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American Intelligence: 'A Page of Shame'

To the Editor:

Samuel A. Adams' effort to throw some light on corruption in the intelligence process before and after the 1968 Tet offensive reflects a personal integrity which, unfortunately, has been increasingly under fire within the C.I.A. and other precincts of the intelligence community in recent years. As a C.I.A. analyst working on the Vietcong in Saigon and in the Pentagon from 1965 to 1970, I can confirm the entire thrust of Sam's charges. My only regret is that I did not have Sam's courage and foresight in saving relevant documents to prove the case.

Some of Sam's critics attempt to represent him as an egomaniac on a crusade. Others portray the questions he raises as "arcane side issues" (R. W. Komer's Sept. 29 letter). These positions reflect either an appalling ignorance of the nature of a people's war or a self-serving but transparent effort at self-defense by the time-worn tactic of "plausible denial."

The truth is that working-level analysts in the C.I.A. continually were diverted from following out leads on Vietcong strength; that they were assigned to other areas of work when they attempted to do so; that they were ignored or suppressed, as Sam was, when they persisted, and that these efforts at distortion and suppression of the facts were common knowledge and were openly discussed at the working level. There was room for only one convenient "truth" in official estimates, as Sam has proved beyond any dispute. The choice was to compromise one's integrity or to resign, and too many chose the former.

If the issues were fully studied, if special task forces were appointed to study them and if the results were circulated in the intelligence community as they became available, let the C.I.A.'s offices of Current Intelligence and National Estimates produce the published results for Congress. Let the Director of Central Intelligence release to Congress the detailed records and documents of the National Security Council's Watch Committee to prove that the matter was pursued vigorously and professionally. The facts will speak for themselves.

The record is clear. It speaks of misfeasance, nonfeasance and malfeasance, of outright dishonesty and professional cowardice. It reflects an intelligence community captured by an aging bureaucracy which too often placed institutional self-interest or personal advancement before the national interest.

It is a page of shame in the history of American intelligence, and it deserves to be aired as fully as possible before the public.

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Selinsgrove, Pa., Oct. 10, 1975

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