

INCIDENTAL PAPER

**Seminar on Command, Control,
Communications, and Intelligence**

**The Quest for “Good” Intelligence
Mark Lowenthal**

Guest Presentations, Spring 1986

Clarence E. McKnight, Jr.; Robert Conley; Lionel Olmer;
Harold Daniels; Mark Lowenthal; Richard J. Levine;
John Grimes; Bobby R. Inman

February 1987

Program on Information Resources Policy



Center for Information Policy Research



Harvard University

The Program on Information Resources Policy is jointly sponsored by Harvard University and the Center for Information Policy Research.

Chairman
Anthony G. Oettinger

Managing Director
John C. B. LeGates

Copyright © 1987 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Not to be reproduced in any form without written consent from the Program on Information Resources Policy, Harvard University, Maxwell Dworkin 125, 33 Oxford Street, Cambridge MA 02138. (617) 495-4114

E-mail: pirp@deas.harvard.edu URL: <http://www.pirp.harvard.edu>
I-87-1

The Quest for "Good" Intelligence

Mark Lowenthal

Dr. Lowenthal is Acting Director of the new Office of Strategic Forces Analysis, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State. He is responsible for intelligence and analysis of issues pertaining to nuclear arms and Soviet activities, providing overall intelligence support to U.S. arms control negotiators, and designing new products for use by policy makers. In a previous assignment, he was a specialist in national defense for the Library of Congress's Congressional Research Service, heading the Europe, Middle East, and Africa Section. Prior to that, he was a Foreign Affairs Officer in the State Department's Office of Policy Analysis, Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, and was a member of the Consolidated Verification Group. He is the author of U.S. Intelligence: Evolution and Anatomy (1984), and of many articles and Congressional studies on intelligence-related issues.

As you may understand from my title, I am now managing the production of intelligence at the State Department on strategic forces and on nuclear proliferation. After I left Harvard, I set out in life working for the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS is somewhat detached from the rest of the Congressional Staff members; we were not on the same personal call, which is a good thing. For 9 of the last 10 years I was responsible for intelligence matters, largely on my own, doing a lot of work for committees and for the individual members. Essentially, I was overseeing the overseers. Now I've gone from doing that to being a producer, and it is different.

The way I've structured this talk is basically to discuss how the Executive Branch and Congress view and assess the intelligence community, what I call the quest for "good" intelligence. These are my personal perceptions and do not reflect any official government view.

I'd like to begin by first discussing how I see the basic large relationship of the two branches to the issue of intelligence, and then discussing two different ways of assessing intelligence and showing how

those models are used by the Executive and Congress. Then maybe we can come up with some conclusions.

The two major branches share a number of facets of intelligence. They're both consumers, they're both overseers, and they're both policymakers. But they do those different functions in very different ways. The Executive is a daily consumer of intelligence in great volume. There's a whole set of product lines that go out late every night, or early every morning. The Secretary gets his own morning summary. Lots of people in the community get the NID, the *National Intelligence Daily*, which is a CIA "early morning newspaper." The President gets the PDB, the *President's Daily Briefing*, which is a distilled version of the NID. There are NIEs (national intelligence estimates) that come out on a fairly regular basis, plus Special NIEs (SNIEs) that come out on an "as needed" basis. So there is a product line that gets consumed every day in the Executive Branch. There's this tremendous volume and tremendous depth, and like everything else in life, you learn to stop reading certain things. If I see Nicaragua

at the beginning of an article, I skip to the next article. I'm just not busy with Nicaragua, I don't have to do it, and I've got other things to do.

Congress' use of intelligence is very different. It's less frequent and in less detail. It's not a day-to-day exposure, even on the Intelligence Committees. You've got so many other things occupying your time; intelligence is just one. In fact, one of the interesting things about serving on the Intelligence Committee for members is that there's basically no political benefit to it. There's nothing you can bring home to your constituents. You can't say, "I'm going to move the CIA to Lexington, Kentucky." You can't open up a separate branch of the CIA Directorate for Operations in Texas. Maybe you can get a National Security Agency (NSA) collection facility out someplace, but there's not a lot of the common traditional things, and also, you can't even tell your constituents what you did. You can't say, "Hey, I stopped this really lunatic operation in South Asia." You just can't talk about it. It's one of the things where you just do it to serve. This was brought home to me by a former member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and it probably was one of the things that cost him his seat, because he didn't have enough "bennies" to show the citizens of his state when it came time for reelection. So, for Congress, intelligence consumption is much less frequent and in less depth and detail.

In terms of their both being overseers, they both are overseeing the same things but in very different rank order. The rank order for the Executive, I would say, is policy support, management issues, and then propriety. The most important is policy support, and by that I mean, there's a positive question that the consumers ask, and there's a negative question. The positive question is, "Where did intelligence help? We got out of this really well. Did intelligence help, or did we just sort of do this brilliantly on our own, again?" Then there's the question you don't want to be asked, and that is, "Where did intelligence fail?"

One of the great overused terms in American intelligence is "failure." I have argued in an article for the Air Force Academy* that we haven't had that many genuine intelligence failures. We've had screw-ups, and bad calls, and most of these so-called "failures" usually happen for policy reasons rather than intelligence reasons.

Pearl Harbor is an intelligence failure. It's very hard to argue your way around that. When you lose half your fleet at the outset of the war something really has gone wrong. The Middle East War in 1973 was a gross intelligence failure for the Israelis. The other cases that I've looked at, though — South Korea in 1950, Cyprus, Portugal, Tet, and Iran — all probably were less failures of intelligence than areas where policy had sort of prejudiced the outcome. But when something goes wrong there is a certain amount of head-hunting, and the issue is where intelligence failed.

The management issues are the second rank of issues for the Executive. These are the average simple things like how much money, and how many people, and are they getting their work in on time. That's the typical sort of thing that you worry about in management.

The propriety question is less of a consuming day-to-day concern in the Executive Branch. There are people whose job it is to make sure that operations are proper: that we're not doping people with LSD anymore without their knowledge, and that we're not attempting to assassinate heads of state.

In Congress, I would say the order for those same three things is probably propriety, policy support, and management. Congress worries least about management issues. Their main preoccupation is with propriety because, quite frankly, that's how they got into this business. During the period from 1974 to 1976, Congress became concerned that there was, in the absolutely infelicitous phrase of the late Frank Church (which he later retracted, although nobody remembers that he did) this "rogue elephant," and it remains one of their primary concerns.

Their second issue is policy support. But here they're basically coming at it in a more negative respect, because the view of intelligence in Congress is largely part of the necessarily adversarial oversight function. The two branches aren't supposed to get along. The relationship is supposed to be adversarial. It's built into the Constitution. All that guff that they told you when you were a kid about checks and balances is true; it's frustrating to both sides, but it works admirably well. The way Congress views intelligence fits into this highly skeptical view of everything the Executive is doing. When you're in Congress your first rank order problem is the Executive Branch. They're your main day-to-day problem. Then there's everybody else in the world, or every other domestic lobby.

*"The Burdensome Concept of Failure," in A. Maurer, ed., *Intelligence Policy & Process*, 1985.

Both branches are policymakers, but there's a large difference between the two. The Executive has a policy to sell, a policy to support. If there was a new treaty overnight, a new arms treaty, an Administration spokesman wouldn't come before the Foreign Relations Committee and say, "Hey, it was late. I was tired. I had jet lag. It's not a great treaty. It's a good treaty." He would say that treaty was truth, justice, freedom, and national security. Congress would then say, "Could we get another point of view on this? I mean, you negotiated the treaty, what else are you going to tell us?" So, the Executive's always selling policy.

Congress is reviewing policy; it doesn't really have a policy of its own to sell. It may have alternative policies to propose, but largely as thwarts to the Executive policy. In the Executive, policymakers hope that intelligence is going to come in and say that this is the thing to do, and this supports what you're going to do. In Congress, the response is, "I'll bet they cooked that up to sell something." There's a tremendous dose of skepticism about the intelligence they're getting; they assume that it's self-serving at a certain level.

