

34. The Central Intelligence Agency

The Central Intelligence Agency and other components of the U.S. intelligence community have adopted a snail's-pace approach of evolutionary and incremental adaptation to the post-Cold War world. An agenda of reform is essential to eliminate unnecessary and undesirable capabilities and to reflect the altered international threat environment of the post-Cold War era. The 104th Congress should

- **pass a new legislative charter for the CIA and the rest of the intelligence community that is more consistent with the values of a democratic republic;**
- **establish a communitywide inspector general's office to ferret out inefficiencies and abuses;**
- **decline to authorize the development and purchase of new intelligence-gathering systems, such as satellites and other expensive technical items, until there is a clear need for additional capabilities;**
- **explicitly eliminate the CIA's authority to conduct covert paramilitary operations;**
- **disband the Department of Defense's Human Intelligence (HUM-INT) Service;**
- **overhaul the classification system to eliminate excessive secrecy in the intelligence community, and publish aggregate intelligence budget figures;**
- **refrain from developing new systems for and devoting more funding to tactical military intelligence needs;**
- **reduce the budget of the intelligence community by approximately one-third.**

Reviewing the Intelligence Mission

Former secretary of defense Les Aspin and former senator Warren Rudman have just been named chairman and vice-chairman of yet another

presidential commission to study the various intelligence agencies. This time the purpose will be to examine the role of the intelligence community in the post-Cold War world. One important impetus for the **Aspin-Rudman** commission is the CIA's embarrassing **Aldrich Ames** case. It would, however, be a serious mistake to assume that the challenges facing the CIA and the rest of the intelligence community can be met merely by reshuffling the organizational charts as so many other executive branch departments and agencies are doing. Significant substantive reforms are needed.

Espionage and counterespionage failures are actually the least of the intelligence community's problems. It is time to acknowledge that all too often the community is both out of touch with and irrelevant to the needs of policymakers. For example, the intelligence community apparently failed to identify the erosion of the shah of **Iran's** political power base in the late 1970s, repeatedly overestimated both the size and the vitality of the Soviet economy, and failed to prepare U.S. officials for the wave of democratic revolutions that swept through the Soviet bloc at the end of the 1980s. Former director of central intelligence **Stansfield Turner** noted that the CIA had consistently failed to serve the president with its National Intelligence Estimates, its premier analytical product. Such an admission lends urgency to the need for the presidential commission to "determine the quality of the current intelligence structure and identify alternatives," one of the 19 tasks it has been assigned.

The CIA's Dubious Record

Recent revelations about CIA financial support of **Japan's** Liberal Democratic party in the 1950s and 1960s, which helped to promote corruption and one-party domination, underscore the fact that the agency has far too often focused on ventures that were ill conceived and, over the long term, harmful to U.S. interests.

In fact, from the very beginning the CIA undertook operations that contravened such basic tenets of American democracy as the right of people to choose their own government. The principle of **self-determination** was violated repeatedly during the early years of the Cold War, as the agency meddled extensively in the political affairs of France, Italy, and other West European countries to ensure the election of "**friendly**" governments.

From such beginnings has come a long list of often embarrassing, sometimes inexplicable, operations. In **Zaire** what began as a CIA plot to

overthrow an elected prime minister has ended up 30 years later as a patron-client relationship between the United States and Mobutu Sese Seko, best known for being the world's leading kleptocrat.

Even the covert supply of weaponry and logistical support to the Afghan *mujaheddin* had unexpected adverse effects. Although the operation did cause serious problems for the Soviet Union, and was therefore a successful Cold War tactical maneuver, it also helped place in power the most anti-Western, radical Islamic factions. Men trained by the CIA to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan have committed terrorist acts all over the world. The United States itself suffered the consequences of such poor judgment when terrorists connected to the Afghan war effort bombed the World Trade Center.

