

# LETTERS

## The cult of misintelligence

Either Sam Adams's article ["Vietnam Cover-Up: Playing War With Numbers," May] was heavily edited or Sam's memory isn't so good these days. There was no cover-up in the CIA.

Most of the knowledgeable people in the CIA, including the director and myself, thought Sam's analysis of the strength of the VC had merit. The question was, How much merit? Most agreed that, where the evidence existed, Sam's figures could be supported. But where there was little or no evidence, considerable doubt existed as to how reliable Sam's extrapolations were. Sam thought his extrapolations to be sound. Other equally competent and knowledgeable analysts and their supervisors were not so sure.

As I remember the consensus, it was that VC strength was indeed a good deal greater than had been estimated but probably not as much greater as Sam thought. Even the CIA was inclined to agree, but Military Assistance Command headquarters remained skeptical. Sam wanted to take the matter directly to the President. Our director—quite correctly, I thought—didn't feel he could do that without stronger evidence and a consensus in support of it.

The director asked me to look into the matter. I did so and spent considerable time on the question, including a long interview with Sam which he neglects to mention, or perhaps he confused it with the one he says he had with our then executive director. Anyway, Sam made a long

memo of our conversation, and I agreed to its substance.

As a result of all this, I discussed the matter with the chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. He then arranged to have Patrick Coyne, executive secretary of that board, interview Sam Adams. This was done.

The net result was that we could perceive no merit in presenting Sam and his conclusions to the President, and that close scrutiny and revision of VC strength figures should be continued as evidence became available and along the lines he had pursued.

Sam was not satisfied with that decision and kept insisting that arrangements be made for him to present his case personally to at least the PFIAB and Rostow.

At that point Helms and the rest of us had had enough of what I considered intellectual arrogance on Sam's part, so I told him in writing to get back to work with the rest of the team or resign and pursue his campaign on his own time. At no time do I recall Sam Adams being suppressed, ignored, or restrained or his ideas pigeonholed, nor was any question of security restraint raised.

I think *Harper's* owes an apology to Messrs. Graham, Procter, and Hyland for the gratuitous and insulting comments it printed about them.

RUFUS L. TAYLOR  
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)  
Whispering Pines, N.C.

*The writer was Deputy Director of Central Intelligence from 1966 to 1969.*

Sam Adams's article presents a distorted picture of the CIA's ana-

lytical effort on Vietnam. *Harper's* has become an accomplice in an unjustified attack on precisely those elements of the CIA—the Directorate of Intelligence and the Office of National Estimates—that worked consistently to put forth an honest and objective picture of Communist capabilities and determination to prolong the war against the imposing military might assembled by the U.S. government.

This work comprised a vast outpouring of studies on Communist logistics, Communist manpower resources in both South and North Vietnam, and the effects of U.S. air bombing (a subject which involved the Agency in long and sometimes bitter arguments with the U.S. Seventh Air Force). The product of this work went to the President and the principal members of the National Security Council (Secretaries of State and Defense).

By mid-1967, if not by mid-1966, the Agency had clearly passed the word that the Communists' manpower resources were adequate to sustain the war, that their logistics system was bearing up under bombardment, and that the Hanoi leadership was determined to protract the struggle.

Unfortunately, Adams fails to take any of this work into account and he conveys a misleading impression of a single-handed and lonely struggle to get the truth about the war to the White House against the massive opposition of countless knaves and cowards. His charge that his research findings were suppressed does not stand up against a careful reading of his article. And his assumption that these findings were generally accepted within the CIA is a distortion

of the facts. His research subject, order-of-battle analysis, was arcane and complex. This was particularly the case when dealing with paramilitary or irregular forces that do not appear on the battlefield in regular units. Adams's methodology for estimating the strength of these irregular and paramilitary forces often raised more questions than it answered. He was dependent on captured Communist documents, which meant that there were valid questions as to the timeliness and accuracy of the data as well as to the statistical significance of the available sample. Beyond the question of the numbers of Communist irregulars was the larger question of their military capabilities and staying power. There was always room for debate on these points, but it is clear that there was no neglect of the subject.

