

# American Intelligence and the Tricentennial

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*Director, DIA, looks at the future of intelligence*

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Some years ago, a young President of the United States told the American people, "This generation has the power to be the best or the last." Much has happened since John Kennedy told us that, and depending on how you measure a generation — I'm never quite sure where one begins or ends — one more may have come along. But his words are still valid — and they are our challenge today, regardless of where we are located as individuals in the framework of American society.

The best or the last — which will it be? You are aware of the dire predictions of some that this will be the *last* for America. It seems that before this nation ever began as a shining example, a British historian, Alex Tyler, offered the theory that a democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government — that it contains within it the seeds of its own destruction. He theorized that a democracy would last only until the voters discover that they can vote themselves benefits from the national treasury. That discovery would be followed by the election of those who promise to expand the benefits until the point is reached when the nation goes bankrupt. Not a pleasant thought.

Now couple that with another theory — this one based on historical research which suggests that the average life expectancy of a great

civilization is right at 200 years. Those who hold these theories would turn our bicentennial birthday into a wake. I hope you agree with me that the title of the De Seversky book a number of years back still is more apropos — recall he wrote about an *America: Too Young To Die*.<sup>1</sup>

America has made it to 200 years — through good times and bad — in sickness and in health — through inflation and times of prosperity — in peace and in war. We have survived to celebrate this bicentennial year. But the question I keep hearing more and more — do we dare plan a tricentennial?

Nor does the question seem to be asked in the calm of logic — or in the context of historical perspective. Rather we hear it in the roar of the doomsayers — the loud clamor of those who think they see the end of this nation — see it slip to number two and then continue a downward trend. Amid this weeping and gnashing, it is sometimes hard to pick out the quiet sounds of the more confident — especially the voices of those who have walked this way before — who carry with them wisdom distilled from problems of their day. Perhaps, for a moment, we should turn the volume down on the shrill and worried voices of the present, so that we can listen better as our past talks to us.

And those past voices do talk to us today. Listen. Can you hear Thomas Paine? He looked around his world and he too saw "crisis." He characterized those days as "the times that try men's souls." He forecast that there would be drop-outs when he said "the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this crisis shrink from the service of their country." Listen as Paine speaks to us today as he adds for all who hang in there:

Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated.<sup>2</sup>

Now eavesdrop on a conversation in Philadelphia. When the discussion of what kind of nation America should be was over, a woman is reported to have asked Franklin, "What kind of government have you given us?"

And Franklin, reflecting on the frailty of the new nation, and predicting the doomsayers heckling even to today, answers: "A republic, madam, if you can keep it."

Listen to Franklin today — "A republic, ladies and gentlemen, but only if we can keep it."

Not all of our forefathers reeked of confidence that the nation would see a centennial, let alone a bicentennial. John Adams, close enough to the dream to have thought better, is speaking. Hear him prophesy: "There never was a democracy that did not commit suicide." Disturbing? It shouldn't be — he just presented the other side of Franklin's coin — that of the *need* for us in the U.S.A. If the nation is to survive, Franklin told us, it's up to us to keep it; if it is to die, it will be we who kill it — the suicide that Adams speaks of. Perhaps what those early voices are saying to us is that this happening called America cannot be taken from us — but we do have the power to give it away. You may not have thought about this, but that is a distinction the founding fathers didn't want to allow when they wrote the Declaration of Independence. When Jefferson penned the original draft, he wrote of *inalienable* rights, but the revision committee — Samuel Adams, Franklin, and Jefferson himself changed it to *unalienable*. The distinction is significant. Inalienable means it can't be taken away without consent of the possessor, but he may sell it, abandon it, or give it away. Unalienable is now an archaic word, but in Jefferson's time it had a precise meaning and was commonly used. It meant that which could neither be taken away nor given away. Let's just be sure we hear those voices of the past as they tell us of an America that should not be able to be taken nor given away.

There are nation-states who have not listened to the voices in their own history, and we know well what happened to them. It is sometimes helpful for us to recall that when this nation was founded, there was a Holy Roman Empire, France was ruled by a King, China by an Emperor, Russia by an Empress, Japan by a Shogun — Germany and Italy weren't even nations, just conglomerates of bickering principalities — Venice was a Republic. Now in the time it has taken for America to grow, all of those ruling regimes and scores of others have passed into history.

