

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN PAX AMERICANA?

In October 1985 Robert Gates, then the forty-two year old deputy director of intelligence, gave a paper to the eleventh convention of the association of former intelligence officers. The paper was titled "The future of the intelligence community" and it examined ten major areas of concern that Gates considered would dominate intelligence to the year 2000. The trends in these areas were, he argued, going to be a mixture of new, specific problems, and a greater complexity of existing ones.

Gates' first trend was the revolution in the way intelligence is communicated to policymakers, particularly electronic dissemination by computer. The second was the increasing difficulty of obtaining necessary data. Soviet camouflage techniques were already reducing the effectiveness of monitoring missile tests and sites. While information about the performance of the Soviet economy was increasingly restricted, even within the Soviet governing elites. The third trend identified by Gates was the problem of recruitment. There was a decline in the number of suitable potential recruits who could pass the polygraph, the main reason for which was drugs. However, once people joined the agency they tended to stay. The attrition rate was less than 4 per cent, the lowest anywhere in either government or industry. The fourth trend was a revolution in relations with Congress which was playing, and would continue to play, a much larger role in foreign policy. The fifth trend was the use by the executive branch of intelligence for the purpose of public education. Under the Reagan administration, intelligence was published to help win support for its policies in the press and in Congress.

The sixth trend, a corollary of the fifth, was the increasing dissemination of intelligence to U.S. allies and others. The seventh prospect already discernible was the dramatic increase in the diversity of subjects which the intelligence community was expected to address including foreign technology developments; genetic engineering; trends in worldwide food and population resources; religion; human rights; drugs; terrorism; high-technology transfers. This also led to a wider range in the users of intelligence right across the Washington bureaucracy. Gates' ninth trend was the growing centrality of intelligence to the foreign policy process of the government. In certain areas, Gates suggested, notably technology transfer, drugs and terrorism, there would be no effective policy without intelligence.

The tenth and final trend was that "intelligence is the only arm of government looking to the future". As the world became more complex and as policymakers needed more information, the intelligence community was the only sector of the government which was looking ahead. The community was faced with the constant uphill struggle of trying to convince a policymaker to do something which would benefit the future. It was a problem of democracy's short horizons and brief attention spans which had faced Gates' predecessors and would prove no less pressing to his successors.

Gates defined these new trends in terms of a bureaucracy seeking to identify with the other important government democracies. His imagination was

reserved for methodology, not objectives or opportunities.

CHANGE

Since 1985, the old certainties in which the CIA was founded have shattered. Gates' trends are still valid, but they will operate in a radically different context. The 1991 Gulf war; the withdrawal by the Soviet Union from eastern and central Europe; the demise of the Soviet communist party and communist system; the complete discrediting of totalitarianism of the right and left; time running out for the oligarchs in Red China; the failed coup in the Soviet Union in August 1991 that led to radical internal reform, were all changes that no-one had foreseen even in 1988. The U.S. is now the only superpower and most of its former enemies are competing for its friendship.

There has been a sea-change in the assertion of democratic belief around the world. In America, government is more accountable to Congress than it was a decade ago. There has been a sharp decline in the ideal of secrecy, a growing refusal to accept a world of secrets upon which intelligence operations depend. In consequence, an intelligence agency needs to think imaginatively about the future, largely because the complexity of events, and of technology, means that imagination is the most effective tool left to the human brain trying to comprehend developments and possibilities.

NEW PROBLEMS

The Gulf War capped a string of post-Cold War changes -in Europe, the Middle East, South America, Africa, and the Far East - that have confirmed the United States as ascendant in the world. In turn, this has required a redefinition of U.S. security objectives, and thus intelligence objectives.

Instead of America going home, and the expressions of U.S. power therefore ebbing with the cold war's end, a Pax Americana - with the support of the Soviet Union and the Gulf allies - has developed. And this has cut across the NATO alliance, and the European Community.

In Europe, Germany, labouring under the burden of assimilating its new eastern third, has been totally absent from the Western security debate. Poland and Britain, with strong support from France and the USSR, are endeavouring to consolidate U.S. power in Europe in NATO as the best way of securing the containment of united Germany.

In the Soviet Union, both Gorbachev and Yeltsin have courted the United States as the best friend of their country's future. In Africa there has been a simple capitulation to the reality of Soviet withdrawal. In the Far East, U.S. power is seen as preventing any Japanese military resurgence. Smaller states see U.S. power as a protection against economic domination by larger regional neighbours. In contrast to the Vietnam war, U.S. performance in the Gulf "has left a very deep impression of competence" according to Lee Kwan Yew, Singapore's elder statesman. Bob Hawke, prime minister of Australia, has said that since 1945 the U.S. has seen its security commitment in Asia "primarily as a contribution to its global containment of communism and of Soviet military power," but that this has now changed to a peacekeeping stance.

