

CHAPTER ELEVEN ESTIMATES

Some months after the Cuban missile crisis, the deputy Soviet foreign minister, Vasily Kuznetsov, was visiting John McCloy, presidential advisor on disarmament, at his home in Connecticut. The two men were discussing the removal of Soviet IL-28 bombers still remaining in Cuba after the withdrawal of the missiles. The two men were talking together by the white wooden fence of a field. McCloy was insisting that all long-range Soviet military capability should be withdrawn from Cuba. Kuznetsov turned to him, angrily:

"All right, Mr McCloy, we will get the IL-28's out as we have taken the missiles out. But I want to tell you something, Mr McCloy. The Soviet Union is not going to find itself in a position like this ever again."¹

The consequence of America's superior nuclear strength was a Soviet determination to match, if not exceed, that strength. This was not anticipated in the U.S. at the time. Few people in either the Kennedy or the Johnson administrations believed that the Soviets would go all out for a nuclear force that was larger than that of the U.S. because it did not make sense to do so. It only took a certain number of missiles for deterrence as long as neither side was strong enough to launch a first strike so powerful that all its opponents missiles were destroyed. Nevertheless, as Richard Helms later acknowledged, building more nuclear warheads and missiles was precisely what the Soviets did. U.S. failure to appreciate the Soviet build-up at the time, said Helms, "probably wasn't a golden moment for American foreign policy."²

Technical intelligence for several years after 1961 showed that while the Soviets were building and testing a number of different missiles, they were inaccurate and plagued with teething problems. In all, the evidence gathered by CIA analysts suggested that despite its best efforts, the USSR was far behind the U.S., both quantitatively and qualitatively.

By 1967, however, it was clear that the Soviet rate of missile and warhead construction was faster than anticipated. The analysts' view now was that the Soviets would construct enough missiles to give them parity with the U.S. At most, they considered, the Soviets might build a few more missiles than were necessary in order to claim superiority for prestige purposes.

They were wrong. The Soviet missile programme had developed an awesome institutional momentum which swept away previous restraints. The escalation was only checked with the successful negotiation of the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty - SALT I - in 1972. After 1967 the CIA estimate of Soviet strength was continually revised upward. Not until 1971, however, was actual Soviet missile strength accurately estimated in Washington:

	Actual numbers		CIA estimates of Soviet numbers for:				
Year	USA	USSR	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971

¹ Newsweek, 28 November 1983.

² Newsweek, 28 November 1983.

Intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)

1966	904	292	420-426	514-582	505-695	509-792	499-844
1967	1054	570	423-484	670-764	805-1010	775-1027	805-1079
1968	1054	858	536-566	848-924	946-1038	949-1154	939-1190
1969	1054	1028	570	858	1038-1112	1158-1207	1181-1270
1970	1054	1299	570	858	1028	1262-1312	1360-1439

Submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs)

1966	590	27	24-30	24-42	24-78	24-114	30-138
1967	628	27	21	29	37-53	61-85	85-117
1968	656	43	24-27	43-46	75-94	123-158	187-238
1969	656	120	27	43	94-110	158-238	222-366
1970	656	232	27	43	110-126	184-248	296-376

Sources: John Prados, *The Soviet Estimate: U.S. Intelligence Analysis and the Soviet Military Threat* (New York, Dial Press, 1982), pp. 183-199; Lawrence Freedman, *U.S. Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat* (London, Macmillan, 1978), pp. 107-108.

By 1972, while the number of U.S. ICBMs remained at 1054 and SLBMs at 656, Soviet ICBMs totalled 1527 and SLBMs 440.

Richard Nixon, in the White House from January 1969, and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, had an avid interest in intelligence and were determined to mold the intelligence community to their own ends. Nixon was already deeply wary of the CIA and what he termed its Georgetown-liberal ethos (Georgetown being the fashionable part of Washington DC). This attitude was to permeate not only his dealings with the CIA but also those of other senior members of the administration.

The agency's underestimation of the Soviet threat was to play straight into the hands of the military, although with hindsight the military was seen to have overestimated the extent of the threat. Nixon and his powerful secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, chose to regard military estimates as being more accurate than the CIA on Soviet missile strength. As a result, Laird was able to disregard CIA estimates and rely instead on his own Defense Intelligence Agency analysis.

