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## Journalism, intelligence and The New York Times: Cyrus L. Sulzberger, Harrison E. Salisbury and the CIA

**Article (Accepted version)  
(Refereed)**

**Original citation:**

Jones, Matthew (2015) *Journalism, intelligence and The New York Times: Cyrus L. Sulzberger, Harrison E. Salisbury and the CIA*. *History*. 100 (340). pp. 229-250. ISSN 0018-2648 ISSN

DOI: [10.1111/1468-229X.12096](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12096)

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Available in LSE Research Online: December 2014

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**Journalism, intelligence and *The New York Times*: Cyrus L. Sulzberger, Harrison E. Salisbury and the CIA**

In early June 1966, Cyrus L. Sulzberger, the renowned former Chief Foreign Correspondent of *The New York Times* – a Pulitzer Prize winner fifteen years before, friend to numerous world leaders, and a confidant of Charles de Gaulle - met Dean Acheson, the ex-US Secretary of State, to discuss the problems facing the Western Alliance precipitated by France's recent departure from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Their conversation was soon interrupted, however, by an urgent message from the then head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Richard Helms, who was insistent that he speak with Sulzberger. Acheson left the room while Sulzberger took the telephone call, in which Helms asked if he could see the journalist for a brief talk later in the day. Returning to his office, a tickled Acheson could not resist teasing Sulzberger with the comment: 'This certainly raises your prestige. Are you a spy?'<sup>1</sup> Over a decade later, in October 1977, Acheson's friendly jibe became of direct pertinence, as the connections between the worlds of journalism and intelligence formed the subject of heated public debate and comment when Carl Bernstein, the investigative reporter who had helped to uncover the Watergate scandal while working for the *Washington Post*, published an article in *Rolling Stone* magazine which alleged that over the previous quarter of a century over 400 American journalists had carried out 'assignments' for the

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<sup>1</sup> Entry for 3 June 1966, C. L. Sulzberger, *An Age of Mediocrity: Memoirs and Diaries, 1963-1972* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 270.

CIA.<sup>2</sup> Many of Bernstein's allegations, had, in fact, already surfaced over the previous few years, but one new 'revelation' which attracted particular attention was that Cyrus Sulzberger, whose uncle Arthur Hays Sulzberger was also the publisher of the *New York Times*, had been a long-time CIA 'asset', and was still regarded as such by the Agency.

The relationship between the CIA and the American news media has received little sustained scholarly attention.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is a subject which illuminates many of the state-private networks that underlay much of the apparatus, and the American mind-set, which underpinned US national security policy in the Cold War.<sup>4</sup> The professions of intelligence and journalism are often regarded as dealing with the related currencies of contacts and information. To the intelligence officer, journalists can provide a ready source of information (and perspectives on an issue) that might otherwise be difficult to access in a particular target country. In the most complicit types of relationship, press accreditation is a natural 'cover' for clandestine work. For a journalist in search of a scoop that might advance their career, intelligence officers might be able to supply the story or leads that made for headline news.<sup>5</sup> The ethical integrity of the journalist, however, has usually been predicated on maintaining a healthy distance from the

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<sup>2</sup> See Carl Bernstein, 'The CIA and the Media,' *Rolling Stone*, 20 October 1977, 55-67; for background, see Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 224-7.

<sup>3</sup> Though see Loch K. Johnson, 'The CIA and the Media,' *Intelligence and National Security*, 1, 2, 1986, 143-69; Richard J. Aldrich, 'Regulation by Revelation? Intelligence, the Media and Transparency,' in Robert Dover and Michael S. Goodman (eds), *Spinning Intelligence: Why Intelligence Needs the Media, Why the Media Needs Intelligence* (London: Hurst, 2009), 13-35; and Tity de Vries, 'The 1967 Central Intelligence Agency Scandal: Catalyst in a Transforming Relationship between State and People,' *Journal of American History*, 98, 4, 2012, 1075-92.

<sup>4</sup> On this theme see Helen Laville and Hugh Wilford (eds.), *The US Government, Citizen Groups, and the Cold War: The state-private network* (London: Cass, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, 'The CIA and the Media,' 144-5.

institutions of the state, with the ‘reporter’ ideally cast in the role of a disinterested and impassive observer. Public trust in a newspaper and its journalists has typically been built on perceptions of independence from government control and influence; during the early Cold War period it was the free press of the West that was often held up in stark contrast to the subservient behaviour of newspapers under Communist systems.

Many of the high-profile stories that surfaced during the 1970s of the close association between the CIA and several leading US newspaper reporters and editors served to complicate such straightforward assumptions. Examining the ramifications of Bernstein’s article for the relationship between Sulzberger and another of the major figures in post-war American journalism, Harrison E. Salisbury, brings such issues into sharper focus. The correspondence between Sulzberger and Salisbury, as the latter sought to investigate the basis of Bernstein’s allegations while researching *Without Fear or Favor*, his 1980 book on the recent history of the *New York Times*, reveals the costs to a long friendship of the ambiguous ethics surrounding contacts between intelligence officers and practicing journalists.<sup>6</sup> Further, the uncomfortable revelation that Salisbury unearthed during his research – that the CIA had also seen himself as a cooperative resource to be tapped as needed – underlines the hazards involved.

Rumours and stories about the CIA’s links with the media were already in wide circulation by the early 1970s. In response to the growing revelations, during 1973 the then Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), William Colby, began a process of reducing the Agency’s involvement with journalists while keeping public comment to a

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<sup>6</sup> See Harrison E. Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor: The New York Times and Its Times* (New York: Times Books, 1980).

minimum.<sup>7</sup> This readjustment culminated in a press briefing given by Colby in November 1973 where he announced that at one time the CIA had had about three dozen journalists on its payroll, but the practice had now been discarded; quiet and informal relationships with reporters and editors would, however, continue.<sup>8</sup>

The CIA obviously hoped that a line could be drawn under past practices when it came to the extent of its involvement with the news media. During the US Senate's Church Committee investigations of CIA activities in 1975, senior figures in the Agency had managed to persuade members of the panel that a full enquiry into relations with journalists would do great damage both to current operations and the reputations of many prominent individuals; Colby, for example, had argued that it would lead to a 1950s-style witch-hunt of those suspected of having improper associations.<sup>9</sup> Agency officials advising the enquiry, such as Walter Elder, a former CIA deputy to John A. McCone (who served as DCI between 1961 and 1965), maintained that because the relationships were of a voluntary nature, the Committee had no jurisdiction. Moreover, the CIA was felt by some Committee staffers to have manipulated its work by being forthcoming with documents over such headline grabbing subjects as assassination plots and covert operations overseas, while protecting what it still regarded were its most valuable sources in the news media world. A former CIA officer, William B. Bader, had been employed

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<sup>7</sup> See William Colby, *Honourable Men: My Life in the CIA* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 377.

<sup>8</sup> See '3 Dozen American Journalists Are Said to Do Work for CIA,' *New York Times*, 1 December 1973; Johnson, 'The CIA and the Media,' 146.

