The Reluctant Directors: Souers, Vandenberg, and Hillenkoetter

Sidney William Souers
(26 January 1946–10 June 1946)

A successful business executive and veteran naval intelligence reservist, Rear Admiral Sidney Souers was the first Director of Central Intelligence, a post created by a presidential directive on 22 January 1946. At a brief installation ceremony in the White House, Harry Truman issued a mock proclamation dubbing him the "director of centralized snooping" and then handed Souers a black cloak and wooden dagger. Despite their mutual prominence in Missouri Democratic circles, it was apparently the first time Souers had met the President.[1] Souers would spend a mere six months as DCI—a short stint that has faded into relative obscurity. Nevertheless, he was a key figure in the development of the US intelligence community in the decade following the end of World War II and would prove to be a valued national security adviser for the President.

Souers was intimately familiar with the substance of the directive that established the post of DCI and was thus the logical choice for the job. A friend and protégé of Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, then Captain Souers had been named deputy chief of naval intelligence in 1944. In that capacity, he had been deeply engaged in the debate on the shape of a new national intelligence apparatus. He served as the Navy's representative on an interdepartmental working committee, addressed the issue of military intelligence for Ferdinand Eberstadt's study of the proposed merger of the War and Navy departments, and prepared a memo on national intelligence sent by Fleet Admiral Chester A. Nimitz to the Secretary of the Navy. At Truman's request, Souers wrote a memorandum explaining his objections to a plan put forward by the State Department and why he thought the President would be better served by the arrangement proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His advocacy of the JCS plan, which became the basis for Truman's directive, led the President to refer to it as "the Souers plan" on occasion.[23] Souers was, said noted CIA historian Arthur Darling, "an influential voice."[4]

As a short-term DCI—he had insisted on leaving as soon as the President and relevant Cabinet members could agree on a permanent successor—Souers had the task of getting the new Central Intelligence Group up and running. Given the sharp differences preceding the issuance of the presidential directive, it was a task that could not be rushed, and Souers avoided taking actions that might trigger a dispute or cause other players to dig in their heels.

From the outset, Souers clearly saw the CIG as "a holding agency until a fully functional agency" could take over the intelligence mission,[5] and, having completed the initial organization and planning,[6] he left

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[1] Souers once told an interviewer that he was appalled when Truman was nominated for the Senate, noting that he would not have hired him in his own business for more than $250 a month. ("Notes on Early DCIs").

[2] For an in-depth treatment of Souer's tenure as DCI, see the internal CIA history completed in 1953 by Arthur Darling. *The Central Intelligence Agency: An Instrument of Government, to 1950* was first publicly released by CIA in 1989 and was published the following year by The Pennsylvania State University Press. Souer's tenure is also covered by the late Danny D. Jansen and Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones in "The Missouri Gang and the CIA," a chapter in *North American Spies: New Revisionist Essays*, edited by Jeffreys-Jones and Andrew Lownie and published in 1991 by the University Press of Kansas.
"Notes on the Early DCIs," written by William Henhoeffer and James Hanrahan, released 13 September 2012.

[3] Ralph E. Weber, *Spymasters: Ten CIA Officers in Their Own Words* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Books, 1999), p. 2.

[4] Darling, *The Central Intelligence Agency*, p. 68.

[5] As Document 1946-03-21A demonstrates, the CIG's dependence on other agencies for its budget and staff caused a wide range of problems, in this case a forced reliance on others for proper screening of personnel. Document 1946-03-27A suggests that Souers found this approach problematic.

his successor well positioned to continue work toward a permanent central intelligence organization. Souers bequeathed to him several talented officers (among them Walter Pforzheimer,[7] Lawrence Houston,[8] and Ludwell Lee Montague[9]) and a well-advanced draft of enabling legislation for a new central intelligence organization. In addition, as Documents 1946-03-05D, 1946-03-14, and 1946-03-16 illustrate, the CIG under Souers had made significant progress in determining how best to preserve and transfer from the War Department to the CIG those elements of the Strategic Services Unit (SSU) deemed to be "of continuing usefulness." The project status reports contained in this document collection reveals a heavy workload aimed at defining the missions and the tools of the new US intelligence apparatus.

