

1948

The Needs of the Nation in Intelligence

W.J. Donovan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Donovan, W. J. (1948) "The Needs of the Nation in Intelligence," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 1 : No. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol1/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

RESTRICTED

THE NEEDS OF THE NATION IN INTELLIGENCE

Major General W. J. Donovan

Gentlemen, I appreciate the opportunity of being here because I know that my education will benefit far more than yours. Your President has asked me to speak on the subject, "The Needs of the Nation in Intelligence."

Every nation has certain vital interests that inevitably come in conflict with the interests of other nations, so national policy is, of necessity, the determination and redetermination of those vital interests that we must protect. Intelligence is the information upon which these determinations may be based.

I want to consider intelligence not merely in the operational sense, with which you gentlemen are so familiar; but in the long range strategic sense in which your service has a vital, but not an exclusive part. It is in this field that we have our conflicts and our difficulties in organization and interpretation.

For example, in determining the aims, the capabilities, and the intentions of Russia, it is not sufficient merely to know the manpower situation in her armed forces. We have to take into account a much larger field which would include her basic raw material sources, her key industries, the health of her people, her state of morale, or any conflict in the Politburo. These suggestions are samples of the studies which would have to be made in order to determine what her intentions might be and to unmask her real purpose.

Major General Donovan was the wartime Director of OSS and in private life is a prominent New York lawyer. For conspicuous gallantry in the First World War, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

RESTRICTED

One difficult thing today is that we have no thorough, comprehensive means of learning those basic facts about Russia from which we can infer her aims, capabilities, and intentions. Nor do we have any direct infiltration into the Russian satellites which present invaluable intelligence targets and which should be less difficult to penetrate than Russia. This points up a weakness in our system for the collection of intelligence.

We have another weakness in our system for collating and evaluating information. Today, it seems to those of us who are dealing with the problem that the real need in our country is for a place where information gathered by the different government agencies can be pooled. Consolidation of the agencies is not essential. We have had some experience already in consolidation and we know how difficult it is. If we had tried consolidation, there would have been a thirty years' war on our hands. If we can take the material that has been gathered and put it together, then research and analysis could make it available to all. That would be a great step forward.

We started on that basis during the last war in a very human way. Neither the Armed Services nor the State Department had ever even approached the idea of a central intelligence agency. Each service—State, War, Navy, and Air—began to protect its own position. Each one felt that it must cover every phase of intelligence that entered into the determination of policies—not only the strictly military, not only the strictly political—but everything. The result was the same kind of conflict among civilian and military agencies that you had originally between the Army and the Navy.

The C. I. A. was recommended as the result of O. S. S. experience. The concepts of C. I. A. were proposed in a letter that I sent to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to the President in 1944. That

RESTRICTED

document fell into the hands of a reporter of the Chicago Tribune. It was published in the papers in 1944 while we were still in the midst of war, and it was published under the headlines, "PROPOSED GESTAPO TO BE SET UP." It was certainly a breach of security. Was it done for the deliberate purpose of discrediting the proposal and preventing its use? As a result the Joint Chiefs of Staff never acted upon that paper until many months after O. S. S. had gone out of business which it did on October 1, 1945, and after many other civilian agencies were on their way out.

The C. I. A. was based upon certain sound principles. Organization is one of the things that I want to talk about very frankly, because I know that many of you gentlemen may differ with me. What we sought to do for the permanent establishment was to create a central agency where intelligence material could be pooled and where representatives of all services could take part in its evaluation. We realized that evaluation is even more important than collection.

The N. K. V. D. and other Communist agencies may build up a bigger stockpile of information for Russia than is held by any other nation, but this quantity is offset by the fatal weakness of inadequate evaluation. It is the same weakness that existed in the German General Staff. Neither the one nor the other appreciated our spiritual and intellectual reactions.

We felt that the important thing was to have a civilian at the head of intelligence. Why? Simply, because any service man, whether State, War, Navy, or Air, becomes a prisoner of his own team and of his own service. His career is involved. It isn't a square thing to put him into any such position. He has to be free of those influences of comradeship, or school ties, or whatever they may be. That is the fight I made.

