

3 October 1979

Reflections on the Special Report for the President

1. The essential purpose of a monthly warning report should be to provide a succinct but comprehensive check list and assessment of the current status of potential warning situations. We need a flexible vehicle which would allow varying treatment, in terms of length and detail, of a wide range of items. On the one hand, subjects which have been covered in recent reports could be treated, for continuity purposes, in a sentence or two if assessments and prognoses have not changed. On the other, items being covered for the first time, or those being reassessed, would require enough background and detail to clothe warning judgments with sufficient impact and meaningfulness. New, unfamiliar, and still inchoate items—which by the nature of things will be few and infrequent—should be elaborated in brief annexes—one page if possible.

2. The Special Report should lead off with a highly compressed check list which would provide a quick overview of the warning outlook. This list would summarize all items discussed in the Report, as well as note in a sentence or two the status of continuing "watch" items which do not require more extensive treatment.

3. The proposed format would be composed of three sections:
- a. A checklist or table of contents with summaries;
 - b. Brief discussion of the leading warning topics of the month, in one or two paragraphs.
 - c. Annexes which would introduce new topics or present modified assessments of continuing items.

Procedures:

4. A Special Report of this nature would require a more systematic and uniform approach than we now have. The present NIO warning assessments, which are essentially rapporteur reports of the monthly meetings, do not lend themselves well to the kind of rigorous and distilled Report proposed here. To be candid, most of the community analysts who attend NIO monthly meetings are not well qualified by training or experience to deal with the demanding requirements of serious warning analysis. Informal discussions of events and exchanges of views and information rarely probe very deeply into the warning dimensions of current developments. These meetings seldom perform the indispensable task of weighing alternative interpretations and hypotheses in a reasonably disciplined and objective manner.

5. Long experience gives little reason to be sanguine that current intelligence analysts—no matter how talented and well informed—will ever accomplish adequately the difficult task of shifting intellectual gears into the warning mode. Some improvements would be possible if office directors and division chiefs would take special pains to underline the priority of the warning function and follow up to ensure that it is receiving sufficient time and attention. But we should recognize that the pressures and preoccupations of current intelligence are often the enemy of effective warning procedures and assessments. In most cases, it is asking too much of current intelligence officers to perform both tasks simultaneously. The preeminent warning hazards—excessive concern with details, preconceptions, congealed and unexamined assumptions, rigid mindsets, and deficient historical perspective and memory—may be unavoidable adjuncts of the insatiable demands of current intelligence.

6. The essential requirements of effective warning are a measure of detachment from the rush of current events and a sense of the potential implications of trends and specific developments. The dilemma for management is how to make sure that the system is giving adequate attention to these requirements. Line production officers are burdened with too many conflicting demands on their time and resources. The experiment with the NIO monthly meetings suggests that most of the participants lack the motivation, time, experience, and understanding of the unique demands of warning to tackle this task effectively. (An OPA analyst told me recently that he and his colleagues regard the monthly round of preparing for the NIO meetings as a nuisance and intrusion into their daily routines.)

7. If the Special Report is to be more than a summary of the results of the rather casual and unstructured NIO meetings, requirements and responsibilities will have to be defined with greater precision. There would seem to be four alternative "solutions"—all directed toward liberating the warning process from the chronic conservatism and inertia of the analyst corps:

a. With the approval and authority of the DCI, DDCI, D/NFAC, and NIO/W, procedural and substantive guidelines for the NIO meetings and monthly warning assessments could be developed and applied.

b. The respective NIOs could be charged with drafting more rigorous and detailed warning assessments. As agents of the DCI, they should be free to express their own views even if these depart from the consensus, if any, among community analysts.

c. NFAC office directors could be charged with preparing the assessments, in consultation with the NIOs.

d. The NIO/W could assume this responsibility, drawing on the SWS and his two assistants. The NIOs would review these drafts, but the NIO/W, in consultation with the D/NFAC and with the approval of the DDCI and/or the DCI, would reserve final authority over warning judgments presented in the Special Report.

8. If the years since Pearl Harbor afford one preeminent lesson, it is that if warning is to be timely and useful to senior decision-makers, it should not be trammled or stultified by being subjected to the normal process of institutional compromise and accommodation. "Coordination" inevitably is the enemy of both timeliness and clarity. Of all the diverse functions of intelligence, warning is preeminently the one that demands a clear focus of responsibility and a capacity to speak "loud and clear", free of the hedges and qualifications that are both unavoidable and justified in other forms of national intelligence.

9. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that warning at the national level—especially as defined by the present DCI—is uniquely the province of the DCI, and that he must retain the freedom to issue timely and unambiguous warning, in some cases well in advance of the ponderous process of reaching agreed community judgments—a process that will almost always lag well behind the flow of events and information. The distinction between warning and estimative procedures and judgments is vital, and the indispensable requirement for strengthening the national warning performance is to recognize the institutional and substantive implications of this distinction.

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September

SPECIAL REPORT FOR THE PRESIDENT

The Warning Outlook in Brief

1. USSR. Brezhnev's growing senility and intensified maneuvering in the leadership over succession may make Soviet foreign policy behavior more erratic and unpredictable in the next few months.
2. USSR-Afghanistan. Amin's coup against Taraki has not resulted in any change in Soviet policy, although it appears to have surprised and embarrassed Moscow. The alerting of Soviet airborne forces in mid-September strongly suggests that the Soviets were prepared to introduce sizable forces into Afghanistan if this had been judged necessary to defend Soviet personnel and interests. In view of the fragile position of Amin's regime, the chances of greater Soviet military involvement probably will increase in the next 60 days.
3. USSR-China-Vietnam. Both Moscow and Beijing view the new round of talks as an arena for political warfare, with the Chinese striving to discredit Soviet support for Vietnam and inhibit the latter's dry season offensive in Kampuchea.
4. USSR-Iran. Moscow is downgrading Khomeini's prospects and positioning itself to capitalize on an expected decline in his authority and control.
5. Syria-Israel. Syrian attempts to challenge Israel's control of Lebanon's airspace may trigger an escalation which could shake President Assad's already precarious domestic position.
6. Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. Failure of the London Conference, combined with more aggressive Rhodesian and South African military operations against ZANU forces in Mozambique, may oblige the Patriotic Front and the Frontline States to make decisions which will open unprecedented opportunities for an expansion of Soviet and Cuban presence and influence.
7. Central America. The Romero regime's precarious position in El Salvador could be shattered suddenly by large-scale violence precipitated by leftist provocations. A showdown in Salvador would trigger a sizable increase in Nicaraguan and Cuban support for the leftists.
8. Morocco. King Hassan's position is becoming more precarious as the Western Sahara dispute is attracting greater meddling by outside forces. Egypt perceives an opportunity to draw Morocco away from the Arab rejectionist coalition by offering political and military support to Hassan. In addition to Libyan meddling, the Cubans reportedly plan to increase their support to the Polisario Front. These trends will reinforce Polisario intransigence in demanding independence for the Western Sahara and increase pressure on Hassan to negotiate directly with the Polisario as the only avenue to a settlement. Hassan, however, has little freedom of maneuver because he fears a popular backlash if he appears to be weakening his claim to Western Sahara.

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Next 19 Page(s) In Document Denied