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*Secrecy in sunshine*

## THE FUTURE OF INTELLIGENCE \*

Walter Laqueur

American society's aversion to intelligence is a political fact of life, one which no politician can ignore. From time to time—after some particularly humiliating political or military defeat, or in the face of obvious danger—the call goes out to strengthen intelligence, to give it a freer hand, to allocate more resources to it. Once the immediate crisis passes, the feeling again prevails that the public has a right to know everything, or almost everything, and that the denial of this right is bound to result in abuse and crime. Secrecy, it is said, erodes the system of checks and balances on which constitutional government rests.

These fears are not groundless. There is a contradiction between free societies and secret services, and there are no easy ways to resolve the problem. There is great reluctance to accept the fact that without secrecy there can be no diplomacy, much less intelligence. American attitudes toward intelligence arise from a high standard of morality, but there has also been some humbug involved. Justice Brandeis's dictum that "sunshine is the best of disinfectants" is sometimes cited by those who oppose secrecy. Those who quote it also know that as far as human beings are concerned, sunshine is wonderful only in moderation. In some instances it is not valuable at all, as in the case of undeveloped film. Those most embittered about secrecy and intelligence argue that American administrations have been lying to the American people—lying about the Bay of Pigs and about Laos, about operations MONGOOSE and CHAOS and COINTELPRO, about Indonesia and Chile, about projects MKULTRA and CHATTER. There is no denying that the authorities have been lying; all governments do at one time or another—some, admittedly, far more often and outrageously than others. It is one thing to argue that a government that consistently misleads its people has effectively lost its legitimacy and should be replaced. It is preposterous to demand that governments should always tell the whole truth, as if that single moral value everywhere and forever transcended all other values. An individual may legitimately decide to act this way, even at the cost of his life; but governments are not free to choose this "ethic of ultimate ends": their decisions are necessarily determined by a process of weighing alternative goods.

Intelligence runs against the grain of American political culture. True, even President Wilson, when he talked about diplomacy proceeding "frankly and in public view," did not really mean anything more than the results of secret negotiation. His rhetoric did not prevent him from having secret sessions with Lloyd George and Clemenceau while US marines with fixed bayonets stood at the door and patrolled the garden outside. Intelligence is in an even worse

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position than diplomacy: it has to hide not only its operations but also the final product from the public. Hence the aversion against intelligence, which is seen as an unfortunate necessity in war—but certainly not a profession for decent people at any other time. . . .

The charges of the early 1970s, which resulted in the muzzling of US intelligence, were not groundless: secrecy is always a potential danger to a democratic society, and government officials may try to shield themselves from public scrutiny by keeping their actions unknown. In Britain, for example, the Official Secrets Act has been used to protect the government and the civil services from inconvenient probes. The labels "confidential," "secret," and "top secret" have been used on many occasions without any obvious need. Some 20 million documents are classified each year (about 350,000 as "top secret"), two-thirds of them by the Department of Defense. While a presidential order explicitly forbids classifying information to conceal violations of law, inefficiency, and administrative error, the general tendency has always been, and remains, to overclassify. Yet for all the bureaucratic effort to preserve secrecy, more important secrets are revealed in the United States than in any other country.

Covert action has been abused to carry out operations that were dangerous, morally questionable, stupid, or unnecessary. It is unlikely that without these misguided covert actions the general campaign against intelligence would have been as extensive and as damaging as it was. Given the circumstances in which it operated, US intelligence might have been better advised to refrain from covert action of the violent kind in the 1960s and 1970s; the results were meager, and there was little public support for it. Some notable instances apart, US covert action has not been successful in its more violent forms. Investigations showed that while the assassination of foreign leaders had been considered several times, in only one case was it really attempted; and no foreign leader is known to have actually been killed or even injured as the result of a CIA plot—surely an almost unheard of record in the history of secret services. There is something of a contradiction between covert action and violence, for violence cannot remain covert for long. What is frequently overlooked is the fact that most covert action has not been violent, and in this respect US intelligence has been at times very successful; the greater part of these successes is still unknown to the general public.

