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BRIEFING

WHAT'S WRONG WITH U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES

The problems that plague the intelligence community are so deeply rooted that only fundamental changes can improve performance



AP/WIDE WORLD

BY ALAN E. GOODMAN

The recent campaign for the White House marked the third straight year in which the American intelligence community's performance was a major issue.

From their members it is clear that President Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski all felt often thinking intelligence had not served them well.

Moreover, over since the debacle in Iran the Senate and House Select Committees on Intelligence have been sharply critical of the substantive intelligence they have received from the intelligence agencies.

Unfortunately, such problems have plagued the intelligence community for more than a decade and are so deeply rooted that only fundamental change in the system will improve performance.

Intelligence Failures

The quality of intelligence provided by the community has been seriously questioned for some time. There have been at least 10 alleged intelligence failures investigated by Congress or the press since 1980.

also brought the question of the origins and locations of the Soviet or Cuban spy rings "discovered" in Cuba in 1979. Such misjudgments have all been extremely costly to U.S. security. Some of these failures led to major crises, like the Cuban missile crisis; others, such as the underestimation of the Soviet nuclear buildup, led to complacency about America's own arsenal and the need to modernize it.

U.S. intelligence agencies also have failed to anticipate military attacks and to identify tactics and targets in limited wars. The intelligence community has rarely predicted correctly the use of force by one state to achieve its aims over another.

These failures include the North Korean attack on South Korea in 1950, the risk to the USS

Liberty of Israeli air attack if the ship carried a surveillance mission during the 1987 Arab-Israeli war, the risk to the USS Pueblo of its surveillance activities and the objective of the Tet offensive in Vietnam in 1968, the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Argentine seizure of the Falkland Islands (Glebe Mariner) and the subsequent British seizure of the Argentine cruiser, and the efforts by Iran and Iraq to destroy each other's oil fields and export facilities since the Persian Gulf war began in 1980.

In each of these cases, ill-conceived or mistaken policy also was at fault. But to blame the policy-maker for the failure, as many intelligence professionals have done, would be a serious mistake.

However the policy-makers

reached their conclusions, they were misled by faulty intelligence analysis or poorly served by the slow or incomplete dissemination of reports by the intelligence community.

The Iran Debacle

The most badly debated intelligence failure of the 1980s was the Iran debacle. Actually, a series of failures along with a conflicting policy toward the state led to the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in November 1979 and destroyed vital American and security interests in the region.

To be sure, at the commission who compiled the CIA's post-mortem on Iran a later discovery, as a single person in or out of government forecast the success of Ayatollah Khomeini's Revolution have

surely been predicted correctly, but U.S. intelligence agencies and their analysts failed even to estimate.

The episode caused Jimmy Carter to send the following handwritten note to then Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Brzezinski, and then director of Central Intelligence, Admiral Stansfield Turner:

"To Mr. [Stansfield Turner] — I am not satisfied with the quality of the political intelligence. Assume our own staff, arms or intelligence, plus a report concerning our position in the most important areas of the world. Make a joint recommendation on what we should do to improve our ability to give us political information and advice."

At the senior level, how serious?

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As early as 1981, the Reagan administration's disappointment was underscored by Admiral Brentnider, the country's chief intelligence officer and deputy director of central intelligence staff.

James told several sessions that the U.S. intelligence community's performance was at its lowest level since Pearl Harbor.

And in the wake of the most serious weaknesses of the U.S. intelligence community, President Reagan issued a report that said "the most serious weakness" of the intelligence community was "the quality of the intelligence provided to the President."

It called for greater Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, the assessment to Carter, Brzezinski, and Yarek from speaking; and Soviet technology to design and produce a limited arms or 1985 mission with accuracy comparable to America's five years.

Many intelligence operatives have felt the problems wondering if the community has become

Since the White House has not permitted the director of central intelligence to release an unclassified version of the CIA assessment, the matter is not known and therefore it is impossible to compare a track record.

But if it is not recurring that the intelligence community and that many of them involved issues and threats of major strategic, diplomatic, or economic importance, to the United States.

