

## **Intelligence Activity in Hollywood: Remembering the "Agency" in CIA**

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Though it has existed since 1947, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) did not establish an entertainment industry liaison program until the mid-1990s, leading many to assume the Agency was inactive in Hollywood during the Cold War. When the CIA finally began working openly with filmmakers, it claimed its job was to reactively improve public understanding of the Agency as part of its more open remit, [1] and the CIA has often stressed its ineffectiveness at censoring or amending scripts to emphasize further its passive role. [2] Moreover, the CIA has always claimed that its entertainment liaison program seeks merely to aid recruitment and correct misperceptions about Agency practice. [3]

These claims about the CIA's role in Hollywood have received scant attention from the press. With the exception of providing some historical context, academic literature barely touches on the relationship. [4] This is hardly surprising. The CIA is a secretive organization, even though ironically it possesses a public affairs office. However, a serious interrogation of the CIA's role in the entertainment industries reveals a more nuanced picture than the one painted above. By drawing on the now better-documented history of early Cold War activity, we can form a clearer sense of how the present system functions. What follows is therefore not a detailed chronological history of the CIA-Hollywood relationship, but rather the best model we can determine of how it works in the post-Cold War era. Using documents, "insider" testimony, and historical precedent, we highlight the uniqueness of the CIA's relationship with Hollywood during the post-Cold War period and draw parallels with its older, more covert strategies.

More specifically, this piece demonstrates that the Agency worked covertly with Hollywood during the Cold War to make American democratic and capitalist ideologies more palatable to international and otherwise skeptical viewers. During the post-Cold War and post-9/11 eras, the CIA eventually turned its attention away from manipulating the country's image and instead worked more openly with the American media to improve its reputation. This shift largely resulted from the CIA's need to reassure the public that it was still necessary and competent, despite the decline of the Soviet Union and criticism of the Agency for failing to prevent the 9/11 attacks.

Additionally, this study reveals that the CIA's work with Hollywood is now governed and severely limited by its economic bargaining power. While the Pentagon is able to leverage its expensive assets—like submarines, naval carriers and military personnel—to extract favorable script changes from producers with tight margins, the CIA lacks these same resources. Thus, the CIA aims to work with directors, writers and producers during pre-production to influence ideas about the Agency as they are being formed. Of course, pre-production work is much more difficult for scholars to trace. The CIA's influence on Hollywood production is therefore far less transparent than the Pentagon's.

Finally, while one should not overestimate the CIA's capacities or deny the predominant importance of the economic, cultural, and social scaffolding involved in the political output of Hollywood, one should not turn a blind eye to the often pivotal roles of a few powerful individuals that either represent or are sympathetic to government interests. Indeed, much of the history of the CIA in Hollywood outlined herein involves "special relationships" between well-placed individuals that have been used for everything from efforts to boost recruitment levels and ensure more favorable representations of the Agency and its policies, to engaging in psychological warfare and even providing cover for the CIA's covert operations. [5]

By focusing on the CIA's behind-the-scenes efforts to influence popular texts, this piece is firmly grounded in a production and political economy approach to cultural studies, rather than textual analysis or audience reception. As Douglas Kellner explains, analyzing texts within their system of production has been neglected in many modes of recent cultural studies, but "inserting texts into the system of culture within which they are produced [can] help elucidate features and effects of the texts that textual analysis alone might miss or downplay" (2011: 10). This is because a text's system of production often determines what content will be produced, "what structural limits there will be as to what can and cannot be said and shown, and what sort of audience effects the text may generate" (*Ibid.*).

More broadly, we hope this study will inform academic investigation of film's role in the transmission of ideology. After all, the CIA's most recent efforts in the entertainment industry have tried to shape public perception of the outfit, while in previous decades they worked to shape America's reputation abroad. Whenever a government organization polishes its own image, it also has the ever-pressing temptation and indeed unavoidable necessity of rewriting history and perpetuating myths that favor the national security establishment. These efforts' cumulative effects on citizens are surely significant, if difficult to measure. Indeed, organizations and individuals, from the CIA to the FBI, from V.I. Lenin to Joseph Goebbels, have all expressed the view that cinema is the most

important medium for transmitting political ideas. [6] Twentieth Century Fox founder Darryl Zanuck even claimed that, "If you have something worthwhile to say, dress it up in the glittering robes of entertainment and you will find a ready market," adding that "without entertainment, no propaganda film is worth a dime" (quoted in Shaw, 2007: 9). In other words, those most invested in and most successful at circulating cultural ideologies recognize film's power on consciousness and attitudes.

