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Changes Set In Key CIA Department

Washington

Acting Central Intelligence Director William E. Colby has acknowledged that "some changes will occur" in operations of the agency's top level evaluative body, the Office of National Estimates.

He maintained that the office's highly refined and prestigious product, the National Intelligence Estimate, will continue to be produced under the aegis of the CIA as it has for the past two decades.

Colby's assurance was conveyed internally through the CIA's employee bulletin in response to an August 19 news story asserting that he had made a "firm decision" to abolish the office.

ISSUES

The National Intelligence Estimate is the U.S. intelligence community's most classified and senior-level assessment on major international issues. It has been relied upon by Presidents for guidance on a variety of matters, such as Soviet missile capability and Vietnam war prospects.

There have been growing indications within the past year that influential members of the Nixon administration, notably Secretary of State-designate Henry Kissinger and Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, were unhappy with the CIA's strategic intelligence estimates.

During Schlesinger's interim reign early this year as CIA director he was reported to have initiated action to overhaul the Office of National Estimates, with the endorsement of the White House. Colby is currently working out the details of the high-level intelligence reorganization.

The notice to CIA employees, issued with Colby's authorization, alluded to news reports suggesting that senior administration officials were disillusioned with the national estimates and that the CIA was under attack from the administration "for having failed to produce the kind of intelligence estimates that would support its policies."

ESTIMATES

It asserted that the NIE's estimates would continue to be published and that "the objectivity of the National Intelligence estimates will be sustained."

However, the "structure" of the Office of National Estimates is under review, the bulletin said, and some changes would occur.

The fate of the office has important symbolic, if not practical, consequences in the intelligence community.

The strategic estimates of the CIA were criticized from within the administration for their pessimism on the Vietnam war, for under-estimating Soviet military buildups, for failing to predict the intensity of the North Vietnamese 1972 spring offensive.

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