<sup>9</sup> Bernstein, 'CIA and the Media,' 65. For the work of the Church Committee, see Loch Johnson, *A Season of Inquiry: The Senate Intelligence Investigation* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985); Kathryn S. Olmstead, *Challenging the Secret Government: The Post Watergate Investigations of the CIA and FBI* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

by the Committee to lead its foreign intelligence task force and, with assistance from David Aaron, oversaw its examination of the links with the news media.<sup>10</sup> From the start they met obstruction from inside the Agency, as first access to files was denied completely, and then, after appeal, only bare summaries of several hundred representative files provided with names of individuals and organizations omitted. Nevertheless, with the scale of the contacts becoming all too apparent from just this selection, Bader was sure that the relationships they inferred warranted further investigation. The CIA, for its part, made clear that the summaries were as far as it was prepared to go on the subject. Eventually, after much coaxing from Church Committee members and a meeting in March 1976 with Colby's successor as DCI, George H. W. Bush, Bader was allowed to see twenty-five full files, picked from among the 400 or so summaries he had seen, but with the names still blanked out. Two senators (Frank Church, the Committee chair, and John Tower, his vice-chair) were also allowed to see unsanitized versions of five files.

It was apparent to those who were given such privileged access that the CIA had maintained deep and extensive relationships with American journalists from the 1950s to the early 1970s, including dealings with some of the leading news outlets in the country. Yet despite this, no further revelations were generated, with Bush, Colby, and Elder all successfully appealing to the Committee and its staff not to dig any deeper, as further investigation might prejudice current sources of intelligence, as well as ruin reputations and lives. Nonetheless, when the Church Committee published its final report in April 1976, it contained the opinion that as of the beginning of the year perhaps as many as 50 US journalists or employees of US news organizations 'were employed by the CIA or

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<sup>10</sup> On Bader's role for the Church Committee, see Johnson, *Season of Inquiry*, 33-4, 41.

maintained some other covert relationship' with the Agency.<sup>11</sup> Despite the expectation of some Church Committee staffers, including Bader, that in due course the story would be pursued in a methodical and responsible way by the new permanent Senate Intelligence Committee, charged with oversight of all US intelligence agencies, the subject was quietly dropped, with many senators on the committee unaware even of what had occurred. Frank Church was obviously sensitive to the charge that his committee had been less than thorough in its work, later exclaiming on hearing of Bernstein's 1977 assertions, 'We never said we got everything ... I'm sick and tired of every three months having someone say there is another cover-up.' As to Bernstein's central contentions, they were 'baseless', and his article a 'rehash of an old story.'<sup>12</sup> The Church Committee's counterpart in the House, led by Congressman Otis Pike, had made some headway during 1975 with the issue, and in its unpublished final report disclosed that five reporters working for major US news organizations had had 'informant relationships' with the CIA, though these had indeed been ended by Colby. It was also revealed, moreover, that eleven CIA officers were then using news or journalistic cover abroad.<sup>13</sup>

Away from Congress, the news media itself was beginning to examine its past record. In January 1976, the *New York Times*, for example, published a story by John Crewdson which described how the CIA had tried to recruit Wayne Phillips, one of its reporters in the early 1950s; the most damaging aspect of the allegations carried by the story was that CIA representatives had claimed to have a special relationship with the then publisher of the *Times*, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, which allowed it to place the

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<sup>11</sup> See Richard Harwood and Walter Pincus, 'The CIA's Journalists,' *Washington Post*, 18 September 1977; Bernstein, 'CIA and the Media,' 65-7.

<sup>12</sup> Harwood and Pincus, 'The CIA's Journalists'.

<sup>13</sup> 'C.I.A. Data Asked by Times and CBS,' *New York Times*, 10 February 1976.

paper's reporters on its payroll.<sup>14</sup> Responding to what was becoming a slew of stories, George Bush, the new DCI, announced in early 1976 that the CIA would henceforth eschew paid or contractual relationships with any full- or part-time news correspondent from whatever media outlet. He had added, however, that the voluntary and unpaid cooperation of journalists would still be welcomed by the Agency, while blocking further Congressional attempts to probe deeper into the subject.<sup>15</sup>

As he freely acknowledged, Bernstein was to come extent recycling some of this older material in the article that appeared in the October 1977 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine. 'Some of these journalists' relationships with the Agency were tacit; some were explicit,' Bernstein had written. 'There was cooperation, accommodation and overlap. Journalists provided a full range of clandestine services – from simple intelligence-gathering to serving as go-betweens with spies in Communist countries. Reporters shared their notebooks with the CIA. Editors shared their staffs.' Moreover, this was an area of its activity that the Agency was particularly keen to keep away from public scrutiny. Only nine pages of the Church Committee's final and voluminous report, Bernstein had highlighted, were devoted to the CIA's links to journalists, and it was a topic covered in 'vague and sometimes misleading terms', with the Committee having been given only very limited access to relevant Agency files. Bernstein divided the journalists he claimed had ties to the CIA into various categories. In a practice begun under Allen Dulles, the DCI between 1953 and 1961, reporters returning from an

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<sup>14</sup> See John M. Crewdson, 'C.I.A. Tried in 50's to Recruit Times Man,' *New York Times*, 31 January 1976; 'Reporter Tells of CIA Offer,' *Washington Post*, 1 February 1976.

<sup>15</sup> See Crewdson, 'Senators and Bush Heading for Clash on C.I.A.-Journalist Data,' *New York Times*, 16 February 1976; Crewdson, 'Senators Won't Seek Newsmen's Names at C.I.A.,' *New York Times*, 18 February 1976; Bernstein, 'CIA and the Media,' 64-5.



overseas posting or assignment were regularly invited to meet senior CIA personnel where they would offer their impressions, provide information, and go through what the Agency described as ‘debriefing’. Only the DCI himself, or his deputies, had a thorough knowledge of the extent of the ties with the world of American journalism, so sensitive was it considered.<sup>16</sup>

As well as offering a fuller picture, where Bernstein differed from previous accounts was in his use of unnamed CIA sources, some of which had had access to the Agency’s files on the subject, and which were able to corroborate stories and rumours that his own enquiries had picked up. Not only, Bernstein alleged, was the CIA’s relationship with the journalistic profession one of its most productive means of intelligence gathering and offering ‘cover’, but investigation of these links in the 1950s and 1960s would be embarrassing to many powerful and famous names in the field. The most important associations, Bernstein’s CIA sources had claimed, was with the *New York Times*, CBS, and Time Inc., while the most extensive use of journalists was seen in Western Europe, Latin America, and the Far East, rather than in the Soviet bloc countries.<sup>17</sup> In his account of the CIA’s dealings with the *New York Times*, Bernstein alleged that between 1950 and 1966 about ten CIA employees were given cover by the newspaper under the authority of Arthur Hays Sulzberger, who had instigated a policy of providing assistance whenever he could do so. This involved giving *Times* credentials to CIA employees posing as stringers abroad, or give jobs on the staff of the newspaper’s foreign bureau. Sulzberger had even signed a non-disclosure agreement in the 1950s, so that the Agency’s involvement with the newspaper was to some extent protected from

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 55-6.

exposure.<sup>18</sup> As Bernstein was eager to stress, the *New York Times* was a natural subject for CIA attention. It maintained the largest overseas operation of any US news outlet, and its reporters had access to foreign territories and individuals enjoyed by few other American citizens; its journalists could also, of course, ask questions without necessarily arousing suspicion. Moreover, Arthur Sulzberger had close social ties to Allen Dulles, and much of the help provided by the newspaper could be agreed between the two of them informally, though the detailed arrangements were handled by subordinates.<sup>19</sup>

