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C.I.A. Employee Fired for Alleged Leak

By DAVID JOHNSTON and SCOTT SHANE Published: April 21, 2006

WASHINGTON, April 21 — The Central Intelligence Agency has dismissed a senior career officer for disclosing classified information to reporters, including material for The Washington Post's Pulitzer Prize-winning articles about the agency's secret prisons overseas for terror suspects, intelligence officials said today.

Multimedia

Video: David Johnston

The C.I.A. would not identify the leaker, but several government officials said it was Mary O. McCarthy, a veteran intelligence analyst who until 2001 was senior director for intelligence programs at the National Security Council, where she served under Presidents Clinton

and Bush. . At the time of her dismissal, Ms. McCarthy was working in the agency's inspector general's office, after a four-year stint at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based organization that examines global security issues.

The dismissal of Ms. McCarthy provided fresh evidence of the Bush administration's determined efforts to stanch leaks of classified information. The Justice Department has separately opened preliminary investigations into the disclosure of information to The Post, for its articles about secret prisons, as well as to The New York Times, for articles last fall that disclosed the existence of a warrantless domestic eavesdropping program supervised by the National Security Agency. Those articles were also recognized this week with a Pulitzer Prize, awarded to two New York Times reporters.

Several former veteran C.I.A. officials said the dismissal of an agency employee was rare and perhaps unprecedented. One official recalled the firing of a small number of agency contractors, including retirees, for leaking several years ago. Ms. McCarthy's dismissal was announced at the C.I.A. on Thursday in an e-mail sent by Porter J. Goss, the agency's director, who has made the effort to stop unauthorized disclosure of secrets a top priority. News of the dismissal was first reported today by MSNBC.

Her departure followed an internal investigation by the C.I.A.'s Security Center, as part of an intensified effort that began in January to scrutinize employees who had access to particularly sensitive information. She was given a polygraph examination, confronted about answers given to the polygraph examiner and confessed, the government officials said. On Thursday she was stripped of her security clearance and escorted out of C.I.A. headquarters.

"A C.I.A. officer has been fired for unauthorized contact with the media and for the unauthorized disclosure of classified information," said C.I.A. spokesman Paul Gimigliano. "This is a violation of the secrecy agreement that is the condition of employment with C.I.A. The officer has acknowledged the contact and the disclosures."

Mr. Gimigliano said the Privacy Act prohibited him from identifying the employee.

Intelligence officials speaking on the condition of anonymity said the dismissal resulted from "a pattern of conduct" and not from a single leak, but that the case involved in part information about secret C.I.A. detention centers that was leaked to The Washington Post.

Ms. McCarthy's departure was another unsettling jolt for the C.I.A., battered in recent years over faulty prewar reporting in Iraq, waves of senior echelon departures following the appointment of Porter J. Goss as director and the diminished standing of the agency under reorganization of the country's intelligence agency.

The C.I.A.'s inquiry focused in part on identifying Ms. McCarthy's role in supplying information for a Nov. 2, 2005, article in The Post, by Dana Priest, a national security reporter for the newspaper. The article reported that the intelligence agency was sending terror suspects to clandestine detention centers in several countries,

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Leonard Downie Jr., The Post's executive editor said on the newspaper's Web site, that he could not comment on the firing, because he did not know the details surrounding it. "As a general principle, obviously I am opposed to criminalizing the dissemination of government information to the press."

Eric C. Grant, a spokesman for the newspaper would not address whether any C.I.A. employee was a source for the secret prison articles, but said, "No Post reporter has been subpoenaed or talked to investigators in connection with this matter."

The article provoked an outcry among European allies and set off protests among Democrats in Congress. The article prompted the C.I.A. to send a criminal referral to the Justice Department. Lawyers at the Justice Department were notified of Ms. McCarthy's dismissal, but no new referral was issued, according to law enforcement officials. They said they will review the case, but that her termination could mean she will be spared criminal prosecution.

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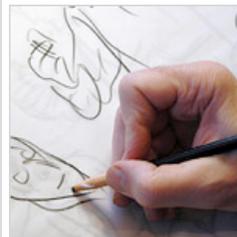
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