### **The CIA's Historical Involvement in Hollywood During the Cold War**

Though the CIA did not have an entertainment liaison office until the mid-1990s, it has a long history of involvement with the American motion picture industry. For example, one of its assets in the early 1950s was Luigi Luraschi, the Head of Domestic and Foreign Censorship at Paramount Studios, whose job was to eliminate images that might be offensive to foreign markets during pre-production and production. In Luraschi, the CIA found a strong anti-communist supporter, as well as someone adept at navigating the film industry with the government's interests in mind. During the 1930s and '40s, Luraschi worked closely with the Production Code Administration (PCA) on an almost daily basis. Luraschi forwarded scripts and story materials to the offices of its conservative Catholic head Joseph I. Breen, whom he described as a censor and injector of ideas into scripts to improve their moral perspective (Eldridge, 2000: 152). The English trade paper *Film Weekly* described Breen more bluntly as "The Hitler of Hollywood" (quoted in Leff and Simmons, 2001: 59). [7]

Performing a similar role for the CIA in the 1950s, Luraschi worked at Paramount Studios to delete scenes where Americans were depicted as "brash, drunk, sexually immoral, violent or trigger-happy" and eliminate scenes where Americans travelling abroad were depicted as imperialistic or insensitive to other cultures (Eldridge, 2000: 154). Luraschi also reported that he had secured the agreement of several casting directors to subtly plant "well dressed negroes" into films, including "a dignified negro butler" that delivered lines suggesting he was a "free man" in *Sangaree* (1953) and in the 1953 Dean Martin/Jerry Lewis vehicle *The Caddy* (Eldridge, 2000: 159). Elsewhere, the CIA arranged for the removal of key scenes from the film *Arrowhead* (1953), which questioned America's treatment of Apache Indians, including a sequence where a tribe is forcibly shipped away by the US Army (Eldridge, 2000: 160). Such changes were not part of a ham-fisted campaign to instill what we now call "political correctness" in the populace. Rather, they were specifically enacted to hamper the Soviets' ability to exploit its enemy's poor race relations record and served to create a peculiarly anodyne impression of America, which at the time was beset by upheaval over racial segregation. Whilst conspiracies raged in the House Committee on

Un-American Activities from the mid-1940s onwards, pushing hundreds of industry professionals out of work, at least one powerful figure was operating without detection for opposing ideological ends, seemingly without ties to the usual anti-Communist organizations like HUAC or the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals.

Despite a period of ostensible peace, private post-War letters to an unknown CIA official uncovered four decades later also show that Luraschi was able to use his position in the Academy to ensure that already circulating left-wing or "suspect" films did not receive wider recognition or win industry endorsement. For instance, Luraschi claimed that he was instrumental in ensuring that *High Noon* was at least passed over in the best film category at the 1953 Academy Awards (Eldridge, 2000: 155). [8] He further commented that "I think we have succeeded in shunting *The Little World of Don Camillo* (1952) over to one side so that it won't get the Oscar for the 'Best Foreign Picture'" (quoted in Eldridge, 2000: 172). Luraschi's CIA remit also seemed independent of broader Paramount management. At one point he discussed using a "contact in Casting" to influence Paramount executive Y. Frank Freeman, which presumably would have been done directly if Freeman had approved of Luraschi's clandestine activity (quoted in Eldridge, 2000: 168). Thus, the Luraschi case reveals how useful a single, well-placed ally in the motion picture industry can be to a government agency. [9] Of course the studios were not necessarily interested in rooting out such covert influences, since their overriding objective was—and remains with scarcely any deviation—to make commercially successful products. In Luraschi's time, studios understood that pro-American films would make more money in the long term and help them avoid costly investigations by organizations like HUAC. As long as potential audiences were unaware of the manipulation and not put off by the politicization of the product, who cared?

Despite its utility, the CIA's relationship with Luraschi was short lived, as the Eisenhower Administration, through the work of C.D. Jackson, began to take over the CIA's role of helping to circulate positive depictions of the country through the newly founded United States Information Agency (USIA). Nicholas Cull recently found an internal memo from Eisenhower's Sprague Committee written in 1960, stating that the relationship between the USIA and Hollywood, while "delicate and highly confidential," nonetheless established the means "to exercise influence on almost all elements of the theatrical motion picture industry" (2009: 185). Still, whilst the USIA was America's most salient provider of government propaganda during the early Cold War, Luraschi's case, as David Eldridge summarizes, represents "an excellent illustration of how anti-Communism in the film industry was not confined to blacklisting and overt attacks on suspected Communists, but affected everyday production" (2000: 159). Written during a critical moment for America in world affairs, Luraschi's

letters are permeated not only with a sense of paranoia, but also with the grandiose sentiment that film could change the course of history (*Ibid.*).