MIDDLE EAST

In the Middle East, perhaps the most critical region, the Gulf war jolted every country in the area to compete for U.S. friendship. Now, even Iran seems to accept what Egypt and Israel have long accepted: that the key to the region's future is in Washington. In turn, Washington has encouraged France and the Soviet Union to act as go-betweens in the region. France deals with the PLO because Washington refuses to have official contacts with the organisation, and the USSR has brought its influence to bear on its clients in the region, notably Iraq and Syria, to reduce terrorism and hostility to Israel.

The Gulf War demonstrated that U.S. mid-east policy was distorted by the idea that "my enemy's enemy is my friend". Iraq had limited U.S. support in the Iran-Iraq war, and it was clearly hoped in Washington that Saddam Hussein would be an effective mid-east counterweight to Iranian disturbance. Senator Alan Simpson in April 1990 apologised to Saddam for the way the U.S. media was treating him. It was an example of the U.S. tendency to treat every client as a friend. U.S. support for Saddam was grossly over done. Iraq, after all, was also a substantial enemy of America's particular friends in the region: Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

The geopolitics of the region involve the world -and Washington politics - today more than ever. The Israeli lobby in Washington is of prime significance, especially given Israeli intelligence's historical ties with the CIA. Before 1967, U.S. oil companies offset Israeli influence in Washington; since then, Israel has dominated U.S. policymaking in the region. This is the real significance of the Iran-contra affair: conflict between Arab states is of direct benefit to Israel, and Israel's role as a middleman in the arms-for-hostages deals needs to be seen in this light.

The Soviet Union's desire - shared with Czarist Russia - for a warm water port was a cardinal feature of the 1970s and early 1980s, leading Moscow to bid for regional power with its invasion of Afghanistan, its massive military support for Iraq, the Yemen, and Syria, and its attempt to mollify the mullahs in Iran.

Historically, the mid-east is a revolutionary area. One of the central themes of CIA activity in the region was the fear that revolutions (against secular governments; against monarchies; against democratic regimes) would be kidnapped by the USSR. The fact that kidnappings did not take place to any great degree displayed both the incompetence of the USSR, and the strength of local feelings. But the kidnapping prospect was a U.S. fixation, and it was strongly supported by the Soviet Union's geographic proximity, and its claims and activities which constantly threatened to secure a beach-head in the area. The CIA's (and State Department's) analysis of the region was filtered by these perspectives; its awareness of regional power-play consequences was blunted by cold war assumptions. There was a failure to predict the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

It is in this context that the U.S. alliance with Israel needs to be seen. The Israeli connection met the U.S. preoccupation with acquiring a presence in the area in order to prevent the Soviet Union securing regional strength during the early cold war period when the European empires were vanishing. Subsequently,

the U.S. objective of securing oil supplies and preventing Soviet advances, and the Israeli objective of preventing Arab unity against Israel, were both met by playing-off Arab states and securing Israeli power.

The U.S. obsession with being the first "new" nation and thus buddying up to everyone "new" was one of the great characteristics of the cold war. Many of the "new" were undesirable, and enormous resources were spent by the U.S. on unworthwhile objectives. The Gulf war signified the lodging in U.S. policymaking of this realisation.

The 1990s have witnessed the end of the post-1945 cold war, but cold war is the ordinary state of mankind, and new cold wars have already commenced. Accountability to the President or to Congress is still an issue for the agency. Bob Gates has said that the agency now lies midway between the President and Congress in this respect. Congress in 1990 appointed its own inspector general to investigate the agency from within. But the President still gives the agency its orders. It is a complicated, not straightforward matter.

It is highly likely that the CIA in its present form will be organized out of existence in the next few years, precisely because of the changing world. Between 1944 and 1947 we had an age of astonishment: the guided missile; the Bomb; the reversal of the USSR from an ally to an enemy. We are in the middle of another such age right now: OPEC radically altered the world in the last fifteen years; biological advances are changing species; computer advances have displaced millions of people in the world of work; the reversal of the USSR from an enemy to a friend.

The CIA predicts the shape of the future with the interests of the United States in mind. The questions for the future include many that have been addressed in the past. Just because there are more democracies in the world today than there were five years ago does not mean that U.S. national security is necessarily more assured. So the agency should be expected to continue to keep its eye on the rest of the world. But new subjects, and new emphases, are already demanding attention.

