Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

IS OUR INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM RELIABLE?

by

George Fielding Eliot

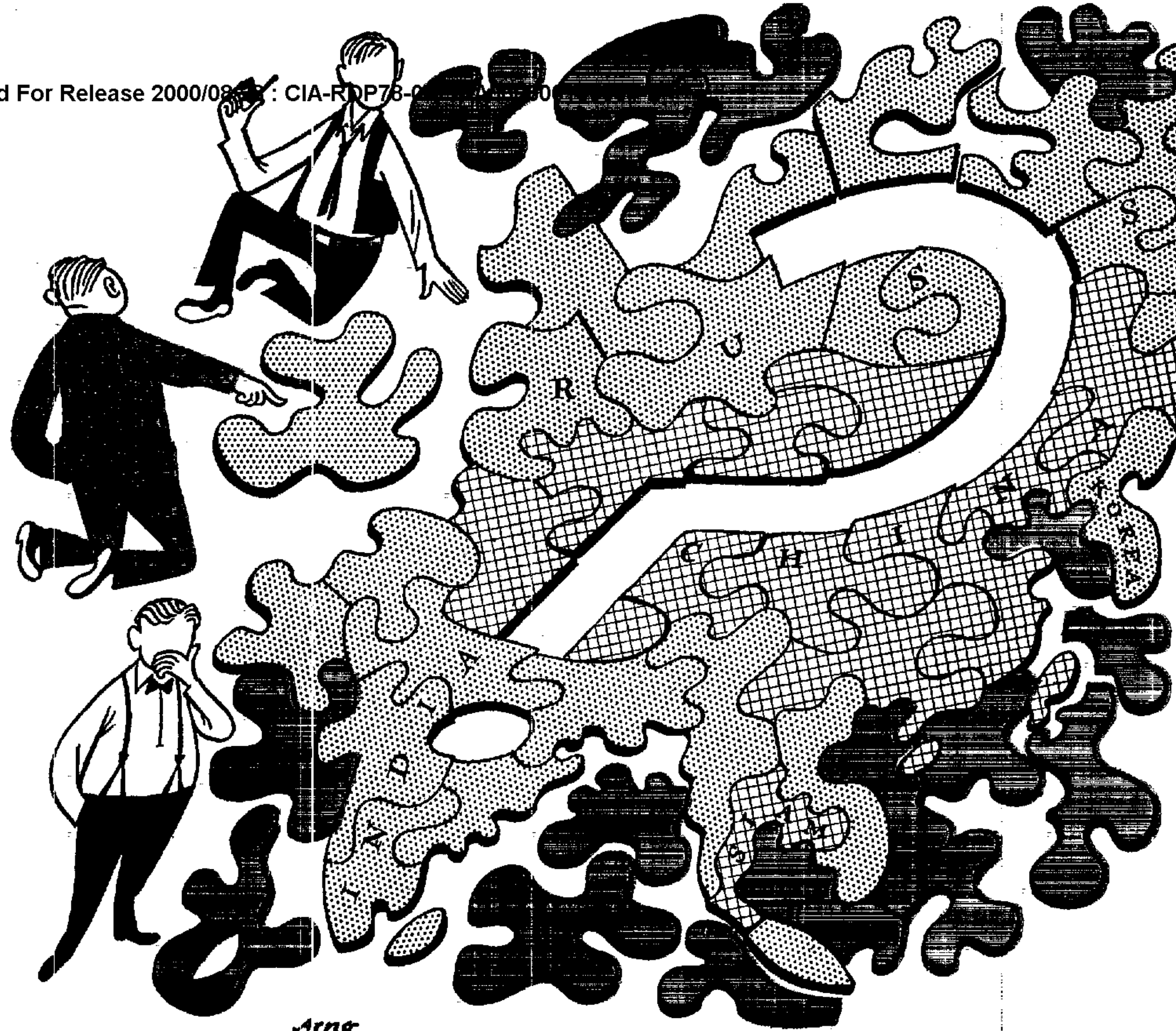
Document No. 004
No Change In Class. ☐
☐ Declassified
Class. Changed To: TS S C
Auth.: HR 70-2
Date: 21 NOV 1978 By:

A reprint from
U.S.A., the Magazine of World Affairs, June 1952

Permission has been given CIA for the reproduction and distribution to employees of the following piece.

