

Is the CIA a Clear and Present Danger?

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to have lasting value — should result in strong recommendations to do things differently.

Some longtime critics, such as New York's Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, have seized the latest revelations as a hammer to pound the CIA out of existence. Yet as the sole remaining superpower, the United States will always need an intelligence agency. What it also needs, however, is a redefinition of that agency's mission.

During the Cold War years when the CIA's mission was well-defined, the agency grew smug and sclerotic, resistant to criticism and internal change. But in a post-communist world of new alignments, the CIA's missions are ill-defined, without apparent strategic purpose. To arrive at an appropriate role for the CIA one must first define national policy. And because the CIA is a servant of policy, not a formulator, it is essential that the commission define national goals for the

next 10 to 20 years and task the CIA accordingly.

One criterion for CIA involvement — often overlooked or ignored by policy-makers — is whether a task can be accomplished by another agency, such as state or defense. Doing things clandestinely must be an absolute last resort, for the covert way is the complicated, difficult way of trying to achieve a national result.

Previous administrations often turned to the CIA because it was there, downplaying the risk of embarrassing exposure, then suffering the often predictable consequences. That historic tendency should also be examined by the commission and laid to rest.

The CIA has not undergone a substantial reduction-in-force since Director Stansfield Turner's 1975 firing of 820 professionals. If the agency's mission is to be reduced, however, fewer personnel are required to advance it, and we can assume the commission will establish personnel levels compatible with whatever role the CIA is henceforth to fulfill.

As the lengthy retention of Ames lamentably demonstrates, mediocre, even substandard personnel, traditionally have been allowed to linger on. The commission should charge the agency with ridding itself of deadwood, preferably through early retirement. Otherwise, the commission itself should do the parting.

Still, there is plenty of work for a downsized CIA. It could take action against international terrorists by penetrating their organizations and assessing the threat they pose. It could use agents in the field to monitor nuclear proliferation in India, Korea, Israel, Iraq, Iran, China, Pakistan, and the former USSR. This could be of increasing importance if the United States, as some intelligence experts predict, cuts back on its use of satellite surveillance now that a Soviet army no longer threatens the West.

The agency could have agents take the political temperatures of regimes potentially hostile to the United States, such as Iran and Cuba, and assess their intentions.

It could collect commercial intelligence to benefit American business and prevent the illegal foreign use of American technology. At the end of WWII, when the British economy was in tatters, the MI-6 was reoriented away from its

traditional espionage role to assisting Great Britain in regaining its foreign markets.

The CIA could also expand its anti-narcotics efforts abroad by identifying the main drug producers and following the money trails, tracking bank accounts and money laundering operations in foreign countries. The agency did that type of work in Asia's Golden Triangle for a short while, an effort that diminished after the Vietnam War.

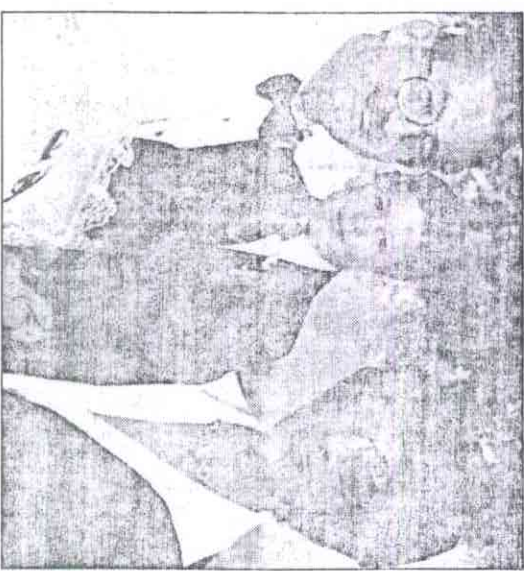
These tasks are among those the commission can be expected to validate at the end of the day, assuming our foreign policy is clear and unambiguous. And other missions will arise as well.

The Hughes-Ryan amendment to the 1974 foreign aid bill required the CIA to report all covert action plans to no less than seven congressional committees. Just five years later, those committees comprised 163 members of Congress and 41 staff members, a total of 204 persons enjoying access to CIA secrets. This was an enormous number of non-CIA personnel privy to sensitive information, and over the ensuing 15 years, that number has undoubtedly ballooned. Given the congressional proclivity for leaking, corrective measures must be taken to limit external access to the CIA's most secret affairs.

In addition, the traditional suspicion, if not downright hostility, between the CIA and FBI will have to be ended. Their separate fiefdoms must be melded into a single national counterespionage/counterintelligence center reporting directly to the chief executive.

Only when old turf claims are eliminated can such a unit fully serve the nation's interests. Its existence could have ended Ames' surreptitious travels and brought his betrayals to an earlier end. And a joint counterintelligence operation could, for instance, more effectively identify and surveil foreign terrorists such as those who came here to destroy the World Trade Center.

Though great the need for a reorganized intelligence service, we cannot realistically anticipate early results. Interviews must be conducted, documents assembled and digested, internal commission differences resolved, before the panel can issue its report and recommendations. This inquiry has been too long awaited to be disposed of in a few months time. For the nation the stakes are far too great.



AP Photo
Happier times in 1993 for Ames and his wife and son Paul