The CIA made other efforts to shape film content. Through the Psychological Strategy Board, the CIA failed to commission Frank Capra to direct *Why We Fight the Cold War* and provided details to filmmakers about conditions in the USSR in the hope they would use them in their movies (Leab, 2007: 93). More successfully, production of the Michael Redgrave feature *Nineteen-Eighty Four* (1956) was overseen by the CIA-supervised American Committee for Cultural Freedom (*Ibid.*). In 1950, the CIA, along with other secretive organizations like the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), also bought the rights to George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1954), which was adapted as an animated feature and given an anti-Soviet spin to satisfy its covert investors. [10] Orwell Subverted author Daniel Leab observes that it took decades for rumors about CIA involvement in *Animal Farm* to be properly documented, which he claims "speaks volumes about the ability of a government agency to keep its activities covert" (2007: 137).

Additionally, the CIA tampered with the 1958 film version of *The Quiet American*. US Air Force Colonel Edward Lansdale, the CIA operative behind Operation Mongoose (the CIA sabotage and assassination campaign against Cuba) entered into production correspondence with director Joseph L. Mankiewicz to "reverse the anti-Americanism" of Graham Greene's novel and turn it "into a decidedly patriotic film" (Bushnell, 2006: 38). The pair's revisions included an alternative ending, where communists rather than the American-backed Colonel Thé are responsible for a terrorist bombing in Saigon. The two also "reveal" that communists tricked Thomas Fowler into murdering the quiet American Alden Pyle, who does not turn out to be a weapons-maker as viewers were led to believe, but a children's toy manufacturer. Upon the film's completion, Lansdale wrote to President Ngo Dinh Diem that the film was an excellent change from "Greene's novel of despair" and should help the American-backed President "win more friends [in] Vietnam [and] in many places in the world where it is shown" (Bushnell, 2006: 39). Executive Producer of Figaro Productions Robert Lantz met CIA director Alan Dulles, who liked the direction the film was taking and offered assistance (*Ibid.*). After watching the movie, Greene remarked that "One could almost believe that the film was made deliberately to attack the book and the author" (quoted in Bushnell, 2006: 39). It was.

During the latter stages of the Cold War, the CIA used Hollywood in more general ways to assist its hearts and minds campaign. Antonio Mendez, a retired Senior Intelligence Service executive, recalls that any time a Soviet official visited the United States, the Agency made sure they left with VHS players, computers, fashion magazines and films, thereby promoting the luxuries of capitalism (interview with Mendez, 2008).

According to Mendez, the CIA's covert action programs often "had a very robust media component," while its Mighty Wurlitzer "co-opted a lot of show biz people who were used as ambassadors of the West" (*Ibid.*) [11] Former operative and CIA entertainment liaison Paul Barry likewise explained that the Agency often pumped dozens of episodes of *Dynasty* (1981-1989) into East Germany as advertisements for capitalism and a luxury lifestyle (interview with Barry, 2008). Mendez further lamented a lack of entertainment content used to win cultural allegiance in the war on terror, stating that "In the Cold War, we didn't tear down the Iron Curtain or the wall, so much as it was pushed down from the inside" (interview with Mendez, 2008).

Despite the history outlined above, the CIA has at times tried to downplay its role in Cold War motion pictures. In a panel discussion about Hollywood and the CIA, for example, CIA lawyers suggested that the Agency did not function in Cold War entertainment at all. Former CIA associate general counsel Paul Kelbaugh specifically explained that the CIA's lack of involvement in Hollywood before the 1990s stemmed from its "very aggressive ethics training program" on things like illegally using taxpayers dollars to benefit one group over another" (*A Strange Bond*, 2007). Kelbaugh further explained that the Agency's concern about violating the First Amendment was one reason why we "didn't cooperate with Hollywood [for] all those years," since "if we supported one group over another in moviemaking to the benefit of one group or another it might be a misuse of appropriated funds" (*Ibid.*).

While Kelbaugh is primarily commenting on the CIA's "open" relationship with Hollywood, his comments suggest that the Agency was not involved in any sort of cooperation with filmmakers prior to the mid-1990s. Yet the CIA actively sought to influence film content for political reasons through covert means. It also used entertainment stars and programs in subtle propaganda campaigns directed against the East. But does the CIA still operate in the same way? Does it try to influence scripts? And to what ends? The answer is that the CIA actively works to influence film content, but its focus has shifted away from foreign-directed propaganda and moved toward bolstering its image in the American media, a political move of a different kind. This shift originally stemmed from the CIA's need to reassert its importance after the end of the Cold War and the highly publicized betrayal by Aldrich Ames, which led to Congressional hearings discussing the possible dismantling of the Agency. Post-9/11, the CIA was encouraged to continue its makeover efforts after suffering repeated criticism for failing to predict the 2001 attacks and providing faulty information about Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction. At this time the CIA was engaged in torture and extraordinary rendition, and was outsourcing much of its intelligence work.

