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Reforming Intelligence Analysis

Currently Congress has approved or is considering a number of measures to correct the damage done to the U.S. intelligence community in the past decade. Under the leadership of Senator Frank Church and other prominent legislators, Congress enacted a number of hastily conceived restrictions which effectively dismantled America's capacity for covert intelligence operations. Measures now being considered to rectify the problems include repeal of the Hughes-Ryan amendment, which established extensive congressional oversight of covert intelligence activities, repeal or extensive modification of the Freedom of Information Act and adoption of an Intelligence Identities Protection Act. The Reagan Administration also is studying means to restore the intelligence community to its former importance, such as re-establishing the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Committee (PFIAC), which was abolished by President Carter in 1977.

Such steps are badly needed if the United States is ever to regain its ability to conduct covert operations, or indeed to collect data from sources other than technical means of surveillance. Yet, taken on their own they do nothing to help, and may even impede correction of the most significant problem facing the U.S. intelligence community—correctly analyzing and assessing the data it possesses. This is a long-standing problem that has intensified in recent years, especially under the Carter Administration.

A RECORD OF FAILURE

Discussion of faulty intelligence assessments must focus on the Central Intelligence Agency, the designated producer of National Intelligence Estimates for the President and other top policymakers. Although the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the military intelligence services, and the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research contribute to the NIE, their own reports are more specialized to fit the in-house needs of the Departments of Defense and State, respectively. By contrast, CIA reports are considered "national"; the analytical branch of the agency is the National Foreign Assessment Center, and the section heads for regional and topical analysis are termed National Intelligence Officers. When an NIE is produced, the CIA selects the precise topic and assigns the principal drafter, whose task is to produce a paper reflecting a consensus of the views of the intelligence community. Although agencies may register a formal dissent on particular points, a high value is placed on consensus. Even under the best of circumstances this emphasis results in an enshrinement of the lowest common denominator of intelligence opinion, and all too often

leads to "party-lining" or anticipating the views of policy-makers.

However, this process of forced consensus is not sufficient to explain these staggering failures of the intelligence community:

- Until 1979 the NIEs contended that the Soviet Union would not place offensive weapons in Cuba. To contend otherwise was to assert that the Soviet Union was violating the 1962 agreement ending the Cuban missile crisis (amended in 1970). Therefore the stationing of MiG-23 and MiG-27 fighter-bombers, the construction of submarine pens, and the frequent visits of major Soviet naval units were noted but not assessed as being of any significance. Only the revelation of the presence of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba just prior to the 1980 election campaign forced modification of this assessment.

- Until December 1979 it was contended that the Soviet Union would not invade Third World countries, such as Afghanistan, with its own troops. Attention was focused instead on "proxy wars," which enormously improved the strategic situation of the U.S.S.R. in the Third World.

- The intelligence community predicted well into 1978 that the Shah of Iran would remain in power for the duration of the 1980s and that Iran was not in a pre-revolutionary state. Challenging this assumption meant questioning American reliance on Iran as the "policeman of the Gulf."

- In 1981, after the Reagan Administration called attention to Soviet use of terrorism as a weapon against Western nations and pro-Western Third World governments, the CIA retroactively identified over a thousand terrorist acts in the previous year that it had not counted earlier.

- The CIA produced a study on Soviet oil production in 1977 predicting a major oil crisis within a decade. This study was not substantiated by other analyses—either by the oil industry, European research centers, or the DIA—and yet was perfectly suited for President Carter's contention that increased Soviet need of Western drilling technology would strengthen detente. The 1977 predictions proved embarrassingly inaccurate, and were drastically revised in January 1981.

Yet it is in the area of assessing the extent of the Soviet strategic buildup during the 1960s and 1970s, and in estimating Soviet defense expenditures, that the intelligence community has accumulated its most dismal record. Albert Wohlstetter's documentation of continual annual CIA strategic underestimates during the 1960s goes far toward explaining the deplorable U.S. experience with arms control, including CIA's failure to recognize Soviet SALT deception, and the current radical change in the

world correlation of forces. What is less well known is the documentation by former intelligence analysts William Lee and David Sullivan, which demonstrates that well into the 1970s the CIA estimators continued to avoid "worst-case" assumptions about Soviet military intentions. As a result under-estimates of the scale and pace of the Soviet strategic build-up continued, as illustrated below in Chart 1. (None of the estimates comes close to being accurate.)

