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Letters

To the Editor:

Normally, the CIA does not respond to articles written about it. However, because Allan Goodman's article, "Dateline Langley: Fixing the Intelligence Mess," in FOREIGN POLICY 57 (Winter 1984-85), concerns an area of the agency's activities where we can speak publicly, and because the article is so inaccurate, we believe the record should be corrected.

Goodman left the agency in 1980, and his information concerning it is seriously outdated. A point-by-point rebuttal of all of Goodman's errors and recommendations would take too much time and space. Therefore, I will address only the most egregious inaccuracies.

Goodman states that the intelligence community does not study its failures and that the results of the few postmortems that have been undertaken have not been widely disseminated or discussed. But in recent years the director has assigned a senior group of distinguished officials the task not only of evaluating some 15 major historical intelligence problems but also of evaluating retrospectively at 1- and 2-year intervals virtually every estimate now prepared.

Moreover, the Directorate of Intelligence now has its own evaluation staff whose principal function is to conduct retrospective evaluations of CIA assessments on particular subjects. These evaluations are widely shared with the concerned organizations. Finally, in this connection, one of the agency's most popular training courses now is a course on intelligence successes and failures.

Goodman asserts that analysts learn to be wary of doing longer-range or in-depth studies and that the task of writing estimates and think pieces is to be avoided. He notes that most of these studies are turned out by members of a special staff and that promotions of analysts at middle and senior levels require that they take on management responsibility. But for more than 3 years now, a substantial percentage of new analytical resources has been devoted to strengthening long-term research. In the last year alone, more than 700 long-term research assessments were published. Indeed, the structure of

~~intelligence~~ has been revised in such a way that it is now more difficult to get analysts to work on short-range projects and current intelligence than on longer-term research. The special staff Goodman cites has not existed for several years, and the agency now has a number of opportunities for analysts to rise to GS-15 and even to supergrade level.

Goodman asserts that the intelligence community posts few analysts abroad and that even short field trips are hard to come by. But one of the benefits provided by new resources in recent years has been to permit significant expansion of the number of analysts assigned overseas. Moreover, for the first time there are adequate funds for analysts to travel and work overseas, often for several months at a time. Goodman's statement that analysts are generally limited to one 6-week stretch of temporary duty every 3 years or so is wrong.

Goodman also states that attempts to reach out to academics are strongly resisted and dismissed as cosmetic. But a major CIA initiative in recent years has been the dramatic expansion of its contacts not only with academics but also with think tanks and the private sector. In 1984 alone some 1,200 analysts attended nearly 500 conferences on substantive issues, many of them sponsored by universities. Moreover, analysts are now required to obtain outside training every 2 years, either through academic course work or through attendance at conferences and seminars. Many of the agency's substantive papers are now reviewed by academics. Particular emphasis is placed on seeking out scholars with a different point of view than the CIA's.

Goodman states that analysts should do more to distinguish between what they know and do not know, to identify those judgments based on specific evidence from those based on speculation, and to make projections about the future. Goodman suggests further that policymakers be given some indication of what to look for in the way of events or developments that can be used to test CIA judgments.

But one of the principal objectives of new, far more intensive, substantive review of CIA analysis is to ensure that its analysts not only are giving policymakers a more explicit description of their evidence but also are distinguishing between what is analysis and what is based on evidence, as well as stating the agency's view of the reliability of

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that evidence. And when analysts speculate, the reasons behind the speculation are included. A list of the types of indicators Goodman referred to is now often included in national estimates and CIA assessments.

Goodman states that the blocking of critical analyses unwelcome to policymakers has been consistent in recent years, citing an estimate on Lebanon as one example. Not only was the estimate Goodman cites not blocked—any more than the one he alludes to relating to Central America—but these estimates delivered an unvarnished, candid intelligence community judgment on key issues. No viewpoint was suppressed in the presentation of those reports. The charge of the blocking of critical estimates because they were critical of policy is false; the agency continues to publish a wide range of estimates without regard to the political consequences for policies that may be affected. In view of the strength of Goodman's assertion and the centrality of this issue, we would note simply that neither congressional oversight committee has reached his conclusions. Unlike Goodman, these committees have access to our assessments.

In sum, many of the policies Goodman advocates to improve the quality of analysis already have been implemented. While the agency recognizes that there is always room for improvement and that there are still occasional lapses, the policies are in place. And just as Goodman predicted, these changes in analytical methods and management have reduced the failure rate for American intelligence.

George V. Lauder
Director, Public Affairs
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C.

The Author Replies:

I am deeply disturbed that the CIA—as opposed to other parts of the intelligence community—has responded to my article apparently by launching a disinformation campaign.

Notwithstanding Lauder's assurances that CIA performance has improved substantially since I left the organization, there is persistent and disturbing evidence that the U.S. intelligence community in general and the CIA in particular remain handicapped by the problems my article discussed.

In January 1985, for example, the Senate and House select committees on intelligence released public versions of their reports on U.S. intelligence activities covering the period from January 1, 1983, to December 31, 1984. Their conclusions are very similar to my own. Strikingly, nowhere in either the 61-page Senate report or the 19-page House report is mention made of any of the so-called policies and initiatives to improve the quality of analysis that Lauder describes, despite his assertions that agency officials "can speak publicly" about them.

Indeed, the Senate report concludes that with respect to analysis and production "analysts are not producing enough basic data to meet important intelligence requirements. Instead, analytic efforts seem to emphasize short term 'current' intelligence products." With respect to collection, the report noted "a growing imbalance between collection and analytic capabilities"; "persistent gaps in information on certain subjects of great importance to national security"; and the need to "shift away from the collection of data that is currently proving to be of diminishing value." And when it focused specifically on human intelligence (HUMINT) collection performance, the committee, like my article, found "collection gaps and dissemination problems" and urged that "clandestine HUMINT collection by U.S. agencies be carefully coordinated."