THE MIRV DEBATE

The conflict between the agency and the military came to a head in 1969 over the Soviet SS-9 ICBM. They disagreed over whether the SS-9 had a multiple

independently targeted reentry vehicle (MIRV) capability. In effect, MIRVing a missile turned it into several missiles as each reentry vehicle could be programmed to strike a separate target. For example, the result of MIRVing the U.S. ICBM force increased the number of reentry vehicles from 1054 ICBMs and 656 SLBMs to a total of 7274 warheads.

In the mid-sixties MIRVing was clearly the next step in the arms technology race and the first successful MIRVs were developed for the U.S. Minuteman III missile in 1968. It was expected, therefore, that the Soviets would MIRV the SS-9. This view was enthusiastically endorsed by the Pentagon, which wanted a larger U.S. MIRV programme and improved antimissile defences.

The question was whether the Soviets had the necessary skills and technology to develop a MIRV system comparable to the U.S. Initially, the CIA thought that they had but by 1968 satellite reconnaissance and telemetry (deciphering the electronic signals from missiles, planes, and warheads) intelligence proved that Soviets did not yet have the capability to MIRV the SS-9. This conclusion was set out in a national intelligence estimate of October, 1968, in the last weeks of the Johnson Presidency.

When the new administration took office, Nixon, Laird, the air force and the DIA strongly opposed this estimate and argued that the SS-9 was being MIRVed after all. In their view the Soviets might be able to inflict a first-strike attack on U.S. missile sites, and steps had to be taken to meet this threat. A first-strike capability, by definition, had to be so devastating that no retaliation was possible. By increasing their missile production so much, the Soviets were bouncing the United States into a major missile building effort in order to maintain deterrence.

At stake in the debate over the SS-9 was a vast budget, vast patronage, and important decisions about the next stage in U.S. offensive nuclear capability. There was now a real missile gap and the CIA knew that it would incur considerable hostility if it persisted in arguing that the SS-9 was not MIRVed. Congress was debating the ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and both the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee were holding hearings on the nature of the Soviet nuclear threat and the measures needed to counter it. Thus the agency came under considerable pressure to modify its conclusions. Nixon publicly stated that the 1968 estimate was wrong while Laird declassified and released detailed intelligence findings on the SS-9 which predictably alarmed Congress and supported his claims for more sophisticated antiballistic missile systems.

The agency analysts stuck to their guns, in effect arguing that the request for increased military spending and the anxieties which prompted it were premature. In order to forestall an unseemly public quarrel, the DCI, Richard Helms, decided to prepare a new estimate which would go over all arguments and evidence again.

Before the new estimate could be discussed, the disagreements between the agency and the administration were revealed to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when both Laird and Helms were questioned together about the Soviet Union's first-strike capability. The point about first-strike capability was that it made retaliation impossible, yet as Senator William Fulbright reminded him, Laird had argued that the U.S. could take a first strike and still retaliate. In other

words, Laird was in the inconsistent position of arguing that while there was doubt about Soviet capabilities, the U.S. should act as if the Soviets had a first-strike capability even though they did not, simply because the risk of not doing so was too dangerous. The logical question then was why the U.S. government should spend billions of dollars on missiles to counter a threat that might not actually exist. By following Laird's argument, the U.S. might actually trigger a far more extreme arms race.

When Helms' new estimate was presented to the U.S. intelligence board in August 1969, most of the other agencies having carefully reviewed all the evidence, now agreed with the CIA's conclusion that the Soviets, on economic, military and technological grounds, were unlikely to attempt strategic superiority over the U.S. and thus first-strike capability. Laird was furious and demanded that this conclusion be deleted, claiming that it subverted administration policy. Helms bowed to the pressure and excised the offending section. His decision was bitterly resented by, among others, the State Department's bureau of intelligence and research. But most of all it was resented by the CIA's own analysts who regarded Helms' action as a slap in the face from their own director. In the event, the controversial section was included as a dissent in a footnote, but the damage had been done. In modifying the estimate Helms was seen to have truckled to political pressure.

However, there was sympathy for his position particularly since the Vietnam estimates battles were still fresh, and Helms was fighting for the agency's position on the inside of the new administration. The political reality was that the importance of the agency and of the DCI were determined directly by the relationship the DCI had with the President. Helms had gone far enough in the Senate in disagreeing with Laird: it would have been a tactical mistake in terms of Washington politics for him to have angered Laird any more. Laird almost personified the Republican party. He was well-respected and vastly influential - so much so that Nixon always refused to fight with him. John Huizenga, head of the board of national estimates and involved in writing the estimate, said that despite Laird's intervention, "by and large the impact of the paper was pretty much the same."¹ In 1978 Helms expressed what was probably his view when he told the Senate Intelligence Committee that when the director of Central Intelligence "clashes with the secretary of Defense, he isn't a big enough fellow on the block."²

When evidence of actual Soviet MIRV development became clear in 1972, the CIA's position was vindicated. The SS-9 was never MIRVed, and when the Soviets eventually deployed their MIRV system at the end of 1974 it was with the much smaller SS-19 missile.

