

DRAFT - Portland World Affairs Council

Mr. Chairman, officers and members of the World Affairs Council, guests:

When I first heard that I might be honored by an invitation to speak to you I sent a draft of what I thought what was a pretty good talk on Central America--and all that--to one of your board members--not for approval but to see if it might be suitable. It was not, this severe judge told me: "...much too general--she said"--anyone could have written that." I bring this up not only to show the severe standards of your board--may I come up to them!--but to apologize for what may be an excessively personal or confessional note in all this. I was told to speak of my experiences on the National Intelligence Council over the past year and I shall do so: Cardinal Newman said: "Egotism is true modesty. In religious enquiry each of us can speak only for himself." So in international politics.

It has been said that the Department of State lacks a constituency in the country: compared with the Department of Agriculture with its farmers, Commerce, Treasury, (hand) and that's another way of saying there is only a small number of citizens engaged in sustained and serious examination of foreign affairs. This is a definably different element from the single-issue factions who clamor for the interests of a single-minded group, clustering about the fashionable banner of the moment. If there is a constituency that can bring rationality and open-mindedness to questions all too much marked--and naturally so--by prejudice and emotion--it

is your World Affairs Council, and other gatherings like yours around the country.

In passing let me throw out two questions--two ways of expressing our weakness in the conduct of foreign affairs. First: can we afford to let our course in foreign affairs veer like a weathervane as, with each new administration, a new set of inexperienced hands comes on board?

Second: that old, familiar, but pessimistic question: is it possible to carry out effective foreign policy in a representative democracy like yours?

An intelligence officer--which I was and I suppose I shall always be must work with Francis Bacon's advice: "If we begin with doubts, and are patient in them, we shall end in certainties." We can't be sure of ending with certainties but the passage itself is worth taking: getting there may not be half but all the fun.

If you are--metaphorically speaking--the constituency of the Department of State, I am going to borrow you to talk about another part of the foreign affairs apparatus with a constituency even smaller than that of State's: the so-called intelligence community, that nexus of intelligence agencies--military and civilian--in Washington and their extensions abroad. There are a couple of reasons for this constituency being so tiny. One is the difficulty the outsider has in knowing what is going on in the intelligence community

and thus how or even whether any questions of interest to the informed citizen is being considered: another reason is the superficial, romantic, slanted, and sensational, treatment intelligence work gets in the public press.

Intelligence work consists of four parts, roughly, arbitrarily--forgive me if I tell you things you know as well as I do but I want to be sure we are all together when we get to the point of all this.

- Four functions, let's say:
  - The gathering and reporting of information the government needs to make plans and reach decisions-- it can come from anywhere or anyone--it includes the information we can get only through espionage:
  - The analysis of this information to be sure its meaning is clear, that it is plausible, probable, that it is given its proper weight;
  - the preparation of estimates--the national intelligence estimates--looking into the future--we'll come back to that;
  - Secret political operations, paramilitary operations, perhaps the least important of all aspects of intelligence work but the side that gets the most attention.
- Now I am going to talk to you about my experience with

overseeing the writing of a national intelligence estimate, not because the experience was typical of the preparation of all such estimates but because the experience illustrates the conflict between intelligence and ideology. I shall go on to make some observations about the quality of the discussion of strategies in Central America, within the administration, that is.

Let me make it clear that I am not speaking for the National Intelligence Council, the CIA, or the government in any way but that I do speak with the bias of an intelligence officer.

The National Intelligence Council is made up of National Intelligence Officers, each of whom deals with a geographic area-- Latin America in my case--or with a subject, Soviet strategic weapons, or ground forces, nuclear proliferation, terrorism. (hand)  
Incidentally, I'm not going to take your time going over how we go about our work although I can later if you're interested.

Estimating deals with the future. Hans Morgenthau said once:

The first lesson which the student of international politics must learn and never forget is that the complexities of international affairs make simple solutions and trustworthy prophecies impossible.

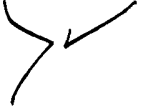
It is here that the scholar and the charlatan part company.

