

# THE CAESAR, POLO, AND ESAU PAPERS



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**Cold War Era Hard Target Analysis of Soviet  
and Chinese Policy and Decision Making,  
1953-1973**

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This collection of declassified analytic monographs and reference aids, designated within the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Directorate of Intelligence (DI) as the CAESAR, ESAU, and POLO series, highlights the CIA's efforts from the 1950s through the mid-1970s to pursue in-depth research on Soviet and Chinese internal politics and Sino-Soviet relations. The documents reflect the views of seasoned analysts who had followed closely their special areas of research and whose views were shaped in often heated debate. Continuing public interest in the series, as reflected in numerous requests through Freedom of Information and Executive Order channels, led CIA's Office of Information Management Services (IMS) to conduct a search of Directorate of Intelligence record systems for documents in this series and then undertake a declassification review of all the documents we located. The 147 documents in this collection, amounting to over 11,000 pages of analysis, were written between 1953 and 1973. The collection includes a large number of newly declassified monographs as well as some studies that have been previously declassified and released to individual requesters. The continuing sensitivity of some documents in the series required that they be withheld from declassification.

In contrast to the streams of formal assessments and reports on all aspects of the Soviet Union and China prepared by the intelligence community, the less formal and uncoordinated CAESAR, ESAU, and POLO studies were not intended as "finished" intelligence products primarily aimed at informing policymakers. Rather, the authors sought to develop a comprehensive knowledge base on select political issues that could contribute to building analytic capital for intelligence specialists throughout the community. Consequently, the intent of the collection is to provide insight into some aspects of CIA analytic thinking of the period and to make the documents more readily accessible to the general public.

Two former senior officers in the Directorate of Intelligence--Tom Elmore, former Director of the Office of East Asian Analysis, and James Noren, a Soviet economics expert--compiled this collection with assistance from Martha Lutz, Information Review Officer for the Director of CIA and members of the Historical Collections Division of IMS. A third former senior officer, Harry Gelman, former Chief of the Soviet Division of the Office of Regional and Political Analysis, has contributed to this foreword drawing on his many years of membership in the staff that produced most of these studies.

#### **History of the Research**

The genesis of CIA's research efforts on the Soviet Union and Communist China stemmed from growing concern in the intelligence community during the early 1950s over the limited coverage and resources being devoted to international communism as a movement. The

Director of CIA (DCI) initially responded by assigning a few analysts in the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) in CIA's DI to establish Project CAESAR in 1952.

The purpose of the CAESAR project was to study all available information on the members of, and the events affecting, the Soviet leadership hierarchy. The vehicles used by the analysts involved were a series of so-called "working papers," the first of which was "The Doctors' Plot," issued in July 1953. The intended customers were other analysts and operations officers in CIA along with other community agencies, some of whom, such as the Department of State and the National Security Agency, also contributed to the project. In effect, Project CAESAR represented the DI's first all-source, in-depth research endeavor.

In September 1956, Ray Cline, then-Director of OCI, decided to establish a small new research staff designated as the Sino-Soviet Studies Group (SSSG) within OCI. The SSSG was to continue the CAESAR project while initiating two new research endeavors: POLO, instituted in 1956 to study the Chinese Communist hierarchy,<sup>1</sup> and ESAU, launched in 1959 to examine the Sino-Soviet relationship. Cline declared that he intended these analysts to have a "detailed familiarity with Soviet political leaders, doctrine, and daily policy pronouncements," and to work with analysts with similar expertise on Communist China.

Subsequently, the SSSG was slightly expanded, renamed, and changed in status. In 1963, after Cline had become Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI), he decided to transfer this staff from the OCI and attach it to his own office as the DDI Special Research Staff (later, merely "Research Staff"). Cline took this step largely because of his high opinion of the role the staff's analysts had played in providing evidence of the reality of Sino-Soviet dispute against "furious" opposition elsewhere in CIA and the intelligence community and despite great skepticism among policymakers.<sup>2</sup> For the next decade, this structural shift served to give this long-term research program a somewhat stronger and more central position in the organization.

The first leader of this research effort, and its heart and soul as the staff's name and its bureaucratic status evolved over the years, was Walter P. (Bud) Southard, a senior intelligence officer who had had unique experience in China as a naval intelligence officer dealing with senior Chinese Communist liaison in the years immediately after World War II. In its first years,

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<sup>1</sup> Although begun in 1956, no recoverable monographs in the POLO series have been located in CIA's document records prior to 1961. The titles of two of the earliest POLO monographs, however, have been identified as "Evolution of the Central Organs of the Chinese Communist Party (1921-1958)" and "Chinese Communist Party and the Intellectuals."