### Secrecy vs. Democracy

Intelligence control reforms proposed in the 1970s took a number of assumptions more or less for granted. These assumptions were: that intelligence could function—and even function better—in a democratic society under the supervision of outside officials and in the limelight of the media; that while regrettable, the betrayal of secrets by leaking was part of an unofficial system of checks and balances; that the right to know usually took precedence over the need for secrecy; that there was no fundamental clash between secrecy and the right to know; and that it was almost always more important to protect the citizen against intelligence abuses than to shield intelligence against its adversaries. These assumptions were based on certain political beliefs—that America, with its democratic values and free institutions, was in no immediate danger if it behaved prudently; and that those who pointed to external dangers were either grossly exaggerating or were engaged in special pleading. Some argued that even

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if there were certain dangers, it would be wrong to use questionable means in the defense of one's values. The big debate centered on what means were permissible in the conduct of foreign policy, and whether America could afford to play according to a set of rules much more stringent than those used by her adversaries.

Secrecy and the right to know are not absolutes which totally preclude each other; various democratic countries have developed arrangements which, while not ideal, work tolerably well most of the time. America is ill-suited for such experiments. Its position cannot be compared with that of Costa Rica, which has abolished its army and presumably has few state secrets. Nor can it afford a kind of modern-day "armed neutrality" like Sweden. American interests are global, and the anonymity of her big cities provides many more opportunities for espionage and leakage than is the case for countries like those just mentioned. The United States lacks that elementary national solidarity and responsibility which in some other democratic countries prevents most leakages damaging to the national interest. The US investigative journalist, for example, sees it as his or her job to ferret out secrets and to publish them: protection of the national interest is up to government officials, who are paid for doing so. A journalist of radical persuasion may even claim that "the national interest" is merely the shibboleth of paranoid right-wingers. To blame journalists for leaks would be unfair: politicians and government officials, for whatever motives, have frequently been worse offenders. They are the wholesalers of what journalists later retail. In other democratic societies such behavior would be frowned upon and the perpetrators would be ostracized, if not punished. This is not the situation in the United States, where revealing state secrets is not punishable, provided it is done in the proper way such as in a public speech, an interview, a newspaper article, or a book.

Leaking may have "an honorable history," and it may provide the public with valuable information for judging its elected officials; but the intelligence officials (who were not elected) cannot be expected to do a reasonable job in the full glare of publicity. Another common justification for such leaks is that otherwise abuses would never become known; but the leaks affect the legitimate uses of intelligence, not just its abuses. If details are published about the US capacity to decrypt enemy codes or to observe a strategic buildup through satellites, this will enable the other side to hide its activities, and the operations of US intelligence will become that much more difficult. The chances that they will pick up important information will be greatly reduced, and the danger of successful deception will increase.

Even at present, the United States has an espionage act, 18 US Code, sections 793-798. This act deals with gathering, transmitting, and losing defense information, photographing or sketching defense installations, the disclosure of classified information, and other such subjects. While these statutes are not entirely ineffective, they do not provide national security protection comparable to that of other countries. The reasons for this are rooted in the Constitution and in the protection afforded by American criminal justice procedures.

The statutes are confused and contradictory with regard to the definition of national security and state secrets. The government must prove that those accused of violating the act intended to injure the United States or aid a foreign

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nation—the so-called specific intent requirement. The government has to persuade judge or jury that the information involved was classified, and that if it was classified, the classification was necessary and proper. All the secret details concerning the case must be disclosed in court and made available to the defense. Thus a spy, not to mention a leaker, may enjoy de facto immunity from prosecution because the price of disclosure would be unacceptably high to the government. The statutes do not provide sufficient protection against “subversive leaking”: if a spy, instead of selling his secrets to a foreign power, decides to have it published by a group or press in the United States which supports that foreign power, he could probably not be prosecuted. A former legislative counsel in charge of CIA relations with Congress put the situation drastically in focus. He noted that, whereas there are criminal laws in the United States likely to send a Department of Agriculture employee to prison for up to ten years if he reveals advance information on next year’s soybean crop, defense secrets are not protected in a similar way.

