

23 October 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chairman, NSCIC
SUBJECT: Intelligence Warning

INTRODUCTION

1. In the broadest sense, the function of intelligence is to provide the policy maker with a forecast of future international developments that are likely to have a significant effect on U.S. national interests. This is done on a continuing basis through the production of current intelligence and estimates.

2. Within this broad, general responsibility to forecast, intelligence has also a special responsibility to warn the policy maker of potential developments that are perceived to represent a special threat to U.S. national interests. Implicit in warning intelligence is the assumption that something might occur which requires a U.S. response and, thus, the special, focused attention of the policy maker.

3. Within the overall responsibility of the community to provide warning lies the more specialized responsibility to provide warning of military attack against the U.S. or its allies. An even more specialized responsibility is warning of nuclear attack. (See Tab A for a graphic display of the progression from the intelligence

NSA, DIA reviews completed

community's "steady state" forecasting role to its role in providing alerts and strategic warning.)

4. Until recently, the intelligence community has had no established mechanism to provide explicit warning to the policy maker except for the USIB Watch Committee. This was established in 1954, in response to the so-called Pearl Harbor syndrome, to provide warning of imminent military attack against the U.S. Given the narrowness of its charter, it has had little occasion to produce ^{strategic} warnings during the 20 years of its existence. Its weekly reports, containing essentially negative threat assessments, have been of little, if any, value to the policy maker. And even with some loosening over time of its reporting criteria, e. g., to cover military developments in Vietnam, the policy maker has been left unwarned, in any explicit sense, of a wide range of critical developments -- military, technological, political, and economic -- which have deserved his focused attention. He has been left largely to his own devices to glean from the mass of finished intelligence products constantly available to him which items deserve his special attention. The intelligence producer, after the event, has usually been able to demonstrate that in one way or another he forecasted the event. But he has generally assumed no responsibility to warn.

THE ALERT MEMORANDUM

5. In order to fill this gap in the community's procedures, I am in the process of developing a new intelligence art form, the Alert Memorandum (AM). Its purpose will be to provide me with a medium explicitly to warn the members of WSAG of a foreign development of special gravity in terms of U.S. national interests.

6. In recognition of the fact that warning is a responsibility of the whole community, no special group or office will be established to produce this document. An alert memorandum can be proposed by any element of the community; it will be produced by the appropriate National Intelligence Officer in conjunction with whatever elements of the community he wishes to call on to do the job. To the extent that time permits, it will be coordinated among the USIB agencies.

STRATEGIC WARNING

7. The possibility of a military attack against the U.S. or its allies, because of its extreme gravity, requires, in my view, an additional, discrete, and specialized effort.

8. Generally, U.S. policy interests will require warning of military events -- whether Communist-initiated or not -- more often and at an earlier stage of development than strictly political, technological, or economic events. Providing such warning, however, is extremely difficult because frequently no indications

exist of the intent to employ military measures until a very short period before the action is taken. While the decision to launch some military actions (e. g., Hitler's invasion of Poland and the Arab initiation of the October War) almost certainly occurs some time before the actions are adopted, in many cases (e. g., Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974) the decision to use force is not made until almost immediately before the action is taken.

9. In cases such as these the use of force (or initiation of hostilities) becomes, early on, one of a range of serious options addressed by a potential aggressor's top policy-making body. Capabilities are augmented, sometimes behind a screen of deliberate deception, to keep this option open and make it genuinely, or increasingly, viable. But the actual decision to exercise this option, i. e., to strike, may not be made until very late in the process rather than at the outset. There will be no evidence early in the game of firm intent to go to war -- not because intelligence is deficient but because no such firm decision has yet been made. A warning keyed to hard evidence of an attack decision -- i. e., a firm "intent to go to war" -- will in these instances inevitably come very close to the actual initiation of hostilities, too late for counter-action.

In this sort of situation, the Intelligence Community needs to give formal warning when a potential adversary first begins to weigh initiating hostilities as a serious practical option. The final decision point may come much later -- long after capabilities are already augmented -- or not at all. (See Tab B ^{for} a detailed description, and graphic representation, of how the Japanese kept their options open up until a few hours prior to the Pearl Harbor attack.)

