Did intelligence matter in the Cold War?

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Introduction

By Olav Riste

The articles in this issue of *Forsvarsstudier* emanate from an international conference held in Oslo in 2005 on the topic "Intelligence in Waging the Cold War: NATO, The Warsaw Pact and the Neutrals, 1949–1990". The conference was organised by the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies and the international project on the Parallel History of NATO and the Warsaw Pact and featured two pioneering ventures. First, as indicated by the title, it brought together intelligence historians from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Second, the organisers decided it was time for intelligence historians to make a first attempt to assess the role played by intelligence in the overall development of the Cold War.[1] In spite of the great limitations imposed by the demands of secrecy – some of them perfectly reasonable, but many less so – research into intelligence in the Cold War has made remarkable progress during the last fifteen years, especially in the West. In the countries of the Warsaw Pact, headway has been more spasmodic, particularly since the archives of the former Soviet Union remain closed to outsiders.

The organisers of the conference therefore decided to challenge two prominent intelligence scholars to put to paper their assessments of the contribution that western intelligence made to the course of events that we now call the Cold War. In other words, we wanted them to ask what John Lewis Gaddis called "that most useful of the historian's interrogatories: What difference did it all make?"[2]

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1   It is possible to see this decision as a response to John Lewis Gaddis' challenge, in the somewhat rambling chapter on "Intelligence, Espionage, and Cold War History" in his book *The United States and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), that "we know relatively little, as yet" about that role.

2   Ibid., p. 88.

They approached the task from somewhat different perspectives. One of them, J. Kenneth McDonald, could draw on his many years of experience as Chief Historian of the US Central Intelligence Agency. The other one, Michael Herman, has had the benefit of a lifetime of service in British intelligence, both as a specialist in signals intelligence and as senior secretary in the Cabinet Office. For a parallel assessment from "the other side of the hill", we then asked Vojtech Mastny to contribute a paper – knowing, of course, that the general unavailability of Soviet archives made his task that much more difficult. McDonald and Mastny decided to deal with the topic in a fairly straightforward, historical way. In this publication we have therefore decided to lead off with Michael Herman's article, since his more thematic approach may enable readers less familiar with the field of intelligence studies to acquaint themselves with the wide spectrum of activities that intelligence agencies engage in.

When presenting the original papers at the conference, the authors stressed that their assessments were necessarily of an *ad hoc* nature. But the Institute for Defence Studies felt that they could offer an important and valuable "benchmark" of what we now know about the place and role of intelligence in the Cold War. We therefore persuaded the authors to revise and expand their papers for publication. The resulting three articles presented here do not have any final answers, but they provide a number of pointers to help us towards answering the big question: In the power conflict which so dominated the second half of the twentieth century, and over which hung the Damoclean sword of nuclear weapons, capable of annihilating the world several times over, did intelligence help avoid the Cold War becoming "hot"?

Intelligence effects on the Cold War: Some reflections[1]

By Michael Herman

The Cold War was particularly an intelligence war. Soviet secrecy made the West especially dependent on intelligence and, despite Western openness, the Soviet regime was incapable of believing anything that it had not learned by espionage. Both sides attached great importance to knowing the enemy, and to intelligence's other, defensive role of counterintelligence, counterespionage and ensuring information security on its own side.[2] This struggle between the intelligence adversaries – in some ways replicas of each other, and in others as different as the state systems they represented – was conducted with unprecedented peacetime resources and intensity, competing to penetrate the adversary's information defences while strengthening one's own. The Cold War cannot be imagined without this contest.

This was to have lasting consequences. Intelligence became a sizeable, permanent and public institution of the modern state, and from this came the Western ideas of its democratic accountability and legal legitimacy that are now gaining worldwide currency. There were long-lasting societal effects: the modern, elec-

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1   I am grateful to Professors Danchev, MccGwire and Riste for comments and suggestions.
2   For a discussion of the connections between intelligence's offensive and defensive roles see the author's *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapters 10–11.

tronic society owes something to the years following 1945 in which
intelligence helped to stimulate the rapid advances in computeri-
zation, miniaturization and photography. At a more prosaic level,
the employment vetting that we now accept as normal started as
British and American reactions to the Soviet espionage threat; as
did the modern habit of wearing personalized IDs in the work-
place.

But these wide effects are not the focus in this paper. Instead I
consider how intelligence influenced the Cold War itself and how
it was fought. Intelligence was an integral part of that war, but did
it make it hotter or colder, or sway governments' decisions in any
systematic way? Or, despite its prominence, did it contribute more
to the atmospherics – such as the "adversary images" – rather than
to the actual substance? Intelligence was essentially three things:
its activities, the knowledge it provided from them, and its power
as a capability – in military terms, as a "force in being". I review
its influence under these three headings, and then assess how much
it mattered as a totality.

But this is no more than a partial sketch of a big subject. I con-
centrate on the Western side, and within it on Britain and America,
treating them together as "Western" without covering all the other
members of the alliance. My judgments about intelligence accu-
racies and inaccuracies are broad-brush, and are not argued. The
effects considered are those of intelligence as an institution, and
not the personal impact of its individual leaders. I touch on the
Soviet side in places where each side's intelligence had reciprocal
effects on the other, but I do not deal with the central question
of Soviet intelligence's influence within its own regime. Nor do
I discuss which side "won" the intelligence war. On all counts
– particularly the need for more comparisons of East and West
– much more work is needed. I hope this paper will encourage it.

Activities
Technical Collection
Intelligence was a major activity by each side: no one knows the
exact manpower totals, but some years ago I estimated that the
American effort alone (excluding its allies) may at its height have

involved some 200,000 staff, and the Soviet effort was even larger.[3] Each side was the other's main target: the British estimated that around 60–70 per cent of their effort was directed at the Soviet Bloc, and this did not include the indirect coverage of Soviet activities in the Third World. The pervading image of intelligence was of spying, yet most of the work in the West consisted of various forms of technical collection. (The Soviet Bloc's technical effort was also substantial, larger than often thought.)[4] This effort included imagery and photo-reconnaissance, whose early use of aircraft was eventually overtaken by the extensive American (and Soviet) imagery satellite programmes. But the main activity was Sigint collection, overwhelming so in the West, and perhaps also true of the other side. Though this Sigint also came to use space satellites, most of its collection remained at sizeable, fixed, terrestrial sites. These were not publicly declared, but could not be completely concealed: the antennae could not be submerged underground or the workforce hidden. Each side was well aware of the other, though sketchy on the details.

The location of these sites was dictated by the realities of radio propagation, and these reinforced the Cold War's geo-politics. The principal classes of Soviet military transmissions could be intercepted at ranges of hundreds of miles, but there were difficulties if these got into thousands. So very few of them could be intercepted from the American homeland, and the United States needed Sigint bases nearer the USSR or arrangements with friendly services in the right places. Almost all America's NATO allies, including the UK, could provide some useful "real estate" to fulfil this requirement: even Canada, whose distance from Russia appears exaggerated on most maps, was able to contribute usefully on the Soviet Arctic. The same requirement applied around the southern Soviet periphery and Soviet Far East. Geography was also a factor in other kinds of technical collection, as exemplified by the British and Norwegian

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3   See Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, p. 37(note).
4   See for example Ben Fischer, "'One of the Biggest Ears in the World': East German Sigint", *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, vol. 11, no. 2 (summer 1998). For Soviet Sigint see Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), pp. 510–512.

sites used as shore ends for the American acoustic devices that de-
tected submerged Soviet submarines en route between northern
waters and the Atlantic.

As the Cold War developed this geographical dimension was
additionally sharpened by the growing volume of Soviet transmis-
sions and emissions that used the higher frequency bands which
necessitated interception at much closer range: further than line-
of-sight, but not much further. Western states that had Soviet
forces near their borders or just over the horizon could thus offer
particularly valuable locations. Hence the original wider ring of
Western sites was soon complemented by an inner ring of close-
access ones that included northern Norway, the Baltic area, the
Federal Republic of Germany, northern Turkey and Iran, and
Berlin as a prime location behind enemy lines. American technical
intelligence needed these footholds abroad, and most of the count-
ries providing them insisted on being treated as collaborators ra-
ther than mercenaries or real estate agents. One result was to en-
courage intelligence interdependence and cooperation within the
Western alliance as a whole, and not only in the special UK–US
relationship.

So the requirements of technical interception reinforced the
Cold War's geography, of Western forces around the Soviet heart-
land looking in, and the USSR's on the inside looking out. Intel-
ligence formed part of the Soviet perception of the encircling
Western threat. Soviet intelligence lacked comparable territory for
collection on the American home base, except for Cuba, where its
large Sigint station remained an irritant long after the USSR had
ceased to exist. In the Cold War the Soviet leadership sought to
redress this balance by using ships, aircraft and diplomatic prem-
ises, but this could only partially offset the absence of conventional
terrestrial bases.

Collection geography also had a bearing on the internal politics
of the Western alliance. The intelligence dimension of the UK–
US special relationship owed something (though by no means
everything) to the UK's position as an unsinkable aircraft carrier
within intelligence range of the enemy. The same applied to the at-
tention paid to Norway and the Northern Flank, the value attached

to Turkey, and the role of Cyprus and its bearing on the politics of Greek–Turkish relationships. Conversely, France's lack of well-placed sites held it back as a player in the Western intelligence club, and possibly contributed a little to its semi-disengaged stance in the alliance.

These geographic effects extended outside NATO. The value of Iran as an interception site was a major factor in the American presence there, and all that followed from it after the Shah's departure. Japan's value as an intelligence window on to the Soviet Far East figured in its American relationship, and perhaps the dispute over the Kuriles. Australia's ability to provide ground control sites for American satellites became a factor in its emergence as a US ally in its own right, no longer tied to the British connection. Using their geography to make unique intelligence contributions also helped neutrals to align discreetly with the West. Geographic access was even the basis of the secret Sino-American agreement over Sigint operations in China against Soviet missile tests.

This collection was all fixed and unprovocative. But the need to get close to short-range Soviet transmissions also led the West to mount mobile collection from ships and aircraft where land-based collection was impossible or incomplete. Aircraft were also used where flying at height provided a deep look into the adversary's territory for Sigint, photography, active radar and other collection. There were thus constant aircraft flights along Warsaw Pact borders, in international waters off the Soviet coastline, and in the sea areas used by the Soviet navy. One side acted, the other reacted, and monitoring the reaction was one of the Western intelligence objectives. Naval vessels also collected intelligence on suitable deployments, and there was some limited Western use of specialized intelligence vessels that could spend lengthy periods on station.

These operations were intensive: a multinational Great Game, played not only along the German border but also over and in the Baltic, the Barents Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk, the North Pacific and elsewhere. Aircraft packed with technical equipment flew every day, and tough men rolled for weeks on station in small ships. Though the US led, others played significant roles.

Soviet collection reflected its geographical limitations: except

along the German border, it was difficult for Soviet aircraft to get
close to Britain and America and their main forces. Perhaps as a
consequence there was greater Soviet effort – much greater than in
the West – to carry out regular patrols using specialized collection
vessels, the so-called "intelligence trawlers"; but these were still
quite widely dispersed around worldwide Western targets.

Operations by both sides were all undeclared, but many of
them were almost overt: there was no mystery about the regular
"milk-runs" by Western aircraft and their routine investigation
by Soviet fighters. Surface vessels were equally observable. Other
operations were deeply covert, particularly the American sub-
marine missions to tap cables off the Soviet coast. Submarine
operations in Soviet fleet areas sought to avoid detection, but the
Soviets had no illusions about their existence. (As far as is known,
the Soviet use of submarines on covert missions was confined to
their appearances in Swedish coastal waters). Close contact of a
quite different kind was also provided by the "licensed espionage"
– actually observation and photography – of both sides' military
missions in Germany and their military attachés everywhere.

Most of this maritime and airborne collection took place in
international airspace or over international waters or friendly ter-
ritory. Some of it was part of the demonstrative use of military
power by both sides, such as the American "forward deployment"
in the Soviet bastion of the northern waters, and the Soviet use of
ships and aircraft to show world reach. Some was part of the sur-
face and underwater "tailing" of the maritime Cold War. Other
collection became accepted, even if not licensed.

But particularly for airborne collection, the technical imperative
of getting close to the targets made it a fragile routine, especially
when the operations included deliberate provocation. An aircraft
would approach low under radar cover and suddenly go high:
or, in one American's words, "to tickle the Soviets a little and
create more activity we would do a straight approach towards
Sevastopol, turn and run out. Then we would listen to the racket
[the communications of the Soviet air defence system]".[5] For the

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5   A. Price, *The History of U.S. Electronic Warfare* (Alexandria, VA: The Association of Old
     Crows, 1989), p. 87.

Soviet defenders there was always the fear of surprise American attack, particularly when Strategic Air Command (SAC) had nuclear-armed aircraft permanently airborne.

So there was always a risk of incidents because of navigational miscalculations or extempore or calculated macho behaviour, particularly in states of East-West tension. More than twenty American aircraft were shot down between 1947 and 1960;[6] twelve are said to have been collecting Sigint and some others may have been on other intelligence missions. A Swedish aircraft shot down over in 1952 over the Baltic was unquestionably an intelligence collector: a flying boat sent to rescue the crew was also shot down.[7] There were also innocent civilian victims. In April 1978 a South Korean airliner was shot down over the north-west USSR, and the same fate met another which was shot down with no survivors in September 1983 after its accidental incursion over Kamchatka. Even "licensed spying" had its casualties: in the strained atmosphere of 1984, an officer of the American military mission in East Germany was shot and killed.[8]

Underlying the tension in these incidents there was of course the Soviet regime's knowledge of the deliberate American overflying of its territory. This included deep penetrations, initially by SAC aircraft in the first half of the 1950s and then by CIA's U-2s in the second, and also some British participation. The SAC operations seem to have been part of an (unauthorized) programme designed to combine operational reconnaissance with political pressure. The U-2 programme was a wholly intelligence one, principally for photo-reconnaissance, and comprised some 20 overflights until one was shot down deep over the Soviet Union on 1 May 1960. They were all detected by Soviet air defences;[9] and the West knew that the Russians knew. Over the same period nearly five hundred unmanned American balloons were also released to drift over the

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6   P. Lashmar, *Spy Flights of the Cold War* (Stroud, Glos: Sutton, 1996), p. 171. But
     varied figures were offered earlier about the total of American aircraft shot down
     and the number of them engaged on intelligence missions. See Herman, *Intelligence
     Power in Peace and War*, p. 187(note).
7   Lashmar, *Spy Flights of the Cold War*, p. 169.
8   Tony Geraghty, *Beyond the Front Line* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), pp. 247-8.
9   Alexander Orlov, "The U-2 Program: A Russian Officer Remembers", *Studies in
     Intelligence* (Washington: Center for the Study of Intelligence, winter 1998-1999).