Legislation against leaks and to strengthen the espionage statutes is opposed by those who argue that the Constitution protects the right to receive and disseminate information and ideas, and that the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights are intended to protect citizens against the government, not the government against its citizens. Without the dissemination of information, they argue, there can be no informed public discussion. Such views have been behind much of the resistance against attempts to introduce a state secrets act in the United States.

There is no real balance between the rights of the individual and the security needs of the nation. Without a balance of this kind the very existence of an intelligence agency is problematical. Even the most effective laws against espionage and leaking will not stamp out these activities altogether. Making these activities more risky would reduce the extent of the problem.

The desire for openness is so deeply rooted in the American tradition, it seems unlikely that more effective laws against espionage and leaking will be passed. An Intelligence Identities Protection Act became law in 1982 after a three-year legal battle, but this addresses itself only to a small part of the general problem, and this act, too, may be circumvented in the course of time.

Could intelligence function without secrecy? To some extent its role can be fulfilled by research institutes or think tanks which analyze newspaper clippings and radio broadcasts, diplomatic and travelers’ reports, and perhaps some other occasional pieces of information. A great deal of intelligence can be assembled on the basis of such material. Suggestions of this kind have frequently been made: they aim at disassembling the CIA and assigning its two principal functions to separate organizations: the central analytic and estimating responsibilities should be placed in a new agency, organized and staffed to perform only those functions, fully isolated from all clandestine activity. An organizationally separate agency would be responsible for any and all active measures.

**Active Measures/Covert Action**

The maintenance of two or even three separate intelligence agencies is not unheard of; it has been tried before—in Britain during World War II, for example. The scope of covert actions includes financial support and technical

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assistance, propaganda, and political and paramilitary action aimed at either supporting, destabilizing, or overthrowing a foreign regime. Collection of intelligence aims at knowing about the state of affairs in a foreign country; covert action aims at doing something about it. The analysts, to paraphrase Marx, are the philosophers who have interpreted the world in different ways; those in covert action have been commissioned to change it—a little bit, and from time to time. The National Security Act of 1947 was not altogether clear about the functions of the CIA in this respect. It mentioned not only the coordination of intelligence but the performance of "such other functions and duties related to intelligence. . . . as the NSC may from time to time direct." This clearly meant covert action, but it is doubtful whether those who composed and passed the act envisaged that covert action would soon emerge as by far the most important component within the CIA.

Some reformers have advocated doing away with covert action altogether; others have proposed that clandestine activities be confined to the gathering of foreign intelligence. Still others, accepting the need for covert action, have proposed that this should be done by a separate organization. . . .

The issue is not one of principle but of utility. Those opposed to covert actions would not be any happier if clandestine activities were continued under different management, and under a different name. The practical difficulties involved in such an organizational scheme would be formidable: members of the two agencies would run the risk of getting in each other's way. The cost would be great: two parallel worldwide networks would be required, since it cannot be known beforehand in which country covert action may be needed. The foreign assessment center would still need human intelligence, otherwise it would have only the same sources at its disposal as other organizations. Since human intelligence involves secrecy and illegal activity, covert action might reenter through the back door. Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, a new division of labor in the intelligence community might be viable. It is a practical question, not one of principle. The issues involved in this debate lead in the end to a reconsideration of our fundamental question: Why intelligence?

It is not quite true that there is no point in producing intelligence of any sort if it cannot be used. A case can be made for producing "pure intelligence" just as a case can be made for doing basic research in science. An institute bringing together some of the best brains in the country with an annual budget of \$100 million would provide basic intelligence which, for all we know, might be superior to anything produced at present; but it could not provide the practical information that politicians need most: whether or not Argentina will actually land on the Falkland islands at a certain date, whether the Soviets are massing troops for an operation against an unruly satellite, and so on. Roberta Wohlstetter has provided an excellent illustration in her study, *Pearl Harbor*:

Foreign correspondents for the *New York Times*, the *Herald Tribune* and the *Washington Post* were stationed in Tokyo and Shanghai and in Canberra. Their reporting as well as their predictions on the Japanese political scene were on a very high level. Frequently their access to news was more rapid and their judgment of its significance as reliable as that of our intelligence officers. For the last few weeks

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before the Pearl Harbor strike, however, the newspaper accounts were not very useful. It was necessary to have secret information in order to know what was happening.

