

U.S. Intelligence System: How Well

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 17—As the House Select Committee on Intelligence closes its doors to prepare the next phase of its investigation, it leaves behind what many see as a troubling answer to the question of how well American intelligence performs its principal task—predicting events of international significance in time to allow the makers of foreign policy to prepare or react.

The conclusion that seems to emerge from public hearings over the last month is that the half-dozen or so Federal agencies charged with gathering and evaluating foreign intelligence do not provide a reliable early-warning system where such things as wars, invasions and political upheavals are concerned.

Representative Otis G. Pike, the Suffolk County Democrat who heads the 13-member select committee, found the evidence so disturbing that he recently went so far as to question this country's ability to detect in advance a threat to its own shores.

Four Crises Studied

"If an attack were to be launched on America in the very near future," Mr. Pike declared, "it is my belief that America would not know that the attack were about to be launched."

The Central Intelligence Agency disputed that assertion, but so far no one has seriously challenged Mr. Pike's assessment that, in return for an intelligence budget that approaches \$7-billion, the country does not seem to be getting its money's worth.

In the public hearings, the committee chose to concentrate on four international crises in which the United States had a military or diplomatic interest, and by which it was to some extent caught off guard—the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam, the 1973 war in the Middle East, the military coup in Portugal and the invasion of Cyprus by Turkey.

Despite delays in obtaining documentary evidence, occasioned by a dispute with President Ford over the committee's handling of secret materials, the panel was able to establish that in each of the four instances warnings of what was to happen failed to reach

the top.

The committee is also understood to have received documents showing failures of intelligence in advance of other events, including the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and its allies and the detonation of a nuclear de-

vice by India, but those materials are still secret.

The reasons for the intelligence failures are varied and complex. In some instances, raw intelligence collected was incomplete or simply in error. In others, good intelligence was misinterpreted by analysts.

In the case of the 1968 Tet offensive, the committee heard assertions that American leaders, in deference to preconceived policies and for fear of inflaming antiwar sentiment at home, had ignored indications that the Communists' forces might be twice as large as the official estimates.

Samuel A. Adams, a former C.I.A. analyst who specialized in studying the Vietcong, recounted his contention that this country's "astonishment" at the scope of the Tet offensive had resulted from a deliberate effort within the intelligence community "to portray the Vietcong as weaker than they actually were."

Mr. Adams quoted from previously secret cablegrams between Saigon and Washington that resulted in the unannounced dropping of two categories of Vietcong forces from the official strength estimate to keep it at its previous level of 299,000.

Mr. Adams's charges of corruption were not repeated by witnesses who testified on Cyprus, Portugal and the Middle East. But their accounts of failure to clearly see or correctly interpret key signals were equally dismaying to most of the committee members.

'An Intelligence Failure'

One subsequent assessment obtained by the committee said "there was an intelligence failure in the weeks preceding the outbreak of war in the Middle East" in October, 1973.

The fault, it said, lay not with the collectors of intelligence, who passed on "plentiful, ominous and often accurate" indications that the threat of war was serious, but

Does It Do Its Job?

rather with the analysts who were assuring officials that "neither side appears to be bent on initiating hostilities."

Some of the best intelligence, the committee was told, was picked up by the National Security Agency, which monitors the military communications of other countries.

But some of this intelligence could not be passed on to the Watch Committee, set up to keep an eye out for trouble spots, because its members were not clear to receive such sensitive material.

Ray Cline, the State Department's director of research and intelligence at the time of the 1973 war, testified that he had

concluded hours before the fighting began that hostilities probably were imminent and he had asked that the message be passed to Secretary of State Kissinger. Mr. Cline said he learned later that Mr. Kissinger never got the message because his secretariat "did not want to trouble him at that late hour."

Three intelligence officials told the committee that their agencies—the C.I.A., the State Department and the Defense Intelligence Agency—had been surprised by last year's overthrow of the Portuguese Government by leftist military leaders.

According to William G. Hyland, the current State Department intelligence chief, no specific warning was provided by intelligence agencies despite indications in the months before.

Another witness, Keith Clark, an intelligence officer for Western Europe, said the intelligence community had failed to compile information about the dissident military officers who led the coup in Portugal.

Cyprus Situation Cited

According to evidence and testimony assembled by the House committee, C.I.A. analysts studying the Cyprus situation in July, 1974, tempered their previous warnings that the Government of Archbishop Makarios, the President of Cyprus, was endangered by the military regime in Greece.

That reversal, according to a second post-mortem report

made available to the committee, occurred a few days before President Makarios was unseated and was founded on a single C.I.A. report from Athens suggesting that the Government there "had now decided not to move against Makarios, at least for the time being."

The Cyprus post-mortem report comments on an "inability to foresee critical events in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary."

"Ultimately," the report continues, "intelligence will be

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...Among analysts, they said, there exists "the perhaps subconscious conviction and hope that ultimately reason and rationality will prevail that apparently irrational moves will not be made by essentially rational men."