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Military intelligence issues in declassified articles of the CIA's professional journal Studies in Intelligence (1955-1989)

Dan ROMAN*

*Romanian Academy – “George Barițiu” History Institute Cluj-Napoca

e-mail: danroman2012@yahoo.com

Abstract

The CIA began publishing the journal “Studies in Intelligence” in the mid-1950s. This journal contains both classified and unclassified materials, with the latter being available to the public. Its initiator, Sherman Kent, the director of the analysis office within the CIA, aimed to support an “intelligence literature”. The journal, which is still published today, covers various topics in the field of intelligence. One of its main areas of focus is military intelligence, where it has helped pave the way for modern practices still in use.

Keywords:

CIA; Cold War; military intelligence; Soviet Russia; studies.

Enrolled in the operational responsibility of various structures within the American Armed Forces (Office of Naval Intelligence, Sixteenth Air Force, Marine Corps Intelligence, Military Intelligence Corps), or the Department of Defense (Defense Intelligence Agency), the area of military intelligence held a fundamental importance during the Cold War, with the main objective of monitoring and evaluating the capabilities of the USSR in the field.

As an integrator of intelligence products in a strategic plan, the CIA paid due attention to this domain, in accordance with its institutional attributions, mainly through the estimates and the various information materials transmitted to the American policy makers. Moreover, the efforts at the Agency level highlight constant concerns, as evidenced by a series of declassified documents, available in the American electronic archives, in order to implement and standardize an appropriate terminology of intelligence activities. Of course, one of these concerns was military intelligence.

Along with this dimension, which is related to the fulfillment of the Agency's usual activities, the area of military intelligence represents a constant and varied presence in the pages of the CIA journal, *Studies in Intelligence*. With a common denominator represented, in the vast majority of them, by the Soviet threat that manifested itself, mainly from the perspective of its nuclear capabilities, these studies cover a wide spectrum, from historical, technical and "philosophical" themes, to various assessments and analysis of military doctrine and strategy. Prepared as classified documents (usually, secret or confidential) for the benefit of the American Intelligence Community, these materials can currently be accessed in the *Studies in Intelligence* collection (from the first issue, published in September 1955, to 1992 including) available online in the catalog offered by www.nationalarchives.gov, another valuable resource being www.cia.gov/reading-room.

This article aims to show how military intelligence was reflected in the CIA journal during the Cold War. It starts with a brief description of this publication, by revealing its role in the American intelligence community; a portrait of the initiator of this journal is also made. Next, the main military intelligence topics identified in the CIA journal are presented, including some data about their authors, as far as this was possible. The last part contains the conclusions drawn from the research carried out on this topic. At the same time, in order to substantiate an adequate image on the dimension of the military intelligence in the CIA journal, we added an appendix that presents the titles of these materials.

Studies in Intelligence: Its founder, role and relevance

The founding of the CIA's professional journal, *Studies in Intelligence*, and, subsequently, the directing, to a large extent, of the editorial policies in the first decade of its existence is due to Sherman Kent, director of the Office of National

Estimates (ONE), which was at that time the entity responsible for the production of integrated analytical materials within the Agency.

Former history professor at Yale University, and member of the elitist “Ivy League”, Kent was active, during the Second World War, in the Office of Strategic Service (OSS), where he performed several functions, among which that of “*office director*” for Europe and Africa, held in the final part of the conflagration. From that position, he contributed, according to one of his collaborators in the CIA, and, later, one of his main biographers, to the development of “*major projects, including studies that helped to establish governmental structures in Germany after the war*” (Davis 2002, 35). Back at the Yale University, Kent affirmed, this time in an academic place, his competences in the domain of intelligence, by publishing the book (initially, rejected by several publishing houses) *Strategic Intelligence for the American World Policy* (1949). It gained, very quickly, the most favorable appreciations. For example, the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs* noted, in a review, that Kent’s work was “*a first-class analysis of our record during the recent war and a concrete statement of what we must do in order that our Intelligence Services perform their cardinal function*” (*Foreign Affairs*, October 1949). Even more pointedly, the aforementioned biographer qualifies Kent’s book as “*probably the most influential book ever written on US intelligence analysis*” (Davis 1992, 91).

