

situation, even when there is a clear invitation to do so, one can easily imagine the prevailing timidity in one-to-one conversations where there is a disparity in rank or bureaucratic authority. FSOs may proudly relate the vehemence with which they have rebuffed officers of other agencies—notably USIA and AID—but direct argument with one’s superiors in State is not a generally accepted mode of conduct. Former Undersecretary of State George Ball enjoyed a reputation as a courageous devil’s advocate

on the subject of Vietnam, but anyone who opposed Ball’s hard line vis-a-vis General de Gaulle had to be wary of the consequences. At least one senior officer with the temerity to play devil’s advocate on this issue received word that the Undersecretary no longer desired to share the same room with him during policy discussions. ■

From “The Cost of Cowardice: Silence in the Foreign Service” by William Bell in the July, 1969, issue of The Washington Monthly.

Patrick J. McGarvey

Intelligence to Please

From 1964-65, when U. S. involvement in Vietnam began to be considerable, until late 1966 or early 1967, the generals in Saigon worked to build up U. S. troop strength. Therefore, they wanted every bit of evidence brought to the fore that could show that infiltration was increasing. The Pentagon’s Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) obliged and also emphasized in all reports the enemy’s capability to recruit forces from the South Vietnamese population. In 1967 a second period began. The high priests of Saigon decided that we were “winning.” Then the paramount interest became to show the enemy’s reduced capability to recruit and a slowdown in infiltration due to our bombing. The tune and emphasis of

reports from the field changed radically, and so did those put out by DIA.

It should not be concluded that any one person suppressed evidence. No one did. The military in Saigon sent all the facts back to Washington eventually. During the build-up period, infiltration data and recruitment data came in via General Westmoreland’s daily cablegram. Data from field contact with enemy units came amid the more mundane cables or by courier up to five weeks later. Cables from Westmoreland, of course, were given higher priority in Washington. When we started “winning,” detailed reports highlighting “body counts” and statistics on how many villages were pacified were cabled with Westmoreland’s signature; recruitment studies were pouched or cabled with the reports on the fluctuating price of rice. It was all

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a matter of emphasis.

During all this time DIA was thoroughly enmeshed in the numbers game. It paid little or no attention to what Hanoi was saying on the radio, discounting it as propaganda. It made little effort to perceive the enemy's view of the war. It made little effort to reason out what the enemy's strategy was, why he believed he was winning, what he was saying publicly about how he was going to fight the war, or how the bombing was affecting his morale. It was too busy keeping up with the flow of numbers from Saigon.

Find Us a Target

As the air campaign crept northward, the Operations people on the Joint Staff wanted bigger and better targets. They didn't ask the intelligence people what was worth hitting or what a rational plan of attack might be. On the contrary, they demanded targets that a certain weapons system could attack. They had a TV-guided missile, and they wanted to use it. "Pick out a building for us to hit," they'd say. DIA could have told the JCS this was the wrong approach, but it played the game. It sent photo-interpreters scurrying to their scanners to find, say, a two- or three-story building in an area open to U. S. raids. If they saw no signs of military activity around the building they would dub it a "possible military storage area," a description that gave Intelligence the right to go hunting.

The Operations staff's biggest hangup was over the prohibition on bombing the port of Haiphong. It refused to accept the judgment of the CIA that bombing the port wouldn't stop the flow of goods into North Vietnam. It refused to accept that the North Vietnamese man-packed arms across the Chinese border and imported little by sea. DIA, bowing to the pressure, came up with a list of several hundred small, insignificant targets in and near Haiphong, listing them as crucial and suggesting that the

cumulative effect of hitting all 200 or more barge and ferry landings, rail spurs, bridges, and road intersections would be the same as flattening Haiphong—again a triumph for the art of compromise and no doubt small comfort to the pilots shot down in that heavily defended area.

