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IAC-D-98/2
24 February 1956
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INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Glossary of Intelligence Terms

Background

1. On 30 August 1955 the IAC, acting on a proposal of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, directed that a list of intelligence terms requiring definitions be prepared for IAC consideration prior to deciding whether or not to compile a glossary (IAC-D-98; IAC-M-210, item 6 a).
2. In response to the IAC's request for contributions to a proposed Glossary of Intelligence Terms, a total of 364 different terms were suggested by four of the IAC agencies. (State had no items to contribute and questioned the need for such a glossary. G-2 also saw no need for a glossary and made no contributions.)
3. JIG suggested 45 words, Air Force 54, ONI 143, and CIA 179.
4. Only 41 of the 364 words were suggested by more than one agency. Of these, 1 was by four agencies, 9 by three agencies, and 31 by two agencies.
5. The terms submitted are attached as an Appendix. They have been arbitrarily divided into two groups. Category A includes strictly intelligence terms or terms having to do with the intelligence business. Very few are ever used in finished intelligence publications, particularly in National Intelligence Estimates. Category B includes all the other terms. Some of those in Category B have special meanings in intelligence, but have not been included in Category A because they also have more general usage and meaning.

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Discussion

6. Publication of an IAC-coordinated Glossary of Intelligence Terms would presumably be of value if it: (a) helped to develop agreement within the intelligence community on the usage and meaning of words used in the conduct of intelligence activities or in finished intelligence publications; or (b) helped make finished intelligence publications more understandable to non-intelligence readers. Although improvement in both these respects is needed, it is unlikely to be achieved by an intelligence glossary coordinated under IAC auspices.

7. The practical problems of producing such a coordinated glossary would be immense.

a. Selection of words. The words thus far suggested testify to the magnitude of the problem of selecting which words to include in a glossary. It is apparent that there are as yet unresolved differences of opinion among the various agencies as to not only what words but what categories of words should be included. Moreover, the wide variety of words thus far suggested and the number of different and overlapping categories some of them fall into, point up the difficulty of drawing up precise guide lines for determining the selection of words for a glossary. For example, a decision to exclude words already included in recognized government glossaries such as the Dictionary of United States Military Terms for Joint Usage would result in the omission of many words with predominantly intelligence usages; including such words, on the other hand, would not add to general knowledge if the definitions were the same and would cause great confusion if the definitions were different. Finally, the words already suggested indicate that a coordinated glossary which met the needs of all the participating agencies would include many words which would be of interest and use to only one agency.

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b. Definition. The problem of obtaining interagency agreement on the definition of many of the terms would be a difficult and time-consuming one. Many words would require periodic re-definition. Many others could not be described in brief compass. For example, a two or three line definition of "current intelligence" would add very little to the knowledge of most people within or without the intelligence community. A thorough understanding of "current intelligence" and many similar terms would require an encyclopedic rather than a dictionary approach, thereby adding considerably to the task of reaching agency-wide agreement.

8. Aside from the considerations in paragraph 2 above, any glossary which attempted to include words which had more than strictly intelligence usage or context would pose very serious problems. For example, the intelligence community, in the ordinary course of its work, must use the vocabularies of the military officer, the economist, the political scientist, and the historian. Selection of words of this type would have to be on an arbitrary basis. Referring to Category B, there is no apparent justification for including "economic growth" and excluding such phrases as "balance of payments" or "inflation." Including them all would require a full-sized dictionary. Moreover, most words of this type, as well as many of the more technical intelligence terms, have the same meaning in intelligence publications as they do in other publications and are defined in standard reference works or government manuals. Any attempt to give these words different definitions in an intelligence glossary would be self-defeating. Intelligence publications are designed to be read and understood by non-intelligence people, who should not be forced to refer to an intelligence glossary in order to understand what they are reading.

Conclusions

1. An IAC-coordinated glossary of intelligence terms would be a time-consuming, expensive undertaking.

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2. Preparation of such a glossary presents almost insoluble problems of selection and definition.

3. A glossary restricted to brief definitions of strictly intelligence terms would not materially facilitate the operations of the various intelligence agencies, would be of little use outside the intelligence community, and would contain many words already defined in approved government manuals.

4. A glossary of more generalized terms, rather than making intelligence publications more understandable, might encourage the intelligence community to adopt meanings for words at variance with the meanings generally accepted in the non-intelligence community.

Recommendation

That the IAC not undertake publication of a comprehensive, coordinated Glossary of Intelligence Terms.

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