If you are a producer you find this very annoying. You like to believe every morning that you're being honest and intellectually objective, which I think I probably am most days! There are times when the numbers haven't come out the way we wanted them or things like that. In the Library of Congress, they sort of legislate or mandate objectivity in the CRS. There's a very rigorous reviewing procedure. In the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) and the CIA, you have to do it more on your own. My analysts and I like to assume that we're being objective. But some in Congress assume that intelligence is being shaped to support policy. When you produce the odd number of guerrillas that you've captured in the boonies in Honduras, Congress says, "Oh, come on, guys. Where did you recruit these? This is the 'Central Casting Guerrilla Department.'" Congress approaches lots of issues like this. You collect AK-47s and they want to know, "Well, didn't you just buy those from Egypt?" Congress naturally assumes that intelligence is just part of the salesmanship.

The two branches diverge functionally on the issue of production. Only the Executive is the producer of intelligence. The Congress isn't. It hasn't the facility. It just doesn't exist in that area.

The conclusion out of all this is that the two branches approach the intelligence issue very differ-

ently; their relationship to intelligence is different; their need for intelligence is different; their knowledge of intelligence is different; and their concerns over intelligence will differ. Beyond this agreement that what we want is good intelligence, the value of intelligence lies in the eyes of the beholder. That's also true in the Executive, at a different level, where you get this argument about what constitutes good intelligence. I'll come back to that.

Having sort of laid that as groundwork, how do you assess intelligence? I have two different paradigms; one is the ideal, and one is the bureaucratic. The ideal model was derived from the late Sherman Kent* who was both an academician, a scholar, and a producer of intelligence; he said, "If an intelligence analyst had three wishes in life, they would be to know everything, to be listened to and believed, and to influence policy for the good."

The second model is your more customary bureaucratic model, which in intelligence, I think, boils down into accuracy, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness. Let's go through the first model — the ideal — knowing everything.

In the Executive, I think most policymakers know that the ideal is not reasonable for either the producers or the consumers. No one can know everything, nor can every organization know everything. In fact, to save time, they basically only want to be told what they need to know. I have a lot of technicians who work for me. They do, in a technical sense, what regional analysts do. You want to tell the boss everything. You don't want just to tell him why there's a trade war with Japan; you want to go back to the Meiji Restoration so he can sort of imbue himself in Nipponese culture. I often tell my analysts you can just explain the miracles without telling the lives of all the saints. This is very difficult for analysts. It's very hard to discipline yourself to do that.

Policymakers realize that there's a great amount of competition for their time. Therefore, they will leave it to the analyst basically to tell them what they need to know, and perhaps toss in a couple of the odd tidbits that will also be interesting or fun. The mistake, I think, that consumers make in the Executive is that they probably believe that everything else is being covered and waiting to be tapped. If Botswana were to go up tomorrow night, most likely we could

*Former director, Office of National Estimates, CIA, and former director of the Office of Strategic Services, and author of *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, 1949.

indeed suddenly find someone who has been covering Botswana for 40 years and tell him, "This is your moment in the sun. Let's do Botswana!" But every so often that's just not true. It wasn't true in Iran. It wasn't true in Portugal in 1974. You do find that you have to make management choices. For example, we drew a lot of people out of the Soviet area in the CIA during Vietnam, and really consumed a lot of time. It was an ongoing concern. It was a war. Then when Vietnam wound down, we found that we had lots of other regions that no longer were being covered where we were tremendously weak. In the Middle East, I think we've always been very weak; we've relied for about two decades on the British. Well, the British pulled out and it's been very hard to replace them. This assumption of "Don't worry about it — if it happens someone will cover it," prevails among producers and consumers in the Executive, and it's not always true.

With Congress, the likelihood of knowing everything is probably an even more limited phenomenon. Congress just can't take in intelligence in the same doses or in the same frequency that the Executive is taking it in. There's much more divergent competition for the time and attention of a Congressman, I think, than there is for the average Assistant Secretary of whatever. The Congressman and the Senator have day-to-day preoccupations that really eat up a lot of time. That's part of the system. It means that they can't devote the same sort of time and attention to knowing everything.

As for the second of Kent's wishes — to be listened to and to be believed — in the Executive, getting listened to means competing with all your fellow analysts. For example, in INR there are 11 production offices in addition to mine. Each day we're all producing papers that we feel are what the Secretary really wants to read tonight. There are some 18 bureaus in the building where the same competition is going on. That's some 300 levels of competition to write that one memo that the Secretary's going to read in the evening, or those two memos, or those three memos. This is very difficult. It's the job of certain people, the Assistant Secretaries at one level, and then the Executive Secretary at another, to filter and make choices of what the Secretary really needs to read, and what you do with the other papers. Do you send them to Assistant Secretaries? Under Secretaries? Publish them? My office does a biweekly magazine. Some memos that haven't gone to the Secretary will appear as lead stories. If we're smart,

we'll make the decision that it's interesting but it's a little too technical for the Secretary. So there's one problem with being listened to in the Executive.

The other problem is what you do when intelligence runs counter to policy, and it happens. Policy-makers can always reject intelligence out of hand. A classic case is President Johnson in 1965. His Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), John McCone, told him, "You want to win in Vietnam? You've got to put in 300,000 troops; you've got to go to war; you've got to destroy the North; and then you'll win." Well, that was not what Johnson wanted to hear in 1965 on a continuing basis from his DCI. He wanted to hear, "Don't worry, the Viet Cong is small, and if you throw in a couple of advisors and a couple of ground forces on the bases, everything will be fine."

At first Johnson cut McCone out, and then he just sacked him. From Johnson's point of view that made good sense, because he wasn't hearing what he wanted to be told. In retrospect, obviously, it was a mistake. McCone was right and Johnson was wrong. But there's nothing you can do about the policymaker ignoring you. You can't grab him by the lapels and speak to him the way Americans speak to foreigners, which is to say it louder and slower. So that's the other problem.

Congress, again, is more selective. They have two major motives in listening to intelligence. What you're telling them had better be directly related to a key policy issue. You cannot often tell them, "Well, this is interesting and a sleeper and you ought to worry about this." There are very few members of Congress who have the luxury of saying, "That could be a problem in 15 years, so I'm really going to worry about that." First of all, there's a chance they won't be there in 15 years. Their sense of the immediate future, I would say, is anywhere from two to six years, maybe eight years. You'd better be able to relate what you're telling them directly to something that's going on right then in their lives in terms of legislation or important public events. They want to make sure the sleeper problem is covered because they don't want to be surprised by it, but it's very hard to devote any time, attention, or resources to it — which is also true in the Executive, but more of a problem, I think, in the Congress.

Congress also has an even greater ability than the Executive to reject intelligence they don't like, because they're first passing it through the filter of asking, "Is this intelligence self-serving?" When

they get intelligence they don't like, some may be inclined to say the answer is yes.

On influencing policy for the good: In the Executive, the first question you have to ask yourself is, "What is the good? Is it in the policymakers' outcome or is it in the intelligence analysts' outcome?" Intelligence analysts, like everyone else in the world, develop a certain clientism. They know their subject really well. All these other people at the top are transient phenomena. The Secretary of State will be gone in four to five years, and the Assistant Secretary will probably be gone in two years. Nixon was right about that; the permanent bureaucracy thinks that way. They can outlast anybody; they're not going anywhere. They're very happy in their jobs. Therefore, you do end up with the policymakers, the people who are currently responsible — which I would say is from the Deputy Assistant Secretary level on up, where political appointments tend to begin, although at the Deputy level you'd get a mix of some career and some political — usually holding two different views of what is the good in policy. This is what I referred to before about the perceived value of intelligence varying between certain levels within the Executive as well as between the Executive and the Congress.

The second thing is, how do you know what the good is? I think most intelligence producers have enough sense at least to question whether or not they're right, even if they hold private views and think, "I know better than they do how to fix it."

In Congress, well, what Congress wants is good, and what the Executive wants is bad if they disagree. That's a very simple phenomenon. That's why they're two separate branches of government. Again, Congressmen are back in the situation of tending to accept that which fulfills their policy goals, and rejecting that which fulfills the Executive policy goals that they oppose.

So that's the ideal model, according to Kent's three wishes, for both branches. The ideal might be nice. I don't think any intelligence producer assumes it can ever be achieved. I'm not sure the ideal in the end would lead to any meeting of the minds on what is good intelligence.

