

The rise and fall of the CIA

What do you think of the CIA?" I asked a former director of U.S. military intelligence. "A bunch of lily-livered, liberal preppies," he sneered, "who don't know squat about anything but tennis."

Wait a minute. This isn't the nefarious CIA shown by the media, or the CIA of left wingers who positively shudder with loathing at the mere mention of the intelligence agency. Where is the old CIA of exploding cigars for Castro or midnight parachute drops?

Gone — probably for good. More evidence came this week. Incredibly, it was finally confirmed that the CIA had labored for years to block delivery of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and other hi-tech gear to the Afghan resistance. Only intense pressure from Congress, the president and an outraged public finally forced the CIA to cave in and ship the missiles.

The agency reportedly was afraid that giving the resistance Stingers might provoke a major Soviet attack against Pakistan.

For the past three years, I have constantly heard the refrain: "Why aren't the Stingers getting to the mujahedins?" Well, now we know. Thank the CIA for stopping delivery of the same missiles that have decimated Soviet air power in Afghanistan and brought Moscow to the negotiating table.

Why would the CIA do this?

Forget about James Bond and the days of cloak and dagger. The CIA has become just another giant Washington bureaucracy, filled with paper-passers, time-servers and careerists. Only more secretive and less susceptible to public scrutiny and accountability. The motto is: "Don't rock the boat."



Thank Congress and Jimmy Carter for gelding the CIA. First came Watergate and the Church commission. After ruining Richard Nixon, publicity-seeking liberals in Congress nearly wrecked the CIA. The very strange William Colby, a man of murky loyalties, was put in charge. Seasoned veterans were purged and vital covert operations shut down. Morale collapsed.

Next came Carter, who sent in Adm. Stansfield Turner as new director with orders to shrink the organization and get rid of any remaining "cowboys."

The key operations directorate — the people who got things done — was gutted. The most experienced and skilled cadres and field agents were either fired or resigned. What remained was the CIA's research and evaluation staff — "chairborne rangers," as they are derisively known in the trade.

When the late William Casey became CIA director, he inherited a demoralized, frightened collection of sullen bureaucrats who were scared to do anything for fear of running afoul of Congress or the media. Critics accused the agency of merely telling Congress what it wanted to hear. They claimed the CIA no longer even reported to the executive, as originally intended, but had been taken over by Congress, which granted its budget requests and approved promotions.

This is quite clearly why Casey had Ollie North use the National Security Council to do what the CIA's operations directorate should have been doing, but dared not. Casey also found he could not trust most of the senior CIA mandarins who had been promoted to high positions during the Carter years and owed their careers to liberal democrats in Congress — and to caution.

To them, the CIA's role was only to provide organized information and assessment, not to run covert foreign operations that had so often exploded in the CIA's face. Everyone remembered how John Kennedy's indecision and fear caused the Bay of Pigs disaster, and how he had laid the blame on the agency, firing some top men.

In the most recent presidential fiasco — the Iran-Contra arms imbroglio — senior CIA men were blamed though they had only been obeying orders from higher up. An angry Congress caused more heads to roll.

So no wonder the CIA opposed shipping Stingers to the mujahedin. If the Soviets had reacted by doing something beastly, petrified Congressional liberals would have demanded, "Who authorized shipment of the Stingers?" Whoever did, would have soon found himself out looking for a non-government job. And what exactly is a 55-year-old career agent fit to do — work as a security guard?

What's more, critics claim the CIA gets 98% of its data from the larger, and far more secret National Security Agency via spy satellites and radio intercepts. "Humint," or intelligence produced by agents in place, seems a dying source. All the CIA does, they say, is shuffle papers and fret about promotions.

If James Bond had been with the CIA, Dr. No might still be in business.