The high impact that *Strategic Intelligence...* registered both in the academic area and in the American intelligence circles brought Kent back in a short time in this domain, through his transfer to the CIA, where he was appointed deputy director of ONE, at the end of 1950. After only two years, following the retirement of the director of this structure, William Langer, who decided to return to academia, Kent took over the leadership of ONE (Steury 1994).

Along with the special merits related to the conceptualization and development, within the CIA, of the intelligence analysis, whose founder he is, indisputably, considered, the director of ONE also acted for the foundation of a specialized literature that would support the professionalization of the new field of intelligence. His major achievement in this direction was represented by the appearance of the CIA professional, in house, journal *Studies in Intelligence*, in September 1955.

According to the opening material, “The Need for an Intelligence Literature”, signed by Kent, the American field of intelligence had succeeded in the ten years that had passed since the end of the Second World War to assert itself as a genuine profession. More than that, says Kent, “*like most professions it has taken the aspect of a discipline: it has developed a recognized methodology; it has developed a vocabulary; it has developed a body of theory and doctrine; it has elaborate and refined techniques.*” What it lacked in this direction was a specialized literature, a dimension that Kent intended to achieve and support by establishing this new publication, which he qualifies in the same text as “*the institutional mind and memory of our discipline*” (Kent 1965, 3).

Emerged under the auspices of CIA Office of Training, *Studies...* was to include thematic texts, in accordance with its initial presentation as a “*monograph series*”. However, it maintained this form only during the following year, 1956, when it recorded two new issues: the first with two studies on military intelligence related to capabilities and estimates on the enemy (January), and the second with two other studies this time on economic intelligence (May).

After a break of almost a year and a half, about which, unfortunately, no mention was made, *Studies...* reappeared with notable changes, which gave it all the characteristics of a journal, through various materials on the components of the professional activity to which a relatively rich section on the editorial appearances of interest for the intelligence area was constantly added. The change occurred in the fall of 1957, with a new appearance of *Studies...*, marked as “*volume 1, number 4*”.

In the following years, the CIA journal established itself as a valuable publication in the American Intelligence Community, both through the topics it addressed in its contents, and through the high level of expertise possessed by their authors, in the vast majority decision-makers in different intelligence structures. Moreover, by publishing, from 1958, an unclassified part, it crossed the borders of the intelligence community, and became available to the American public.

From this perspective, *Studies...* acted as the main vehicle for creating an intelligence literature, in order to legitimize, according to Kent, this field as a discipline. In carrying out this mission, it includes, as noted on the 50th anniversary of its first appearance, one of the members of the editorial board and of the CIA Historic Staff, “«the best thinking» of intelligence thinkers and practitioners” (Dujmovic 2005). In doing these, the CIA journal has successfully accomplished its stated goals – and continues to do so today.

The CIA journal and military intelligence

Studies in Intelligence contains a rich theme regarding the domain of military intelligence, with articles on various historical aspects, evaluative studies, or of a technical nature, including an exotic text about the investigation of unidentified flying objects. Instead, there is a complete absence of any concerns about defining the term - or, at least, an articulate presentation from the perspective of its evolution in the American establishment. A plausible explanation for each of the two situations mentioned above could be, in the first case, that the meaning of the term had settled enough in the usual meaning, without highlighting difficulties regarding its delimitation and circumscription in a conceptual plan – as it happened, however, regarding the term “economic intelligence” within the CIA. Moreover, even if such a clarification had been deemed necessary under the conditions of the time, the main expertise in this matter was, of course, at the defense institutions, represented at the highest level by the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Military intelligence was covered in the CIA journal in the very first issue of the “monograph series” (Smith 1956), which is devoted entirely to these aspects. It contains two studies (one on capabilities and the other on estimates), to which is added a review of a paper, in manuscript (*The Hazard and Advantages of Estimates of Enemy Intentions*, written at the Air War College, Air University, by Col. Sanford H. Kirtland Jr.).

