

Improving Intelligence Analysis

THE *raison d'être* of the Intelligence Community is to provide accurate and meaningful information and insights to consumers in a form they can use at the time they need them. If intelligence fails to do that, it fails altogether. The expense and effort invested in collecting and processing the information have gone for naught.

Assessing how well the Intelligence Community accomplishes this fundamental task is a complicated matter. A great deal of analysis is published; much of it is timely and of excellent quality. The Intelligence Community has many analysts who are recognized experts in their respective fields and whose professional judgments are valued and relied upon. Clearly, intelligence analysis has substantial value to many consumers.

The Commission found especially close ties between the producers and users of military intelligence. Within the military there is a long history of respect for, and reliance upon, intelligence. Intelligence is factored into strategic and tactical planning, is exercised in war gaming, and is integral to operations. As a result, military requirements are better defined, in large part, because of the close and continuing dialogue between intelligence analysts and the military commands they support.

Where policy agencies are concerned, however, consumers more often take a jaundiced view of the analytical support they receive. The President and senior cabinet officials appear to be relatively well served, but many decisionmakers at lower levels find that intelligence analysis comes up short. Often what they receive fails to meet their needs by being too late or too unfocused, or by adding little to what they already know.

In fact, only a small percentage of the resources allocated to intelligence goes to “all-source” analysis. Relatively few resources are devoted to developing and maintaining expertise among the analytical pool. Intelligence lags behind in terms of assimilating open source information into the analytical process, and it continues to struggle with how to avail itself of expertise in the private sector. Analysis that is not responsive to consumer needs continues to be produced.

The Intelligence Community is not entirely to blame. Consumers have a responsibility not only to engage in the process but, more important, to drive it. Often, they are uncooperative or too busy to engage at all. Since most are political appointees, many enter and leave government never appreciating what intelligence might have done for them. Clearly, consumers need to be better educated about the value of intelligence.

The Commission did find numerous instances where there was a close working relationship with policymakers. Intelligence producers were able to focus on issues of significance and to make information available when needed. Analysts understood the consumer’s level of knowledge and the issues he or she wanted help on. Their analysis was read and relied upon. The consumer, for his part, developed an understanding of what intelligence could do for him and—equally important—what intelligence could not do. Many considered the support vital to meeting their responsibilities and actively engaged in

a dialogue with analysts to refine the support they received. But these instances appear to be the exception rather than the rule.

For the Commission, the lesson from all this is clear: there must be a concerted effort to make intelligence analysis more useful to the policymakers it serves. Just as elements of the private sector have re-engineered themselves to improve the quality of their products and their responsiveness to customers, so, too, must intelligence agencies. In the sections that follow, the Commission explains how we believe this might be accomplished.

Building Relationships

Policymakers receive their support from a variety of sources. CIA's Directorate of Intelligence (DI) as well as the National Intelligence Officers who comprise the National Intelligence Council are responsible for providing all-source intelligence analysis to the Government as a whole, with the President, the National Security Advisor, and the Secretaries of Defense and State being the foremost customers to be served. The CIA continues to be viewed by most policymakers as the preeminent all-source analytical element within the Government for providing independent judgments free of policy or departmental bias.

Departments and agencies that have substantial requirements for intelligence also have internal elements that provide tailored all-source analysis to the agency head and his or her staff, using what is provided by CIA and other sources available to the agency. In the Department of Defense, this function is performed by the Defense Intelligence Agency; in the Department of State, by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research; and in the Departments of Energy, Commerce, and Treasury, by small dedicated components. These departmental organizations also participate in the production of National Intelligence Estimates (discussed later in this chapter) and other analyses produced under Community auspices. (See Chapter 10 for a description of the agencies that provide analytical support to military users.)

In addition, consumers receive "single-source" reports based on data obtained by NSA, CIA, DoD and diplomatic reporting from the Department of State. Such reports are valued by consumers, although they may not provide the context of all-source analysis.

