
Interview: Victor Marchetti



Intelligence Reorganization Is a Tough, Uphill Battle

*Victor Marchetti served for several decades in the CIA, including as executive assistant to the Deputy Director. Several years after he left the Agency, he wrote *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), one of the most widely read and important books critiquing the intelligence community at that time. Jeffrey Steinberg interviewed him on July 20.*

EIR: What is your present assessment of the state of affairs, with the CIA in particular, and the U.S. intelligence community more broadly?

Marchetti: I think we're in a period of revision, obviously, and reorganization, that is, in general purposes and general goals, all for the better. There'll be parts of it that somebody will not be happy with. Generally speaking, I think Silberman and Robb¹ did a pretty good job, and their staff, of seeing the intelligence community for what it is, and how it's divided, and where the changes need to be made.

EIR: What were some of the problems as you see it, and as they discussed it in the commission report, that needed to be corrected?

Marchetti: Well, for one thing, the intelligence community has gotten much too big. It's grown into a monster. And it's become very much of a bureaucracy, in the worst sense of the word. It really needs to be, not only reorganized, it needs to be cut down, pared down, and I don't know that they're going to do any of that. But at least they're going to reorganize it, by making John Negroponte the new Director of National Intelligence [DNI]. This is a good thing: Because the old days, when CIA, essentially, was the main producer of finished intelligence for the policymakers and the White House, are gone. Everybody got into the act.

Now, even back in the old days, the State Department was always very important. And the Pentagon was, too, but not so much in an intelligence sense, but in an interpretive sense, interpreting what the intelligence meant, in looking down the road as to what could happen in the future.

It was kind of a tight little world. And everybody knew

what the pecking order was. For the National Intelligence Estimates, the CIA had control of that. But they did it very deftly, and included everybody in State Department, Pentagon, National Security Agency [NSA]; and everybody contributed to it; everybody had a say in the final version; and everybody had a say in approving it. But CIA was basically in control. They wrote the Estimates—at one point in time, that's what I used to do, is to write National Intelligence Estimates.

They wrote the Estimates, and then this was after they were coordinated with the other agencies, then it was approved by what was then called the U.S. Intelligence Board (USIB). The director, was the chairman. And the heads of the other agencies participated.

That exercise of National Intelligence Estimates has grown all out of proportion. In the old days, you might get a request, say, from LBJ—you know, directly from his office—saying that he'd like to know what is the status of Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles; or, what would the Soviets do, if we did that; or, what are the Vietnamese likely to do, if we bomb Hanoi? These Estimates would then be prepared by the Agency, with all the other agencies contributing in that, and be sent over to the White House—where it might be read, or it might not be read. And even if it was read, it might be thrown in the wastebasket, or it might be put aside for future reference.

Intelligence was an input. And everybody knew this, that intelligence was an input, into the policymakers' decision process. It didn't control anything. And there were many times, when the President and Secretary of Defense, like Robert McNamara, and State Department, Dean Rusk, would request Estimates. And so then, nobody got their nose out of joint, if the President, or McNamara, or the other policymakers didn't take what seemed to be the obvious advice—you couldn't give advice, you could only imply it by the way the Estimate was written—that was their prerogative. And everybody understood it: That intelligence was just one of the things that went into making a policy decision.

So, intelligence had not achieved this very high status that it has now. You know, where people talk about Estimates, like it is the Gospel. And part of the reason, is, that back in the old days, intelligence was tightly held. There weren't that many people who had access to this kind of intelligence. Now,

1. The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, co-chaired by Charles Robb and Laurence Silberman, presented its report to the President on March 31, 2005.

Congress is in on the act, and the committees—and it's much more widely spread. And therefore, the information easily leaks into the media.

Another thing, I think has gotten out of control by the growth—right now, I'm just concentrating on intelligence production—and that is, what was current intelligence. The CIA used to prepare a daily brief for the President—it wasn't called that, it was called a "bulletin" then—for the White House and for the key policymakers, in which we talked about the current events that were going on around the world, and what they meant, and how accurate the reporting was, and so on and so forth. And this was something that they read in the morning (or maybe didn't read).

We had a little White House staff—we were called the "warroom" which was a misnomer, but it was a little watch office where some of the CIA people worked over there, in close relation to the National Security Advisor, and provided information on overriding things. And it was up to the National Security Advisor to decide what to give the President—like Kissinger would decide. And his staff consisted of CIA people, and some State Department people. So it was, again, a tight little shop. Everything was very closely knit. And the intelligence was just an input.

I think Kennedy used to read the bulletin once in a while, but I don't recall hearing that Nixon, or—from our guys over there, who were right there, they didn't even know if Nixon was reading it, or Ford. Maybe Jimmy Carter did, I don't know.

That was the intelligence production side. Now, there was a lot of intelligence that was produced: big studies on economies, on geographical issues, numbers of things that were of interest to the government.