USSR and record radar emissions. There were no comparable Soviet intrusions of Western airspace, though the approaches of Soviet aircraft and intelligence vessels were regularly portrayed in the West as the adversary flexing his muscles.

Espionage and Covert Action

Extensive though all this technical collection was, it was still of less influence than the clandestine use of human agents. Much of this activity entailed intelligence collection, but as in centuries past it extended to covert action of all kinds. In the Soviet view the two were inseparable and of equal priority,[10] and its effort within both forms was extensive. The West, however, distinguished between them, perhaps influenced by the Second World War division between the British SIS's intelligence gathering and the Special Operations Executive created to "set Europe ablaze".[11] It tended to see covert action as a minor activity, to many a controversial diversion from information gathering. Yet in its wide spectrum, from support for guerrilla warfare at one extreme to unattributable information services at the other, it remained a significant American investment, even though belief in it waxed and waned. Britain was more cautious but made its contributions. Covert action appeared to be a means of keeping the adversary under pressure, and of waging the Cold War with containable risk.

So covert action was important to both sides. Early Western support for resistance movements in Eastern Europe has now been well documented. But despite the corpus of publications about it, covert action in the Cold War as a whole needs more attention than it has been given, and putting into its overall context. Operations whose effects might justify attention of this kind include American funding of Italian anti-communist parties after 1945; the USSR's support for the collapse of Western colonialism and its covert influence in the post-imperial regimes, particularly India; its assistance to militant trade unionism in the decades of

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10   The KGB's official definition of intelligence-gathering was as "a specific form of
      political struggle used by the intelligence agencies of a state to help it to fulfill its
      internal and external functions". See Vasiliy Mitrokhin, *KGB Lexicon: The Soviet
      Intelligence Officer's Handbook* (London: Cass, 2002), p. 200.
11   Though the American Office of Strategic Services combined the two.

British economic failure; America's backing for the Mujahidin in Afghanistan, and provision of printing presses and other covert support to Solidarity in Poland. Indeed, covert action of all kinds may come to be seen as a significant contributor to the collapse of empire on both sides: first those of the European colonial powers, and then the Soviet Union's. But we lack a synoptic view of this kind, and I shall not attempt one here.

More has been written about espionage. The Soviet effort against the West became public knowledge thanks to Gouzenko's revelations after his defection from the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa in 1945, and other spy cases of one kind or another continued from this early period to the end of the Cold War. The USSR had a roughly comparable incidence of high-profile Western cases. Espionage was additionally linked to the use of diplomatic cover for recruitment and agent-running and the resulting diplomatic expulsions and tit-for-tat responses. Embassies were also targets for bugging and other technical attacks, and were themselves bases for comparable technical collection.

In both East and West these threats merged to arouse visceral fears of treachery, the special betrayal of trust, the enemy within, and encourage a paranoid political style. The conspiratorial Soviet regime had a special fear of conspiracies against it. Fact and fiction in the West combined to make spying seem much of what the Cold War was about, second only to The Bomb. Perhaps this is how it is still remembered today.

Activities and Effects
Some events connected with these various activities are already parts of Cold War history. Gouzenko's revelations played a significant part in the West's disillusion with its wartime ally, and the Hiss and Fuchs cases in early 1950 may have contributed to the hard line of the American NSC-68 issued that summer. The shooting down of the U-2 over Sverdlovsk on 1 May 1960 led to the subsequent break-up of the Paris Conference. The expulsion in 1971 of 105 Soviet intelligence officers from their diplomatic cover in London froze UK–Soviet relations for some time. The fate of the South Korean airliner in September 1983 exacerbated a situation

of already high US–Soviet tension. Raymond Garthoff has com-
mented on this that

> each side thus converted its ready suspicions and worst assump-
> tions about the other into accusations that could not be proved
> or disproved, but that tended to be believed by its own side and
> bitterly resented by the other. The upshot was to set American-
> Soviet and Soviet-American relations considerably further back
> and undercut tentative steps towards an improvement in rela-
> tions.[12]

These incidents occurred against a background of the many similar
activities that did not become news but nevertheless added cumula-
tively to the effects. Some Western mobile operations were part of
the Cold War choreography of "showing resolve", while others,
particularly the early overflights of the USSR, must have stoked
Soviet threat perceptions more directly. Using diplomatic cover for
intelligence produced what I have called embassies' resemblance to
medieval castles – "under a kind of intelligence siege, but with their
intelligence sallyports from which their inhabitants struck at the
attackers"[13] – and must have influenced diplomatic assessments.
Oleg Gordievsky's autobiography recounts the claustrophobic
precautions taken in the Soviet Embassy in London,[14] and an
American diplomat has written with honesty of the effects of being
under intelligence siege in Moscow on his own judgments: "it was
hard not to let that situation impact on your own view of the
former USSR".[15] The British review of the Soviet Threat in 1972
gave some prominence to the presence in Europe (excluding the
UK) of "more than 800 identified or suspected Soviet intelligence
officers with official cover", and forecast that "the Soviet Union
will increase the number of agents of influence and sympathisers
... in order to influence Western policies and undermine Western
resistance to Soviet aims."[16] All in all the threat of espionage linked

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12   Raymond L.Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation: US–Soviet Relations from Nixon to
       Reagan* (Washington: Brookings, 1985), p. 1016.
13   Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, p. 186.
14   O. Gordievsky, *Next Stop Execution* (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 257–8.
15   D.R. Herspring, "The Cold War: Perceptions from the American Embassy,
       Moscow", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 9, no. 2 (July 1998): 200.
16   G. Bennett and K.A. Hamilton (eds.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy*

to covert action must surely have been intelligence's most pervasive influence on the Cold War psychology of both sides.

Nevertheless the human and technical activities discussed here were not a major influence. Knowledge of them reinforced each side's adversary images, but did not create them. They were still small print compared with the main Cold War threats. Covert action excepted, intelligence's main influence was not in what it did, but in the knowledge it provided and the ability to provide it.

Intelligence knowledge
Tracking Soviet Activities
Western governments had voracious appetites for "facts" about the opponent and what he was doing, but there was always the problem that Soviet security limited the reliable facts available: most of intelligence's "facts" were squeezed out of difficult raw material, and the important ones are best thought of as "analytic facts", of varying hardness and softness. Nevertheless there were great quantities of day-by-day and other routine reporting, mostly of factual or quasi-factual kinds, on what was going on over the Soviet hill.

Some of this material was used by governments to conduct the Cold War at the tactical diplomatic level of reacting to events and shaping them to best advantage. Some of it had a direct impact on Cold War history: the most notable was probably the 928 photographs taken by the U-2 mission over Cuba on 14 October 1962 that revealed the Soviet missiles there. The intelligence that tracked Soviet activities outside the Soviet Bloc – for example, noting the deployment of Soviet Air and Air Defence forces to Egypt in 1970 – was probably also of particular use in Cold War diplomacy. This was intelligence acting in its normal role as an extra source of government's information: helping foreign policy when intelligence is accurate, and making it less adept if it is wrong. But this did not shape the Cold War in any particular way.

Overseas series III, vol. I: *Britain and the Soviet Union 1968–72* (London: Stationery Office, 1997), p. 528.

The same applies to intelligence's other normal role of suppor-
ting military power. Soviet armed forces were by far the main Wes-
tern target and were the subject of most of its output. Of this a
substantial part provided timely accounts of their activities. Their
importance was as a capability and a precaution, and will be discus-
sed later. By contrast another part of this output on Soviet forces
was greatly used in the West's military preparation and training for
war, and linked with it was intelligence's preparation for providing
its own wartime support. Much the same may have been true on
the Soviet side. Both sides had forty years in which to accumulate
intelligence about the other, and I imagine that nothing has ever
been studied and war-gamed as intensively as the putative battle
on the North German Plain. A result, at least in the West, was that
its forces were almost as well provided with intelligence on the op-
ponent as can be imagined in peacetime, and below the top level of
government this was indeed intelligence's main Cold War utility.
It may have added slightly thereby to Western confidence, but in
other respects it was just an adjunct to military power: a weapon
like the others, though less publicly visible and demonstrable than
many.

Linked to this was another normal intelligence function,
though with special Cold War emphasis: support for the national
information defences that sought to deny secrets to the opponent.
Within this was the East-West war of attrition between the
intelligence services themselves, in which each side sought to pene-
trate, disrupt, demoralize and deceive its opposite number. This
was an inward-looking conflict but had some external effects.
Intelligence knowledge in London and Washington about the ex-
tent of Soviet-controlled penetration of other Western countries
was a factor in the UK–US exclusivity within the alliance. Within
the UK and US themselves, the espionage threat was countered
by intelligence's evermore complex compartmentation and sub-
compartmentation of its product: necessary security precautions,
but with the effect of reducing the intelligence product's value to
its intended recipients. The same applied even more on the Soviet
side, where its good access to Western secrets was often negated
by the fears that what was obtained must be Western deception.

To these limited degrees, the two sides' intelligence services cancel-
led out each others' value by their threats of double-agents and
penetration.[17]

Understanding: Soviet Intentions and Capabilities

Apart from these undramatic effects through the provision of facts
or quasi-facts, by 1945 British intelligence had also achieved the sta-
tus of expert at *understanding* its targets at the level needed for top
policy decisions; and the fact-providing and understanding roles
had merged. Being the expert on foreign forces had long been a
role of military intelligence, but in Britain in the Second World War
the new Joint Intelligence Committee (the JIC) had extended it to
producing estimates and judgments about all aspects of the enemy:
on Hitler's overall situation and how he would see it. It spoke au-
thoritatively to government with one voice: the Churchillian style
was to insist that its product should be corporately agreed. Mini-
sters were there to take decisions and should not have to argue
about intelligence interpretations.[18]

In 1945 this British machinery moved smoothly from war to
peace, and two years later the American version of it appeared
when President Truman created the CIA. Though the machinery
differed, what had been practical reactions to the Cold War in
both countries became permanent arrangements and received
Anglophone doctrine. Intelligence exists to provide objective judg-
ments as well as facts; it deals with foreign targets, not its own
side; it eschews policy recommendations; and government takes it
seriously. (The Soviet side by contrast gave more weight to the pro-
vision of facts: intelligence provided them, and interpreting them
was for the leadership). So in the West the practice of military
intelligence was applied at the centre of government. Someone had
to understand the USSR, and intelligence was the institution to do
it. Yet what followed illustrates the complexity in practice.

Understanding the USSR at the top, strategic level can be con-
sidered under the two conventional military headings of enemy "in-
tentions" and "capabilities". (Intelligence also worked on Soviet

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17   Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, chapter 11.
18   A dictum that Churchill did not apply to himself.

economic prospects and other aspects of the whole regime, but
with limited impact: the USSR was studied as a threat rather than
a society). Capabilities were Soviet power; intentions were the in-
tended use of it; power multiplied by intentions was the threat.
But intentions were always the more important and difficult part
of the equation. As the central problem was put by the JIC at
the beginning of its report on "Russian Interests, Intentions and
Capabilities" in 1948, "What is Russia trying to do?"[19] Almost
everything followed from the answer. Assessing the intentions
– or proclivities – of any government involves a great element of
interpretation and conjecture, and this was specially so for the
secretive and alien USSR. There were no hard facts and the judg-
ments were doubly inferential.

Soviet military capabilities, including production, logistics and
similar factors, were in principle more knowable. But there was
still a dearth of hard facts and the uncertainty of the analytic ones.
Moreover, the important Western interest was often in the future
rather than the present: what would the next Soviet weapons be,
and when would they appear? Since there was rarely any firm evi-
dence, answers drew on guesses about the adversary's intentions,
often indeed on what his reaction might be to American plans.
Would the USSR react to President Kennedy's nuclear programme
of the early 1960s by seeking nuclear supremacy, parity or some-
thing less? Intentions in turn went back to capabilities: surely the
size and composition of Soviet forces must be a good pointer to
the regime's objectives? Deductions on the two were mutually rein-
forcing. Intelligence had the status of Keeper of the Threat, but
this remained a mental construct with a lot of conjecture to it.

Cold War Beginnings

This was particularly so in the early years of the Cold War, roughly
up to the Korean War. For intelligence this was the period of greatest
difficulty. Its attack on the Soviet target had started almost from
scratch on what were large and apparently intractable professional
problems. It was a hard slog to produce even soft, analytic facts.

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19   JIC(48)9(O) Final, 23 July 1948 (London: India Office Library and Records,
L/WS/1/1173), first paragraph of Annex I, the summary.

In reality intelligence did not do badly, but there was only limited confidence in what it produced.

Its relationships with policy were also not as well developed then as they became later. In America the separate armed services produced their own estimates, and their Joint Intelligence Committee (formed in 1941) produced its joint versions, but these had only limited influence outside the military.[20] For some time after its creation in 1947 the CIA was still trying to find its role, and the main series of National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) was not developed until the early 1950s. Sigint remained disorganized until the National Security Agency was set up in 1952. Apart from these organizational problems, the American community also lacked the sophistication it later developed. It provided facts when it had them, but the important advice on Soviet intentions came from diplomats and knowledgeable individuals, not from intelligence's own ranks. Its transition to its subsequent status came with the Korean War and the Eisenhower Presidency, but it was not a strong Washington player until then.

This early limitation did not apply to the same extent in London, where the JIC had been up and running from the outset of the Cold War. Nevertheless, the JIC was still a Chiefs of Staff committee, nominally part of defence. The Joint Intelligence Staff which prepared its reports had lost the talented and independently minded civilians in uniform who had contributed so much to its wartime effectiveness. The 1948 report just quoted, "What is Russia trying to do?", now appears to be a rather crude "cut and paste" compilation from separate, departmental contributions, in the style of "joint service writing" that was then the military fashion.[21] Service intelligence had reverted to its limited prewar status,

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20   For details of the American JIC see Larry A.Valero, "The American Joint
      Intelligence Committee and Estimates of the Soviet Union, 1945–1947", *Studies
      in Intelligence*, no. 9 (Washington: Center for the Study of Intelligence) (summer
      2000). It remained in existence as part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff organization until
      1958.