It was, however, Bernstein's depiction of Cyrus Sulzberger, Arthur's nephew, that drew much attention. A major figure among the pantheon of American foreign correspondents, whose his multi-volume diaries are a delightful source for diplomatic historians, Cyrus Sulzberger had established his reputation in the field during the late 1930s and early 1940s with his coverage of Balkan politics, flitting between Belgrade, Budapest, Sofia, Bucharest, Istanbul and Athens.<sup>20</sup> After the Axis advance had driven him from the region in 1941, he had widened his scope to the Middle East and Cairo, and reported on the Russian war effort from Moscow; in September 1944, aged only thirty-two, Sulzberger was given the title chief foreign correspondent by the *New York Times*, overseeing all overseas news coverage and responsible for planning the newspaper's post-war foreign service.<sup>21</sup> In 1946, Sulzberger settled in Paris from which base he developed contacts with many of the leading figures on the international political stage

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 60-1.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>20</sup> See Cyrus L. Sulzberger, *A Long Row of Candles: Memoirs and Diaries, 1934-54* (New York: Macmillan, 1969); *The Last of the Giants* (New York: Macmillan, 1970); *An Age of Mediocrity: Memoirs and Diaries, 1963-1972* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); *Postscript with a Chinese Accent: Memoirs and Diaries, 1972-1973* (New York: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>21</sup> See Sulzberger, *Long Row of Candles*, 243.

(and forged his particularly close connection with de Gaulle), controlled a network of sources, and enjoyed legendary access to many top US policymakers.<sup>22</sup> ‘If the CIA had tried to invent a journalist who would be eternally useful to its intelligence arm,’ Harrison Salisbury later wrote, ‘it could not have created a better one than Cyrus Leo Sulzberger.’<sup>23</sup> In 1954, Sulzberger gave up the role of chief foreign correspondent but took on the authorship of a regular column, ‘Foreign Affairs’, which appeared on the newspaper’s editorial page and became his pedestal until stepping down from the *New York Times* in 1977. Always somewhat arrogant and aloof, contemporaries described Sulzberger as having become irascible and even bitter (and left distraught by the premature death of his Greek wife the year before), his isolation from the mainstream of the *New York Times* made plain by the newspaper management’s insistence that he retire at sixty-five, when others of his illustrious generation, such as James Reston, were retained.

On 2 September 1977, recently widowed, and settled in retirement on the Greek island of Spetsais, Sulzberger received a phone call out of blue from Bernstein, who treated the veteran reporter to a cascade of questions about his links with the Agency. After an hour and a half of conversation, Sulzberger had told Bernstein the allegation he had been an asset ‘was a lot of tommyrot.’ Sulzberger’s immediate reaction to the call was to wonder who in the CIA was trying to smear him. A few days later Sulzberger received another call, this time from the *New York Times* office which relayed advance sections of the *Rolling Stones* piece to Sulzberger, making it plain that Bernstein had

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<sup>22</sup> On Sulzberger’s relationship with de Gaulle, see Sulzberger, *Last of the Giants*, 9 and passim.

<sup>23</sup> Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, 457.

already composed his article a long time before they had spoken. When asked if the allegations were true, Sulzberger ‘replied in a series of spluttering negatives,’ while his first instinct had been to refuse the *Times*’s request that he issue a formal denial, Sulzberger professing he did not want to dignify the story with a response: ‘it was pointless... to engage in a pissing contest with a skunk.’<sup>24</sup>

In Bernstein’s published piece, Sulzberger was classed as one of ‘perhaps a dozen’ ‘columnists and commentators’ who were ‘considered receptive to the Agency’s point of view on various subjects’ and whose relationship with the CIA went ‘far beyond those normally maintained between reporters and their sources.’ Alongside the famous columnists Joseph and Stewart Alsop, who were unashamed about the assorted tasks that they had performed at the behest of CIA officials, Sulzberger was said by one CIA source to be ‘very eager, he loved to cooperate.’ The relationship was pictured in reciprocal terms by those who spoke to Bernstein: ‘We’d say, “We’d like to know this: if we tell you this will it help you get access to so-and-so?” There was sharing, give and take ... Because of his access in Europe he had an Open Sesame. We’d ask him to just report: “What did so-and-so say, what did he look like, is he healthy?”’<sup>25</sup> There was even an instance, Bernstein’s sources related, where Sulzberger asked for some background for a piece, the CIA supplied a briefing paper, and he published it verbatim under his own name.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Untitled Sulzberger TS, pp13-16, box 156, Harrison E. Salisbury papers (HESP), Butler Library, Columbia University.

<sup>25</sup> Bernstein, ‘CIA and the Media,’ 59-60.

<sup>26</sup> The article in question was, ‘Where the Spies Are,’ *New York Times*, 13 September 1967. E. Howard Hunt claimed, in an October 1977 edition of *More* magazine, that he had largely written the piece, at the original behest of Helms, and it was based on information provided by Howard Osborn, the CIA’s Director of Security, see ‘Hunt

Bernstein reproduced the notes he had derived from his earlier telephone conversation with Sulzberger, where the latter denied any wrong-doing. To the story that, like his uncle, he had signed a secrecy agreement with the Agency in the 1950s, Sulzberger's recollection was that he had been asked to sign one by an Agency man who had said, 'You are a responsible newsman and we need you to sign this if we are going to show you anything classified.' Professing at the time that he did not want to get entangled, Sulzberger referred the matter to his uncle, and so he may have gone on to sign, but his memory some twenty years later was not clear on the subject. As for the accusation that he was 'tasked' by the Agency, Sulzberger denied any such relationship, and 'he would never get caught near the spook business. My relations were totally informal – I had a good many friends ... I'm sure they consider me an asset. They can ask me questions. They find out you're going to Slobovia and they say, "Can we talk to you when you get back?" Or they'll want to know if the head of the Ruritanian government is suffering from psoriasis. But I never took an assignment from one of those guys.'" Admitting that he had known Frank Wisner (head of the CIA's covert action arm in the 1950s) and Helms well, and had played golf with John McCone, Sulzberger claimed nevertheless that 'they'd have had to be awfully subtle to have used me.'<sup>27</sup>

The explosive contents of Bernstein's article was known to several news organizations before it actually appeared, and many were active in issuing denials, saying they had been unable to find any evidence to substantiate the claims. Having finally been

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Claims Authorship of CIA Article,' *Washington Post*, 18 September 1977; see also Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, 568.

<sup>27</sup> Bernstein, 'CIA and the Media,' 60.

persuaded by the *Times* to issue a formal denial, Sulzberger's statement protested that he had never worked for the CIA in any capacity: 'I have been a professional newspaperman all my adult life, and I hope I have been more careful in ascertaining – or seeking to ascertain – the truth of what I write than certain modern practitioners of the old school of muck-raking.' When asked for his reactions to the specific allegation that he had accepted an article written for him by the CIA, Sulzberger's pithy response was, 'A lot of baloney.' But the force of Sulzberger's denial was weakened by his admission to that he could not recall if he had signed a non-disclosure statement during the 1950s.<sup>28</sup> In an intelligence world where the moral boundaries of behaviour were often shifting, there was much unease, as Bernstein himself recounted in his *Rolling Stone* piece, regarding the ethics of pursuing any investigation in this area, especially when much of it came from the CIA's own perspective. While the CIA might see a particular journalist as an 'asset', this was not likely to be how the journalist viewed the relationship. A CIA official might allege control over a journalist, when none in fact existed, and when from the other perspective 'the journalist might think he had simply had a few drinks with a spook.' There was often a *quid pro quo* in operation, with journalists trying to tap Agency officials for a good story or lead, and the CIA trying to enlist journalists for discrete and special tasks, or for the supply of information in return. It was the ambiguous nature of the whole exchange that meant levelling accusations of wrong-doing were often problematic, while Church Committee staffers such as Bader wanted to hear the journalists' side to the story.