Some Americans have listened, and some are listening today, but it seems that there have always been those who wonder "How long can it last?" Can you decipher the accent as the French historian Guijot asks the American poet, James Russell Lowell how long the American

Republic can last? You shouldn't have any trouble with Lowell's answer: "It will last as long as the ideals of its founders remain dominant." And that places the burden not on impersonal outside forces, but squarely back on us, it puts the monkey on our backs. The voices from our history convey one major overriding theme, "It's up to us."

Please indulge me when I say to you, a group of tried and proven American patriots, that I hope the message of my voice comes through loud and clear today. It is a statement of conviction. It says simply that America is alive and well — and will stay that way *until* Americans choose otherwise — and nobody consciously wants to make a choice like that.

I believe that you as former members of our nation's intelligence arm will agree that we can see the potential still for some *interim* decisions and *contemporary* actions which might result in some bad choices for the future, perhaps unconscious ones. I speak about some fundamental concerns I know you share about what has happened in the U.S. foreign intelligence community.

From December 1974 around to late Spring 1976 we were being treated to daily and nightly horror stories and exposés about the U.S. foreign intelligence community on our television sets and in our newspapers and magazines. We were charged with nearly every offense in the book, from "massive" domestic spying to being unable to warn our nation of impending attack.

All too often it seemed only the accusations and allegations were making headlines, and the denial and truth of the matter seemed to be played down. I can only hope that the American public is not going to come to believe unfounded allegations simply because they get repeated so often.

We must face the fact that there were issues to be faced up to. And we did face up, but to a degree we were caught up in the power dynamics of the checks and balances system at work, in a sort of political tug of war.

I must reiterate that a number of the concerns expressed regarding our past and potential abuses were real and had to be dealt with.

But the competence and effectiveness of the U.S. foreign intelligence effort were coming under attack. There was the charge of intelligence failures, that our intelligence is not worth the cost — in whatever terms.

That was — and is — the nexus of the problem.

Now, I firmly believe we are coming out all right in the end — with better, more explicit legislation, effective congressional oversight with tighter procedures. The rights of citizens under the first and fourth Constitutional Amendments continue to be protected, and we are going on.

There was a great danger in the interim period, however. Some of it may still exist.

- There was and remains the fear of unnecessary revealing and thereby compromise of sensitive intelligence, sources and methods.
- The signs of approaching crises conceivably could have been missed because of senior management's preoccupation with other matters. We still worry on this score.
- There was a deteriorating morale situation throughout the intelligence community. And components of the community seem to me yet to be somewhat more at sea than they should be.
- Further, we are still concerned lest overly proscriptive legislation be developed for the future and so constrain our activities that we cannot carry them out effectively.

In essence, our job in the next few months is to emerge from this crisis in intelligence with a workable institution without undergoing irreparable damage in the process.

I am certain that no one in this room doubts the need for America to have a strong intelligence service. Some few in our country apparently do doubt it. Others say they believe in one, but they would so expose and unwittingly hamstring it that it could not operate effectively. Still others, who favor an effective intelligence service, question whether our service is properly controlled and properly focused. We must listen carefully to the voices of the latter.

Some responsible people feel the intelligence community itself has been the cause of some of these doubts. The old traditions of total secrecy and silence have been under attack because many fear that they have been used to cover abuses. Of course we cannot condone abuses. We must not call upon secrecy to hide failures or wrongs in our past.

But when, for example, an operation that involved three agents is

proclaimed as "massive;" when the normal loan of CIA employees to other government agencies at the latter's request is called "infiltration;" or when conspiracy theorists mouth CIA complicity in the assassination of President Kennedy despite flat and factual denials, then the American people are understandably troubled.

We don't want that. We want and must have their implicit confidence. Recall that the United States intelligence community itself brought out and exposed the missteps and improprieties of the past 28 years. In 1973, the Director of Central intelligence set out clear directives that any activities not in full compliance with the laws of the United States would cease immediately. They stopped. As many of you know, we ourselves came forward and gave our investigators the results of our own self-examinations and what we had done about our findings. Paradoxically, instead of improved confidence we were being hit over the head with facts that we ourselves provided *voluntarily*.