Intelligence is primarily action-oriented, frequently calling for immediate political action to cope with dangers abroad. The country in question might be of no vital importance to US security, in which case no action would be necessary. But if vital US security interests are involved, what should be done? If a capacity for covert action exists, all kinds of possibilities are open. If not, the United States will either have to mount a full-scale military intervention (which is unlikely) or refrain from supporting its friends (which is undesirable).

In the conduct of foreign policy there is a gray zone between full-scale military intervention and doing nothing; this part of the political spectrum has grown very much in recent years, and is now of great importance. There is every reason to assume that most of the action touching on US security in the 1980s and 1990s will be in the "noncommitted" countries of the Third World, where there is wide scope for active measures.

Covert action is only one of the tools of foreign policy, but it is not a negligible one: in certain conditions it may be decisive. It is not an option to be chosen lightly, but in the absence of such an option a global power may be doomed to impotence. Most people, albeit reluctantly, have reached the conclusion that a covert action capacity should exist as long as international politics remains what it pretty much always has been. There is yet another argument against covert action. It runs as follows: while the existence of a covert action capability may be in principle desirable, America frequently does not have the knowhow, the trained individuals, the surrogates, the experience to carry it off. If these preconditions do not exist, if such action is hemmed in by too many restrictions, if it is impossible to keep preparations secret, success may not be possible—in which case it may be preferable not to engage in an operation of this kind.

**Overseeing and Evaluating**

Assuming that intelligence will have a freer hand in the 1980s than in the previous decade, assuming also that effective measures will be taken so that intelligence can engage in clandestine operations with improved hopes for success, how will effective control be established? Supervision should cover both the quality of intelligence and possible abuses. There are various official organs designed to attend to these duties, but none has proved satisfactory in the past. The quality of intelligence will always be under some scrutiny, if only because the customers will evaluate its usefulness for their own work. Neither their satisfaction nor their complaints need be assumed accurate; only systematic monitoring can establish whether intelligence could have done better, and whether it has kept within its legitimate areas of activity.

Congress has conducted various hit-or-miss investigations of intelligence in the postwar period. Such inquiries have been mounted by the Armed Services and Appropriations committees of both houses, by subcommittees of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and others. Some reports published by these committees were of interest; others did not serve any obvious purpose.

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While congressional briefings by the most senior intelligence officials has benefited both Congress and the CIA, these committees are not really able to exercise a true oversight or evaluation function. Their members have only limited time to spare for this purpose, not all of them are adequately educated about intelligence, and membership of the committees changes—sometimes too frequently for the necessary continuity. Intelligence, for its part, has no wish to supply information beyond the call of duty. Senators and congressmen will usually be told the truth by those briefing them, but rarely the whole truth. The committees ordinarily are not equipped for systematic and detailed investigations.

There is always the danger that the committees' attitude toward intelligence, be it praise or criticism, will be dictated by party political considerations; the most recent example of this phenomenon has been the debate over Central American policy. There are aspects of intelligence which can and should be subject to congressional oversight. It is difficult to envisage how committees of this kind can conduct systematic evaluation of intelligence performance. To make such an evaluation one would have to know more about the subject than the intelligence community itself, which could not be the case. A well-written, well-organized, seemingly objective intelligence estimate may still be fundamentally wrong. On some issues it is possible to know after a few weeks or months whether intelligence assessments were correct or not, in which case evaluation may be possible and desirable. For the broader, long-term issues, years may have to pass before a definitive conclusion can be reached. Clearly, it is beyond the capacity of congressional committees or subcommittees to engage in historical postmortems of this kind.

The President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) played a role of importance under some presidents, such as Eisenhower, who created it, but not under others, such as Johnson. PFIAB members have included distinguished scientists, corporation presidents, and retired senior naval and army officers. They have offered important technical and military advice and on occasion also offered important economic and political guidance. The PFIAB met as a rule for two days every other month; it had a minute staff, which prevented leaks. Its postmortems on intelligence failures or on the advisability of certain covert actions apparently had limited impact.