SALT I

The MIRV debate coincided with another contentious issue in U.S.-Soviet relations: an arms limitation agreement. After eight years of the Vietnam war, the expense of the arms race in addition was an increasingly heavy burden. The U.S. economy was feeling the strain of both, and Nixon hoped that an arms agreement

1 Interview, 25 July 1983.

2 United States Senate Intelligence Committee, "Hearings: National Intelligence Reorganization and Reform Act", p. 21.

would defuse the increasingly bitter anti-war feeling. An agreement might also help to quantify the differences between U.S. and Soviet capabilities and thus achieve some kind of parity of forces.

The question was how to monitor any agreement. At the first summit meeting in 1955, with the U-2 already in development, Eisenhower proposed to Khrushchev an open-skies mutual inspection pact based on aerial reconnaissance of each other's territory. Although the Russians dismissed this offer as an American espionage trick, once the U-2 was operational Russian acquiescence made little difference. The Russians had always refused to accept on-site inspections because they knew they would reveal Soviet weaknesses. Satellite and aerial surveillance made the verification of arms agreement theoretically possible, but were they enough? By the 1970's the Soviets had improved their camouflage techniques which afforded their new weapons systems some measure of protection against U.S. spy satellites. So, could the U.S. security safely depend upon technical intelligence?

In June 1969 Helms told the national security council that the CIA was confident that technical intelligence methods could, in fact, successfully verify a treaty. Kissinger thought Helms had reached this conclusion in order to further the CIA's power and influence. This was also the view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who were equally suspicious of Helms' claims about verification. In the event, Kissinger and Nixon used Helms' testimony, bypassed the NSC, the CIA and the Joint Chiefs completely in the SALT negotiations and agreed a treaty with Moscow through a personal, secret "backchannel" with the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin.

The SALT I treaty was signed in May 1972 amidst considerable fanfare. The Presidential election was only a few months away and Nixon and Kissinger were anxious to sell the agreement to the U.S. electorate. The fact that the CIA considered it could monitor the treaty without on-site inspection carried great weight in Congress. In the cold light of day, however, the terms seemed advantageous to the Soviets. Because of the differences of opinion about America's ability to verify, Nixon and Kissinger had decided that they would confine verification to quantitative matters - numbers of missiles and so on - rather than to qualitative ones such as missile accuracy and MIRV development. The advantage of this plan was that all parties agreed that quantitative verification was possible. The major drawback was that by agreeing to a large quantity, the Soviets could stay within the agreement while simultaneously developing, testing and deploying new weapons systems. Soviet secrecy vastly reduced the effectiveness of public opinion. If the U.S., on the other hand, wanted to match the Soviets, it would appear to the public as if SALT was ineffective and that an arms race was, after all, a reality, and Nixon could be presented as a dupe, seriously damaging his re-election chances.

A few weeks after the signing of the agreement, Helms became chairman of a steering group set up to monitor SALT I and which consisted of officials from the DIA, national security council, the service intelligence departments, and the CIA. Their reports soon confirmed that Soviet weapons development was continuing in contravention of the limitations which SALT was supposed to have established. That Kissinger was aware of the political significance of these reports was evident from his subsequent actions: he ordered Helms to send the

steering group's reports only to the national security council which would then decide what information to release and whether the Soviets were adhering to SALT I or not. In addition, all SALT intelligence was to be highly classified and was not to be distributed. This meant, in effect, that the White House was ensuring that the fact that SALT did not stop the Soviet arms build-up would remain secret.

This Gilbert and Sullivan situation was essentially a short-term arrangement to see Nixon through the election. But by the time Nixon resigned in August 1974, criticisms of SALT in Congress and the press had begun to mount. There was more and more pressure for the facts of Soviet military and economic capability to be established for all to see. It was a matter of some moment in 1974-75 because the new President, Gerald Ford, hoped to conclude a second arms limitation agreement, SALT II, in time for the 1976 Presidential election.