Intelligence producers interact with their customers in various ways. At one end of the spectrum, intelligence analysts may be assigned to the staffs of certain consumers and integrated into their work force, taking part in the substantive work of the office, participating in foreign travel, discussions with foreign representatives, etc. This type of support was universally acclaimed by the consumers who had it, but because the assigned analyst is then unavailable to meet the demands of other consumers, such in-house support is at present limited to a small number of senior officials.

Some consumers are supported by detailing intelligence analysts to help with a particular issue or process, for example, to support a treaty negotiation. In other cases, intelligence producers station "liaisons" with their customers, not to provide substantive support, but to serve as a focal point for requests for such support. The CIA, which has a government-wide responsibility, now has over 100 officers in policy agencies or military commands, either providing direct support or in a liaison capacity. DIA and NSA similarly

have specialists providing direct support to consumers or in a liaison capacity. In addition to providing benefits to the customer, assignments to policy agencies also benefit the analysts involved by improving their understanding of the policymaking process and customer needs.

Other consumers receive regular briefings, or are briefed when there are developments in their area of interest. Others may simply be introduced to the analysts who cover their subject area and invited to call them as needed. Many other consumers, particularly those down the bureaucratic chain, may receive no special analytical support beyond what is available in the daily publications and intelligence reports. Obviously, the more intensive the support, the more strained the personnel resources of intelligence agencies are to provide it.

The Commission found that those consumers who have intelligence aides on their staffs, or who receive daily intelligence briefings, tend to express greater satisfaction with the quality of the intelligence. In our view, such arrangements, while costly in terms of manpower, should be encouraged. Nevertheless, no single relationship will “fit all.” It is up to intelligence producers, working directly with particular consumers in policy agencies, to determine the preferred kind of analytical support and to make every effort to provide it.

A more systematic approach to building these relationships is also needed. At present the support arrangements for officials below cabinet-level appear largely *ad hoc* rather than the result of a deliberate strategy. Further, where particular consumers (for example, an assistant secretary at the Department of State) receive analytical support both from an internal organization (in this case, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research) and from the CIA, it is sometimes unclear where the division of responsibility lies between the two organizations, and opportunities to contribute are missed.

8-1. The Commission recommends that each intelligence producer develop a strategic plan for better serving consumers. Relevant customers should be identified by position and consulted with respect to the type of intelligence support they prefer. Senior-level consumers should be strongly encouraged to have intelligence aides assigned to their staffs or to have daily intelligence briefings. As new incumbents are appointed to these senior positions, additional consultations should be arranged to ascertain whether the existing relationship should be changed. Once the customer has indicated a preference, the producer should make every reasonable effort to provide the support requested. Where the consumer receives support from the CIA and also from a departmental organization, representatives of both should participate in these consultations in order to establish clear areas of responsibility.

Many observers have cautioned that in promoting closer relationships with consumers, the chances are increased that intelligence analysis will lose its objectivity. As analysts became aware of their customers’ assumptions and policy preferences, they would, consciously or not, produce analysis that conformed to those preferences.

The Commission believes this problem is real, but manageable. The need to present the “unvarnished truth” to policymakers is at the core of every analyst’s training and ethos. It is, in a real sense, why intelligence exists. Further, there are checks and balances

within the system. Virtually all analysis is reviewed by multiple experts, not all of whom are familiar with the biases of a particular consumer. Some analyses, such as national estimates, are reviewed by interagency boards.

The role of intelligence analysts is to inform the policy process. One witness before the Commission expressed the view that “if an intelligence analyst is not in some danger of being politicized, he is probably not doing his job.” The Commission agrees. The greater danger lies not in becoming “politicized” but in becoming irrelevant to the process of government.

Improving the Quality of the Product

However desirable it may be to build relationships between producers and consumers, such relationships cannot be sustained unless the intelligence side is able to demonstrate over time that it brings something of value to the table.