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2



"ANOTHER INTELLIGENCE BLUNDER!" That was the instant accusation hurled by a pack of frightened congressmen in June, 1950, upon hearing that the Korean bombshell had burst. For three years they had put up with the new Central Intelligence Agency and its growing pains. Now the CIA had failed to warn Congress of a major military threat.

There was, of course, an investigation. Facing a semicircle of anxious, angry Senators, CIA's director, Rear Admiral Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter, calmly produced piece by piece the documentary evidence which proved beyond all argument that CIA had warned the policy-makers well in advance of the North Korean troop concentrations above the 38th parallel, and had made what proved a very shrewd estimate of the Red numbers, organization, and armament—and their offensive intentions.

The Senators sat for a moment in stunned silence when Hillenkoetter had finished. Then one Senator spoke his mind:

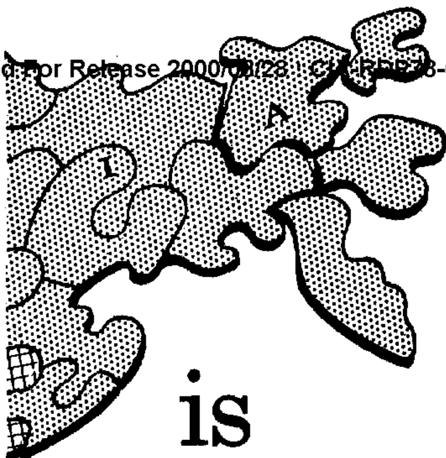
"But, Admiral," he cried, "why didn't you see that something was done about this information?"

"Senator," said Hillenkoetter, "the duty of an intelligence agency is to present facts, not to make policy."

Major Eliot is a noted commentator on affairs related to our national security.

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2



is our intelligence system reliable?

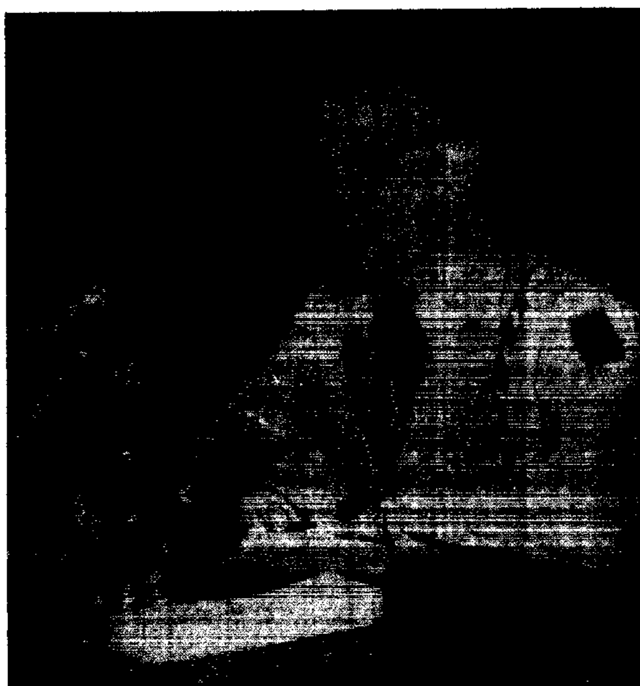
American Intelligence is coming of age fast. The big problem is to read the meaning of facts with accuracy!

By George Fielding Eliot

He did not say what must have been painfully apparent—that the facts had been presented, but had not been acted upon because the policy-makers did not want to believe them.

To put it bluntly, a junior rear admiral did not have the weight of authority himself—and his newborn agency had not acquired an accumulated weight of its own—sufficient to compel Secretaries of State and Defense and Chiefs of Staff to accept unpleasant facts which ran contrary to their own expressed and intrenched beliefs.

This question of authority had been hamstringing American intelligence activities for years. Back in the 'thirties, the Chief of Naval



Harris & Ewing

General Walter Bedell Smith brings to CIA the needed prestige of rank and experience

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

Operations once explained how departmental preconceptions and interests and the personal "bugs" of secretaries and military chiefs were coloring the assumptions drawn from the intelligence agencies of the State, War, and Navy Departments. There was little or no coordination of intelligence. Therefore there existed no sifted, agreed body of fact on which a national policy could be based.