The House committee's report found "a need for improved performance on the part of intelligence collectors and analysts" and "a clear need for better coordination between the users of intelligence and the providers of intelligence." The report also stated that "care had to be taken lest analytic thought succumb to pressure to support rather than inform policy" and that "shortcomings in analysis and collection continue to appear."

Possibly in anticipation of these congressional reports and to rebut my article—which he had seen in draft—Deputy Director of CIA for Intelligence Robert Gates submitted an op-ed piece to the Washington Post that was published on December 12, 1984, and that made many of the points in Lauder's letter. In response, one veteran and highly respected career officer wrote to the Post in a piece published January 10, 1985, that Gates's article was "panglossian." Moreover, after listing all of the initiatives that have characterized his approach to reform at the CIA, Gates himself concluded, "I cannot say this approach would

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have enabled us to predict the fall of the Shah [of Iran]"—a major intelligence failure my article addressed at length because the patterns of collection, analysis, and management that led to failure still appear to handicap the CIA and the intelligence community.

The Lauder letter and the Gates article sidestep the fundamental questions that have been raised about the quality of the agency's performance by dismissing my critique and that of others as outdated and partisan. I did leave the agency in 1980. I have stayed in touch, however, and based the portion of my article dealing with the CIA under William Casey on discussions over the past 3 years or so with more than 100 analysts, managers, and policymakers. Some of these discussions were even arranged by Lauder's office.

It also is important to note that the CIA is only one part of the U.S. intelligence community. Further, the policies and initiatives Lauder refers to apply to only one part of the CIA, namely, the Directorate of Intelligence (DDI). The DDI has been reorganized during the Reagan administration and some of its internal procedures have been changed, as my article noted. After discussing these specific changes with numerous analysts, managers, and policy consumers, I concluded in print that the reforms have been slow to take hold, that their impact on the quality of intelligence has been marginal, and that they have not been widely adopted throughout the intelligence community. The community is still plagued by fragmented intelligence collection and reporting. Such fragmentation—coupled with the politicization of analysis—still leads policy consumers to be critical of the product, and also leads to shocking failures that demonstrate persistent problems with the way the American intelligence system is organized and managed.

Thus Lauder's letter overstates the significance of the actions taken by the DDI and their impact both on the community as a whole and on the quality of CIA analysis in particular. To cite specifics:

> I stand by my judgment that the intelligence community does not study its failures. The DDI does this to some extent but, just as in the pre-1981 period, the senior review group referred to by Lauder that is charged with this task examines only a very small part of what even the DDI produces—60 or so estimates annually versus

thousands of community judgments contained in briefings and memoranda. The work of this group is meticulous but not widely accepted throughout the community, in part because some members lack intelligence experience. Nor did Lauder point to even one way in which the group's findings have actually affected the way an analyst's routine or crisis work is done. Lauder also neglects to mention that the course on intelligence successes and failures has been criticized for holding back on providing students with the details, especially the sensitive intelligence reports, on which both successes and failures appeared to turn.

> The present DDI may emphasize research more than ever before, but depending on definitions, 700 "long-term research assessments" per year strikes me as about average for the past 8 or more years. Yet the community as a whole has not followed suit, as the Senate oversight committee also noted. Further, the special staff of the National Intelligence Council to which I referred, and on whom the principal burden of writing estimates and think pieces falls, still very much exists, and its members are worried about how well they will be absorbed back into the system. Analysts and managers alike told me that there are still too few opportunities for analysts to rise to the GS-15 and senior intelligence service ranks. And the Senate intelligence committee report asserts that the Defense Intelligence Agency has "been significantly handicapped in its ability to recruit and reward outstanding analysts and other intelligence specialists."

> I did not say that the CIA has failed to provide analysts with an opportunity to attend academic conferences. I did say that substantive consultations with academics, when they proved critical of agency work, were resisted by many managers. Lauder's letter does not dispute this point at all. Moreover, Lauder ignores the chilling effect of several recent firings of intelligence officers for speaking out at academic conferences on the motivation of other analysts to attend or participate in such conferences.

> As Lauder knows, more explicitly and frankly explaining to policymakers the evidence behind intelligence analysis is not being done on a significant scale beyond national intelligence estimates. The House oversight committee's recent report refers

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to intelligence community concerns about this continuing problem.

> Politicization of reporting and analysis has taken place and in my judgment has vitiated the effect of many of the initiatives Lauder highlights. Indeed, the effects of politicization cannot be glossed over by saying that eventually a product sees the light of day even if it is critical of administration policy. As Lauder knows, senior career officers have complained, and some have resigned in response to the pressures exerted by the director of central intelligence to reshape national intelligence estimates for political effect. In fact, the details of one such episode were printed in the Washington Post in a January 2, 1985, article by John Horton titled "Why I Quit the CIA." As Lauder also knows, the newly composed oversight committee is likely to agree to several senators' requests to investigate the specific charges of politicization mentioned in my article.

The record, therefore, only reinforces concern that the intelligence community is not functioning effectively. I do not doubt that Lauder and his associates will continue to work to improve CIA performance. But I am skeptical of their efforts in the current politicized environment and, as I noted, previous internal agency reorganizations and reforms have not significantly improved the quality of analysis. America still lacks a centralized intelligence collection and analysis system. If it fails to develop one now, disaster lies ahead.

Allan E. Goodman
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.