The Commission attempted to assess, as a general proposition, what intelligence, in fact, does bring to the table. Put another way, what value, if any, is added by intelligence over information available from open sources or the media? The Commission reviewed prior studies of this issue and conducted its own analysis of two separate international incidents, comparing the information reported by the news media with the information reported by the Intelligence Community. The conclusion reached in each case was that both sources of information had their strengths. The media were faster and did a better job conveying information on an immediate event. But the media lacked staying power, missed essential details, and often did not report what was of interest to policymakers or report in a way that was comprehensible to policymakers. In some cases, the intelligence analysis provided critical information that was not reported by the news media at all. The verdict arising from this sampling was that while the media contributed importantly, there was clear value added by intelligence analysis.

Whatever its past contributions, the quality of intelligence analysis can always be improved. The Intelligence Community has, in fact, made substantial progress in this regard over the last four years. But the Commission believes more could be done.

Promoting Greater Expertise Among Intelligence Analysts

An intelligence analyst sent to brief a senior policymaker on “country x” faces a daunting situation. The policymaker often is someone who has lived in, or frequently travels to “country x,” has daily contacts with his or her counterparts there and with substantive experts in the United States, and reads the current literature on “country x.” The intelligence analyst, on the other hand, may have neither lived in, nor even traveled to, “country x,” and his or her contacts with experts in the U.S. and within “country x” itself may be limited. Yet he or she is expected to provide fresh insight to the policymaker.

While there are senior analysts in the Intelligence Community who are nationally known experts in their respective fields, they are the exception rather than the rule. Recognizing this, most analytical elements within the Intelligence Community have programs

designed to give their analysts the skills and knowledge base they need to perform credibly. These programs are promising and deserve support, but their scope remains limited. Exacerbating the problem has been an unfortunate decline in the number of government and foundation programs that once served as training grounds for area, functional, and language specialists in the intelligence area.

8-2. The Commission recommends several actions to improve the quality of analysis:

- ◆ **More intelligence analysts should be given the opportunity to serve in, and travel to, the country or countries they are expected to cover. An extended visit to the country or countries involved should be a minimal pre-requisite for any intelligence officer prior to undertaking analytical duties.**
- ◆ **Educational opportunities should be expanded. Analysts should be encouraged to take university or graduate courses here and abroad within their areas of expertise and to establish contacts with experts in the private sector. They should be rewarded for learning and maintaining proficiency in relevant foreign languages. Participation in pertinent conferences and seminars, both in this country and abroad, should become a routine part of their duties.**
- ◆ **Analysts should be encouraged to remain within their substantive areas of expertise rather than having to rotate to other areas or serve in management positions in order to be promoted. Substantive expertise should be rewarded.**
- ◆ **Analysts should be encouraged to serve rotational assignments in the policy agencies they principally serve.**

The Commission recognizes that similar recommendations have been made in the past but have not been followed up with a sufficient commitment of resources. Considering the importance of this aspect of the intelligence function, however, they must receive a high priority for funding. Personnel shortages and budgetary constraints should not be used to justify a lower level of effort in these areas.

Making Greater Use of Expertise Outside the Intelligence Community

Analysis on topics of significant national interest should be informed by the best expertise this country has to offer, whether that expertise resides within the Intelligence Community or outside it. Intelligence agencies should more often take the initiative to sponsor open conferences on international topics, make direct and regular use of outside consultants, establish regular “peer review” by outside experts for major assessments and estimates, and contract out research on unclassified aspects of analytical problems or the maintenance of reference data bases. Analysts should systematically be able to consult outside experts on particular issues without undue bureaucratic hindrance.

The failure to make greater use of outside expertise at the CIA appears to result in part from a lack of financial resources and in part from onerous security requirements—particularly the polygraph examination and the requirement to submit subsequent publications for review—that discourage some outside experts from participating in intelligence work. The Commission believes that less intrusive measures should be instituted in order for outside experts who will have limited access to intelligence information to obtain a security clearance.

Making Better Use of Open Sources

While the use of secret information distinguishes finished intelligence from other analysis, no analyst can base his or her conclusions solely on secret information without considering what is on the public record. Indeed, analysts must have command of all relevant information about their subjects, not simply command of secret information.