That same year, a congressional committee refused the Director of Naval Intelligence—who came personally to beg for it—a modest appropriation of $15,000 to buy mimeograph machines and paper so that he could distribute intelligence reports and summaries to fleet and naval district commanders. He was rebuked for having suggested the spending of public money to disseminate "Navy propaganda." There was even a mutter of "gumshoe business," of "trying to set up a Gestapo." There seemed something vaguely un-American about the very words "intelligence service." And being detailed to intelligence did no officer's career—Army or Navy—any good. It was regarded as being a little on the fancy side, even as suggesting incompetence for command duties. General of the Army Omar N. Bradley remarks on this point: "I recall how scrupulously I avoided the branding that came with an intelligence assignment in my own career."

Then came 1941 and Pearl Harbor, blasting us into belated realization of the dangers of trying to get along without an organized national intelligence service. Many of the same congressmen who had denied money for simple needs now loudly denounced the "failure of our intelligence." In fact, even though starved for money and manpower, the intelligence services had dredged up enough morsels of information which could have enabled the U.S. to foresee and forestall the Japanese attack—had there been any means by which these morsels could have been co-ordinated and evaluated, and their result brought forcefully to the notice of those in the seats of decision. There wasn't.

Pearl Harbor made that need clear—but Pearl Harbor also landed us in the midst of the biggest war we have ever fought. The attempt to meet the need for organized intelligence through the creation of the Office of Strategic Services in June, 1942, was under military control and directed (naturally enough) toward the immediate end of victory. The moment the war was over, OSS (which had accumulated its share of jealousies and frictions) was dissolved and its functions distributed to the State and War Departments, amid a barrage of lurid tales which tended to obscure its very real service.

The need for centralized intelligence remained. It was given lip service by the creation of the National Intelligence Authority in January, 1946, under a presidential directive to "coordinate" the intelligence procured by the Army, Navy, State Department and other government agencies. It limped along as best it could while the bitter unification struggle raged in the Pentagon and most Americans thought wistfully of a world of peace and justice under the benev-

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

olent aegis of the United Nations.

But it soon became clear that makeshift policy and pious hopes would not do in the face of the Soviet power bloc. We had not forgotten Pearl Harbor. There was a rising demand for effective policy-making machinery, for effective defense organization. And it followed as the night the day that we could have neither unless we began with a fact-finding agency to provide the body of knowledge on which to base policies and military plans.

The National Security Act of 1947—largely the result of the patient, tireless efforts of the late James Forrestal—tried to provide answers to these problems. It established our first top planning agency, the National Security Council, and it gave the NSC as its fact-finder the Central Intelligence Agency. When that act became law in July, 1947, the United States for the first time acquired a national intelligence service with a statutory foundation.

Chiefly, the new organization, under the terms of the act, was to provide the much-needed clearing-house for the information obtained by others: by the far-flung net of State Department activities, by the Army's G-2, by the Office of Naval Intelligence, by the Air Force Intelligence, and by other government departments. CIA was supposed to "correlate" and "evaluate" this mass of information—that is, to sift out fact from conjecture, reconcile contradictions, eliminate duplication, produce an end product which policy-makers could rely upon, and see that this product was distributed to those who needed it.

CIA was also required to advise the National Security Council as to all intelligence activities relating to the national security and make appropriate recommendations for the coordination of such activities. CIA was not given direct authority to coordinate; but, considering that the members of the NSC are the President of the United States as chairman, the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the chairman of the National Security Resources Board, a statute-backed right to advise and recommend to such a body acquires a formidable character.

Finally, CIA was empowered to "perform, for the benefit of the existing intelligence agencies, such additional services of common concern as the National Security Council determines can be more efficiently accomplished centrally," and "which other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council may from time to time direct." In other words, CIA was not to be merely a coordinator; it could operate on its own if there were gaps to be filled. But ancient suspicions and jealousies die hard, and the law as drawn was amended by Congress in two respects: first, to deny specifically to CIA any internal security or police powers; and, second, to preserve to the several departments their existing intelligence processes.