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<sup>28</sup> See John M. Crewdson, '400 Journalists Seen Linked to C.I.A.,' *New York Times*, 12 September 1977; John M. Crewdson, 'News Organizations Say They Find No Evidence Their Employees Maintained C.I.A. Relationships,' *New York Times*, 13 September 1977.

Bernstein's article set off a flurry of concerned comment in the press. The Executive Vice President of the *New York Times*, Sydney Gruson, wrote to the CIA asking for any information it had on links with the newspapers' journalists, complaining 'The CIA's persistent refusal to disclose in full its relationships with the news media has placed *The Times* and its employees in an untenable position.'<sup>29</sup> The *Times* itself carried out its own internal inquiry into its links with the Agency. This served to clear the newspaper of some of Bernstein's more extravagant claims, but produced more material on the propaganda and media interests of the CIA both at home and abroad.<sup>30</sup> In late December 1977, a series of new hearings from the oversight subcommittee of the House Intelligence Committee were also launched, and billed as having the purpose of exploring whether the press should be involved with the CIA at all, and if so, under what restraints.<sup>31</sup> When Colby was called as a witness, he freely admitted that in the past CIA employees under his authority had acted as journalists while carrying out duties abroad, but professed his support for a free and independent press. He bemoaned the fact that the Agency struggled to find suitable cover for its officers when so many government organizations and groups were now off-limits. Though he supported the ban on using journalists as cover, he still wanted the CIA to be able to approach journalists for the 'overt' information they might offer.<sup>32</sup> David A. Phillips, a former head of the CIA's Western Hemisphere Division, spoke of the 'natural affinity' between US journalists and

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<sup>29</sup> 'Text of The Times' Letter to C.I.A.,' *New York Times*, 13 September 1977.

<sup>30</sup> See, in particular, 'C.I.A. Established Many Links to Journalists in U.S. and Abroad,' *New York Times*, 27 December 1977. See also Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, 561-5.

<sup>31</sup> Crewdson, 'U.S. Correspondents Give Views on C.I.A.,' *New York Times*, 29 December 1977.

<sup>32</sup> 'Ex-C.I.A. Head, Again Under Fire,' and 'Colby Statement to Panel, in Part,' *New York Times*, 28 December 1977.

intelligence officers abroad: ‘They perform tasks which are similar, except that one reports to the public and the other to his government.’ Echoing Colby’s own views, Ray Cline, who had headed the Agency’s Directorate of Intelligence in the 1960s, derided the ‘sanctimony’ of the press and their brandishing of the First Amendment. ‘Reporters investigate all leads to good stories,’ Cline told the Congressmen, ‘pay sources whose secrecy they preserve, and receive – and print – stolen documents from inside our own Government. That is exactly what United States intelligence agencies do, except that they concentrate exclusively on penetrating foreign governments and institutions, not our own.’ The problem was really what Cline called ‘the extravagant post-Watergate pretension to purity and morality that suggests to some journalists that they should preserve a reputation for “cloistered and fugitive virtue” at the expense of a healthy relationship with the parallel profession of newsgatherers in the C.I.A.’<sup>33</sup>

While the public reverberations of Bernstein’s story faded away, eighteen months later it had a deleterious effect on the private relationship between Sulzberger and his erstwhile friend and colleague, Harrison Salisbury, as each wrestled with the ethical dilemmas raised by the links between what Cline had termed the ‘parallel professions’ of journalism and intelligence. Salisbury was Sulzberger’s senior by four years, and in the early 1930s had acted as Sulzberger’s first overseer at the Washington Bureau of the United Press agency. By the end of that decade a friendship and mutual admiration had developed between the two. After 1941, however, Sulzberger’s star rose higher more quickly, and as their careers blossomed, it was Salisbury who came to adopt a more

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<sup>33</sup> Crewdson, ‘Colby Acknowledges U.S. Press Picked Up Bogus C.I.A. Accounts,’ *New York Times*, 28 December 1977.



deferential posture toward the younger man.<sup>34</sup> During the Second World War, Salisbury had reported from London and Moscow, and then became UP's foreign news editor after returning to New York. He was recruited by the *New York Times* in 1948, and between 1949 and 1954 rose to prominence as head of the paper's Moscow bureau, becoming one of the most widely read Western correspondents reporting on Soviet affairs. His writing on life in Russia earned him a Pulitzer Prize in 1955, and thereafter he made many more trips to Eastern Europe, and several return visits to the Soviet Union. In 1962 Salisbury became national news editor for the *New York Times*, achieved additional notoriety for his reporting from Hanoi in the winter of 1966-67 during the US bombing of North Vietnam, and continued to rise through the ranks of editorial management until retiring from the paper in 1973.<sup>35</sup> Ever restless, Salisbury was already a prolific author, and in 1978 set about writing a recent history of the newspaper he had so recently worked for, focusing on its changing relationship with the established power of the state. It was this book project, *Without Fear or Favor*, and his attempts to explore the relationship between the *New York Times* and the CIA, that brought Salisbury back to Bernstein's 1977 allegations, and led him to examine Sulzberger's past associations.

In April 1979, Salisbury began to bombard his old friend with a series of letters asking him for recollections of his career on the newspaper, which he planned to use in the final part of his book. In his first letter, he asked in rhetorical fashion: 'What am I to do with this miserable business about CIA? I don't much care for Bernstein's report about you but I don't much care for your denial either. Both seem to miss the point.

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<sup>34</sup> See Sulzberger, *Long Row of Candles*, 25-30.

<sup>35</sup> On Salisbury's reporting from Hanoi, see Mark A. Lawrence, 'Mission Intolerable: Harrison Salisbury's Trip to Hanoi and the Limits of Dissent against the Vietnam War,' *Pacific Historical Review*, 75, 3, 2006, 429-59.

Signing a non-disclosure document really has nothing to do with cooperating or “tasking” or maintaining an intimate or more than intimate relationship.’<sup>36</sup> Sulzberger immediately composed a long reply, where he endeavoured to answer Salisbury’s queries. He began with the firm refutation that Bernstein’s story had been ‘not only tendentious; it was untrue.’ The facts were very simple, as far as Sulzberger was concerned: ‘I have never had any relationship with the CIA that in any way differed with the relationships I had with the CIO and AFL when I first knew you, the State Department and its envoys, military attaches, agricultural attaches, foreign governmental bodies and representatives, military men, guerrillas, etc. Indeed, I was particularly leary [sic] of the idea [of involvement with the CIA].’ He had been, Sulzberger affirmed, a good friend of Allen Dulles, Bedell Smith, Helms, and Frank Wisner, the latter particularly so. With both Wisner and Charles Bohlen of the State Department, Sulzberger had often had to defend Salisbury from the accusation that he was ‘an unreliable leftist’, also reminding the latter that he had promoted his interests on the *New York Times* when others had sought to damage his career. From the Second World War onwards, Sulzberger believed that reporting for the public and intelligence work for the government were two ‘entirely different and often contradictory pursuits’, and he had hence – though in receipt of many offers - avoided performing tasks for OSS and CIA. Sulzberger was quite categorical in his position: ‘you can’t work for two masters, above all one whose aim is to publicize and expose and the other to classify and hide. But the CIA always played straight ball with me and was also often helpful in providing otherwise inaccessible information.’ Contrasting his own stance with that of Joe Alsop, he professed, ‘I have never been asked