## **The CIA's Involvement During the Post-Cold War and Post-9/11 Eras**

The CIA originally claimed that its post-Cold-War media efforts would involve working reactively with those seeking CIA guidance. For instance, internal memos generated by Robert Gates and the Task Force for Greater Openness in 1991 noted that the CIA's Public Affairs Office (PAO) had occasionally reviewed film scripts about the Agency at the request of filmmakers seeking guidance on accuracy and authenticity (Gates, 1991: unpaginated). Gates states that "Responding positively to these requests in a limited way [enabled the PAO] to help others depict the Agency and its activities accurately and without negative distortions" (*Ibid.*). Yet except for responding to such requests, the memos claim that the CIA does "not seek to play a role in filmmaking ventures about the Agency which come to our attention. For example, although we knew that Oliver Stone's movie on *JFK* was in the works for some time, we did not contact him to volunteer an Agency viewpoint" (*Ibid.*).

By 1994, however, the CIA's more passive approach to Hollywood had changed. In that year the Agency hired Jack Myers and David Houle to create a weekly television series to help rebrand the CIA after the Aldrich Ames case. The show, called *The Classified Files of the C.I.A.*, was to be based on actual case files provided by the Agency. Myers and Houle's company, Television Production Partners, agreed to give the CIA script review rights in exchange for use of its seal, name, and files. The show was eventually purchased by Twentieth Century Fox, but the deal fell apart when a change in CIA leadership forced the show's cancellation, partly because final negotiations with Fox led to a significant decrease in CIA control over content (interview with Houle, 2009).

George Tenet's Director of Public Affairs Bill Harlow also demonstrated the Agency's more proactive media involvement in the mid-1990s by hiring former covert operative Charles "Chase" Brandon as first entertainment liaison officer. Brandon is first cousin to actor Tommy Lee Jones and has thus established a number of industry contacts, such as screenwriter Gary DeVore (*The Dogs of War* [1980], *Raw Deal* [1986]) who was best man at Jones' 1981 wedding. According to Harlow, Brandon spent many hours on the phone pitching ideas to writers and working with directors, while Harlow and Brandon travelled to Los Angeles several times a year to "make the rounds," establish industry contacts, and alert them to the CIA's new willingness to work openly with filmmakers (interview with Harlow, 2010).

Brandon's successor Paul Barry took a similar approach, seeking opportunities to work with Hollywood by scouring *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*, then contacting the producers of relevant upcoming projects to inform them of his services (interview with Barry, 2008). On the CIA's entertainment liaison webpage, Barry also created a space

called “Now Playing,” which suggested possible storylines that writers and producers could explore. Of course, these only featured CIA success stories, including the engineering of the Berlin Tunnel and the story of “a potent counterintelligence response” against the East called “The Farewell Dossier” (Now Playing Archive, 2007).

In the 2000s, defense contractor and celebrity publicist Michael Sands joined forces with Barry, using his Hollywood contacts to introduce Barry to members of the entertainment community, including Sony Pictures vice president Scott Valentine, Jack Gilardi at International Creative Management (ICM), and CAA (Creative Artists Agency) head Rick Nicita (interview with Sands, 2010). According to Sands, Nicita was of particular interest to Barry because Paula Wagner, the president of Tom Cruise’s production company, was Nicita’s wife. At that time Cruise was considering making the spy film *Salt* (2010), and his company was in the process of rewriting the script about a rogue CIA operative. Barry was continually trying to help “develop scripts and steer them away from the Jason Bourne type film that have the CIA running along rooftops shooting people,” Sands added, and a potential meeting with Wagner seemed part of that initiative (*Ibid.*).

