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IN FOCUS Use — Or Misuse — of Intelligence to Support Policy

Has an old art reached a new peak under Kissinger?

By Henry S. Bradsher
Washington Star Staff Writer

One source calls it "keyhole questioning."

The way a number of present and former government officials describe it, questions are framed by the administration so narrowly as to elicit responses from the U.S. intelligence community that will support predetermined policies.

There are other techniques for the selective use of intelligence, too. Sometimes a branch of the administration rejects intelligence findings, insisting that some factors have been ignored, until finally a useful finding is made.

What several officials call "playing the intelligence game" is an old bureaucratic art.

They say it was brought to a new peak of refinement and a new frequency of use when Dr. Henry A. Kissinger was the presidential adviser on national security, and it continues with Kissinger as secretary of state in charge of arms control negotiations with Moscow. Other parts of the bureaucracy also play the game.

A senior administration official involved in the reorganization of the U.S. intelligence community under President Ford's Feb. 18 executive order says the changes now being made will not prevent such abuses of intelligence.

MATERIAL STILL can be ordered from the CIA, the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and other parts of the community in ways that will fit it into top policymakers' preconceptions.

One senior official involved in major policy decisions, who describes himself as "an avid consumer of intelligence," says he is unaware of leading questions being submitted to the intelligence community. "These charges fit into the category of insinuations that make the rounds," he comments.

Several other officials and congressional sources point in the direction of that senior official's operations, if not at him personally, as one of the major areas of the selective intelligence use that he denies.

General policies are framed on the basis of overall intelligence evaluations. Decisions are made on what is generally desirable for the United States, like a cease-fire in Vietnam, a strategic armaments limitations treaty (SALT) with the Soviet Union, an interim Sinai settlement in the Middle East, or a new weapons system.

But then new developments, newly received information on old situations, or fresh analyses of problems can sometimes poke holes in policies. Awkward facts that argue against decisions can appear. If the decision was a controversial one in the first place, as many major policies are, then new facts can reopen and threaten to change it.

The tendency, therefore, sometimes is to try to adapt the intelligence to the policy, rather than the other way around, some officials say.

The "keyhole questioning" method is putting very tightly defined requests for specific answers to the intelligence community — primarily to the CIA — without giving the context in which the answer is going to be used or allowing any surrounding circumstances to be considered. These amount to loaded questions.

IF THE FIRST question draws an answer that does not seem to justify the policy course already decided upon, then another one is framed, "just three degrees to one side, enough to force another study, in hopes of getting a different answer," one official explained.

This can go on for some time, until finally the inquirer hits upon a formula that yields an answer that then can be used in bureaucratic debates to support the policy. Earlier questions and answers are quietly forgotten.

A current case in point involves a Soviet supersonic bomber with the Western code name of Backfire.

When Kissinger arranged the preliminary agreement for a second SALT treaty with the Soviet Union in November 1974, Backfire was not included within the limitations. The Pentagon objected that the plane has the capability at striking the United States from Soviet territory, and therefore had to be counted. Moscow denied that it was an intercontinental bomber, arguing that it was properly excluded from the agreement.

This objection has been a major stumbling block in turning the agreement into the treaty that Kissinger and his top advisers seek for overall policy reasons. They have argued in the National Security Council that Backfire did not deserve to be counted.

Backfire also has been a problem within the Pentagon, since it affects arms programs of the United States.

Eight intelligence studies of the Backfire's range potential have been made. Each one showed that it could reach the United States.

According to one source who reflects suspicion of

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