Let's go to the bureaucratic paradigm of accuracy, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness. Obviously, accuracy is essential. You want to avoid the surprise phenomenon. You want to have accurate intelligence. Most of my customers tend to appreciate the necessary limits of what we can achieve in terms of accu-

rate predictions. In politics, it's very hard predicting on the average afternoon what Khaddafi's going to do. It's probably not something you want to do for long if you're keeping a batting average. My analysts cover a lot of technical matters with the Soviet weapons systems, worrying about range and throw weight and number of RVs (reentry vehicles) and size of the blast and so on. Technical intelligence can be more precise than political intelligence, so we can get what we feel is pretty close and pretty accurate, although even here there will be wide divergence of opinion on some issues.

I think there is some tolerance among the producers for the finite limits of intelligence. I'm not sure that the consumers in the Executive always appreciate the need for "maybes" and "perhapses" and "it appears that," — what someone called "writing in the subjunctive." Most intelligence analysts are smart enough, or have been burnt enough times, that they don't want to state flatly, "At 9:05 tomorrow morning they're going to do X." Unless you've got the world's best intelligence that tells you that, most producers aren't going to write that. They write, "Well, it appears they're going to do X, then again they may do Y, or Z, or possibly go back to A." Sometimes it's necessary and sometimes it's simply CYA. I don't think, though, when it's necessary, that consumers always understand why. So we have a divergence between the producer and the consumer where, if the consumer does not appreciate the need for this hedged analysis and cries "failure" whenever he gets burnt, you end up with very timorous producers.

Also, there's a learning curve. During the period when we had sick old men running the Soviet Union, we really got very complacent in predicting Soviet policy issues. I've never understood people who say, "Well, we want them to have a dynamic leader." Why? I don't! I think we were in much better shape when they had sick old men. Gorbachev is a whole new ball game. We're coming up to speed on him. If you get burnt enough times, you become a little more cautious.

In Congress, among the three issues of accuracy, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness, accuracy is probably the key factor in terms of assessing intelligence. But it's probably applied with less understanding for the limits, for the "maybe," for the need to hedge the analysis; therefore, the notion of accuracy is applied more rigorously and perhaps less reasonably, I think. The average member of Congress is not

exposed to a lot of what we call intelligence. They don't *all* see the NID every day. They certainly don't see the PDB, or the Secretary's morning summary. The members of the Intelligence Committee will see the NID, but you're talking about 17 on one side and 15 on the other. So not even 10 percent of the whole is being exposed to intelligence on anything close to a regular basis. The Foreign Relations Committee members will get to see more, but even then it's selective. You don't bring up cartloads of stuff on the People's Republic of China (PRC) nuclear test program. You give them what you think they'll need.

Oettinger: Implicit in everything you said — and it's at a particular force right now — is the notion that intelligence and intelligence input are the formal products of organizations within the government labeled "intelligence."

Lowenthal: No, I would include briefings in that.

Oettinger: But quite aside from reports and briefings, the Congress takes junkets hither and yon, and they've got all sorts of folks walking in and out of their offices every day, lobbyists and the like. If you take a broader view of what the inputs are, is your assessment of Congressional exposure to intelligence still correct, or is it colored by too narrow a definition of what intelligence is?

Lowenthal: In terms of finished intelligence, where you've actually done analysis and come to a conclusion, I would say it's correct. In terms of people walking in and out, that's obviously different, but the trouble is that you get a lot of self-appointed experts walking in and out.

In terms of briefings, you're back in the situation where intelligence is perceived as self-serving. Every Secretary of Defense, not just this one, has a message to deliver in front of the Congress so as to produce a desired effect. Choices get made. So there's a further filtering of the information before it gets to the Congress.

This doesn't prevent them from hiring outside experts; they have four formal agencies, and then they all hire people. The people who are upset about charges of yellow rain hired Mathew Meselson. Of course, here a member or staffer may be doing what it accuses the Executive of doing — finding someone who is going to support their point of view. Now we have competing bee experts. So Congress, at that point, makes the same mistake as the Executive. I

still think that their basic exposure to intelligence is less than the Executive's, so that the paradigm holds true for the relative significance of accuracy to each branch.

The issue of timeliness is obviously essential for the Executive. There's no sense telling anyone on December 8th that you're going to have your fleet attacked when it's been attacked on December 7th. There's a wonderful story about Talleyrand having dinner in Paris in July of 1821 when news came that Napoleon had died at St. Helena in May. His companion said, "What an event!" Talleyrand said, "No, Madame, now it is only news." You don't want to be in a situation of producing intelligence that's only news, and especially old news. The thing that you have to convince producers of is the time it takes to produce good intelligence, or to work up a good briefing, unless it's something that's already been done. If there is a need for a briefing in an area where our intelligence is less firm, it takes a certain amount of time before we can whip that presentation into shape. That's one problem.

Then there's the problem of, again, getting the attention of the consumers. Pinning down an Assistant Secretary is difficult. Similarly, when the ambassadors for the arms control talks are in Washington, they get briefed regularly. But there are some days when the 9 o'clock briefing goes to 10 and some days the 10 o'clock briefing gets postponed to tomorrow. That's just a fact of life. If it's something really urgent, you can always get to the consumer. There are ways that you can wave flags and push the right buttons. But you also don't want to cry wolf too often.

One of the great overrated experiences of government life is the concept of crisis, and crisis management, which I love because it's a wonderful oxymoron. If you're having a crisis you're not managing, and if you're managing, don't worry, you're not having a crisis. It's up there with jumbo shrimp in terms of felicitous expressions.

A crisis is the worst time to get something done in the government, because everyone's critical faculties begin to drop off; everyone's living on adrenalin, and everyone wants to be involved. A classic example was Grenada. There were troops in action. Everyone really gets excited about combat. Lots of people were trying to get into the Operations Center in the department to "be there," including Assistant Secretaries for regions that in no way, shape, or form had anything to do with Grenada. I had to do a

postmortem on how we handled that situation and several other "crises." The director of the Operations Center told me that what he really wanted to do was to stand on a table and yell, "Will everyone except for the two GS-9s who are supposed to be in here please leave the room." But you don't do that to an Assistant Secretary of State when he's in the Operations Center.

During a crisis things don't work as well. People start doing things for really bizarre reasons. Civilians, for example, often tend to be much more willing to use force than the military. The civilians have much less sense of what these operations are really like, even one-time veterans.

McLaughlin: If I may just interject here, you also have the problem in both John Vessey* and Shy Meyer** of the post-Vietnam Army. The attitude is, "We finally built this instrument and we don't want to get it dirty; we don't want to incur damage; we took such a beating over in Vietnam." And of course the civilians are saying, "Why do we spend hundreds of billions of dollars a year to have this instrument?"

Lowenthal: This happens every year in the budget cycle. There are two questions that get asked of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs by the members. The first question is, "Could you safeguard the United States tonight?" To which there is only one permissible answer: "Yes." The next question is, "Do you need more stuff?" To which the only answer is, "Yes." This is F. Scott Fitzgerald's concept of genius: having two opposing ideas in your mind at the same time. The average Congressman's saying, "You just told me you could defend us tonight, and now you need more stuff." Then you end up in this tedious explanation of deterrence: "If you don't buy any more stuff tomorrow, I may have to use what you gave me yesterday." To lots of members, the logic drops off on that. I think you're right. I think that does happen.

At any rate, moving on to the timeliness issue in the other branch, the Congress, I think that unless you've been in the intelligence production process or unless you've had a lot of exposure to it as an overseer, there's less appreciation for how hard it is to coordinate policy, and how hard it is to coordinate intelligence in the Executive Branch. Lots of people have axes to grind. Every intelligence producer has

his own benighted view of the world. The intelligence production process is no better than the clearance process, which can be abysmal. You've got to get everyone to sign on, and you end up with lots of lowest common denominator paragraphs, or you end up with papers that read like first-year German translations of Nietzsche, where all the verbs are in the wrong places and all the adjectives are in the wrong places, and yet it's in English. (NIEs, stylistically, are some of the most unrewarding reading you can do in your entire given life.) So timeliness is important to the Congress; as I said, though, I think they're less aware of the problems involved.

Cost is the next way of measuring the value of intelligence. For the Executive, it's not so much a question of cost-effectiveness as it is of resource allocation. You're always playing with fewer resources than you need, and you've got intense competition within the budget as a whole, and within the intelligence budget, for resources. I never have understood the arguments that the CIA hypes the Soviet threat to improve the defense budget. It doesn't make any sense to me bureaucratically. The CIA has no institutional interest in a higher defense budget except for collection systems. If more money's going to defense, less money's going to CIA, and that's a fact of life.