RESTRICTED

The personality of Admiral Hillenkoetter who now heads C. I. A. is not involved. On the contrary we tried to get him to head up our intelligence in the Pacific. The Navy wouldn't let him come to us, although he wanted to. Nor was the personality of any other individual involved. It was the thought that an individual from any particular branch of government would have a perspective or bias in accordance with that of his service. It was solely a matter of principle.

We can trace back the handling of intelligence. In the seventeenth century it was perfectly natural when strategy was largely the art of handling men in war, whether on sea or land, to have intelligence in the control of the military. But, today, in the twentieth century, when strategy is the art of integrating all the resources of the nation, you cannot hold yourself down to the same simple concept. The specialists, the linguists, all who can get at any source of information must get together and pool their resources both for gathering news and for evaluating intelligence. The military is no longer the single dominant factor, just as war is no longer dominated by any one service. My simple philosophy is that we will never have a real intelligence agency as long as we have a service man at its head because intelligence requires an unbiased effort on the largest scale.

There is an essential part of intelligence which we have not recognized—the counter-subversive elements, black propaganda, and psychological warfare. We need an organization to handle this. We must send organizers behind the lines to set up resistance groups. We must penetrate to rear areas by using men who are of the racial origin and speak the language of the countries we are seeking to liberate.

For a year I have been urging that we reorganize these groups because we have to go in and fight this subversive war.

RESTRICTED

We can do it in an open sense in Western Europe. We can use Western Europe as a base to do it in a clandestine sense elsewhere. It is essential in Europe and the opportunity is rich because everything that Russia has done has planted the seeds of her own disillusion, and with the proper information we may learn how to capitalize on this.

When this subject was under discussion at a recent meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff one of the officers said, "Well, you know, we fellows in the services—it's not quite in our line. It isn't something that we like to do." I replied, "I don't think it's any worse than dropping bombs on helpless women and children. If it is, then all I ask is that the Air Force and the Army and the Navy only do to the enemy what they are doing to one another now. Then we would have the perfect subversive operation."

That is absolutely true. War isn't a pretty thing. It is futile to hope that we can buy or maneuver our way out of it. I think the day for subtle diplomacy has passed. It is now the day for character and determination to prevail.

I want to say a word on security. I came back from Europe recently and was greeted at the dock by a group of newspaper men. Among other things they said, "There is a man of yours (O. S. S.) who is accused by a self-confessed Soviet spy (Elizabeth Bentley) of having disclosed to her things that were of interest to Soviet Russia." I said, "I think I know that man. In tradition, in character, and in family, certainly he dates back to the earliest fathers. From what I know of him I cannot believe that he would ever do anything that would mean disloyalty to his country, but I am willing to assume that what you say is true." Now we must distinguish carefully between the intent and the deed. The intent is unknown, but while going through your excellent

RESTRICTED

library I noticed several copies of General Russell Deane's book, "The Strange Alliance", and I think that 50% of what that Bentley girl was supposed to have heard could be read in this book.

O. S. S. was an organization of 31,000 people; men and women in uniform, and civilians. These people were not trained spies. They were just ordinary people that constitute a cross-section of America. Certainly we were a vital target, particularly when Russia began to see that our interests and hers did not coincide. I believe that there was no vital information that ever leaked out from O. S. S. We had the opportunity of examining the documents of the Gestapo and the Japanese. We had worked against the Japanese in Siam and in China and in other countries of Asia. Our men had gone in to blow up tunnels, to work for resistance groups and to do a multiplicity of things. Many of the men in our fighting units had been murdered, but nowhere in these documents were we able to find that the Gestapo or the Japanese had ever uncovered our various elements of secret intelligence.

The method of organization and the type of our structure was the reason for this. I speak of it because it is important to get this thing home. You must expect penetration, or at least, efforts at penetration. It is not safe to build unless the structure is planned in expectation of penetration. Therefore, the segments of your organization must be set up so that penetration of one unit does not lead to penetration of another. This must be done both by blocking the flow of the blood-stream from unit to unit and by care in picking the individual members.

