



Tackling Today's Intelligence Challenges

INSIGHTS FROM ANALYTIC
INNOVATIONS IN THE 1970S

James Marchio



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“I suppose that if we in intelligence were one day given three wishes, they would be to know everything, to be believed when we spoke, and... to exercise an influence to the good in the matter of policy.”

– SHERMAN KENT, “Estimates and Influence,”
in *Sherman Kent and the Board of Estimates:
Collected Essays, II, The Making of an NIE*, ed. Donald
Steury (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1994), 42.

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 - James Marchio, “‘If the Weatherman Can...’: The Intelligence Community’s Struggle To Express Analytic Uncertainty in the 1970s,” *Studies in Intelligence* 58, no. 4 (Extracts, December 2014): 31–42, <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/ICs-Struggle-to-Express.pdf>.

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PREFACE

“WHAT’S PAST IS PROLOGUE”



Students and intelligence scholars and practitioners will find this book of interest and of use, for it offers historical insight into prospective approaches for overcoming the challenges confronting the IC today. In telling the story of an important chapter in intelligence history that has not been covered before in any detail, it also provides helpful context for understanding the analytic innovations that followed the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) and influenced IC practices in the 20 years since Congress passed this legislation.¹

This book argues that many of the measures implemented following the passage of the IRTPA to improve the quality of IC analysis had their origins in the innovative initiatives begun three decades earlier. Moreover, lessons distilled from the IC’s decade of innovation in the 1970s are relevant to today’s community as it grapples with the enormous analytic challenges posed by the pace of technological change and the expanding and increasingly diverse global threat environment. The nature and scope of analytic innovation in the IC between 1972 and 1976 was unprecedented and has yet to be matched. This book explores the factors that drove innovation in nearly all aspects of analysis during the first half of the 1970s, examining how this innovation was manifested—from evaluating the quality of the IC’s analysis to the use of new analytic methods—and why many of these

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initiatives disappeared and had to be rediscovered following the 9/11 attacks and the 2003 Iraq War.

Several factors shaped the writing of this book. First as an intelligence analyst and later as the commander of US Transportation Command's Joint Intelligence Center with hundreds of intelligence professionals under my command, I pursued high-quality analysis but only vaguely knew what that entailed. My understanding of quality improved years later when I began work as a senior evaluator in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's (ODNI) AIS group, charged to help develop and apply the analytic tradecraft standards as directed in the 2004 IRTPA. Arriving at AIS in August 2006, I was immediately immersed in ODNI Deputy Director for Analysis Thomas Fingar's wide-ranging campaign to transform how the IC conducted its analysis.

As a member of Fingar's vanguard, I was caught up in the excitement of trying to implement the analytic transformation called for in the IRTPA. This reform involved—among other actions—drafting new directives, such as ICD 208 (*Write for Maximum Utility*)² and eventually a “best practices” guide to help analysts understand and apply the standards prescribed in ICD 203 (*Analytic Standards*).³ My training as a historian, however, kept prompting me to ask the question where did these analytic standards originate? Could this significant effort to ensure the IC produced quality intelligence be linked entirely to the 9/11 and Iraq Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) intelligence failures that drove the passage of the 2004 IRTPA?

The more immediate and direct origins of this book can be traced to a renovated Tuscan townhouse in the summer of 2011 where—without television and access only to a laptop—I began writing an article that was later published as “Analytic Tradecraft and the Intelligence Community: Enduring Value, Intermittent Emphasis.”⁴ This article traced the origins of many of the analytic standards contained in ICD 203. Over the course of the next 13 years this curiosity, as well as the demands of my job in AIS (including writing and revising ICD 208 and leading a rewrite of ICD 203 in 2014), drove me to explore the roots of other analytic initiatives

“What’s Past Is Prologue”

begun following the 2004 passage of the IRTPA. Consequently, this book reflects more than a decade of research and writings on various aspects of this topic using primary sources from CIA’s Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) declassified database. It also draws on the memoirs of, as well as interviews with, key participants in these analytic changes that emerged in the 1970s.

Besides my own motivations, the relevance of historical context to understanding the need for change provides reason for exploring this topic. Understanding the evolution of the IC in the aftermath of World War II is central to appreciating the significance of the analytic initiatives launched during the 1970s—and, in turn, the role of these initiatives in influencing the IRTPA-inspired reforms and possibly future measures. One factor in the IC’s evolution was its expansion and the division of roles and missions among its members. The 1947 National Security Act created the CIA, established the position of Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), and placed the armed services intelligence elements, including those of the newly established Air Force, under the Secretary of Defense.⁵ This growth marked the establishment of a true national IC. In the years that followed, the community was joined by the National Security Agency in 1952, and by both the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) and DIA in 1961. As the IC expanded especially during the 1950s, however, budgetary constraints spurred disagreement and bureaucratic turf wars among the IC elements that limited reform measures and hindered their implementation.