As politically-sophisticated as a president and his policymakers may be they are probably quite unmindful of Morgenthau's advice and they do ask questions about the future. And they expect answers: that's what the Council is for. And if they don't ask the questions, the intelligence community should be asking the questions and trying to come up with answers. The national estimate does not furnish simple solutions--it is not a policy paper--and it does not do any flat prophesying although many papers do talk about the various ways the game may play out. The President should feel confident that he gets these opinions just as he gets other intelligence information--not free of bias but with the proper bias in favor of the interests of the United States--not the particular administration but the government of the United States--not the bias of any particular group or fashion--but of the government of the United States. The estimate may not prophesy but the president should learn whether the subject is one he should worry about and whether there is anything he can do about it.

Now I came into the Council as the National Intelligence Officer--the NIO--for Latin America. The position put me in close touch with the director, William Casey. He wears two hats: one is that of Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and the other is that of Director of Central Intelligence--the president's intelligence officer, as it were, and the Council comes under Casey

in this function--a function that finds him also chairman of the National Foreign Intelligence Board, the board on which the heads of the various government intelligence agencies sit and where national estimates are submitted, accepted, rejected, or modified. I was, figuratively, Casey's 'man' on Latin America, not for operations but for estimates, assessments, briefings, interagency meetings--all that.

Now the reason I was brought in was that the previous NIO has strong views about Latin America, about what our policy should be, what our intelligence should say, how our intelligence reports should read, how intelligence analysts should think--in short, he was ideologue, a grue believer. He left the job--in a formal sense--and is now the senior Latin American person on the National Security Council. It was the healthy resistance of the intelligence community to ideological dominance that led to his leaving the job. He was not a professional intelligence officer, but a writer, whom Casey had brought in from a think tank, and it was not Casey's disagreement with his views or Casey's disapproval of his approach to the job that led to his leaving. That was the reason for my coming and, to get ahead of myself, that was the reason for my leaving: the intelligence community and I soon fell into step but I was out of step with Casey. >

Mexico. Even before I was brought on board I was warned that I would have to do something about Mexico. It turned out that a draft estimate had been written by a quite competent analyst in one of the agencies but that the previous NIO had found it seriously wanting. So there it say and the intelligence community had no chance to comment on it. 

Like a number of other countries in Latin America, Mexico is passing through a serious, perhaps dreadful time, of shrinking opportunity, unemployment, continued underemployment, hardship, because of the enormous debt she has incurred with foreign banks and the need to repay the debt and to regain investors' confidence. Under the leadership of President Miguel de la Madrid Mexico has been the International Monetary Fund's prize pupil, exceeding the IMF's stipulations for cutting public spending, with the consequent severe political costs of austerity.

The main difference, for us, between Mexico and the other Latin American nations struggling with debts--Argentina, Brazil, Peru--is that Mexico is on our border. There are uncountable connections between us and Mexico--commercial, social, cultural, personal--and despite differences in outlook we are a remarkably friendly pair of neighbors.

Now in preparing a national intelligence estimate on Mexico, we knew we had to cover a number of important questions in

a comparatively short document that would tell the president and other policymakers what Mexico looks like--from Washington--what the problems are, what the prospects are for their growing worse, how the Mexican government seems to be dealing with the problems, and what effect all this has on the United States and what effect the United States and foreign banks have on the prospects for Mexico.

In short, we met--representatives of the intelligence community--to define what we were after, to agree on the questions we wanted to cover, and set the drafter to work, all promising cooperation in getting the data he would need--by the way generally the embassy, in this case, Mexico City, is brought in to the process so that everyone who can contribute is able to do so although an embassy--an ambassador--is not allowed to dictate the conclusions of an estimate.

The process, which should have taken us three or four months at most took us about nine--a familiar gestation period to all of us--but much too long for even this important estimate. The reason was that we were trying to write an intelligence estimate when what was wanted from us was something to fit the pattern of a stereotype.

The previous NIO, before he had come to the Council, had published an article: "Mexico: the Iran to our South."