Well before the Tet Offensive of January, 1968, when the enemy build-up at Khe Sanh first became obvious, two DIA analysts who had been studying enemy tactics and strategy for four years sat down and wrote a

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paper that concluded that the enemy was planning a feint at Khe Sanh. They based this judgment on their interpretation of General Giap's fighting methods over the past two years. They outlined a likely enemy course of action designed to draw American forces to the Khe Sanh area so that the populous coastal plains would be left thinly defended and concluded that perhaps it would be unwise to react to the Khe Sanh build-up. They presented the findings of their paper at a briefing, much to the amusement of all present. They suggested that the paper be cabled to Saigon as a DIA assessment of the situation and that the JCS be given the benefit of their thoughts. This, too, caused merriment among the assembled. "How could you possibly know more than General Westmoreland?" they were asked. Their boss, an Army colonel, finally got angry at their persistence and taped the paper to the wall beside his desk, claiming that the analysts had just stuck their professional reputations on the line and adding he hoped they were wrong. The paper hung there until late in March, 1968, after the Tet Offensive, which occurred largely on the coastal plain, and after the enemy ended the siege of Khe Sanh without ever assaulting it. Then it was taken down quietly. The Colonel never mentioned the subject again. The JCS was never given a copy, and it was never cabled to Saigon.

Backdoor Pressure

The pressures on DIA to conform to the views of the military are hard to resist. Take a mechanism known as the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which is supposed to represent the best judgment of the intelligence community on a particular issue and is used by the President and his Cabinet in formulating policy. Everyone in the intelligence business has a chance to assert his point of view in these estimates, and it is here that DIA's role is crucial. DIA is well aware that

many service judgments are biased and don't reflect reality. Its obligation, in those cases, is to assume its responsibility as arbiter among the services and establish a Defense position on the issue, and it works hard at doing just that. But strong pressures usually come in through the back door.

For one thing, there is something called the "Eyes Only" cable that is sent "back channel" and is severely restricted in dissemination. Usually no more than five people see it. I have seen "Eyes Only" cables come in from the U. S. Commanders in Honolulu and Saigon to the Director of DIA requesting that he give more than a passing consideration to the command viewpoint about this or that. The language is always moving. Such a cable is likely to start off complimenting the recipient for the fine job he is doing and then work in high-sounding phrases which evoke motherhood, apple pie, the American flag, and, of course, the uniform. It then implies that the sender would like to see a particular judgment or set of figures changed to conform to the command view. It rarely offers any evidence to support this request. It is sure to close with a veiled threat that the recipient's career is in jeopardy if he doesn't play the game and "get on the team." Many estimates have been changed or reworded because of an "Eyes Only" cable from a field commander. In one instance the Air Force Chief of Intelligence called my boss at DIA about a nearly completed estimate on U. S. bombing in Laos. He told him that he was sending a team down to change the wording of the estimate and that my boss had better remember what color his uniform was. Of course it was the same as the General's—blue. The team arrived, and, over the protests of the DIA analysts, a compromise was reached.

The classic example of command influence on intelligence matters occurred just after the Tet Offensive in January, 1968. In the early weeks of February the JCS insisted that the offensive was total military defeat for

the enemy—General Westmoreland told them so in his daily cables. DIA didn't agree with this interpretation, but it watered down every paper it wrote on this subject so that its position was impossible to determine. Then General Wheeler went to Saigon and came back with Westmoreland's request for 206,000 troops to "clean up" the "defeated" enemy. Suddenly it was legitimate to say that the Tet Offensive had really "set us back." Everybody on the service staffs, with DIA leading the pack, started writing gloomy estimates with unaccustomed forthrightness and clarity.