21   The 1948 report at note 19 consists of a (brilliant) two-and-a-half page summary,
      and main sections with A4 page lengths as follows: "Fundamental Principles
      in the Outlook of Soviet Leaders" (1 ½), Capabilities (Economic and Military)
      (15), General Soviet Policy (9), Soviet Interests and Intentions by Area (36). By
      comparison its 1972 equivalent (note 15 above) is now printed on 17 (smaller)
      pages, and had a single author.

and the new, postwar civilian Joint Intelligence Bureau had only been given a restricted role. No part of postwar intelligence was set up to be the expert on Soviet policy: a vestige perhaps of the prewar assumption that foreigners' policies were the business of the Foreign Office. Diplomats there and in the Moscow Embassy carried more weight, rather as in Washington. The Foreign Office chaired the JIC, but for a time put its energy into its own, in-house, "Russia Committee". The JIC's reports were felt to be important, but on the enigma of Soviet intentions they may have been articulating compromises that the Foreign Office and the military had reached elsewhere on the big issue of rearmament. In the relationship between intelligence and policy the evidence is not clear on who was influencing whom.

Whatever the historical obscurity, British and American intelligence did not precipitate the Cold War. Hostility between East and West was inevitable in some form. The key Western views of Soviet motives were formed and solidified in these formative years through experience of Soviet behaviour, and in the UK and the US it was others in and around government who developed such views, rather than intelligence. The stroke of luck of Gouzenko's defection, and the intelligence that came from it on the extent of Soviet espionage, certainly contributed to the Western view of the opponent, but it was never the main factor behind setting the West on its Cold War course.

Nevertheless, the JIC in this early period did give its imprimatur to what was to become the UK's position throughout the Cold War. Soviet motives were judged to be a mixture of hostility to the capitalist West, the conviction that history was on communism's side, anxiety about the Western threat to Soviet security, and a preference for caution, though without excluding opportunism. A hot war was not inevitable, but the Cold War would be a long haul against a determined and calculating opponent. In general terms this also became CIA's central position. But in the US, and perhaps also in the UK, it was reached in the first instance by policy-makers in government, and the intelligence contributions were only supportive.

More important was intelligence's initial contribution to the

"capabilities" part of the threat. Soviet power was essentially military: if the West fell it would be because of the Soviet army or the threat of it, rather than Soviet subversion – at least after the immediate post-1945 years and the Marshall Plan. Soviet armed forces were intelligence's main target, and its estimates of them were the source of the essential facts and forecasts that became the basis of the West's defence policies in this formative period.

In this early period three intelligence conclusions were of particular importance. One was that the Soviet Union would be in no state to go to war until some time in the future, estimated eventually as the mid-1950s . Another was that the Soviet army's peacetime size at that time was around 175 divisions. This was creditable analysis, but it involved the assumption that these were all active divisions. It was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s that it was appreciated that their actual status was of the order of one-third full-strength, one-third partial strength, and one-third cadre,[22] but by then the Western image of overwhelming conventional Soviet superiority had taken firm hold. The third conclusion, with similar effect, was that the armed forces of the Soviet European satellites could be counted as Soviet assets, with relatively few reservations about their reliability, These reservations then diminished further in later years as the Warsaw Pact seemed to be consolidating.

For the future, the most important forecasts at that time were those on Soviet missiles and nuclear weapons. Much has been made out of the Western surprise over the first Soviet nuclear test, two years earlier than expected, but the early forecasts of the Soviet ability to launch nuclear strikes on Europe in the second half of the 1950s were not too wide of the mark; though the forecasts of the ICBM threat to North America in this same period were pitched some years too early. These and other forecasts were based even at

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22   Matthew A. Evangelista, "Stalin's Postwar Army Reappraised", *International Security*, vol. 7, no. 3 (winter 1982–3): 112, quoting an opinion of Paul Nitze. It has been argued that reasons for reducing the 175-Division threat were recognized in intelligence circles quite early in the 1950s, but not incorporated in government pronouncements. (J.S. Duffield, "Soviet Military Threat to Western Europe", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2 (June 1992)). The distinction between cadre strength, low strength and combat-ready Divisions was not incorporated into US intelligence estimates until the early 1960s. (R.L. Garthoff, "Estimating Soviet Military Force Levels", *International Security*, vol. 14, no. 4 (spring 1990).

this early stage on impressive work on Soviet production, but except
for the immediate future they necessarily consisted of what the
USSR *could* produce if military preparations were given sufficient
priority. These became part of the West's image of what it *would*
produce, and thence part of the spiral of military procurement on
both sides in which "worst case" forecasts of the adversary be-
came self-fulfilling. Nevertheless their general impression that the
development of Soviet nuclear and conventional weaponry could
produce a period of danger from around the mid-fifties onwards
was the basis of Western strategy, and turned out to be not too far
from what happened.

Improved Intelligence Status

After its limitations up to the Korean War, intelligence's influence
increased progressively. Institutionally the CIA developed its spe-
cial, non-departmental status, and swung into action in the 1950s
as the NIE's acquired authority. Development in Britain was more
gradual but nevertheless considerable. The JIC shed its defence-
oriented subordination to the Chiefs of Staff, becoming a Cabinet
Office committee in 1957. After the formation of the unified De-
fence Intelligence Staff (DIS) in 1964 the influence of the three
individual services weakened, but was not eliminated. After the
creation of the JIC's new Assessments Staff in 1968 its product
ceased to be amalgams of departmental contributions and became
more powerful and holistic.

Even more significant was the increased success of British and
American collection. This was largely a gradual process, in some
ways like the British children's board game of snakes and lad-
ders:[23] successes tended to be compromised by Soviet espionage
or American press leaks and then eliminated by Soviet security
measures.[24] Nevertheless, there were cumulative gains, and to these
was added the major and lasting success of the American satellite-
borne photography from the early 1960s onwards. Thanks to this

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23   On the throw of a dice the competitor moves upwards and forwards if he lands on
      a square with a ladder, and downwards and backwards if he lands on one with a
      snake.
24   Matthew M. Aid and Cees Wiebes (eds.), *Secrets of Signals Intelligence during the
      Cold War and Beyond* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp. 18–19, 34–35.

imagery and its synergy with other sources the West came to be increasingly well informed about Soviet military hardware and its production and disposition. Anything visible was sooner or later observed, analyzed and counted, its movements noted and, up to a point, its characteristics determined. The transparency extended beyond military matériel to include formed units. The result was a more accurate and confident picture than before. When data was exchanged and verified in the East-West arms control agreements of the 1970s and 1980s, first on the US and Soviet strategic nuclear arsenals and then later on other forces, the Western estimates were found to be accurate in most respects.

There was also more evidence from which to infer Soviet combat effectiveness, but the problems remained of assessing Soviet forces through Western eyes. Judgments of their quality remained figuratively as two-dimensional as the photographs that were their major ingredients. Estimates were strong on numbers, but more speculative on quality and reliability. Intelligence was never sure whether the adversary was a paper tiger or ten feet tall, and protagonists of policy positions could always find analytic facts to support them. Nevertheless, the progress within collection and the sheer build-up of knowledge meant that by the 1980s Western governments probably had more information about opposing forces than any other modern state has ever had in peacetime.

As intelligence acquired this greater competence and status it might have been expected to contribute more powerfully than before on both Soviet intentions and capabilities. On the first of these it was certainly expected to assess long-term Soviet motives, and as nuclear deterrence grew in importance these extended to judging hypothetical Soviet responses to proposed levels of Western threat: what US (or UK) capability for destruction was needed to deter the Kremlin effectively?

Yet in this reading of the Soviet mind, intelligence's influence remained varied. Factually it made some major discoveries. One was the famous Khrushchev speech denouncing Stalin of 1956: it is now often forgotten that this was originally acquired by the CIA. Another was the British realization in early 1984, thanks to the evidence of its agent Gordievsky plus skilled analysis of

other material, that there had been heightened Soviet fears of a
preemptive American strike in the early 1980s, culminating in an
alert of some kind during NATO's Able Archer exercise of nuclear
release procedures in November 1983. The Khrushchev discovery
needs no comment. The British Able Archer assessment was to
influence President Reagan's shift in 1984 from his "evil empire"
portrayal of the opponent to a more moderate stance, foresha-
dowing the Western attitude to Gorbachev when he came to the
fore.[25]

But such facts, or analytic facts, on Soviet intentions remained
limited; and the effect of intelligence's wider judgments is debatable
in both countries, though the reasons are not the same. In Britain,
the JIC was much respected and there was no dispute with what it
said. Nuclear disarmament was a divisive issue among the political
Left, but there was less controversy over Russian intentions; by
Washington standards London had few out-and-out hawks and
doves. The military fought its corners over defence budgets and
leaned hard on the DIS for support, but the JIC was not much in-
volved except in nuclear policy. The Treasury, probably distrusting
intelligence as an ally, did not seek to enlist its support. Despite
the variations between moods of détente and greater tension, the
early Cold War view on Soviet intentions remained substantially
unchanged in the JIC's periodical reviews of it.

What is unclear about these is how far the committee was conside-
ring the evidence from scratch, without intellectual baggage, or
whether it was legitimizing the long-standing Whitehall consensus
– not exactly going through the motions, but starting without seri-
ous doubts about the conclusions. It must be remembered that
the JIC comprised not only intelligence proper but also its non-
intelligence members, notably the Foreign Office which chaired it

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25   The literature includes Peter Vincent Pry, *War Scare: Russia and American on
      the Nuclear Brink* (London and Westport: Praeger, 1999), chapter 6; Raymond
      L. Garthoff, "Foreign Intelligence and the Historiography of the Cold War",
      Journal of Cold War Studies, vol. 6, no. 2 (spring 2004): 40; Fritz W. Ermarth,
      "Observations on the 'War Scare' of 1983: From an Intelligence Perch", *Parallel
      History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP)* (Swiss Federal Institute of
      Technology Zurich [online 8 Aug 2006]), by permission of the Center for Security
      Studies at ETH Zurich and the National Security Archive at the George Washington
      University on behalf of the PHP network._

and supplied most of the horsepower in the drafting staff. In the last years of the Cold War, its Chairman, a retired senior diplomat, also doubled as the Prime Minister's foreign policy adviser, an arrangement that made the intelligence-policy relationship particularly close.

It would be perverse to argue against this backdrop that the JIC's reports were not proper "intelligence", but its unusual composition as an intelligence body should be remembered. Lawrence Freedman has commented on military estimates that

> the point is not that military intelligence officers are prone to follow slavishly the demands of their political masters, but that they have been socialised into a particular world-view which is shared by the main consumer of their work.[26]

Could this also be applied to the JIC system and its membership? Did its view of the Soviet Union reflect a tacit intellectual stitch-up between diplomats and the military over the nuclear deterrent and the size of the defence budget? Was intelligence speaking to policy, or policy speaking to intelligence and just being echoed? The fact that its reports were well received cuts both ways.

In spite of the superficial similarities, the Washington situation was very different. The intelligence community there was unambiguously "intelligence" and not a British-style hybrid. The CIA became unrivalled as a centre of Soviet expertise, and was indeed criticized for being too academic and distant from government. But American "intelligence" was no monolith. Unlike the consensus-driven British example, the system encouraged diversity at every stage. The CIA was the first among equals, but other members of the community could "take a footnote" of dissent in the NIEs. They would also produce their own analyses and conclusions for their own departmental customers. This was of particular importance in Defence; and there the four service intelligence organizations could also produce their own interpretations, usually coinciding with the varied and intense single-service interests.

The result could be the converse of the Britain's intelligence

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26   Lawrence Freedman, *US Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat* (London: Macmillan, second ed. 1986), p. 186.

consensus. Cold War issues had far greater political salience in Washington than anywhere else; everyone was either for or against the current policy; the individual armed services (particularly the navy) often had their own Cold War strategies; and the latest intelligence was usually ammunition in the public and private firefights that followed. Those at the top policy levels could usually find intelligence to suit them, and if not there were plenty of private think tanks to provide alternatives. CIA's record as the senior intelligence body is of a moderating influence, but its standing with government varied: broadly speaking, Democrats respected its judgments, while Republicans were inclined towards others'. Intelligence was prized as never before, but often to support policy preconceptions rather than determine them.

Over Soviet capabilities it was more influential. The long-lasting strategic instability traceable back to the effects of the erroneous American estimates in the 1950s is well known. The American view of the so-called "missile gap", after the earlier "bomber gap", led to the deployment of American missiles in Europe, but was still exploited in Kennedy's Presidential campaign of 1960. The results were the enhanced missile programme after he took office, the larger-than-forecast Soviet reaction to it, America's alleged "window of vulnerability" in the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s, and the increased Reagan programme that followed.

Yet this inaccuracy and the results are only part of the picture. Once satellite imagery had been properly developed there was no longer much doubt about the actual totals of Soviet missiles, ships, aircraft, tanks and other weapons. These numbers and the balance with the West loomed large in presentation and advocacy with publics, allies, enemies and the rest of the world, and counted heavily in what democratic governments decided. Their frequent basis in satellite photography gave them a particular credibility, even though photo-interpretation was as esoteric a craft as any other. There was less scope for exaggeration and politicization than in the years of the bomber and missile gaps. A surprising result of the improved British and American intelligence was that, despite the quite unprecedented secrecy on the Soviet side in which it began, the East-West arms race was eventually conducted rela-

tively openly, by contending parties quite well informed about each other, rather like the earlier arms races before 1914 and 1939.

The numbers, and confidence in them, also had an effect on diplomatic tactics. The September 1961 CIA report, showing that ICBM inferiority was all on the Soviet side, was used shortly afterwards to reverse the tenor of previous Kennedy-Khrushchev relations.[27] There were also many other, more complex effects at the expert levels of defence planning. One was in nuclear planning when American planners drew on the new lexicon of mutual nuclear deterrence, launch on warning, first strike survivability, retaliatory threat, nuclear sufficiency and the like. For their practical application these needed good data on the Soviet side, not only on missile totals, but also on MIRV-ing, accuracy, throw weight, warheads' nuclear yield, and destructive effects. American intelligence became able to provide these Soviet numbers, not only from satellite imagery of missile silos and submarine launch tubes, but also from the UK and US success in intercepting telemetry from Soviet test firings and exploiting the results. Weapons that the West had never seen could be reconstructed and modelled into a kind of virtual reality.

This became particularly important when ICBM survivability emerged as a central issue. Lawrence Freedman commented that for eight years after 1969 the problem of the American Minuteman's perceived vulnerability was "at the centre of strategic debate, accepted by all as the most serious potential source of instability in the strategic balance".[28] After intelligence discovered the Soviet ABM system, its present and future capabilities became equally important factors in American and British decisions. Intelligence-based estimates were embedded within all the expert arguments, and gave them some earthing to reality. It was not unreasonably expected in the 1950s that the West would never have more than the haziest information about Soviet missiles and their performance, and it is arguable that had this remained true, the American drive not to be outstripped might have developed differently.