This furnished the architecture of the stereotype. The implication of the title alone is that the experts were wrong about Mexico just as they are wrong about Iran. The Intelligence community was complacent about Mexico. Those with a tendency to distrust the bureaucracy and intelligence analysts in particular took to that idea. Reporting from the embassy or from other sources--particularly other sources--that indicated instability was eagerly waved about by the doomsday faction and information that showed de la Madrid and his government to beware of their own problems or attempting to deal with them was scoffed at as another delusion of the old hands. That is to say, those who said that Mexico had weathered many storms, that the government had brought on stability and growth as had no other government south of the Rio Bravo, and that they would probably get through this were dismissed as complacent. Remember Iran!

Then there were those usually faceless sources I came to think of as "Casey's rich friends," showing the development of a bad attitude on my part. The information from these people - came not in the form of dry and careful intelligence reports but in the attractive and impressive anecdote. The anecdotes came with flat statements "the PRI is dead--" that's the Institutional Revolutionary Party that has so successfully dominated Mexican political life--run Mexico, really--for almost sixty years. Or "de la Madrid is a

technocrat," meaning that he lacks the political aptitude to control the unrest and grumbling that will flow from austerity. To anecdotes were added the allegations: the Cubans were organizing secret groups to overthrow the Mexican government; guerrillas are gathering in Oaxaca; the Mexican government is turning a blind eye to the Guatemalan guerrillas' safehaven in Chaipas. Arms are flowing through the Yucatan to El Salvador. Have you ever tried to disprove an unfounded allegation? You are complacent: you are talking to the wrong people: you're looking in the wrong place: your intelligence is no good. It's quite a game and the "allegator" if he is in a position of authority is never wrong: the burden of proof is on the intelligence officers. Many an expensive wheel has been spun in searching for evidence to back up allegations. There can be smoke without fire.


There are reasons for portraying Mexico as weak and political stability as fragile. One is used to bolster the arguments for our policy in Central America. Thus, if Mexico is weak, tottering, how much more important that we stop the Communists in Central America. Mexico--the Iran to our south--is next. One can't dismiss the threat from those who are sowing violence in Central America. One must object to skewing intelligence to fit the propagandist's breathless message. Must we paint Mexico in frightening colors to justify a policy that makes sense in itself?

In the hearts, and leaking into the heads, of key members of the administration is a strong resentment of Mexico's role in Central America. One benefit of our backing the insurgents in Nicaragua was to frighten Mexico into taking the initiative to join three other countries in the so-called Contadora process. Before this Mexico had been apathetic--at best apathetic--more accurately favoring the Saninistas regime in Nicaragua and if not hoping for the success of the guerrillas in El Salvador certainly doing nothing to help the legal government in El Salvador. This cannot but be annoying to the United States that is working exactly in the opposite direction. This resentment colored the views of those who wanted the estimate to come out with a highly negative view of the Mexican government. With some it seemed almost an obsession, as though Mexico were the cause of the problems in Central America rather than being an obstacle to the solutions we favor.

The task of drafting and redrafting the estimate was complicated by real gaps in information and honest and respectable doubts about the meaning of much of the information we had. Information, if incomplete or contradictory, as it may often be leads to the need to qualify opinions and for some care in the expression of judgements. But we had to do that while batting off the constant barrage of allegations from above: unrest in the slums,

sullen campesinos, leftist unions growing, restless youth. On two occasions I had detailed critiques under Casey's signature, challenging our information and our judgements. It became evident not only to me but to the representatives from other agencies gathered around the table that our elbows were being jiggled.

When we came up with a final draft of the estimate and sent it out to the various agencies for their principals to read before the meeting of the National Foreign Intelligence Board, an unusual step was taken. The Vice Chairman of the Council was a magazine editor who had come into the agency with the new administration and who, after a period as personal assistant to Casey, had been assigned to the Council. He called around to the heads of the various agencies to express Casey's dissatisfaction with the draft, saying that each one of them would be expected to estimate the odds for complete collapse in Mexico. I don't know whether this was the eagerness of the subordinate to please or whether this lobbying was done at Casey's direction but, added to the previous pressure on the intelligence community, it did not make a good impression. The judgements of the estimate were not rejected at the meeting, the estimate having given due weight to the possibilities for things going wrong in Mexico. Nevertheless Casey declared that this is my estimate and ordered that the key sections be rewritten to reflect the sense of the meeting. At this point the estimate was taken from my hands and rewritten in



part by the magazine editor to give an even more dire view in the key passages. Casey is right in saying that in his estimate.