As the volume and availability of information from “open sources” has multiplied as a result of the revolution in information technology, ascertaining what relevant information may be on the public record has become more difficult. In CIA alone, the amount of open source information has grown by a factor of ten over the past four years.

To cope with this situation, the DCI established a Community Open Source Program Office in 1992 to coordinate the collection, processing, and dissemination of openly available information to CIA and other elements of the Intelligence Community. Two new computer networks have been established: one provides CIA analysts on-line access to over 1200 open source publications; the other provides consumers access not only to the CIA open source data base but also to other unclassified and classified data bases maintained within the Intelligence Community.

While the development of open source data bases is growing, intelligence analysts have only limited access to them. Given the amount of open source information that is readily available to the public over computer networks, the effort of the Intelligence Community to structure and make available to analysts pertinent open source data bases seems inexplicably slow.

During the course of its inquiry, the Commission conducted an impromptu test to see how readily information could be obtained exclusively from open sources on a subject of current national security interest and how that information compared to what could be obtained from the Intelligence Community. The information obtained from open sources was substantial and on some points more detailed than that provided by the Intelligence Community. On the other hand, the information that came from open sources took longer to produce, required validation, and failed to cover many key aspects of the situation important to policymakers.

In any event, it is clear that open sources do provide a substantial share of the information used in intelligence analysis. In some areas, such as economic analysis, it is estimated that as much as 95 percent of the information utilized now comes from open sources. With more and more information becoming available by electronic means, its use in intelligence analysis can only grow. Indeed, knowing what is publicly available enables

producers and collectors of intelligence to better focus their efforts on that which is not. So crucial is this determination to the overall intelligence process that the Commission finds it surprising that more emphasis has not been given this aspect of the Intelligence Community's operations. An adequate computer infrastructure to tie intelligence analysts into open source information does not appear to exist. In the view of the Commission, the creation of such an infrastructure should be a top priority of the DCI and a top priority for funding.

Making Analysis Available to Consumers

Until recently, intelligence was made available daily to consumers in the form of large stacks of intelligence reports and daily printed summaries of reports and analyses on specific issues. Typically, staff would sort through this material and select or summarize what the consumer should read. Once read, the materials would be returned or destroyed. If a consumer had a question about something he or she read, or wanted to be reminded of something in a previous report, he or she could attempt to reach the analyst who had prepared the report.

This situation has begun to change. The military, in particular, has made significant strides in applying new information technology to facilitate the dissemination and use of intelligence. Through the Joint Deployable Intelligence Support System (JDISS), military commands around the world have access not only to open source information and current intelligence reporting over their computer terminals, but are able to search electronically the archives of intelligence agencies for pertinent data. Sorting is done by keyword selection rather than the tedious process of going manually through stacks of messages and printed publications. A user with a question can query the analyst who prepared the report electronically. The user also has an ability to evaluate instantly what is being provided and request additional data as needed. In addition, intelligence briefings are now provided daily through secure videoconferencing, and fast-breaking intelligence is relayed instantaneously over secure communications to affected consumers.

A similar capability known as INTELINK has been developed by the Intelligence Community and is being installed in policy agencies and with military users. While commercial technology has been available for some time to allow the electronic storage, dissemination, and manipulation of intelligence, agencies have faced a considerable problem in doing this securely. Not only do they have to worry about "hackers" gaining access to the system, but also about controlling access. Not all users are necessarily cleared for all levels of intelligence. While these problems are gradually being overcome, they have slowed progress on the civilian side beyond what one might expect, given the rapid development and availability of commercial information systems. When INTELINK is fully deployed to users, some policymakers will in all likelihood continue to rely upon their staffs to utilize the system on their behalf. Nonetheless, their ability to obtain specific intelligence on demand should be greatly improved.

The Commission believes it essential that the development and deployment of INTELINK be completed as soon as possible. The project should be given the highest funding priority within the Intelligence Community.

