

TRANSFORMING THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

Background

Intelligence analysis seeks to provide necessary information in a timely manner to help policy makers from the president to the Congress make better decisions. The information and judgments must be pertinent to what policy makers need to know but not skewed to support a particular policy outcome. In reality, this is more of an art than a science, especially because the manner and means of most effectively informing the President and other senior policy makers change with the preferences and working style of each new Administration.

The Intelligence Community (IC) of the United States has been undergoing major reforms since then-President George W. Bush in 2005 signed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act. Under the new Director of National Intelligence, the shortcomings in intelligence analysis that came to light in the wake of the 9/11 and Iraq WMD intelligence failures are being addressed through revamped analytic standards, increased resources for the IC, and numerous organizational, technological, and procedural changes. As of now, many of these innovative initiatives are in the development and early implementation stages. Once completed, given their conceptual and technological complexity, it will be important to assess whether they produce significantly improved analytic products.

Findings

Many innovative initiatives are in the development stage and should be continually assessed to see if they produce improved analytic products. Against this backdrop of reform, extensive interviews with current and former policy makers and intelligence community analysts and managers reveal that there are flaws in the current system that require dedicated attention. The most consequential include:

- **Overemphasis on the President's Daily Brief (PDB):** President George W. Bush elevated the PDB to an unprecedented level of importance, which had the unintended effect of skewing intelligence production away from deeper research and arms-length analysis to being driven by the latest attention-grabbing clandestine reports from the field.
- **Disappointing National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs):** NIEs are meant to be one of the major products of the IC, yet they are frequently too late, too long, and too detailed to serve high-level policy makers well. Moreover, NIE analytic quality is often compromised by the effort to achieve a unified analytic position, producing reports that can become the lowest common denominator statement that is able to obtain agreement across the IC silos.
- **Analytic Risk Aversion:** In the wake of the Iraq WMD fiasco, the pendulum has swung decidedly toward a tendency for analytical products to focus on amalgamating all potentially

relevant data and to leave it largely to policy makers to draw the analytic conclusions. DNI Dennis Blair has recently made a welcome commitment to having opportunity analysis—the identification by analysts of unanticipated windows of opportunity to advance US policies—become a key component of intelligence products.

- **Insufficiently Deep Country Knowledge:** Many of the young IC analysts are trained to follow a particular stream of information from “their” country but lack the deep immersion in the country’s political system, economy, and modern history necessary to produce nuanced, insightful analytic products. Moreover, very burdensome security constraints make it very difficult for them to build that kind of analytic depth.
- **Overemphasis on Classified Sources:** IC analysts tend to gravitate to information obtained by clandestine means. Yet much of that information lacks context and is substantively rather marginal. As a consequence, analyses overly driven by classified sources may suffer from ignorance of important information in unclassified sources. This is especially notable with the explosion of unclassified material now available on key targets such as China.

Recommendations

Recommendations to address these shortcomings fall into three broad categories.

On improving the capabilities of analysts:

- Recruit a greater percentage of the incoming class of analysts from those in their late 20s and early 30s who have had extensive experience related to the country of concern
- Establish a National Intelligence University with its own campus and faculty
- Devote greater time and attention to formal training
- Nurture and reward area specialists
- Break stovepipes in analytic assignments

On improving the utility of IC analytical products for policy makers:

- Provide formal introductory briefings for incoming policy makers on IC capabilities and limitations
- Assign IC analysts systematically to provide on-site support to policy makers at and above the Assistant Secretary level
- Develop regular feedback mechanisms from the policymaker to analysts
- Allow for NIEs with concurring and dissenting opinions, similar to Supreme Court decisions
- Train analysts in the power dynamic between analysts and policymakers

On improving the ability of policy makers to elicit and utilize high quality IC analysis:

- Encourage policy makers to better articulate their intelligence questions and priorities
- Elicit what analysts know, what they don’t know, and what they think is likely to happen
- Provide the IC with the insights the policy makers themselves gain from their meetings with foreign officials
- Avoid as much as possible the temptation to declassify NIEs

Key Facts

- Fifty percent of the intelligence community's workforce has been hired since 9/11, and there is now a large pool of young, technology-savvy talent that is eager to be shaped into a superior new IC. Indeed, cultural shifts based on the information age almost guarantee that many important changes will happen simply because of the nature and talents of this younger generation.
- The budget for National Intelligence Programs, which includes all intelligence spending except that done by the separate military service arms, has risen markedly from \$26.6 billion in 1997 to about \$45 billion this year.
- The first issue President's Daily Brief (PDB) was handed to President Lyndon B. Johnson on December 1, 1964. It is considered the flagship publication of the IC analytical community.

Brookings Experts

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