Intelligence Production During The Helms Regime ~~(S)~~

Russell Jack Smith

Editor's Note: The following article originally appeared as a chapter in the biography of Richard Helms that was published by CIA's History Staff in 1993. The author abridged it for Studies in Intelligence.

When Richard Helms became DCI on 30 June 1966, he took command of a mature, smoothly functioning organization for producing finished intelligence. Most of this intelligence was disseminated to the President and his foreign policy advisers in one of two ways: through formal National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs), or in various publications of the Directorate of Intelligence (DI), ranging from daily periodicals such as *The President's Daily Brief* to long-range, in-depth studies of political, economic, and strategic developments worldwide. (U)

Then as now, these two forms of production were not mutually exclusive in either subject or scope. For example, in dealing with the primary preoccupation of the period, the Vietnam war, Helms used both methods to provide intelligence support for the planning and implementation of policy. NIEs, usually thought to be broad in scope, on occasion addressed short-range, contingent matters, while DI memorandums undertook the analysis of long-range trends. (U)

By June 1966, the Office of National Estimates (ONE) was in its 16th year and had become entrenched by personnel and procedures that dated back to the Eisenhower administration. Under the leadership of Sherman Kent, ONE consisted of a board of senior officers and a staff of generalists. ONE followed a routinized procedure for producing NIEs. The staff prepared a draft, based in part on contributions from intelligence analysts in the Departments of State and Defense. The board then reviewed, amended, and approved it and sent it to be coordinated word for word with the other departments. The draft was forwarded to the DCI for approval and finally presented to the United States Intelligence Board (USIB)—a senior panel of representatives from the various intelligence agencies—for coordination, final approval, and distribution. The process normally took weeks, but at special request could be reduced to days or even hours. (U)

By the mid-1960s subjects of the NIEs had become fixed by custom established during the Eisenhower administration, when NIEs were often prepared as annexes to policy papers for the National Security Council (NSC). Some NIEs, particularly those dealing with the USSR, were done annually; others every two or three years. By 1966, ONE was producing about 60 NIEs annually, of which about 75 percent were programmed in advance and 25 percent dealt with emergent conditions. (U)

Richard Helms's career to this point had been exclusively in the Directorate of Plans (now designated the Directorate of Operations), and there was concern that he might, like Allen Dulles, give estimates secondary ranking in his priorities. But from the outset Helms took an active interest in the quality and timeliness of NIEs. At his second chairing of

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USIB, he complemented ONE on the timeliness of NIE 14.3-66, "*North Vietnam's Military Potential for Fighting in South Vietnam*," noting that this subject was of maximum interest to policy people at the moment.[1] At a subsequent meeting he marked on how well a recent Panama estimate had held up during a White House discussion. ~~(S)~~

DCI Helms valued NIEs primarily for their timeliness. Their usual long leadtimes did not always make estimates emerge at the moment they were urgently needed. He constantly struggled to minimize this problem. Once, he told ONE that a paper on Jordan was too urgently needed to permit normal coordination procedure.[2] Later, he prodded Kent to expedite NIE 11-8-67, "*Soviet Advanced Weapons Systems*," because Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had requested its early delivery.[3] The relative sluggishness and inflexibility of the NIE production process caused Helms in his later years to turn more to other modes of production and communication. ~~(S)~~

Within the DI, research and analytic skill had matured by 1966 to a level that gave CIA acknowledged preeminence in intelligence production. In the early years of the Agency, this had not been true, and coordination with the intelligence units of State and Defense had often improved papers. This shift in the balance of analytic expertise, combined with the quick, pointed response of CIA internal production, led Helms to turn increasingly to CIA papers to meet White House and NSC needs. (U)

The DI served as the primary spokesman for the Agency. As the production workhorse of CIA, the DI produced an array of publications ranging from daily periodicals to encyclopedic country surveys. Within the DI, the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) played the major role in production. Other producing offices were Economic Research (OER), Strategic Research (OSR), and Basic and Geographic Intelligence (OBGI). (U)

By 1966, the Vietnam war had become a major US undertaking, and CIA intelligence production pertaining to key issues in the conflict became crucial. Most CIA reporting and analysis was considerably less positive than the prevailing views of President Johnson and the administration. Early in Helms's tenure, a study was done in response to a request from Secretary McNamara for an estimate of North Vietnamese will to continue fighting. Titled "*The Will to Persist*," the study came to the pessimistic conclusion that US efforts in Vietnam as currently planned were not likely to deter the North Vietnamese nor slacken their effort in the foreseeable future. Despite this unwelcome message, Johnson commended the memorandum as a "first-rate job" and requested Helms to brief three key senators—Mansfield, Fulbright, and Russell—on its contents. Helms later concluded that the study failed to alter any senatorial positions: Fulbright vociferously maintained the struggle was a civil war; Mansfield was noncommittal but thought the study "thorough and objective"; and Russell said he shared the study's conclusions.[4] ~~(S)~~

