

ORIGINS OF THE CENTER

PROJECT TROY

World War II laid the foundation for the formation of academic research centers like CIS. Physical and social scientists from MIT and elsewhere made critical contributions to the war effort, and policymakers concluded that academic research would be important after the war as well.

In 1950, as war raged in Korea and the U.S.S.R. tested its atomic bomb, the Soviets were jamming Voice of America (VOA) radio propaganda broadcasts. Undersecretary of State James Webb asked MIT President James Killian to assemble a team to solve the jamming problem.



Killian and Humanities and Social Studies Dean John Burchard assembled a diverse group (including professors from Harvard and other universities) to address not only the technical issues but also matters of political warfare: what the VOA should broadcast, to whom, and to what effect, once the jamming was circumvented. This State Department project, code-named "Troy" (after the hollow wooden horse in which the Greeks were said to have hidden their army in order to secretly gain entrance to Troy) led in 1951 to a report, some of which remains classified a half century later.

Project Troy resulted in the establishment of a research center at MIT funded by the CIA and located in a warehouse on Albany Street. Its first study, "Soviet Vulnerability," was conducted by Walt Rostow, the MIT economic historian who later served as national security advisor to presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

In 1952, this group moved to the Sloan Building as the Center for International Studies. Project Troy had not only led to a solution of the jamming problem, but also to the creation of an interdisciplinary center where scholarly expertise would be applied to foreign policy issues.



Some of the Center's founders: James Killian (MIT President), John Burchard (Dean, Humanities and Social Scientists), Professors Walt W. Rostow and Jay A. Stratton, Vice President and Provost of MIT—and Acting Director of CIS in the months leading up to the formal establishment of CIS in 1952—and Max Millikan.

The MIT Center for International Studies was founded in 1952 as a direct result of the Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Max F. Millikan, a young MIT economist, urged the eclectic faculty he assembled at the Center to become "social science entrepreneurs"—to use scholarship to help policymakers better understand and respond to international events, and to further the cause of the social sciences at MIT.

During Millikan's long tenure (1952-1969), the Center's sociologists, economists, anthropologists, political scientists, and historians studied communist societies and movements, the economic and political development of industrializing countries, and communication systems in both East and West. They published influential articles and more than 100 books, and contributed to the expansion of the social sciences at MIT—including the founding in 1965 of the Department of Political Science around a core of CIS faculty.

And while the Center has shifted focus through the decades, as dictated by world events, its commitment to research in the national interest has remained constant.

CIS RESEARCH PROGRAMS

CIS initially pursued three major research initiatives: international communication, economic and political development, and communist bloc studies.



International Communication

The International Communication Program examined how elites shape foreign policy preferences, and how communications influence modernization in democratic and communist societies. This program was perhaps the clearest intellectual descendant of Project Troy, and was led by Ithiel de Sola Pool throughout its 30-year lifetime.



Economic and Political Development

The program on Economic and Political Development initially focused on India, Indonesia, and Italy—modernizing societies thought to be potentially unstable and thereby vulnerable to communism. One goal was to help direct economic planning in these countries. Another was to develop a rationale for U.S. development aid. Professors Max Millikan, Walt Rostow, Myron Weiner and Lucian Pye conducted the most influential research in this area.



Communist Studies

Communist Studies analyzed communist societies as a whole, as well as communist movements, intra-bloc tensions, and technical and scientific education within the Soviet system. When Walt Rostow left CIS to join the Kennedy administration, William Griffith became director of this program, and produced a series of books on communist movements and schisms.

CIS produced numerous books and papers on Communist systems and parties in the U.S.S.R., China, and Europe.



This chart, created for a presentation at the Center during the first years of the nuclear age, reflects perfectly Cold War concerns about Soviet capabilities in science and technology.

Funding

The Central Intelligence Agency was the primary funding source for the Center's first two years, and a sponsor of various research projects until 1966. The Ford Foundation was CIS's principal supporter through the 1960s. It provided general support for the Center, funds for projects in several fields, and endowment funds for faculty appointments. Numerous other foundations and government agencies also have funded CIS activities.



Max F. Millikan, CIS founding Director.

Max F. Millikan

Max Millikan's concern with the integration of academic expertise and policy practice was a reflection of his own background; he was an economist who had served in the War Shipping Administration and, briefly, with the CIA. Millikan was responsible for the Center's early focus on economic development in developing nations

"The purpose of social science research should be to deepen, broaden, and extend the policy-maker's capacity for judgment—not to provide him with answers."

—MILLIKAN, "THE RELATION OF KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION"



Walt W. Rostow

Walt W. Rostow's theories of modernization were to prove highly influential in shaping U.S. foreign policies during the 1950s. He also directed early CIS studies on the Soviet Union and China.

Millikan and Rostow believed that academic specialists should not only study the economic and political development of industrializing societies, but that they should also inform U.S. policy. One of their concerns was that modernization's inevitable stresses not give rise to anti-democratic politics.

"It is plain that the Communist world poses two threats to the United States—a military threat and an ideological threat... two national efforts, one military and the other political, interacting intimately, must go forward together as part of a total effort to protect the interests of American society."

—MILLIKAN AND ROSTOW, "A PROPOSAL: KEY TO AN EFFECTIVE FOREIGN POLICY"

Ithiel de Sola Pool

Ithiel de Sola Pool was the major figure behind communications research at CIS. Like Max Millikan, he was an outspoken proponent of social science research on important issues of public policy.

"The only hope for humane government in the future is through the extensive use of the social sciences by government... I can think of no greater contribution a social scientist could make than to help improve this effort at knowledge of the outside world."

—POOL, "THE NECESSITY FOR SOCIAL SCIENTISTS DOING RESEARCH FOR GOVERNMENTS"



A 1960 International Communications seminar led by Ithiel de Sola Pool (head of table), and sociologist Daniel Lerner (right, arms folded).