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<sup>36</sup> Salisbury to Sulzberger, 13 April 1979, box 156, HESP.

by the CIA to keep an eye out for this or that on going to a place and I have never been debriefed.’ For all his outright patriotism, Sulzberger maintained that unlike Alsop, his journalistic code ruled out working for the CIA, and though they might have traded information at times, he had never accepted a task from them or knowingly hired anyone with existing CIA connections. Salisbury had asked in his letter what to say about Sulzberger in his forthcoming book, to which the latter simply retorted, ‘Whatever you want, Harrison. I am telling you the truth but you have to judge the value of this statement.’ Sulzberger finished his letter on a warm note, inviting Salisbury and his wife to join him on his Spetsais for a visit where they could recapture the easier relationship they had enjoyed many decades before when both were young reporters.<sup>37</sup>

Salisbury’s next letter was filled with sensitive and touching words about Sulzberger’s late wife, Marina. He confined himself to asking Sulzberger to confirm the hour when Bernstein had first called, and mentioned how he was ‘still digging on the CIA thing. Trouble is Cy, the damn thing comes out of the CIA itself! Don’t think that just because a responsible CIA guys [sic – says?] that it is so that I necessarily believe him; too g. d. many cross currents in the Agency these days; nobody knows whose motive for what. But I want to lay the thing once and for all and thank god there are some other people who have the same motivation.’<sup>38</sup> In his reply, Sulzberger chose to attack the kind of CIA sources who had made the accusation that he had simply signed off a column given to him as his own piece of work, calling this story an ‘outrageous lie’. Sulzberger recalled asking Helms over a lunch if he had any information about KGB agents operating under Soviet diplomatic cover in the United States and elsewhere. According

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<sup>37</sup> Sulzberger to Salisbury, 18 April 1979, *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Salisbury to Sulzberger, 3 May 1979, *ibid.*

to Sulzberger, Helms duly provided a list of names, which Sulzberger then used in his column, but it was in no sense a finished piece, as had been claimed. ‘I’m afraid,’ Sulzberger continued, ‘you’ll just have to take my word for it that I had no connection with that outfit and never did an assignment of any sort for them and never gave them any de-briefing on anything. Some of these unknown characters in the woodwork may wish to state otherwise but what I’m telling you is the truth.’<sup>39</sup> Replying directly to Sulzberger’s gentle admonition over the reliability of his sources, Salisbury then explained that his source was not Howard Hunt (the ex-CIA officer who claimed that Sulzberger had simply reproduced a story he had provided in the *Times*) but was ‘a guy in the Agency who sticks to this story so hard it is like glue. That is why I am doing my goddamndest to run it down. I know, as well as you do, that you can’t prove a negative. But that’s what I’m trying to do!’<sup>40</sup>

Beside all the background information on the *New York Times* and its characters that Sulzberger was happy to offer Salisbury in their correspondence, the former – quite understandably – remained uneasy about what Salisbury’s book on the newspaper might contain. By late May 1979, Sulzberger was asking Salisbury directly who was his Agency source:

Maybe I can tell you if he has a reason for trying to “get” me or something. I know for a fact and my conscience is my guide on this that I never did a damn thing for them because I didn’t believe in working for two masters at one time, above all one of them any branch of the U.S. Government, much less that branch.

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<sup>39</sup> Sulzberger to Salisbury, 9 May 1979, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Salisbury to Sulzberger, 22 May 1979, *ibid.* See also Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, 568.

I have nothing whatsoever against it and I admire a great many of the people who I have known who have worked selflessly and patriotically for it. But I was a newspaperman and that's what I considered my job to be. Obviously I made use of them when I could checking stories, giving me background information, etc. For your private information the story I wrote about the Russians setting up a secret submarine base in Cuba at Cienfuegos was given to me by Kissinger and then checked by me with Helms. I knew that Henry was not above occasionally putting things out and then blandly denying it or blaming leaks in the State Department. I didn't want to get caught in one of those traps so I specifically checked it with Dick [Helms] one day when we were having lunch together.

Sulzberger could still not understand why anyone in the Agency would want to blacken his name, and implored Salisbury: 'God knows if you trust me on all other matters I cannot understand why you don't even trust my simple categorical denial. There is a retired DOS [Department of State] + CIA man on this island who knows me well + says its all balls but if once someone makes such a charge you can't elude it. Well you at least could try.' Having raised the possibility of getting affidavits from Colby and Helms that there was no truth to the stories, Sulzberger then dismissed the idea: 'nowadays I don't suppose that an affidavit from either of them, even if they wore halos, would be worth a damn.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Sulzberger to Salisbury, 31 May 1979, *ibid.* The Cienfuegos submarine base episode in 1970 is recounted in Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 632-52, with mention of Sulzberger's scoop (though nothing of Kissinger's own role in this) on 644-5; see also Raymond L. Garthoff, 'Handling the Cienfuegos Crisis,' *International Security*, 8, summer 1983, 46-66.

Nevertheless, as Salisbury began to deepen his investigation, by conducting numerous interviews with Sulzberger's former associates, secretaries, and retired CIA officers, his conviction grew stronger that there might be some substance to the original Bernstein story. Indeed, his first lead had come from John Crewdson, the *New York Times* reporter who had led the newspaper's probe of CIA links after Bernstein's article had appeared. As with Bernstein, Crewdson's principal CIA (and unnamed) source had been Walter Elder, a former deputy to John McCone when McCone had been DCI, and responsible for running the 'mighty wurlitzer' of domestic propaganda activities for the Agency in the early 1960s. Elder had been the main CIA liaison between the Agency and the Senate's Church Committee's investigation. It was also Elder who, Crewdson claimed, had confirmed Crewdson's suspicions that Sulzberger had been the CIA's most important fixer at the *New York Times* (Crewdson himself was under no illusions about Elder's information, believing that everything that he was told by him had probably been cleared by the CIA beforehand).<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, when interviewed by Salisbury in July 1979, Elder denied that he had confirmed Sulzberger's role, although admitting this would have been a logical inference to make on Crewdson's part. Crewdson himself then told Salisbury, that 'From my talk with Elder it would have had to have been Cy. No he didn't say "yeh, it's him". He said something else. But from the context it didn't fit anyone else.'<sup>43</sup> Despite the ambiguity over Elder's information, Salisbury became fixed on the idea that Sulzberger was the CIA's most valuable asset at the *New York Times* during the 1950s. Probably the most suggestive of the many interviews that Salisbury

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<sup>42</sup> Salisbury-Crewdson interview notes, 6 October 1978, box 157, HESP.

