

nent feature of the Watergate era was investigations of the CIA by committees headed by Frank Church in the Senate and Otis Pike in the House. They published evidence that the CIA had secretly planned to assassinate Fidel Castro and other foreign leaders. The President had not taken plain responsibility for these judgments. CIA officials had taken most of the blame, saying they had done so in order to preserve the President's "plausible deniability."⁷³

After the Watergate era, Congress established oversight committees to ensure that the CIA did not undertake covert action contrary to basic American law. Case officers in the CIA's Clandestine Service interpreted legislation, such as the Hughes-Ryan Amendment requiring that the president approve and report to Congress any covert action, as sending a message to them that covert action often leads to trouble and can severely damage one's career. Controversies surrounding Central American covert action programs in the mid-1980s led to the indictment of several senior officers of the Clandestine Service. During the 1990s, tension sometimes arose, as it did in the effort against al Qaeda, between policymakers who wanted the CIA to undertake more aggressive covert action and wary CIA leaders who counseled prudence and making sure that the legal basis and presidential authorization for their actions were undeniably clear.

The Clandestine Service felt the impact of the post-Cold War peace dividend, with cuts beginning in 1992. As the number of officers declined and overseas facilities were closed, the DCI and his managers responded to developing crises in the Balkans or in Africa by "surging," or taking officers from across the service to use on the immediate problem. In many cases the surge officers had little familiarity with the new issues. Inevitably, some parts of the world and some collection targets were not fully covered, or not covered at all. This strategy also placed great emphasis on close relations with foreign liaison services, whose help was needed to gain information that the United States itself did not have the capacity to collect.

The nadir for the Clandestine Service was in 1995, when only 25 trainees became new officers.⁷⁴ In 1998, the DCI was able to persuade the administration and the Congress to endorse a long-range rebuilding program. It takes five to seven years of training, language study, and experience to bring a recruit up to full performance.⁷⁵

Analysis. The CIA's Directorate of Intelligence retained some of its original character of a university gone to war. Its men and women tended to judge one another by the quantity and quality of their publications (in this case, classified publications). Apart from their own peers, they looked for approval and guidance to policymakers. During the 1990s and today, particular value is attached to having a contribution included in one of the classified daily "newspapers"—the Senior Executive Intelligence Brief—or, better still, selected for inclusion in the President's Daily Brief.⁷⁶