In this same period, McNamara requested the DDI to undertake analysis of the effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER, the US bombing program over North Vietnam. Although first-class competence in logistics existed in OER, this was a remarkable request for a Secretary of Defense to make of a civilian agency, and I felt obliged to ask McNamara whether he wished to have the study coordinated with the Pentagon. "No," he said, "I already know what the Air Force believes. I want to know what your smart guys think." ~~(S)~~

Like the study on Vietnamese morale, the ROLLING THUNDER memorandum arrived at a pessimistic conclusion: CIA logistics analysis demonstrated that ROLLING THUNDER was not significant in slowing the flow of men and materiel into South Vietnam. McNamara was so impressed with the quality of the analysis that he asked the ROLLING THUNDER assessment be repeated on a quarterly basis. Successor studies continued, with Helms's backing, to declare unflinchingly that ROLLING THUNDER was failing in its objective, ultimately judging that the North Vietnamese had succeeded in the teeth of the bombing program to improve their ability to move materiel south by five times. ~~(S)~~

In September 1967, CIA analysts produced another highly controversial study on the war in Indochina—this time a sensitive, tightly held memorandum written by John W. Huizenga, chairman of the Board of National Estimates, and titled "*Implications of an Unfavorable Outcome in Vietnam.*" This study spelled out the view dominant among CIA analysts that a US–South Vietnamese defeat did not necessarily mean a collapse of the rest of non-Communist Southeast Asia. In taking this position, Huizenga was both maintaining a long-held Agency position and challenging the so-called domino theory. ~~(S)~~

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The sharpest controversy over a Vietnam issue arose over the differences between the military, especially the command in Saigon, and CIA over the strength of the enemy force. This came to a head in 1967 during the preparation of an estimate, SNIE 14.3-67, "*Capabilities of the Vietnam Communists for Fighting in South Vietnam.*" The sources of the differences in judgment were many and complex, and they included differing interpretations of equivocal evidence, varying definitions of enemy organizational structure and order-of-battle categories, and differing concepts of the war itself. Such controversies were not new, but it was unprecedented for a civilian, Washington-based intelligence unit to take issue with an American army fighting in the field over the size and composition of the enemy forces that army faced. By tradition, assessing the enemy's order of battle was a strictly military responsibility. ~~(S)~~

DI analysts had wrestled with military analysts for months before the preparation of SNIE 14.3-67. Helms had been made aware of the controversy at the outset of his tenure. Two weeks after becoming DCI, he ordered CIA components to review and improve their procedure for maintaining Vietnam statistics.[5] Six months later, he urged great care in producing figures on Vietnam.[6] But the controversy continued, and in June 1967, Helms directed the DDI to sort out and rationalize differences between CIA and DIA on the number of defections and recruits in Vietnam, one of the points of disagreement.[7] ~~(S)~~

By July 1976, the disagreement was full blown and seemingly irreconcilable. It centered around the number of non-main-force units (that is, guerrillas, people's militia, part-time combatants). The military's estimate was roughly half as large as CIA's. The DDI based its estimates of non-main-force strength largely on the work of Samuel Adams, who sifted figures from a large volume of low-grade material, such as interrogations of prisoners of war.[8] ~~(S)~~

In early July 1967, Helms ordered SNIE 14.3-67 withdrawn from USIB consideration and remanded for further work.[9] The controversy between Washington and Saigon remained unresolved for the rest of July and much of August. A new draft of the SNIE emerged again with the wide-open split retained. Helms felt that a split of this dimension was not useful. He ordered the draft withdrawn from USIB once again and ordered work to be suspended while a team of analysts went to Saigon to make one more attempt to find agreement with MACV. George Carver, DCI Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs, headed a team of CIA and DIA analysts. ~~(S)~~

The Saigon discussions—"pretty warm and pretty bloody," in Carver's words—disclosed that much of the disagreement derived from differing concepts about Vietnamese military organizations. As Carver later explained, "The Vietnamese simply do not wire together their structure the way we do." There also were differences over nomenclature. To CIA analysts, a guerrilla was any person engaged in part-time military activity. To MACV analysts, a guerrilla was a person in a military unit subordinate to a provincial or regional committee. Added to that, "spongy" evidence, especially that based on POW interrogations, offered varying interpretations.[10] ~~(S)~~