The DCI's second major task was to find his successor so he could return to St. Louis and his varied business interests. He soon fixed on Hoyt S. Vandenberg, a war hero and the nephew of a prominent Republican senator, as the ideal candidate to guide the CIG and secure passage of legislation for an independent central intelligence agency. Vandenberg was reluctant, but Souers, who had impressed wartime colleagues as a shrewd intelligence operator, secured his agreement.

Not all of Souers's proposals were implemented. For example, he argued that the various departmental intelligence bodies should coordinate their representation on budget issues, a tactic that he characterized as "one of the more effective means for guarding against arbitrary depletion of intelligence sources at the expense of national security." After the bruising interdepartmental battles to create the CIG, a proposal was unlikely to gain traction for decades to come.

In June 1946, Souers returned to St. Louis, but his "retirement" was brief. Within a year, he was recalled to Washington to set up an intelligence service for the Atomic Energy Commission. In September 1947, he became the executive secretary of the newly created National Security Council, a post in which he would help steer the evolution of the CIG's successor, the Central Intelligence Agency.[10] Even after leaving that post in 1950, he remained a close adviser and poker-playing buddy to the President, spending much of his time in Washington. Truman later commented in an oral history, "You can depend on this guy. He was one of my greatest assets." Souers suffered a debilitating stroke and died on 14 January 1973, just weeks after Truman's death in Kansas City.

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[6] Darling, p. 106.

[7] Walter Pforzheimer played a key role in drafting the legislation that created CIA and went on to serve as the Agency's first Legislative Liaison. He also collected a wide range of books on the craft of intelligence, a collection that forms the basis of the CIA Library's Historical Intelligence Collection. Pforzheimer was the collection's first curator, a post he held until 1974.

[8] An OSS veteran, Larry Houston served as the General Counsel of the Strategic Services Unit before holding the same post in the CIG under Souers. After the creation of CIA, he served as its General Counsel from 1947 to 1973. He is widely recognized as one of the architects of CIA and a central player in virtually every Agency undertaking during his tenure.

[9] Ludwell Lee Montague was an Army intelligence officer who served as executive secretary of the wartime Joint Intelligence Committee. On joining the CIG, he headed the Central Reports Staff, and, when CIA replaced the CIG, he helped set up the Office of National Estimates. He was a member of the Board of National Estimates until his retirement in 1971.

[10] Entries in the diary of Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter, the third DCI, show that Souers was in frequent contact with Hillenkoetter regarding legislation pertaining to the CIG. (See 1947-04-09a).

Hoyt Sanford Vandenberg[11]
(10 June 1946–1 May 1947)

A West Point graduate and career military aviator, Lt. Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg shared little with Sidney Souers other than a reluctance to serve as DCI. His goal was to become the first chief of an independent US air force. Souers, however, saw him as just the man to give the CIG energy, and he was also keenly aware that Vandenberg's uncle, a powerful Republican senator, could help smooth the way for legislation that would put central intelligence on a sound legal footing. Cannily, Souers asked Vandenberg if he thought the powers that be would make him Chief of Staff of the Air Force just because of his good looks—the "impossibly handsome" pilot had allegedly been singled out by Marilyn Monroe as one of the three men with whom she would most like to be stranded on a desert island. Souers pointed out to Vandenberg that a better way to position himself to become chief of the air force would be to serve the President as DCI. Vandenberg saw the logic and agreed to take the job.

Vandenberg had learned the value of coordinated intelligence during a stint as commander of the 9th Air Force in World War II, when his men played a key role in the Allies' march across Europe, and he had gained a thorough understanding of the CIG while serving on the Intelligence Advisory Board as the Army's Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (G-2). When he took over from Souers on 10 June 1946, he was up to speed on the progress that had been made and the work that remained to be done. Souers had also spelled out many of the challenges ahead in a farewell progress report, dated 7 June 1946. The departing DCI recommended that Vandenberg seek greater authority and an independent budget as soon as possible. Excerpts from "General Van's" diary, included in this document collection, reveal that the new DCI continued to consult with his predecessor as he continued the struggle to gain independence and respect for the CIG.