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27   John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 256–7.

28   Freedman, *US Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat*, p. 182.

The same may be true of planning for conventional weaponry, and examples can be quoted of the improved effects of intelligence in Britain. A battle tank programme was cancelled after disconcerting intelligence appeared to show a weakness against its likely Soviet opponent. The ground defences of the nuclear V-Force bases were reorganized after intelligence seemed to show a threat of attack by covert Soviet Spetsnaz forces. Air defences of the UK as a whole were strengthened after intelligence on new Soviet aircraft stiffened earlier threat assessments.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to see such clear effects. Despite intelligence's improved quality, many of its analytic facts were still open to debate. In the 1980s CIA doubted whether the use of chemical weapons was still part of Soviet military planning for conventional war in Europe, while others (including the British) argued on the same evidence that it was. There was prolonged argument whether the new Soviet Backfire bomber could attack the American homeland. Yardsticks for judging Soviet effectiveness were elusive. Apart from aerial combats in the Korean War, the forces of the East and West had never fought each other, and the Soviet army had never fought anyone before Afghanistan. In its design philosophies, the West sought to lead Soviet military technology and not imitate it: unlike its opposite numbers, Western intelligence was not charged with acquiring Soviet designs to copy them. Western defence programmes had the powerful momentum of past investments and institutional interests, including those of industry and politics, and it took a lot of intelligence to deflect them from their course. For Britain the transatlantic relationship gave its forces, particularly the Royal Navy, powerful incentives for remaining in step with their American counterparts. Intelligence was always part of the armed forces' bids for conventional resources, but was only one factor. It may have weighed less heavily there than in the nuclear planning that had fewer institutional inheritances. But until more case studies of Western defence planning have been put together, it will be difficult to judge intelligence's precise influence anywhere.

Intelligence and its own capabilities

Arms Control

Apart from its activities and the knowledge they produced, intelligence also influenced the Cold War through its own capabilities: in its potential for knowledge production, rather than through the knowledge it was actually producing. One specific effect of this kind was in its support for arms control. Initially this was through what it had learned about Soviet missiles, so when America initiated the negotiations on strategic nuclear limitation in the late 1960s a baseline of data was available to start from. Without it, arms control would never have got underway:

> It was in large but unrecognised measure US confidence in the
> quality of the intelligence on Soviet forces during the late 1960s
> an early 1970s that allowed strategic arms limitation negotiations
> to begin at all.[29]

But intelligence's importance then became its ability to do this in the future and provide the verification on which the agreements depended. As long as on-site inspection was unacceptable to the Soviet Union, this was a key part of the American proposals, and the fact that the USSR was able to reciprocate with its own imagery satellites and telemetry interception (perhaps from intelligence vessels stationed off the Florida missile range) enabled intelligence to be part of the bilateral agreements. A further key part of arms control history was American intelligence's success in persuading Congress that it could meet the verification requirements.

Hence American intelligence abilities and their matching on the Soviet side largely determined the forms of arms control. SALT I was cast in terms of launchers (missile sites and missile tubes in submarines), not missile production, because launchers were what imagery satellites could see. The limitations on throw weights and MIRV'd warheads in SALT II were possible because Western technical intelligence yielded data on these parameters. Intelligence in this verification role, under the label "national technical means"

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29 W.H. Kincade, "Challenges to Verification: Old and New", in I. Bellany and C.D. Blackmore (eds.), *The Verification of Arms Control Sagreements* (London: Cass, 1983), p. 26

(NTMs) of information-gathering, received treaty recognition in
the provisions of the ABM Treaty and in SALT 1 and SALT II
that it might be used by each party for this purpose, without inter-
ference or impedance by the other party through deliberate con-
cealment measures.

This was the first legitimization of intelligence collection, and
the first undertaking not to take defensive measures against it.
SALT II negotiations also provided specifically against any further
Soviet encryption of telemetry channels. What emerged was, in
John Gaddis' words, a "reconnaissance satellite regime" between
the Cold War superpowers.[30] It was carried further in the INF
and START treaties, along with agreements for specific displays of
equipment to imagery satellites.[31] START also banned telemetry
encipherment completely.[32] NTMs subsequently acquired some
multilateral legitimacy in the CFE agreement,[33] and in CSCE's
Stockholm Document of 1986.[34] Whatever part arms control play-
ed in Cold War history, American intelligence's capabilities, plus
the Soviet position in the same league, were the means of getting
it underway and maintaining its impetus until on-site inspection
became possible as the Cold War wound down.

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30   John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987),
     pp. 195–214.
31   Thus article XII of the INF Treaty provided for each side to be able to request six
     open displays per year of road-mobile ground-launched missiles at operating bases;
     not later than six hours after receiving a request, roofs of all launcher structures
     were to be slid open, and missiles and launchers moved into the open for a period
     of twelve hours. (J.K. Leggett and P.M. Lewis, "Verifying a START Agreement:
     Impact of INF Precedents", *Survival*, vol. 30, no. 5 (Sept/Oct 1988): 413). The
     START I agreement included similar provisions for monitoring mobile ICBMs; see
     A.S. Krass, "Update: Verification and START: a Progress Report" in J.B. Poole and
     R. Guthrie (eds), *Verification Report 1992* (London: Vertic, 1992), p. 57.
32   The treaty required the broadcasting of all telemetric information and banned
     any practice – including encryption, encapsulation and jamming – that denied
     access to it by NTMs. It also required the provision of full telemetry tapes and
     certain information that helped in their interpretation. This was "a new and highly
     significant commitment to transparency in military affairs." (Details and quotation
     from Krass, "Update: Verification and START...", p. 59.)
33   Signatories agreed not to interfere with national or multinational technical
     verification or impede it by concealment; and to consider cooperative measures to
     enhance national or multinational verification (*Trust and Verify*, no. 4 (October
     1989)).
34   V. Kunzendorf, "Verification of Conventional Arms Control", *Adelphi Papers*, no.
     245 (London: IISS/Brassey's, 1989): 52.

Warning

If support for arms control was the area where intelligence's potential had its most specific Cold War influence, another was less specific but more important. This was intelligence's warning role, the antidote to the fear of surprise Soviet attack, the trip-wire to alert all other trip-wires. Pearl Harbor had seared itself into the American consciousness, and fear of a surprise Soviet attack was a lasting American concern. The British experience of warning failures had been less traumatic, yet the German invasions of Norway and France in 1940 had pointed to the need for warning, and Churchill charged the JIC with producing appreciations for him "at any hour of the day or night". After 1945 the American concern about warning was spurred by the attack on Korea and the subsequent Chinese intervention, and warning machinery was set up.[35] Britain then responded to a later American initiative to extend this to a tripartite system to include Canada.

In providing for this it was always assumed that there would never be explicit evidence of a Soviet intent to attack or the decision to proceed. These would instead be inferred from departures from normality over wide ranges of Soviet activity, and the warning indicators that these would present.. This entailed monitoring Soviet armed forces and their supporting services as extensively and speedily as possible.

From this requirement came the major US-led Western investment, on a multi-national basis that extended beyond the special UK–US–Canada relationship, to use technology to provide increasingly timely coverage of this kind with correspondingly accelerated computer processing and analytic support. The effect was to move towards providing twenty-four hour electronic surveillance of the Soviet threat, though this was never complete or instantaneous. If an exciting part of the intelligence Great Game was the close-range collection around the Soviet periphery, a more routine but equally substantial one was the operation of the Western network of reporting centres, situation rooms and duty of-

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35   C.M. Grabo, "The Watch Committee and the National Indications Center: The
      Evolution of U.S. Strategic Warning 1950–75", *International Journal of Intelligence
      and Counterintelligence*, vol. 3, no. 3 (fall 1989).

ficers that incessantly followed and reported Soviet military moves.
It is interesting that the Soviet Union adopted its own warning sys-
tem in the early 1980s when the preemptive American strike was
so much feared.

In the West this accent on current intelligence was never solely
for strategic warning. Some of the mobile collection operations
needed their own real-time alerting systems for Soviet reactions
that threatened their safety; and it was inconceivable in any case
that Western governments should not have some current awareness
of Soviet military activities, particularly of forces deployed outside
the Soviet Bloc. Nevertheless, strategic warning was a special re-
quirement of top priority, and provision for it at a near-wartime
tempo became a distinctive feature of the Western intelligence ef-
fort. Of all the megatons of paper that Cold War intelligence con-
sumed, a considerable proportion must have been for the epheme-
ral material produced as part of this surveillance system.

No one will ever know how effective it would have been
against a real attack. Its record on Soviet moves against others
was actually unimpressive. Intelligence failed to provide warnings
of the military moves to crush Hungarian and Czechoslovakian
independence in 1956 and 1968. It provided some indications of
Moscow's preparation to take action against China in 1969, but
it did not forecast the scale or significance of the Soviet invasion
of Afghanistan in 1979, though it did do better in following the
aborted preparations for a military move into Poland in December
1979 and spring 1980. We do not know how the Soviet leadership
rated the West's ability to get warning of such moves, and whether
this was a factor in its own decisions: though the detection of
the missiles in Cuba probably left a lasting mark, and America's
diplomatic signalling based on intelligence on the Polish situation
in 1980–81 may have helped to deter Moscow from the military
solution it was contemplating.

But this record is hardly relevant. Belief in a warning capability
was central to the West's politico-strategic stance. Despite the sur-
vivability of some nuclear forces, strategic deterrence as a whole
needed some warning of a Soviet bolt-from-the-blue. The ability
to resist a conventional Warsaw Pact attack on continental Europe

depended on warning time for NATO's large-scale mobilization and reinforcement. There were endless debates about the warnings that could be expected for various scenarios of a Soviet attack, but the bottom line was that the West believed in its warning system, even if it had no other option. The Soviet Union was no doubt well aware of this, and probably believed in it as well. Less formally, it was recognized in the West that timely warning could help to prevent war by mutual misperception, or because of accidents in the automated detection of missile launches and in-coming warheads. As technology increased the impressiveness of the warning system, statesmen felt that they had some additional protection against the fog of Cold War crises, and this confidence was a significant stabilizing element. Even at the times of greatest tension, American Presidents never believed that they were about to be Pearl Harbor-ed.

Effects overall

The key question for the West was Soviet strategic intent. Intelligence contributed in varying ways but on this it never had hard facts or unique insights to offer. It did not create the West's adversarial image of the USSR when it was first formed, though its evidence of Soviet espionage played a part. It became more influential later, but by then the Soviet image was well established, and continued to be refreshed by overt Soviet behaviour. On the whole Western intelligence legitimized this general view of the adversary, or furnished evidence that others drew on for this purpose.

We still do not yet know whether in what it produced it really got inside the mind of the Soviet leadership, particularly in the balance there between ambitions and fears. One of its handicaps on this was that those drafting its assessments were rarely aware of the scale of Western covert action and provocative collection against the USSR, and the effects these could have had on Soviet thinking. But we may never know whether the Western view of the adversary's intentions was "right" or "wrong". It was an integral part of the Cold War and may have been as self-fulfilling as other parts of it.

Intelligence was of more effect on the Soviet military capabilities

that turned intentions into threats. It was the only authority on
the Soviet military power to which Western defence policies were
reactions. Its early inputs were important in establishing the Western
view of the Soviet preponderance of conventional land forces and
the expectation of operational Soviet nuclear weapons and mis-
siles from the mid-1950s onwards. Subsequently the erroneous
American estimates of the "bomber gap" and "missile gap" and
their place in American politics produced what turned out to be
the long-lasting instability in the two sides' strategic nuclear force
development. But as the West's intelligence improved, its defence
decisions came to be better geared to actual Soviet capabilities,
particularly perhaps in nuclear weaponry. The "numbers games"
in defence decisions were more firmly based in the second half of
the Cold War than in the first.

There were still distortions and uncertainties. Intelligence in-
clined towards worst cases, or was used by governments as evi-
dence to support them. Soviet effectiveness remained hard to judge,
and future Soviet weaponry remained a matter of guesswork. In-
telligence was not treated with the objectivity it commands in seri-
ous war. It figured somewhere in all Western defence decisions,
but its importance remains elusive. Nevertheless as it improved it
increasingly limited the room for exaggeration and fantasies. Wes-
tern defence policies by the later years of the Cold War came to
be better grounded in evidence, and less faith-based. There was no
repetition of the situation at the end of the 1950s when intelligence
could only offer genuine professional uncertainty whether the US
was threatened by hundreds of Soviet ICBMs or hardly any.

Other parts of Cold War history were more directly intelligence-
driven or intelligence-influenced. Covert action was obviously
one. Arms control was another: it would never have been put into
place without American satellites, and the American imagination
in using them for this purpose. Intelligence stands out in some
Cold War incidents and episodes: it drove much of the Cuba crisis,
which might have run a different course if the Soviet missiles had
been discovered later, or earlier.

But considering the effort expended on it, Western intelligence's
impacts at the detailed cause-and-effect level of Cold War history

seem fewer than might be expected. Intelligence comes into its own in war, and its clearest Cold War use was in preparing armed forces for the war they did not have to fight. Its significance in peace is always more diffuse and harder to trace. To return to the dichotomy at the beginning of this paper between swaying governments' decisions and influencing the atmospherics: the impact of intelligence (of both sides) was probably as much on the second – the images, the moods, the fears, the leadership styles – as on the first.

Part of this was the effect of intelligence activities in confirming (in the words of a British government poster in the Second World War) that "there's a war on". Soviet methods led the US to an early conviction that it had to fight the intelligence war in the same way as the opponent. As President Eisenhower noted in 1955, well after this had happened, "I have come to the conclusion that some of our traditional ideas of international sportsmanship are scarcely applicable in the morass in which the world now flounders".[36] The British never needed persuading about this.

So both sides played intelligence hardball. As the Cold War continued there was the succession of intelligence–related incidents plus the drip effects of East-West maritime and airborne encounters, the deeply clandestine technical operations (notably the early overflights of the Soviet Union), widespread espionage and covert action and their connections with diplomatic cover and diplomatic premises. Suspicion of them was as important as detection. The effect was to underline hostility and to weigh in the scales against détente. The Western intelligence bases around the Soviet periphery were less provocative, but were still part of the Cold War's line-up of forces. Intelligence in all its operations was an affirmation of the long-term contest and hostility between the two competing systems in a state of abnormal peace. If this really shifted Western democracy towards the "garrison state" that its critics discerned,[37] then intelligence was a principal factor in the change.

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36   Quoted by John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p. 165.
37   For discussion and reference see Peter Gill, *Policing Politics: Security Intelligence and the Liberal Democratic State* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 28. See also E. Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies* (London: Heinemann, 1956).

