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The DIA Is as Good as the CIA

Adm. Stansfield Turner tried to rewrite history in his article, "The Pentagon's Intelligence Mess" [Outlook, Jan. 12].

He suggests, as the subhead states, that "a weak [Defense Intelligence Agency] can't cope with the parochialism of the military." As director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Turner should have become more familiar with the operations of the DIA and military intelligence. His incorrect and dated opinions need correcting for the insult they bring to the U.S. intelligence community and the American people.

The truth is, the DIA continues to make major contributions to the national security of the United States by providing objective intelligence analysis to the secretary of defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the U.S. military forces, the White House and Congress.

Turner errs when he claims that the DIA is dominated by military service parochialism. There are two factors that sustain DIA's ability to provide objective intelligence to senior policy makers. First, the DIA's staff is on the leading analytical edge of most military intelligence issues. While this may not have been true in the early years of the agency, its civilian staff is now mature and, joined with outstanding intelligence officers with broad field experience, the DIA's defense analysis is unsurpassed.

Second, the DIA works because all its directors have demanded uncompromising, objective intelligence reporting on all issues. The secretary of defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs not only support this DIA policy, they insist on it.

One major U.S. intelligence product is the "National Estimate on Soviet Strategic Offensive and Defense Capabilities." During Turner's tenure at the CIA, the DIA did disagree with most of the intelligence community; it offered alternative positions on the subject of Soviet nuclear war doctrine and its strategic force posture objectives. DIA positions from 1975 to 1979 on the objectives of Soviet strategic force expansions, extensive leadership survivability programs and enormous strategic defense investments have proved correct and are now accepted by the intelligence community.

Turner attributes the DIA position on "net assessments" to a "parochial motive." The simple attempts at net assessments which Turner pushed at the time were, in fact, not useful to furthering policy makers' understanding of the true U.S. and Soviet strategic balance and represented the classic MAD position that has been rejected by every U.S. administration since 1961.

Turner's account of the DIA-CIA oil controversy is riddled with errors. In April 1977, the CIA predicted that Soviet oil production would peak as early as 1978 and then fall sharply, forcing the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe to become net oil importers by 1985. This assessment was leading some to believe that the U.S.S.R. would take military action to gain access to Persian Gulf oil resources.

DIA's reason for challenging the CIA was not, as Turner suggests, merely to assert its independence. We disagreed with the CIA's judgment that Soviet recoverable reserves were inadequate and that the Soviets would be unable to acquire the necessary equipment and technology. The DIA took into consideration Soviet resources in natural gas, coal, nuclear power, as well as Soviet oil reserves, and concluded that the Soviets had no energy crisis, nor was there likely to be one in the future. An April 1982 review of the differing views, entitled "Report on Intelligence Performance on Soviet Oil Production," concluded that the DIA's large data base on the subject and its sophisticated analysis had led it to the correct conclusion. The Soviets would not be a net importer of oil by the 1980s. The DIA, not the CIA, was correct.

Turner fails to describe accurately the DIA's working relationship with the CIA and the military intelligence staffs. There is not an adversarial relationship with either, only healthy checks and balances.

Turner implies that the services do not assign their best officers to DIA. There may have been some truth to this observation early in the agency's existence, but no longer. DIA employees have gone on to senior positions. For example, three have become deputy directors of the CIA, three to direct the National Security Agency, three to serve as chiefs of staff for intelligence and numerous flag officers have risen to two-, three- and four-star ranks within their services.

Today the DIA is the recognized expert in critical military intelligence. With its partners in the CIA, State Department and the military services, it provides the best intelligence in the world.

—Lt. Gen. Eugene F. Tigne Jr.

The writer was director of the DIA from 1977 to 1981.