Characterized by his biographer as a "superb blend of leader and manager," Vandenberg pursued Souers's recommendations with gusto. His often tightly packed calendar reveals a man who had clout and connections and did not hesitate to use them to reach his goals. Within his first months on the job, he campaigned to double the CIG's budget and to expand its staff; by September he had won the right for the CIG to "hire and fire and spend." This document collection also shows him dealing with the nitty-gritty problems generated by these strategic victories. Few later DCIs would take issue with his concerns about space, and his desire to have all CIG employees in a single building would be echoed by his successors for decades (see Document 1946-06-07a, 20 November 1946).

Vandenberg also set out to ensure that the CIG had the right to conduct independent research and analysis, a discussion of which had begun under Souers (see Document 1946-03-26B). It was his contention that the DCI "should not be required to rely solely upon evaluated intelligence from the various departments," each of which would assess information through a parochial lens.[12] Although forced to backtrack on his demand that funding, facilities, and personnel be centralized in the CIG, he did eventually succeed in securing a measure of independence and set up the Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE) to undertake the new role. He also secured for ORE the responsibility for developing a national program of scientific intelligence and the authority to coordinate all intelligence related to foreign development of atomic energy; to support the latter, the files and personnel of the intelligence division of the "Manhattan Engineer District"(MED), the US program to develop nuclear weapons, were

[11] For more information on Hoyt Vandenberg as DCI, see Darling, op. cit., and Charles R. Christensen, "An Assessment of General Hoyt S. Vandenberg's Accomplishments as Director of Central Intelligence," *Intelligence and National Security* 11, no. 4 (October 1996), pp. 754–64. For a look at Vandenberg's air force career, see Phillip S. Meilinger, *Hoyt S. Vandenberg: The Life of a General* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).
[12] Darling, p. 107.

transferred to ORE. Although ORE produced the first national estimate—on Soviet capabilities and intentions—in July, it faced significant resistance from the departments, both on substance and the provision of personnel, and the evolution of a truly national estimative process and machinery would continue for decades.

Vandenberg was also intent on ensuring that the DCI conduct all foreign intelligence collection and foreign counterintelligence. His determination was driven in part by his fear that an enemy might pit one foreign intelligence collector against another as had occurred in Hitler's Germany. Unlike Souers, who had declined to take over the FBI's clandestine operations in Latin America, he wrested control of Latin American intelligence operations from J. Edgar Hoover (Vandenberg said Hoover was "mad as hell" at being forced to cede his responsibilities).[13] These new CIG duties were added to the mission of the Office of Special Operations, established by Vandenberg in July 1946 to manage the assets—money, personnel, equipment, and so forth—being transferred to the CIG from the soon-to-be eliminated Strategic Services Unit. After intense wrangling among the members of the Intelligence Advisory Board, Vandenberg also secured the right to collect foreign intelligence in the United States and assumed control of the Foreign Broadcast Information Bureau (now the Open Source Center) from the Army.

Like Souers, however, Vandenberg recognized that the DCI, whose authority rested only on a presidential directive, would have no real power without Congressional legislation,[14] and he stepped up efforts to give the CIG and the DCI teeth. As Truman and key Cabinet officials began discussions on improving US national security by consolidating the branches of the military and creating a national defense council, Vandenberg lobbied for the inclusion in the legislation of provisions for a central intelligence organization. During the ensuing debates, Vandenberg beat back attempts by the military services to retain control over US intelligence. The resulting National Security Act, signed by Truman on 26 July 1947, remains the basis for the organization structure of the US national security apparatus.

Just under a year after replacing Souers, Vandenberg left the CIG in response to a request from General Dwight Eisenhower, then Chief of Staff of the Army, that he return to "important and necessary duties with the Army Air Forces." He held that post only briefly before being promoted to the rank of general and named Vice Chief of Staff of the newly created independent US Air Force in October. He did not realize his dream of becoming Chief of Staff of the Air Force until succeeding General Carl Spaatz in April 1948. In 1953, suffering from prostate cancer, Vandenberg retired from active duty. He died nine months later at the age of 55.