But what was happening at this time, was that the intelligence community was ballooning, and not just that part. That part was actually the last part to grow, the production, the analytical part of the Agency. What was ballooning were the collection systems, like the satellites and other forms of overhead reconnaissance, photographic, ELINT [Electronics Intelligence], SIGINT [Signals Intelligence]. And at the same time that they were exploding and growing, it required bigger and bigger processing facilities; like the National Photographic Interpretation Center has now ballooned into this big thing, the Geospace something-or-other. And the original was just a little group controlling the satellites, that was in our own [offices]—now, it's a big agency. NSA, of course, just *really* mushroomed with all the advances in electronics, communications systems, and the subsequent advances in the intercept and analysis of this. So, you have tons of people processing all this stuff, and operating the systems and then processing it.

Now, in the old days, when it was this tight little ship, where the CIA was the Central Intelligence Agency, it controlled a lot of these new things. Because, in some instances, they were the leaders in developing overhead reconnaissance

by aircraft, and then by satellites. And they were the leaders in processing it. So, all of this was under the CIA umbrella. But then they were relatively small shops. And the Director, even then, couldn't keep on top of everything. The Director had to decide, he had to pick and choose.

When Allen Dulles was Director, clandestine operations were kind of his primary interest; for John McCone, intelligence production, estimates, current intelligence, all that, became his primary interest; *and*, science and technology, the developing of systems, and how to process them. And he gave everything to his Deputy Director, who was then Gen. [Marshall] Carter—you know, "You ride herd on clandestine operations." That was very difficult for him to do, so a lot of it was deferred to the clandestine services in the Agency, who run themselves.

Then, somewhere along the line, and I think with the coming of Henry Kissinger, intelligence began to take on a special role in policymaking, and it just kind of grew under Reagan and the other Presidents. And the emphasis gradually seemed to be more on the analysis side. For a lot of good reasons—I mean, first of all, we'd been burned in some big clandestine operations, like Cuba for example, and we had been thrown out of some countries, like Iran. And we were up against our primary target with the Soviet Union, and secondly China, [we] were denied territories, very difficult to operate against.

So, the clandestine services as such, were not that important in those issues. Where they were important, was in the Free World, in the underdeveloped world, where they did a lot to counter—in fact, too much, in my opinion—to prevent the spread of Communism. They actually destroyed some good things, like the national liberation movements of Sukarno, and had a lot of trouble with Nehru, and Nasser.

But that's where they were good. They were very good at operating in these kinds of environments. And they were very good at combatting the Soviets and Communism, in these areas. And they did this, in part, not only just from knowing what was going on, and reporting on it, but that's where covert action came in, the work of people like Cord Meyer, who developed propaganda, and disinformation techniques, and some other very sophisticated things. And got American liberals like Gloria Steinem in on the act; they didn't necessarily know they were working for the CIA, but they knew they were working against Communism, which they didn't like.

But the Agency was starting to get too big, then. And the community was growing around it. But they were still in control. And then, I think in the last 20 years, it just ballooned all out of proportion—and you don't know who's in charge; you don't know whom to rely on, what's really going on. And I think this is where Presidents were getting frustrated, but also Congress. Because, see, now Congress was in on the act. Before, back in the old days, when it was this tight little community, Congress had nothing to say.

EIR: A few senior committee chairman would be informally

The neo-cons couldn't control the CIA, so they went into the Pentagon, and they got everything they wanted and did everything they wanted, said everything they wanted. And then, the pressure that built there and in Congress, and in the White House, was just too much for a weak Director like Tenet to handle. It has to be a very strong Director.

briefed, but there weren't oversight committees, there wasn't this sort of public scrutiny.

Marchetti: In the Senate, there was an ad hoc committee made up of half a dozen members of the Defense Committee, and half Foreign Relations. And Senator Stennis was in charge of it. And he just didn't have any meetings! For more than a year at a time, sometimes. And all that the Director had to do, was whisper in his ear, and, he'd say, "I don't even want to know some of this stuff."

So, the CIA was really the President's special tool. And there wasn't any Congressional interference to speak of.

Anyway, over years, with people writing books about the CIA, criticizing, and committees being formed in Congress to look into this stuff.

EIR: Church and Pike Committees—

Marchetti: Yes. The net result was, that Congress had a bigger role. And, at the time, I thought that was good. Now, I'm not too sure.

But, the community grew out of all proportions. And then, it became—I think the big mistake, with a guy like Clinton, who didn't know or care much about foreign policy or intelligence, to put in a bureaucrat from the Senate, George Tenet, to run the CIA, was a big mistake. I'm not saying that an outsider isn't qualified, because John McCone was certainly very good. But, if you're going to have an outsider, he has to be somebody who understands foreign affairs, and understands the intelligence process, or is going to learn. You don't want somebody whose life has been dealing with Congressmen, and playing the game. So, when he gets his big opportunity with the White House, it became a slam dunk, you know, he pulled down the backing board with it!