On the whole, it was a good law —a great step forward. But, like every other law that has ever been printed on paper, it did not produce miracles immediately. The first need of the new agency was for capable, experienced men and women. This was a need not easily

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

filled, as the newly appointed director, Rear Admiral Hillenkoetter, quickly discovered. A few good people had been inherited from OSS. But where were the others to come from? The body of experience was not great, since intelligence on a national scale was a new thing in America. Career officers of the services were still shy of the "intelligence" brand. Capable civilians of standing and merit were reluctant to give up established careers for the uncertainty of this new venture—and Hillenkoetter's attempts to found a career intelligence service by enlisting young people straight out of college met with the same reluctance. "Can you promise me a secure future?" was the question which Hillenkoetter could not yet answer honestly in the affirmative. CIA represented a new idea on trial. It had yet to come of age, to establish itself as a permanent governmental unit.

In those early days, there were not lacking voices prophesying CIA's early demise, voices saying—"That outfit won't last through the next Congress, or certainly not after the first stupid blunder that's sure to come." A new agency always has trouble, as Hanson Baldwin remarks, "in establishing itself in politically jealous, power-conscious Washington." This was a heavy burden to lay on the shoulders of a young rear admiral of less than a year's seniority in grade. The older intelligence agencies fought tooth and nail against any "invasion" of their prerogatives. Army G-2 quarrelled with CIA over who was to do what abroad; the State Department worried for months over the question of whether its Ambassadors and Ministers should have authority over CIA personnel in various countries; the FBI took a dim view of CIA's taking over certain activities in Latin America which FBI had been performing. But the big trouble was—and remains—the old, old problem of departmental interpretation.

CIA was there to get at the facts, rock-bottom facts, impartially determined in the light of the best available evidence, and filled in by educated guesses and careful deduction only where absolutely essential and with guess and deduction duly labelled as such. It is natural that each departmental intelligence service will look at the facts from the point of view of its own interests. In any over-all survey of Soviet military strength, for example, one would expect Naval Intelligence to lay chief emphasis on Soviet submarine activities, the Air Force to give first priority to Soviet air power, and the Army to present the mass of Soviet divisions as the chief menace. But when it comes to presenting the final consolidated report, it isn't always easy to get agreement as to how this report should be weighted. Cries of "Kill the umpire!"—or their equivalent—are not unknown in CIA conference rooms.

Yet somehow the CIA took form and functioned amid all these growing pains. The numerous criticisms—some well-founded, others far less so—brought about in the Summer of 1948 the appointment of a committee of distinguished civilians with wartime intelligence experience (Allen W. Dulles, William H. Jackson and Mathias F. Correa) to make recommendations

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

for improvements and necessary changes. The committee did a helpful job. But much credit is due to the courage, good temper and quiet self-effacement with which Rear Admiral Hillenkoetter struggled along, eliminating chair-warmers and "empire builders," bringing in a trickle of new personnel when he could get good people, doing the best he could with second-raters when he had to, and on occasion jeopardizing his own naval career by remaining impartial in the face of some naval preconception.

Hillenkoetter was scheduled to return to the Navy, however, and was longing for sea duty. So he went to command a cruiser division in Korean waters, and in October, 1950, CIA had a new director, Lieutenant General (now General) Walter Bedell Smith, USA.

Smith brought to CIA his great gifts of command and of persuasion, his three years of experience in the Moscow embassy and as a participant in every international conference during that period, and the prestige of high rank and of distinguished war service as Eisenhower's Chief of Staff.

He came to CIA, moreover, at a time when the Korean war was stepping up appropriations and when men of substance could be called upon for service with some assurance of favorable reactions.

It is no injustice to Hillenkoetter to say that with the appointment of Bedell Smith CIA came of age. It acquired a chief who could not be disregarded by anyone in the Government, however high in authority. It had won through its period of growing pains. It had weathered the Korean storm with credit, and it came well out of the later uproar over the Chinese intervention in North Korea, again well able to prove that whatever had gone wrong, CIA had been there with the information. Its prestige as an impartial, reliable source of vital knowledge was established. Not easily would its warnings be set aside again.

Now Smith could start building a permanent structure with some assurance for the future. The basic truth upon which CIA was founded at last had been accepted as established gospel: that national intelligence was a task far beyond the scope of any single agency.

Not only is the field of its research world-wide from the geographical viewpoint, but today it must produce far more than a mere list of regiments or air wings or fortified places. The sources of national power cover the whole range of human activity—military, political, economic, and psychological.

As a young officer, the writer was told: "Military intelligence is not the sun illumining the world, but a searchlight poking into dark corners." But today, with one-fourth of the whole land surface of the globe deliberately blacked out to the rest of mankind, with all normal sources of information denied and the most elaborate precautions taken to preserve secrecy as to every detail, something more than an intermittent searchlight survey is required.