Additionally, former CIA case officer Robert Baer points out that former CIA director George Tenet was often “out in Hollywood, talking to studios” (interview with Baer, 2008). For example, Tenet was keynote speaker at the annual Sun Valley meetings in Idaho in 2003 (whilst still CIA head) and again in 2005 (van der Reijden, 2005: unpaginated). Sun Valley draws together several hundred of the biggest names in American media—including every major Hollywood studio executive—to discuss collective media strategies for the coming year. Against the idyllic backdrop of expansive golf courses, pine forests and clear fishing lakes, deals are struck, contracts are signed, and the face of the American media is quietly altered. The press has minimal access, which makes Sun Valley comparable with the annual Bilderberg conference, where influential people from the fields of politics, banking, business, the military and the media come together to discuss global issues behind closed doors. [12]

Despite these interactions, the CIA’s Public Affairs Office and its entertainment liaisons seem to work largely with screenwriters, producers, directors and actors, rather than with movie studio executives. This is because the CIA does not possess the same bargaining power to negotiate script changes as the Department of Defense or the individual armed forces. As mentioned in the introduction, the Pentagon can use its expensive tanks, submarines, aircraft and military personnel to negotiate changes to scripts with producers ever-mindful of the bottom line, to ensure the military is portrayed in a positive light. [13] The CIA’s only real leverage to negotiate script changes is its ability to grant access to its



headquarters for research or filming and permission to use its official seal, which is protected under the 1947 National Security Act. Yet the reality is that it is easier and less expensive for Hollywood to simply recreate a facsimile of its lobby and other premises. Barry therefore concluded that “Once a story has been optioned for a movie, it’s almost too late for us to participate” (quoted in Jenkins, 2009: 492). Instead, Barry stated that the CIA is most effective in influencing storylines during pre-production, when through talks with scriptwriters, producers, and directors it can suggest ideas as they are being crafted. Indeed, if military hardware is the Pentagon’s most powerful bargaining chip, the CIA’s covert nature functions equivalently. Because so many image-makers know so little about the largely covert outfit, they are more inclined to seek CIA assistance if they are interested in creating realistic explorations of the Agency or espionage-related topics. As *Covert Affairs* (2010-present) creators Matt Corman and Chris Ord succinctly put it, their “entire conception of the CIA was based on other [fictional] TV shows and movies,” so they sought CIA assistance during pre-production to shape their understanding of the outfit (interview with Corman and Ord, 2010).

The CIA’s decision to shape content during pre-production makes practical sense, but it also means that its involvement in the film and television industry is even less transparent than its cousins’ at the Pentagon. Many documents tracing the DoD’s involvement in Hollywood are available, although only a handful of researchers have taken advantage of them. For example, investigative journalist David Robb acquired more than a thousand pages of notes for his exposé of DoD involvement in the entertainment industries, including details of script changes from the “very transparent and cooperative” Marine Corps film office in LA. (email to Alford, 2010). Additionally, Pentagon film office head Phil Strub donated hundreds of thousands of pages of the Pentagon’s notes and correspondence with producers going back fifty years to Georgetown University Library’s special collections archives (*Ibid.*). The more recent documents are privately owned by Lawrence Suid, a researcher sympathetic to the DoD. These documents are therefore difficult to access. However, Suid has published extensive analysis of this material (*Ibid.*). In other words, while hardly a model of openness, the DoD has made some steps toward public accountability over their attempts to manipulate Hollywood in a way that far surpasses CIA efforts.

Credit listings and occasional comments from CIA officers in the public domain reveal that the Agency has worked on dozens of film productions since the mid-1990s, but there are almost no public records detailing the specifics of that involvement, except for occasional declassified CIA newsletters celebrating an actor or director’s visit to headquarters. [\[14\]](#) Even in cases of known CIA involvement, its role is not always publicized or fully explained by either the Agency or the film industry. For example, in a special feature on the DVD of *The Recruit* (2003) that feels like a

recruitment tool for the Agency, Chase Brandon is merely introduced as a 25-year veteran officer of the CIA, who lent the film his expertise on the CIA's training and recruitment activities. Nowhere is he identified as an active CIA employee that worked at the time in its PAO to paint a positive image of the Agency. Likewise, while news stories discussed *The Agency's* (2001-2003) relationship with Brandon when developing its pilot, the former officer is not listed as a CIA Technical Consultant in the episode's scrolling credits, nor is he credited on the series' Internet Movie Database webpage.

Additionally, we know that the CIA worked on series such as *Alias* (2001-2005), *JAG* (1995-2005) and *24* (2001-2010). In correspondence with Matthew Alford, DoD contractor and Hollywood publicist Michael Sands claimed that "Chase Brandon had his DNA in all Hollywood [spy] productions," including the character of *24's* hero Jack Bauer (interview with Sands, 2010). In 2005, *Metro* confirmed the CIA's involvement in *24*, as Brandon states that the Agency was now working with its producers on set to improve the show's realism (Williams, unpaginated). However, acting CIA General Counsel John Rizzo stated in 2007 that "For the record, [the] producers of *24* have never approached the Agency for anything. So I'm happy to say that the series does not bear a great deal of relationship to reality" (*A Strange Bond*, 2007). This seems to be disinformation, or misinformation at best.

