asked the Director of OIM, Ed Cohen, to ensure that all of our programs are effectively coordinated and our limited resources efficiently managed, taking the fullest possible advantage of the latest automation technology. I am pleased to report that our output is increasing and shortly we will report numbers that will dwarf our prior successes.

I also tasked Ed with ensuring that we have in place a records management system that preserves and protects our records in full compliance with the guidelines established by the National Archives and Records Administration. Indeed, without a records management system that facilitates the identification of pertinent records in a timely manner, the declassification effort is itself made considerably more difficult.

Plans for Historical Declassification

Notwithstanding these improvements in our ability to cope with the growing demand, we continue to face the dilemma of where to apply our available resources. This becomes particularly important, I believe, where documents of historical interest are concerned. Out of this vast universe of classified information potentially available for review, where do we focus our

declassification efforts that would make the most difference?

I am announcing today the priorities that will guide the Agency's historical declassification efforts for the foreseeable future.

Top priority must continue to be given to the review and release of information related to the JFK assassination for so long as that particular inquiry continues. We must satisfy our statutory and moral obligations in this regard.

Top priority must also be given on a continuing basis to support of the State Department's Foreign Relations of the United States series, which constitutes the basic historical record of American foreign policy. It is important that the public, through access to these volumes, be able to judge for itself the contribution made by the Intelligence Community to the successful conduct of the Cold War.

I should also note that the Congress has asked that I give priority to the review and release of information on Guatemala-Honduras human rights violations. We are responding to requests from the Guatemala Historical Clarification Commission and to the Honduran Government Human Rights Ombudsman, and responding to hundreds of Freedom of Information Act requests on this subject. We are doing everything we can to complete work on this by the end of the summer.

At the next level of priority are records that will enable the public to understand the role of the Intelligence Community in the shaping of national policy. To assist me in establishing priorities among these records, I have consulted with my Historical Review Panel, chaired by Dr. S. Frederick Starr from Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, and composed of six other distinguished academics and historians: Dr. Lewis Bellardo, Dr. Robert Jervis, Dr. Ernest R. May, Dr. Page Putnam Miller, Dr. Robert Pastor, and Dr. Henry S. Rowen. After considering the recommendations made to me by a majority of the panel and consulting with my own staff, I have directed the Office of Information Management to review those records that pertain to policymaking at the highest levels--that is, National Intelligence Estimates and the National Intelligence Daily.

In addition, to help scholars research/explore the contribution of intelligence to the development of policy, the office files of former Directors of Central Intelligence also will be reviewed for declassification. In keeping with normal archival practice, we will proceed systematically to consider the earliest records first, presuming they would be less sensitive and result in the release of a greater number of documents. We also will consider records within a complete series rather than selecting records that pertained to particular topics in order that historians could gain as complete a picture as possible of a particular situation. I am hopeful that as certain projects such as the JFK assassination records review are completed, additional resources can be directed toward this effort.

Finally, I want to comment on the plans announced by two of my predecessors to review for possible declassification records on 11 covert actions undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s. The first tranche of documents--consisting of some 3200 pages--related to the Bay of Pigs soon will be released to the public. The remaining records related to the Bay of Pigs will be reviewed for release immediately thereafter. Work also is continuing on Guatemala--about 1800 pages were released to NARA last May and some 16-17,000 additional pages are being processed for release. We also will initiate declassification reviews, as soon as resources are available, of the materials involved in the covert actions undertaken during the Korean War, and in the Congo, Laos, and Dominican Republic during the 1960s. These reviews will be undertaken in the order I've just described.

We will address the remaining five covert actions identified by my predecessors as soon as the others have been completed. The fact is, we do not have sufficient resources at the current time to review the documentation involved in these five remaining covert actions. Moreover, in some cases, because of national security and foreign policy concerns, the amount of information that could be released about a particular program would be limited, and in other cases, the volume of documentation is so great that reviewing them for declassification would virtually prevent the release of other documents, which, in the view of my Historical Advisory Panel, should be given a higher priority. These include National Intelligence Estimates and finished intelligence analyses on the former Soviet Union, as well as the early records of the Office of the DCI. I have opted, therefore, to hold the reviews of these covert actions in abeyance for the time being.

I also wish to point out that our support to the State Department's Foreign Relations series--which I mentioned earlier will be given top priority--will itself lead to the publication of information concerning covert actions as they relate to the subject matter of particular volumes in that series. Indeed, it's possible that certain of the covert action programs selected by my predecessors for declassification review could be addressed on a more expedited basis as part of our support to the Foreign Relations series.

In closing, let me reiterate my belief that the American people are best served by having available the information necessary to understand how their government functions. In the case of CIA, this means information about its activities that allow the public to judge its impact and effectiveness over the years.

No other nation's foreign intelligence agency has voluntarily released as much information about its past as has the Central Intelligence Agency. And within the limits imposed upon me by law not to jeopardize intelligence sources or methods, impinge on our liaison relations with other countries, or interfere with our ability to carry out the Agency's mission, we will build upon that record in the years ahead.

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