Postwar evolution in other areas of American life also influenced IC practices. Developments in the business world in the 1950s and 1960s helped shape how the IC served its “customers.” Following World War II, US businesses increasingly focused on surveying their customers in hopes of determining what they desired and how successful firms met their needs with products and services. This ethos of “consumerism” and “marketing” became evident in the IC as well, and sheds light on criticism levied against the IC in the 1970s—as, again, today—and the measures undertaken by the IC in response.

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The threats the United States faced after 1947—threats that exposed shortcomings in the IC's collection and analysis—were even more critical in shaping the environment from which the analytic innovations of the 1970s emerged. The IC's expansion coincided with the height of the Cold War and fears that World War III might erupt. These fears were only exacerbated by the Soviet Union's acquisition of the atomic bomb in 1949 and the outbreak of conflict in Korea a year later—both events prompting criticism of the IC and its analysis. The 1950s witnessed other events where the IC's warning was deemed inadequate, including the 1956 Hungarian uprising and the nearly simultaneous conflict over control of the Suez Canal, as well as the “bomber gap” and “missile gap” controversies.⁶ These warning failures spurred Presidential-appointed task forces and commissions charged with identifying deficiencies in intelligence collection and analysis. For example, in July 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower charged the Killian Task Force, named after Massachusetts Institute of Technology's President James R. Killian, with “studying ways of preventing surprise attack” and “increasing our capacity to get more positive intelligence about the enemy's intentions and capabilities;” Eisenhower commissioned a second committee in 1957, headed by H. Rowan Gaither of the Ford Foundation, to study security in the atomic age.⁷ The 1960s were no less challenging for the IC. The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the escalation of fighting in South Vietnam further highlighted collection shortfalls and analytic disagreements that reinforced the need to address these ongoing problems.

The initiatives launched to raise the quality of intelligence between 1947 and 1970 also provide insight into the IC's priorities and the limited nature of the measures taken to make improvements. Shortfalls in collection—particularly involving the Soviet Union's strategic weapons programs—drew the overwhelming bulk of attention and resources, as illustrated by development of the U-2 high-altitude spy plane and the CORONA satellite. In contrast, most efforts to enhance the IC's analytic practices were limited and intermittent, such as the systematic attempt to assess the accuracy of the IC's assessments through use of “postmortems” and “validity studies,”

which was eventually abandoned,⁸ and programs to codify and standardize how uncertainty was characterized and conveyed in IC products that were pursued in the 1960s on a limited scale and with mixed results.⁹ Other efforts were largely associated with a few individuals, such as CIA officer Sherman Kent. One creation with staying power was Kent's publication in 1955 of the IC's first scholarly journal, *Studies in Intelligence*, designed to give serious thought to how intelligence was conducted.

Finally, today's environment makes this historical examination relevant. Much like President Richard Nixon and his inner circle, the current administration has been critical of the IC and pushed it to improve its analysis. A coincident push for greater efficiencies in government operations likewise is reminiscent of the earlier decade's priorities. Equally significant, the embrace of new technologies in the 1970s—from microprocessor chips to the Global Positioning System—influenced intelligence collection and analysis just as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) are doing in the 21st century. In sum, both past and current events set the stage well for the analytic reforms launched by DCIs Richard Helms, James Schlesinger, William Colby, George Bush, and Stansfield Turner—examined in the pages that follow—and lessons that can be applied today.

Chapter One addresses the historiography surrounding the 1970s and the IC—particularly the drivers of analytic innovation. It examines, among other influences, the dissatisfaction voiced by President Nixon, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, and others in and outside the IC with the quality of intelligence they were receiving in the early 1970s. This chapter identifies the Presidential directives and subsequent IC guidance issued to address the perceived problems.

Chapter Two explores the standup, operation, and dissolution of the National Security Council Intelligence Committee (NSCIC) and the IC's efforts to make intelligence products of greater use to those for whom they were produced. These measures ranged from customer surveys to customer involvement in intelligence production and evaluation. Chapter Three continues this look by examining IC Staff efforts to systematically evaluate the quality of analysis being produced by the IC through the work of the DCI's

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Product Review Division (PRD). The PRD used evaluation criteria that mirror the analytic standards cited in ICD 203 and that are still used today to evaluate IC finished analytic products.