At the beginning of 1975 the Senate and the House both set up select committees on intelligence and the evidence given to them on SALT gave a damaging impression of muddle and secrecy. William Hyland, a senior CIA analyst who was later Kissinger's deputy on the NSC, was questioned by the House committee about the backchannel procedures between the White House and Dobrynin. If the Russians were told of violations, he was asked, then why was this information kept secret in Washington? "We are keeping a hold item secret from people who might read the Central Intelligence Bulletin that is disseminated in several hundred copies," explained Hyland to a bemused committee.¹

SOVIET ESTIMATES

The controversy over the monitoring of SALT I coincided with, and in many ways helped to accelerate, attempts to reduce the CIA's power and influence on the estimates. Jealousy and concern about the CIA's position in the intelligence community, and about CIA estimates, particularly the agency's unexcited view of Soviet capabilities, had been building up for several years. Admiral Stansfield Turner, President Carter's DCI from 1977-81, gave expression to some military resentment of the agency by his habit of writing some estimates himself. Although he had every right to do so, this led to considerable resentment among the agency's analytical staff who saw Turner as effectively questioning their ability. But there was widespread feeling that the CIA's analysis had been defective in several key instances and that reform was necessary.

One man who shared this view was air force General George Keegan, assistant chief of staff for air force intelligence, who had over thirty years experience in military intelligence. Keegan believed that in concluding SALT I the Soviets were simply manipulating U.S. public opinion while they strengthened their military forces. In the drive for detente, he argued, the intelligence community, led by the CIA, had refused to acknowledge the imbalance. The U.S. must enjoy superiority over the Soviets in every military area.

In response to pressure from Keegan and from the Ford administration, in 1975 the agency tried to reach a consensus within the intelligence community on Soviet objectives. A report entitled *Understanding Soviet Strategic Policy* was

¹ CIA: The Pike Report, Nottingham 1977.

written by Fritz Ermath, national intelligence officer for the Soviet Union, but consensus was impossible. Ermath argued that there were three broad views of Soviet policy within the intelligence community: the Keegan view; the CIA view that the Soviets were not aiming for world domination but were engaged in a standoff battle with the U.S., constantly seeking to maintain and improve their existing interests, and the State Department view that the Soviets wanted military parity with, but not superiority over, the U.S., and would be opportunistic expansionists. By pointing out these differences, Ermath appeared to be arguing that the U.S. had no idea what the Soviets' real intentions were.

The Ermath report was seen as a confession of analytical weakness and confusion but one can easily argue that Ermath's description of the different U.S. attitudes accurately mirrored the arguments and conflicts within the Soviet leadership about U.S. aims and intentions. Since the U.S. had no way of showing for certain which argument had the upper hand in the Kremlin, it had to be prepared for all eventualities. The only way to achieve this was by detailed world analysis. But, Ermath was arguing, the CIA was not providing this analysis.

In 1975 an error in the CIA's calculation of Soviet military expenditure led to a concerted attack which considerably reduced the agency's power and influence on the estimates. There were also enormous differences in efficiency and costs which were very hard to quantify in bald statistics. It was virtually impossible to set a true value on the rouble in dollar terms and no one believed the Soviets' own estimates, least of all the Soviets themselves. In the Soviet Union, information was equated with power. The Soviet military, for example, thought that if the real costs of the arms race to the Soviet economy were known, their budgets (and thus domestic power and status) would be affected. During the SALT negotiations Soviet military negotiators had been extremely anxious that their civilian colleagues should not hear American statements and assessments of Soviet military capabilities and costs.

The CIA's office of economic research developed a "building block" method in which actual Soviet economic output was costed in U.S. terms. For example, if the USSR produced 100 tanks, they were counted at what it would cost the U.S. to produce 100 comparable tanks. This U.S. cost would then be projected in roubles to assess the impact on the entire Soviet economy. This method was applied to the whole range of Soviet military production within the context of the Soviet economy as a whole and was thought to provide a reasonably accurate way of assessing comparative military expenditure.

The building block method was strongly criticised by the DIA which since 1974 had been headed by Major General Daniel Graham, a zealous anticommunist who had a highly political view of the struggle with the Soviets. Since 1970 DIA analysts had used a different method for costing the Soviet military and had come up with consistently higher figures than the CIA. The DIA pointed out that an American tank was not comparable to a Soviet tank: American weapons were much more sophisticated. The costs of the different weapons systems, the DIA argued, were not in fact comparable because fundamentally the two economies were not comparable.

