

# **Documents reveal CIA activity at past political conventions**

Last year, the Central Intelligence Agency released a raft of documents detailing sensitive and controversial operations from its past - including surveillance programs aimed at U.S journalists, and drug experiments conducted on unwilling test subjects.

Also revealed in the so-called "Family Jewels" files were extensive patterns of involvement with domestic police agencies - ranging from training, to loaning equipment, to assisting with the surveillance of political groups inside the United States. In addition, the documents detail CIA operations at the national political conventions during the late 1960s. These past activities raise intriguing questions for the present, as the federal government's security apparatus begins to deploy itself in Saint Paul, in advance of the 2008 Republican National Convention.

Many of the "Family Jewels" operations were conducted in direct violation of the agency's charter, and their previous exposure during the 1970s led to the creation of today's congressional intelligence oversight system. The newly released documents refer to numerous events studied by congressional investigators during the mid-1970s, when Congress conducted its first in-depth examination of the methods and practices of the intelligence community. In comments published by the Washington Post, current CIA Director Michael Hayden said of the document release, "Most of it is unflattering, but it is CIA's history."

## **Police contact pervasive**

While the "Family Jewels" files contain flamboyant details about the CIA's past conduct - such as its maintenance of assassination programs for foreign leaders - the documents also reveal less spectacular, but more pervasive activities. These activities included wide-ranging collaborations between departments of the CIA, and local police agencies.

The files show that CIA-police cooperation during the 1960s and 70s involved a variety of initiatives - many of them related to the social protest movements of the time. For instance, the files reveal that from 1969 to 1971 the Agency provided the Washington DC Metropolitan Police Department with a communications system to monitor "major anti-Vietnam War

demonstrations in the Washington area." The documents note that the "system consisted of a radio receiver and an Agent at the Intelligence Division Headquarters, and several automobiles from the Washington field office equipped with radio receivers and transmitters."

CIA assistance extended beyond the provision of surveillance technology and support, and included the fielding of undercover agents. One undercover operation detailed in the files ran from February 1967, to November 1971, and involved a CIA proprietary organization that "recruited and handled several Agents for the purpose of covertly monitoring dissident groups in the Washington area considered to be potential threats to Agency personnel and installations." The files also note that "one of these Agents so successfully penetrated one dissident group that she was turned over to the FBI for handling."

During this time, the Agency also provided various types of material support to local police departments, ranging from "clandestine transmitters and touch-tone dial recorders" to large quantities of riot control equipment. Page 32 of the files contains an extensive list of items provided to Washington DC area police, including gas masks, flak vests, stun guns, tear gas, and chemical cartridges. A memo from CIA Security Director Howard Osborn outlines the Agency's thinking behind the provision of riot equipment:

"During the period when the Agency's installations in this area appeared to be a target of dissident elements, a conscious decision was made by the Agency to utilize the services of local police to repel invaders in case of riot or dissension as opposed to the utilization of our GSA guards, who are not trained in this type of activity."

In addition to providing hardware, the Agency appears to have offered a variety of training programs to local law enforcement officers, ranging from classes in explosives handling, to investigative tools.

### **Activity at political conventions**

CIA support for domestic law enforcement extended beyond municipal police departments, and included federal agencies such as the Secret Service and FBI. The Agency's newly declassified documents indicate that it offered various kinds of assistance to Secret Service agents at the 1968 political conventions. Such support included providing "name traces and other intelligence information relating to subversive influences which might affect

those conventions," as well as "audio countermeasures support." This countermeasure activity related to sweeping candidates and their living quarters for listening devices. The "Family Jewels" files indicate that Agency personnel provided this service at both the 1968 Democratic and Republican conventions, with Agency personnel operating under Secret Service credentials.

A heavily redacted memo from Howard Osborn also cryptically refers to equipment tests conducted just prior to the 1968 Republican National Convention in Miami. Osborn's memo states that "in the course of running these tests, our technicians were in and out of some four hotels in Miami, with radio equipment. This was shortly before the political conventions, and at least one of the hotels was within a block of the convention hall."

The type of equipment involved in these tests was withheld from the newly released documents, but the unclassified portion of Osborn's memo notes that public awareness of the tests "might conceivably have an embarrassment potential for the Agency," despite his belief that the equipment test was "completely innocent - although subject to misconstrual."

### **Pushing legal boundaries**

Many of the domestic operations outlined in the "Family Jewels" files raised significant legal issues. Since the creation of the CIA, the Agency has been prohibited from operating domestically - including in a law enforcement capacity. The CIA's charter as set forth in the National Security Act of 1947 specifies that the Agency, "shall have no police, subpoena, or law enforcement powers or internal security functions."

Despite this prohibition, evidence of domestic operations is found throughout the "Family Jewels" documents. The basic contours of the Agency's domestic activities were discussed extensively during the 1975 Pike and Church investigative hearings, but the newly declassified files add fresh details to the public understanding of the CIA's past actions - including its internal debates over the legality of various programs, such as its police assistance mission.

Many of the Agency's internal memos from this period demonstrate a belief that such assistance fell into a legal "gray area." For instance, a 1973 memorandum from CIA department head James Murphy notes that his

department "has not engaged in any activity outside the CIA charter, or that could be construed as illegal. Some of the functions that we perform ... however, are perhaps borderline or could be construed as illegal if misinterpreted." At the same time, other memos note a refusal on the part of some CIA personnel to become involved in law enforcement operations. One such memorandum notes a request from the IRS to provide assistance in a "domestic search of 'moonshine' stills using CIA infrared scanners." The memo subsequently notes that "this request was turned down."

Some of the "Family Jewels" memoranda explicitly document the desire of Agency officials to scrub existing CIA documents for evidence of domestic operations. Several internal memos pertaining to a CIA study of student radicalism note that "the author included in his text a study of student radicals in the United States, thereby exceeding the Agency's charter." The same memos recommend that before the study was disseminated further, "the text should be further edited for the purpose of eliminating even the most casual reference to the domestic scene -- lest someone infer from a chance reference that the original paper had contained a section on American students."

Still other internal documents offer frank assessments of the potential political fallout of revelations about domestic operations. A 1973 memo from CIA security chief Howard Osborn notes that Watergate prosecutors had interviewed Washington DC Metro police officers regarding the CIA's training programs for local police. Osborn's memo states his belief that "of extreme sensitivity is the fact that these same individuals were engaged in other highly sensitive activities which could cause the Agency severe embarrassment if they were surfaced today in the current Watergate climate."

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