In the opposite direction there was the psychological effect on the West's leaders and publics of feeling that as the Cold War continued they were knowing the enemy better. In the first half of it, Western intelligence performed creditably but could not command great confidence. By the second half governments were less worried that new Soviet weapons would appear out of the blue. There were still plenty of scare stories about frightening Soviet capabilities and Soviet deception, and intelligence was cherry-picked to support them. But it was able to provide some test of advocacy against evidence, and had some effect in dampening the oscillations of American policy. There was no repetition of the policy panic in 1957 when the appearance of the Soviet Sputnik seemed to show that America was being outstripped. In so far as the Cold War resembled an arms race of an earlier era, it was managed more realistically than if complete Soviet secrecy had prevailed.

This helped Western governments as their concern increasingly became to seek East-West stability: to manage the Cold War, rather than seeking to wage it or end it. Most important for this, however, was the belief in intelligence's ability to provide warning of a Soviet attack. Many parts of the West's defence depended on it, and it was indeed a bulwark for the belief in Cold War management. Here intelligence's important contribution under US leadership was its harnessing of technology to provide a wartime-style warning system for permanent operation in peacetime, in effect continuously taking the pulse of the Soviet system. Hardly any action was ever needed on the extensive flow of ephemeral intelligence this produced: strictly speaking, most of it was useless, a precaution against the attack that never came. But it helped to reduce the risk of mutual misperception and false alarms. The belief in this capability now seems more important than how it might have performed if actually tested.

Now it is over we forget the Cold War's tension and fears, and the extent to which they might have increased its huge risks. Intelligence's surveillance reduced governments' uncertainty, and gave British and American governments some confidence that situations would not spin out of control. To repeat: American Presidents never believed that they were about to be Pearl Harbor-ed.

Subsequent experience since the terrorist attacks on the American homeland has shown us just how drastically a fear of surprise attack can change the perceptions of governments and publics and shift decision-takers on to unexpected tracks.

So did Western intelligence make a difference? I am inclined to support the verdict of Sir Percy Cradock, long-time Chairman of the British JIC, that "despite the best intentions, government is usually a hand-to-mouth affair. The Committee made it less so".[38] Intelligence did the same in the more difficult conditions of Washington. It was fortunate in this that both countries drew on the professional heritage of 1939–45. that gave them an intelligence gold standard to which they could aspire. British children at that time asked their fathers and grandfathers "what did you do in the First World War (or the Second)"? If they now ask the retired intelligence practitioner what he or she did in the Cold War, the answer might be that "I helped to tame it and avoid Armageddon".

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38   Percy Cradock, *Know Your Enemy: How the Joint Intelligence Committee Saw the World* (London: John Murray, 2002), p. 302.

How much did intelligence matter in the Cold War?

By J. Kenneth McDonald

> We are the eyes and ears of the nation and at times its hidden hand.
>
> —*CIA Mission Statement*

It has been said about advertising that half the money spent is wasted – but no one knows which half. Much the same might be said about intelligence, on which the US spent at least half a trillion dollars in the Cold War.[1] I cannot produce a Cold War profit and loss statement for CIA, but I can look into some of its most important efforts to see what United States taxpayers got for their money.

My paper focuses on the Central Intelligence Agency both because CIA and the Soviet KGB were the principal intelligence adversaries in the Cold War, and because after 14 years as CIA's chief historian I can evaluate that service's experience in a way that I could not attempt for the KGB.[2] Moreover, what mattered

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1   Patrick Radden Keefe, *Chatter: Dispatches from the Secret World of Global Eavesdropping* (New York: Random House, 2005), p. vii.
2   Although the CIA has reviewed this paper to ensure that it includes no classified

about intelligence to the United States probably also mattered to its allies, its adversaries, and those who were neither.

While the CIA was not alone in the secret war against the intelligence services of the Soviet Union and its allies, one historian has observed that it "was to the Western effort as the US Army was to the Allied landing on Normandy in 1944, first among equals and the principal source of men and money."[3]

Although the United States had got along with almost no intelligence capabilities from 1776 to the eve of the Second World War, by 1945 the US had developed all forms of intelligence to a high state. In the two years after the war's end, the United States thoroughly reorganized its defense and foreign policy establishment in the National Security Act of 1947. Created by that statute, the Central Intelligence Agency arrived on the scene in September 1947 as US civilian and military policymakers reached a consensus that an aggressive and intractable Soviet Union was the major threat to the peace and stability of the postwar world. From that time forward, intelligence unquestionably mattered mightily in waging the Cold War.

CIA's intelligence work falls into two categories: traditional intelligence and covert action.[4] This paper focuses on traditional intelligence, which involves the collection and analysis of information. Intelligence collection includes classical espionage, the intelligence CIA gets from human informants, liaison, and open sources. Collection also includes technical means such as imagery and signals interception from high altitude aircraft and satellites. Since the U-2's first flights in 1956 and the Corona spy satellite's first orbits in 1960, these new sensors and collectors have become crucial for US intelligence. Intelligence analysis involves processing and evaluating information collected from all these sources to produce timely finished intelligence for policymakers.[5]

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information, that review neither constitutes CIA authentication of information nor CIA endorsement of my views.

3   Thomas Powers, *Intelligence Wars: American Secret History from Hitler to Al-Qaeda* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2002) p. 282–83.

4   CIA sums up these two roles: "We are the eyes and ears of the nation and at times its hidden hand." Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA: Vision, Mission, and Values", (Central Intelligence Agency [online 8 Aug 2006]).

5   Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA: Vision, Mission, and Values".

Since 1963 CIA had divided responsibility for collection be-
tween the Directorate of Science and Technology (DS&T), which
manages satellite intelligence, and the Directorate of Operations
(DO), which manages clandestine collection, largely from human
sources.[6] Intelligence analysis is the responsibility of CIA's Directo-
rate of Intelligence (DI), which also has a major role in preparing
National Intelligence Estimates.

Intelligence has been defined as "knowledge and analysis design-
ed to assist action."[7] It involves both the collection and analysis
of information and procedures to put findings at the disposal of
policymakers. The quality of intelligence depends on its precision
and accuracy and on its timeliness and relevance to policymakers'
concerns.[8] Since CIA's job as an independent agency is to provide
objective intelligence in support of policymakers, it does not itself
have a policymaking role.[9]

Cold War policymakers needed intelligence to provide a forecast
or estimate of future developments. At one end of the spectrum,
intelligence monitors current events and trends, and alerts policy-
makers to emerging and long-term problems. At the other end,
intelligence may need to respond quickly in a crisis or warn of an
imminent attack. In the Cold War, CIA's primary mission, intel-
ligence collection and analysis, has always mattered most.

CIA's other capacious mission, covert action, ordinarily has lit-
tle to do with collection and analysis. Before taking up CIA's tra-
ditional intelligence mission in the Cold War, I should briefly des-
cribe the on-again, off-again role of its covert action operations.
By definition and in practice, such operations are not intended to

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6   The DO also manages covert action operations, as well as counterintelligence to
     protect CIA's organization, sources, and methods from outside penetration.
7   Robert Bowie, quoted in Ernest May, ed., *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence
     Assessment Before the Two World Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,
     1984) p. 3. CIA's "vision" statement declares "We will provide knowledge and take
     action to ensure the national security of the United States", Central Intelligence
     Agency, "CIA: Vision, Mission, and Values".
8   May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies...*, p. 3.
9   The CIA reports to the National Security Council, but the Director of Central
     Intelligence was not a statutory member of that body. Neither CIA nor a National
     Intelligence Estimate can serve as a proponent or advocate of any particular policy
     option.

collect intelligence. [10] According to its current mission statement, CIA conducts covert action "at the direction of the President to preempt threats or achieve United States policy objectives." [11] You should understand that "covert action" is not a generic term for all of CIA's clandestine activities. Covert action involves secret operations or activities, designed first to influence foreign governments, organizations, persons or events, and secondly to be conducted in such a way that the US government's role is not apparent and can be plausibly denied if an operation is uncovered.

As "the nation's secret hand," CIA's covert action operations have ranged from secret funding of student associations, trade unions or political parties abroad, to efforts to support resistance groups behind the Iron Curtain or organize dissident colonels to overthrow a Third World regime. Unlike espionage (or "clandestine collection"), which ordinarily remains secret, covert operations are almost always exposed, usually sooner rather than later, and often with serious domestic and foreign political consequences. In the country involved, these secret interventions can leave a lasting legacy of hostility, fear, and suspicion of pervasive CIA conspiracies.

In covert action's heyday from 1953 to 1961, when Allen Dulles was Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), CIA carried out large paramilitary operations in Iran, Guatemala, and Cuba. Later there were operations in Southeast Asia and Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s and in Afghanistan, Angola, and Central America in the 1980s. With the exception of CIA's covert aid to the Afghan resistance from 1979 to 1989, large paramilitary operations usually damaged US long-term interests even when they did not fail. [12] It will require another paper, perhaps at another conference, to explain why CIA's covert action operations frequently frustrate and only rarely benefit American national policy or interests.

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10   The 1974 Hughes-Ryan amendment to the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act defined
      covert action (for the first time in legislation) as "operations in foreign countries,
      other than activities intended solely for obtaining necessary intelligence."
11   Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA: Vision, Mission, and Values".
12   CIA's successful Afghan operation helped the *Mujahidin* drive the Soviet army out
      of their country, but the Taliban takeover, Al-Qaeda training camps, and bootleg
      Stinger missiles were part of its aftermath.

Leaving covert action aside, I shall concentrate on CIA's traditional intelligence mission, which is intended to provide timely, accurate, and relevant information to help policymakers take action. I begin with the advent of overhead reconnaissance, the most important advance in the history of intelligence collection. I shall then turn to CIA's premier form of finished intelligence, National Intelligence Estimates, whose analytical base was revolutionized by overhead reconnaissance.

Overhead Reconnaissance: the U-2 and Corona

On the advice of a committee of scientists searching for means to prevent any surprise attack, President Dwight Eisenhower in late November 1954 directed CIA to build and operate a special purpose, unarmed photo reconnaissance aircraft capable of flying safely at extremely high altitudes over the Soviet Union.[13] Recognizing that flying in another state's airspace without permission in peacetime could be considered a hostile act, Eisenhower assigned CIA to manage the project and to fly the aircraft as a non-military, secret intelligence operation. Despite its total lack of experience with large or advanced technological projects, CIA produced this new aircraft, the U-2, in eight months, ahead of schedule and under budget.[14] Lockheed's delivery of 22 of these aircraft to CIA in the first half of 1956 marked CIA's entry into a new world of overhead reconnaissance.

From its first flight over the USSR 4 July 1956, the U-2 searched for Soviet production and deployment sites for intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), as well as for nuclear weapons production and test facilities. In August 1957, U-2 flights first found the main Soviet ICBM launch site at Tyuratam, and then the Soviet nuclear testing grounds at Semipalatinsk. In the same month, August 1957, the Soviets successfully tested an ICBM from Tyuratam, and two months later launched Sputnik I, the world's first artificial

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13   G.W. Pedlow and D.E. Welzenbach, *The CIA and the U-2 Program, 1954–1974* (Washington, DC: CIA History Staff, 1998), pp. 32–33. The U-2 was built to fly long missions without refueling at more than 70,000 feet.
14   4 August 1955 the U-2 made its maiden flight.

earth satellite.[15]

The surprise of Sputnik encouraged some US journalists and politicians to project a missile buildup that would give the USSR an ICBM superiority over the US by the early 1960s. This so-called "missile gap" could make the US vulnerable to surprise attack. The U-2 flights over Russia ended on 1 May 1960, when a Soviet surface to air missile (SAM) shot down Gary Powers' aircraft. The next stage in overhead reconnaissance began less than four months later, when CIA at last launched into orbit an intelligence satellite codenamed Corona in August 1960. Imagery gathered by this new Corona satellite in 1960 and 1961 established conclusively that there was no massive Soviet buildup and hence no missile gap.

In 12 years of operation, Corona took over 800,000 images that covered more than 600 million square miles of the earth's surface, including 1.65 million square miles of Soviet territory. It photographed missile and nuclear facilities, aircraft factories and airbases, and sites for constructing ships and missile submarines. It could uncover antiballistic missile sites, locate air defense missile batteries, and monitor ground forces' order of battle. From Corona the United States got its first timely, accurate and comprehensive coverage of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China.[16]

For the United States and CIA, the Corona satellite was the beginning of a Cold War intelligence revolution. As the first of a succession of reconnaissance satellite systems, Corona changed CIA's structure and the way it produced intelligence for national policymakers. In 1963 CIA Director John McCone formed a new Directorate for Science and Technology (DS&T), which developed the succeeding satellite programs of ever-increasing capabilities,

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15 By orbiting Sputnik I in 1957, the Soviet Union established an international precedent for the "freedom of space," which implied an unrestricted right of overflight in outer space.

16 The first successful CORONA flight in August 1960 acquired 3000 feet of film, which provided more photographic coverage of the USSR than all the U-2 flights had produced up to then. R. A. McDonald, ed., *CORONA: Between Earth and Sun: The First NRO Reconnaissance Eye in Space* (Bethesda, MD, ASPRS, 1997). See also Doc. No. 1, K. E. Greer, "CORONA", and Doc. No. 14, CIA/PIC, Joint Mission Coverage Index, "Mission 9009, 18 August 1960", Sept. 1960 (Excerpt), in Kevin C. Ruffner, ed., *CORONA: America's First Satellite Program* (Washington, DC: CIA History Staff, 1995), *Center for the Study of Intelligence* (Central Intelligence Agency [online 8 Aug 2006]).

complexity and expense. From the 1960s, CIA based its finished intelligence more and more on satellite imagery, which provided the US intelligence community with unprecedented knowledge about the Soviet Union. [17] Former CIA director Robert Gates later observed that from that time the US was never surprised by a Soviet weapons system.[18]

Processing, evaluating, and most of all, exploiting the massive data from satellites posed new and difficult problems. Once CIA acquired this data, however, it became very good at gauging the character, size, and location of Soviet weapons, forces, and bases.[19] At any given time CIA knew, for example, roughly how many combat aircraft or warheads the Soviets had, and where. Determining why the Soviets had that number and what they planned to do with them was, of course, a much more difficult enterprise. The ability accurately to locate, identify and count strategic forces nevertheless made it possible for Corona and the systems that succeeded it, along with the Soviet Union's counterpart satellite programs, to stabilize the last decades of the Cold War. It was a shared confidence in verification by overhead reconnaissance that made SALT-I (the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty of May 1972) and later agreements possible.[20] Both the US and the USSR maintained their strategy of nuclear deterrence, but each side's ability to search and monitor developments in the other reduced the fear of surprise attack for both sides. This critical role of overhead reconnaissance in keeping the peace may be the most important answer to the question, "How much did intelligence matter in the Cold War?"