In the cases of some productions like the Anthony Hopkins/Chris Rock feature *Bad Company* (2002), the Jerry Bruckheimer blockbuster *Enemy of the State* (1998), and Tony Scott's *Spy Game* (2001), there are no comments in the public domain to indicate what assistance the CIA lent filmmakers, although we do know that the CIA withdrew its endorsement from *Spy Game* (Patterson, 2001: unpaginated). We also know that Tom Cruise met CIA officials to discuss ways to present the Agency "in as positive a light as possible" for *Mission: Impossible III* (MX, Melbourne, 2001: 4), while Sands claims that Brandon worked closely with Robert Towne, who wrote the earlier *Mission: Impossible* scripts. The CIA is thanked in the first *Mission: Impossible* film's credits, though no other details are on public record and Brandon did not want to be formally interviewed.

At times the CIA seemed to be on set just to ensure that filmmakers did not reveal operational secrets. For example, Paul Kelbaugh claims that a CIA adviser on the set of *The Recruit* (2003) was there to misdirect the filmmakers, stating that "We didn't want Hollywood getting too close to the truth" (quoted in Alford and Graham, 2008). Peculiarly, though, in a strongly worded email to Matthew Alford, Kelbaugh emphatically denied having said this, stating that he recalled "very specific discussions with senior [CIA] management that no one was ever to misrepresent to affect [film] content—EVER" (email to Alford, 2008). Alford's source stands by

the original report, and Kelbaugh has refused to discuss the matter further. Regardless, Kelbaugh clarified that “when the filmmakers got too close to something considered classified, he [the on-set officer] simply didn't respond or gave a neutral response” (*Ibid.*).

### **The CIA's Motives for Working with Hollywood**

In interviews, the Agency frames its interactions with Hollywood as stemming from two motives: (1) to assist its recruitment and retention efforts, and (2) to correct misconceptions about the Agency. These claims are certainly true. Indeed, David Houle states that one of the main reasons the CIA became involved with his television production in the early 1990s was to replicate the Navy's success with *Top Gun* (1986), which served as one of the biggest recruitment boosters for its flight program (interview with Houle, 2009). Paul Barry also explained that when deciding which productions to assist, he asked himself if the piece would generate positive interest in the Agency and instill pride in current CIA employees (Jenkins, 2009: 491). The Agency of course has a history of working on texts that depict it favorably, including CBS's *The Agency*, the pilot episode of ABC's *Alias*, and *The Sum of All Fears* (2002). In fact, the CIA used its association with *Alias* to hire Jennifer Garner to star in a recruitment video screened at college fairs and accessible on its website.

However, Chase Brandon claims that while “there is an element of recruitment [...], it is not as important” to the Agency as issues of representation. “What really drives us, more than anything else, is that we finally got tired of being universally cast as bad people” (quoted in Robb, 2004: 152). Brandon suggests that such representations are simply not accurate; and while not all or even the majority of CIA officers are nefarious people, the concept of accuracy is a more complicated one to evaluate, especially given its importance in the Agency's public discourse (*Ibid.*). For instance, when interviewed by the *New York Times*, DCI George Tenet stated that “where feasible” the CIA helps “members of the entertainment industry willing to *accurately* portray the work of the intelligence community” (quoted in Sciolino, 2001; emphasis in original). The concept of accuracy was similarly discussed in a *New York Times* article stating that the CIA had grown tired of being depicted on screen as a nefarious organization and was now trying to work with Hollywood to portray the Agency more truthfully (Bernstein, 2001: unpaginated). However, Brandon lamented that there are “still writers and producers and directors who don't want to be confused by the facts,” adding that “They'd rather live in their own little creative make-believe world” (quoted in Bernstein, 2001).

These comments suggest that the CIA's efforts in Hollywood are primarily to correct inaccurate images of the Agency. However, this claim begs the question: who decides what is accurate? In the case of the CIA, the answer is the entertainment liaison or the PAO, since they review scripts

and talk with pre-production teams to decide whether to grant or deny resources to producers and offer broader advice to creators. The problem is that these employees are also paid by the CIA to shed a more favorable light on the Agency. Positive representations of the CIA thus seem more important to the Agency than notions of accuracy. After all, if the CIA is primarily concerned with issues of accuracy it could support scripts that depict waterboarding, rendition (*Rendition* [2007]), the destruction of tapes of questionable interrogations in television and film productions, overseas assassinations (*Lumumba* [2000]), or involvement in mind control/drug experiments (*The Good Shepherd* [2006]). Yet the CIA has never tried to support these projects and presumably never would.