When PFIAB was first established it was meant to act as a quality-control oversight group charged with seeing that intelligence performed effectively. Under the Carter administration the emphasis was placed on preventing abuses and punishing wrongdoing. Inquiries as to whether the administration was getting adequate intelligence on situations in Iran, Afghanistan, Cuba, the Horn of Africa, etc., came only after some major setbacks to US foreign policy had occurred; by this time PFIAB had been abolished. From the intelligence community's point of view the fact that PFIAB had only a small staff was a blessing. The CIA and the other intelligence agencies knew from experience that if staffs operating in the name of prestigious senior bodies were large enough, they tended to become meddlesome, another bureaucratic impediment to their work.

The PFIAB that was reconstituted in 1982 has shown much initiative, but it is too early to say whether it will enjoy much influence. In theory, PFIAB has direct access to the president, but successive directors of intelligence have on the

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whole regarded PFIAB as neither a formidable threat nor a strong ally; consequently, their cooperation has been less than wholehearted. PFIAB has been regarded as a necessary evil, not to be antagonized unduly, but also not to be taken too much into confidence. This is probably a mistake; even for purely political reasons it is advisable that the intelligence community work closely with PFIAB in case things go wrong. Such collaboration would also help to secure greater backing in Congress.

Internal oversight bodies include the CIA General Counsel and the Inspector General. Both report directly to the Director of Central Intelligence. The General Counsel is technically responsible for ensuring that CIA operations are in compliance with the law, but he does not very often initiate inquiries. While he has a sizable staff of lawyers, it is doubtful that he is kept truly informed about the more sensitive intelligence operations. The Inspector General has a similar function, but he is also concerned with the level of CIA performance. His office acts in addition as a forum for grievances by CIA personnel, and it engages in periodic inspections of CIA offices concerning both their effectiveness and their observance of regulations. Under certain conditions, the Inspector General can be denied access, but this must be done by the DCI in person and in writing. It is likely that illegal activities and other intelligence shortcomings will occasionally escape the Inspector General's attention. Despite these shortcomings, and although the Inspector General has never influenced "high policy," his office has played a positive role in the intelligence community.

True control over the CIA should by rights have been exercised by the National Security Council—or, to be precise, by the various subcommittees it has set up in the past (the Forty Committee, the Special Group, the 54/12 Group, and the 303 Committee), each of them slightly different in scope, outlook, and responsibility. Some NSC subcommittees have been in charge of approving proposals for clandestine operations, and their importance in the decision-making process has been considerable. This is more than can be said for others, such as the NSC intelligence committee, various subcommittees (for example, on economic intelligence), the Resources Advisory Committee, and the Net Assessment Group—all of which hardly ever convened.

A review of the oversight process shows that considerably more can be done, both inside and outside government, to make the controls more effective. As a former European secret service chief noted, "they (the elected authorities) have to trust in the final analysis the man whom they have appointed and his closest aides. It is difficult to control an intelligence service from within, it is impossible to do so from outside." It may not be altogether impossible, but it is certainly very difficult, and this has been a permanent source of resentment for critics of intelligence. As they see it, directors of intelligence by definition cannot be trusted. Critics do not want to give a blank check to intelligence, yet there are many situations in which intelligence cannot succeed unless it has a free hand. This is an undesirable state of affairs; unfortunately, it seems to be one for which there is no constitutional or practical remedy.

Some DCIs have tried to involve outside experts in the process of intelligence review, but such discussions of current problems and tactical issues have not usually been very fruitful. In the case of Allen Dulles's Princeton Group, periodic meetings with distinguished figures succeeded in some areas, failed in others. I have heard from a senior intelligence official that similar attempts in

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Europe have not been any more successful. On the other hand, exchanges with outside experts on broad issues of political, scientific, or economic interest can be of considerable value to the intelligence community. Intelligence officers absorbed in day-to-day tactical work will frequently benefit from exchanges of views about long-term, strategic issues they may lose sight of. While "ethical" control of intelligence from the outside is exceedingly difficult, the assessment of the quality of intelligence is perfectly possible, given the openness of the American system. Such evaluations have been made with considerable competence by researchers from abroad without privileged access; it should be possible to expect at least this much from others with at least some such access.