The next three chapters provide case studies detailing initiatives the IC launched during the 1970s to improve analytic processes and tradecraft. Chapter Four examines the manner in which analytic uncertainty was determined and conveyed in IC products. Chapter Five identifies and explores the IC's efforts to employ new analytic methods—many drawn from the social sciences—to conduct and present analysis differently and more effectively. Chapter Six examines an endeavor to institutionalize Devil's Advocacy in IC analysis following the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973.

Chapter Seven discusses broader efforts to revamp the IC's warning structure and products, which began before the 1973 Arab-Israeli War but drew added impetus from this significant warning failure.

Chapter Eight examines a little-known initiative to create a "National Family of Products" designed to improve intelligence support to key decisionmakers before and during crisis situations while also reducing redundancy in intelligence production. This chapter addresses the problems and forces that drove efforts to create the first joint national daily current intelligence product (the National Intelligence Bulletin) and a National Intelligence Task Force Situation Report to be issued during crises.

Chapter Nine examines what in many ways represented the culmination of the IC's efforts to produce more relevant intelligence to serve its most senior customers. Pairing the disestablishment of the Office of National Estimates with the appointment of National Intelligence Officers (NIOs) in October 1973 represented the IC's most innovative and significant response to President Nixon's 1971 directive to improve its analysis and better meet the needs of its key consumers. In response to these consumers' complaints, NIOs were asked to integrate IC production and collection efforts in an efficient, cost-effective manner. Like other initiatives during the decade, these reforms met bureaucratic resistance and proved inadequate but ultimately laid the groundwork for reforms following the passage of the 2004 IRTPA.

“What’s Past Is Prologue”

The book’s final chapter discusses the lessons that the IC’s analytic innovations of the 1970s may offer for today’s community. “Days of Future Past” assesses these innovations and their impact, particularly in view of the 9/11 and WMD intelligence failures, and details their relationship to and influence on IRTPA reforms. Chapter Ten then concludes by exploring how insights from five decades earlier may aid the IC in addressing the increasingly complex and diverse technological and security challenges confronting the United States today.

James Marchio

January 2026

CHAPTER ONE

THE 1970S AND THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY: DECADE OF SCANDAL, FAILURE, AND INVESTIGATION, BUT ALSO INNOVATION



If asked to recall the Intelligence Community (IC) of the 1970s, most Americans and especially historians would probably point to the violations of civil liberties and other abuses that came to light in the middle of the decade. And with good reason.

The IC was under nearly continuous investigation from 1972 through 1976. The Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy (also known as the Murphy Commission), the United States President's Commission on CIA Activities within the United States (better known as the Rockefeller Commission), the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (the Church Committee), and the Pike Committee, which evolved into the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, all investigated facets of IC shortcomings and alleged illegal activities. By 1975

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all four investigations were either active or in the process of submitting their reports. Not surprisingly, 1975 was dubbed the “Year of Intelligence.”¹⁰

Hersh Reveals Some of the CIA’s “Family Jewels”

Seymour Hersh’s exposure of Operation CHAOS was the earliest reporting to reveal contents of the CIA’s “Family Jewels” list of its illegal activities. Although Hersh reported that CIA had compiled dossiers on at least 10,000 US citizens, including members of Congress, the US Government eventually conceded the figure was closer to 300,000. He wrote 34 more articles on the story but soon felt “double-crossed” after learning of a meeting in January 1975 between the *New York Times*’ top editors and President Gerald Ford, in which the president mentioned CIA political assassinations—a comment that Ford subsequently asked to be struck from the record. The editors agreed not to tell Hersh about the disclosure, and Hersh decided to move away from reporting on the CIA.

Source: John Prados, *The Family Jewels: The CIA, Secrecy, and Presidential Power* (University of Texas Press, 2013).

These investigations were spurred by a series of articles written by *New York Times* journalist Seymour Hersh that appeared during the latter half of 1974. In September, Hersh revealed that the CIA, with the approval of National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, had spent \$8 million to influence unions, political parties, and media in Chile to destabilize the government of socialist Salvador Allende who had been overthrown a year earlier in a military coup.¹¹ In December, Hersh then exposed a large-scale CIA program of domestic wiretapping and infiltration of antiwar groups during the Johnson and Nixon administrations (also known as Operation CHAOS), which was conducted in direct violation of the agency’s charter.¹² These actions were identified in an internal CIA document known as the “Family Jewels,” a list of illegal activities carried out by the CIA since its creation. Additional details and corroboration were provided in tell-all books written by former Agency employees in the years that followed.¹³ The ensuing hearings and investigations conducted by the Presidential commission headed by Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, the Senate’s

Persistence of 1970s Concerns Today

The negative image of the IC during the 1970s was reinforced in recent years by Edward Snowden's 2013 revelations of the National Security Agency's domestic and international spying. As a *New York Times* article in June of that year began, "American intelligence agencies, which experienced a boom in financing and public support in the decade after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, have entered a period of broad public scrutiny and skepticism with few precedents since the exposure of spying secrets and abuses led to the historic investigation by the Senate's Church Committee nearly four decades ago."