Oettinger: Who holds that theory?

Lowenthal: In Congress or in the media you can hear that notion, that the CIA is hyping. Part of it also has to do with the history of intelligence on the Soviet Union. Take the missile gap: A lot of people think that the lesson of the missile gap was that we grossly overestimated how many Soviet ICBMs (intercontinental ballistic missiles) there were out there. It was largely promoted by Democrats in Congress, but lots of people forget that. What lots of people also forget is that there were two gaps. There was indeed an overestimate of the ICBMs. There was also an underestimate of MRBMs and IRBMs (medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles). That was the mistake. Everyone assumed the Russians were acting like us. Americans build weapons in a certain way: You build the best weapon you can and then you field it. The Russians field their OK weapon right away. Initially their concern was in covering their Eurasian targets, so they fielded lots of MRBMs and IRBMs. Americans would not do that; Americans would say, "We've got range? Give me as much range as you can get. I want ICBMs."

*General John Vessey, former Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**General Edward C. Meyer, former Army Chief of Staff.

There were lots of mistakes in the missile gap, but the *legend* of the missile gap is that "CIA cried wolf," and when the Democrats got into power they discovered, yes, there was a missile gap, and it was in our favor. This legend has stayed with the CIA.

Then there's the case where the CIA changed its numbers on the Soviet defense expenditure, which has been reported in the press. Initially their numbers stated that six to seven percent of GNP in the Soviet Union was going to the military. In the late 1970s, I think it was during Carter's administration, they redid the numbers. Not out of any malice aforethought; they just had new information and new analytical techniques. The number went to 13, 14 percent. The average skeptical Congressman has one very simple reaction to that: "Your old numbers were bad, why are your new numbers good?" In the Executive, you get asked the same question. But in the Executive you can get a consensus for more defense spending in the national security community. In Congress, you've got a different sales job.

To go back to the question of competition in the budget, there are two levels of competition in the intelligence budget. One is between and among technical collectors, and these things are really expensive. Most of the intelligence budget goes to two commodities, collectors and computers. The bottom of the NSA, the subbasements, is reportedly one very large computer. It's very expensive stuff.

Then you get the competition between the technical collectors and the analysts. What if you collect all the information and no one can analyze it? And we do collect more information than you can easily go through in a given day. Every morning when my analysts take "the take," they've got a stack of cables a foot high. A lot of it is absolutely inconsequential stuff. Then there are the interesting items. Winnowing that out in the half an hour that I give my staff in the morning, before I go to my director's meeting, is a very hard task. The trouble is that it's always easier to get money for collectors. This is true in both the Executive and Congress. You can always sell gadgets to Congress and the Executive. We have a lot of belief in technology in this country. People are always easier to cut, or easier not to buy. It seems less threatening. Obviously you reach a certain point where that's not true; if you don't have enough analysts, and you have too much incoming information, then you have a big problem.

Congress, I think, suffers in that they have a less reliable means for creating a standard. They have

more difficulty judging where to make these choices within the intelligence budget. What's interesting is, we've had instances where the Congress has questioned the choices the intelligence community made and tried to increase the money. For example, in one of the annual reports of the House Intelligence Committee, I think it was around 1983, possibly 1984, the Committee said that OMB's (Office of Management and Budget) decisions on which collectors to buy were wholly divorced from any intelligence requirements. They were just a bunch of green eyeshade people going over the intelligence budget and making bad resource choices, just deciding this is expensive, this is cheap, buy this. Congress actually reversed a lot of OMB decisions. So if you've got a group of informed members and an informed staff, congressional review can actually work to the benefit of the intelligence community. But I think, on a day-to-day basis, it's probably harder for them to do. Congress nevertheless really has been very interested in resource management.

Having said all that, let me add one other feature to the bureaucratic paradigm, and that's quality control. Who performs quality control? In the Executive, I would say the consumers are largely performing quality control, but usually through negative feedback. Usually you only hear from your customers when they feel they haven't been well served. You don't get a lot of complimentary notes going back and forth, although it happens. There's also the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, PFIAB, which serves as an overseer. The trouble with PFIAB is that it's somewhat irregular and unsystematic. It's a group of high-powered people who've had interesting jobs in industry, government, or the private sector, who then get paid per diem to sit on this board and assess the effectiveness or utility of intelligence. But it's done somewhat irregularly, making it difficult in terms of quality control for the Executive.

In Congress, the quality control is being performed by the intelligence committees. The first issue the committees have to face is what their standards are for good intelligence. As I've said, I think that their sense for what constitutes good intelligence is different from that of the Executive. Yet, in many respects, I think the committees are much better situated to do postmortems, at least intellectually, if not in terms of access. Postmortem is not something that we do an awful lot of in the Executive Branch, for a reason that I'll come back to. We've had the committees now for 10 years, and they've been very helpful in

trying to promote good intelligence. For example, the House Intelligence Committee's Report on Iran was a very useful study, not only of why we didn't know that the Shah was on his last legs, but also of the entire intelligence production process. They went through the NIE process and said that it is not a very sound intellectual procedure, and that the NIEs are not worth fighting for because they're not influencing policymakers.

Let me draw some conclusions then and throw the rest of the time over into discussion, disagreement, or whatever. I think both branches tend to judge intelligence largely through a negative reference, especially during so-called failures. I think it's easier to assess when things have apparently gone wrong than to figure out when things are going right. When you're getting intelligence right it's just basically not news. It's when you've left people in the lurch or surprised them that they come and tell you. Every so often you will hear that your product was very useful.

Between the branches, intelligence is treated politically. In part I would say, "Why not?" Everything else is. Why should intelligence be exempt?

And in part it's the nature of the system we have, especially in foreign policy. We have a wonderful myth in this country that foreign policy is bipartisan. Politics stops at the water's edge. In reality we have always had partisan debates over foreign policy, and I would argue that with 2.5 exceptions, every political campaign since 1948 has had a major foreign policy input. The trouble is that intelligence has now become part of this debate, for a number of reasons. One was the effect of the investigations, which left people with the attitude that these agencies can do some really nasty or inept things if they're not controlled; and they did, in fact, do some things that were illegal as assessed by both branches.

The second, I think, was that we politicized the position of the DCI. Until 1977 DCIs did not change with every administration. There was usually an overlap of about a year, because this was seen as a nonpolitical position. Eventually a President will want his own DCI, but they are not changed automatically. We're now in a situation where a new President appoints a new DCI. When Carter came in, George Bush reportedly said to him that the CIA needed more continuity than four DCIs in three years. He offered to stay on and to forgo political activity. Carter wanted his own DCI, and nominated Ted Sorensen, who withdrew, and then Admiral Stansfield Turner. It was obvious that when Reagan

won, Turner was going to go. So he named William Casey. Had Mondale won in 1984, Casey would not likely have been kept on as DCI. Every President is entitled to name his own DCI, but I think that's one position that you should avoid politicizing, although that may no longer be possible anymore.

Finally, the partisanship issue in foreign policy has obviously affected the way in which intelligence is treated between the branches. As I mentioned earlier, the Executive tends to resist making assessments and postmortems. There are two reasons. First, the consumers resist it because they don't have the time. They've solved whatever that crisis is or they've stopped worrying about whatever that crisis is, and they're on to the next one: "Let's just keep moving." It's a very now-oriented environment. The consumers don't have time for it.

Second, the producers generally don't want report cards. Adults are no different from children in that respect; they don't want to be assessed on a continuing basis. There's always that element of chance that you didn't get the grade you wanted or felt you deserved. So the producers tend to resist it.

Congress, I think, is more interested in doing postmortems, and I think that they're better suited to it. Congress has actually at times said, "Hey, that was good." One example that stands out in my mind is during the *Marief* boat lift. Les Aspin (D-WI), who at that time was Chairman of the Oversight Subcommittee, issued a report saying, "Intelligence was really good on this. They predicted that Castro would do this, and they predicted the numbers of people we would have to deal with, and the policymakers had every reason to be prepared."

Congress has tried to foster more postmortems, and I think they've been fairly successful. The Iran one stands out in my mind as a good one. There was one on Grenada that was less successful. I think Congress is well suited to do this as long as they're not simply grinding axes because they also disagree with the Administration's policy.