As Director of Central Intelligence he can decide what an estimate will say. As I was, when the estimate was finally approved, Casey remarked that he only wanted to be sure that our government was alert to the possibility--no matter how small--that things might go the wrong way in Mexico. As is the case in struggles such as this, there is no clear-cut difference in the outcome and it was the process that was clouded, subtleties were blurred in the development of "two sides" to the estimate, and as is so often the case moderation and wisdom were the casualties. The struggle led to a draft that I was not particularly proud of--save for its showing that we in the intelligence community had stuck to our guns--and the version redone by the magazine editor made it somewhat worse. Truth is not so distorted as to hurt either country--Mexico or the United States--and if you were to read the estimate you would probably shrug your shoulders and say it looks all right to me as I am figuratively shrugging my shoulders now. But what an unnecessary struggle!

To sharpen the contrast between what in my opinion is the right and the wrong way of handling intelligence estimates when political pressure, ideology, or the desire to "go along" threaten to influence the integrity of the process, let me turn to a harsh example.

Richard Helms, director from 1966 to 1973, said not long ago that he was accused of being a traitor because CIA estimates about the war in southeast Asia were not pleasing to the policy-makers at that time: they didn't say that it was working. This is the difference I want to illustrate: Helms would rather be called a traitor than to warp the intelligence to fit the policy--that may be an extreme way of putting it but it may be also a way of expressing the ethics of the intelligence officer.

I said earlier that the case of Mexico isn't typical of the estimative process. Casey is proud of his work at rebuilding the agency after the neglect of the Carter years. He is proud of the greatly increased number of estimates the Council has produced. He has a sentimental attachment to intelligence work going back to his wartime service. He also is close to the president and can get things for the agency that another director might not be able to do.

Let me put this into context. When it is a matter of policy or of ideology any administration may be tempted to try to get the intelligence to fit what it is doing or what it thinks of the world. Someone said that the test of any army is how it fights when it's tired. For an intelligence officer the test of an administration might be how it accepts intelligence information when it hurts--when it goes against the ideological grain.

Central America. It is allowed that an intelligence officer

have opinions but he should not let them interfere with his work.

I here confess I sinned by intruding on Casey with suggestions about the course of events in Central America. These were in my own mind the most pragmatic sorts of observations based entirely on my appreciation of the direction of events in Central America. When I discussed my letter of resignation with Casey he said that it was probably right that I should go because of my feelings about policy in Central America. I won't quarrel with him about that: in my own mind it was the process that raised questions in my mind not the policy itself. Our policy in the broad sense is one of supporting the government in El Salvador and of opposing the gradual imposition of totalitarian government in Nicaragua. Our particular objection--not the only one--is to their supporting subversion in neighboring countries, not only in El Salvador.

Part of this policy has meant putting a good deal of pressure on the Sandinistas, the ruling faction, better, factions, in Nicaragua. Pressure through:



maneuvers in Honduras;

- public and private statements both criticizing the Sandinista regime and iterating our objections to their actions;
- the invasion of Grenada, not carried out for this reason, frightened both the Sandinistas and the Cubans who let

it be known that they could not defend Nicaragua from an invasion (nor would the Soviets).

Pressure, I began to ask myself, for what? Did we expect the Sandinistas to step down? Become democratic? To voluntarily stop supporting the guerrillas in El Salvador? Were we merely playing for time? What did we expect to happen--what would we do--in time?

I persisted in discussing this with Casey: the theme was: where do we think we're going? I also put forward a view that the survival of the government in El Salvador might depend on the cutting off of the support to the Salvadoran guerrillas from Nicaragua. Support here means safehaven, training sites, infiltration routes, passage to and from Cuba for training, communications and command facilities, and importantly as well arms and ammunition smuggled into El Salvador for the guerrillas.

If this support is important, better--vital--it would be worth our while to negotiate an end to it with the Sandinistas while we have the pressure on. What if our pressure--our bargaining position wears out--what if the congress forces the administration's hand--what if there is a change in administration? Now, implicit in the suggestion of negotiating an end to this support would be or might be an acceptance of the Sandinista regime.

