

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

CIA Faces Hard Structural Choices

Soviet dissolution and transition in US intelligence leadership prompt rethinking of agency

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= WASHINGTON =

FOR months, debating the future of the United States' vast spy apparatus has been a favorite pastime for arm-chair intelligence quarterbacks.

As it currently stands, intelligence work on the Soviet Union accounts for fully half of the US intelligence budget. But the cold war is over, and the time has come to rethink both the mission and structure of the US intelligence community, analysts agree.

Some suggestions have been highly controversial. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D) of New York, for example, has proposed disbanding the Central Intelligence Agency and parceling out its functions to the State Department and other agencies. The senator acknowledges that he has thrown the idea out not because he thinks it might happen, but to spark discussion - which it has.

Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of Central Intelligence under President Carter, wants more focus on economic intelligence to boost America's competitiveness; his suggestion is fraught with complications, such as how the government would decide which companies to help.

Two events have thrust discussion of America's intelligence future from the theoretical to the here and now: the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the transition in the leadership of the intelligence community.

At his confirmation hearings last week, intelligence-chief nom-

inee Robert Gates laid out the parameters of his vision for US intelligence in the post-cold-war era.

The challenge for the CIA and US intelligence overall, he said, "is to adapt to this changing world, not just in places like the Soviet Union and Europe, but to the very idea of change, the idea that for years to come, change and uncertainty will dominate international life, that the unthinkable and the not-even-thought-about will be commonplace."

Structural changes

If confirmed, Mr. Gates said, he will recommend a top-level administration effort to identify the nation's intelligence needs for the next 10 to 15 years. Then he would be able to recommend how the intelligence community could meet those needs.

One common structural suggestion is to create the post of "director of national intelligence" to enhance the collaboration of the nation's numerous intelligence services: the CIA; the Defense Intelligence Agency; the National Security Agency, which handles eavesdropping; the agency that operates intelligence satellites (and whose name is classified); and the intelligence services of the Treasury, Energy, and Commerce departments.

Currently, the director of Central Intelligence is both director of the CIA and nominally director of all the nation's intelligence services.

In his testimony, Gates listed some of the intelligence community's top concerns:

■ Nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons proliferation.

■ Political instability in the third world, which challenges the US "politically, economically, sometimes militarily, and always morally."

■ International narcotics cartels.

■ Regional conflict and "its terrorist stepchildren, as in the Middle East."

■ The remnants of the Soviet empire, which contain "the seeds of grave instability, chaos, and civil war." There is also the Soviet nuclear arsenal, containing almost 30,000 warheads.

Though US intelligence services already focus on all these areas, the question will be how to set priorities. The key, say intelligence analysts, will be flexibility.

"They've got to be prepared to play a fast-break basketball game," says George Carver Jr., an ex-CIA official and intelligence specialist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

A major factor in enhancing the capabilities and morale of the CIA is to rebuild its corps of spies, Gates says. In the late '70s, "human intelligence" was de-emphasized in favor of satellite and other electronic intelligence-collection methods. Since then, US intelligence has failed to foresee a number of crucial developments - including Iraq's invasion of Kuwait - and under the most recent director, Judge William Webster, has already been expanding its human spying.

Gates also cited a need for a better system of getting intelligence information to policymakers.

"We publish too much intelligence of questionable relevance to policymakers," he said. "Less

and better should be the rule."

On this point, Gates may encounter resistance within the agency, says intelligence expert Roy Godson. Traditionally, a CIA analyst's job has been to describe simply what is happening. What Gates has been pushing for is "opportunity-oriented analysis" - information that is useful toward advancing a policy.

"The danger is that people will see it as politicization," says Dr. Godson. In fact, what it means is that when the US has a goal, such as getting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein out of office, CIA operatives should collect information that relates specifically to that purpose and analysts should interpret the information to explain how to achieve that goal.

Old-guard resistance

Another Gates proposal that will be controversial within the intelligence community is his plan to expand on Judge Webster's policy of "openness," designed to rebuild public support for the agency in the wake of the Iran-contra scandal.

Former deputy CIA director Bobby Ray Inman, one of Gates's strongest backers, said at the hearings Friday that Gates could have a rough time in his first few months as intelligence chief.

As a bright young analyst who was promoted over many of his superiors to top spots in the agency, Gates gained a reputation for being a taskmaster.

Inman described "substantial apprehension" among some of the older ranks at the CIA that Gates "will move too fast, too swiftly, and too brutally for their careers."