But I think Congress can do this well, and has done it well, which leads us to the question that I started with: What constitutes good intelligence? The more I thought about this, the more I felt like Justice Potter Stewart in his comment about pornography: "I can't define it, but I know it when I see it." I think to a certain extent that's what good intelligence is. I sat through a briefing recently that didn't tell me anything I hadn't really known before, except it was a bit more concrete. But I walked out saying

that was really a good analytical job. They pulled together lots of disparate pieces. They made a couple of leaps in the dark of their own that worked. They pulled together all sorts of interesting knowledge. That was really good intelligence! But I can't prescribe how to do it. If I could prescribe how to do it, I wouldn't make my own mistakes.

There are two paradoxes in intelligence. One is that intelligence often serves best on the areas that are little known. For example, the PDRY, South Yemen. Little regular attention is paid to South Yemen. But, when a civil war erupted, we were able to get people up to speed very fast. Also, there you're dealing with consumers who know that they don't know anything about South Yemen. There's no reason to pay tremendous amounts of policy-making time to South Yemen until it blows up and the Yemeni Cabinet starts shooting each other.

In contrast, when it comes to U.S.-Soviet relations, everyone assumes he knows what's going on. We've been living with this problem for 41 years, and everyone assumes, "Oh, yeah, I can do U.S.-Soviet analysis. You're not telling me anything I didn't know before." This becomes heightened during a crisis. I think the major thing that goes wrong during a crisis between the producers and the consumers is that the consumers tend to act as their own analysts. Their attitude is, "Give me raw cable traffic. I can make up my own mind." Terrible, terrible thing to do, but it happens.

So there is this paradox that we probably do better on the rare, odd event than on the general long-running event. In ongoing situations you also tend to get trapped by your own analysis after a while. There is a certain timidity about making major changes in assessments because this raises the question, "Well, if you were wrong then, why are you right now?" Then, when the assessment gets changed again, people keep asking, "When are you going to give me a number that was the right number?" The answer is, "Never." It's very hard to explain that to a consumer.

The other paradox is that Congress may in many respects be in a better position than the Executive to make improvements in intelligence, because they're not involved on a day-to-day basis; they can sort of step away and take the long view. The question is, will the Executive really allow that? My sense is, on a regular basis, probably not. It's going to take some major gaffe. The CIA is a direct result of Pearl Harbor. That's why we have the CIA. It's not because some genius came up with the idea in 1947. It's

because we lost a fleet once. That's the kind of event it takes to make a massive improvement in intelligence. But as I've said, Congress may be better suited to do it.

Let me stop there and throw this open to questions or discussion.

Student: I was kind of surprised by your statement that the Congressional view is that CIA overstates the Soviet threat. Do you have an historical bound on that?

Lowenthal: Since the missile gap. But again, not all Congressmen; some.

Student: Isn't there such a thing as track records that can clarify whether it's been overestimated or underestimated in those years?

Lowenthal: Well, the reality is very different from the perception, but the perception is the governing factor.

Student: But is doing these track records or getting people to give them the track records part of the answer to Congressmen's misperception?

Lowenthal: For one thing, very few people will bother to review NIEs from year to year or from five years to five years to see how accurate they were. No one has time to do it.

Student: Isn't that what you had in mind with the postmortem?

Lowenthal: Yes. I think that would be very useful.

Student: But as far as trust is concerned, it's usually DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) that gets cast as the producer.

Oettinger: I was caught up in the same thing. Let's make sure. With all the corrections, what I think Mark is ultimately saying is that the Congressional perception is one of CIA exaggeration. What you guys are saying, which I don't think he would argue with, is that the record shows that an honorable CIA has tended to estimate less and DIA has tended to estimate more.

Lowenthal: Perhaps, but that is the nature of the estimative process — a fairly reliable number bounded by highs and lows.

Oettinger: To the extent that there have been post-mortems done at the behest of the Congress or the Executive Branch, or PFIAB, whomever, they

corroborate that “reality.” What he’s saying, if I heard correctly, is that nonetheless on an average day a Congressman’s perception is the other way around.

Lowenthal: Yes. Again, perceptions or legends tend to overpower reality. Also, not everyone may have access to these reassessments.

Student: Is it the other way around, or is it that both of these are overstated?

Lowenthal: It’s not a question of overstatement, it’s a question of process and audience. You have to distinguish between the roles of the principal analytical agencies within two processes. All agencies participate in what we call the national intelligence process, under the direction of the DCI. Here we have products like the NIEs, and the well-known debates over accommodating necessary differing points of view in one document.

At the same time, each of the analytical agencies has separate functions on their own, and very different audiences. INR and DIA are both part of larger policy organizations with specific points of view or ways of approaching issues. The CIA does not have the same relationship; it has been said that, while INR serves State and DIA the Pentagon, CIA serves the President — to its advantage and disadvantage. It may be during this process that more parochial — if you will — bureaucratic differences surface, where agencies, writing on their own, take stands that have greater divergence than in the national process. One analyst’s overstatement may be another’s understatement. Obviously, some of this divergence eventually gets reflected in the national product, but not necessarily in its entirety. For one thing, the audiences are not always identical. We all share our analyses with one another, sometimes agreeing, sometimes not. On balance, we undoubtedly profit from the interchange, whether or not we finally agree. It’s useful to know what the other views are, what the analytical boundaries are. But as far as overstatement is concerned, this may tell you as much about the particular viewpoint of the critic as of the product.

But to go back to your original question, I would say if you look at the track record, we’ve probably done pretty well over time. Sometimes we err high, sometimes we err low.

One of the things that has always bothered me as an analyst, and something that I’ve tried to avoid doing now as a producer, is focusing on how much money the Soviet Union is putting on defense. I

don’t think you can calculate it. I’m never sure. Should we be doing dollars to rubles, or rubles to dollars? (I once suggested we find neutral currency; we’ll convert everything to Polish zlotys and see if we can come up with a better number.) I’m not sure what it tells you. If I were convinced you could get a good GNP number for the Soviet Union, which you can’t, and if I were convinced that you could then translate what percentage of their resources they put into defense, it might be interesting. The only useful commodity that you come up with in terms of analysis is, well, what have they produced? They’ve got 1,398 ballistic missiles. That’s an interesting number. That’s real. Now you get into the issue of how many refires, and how many spares, but numbers won’t necessarily tell you that. Not numbers of dollars, or numbers of rubles.

I have always found this to be a very bizarre discussion, yet it always happens. Ted Turner said, “Money is how people keep score.” Well, Congress and the Executive both do that with the defense budget of the Soviet Union, or they compare their budget and our budget. We’re buying apples and they’re buying oranges, or we’re buying beefsteak and they’re buying potatoes. Yet everyone is saying they’re spending different amounts of money. Of course they’re spending different amounts of money.

I think one of the big mistakes you can make as an intelligence analyst, and this is apparent even before you become a producer, is mirror imaging — assuming that everyone is making decisions for the same reasons. You make all these wonderfully, facile intellectual comments like, “They’re all just people. They’re all just like us.” Nobody’s just like us. I don’t even know what “just like us” is on the average afternoon, but you get that kind of discussion.

I’m not sure I answered your question, but I sort of bounced off of it in a couple of places.

Student: You didn’t answer the follow-on which was, does the Intelligence Community overstate the threat in the perception of Congress?

Lowenthal: Yes. In the perception of some members, yes. Tony is correctly interpreting what I was saying: The perception is that the Intelligence Community, this monolith, hypes the threat. I see it happen occasionally in pieces of the community, but I don’t think we do it as a general rule. Certainly not with consistent malice. But every so often we get it wrong.

Student: It seems to me that overstating the threat is just a prudent thing that people do in intelligence.

I'm in intelligence, at NSA. I think that's done because we just feel obligated to state the worst possible threat.

Lowenthal: Yes, this is the worst case analysis. You don't want to have your policymaker caught short. But at the same time, what you should do in that case, unless you know with certainty what the numbers are, is to present ranges. Say, "Look, they could have produced anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 of these. That's my uncertainty. I can give you a guess as to which side of the range they're closer to, but quite frankly that's as close as I can get." Then you go back into the problem I was mentioning before about the consumers. They say, "Just give me an answer. I don't want ranges. How many missiles are out there?" Well, I can't do that for you. You run into that problem.