<sup>2</sup> "This staff [OCI's SSSG] compiled the data that permitted CIA to lead the way--against furious opposition elsewhere--in charting the strategic conflict between Soviet and Chinese styles of dictatorship and doctrine that was basic to the definitive split in 1960." Ray S. Cline, *Secrets, Spies, and Scholars: Blueprint of the Essential CIA* (Washington, DC: Acropolis Books, Ltd., 1976), p. 151.

the staff was quite small, comprising three or four senior specialists on China and the Soviet Union. Among its initial members were Southard, Philip Bridgham, and Donald Zagoria; after 1961, the core group became Southard, Bridgham, Harry Gelman and Arthur C. Cohen. In later years, the size of the staff grew to approximately eight as younger officers were added. As the staff grew over the years it sought to provide both global coverage on Communism and important non-communist issues not being researched elsewhere, but its principal focus remained on the Soviet Union and Communist China and the relationship between the two.

As working papers, the studies produced by the staff did not require formal coordination with other components of CIA or other agencies in the intelligence community. They were deemed to represent only the views of their authors rather than an official DDI position on an intelligence issue. The staff studies also differed from OCI reports in having no set format, tone, or content. Ray Cline, the official who established the framework for the staff's work--first as Director of OCI and then as DDI--was clearly determined to free the staff's analysts not only from the constraints of current production deadlines but also from any restrictive review process that might have inhibited the fullest examination of a given issue.

### **Objectives of the Series**

The goal of the Research Staff was to explore in depth the politics of the communist world in order to develop a foundation of intellectual capital for the intelligence community. Ultimately, this comprehensive research on selected issues improved intelligence assessments of the future direction the Soviet and Chinese leaderships were likely to take in domestic and foreign policy.

The staff itself mainly originated the research topics. Some questions were returned to again and again, such as the status of the Sino-Soviet dispute and leadership positions and maneuvering in the USSR and China. Other topics were taken up in response to the internal arguments over issues with other parts of the CIA, or in support of the DI's research program. The staff thus did not act in isolation but benefited greatly from the creative tension that developed with other components of the Agency, OCI analysts, and with staff members of the Office of National Estimates (ONE), with officers of the Directorate of Plans, and with the analytical division of CIA's Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (FBIS). The staff's analysts also sought to consult as widely as possible with qualified experts outside CIA--both elsewhere in the Intelligence Community and throughout academia.<sup>3</sup>

The existence of the staff also benefited those in CIA with whom they interacted. The staff's products served to develop a framework to help both new and experienced analysts better

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<sup>3</sup> For a number of years, the Special Research Staff was CIA's primary representative interacting with the academic world. Some members or former members of the Staff (Zagoria, Bridgham, Cohen, and Gelman) published books or articles in academic journals on matters concerning the Chinese and Soviet leaderships.

understand key issues, such as political motivations and the objectives sought in foreign policymaking, the role of the military in politics, or the ideological underpinnings of the Communist regimes. Whether OCI analysts agreed or disagreed with conclusions of any given study, the overall goal of developing solid building blocks to enhance future strategic analysis was considered valid by OCI and DDI leadership.

Although current intelligence remained primarily the responsibility of others, particularly analysts in OCI--the Research Staff produced a number of studies providing useful background for understanding shorter-term issues. For example, the POLO series devoted considerable effort from the mid-1960's to 1973 to examining all facets of Mao's Cultural Revolution, thereby demonstrating the staff's capacity to provide a comprehensive framework for a dynamic and still unfolding current intelligence issue. Some of the monographs on the Cultural Revolution also sought to stimulate analysis by offering alternative interpretations of a developing phenomenon.

OCI management, for its part, recognized the difficulties that would arise if analysts responsible for current intelligence also sought to perform long-term research. Even though many of OCI's current intelligence memoranda did, in fact, require considerable research by their authors, the final products required a current focus and short-term analytic judgments, and did not seek to build a bank of knowledge. Therefore, the SRS studies were a unique product, born of a belief that analysts skilled in the requirements of deeper research should be housed in a separate structure that was freed from the ever-evolving and growing demands for current intelligence support to the policymakers.

Most fundamentally, while the staff existed, its presence as a source of an alternative point of view also served to help diminish the risk posed by the development of "groupthink" in the production of finished intelligence.<sup>4</sup>

### **Reorganization of the Mission**

Eventually, in 1973 the DDI Research Staff was abolished and its analysts were absorbed into a small new Office of Political Research (OPR). OPR was expected to do in-depth analysis, on a broader geographic basis, about political and interdisciplinary topics of long-range concern to US decision makers. Then, in a further restructuring in 1976, OPR was incorporated into the Office of Regional and Political Analysis (ORPA) whose divisions were charged with experimenting with fresh approaches, emphasizing interdisciplinary analysis and producing

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<sup>4</sup> Mention must also be made of the stimulating contribution to CIA analysis furnished in the 1950s and 1960s by the analytical component of FBIS, despite the fact that this component throughout the years of its existence was obliged to use only unclassified rather than all-source evidence. In addition, the FBIS analytical group served as a valuable training ground for analysts who later worked in OCI or the Research Staff.

longer-range papers. In 1981 the functional-office structure was abandoned in favor of a combination of regional and functional offices to produce multidisciplinary analyses across the directorate.

In retrospect, the products produced by the Special Research Staff remain an exceptional endeavor in CIA's analytic history. Nevertheless, the concept remains a benchmark for any future effort to develop another entity whose mission aims primarily at building intellectual capital for analysts in the intelligence community.