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Central Intelligence: Origin and Evolution and U.S. Intelligence Community Reform Studies Since 1947 - Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Reports

J. Kenneth McDonald, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Michael Warner, Center for the Study of Intelligence

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This is a compilation of two documents from the CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence, converted for accurate flowing-text ebook format reproduction.

The first is the introduction the CIA History Staff report, Central Intelligence: Origin and Evolution. (Document reproductions are not included.) The second is a review of fourteen significant official studies of the United States intelligence community since 1947. From the Executive Summary:

We have examined the origins, context, and results of 14 significant official studies that have surveyed the American intelligence system since 1947. We explore the reasons these studies were launched, the recommendations they made, and the principal results that they achieved. It should surprise no one that many of the issues involved—such as the institutional relationships between military and civilian intelligence leaders—remain controversial to the present time. For this reason, we have tried both to clarify the perennial issues that arise in intelligence reform efforts and to determine those factors that favor or frustrate their resolution. Of the 14 reform surveys we examined, only the following achieved substantial success in promoting the changes they proposed: the Dulles Report (1949), the Schlesinger Report (1971), the Church Committee Report (1976), and the 9/11 Commission Report (2004).
The earliest such study, the January 1949 Dulles Report, achieved its considerable influence only after a disastrous warning failure almost 18 months later at the outset of the Korean War. A new Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, used this report to make major changes at the Central Intelligence Agency. While organizing the CIA into a durable internal structure, Smith also formed the Board of National Estimates to coordinate and produce National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs), created new offices for current intelligence and research, and took control of the Agency's expanding covert action campaign. Most importantly, DCI Smith shaped the nation's disparate intelligence agencies into something recognizable as an Intelligence Community—a term first used during his tenure. He maneuvered the Department of State and the Joint Chiefs of Staff out of clandestine operations, and pushed successfully to bring the signals intelligence capabilities of the armed services under civilian control.

Almost 20 years later, as the Vietnam War wound down in 1971, James R. Schlesinger of the Office of Management and Budget (and later DCI) produced a review of the Intelligence Community for President Nixon and the National Security Council (NSC). While the cost of intelligence had exploded over the past decade, Schlesinger observed, the community had failed to achieve "a commensurate improvement in the scope and overall quantity of intelligence products." A manager was needed to plan and rationalize intelligence collection and evaluate its product, both within the Defense Department and across the Intelligence Community. This manager, he explained, could be made anything from a new coordinator in the White House to a full-fledged ""Director of National Intelligence" controlling the budgets and personnel of the entire community. Since Schlesinger outlined the concept in 1971, the need for a Director of National Intelligence has been a recurring theme in intelligence reform studies.

The Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) was founded in 1974 in response to Director of Central Intelligence James Schlesinger's desire to create within CIA an organization that could "think through the functions of intelligence and bring the best intellects available to bear on intelligence problems." The Center, comprising professional historians and experienced practitioners, attempts to document lessons from past operations, explore the needs and expectations of intelligence consumers, and stimulate serious debate on current and future intelligence challenges.

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