Chart 1: Accuracy of Intelligence Forecasts

Soviet Strategic Weapons Systems Deployments	Under-estimate	Over-estimate
3rd Generation ICBMs	X	
2nd Generation SLBMs	X	
ABM Deployments		X
Advanced ASW Submarine Force	X	
MIRV Accuracy	X	
MIRV Yield		X
SLBM MIRVs	X	
Defense Spending 1960-76	X	
Defense Spending 1976-80	X	

By the same token, the Central Intelligence Agency reported annually from the mid-1960s until 1976 that the Soviet Union was spending about 6 percent of its "Gross National Product" on its military, or in absolute terms, about half of what the United States was spending in the same period. Yet this was in a period of drastic American decline in military strength, while at the same time the Soviet Union was embarking on the greatest military buildup in history.

In 1976 the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board belatedly became aware of these failings and recommended to President Ford that an exercise in competitive intelligence estimates of the degree of the Soviet strategic threat be undertaken. Distinguished outside experts on the so-called B-Team correctly estimated that Soviet ICBM MIRVing rates and accuracy improvements would increase so rapidly in the late 1970s that by as early as 1980 U.S. strategic land-based forces would be vulnerable to a Soviet first strike. They also correctly predicted that the Soviet leadership, not content with nuclear parity, was striving for strategic superiority.

The results of the B-Team exercise and other pressure put on the intelligence community included some revisions in estimates of Soviet defense spending and some consideration of the possibility of a Soviet counterforce threat in the 1980s. But the chief result of the B-Team was the Carter decision to dismantle PFIAB and completely ignore the compelling results of the competitive estimates. The Carter Administration then proceeded to cancel, cut back, or delay *every single* strategic force program inherited from the Ford Administration. Last December, outgoing Undersecretary of Defense William Perry conceded that the Carter Administration had grossly underestimated the Soviet counterforce threat for 1980 in 1977. Yet consistent with over two decades of underestimating Soviet strategic forces and defense expenditures, and continually placing the most benign interpretation on Soviet actions and intentions, the U.S. intelligence community is still unwilling to concede that Soviet actions world wide are planned and coordinated to further a considered and articulated program to weaken and lull the West in the face of continual Soviet expansion. Questioning the fundamental set-up of CIA analysis is long overdue.

UNAVOIDABLE PROBLEMS—AVOIDABLE BIASES

Any suggested remedies to the major deficiencies in American intelligence analysis must take into account the myriad uncertainties involved in evaluating, processing,

and analyzing intelligence data. These uncertainties preclude anything approaching complete accuracy in intelligence analysis. A review of the means by which intelligence is collected and weighed will demonstrate this, and also reveals the institutionalized reasons for the continued poor performance of American intelligence.

There are three principal sources of raw intelligence data: the so-called national technical means of surveillance (NTMs), human intelligence, and open sources. National technical means of surveillance have recently been much discussed owing to the key role they were assigned in assuring the verifiability of the SALT II treaty. National technical means of surveillance are essentially mechanical: aerial and satellite photography, monitoring stations in countries bordering the Soviet Union, seismographic records of explosions, and so forth. In the United States a premium is placed upon these sorts of data, as their reliability is considered to be high. A photograph, after all, is an incontrovertible *fact* that can be displayed to a policymaker in a much more convincing manner than a message from an agent, who could easily be a plant.

However, NTMs have many drawbacks that are minimized by the American intelligence community to avoid questioning our reliance on them:

- NTMs can never provide negative proof; as Amrom Katz, former Assistant Director of ACDA puts it, no one has ever found anything that has been successfully hidden. Developed nations, especially states such as the Soviet Union, are adept at concealing or falsifying important information, especially if they have learned how the monitoring devices work. Recent disclosures that Soviet agents have successfully acquired the operational manuals for sophisticated American surveillance satellites underline this point.