Progress toward agreement was slow. There was little disagreement on main-force numbers, but the irregular numbers remained in dispute, with the CIA holding to a number nearly double that of MACV. At this point, Carver proposed to Helms that he meet privately with Gen. William Westmoreland, commander of MACV, and offer a compromise formulation. Helms instructed Carver to proceed according to his own best judgment. ~~(S)~~

In a private session, Carver proposed that the estimate should break the order of battle into three parts. First, for main-force units where there was little dispute, a single figure would be given. Second, for those ancillary components for which there was some hard evidence but not enough to support a single figure, a range of numbers would be used, such as "between 20 thousand and 40 thousand." Finally, those components for which the evidence was too soft to provide an agreed figure would be described in words, not numbers. Westmoreland bought this proposal, and agreement on strength figures for SNIE 14.3-67 had finally been reached. ~~(S)~~

The dispute between CIA and MACV had been so protracted that much of official Washington was aware of it. President Johnson,

impatient, asked Carver, "Can't you people get together? You're all dealing with the same pool of evidence, aren't you?" But the dispute was not an idle bureaucratic rumpus. The differing numbers supported different views of the state of the war. MACV's numbers suggested that progress had been made, while CIA's numbers indicated that a large manpower pool remained untouched. Despite presidential impatience, Helms received no pressure from any source to conform to the military's estimates. As Helms explains, "Johnson, and McNamara particularly, had confidence in what we were trying to do."[11] Even so, Helms felt a strong obligation to arrive at an agreed figure the White House and the Secretary of Defense could use for fighting the war. The Westmoreland-Carver compromise, which Helms endorsed, brought that agreement. ~~(S)~~

In retrospect, it seems that it would have been simplistic and intellectually dishonest to insist that the higher CIA figure for irregular forces was carved in granite, based as it was on flimsy evidence and a complex methodology. As to a suggestion that Helms trimmed his judgment on the matter, Carver says, "I never knew him to trim on a judgment, and certainly ... never did he direct me to trim."[12] ~~(S)~~

The publication of SNIE 14.3-67 marked the end of a battle but not the end of the war. During active discussions between CIA and DIA in March 1968, CIA maintained the position that in the quasipolitical war in Vietnam it was essential to base enemy strength estimates on "the organized opposition," as Carver dubbed it, as opposed to classic order-of-battle numbers. MACV continued to oppose the higher numbers for irregular units, and it was only after a change of administration and numerous sharp exchanges that consensus was reached. In July 1970, Helms instructed me to send a memorandum with the agreed numbers to Henry Kissinger with a copy flagged for President Nixon.[13] ~~(S)~~

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Another sharp disagreement between CIA and MACV on a Vietnam-related issue occurred regarding Cambodia. In July the White House called for improved intelligence collection on Vietnam and Cambodia.[14] Helms pushed for intensified efforts to shore up the "flimsiness" of the Agency's intelligence on these two countries.[15] White House discontent with the Agency's performance came to a head over the issue of the amount of war materiel moving through Sihanoukville into South Vietnam. The OER analysts who had done superb work on ROLLING THUNDER were now working on the Sihanoukville problem and, once again, CIA and MACV went head to head. As with the Vietnam irregular numbers problem, the intelligence reports available were of poor quality. Guided in part by the judgment that the flow down the Ho Chi Minh Trail was approximately sizable enough to account for the enemy materiel in South Vietnam, DI analysts arrived at a tonnage figure for Sihanoukville approximately half MACV's figure. ~~(S)~~

Helms had been aware of the controversy which had begun during the last year of the Johnson administration. Both Carver and I had been instructed to make special efforts during visits to Saigon to find common ground with MACV. We discovered that the military analysts were using materials identical with those in Washington and that those analysts were modest to the point of being tentative about their high figure. The CIA leadership therefore decided that the OER figure was the best that could be established from such inferior materials. ~~(S)~~

The matter remained in this state until [redacted] obtained access to warehouse records listing Communist shipments received. These records showed that tonnage flowing into Sihanoukville and thence into South Vietnam was twice that of the CIA figure, or about that predicted by the MACV analysts. I reported this new "excellent CIA reporting" to Helms in late July 1970 and pointed out that this brought into question the CIA tonnage estimates for Sihanoukville. OER immediately revised its figures, incorporating the new reports, and Helms delivered the new study to Kissinger, together with an explanation of the analytic methodology applied. ~~(S)~~

