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What We Do

CIA's primary mission is to collect, analyze, evaluate, and disseminate foreign intelligence to assist the President and senior US government policymakers in making decisions relating to national security. This is a very complex process and involves a variety of steps.

First, we have to identify a problem or an issue of national security concern to the US government. In some cases, CIA is directed to study an intelligence issue—such as what activities terrorist organizations are planning, or how countries that have biological or chemical weapons plan to use these weapons—then we look for a way to collect information about the problem.



There are several ways to collect information. Translating foreign newspaper and magazine articles and radio and television broadcasts provides open-source intelligence. Imagery satellites take pictures from space, and imagery analysts write reports about what they see—for example, how many airplanes are at a foreign military base. Signals analysts work to decrypt coded messages sent by other countries. Operations officers recruit foreigners to give information about their countries.

After the information is collected, intelligence analysts pull together the relevant information from all available sources and assess what is



happening, why it is happening, what might occur next, and what it means for US interests. The result of this analytic effort is timely and objective assessments, free of any political bias, provided to senior US policymakers in the form of finished intelligence products that include written reports and oral briefings. One of these reports is the President's Daily Brief (PDB), an Intelligence Community product, which the US president and other senior officials receive each day.

It is important to know that CIA analysts only report the information and do not make policy recommendations

—making policy is left to agencies such as the State Department and Department of Defense. These policymakers use the information that CIA provides to help them formulate US policy toward other countries. It is also important to know that CIA is not a law enforcement organization. That is the job of the FBI; however, the CIA and the FBI cooperate on a number of issues, such as counterintelligence and counterterrorism. Additionally, the CIA may also engage in covert action at the President's direction and in accordance with applicable law.

The US Congress has had oversight responsibility of the CIA since the Agency was established in 1947. However, prior to the mid-1970's, oversight was less formal. The 1980 Intelligence Oversight Act charged the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) with authorizing the programs of the intelligence agencies and overseeing their activities.

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