

Documents Detail U.S. Intelligen

Experts Note Tardy Recognition of Gorbachev's Significance,

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PRINCETON, N.J., March 10—What's the return on an investment of hundreds of billions of dollars over 45 years to collect intelligence on your enemy in a mortal battle for world domination? Some useful information, and some big mistakes—some insights, some reassurance, and lots of bureaucratic infighting.

All of that was evident here this weekend in a conference organized by the CIA, and in 19,160 pages of Cold War intelligence documents released for the meeting. Scores of old intelligence agents and about two dozen current ones, joined by academics and journalists, heard boasts of success and confessions of failure. Some of the exchanges were emotional. According to Douglas J. MacEachin, former deputy director of the CIA for intelligence, these gave conference participants a sense of what the bureaucratic battles were like during the Cold War years.

The documents and discussion provided new information about how the CIA reacted to perhaps its most dramatic opportunity, the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev, who, in nearly seven years as leader of the Soviet Union, ended the Cold War for which the CIA was invented and ultimately dismantled his own country and its empire.

Former intelligence officers who had participated in debates about Gorbachev revealed that the CIA analysts who took his reforms most seriously were often at odds with colleagues and superiors who refused to sign off on analyses that credited Gorbachev with bold intentions or recognized the constraints he was under. Acknowledging excessive caution in estimates about Gorbachev, Fritz W. Ermarth, chairman of the National Intelligence Council from 1988 through 1993, said one contributor to the incorrect estimates was then-Secretary of State George P. Shultz, who did not share his private conversations with Gorbachev or his assessments of them with intelligence an-

alysts such as Ermarth.

Jack F. Matlock, the U.S. ambassador to Moscow when Shultz was secretary of state, said Shultz was afraid to speak frankly about his views on Gorbachev because he knew his rivals in the Reagan administration—particularly Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger and national security adviser Robert M. Gates, a former CIA specialist on the Soviet Union—would accuse him of being "hopelessly naive" if he did. Matlock and Ermarth noted that Shultz and President Ronald Reagan went ahead and made deals with Gorbachev based on their confidence in him. The deals helped end the Cold War.

The documents released for the conference—just a fraction of the total CIA output, but more than have been released before—implicitly confirm that the big events of the Gorbachev years virtually all caught the CIA by surprise. There is no evidence that the agency anticipated the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the release of dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov from internal exile, the effective end of most Soviet censorship, unilateral cuts in the Soviet armed forces, Gorbachev's willingness to accept huge reductions in conventional armaments and missiles or his acquiescence in the collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe.

Ermarth and others saw a silver lining in their failures: They produced no "serious deleterious consequences," as Ermarth put it. He was one of several former officials who rejected the criticism made in

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Errors' Lack of Dire Consequences

the early 1990s by then-Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) that a more timely appreciation for what Gorbachev would bring would have allowed the United States to save many billions of dollars spent on defense in the 1980s. Intelligence officials here said they doubted Congress or the executive branch would have cut defense spending then on the basis of CIA estimates, no matter what they said.

Others have disagreed. Another former CIA analyst, Melvin A. Goodman, wrote last year that missing the significance of Gorbachev until late in his tenure cost the United States unnecessary defense spending, delayed arms control agreements and "squandered [the] opportunity to influence developments in the Russian federation." Goodman has accused the agency of failing to rise to its most important challenge by not recognizing the significance of Gorbachev until nearly the end of his time in office.

Some of the documents released for this conference demonstrate the agency's caution. One example was an analysis written shortly after Gorbachev's speech to the United Nations on Dec. 7, 1988, when he announced a unilateral cut of 500,000 men in the Soviet army, the withdrawal of six tank divisions from Eastern Europe and that the Soviet Union was renouncing the use of force to settle international

disputes. He also declared the end of jamming of foreign radio broadcasts to the U.S.S.R. and said there was no longer any ideological basis for international tension.

Two months later, CIA analysts began a paper on Gorbachev's foreign policy with the observation that his "broad strategy is in the Leninist tradition: it calls for weakening the main enemy—the United States—by exploiting 'contradictions' between it and other centers of capitalist power." The paper said Gorbachev was still interested in "weakening American global political influence, 'decoupling' Western Europe from the United States, preserving, in some form, Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe" and, gen-

erally, in trying to "promote the interests of the USSR at the expense of the United States and other enemies." The same paper credited Gorbachev with interest in making changes, both at home and in foreign policy, but it gave no hint that the Soviet leader had decided to fundamentally change the superpower relationship.

In a speech to this conference, the current deputy director of the CIA, John E. McLaughlin, cautioned that "our country is vulnerable—if our intelligence analysts are not ready for something completely different" from what they have experienced in the past. The newly released documents on

the Gorbachev era suggest how difficult it can be for intelligence analysts to achieve that kind of intellectual freedom from their own predilections.

So, for example, in early 1989—after the Soviets had withdrawn from their naval installation in Vietnam, from the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, and ceased most active participation in Third World conflicts of all kinds—a CIA analysis described "Moscow's intention to expand its role as a global actor, a role that is the basis of its claim to superpower status. Consequently, the Soviets have tried to avoid being seen as retreating from the Third World in the face of U.S. pressure."

Other newly released analyses show that the CIA had a keen appreciation for the extent of Gorbachev's domestic reforms. The agency kept a close eye on the changes in Soviet newspapers and magazines, and on the shifting cultural policies under Gorbachev that made many previously banned movies and plays available to the public. And from the beginning of the Soviet leader's economic reform efforts, the CIA's economic analysis understood and reported the enormous difficulty Gorbachev faced in trying to make the Soviet system more efficient. They repeatedly predicted, accurately, that his ambitious economic targets would likely not be met.

MacEachin, who headed the CIA's office of Soviet analysis for five years during the 80s, recounted how difficult it was to get cautions based on Soviet economic difficulties into the National Intelligence Estimates on Soviet military programs. In an interview, MacEachin said "we gave up on the [National Intelligence] Estimates after '86 or '87" because it was so difficult to get realistic assessments into them. In 1986, MacEachin tried to attach a CIA "dissent" to the NIE, with the agency noting that the continued Soviet arms buildup predicted by the NIE was greater than any known Soviet buildup since the '60s and would cost far more than the Soviet Union could afford to invest in arms. The dissent was not included, though its suggestion that such a buildup would not occur proved to be accurate.

The newly released documents are available online at www/foia.ucla.gov/historicalreport.htm

What this newly reported is that national policy was used as intelligence superpower nation's policy which was wrong. Some of us will depend on what intelligence was at all and was formulated in CIA's interest. Report means too work in CIA, in my example