Among these we will refer to the first study, “Notes on «Capabilities» in National Intelligence”, signed by Abbot E. Smith, the main collaborator of Sherman Kent in his manifestations of strengthening ONE. The author approaches the relevance and specificity of “capabilities” in the areas of “national intelligence”, and highlights that the CIA frequently borrowed military terminology. However, caution is needed, because its use must be carefully accompanied by its adaptation to the Agency’s role and functions. Based on a parallel between what an Estimate of the Enemy Situation is, in which aspects of the enemy’s capabilities – what he can do – hold the most important part, and represent “*the ultimate goal or at least the penultimate goal of military intelligence*”, and a National Intelligence Estimate prepared by the CIA, the author shows that “*the borrowing of military terminology was sometimes a little too enthusiastic*”, which inevitably led to its incorrect use in the Agency’s materials (Smith 1956, 14).

But the perspective showed by Smith is an optimistic one, suitable for any beginning of the road. He expresses his confidence that “*things will improve through experimentation*”, which he wants to exemplify in the widest possible framework, highlighted by some substantive enumerations he presents below: “*through trial and error, through discussion and argument and, perhaps, from time to time, through purely theoretical and doctrinal investigations*” (Smith 1956, 18). These mentions that signal a series of milestones or tests that must be overcome, complete, in an anticipatory manner, no doubt based on rich experience, the perspective displayed by the author. In fact, it can be considered that the approach of the deputy of ONE primarily outlines the concerns expressed by the CIA for the foundation of an appropriate terminology. Moreover, it suggests the need for a common effort, to be carried out by the entire American Intelligence Community, as an efficient way to overcome this situation.

Another concern in the area of military intelligence was that of war-gaming, also early found in *Studies in Intelligence*. Such an example is offered by the text “Developments in Air Targeting: the Military Resources Model” (Leavitt 1958). The study clearly proves the perpetuation of the CIA’s interest in developing procedural tools, by establishing techniques that facilitate the proper evaluation of the enemy. Also, the affiliation of the author, Robert E. Leavitt, to the US Armed Forces (most likely, to 16 AF, considering the fact that following the establishment of the DIA he was active within this institution) highlights the CIA’s practice of capitalizing on a series of elements from the area of military intelligence, beyond terminology, in order to integrate and use them in the whole of their own activities.

The main operational characteristics in the reference area of this work are revealed in the study „Combat Intelligence: A Comparative Evaluation” (Kirkpatrick 1961), that presents – in a historical perspective, related to the Second World War – the most important methods of data collection by the G-2 military intelligence structure, within the American Armed Forces.

The author, Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, himself an exponent of this entity, carried out a vast investigative approach at the level of the command structures of the G-2 units, on the basis of which he classified and exposed five representative categories of informational resources, the first of which was “*prisoners of war*”, regarding which he points out that it is “*by far the most profitable source of intelligence for all levels of command*”; in second place is “*aerial reconnaissance*”, followed by “*signals intelligence*”; obtaining documents ranks fourth and only last is “*the use of agents*” (Kirkpatrick 1961, 45-49).

Regarding this last source of information, which has proven itself not infrequently throughout history to be of major importance for obtaining adequate knowledge of the enemy’s bellicose intentions and plans, as well as their movements on the battlefield, the author also makes some statements to explain a situation encountered at that time in the military intelligence entities of the American armed forces. In this regard, he notes directly that “*the use of agents was unquestionably the intelligence collection technique least well understood by military personnel*”. Additionally, Kirkpatrick shows that there was “*inadequate forward planning for placing agents in key spots*” (Idem.).

Although he presents a classification that is based on the evaluation of past events, in this case during the Second World War, the author’s approach is not without relevance. The assessment he makes regarding the informational resources used in the war is useful both for understanding the current situation and for future projections. It is to be expected, as he himself admits, that the perspectives of “*combat intelligence*” will not, at least for the foreseeable period, experience fundamental changes.

