opinion

Couldn’t CIA see anti-shah graffiti?

By Bob Wasserman

President Jimmy Carter is extremely dissatisfied with US intelligence reporting after its failure to warn of this month’s near-revolution in Iran and the fall of Shah Pahlevi. Carter’s main criticism has been aimed at CIA director Stansfield Turner for his agency’s misguided analysis of the mood in Iran, but the President also has knocked the CIA for past failures to predict last April’s coup in Afghanistan and the Arab Oil embargo of 1973. While lacking foresight on events in remote Afghanistan and of the thoughts of OPEC leaders is understandable, missing the boat on Iran is not. In the CIA would have had to do is follow this spring’s happenings on the MIT campus!

Evidence of the turmoil in Iran first surfaced at MIT with the April 14 lecture by former CIA director William Colby. Colby was treated with extreme disrespect by Iranian students, who showered the speaker with rude remarks as Colby explained US involvement in the 1953 coup restoring the Shah to power.

Iranian students at the lecture told a Tech reporter that there already was a wave of general strikes in fifteen Iranian cities, and one student was quoted as saying that in the even of a mass uprising “The Shah will not be able to stay in control without direct US assistance.”

Now, one should not expect the CIA to read The Tech in order to ascertain such obvious forewarnings of Iranian street, but at least the agency could have asked a former director what was going on at his lecture.

The Colby lecture was not the last clue to Iranian politics to unfoul of MIT last April, for a headline in the April 28 Tech read “Post predicts collapse of Iran government.” The post was Iranian Reza Bani-Sadr, who committed a meeting here that “The recent period of instability in Iran began in January 1977,” and is marked by strikes, demonstrations, and “if a power could protect the Shah’s downfall that early (not to speak of foreknowledge by politicians and religious leaders in Iran), why the hell couldn’t the CIA predict it!”

That spring ended with further events, although ones with less drama and forewarning. The Tech photographer Douglas Birdwell was threatened by the crowd of Iranians in attendance. A letter of reply in The Tech then followed explaining the fear of Iranian protestors of being photographed. The handwriting began appearing on the wall, too: “Down with the Shah” graffiti sprung up around Boston.

Meanwhile, the CIA was studying the situation in Iran and finally issued a report in mid-August. This report concluded that “Iran is not in a revolutionary or even pre-revolutionary situation at the present. Events of the last month were soon to prove this analysis wrong.

Demonstrations involving three to four million Iranians took place in Tehran and other major cities in September, and these happenings were reported on in an Iran-teach-in held at MIT October 15. The teach-in featured MIT Professors-Joseph Weizenbaum and Noam Chomsky, and was given a great deal of coverage by the Boston Herald and The Tech. By now even the CIA could foresee the fall of the Shah’s reign.

The reasons behind the CIA’s ignorance of the Iranian political climate are several. It may be that recent reports from a former director what was going on at his lecture works.

Whatever the CIA’s excuse, it is obvious that they should learn one lesson from the entire Iran episode. While agency executives were at work behind their desks reading newspapers and books (The US press was accused of covering up Iranian demonstrations by Chomsky and George Wald of Harvard) the real story was untold right in front of their eyes. Iranian students and American academics were protesting, giving lectures and even scrawling anti-shah graffiti. Maybe the CIA should move their offices to Cambridge, besides simply sending recruits to MIT to find out what’s going on in the world.

To the Editor: There is a revolution coming in the arts, too. The very people who can predict it claim to have been one of its earliest battlegrounds. Three years ago, when Louis Nelson’s monumental, Transparent Horizon was purchased for a rumored $80,000, its installation on East Campus was vehemently opposed by both residents there and many other interested parties of varying aesthetic sensibilities and political stripes. The new sculpture was ugly, intrusive, overpriced, meaningless, and dangerous, it was said, having been purchased and installed in a paternally undemocratic manner. That, to some extent, was three years ago. In an article subtitled “Arrogance Abounds” in the November issue of The Atlantic, author Jerome Turner now admits that “I am not sure if in favor of public sculpture” despite his taste for modern art. Quoted by Turner are recent remarks of the contemporary sculptor Claes Oldenburg, himself instigator on this campus three years ago during a joint exhibit of his work by Hayden Gallery and the Institute for Contemporary Art. “I don’t really know if I’m in favor of public sculpture,” observed Oldenburg last December during the dedication ceremonies of his 100-foot high Batcolumn outside the new federal building in Chicago. “I think it is intrusive and incomprehensible, so why spend public funds on it? The Bat is very intrusive. Maybe that sort of thing is no longer justified. The Chicago Picasso is a good, tough piece, but the public had no real say in it — Picasso gave the design, and a group of rich people paid to have it built.”

Now he tells us.

Roger Kell G

Second thoughts on sculpture

Paul Hubbard

by Kent C. Massey

Even if I expect lower grades, the place offers such an intensity of experience that I don’t mind.

Besides, third of the second semester’s work was finished before the end of the year. I love MIT when you get it.

Crazy, you must have thought quitting a year ago. Or did you decide to stay?

Want Freshman year back and another yes for sure! Then you go to one of the few places where I would live the rest of my life.