

C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

22 May 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Adequacy of Certain US Intelligence Reporting

NOTE

This memorandum responds to your request for the Board's judgments about political, economic, and military reporting on countries which do not constantly preoccupy Washington but in which unanticipated political or social explosions could seriously affect United States interests.

Our assessment is presented in two parts: the body of this memorandum discusses problems common to the task of reporting and analysis about a wide range of countries; an Annex contains more specific assessments of coverage on five regions -- West Europe, the non-Communist Far East, near East/South Asia, Latin America and Africa. In the Annex, a commentary on overall coverage of each region is followed by more detailed critiques of the reporting on certain selected countries in that region. The countries selected include those mentioned in your memorandum of request, together with several others which we consider of at least equal relevance.

Two caveats are in order. The first is that intelligence warning and estimating are as much problems of analysis in Washington as of reporting from the field; this memorandum concentrates on the latter, as requested, but no one should

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infer from the emphasis any inclination to blame the field for all deficiencies. The second caveat is that the relative value of various kinds of intelligence reporting will necessarily be judged differently by users with different interests, responsibilities and specialties. One man's meat may offer little nourishment to another, and what one specialist considers a serious deficiency in reporting may not look important to another. The observations and judgments below reflect the needs and point of view of the intelligence generalist, and to suggest that one kind of reporting could usefully be given greater emphasis than another is not to argue that the second kind is useless.

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A. SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. The best conceivable system of reporting and analysis cannot guarantee against occasional surprise. No amount of money and talent spent on intelligence would enable it to foresee every interplay of chance, accident, and personality by which events are often determined. Mass psychology, sometimes a critical factor in social and political upheavals, often operates on mysterious schedules, even in societies most familiar to us, including our own. The apparently improbable sometimes occurs and the apparently probable quite often does not. This is nowhere more true than in the field of social and political prognosis; and it has never been more true than in our era of constant and accelerating change -- one in which a few years have seen more new states come into existence and more peoples lives altered in more profound and rapid fashion than in decades or even centuries before.

- 2 -

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2. The present question is whether there is room for improvement in reporting from the field which would help producers of finished intelligence -- current and estimative -- do a better job of anticipating political and social change in this turbulent environment. We believe that there is room for such improvement. The following paragraphs avoid specific administrative or institutional recommendations, but do seek to identify certain general ways in which we think the present process could be strengthened. It should be noted that none of the problems addressed here is wholly new, and none of the suggestions for meeting them is radical. What may be new is the accelerating pace of change in much of the world, and what may be needed are some adjustments in our approach to take account of this fact.

(a) The most frequent criticism of present reporting is not directed at factual reporting of hard information but at the scarcity of interpretative coverage of local atmospherics -- nuances and trends in the political, social, and psychological climate which are often quite intangible and usually unprovable at the time of writing. Such reporting is necessarily a matter of conjecture and even of intuition, but it can often be more to the point than more objective data. Particularly in less open societies

- 3 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

outside Western Europe, a feel-for-the situation is hard enough to pick up on the spot; it is even harder to acquire in Washington.

(b) A second frequent criticism of current coverage is that insufficient attention is given to examination in depth of key institutions and long-range trends in certain countries; that research and analysis of this sort is too often slighted under pressure of daily reporting requirements on events of immediate importance.

(c) One obstacle to both adequate atmospheric reporting and integrated studies in depth is bureaucratic compartmentalization in the field. Even when the political, economic and military parts are well covered, and conscientiously added together in Washington, the sum may not equal the whole. Well-defined areas of collection and reporting responsibility between agencies are no doubt necessary, but interpretative reporting on intangibles, speculative analysis of trends, and studies in depth of local institutions are too often no one's top priority.

(d) Traditional interests of government agencies tend to focus the attention of collectors on political stability, economic growth, and military capabilities -- all too often conceived

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of in Western terms. What the analysts increasingly need today is often what the collectors are not accustomed to look for or trained to evaluate, namely revolutionary change in societies, the relationships between economic change and political and social change, and the political and social role of the military.