Inadequate Studies and Reforms

It is worth remembering that the various legislative and executive branch intelligence oversight structures that have been created over the last 20 years have not prevented such CIA fiascoes. Reforms enacted during the 1970s and 1980s have done a better job of curbing other abuses—especially the CIA's illegal domestic spying operations that reached scandalous proportions in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Even on that issue, however, additional safeguards would be advisable.

Supporters of the status quo argue that intelligence activities have been conducted by the U.S. government since the beginning of the Republic and will remain an essential mission in the post-Cold War era. Usually they merely call for refocusing goals and taking on new priorities (e.g., economic intelligence gathering, monitoring environmental degradation, beefing up efforts against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, monitoring the arms trade, and countering drug trafficking and money laundering).

There have, in fact, been several studies of the intelligence community in recent years. In the aftermath of the Iran-Contra affair, Congress revised the Intelligence Oversight Act of 1980 to, among other things, require that presidential approval of covert actions be in writing and to prohibit the chief executive from retroactively authorizing such actions. Later, Congress and the Bush administration reached agreement on the Intelligence Organization Act of 1992, which amended the National Security Act of 1947, and for the first time defined the term "intelligence community."

None of those measures represented a dramatic change in the status quo, however. While the Clinton administration has continued the commit-

ment to congressional oversight, it has not advocated any significant organizational or structural change in the intelligence community.

The ills afflicting the intelligence establishment include the distortion of intelligence by analysts and policymakers and excessive attraction to covert action. Any meaningful reforms must start with the recognition that, like all government entities, the intelligence community is a bureaucracy. And from time to time it is necessary to shake up bureaucracies to prevent **stodginess**, complacency, inefficiency, and corruption. The **Aspin-Rudman** commission will not be issuing a report until 1996, but there are some steps that can and should be taken before then.

Key Features of the Reform Agenda

The first step should be to adopt an entirely new charter for the CIA and the rest of the intelligence community. Although there have been revisions over the years, such as the 1992 Oversight Act, the guiding light is still the 1947 National Security Act. That legislation is no longer adequate. The current charter does not even **explicitly** outline the roles of key organizations such as the National Security Agency, which conducts extensive electronic surveillance. A new charter should define the missions of the intelligence community in the post-Cold War period and create additional safeguards to prevent any repetition of domestic spying operations and to prohibit mischievous new missions such as economic espionage.

A desirable corollary to a new charter is the creation of an inspector **general's** office for the entire intelligence community, not just the CIA. It is essential to have an independent watchdog to ensure that the various agencies do not abuse their authority and remain within the confines of the charter. If an effective IG's office had been in operation in the 1980s, we might never have had the **Iran-Contra** scandal.

Second, much of the intelligence community's estimated \$28 billion a year budget is procurement driven. Huge expenditures are required for satellites and other technical means of intelligence gathering. The heavy reliance on such means, in the absence of a dire strategic threat, is unjustified. The end of the Cold War has lessened the need for such strategic intelligence. Advocates of the status quo contend that technical systems are needed to monitor attempts by other states to develop nuclear weapons. But as we learned after the Persian **Gulf War**, the vaunted high-tech systems failed to detect **Iraq's nuclear-weapons** program. Our knowledge of that program came primarily from human intelligence sources and inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency. Increasingly,

the justification for procurement of high-tech systems resembles the Pentagon's justification for building B-2 bombers and Seawolf submarines (i.e., to preserve the military-industrial sector).

Third, the CIA's ability to conduct covert paramilitary operations should be eliminated. Such a prohibition would represent the final stage of a long-standing trend. Whereas covert operations took up about half of the CIA's budget in the 1950s, they now apparently take up less than 5 percent. CIA officials like to say that it is only the occasional failures that receive public attention while successes go unpublicized. But the truth is that the agency's failures, including such operations as the Bay of Pigs invasion and support for a Kurdish insurrection against Iraq's government, outnumber the successes. Furthermore, even the CIA's "successes," such as the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran and President Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala have, in the long term, turned out to be foreign policy failures.