Recall that against the service our intelligence has rendered the nation over the past 28 years, those improprieties were truly few and far between. Less — I would submit — than any other agency of government. We here recognize that such missteps as there were must be looked at in the context of the times. For example, it is not easy to explain to people who didn't live through it, just what Pearl Harbor meant to America and the strength of our national commitment never to be taken by surprise again. It is equally hard to recall the days of the Cold War and the strength of our commitment to stopping "the Communist menace."

Times change. The national point of view changes. Some of our national values may change. We cannot, however, use our changed values to make scapegoats of the dedicated men and women of our intelligence community who have served and continue to serve their country in an anonymous and demanding craft.

Of course, America cannot and must never allow abuses in its intelligence services. Abuses must be identified and ended. We *have* identified and ended them. The people have been told about them. We told them. Now they must ask themselves whether it serves their interests — America's interests — to expose intelligence secrets and activities that are valid, yes, critical, and that have nothing to do with "abuses."

We cannot oppose investigation. On the contrary, we welcome it. But just as intelligence must be responsible, investigation must be responsible. The investigations of the intelligence community had as their primary aim recommendations for executive and legislative actions to ensure that American intelligence fits American standards.

The laws that created most of our national security structure were purposely left vague back in 1947. The Director of Central Intelligence has recommended tightening those laws so that the charter of the CIA, for example, specifically refers to "foreign" intelligence. Other changes may still be desirable to clarify lines of command and authority within and among members of the intelligence community. Again, we welcome such changes.

As I said, American citizens have every right to expect their intelligence service to be responsible, to protect them and their country. But senseless exposure of America's true intelligence secrets can cause great damage. Our adversaries find it all too easy to close the chinks in their armor when we obligingly make them public. As the former Director of Central intelligence has said, "Security must not be sacrificed for sensationalism. Protection must not be jeopardized by publicity."

The revelation of true intelligence secrets makes exciting reading in the morning paper. It is soon forgotten by most readers, but not by our adversaries. Enormously complex and expensive technical intelligence collection systems can be countered. Need I remind this particular audience that dedicated and courageous men and women who risk their lives to help America can be exposed and destroyed? I don't think the American people want this to happen especially when our adversaries dedicated to the proposition that we eventually must be defeated — are hard at work. But Americans must understand or they will inadvertently cause this to happen.

Instead they hear a lot about "intelligence failures." They've been told that the American taxpayer is not getting his money's worth for his intelligence dollar. They've been told that American intelligence cannot warn of imminent attack.

We know the truth of the cliché "Victory has a thousand fathers, defeat is an orphan." And our version: "Our defeats and mistakes are trumpeted; our successes pass unnoticed and unknown."

Somehow, though, Americans have got to come to realize that America

has good intelligence — the best in the world. It is time for them to know our country *is* safe from a sneak attack. It is time for them to know our country is getting a bargain for its intelligence buck. It is time for them to know the American intelligence record is studded with success after success.

It is time for them to know:

- That American intelligence spotted the Soviet nuclear missiles being delivered to Cuba in 1962 and supported the President as he worked through 13 nightmarish days to force their removal;
- That American intelligence gave seven years' warning on the development of the Moscow anti-ballistic missile system;
- That American intelligence pinpointed eight new Soviet inter-continental ballistic missile systems and evaluated the development of each three or more years before it became operational;
- That two major new Soviet submarine programs were anticipated well before the first boats slid down the ways;
- That we knew the status and design of two Soviet aircraft carriers well before the front one put to sea for sea trials;
- That American intelligence successfully monitors and predicts trends in oil prices and tracks the flow of petro dollars. That these things impinge on their pocketbook and on their everyday life;
- That American intelligence each year turns to the key task of assessing world crop prospects, which has to do with the price of the market basket we all must buy, with the world food problem;
- That American intelligence monitors compliance with the strategic arms limitation agreements. We do not have to estimate. We do not have to guess. We *know* whether our possible adversaries are keeping these agreements — that this is a new job for intelligence: keeping the peace and restraining the arms race;
- They have to know that the bold technical thinkers; the courageous people on hazardous duty in strange lands; the gifted analysts puzzling out mysterious political and military moves made by unpredictable people in far and closed societies are more than craftsmen — they are dedicated, talented artists.