- NTMs provide such massive quantities of low-grade data that they cannot all be minutely analyzed. Generally they are scanned to find interesting anomalies that will lead to extensive examination of certain areas or facilities. The vaunted high-resolution satellite cameras and sensors are actually capable of monitoring only extremely limited areas and times.

- NTMs provide evidence of capabilities only; they are no guide to intent. Only human intelligence or open sources can reveal exactly what an opponent's leadership actually intends to do. To be sure, intentions are constrained by one's capability to carry them out, and acquisition of new capabilities can be an indicator of future intentions. Yet in the final analysis, NTMs are limited in this extremely important area of data collection.

The second source of raw data is human intelligence. This includes information received from espionage agents, defectors, diplomatic personnel, military attaches, and theft of classified documents. Human intelligence is not regarded as highly as technical data by the U.S. intelligence community. There are several reasons for this beyond the one mentioned above. To begin with, the KGB and other intelligence agencies maintain active policies of planting disinformation and forgeries, which tends to discredit reports not backed by technical data. Yet it is not felt that technical data require this cross-checking, although they are equally susceptible to disinformation. Then again, those nations the United States is most interested in monitoring are generally closed societies where it is extremely difficult to maintain covert sources. Finally, the campaign waged against the CIA in recent years has in many instances made it impossible to maintain covert sources without eventual disclosure. This inhibits foreign nationals and friendly intelligence services alike from cooperation.

The final source of data is open sources, which include press reports, books and manuals, research of scholars and researchers, radio and television broadcasts, accidental divulgence by officials, and accounts by emigres and tourists. In terms of their evaluation priority by the U.S. intelligence community, open sources have the dual disadvantage of being as suspect as covert human intelligence, and as massively plentiful as technical data. As a result, even highly useful material is ignored, to a degree that would appear astonishing to the non-specialist.

Bad or wrong data can be a major source of misperception, but when institutionalized bias appears in the form of consistent error on one side of an issue or in overreliance on one sort of data the intelligence community is suffering from major problems. One such bias appears throughout the community: minimizing the threat from the Soviet Union. In evaluations of Soviet defense spending, oil production, military presence in Latin America, KGB penetration of the European or U.S. political establishment, instability in the Middle East, Socialist control of NATO governments, or any other issue, suggestions that American security might be affected are downplayed. Above all, there is little to no recognition of the fact that all such issues are linked, in that the Soviet Union follows a deliberate policy of exploiting weakness and instability globally. Not only is there no U.S. long-range planning to deal with this, but no recognition that the Soviet Union is engaged in long-range planning.

One important reason why such biases can pervade the entire intelligence community is that one cannot make a successful career out of intelligence analysis. Supergrade (GS 16-18) intelligence analysts are non-existent, and rare in the GS 13-15 ranks. The Central Intelligence Agency possesses relatively more high-ranking slots than do the other agencies, but even in the CIA there are relatively few GS 13-15 analysts. To obtain promotion, it is necessary for an ambitious intelligence officer to get into analysis management. Other problems with analysis include inadequate attention to Soviet intentions and foreign policy planning, insufficient understanding of Soviet doctrines, and a propensity to "mirror image" U.S. strategic policy and planning; and inadequate quality control, with no in-house box score kept on the accuracy of past predictions and assessments.

SOLUTIONS AND OBSTACLES TO SOLUTIONS

The present-day situation, where the intelligence community faces major questions of competence in the areas of political responsiveness, internal bias, and managerial dominance of the analytical staffs, would not have arisen if good intelligence were highly regarded and demanded by the American political system. Nations where intelligence is considered important, such as the Soviet Union or Israel, do not face such problems. Yet in the United States, far too often the primary use of intelligence has been to bolster decisions already made for political purposes or to provide simplistic "score cards" for busy policymakers.