I think it's good that they're doing this. I think it's good to have DNI, and let him handle certain big things: Let him handle the budget; let him decide what agencies will do what, and where people will work, and all that kind of stuff. And I think that's all very good.

And *in that*, the little old CIA is going through a revival, or trying to go through a revival. There are cliques. There's obviously a bureaucratic clique in the CIA, that isn't happy with what's going on. And there are the people who were in the analytical area, and estimates, current intelligence—well, now they're all going to be under Negroponte.

And the Pentagon has always captured any of the big things the CIA did, like overhead reconnaissance, satellites, U2s, A11s, all this sort of stuff. Let them have it, let them do it. And the scientists can work anywhere, they don't have to work in CIA. And, besides, most of the work is really done on the outside. It's all shopped out, because, they don't have the facilities to do the basic research, and the advanced research necessary. So, they work through some of the very companies they built—like TRW, JPL—you know, they helped to build these organizations by working closely with them.

I think that's fine.

So, what I'm hearing, is that there's a trend in the Agency, toward getting back to the basic clandestine mission, and that this is being done with the acquiescence and approval of the President and the White House, for a number of reasons. Porter Goss is there, now. He didn't come over to the CIA, to preside over its burial—I mean, he knew what was going on, the way the winds were blowing. After all, he was a member of Congress, he was on the committee—

EIR: He chaired it.

Marchetti: So, he knew what was coming, the DNI and that. And he didn't want that anyway! He didn't want to spend all day long preparing to brief the President, and going over these sticky National Intelligence Estimates, and worrying about budgets. He's an old clandestine operator, and that was his first love, and that's what he wants to get back to. To get the Agency back into that mode, which is, in a sense, a direct inheritance from the Office of Strategic Services, OSS, in World War II, you know, which was a combination of intelligence-gathering, or FI, and covert action.

Now, in World War II, that happened to be a lot of paramilitary stuff—dropping in behind enemy lines and so forth. But when the Cold War came around, following the Presidential guidance and NSC-68, Paul Nitze's paper, it became covert action. Now, clandestine operations include, of course, espionage or foreign intelligence, acquiring information by various means; counter-espionage, protecting your sources, your organization; *and* covert action.

Now, covert action has a whole series of things that go on under that. All ways, from propaganda, and disinformation; you start getting down into the destabilizing of governments;



White House/Paul Morse

President Bush listens to Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte at a press conference on Feb. 17, 2005. Marchetti comments that the current situation requires a very strong DNI. "This is going to be Negroponte's problem, to tell them, 'No. I know what you're thinking. I know what you'd dearly love to hear, but that ain't the way it is!' That's going to be very, very difficult."

it starts getting on the dirty side, with sabotage, and who knows what else; and then you're all the way down, to paramilitary operations. The kind of paramilitary operations that the CIA carries out, are not really the same thing that the military does. It really is paramilitary operations.

EIR: Like Afghanistan, for example?

Marchetti: Yes. Well, see, in Afghanistan, there were two kinds. Now there's a good example. See, in Afghanistan, you had SEALs—

EIR: Green Berets—

Marchetti: Yes, and other elite military guys going in and doing some fighting. The CIA guys were there—but what were they doing? They had suitcases full of money, and they were bribing warlords. And then they had a couple of guys out in the field, who had to stir up some people, and machine-gun a few things, and so on. That's what the CIA is, *that* difference. People say it's a fine point. It may be a fine point, but it's two different kinds of missions. The CIA is going to hold onto that.

Another thing that the CIA is very good at, oversees, is not just spying; it was an embassy within the embassy: It was the President's private representative there. If he wanted the President of the other country to know something and he didn't want to go through channels, because of too many leaks and problems, he'd use the CIA channel. And vice versa! These people would talk to the CIA station chief and let him know what was going on. You know, guys like King Hussein would talk to the station chief. The Ambassador was for par-

ties and other things. Down in Mexico, there were three straight Presidents who were tied into the CIA chief of station. And so, if you're the President and you want to know what's going on in a country, you can ask for an Estimate, you can ask the State Department, you can ask the military and their attaché—but you can also ask the CIA guy, who might have special connections about what's going on in the country.

EIR: Do we still have those kinds of CIA capabilities out in the field?

Marchetti: Yeah! That's right, we do! And that's one of the things that's being saved. That's why the FBI was told, "No, no, no, no, you're not going to operate independently," and the military, "You're not going to operate independently in these countries. You're going to work through the CIA chief of station. He's the boss. He's the clandestine operations boss in your country."