Improving the National Estimates Process

National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) treat issues of major importance and long-term interest to the United States and are considered by the Intelligence Community to be its most comprehensive and authoritative products. NIEs are produced by the National Intelligence Council (NIC), an organization composed of twelve senior officers called National Intelligence Officers (NIOs), who report directly to the DCI. Each NIE undergoes thorough review and coordination by representatives of the various intelligence agencies and is ultimately approved by a board chaired by the DCI and composed of the heads of these agencies.

NIEs are intended to help policymakers and warfighters think through key issues by presenting forward-leaning judgments about the likely course of events in foreign countries and their implications for the United States. The Commission, however, found consumer reaction to NIEs mixed at best. Some senior policymakers professed to be unaware of them altogether. Some dismissed them as neither timely nor relevant. Others criticized them for notable predictive failures or for watering down the analysis through an inter-agency coordination process that led to “lowest common denominator” results. NIEs did receive the plaudits of a few policymakers, but, on balance, the reaction was negative.

Regardless of how NIEs are appreciated by senior policymakers, they do appear to serve several useful purposes. They are authoritative statements of the views of the Intelligence Community about important topics. The development of NIEs forces analysts to consider and test all the evidence brought to bear upon the issue. Without such a process, the assessment of important issues probably would not be as rigorous or comprehensive. It also appears that while senior policymakers may not read them, their staffs do, incorporating information and judgments from NIEs into what is being provided to more senior levels.

To improve the usefulness of NIEs, the Commission believes policymakers should be involved more directly and systematically in the estimates process. NIEs should only be prepared at the request of a senior policymaker or where there is senior policymaker interest. These policymakers should be consulted routinely on the terms of reference and timing of estimates affecting their areas of responsibility. Moreover, analysts developing national estimates should routinely solicit the views of pertinent policy officials, to include U.S. Ambassadors, on the subjects concerned, without distorting their analyses to reflect policy preferences.

Establishing a More Broadly Focused Analytical Entity

During the Cold War, the focus of intelligence analysis was on the Soviet Union and other Communist states. Most of the information relating to these countries was secret and could best be obtained, analyzed, and reported by the Intelligence Community. When it came to assessing the significance of the information, it made sense to do that within the Intelligence Community as well.

Today, while there remain subjects that can be addressed adequately only by intelligence means, such as terrorism or weapons proliferation, much of the information on the vast majority of issues of concern to policymakers is openly available. Most of the expert knowledge on these subjects lies outside the Intelligence Community: in the policy agencies, in academia, in “think tanks,” in the Library of Congress, in foreign countries, and in the media. While the Intelligence Community may still have an important contribution to make in these areas by providing the “secret piece,” the Community will rarely provide the “recognized expert” in the field.

In recognition of these realities, the Commission believes that the NIC should be restructured to become a more open and broadly focused analytic entity. Important as it is to improve the expertise of intelligence analysts, the Commission is persuaded that, with the end of the Cold War, the Government must take better advantage both of openly available information and of the wide range of expertise in the academic and business communities. The wisdom that exists outside the Intelligence Community must be incorporated into the assessment of today’s foreign policy issues. An open environment needs to be created where knowledgeable experts on issues of concern to policymakers can be brought together from policy departments, “think tanks,” and academia, as well as from the Intelligence Community, to analyze, debate, and assess these new world issues. Although the NIC has increasingly drawn on outside experts in recent years, the Commission believes a more radical approach is required.

8-3. The Commission recommends that the National Intelligence Council be restructured as a “National Assessments Center.” The new entity should continue to produce NIEs requested by policymakers that draw largely or partially on information collected by intelligence agencies. Equally or more important, it should also prepare classified and unclassified “assessments” of issues of concern to policymakers where the intelligence contribution is relatively small. These assessments should include analyses of long-term problems policymakers are unable to address effectively because of their demanding schedules and need to focus on current events. The Commission anticipates that assessments would increasingly be directed by experts—in or out of government—who would manage integrated teams of substantive specialists on rotational assignment from policy departments, academia, think-tanks, and the Intelligence Community. The Center should remain under the purview of the DCI but should be moved out of CIA headquarters to a suitable location in downtown Washington to make it more acceptable and accessible to policymakers and outside experts.