American intelligence has frequently misjudged Soviet behavior and capabilities — largely of highest priority. U.S. intelligence has been wrong, for example, about the Soviet threat to American US reconnaissance flights in 1980.

It failed to predict Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, the assessment to Carter, Brzezinski, and Yarek from speaking; and Soviet technology to design and produce a limited arms or 1985 mission with accuracy comparable to America's five years.

The intelligence community

When Pressure Forces a CIA Officer to Quit



BY JOHN HORTON

Last year I resigned as National Intelligence Officer for Latin America because of the pressure put on me by the director of central intelligence — William Casey — to cease up with a National Intelligence Estimate on Mexico that would not only be the right answer.

This is not the first time that pressure has been put on intelligence officers to come up with what their superiors consider to be the right answer.

A previous director did long ago remark that he was considered a "traitor" because the intelligence community felt that were being written under his direction were not pleasing to the policy-makers at the time — the administration that our policy in Vietnam was working.

In any case, it was not that the policy-makers were putting pressure on the director, but rather that the pressure on me and others working on the Mexico

estimate came from the director himself.

Nothing will get an intelligence officer's back up faster than a staff of that kind of pressure in his neck. It is a matter of principle that he not stand intelligence reports or judgments that don't back up an administration's policies to his superiors or to show the glory of approval on an administration's policies.

A National Intelligence Estimate is not simply an intelligence report or a bit of analysis, but should be the very best opinion. It is the product of the distillation of representatives of all the intelligence agencies dealing with foreign affairs.

As a member of the National Intelligence Council, the national intelligence officer chairs the writing of the estimate. He may give his own influence than one of the representatives from CIA, Defense, Army or Navy or Air Force, but the estimate is from the Defense Intelligence Agency. It may not.

But the result should reflect the views of all the agencies and intelligence to their reports. It is not or should not be merely unbalanced, and it should reflect doubts as well as disagreements.

In 1978, a distinguished intelligence officer, in testimony before the Senate, spoke of the "natural tension" between intelligence officers and policy-makers and said, "Policy-makers must respect the integrity of the intelligence process and avoid attempts to get estimates tailored to their tastes."

Such has been said — and no doubt more will be said — about the motives of policy-makers for distorting or distorting the intelligence they receive. The past is understood and to accept that this has happened in the

past, and it can be expected in the future.

Strong-minded officials often think they know better than intelligence officers. Attempts to suppress dissenting intelligence reports or judgments that don't back up an administration's policies have a non-partisan provenance.

William Casey, the current director, said officers from previous directors of central intelligence in that he is part of the policy-making group where Central America is involved as much as he is the president's chief intelligence officer. His particular case has led to talk of a bill to ensure the selection of future directors from the career service to prevent political being put in the job.

That may appeal to us intelligence officers who have an unhealthy respect for our own views, but as legislators can ensure that a director, so matter how experienced in our work, will not be able to resist pressure.

We should face the experts who that even some of good will and integrity may be in possession of opinions they consider to be wrong or inconvenient. A lack of respect may be taken as arrogant. The natural tension will continue.

If we accept this as inevitable, we should be to set the conditions. I propose that we do so through a loose, informal council of officers — a tribal council — to act as the public conscience, more intelligent officers cannot by their nature be taken open to public scrutiny and force the early discussion of policy does not benefit from mouth-making.

This council would sit with the director when he is being briefed by the politicians, held his head when lampshade flickers

him from the path of duty, and talk quietly with other parties to see if the differences be minor or major and to avoid warnings of the risks to be run some not worth the candle.

The council would be made up of members of the four different organizations already charged with the task of examining the performance of the intelligence community and the CIA in particular.

In the CIA there is an Office of the Inspector General that reports the agency and acts as an ombudsman for employee complaints. The President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board is made up of private citizens appointed by the president.

Two other organizations charged with oversight of the intelligence community are the Senate and House intelligence committees. The informal exchange of information and views on these groups would provide an immediate improvement.