The Japanese economic and technological challenge has direct security effects. If Japan becomes the sole manufacturer of certain computer chips required for airplanes or rockets, for example, this would impinge upon U.S. security. The question of the Federal government becoming involved in combating commercial espionage is another matter that the behaviour of some Japanese firms has raised. And this, in turn, comes back to the place of secrecy in a democracy: should U.S. taxpayers' money be used, by the CIA (or the FBI) to protect commercial secrets of direct value not simply to the country, but to a small number of shareholders? Whether the agency becomes so involved or not, however, President Bush has made clear to it that political, economic and commercial intelligence on Japan is now of utmost importance to the U.S., and has tasked the agency with this as a collection and analytical priority.

Energy supplies; the future of the Soviet Union; the likely development of intelligence-enhancing drugs; genetic engineering prospects; secure computer systems; the greenhouse effect - will the sea level rise? Will there be more deserts? Changes in population patterns and the likely consequences; new diseases, particularly aids, are some of the new questions. What is manifest is that future shocks are going to be largely economic.

The CIA is both neglected and over-interpreted simultaneously. Intelligence as a great day-in, day-out enterprise has not been generally recognized. The last twenty years has told us that intelligence is much more crucial to what has happened and to policy formation than people thought: the release of the Ultra story required the rewriting of the history of the second world war. The great book-buying and television-watching publics are obviously interested in the subject, but for too long there has been no real academic or research base for the proper study of the intelligence world either in the United States or in Britain. The agency's reputation for being a rogue elephant - now, I believe, no longer so with knowledgeable people - came from the lack of an historiographical and historical perspective.

In studying the CIA I discovered much about America. Americans are so approachable. I was able to interview past and present officers and directors of Central Intelligence, and speak to them about serious matters seriously and in detail: something that is impossible to do with their opposite numbers in Britain because of British secrecy. In the United States, power is associated with publicity; in Britain, power is associated with secrecy. My experience with CIA people was a lesson in the openness of American society. A sense of the CIA's moderation came through, and the way that it maintained its sense of purpose over the decades without becoming drunk on power.

The U.S. today needs an intelligence capacity, which is not to say that it needs an agency in the way that it has been conceptualised so far. I have always had a sneaking regard for that school of thought that says you should abolish every institution every thirty years. If you abolished the CIA tomorrow, it would not be recreated. Something else would be. We may speculate on what that would be.

The moral self-confidence of the U.S. is sufficiently reduced since the time of the agency's start in 1947 that the notion that the CIA should be able to overturn a couple of governments if necessary would not be present in a recreation. The CIA's research and academic side would be utterly different: today it would be above all to do with communications and technical intelligence; all those people who came into the CIA in the 1940s and 1950s to provide psychological profiles and thesis-like analyses would not be there. Some years ago the agency came out with a report of what global warming might do to the cities of the U.S.: if the CIA was recreated, it would probably not be called upon to do much more of that type of work.

The agency was seen originally as a unique general staff of remarkably able men and women which was consulted on many subjects. Today, its people are still remarkable, and it is still able to recruit the country's best and brightest, but it is no longer unique. It is partly that other government departments have able people; partly that the agency has drawn back; partly that intelligence is no longer seen as a natural think tank. The radical changes in the geopolitics of the world recently have meant that the assertion of democratic belief is seen much less as an ideological affair than thirty years ago. The Left is as strong in support of the Chinese dissidents as anyone. The monkey is off the back of the Right

about being anti-Soviet and anti-Red Chinese. The communist system is so obviously clapped out: it lacks the attractions of a system on the move, a system that whatever else it is doing, is creative. With that, today's agency is both justified and dated at the same moment.

The agency has lost its future - not in the sense that the future is that of an insecure world - but that the agency is so obviously geared to a dated struggle for the world. That is not to say that struggles for the world are over; it is that in the post-1945 struggle, one side - the communist - has surrendered, and the other side - the democratic - has won. The CIA kept its eye on Libya and on terrorism, but Ghaddafi was not regarded as an agency target: when he became intolerable, President Reagan sent warplanes after him. The agency had much more primacy in terms of opportunities and resources when it started than it now has. The actual fabric of communication and technology has displaced the agency from centrality. The very term 'central' is now just a piece of dressing. It could be the National Intelligence Agency or the Civil Intelligence Agency and be more meaningful today. In 1947, central meant central. Intelligence needed a center, and the President needed a DCI who was as much the prime figure of intelligence as the secretary of State was the prime figure of international affairs.

Changes are to be expected in the history of any institution or country. Paul Kennedy had a blockbuster a couple of years ago with his book, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, making the point, in effect, that the seeds of its own decline and possible destruction are built into every great combination of men. It would be a mistake to think that the calibre of the agency has necessarily changed: what has changed is the world within which it operates, and the agency will always need to be adapted accordingly.