[13] See Document 1952-03-17, paragraph 11.
[14] Darling, Introduction to Chapter V.

Roscoe Henry Hillenkoetter
(1 May 1947–7 October 1950)

A veteran intelligence officer, DCI Roscoe Hillenkoetter oversaw the transition of the presidentially authorized Central Intelligence Group to the legislatively created CIA. Like Souers and Vandenberg, however, he was a reluctant nominee. He was serving as naval attaché in Paris, his third stint in France, a job that put him at the heart of intelligence collection there (see Document 1952-12-02c for Hillenkoetter's discussion of his role). Against his wishes, he was ordered to return to Washington and succeed Vandenberg. At the time, he was a brand-new flag officer, having received his first star only a few months earlier.

Hillenkoetter was highly regarded by many for his knowledge of and experience in intelligence. A St. Louis native who had graduated with distinction from the US Naval Academy, he had served as assistant naval attaché in Madrid and Lisbon and as naval attaché in Vichy France. In 1942, after recovering from wounds suffered during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he was assigned to the staff of Admiral Chester Nimitz as officer in charge of intelligence for the Pacific area. In that capacity, he set up a Joint Intelligence Committee Pacific Ocean Area (JICPOA), a wartime intelligence network that anticipated by almost half a century today's joint commands. Admiral William Leahy, Hillenkoetter's boss in Vichy France, once observed that no man in the country had a better grasp of the mechanics of foreign intelligence.[15] Hillenkoetter had been one of the candidates to become DCI when the post was created in 1946, but, as noted earlier, Sidney Souers was given the job because of his familiarity with the background and substance of the presidential directive. In 1947, however, Leahy used his clout as chairman of the National Intelligence Authority to ensure that Hillkenkoetter succeeded Vandenberg as DCI.

As DCI, Hillenkoetter inherited the solid work of Souers and Vandenberg, but his legacy also included bickering within the CIG and festering resentment from the service chiefs and, as a consequence, a growing conviction that a collective intelligence body such as the CIG was unworkable. The chiefs considered the DCI to be their equal, if not subordinate, and were annoyed by Vandenberg's insistence that the DCI be the executive agent of the Secretaries of State, War, and the Navy.[16] Unfortunately, "Hilly" had neither Vandenberg's forceful personality nor his seniority in a town that placed a high premium on both,[17] and he was reluctant to make his job more difficult by antagonizing the chiefs. Within two months of taking office, for example, he volunteered to relinquish the authority of the DCI to act as executive agent of the Intelligence Advisory Board (IAB) that had been wrested from the service chiefs by Vandenberg—"to create better feeling" among the IAB agencies.[18] He was similarly compliant when the NSC, in creating the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) to carry out covert operations, set up an operating framework that placed OPC clearly outside the effective control of the DCI. His successor, Walter Bedell Smith, quickly demonstrated that he would not tolerate such an arrangement.

The bureaucratic challenges to his role as DCI and to the standing of the new CIA were not Hillenkoetter's only headaches. In April 1948, a violent riot in Bogota, Colombia, forced the visiting US

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[15] "Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter," *Current Biography*, January 1950, p. 25. Darling devotes several chapters to Hillenkoetter's role in CIG/CIA.
[16] Darling, Introduction to Chapter VI.
[17] Unlike Vandenberg, a scratch golfer, Hillenkoetter shot in the low nineties. His chief recreation was reading history. In Document 1952-12-02b, he notes that reading the history of OSS and its "trials and troubles" helped him when he was DCI. (*Current Biography, p.25*)
[18] Darling, p. 201.

Secretary of State, the widely respected George C. Marshall, to take cover and led to charges that CIA had failed to warn of the potential for trouble. Hillenkoetter and the Agency were publicly exonerated during the resulting Congressional hearings, but, as Document 1950-08-03 illustrates, that vindication did not erase public perception of a CIA intelligence failure. The Bogotazo, as it came to be called, also reflected ongoing tension with the State Department. It was followed by the testing of a Soviet nuclear weapon well before the timeframe in which CIA analysts had predicted and, later still, by what many perceived as twin failures of intelligence in the Koreas—the invasion of South Korea by the North and the entry of China into the conflict. Recent scholarship suggests that the record of CIA's analytic performance does not sustain allegations of failure,[19] but at the time the charges added to perceptions that Hillenkoetter was in over his head and gave opponents of CIA even more ammunition in their bureaucratic struggle.