It was an acutely embarrassing moment for the DCI, and the entire episode served to reinforce the negative impression the Nixon administration held of CIA analysis. To Nixon, Kissinger, and Secretary of Defense Laird, it seemed CIA had made a negative assessment of ROLLING THUNDER, and now had only belatedly agreed with administration's view of the importance of Sihanoukville. The tendentiousness

of this pattern seemed obvious to political figures who were prone to regard anyone outside the White House coterie as partisan. In the atmosphere of the early 1970s, this demonstration of CIA fallibility became an indictment of CIA integrity. ~~(S)~~

Throughout this episode, Helms kept his confidence in the objectivity and competence of his analysts. No reprimands were made for poor performance. The integrity of OER analysts was amply demonstrated by their immediate and complete about-face when solid evidence came to hand. Helms speaks of the episode philosophically:

> *Obviously, I was not pleased about Sihanoukville.... But you've got to take the good with the bad. Anyone who goes into the intelligence business, I think, goes into it with a recognition that God did not give prescience to human beings.... And therefore you've got to assume that you're going to make a lot of bad calls, particularly if you have courage and really reach out there.*[16] ~~(S)~~

Nonetheless, the damage was lasting. As Carver comments, Helms "was vulnerable because in any future major controversy where he really held the line, he would vulnerable to: "Yes, but that's what you said about Sihanoukville."[17] ~~(S)~~

Throughout his tenure, Helms involved himself with a steady stream of NIEs on sensitive matters. In April 1967, he emphasized to USIB members that US base rights overseas were currently of great interest to the administration.[18] In October, he applauded the timely completion of NIE 11-8-67, "*Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack*," characterizing it "a very good paper and important document."[19] That same month, he referred to NIE 31-67, "*India's Domestic Prospects*," as highly useful for the PL-490 (Food for Peace) discussions then in progress and ordered prompt distribution to the Secretary of Agriculture and other officials.[20] He also commended NIE 80/90, "*Potential for Revolution in South America*," for its clear, lively language and its wide range of consensus on a subject so broad[21] and praised NIE 13-9-68, "*Short-Term Outlook in Communist China*" as a good job on a difficult problem."[22] ~~(S)~~

It was Helms's persistent tendency to judge estimates by their responsiveness to the current concerns of top-level officials while the Board of National Estimates concentrated on preprogrammed estimates. With their long preparation times, estimates often dealt with issues of only secondary concern to policy people. Among the 60 or so estimates produced each year, there would inevitable be a number of only perfunctory interest to top echelons. The Board felt that its papers could play a satisfactory role in the support of US policy at several levels of the process, beginning with the individual bureaus in the Department of State. Helms was content that such support should continue, but he strongly believed that the most important job for national estimates was to provide timely illumination of problems for top people making key decisions. Here was where maximum impact and the greatest service could be provided:

> *I tried to give the President, the Vice President, and the Cabinet the impression that the Agency was there to be useful, to be of service, to be helpful. I did my damnedest, as a result of demands placed on the Agency ...to see to it they were carried out and that the Agency put its best foot forward and the papers produced in a timely fashion... this is what we were in business for, and we were going to do this the best we could.*[23] ~~(S)~~

From the beginning, Helms established a pattern of alerting senior officers at his daily morning meetings of the issues on the minds of the President and members of the NSC. He repeatedly requested the DDI, ONE, or DDS&T to prepare studies to meet urgent needs. Once, he advised ONE that the White House felt keen concern over Soviet intentions regarding disarmament and requested a paper on the subject. Another time, he urged that attention be focused on the likely situation in Southeast Asia after the war's conclusion. These efforts by Helms to seek out the current and emergent concerns of key people peaked during the final 18 months of the Johnson administration, when Helms received unprecedented access to the White House inner circle. During the Nixon administration, this trend declined steadily despite Helms's best efforts to maintain it. ~~(S)~~

Nixon White House and CIA relations, never entirely amicable, became extremely testy during an episode that occurred in September 1969 involving a difference of judgment between CIA and the Pentagon over the capabilities of a new Soviet ICBM, designated the SS-9. In 1969, the Nixon administration was

seeking public and Congressional support for the development and deployment of an antiballistic missile defense system, the Safeguard ABM. ~~(S)~~

To provide a rationale for the multi-million-dollar ABM system, Secretary of Defense Laird and the Pentagon seized on the development of the SS-9 as a superweapon, claiming that its triple warheads were multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles (MIRVs). This weapon, MIRV equipped, they claimed, would be able to destroy the bulk of the US Minuteman ICBM force in one strike, thus demonstrating a Soviet intention and program to develop a first-strike capability. A US ABM system was needed to meet this challenge. ~~(S)~~