**A Modest Function**

Intelligence has many functions and aspects, and the problems confronting it are even more numerous. Any attempt to summarize them is bound to be selective and approximate. The function of intelligence is more modest than is generally believed. It is a prerequisite for an effective policy or strategy, but it can never be a substitute for policy or strategy, for political wisdom or military power. In the absence of an effective foreign policy even the most accurate and reliable intelligence will be of no avail. True, those responsible for intelligence must act as if the fate of all mankind, or at least of their nation, depended on their success or failure. Seen in a wider perspective, there are periods and constellations in which intelligence is more important than in others. Intelligence could have been of considerable importance in the immediate postwar period when the future of Europe and the Near East was in the balance. It is of growing importance today in view of the more or less equal strength of the two main power blocs. What David Dilkes wrote in *Retreat from Power* about the eve of World War II applies with added force to the situation in the 1980s: "It is precisely when the resources are stretched and the tasks many, when the forces are evenly matched and the issue trembles in the balance, that good intelligence and sensitive interpretation matter most." In a situation of this kind even relatively minor factors may make a decisive difference. Intelligence must always be viewed within the wider framework of foreign policy. The crucial questions are: If what was not known had been known, would the outcome have been different? If nothing had been known, would those in question have acted differently?

Seen in this light, many intelligence failures of recent decades mattered less than is commonly assumed. Even if US policymakers had known about the weakening position of the Shah, or the anti-Amin coup in 1979, there is little they could have done about it. On the other hand, there have been instances in which available information would have been of great importance if decision makers had been willing to act upon it. Such willingness cannot be taken for granted. The British and French had fairly accurate facts and figures on German rearmament in the 1930s, but they were unwilling to act. American leaders knew about the impending Polish military coup in November 1981, but this in no way changed their course of action. The capacity to make use of intelligence is always the decisive factor.

The performance of US intelligence since World War II has been uneven. While it has pioneered technical means of collection, it has been weak on human

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intelligence. It has been excellent in ferreting out facts and figures, but it has been much less accomplished in putting them into a coherent picture, in analyzing trends, assessing situations, warning of future contingencies. The need for human intelligence has not decreased, but it has become fashionable to denigrate the importance of human assets because technical means are politically and intellectually more comfortable. On the other hand, the opportunities for hostile intelligence agents operating in democratic societies are incomparably greater than for their Western counterparts. Technical means of collection frequently do not result in unambiguous evidence: they seldom help in the assessment of intentions rather than capabilities, so that their uses for political intelligence are strictly limited. Yet precisely because US intelligence has been so much better in technical intelligence than in human intelligence, it has invested more and more in the former to the neglect of the latter.

To some extent failures in intelligence are inevitable because indeterminism prevails in international affairs. Yet certain events and trends are more predictable than others, and no one can fairly expect intelligence to do more than provide warnings based on probabilities. Bias is among the causes of intelligence failure most frequently adduced. It may take various forms, such as an unwillingness by analysts or consumers to accept evidence contradictory to their preconceived notions, or evidence which is for some other reason inconvenient. Such bias has on occasion had fatal consequences. Yet bias has probably been of less overall importance than ignorance, lack of political sophistication and judgment, lack of training and experience, lack of imagination, and the assumption that other people behave more or less as we do—that their governments, broadly speaking, share our psychology, values, and political aims. The impact of ideology and of nationalism, militant religion, etc., has always been difficult for deeply pragmatic and nonideological people to understand.

Other weaknesses have included the politicization of intelligence; bureaucratic reluctance to accept risks and to present unambiguous intelligence assessments; and reluctance on the part of consumers to pay attention to intelligence warnings. These and other shortcomings are of minor importance in comparison with the basic weakness of inferior political knowledge and judgment. The inclination to exaggerate the role of bias and deception is as strong and constant as is the tendency to underrate incompetence and self-deception.