The launch by the Soviets, in October 1957, of the first artificial Earth satellite, Sputnik 1, which marked the beginning of the race to conquer space between them and the Americans, determined the publication in the CIA journal of a substantial number of studies on “*air intelligence*” and „*air targeting*” (not less than six materials in three consecutive issues – see the Appendix), Each of these underlines the particular importance of this field in the new context of (in)security. Beyond the particular or general, applied or theoretical aspects to which they refer, the relevance of these studies for the American military establishment is also given by the “*weight*” of the authors, through the positions held within it.

The first, *Strategic Thinking and Air Intelligence*, which opens the winter 1958 issue of the CIA journal, is signed, naturally, by a senior representative of US Air Force,

namely Major General James H. Walsh, at that time deputy assistant chief of staff for intelligence. In a brief assessment of the changes in the military area after the Second World War, the author notes that “*atomic air power has become the dominant military force*” (Walsh 1958, 8). In the face of the Soviet nuclear threat, raised to a new level after the launch by the USSR of the Sputnik 1 satellite, Walsh places “air intelligence” among the main resources that can be used to obtain the necessary knowledge. It also pays special attention to the technological development, which he considers the key to victory in a possible war.

A no less extensive and relevant study, published in the same issue of the CIA journal, presents several concepts for the foundation of a “philosophy” of the new field of “air intelligence”. The author, Lewis R. Long (most likely a pseudonym this time), lists 11 such concepts, which he presents mostly in the form of commandments (“*intelligence should be used as an offensive weapon*”, “*all intelligence must be considered dynamic, kept under constant review, and revised to meet changing world situations*”); above all, however, he places in front of them, as a guiding principle of the activities in the field, the following statements: “*air intelligence is geared to nuclear power in a nuclear age*”, and “*it has the same predominant characteristics as has the air force – range, speed, mobility, flexibility, and penetrative ability*” (Long 1958, 31).

The problem of the estimates made at the level of the American Intelligence Community, regarding Soviet military capabilities and perspectives in the context of the arms race, is also a theme reflected in the content of the CIA’s professional journal. This topic, highlighted, in particular, by two complementary contributions published at mid ’70s, attest and explain the overestimations transmitted during the ’60s, followed, in fact, by a constant underestimation regarding the development of the Soviet strategic forces.

Through a systematic research of CIA materials from that period, Jack H. Taylor confronts in his study, entitled *Wohlstetter, Soviet Strategic Forces, And National Intelligence Estimates*, the issues presented in an article on the arms race, published by Albert Wohlstetter in *Foreign Affairs* (Taylor 1975), reaching the same conclusions. Taylor’s exclusively quantitative approach is criticized in the next issue of the CIA journal. Ross Covey, Taylor’s collaborator in the documentation activity for that study, criticizes him, in the *More on the Military Estimates* study, for the sequential presentation of the results, by limiting them to the numerical, quantitative elements, without taking into account other aspects less important, regarding which CIA estimates proved to be correct and could substantiate effective decisions of the American establishment.

Chronologically, among the materials in the CIA journal, which include various aspects of military intelligence, *Strategic Arms Limitation and Intelligence* (Helms 1973), signed by Richard Helms, the Director of the Agency at the time, also deserves attention. In fact, as marked at the very beginning, it represents a speech

the CIA director gave at the National War College in October 1971. In its content, Helms directly names the issue of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) as “*one of our major intelligence problems*” and then try to illustrate some aspects of “*how we cope with it in practice*”, emphasizing that the significant role belongs primarily to the activities carried out through satellite reconnaissance (Helms 1973, 1-2).

In his speech addressed to young members of the American Intelligence Community, the director of the CIA emphasizes the involvement and major role of the Agency in establishing the coordinates regarding SALT. Beyond the various operational aspects, he states that the CIA elaborated several definitions regarding a series of terms in the area of military intelligence to ensure standardized understanding.