So, by developing that system, rebuilding the old chief of station, the old overseas

presence, developing deep cover, like NOCs, non-official cover; and they're going to have to get a lot of people, they're going to have to work very hard to spy on these countries. And it's not going to be very successful. It's going to be really difficult.

And, you've got to understand, we're in another Cold War. They can call it what they want to—"war on terrorism"—and that's not it; it's a cultural war. It's a war between Judeo-Christian Western civilization versus Islamic radical ideology, which is very powerful, as you know, throughout the area. And it's got to be fought the way Communism was fought. And this is where covert action is going to have a revival, comeback. And we're going to have to start publishing newspapers, magazines, and that, have to influence people; radio programs; we're going to have to try to recruit people, develop them, and hope that they can get to be Senators in their country, or get to be President. We're going to have to recruit imams and mullahs, you know what I mean? It's going to be a battle of ideas, not to get information about what's going on, but to actually *influence* events, and develop events more to our liking, or at least less to our disliking.

So, I think what's going on is good. And from what I hear, I think Goss is doing a good job. Now, whether he'll be able to do it, to do all these things—it's a big, big job he's taking on; but at least he's got a fighting chance, if he doesn't have all these other things that he has to worry about, which will be Negroponte's job. And the CIA, under Goss, is going to fade back into the woodwork.

I don't know what they're going to do with all those build-ings. They're going to have to—I don't know.

EIR: Go into the real estate business! Sell 'em off.

Marchetti: Give that to Negroponte. And all of a sudden, maybe out here in Leesburg, we'll have a little building somewhere in our district.

EIR: Now, it seems to me, that what you're describing is a long-term rebuilding process, and refocussing of the mission back to much more of the kind of traditional CIA role that evolved out of World War II, and through the Cold War: Do we have, within our culture, within the universities, within the society, people with the requisite skills to be able to do the job? Or, is there going to be a big rebuilding process, to even create that core cadre again? You had OSS as a training experience, and a whole kind of elite, coming out of World War II, going into intelligence, coming out of Ivy League schools, plus the combined experience of the war. Where does the raw material exist at this point, for the kind of mission that you're asking about, that you're saying has to be done?

Marchetti: That's a very good question. Because, first of all, it may not exist! This may be wishful thinking. The world has changed. The country has changed, quite a bit. The people in it are much different. Over the years, I've met young CIA officers, and even 20 years ago, when I was meeting some of them for the first time, I was just shocked at their lack of dedication and sense of duty. And there were all these gals who were serving five years, and then writing books; you wonder about them, too, you know.

The whole society's is just, "What's in it for me?" "How fast can I get to the top?" Or, "How much money can I make? But at least, how fast can I get to the top?"

We may not have the wherewithal, the human wherewithal, the personality, dedication, that we once had to do something like this. It may be that this will be a failure.

EIR: There were two events, in effect, that I think were the drivers for forcing this whole reorganization question to the surface. One was obviously the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001; and the other one was the whole debate over whether or not the intelligence product that went into the White House, leading into the invasion of Iraq, was up to snuff. And there was also a question that came up, that I know was an issue that you wrote about way back, and that we talked about over the years: namely, the interaction between policymakers, who may have a preset notion of what they want, and the pressure coming down on the intelligence community to produce a product that proves the case that policymakers have already decided upon.

How do you see those problems sorting out? Was there undue pressure from the White House, and from neo-conservatives at the Pentagon, to get an intelligence product that fit their desires, for example, to go to war in Iraq?

Marchetti: I don't think there's any question about it, that the preconceived notions, justifying the preconceived goals of the neo-cons, of the old Cold Warriors like Cheney and Rumsfeld, and other people—Bush—who are overly influenced by the Religious Right—that they wanted intelligence

to fit their goals. And this is where you have to have a very strong Director of Intelligence. Now, this is going to be Negroponte's problem, to tell them, "No. I know what you're thinking. I know what you'd dearly love to hear, but that *ain't* the way it is!" That's going to be very, very difficult, now; first of all, for the normal reason that no President or policymaker wants to be told by some intelligence expert, that he's wrong. And the second thing, is now, with so much emphasis on intelligence, with Congress involved, so much leaking going on, it will be very difficult to keep it private—say, between the DNI and the President, the DNI and the Secretary of Defense. So that he could make some decisions, and go ahead and do it.

And then, they're all surrounded by so many action-oriented people in the National Security Council, and in the Defense Department intelligence.

See, this is one of the reasons the neo-cons went into the Pentagon. They couldn't control the CIA, so they went into the Pentagon, and they got everything they wanted and did everything they wanted, said everything they wanted. And then, the pressure that built there and in Congress, and in the White House, was just too much for a weak Director like Tenet to handle. It has to be a *very strong* Director—but I don't know. It's going to be a real struggle.

You know, as you get older in life, you're not quite as optimistic as you used to be. If I had to place a bet, I'd say, "It's not going to work. It was a good try, but, no cigar."

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