Oettinger: I'd like to go back to something you said towards the end, where you said "terrible thing to do" apropos of the customer's doing his own analysis on the basis of whatever he may judge to be raw direct evidence. Do you care to elaborate on that? Because that seems to me, to put my cards on the table, a somewhat parochial professional producer's point of view.

Lowenthal: To a certain extent, yes. I'll give you an example. When the U-2 came back from Cuba in 1962 there was the famous photo of the Star of David pattern. To the average individual looking at that, this is very interesting. There's this weird road pattern that nobody in his right mind would build — something's going on there. To the PIs, the photo interpreters, this was like having a big sign, "IRBMs here in 10 days." When they brought the photos to the White House they dragged in Ray Cline as a matter of fact; and Ray Cline did a tutorial for the President and the EXCOM saying, "This is what this is here. Let me show you this."

The trouble is, as I said, during crises people just don't think well. There's a lot of role-playing. I think one of the lessons from Robert Kennedy's *Thirteen Days*, for example, and one of the reasons why his brother sagaciously did not stay in the room for the discussions, is that everyone tends to say what he thinks with one eye on the President to see if he's nodding or narrowing his eyes. Then you sort of trim. Also, people get very wrapped up and work long hours, and they wear out — which a lot of managers don't appreciate. That's not the time to start taking raw traffic and making your own interpreta-

tion. If you want to make your own interpretation, fine, but don't say, "Don't give me the analysis." Most decisionmakers at that level are not in a position to do that kind of analysis and also function as policymakers. They really need someone to give them some analysis along with the cable traffic.

Oettinger: What about the Congress? There, the customer's view is that analysis is sort of pear-shaped, consensus-driven, lowest common denominator, etc., which hides sources, disagreement, and any number of things that might surface if you had the guy in the room so that you could grill him on the details. It seems to me that there's a necessary tension there, and I was wondering whether you have any sense as to how one might tweak this in an acceptable manner.

Lowenthal: One thing to do, if they don't want to sit there and read analysis, is to do exactly what you said — to drag someone in, just as they brought in Ray Cline, and ask, "What does this mean? Give me five minutes of brilliance on your subject here and explain to me the dynamics of the situation as you see them." Then send him away. At a certain point, briefings are more effective than writing. The producer also has to know which way to channel his message, what medium to use. As I say, I think the do-it-myself tendency is understandable from the point of view of the consumer; I just think it can have regrettable consequences. They are less attuned to certain subtleties that could in fact be important. Of course, I may be voicing the prejudice of wanting to know everything, or wanting consumers to know everything. It's like writing a dissertation. It's so hard to throw away note cards. "Hell, I did the research, I've got to tell somebody this."

So I think dragging people in is good, and it happens sometimes; but then the trouble during crises is the downside of that, how much time it eats up. The competition for the time of that audience has really increased. Crisis management becomes so all-consuming that it's the only thing they're doing, and they don't have a lot of time to stop for 10 minutes and listen to a brilliant summation. So there's that problem. During a crisis is just not the time to watch the government work.

Student: You talked about oversight and control of the intelligence process. It might be to some extent self-correlating and self-regulating because of the competition between producers.

Lowenthal: I'm not sure it's self-regulating. I think the competition is a good thing. It's useful to have DIA presenting a military view. Your theory would hold true if you didn't end up with lots of lowest common denominator paragraphs that tell you nothing. That's the trouble with the consensus model of government. This happens not only in the intelligence community but also on the Joint Staff, for example. Congress and the Executive have noted this. That's the nature of how our Executive does business. That's the nature of the clearance process. Everything objectionable gets filtered out.

We're getting better at doing dissents. NIEs are now being written more with something up front that says, "Here are the areas where they disagree." I think that's really important to tell the policymaker or the Congress right off the bat. Tell them what you don't know. What you don't know is often the stuff that's going to bite you, not the stuff that you know. In fact, I would like to see more of that. The footnote wars can be a tedious way to spend your time.

McLaughlin: I'd like to go back to your observation on postmortems because it partially fits with some observations we've made in running the seminar and the research that goes with it. We've seen time and again that intelligence, command, and control "failures" get documented in the national security world. It may be internal in terms of the Inspector General or something, or it may be a Congressional investigation. Failures in the business world don't get documented, for all sorts of good reasons having to do with stockholder relations, stockholder liabilities, Chapter 11, and other such things. But contrary to the usual platitudes about success having a thousand fathers, success seemingly never gets documented in either world — probably because people are too busy exploiting the results.

The other observation I would make is that it's much easier for Congress to do an objective post-mortem simply because it's not responsible.

Lowenthal: That's what I'm saying. The fact that they are somewhat distant from it probably plays to their advantage, as long as they're not also grinding their own axes. I think the House Committee has had successful postmortems, such as the Iran one. The Senate did a very good one on Team A/Team B.

Oettinger: Can I get you to shift tactics slightly? I keep hearing you describe intelligence in terms of a formal process carried out by entities that are labeled intelligence agencies. Let me come at it slightly

differently. Suppose I'm a Representative or Senator, and I want to inform myself. There are any number of things at my disposal, among them the Congressional Research Service. From that point of view, intelligence is whatever the hell I need, or want, or get to help me do my job. Can you approach it from that point of view? Pretend you are sitting in the office of Congressman X either qua Congressman or qua chairman of the something or other committee — you name the role. You're saying, "For the job I'm doing, I need information." Now talk about how much of that comes from CRS, formal intelligence agencies, or cronies or constituents, whatever they need for their purposes.

Lowenthal: I understand the question. What, out of the panoply of resources, will I choose to plug into? It's a very individual sort of thing, as you would expect. When I was on the Hill we would have standard lines of products, some of which you've seen from time to time. I usually work from the general to the specific. The typical call I would get was, "The Congressman wants to know everything about U.S. intelligence." My first response was, "No, he doesn't. What does he want to know?" "He wants to know everything." This is where the Kent paradigm works against you: "I want to know everything." "No, you don't."

What I used to send them usually was one of my issue briefs on what the key issues were then in U.S. intelligence. I said, "Read this, or have him read this, and then come back to me with what you need to know specifically." I would say that in eight out of 10 of the cases that was it. I never heard from them again. I knew that what they really wanted to know was what's hot these days in intelligence and the pros and cons of an issue.

There was one Congressman who was in his second or third term and got really interested in arms control. He said, "I want to know what we're building, what they're building." Actually, he didn't want lots of formal briefings from the Executive yet. He wanted what he perceived to be an objective staff to give him briefings. First we sent him the usual — papers and off-the-shelf items — and we spent long evenings in his office drilling him on RVs and how a ballistic missile works.

There are some members who are very interested in some issues, and are very well-read. They call in briefers on a regular basis. Here we're dealing with a member who knows a fair amount about the subject, and he's asking for specifics: "I've heard

something new has happened,” or “I’m worried that something new is happening.” Staffers go overseas or constituents go overseas, and they’ll often pique a member’s interest.

It varies a great deal. For the kind of really broad-gauged question of “Tell me everything about...,” I used to find that an off-the-shelf item was usually a great way to distill the question; they really didn’t want to know everything about it. You tend to get that question more in the Congress than in the Executive. For one thing, a Congressman is responsible for all aspects of public policy.

The fact that as a Congressman or Senator you are responsible for everything automatically sets you up to have blind spots. The Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, or the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Technology Transfer, has a more narrow field of vision and knows there are a whole bunch of things he or she really doesn’t have to worry about. It’s not an event in his or her life, and it doesn’t matter. The Congressman doesn’t have that luxury. He is forced to pull in a lot more resources because he has to vote on everything. He’s responsible for it. It varies from member to member.

Congressmen usually do carve out niches for themselves where they specialize. Sam Nunn (D-GA), for example, is a master on defense. Robert Packwood (R-OR) and Russell Long (D-LA) are great on taxes. Henry Waxman (D-CA) is superb on health policy.

McLaughlin: Let me pursue Tony’s thought a little further. Take the Speaker,* from the 8th district here in Massachusetts. He was declaiming at some length recently about the fact that one of his sisters is a Maryknoll nun and she’s the source of his information on Central America. I think many Congressmen give what they read in *The New York Times* at least equal if not greater weight than a confidential briefing from the CIA. I think that was the range of intelligence sources that Tony had in mind.