There have been periodic attempts to improve intelligence; most of them have had no positive effect. In the perspective of three decades it has at least become clear which approaches do not work. This goes above all for attempts at organizational reform. Managerial principles that may work in other fields are not necessarily applicable in intelligence: by and large, the less bureaucratization the better. While changes may become necessary in the light of new technical or other developments, frequent organizational change always has a detrimental, unsettling effect. The uselessness of most organizational changes should have been manifest a long time ago. Nevertheless, they seem to be forever with us, partly because of a feeling that "something ought to be done," partly because such reforms are much easier to carry out than substantive changes that would improve the quality of intelligence. The overemphasis on organizational reform also stems from the erroneous belief that America is particularly good at solving managerial problems.

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Another misconception has played a pernicious role: the belief that modern machinery (or gadgetry) will provide answers that have eluded the human mind. The corollary of this error is the assumption that enough quantity automatically turns into a new quality—that is, if there is an unsolved question, more intelligence data will provide the answer. This may be so in some cases, but not in most. Technical means of collection already produce more information of certain kinds than can be analyzed, whereas other secrets cannot be penetrated at all. There is also the "scientific theory" fallacy—the belief that if only intelligence were firmly grounded in concepts or certain policy sciences, it could solve important questions hitherto thought insoluble and improve intelligence performance all along the line.

**Prosaic Measures**

There is no panacea to provide better intelligence, no sensational breakthroughs, approaches of which no one has thought before. The only realistic prospect for genuine improvement depends upon prosaic measures. They include the recruitment of promising individuals, careful personnel evaluation, thorough assignment processes, extensive and systematic training in relevant subjects, a constant search for better means of collection, and the pursuit of efficiency with a minimum of bureaucratic procedure.

Intelligence agencies need employees in many fields: in some of them, technical proficiency may be an adequate criterion. In others the requirements are broader, and while recruitment mistakes are unavoidable, there have to be mechanisms to remedy such errors. This refers not only to cases of incompetence or major deficiencies of character: intelligence can afford mediocrity only within narrow limits. The record shows that relatively low priority has been given to the selection of recruits. The whole procedure, the methods used and the requirements set, ought to be reexamined.

Far greater emphasis ought to be given to training. The courses presently taught inside and outside the intelligence community constitute an advance in comparison with the state of affairs ten or fifteen years ago, but they are still altogether insufficient. Intelligence needs either a central academy or several such institutions, specializing in military, political, economic, and scientific-technological intelligence. Such an institution or institutions should engage in systematic, full-time training, employing the best talent available. There should be a heavy emphasis on subjects directly relevant to intelligence; in particular, subjects not systematically covered in university education—such as wide knowledge of world affairs—should be stressed. Such study should be combined with practical work, at headquarters or in the field: in the course of a training period of two to three years, the specific abilities and weaknesses of the trainees would become obvious. Thus it would be easier to direct new members to the kind of work in which they are most likely to feel at home and achieve the most.

Recruitment and training are crucial for the future performance of intelligence. Lip service has always been paid to the need for superior recruitment and training, but the attention actually devoted, the financial allocations made, and the quality of appointments show that these tasks have never been given the priority they deserve.

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Intelligence should never be satisfied with its performance. There will always be a great deal of reliable and detailed information on subjects not in demand, whereas the information on the most urgent issues will often be sparse, unreliable, or even nonexistent. Unless intelligence tries constantly to improve its performance, it is bound to deteriorate. Intelligence is necessarily bureaucratic in structure and also part of a wider bureaucratic network. It is always threatened by the negative features of bureaucracy, such as routine, innate conservatism, preoccupation with questions of procedure and organization rather than substance, and the stifling of creative thought and fresh initiatives. In the final analysis, intelligence will be judged by performance—not by the number of memoranda circulated or by adherence to rules established to promote the smooth functioning of a bureaucratic organization. In many respects intelligence is, or should be, the very antithesis of bureaucratic thought and practice. It can fulfill its functions only if it constantly resists the encroachment of bureaucratic routine. Eternal vigilance in this matter is the precondition of success.