In addition to its crucial importance for arms limitation veri-

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17   Some suspected a CIA obsession with technical intelligence. Secretary of State Alexander Haig once complained that, "in the intelligence business, if you haven't overheard it on intercept, or seen it in a photograph, you're not interested in it". *CIRA Newsletter* (Spring, 2005): 3.

18   Gates's statement did not mean that it was all plain sailing after CORONA; identifying new weapons systems usually left open many questions concerning their possible uses, projected numbers, etc. (e.g. the MIRV debate below).

19   A good deal of credit must go to the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC), which was formed in 1961 by combining CIA and military resources.

20   Since neither the US nor the Soviet Union officially acknowledged until late in the Cold War that it was using spy satellites, arms control agreements referred to verification by "National Technical Means."

fication, satellite intelligence also offered by far the most useful information for CIA's assessment of Soviet military capabilities right up to the end of the Cold War. Let us look at some examples of how CIA assessed Soviet strategic forces over the years for the intelligence community's ultimate product, the National Intelligence Estimate.

CIA and National Intelligence Estimates: Soviet Strategic Forces

CIA's major analytic organization, the Directorate of Intelligence, produced and disseminated mountains of finished intelligence to policymakers. These ranged from daily current intelligence (including the President's Daily Brief) to long-term estimates. I wish to look at the weightiest of these products prepared for senior policymakers, the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE). As the capstone of the intelligence pyramid, the NIE is a document usually drafted by CIA officers, coordinated with other members of the intelligence community, reviewed by senior panels, and submitted by the DCI to the President and National Security Council.[21]

When the National Security Act established CIA as an independent agency in September 1947, current intelligence – especially daily summaries for the president – was its most important analytical product. Efforts to produce long-term national estimates were few and indifferent. In June 1950, CIA, then a small new agency in the doldrums under an amiable but ineffective director, was as surprised as the rest of the United States' government by the sudden outbreak of the Korean War. To mobilize CIA for war, President Harry Truman appointed a new Director of Central Intelligence, Army Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith. Taking office in October 1950, General Smith immediately reorganized CIA, following the 1949 recommendations of a committee headed by Allen Dulles.[22] Smith

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21   D. P. Steury, ed. *Intentions and Capabilities: Estimates on Soviet Strategic Forces, 1950–1983* (Washington, D.C.: CIA History Staff, CSI, 1996) p. xiii. This volume contains 41 NIEs on Soviet strategic capabilities and intentions from the 1950s to 1983, which illustrate how CIA and the intelligence community performed their most crucial Cold War mission: to assess the Soviet threat to the US.

22   Truman nominated Gen. Smith on 21 August 1950, but because of serious surgery

was appalled at CIA's negligible production of estimates: when
he arrived in October, CIA had not yet produced an estimate on
Korea.

To ensure a continuing series of long-term estimates Smith created
a Board of National Estimates (BNE) of senior experts, chaired by
William L. Langer, an eminent Harvard historian, and supported
by a staff of CIA analysts in an Office of National Estimates
(ONE).[23] The new Board of National Estimates produced its first
National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) in November 1950 and by
the close of 1953 had circulated almost 150. Although other in-
telligence organizations were involved in the NIE process, CIA's
Board and Office of National Estimates, along with the large role
of CIA analysts, gave CIA clear leadership over the process. Some
of CIA's preeminence dissipated after 1973, when a new DCI,
William Colby (whose CIA career had been in the Directorate of
Operations), replaced the Board and Office of National Estimates
with a system of National Intelligence Officers (NIOs), who were
gathered into a new National Intelligence Council (NIC) in 1979.

Every year CIA and the intelligence community produced
a host of National Intelligence Estimates that covered not only
the Soviet Union but the whole spectrum of issues of interest to
US policymakers. Of all the estimates drafted, coordinated, and
disseminated over the years, probably the most important were
those that responded to questions about the capabilities and
intentions of Soviet strategic forces and the role of military power
in Soviet doctrine, policy, and plans. To understand these develop-
ments in the tightly controlled Soviet society was a formidable chal-
lenge. Moreover, since these estimates influenced US military plans
and procurement they impinged on a wide range of budgetary and

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he was not sworn in until 7 October 1950. Smith had been Eisenhower's chief of
staff 1942–1945 and Truman's ambassador to the Soviet Union 1946–1949.

23   Langer had headed the Research & Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic
Services (OSS) in the Second World War. Sherman Kent, a Yale historian and OSS
veteran, succeeded Langer in 1952 and chaired the BNE until 1967. In its first
year, the Board included three historians, an economist, a lawyer, and two senior
CIA officers. Sherman Kent, "The First Year of the Board of National Estimates:
The Directorship of William L. Langer," in D. S. Steury, ed. *Sherman Kent and the
Board of National Estimates: Collected Essays* (Washington, D.C.: CIA History
Staff, CSI, 1994) p. 143–49.

bureaucratic interests. This often gave the NIE coordination pro-
cess a hard edge and produced frequent footnotes dissenting from
the coordinated consensus position.

National Intelligence Estimates on Soviet strategic forces soon
formed an annual series prepared by a permanent staff whose re-
search and analysis continued all year. "The resultant continuity
and sheer intellectual concentration," writes Donald Steury, "contri-
buted significantly to the sophistication, depth and intensity of the
analysis that went into the Estimates."[24] A horseback survey of
some of the debates these NIEs provoked over four decades will
offer an idea of the importance of their analysis and its influence
on American Cold War policy.

By 1947 US policymakers, military intelligence, and CIA had
reached a consensus that Soviet leaders based their policies and
actions on an ideological conviction that a conflict between the US
and the USSR was inevitable. By the mid-1950s, the military ser-
vices, then the leading contributors to national estimates of Soviet
military programs, were gravely miscalculating the Soviet threat.
They underestimated the growth of Soviet military manpower and
expenditure and overestimated the growth of the Soviet submarine
force and all-weather fighter interceptors. More significantly, seri-
ous overestimation of Soviet long-range bomber production led to
a public outcry over a projected "bomber gap." While the US Air
Force estimated 700 to 800 Soviet long-range bombers from 1955
to 1957, the Soviets actually never deployed more than 150. By
1958, CIA intelligence, especially from U-2 imagery, had made the
illusory "bomber gap" disappear.[25]

A more politically volatile controversy soon followed over an al-
leged "missile gap", as mentioned in the previous section.[26] From
late 1957 (when the Soviet Sputnik stunned the US) to mid-1961, a

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24   Ibid., p. xix.
25   Raymond L. Garthoff, "Estimating Soviet Military Intentions and Capabilities," ch.
      V in G. K. Haines and R. E. Leggett, *Watching the Bear: Essays on CIA's Analysis
      of the Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: CIA, Center for the Study of Intelligence,
      2003). This section is mainly based on Dr. Garthoff's excellent essay and the
      estimates published in G. K. Haines and R. E. Leggett, *CIA's Analysis of the Soviet
      Union 1947–1991* (Washington, D.C.: CIA, Center for the Study of Intelligence,
      2001).
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series of National Intelligence Estimates projected a Soviet buildup
of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) much larger and
more rapid than the US program. Word of a developing "missile
gap" leaked out and critics of the Eisenhower administration ex-
pressed alarm at the threat of surprise attack to the US and its stra-
tegic forces. Senator John F. Kennedy used the "missile gap" issue
in his successful 1960 presidential election campaign against Vice
President Richard M. Nixon.

Taking the lead in alarmist forecasts, the Air Force sought in-
creased appropriations, while the other military services, State,
and CIA were also uncertain and uneasy about the Soviet ICBM
program. It was not until late 1961 that imagery from the new
Corona satellite along with new analytical techniques revealed
that Soviet leaders had decided to deploy only a few of the SS-6,
their bulky first generation ICBM, and wait for a better second ge-
neration missile. The missile gap disappeared.[27]

After this estimative success, the Office of National Estimates
confronted another question of Soviet missiles in the following
year, when the Soviet Union secretly began to deploy nuclear-
armed medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba.
In September 1962, a few weeks before these offensive missiles
were discovered, the Board of National Estimates circulated Spe-
cial National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) 85-3-62, which both
failed to predict the Soviet action and insisted that such a step
was unlikely. Fortunately, CIA Director John McCone, was not
persuaded and insisted on U-2 flights over western Cuba. On 14
October a U-2 flight photographed the nearly completed missile
sites, in time for President Kennedy to take steps to force the
Soviet Union's removal of the missiles. Although the erring SNIE
had recognized a Soviet military advantage in placing missiles in
Cuba, it insisted that the Soviet leadership was too prudent to
take such an unprecedented step. It would be "incompatible with
Soviet practice to date," the SNIE argued, and "would indicate a
far greater willingness to increase the risk in US–Soviet relations
than the USSR has displayed thus far." [28] Yet the estimate was

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27   Garthoff, "Estimating Soviet Military Intentions..."
28   M. S. McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*

dead wrong in a warning failure that was probably the Board of National Estimates' worst lapse in the Cold War. CIA was able to recoup this error when the 14 October U-2 flight saved the day.

In the 1960s and 1970s CIA's analysis of the Soviet ICBM threat diverged from that of military intelligence. In the 1950s CIA had agreed with the military consensus that in the long run the Soviet Union was seeking to achieve clear, military superiority, if possible. In the 1960 National Intelligence Estimates, CIA broke the consensus by contending that the Soviet ICBM buildup was intended to provide a substantial deterrent and preemptive attack capability, but not a decisive superiority. The Air Force's emphatic and stubborn dissent, stated first in February 1960 and repeated in most NIEs on the topic for the next 30 years, insisted that the Soviet Union would not be content with a deterrent and preemptive capability, but was working to attain, as soon as practicable, a military superiority over the United States which they would consider so decisive as to enable them either to force their will on the United States through the threat of destruction, or to launch such devastating attacks against the United States that, at the cost of acceptable damage to themselves, the United States as a world power would cease to exist.[29]

This of course describes the Soviet goal as a nuclear first-strike capability, an attack so devastating that a US retaliatory strike could not cause unacceptable damage to the Soviet Union. In a serious contretemps at the beginning of the Nixon administration in 1969, CIA's Directorate of Intelligence and Board of Estimates vigorously opposed a Pentagon contention that the Soviets' latest ICBM, the SS-9, had a first-strike capability. Rejecting the Pentagon's claim that one volley of these missiles could destroy all 70 US Minutemen missiles in their silos, CIA offered evidence that although the SS-9 missiles carried three warheads, they were nei-

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(Washington, D.C.: CIA History Staff, 1992), Doc. No. 33, SNIE 85-3-62, "The Military Buildup in Cuba," 19 Sept. 1962 (Excerpt). In 1964 Sherman Kent, Chairman of the BNE, wrote a thoughtful retrospective explanation of why the Board erred so badly. "A Crucial Estimate Relived," in Steury, *Sherman Kent and the Board of National Estimates...*p. 173ff.

29 NIE 11-8-59, "Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack through Mid-1964" (9 Feb. 1960), USAF dissent footnote, p. 3. (Quoted by Garthoff, "Estimating Soviet Military Intentions...")

ther Multiple Independently Targeted Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs),
nor (as the Pentagon later claimed) the "functional equivalent" of
MIRVed missiles.[30]

In fact, the issue revolved around the Nixon administration's
determination to build a US anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system,
which an SS-9 first-strike threat would justify. A mid-1969 CIA
memorandum updating the most recent Soviet strategic weapons
National Intelligence Estimate repeated the long-standing position
that the Soviet Union was not seeking first-strike ability. An out-
raged Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, accused the CIA of an
attack on the Nixon administration's ABM policy. DCI Richard
Helms reluctantly gave in to Laird's insistence and – to the intense
chagrin of the Board of Estimates – withdrew the offending para-
graph.[31] This was one of few times that policymakers insisted that
an estimate conform to their own policy. As it turned out, the
Soviets never MIRVed the SS-9, and their first MIRVed Interconti-
nental Ballistic Missile only reached initial operational capability
(IOC) in 1975.[32]

Throughout the 1970s, CIA and the National Intelligence Esti-
mates maintained that the Soviets were seeking at least strategic
equality with the US and if attainable, some degree of strategic ad-
vantage. The US military, on the other hand, insisted that the con-
tinuing Soviet ICBM buildup aimed at achieving a first-strike ca-
pability, which would give the USSR world domination. Military
intelligence, convinced that the Soviets unfairly exploited any
Western concessions, typically opposed policies of détente, arms
control, and increased trade with the USSR.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, both the Carter and
Reagan administrations warned that US defense spending was

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30   Russell Jack Smith, *The Unknown CIA: My Three Decades with the Agency*
     (McLean, V.: Brassey-Pergamon, 1989) p. 205–7. CIA used advanced aerodynamic
     and ballistic trajectory evidence to refute the Pentagon claim that the SS-9's triple
     warheads' free fall would form a "footprint" that could destroy all of the US
     Minutemen missiles before they could be launched.
31   Ibid., p. 207–8. Helms reasoned that he could make this concession since the update
     was merely an addendum to the original NIE, where CIA's long-standing position
     was still clearly stated. The Director of the Department of State's intelligence put
     the withdrawn paragraph back into the update memo, as a dissenting footnote.
32   The US already had MIRVed ICBMs by 1970.

in a dangerous decline while Soviet defense spending was allegedly increasing at about four to five percent a year. In 1982 CIA analysts nevertheless found that the actual growth in Soviet defense expenditures since 1976 had averaged about two percent, while weapons procurement showed no growth at all. The US "spending gap" silently disappeared.[33]

In the final phase of the Cold War, from 1987 to 1991, the most important fault in National Intelligence Estimates on Soviet military power was their unwillingness even cautiously to acknowledge the radical changes in Soviet doctrine, policy, and strategy that were already underway

NIEs in 1987 and 1988 continued to be skeptical of any fundamental change in Soviet military policy right up to the time that Gorbachev announced, in a December 1988 address to the UN General Assembly, that the Soviet Union would unilaterally cut its forces by 500,000 men and withdraw six tank divisions and 5000 tanks from Eastern Europe. NIEs on Soviet policy, doctrine, and strategy were especially slow in reacting to the rapid changes under Gorbachev, finding it difficult to credit the new Soviet defensive strategy.[34] Yet to the end, National Intelligence Estimates continued to state, without dissent, that the Soviet Union never had capabilities that could give its leaders confidence in surviving and winning a nuclear war. The debate was always over whether the Soviet leadership believed such superiority was attainable and whether they were driven to seek to achieve it.[35] It was only when the Soviet Union finally disappeared at the end of 1991 that CIA no longer needed to defend its National Intelligence Estimates against the Pentagon's belief in a Soviet Union hell-bent on world domination.