A good example of this last point is the major effort invested by the CIA in estimating Soviet defense expenditures. Great pains are taken, involving an important proportion of the analytical resources focused on the Soviet Union, to assess accurate "prices" of the various elements of the Soviet military establishment, to fit these elements into an elaborate model of the Soviet economy, and to determine what impact this "spending" has on the model. Many critiques have been made of the methodologies employed, or the certitude with which estimates are produced in the absence of hard data. Yet the most important

objection to this whole process is that important intelligence assets, including many highly trained analysts, have been tasked to produce a relatively minor set of estimates. When faced with enormously enhanced Soviet military capabilities, inquiry into how much funding was invested into its acquisition should not interfere with assessment of the threat this poses to U.S. security. This is especially true when the results of the inquiry are at the very best broad estimates. Yet the CIA, when faced with strong congressional pressure to produce "the figures on Soviet defense spending," felt compelled to do the best work possible. Before major reforms can be initiated, an appreciation for good intelligence must be cultivated in both the Congress and the Executive branch of government.

Recent events have demonstrated that the Reagan Administration is not greatly concerned with these problems at the present. Just as there has been a failure to initiate new defense policies, reforming the intelligence community appears to have low priority. There is a feeling among many people in the government and other influential public positions that the problems with the intelligence community stem from political interference by Congress and the Carter Administration, and the optimum solution is for the "intelligence professionals" to be given a free hand. This belief is held in ignorance of the long-standing institutional problems faced by the intelligence community, which are strengthened by the fact that the intelligence community does not want major reform. It has come to associate any outside efforts to reform the analysis process with heavy-handed attempts to politicize intelligence analysis. Then, too, the leadership of the intelligence community was selected by the Carter Administration and to a certain extent carries over Carter views on the nature of the international political situation. In spite of the events which discredited this world view, it will continue to flavor intelligence estimates for some time to come.

To drive through needed change, a high-powered, independent commission is essential. A reconstituted PFIAB might not be capable of carrying out this function, but it would be able to initiate such a commission in consultation with the Director of Central Intelligence. This commission would have to possess political power and dedication to carry out a difficult and complicated task. It would require:

- direct access to the President and a commitment from him to implement its recommendations;
- total access to the work of the intelligence community. Because of this, the commission would have to include proven analysts as well as critics of the agency. It cannot be a repository for political hacks.
- The commission would have to be appointed to its work for long duration—two years would probably be the minimum time needed. The commission members would have to devote their full attentions to its work.
- In appointing the board, it will have to be remembered that there will be objections to any nominee worth including.

The major role of this commission would be to determine how best to institutionalize the principle of the B-Team. Competitive analysis and estimates should not take place merely between the CIA and a team of distinguished outsiders, but within the community as well, both inter-agency and intra-agency. The difficult but necessary task of the commission will be to reconcile this principle of competitive estimation with the need to produce crisp and coherent intelligence reports. It will also have to determine what safeguards can be established to protect the competitive process from political exploitation.



Insiders Report

Tracking the Issues through Congress

Diverting Attention from Intelligence Reform

The outcry which led to the resignation of Max Hugel, third ranking official at the Central Intelligence Agency, and which has badly weakened the prestige and effectiveness of William Casey, Director of Central Intelligence, is rooted in public and congressional concern over the effectiveness of the intelligence community. The fact that both of these officials lacked contemporary intelligence experience and were appointed because of their work in the 1980 presidential campaign has been publicly deplored by prominent public officials, and there has been pressure for "intelligence professionals" to fill both positions. Mr. Hugel's successor, John Stein, is such a professional, a veteran of the operations directorate of the CIA.

There is a strong consensus both in Congress and among the general public to improve the quality of American intelligence, and a feeling that this can best be achieved by removing restrictions from the professionals in the community. This interest is demonstrated by the careful manner in which the Senate is approaching the issue of exempting the intelligence community from the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. Currently two bills, S.1273 introduced by Senator John Chafee, and S.1235 sponsored by Senator Alphonse D'Amato, are being considered by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Both of these bills are designed to help the intelligence community preserve necessary secrecy while doing as little violence as possible to the principle of freedom of information.

