Cold War Anthropology

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On Christmas Day, 1966, anthropologist Elizabeth Bacon wrote Ralph Beals a letter containing the following short historical overview:

**Before World II, the U.S. had little in the way of intelligence for limited activities of the Army and Navy. Even the State Department had no resident representatives in some areas, relying on British or other consular and diplomatic officers to care for the occasional American traveler. With U.S. entry into World War II, U.S. interest became global. The State Department opened legations where it had had none before, and raided the universities for area specialists to staff the Washington office. The first attempt at organizing an information agency, coi (Coordinator of Information), proved too cumbersome, and was divided to form owi (Office of War Information), a propaganda agency, and oss (Office of Strategic Services).

**oss had five branches:** r&A (Research and Analysis); si (Secret Intelligence); and three cloak and dagger branches whose exploits have been widely publicized, most recently by Allen Dulles’ new book. si, the fact-gathering branch, and r&A, the analysis branch, worked together quite closely; they had no contacts with the cloak and dagger branches. At the end of the war, r&A was taken over by State, where it became oir (Office of Intelligence Research). si and the cloak and dagger branches formed the basis of cia (Central Intelligence Agency).

**The dangers of subordinating fact-gathering to planners conditioned by experience and temperament to daredevil exploits are obvious. The imbalance was accentuated by the fact that most of the r&A people did not remain with oir. A majority returned to academia; others transferred to other governmental departments where research was less subject to the vagaries of political crises. Not surprisingly, cia flowed in oir to fill the vacuum.**

**For example, it had been discovered during the war, in areas not involved in fighting, that much useful intelligence could be obtained openly more readily than secretly. After the war, a new type of post was established in the State**
Department, that of research attaché. This, as far as I know, worked well enough. No government would object to a research attaché any more than it would object to a military attaché. But when the Eisenhower administration came into office, with John Foster Dulles [as] Secretary of State, and adventure-minded brother Allen head of CIA, this position was abolished “for economy reasons.” This, of course, meant turning over to CIA the open fact-gathering activities which State was trying to develop. The present resident CIA agent in Afghanistan is presumably doing the work of research attaché. If he had that title, there would be no problem. Instead, he operates under three academic covers (one a front organization, the other two bona fide academic institutions), and proclaims himself an anthropologist at the top of his voice.

. . . With the vast expansion of intelligence activities during World War II, there was an urgent need for personnel with real experience. The people who had this background and were able to use it effectively were to a considerable extent academics and other professionals. At the end of the war one might have expected a program to train professional operatives who, with varied covers, could settle in a country and blend into the landscape. Instead, the emphasis seems to be on “quickie” operations, to get information on areas where the need is immediate, using the easiest cover that comes to mind.

There have, of course, been training programs usually with the emphasis on language. You will perhaps remember the number of special language training programs for “businessmen and government officials” that burgeoned among the universities after World War II. There are still plenty of intensive programs for “exotic” languages (vide the last ACLS Newsletter for next summer’s programs). It would be interesting to discover what proportions of the students enrolled in such programs are casuals — that is, not graduate students planning to specialize in an area or teach languages.

Before World War II, there were very few area programs in the U.S. The Army astp during the war gave great impetus to area studies, and after the war a number of area programs were established in universities around the country. Also the Ford Foundation set up its program for Foreign Area Training. In some universities the area programs were presumably set up on the initiative of university personnel. In others, it seems likely that CIA provided the
initiative. I suspect this of one university, and consider it possible that the UCLA Middle East Center may have this background.

. . . To sum up, CIA is conducting its intelligence operations as if it were a cloak and dagger organization in wartime and seems never to have adjusted to the normal peacetime pattern of other countries, of trained professional agents located permanently at strategic locations. Instead, it seems to be going in for “saturation coverage,” sending everyone it can find into strategic areas. For years, the proliferation of CIA and psychological warfare people in Bangkok has been notorious. In Saigon there are bars patronized only by CIA operatives. And these operatives are so obvious that everyone knows who they are. I have heard the same stories of obviousness from parts of Africa. . . .

Anthropological research is certainly being endangered by the activities of CIA. (RB 75, EB to RB 12/25/66)
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