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33   Ibid. Later Directorate of Intelligence research revealed that from 1974 to 1986, in spite of the perennial military dissents, CIA's NIEs had all overestimated the size of Soviet force modernization plans.

34   Garthoff, "Estimating Soviet Military Intentions..."

35   Ibid.

Conclusions

The answer to the question, "How much did intelligence matter in the Cold War?" is "A lot." It is hard to see, for example, how the Soviet Union and the United States could have reached their arms limitation agreements without satellite intelligence for reliable verification. The influence of any given NIE or NIE series on specific people and policy decisions is not easy to track, although the influence of the NIE series we surveyed, on the intentions and capability of Soviet strategic forces, is easier to discern than most. This is because, as the hard fights and dissents in coordination demonstrated, these estimates' conclusions could directly affect major US decisions on defense appropriations, weapons programs development, and force structure as well as foreign policy.

Now, in the second decade since the Cold War's end, we can look back at the prodigious effort and money US intelligence invested in collecting everything useful to know about Soviet strategic arms capabilities and intentions. It was the analysis of this body of knowledge that enabled a succession of National Intelligence Estimates to guide the US to a happy ending in the long rivalry with the Soviet Union. Thus it was intelligence – above all Soviet and American satellite intelligence – that stabilized and eventually ended the Cold War arms race. "Great Powers can struggle vigorously for decades without precipitating a global bloodbath," Thomas Powers has observed, "so long as both sides are good at discovering, but not too good at hiding, the secrets that really matter."[36]

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36   Thomas Powers, *Intelligence Wars: American Secret History from Hitler to Al-Qaeda* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2002) p. 306.

On the Soviet side

By Vojtech Mastny

Anyone attempting to compare the accomplishments of Western and Soviet bloc intelligence during the Cold War must start by recognizing two obvious differences: First, intelligence and its agencies were integral to the totalitarian Soviet system in ways they were not to the pluralistic Western democracies. And second, whatever these services' accomplishments, they were not enough to save the system from its wretched end. Were there congenital flaws that hampered Soviet intelligence in serving the intended purposes of its masters? If so, could its activities at least be credited with keeping the Cold War cold? Looking at the historical record, these are the main questions addressed in this essay.

The Stalin Era

The secret services that helped the Soviet Union wage the Cold War had evolved over decades as part and parcel of the machinery of a police state. Created by the country's Bolshevik rulers, they were adapted by Stalin to suit to his particular brand of personal dictatorship. Both intelligence and counterintelligence served the primary purpose of securing internal control while protecting the regime against real or imaginary foreign infiltration and subversion. Domestic and foreign operations were intertwined with each other as well as with the apparatus of preventive repression throughout the Soviet Union and its Eastern European dependencies. In peace-

time, there were no sharp lines between the military and political intelligence that was gathered, respectively, by the GRU and the super-agency known in its final incarnation as the KGB.

In the golden days of communism, strong ideological dedication permeated all the intelligence personnel, generating an image of its nigh mystical capability and effectiveness. The Marxist ideology that inspired its thinking and motivated its action posited the existence of powerful and irreconcilable enemies, whose hostility required perpetual vigilance. In the extreme Stalinist conception, the intensity of the "class struggle" that had to be waged against those enemies was increasing rather than diminishing as the historically inevitable triumph of "socialism" was approaching. The Soviet Union's victory in World War II, which brought under its control largely hostile parts of Central and Eastern Europe, added to the importance of intelligence as the "fatherland of socialism" was heading toward a confrontation with the world's most powerful capitalist nation, the United States – a turn of events Stalin had neither wished nor anticipated.

However, the exalted reputation of Soviet intelligence services was greatly exaggerated. Under Stalin, the pervasive atmosphere of fear that permeated his regime affected adversely the efficacy and value of intelligence operations, as it induced both the spies and the analysts to gather and report to their superiors mainly what the despot wanted to hear. For example, during his pact with Hitler, Stalin's propensity for appeasement discouraged the collection of intelligence when it was most needed to prepare for the impending German attack. Stalin's refusal to heed the abundant warnings he had nonetheless been receiving from different quarters prior to the June 1941 German invasion has gone down in history as a prime example of the irrelevance of intelligence if the will to act upon it is lacking. Conversely, Moscow's willingness to act at that time on intelligence reports from Tokyo that Hitler's Japanese ally would remain neutral made a major difference. The resulting strategic shift of the bulk of Soviet forces onto the German front probably saved the country from defeat. Such an important outcome of an intelligence feat, however, was much more likely to occur in wartime than in peacetime.

Having learned from its mistakes, the Soviet Union subsequently achieved what may in retrospect be judged its greatest intelligence triumphs. By the end of the 1940s, its agents' penetration of Western governments had left hardly any secrets of any value outside its reach. The magnitude of this accomplishment, to be sure, was due not so much to the prowess of Soviet officers as to the extraordinary availability of well-placed Western sympathizers, typically disillusioned members of the upper classes, who were ready to commit treason for the sake of supposed communist ideals.

The most notable result of this significant, but episodic, phenomenon was the acquisition by the Soviet Union of Western nuclear secrets, which allowed it to produce the atomic bomb sooner than it would have been able to do otherwise, and thereby emerge as a rival superpower to the United States. In the longer perspective, however, there was an air of futility about that accomplishment, as it generated unfounded assumptions about each side's aggressive intentions, offered the dubious and costly rationale for strategies of deterrence, and fueled the inconclusive arms race. Rather than providing solid foundations for great power status, nuclear weapons' most conspicuous and lasting legacy for Russia, as well as for other parts of the former Soviet Union, has been the contamination of large portions of territory with radioactive waste and the headache of having to protect the obsolete nuclear stockpile against illicit removal.

More important than the acquisition of the dismal weapon was the Soviet ability to become privy to the West's most secret military plans at a time when the possibility of a real war appeared most likely and, according to the Marxist-Leninist writ, inevitable. But since Stalin believed such a war could be delayed, perhaps indefinitely, his capacity to learn from his spies that a Western attack was not imminent was more important than anything else, especially in view of his susceptibility to miscalculation. This came again on display in 1950, when he finally gave his approval, after considerable hesitation, to the communist aggression in Korea on the erroneous assumption that the United States would not intervene. The error showed the limitations of even the best

intelligence in a rapidly changing situation. In fact, the United
States had not been ready to intervene by the time the invasion
was launched and even President Truman could not predict that
his country's lack of readiness would subsequently be reversed.[1]

In Stalin's last years, Soviet intelligence capabilities declined
after his star spy, Kim Philby, had to be spirited away to
Moscow to avoid exposure. The utility of information received
suffered further from the officially fomented paranoia about
enemy conspiracies. Evidence from Eastern European archives
demonstrates that reports showing vast penetration by Western
spies were not merely invented for public consumption to justify
the repression of imaginary enemies, but were taken seriously by
the security services as a working assumption. The results were
sometimes bizarrely counterproductive. For example, it was
Soviet intelligence that played into the hands of the Czechoslovak
services bogus evidence about treasonable contacts of former party
general secretary, Rudolf Slánský – evidence subsequently used to
destroy him and other communist officials of impeccable loyalty
to Moscow.[2]

The Khrushchev Period

After Stalin's death, the self-defeating distortions of Soviet
intelligence due to the impact of his personality and style of
governance lessened but never disappeared. They included build-
ing up the Eastern European secret services as extended arms of
Moscow – a relationship bound to impair the quality of the infor-
mation received at the headquarters about the conditions in the
countries from where, rather than from the West, the most serious
threats to Soviet power in Europe were repeatedly emanating.
Accordingly, the Kremlin was caught by surprise by the 1953 East

1   Kathryn Weathersby, "To Attack, or Not to Attack? Stalin, Kim Il Sung, and the
     Prelude to War," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, vol. 5 (1995):
     1–9.
2   Igor Lukeš, "Der Fall Slánský: Eine Exilorganisation und das Ende des
     tschechoslowakischen Kommunistenführers 1952", *Vierteljahrshefte für
     Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 47 (1999): 459–501.

German uprising, the 1956 upheavals in Poland and Hungary, and all the subsequent crises in the region that ultimately proved fatal of the integrity of the Soviet empire.

Under Khrushchev, the security services' repressive role decreased, but a sense of being vulnerable to penetration and subversion by Western intelligence persisted. This was evident in Khrushchev's resistance to any proposals for intrusive armaments inspections, such as Eisenhower's "open skies" idea of mutual aerial surveillance of military installations. The reason for his opposition was not so much a desire to cheat on weapons development as concern about the effects of such an opening on the closed communist societies. After being the first to send an artificial satellite around the Earth in 1968, Moscow accepted the principle of unimpeded surveillance of any territory from outer space. But the principle was to bring greater intelligence benefit to the West than to the East, for the United States soon assumed and always maintained the technological lead in aerial photography.

The change of Moscow's military strategy in Europe from defensive to offensive during the second Berlin crisis of 1958–61 was difficult to justify by NATO's allegedly aggressive plans. The Soviet intelligence was in a position to find out that these were in fact strictly defensive. To get around the contradiction, the supreme commander of the Warsaw Pact, Marshal Ivan S. Konev, offered its high-ranking officers a contorted, ideologically based explanation. He argued that since NATO based its defensive posture on the unfounded assumption that the "socialist" states were planning to attack, these must plan on the correct assumption that NATO, notwithstanding its actual position, would necessarily be the one to attack because of its capitalist nature.[3]

In taking high risks during the Berlin crisis, Khrushchev tended to rely more on intuition than on intelligence. Once Kennedy came to office, Soviet intelligence reported that the president was supposedly under pressure from his entourage to make conces-

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3   Speech by Koncv at Czechoslovak army exercise, 31 March–7 April, 1959, in
     Vojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne (ed.), *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of
     the Warsaw Pact, 1955–1991* (Budapest and New York: Central European University
     Press, 2005), pp. 97–99.

sions on Berlin.[4] Concluding that the new American leader was
weak, Khrushchev was thus encouraged to play for high stakes.
As he allowed the crisis to escalate, however, uncertainty about
American reaction discouraged him from taking the crucial step
of concluding a separate peace treaty with East Germany. In this
respect, unintended Western transparency may have been a bles-
sing in disguise.

By terminating the Western rights of access to Berlin, the treaty
would have risked provoking a military response. Through a
French traitor on the Allied committee that was planning for this
contingency, the Soviet Union was in a position to know that the
Western powers did not rule out the use of force, including a de-
monstrative high-altitude detonation of a nuclear bomb. Such
knowledge inevitably increased the margin of uncertainty about
Western intentions that eventually compelled Khrushchev to bring
the crisis to an end. The Soviet intelligence coup thus had the
perverse effect of making it more difficult for him to achieve in
Germany the goal he had originally set himself to accomplish.[5]

Nor did intelligence benefit Soviet – unlike American – policy
during the 1962 confrontation over Cuba. When trying surrepti-
tiously to install nuclear missiles on the island, Khrushchev knew
enough about what the Americans could do but not what they
would do, for they themselves did not know until the discovery of
the strategic missiles made them scramble for a policy. The Excom
deliberations, where the policy was being decided, remained
secret, denying Khrushchev the benefit of crucial intelligence. The
humiliating resolution of the crisis, which entailed the withdrawal
of the missiles under US aerial surveillance, exposed the limita-
tions of the attempted Soviet concealment.[6]

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4   Vladislav M. Zubok, "Unwrapping the Enigma: What Was Behind the Soviet
     Challenge in the 1960s?" in Diane B. Kunz (ed.), *The Diplomacy of the Crucial
     Decade: American Foreign Relations during the 1960s* (New York: Columbia
     University Press, 1994), pp. 149–82, at p. 153.
5   Gregory W. Pedlow, "Allied Crisis Management for Berlin: The Live Oak
     Organization, 1959–1963," in William W. Epley (ed.), *International Cold War
     Military Records and History: Proceedings of the International Conference on Cold
     War Military Records and History Held in Washington, D.C., 21–26 March 1994*
     (Washington: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1996), pp. 87–116.
6   Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, "The Pitsunda Decision: Khrushchev and
     Nuclear Weapons," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, vol. 10 (March

This failure was partly offset by Soviet success in concealing the removal from Cuba of tactical nuclear missiles, which the United States did not know about and whose existence only came to light after the end of the Cold War. Removing them undetected was essential so as to maintain the minimum of trust necessary for the improvement of US–Soviet relations, the most important result of which was the 1963 landmark Limited Test Ban Treaty. In this sense, its conclusion was a beneficial consequence of intelligence deception.

Eastern European intelligence services, despite their dependence on the KGB and GRU, could occasionally perform important feats of their own. Polish intelligence agents did so by eavesdropping on Khrushchev's son-in-law Aleksei Adzhubei's wild indiscretions during his talks with high-ranking West German politicians while visiting the Federal Republic in 1964. Passing the incriminating evidence into the hands of the Kremlin conspirators bent on ousting Khrushchev facilitated, though not caused, his downfall. It influenced Soviet power struggle rather than the course of the Cold War.[7]

The Brezhnev Years

Extending the Cold War into the Third World, which was initiated by Khrushchev and accelerated under his successors, vastly expanded the size of the Soviet intelligence agencies and their activities, both political and military. Eastern European and Cuban services were extensively involved. Their operatives usually adapted better to the local environments than did Russians, hampered by their racial prejudices. Czechoslovakia played a prominent role until 1968, after which it never enjoyed enough Soviet confidence to reemerge as an important player. East Germany then became Moscow's most

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1998): 223–27. James H. Hansen, "Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Studies in Intelligence*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2002): 49–58. Cf. James G. Blight, and David A. Welch, eds., *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (London: Cass, 1998), and Raymond L. Garthoff, "US Intelligence in the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Intelligence and National Security* 13, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 46–47, 50–51.

7   Douglas Selvage, "Poland and the Sino-Soviet Rift, 1963–1965", *Cold War International History Project e-Dossier Series*, no. 10 (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars [online 9 Aug 2006]).

valuable subsidiary in foreign covert and overt operations.