The central effort of US intelligence has been misdirected for a long time: there has been an overemphasis on strategic-military intelligence. The importance of knowledge about the Soviet strategic effort (and, to a lesser extent, that of other countries) or of the order of battle, need not be stressed: America's defense and that of her allies depends on the findings of intelligence in this field. The decisive developments in world politics in the last decades have not been military but political and economic in nature, and this is unlikely to change soon. These developments are taking place in Asia and Africa, in Europe and Latin America. The overconcentration of intelligence on "bean counts" reflects a general weakness in US foreign and defense policy. It is also the path of least resistance: it is much easier to monitor the deployment of missile launchers than the frequently intangible and inchoate political trends in faraway countries which cannot be quantified and are open to divergent interpretations. Military strength is the precondition for effective national defense, but the political and economic dimension can be decisive. A reorientation of the intelligence effort in this direction is long overdue. Intelligence's role as a watcher of the Soviet military buildup is by necessity that of a passive onlooker. Our shift of attention to the political scene raises the question of whether intelligence should also serve as one of the tools of foreign policy—not only watching the course of events but also trying to influence it.

There are various ways and means to exert influence abroad—diplomacy, both public and secret; propaganda; aid and trade; friendly or hostile speeches; arms supplies; visits and conferences; the export of movies and the invitation of scholars. There are also active measures, carried out directly or through surrogates; these have come to play a more and more central role in the Third World. Whether the United States is capable of undertaking an effort of this kind may be open to doubt; whether such operations should preferably be executed by a separate organization may be debated at length. If ill-conceived or badly executed they will certainly do more harm than good. Active measures are not a game, to be entered thoughtlessly and as often as possible. They constitute a weapon to be used in cases of dire necessity, but all the same a weapon which is an integral part of the contemporary instrumentation of foreign policy. Forgoing active measures may mean the paralysis and abdication of foreign policy. Intelligence without such a capacity is comparable to a warning system. A loud noise will not deter the burglar who knows that the neighbors are on holiday and that the police have instructions to look the other way.

*Future*

Intelligence not only has to train new recruits but also to educate its customers. This is a formidable task because the latter, at a more advanced age, are very busy people, sure of their own judgment; some may be uneducable. They have to be convinced of what intelligence can, and what it cannot, achieve: they must learn that an overload of requests will result in diminishing returns; that intelligence should be taken into the confidence of policymakers if these wish to obtain relevant information. In short, there is everything to be said in favor of close cooperation. The old fears of intelligence being too close to the policymaking process, thus losing its independence, were largely misplaced. Much depends on the quality of the senior intelligence staff: if they are worthy of their responsible positions, they will not shield their superiors from inconvenient information. If on the other hand they lack sufficient backbone, or if the consumers are congenitally incapable of listening to unpleasant facts, it will not make any difference whether intelligence is organizationally close to, or remote from, the seats of power. It will be ignored anyway.

Intelligence needs both secrecy and supervision. A small think tank, working solely on the basis of open material, may provide as much—or more—valuable information and advice to a government than a big, bad, and demoralized secret service. But a research institute of this sort cannot possibly produce the kind of detailed military and political intelligence that governments need. Secret services can function only in secrecy; attempts to have them operate openly are futile.

The absence of effective deterrents against leaking state secrets is not conducive to the effective working of intelligence. There is no certainty that even under optimal conditions, US intelligence performance will be uniformly good. It is certain that in the absence of such conditions intelligence will have little success to show for its efforts. This is one of many unavoidable handicaps confronting intelligence services operating on behalf of democratic societies. Experience in other Western countries has shown that it is possible to maintain greater secrecy than the level prevailing at present in the United States without surrendering reasonably effective control.

US intelligence ought to be subject to stringent supervision with regard to performance and possible abuse from within the intelligence community, from within the White House, and from within Congress. Such control mechanisms have existed in the past, but they have not worked very well. They could be improved if greater authority were given to a small group of people of stature and energy exercising a full-time control function. While absolute control is impossible under the specific conditions in which a secret service operates, the very presence of such a body would deter abuses.

Intelligence is an essential service, but only a service. It is an important element in the decision-making process, but only one element; its usefulness depends entirely on how it is used and guided. It has been a factor of some importance in providing continuity, such as there was, to American foreign policy since World War II. It has contributed to the education of all levels of the US foreign policy establishment. It can identify options and probabilities and illuminate the consequences of action or the failure to act. It has produced technological marvels without which US strategic weapons policy would have been chaotic. Its performance can be improved. It has no access to revealed truths: the days of "magic" are over in more than one sense.