One paper which dealt with all these issues at length was the 1967 National Intelligence Estimate on Vietnam, which Adams describes as a sellout to the "generals" on the order-of-battle figures. Apparently Adams was so obsessed with his own figures that he never read the entire paper. It included an extended discussion of order-of-battle methodology, with particular attention to the problems of estimating strengths of paramilitary forces. It also provided a lengthy discussion of the various categories of Communist irregulars and the nature of their contribution to the total Communist effort. The paper as a whole gave a fair and objective picture of Communist strengths and weaknesses. I stand by it and would welcome action by the CIA to release it to the public.

In my twenty-five years in the CIA I never saw an analyst given more individual attention, more opportunities to present his evidence and state his case. Yet the impression created by the *Harper's* article is that of a man whose work was suppressed and whose views were ignored. Many of us were sympathetic to Sam because of his diligence and persistence, but these traits were not uncommon among the many outstanding analysts at the CIA. Adams was only uncommon in his inability to see that he, like the rest of us, was occasionally fallible, and in his belief that all who disagreed with his findings had base and ulterior motives.

JAMES C. GRAHAM  
Potomac, Md.

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the Board of National Intelligence Estimates.

#### SAM ADAMS REPLIES:

Vice Adm. Rufus L. Taylor and Mr. James C. Graham suggest that in arguing with the military over Vietcong strength in 1967 and 1968 I somehow got carried away. Vice Admiral Taylor ascribes my zeal for higher numbers to "intellectual arrogance," Mr. Graham to an obsession. The dispute over numbers, they say, was a reasonable debate between reasonable men over different ways of counting enemy soldiers.

As they ought to know, however, the real concern at that time was that the military was deliberately lowering VC numbers in order to promote an "image of success." I did not make this phrase up. It appeared on August 21, 1967, in a secret cable composed by General Abrams, approved by General Westmoreland, and sent to General Wheeler—head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—and finally to Mr. Helms, Director of the CIA.

The principal reason for dropping two categories from the order of battle, the cable said, was that the press would draw "an erroneous and gloomy" conclusion if the categories were left in and that "all those who have an incorrect view of the war will be reinforced and [our] task will become more difficult." I found this argument outrageous, and I would be surprised if both Vice Admiral Taylor and Mr. Graham did not feel the same way.

In my opinion, some of the actions taken to slash enemy strength figures may well have constituted a violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, particularly that article which forbids false official statements. For example, in February 1968, a lieutenant in Westmoreland's Order of Battle Section returned to his desk in Saigon to find that his superiors had cut one of the categories still remaining in the order of battle from some 80,000 to about 40,000. Incredulous—since the category was his analytical responsibility, and since he had seen no evidence to justify the drop—he went to the chief and deputy chief of the Order of Battle Section to demand an explanation. "Lie a little, Mac, lie a little," he was told. He refused to do so, and was transferred from

headquarters to an outlying post. Fortunately, he survived the war to tell Senate investigators looking into intelligence matters recently of what transpired.

Two months later, in April 1968, the same head of the OB Section, a Lieutenant Colonel Weiler, appeared at CIA headquarters with Brig. Gen. Daniel O. Graham to argue for the lower numbers. The question arises whether General Graham—one of the persons to whom Admiral Taylor thinks *Harper's* should apologize—was aware of the alleged falsification. If he was, the question then becomes whether Daniel Graham, now head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, should keep his job.

Unfortunately, sufficient space has not been allotted to me to answer Mr. Graham and Admiral Taylor's criticisms point by point. I have, however, spent several days going over the points raised in the *Harper's* article with Senate investigators, and I have hopes that more will be heard on this subject through the committee's continuing work. My concern at this time is that the controversy not stray from the central question at issue here. The question is twofold: first, whether we now have in our intelligence establishment the competence to accurately evaluate potential and existing threats to our nation's security; second, whether we have the courage and the integrity to present this information, no matter how unpopular it might be, to the men in government who presumably rely on it to formulate a rational foreign policy.

#### Hunting hunters

There was a rock star a few years ago who gained notoriety by dismembering a baby doll onstage. That is the most charitable analogy I can draw to Spencer Brown's act ["Hunters Unlimited," May]. Less charitable analogies would be with the late Sen. Joe McCarthy, who channelled neurotic fears of a minority upon the liberal minority or with President Nixon, who similarly channelled the neurotic fears of the hardhats upon the political minority, the activist students.

Due to the circumstances of modern living and the reduced wildlife habitat, hunters are a minority in the U.S., and Brown is using them to