

Much Policy, Little Intelligence

By HARRY HOWE RANSOM

NASHVILLE—During the height of the Middle East crisis, President Nixon relied for information exclusively on his intelligence bureaucracy. He did not watch television and no more than scanned the morning newspapers. His information came from the intelligence establishment.

That a President can be the prisoner of the intelligence community and that it can sometimes lead him disastrously astray is illustrated by the Cambodian intervention last spring. The President announced to the world that his principal purpose was to destroy the "central headquarters" of the Communists in the area invaded by American forces. No such headquarters were found. One must assume that his intelligence was in part erroneous.

Textbooks on American government fail to inform us that for foreign and defense policy, secret intelligence is far more powerful than Congress and the Department of State. It can be more influential than the Chief Executive. The intelligence bureaucracy exercises a pivotal role in policy making but is not effectively accountable to responsible officials.

A President begins and ends his day viewing a picture of the outside world painted by secret intelligence. So the President is its potential prisoner. If he is insensitive to this danger, the nation could become its captive. A President might try to bring the intelligence system's efficiency under closer surveillance. But none has moved effectively to do it since the Central Intelligence Agency was created in 1947. The Cold War spawned mammoth military intelligence agencies: the National Security Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency. They supplemented C.I.A., State Department, Atomic Energy Commission and F.B.I. No President from Truman to Nixon has shown awareness of the problems posed by these enormous intelligence machines.

Dean Acheson says he advised President Truman when the C.I.A. was created that neither the President, the National Security Council "nor anyone else would be in a position to know what it was doing or to control it." President Eisenhower regretted that the fateful U-2 flight in May, 1960, had not been canceled. President Kennedy confessed that "no one has dealt with C.I.A." President Johnson ignored the C.I.A. problem. He rarely questioned basic intelligence assessments of world politics and America's interventionist role.

Vietnam became a major battlefield because of a colossal intelligence blunder. Intelligence misinterpreted the

nature of the Vietcong. Consequently, Presidents and Congresses were persuaded to believe that impossible objectives could be attained in Southeast Asia with military force. Moreover, Presidents were misinformed about how the Vietnam war was "progressing." There is a classic hesitancy of intelligence men to bring their leaders bad news. When bad news is sometimes reported, one must suspect that intelligence officials may be pursuing their own preferred foreign policy, which they tend to develop independently. Note that dire warnings by the C.I.A. of heavy Communist infiltration in South Vietnam's government were recently leaked to the press.*

What is the nature of this secret machine on which policy makers have so often, so willingly and so dangerously relied? One certain answer is that nobody knows all about it, its organization, its methods. And no one controls it. Not even the President.

The vast and highly compartmented intelligence system costs more than \$5 billion a year to operate. The annual price tag on military intelligence alone has been disclosed as around \$3 billion, with more than 136,000 employees, not including tens of thousands working for C.I.A. and other secret agencies. A high government official recently admitted that no inventory existed of total intelligence resources. So no one knows the exact total costs.

More than two decades ago it was assumed that the whole world must be brought under American intelligence surveillance. A vast network of secret agents, front groups, electronic, sensing and photographic devices was spread all over the globe. They map, record, and intervene anywhere searching out every nation's state secrets, and often meddle in politics, under the banner of deterrence and self-defense.

In the process, the C.I.A. has gained for the United States a tarnished

* 19 OCT 70, THIS FILE

image. In many parts of the world, the C.I.A. has become, in the words of Arnold Toynbee, "the bogey that Communism has been for America." Toynbee adds: "Wherever there is trouble, violence, suffering, tragedy, the rest of us are now quick to suspect the C.I.A. has had a hand in it."

One wonders why, from the record, any President depends so heavily upon the intelligence system. The Bay of Pigs expedition was launched on the basis of patently bad information. Then came the Cuban missile crisis. Kennedy and Khrushchev stood on the brink of nuclear war. This occurred shortly after intelligence had advised the President that the Soviet Union would not emplace missiles in Cuba. National intelligence estimates have caused us to build nuclear bomb shelters, to fear bomber gaps, missile gaps, and next, submarine or new missile gaps. They have made us assume a Russian military threat to Western Europe in the past and a ballistic missile defense crisis in the future. Intelligence estimates have come to control our lives by dominating the allocation of national resources.

Because America's highest government officials do not adequately monitor secret operations, the intelligence establishment exerts undue influence on policy. A vast bureaucracy has grown up in great confusion over its

purpose and functions. The effect is that the government does not always know what it is doing in the intelligence field. Duplication is rampant. Opportunities abound for bureaucratic self-serving.

Technology promises that intelligence operations will continue to expand in scope and increasingly will influence, and in some circumstances control, decision making. This brings seriously into question the survival of the democratic ideal of responsible, accountable government. What can be done?

Serious attention must be given, possibly by a Presidential commission, to problems of intelligence policy, organization and control. Total expenditures on intelligence could be cut in half, after reorganization of the system. Covert political action and espionage, now directed from C.I.A.'s "Department of Dirty Tricks," should be used rarely and removed from C.I.A.'s jurisdiction. Meanwhile, the President, Congress and State Department must supervise more effectively the secret intelligence establishment.

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