

Ex-Director Faults CIA Of Carter Era

Reports 'Irrelevant,' Turner Tells Meeting

By Christopher B. Daly
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CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Dec. 2—Former CIA director Stansfield Turner today stunned a conference of dozens of current and former agency analysts with a blunt critique of the CIA's effectiveness—and his own—during his term in office.

Although not listed on the program, Turner stole the spotlight when he told the audience the agency had shortchanged President Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s.

Turner said the CIA "didn't do well" in foreseeing the downfall of the Shah of Iran or the collapse of the Soviet Union and had consistently failed to serve the president in its handling of its premier analytical product, the lengthy documents known as National Intelligence Estimates.

These reports were not inaccurate or misleading, Turner said, but were simply "irrelevant" to the president in making policy. "If anyone is to blame, it is I," he said.

Robert M. Gates, who served as CIA chief under President George Bush, disagreed sharply with Turner, saying the intelligence agency's reports on the Soviet Union "underpinned the entire arms control process" through the presidencies of both parties. "You could not negotiate with the Russians without the NIE," Gates said in an interview, adding the Senate would not have ratified arms control treaties without assurances the CIA could verify Soviet compliance.

Besides Turner, other critics said the agency's reports were too long, too biased or flat wrong. But they all welcomed the release at today's conference of the latest batch of CIA documents from the Cold War years.

The conference, sponsored by the CIA and Harvard University, is de-



STANSFIELD TURNER
... would not abolish agency

voted to evaluating how the agency performed in its most critical role—assessing Soviet weapons and plans. It comes a time of questions about the CIA's mission following collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War.

Today's discussions provided ammunition for both sides. While critical of the CIA in his remarks, Turner said in a brief interview afterward he does not agree with those on Capitol Hill who would abolish the agency and assign its tasks elsewhere. The agency is needed, he said, precisely because it is not directly involved with policy-making and can offer an independent perspective. In his remarks, however, Turner questioned the agency's effectiveness. He said he had found it "fascinating" recently to review the last NIE produced during his term, in 1980, in light of later events.

In that document, the CIA said the Soviet Union enjoyed a temporary "window of opportunity" in the arms race. Turner said it was important to recall that at the time U.S. forces were capable of absorbing a Soviet nuclear attack and still deliver a counter-punch that would have destroyed 70 percent of the Soviet economy.

"How could we have thought we possibly needed more?" Turner asked. He said the agency should have told Carter there was no need to build more weapons, except for purely political reasons. "What it should have said to him, in my view,

was simply two words: 'Too much.' We and the Soviets both have too much firepower to need any more," Turner said.

At the conference, CIA officials distributed selected documents detailing U.S. estimates of Soviet strategic forces from 1954 to 1984. Labeled "TOP SECRET" and heavily

pockmarked by deletions, the declassified National Intelligence Estimates are dense analyses of Soviet long-range nuclear missiles, bombers, submarines and missile defenses.

Among the most noteworthy was the Sept. 21, 1961, report that effectively declared an end to the famous "missile gap" John F. Kennedy, citing CIA estimates, had invoked against the Eisenhower administration in his winning 1960 presidential campaign. Several analysts defended the agency, saying that in the late 1950s the CIA did not have enough facts to evaluate the Soviet missile program. Faced with uncertainty, the agency had prudently opted to emphasize the danger, they argued.

After the United States launched new satellites in 1961, however, it became possible to track Soviet weapons with certainty, the officials said.