

# Administration

## ■ CIA RECRUITING IN HIGH GEAR

BY STEVE HIRSCH



METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

**A FEW MORE RONINS?** The CIA has been actively recruiting for its clandestine service since 9/11, but sales talent may be more in demand than shooting skills.

**T**he CIA is having a rough time of it these days. But away from its mea culpas about President Bush's State of the Union speech and the criticism from Congress over pre-9/11 intelligence, the agency may be doing one thing right—its recruitment of spies and analysts.

Moreover, the CIA is conducting that effort in a way that seems to reflect the concerns of a broad spectrum of agency and intelligence veterans, many of whom have been quite critical of the CIA and its hiring practices in the past.

The agency had been blasted in the aftermath of 9/11 for having too many WASPs as case officers and for playing down the importance of recruiting foreign sources of intelligence—real human beings in other countries who can tell U.S. agents what is going on in those places. Leading former senior U.S. security officials struck just such a note in a July 12 *Economist* article headlined, "America Needs More Spies."

The quantity and quality of intelligence

acquired from foreign informants is more important than the quality of analysis, according to the authors: former Deputy FBI Director Robert Bryant; former Deputy Defense Secretary John Hamre; former Drug Enforcement Administration Administrator John Lawn; former Associate Deputy CIA Director for Operations John MacGaffin; former FBI General Counsel Howard Shapiro; and former CIA General Counsel Jeffrey Smith. "There certainly was a lack of dot-connecting" before the attacks, they wrote. "But more important was the fact that the blizzard of information available for analysis was of such poor quality. There were too few useful dots." Concentrating on analysis "distracts attention from the real need: improved espionage, to provide the essential missing intelligence," the former officials said.

The CIA would not allow an on-the-record interview about recruiting, but Deputy Director for Operations James Pavitt told a Duke University Law School conference last year. "Today, the year 2002, I have more spies stealing more secrets than at any time in the history of the CIA.... I ask you to take me at my word," he said. "We're stealing more secrets, providing our leadership with more intelligence than we've ever done before."

The CIA also refused to provide precise figures for this article, but it is apparent that the agency is working harder to bring more and different kinds of people into its ranks. A U.S. intelligence official, speaking without attribution, said 9/11 did not necessarily change the direction of the CIA's general recruitment efforts—meaning in all areas, from carpenters to computer specialists, not just for spies. But the terrorist attacks did boost the number of people being hired.

The CIA's hiring requirements are more than 80 percent above what they were before 9/11, with the largest number of openings in clandestine services and such support areas as analysts. CIA spokesman

Tom Crispell was quoted last year in *The Christian Science Monitor* as saying that the agency expected the number of clandestine officers to jump 20 to 25 percent in the coming four years. The intelligence official said that figure is still valid.

The agency now gets 2,800 to 3,000 résumés online a week, which “far outweigh” the number of openings, the official said. About 88 percent of those who receive conditional offers of employment accept, up from 70 percent last year, the official said. In addition, the attrition rate is fairly low, about 5 percent, he said.

Despite the accelerated hiring efforts since 9/11, it will take some time for this jump-started effort to have an effect. New CIA officers must first go through processing and training, often including language training, before they receive interim assignments at headquarters and their first overseas jobs. Only then will they be considered seasoned operatives. CIA alumni interviewed estimated that it takes several years to turn a successful applicant into a tested officer. In the interim, veterans noted that the agency has brought in a large number of retirees to fill the ranks.

One former CIA operative estimated that there are hundreds of the newly rehired “green badgers”—retirees who have been called back because they already have clearances. (Regular employees have blue badges.) Many of the green badgers, generally in their mid-50s and up, he said, left the CIA but did not do well on the outside. They have come back to work in “all the hot areas,” including Afghanistan and Pakistan, as case officers, support officers, the whole range of operations jobs.

