

A Cure for the CIA's Disease

By Melvin A. Goodman

In 1986, CIA Director William Casey and his deputy, Robert Gates, created a flawed Counter-Terrorism Center. Casey and Gates believed that the Soviet Union was responsible for every act of international terrorism (it wasn't), intelligence analysts and secret agents should work together in one office (they shouldn't), and the CIA and other intelligence agencies would share sensitive information (they won't). The Center never understood the connection between Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, the coordinator of the 1993 World Trade Center attack, and the al Qaeda organization until it was too late. And the Center expected an attack abroad, not at home. Last year's WTC attack exposed the inability of analysts and agents to perform strategic analysis, challenge flawed assumptions, and share sensitive secrets. The intelligence community claims that it must protect sources and methods, but that is not the issue. Each agency is trying to protect its position in the bureaucratic competition for access to the president. So what needs to be done?

First, the CIA must separate its secret operational activity from its analytical work or continue running the risk of tainted and incomplete intelligence. The CIA's heavy policy involvement in the war on terrorism will have a direct impact on the clandestine collection of intelligence and will be dominated by worst-case assessments of the problem. Walter Lippmann reminded us 70 years ago that it is essential to "separate as absolutely as it is possible to do so the staff which executes from the staff which investigates." His admonition is a good place to start for revamping the Counter-Terrorism Center. Last week's firing of the director of the center is merely a first step.

Second, the CIA must revamp both its directorate for intelligence and its directorate for operations. The intelligence directorate has

become far too large and unwieldy and, because of its major failures during the past decade, has become permeated with the fear of being wrong or second-guessed. The directorate lacks people with language skills and the regional expertise needed for dealing with post-cold war intelligence challenges. The operations directorate relies too heavily on junior people abroad, working out of U.S. embassies with State Department covers. The directorate must assume greater risks by assigning experienced people abroad without diplomatic cover. Significant gaps in clandestine collection can be filled with greater reliance on foreign liaison intelligence services, which provided sufficient intelligence to prevent last year's attacks in Washington and New York. Just as we shouldn't waste the time of the FBI doing background investigations on government officials, we shouldn't waste the time of clandestine agents collecting non-essential information that is available from open sources.

Third, we must demilitarize the intelligence community and the CIA, which has become merely another support agency for the war fighter. The mismatch between the tools of the past and the missions of the future has given rise to an increased militarization of the thirteen intelligence agencies. The Pentagon controls 90% of the budget, personnel, and collection requirements of the intelligence community, which has led directly to such failures as missing the Indian nuclear tests in 1998. This failure led to the egregious failure to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Retired General Brent Scowcroft, who has conducted a comprehensive review of the intelligence community for President Bush, favors transferring budgetary and collection authority from the Pentagon to a new office that reports directly to the director of central intelligence, but Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and

high-ranking members of the Senate Armed Forces Committee oppose this move.

Fourth, we need to revive congressional oversight of the intelligence community. The House and Senate intelligence committees have done nothing in the past ten years to reverse the precipitous decline of the CIA, and congressional leaders have proclaimed themselves “advocates” for the intelligence community instead of overseers. During this period, there has been an astonishing exchange of personnel between congressional intelligence staffs and the agencies they oversee, including the

post of director of central intelligence and director of CIA.

Finally, it is time to ask why CIA Director George Tenet, facing the greatest political challenge of his stewardship of the intelligence community, is in the Middle East on a feckless policy mission. Former Secretary of State George Shultz told his own intelligence director in 1986, in the wake of arguments over policy toward the Philippines, to “stop being an advocate or get out of the intelligence loop.” He told CIA deputy director Gates in 1987 that the CIA had developed “its own strong policy views” and had given President

Reagan “bum dope.” Apparently, the CIA has returned to the policy world, which calls into question the kind of dope it is willing to provide to the White House.

(Melvin A. Goodman is senior fellow of the Center for International Policy and national security analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus, and was a senior Soviet analyst at the CIA from 1966 to 1986. His most recent books are The Phantom Defense: America’s Pursuit of the Star Wars Illusion and The Wars of Eduard Shevardnadze.)

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