In other actions, Congress is moving closer to adopting the Intelligence Identities Protection Act (S.391 and H.R. 4). This act is attempt to frustrate a number of groups committed to destroying U.S. intelligence, which among other efforts publish names of individuals which they claim are CIA agents. Opposition to this act has come primarily from the American Civil Liberties Union, which contends that careful study of State Department records will reveal the identity of CIA agents and that hence this information is in the public domain. The recent Supreme Court decision, *Haig vs. Agee*, which ruled that the lifting of Philip Agee's passport in 1974 was constitutional, concluded: "Agee's disclosures, among other things, have the declared purpose of obstructing intelligence operations and the recruiting of intelligence personnel. They are clearly not protected by the Constitution." This Supreme Court decision is evidence that any effort to challenge the Intelligence Identities Protection Act on constitutional grounds will not be successful.

It is unfortunate that upgrading the performance of American intelligence has become so firmly identified with insulating the intelligence bureaucracy from outside competition. This identification has been reinforced by the Hugel affair. Before the election there had been recognition that within the intelligence community there were severe problems with the analytical bureaucracy, and that any effort to reform this would require at the very least competitive assessment by experts taken from outside the

community. As the 1980 Republican Party platform stated:

We will reestablish the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, abolished by the Carter Administration, as a permanent non-partisan body of distinguished Americans to perform a constant audit of national intelligence research and performance. We will propose methods of providing alternative intelligence estimates in order to improve the quality of the estimates by constructive competition.

Yet Mr. Casey's commitment to the competitive estimates process has been lukewarm at best. In his first address to the CIA staff, he stated:

I found in SALT I, for example, that some of the judgements were soft. They leaned toward a kind of benign interpretation rather than a harder interpretation of assessing or viewing a situation as being more dangerous. . . . At the PFIAB I supported a competitive assessment process, but I am open as to how that can best be done. Like anyone else I am in favor of improving our analytical capabilities—that is something easy to be for.

Mr. Casey's actions since this address was made have confirmed its tone. None of the important critics of the intelligence analytical process has been appointed to the CIA staff. A special National Intelligence Council at the CIA, formed to "upgrade the system under which national intelligence estimates are produced," is dismissed by many as decorative. They note that the chairman of the new panel, Henry Rowen, was associated with many of the intelligence failures of the 1960s and early 1970s while president of the RAND Corporation, even though in the late 1970s he criticized the "CIA's optimistic assessments of Soviet military strength." They also point out that the panel is empowered only to make minor changes in the existing system, rather than radical improvements.

Of even more concern are the persistent reports that the plans for reconstituting PFIAB will no longer give it direct access to the President. Instead, it will report to the Director of Central Intelligence. The "A-Team/B-Team" experiment in competitive analysis would not have been carried out if PFIAB had not had this access to the President, and there are real concerns that if PFIAB is so constituted it will become a prisoner to the intelligence bureaucracy.

It would appear as though the result of the Hugel resignation and the criticism it brought upon Mr. Casey has been to increase his dependence on the intelligence bureaucracy. His ability to challenge established institutions and mental patterns within the CIA has been undercut, and any confrontation with department heads or national intelligence officers would have a detrimental effect on his image if leaked. Firm action is needed by the White House in this situation. PFIAB should be immediately reestablished, and with its backing Mr. Casey should be given the authority to make some badly needed institutional changes.

Checklist of Issues coming before Congress

Watch For:

Soviet ABM Breakout Possibility Feared: Senate concern over the Soviet ABM-X-3 mobile phased array radar, which was expressed to President Reagan in a May 12th letter (see "Congress and the Abrogation of SALT," NSR 34, June 1981) has spurred the intelligence services to expand their coverage of the Soviet defense establishment to include greater surveillance of production lines for evidence of this weapons system. The Administration fears that the Soviet Union may be stockpiling the weapons system in preparation for rapid deployment after abrogation of the ABM treaty.

