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21 April 1947

MEMORANDUM FOR [redacted]

Subject: Comment on Ludwell L. Montague's memorandum "Authority and Responsibility of the Intelligence Staff and the Branches"

1. The effort of subject memorandum to persuade that "the attempt to distinguish between 'editorial' and 'substantive' functions is illusory and misleading" sets up a false argument which is filled with grave danger for the Central Intelligence Group. While it is true that there is a marginal zone in which editorial changes can be made without seriously compromising the facts of a given study, editorial changes which the Intelligence Staff has imposed in the past have lead frequently to serious "substantive" errors.

2. From the viewpoint of intelligence production, the "substantive" and the "editorial" factors must be considered separately. The easiest way in which this matter can be approached is to recognize that the security of the nation could be preserved by a piece of intelligence that possessed the four essentials: 1. timeliness, 2. correct information, 3. correct evaluation, 4. intelligibility. Whether or not the document had editorial merit would be beside the point. It could conceivably be quite ungrammatical.

3. Subject memorandum is in error in that it omits from consideration the existence and role of the Chiefs of the Geographic Branches. It assumes that intelligence is written by the "specialists" in Office of Reports and Estimates, at one end of the scale, and that the supreme authority, or as the memorandum puts it: "responsibility for decision whether and what to publish" should reside in the Intelligence Staff, at the other end of the scale. This latter assumption is the more interesting when it is realized that the duty of the Intelligence Staff, as established on the functional chart, is limited to the "coordination and supervision" of Office of Reports and Estimates manuscripts. To extend "coordination and supervision" to include final decision as to "whether and what to publish" is a serious matter that should be carefully investigated, since the latter power, overriding that of the Chiefs of the Geographic Branches, and exercised by men whose knowledge is admittedly limited, can lead to the complete negation of the work of the Geographic Branches.

4. The support for the present proposition to enlarge the powers of the Intelligence Staff consists in large measure in the supposition that the Staff is capable of exercising an "overall" view. One is inclined to wonder of what that view consists as one is inclined to query the personal qualifications, which the memorandum would have us believe make it feasible for the Staff to exercise such a view. It is obvious from the memorandum that the Staff does not feel itself to be possessed of special knowledge and it is doubtful that it would claim that it has general knowledge not available to the Branch Chiefs. It is also obvious that the Staff cannot claim any special knowledge of the tastes of

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the persons for whom intelligence studies are prepared by Office of Reports and Estimates.

5. The memorandum provides an escape clause in that it permits that controversies which cannot be resolved by the Staff and the "specialists" can be referred to higher authority for "command decision". This proposition raises a series of simple and fundamental questions: Who is to be believed in respect to a given piece of intelligence: The Branch Chiefs, all of whom are literate men, all of whom are in daily contact with the particular problems of their areas, all of whom by reason of the number of countries with which they are professionally concerned, as well as by past experience, exercise the widest possible, coherent overall viewpoints; or should it be the Intelligence Staff, which has only general and necessarily superficial information? Does the Assistant Director wish to stake his reputation on the former or on the latter type of authority? Should he be asked to settle an argument over a given paper, is he not faced with the necessity of deciding the argument less on the basis of facts than on the relative credibility of these two groups of men? Under what conditions could he decide in favor of the Intelligence Staff in the face of a firm clear contrary statement of a Geographic Branch Chief that the Intelligence Staff position is correct?

6. Should such decisions be reached in favor of the less informed group, there is no excuse for continuing the employment of Chiefs of Geographic Branches, and moreover, it may very shortly become impossible to retain within the Geographic Branches self-respecting intelligence personnel who have the courage of their informed convictions.

7. In view of the great importance which attaches to these considerations, it is strongly recommended that a committee be appointed consisting of the Chiefs of the Geographic Branches, of the Intelligence Staff, of the Basic Intelligence Staff and of the Planning Staff, and that this committee shall within thirty days after its activation, submit a report recommending means whereby the editorial and substantive aspects of the work in Office of Reports and Estimates can be defined and adjusted into a productive system.

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