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The Ascendant Pentagon

Freezing Out the CIA

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The Pentagon is emerging as the principal force in the management of US foreign intelligence, gradually displacing the Central Intelligence Agency from its traditional preeminent position, as a result of the implementation of President Ford's plan to reorganize the intelligence community. This little-noticed power shift may, in the opinion of numerous specialists, have an adverse effect on the quality of US intelligence.

Under Ford's reorganization, based on the Presidential Executive Order of February 18, the Director of the CIA (currently George Bush) remains in name the chief

intelligence adviser to the President, but it is clear that the CIA director acts as a subordinate to the Central Intelligence (DCI) and military intelligence.

however, there are growing indications that Bush, as DCI, is being forced to share his authority with the Pentagon's top intelligence official, the new Deputy Secretary of Defense, Robert Ellsworth.

In part this is so because Ford, wishing to centralize the control of intelligence in the President's office and the National Security Council after all the abuses of the

past, has effectively diminished the DCI's influence in the allocation of resources to the various arms of the intelligence community. It is the power of the purse that counts in operational policy-making, and the Pentagon—running the huge National Security Agency (NSA) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) among other military intelligence operations—holds the lion's share of the total multibillion-dollar intelligence budget.

The other reason is that the Defense Department, interpreting in its own way the presidential Executive Order, has recently streamlined, expanded and strengthened its intelligence apparatus in a way that many intelligence community officials see as an "end run" by the military, designed ultimately to lessen the CIA's position in policy-making and its impact on the elaboration of fundamental intelligence estimates. New lines of authority were drawn in a manner likely to reduce the DCI's direct control over such agencies as the NSA and the DIA. The Pentagon's internal intelligence reorganization was completed on July 6, when a new organizational chart was circulated internally; there was no publicity about it.

In the developing controversy over Ford's reorganization plan—and, especially, the Pentagon's role in it—at stake is whether civilian control of the US intelligence process, as represented by the CIA, can be maintained or supplanted in practice by the military viewpoint. The picture is still quite blurred; the new system is not yet fully understood in the intelligence community, and it is too early to offer final conclusions.

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