MX and the C-5: Reports circulating in Washington in mid-July of a probable airborne basing mode for the MX missile have come as a shock to knowledgeable members of Congress and to Air Force officers in the Pentagon. According to these reports, Secretary of Defense Weinberger, in a move designed to solve the serious political problems surrounding the land-basing plan for MX, has tentatively decided to deploy the new ICBM aboard wide-bodied aircraft. Under this proposal, these missiles would eventually be carried by an Airmobile Patrol Force of 100 new-design, long-endurance aircraft, designed to remain in the air for forty-eight hours without refueling and a week with refueling. These aircraft would fly patrols over designated areas of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans at slow speeds and, in the event of a Soviet attack, would jettison their missiles. The MX missiles, whose engines would ignite in mid-air, would be guided to their targets by a combination of their inertial navigation systems and course correction information provided by navigational satellites. Because the new aircraft would not become available until the early 1990s, in the interim, the MX missiles would be deployed aboard 100 C-5A transports built for this purpose. The proposed basing scheme worries strategic analysts for a variety of technical reasons, including the vulnerability of unhardened C-5s to the effects of airburst nuclear explosions and the danger in relying on satellites, themselves susceptible to destruction or jamming, to provide the necessary navigational data so that the MX missiles could hit their targets. In addition to these technical flaws, experts are concerned about the very high costs of such a deployment scheme (\$40 billion plus).

Republic of China: Congressmen who carefully drafted the Taiwan Relations Act over the objections of the Carter Administration have expressed growing displeasure with the failure of the Reagan Administration to alter previous policies toward the Republic of China. In particular, while agreeing to sell military equipment to the PRC, the Administration has refused to make available the FX advanced fighter to the ROC. During the August recess, House Foreign Affairs Committee members, led by Congressman Zablocki, will go to the Republic of China to evaluate the situation. But executive branch officials accompanying the delegation to other countries in Asia have been prohibited from visiting the ROC by the State Department.

Concern With Lack of DoD Appointments: Congressional defense analysts are becoming increasingly concerned at the slow rate of appointment to top-level Defense Department positions. Three assistant secretaries of defense; the Assistant to the Secretary for Atomic Energy; under secretaries of the Army and Navy; nine assistant secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; and a deputy secretary of defense remain to be nominated. In addition, many of the Administration's nominees remain to be confirmed. This is partially due to the divestiture policy of the Senate Armed Services Committee; many qualified candidates literally cannot afford to serve in the Administration. But another reason is that in the wake of the bitterness produced during the defense transition, many candidates are not mutually acceptable to both the White House and the Secretary of Defense. Congressional defense analysts point out that this delay in appointments may have a major impact on policy. The lack of conservative sub-cabinet level appointees means that the office staffs are still manned by Carter hold-overs.

Directed Energy Weapons: In testimony before the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee in hearings for his confirmation as director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, Presidential Science Advisor George Keyward strongly underlined the need for more efficient coordination of high-energy weapons programs. Keyward emphasized his belief that "laser and directed-energy weapons technology represent an enormous possibility for the future." He cautioned, however, that the potential for a directed energy ballistic missile defense system does not exist in the near future. He expressed his concern that the United States might invest too much short-range effort in an attempt to develop "a technology that could obviate the need for an MX system."

Afghanistan—A joint hearing on human rights violations in Afghanistan held by the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on July 22nd heard first-hand testimony from Afghan freedom fighters and a student who participated in the April 1980 demonstration of school children in Kabul. Of particular interest, Mali Muhammed Hissain Wardak, a tribal leader from the Wardak Province, made many references to the several different types of gases used by the Soviets, including ones that burned the skin and affected the central nervous system. Wardak spoke of the Soviet weaponry used, including gas bombs, artillery, MI-24 helicopters, and even mines disguised as toys and pens, but capable of blowing off limbs. Other witnesses, including American scholars on Afghanistan, indicated that forces resisting Soviet occupation have increased in recent months. They strongly recommend congressional support for direct assistance to the Afghans as well as increases in aid to Pakistan.



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