



A New Broom in The CIA Picture

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NEW BROOMS, as they say, sweep clean. The new director of the Central Intelligence Agency, James Schlesinger, is an obviously vigorous broom. Normally, therefore, the large number of impending changes in the CIA's top personnel would not be of much significance to anyone outside the CIA itself.

This is emphatically not true, however, of the change in leadership that can be expected in the agency's huge hierarchy of estimators and analysts. These are the people charged with giving meaning to the CIA's vast daily income of raw data.

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THIS IS a crucially important job. For it is of no great use merely to know, for instance, that the Russians have a huge missile called the SS-9. Defense policy-makers also need to know the missile's main characteristics, and therefore its probable purposes.

The government, of course, contains other estimators and analysts outside the CIA — in the Defense Department, for instance. But the CIA hierarchy is the largest and the most powerful of all. And it customarily provides the chairman of the Board of National Estimates, at present CIA veteran John Huizenga.

The point of this long explanation is, quite simply, that the CIA's estimating-analytical hierarchy has long had a "line" of its own, which might even be called a marked historical bias. Departing CIA director Richard Helms is far too wise and tough-minded a man not to have observed this peculiar historical bias in so

large a group of his former colleagues and subordinates.

It may be asked, then, why Helms, as CIA director, so long tolerated the bias of his analysts and estimators. The answer appears to be that Helms, a great bureaucrat if ever there was one, had an institutional need of another kind. His estimating-analytical hierarchy had always been broadly gloomy about the Vietnamese War, albeit grossly erroneous in several key factual estimates about Vietnam.

At the opening of President Nixon's first term, a violent attack on the CIA was developing from the left, both in Congress and in the press. The attack from the left was parried, and then caused to cease, by letting it be known — quite truthfully — that the CIA's Vietnam projections had always been the most pessimistic that were made in the government. The factual errors were not mentioned of course.

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THIS ROLE of the estimating-analytical hierarchy as the CIA's shield on the left, is most unlikely to have escaped President Nixon's sharp eye. It is an informed guess, in fact, that while the President always much admired and thoroughly trusted CIA director Helms, he strongly objected to the special historical bias of Helms' estimators and analysts.

As a new broom, therefore, Helms' chosen successor had the President's backing and encouragement. Without explicit backing, the sweeping clean could hardly be done so thoroughly by new broom Schlesinger.