(e) On occasion, the well-established concept of the country team with the Ambassador as responsible head and spokesman can (and has) worked to discourage reporting which does not parallel or support the Ambassador's views. While the concept is no doubt a sound one in administrative and policy terms, and no doubt often discourages irresponsible reporting, an adequate reporting system should nonetheless offer some means for expressing informed opinion not necessarily agreed to by all the mission.

(f) The breadth and comprehensiveness of reporting are, of course, determined in great degree by the spectrum of contacts and sources available. Particularly where authoritarian governments make it difficult or risky for Americans to establish contacts with the opposition, the result can be over-reliance on government or pro-government sources (including the local security services), a pro-establishment bias in reporting, a consequent over-confidence

- 5 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

in the durability of the status quo, and ignorance about forces and factors making for change. Occasionally, the opposite is true, particularly in countries where government policies are hostile to the US and where easy access to disgruntled opposition sources can distort reporting to magnify the weaknesses of a regime. These observations should not be construed as an argument for vastly increased intelligence efforts against difficult or denied targets in all such cases; in many instances, the gain probably does not warrant the cost and risk.

(g) Relatively open societies with a reasonably free press provide analysts with means to compensate for such inadequacies or biases in official reporting, and such sources can be used, in the field and in Washington, to refine or enrich official reporting. However, for budgetary or other reasons, timely acquisition of these open sources is more difficult now than it used to be. In any case, open sources are simply not available or not informative in many countries of concern to us. In such cases, the FBIS publications are of some help in making up the deficiency, and indeed these publications are of considerable value to analysts working on virtually all countries.

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(h) Military reporting represents a special problem -- especially in the many countries where the local military play a key role in promoting or resisting social and political change. The Defense attaches tend to restrict themselves to filling conventional military intelligence requirements, while civilian observers in the embassies may, for jurisdictional reasons, fail to assess and report on the broader implications of local military attitudes and activities.

(i) Overall economic reporting also deserves special mention. Political and social upheavals may seldom be immediately and directly triggered by economic causes, but these are usually conditioning factors which help set the stage. In any case, economic reporting, especially on the less developed states, is criticized by many general analysts for insufficient emphasis on broad interpretation of economic trends and their political and social implications. Professional economic analysts are less concerned with this need, their chief criticism of economic intelligence collection and reporting being that it does not probe deeply enough into varied sources for information and judgment.

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B. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

3. There is no panacea for the problems and deficiencies outlined above. Certainly the cure does not lie in adding further detailed specifications to already extensive lists of intelligence requirements. Our central suggestion would be to encourage freer, more frequent and more informal communications between collectors in the field and analysts and estimators in Washington. The process could take any number of forms: (a) it should include more frequent travel, both ways, within feasible budgetary and workload limits; (b) arrangements for selected senior analysts and estimators to attend the periodic regional conferences of chiefs of mission in the field would be useful; (c) more frequent, informal written exchanges between Washington agencies and field should be encouraged, particularly when important estimates or research studies are initiated in the intelligence community; (d) analysts would be helped in gaining a feel for the situation if there were periodic, coordinated situation reports, with emphasis on how things are changing, and more reporting of the CIA  type; (e) increased contact between Washington and the field should help in tapping several sources of information which, for one reason or another, have not been exploited or at least not

- 8 -

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enough; these include a number of the MAAG's, AID missions, and USIA facilities.

4. Such steps should benefit both Washington and the field. They would help producers of finished intelligence to define and make known their needs and encourage them to check out their questions, misgivings, hunches, and hypotheses as and when they arise. They would help those in the field to look for the answers needed in Washington and give the field assurance that its efforts are in fact being used. In short, any improvement in the ease of communication, and in mutual acquaintance with problems (and people) at both ends, should be conducive to more sensitive and more sophisticated performance by both.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



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Chairman

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- 9 -

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