CIA flatly disagreed with the Pentagon assessment of the SS-9. Agency analysts held that test-derived data showed the SS-9 to have only *unguided* multiple re-entry vehicles (MRVs) and therefore lacked the capability to strike dispersed targets simultaneously, contrary to the Pentagon's claim. Based on this and other considerations, the Board of National Estimates held to its position of several years standing that the USSR was not seeking a first-strike capability. The CIA argument was based on three points: achieving a first-strike capability would impose prohibitive costs; militarily, the task was so difficult as to be almost impossible to achieve; and, finally, Soviet leaders must recognize that the United States would match their efforts step by step and thwart their objective. ~~(S)~~

In March 1969, I alerted the DCI that Laird's testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee attributed capabilities to the SS-9 that CIA data indicated it did not have.[24] Helms pointed out that the strategic threat had become a hot public issue and ordered a review of past NIEs on the subject and a new look at how the CIA view of the SS-9 had been established.[25] ~~(S)~~

As tension continued to mount, Helms told his top command in June that CIA officers were being accused of undercutting Laird's pro-ABM position on the Georgetown cocktail circuit. Helms ordered his deputies to ensure that no CIA officer took a public position, pro or con, on the ABM issue. He also instructed them not to become permanently convinced of the validity of their own judgment but to examine new evidence thoroughly.[26] ~~(S)~~

By June 1969, a new paper addressing SS-9 capabilities was presented to USIB after stormy sessions during coordination created by Laird's firm line on the Soviet buildup. The paper emerged from the USIB meeting laced with dissenting footnotes. The next day, DDCI Robert Cushman, a Nixon appointee, was called to the White House "to explain" the CIA position on the SS-9.[27] Next, Kissinger asked that the officers directly responsible for the CIA position meet with him to discuss it. Helms sent Chairman of the Board Abbot Smith and me to the White House, where Kissinger requested a reordering of the paper and more evidence on the MRV-MIRV issue.[28] Smith rewrote the paper, as requested, but he did not change the CIA position on the MIRV issue or the first-strike question. Despite White House pressure and Laird's angry frustration, Helms gave the paper full backing. ~~(S)~~

The controversy simmered through the summer of 1969. Helms told his officers that "responsible quarters" were charging CIA with built-in bias but made it clear it was not his view.[29] Then Kissinger's office requested that distribution of the revised memorandum be delayed.[30] Meanwhile, frustrated by CIA's refusal to accept that the SS-9 was MIRV equipped, Laird adopted the position that, even if separately unguided, the triple warheads would fall in a predictable pattern which he called a "footprint." In a national broadcast, he claimed these footprints could be plotted in such a way as to destroy completely a Minuteman field. Such rationalizations led DDS&T Carl Duckett to refer to Pentagon analysts as "the inventors."[31] ~~(S)~~

The final chapter of this dispute occurred in September 1969, when the annual estimate on "*Soviet Strategic Attack Forces*," NIE 11-8-69, came under review. This time, having been defeated on the MIRV claim, the Pentagon speculated on another invention, a complex retargeting-after-firing scheme which CIA analysts considered beyond Soviet or even US technical capabilities. Then Laird sent to Helms written comments on NIE 11-8, concentrating his fire on the Soviet first-strike issue which had been stated in condensed form in a single paragraph but was no more than the longstanding CIA position on the question. ~~(S)~~

In addition, a Pentagon official privately passed the word to Helms that the CIA view ran contrary to positions taken publicly by the Secretary of Defense. At the USIB meeting of 4 September, Helms withdrew the questioned paragraph from the estimate.

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Thomas Hughes, the State Department intelligence director, reintroduced the paragraph as a dissenting footnote. ~~(S)~~

Helms's handling of this troublesome episode raises the question whether he had forfeited his right as the top US intelligence officer to speak out on intelligence issues without fear of favor. Without question, the episode was unprecedented. Never before had a Cabinet officer intervened to the point of direct confrontation with a DCI. Even in the paranoid atmosphere of the Nixon administration, where loyal dissent equated with political betrayal, Laird's action was an invasion of an area where CIA estimators had fully as much right to a judgment as Laird. One of the prime purposes of the NIEs on Soviet advanced weapon systems had been to examine Soviet strategic doctrine for those systems. ~~(S)~~