The record of Soviet intelligence in unfamiliar parts of the world with alien political cultures was decidedly mixed. For reasons still not entirely clear, in 1967 Soviet intelligence passed false information onto Egypt about an imminent Israeli attack on Syria, thus precipitating Egyptian preparations for an attack. These in turn prompted Israeli pre-emption and the spectacular defeat of Moscow's Arab clients in the Six-Day War. Afterwards the Soviet Union never regained enough control over them to be able to reliably manipulate them for its purposes. Instead, they became more adept at manipulating the Soviet Union to serve their purposes by having it assume risks it would have otherwise preferred to avoid.[8]

The Soviet miscalculations attending the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 attested to shortcomings of Moscow's intelligence in its own backyard. Its dependence on reporting by second-rate diplomats and party officials led to underestimating the extent of local revulsion against the intervention, forcing the Kremlin to compromise with the very leadership it had intended to depose. At the same time, though accurately informed that NATO was not preparing to move, the Soviet command was taking excessive precautions. The invading forces were instructed to avoid hostile contact with Western troops in the improbable event that NATO would choose to enter the fray – a political decision not supported by the available intelligence.[9]

By lowering the barriers separating the East and West, détente made the gathering of intelligence easier but also less necessary. Since intelligence activities, fueled especially by the continuing arms race, nevertheless proceeded apace they often did more harm than good to their taskmasters. The discovery in 1974 of an East German spy in the office of West Germany's chancellor, Willy Brandt, forced the resignation of a politician favored by the

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8   Aleksandr Shumilin, "Za kulisami 'shestidnevnoi voiny'" [Behind the Scenes of the "Six-Day War"], *Novoe vremia* 1992, no. 37: 22–24; Georgii M. Kornienko, *"Kholodnaia voina": Svidetelstvo ee uchastnika* [The "Cold War": A Testimony by Its Participant] (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001), p. 169.

9   Viktor Suvorov, *Osvoboditel* [The Liberator] (St. Petersburg: Konets veka, 1993), pp. 175–76.

Soviets, whom they had very much wanted to stay in power. Similarly counterproductive were the operations of Soviet submarines in Swedish waters. They undermined Moscow's efforts to cultivate the goodwill of Europe's leading neutral nation, especially after one of the intruding vessels gave itself away by running aground.

The massive penetration by East German spies of not only the West German government but also NATO headquarters was a tribute to their proficiency. Largely thanks to them, Moscow continued to receive reassuring information about NATO's military planning as well as the chronic discord within the alliance. The United States' defeat in Vietnam added to the good news, while the Sino-American rapprochement did not significantly detract from it. In any case, the Brezhnev leadership reached the upbeat, if false, conclusion that the global "correlation of forces" was moving irreversibly the Soviet way.

In view of this mistaken assumption, the value of what could be learned from the all but unlimited access to the enemy's secrets was, ironically, quite limited. Intelligence could not give the leaders a satisfactory explanation of why, contrary to their expectations, détente started deteriorating by the middle of the nineteen-seventies. The Kremlin refused to admit that its own covert and overt anti-Western operations on behalf of Third World "liberation movements" might be at fault for having undermined the détente it wanted to preserve. In fact, these activities gave outsiders the impression that the Soviet Union was more involved than was actually the case. In Africa, in particular, its hand was often blamed for what the Cubans were doing on their own initiative.[10] Clandestine liaisons established with leftist regimes in places of no vital Soviet interest, such as Nicaragua and Grenada, just because an opportunity to do so had offered itself, damaged Moscow's real interests.

The KGB bore a large degree of responsibility for the disastrous decision to invade Afghanistan in 1979. Choosing to meddle in messy Afghan politics, the Kremlin found itself in a situation it was unable to control. The increasingly arbitrary behavior of its

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10   Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976*
      (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 364–72.

onetime protégé, Hafizullah Amin, prompted KGB agents in the country to send to Moscow unfounded reports that the Americans were masterminding his actions. The reports were off the mark in that they exaggerated Washington's willingness, not to mention ability, to use the Afghan politician but were what the bellicose clique within the politburo that was looking for a pretext for an intervention wanted to hear.[11]

Prominent within that clique was KGB chief Yuri Andropov, by virtue of his office the best-informed person in the state, yet evidently not the wisest. During the crisis in Poland that soon followed, however, he acted as if he had learned a lesson. Under no illusions about the country's true situation and the prohibitive cost of a Soviet military intervention there, he emerged as the politburo's leading voice opposed to that course of action under any circumstances. Soviet intelligence agents assessed accurately the relative integrity of the Polish army, whose high command, under Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, eventually imposed martial law on its own initiative, thus giving communism in Poland a lease on life for a few more years.[12]

The head of the KGB understood the Polish situation better than he did the reasons behind the anti-Soviet turn in US policy under the Reagan administration. To the Eastern European allies, Andropov characterized the change as a response to the Soviet Union's attainment of strategic parity, the West's political losses in the Third World, and the capitalist system's progressing crisis. Consistent with the Marxist notion that the cornered capitalists would be tempted to find a way out of their predicament by unleashing war, he ordered operation RYAN – a worldwide watch by his agents for any signs of an impending surprise attack.[13]

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11   Vasiliy Mitrokhin, *The KGB in Afghanistan*, CWIHP working paper, no. 40
      (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002).
12   Mark Kramer (ed.), *Soviet Deliberations during the Polish Crisis, 1980–1981*,
      CWIHP special working paper no. 1 (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International
      Center for Scholars, 1999).
13   Speech by Andropov, 4–5 January 1983, in Mastny and Byrne, *A Cardboard
      Castle?*, pp. 472–70; Benjamin B. Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983
      Soviet War Scare* (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, 1997).

From Andropov to Gorbachev

After having succeeded Brezhnev as the party general secretary, Andropov's forebodings tended to be substantiated by incidents suggestive of a Western readiness to launch the dreaded attack. Besides Reagan's slip of tongue in front of an open microphone, the episodes included especially NATO's "Able Archer" exercise of November 1983 that simulated the release of nuclear missiles while concealing their parameters by encryption. The incident happened amid an officially fomented Soviet war scare; nevertheless, it did not prompt any notable precautionary, much less pre-emptive, action.

Retrospectively, East German intelligence officers have been claiming credit for saving peace by supplying their Moscow superiors with evidence of NATO's peaceful intentions. In fact, none of the records the officers had chosen to save to burnish their image for posterity offers supporting evidence; they all portrayed NATO's intentions as aggressive. More to the point, there was no alarm in the Soviet general staff. It is likely, though difficult to prove, that the various alarming incidents that were taking place, such as when signs of what could be read as incoming enemy missiles appeared on the monitoring screens, were reported by intelligence personnel with so many caveats that the men at the top never had to face agonizing decisions.[14]

If this was the case, it was a tribute to common sense taking hold within the communist intelligence services in the late stages of the Cold War. Unlike before, the services tended to attract the brightest and best, exposing them extensively to the Western environment, where they could form a realistic, rather than an ideologically colored, view of the other side. Symptomatic of the change was the growing number of operatives defecting from the

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14   Bernd Schaefer, *The Warsaw Pact's Intelligence on NATO: East German Military Espionage Against the West*, IFS Info No. 2/2002 (Oslo: Institute for Defence Studies, 2002). Vojtech Mastny, "Did East German Spies Prevent a Nuclear War?" *Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact* (PHP) (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich [online 8 Aug 2006]). On the lack of concern by the general staff, testimony by Col. Vitalii N. Tsygichko at the oral history roundtable, "Military Planning for European Theatre Conflict during the Cold War," Stockholm, 24–25 April 2006.

East to the West rather than in the opposite direction, as had been the case in the earlier days when communism, rather than democracy, appeared to be the wave of the future.

The disillusionment and diminishing ideological commitment of Soviet elites, among whom intelligence personnel figured prominently, were one of the notable achievements of the otherwise ambivalent East-West détente. Its decline in the early 1980s did not reverse that process, facilitating the emergence of "new thinking" under Gorbachev. Rather than fomenting communist militancy, the West's political and economic ascendancy nourished doubts about the adequacy of the Soviet system, thus preparing the ground for the eventual abdication of power by its guardians that made the peaceful ending of the Cold War possible.

Intelligence findings could inadvertently be helpful in promoting the process. For example, the draft of West German "Defense Policy Guidelines," acquired by East German agents, assumed that European stability would be maintained because of the Soviet system's basic continuity, that the superpowers' offensive weapons would help maintain a strategic balance, and that NATO could not sway the balance regardless of its acquisition of high-technology conventional weapons. Although all these assumptions were wrong, knowing that the adversary believed they were right made the relaxation of the Warsaw Pact's military posture more affordable. It made even such hardliner as East Germany's Erich Honecker support Gorbachev's initial efforts to reduce the military confrontation in Central Europe.[15]

In the end, events were moving so fast that even the KGB's greatest achievements during the Cold War's final years – from the penetration of top US military secrets thanks to the greed of individual CIA officials willing to sell themselves to the snatching of technological secrets thanks to employees susceptible to bribes – mattered little to the final outcome. In the remarkably transparent dénouement of the Cold War, the intelligence services, built on secrecy, were notable for their absence. Their irrelevance in the high drama of the Soviet collapse serves as a reminder of

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15   Excerpts from "Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien", April 1987, AZN 32651, pp. 78–86, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg.

the limitations of the role of intelligence within the larger picture of history.

Though an integral part of the Cold War, intelligence was by no means the determining one. This was particularly true on the Soviet side despite the prominence of the profession and its practitioners within the Soviet system. At no time did the deeds and misdeeds of its operatives bring about accomplishments or failures liable to alter the course of the Cold War. Of scant relevance in major crises, Soviet intelligence mattered more on other occasions, when it made outcomes somewhat better or somewhat worse but not substantially different from what they would otherwise have been. In the end, the Soviet system collapsed under its own weight, regardless of the intelligence activities in which it had invested so prodigiously.
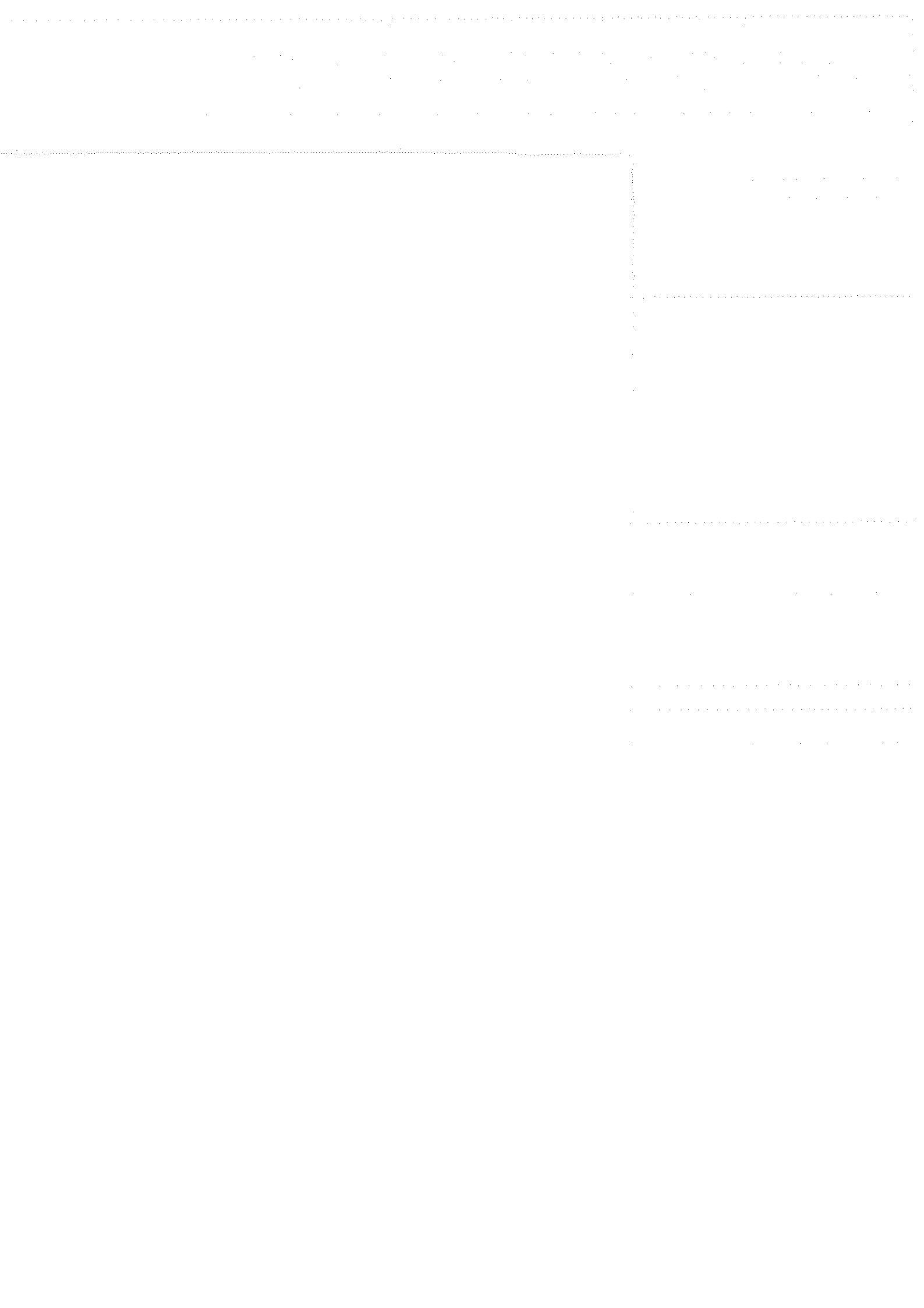
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Did intelligence matter in the Cold War?

For forty years the superpower conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated the world stage. In popular culture the conflict produced a plethora of "spy" books and films about the daring exploits of intelligence agents. In contrast, the scholarly investigation of the role of intelligence in the Cold War had to await the gradual opening, since 1990, of "Top Secret" archives. It is now time to make a first attempt at assessing the role that intelligence played in the overall development of the conflict. Did intelligence help to avoid the Cold War becoming "hot"? We have invited three prominent intelligence scholars to give their views.
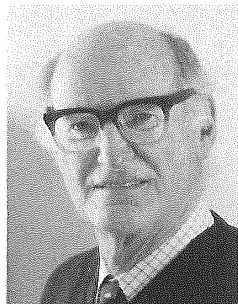
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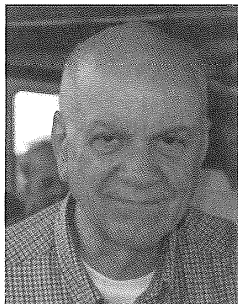
J. Kenneth McDonald

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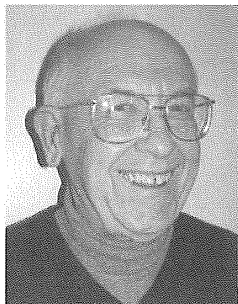
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