Covert operations are based on a fraudulent premise: that they offer a relatively cost-free alternative to doing nothing or waging all-out war. There is a good rule of thumb for evaluating covert operations: if a mission would be unlikely to receive widespread domestic support should it become public knowledge, it should not be adopted. And if such support is present, it is difficult to see why the operation should not be pursued overtly. Furthermore, if a paramilitary option is needed, the United States already has a highly capable force—the 47,000-strong Special Operations Command in the Department of Defense—that can carry out such missions.

Fourth, steps should be taken to prevent the Pentagon from trying to build up its own espionage empire. The Defense Intelligence Agency is the supervisor of a recently established military spy network, the HUMINT Service. That network consolidates under one roof the various military attaches, DIA clandestine operatives, and all service human intelligence assets. Such a separate organization in competition with the CIA mirrors the old civilian KGB-military GRU rivalry in the former Soviet Union. At best it is an unnecessary redundancy, and at worst it could engender a poisonous enmity and an unhealthy temptation for both parties to engage in "mission procurement" to justify budgets and personnel levels.

Fifth, the intelligence community needs to rid itself of the habit of overclassification. Concealing pertinent information from Congress and the public encourages dubious missions and abuses of power. The Joint Security Commission report released in early 1994 noted that the current classification system is in drastic need of reform. In particular, there is

no rational reason not to publish the aggregate budget of the intelligence community or even of specific agencies. Doing so would help strengthen requirements for **accountability**.

Sixth, the public and Congress should not fall victim to the myth, engendered in part by critical comments from Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf that circulated after the Persian Gulf War, that military commanders were ill served by the intelligence **community's** effort to provide tactical intelligence. While there were undoubtedly problems, the system worked as well as could be expected. Military field commanders are like anyone else: they always want more than they have. While **streamlining** and coordination of resources is desirable, the temptation to devote more funds to building more systems for tactical military intelligence should be avoided.

Seventh, if Congress wishes to ensure the effectiveness of the **intelligence** community and make certain that the activities of the various intelligence agencies are consistent with the principles of democratic constitutional government, it must become more serious about institutionalizing investigative oversight. Congressional leaders must take responsibility for recruiting members who will take oversight seriously rather than use it as a platform **from** which to grandstand. Intelligence committee members ought to be freed from other work that wastes time and energy. In that regard, the plan to reduce the number of congressional committees is good. Committee members must also take steps to hire the best staff, focusing on individuals with an investigative mindset as opposed to national security careerists.

If covert action is not eliminated entirely, Congress must demand a much more meaningful role. It should adopt an absolute veto to halt proposed actions when a majority on the intelligence committee in either chamber opposes an action. Greater use can also be made of oversight tools such as General Accounting Office audits and the input of outside experts and critics.

Those actions, along with other recommendations that can be expected from the presidential commission in 1996, can effect significant cost savings, reducing the current budget by perhaps a third. That downsizing, accompanied by a similar reduction in personnel, would be an entirely reasonable goal for the 104th Congress. Previous reductions since the end of the Cold War have merely rolled back the large budgetary and personnel increases adopted during the 1980s. Such limited decreases do not adequately reflect the dramatic changes in the international threat environment, especially the disappearance of **America's** superpower adversary.

The United States still needs intelligence-gathering and evaluation capabilities in the post-Cold War era. It is especially important to identify and monitor security threats posed by hostile states and terrorist organizations. Reliable information will often be crucial to America's ability to neutralize such threats. And it is probably advisable to have independent agencies carrying out such missions, rather than submerging their functions in the State Department or Defense Department—bureaucracies with their own institutional and policy agendas. Nevertheless, significant substantive reform of the intelligence community is essential to restore the moral standing of those agencies, provide better guidance and oversight, and eliminate **unn**eeded and undesirable capabilities.

Suggested Readings

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