

Colby Plans Changes In CIA Evaluation Unit

8/28/73
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Acting Central Intelligence Agency Director William E. Colby has acknowledged that "some changes will occur" in operations of the agency's top-level evaluative body, the Office of National Estimates.

But he maintained that the office's highly refined and prestigious product, the National Intelligence Estimate, will continue to be produced under the aegis of the CIA as it has for the past two decades.

Colby's assurance was conveyed internally through the CIA's employee bulletin in response to an Aug. 19 news story asserting that he had made a "firm decision" to abolish the office.

The National Intelligence Estimate (known among practitioners as "the NIE") is the U.S. intelligence community's most classified and senior-level assessment on major international issues. It has been relied upon by presidents for guidance on a variety of matters, such as Soviet missile capability and Vietnam war prospects.

There have been growing indications within the past year that influential members of the Nixon administration, notably Secretary of State-designate Henry A. Kissinger and Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, were unhappy with the CIA's strategic intelligence estimates.

During Schlesinger's directorship of the CIA early this year he was reported to have initiated action to overhaul the Office of National Estimates, with the endorsement of the White House. Colby is currently working out the details of the high-level intelligence reorganization.

The notice to CIA employees issued with Colby's authorization alluded to news reports suggesting that senior administration officials were disillusioned with the National Intelligence Estimates and that the CIA was under attack from the administration "for



JAMES R. SCHLESINGER **WILLIAM E. COLBY**
... former and current CIA chiefs involved in changes.

having failed to produce the kind of intelligence estimates that would support its policies."

It asserted that the NIEs would continue to be published and that "the objectivity of the National Intelligence Estimates will be sustained."

However, the "structure" of the Office of National Estimates is under review, the bulletin said, and some changes would occur. "The goal is to

conserve resources and maintain efficiency by combining the production of National Intelligence estimates with certain other agency and intelligence community functions," the bulletin said, without further elaboration.

The fate of the office has important symbolic, if not practical, consequences in the intelligence community.

The strategic estimates of the CIA were criticized from within the administration for their pessimism on the Vietnam War, for underestimating Soviet military buildups, for failing to predict the intensity of the North Vietnamese 1972 spring offensive.

Although there was no open criticism of the CIA by administration officials, there was a steady dribble of anonymous though official displeasure with the CIA's performance in news stories and particularly in the syndicated columns of Joseph Alsop last February.

Also last April the former deputy director of the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, Gen. Daniel O. Graham, called publicly for the reassertion of the military's "traditional" role over civilian analysts in strategic intelligence assessments.

A month after Graham's article was published, with presumed official clearance, he was assigned to the CIA as an aide to Schlesinger with responsibility for the military component of national intelligence estimating.

Because of the sensitivity of the agency and ultra-secrecy of the subject matter with which it deals, officials are reluctant to speak out openly on the quiet but intense bureau-

cratic drama now taking place in the upper echelons of the CIA.

Within the agency's old-boy network, which felt the impact of Schlesinger's cost-efficiency policies while he commanded the CIA, the rumored abolition of the Office of National Estimates is regarded as a serious blow to the independence and integrity of the intelligence-estimating process.

Schlesinger is known to have viewed the intelligence products of the CIA's career analysts as verbose in style and dubious in content. He did wield the executive firing broom more vigorously than any director in the agency's history, and his policies were viewed with dismay by the hierarchy of old-timers who had operated together since World War II days as alumni of the wartime Office of Strategic Services.

Colby is now the man in the middle. His ties are to the old boys through his life-time association with the CIA. His responsibility is to the administration, which seems determined to purge their influence, starting last year with the dismissal of Helms.

That is why, rightly or wrongly, the final decision on the Office of National Estimates is being watched keenly by both sides.