The CIA is also much more open now about its interest in attracting a more ethnically diverse group of employees, including officers, and it has produced a series of print ads obviously aimed at drawing a varied pool of applicants. The ads include pitches to professionals and nonprofessionals (“Intelligence Secretary. Why work for a company when you can serve a nation?”), as well as various ethnic groups. One ad celebrates Chinese New Year, saying, “Just as the Year of the Ram is centered on a strong and clear motivation for peace, harmony, and tranquility during challenging times, we are equally intent on our mission to safeguard America and its people. You, too, can play a key role in this important responsibility.”

Other ads, not surprisingly, are aimed at people with Middle Eastern backgrounds. “For over 100 years, Arab-Americans have served the nation,” one says. “Today, we need you more than ever.” Another says, “Your heritage is Arab-American. Your citizenship is All-American,” before inviting applicants to check out the CIA Web site.

An ad in Amtrak’s *Arrive* magazine aims

directly at recruits interested in the clandestine service: covert agents who recruit and run foreign spies in dark alleys. (“Possibly, the most demanding job in the world,” says the ad.) The people pictured in the ad could just as easily be squeaky-clean lawyers or accountants; the main photo shows the back of a man and a woman striding across the CIA seal set into the floor at the entrance to agency headquarters. The various ads have yielded résumés from applicants claiming proficiency up to native-level fluency in Mandarin Chinese and Korean, as well as in Middle Eastern languages, the official said.



**MORE DIVERSE:** The CIA’s recruiting campaign includes ads seeking to attract a more ethnically diverse group of applicants.

At the same time, the CIA is not overplaying its search for ethnic diversity. Although the U.S. intelligence official said the CIA is obviously looking for knowledge, experience, and expertise in the Middle East, and for language ability, he echoed the comments of some CIA veterans who stress that potential foreign spies have preconceptions of what American CIA officers should look like.

There is a “certain image of the United States that’s prevalent internationally,” the official said, one that is “predominantly the white male.” Otherwise, when a potential spy sees someone who does not conform to that image, “they may or may not be comfortable” engaging in a relationship.

One former senior CIA official concurred with that assessment, saying that potential foreign spies will sometimes only respond to someone who fits their image of the CIA—someone who looks “American.” This is particularly the case with Spanish-

speaking or Russian targets, he said, or potential sources in the Middle East, who might suspect a CIA officer who looks Arabic of being a provocateur.

Current and former CIA operatives and officials interviewed also agreed on the need for a renewed emphasis on hiring officers who can successfully recruit more foreign spies. After all, not every CIA agent possesses the skills to parlay an ostensibly accidental meeting with a foreign national into the sustained contacts necessary for the would-be spy to give up secret information about his country or a terrorist group. “Spying is common sense, and a lot of people aren’t born with it,” a former CIA operative said.

A former senior officer in the Operations Directorate, the agency’s espionage branch, cited problems the CIA has had attracting black and ethnically Chinese candidates and those of Arab descent who have fluency in important languages. This could be the most serious problem the agency faces in recruiting officers, given that two years of training are needed just to bring someone up to intermediate language fluency. This former officer said he would like to see at least 20 percent of CIA officers come from non-Western European ethnic groups, compared with the 2 to 4 percent now.

At the same time, though, some of the CIA veterans interviewed said that language and cultural background are secondary to the salesmanship skills that CIA agents need to recruit foreigners as American spies. In some cases, emphasizing language and cultural background ignores the realities of spy recruitment.

The CIA refused to discuss any efforts it makes to ascertain potential officers’ abilities to recruit foreigners as spies, but a quiz on its Web site for potential applicants is revealing. Intelligence veterans say that recruiting foreign sources is in many ways like wooing a customer. Interestingly, emphasizing or de-emphasizing sales experience on the CIA quiz can make a difference on whether a quiz taker shows an aptitude for the espionage track. Checking the box for having had sales experience can, for example, change a reasonably honest middle-aged male reporter’s quiz results from indicating an aptitude for “professional positions” to an “excellent match” for clandestine service.

Overall, the former CIA operatives interviewed for this story were generally supportive of the kinds of efforts included in the CIA’s current recruitment drive. One said the agency is doing “exactly” what it should be.

*The author is editor in chief of U.N. Wire and Global Security Newswire. He can be reached at shirsch@nationaljournal.com.*