Wave-Makers Always Sink

Everyone connected with DIA is partially at fault for the agency's shortcomings. This includes the military who run it, the civilians who staff it, the Secretary of Defense, the JCS, and the individual service staffs. As far as the military men who manage the agency are concerned, their guilt or incompetence results simply from the fact that they are uniformed men with a parent service. Imagine, if you will, what the prospect of a tour with DIA looks like to a military officer. He knows or soon learns that he will be thrust into a position in which, on occasion, his professional judgment will vary markedly from that of his parent service. He will be expected to defend a position that could enrage his chief of staff—but officers who do so more than once get known fast and are accorded an appropriate "reward" at a later date in terms of promotion and assignment. Consider also that a tour at DIA—normally two to three years—is very short when compared to a 20- to 30-year military career. And so most officers assigned to DIA go through a predictable pattern. They come on board as "hard-chargers," ready to set the world on fire. They stick to their principles through one or two scrapes. Then they become a little more circumspect, letting individual issues slide by and rationalizing that it wasn't a crunch question any-

way. Finally, they resign themselves to "sweating out" their tours and playing every situation by ear. They avoid committing themselves or making decisions. They refuse to tackle the agency's long-term organizational ills because doing so would make too many waves.

The shortness of the tours of duty of the military managers of the agency (about nine-tenths of management jobs are filled by military officers) causes some long-term problems. These officers are interested largely in getting good performance out of staff while they are there, not in building up long-run staff or agency capabilities. They want to impress the General, let him know that he's running a "cracker-jack" outfit. The General, of course, is largely occupied with current problems, so his subordinates gear up to service his needs. This has resulted over the years in the reduction of DIA's long-term research capability to near zero. More than 95 per cent of the effort expended in DIA on Vietnam, for example, is on current problems. Long-term study groups have been disbanded and the staffs reassigned to the current problem area. Basic intelligence for detailed studies is simply not getting done or is whipped out with a weekend's furious overtime. The managers who choose to cut the long-term staff don't worry about the ultimate effect, because by the time it becomes evident they'll be off on other assignments.

Another problem is the "can do" attitude that prevails among the officer corps. It is unthinkable for an officer to tell his superior that he cannot complete a task. It is a form of heresy. Officers accept a requirement for four or six extra hours' work a day when they know their staff already puts in 12- or 14-hour days. Rarely, if ever, does anyone say no, or point out that certain jobs take time. "Yes sir, can do!" is all that is heard. The result is an attitude among DIA staff members that is captured in their motto, "If you want it real bad, you're gonna get it real bad." ■

Russell Baker and Charles Peters

The Prince and His Courtiers: at the White House, the Kremlin, and the Reichschancellery

The analogy between the modern presidency and the royal European court, bewigged, bejeweled, and beset with intrigue, is not original with George Reedy, but he is the first to alarm us with notice that court government is undergoing a 20th-century rebirth in the White House. This renaissance of the princely court, Reedy insists, is breeding immense danger for American government, for much the same reason that the 17th and 18th-century courts of Western Europe contributed to the development of violent revolutions.

In both France and England, our immediate political forebears, kings lost their heads because they had become unable to sense or hear the intent and passion of their peoples through the barriers of courts erected to glorify and, ironically, to protect them. Reedy suggests that the presidency is in somewhat the same danger, and for essentially the same reasons.

The president, needing "access to

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reality" in order to govern effectively, too often has access, instead, only to a self-serving court of flunkeys, knights, earls, and dukes in business suits, whose best chances of advancing their separate fortunes usually lie in diverting reality before it can reach the President. The result is a dangerous presidential isolation, which may be compounded in its peril because court life works to persuade the President that he is more closely in touch with reality than anyone else in the realm.

Thus, we had those repeated assertions from Lyndon Johnson that only the President had all the facts on which to base decisions about Vietnam, when in truth he lacked the first fact that was most essential of all for a leader and easiest to learn outside the White House court: to wit, that his people were not behind him as he waded deeper and deeper into the quagmire. This isolation from reality kept Johnson, and has since kept Richard Nixon, obsessed with Southeast Asia as a prime problem of government at a time when very few people could sustain more than a flickering interest in it, and then only when aroused by White House theat-