

Nixon Unhappy With the CIA



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OUR SOURCES inside the Central Intelligence Agency are alarmed over an apparent move to politicize its intelligence estimates and evaluations.

The craggy new CIA chief, James Schlesinger, is shaking up the Office of National Estimates, which produces the supersecret studies of world developments.

But CIA estimates, unhappily, have often conflicted with President Nixon's own concepts. Schlesinger's shake-up, therefore, has been interpreted within the CIA as an attempt to make the intelligence analyses conform with the President's thinking.

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THE PRESIDENT'S displeasure with the CIA has been no secret inside the agency. In 1971, he issued a detailed "Decision Memorandum," complaining about inadequate intelligence and calling for changes. He gave his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, new power to evaluate intelligence and instructed the CIA director, Richard Helms, to make the estimating-analyzing operation more responsive to White House needs.

Some of the reforms the President sought, to be sure, were intended to reduce runaway costs and to increase efficiency. But the cool, competent Helms was reluctant to adopt changes that might make the CIA less professional and more political.

He believed there should be a diversity, not conformity, of intelligence activities. He thought diverse views should be funneled to the White House as a check upon the rival intelligence services. If the President should receive only an intelligence consensus and this should turn out to be wrong, Helms feared, it would be disastrous for the nation.

But the conservatives around Mr. Nixon persuaded him that the CIA had a liberal taint.

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IT'S TRUE the CIA warned in 1966-67 that Communist strength was almost double what the Joint Chiefs estimated. Sure enough the Communists struck with unexpected power during the 1968 Tet holidays.

It's true the CIA claimed that the bombing of North Vietnam had not disrupted the flow of supplies down the infiltration routes into the south. Sure enough, the Communists launched an unexpected, powerful offensive in March 1972.

It's true the CIA warned that the mining of Haiphong harbor and the renewed bombing of the north wouldn't keep the North Vietnamese forces from getting all the supplies they needed. This estimate too, was subsequently verified.

Of course, the CIA wasn't always right, but in the future, it appears that the CIA will be less likely to disagree with the White House.