As John Huizenga, ONE Board member observed, "It wasn't artificial language ginned up for this particular controversy. It was entirely in accord with the sort of thing that had been written about Soviet force planning, what motives guided them and so on, as in any other estimate."[32] But to Laird this was not merely an intelligence judgment with a right to exist independently of a contrary policy decision. He could accept no contrary view of his Soviet first-strike claim, not even in a top secret intelligence paper with a distribution limited to official circles. ~~(S)~~

Some of these considerations may seem clearer in retrospect than they did at the time to Helms, who was subjected to pointed and sustained criticism from the President, the NSC adviser, and the Secretary of Defense. Helms had held staunchly to the Agency's view on these questions for six months, despite intense fire. He had yielded only to the direct request by the Secretary of Defense that an offending paragraph be removed. From Helms's recollections, it becomes clear that to him the matter never became a matter of principle involving the jurisdiction of the DCI. For him, the removal of the paragraph was merely part of the process of producing an NIE: "USIB contributed to the process—the estimates staff, individuals in the White House, ... I really don't see an issue here." As for the immediate issue of a Soviet first-strike capability:

> *I don't think there was any reason for me necessarily to assume that all eternal wisdom was vested in the Agency and whatever they said had to be right and what anybody else said was "political pressure." It didn't make any sense to me at all. So I believe that on that occasion and maybe two or three others I insisted that certain adjustments be made in order to accommodate other points of view in Washington.* ~~(S)~~

Helms believed that the Agency's primary task was to provide the President and the NSC with sound intelligence information and analysis. To accomplish this, the Agency had to retain its credibility. CIA estimates could not get through to their audience if their judgments were deemed biased or partisan. To remain credible, to retain access to the minds of the administration he was serving, Helms decided to remove a paragraph that undercut one of that administration's main policy initiatives. From his point of view, that action was consistent with his understanding that a DCI should hear all competing views and present to the President and the NSC the best judgment that could be formed in that light. ~~(S)~~

Not everyone agreed. ONE Board Chairman Abbot Smith said it was "The one and only time a politician caused us to change part of a finished estimate."[35] But he still was reluctant to blame Helms and admires his overall record on NIEs. He recalled, "I protested a little. I didn't protest as much as I might have or should. Perhaps I should have resigned." The paragraph itself was not that important, he explained, because its statement was repeated elsewhere in the estimate. It was deleted, "But I didn't blame him at all. Why should he oppose the Secretary of Defense?"[36] Nevertheless, he regarded the episode as symptomatic:

> *I look upon that almost as a turning point.... The Nixon administration was really the first one in which intelligence was just another form of politics. And that was bound to be disastrous, and I think it was disastrous.*[37] ~~(S)~~

John Huizenga, Abbot Smith's successor, agrees that this episode set a bad precedent. "It was symptomatic of a tendency that developed more strongly later to view the efforts of the Agency on this kind of subject matter as not reliable and lacking in intellectual integrity."[38] But Huizenga is even more reluctant than

Smith to criticize Helms's handling of the affair. "I suppose by the time the affair has reached that sort of crunch where the Secretary of Defense is demanding the removal of language, it's a little late in the game to try and handle the matter so as to avoid confrontational attitudes.[39] In the last analysis, he accepts Helms's view that it was preferable to yield in order to retain Agency credibility for future issues. He credits Helms with acting in accord with honest conviction and a concept of doing what was best for the Agency. ~~(S)~~

But, after reviewing the circumstances, it seems clear the incident had a greater impact upon ONE than Helms realized at the time. He regarded yielding to Laird's insistence as neither damaging to CIA prestige nor establishing a bad precedent. But his two chief lieutenants in ONE did, even though they understood the political situation and the bind he was in. ~~(S)~~

In the aftermath of the controversy, Kissinger requested that all future NIEs on Soviet advanced weapon systems present in full detail the data and evidence underlying the judgments. The resulting estimates were lengthy, technical, and minutely detailed. In effect, Kissinger and the NSC staff had wrestled from ONE the role it had previously played in monitoring Soviet strategic activities. In any event, the White House was pleased with the new-style estimate, and in March 1971 Helms received from President Nixon a letter of commendation regarding NIE 11-8-71.[40] ~~(S)~~

During the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the most highly prized publication for gaining access to the White House was *The President's Daily Brief* (PDB), a short (10-12 page) summary of intelligence from all sources. The PDB was created in response to President Kennedy's request for a "checklist" of significant overnight intelligence. With a circulation of about 10 copies, it was designed to Kennedy's taste both in style and time of delivery, between 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. daily. The publication was changed by the President's request as often as once a week. It created a unique line of communication directly from CIA to the President, with frequent "feedback" from him personally, and was duly cherished by the Agency. ~~(S)~~

