

Nixon Zeroes In on CIA Unit

9/9/73 Loss of Objectivity Feared in Upheaval

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In abolishing the Central Intelligence Agency's Office of National Estimates, the Nixon administration executed a bearer of often unwelcome tidings.

That fact is central to the quiet upheaval in the national intelligence bureaucracy that is being carried out under White House prodding by the CIA's new director, William E. Colby.

Because of the heavy coating of official secrecy that surrounds the issues and the personalities it is unlikely that the merits of the intelligence reorganization will ever be thrashed out in public or subjected to full congressional review.

Yet it could, in the opinion of some senior intelligence professionals, profoundly affect the quality and objectivity of the government's judgments on a wide range of strategic questions: Soviet military capacity, disarmament policy, U.S. intervention in "third world" crises, determining whether certain governments will stand or fall.

On matters such as these the Office of National Estimates has over the past 20 years delivered its judgments to four Presidents in formal papers—anon-ymously and with little ap-



WILLIAM E. COLBY
... oversees change

parent controversy until the later years of the Vietnam war and the accession of the Nixon administration.

Since 1969, however, a widening breach has opened between the CIA's team of professional evaluators and the White House national security staff commanded by Henry A. Kissinger, the President's national security adviser.

On strategic military questions, such as Soviet missile and antiballistic mis-

sile technology, there have also been abrasive differences between the CIA analysts and Pentagon representatives on the interagency team that produces the national estimates.

Kissinger is reported by authoritative White House sources to have found the CIA's National Intelligence Estimates "deplorable" in style and content. They were also sharply at divergence from the policies pursued by the Nixon administration.

Item: Early in 1970 the CIA provided the White House with an estimate that expressed grave pessimism over the prospects for long-term survival of the Lon Nol government in Cambodia. Nevertheless the administration steadily increased military aid to Lon Nol and the President was to pronounce the Cambodian effort as "the Nixon Doctrine in its purest form."

Item: Shortly after the outbreak of Pakistani army hostilities in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in March 1971 the CIA produced a national estimate warning that India would be drawn into the war, that Pakistan would be dismembered and that Soviet influence in the subcontinent would be

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greatly enhanced. ("The White House later complained that the estimate didn't have enough zing and impact," said one CIA evaluator. "We wondered if they read it.")

Item: In 1969 and 1970 the CIA's strategic analysts were far more conservative than Pentagon evaluators in their reading of Soviet ABM and MIRV (multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle) capability. Current Pentagon assessments of Soviet MIRV development tend to support the more conservative appraisal.

White House sources

stress that the dissatisfaction with the intelligence products of the CIA stemmed mainly from their "mushiness," their inconclusive style and the sense that the agency was trying to impose policy on the President through its control of intelligence data and evaluations.

CIA analysts familiar with the national estimating process say it was at Kissinger's insistence that the reports grew longer and more detailed. Kissinger, they said, wanted them to include the arguments and justifications in the formal estimates.

During the turbulent in-

terregnum of James R. Schlesinger's five-month term as CIA director this year the Office of National Estimates became one of the chief targets of a broad house-cleaning review. (The other was the CIA's Clandestine Service, otherwise known as the Department of Dirty Tricks.)

Schlesinger, according to one of the stories on the cocktail grapevine, announced to several members of the Board of National Estimates: "This looks like a gentlemen's club and I'm no gentleman."

But it was not until after Schlesinger's departure to the Pentagon that Colby

reached the decision to phase out the board, even though he has yet to acknowledge that he has abolished the office.

Its demise was most clearly signaled by the departure of John Huizenga, chairman of the Board of National Estimates, who left the agency early in the summer on a basis that was "not voluntary."

Huizenga's departure was described by the CIA's public information office as normal and voluntary retirement at age 60. It was not, according to authoritative CIA sources.

The new national estimates setup envisions a

much smaller staff of analysts from various agencies in the Washington intelligence community. (The previous estimating body numbered 40 to 45 staff and board members.)

Rather than producing a collective product reflecting the judgment of the combined staff, the new emphasis will be on individual assessments by intelligence specialists.

Some senior intelligence officials are fearful that the new system will dilute the objectivity of the national estimates. Specialists, they argue, will tend to reflect the institutional biases of their own agencies, particularly the military.

Under the previous sys-

tem differences were thrashed out before the drafting of a formal estimate. Dissenters registered their opposition in footnotes, which were passed along to the White House with the main body of the report.

One former member of the national estimates team expressed the underlying concern of those who oppose the change:

"They're selling out to the Pentagon and Defense Intelligence Agency. If the CIA made any contribution to the intelligence community it was that its intelligence analysts had no axes to grind, no military hardware programs and no policies to defend."

It was the CIA's influence over the intelligence interpretation that irritated Kissinger and possibly other White House aides. One administration official described the CIA papers as "homogenized" and complained that the objections of other intelligence agencies were submerged in fuzzy prose.

Even some CIA loyalists concede that there was some justice to Schlesinger's criticism that the 20-year-old Office of National Estimates had become stale and ingrown—in effect a gentleman's club—and needed an infusion of new blood.

"Some of the staff people had been there since the Year One," said a former

member of the estimates staff. "But the basic structure was sound and independent. People respected each other's integrity and felt free to disagree. We weren't beholden to special interests."

Colby, in a recent bulletin to CIA employees, assured them that the "independence and objectivity" of the national estimates would be preserved. In the same bulletin, he said that no decision had been reached to abolish the office.

"That was an absurd notice," reflected one senior intelligence official. "Everyone concerned knew that the Office of Estimates had already been abolished." **ished."**