In January 1948, in part at Hillenkoetter's suggestion, the National Security Council created the Intelligence Survey Group to study and assess changes in the US intelligence system since the end of the war and the passage of the National Security Act. Mathias Correa,[20] William H. Jackson,[21] and OSS notable Allen Dulles were asked to conduct the review. Because the service intelligence bodies refused to cooperate, they ended up focusing primarily on CIA.[22] The report, delivered to the NSC a year later, was scathing across the board. Intelligence estimates, personnel management, and internal organization all came in for criticism. Hillenkoetter was able to rebut many of the assertions in the report, but he could overcome neither the overall impression of institutional inadequacy nor the perceptions of a lack of leadership at the top of the US Intelligence Community.

Hillenkoetter himself was not persuaded of the impartiality of the review. As he recalled, Jackson and Correa spent little time at CIA, and the man characterized as the real inspector was "personally incompatible and obnoxious to very many of the CIA people, including myself." Hillenkoetter also developed such an intense dislike of Jackson that, after Walter Bedell Smith was tapped to succeed him, he refused Smith's request to appoint Jackson DDCI so that he could get up to speed before Smith's arrival. There has also been speculation that Dulles, whose name had been bandied about in discussions of a civilian director for CIA,[23] may have had an ulterior motive in highlighting Hillenkoetter's lack of leadership.[24]

Hillenkoetter was on the defensive for almost all of his tenure,[25] and, after the delivery of the Dulles-Jackson-Correa report, it was clear that he could not continue as DCI. Nevertheless, he lingered in office for another year and a half, in large part because President Truman disliked Secretary of State Lewis Johnson and refused to accept anyone he nominated for the job. With the outbreak of Korean War, however, Hillenkoetter asked to return to the navy, and in October 1950 he was given a command of Cruiser Division 1, Cruiser-Destroyer Force, Pacific Fleet. He left the Agency in the hands of General Walter Bedell Smith—a man who was his opposite in seniority, influence, and demeanor.

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[19] See HCD release, *Baptism by Fire: CIA Analysis of the Korean War*.

[20] Correa, a former New York District Attorney, had worked in OSS counterintelligence in Italy before becoming an aide to Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal dealing with intelligence reform in 1945.

[21] William H. Jackson, a New York lawyer and banker, had been the Assistant Military Attaché for Air in London and Chief of the Secret Intelligence Branch, G-2, European Theater, in World War II. He became DDCI in 1950.

[22] Darling, Introduction to Chapter VIII.

[23] Darling, p. 194.

[24] See Document 1952-12-02b for Hillenkoetter's recollection of setting the inquiry in motion.

[25] See Document 1950-08-03, for his point-by-point rebuttal, sent to President Truman, of charges raised in a New York *Herald-Tribune* article.

For all the criticism of his directorship, Hillenkoetter could point to a major achievement—the CIA Act of 1949. In congressional hearings, he stressed the urgency of passing this enabling legislation, which had been postponed in 1947 to minimize controversy. A key element of the act was a provision that would enable the Agency to expend funds without regard to the laws and regulations that governed the expenditure of government money. The act also gave CIA a number of other significant administrative authorities that would prove valuable to Hillenkoetter's successors.[26]

After completing his Korean War tour, Hillenkoetter commanded the Brooklyn Navy Yard and the Third Military District.[27] He retired from the navy in 1957 and became a director of Electronic and Missile Facilities, Inc. During 1957-1962, he also served on the board of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), a civilian UFO group that enjoyed high visibility and a board stocked with prominent retired military officers. He died of emphysema in New York City on 18 June 1982.

[26] Britt Snider, *The Agency and the Hill: CIA's Relationship with Congress, 1946-2004* (Washington, DC: CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2008), pp. 141-142.
[27] Pforzheimer.