It isn't easy for Americans to understand the grave difficulties imposed by this handicap. It isn't only the police precautions which prevent or restrict all entry and movement of foreigners in the Sov-

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

iet domain. It is the drying up of every source of information such as is freely available about our own and other free countries—the usual channels of news, trade and credit information, production figures, the exchange of scientific and educational data, maps, books, magazines, all the means by which facts and thoughts flow freely across national boundaries. At least half of the fact-items in the Soviet estimates prepared by CIA with painful, piece-meal effort could be culled as to our own country from the World Almanac, the Census Bureau's "Statistical Abstract of the United States," a set of contoured maps, and a file of any good daily newspaper.

These "national estimates" are the final end product of CIA's labors. There's one for every developing situation—it's as important to understand an ally as to penetrate an enemy's secrets—but the Soviet estimate has No. 1 priority. The estimates are never static. As soon as one is completed, revision begins. They are the result of day-by-day effort which never ceases. CIA can't afford rest periods.

The process of putting a national estimate together has been compared to solving a jig-saw puzzle. You might imagine a huge incomplete jig-saw puzzle—with many pieces missing and large irregular blank spaces all through it—laid out on the floor of a room. Every day come men from Army, Navy, Air Force, State and other activities, each bringing a new piece or perhaps a handful of pieces. It is immediately clear where some of the new pieces fit. Others don't seem to fit at all. They may belong in the middle of some of the blank spaces. They have to be set aside until other pieces which match them are obtained. Or some pieces already fitted in may now seem not to fit quite precisely—one of the new pieces fits more evenly. A whole section of the puzzle thus may have to be readjusted. The picture disclosed may be wholly altered in character by this change. There will be lively argument between those who were proud of the original arrangement and those who insist that the change is more nearly accurate. Finally the time will come when the picture is as nearly complete as seems likely for the time being. Then the blank spaces have to be filled in by guess and deduction from the general color and form of the picture as shown by the pieces already assembled. The result is a national estimate, as of right then. The search for new pieces and the replacement of old pieces continue.

What CIA strives to produce in these national estimates is a firm guide upon which policy-makers and planners can rely. When each estimate (or rather each edition of each estimate) approaches completion, there is a meeting of the Intelligence Advisory Committee, presided over by the director of Central Intelligence, and including intelligence representatives of the military services, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State Department, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (which handles domestic aspects of intelligence work). There is usually a brisk discussion on points as to which full agreement has not yet been reached. Here, as

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2

already observed, the director of Central Intelligence must be the impartial umpire.

Not the least of General Smith's contributions to CIA is his success in this delicate and troublesome task. He never consents to "compromise for the sake of compromise." He will not permit an estimate to be watered down.

Political influence has never succeeded—so far, anyway, but keep your fingers crossed—in filtering into the CIA. Facts, as Dulles remarks, are neither Republican nor Democratic: which itself is a fact that may arise to haunt some candidates in the current election. Presidential candidates might well reflect soberly on the embarrassment of being elected on the basis of vigorous assertions which—when the candidate becomes President and is duly briefed by the CIA—may turn out to be all hogwash.

While—as already observed—CIA's growing prestige plus the Korean crisis have enabled General Smith to obtain the services of many distinguished civilians with special competence for intelligence work, this is only a stop-gap. The agency must develop its own career intelligence corps. It is better able to do so today because it can now say to young men and women: "Intelligence is a serious and honorable profession which offers you a lifetime job in the service of your country." Plans are well advanced for the start of such a career service for CIA personnel.

The big difficulty—the closed mind in high places—is still here. It is not as dangerous as it was, largely due to the vigor of some of General Smith's presentations and the fact that CIA generally has turned out a lot nearer right than any who have questioned its findings. But since General Smith will not always be director of CIA, it is of vital importance that the agency itself should acquire, as it is acquiring, the confidence and prestige which in the future will give the country the assurance that facts, however unpleasant or distasteful, will be looked squarely in the eye by those who must make the decisions of policy or of action.

We are building a good intelligence service for the first time in our history. When we have learned to use it, we can all breathe more easily.

Approved For Release 2000/08/28 : CIA-RDP78-04718A000600100004-2