Furthermore, there is some evidence that the CIA has occasionally collaborated with Hollywood for psychological warfare purposes and as cover for covert operations. For instance, Michael Frost Beckner, creator of *The Agency* recalls that Chase Brandon would occasionally call to offer ideas about upcoming episodes, including one that featured the Agency employing futuristic biometrics (interview with Beckner, 2010). At first, Beckner was unsure why Brandon was suggesting the plotline, especially since the technology was so far-fetched. When Beckner questioned Brandon on the story's realism, Brandon admitted that the technology wasn't real, but told him to "put it in there, whether we have it or not. These people [terrorists] watch TV too. It'll scare them" (*Ibid.*). In other words, Brandon may have been pitching the storyline as part of an anti-terrorist disinformation or intimidation campaign, and Beckner states that through this interaction he realized that the CIA may "have wanted to scare these guys with messages about what the CIA could do" (*Ibid.*).

Beckner also relayed that he and Brandon brainstormed about how to kill a Pakistani general featured in one of *The Agency's* other episodes. Brandon suggested using a Predator drone outfitted with a Hellfire missile. Beckner states:

Remember, now, that at this time, no one had done this before. So, I asked if this was really realistic or not, and Chase said, you know, I think it could happen. Why don't you see how it plays out, how you could make it work. So I did, and one month after the show aired, you have the CIA assassinating a Pakistani general using Hellfire missiles from a Predator drone. I'm not a big conspiracy theorist, but there seems to have been a unique synergy there. (*Ibid.*)

When pressed on this comment, Beckner concluded that Brandon may have been using the scene to workshop threat scenarios just as the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies helps the government workshop threats, which indeed Beckner was asked to join by the CIA shortly after 9/11 (*Ibid.*).

Furthermore, intelligence services have used film producers in its field operations in the past. Such a tactic was at the heart of one of the CIA's most famous successes, as soon to be featured in the George Clooney film *Argo*. In this case the CIA rescued six Americans trapped in Iran during the 1979-1981 hostage crisis by helping them pose as a Canadian film crew scouting locations near Tehran. Hollywood cooperated on the operation, granting the CIA use of Columbia Studios as their "production offices," while award-winning makeup artist John Chambers also acted as part of their disguise team and was recently awarded the CIA's Intelligence Medal of Merit. [\[15\]](#)

It is not clear how unusual this type of cooperation is. Mendez states that during his tenure at the Agency he was unaware of another case where the CIA used Hollywood as cover for its operations, and that the CIA cannot legally use the media, religious groups, students or the Peace Corps as a cover unless it has Director approval (interview with Mendez, 2008). However, Mendez saw no reason why the CIA could not use this strategy again, stating that the cover provides great mobility, which

is important because once you get to a place you can then hold clandestine meetings with a source. It's like the old lore about spies using the cover of a traveling circus because it allowed them to go places and meet people they wouldn't normally have access to. (*Ibid.*)

This notion of access was reiterated by Michael Sands, who was involved in a more recent intelligence-Hollywood operation concerning the terrorist Abu Abbas, the mastermind behind the 1985 high-jacking of Italian cruise ship the Achille Lauro (interview with Sands, 2010). According to Sands, he used his media company to convince Abbas that he was interested in "doing his book and movie" and then used his contacts with Finnish filmmakers to arrange a five-hour interview with the terrorist (*Ibid.*). That interview took place in Baghdad on 13 August 2001 for a movie called *Portrait of a Terrorist*. However, as soon as filming was over Sands sent a copy of the interview, as well as Abbas's cell phone and fax number, to the FBI and CIA. Sands believes this information helped the government to eventually track down and capture Abbas, who was arrested by the government in the spring of 2003. If the extent to which Sands was instrumental in Abbas' arrest is hard to determine, his involvement is one of many indicators that the CIA finds allies in Hollywood, challenging the popular image of Hollywood as a den of "anti-Americanism."

## Conclusions

CIA activity in Hollywood is and always has been more active and politically motivated than the Agency likes to admit. During the initial phase of the Cold War, the Agency worked to covertly shape Hollywood

screen content to either promote foreign policy or America's wholesome image abroad, to which Luigi Luraschi, *The Quiet American*, *Animal Farm* and other films can bear witness. Once the USSR collapsed, the CIA revamped its Hollywood relationship, working more openly with the industry to create favourable public perception of the Agency at home and increase recruitment levels. Both stages involved the CIA working with a handful of well-placed individuals in the entertainment industry to meet its objectives through less than transparent means.

