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Turner Hopes To Narrow Gap In Intelligence

This is the second of two articles on the U.S. intelligence community.

Washington—Central Intelligence Agency Director Stansfield Turner has begun working with top Carter policy-makers to bridge the intelligence gap and solve what he concedes are "very real" problems in the way the system works.

"There has been too much emphasis on what I call intelligence by committee—by consensus," the new CIA director said this month in his most extensive interview since assuming office four months ago. "The system has had too much emphasis on having an agreement, so you can . . . come up with a community solution. . . I think I have to bite more bullets myself."

The trim, gray-haired admiral—he retains his active duty rank—spoke candidly and on the record as he acknowledged criticisms that had been leveled at the intelligence community by a number of current and former top policy-makers.

Those comments of dissatisfaction, outlined in Newsday yesterday, included complaints by policy-makers that they are deluged by raw intelligence that is poorly analyzed—that the espionage experts often do not tell the decision-makers what the information means and how it may affect present and future policies.

Now, for the first time, a president and his top policy-makers will begin telling the intelligence community—on a regular basis—specifically what they expect them to provide in military, political and economic analysis.

"The decision-makers have been too preoccupied to give [the intelligence community] the attention," Turner said. "We are now actively engaged with the President and top people . . . in sorting out the priorities that will be ordered on me to do." He said he had begun setting up a procedure in discussions with President Carter, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Defense Secretary Harold Brown, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and Gen. George Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Turner spoke while sitting at the head of a long, dark mahogany conference table in his seventh-floor CIA office that blends blond-wood paneling and an expansive wall of windows overlooking the woodlands of Langley, Va. In the wide-ranging interview, Turner:

- Agreed that the CIA does not provide enough analysis of the mass of hard data that is delivered to policy-makers;

- Volunteered that perhaps the best remedy for this is for the CIA director himself to "bite the bullet" more often and offer his own analysis and prediction of major events and trends;

- Outlined the manner in which the intelligence community is beginning its most important

current assessment—the study of Soviet strategic capability and strategy;

- Criticized the controversial "A Team, B Team" approach to assessing Soviet strategic capability and strategy, which was initiated by his predecessor, George Bush, and pitted a team of agency analysts against a team of outside hardline analysts;

- Conceded that many CIA analysts need more training and experience because they are not familiar with the countries they are in charge of assessing.

Intelligence: Analysis Needed

Turner agreed with complaints of top officials such as Brzezinski that the policy-makers are not provided with enough good analysis of the mass of hard information that is fed to them by the intelligence community.

Another problem, he conceded, is that the policy-makers are simply fed too much information from the various sources in the intelligence community.

"There is too much information and they can't use it—that is a very real problem," Turner said. "If I had a complete throttle on all of the information going around town from intelligence [agencies] I could prevent some of that. [But] to do so would be dangerous in that I obviously could have my biases and could leave something out. So it is a risk you take in order to have multiplicity of sources."

He added: "It is unfortunate that one of the games in Washington is 'Who Has the Latest Intelligence?' And that puts too much emphasis on current intelligence. . . The problem is as soon as something happens, somebody runs in and says, 'Mr. Jones, did you hear what has happened? Hot off the press, raw intelligence has just arrived! Three days later we find out it was a bad report . . . or put it in context.'"

So it is that the director of intelligence has some suggestions of his own for the policy-makers who rely on intelligence: "If the consumers would learn to be a little more patient and let us put it in context for them, I'd be happier."

Still, he concedes, the criticisms of a lack of good intelligence are "valid." Turner offers his explanation:

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"There has been too much emphasis on what I call intelligence by committee, by consensus. . . . A group gets together and they can't agree, they try to find a common middle ground—and the middle ground is probably never the ground on which you want to be."

He also offered one solution: "I think I have to bite more bullets myself. When the community can't agree, it is the DCI [director of central intelligence] estimate [that must be made]. I've done it once since I've been here already. I bit the bullet and said, 'I think you have waffled this one'. . . . As a result, I deliberately took an external position."

(Turner would not go into detail on just what his position was in the example he cited. But he said the case involved an assessment of the military capabilities of two forces. One was numerically larger than the other, but he said he took the position that the smaller force was of higher quality, and thus should be considered superior.)