With his keen interest in serving CIA information promptly and directly to top leadership, Helms saw the PDB as both valuable and risky. The OCI writers and editors had been encouraged to make the PDB interpretive as well as factual. This meant that a publication speaking as the voice of CIA was reaching the President's ear directly, in effect taking positions on key issues on behalf of the DCI. Confident he could help keep the PDB focused on the President's main concerns, Helms directed that the publication be delivered to him in draft before going to press. Although President Johnson was content with the form of the PDB as he inherited it, he requested that it be delivered at the end of the business day. Reportedly, he read it in bed after the evening news on TV. ~~(S)~~

It became apparent soon after the Nixon administration took office that the President was not reading the PDB. Helms sent me in my capacity as the DDI to discuss with Kissinger what changes could be made, whether in format, scope, or timing, that would make the publication useful to the President. I met in Kissinger's basement office with Kissinger and Attorney General John Mitchell, a Nixon confident and adviser who chanced to be present. ~~(S)~~

The problem with the publication, Mitchell said, is that it mixes facts and interpretation (the style requested by President Kennedy). "The President is a lawyer," said Mitchell, "and a lawyer wants facts." I subsequently ordered OCI to separate facts and comment, reserving all comment until after the facts had been stated. There was no evidence that this change had any effect on the President's reading habits. ~~(S)~~

The principle vehicle for putting forth Agency judgments on major developments was the CIA Intelligence Memorandum. These studies varied in length from two or three pages to several hundred and were used chiefly for dealing with important issues when the Agency's information and analysis had special pertinence. As it became increasingly difficult to reach coordinated judgments in the NIEs, especially on issues relating to Vietnam, there was a growing trend toward turning to the CIA Intelligence Memorandums for expressing Agency views. ~~(S)~~

President Johnson had placed considerable confidence in DCI Helms's judgment ever since the Agency's triumphant handling of the six-day Arab-Israeli war, predicting both its duration and its outcome. Nonetheless, he did not always accept the information or analysis Helms provided. The Vietnam war demonstrates this many times. ~~(S)~~

Another such instance occurred in August 1968 in relation to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. DI analysts had been watching closely the growing tension, and OSR, under

Bruce Clarke, observed in late July that the maneuvers of the Red Army in Eastern Europe were swinging in steadily widening circles. On one of those swings, OSR analysts indicated, the Soviet forces might suddenly take a straight line toward Czechoslovakia. ~~(S)~~

At the time, no solid evidence suggested that the USSR had made a decision to use force against Czech dissent. Before meeting with Johnson's Tuesday lunch group one August day, Helms checked with OCI chief Richard Lehman for a last-minute update on the situation. The only new item available was a UPI press report that the Soviet Politburo, usually on vacation in August, was meeting in the Kremlin. Believing that such an extraordinary meeting might involve a major decision, possibly in relation to Czechoslovakia, Helms decided to warn the President that the Soviets were probably about to cross the Czech border with armed force. ~~(S)~~

Johnson rejected this warning summarily. "Oh, no, I don't think you're right about that. They're talking about us." Helms checked out this mysterious comment with a presidential assistant and learned that in the works was an imminent joint Washington-Moscow announcement of a forthcoming conference on arms control, one that might involve a Moscow trip by Johnson. Helms insisted to the assistant, who had taken minutes of the meeting, that his comments on the Soviets invading Czechoslovakia be recorded. "They're in there," he was assured. ~~(S)~~

Reports came into Headquarters that evening that the invasion had begun. Helms was notified that an emergency NSC meeting would convene in a few hours. At the meeting, as Helms later observed, approximately two minutes were devoted to discussion of the invasion and the ensuring hour spent on "figuring out how to kill the joint announcement" planned for the next day. "In other words, how they were going to tidy up a package that had just dropped on the floor."[4] To Helms's recollection, no one remembered to thank him for having given warning eight hours earlier of an impending Soviet invasion. ~~(S)~~

"...Helms found it useful on many occasions to present Agency intelligence in person in order to deliver it in timely fashion to the right officials."