<sup>43</sup> Salisbury-Elder interview notes, 19 July 1979; Salisbury-Crewdson interview notes 20 July 1979, box 157, HESP.

conducted was with an embittered Helms, who had lunched regularly with Sulzberger while DCI (at one point he had told Sulzberger ‘You know, I tell you just about anything’), and who now avoided ‘clearing’ Sulzberger of a connection with the Agency of one kind or another, but instead claimed a simple lack of knowledge (which Salisbury, along with several of his interviewees, saw as highly unlikely).<sup>44</sup>

The exchanges between Salisbury and Sulzberger became increasingly tense during the summer of 1979, as the former continued his assiduous pursuit of anyone familiar with Sulzberger’s career on the *New York Times*. Salisbury’s letters were by turns fawning and inquisitive, but were never quite satisfied with Sulzberger’s denials. In an attempt to persuade Sulzberger to be more forthcoming, Salisbury revealed that he had used the Privacy Act and freedom of information legislation to request any information held on him by the CIA. After much procrastination, Salisbury’s efforts resulted in the Agency turning over copies of letters that Salisbury had sent when he had worked in Moscow in the 1950s, and documents which indicated that he too had been considered a valuable ‘source’ on developments in the Soviet bloc. Much to his surprise, Salisbury found that in Agency memos he was described as having received ‘briefings’ when he met CIA officers, or as undergoing ‘debriefings’, ‘when I might go down to have lunch with Allen [Dulles] to talk about Russia!’ Other journalists had also told Salisbury of their shock when seeing their names mentioned as a ‘resource’ or ‘asset’ by CIA officers they had met in foreign capitals, but had barely known. Explaining all this to Sulzberger, he exclaimed, ‘Now, you can see what a shitty business it is trying to comb all this out

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<sup>44</sup> Salisbury-Helms interview notes, 23 April 1979 and 4 May 1979, box 156, HESP; Diary entry for 27 March 1972, in Sulzberger, *Postscript with a Chinese Accent*, 69.

with a guy like yourself who knew every g. d. station chief in the world; who had as his closest personal friends geniuses like Wisner; who knew Helms over the years and Colby and I could name a long long list of others.’ Picking up on Sulzberger’s talk of getting affidavits to compel Agency figures to clear him, Salisbury could not help noting that he had already talked to both Colby and Helms and they had both refused to say one way or the other.<sup>45</sup>

By the end of July 1979, Salisbury was beginning to recognise that his persistent enquiries were putting his relationship with Sulzberger under increasing strain. ‘I realize I have been a pest,’ he wrote, ‘But I think you understand it is not for love of being a pest but simply the old reportorial urge which comes on very strong and I think appropriately in something like this which involves a friend who is very dear to me and an institution of which I am equally fond.’<sup>46</sup> To Salisbury’s contention that the CIA was interested in recruiting *New York Times* reporters overseas for particular assignments, all Sulzberger could do was offer his own recollection that he knew of no efforts to do so between the end of the war and the late 1950s. Indeed, Sulzberger had been shocked by Salisbury’s revelations that Sam Brewer, an old wartime friend and newspaper correspondent with strong OSS connections who Sulzberger had recruited to the staff of the *Times* to work as Cairo bureau manager, had retained his ties with US intelligence, a fact which emerged when the CIA tried to call upon his services – and his friendship with Kim Philby - in 1951.<sup>47</sup> When he ran the foreign service of the *New York Times*, Sulzberger nevertheless maintained, one of his cardinal rules was to avoid any connection between his staff and

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<sup>45</sup> Salisbury to Sulzberger, 23 June 1979, box 156, HESP.

<sup>46</sup> Salisbury to Sulzberger, 27 July 1979, *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> See Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, 501-8.



government agencies, especially those dealing with intelligence, other than to confirm stories or as sources of information. Having responded to yet another torrent of questions about the possible connections between the CIA and the *New York Times*, Sulzberger wrote that he was ‘beginning to have the feeling that for some mysterious reason you are intent on “proving” that I secretly worked for the CIA which is totally and absolutely untrue.’ Sulzberger did ‘think it is a very friendly act to keep citing vague and anonymous accusations to which I give you – to the best of my ability – specific answers naming names, including my own. Honest to God I really think we might as well put an end to this belabored point. This is your book, and I have done all I can to help you.’ There was evidently little more that Sulzberger felt he could having repeated his denials many times, and though he hoped their correspondence would continue, he wanted to hear no more from Salisbury on the subject.<sup>48</sup> He was particularly ‘brownd off’, as he put it in a letter to Salisbury in August 1979, that Salisbury had written to his former secretary asking a whole series of questions: ‘She knows perfectly well I never worked for the CIA and so does anybody else who ever knew me or knows me. I would have thought you yourself would have had a certain amount of faith in my good word.’ Having rejected a suggestion from Salisbury that he should use the freedom of information act to request from the CIA any documents they hold concerning him, Sulzberger ventured,

I am not going to get any more involved in this, and if you prefer not to accept my word, well that is your business. I never in any way worked for the CIA consciously or unconsciously. I knew a hell of a lot of their people and I hope

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<sup>48</sup> Sulzberger to Salisbury, 9 August 1979, box 156, HESP.

that I was a good enough newspaper reporter to get more out of them than they ever got out of me. That's it. ... I am simply telling you the truth and I can't go any further along the line on this. I am bored up the wall on this business and I would think that you might be prepared at least to give me an even break in trying to think that I might be telling you the truth. I am beginning to get the impression this is not the case. ... You say it is a "shitty business" trying to work this out "with a guy like yourself"; well, believe me I think it is a very shitty business and I think you are carrying it just a bit too far. You can do what you damn well wish to do with it Harrison. I have been level with you and taken a great deal of care and time to try and help you out. But there is nothing more I can do and I'll be damned if I'll spend several thousand dollars on legal fees to get papers [through the freedom of information act] to satisfy you which you have already told me in writing are probably fake anyway – just to prove an "innocence" which happens to be the case whether you believe it or not.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps realising he had now gone too far, a contrite and apologetic response from Salisbury followed: 'Please remember that, like yourself, I am a reporter, and sometimes the only way a reporter can get answers is to drive, drive, drive. You of all persons would know that. But I am your friend as well, your very very old friend and you will find nothing in the book which will take you amiss.' Salisbury did not relent, however. At the end of 1979, Sulzberger sent one more letter, again trying to correct a story about him that he feared would appear in the book; his last lines illustrated the gulf that now separated them: 'I tried my best to help you, with patience and considerable

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<sup>49</sup> Sulzberger to Salisbury, 6 August 1979, box 156, HESP.

work, during our exchanges this year. I fear I shall regret this help proffered to a man I thought my friend.’<sup>50</sup>

Salisbury’s book, *Without Fear or Favor*, was published in May 1980 to a positive critical reception. In it, Salisbury presented a character portrait of Sulzberger that was both admiring and stinging. By 1977, he was described as a ‘sad, bitter man’, ‘stiff’ and ‘proud’, who had become ‘more and more difficult with the passage of years and frustration of hopes.’ His arrogance was off-set, in Salisbury’s view, by Sulzberger’s natural brilliance as an investigative reporter and newsman, and in his terrier-like digging for facts was a prototype for the Vietnam and Watergate-era approach of a Seymour Hersh, Bob Woodward or Carl Bernstein. Salisbury took his readers through the allegations that Bernstein then made, based on his CIA sources, that Sulzberger had been an ‘asset’ for the Agency. Despite the denials that followed, Salisbury contended that ‘the essential question would not go away. Had the leading newspaper of the United States (and the world) been for many years in some sort of partnership with the CIA? Had the man who had served as chief European correspondent from late in World War II to 1955 and as *The Times*’ commentator on foreign affairs a secret relationship with the CIA?’<sup>51</sup> In dealing with these questions, Salisbury produced many anecdotes which showed the warmth of the relationship between Sulzberger and several Agency officials and station chiefs (most notably Wisner), and the trade in information and secrets they involved. Perhaps most seriously, he implied that Sulzberger may have been seen by the CIA as its key point of contact with the *New York Times*, even as a kind of official ‘clearing agent’ for when high-level business with the newspaper had to be conducted. In

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<sup>50</sup> Sulzberger to Salisbury, 31 December 1979, box 156, HESP.

