

# The New York Times

Founded in 1851

ADOLPH S. OCHS, *Publisher 1896-1935*  
 ARTHUR HAYS SULZBERGER, *Publisher 1935-1961*  
 ORVIL E. DRYFOOS, *Publisher 1961-1963*

ARTHUR OCHS SULZBERGER  
*Publisher*

A. M. ROSENTHAL, *Executive Editor*  
 SEYMOUR TOPPING, *Managing Editor*  
 ARTHUR GELB, *Deputy Managing Editor*  
 JAMES L. GREENFIELD, *Assistant Managing Editor*  
 PETER MILLONES, *Assistant Managing Editor*  
 LOUIS SILVERSTEIN, *Assistant Managing Editor*

MAX FRANKEL, *Editorial Page Editor*  
 JACK ROSENTHAL, *Assistant Editorial Page Editor*  
 CHARLOTTE CURTIS, *Associate Editor*

TOM WICKER, *Associate Editor*

## Let Intelligence Customers Beware

In a handwritten note that did not long remain private, President Carter complained to some of his senior advisers last month that he was disappointed by the quality of political intelligence abroad. He seemed especially disturbed that our snoops and analysts had not predicted, or even allowed for, the possibility of the turmoil in Iran. It is widely reported that Mr. Carter's displeasure was aimed mostly at Adm. Stansfield Turner, the Director of Central Intelligence.

The President's frustration is understandable. Mr. Carter rightly noted that advances in electronic and satellite information-gathering may have detracted from the work of agents in the field. But before the chorus of condemnation of the C.I.A. swells, and before Iran becomes the pretext for reverting to the lax controls for which there is so much nostalgia at the agency, there are several points worth considering.

• First, successful coups or uprisings tend to be the most difficult to predict.

• Second, the gathering of political intelligence is as much, or more, the job of ambassadors and the aptly named political officers of our embassies as it is of the C.I.A. The distressing fact that the C.I.A. has often done a better job than our diplomats should not affect the proper division of labor. The State Department, unfortunately, is not consistent in its instructions on that point to the Foreign Service. In some countries, the American embassies conscientiously stay in close touch with all important elements of society, including a government's most determined opponents. But elsewhere, contact is constricted by inhibitions.

The United States should never have avoided contact of some sort with figures like the Ayatollah Khomeini, the exiled Iranian religious leader; keeping away from opposition figures was a misguided favor to the Shah. Where open contact with opposition figures is standard procedure, as it is in some embassies, it will not be seen in a time of crisis as a hostile political act.

• Third, the pull toward conformity can be disastrous to political analysis. In the early stages of the Vietnam War, many perceptive reports from lower-level field officers were muffled, distorted and even suppressed by high officials. A President needs to be vigilant not only about the skill of his ambassador in Teheran but also about the honesty of those in his own immediate entourage. We had not detected among Mr. Carter's foreign policy makers the blinkered vision of the Johnson White House. But as an Administration ages, a President needs to be alert to signs that officials are avoiding evidence that undermines their past assessments, which, it now appears, may have occurred in evaluating Iran.

Although gathering intelligence is primarily the job of the field agent, its evaluation is a shared responsibility. Those whom President Carter calls the "customers" of intelligence must really want to hear the truth. Mr. Carter has not convincingly demonstrated that he viewed Iran with that sort of clear eye. There were visible storm signals in the palpable hatred of so many Iranians for the Shah's rule well before the President received the lulling intelligence estimates. Let the customer beware.