As the Czech crisis indicates, producing sound information and analysis was only half the job. CIA publications did their part, but Helms found it useful on many occasions to present Agency intelligence in person in order to deliver it in timely fashion to the right officials. He possessed a mind that dealt quickly with complex substantive issues, spoke easily and with confidence, and conveyed no-nonsense assurance of sincerity and objectivity. These skills enable the DCI to bring CIA information and judgment to highly placed officials who might not otherwise have been reached at all. (U)

In particular, Helms relied heavily on informal meetings with Cabinet members for the discussion of substantive intelligence matters. During the Johnson administration, he strove to maintain close relations with the Department of Defense, where the issues of Soviet strategic capabilities and the Vietnam war were of major concern. McNamara received a steady stream of CIA periodicals and memorandums, but in addition he felt a need for face-to-face sessions where he could ask questions and probe judgments. ~~(S)~~

Helms supplemented his own meetings with the Secretary of Defense by assigning George Carver to meet regularly with him. A routine evolved where Carver met with McNamara once a week for between 20 minutes and an hour and a half. McNamara found this custom so useful he recommended it to Clark Clifford, his successor. Clifford retained the procedure with Carver and recommended it in turn to his successor, Melvin Laird. ~~(S)~~

After the high points of close access and rapport with President Johnson and the deterioration of the DCI-President relationship with President Nixon, Helms continued as best he could to provide CIA intelligence support to the White House. The final two years of his tenure were free of major disputes with the Nixon administration. The NSC staff had established channels and procedures to its satisfaction for the receipt of CIA intelligence production. Having remodeled Soviet advanced weapons NIEs to his specification, following the SS-9 dispute, Kissinger insisted that estimates contain optional analyses and exhaustive displays of the evidence underlying each judgment. This was supposed to apply to CIA memorandums as well, and Helms directed that Agency papers be tailored accordingly. ~~(S)~~

In his years as DCI, Helms endured several rough passages where the

Agency's role as objective gatherer and reporter of intelligence came into direct opposition with administration judgments and policies. Amidst the intense disputes of the Johnson and Nixon years, CIA's contribution could easily have become irrelevant. Helms believed that the Agency's relevance and survival depended upon his ability to maintain its role in policy support, and he struggled to keep CIA production responsive to the arbitrary demands of the White House. (U)

The atmosphere of distrust that pervaded the Nixon White House made this task more difficult. Helms had to be careful not to seem biased or committed to positions antithetical to the administration. When obliged by such circumstance to compromise, Helms made the greater good of the Agency his first priority. ~~(C)~~

NOTES

1. USIB minutes, 7 July 1966.
2. USIB minutes, 17 November 1966.
3. Morning Meeting Minutes, 13 October 1967.
4. DCI Chrono file, 21 August 1966.
5. Morning Meeting Minutes, 13 July 1966.
6. Morning Meeting Minutes, 12 January 1967.
7. Morning Meeting Minutes, 13 June 1967.
8. Many thought that Adams's zeal in pursuit of accurate numbers for the "people's militia" became obsessive later, when he sought to use his research to refute the entire order of battle produced by the military. Still later, after the CIA chain of command had given Adams several opportunities to present his case, he took his cause to the public media and charged Helms and others with deliberate malfeasance.
9. Morning Meeting Minutes, 1967.
10. Author's interview of George Carver, Washington, DC, 13 May 1982.
11. Author's interview of Richard Helms, Washington, DC, 3 June 1982.
12. Carver interview, 20 May 1982
13. Morning Meeting Minutes, 6 July 1970.
14. Morning Meeting Minutes, 10 September 1969.
15. Morning Meeting Minutes, 12 May 1970.
16. Helms interview, 3 June 1982
17. Carver interview, 20 May 1982.
18. USIB Minutes, 13 April 1967.
19. USIB Minutes, 26 October 1967.
20. USIB Minutes, 12 October 1967.
21. USIB Minutes, 28 March 1968.
22. USIB Minutes, 23 May 1968.
23. Helms interview, 3 June 1992.
24. Morning Meeting Minutes, 21 March 1969.
25. Morning Meeting Minutes, 4 April 1969.
26. Morning Meeting Minutes, 4 June 1969.
27. Morning Meeting Minutes, 13 June 1969.
28. Abbott Smith memorandum cited in Church Committee Report, Book I, p. 78.
29. Morning Meeting Minutes, 20 June 1969.
30. Morning Meeting Minutes, 30 June 1969.
31. It is significant to note that the CIA position held throughout this stormy episode that the USSR did not have a MIRV in 1969 and would be technologically incapable of producing one before 1974 was borne out when the Soviets tested their first MIRV in 1974.
32. Author's interview of John Huizenga, 10 May 1982.
33. Church Committee, Book I, P. 79.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Author's interview of Abbot Smith, 29 April 1982.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. Huizenga interview, 10 May 1982.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Morning Meeting Minutes, 11 March 1971.
41. Helms interview, 21 April 1982.