Now, besides having all O. S. S. applicants checked by the F. B. I., the Army, the Navy, and the Civil Service, we did something more. We set up an assessment school for the examination

RESTRICTED

of those who would go into particularly sensitive spots. The methods of this assessment school have been fully described in a book called "Assessment of Men."

This book is worth your consideration in dealing with problems as you do here, and even in the training of men in our Military and Naval Academies. It was an effort by scientists. It was made up by psychologists, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and some ordinary common-sense fellows to inquire into what they call the total man. I got the idea from looking at a small but very interesting test made by the British. Then we took it on and applied it under Doctor Murray of Harvard. For all of you who have to deal with men, particularly in dangerous spots, it would be well worth while to look at the techniques that were used.

In addition to the work abroad we had our counter-espionage, especially in working with the British. The best job the British did in intelligence was their counter-effort against the penetration of their island by the Germans. In this war you didn't shoot spies. You took them and turned them around, particularly, if they had radios. You made use of them for the purpose of furnishing the intelligence to the Germans that you wanted them to believe, and you could run the risk of giving them 75% truth so long as the 25% that wasn't true would upset them. Of course all of us knew that we might have had that kind of thing put upon us. The long delay of the Germans at Calais was brought about by the material that was sent out by these British units during the period preceding the attack on Normandy.

The situation in the United States points out one thing to me. In America, neither O. N. I., G-2, nor C. I. A., has any right to set up operating counter-espionage units at home. This is purely a function of the F. B. I. although the F. B. I. cannot do it all alone.

RESTRICTED

You will notice that all the cases that are now appearing were not uncovered during the war. To me that is very illuminating. We only see it now. Certainly no one who had his own particular show was ever informed of it. As the Bentley girl said, she only went to the F. B. I. in October and by that time there were many organizations, including our own, that were out of business.

The lesson to learn from this is the necessity of having all these intelligence services tied in together, exchanging information, and being alive to those forces in our own country that may seek to penetrate into these organizations. Our men pursue a positive cause while police action comes along afterwards. That is the fundamental distinction between intelligence and the police. The police act after the event; they have to work backward. Intelligence must project itself forward.

Corollary to the union of all intelligence agencies is the separation of police and intelligence agencies. One of the most serious things that could happen in our country would be the union of our police with our intelligence agencies, because then you get back to the real operation of a police state.

All these things, gentlemen, lead me to the conclusion that, if we are going to be able to really unmask the enemy's intentions, if we are going to have that kind of information upon which our policy must depend, then we must put operational intelligence in one central place without disturbing the functions of any of the services. What the Navy has to do in its own technical field, its own determination of secret weapons and things of that sort, the Navy ought to do. But in these larger strategic questions, everyone has a contribution to make, and it should be centralized because it is only in this way that you will succeed.

RESTRICTED

Added to this you need secret intelligence. I think that we have so surrounded secret intelligence with lurid colors that we lose sight of its real function. I suppose that secret intelligence never produces more than 15% of the total. The great bulk of intelligence comes by ordinary overt means. But in time of war, that 15% may be so vital that you must be prepared to get it.

I will give one or two instances that may be helpful to consider. In 1939 the Russians were able to buy certain vital codes at the British Foreign Office. How much that had to do with the refusal of Russia to deal with England when discussions were going on in early 1939—who can tell? In 1940 it was discovered that a young American in the code office of Ambassador Kennedy had sold codes to the Germans. In Constantinople in 1942 the British Ambassador had a Turkish valet who was in the pay of the Germans.

Today, in all of the countries abroad the ordinary employees in all our embassies and legations are natives of those countries. How can we have any real security on that basis?

On the question of security we are torn between two things—the need of being secure and the need of getting the job done. Some units are so damned secure that they never do anything. To get something done risks must be taken. Something must be dared. Risks must be calculated, but once calculated a course can be set. And that means, gentlemen, that if you are afraid of the wolves you had better stay out of the forest.

Note: This is a digest of a lecture delivered by Major General Donovan at the Naval War College on 4 September 1948.