Another view is that the Sandinistas can never be trusted to leave their neighbors alone, particularly as long as Fidel Castro



is running things in Cuba, and that we should not accept a regime that is so close to the Cubans and to the Soviets. This view would hold that the Sandinistas might like to be less dependent on those two but that their affection for them will render them always a danger in Central America.

This is the hard-line view and it is a mistake to scoff at it as the evidence against it is not sufficient to support some of the strong arguments brought against it.

My own uneasiness was not caused so much by differences with this view as with the entirely inadequate discussion in government of the courses open to us. In Nicaragua--the discussions about El Salvador were quite direct and open.

We have a number of strategies open to us--a fairly wide range. If one of those involves negotiations you not only talk about it but you explore every avenue open to you with great care: what you want to achieve and what you know or assume the other side wants. How far will they go? What matters do we consider negotiable and what would they consider beyond discussion, and so on. Then you worry about timing, and who will do the talking, and what will be the way to start, and so on down the line. If you are in the State Department, you start working on congressmen and you ask the president to say something. You can imagine the thought it would take to prepare to negotiate with someone like the Sandinistas, with the Cubans sitting in back advising them, and behind them the Soviets, neither

of whom want to see peace in Central America or to see the United States get off the hook there.

Negotiations were never discussed except to be mentioned as a shameful form of surrender to the Sandinistas, the Cubans, the Soviets. The discussion is forbidden on ideological grounds. I should say "was:" I left at the end of May.

One alternative to negotiations is invasion by the United States of Nicaragua. Much bandied about in the press after Grenada and even expected in Managua and Habana. I never heard any responsible officer of our government seriously recommend it although it is so obvious. Conventional wisdom says that we would hold the towns after taking some serious land dig losses, that the Sandinistas and many loyal Nicaraguans would take to the hills, and that there would be protected guerrilla warfare. This has not been examined either. One can just as easily declare that the Sandinista factions would fall apart, the people, sick of struggle and hardship, would welcome the invaders as happily as the Grenadians who were tired of their burdensome and bullying regime.

Neither alternative--nor others that would occur in the course of serious and protracted discussion--are being sufficiently examined.

There is one vexing reason for this beyond the ideological and that is the fear of leaks. Leaks to the press of intelligence information, usually to bolster one move or another; leaks of government intentions to sabotage the action; leaks to the congress.

It is part of everyone's consideration. Don't let the press people tell you that is is healthy--the people's right to know--the First Amendment. It is vicious in intent and it is damaging to your interests. The tendency is to reduce to the smallest the size of any group deliberating a sensitive matter: one result is that people who can give good council may excluded and thus not be heard.

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leaks is a symptom of poor discipline--of a person's being so sure of the rightness of his own views--or of his being a manipulator without any views--of his own that he is willing to violate his trust to have his own way. There are baser motives, as well. (Money, getting even). You simply don't do that: you work within the system and if you do not like the rules of the system you get out.

Nevertheless, it is not fear of leaks alone that prevents the full and intelligent discussion of courses open to us in Central America, but the influence of serious differences of opinion and the persistence of the true believers.

Here I have tried to deal with the ability of intelligence to inform our policymakers or, badly done, to let them down. I bring to your attention also the need for fuller discussion among the foreign affairs departments and agencies of the courses open to us. This must be a concern of yours and it needs attention in any

administration, especially if they come to Washington with their heads full of untested ideas. Hans Morgenthau warned us about easy solutions: what do you say to someone who says: it is immoral to negotiate, to sit down with, much worse to compromise, with a Sandinista, a Marxist-Leninist, or with the Soviets?

What do you say to these Christians who insist that our government help the Sandinistas, no questions asked, and help the guerrillas come to power in El Salvador?

I have a suggestion. Allen Dulles saw to it that engraved on the wall as you enter the CIA building are the words:

"and the truth shall make you free."

I think that on the other side of that hall there should be engraved those words of Oliver Cromwell, addressed to an unruly parliament:

"My brethern, by the bowels of Christ I beseech you, bethink that you may be mistaken."

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