What would begin as a pragmatic approach to supporting the integrity of the intelligence community could build bridges from the perspective of officials from State, from Defense.

Good intelligence is vital to our security. Our discussion of foreign and defense policy differs gravely from partisan organizations and organizations. Such a tribal council could build bridges over party chasms, diffuse real differences and increase the area of consensus that seems so far from our group today.

John Horton was a CIA operations officer from 1948 to 1973 and served on the National Intelligence Council from May 1983 to May 1984.

GREAT DECISIONS '85

Starting Next Week

What year marks the 50th year of the Great Decisions program. It is sponsored annually by the Foreign Affairs Committee, part of the Great Decisions '85 program, which consists of eight weekly meetings in conjunction with the American foreign relations U.S. foreign policy issues.

Starting next week, subject material related to the weekly Great Decisions will run in the briefing section. The subject for discussion the first week will be "Diplomatic Crisis: Toward Arms Control or Conflict?"

Great Decisions '85 is sponsored jointly by the World Affairs Council of Northern California in cooperation with the Foreign Affairs Committee, a non-governmental, non-partisan organization. It is designed to stimulate citizen participation in world affairs.

Participants in Great Decisions will receive their views in opinion letters distributed at the weekly meetings. The letters will be submitted and distributed to members of Congress and the executive branch.

Discussion groups are still being formed and telephone reservations for the weekly sessions are being accepted. Information on Great Decisions '85 can be obtained from the World Affairs Council, 1000 Broadway Street, Suite 200, S.F. 94102; phone 558-0941.

How to Improve U.S. Intelligence

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ties were set for political intelligence in 40 countries whose stability was judged directly to affect major American interests.

The group recommended more resources to hire expert political analysts — not collectors — and decreed greater coordination in the collection of political intelligence between the Foreign Service and the intelligence community.

The only tangible result achieved by the group, however, was a substantial expansion of reporting requirements that fell largely on clandestine collectors because the Foreign Service was not given the staff resources to respond.

During his 1980 presidential campaign Reagan pledged to make improved intelligence one of his top priorities. Once elected, he appointed his campaign manager William Casey as director of central intelligence.

Politics and the CIA

Casey moved decisively and rapidly to bring in his own team to reorganize the analytic part of the CIA along geographic lines, to parallel the organization of the operations directorate, and to substantially increase the National Foreign Intelligence Program budget.

According to a Jan. 16, 1983, New York Times Magazine report by Philip Taubman, the CIA is the fastest-growing major federal agency. Its 25 percent budget increase in fiscal year 1983 exceeded even the Pentagon budget's 18 percent growth that year.

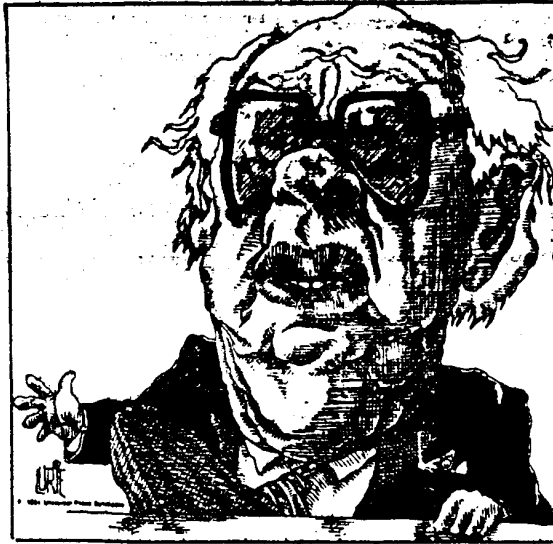
Although the intelligence budget's size is classified, Taubman quotes congressional sources as pegging the cost of annual CIA operations at more than \$1.5 billion.

In his exhaustive 1983 study, "The Puzzle Palace," James Bamford reports that estimates of the supersecret National Security Agency's budget run "as high as \$10 billion."

Yet little improvement is apparent with respect to the accuracy of the intelligence community's product.