Lowenthal: I recognize that. They can pull in whatever they like. The members who are dubious about yellow rain pulled in Meselson because he offered a message they felt should be conveyed. Congressmen can call in whomever they want.

The Speaker’s dependence on his sister also reflects what I was saying about valuing intelligence by its message. He opposes U.S. military involvement in

Central America. He looks for alternate sources of information.

Members of Congress may be afraid the message they believe is going to be suppressed in the community. During the intelligence investigation of the big flap over Cyprus, everyone wanted to get his hands on that one desk officer, whose name escapes me now, who had written a memo that said, “If you do this and this or don’t do this and this, Cyprus will erupt on you.” Congress said, “If we can just get this one analyst up here he will show us that everything we’re saying about what went wrong in Cyprus is true.” The belief that the Executive tends to bury the people who are crying out in the wilderness is not an unusual phenomenon. What it tells you in this case is the prejudice or the objectives with which the members are approaching the issue. It’s just a question of belief from issue to issue.

This happens in arms control. I’ve come to the conclusion that the debate over military significance versus political significance of violations is an absolutely meaningless one. All it tells you is the original risk acceptance level of the person who’s proclaiming it. Someone who really believes in arms control is willing to take a certain number of risks to achieve arms control. Someone who is more skeptical about the value of arms control is less willing to take risks.

Student: Both the Congress and the Administration probably have relatively few resources to draw on in the security arena, but in terms of economic intelligence or assessing the economic policies of other countries, wouldn’t they have more opportunities to draw their sources from other places?

Lowenthal: There are different types of sources that are available. I don’t know if there are necessarily more of them. I think qualitatively they’re very different. Even if it’s a state-controlled economy, you can get reports on how they’re doing. Just that it would not get published as a regular matter.

It’s different, and while I don’t have a tremendous feel for international economics, I think the essential difficulty of the predictive task is the same. I’m not sure that having more sources is necessarily the solution to better analysis. You always want to know more, but I’m not sure that there’s a direct correlation between having more and knowing more. The downside is that you can also get buried alive in your resources, in the incoming mail.

Student: From the consumer point of view, in the security area there’s probably a greater dependence

*Thomas P. O’Neill, Speaker of the House (D-MA).

on the official agencies doing the collections, whereas in the economic arena they've got more sources to pick from so that you have to compete harder to get the time and attention of this consumer.

Lowenthal: I think that's probably true. There is a private economic sector, whereas there is not a private defense sector, other than the defense industry, which is not the same. There are banks from whose interests and activities you can glean all sorts of useful information. But there's not a private reconnaissance agency out there that you can ask, "What do you guys see in the Soviet SS-18 fields?", although this is now beginning with the media using civilian satellites. Then again, if you look at the associations page in the Washington phone directory, there are reams of foreign policy associations that all have their axes to grind and all have their sources, good, bad, or indifferent. You can find them across the entire range of the political spectrum. They're probably not as effective as, let's say, a bank or a multinational corporation that has very real interests, and has more life-and-death choices to make in a real sense than an institute does in Washington. In that sense, you're probably correct. Even in the national security area you can always find lots of lobbies for whatever your cause is.

I remember one day there was a big Tibetan demonstration at the foot of the Capitol. A friend of mine and I looked at each other and said, "There's a Tibetan lobby?" What they were lobbying about is the fact that on Tibetans' passports, where it lists "country of origin," it says China. They don't like that. They want it to say Tibet. So they lobbied. You can always find the odd group of information somewhere. In Congress, you can always find a lobby for any cause you want in the world. In Congress, I think you are more exposed to this. That's the nature of your job. You're a representative. I think in the Executive you tend to be less exposed and it's probably a limiting experience in that sense.

Oettinger: Would it make sense to exploit that kind of source in the Executive Branch more systematically than is being done? I sense a greater implosion, if you will, and exclusivity in the Executive Branch.

Lowenthal: I think that's true.

Oettinger: Is it true due to factors that are unavoidable or unchangeable, or is it something that might be amended?

Lowenthal: It's probably a little bit of everything. To a certain extent it's very difficult because the competition for time has just increased by whatever that factor is. That is one problem. The other one is that you're not being exposed to lots of objective outside opinions, but you're being lobbied basically for a desired outcome. I think you can sort of lose touch with what's going on out there more easily in the Executive than in the Congress.

Oettinger: I didn't mean knowing on a day-to-day basis what's going on in the Congress so much as I was jumping off on your point about all those lobbies out there. There are sources of information that are distinct from the formal ones labeled "intelligence."

Lowenthal: You can also get eaten up alive by that; it's hard to handle. I just think also there's probably a greater sense of specialization, of having good or at least adequate sources at one's disposal; given one's particular function in life, one really can't spend the time seeking out information sources. It probably could be done more, even if on a limited basis, with some effort and commitment.

McLaughlin: Mark, if you will, for those who missed it at lunch, I would like you to repeat your telescope analogy.

Lowenthal: The analogy is — actually, there's a long story that goes with it, too. Pennsylvania Avenue, if you look at the original plan, was supposed to run straight between the Capitol and the White House; but if you look at the map of Washington, D.C., it doesn't. The Treasury Building is in the way. The legend is that when Jackson was President, before the Treasury was built, he assumed that his enemies on the Hill were spying on him with telescopes. When the money was appropriated for the new building, he walked out of the White House one day and said, "Put it here," so he could cut off their view.

The metaphor that I had created was that Congress and the Executive look at each other through one telescope using opposite ends. Congress uses the proper side of the telescope, and so everything the Executive does looms large. Like I said, when you're in Congress your first source of problems is the Executive. The Executive tends to look at Congress through the wrong end of the telescope. There is this little smudge on the screen. On a regular basis, except for those people charged with legislative liaison, we are using the wrong side of the telescope to look at our peers in the other branch.

I probably have a different view of this because I have served in both branches, and I often urge people in the Executive to spend a year on the Hill. A friend of mine who had spent his entire career in State in the West Europe Bureau, INR, and in the policy-planning staff, got a job for a year with a Senator. I asked him, "How's it going?" He said, "I spent the whole day writing to people trying to get somebody buried in the national cemetery! Whoever expected it to be like this?" He wanted to worry about war and peace, he wanted to do Israel, he wanted to do NATO; and he was worrying about getting some poor veteran buried in the national cemetery.

When the Speaker says, "In the end all politics is local," I think there's a very large measure of truth to that. People don't appreciate the amount of time — of the Congress much more than the Executive — that gets consumed by what appear to other people as very parochial interests, by constituents petitioning you for various goods and services. The successful members are the ones who do provide service. That's one of the ways you get elected, which goes back to what I was saying about serving on the Intelligence Committees. What are you bringing home? Nothing! It's really a hard service to do.

Keeping Congress in agreement with you is an important thing to do if you're in the Executive. There's no question about it. They, in the end, have the ultimate power, and that's money. The budget is the prime cause of all life, and Congress controls the budget. Every department has its legislative liaison.

One of the things that you should never do to Congress is surprise them. Congress is sort of like a large cat, and if you stroke it the right way it tends to purr; if you stroke it the wrong way, it will claw you. The exception to this rule is Jimmy Carter who got clawed no matter how he petted the cat. For example, you don't get on TV one Friday evening and say, "I have just recognized the People's Republic of China and I'm ditching Taiwan," and not tell anybody beforehand. Don't just go on TV and air it. That's a death wish.

I don't think keeping Congress "happy" is actually that difficult on a day-to-day basis. What Congress basically wants is to be kept informed. Congress realizes a lot of the time that they don't have the right to say yes or no on a lot of the issues at hand. They're not there to form an alternate foreign policy all of the time, but they want their opinion asked.

McLaughlin: Going back to something you mentioned earlier; what you just stated actually was the Lyndon

Baines Johnson view of the world: If he could continue to stroke Congress and keep them informed, he wouldn't have problems with policy.

Lowenthal: His mistake was that he didn't realize that you can't tolerate indecisive policies for a long period of time. This is true of us as a country. He just misunderstood that eventually people were going to walk away when they smelled disaster. As I said, I think he had a lot of blind spots on Vietnam.

Student: I have a question about judging intelligence. It seems to me that there's a lot of things that you and other people have grouped under intelligence: information, analysis, predictions, policy recommendation, and also operations done by intelligence people. In judging what is good intelligence, how many of these should be judged differently? How many of them make up good intelligence?