<sup>51</sup> See Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, 448-50.

this context, Salisbury highlighted the repeated refusal of Helms to deny a CIA connection with Sulzberger, even though Helms would have been fully aware of how this would be interpreted.<sup>52</sup>

With the publication of the book, the ‘old scab’, as Sulzberger dubbed it, of Bernstein’s story was ‘torn right off’. It was a volume Sulzberger found ‘bathetic and turgid’ and ‘absurdly inaccurate’ when it came to himself. Sulzberger was especially angry that having helped Salisbury earlier in his career, and defended him against accusations that he might be a ‘fellow traveller of Moscow’, Salisbury had shown no loyalty in his book. Salisbury was ‘sly enough to carefully avoid stating flatly that I did indeed work for the CIA – although I flatly denied this to him.’<sup>53</sup> Pointing out numerous errors of fact and inaccuracies in the text, Sulzberger complained that the book was ‘replete with inferential slander presented in a crafty way ... If this is Salisbury’s idea of how you treat a friend, give me someone who hates my guts.’<sup>54</sup> The steady flow of Salisbury-Sulzberger correspondence was broken in 1980, and was not to be resumed for another five years.

From Sulzberger’s point of view there was something naive in the way his links with the CIA were depicted by the likes of Bernstein and Salisbury. ‘Why shouldn’t the CIA have been interested in me?’ he contended in an unpublished manuscript from 1980 (written expressly to address Salisbury’s allegations). ‘They were. But I traded information with them just as I traded information with U.S. ambassadors who were as eager to find out my ideas of one another statesman as I was eager to obtain facts or

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<sup>52</sup> See Salisbury-Helms telephone interview notes, 23 April 1979 and 4 May 1979, box 156, HESP; Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, 581-3.

<sup>53</sup> Untitled Sulzberger TS, pp19-21, box 156, HESP.

<sup>54</sup> Untitled Sulzberger TS, p26, box 156, HESP.

assessments from them. I knew many CIA men abroad and often exchanged impressions. But I never accepted any assignment on any basis and was certainly sophisticated enough to know if anyone was trying to use me. I still have the feeling that I got a good deal more out of the CIA than it got out of me.’<sup>55</sup>

The contrary view was offered by Salisbury in *Without Fear or Favor*. It was of the utmost importance, Salisbury argued, that any potential links between the journalists affiliated with the *New York Times* and the CIA should be thoroughly investigated. The *Times*, he explained, ‘set the standards for reporting and editorial objectivity.’ If the *Times* and other newspapers were to act as ‘watchdogs’ of the public and uncover the abuses of power seen over recent years, ‘they must themselves face the same standards which they set for others. There could be no skeletons in the attic; no undercover deals; no double-talk.’<sup>56</sup> Salisbury’s own contacts with the CIA, however, serve to illustrate how difficult it was to maintain the requisite distance with the intelligence services when officials and journalists could profit from contact and exchange. Salisbury had made his initial attempt under the Privacy Act to extract from the CIA any files with references to himself in April 1978, and just over a year later the Agency delivered its initial response. Among the many documents released to Salisbury were internal memoranda to Allen Dulles from Stanley Grogan, the DCI’s special assistant and the Agency’s then principal liaison with the media, which detailed Salisbury’s meetings in the mid- and late-1950s with senior Agency officials, including the DCI himself; these were occasions when

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<sup>55</sup> Untitled Sulzberger TS, p9, box 156, HESP.

<sup>56</sup> Salisbury, *Without Fear of Favor*, 451.

information on internal Soviet and Communist bloc developments was exchanged.<sup>57</sup> In one instance, according to Grogan, Salisbury even wanted ‘to discuss frankly and fully the role of CIA in getting defectors to come to the United States and our responsibility and activities re defectors after they get to the United States.’ Assembling his defector story for the *New York Times*, Salisbury was especially insistent that he see Robert Amory, the Deputy Director Intelligence, or even Dulles, as when he talked with either he got ‘the inside story ... not for publication but for his own guidance and background,’ while Grogan, Salisbury asserted, was ‘only giving him the surface story that everybody knows, the old “security” line that we can’t tell you details because our operations are so secret. CIA is in this defector business ... and is in the business not only for intelligence but for propaganda and counter-propaganda and just can’t avoid being involved in the TIMES’ investigation.’<sup>58</sup> Amory would receive telephone calls from Salisbury asking him for comment on the drafts of stories he was writing on Soviet bloc affairs; when Amory discussed this relationship with Dulles once, the latter’s opinion was that ‘the general line being taken by Harrison Salisbury, whether accurate or not, was useful cold war business.’<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See Grogan memo for Dulles, 9 November 1955; Grogan memo for Dulles, 20 March 1956; Grogan memo for Dulles, 16 April 1956; Grogan memo for Dulles, 24 August 1959, box 251, HESP.

<sup>58</sup> See Grogan memo for Dulles, 2 May 1956, box 251, HESP. Grogan’s recommendation was that Dulles see Salisbury over the defector issue, and that he ‘play by ear the tune that will maintain CIA secrecy and yet have Mr Salisbury satisfied he has gotten the “inside” he is after.’

<sup>59</sup> Amory letter, 28 February 1957, box 251, HESP.

Salisbury was also the recipient, on CIA authorisation, of unclassified Foreign Broadcast Information Service reports on internal developments in the Communist bloc.<sup>60</sup> In early 1962, following a visit that Salisbury had made to the Soviet Union, John A. McCone, the DCI, wanted to know when he would next be in Washington, and anticipated involving Amory and Helms, the then Deputy Director for Plans, in any 'debriefing' of the journalist that could be arranged. The session with senior CIA officials was eventually held on 2 May 1962, after which Salisbury expressed his regrets that, following a lengthy talk with McCone, he had not had longer in which to respond to questions from others who had assembled, and made clear he would be happy to make more time for further follow-up when he was next in the capital. In the account that Grogan offered to McCone of these arrangements, the sessions were referred to throughout as 'debriefings'. 'Because he had another appointment,' Grogan explained afterwards, 'Salisbury said he was able to spend only five or six minutes with the debriefers. They hardly covered anything, with only two or three questions being asked ... He would be willing to return and have a thorough debriefing. Mr Salisbury said that on the other side of the coin, he had an excellent debriefing by the DCI. He said the Director was well informed and asked questions that had meaning.' Indeed, Salisbury had enjoyed the 'play of minds' with McCone and would be 'delighted to see him again'. Grogan affirmed that he would let the Agency's senior analysts know when Salisbury was next available 'and suggest that the debriefing be resumed so that we can maintain

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<sup>60</sup> See Grogan memo for Dulles, 21 February 1956; Salisbury to Grogan, 7 March 1961; Martin P. Clausson (Acting Assistant to the DCI) to Salisbury, 8 March 1961; Clausson memo for Dulles, 14 March 1961; Grogan to Salisbury, 13 April 1962; Salisbury to Grogan, 19 April 1962, box 251, HESP.

this contact and secure from Salisbury whatever information he has that would be of value to the Soviet experts.<sup>61</sup>