Charges of intelligence failures have surfaced over estimates of the Soviet military buildup, the accuracy of arms-control monitoring, the threat against the U.S. Embassy and the Marine barracks in Beirut, the ability of the Lebanese army, the nature and extent of the Cuban presence in Grenada, and the likely outcome of elections in El Salvador, as well as that country's domestic politics in general.

Another major congressional public concern has been the politicization of the position of the



CIA Director William Casey

CIA director in the Reagan administration.

The appointment of Casey and his elevation to cabinet status have put the intelligence community deeply into the policymaking arena.

In the atmosphere of a National Security Council meeting, the cabinet room, and the Oval Office itself, the central intelligence director can be tempted, if not basically inclined, to take sides and to express a policy preference.

Yet the temptation is an important one to resist, especially for the president's sake. As the president's principal adviser, only the CIA director can provide the security council with assessments independent of policy preferences.

Report on Lebanon

The trend today at the CIA and elsewhere in the intelligence community is to tailor the product to the needs and nuances of policy debate.

As one senior intelligence officer said in an interview, "Casey comes back here from the White House looking for reports to buttress his stand. He does not ask us for a review of an issue or a situation. He wants material he can use to persuade his colleagues, justify controversial policy, or expand the agency's involvement in covert action."

A case in point is Lebanon. Casey repeatedly returned drafts of one National Intelligence Estimate for revision with the notation "try again."

Many analysts think Casey was dissatisfied with the National Intelligence Estimate's conclusion that the government of Lebanese Pres-

ident Amin Gemayel, and especially its army, were not viable and that they would not be significantly strengthened by a U.S. Marine presence.

Charges that reports have been altered have also surfaced in connection with the CIA's work on Central and South America. Two senior analysts resigned recently claiming that Casey ordered their findings to be rewritten to inflate the threat to U.S. security.

Senate Minority Leader Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., has asked the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to conduct a thorough evaluation of their allegations. "If accurate," Byrd said in a letter to the committee's vice chairman, "these reports indicate there has been a shocking misuse of the CIA for political purposes."

In addition, the Senate select committee has repeatedly expressed "concern" about whether Casey would keep the committee "fully and currently informed of all intelligence activities."

These anxieties proved well-founded when it was revealed by the New York Times that the CIA had launched a covert action to mine the harbors of Nicaragua without adequately briefing the committee.

Unfortunately, some of these problems are not new. Policy-makers constantly seek intelligence to support their policies and frequently encourage the CIA director to provide it. And intelligence officials have always tried to tell congressional oversight committees as little as possible, especially regarding covert operations.

One fundamental problem is that the current reporting system

discourages analysts and agencies from sharing information. Consequently, when collectors or analysts in one part of the community find new data that challenge conventional wisdom, their first instinct is to squirrel them away.

What Is Needed

The immediate need is for an overhaul of the analytic career service and production process that will correct patterns of thinking and of management that have contributed to past intelligence failures.

A central, community-wide foreign-intelligence data base should be created to assure that an analyst working on a specific problem would have access to all the information collected.

Analysts also should be provided with incentives to do more reflective writing and research. Work and travel abroad should be facilitated and a thorough, substantive review procedure for all products and publications should be developed. These steps would greatly improve the accuracy and quality of the intelligence product.

Analysts must also pay more attention to distinguishing between what they know and do not know, to identifying judgments based on specific evidence vs. those based on speculation, and to making projections about the future.

Reorganizing the way U.S. intelligence services collect, analyze and disseminate the knowledge essential for national decision-making should be a high priority.

In particular, a return to the concept of central intelligence collection and analysis would help improve the performance of both tasks. Such centralization, along with the separation of collectors from analysts, would break down agency-erected barriers to the badly needed sharing of all information.

Thus the United States should establish a central collection agency, able to command and mix human and technical intelligence collectors to use each most effectively.

Also needed is a central agency for research and analysis where, again, the best talent can be employed to work on a problem in as much depth as required. These two agencies should replace the CIA, NSA, and other intelligence organizations.

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