By the middle of 1975 the challenge to the CIA as the estimator of the Soviet Union had crystallized. The agency's January 1975 estimate on the Soviet Union had concluded that Soviet spending was 20 per cent more than American

spending. This, said the agency's critics, was a substantial underestimate.

William Colby, DCI 1973-1976, decided that he had to reach a consensus or else every estimate would become a controversy and would be ineffective. He appointed a joint CIA-DIA study group, giving for the first time a non-CIA team of analysts equal weight with the agency's own. The CIA analysts were forced to accept that their estimates of Soviet spending had been about half of what the Soviets had actually spent. In February 1976 the agency's estimate was revised upward: the Soviet Union was spending much more than had previously been estimated on its military, with 10-15 per cent of Soviet GNP consumed by military spending as opposed to the 6-8 per cent previously thought. The alarm about violations of SALT I seemed suddenly much more serious.

As a result of the manifest success of the DIA in forcing a CIA revision of Soviet expenditure, the agency's monopoly of the national intelligence estimates was weakened. When Colby dissolved the board of national estimates in 1973 this meant that all the final assessors of CIA estimates were outside the agency. Other intelligence agencies and groupings began to press for more influence. Among the prime movers was the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), the civilian overseers of the intelligence community, which independently reviewed estimates and made recommendations about intelligence organisation and activities.

In August, 1975 the chairman of the PFIAB, George W Anderson, suggested to President Ford that there should be "competitive analysis" of the CIA's Soviet estimate. As Anderson well knew, this suggestion, by promoting a rival of equal status to the CIA's soviet analysis, would give the PFIAB considerable power over the director of Central Intelligence. Colby fought off this encroachment but the following year, after the 1976 estimate had to be revised. Ford agreed to Anderson's renewed request. It was a milestone decision. Now the CIA was no longer *primus inter pares*, but was just one of several competing agencies.

TEAM A/TEAM B

Two teams were set up under the national security council. The A Team was a group of CIA analysts while the B Team was a group of outside experts headed by Professor Richard Pipes of Harvard which contained a preponderance of critics of both SALT and the building block method. The resulting reports held no surprises. The A Team adopted the traditional containment view. Although they amended the estimate of Soviet military spending, they maintained the CIA's view that the Soviets, while all the time improving their weapons systems, were less efficient than the U.S. The B Team took a more hardline attitude: the Soviets were intent on a first-strike, war-winning capability against the U.S. and were pursuing a policy geared towards achieving global domination for which thus far the U.S. had failed to prepare.

Both teams presented their reports to PFIAB and argued their respective cases. The 1976 estimate was sent back to the CIA three times for redrafting and was not finally approved until January 1977.

There is some doubt as to how much the B Team report actually influenced the estimate but there is also some puzzlement as to why the exercise

was conducted in this way since the B Team was composed of known hawks and thus its conclusions were predictable. But although its immediate effects were short-lived, the whole Team A/Team B debate was an event of crucial significance to the agency. Thirty years of policy, of strategic plans, of politics, depended on the CIA's assessment. The agency was being challenged in the area of its most precious and important expertise: the Soviet estimate.

Was the agency wilfully closing its eyes and sticking to a preconception that the Soviets could not afford truly vast military expenditure? Or was the agency right? The answer was the discovery that both teams were half right, and an outcome that neither team had envisaged - the end of the cold war; Soviet openness about their military and economy - seems to be resolving the issue today.

Team B scored a direct hit on the agency by showing it to have been blind to the quantitative argument. But Team A demonstrated that the Soviet economy was genuinely weak and that its military capability was much less than it seemed. Team A was also saying, in effect that the Soviet Union could not spend what Team B claimed on its military because it would suffer an economic collapse if it was. Team B argued that the Soviet economy must be in better shape than the CIA said because the Soviets were spending more than the agency estimated. It dwelt on Soviet military expenditure without trying to fit it into the general pattern of the Soviet economy.

It was the irrationality and riskiness of Soviet policy which put everyone off the scent. The Soviets took a colossal and conscious risk that their economy might collapse under the burden of military spending, and this was not appreciated by either party.

THE SOVIET GAMBLE

The Soviets were gambling that they would not face economic collapse before they established regional (European/West Asian) strategic supremacy, which they could then finance out of "loans" from Europe and, perhaps, Japan. They felt American and European will to resist slipping in the 1970s, and decided to go for broke. They were attempting to fit the Soviet economy into the developed countries' economies on its terms, not on terms that the West wanted. They appear to have failed in this. Socialism in one country had been rejected by Khrushchev and his successors until Gorbachev, who has returned to it.