Salisbury was both horrified and outraged when he received these copies of documents which showed the CIA regarded him as a ‘source’, who gave ‘debriefings’ to senior CIA figures. Having vented his feelings on the matter to Sulzberger in their correspondence, he made reference to his unsettling discovery in *Without Fear or Favor* (though did not quote directly from the CIA materials, with their portrayal of Salisbury as highly complicit in the relationship).<sup>62</sup> Yet Salisbury’s sense of shock seems strangely naïve - he had, after all, opened himself up to these kinds of descriptions with the way he had engaged with the Agency in the 1950s and 1960s – and, in the light of the CIA documents, his attitude to Sulzberger’s own links with Agency figures carried more than a whiff of hypocrisy.<sup>63</sup>

The realms of intelligence and journalism have always had a close affinity. Both seek various forms of information, often involving issues and topics concealed from the wider public domain, where sources are nurtured, protected and mined for what they can provide. Incentives are also offered for information, ranging from straightforward payment to the knowledge that information will be used to influence policy, or even to settle grudges. Even less savoury is the employment of coercion, where blackmail might be used. As well as these similarities, journalists and spies engage in an uneasy but

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<sup>61</sup> Grogan Daily Diary excerpt, 20 February 1962; Grogan to Salisbury, 3 March 1962; Salisbury to Grogan, 12 March 1962; Grogan memo for McCone, 1 May 1962; Salisbury to Grogan, 10 May 1962; Grogan memo for McCone, 11 May 1962, box 251, HESP.

<sup>62</sup> See Salisbury to Sulzberger, 23 June 1979, box 156, HESP; Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, 500, 574-5.

<sup>63</sup> The issue of ‘prebriefings’ and ‘debriefings’ is explored in Johnson, ‘The CIA and the Media,’ 154-6.



sometimes mutually beneficial exchange. Where they differ is in the clients and customers they serve, and the means they have at their disposal. The intelligence officer is avowedly a servant of the state, there to provide the information that will assist with the conduct of official external policy, or to counter threats to domestic security. By contrast, for the journalist it is often the story itself - whether it has intrinsic interest for an informed citizenry, and what it might mean for the wider nature of society – that is a prime motive for investigation.

The fact that Salisbury's own meetings with CIA officials, including DCI McCone, were referred to in internal CIA reports as 'debriefings' helped to blur the line between when a reporter was active in cultivating his own contacts with the intelligence world, and when he was being used as a source of information and opinion. Interviewed in 1988 by a CIA historian, Colby downplayed ties with journalists as 'a false issue. I've used journalists as agents, and case officers have, and our rule was what they wrote for their journal [sic] was their business ... They were useful agents and then this crazy business got loose – you can't use journalists, you can't use academics, you can't use missionaries, you can't use something else, you can't use this, you can't use that. There's nobody left.'<sup>64</sup> Helms was also willing to say that, as a former journalist, he knew very well what the rules of the profession involved, and, when in control of such links in the Deputy Directorate of Plans, he had insisted that he sign off any use of a particular journalist: 'I had a hold on all these things all the way through,' he recollected, 'and I just okayed or approved ones that I thought made sense, where we wouldn't get this material any other way [through] people I felt we could trust not to blow the operation.' He felt

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<sup>64</sup> 'Oral History: Reflections of DCIs Colby and Helms on the CIA's "Time of Troubles", in *Studies in Intelligence*, 51, 3, September 2007, 18.

no concern over journalists' protests that this compromised their position, as the Soviet Union and many other states used exactly the same methods. Helms summed up his views in a fashion that many of his CIA contemporaries probably shared:

Newspapermen in this country think that they're a special breed because they are protected by the First Amendment, in a way that they're protected in no other country in the world. They've come to think that they're rather special and that they have to be taken care of in a very special way, and they get away with it most of the time. But I have no apologies for using newspapermen. After all, we're all in the United States, we're all Americans; we all should be working for our country.<sup>65</sup>

It is difficult not to feel a very strong degree of sympathy for Sulzberger, widowed and then hounded in retirement on his Greek island by an erstwhile friend and colleague, his journalistic life being raked over, and many of his other former colleagues and contacts pursued by a remorseless Salisbury. This sense of sympathy is bolstered by the knowledge that a degree of hypocrisy surrounded Salisbury's charges, as the latter seemed only too happy to meet with and provide information to CIA officials on his travels and experiences in the Communist bloc. Salisbury would doubtless maintain in his defence that his use by the CIA was unwitting - though the accounts of his meetings with McCone and others in 1962 show his enthusiasm to be cooperative - whereas the fundamental and most serious contention he was investigating was that Sulzberger was knowingly complicit in a relationship which prejudiced his journalistic integrity. However, these are necessarily very fine distinctions to draw. Indeed, any contact

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 24.

between journalists and intelligence officials had the latent potential to compromise the position of the former if an intelligence agency so wished: journalists, after all, were in theory bound by an ethical code which suggested they should operate at arm's length from the state in order to preserve their independence and objectivity, but engagement with intelligence officials allowed the latter to help determine how the relationship would be perceived.

The crucial point, and one made by Salisbury himself in *Without Fear or Favor*, was the social milieu in which both newspaper and Agency men operated in the early post-war period, when lasting personal relationships were forged. The majority had gone to similar schools, graduated from Yale, Harvard or Princeton, shared a geographic focus on the East Coast, operating along the Washington-New York-Boston corridor, and held broadly similar worldviews.<sup>66</sup> 'They knew each other,' Salisbury wrote with personal understanding of how this network operated, 'they stayed at each other's houses, they drank together and dined together and golfed together and travelled together and talked together and they knew each other's secrets – a lot of them anyway.'<sup>67</sup> They also shared a common view of the Cold War and the stakes at play in the contest between the United States and the Communist bloc. For some journalists the idea that cooperation with the CIA should be completely eschewed offended their sense of patriotism: Joe Alsop, who by the 1970s was quite happy to confess that he had been willing to write stories suggested by the Agency in order to promote US interests abroad, once pithily observed: 'The notion that a newspaper man doesn't have a duty to his country is perfect balls.'<sup>68</sup> It

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<sup>66</sup> See Olmstead, *Secret Government*, 21-2.

<sup>67</sup> Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, 566.

<sup>68</sup> Alsop is quoted in Johnson, 'The CIA and the Media,' 160.

was after the US political system went through the twin upheavals of Vietnam and Watergate, events which exposed the mendacious side of those who held power in Washington during the early 1970s, that journalists began to re-examine their connections with the institutions of the state, and to question the role they had played in the abuses at home and abroad that they now acknowledged.<sup>69</sup> It was this that constituted the sharp dividing line between Salisbury and Sulzberger: the former always more radically inclined than his old friend, and now disillusioned with the system in the corrupt expression it had reached under the Nixon administration, the latter world-weary and cynical, expecting little, and finding less troubling the moral equivalence that many now saw in the Cold War. Sulzberger would probably have agreed with sentiments of the publisher of the *Washington Post*, Katherine Graham, who warned in 1974 that distrust of government on the part of the media had perhaps gone too far: ‘To see conspiracy and cover-up in everything is as myopic as to believe that no conspiracies and cover-ups exist.’<sup>70</sup> It is possible to find, in other words, that in the end of the friendship between Salisbury and Sulzberger over the issue of journalism’s relationship with the world of intelligence were elements of that breakdown of consensus that so many have identified with this troubled time in US history.

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<sup>69</sup> See Olmstead, *Secret Government*, 22-7, 79.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in *ibid*, 26.