Finally, for the part that can be considered the beginning of the end of the Cold War, characterized by a progressive de-tensioning of Soviet-American bilateral relations, along with the commitment of the colossus of the USSR on the path of reforms, through its new leader Mikhail Gorbachev, the CIA journal stands out for two other studies on the Soviet military component, both under the signature of G. Murphy Donovan, director of Research and Soviet Studies, a structure with analytical activities, created within the United States Air Force Intelligence Agency.

The first study, „Deciphering Soviet Military Doctrine” (Donovan 1985), is an exploratory approach on the topic, based on the way this is revealed and supported in the Soviet military literature, respectively received and evaluated by some exponents in the area of American military intelligence. The elements analyzed by the author from the perspective presented in the title of his study reveal both the relationship between the political and the military leadership of the state, as well as a series of peculiarities found within the Soviet military system. Admitting the party’s institutional control, Donovan believes that this could change in the future. In this direction, he argues through the existence of two categories of Soviet military doctrine works. The first one consists of “*collaborative projects, usually attributed to relatively unknown (albeit compliant and ambitious) officers, and they are probably written at the behest of a military-political organ*” (Donovan 1985, 84). In essence, such works, the author of the study shows, have a predominantly educational purpose, “*and are intended to convey the approved political and military line to the officers’ corps*” (Ibidem). On the contrary, the second category of Soviet military literature is attributed to the officers at the top of the army and has it aims “*more prestigious audience*”; at the same time, it “*may also, implicitly or explicitly, test the boundaries of property and policy*” (Idem).

On these basis, Donovan points out a significant feature that stands out regarding the leadership of the USSR army, as he notes that “*Soviet marshal believes that military doctrine controls the future of military development;*” this statement is, clearly, of utmost importance, since such a belief grounds and supports a behavior, which shows that senior Russian officers build their careers and reputations in the

military in a special way, “*tying their stars not so much to weapons systems as to the advancement of theories that are based on military science*” (Idem). As the author further claims, “*At what point these theories change or challenge doctrine will always be arguable*” (Idem), but the knowledge of these perspectives proves to be useful, necessary and relatively easy to achieve, through the books the high-ranking Russian officers publish during their careers.

Along the lines of this study, the second one, „Soviet Military Vulnerabilities” (Donovan 1987) reveals another surprising conclusion, qualified by the author as “*a final irony*”; in this regard, he does not hesitate to affirm in a quite bluntly and clear manner: “*What is best understood, Soviet weapons and forces, is probably the least exploitable; what is understood less, Soviet doctrine and military art, are probably the most vulnerable*” (Donovan 1987, 17).

Conclusions

Military intelligence is a recurring theme in the CIA’s professional journal, which matches and illustrates its great importance for the American Intelligence Community during the Cold War. As an example, the so-called “monographic series” in *Studies in Intelligence* are inaugurated in the first issue from 1956 by two texts devoted to military intelligence, highlighting its prioritization from the very beginning. This is all the more relevant, considering the fact that this field has been traditionally the (almost exclusive) remit of the US armed forces and the Department of Defense.

The systematic approach in the CIA bulletin, from multiple perspectives including the didactic one, reflects the efforts of the Agency, in its role as the central entity in the intelligence sphere, to constantly generate better practices and results not just for itself, but also for all the parties involved in the gathering and analysis of military intelligence.

A mapping of the texts concerning these activities published in the reference period in the CIA journal, carried out by using as an index the predominance of the military theme, reveals the following main points:

1. such articles are a relatively constant presence, with a series of relevant studies usually concentrated in a few consecutive issues or, for broader subjects, in several of them (as in the case of air intelligence);
2. their distribution corresponds to the probability of open military conflict: based on their division into a first block representing the second half of the 1950s, and later in units of ten years each, it immediately becomes clear that military intelligence is a most relevant theme during 1960-1969, when the military threat is highest, with no less than 20 occurrences (compared to nine in 1955-1959, six in 1970-1979 and only four in 1980-1989).

By constantly publishing relevant studies concerning military intelligence, written by specialists at the top of the American intelligence hierarchy, the CIA journal substantially contributed to the understanding and consolidation of this topic and, last but not least, to the general knowledge in this field.

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