That the Soviets would make such an ambitious attempt as to fall apart when failing to achieve it is high drama which neither Team A nor Team B addressed. In the 1980s the NATO war projection began with a scenario of mounting Soviet economic difficulties coinciding with genuine nationalist initiatives in the countries of central and eastern Europe. The importance of estimating the Soviet economy accurately was manifest.

The Soviets, lacking an adequate price system, have always had a self-destructive attitude to economic development. Not having a price mechanism is like having leprosy. Leprosy does not make your fingers and toes fall off: it removes sensation. Without sensation, you start knocking and scraping and squashing and cutting your extremities off. That is what has happened to the Soviet economy. Instead of getting regular signals through the market system as

to what is expensive and what is not, it has spent without regard to real cost or demand. The appalling economic problems facing the Soviet Union today are almost certainly a direct consequence of a very high policy decision indeed in Moscow in the 1970s to seek sufficient military strength to overawe Europe and seek a warm water port by going through Afghanistan to Iran or Pakistan.

DECLINE

The change in the agency's position and authority between 1974 (the start of Team A/Team B) and 1981 when President Reagan entered the White House, was dramatic. In many respects, the agency's height of power and weight was approximately 1965-74 when it held its own over Vietnam. Then, from 1974, there was a succession of troubles: the fall of Saigon and the end of people-intensive CIA operations in south east Asia; the general shift in the country's attitude on foreign policy and especially secret policy in the wake of Watergate and Vietnam; the unwarranted assumptions about the CIA and Watergate: fifteen years later Nixon admitted that he asked the agency to try to abort the Watergate investigation and the agency refused; Jimmy Carter campaigning and winning in 1976 partly on the grounds that the CIA was "evil". And the Team A/Team B affair, effectively challenging the agency's analysis. The country in 1974-81 was half persuaded that the CIA was a rogue elephant. There were Congressional committees of inquiry into its operations and history. There were newspaper stories and revelations about its activities. Admiral Stansfield Turner, DCI for four years from 1977, convinced people that he was hostile to the agency. Jimmy Carter spoke of the agency in his 1976 Presidential campaign in the most disparaging terms.

It was all part of the erosion of the agency's position. If pundits had attacked the agency in 1970-71, they would almost certainly have been brushed off. In the days when Henry Kissinger was roaming through Washington selling SALT I, Team B would have had short shrift.

What happened to the agency in Team A/Team B was part of a change in the country's perceptions and attitudes, in certain crucial elite perceptions and attitudes, and in the agency's standing and self-confidence. When President Carter announced Ted Sorensen, a liberal Democrat, as his first DCI-designate in 1977, only to witness the sight of Sorensen being slowly cut to pieces in Congress because of his liberalism, it was impalpably and irrationally diminishing to the agency.

The CIA habitually miscalled - not radically - the nature of the Soviet threat, and cumulatively was almost certainly too cool. But this should not conceal the fact that it probably had a more realistic sense of the overall direction of the Soviet economy and of the overall capabilities of Soviet forces than anyone else.

ABOUT RIGHT

For a generation the agency had been a calming voice at a time of great tension. It had not gone along with any of the scares of the last third of a century. It did not go along with Kennedy over the "missile gap". It published a landmark report in 1960 on the deep inefficiencies of the Soviet economy, a salutary reminder that

although sputnik had gone up first, the Soviets were not economic giants. It did not go along with alarmist projections that the Soviets would intervene in Vietnam. It was probably the least enthused - because best informed - observer of the China demarche.

The CIA was a cool customer, unfazed by the alarums and excursions all around it. It managed to stay apart from the corruption of military estimates being tied to military budgets. It stood up to McCarthy. It was not swayed by political blandishments to tailor its estimate of the Soviet threat one way or another: that is why Nixon and Kissinger tried to keep the agency out of the White House, and why in the mid-1970s it faced the Team A/Team B examination.

From the start the agency brought the good news that the Soviets were weaker than many thought. Agency people generally were not alarmists. This gave the agency its standing in the foreign policy establishment, and made it political and military enemies. The agency's separateness from the military consensus was an aspect of its civilian tone. It is the least military major intelligence agency in the world both in terms of its institutional structure and in terms of its thinking. It has a general counsel, a public relations branch, a congressional liaison, a congressionally-appointed inspector general: it is not nicknamed "The Company" for nothing: it resembles a multinational corporation and not a military outfit.