So how significant are the CIA's efforts over the past two decades? The cases cited above give some indication of how influential a small number of well-placed, politically motivated individuals can be in shaping key aspects of the politics of Hollywood, particularly as it relates to public relations for a powerful organization. The CIA's reputation for conspiracy and skullduggery, long established since the 1970s, is not nearly as in vogue on our screens as in the past, and several recent entertainment products have actively and unambiguously championed the CIA, including *Covert Affairs*, *The Sum of All Fears*, *In the Company of Spies*, and *The Agency*, all of which were produced with some level of CIA assistance.

Whether their makeover efforts will continue at such a pace following the departure of Brandon and Barry (who have since retired from their posts) remains to be seen, but the Agency remains an important, neglected dynamo in the motion picture industry; an industry comprised of those major companies that the Senate dubbed in 1941 "giant engines of propaganda" (Moser, 2001: 731-752). What makes the present situation so alarming for democracy and interesting for researchers of propaganda and public policy is not that Hollywood whitewashes the CIA's historical record. Hollywood's primary objectives are to entertain and turn a profit; pedagogical obligations are secondary at most. Rather, what is most eye-opening is that the industry is clearly influenced by a deliberate public relations campaign undertaken by the CIA, whilst the media and scholarship has apparently remained unconcerned.

## Notes

[1] See Gates (1991).

[2] See Jenkins (2009).

[3] See Sciolino (2001) and Bernstein (2001).

[4] See Stonor Saunders (2000) and Shaw (2007).

[5] This pattern of influence is similar to the way Carl Bernstein demonstrated that the CIA worked with news media in the 1960s and 70s. In his *Rolling Stone* exposé, Bernstein explained that hundreds of stringers, freelancers, and accredited staff members of news organizations helped the Agency gather intelligence while reporting

abroad. The CIA also used actual news organizations and Agency proprietaries to provide cover for its operatives. Most important to this article, however, is the fact that the CIA also enlisted the help of dozens of newspaper columnists and commentators to publish stories that were sympathetic to the Agency's viewpoint and sometimes written by the Agency itself. As Bernstein concludes, "The Agency's special relationships with the so called "majors" in publishing and broadcasting enabled the CIA to post some of its most valuable operatives abroad without exposure for more than two decades," and most interactions simply consisted of high-level officials personally dealing "with a single designated individual in the top management of the cooperating news organization" (1977: unpaginated).

**[6]** In the 1940s, the FBI was concerned about Communist infiltration of Hollywood, and as a result operated on the assumption that "the motion picture industry is beginning to be recognized as one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, influence upon the minds and culture, not only of the people of the United States, but of the entire world" (Sbardellati, 2008: 412). Likewise, Lenin was purported to have said "the most important of all arts is the cinema" (quoted in Kenez, 1992: 27). Goebbels also commented, "We must give film a task and a mission in order that we may use it to conquer the world" (quoted in Rentschler, 1996: 215).

**[7]** Luraschi's cooperation with the PCA was important because during the Second World War the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) operated under the Office of War Information (OWI) to network with Hollywood and, by the fourth quarter in 1943 every studio except Paramount allowed the OWI to read its scripts (Black and Koppes, 1977: 103). Although the OWI had no censorship powers, the studios nonetheless responded very well to the OWI's essential question: "Will this picture help us win the war?" (Worland, 1997: 50), and Luraschi's work with the office helped ensure Paramount's less formal cooperation.

**[8]** Although Luraschi was only one of a number of voices, including John Wayne, who decried the film's "un-American" ending, as a senior member of the Academy, Luraschi had some weight.

**[9]** We would sincerely like to thank David Elridge for corresponding with us on Luraschi's case.

**[10]** Consider, for instance, the film's ending. The last few sentences of Orwell's novel read: "Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which." Orwell's ending clearly indicts both capitalist (the men) and communist governments (the pigs), suggesting that there is little

difference in their overall effect on the human condition and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. The film version, however, completely removes the capitalist farmers from the final scene and instead merely features the pigs, thereby erasing any implication of capitalist shortfalls.

**[11]** The Mighty Wurlitzer was a term used by the CIA in its cultural propaganda campaign during the Cold War, which often used entertainment media and stars to promote capitalism throughout Eastern Europe and South Asia. See Wilford (2008).

**[12]** See Sutel (2007); Kirkpatrick (2003); and Estulin (2007).

**[13]** See Robb (2010).

**[14]** See "The Agency's Lead Characters" (2005); and "Patrick Stewart Visits CIA" (1997).

**[15]** See Mendez (1999).

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