10. Indeed the final decision point is often so much an immediate or tactical matter that no single system can be expected to bear the entire burden of giving such warning. Most likely the warning(s) would be reflected by various elements of the Community in one or more forms of "critic" communication: e.g., [redacted] 25X1

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[redacted] the FBIS ticker; the White House Spot Report; the DIA Service, and INR briefings; the secure telephone call from the USIB principal. Only if time permitted would consultation between Community agencies take place, though the recent introduction of the National Operations Intelligence Watch Officer's Net (NOIWON) has improved the possibilities of such consultation.

11. The community's strategic warning mechanism (the Watch Committee of USIB and the National Indications Center) is in the process of being revised. In its new form it will consist of a small national-level oversight committee and a small staff consisting of

analysts drawn from the major production elements of the community. The committee chairman will be responsible directly to me but will work in close coordination with the specialized warning mechanisms of the Department of Defense. The staff will be co-located with the NMIC and will rely on the NMIC to perform the 24-hour watch functions formerly performed by the NIC.

12. The mission of the new Strategic Warning Committee and Staff will be to assist me in carrying out my responsibility for providing strategic warning to the National Security Council. They will be responsible for providing the earliest possible warning of military action against the U.S. or its allies. They will also be responsible for providing warning of military action in developing crisis situations, in any area, which could involve U.S. forces. If, for example, Arab-Israeli tensions suddenly increased and culminated in a Syrian attack against Israel, the strategic warning mechanism would not be responsible for providing warning of this event. The responsibility would rest with the community at large and the NIOs to produce an Alert Memorandum. The Strategic Warning Committee and Staff would, however, be responsible for following the situation closely, even before the Syrian attack, to determine whether any indications existed of a Soviet military role

in the crisis. The personnel of the Watch mechanism would not only scan the current traffic for signs of Soviet military movement, but would bring to bear their special understanding of Soviet alert and combat readiness procedures, mobilization laws, war games or exercises, civil defense doctrine and practice, and other similar material of a type rarely needed for day-to-day intelligence reporting but absolutely vital when there is a threat of employment of military force by a major Communist state. And because this expertise presumably would be unique to the strategic warning mechanism, no other element of the Community would attempt to compete with it.

Other Community Efforts to Improve Warning

13. A community effort to address the nuclear dimension of the warning problem was set in train by NSDM 242, "Policy for Planning the Employment of Nuclear Weapons," issued in January 1974. An Ad Hoc Interagency Crisis Management Task Force (ICMIF), chaired by J-3 and with representation from the Secretaries of State and Defense, the DCI (IC Staff), JCS, NSC Staff, ASD(I), and DIA. The ICMIF in turn created separate groups to concentrate on crisis management communications and on contingency planning. The revised NSDM 242, awaiting Dr. Kissinger's approval, would engender further organizational measures.

14. On the theoretical level, a veteran analyst in the National Indications Center has produced a Handbook of Warning Intelligence

(3 vols., 1972-74). It is the first of its kind, and has assisted many in the Community both in understanding the many forms of warning and in identifying the particular expertise which should be associated with the strategic warning function.

15. Other projects related to warning are:

a. The establishment by the ASD(I) of an Intelligence and Warning Review Panel chaired by the Director of Indications and Warning in ASD(I). This has led to the formation of an Indications and Warning Functional Review Group, which presently includes representatives from J-3, J-5, NSA, DIA, State, IC Staff and CIA, as well as ASD(I). ASD(I) has also commissioned several major warning studies, such as War in Europe (WINE), [redacted] and on [redacted] warning hardware requirements, [redacted]

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c. Special attention by the Studies Analysis and Gaming Agency (SAGA) to warning and deception on behalf of the JCS.

d. The establishment of a Current Intelligence Staff in INR to facilitate the rapid transmission of warning to various policy levels in the State Department.

e. The establishment by CIA of a Committee on Internal Organization for Crisis Management.

f. The IC Staff's promotion of conferencing networks (NOIWON, NOLAN, CONTEXT, Meet-Me), which hopefully will improve the technical support aspects of warning.

g. The IC Staff's compilation of a Crisis Directory, intended to link watch centers in operational, intelligence, and related government agencies.

W. E. Colby
Director