A Team vs. B Team

Turner said he is determined to avoid the public controversy that has surrounded the most vital intelligence estimate that the agency makes: the assessment of Soviet strategic strength and intentions.

In 1976, Bush, then the CIA director, took the internal CIA estimate and brought it before a board of experts from outside the government. That was called the A Team, B Team approach.

But Bush purposely loaded the outside team with hardliners, who predictably said the Soviets had a much greater military capability than the CIA estimated and that the Soviets were pursuing superiority in nuclear weapons.

The hardliners leaked their version to the press and started a public controversy as the Carter administration came into office.

Bush defended the A-team, B-team approach, saying: "Yes, if you pick hardline guys, you're going to get a hardline response—so what? This was to have been done in private. . . . The question we were posing was if you pick hardliners, would they necessarily come up with analysis that was more hardline?"

Turner said of the A Team-B Team approach: "The concept of having a team with an ideological polarization is one I would use with great caution." He added: ". . . But there could be some cases in which I would want to do it."

Turner says he is using a different procedure. "We are approaching the next estimate with a single team and a single advisory group rather than the A-B team approach," Turner said. ". . . I don't ever want to get into an A-team, B-team [dispute] in public again."

Turner's plan on the new Soviet estimate is to bring in outside experts with a diversity of opinion to work with agency personnel within the analysis team.

He is relying on top assistant Robert Bowie, a

Harvard political scientist who served on the State Department's policy planning staff in the Eisenhower administration, to select the consultants. "We are selecting them to complement the background, biases, theologies, and the philosophies of the people we are assigning," Turner said.

Turner also plans to consult with a board composed of all the key members of the intelligence community, asking them if there is "any strain of opinion that ought to be represented."

He said: "I've told the board that I don't want to find out we left something out after it has been published."

Turner said he planned to use basically the same approach in organizing the national intelligence estimates of other nations. He also has created a special board composed of members of the intelligence agencies that will help him determine which countries and subjects should be studied.

Top past and present policy-makers have criticized the CIA analysts for not being sufficiently knowledgeable about the countries they are assessing. Many analysts have not even been to the countries to which they are assigned, the officials charged.

Turner concedes that that is true. "We need some improvements in the training and education and diversity and experience of our analysts," he said. "We need to give our analysts more opportunities—letting some of them go to various courses, posts overseas, and with more interplay with the academic community and think-tanks."

Officials throughout the executive branch and on Capitol Hill currently are debating various proposals to reorganize the intelligence community. Reorganization has become a topic of major dispute, especially between Turner and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown.

The subject has become so sensitive that Turner wouldn't discuss it in the interview. But according to other intelligence officials, Turner wants to create a director of national intelligence who would have broad power over the entire intelligence community.

The director would set the budget, make the assignments and, possibly, directly control the analysis of all collected information. He would be an intelligence czar.

Brown is opposed to relinquishing administrative control of the huge National Security Agency, the agency that does most of the electronic collection and currently is run by the military.

Other members of the intelligence community say they fear that the director would be too powerful and that dissenting opinions would not get through to policy-makers.

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Proponents of the reorganization argue that it would make the agencies more accountable, eliminate duplication and inter-agency rivalry and improve the production and quality of intelligence.

Bush, the former CIA director, is against the reorganization. He said: "I oppose the concept of a czar if it means that he would be removed from being the head of the CIA and would not have a CIA base. I don't think the CIA should be just one component in a military dominated intelligence network."

Joseph Biden (D-Del.), a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, says he favors the concept of a single director with broad powers.

"There has got to be one person a president can turn to and say, 'Hey, Charley, what's the story?'"

"We need one person—a director of intelligence—over CIA, DIA, NSA and all the rest," Biden said.

The President is expected to make a decision on reorganization before the end of the summer.

Even with all the controversies and problems, high-level officials in the intelligence community hope Turner is the man who can bridge the gap between the needs of the decision-makers and the capabilities of the intelligence community.

"You see, I have an interesting perspective here," Turner said. "Until March 9, I had been nothing but a consumer of intelligence for 30½ years. And I sympathize with the consumers."