Lowenthal: Operations and analysis are obviously done for different reasons, unless you're just talking about covert collection. If by operations we mean trying to produce a specific policy outcome, arming people or overthrowing the odd government here and there, or that sort of thing, that's done for a very different effect from analysis. The nice thing about it is that it's very easy to tell whether or not it worked. Either the government collapsed that night or it didn't collapse. It's when it doesn't work that you get this long, agonizing reassessment, the Bay of Pigs sort of thing.

Student: Does intelligence need to predict successfully what will happen in order to be good intelligence?

Lowenthal: On certain issues, yes. You don't want to miss strategic attacks. That's bad. The Pearl Harbor case is the classic intelligence failure. Roberta Wohlstetter* has written much better about that than I ever can.

Most sensible people know that economics is hard to predict. If it were easy, a lot more people would be rich. I happen to know a fair number of stockbrokers, and there aren't that many who get very wealthy at it. Why? Because it's very hard to predict the market, or to pick that one stock that's going to go from 7 one night to 24 the next week, and then to know to get out before it drops to 2.

*Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*. Stanford University Press, 1962.

It depends on the issue. I don't think a lot of people are holding us to the standard of being right a lot of the time. I think we are being held to the standard of keeping them informed on a regular basis of the things they really need to know to do their job. That's a very different standard. It's not an unreasonable standard. It's a much more reasonable standard than, "You'd better get this right all the time." Even then you're going to have what Dick Betts* wrote an article about, "The Inevitability of Failure," which I think was an unfortunate choice of words. I think there's the inevitability of surprise. Surprise is a fact of life in international politics. Things are going to happen that you didn't expect or watch out for.

Being held responsible for keeping surprises down to zero would be unreasonable. A certain number of surprises will get through. It just happens. I think the standard to which we tend to be held, of keeping people informed on a regular basis on things we feel they need to know, is feasible. If they're missing something, they'll let us know. We tend to hear from the consumer when he feels that he's not getting what he needs.

Student: Do you push on beyond prediction to policy recommendation?

Lowenthal: Not unless I want to get slapped, which I don't like on a regular basis.

Student: But then do you have a function of predicting what the consequences of various policies will be?

Lowenthal: Analyzing the wisdom of buying more D-5s as opposed to MXs or Midgetmen is just not a function to which I'm entitled. I can analyze Soviet forces all day, and I can lay out the implications for the United States. I can say, for example, if the Soviets are making the following buys in the next 10 years, and I have a pretty good sense that they are, these are the *kinds* of forces the United States would need to hold them at risk. That's not the same as then saying, "Therefore, buy the D-5 and not the MX." That's something that all the intelligence agencies have to keep out of.

What happens in defense is that each of the services has kept its own intelligence staff — a very small one, but a separate one. There you probably are getting more of the recommendations such as,

"Well, this is what we think the Russians are going to buy at sea, therefore, we should buy this missile, not that missile, or this surface ship or that surface ship." In the larger sense of the community, we don't do that and we can't do that.

Student: Isn't that leaving a gap, because our force structure plans may be affected by our perception of what the other side's force structure plan is, and vice versa?

Lowenthal: There's a gap, but I'm not convinced that the intelligence producers by and large are also the people who are best suited to make policy recommendations. Our view of the world is slanted also. Your vision tends to narrow down a lot. There are all sorts of ramifications. You may come up with what's an excellent policy choice for an incredibly narrow set of reasons. The policymaker is responsible for keeping that broader, I think.

McLaughlin: I think this is also one of the reasons we asked you to read the Richard Beal* seminar for this week. One interesting thing in there is Beal saying, "But nobody ever looks at Blue." No one in this universe is considering the status of affairs or preferences on the Blue side.

Oettinger: This gets back to a whole other set of topics that we haven't touched on much this year, and more so in previous years, which is the structure of the military itself. As Mark points out, to the extent that such judgments are made, they're made service by service. The defense-wide judgment is already a more iffy kind of a thing, and the national level is concerned with getting it all together. That's one of the reasons why, in our own research program, this whole question of the defense organization and the 40-year-old structure with service primacy has loomed so large. There are many problems where essentially the National Security Act of 1947 looks like the first line of responsibility in terms of what is or is not happening. That's a whole other set of very important topics, but a bit beyond the question of organization of intelligence, because you're in the fundamental area of defense organization.

*Richard K. Betts, *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning*. Washington: Brookings Institution, 1982.

*Richard S. Beal, "Decision Making, Crisis Management, Information and Technology," in *Seminar on Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence: Guest Presentations, Spring 1984*, Program on Information Resources Policy, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, February 1985, pp. 5-20.

Lowenthal: In terms of how the two branches react, when I used to cover JCS reorganization on the Hill, I found that the Armed Services Committee and the Chiefs tended to treat the Defense budget in the same way, with a service orientation. The five Chiefs are sitting in what they call "the tank." If you're Chief of Staff of the Air Force and you undercut the Navy guy too often, he's going to get back at you. So what do you do? "You get your aircraft carrier, I get my bomber, and we'll give the Army guy a couple of tanks." I think there's a lot of this horse-trading.

When you get up to the Hill, what happens? You've got a group of Air Force-oriented members, and Navy-oriented members (although not that many ground force-oriented members). For example, Barry Goldwater is a Major General in the U.S. Air Force Reserve. He looks out for the Air Force. John Tower was a Chief in the Navy, and when he was Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, he looked out for the Navy. Then you end up with the same horse-trading both in that sense, and also in the sense of, "If I close your base, you're going to close my base, or you're going to shut down my defense plant." Here's where you get the lobbying, and the logrolling, and the back-scratching, and all those interesting phenomena of life on the Hill. It's my observation that the two separate entities behave in a very similar way on this set of issues, and it's very interesting.

Student: I want to ask one question about oversight, given your background, particularly the oversight of all kinds of intelligence operations. It seems to be increasingly impossible for the United States to have both Congressional oversight in its present state, chiefly for covert operations, and covert collection activities that remain covert.

Lowenthal: I don't think that's true. I think the action of the oversight mechanism has worked very well. To go back to one of your points about perception, one of the other great myths in American political life is that Congress leaks like a sieve. Ninety percent, 95 percent of all the leaks come from the Executive Branch. Of course, leaks are like murder mysteries. The first thing you ask in a murder mystery is, "Cui bono?" Who benefits? Leaks are like that, and most of the time it's someone in the Executive who's benefiting. The record of the Intelligence Committees has been absolutely admirable on this business of keeping operations that were supposed to be secret, secret.

What's interesting is institutionally, if you read the rules of the two committees, there are very severe penalties for leaks, such as getting thrown off the committee, and being censured on the floor, which is something that no member wants to see happen. It's worse than death.

McLaughlin: It's defeat at the polls!

Lowenthal: Right — it's a living death. I think the system has worked. I think the Congress has been very good at policing itself, and I think the Congress is much better about leaks than is the Executive.

Student: I had a question in that regard on the Intelligence Committees. If there are no or few political benefits for service, and yet it's a tour of duty in the leadership, and the House and the Senate feel that some fraction of their members must serve for the good of the country, what sort of self-selection process is there by which a certain cross section serves or doesn't?

Lowenthal: You get some people who are intellectually interested in the issues at stake, whether they be intelligence issues or the policy ramifications of those issues. A lot of the members I've known have done it for what you just said. It's an obligation, it's a duty. Their attitude is, "We made this big stink over the fact that there was no oversight. Now we've got oversight. If we're going to be honest about this, someone's got to do it, and I'm willing to do it." I think they've been very lucky in the last two years.

Oettinger: Our Congressman from Massachusetts, Edward Boland (D-MA) is a good example: a good buddy of the Speaker, a reasonably safe seat in his day, and probably a sense of obligation. I think that's a nice example of a guy who has patriotism in the best sense of the word.

Lowenthal: This is also a case where the Speaker wanted the oversight to get off to a good start, to work well, so he turned to one of his best friends to do it. Inouye (Senator Daniel Inouye, D-HI) was an excellent chairman. Birch Bayh (Senator Birch Bayh, D-IN) was very good. Both Committees have been fortunate in their chairmen and their members. I think they do it as General Maxim Weygand said in his memoirs, *à servir*; just do it to serve.

What a nice upbeat note to end on.