Intelligence is more than a craft. It is more than a science. It is indeed an art. We do not have a crystal ball, and we can't yet provide a copy of the 1980 World Almanac. And we may not predict the given hour of a particular coup or revolutionary more than a weatherman can make a

flat prediction that it will start raining at precisely 0920 hours tomorrow. We can't tell what God is going to do on Tuesday of next week, especially when he hasn't made up his mind. But we probably can tell when he's getting mad. You and I know all of this — but the American people don't, and they are confused. They don't realize our primary function is to provide the leadership of this nation with the deepest possible understanding of the military, political, social, and economic climate of countries that affect vital American interests. Our mission is to see that our leaders know about what may happen in the world beyond our borders and about the forces and factors at work there. The American taxpayer should know we do this job well, despite our problems.

In fact, when they see a statue of Nathan Hale — like the one in front of the CIA Headquarters building — they recall his voice from the past. But they don't go beyond his words enough to take a close look at him. For that shows his hands are tied behind him and his legs are bound with a rope, just as he was bound before the Redcoats hung him for attempting to steal their secrets.

They, not fully understanding, accept that statue as the way it should be. Somehow we have got to secure their support *to help us get the ropes off of Nathan Hale*. Failure to do that would be to neglect the voices from our past, to jeopardize our freedom, and to endanger our tricentennial.

And behind all this is that powerful foreign adversary, ready to take advantage of our missteps. Let's talk for just a moment about him.

What I say here is my own opinion based on personal experience, which comes from living with him, of what the other guy feels about us:

The Soviets have profound respect for the United States, especially for our ability to produce in an economic sense. They have been pursuing Stalin's will-of-the-wisp goal of "catching up with and surpassing the U.S." in productivity ever since the 1930s and still have not attained it.

The Soviets distrust the U.S. and are basically afraid of us. They picture us as killing our presidents, assassinating our minority political leaders, demonstrating in the streets, criticizing ourselves, and slashing at each other without mercy. As one Soviet general put it to me, "You Americans are crazy. You are a temperamental and immature society. No one can predict how you may react on a given occasion." And, historically, they have guessed wrong, as during the Cuban Missile Crisis. They also mis-

guessed us in Indo-China and feel we vastly over-reacted to the problems posed for us there. In a sense, our very unpredictability may act as a certain deterrent for them.

The Soviets seem to believe their own propaganda that we are disintegrating as a society, but they worry about what we may do in our death throes. At the same time, they will not hesitate to do whatever they can discreetly to hasten our demise. Their strategy is to press us politically, economically, psychologically wherever we are weak and where the risks are slight, particularly in the low-intensity conflict arena in the underdeveloped world; to bleed us and to embarrass us, while striving for across-the-board military superiority, especially in strategic weapons systems — in other words, a form of nuclear blackmail.

There is a definite dichotomy — if not dichotomy — in Soviet attitudes toward us, as one perceives them from a close-up position in Moscow.

a) In face-to-face contacts, the Soviets profess a desire for our friendship, want the benefits of trade with us, are sensitive regarding our relationships with China. Some of the leading Soviet military figures have made statements in private conversations to the effect that "if we could only really get together and reach a true common understanding, we could take care of all the world's problems. We could decide everything."

b) The Soviets respect us but are deathly afraid of us. They further are inclined to overestimate our military capability and to worry that we could be reckless in employing it.

c) Finally, they still view us as the ideological enemy of long standing, which means that an adversary relationship between the U.S. and the USSR continues to exist and is not likely soon to go away.

With that as a reality, we cannot afford to ignore the voices of the past, we cannot permit a shackled Nathan Hale — nor can we as professional intelligence officers really fully retire until we have done all we can to ensure that America understands the reality, hears the voices, and unties the hands of Nathan Hale. For it may very well be on these things that the best generation or the last generation depends.

My good friends, I know many of you personally — have worked with you and for some of you — know your great abilities and your dedication. You are, collectively, an important voice today. One of these days I hope to join you and together we will go on saying what America must continue to hear. In the meantime, you have my total respect for the contributions you have made in your lifetimes and continue to make today. In recognition, I block my heels and give you my snappiest and proudest salute. Thank you.

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## Footnotes

\*From an address to the Association of Retired Intelligence Officers (ARID), Reston, Va., 17 September 1976.

1 Alexander P. De Seversky (McGraw-Hill, New York, London, 1961).

2 Opening paragraph, *The Crisis*, 1776.

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