

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 11-5LOS ANGELES TIMES  
17 January 1986

# To Check on the CIA, Send In the B Team

By EDWARD JAY EPSTEIN

The ambiguous nature of secret intelligence is often not fully appreciated, especially by top Central Intelligence Agency executives who boast that they are privy to the intentions of the Kremlin through sources that report to them directly from its inner sanctum, the KGB.

The "facts" that proceed from secret intelligence are not discrete objects, like marbles, that can easily be separated by color, lined up and counted. They tend to change their shape, color and meaning depending on how, and by whom, they are arranged.

Consider the case of Vitaly S. Yurchenko. He came to Washington last August as a "defector" from the highest stratum of the KGB. Then, after the deputy director of the CIA, John N. McMahon, had staked his reputation on the quality of Yurchenko's information and CIA Director William J. Casey had proclaimed him "for real," Yurchenko returned to Moscow.

Despite this embarrassment, Casey continued to assert that Yurchenko had provided extraordinarily important information to the CIA during his curious visit. That very same week, on the basis of a briefing about the case by his national-security staff, President Reagan said categorically that "the information he provided was not anything new or sensational." He added that the putative defector had told the CIA nothing more than it "already knew."

Clearly the CIA director and his deputy, and the President and his national-security adviser, had looked at the same set of secret intelligence "facts" from the same defector, but they arrived at diametrically opposite conclusions about their value.

The issue goes far deeper than the credibility of a single defector. It cuts to the

core of the CIA's assumptions about Soviet deception. Does, for example, the KGB systematically attempt to mislead American intelligence by allowing its agents to reveal misleading data? The CIA's current position on this vexing question, as stated in a letter sent to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, is that it can find no evidence of such kinds of deception on strategic issues in the past 20 years. Counterintelligence experts outside the government, such as those at the Rand Corp., reached the opposite conclusion.

The problem can be resolved neither by insiders, who are committed to a denial of deceptions, nor outsiders, who lack access to the highly classified data. Nor does the evidence speak for itself. What is needed to break this conceptual logjam, if only on a temporary basis, is another "B Team."

The B-Team idea stretches back a decade, when George Bush was the CIA director. Data from reconnaissance satellites had raised serious doubts about the CIA's assessment of Soviet bomber and ballistic strategy. The question again was not the raw data but what might be missing from it. In order to settle the matter, Bush appointed two teams to look at the same data. The A Team, headed by Howard Stoertz, the CIA's national intelligence officer on the Soviet Union, consisted entirely of CIA insiders; those on the B Team, headed by Richard Pipes, a professor of Russian history at Harvard, were all outsiders (with proper clearances) who were not committed to any prevailing view of Soviet strategy.

The most dramatic result of this unprecedented competition was a radical reassessment of the Soviet threat, based on the B Team's conclusion that the CIA had seriously underestimated the accuracy of

Soviet missiles. It also shook up much of the complacency at the CIA.

Casey, at his confirmation hearings, suggested that there was definite value in these kinds of competitive analysis. If so, the current crisis in counterintelligence presents a golden opportunity for a new B Team.

The team should be chosen by Casey, not in his capacity as the director of the CIA but in his wider role as the head of the intelligence community. As in the model of the 1976 B Team, these experts should be drawn both from other U.S. intelligence services, such as the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency, and from think tanks, such as Rand and R&D Associates, that have been working on these problems for a decade or more. To head the team, Casey might consider a senator who has served on the intelligence committee and is respected for independent thinking on these issues, such as Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.) or Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.).

Since this B Team's primary purpose would not be to investigate but rather to test the CIA's imagination, it should have a limited mandate and be confined to two or three specific issues. These might include Soviet use of double agents and Soviet disinformation tactics to confuse anti-ballistic-missile strategy and mislead U.S. submarine deployments. The idea would be to test the proposition that analysis with diverse views might discern different clues from the same raw data. The results, again, might prove both surprising and useful.

*Edward Jay Epstein, the author of "Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald," is completing a book about international deception.*