Linkages to the intelligence abuses of the 1970s persist to this day, as witnessed in the 2023 Congressional debate surrounding the reauthorization of Section 702 of the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and the passage of the Government Surveillance Reform Act. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act established procedures for surveillance and collection of foreign intelligence on US soil, as well as the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to oversee requests for surveillance warrants. Just as Congress enacted the law in 1978 in response to revelations of widespread privacy violations by the Federal Government, fresh concerns about privacy protection and civil liberties spurred the more recent reauthorization debate.



Sources: Scott Shane, "*James R. Clapper, Facts and Fears: Hard Truths from A Life in Intelligence* (Penguin Books, 2019), 214–49 (for an insider view of Snowden leaks and their impact); Elizabeth Goitein and Noah Chauvin, "The Year of Section 702 Reform, Part IV: The Government Surveillance Reform Act," *Just Security*, November 7, 2023, <https://www.justsecurity.org/89786/the-year-of-section-702-reform-part-iv-the-government-surveillance-reform-act/>; Jessica Katzenstein, "As FISA Turns 45, Time To Rethink Post-9/11 Mass Surveillance Expansion Under Section 702," *The Hill*, October 29, 2023, <https://thehill.com/opinion/congress-blog/4282617-as-fisa-turns-45-time-to-rethink-post-9-11-mass-surveillance-expansion-under-section-702/>; US Congress, Senate, *Government Surveillance Reform Act* (2023), S. 3234, 118th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/3234>; and *Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act* (1978), P.L. 95-511, 92 Stat. 1783, October 25, 1978, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-1449/pdf/COMPS-1449.pdf>.

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Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, and the House of Representatives' Pike Committee all exposed shortcomings of judgment in IC activities and ultimately led to Congressional legislation mandating increased oversight, restrictions on IC operations, and other reforms included in the issuance in February 1976 of Executive Order 11905, which also placed restrictions on certain foreign intelligence activities.¹⁴

WHITE HOUSE DISDAIN: NIXON, KISSINGER, AND OTHER DRIVERS OF IC REFORM

In addition to public scandal spurring Congressional investigation, the executive branch—arguably the IC's leading customer—held the community in a negative light that compelled change in the 1970s. The Nixon White House's dissatisfaction with the IC was well known. Richard Nixon believed that his narrow defeat to John Kennedy in 1960 was partially due to the IC's misperception of a US "missile gap" with the Soviet Union, and clashes with the IC over other issues such as the purpose and capabilities of the Soviet Union's SS-9 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) contributed to his annoyance.¹⁵ Former Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Richard Helms discussed at length in his memoir Nixon's disdain for the IC and, in particular, the CIA. Upon his reappointment as DCI after Nixon's election in 1968, Helms wrote: "I was pleased to be reappointed, but it did little to shake my longstanding impression of Nixon's antipathy to the Agency." As he explained: "Nixon appeared to be convinced that the Agency had shaped itself into a gentlemen's club dominated by the senior members of the plans directorate—in effect, as one writer reported it, my 'Praetorian Guard.'" ¹⁶

Nixon was not alone in his dissatisfaction. Andrew Marshall, a key member of Dr. Henry Kissinger's National Security Council (NSC) staff, conveyed there "was a sense of general dissatisfaction with the level of 'sophistication' of intelligence production." In fact, Marshall recalled that Kissinger once remarked to him "analyses and commentaries in the newspapers were superior to anything he read in intelligence publications."¹⁷ Another senior policymaker, Assistant Secretary of Defense Robert Ellsworth, was even more far-reaching

in his criticism, asserting: "The principal difficulties which the consumer has in satisfying his intelligence needs generally fall into six areas: management, tasking, uncertainty, evaluation, methodology, and availability."¹⁸ Even one of DCI Helms' advisors acknowledged there were grounds to criticize the IC's performance on some issues, "especially for failure explicitly to acknowledge uncertainty (though for this consumers seldom show gratitude)."¹⁹

Scholars have pointed out that Kissinger's disparagement of the community's intelligence analysis was met by the IC's complaints that he refused to keep analysts informed of his intimate conversations with foreign leaders.²⁰ An argument can be made that, while his criticism was valid in some cases, in other instances it was more attributable to Kissinger's enormous ego and desire to protect his personal power and access to Presidents Nixon and Ford. Yet as the ensuing chapters show, Kissinger and his staff played a central role in driving and shaping many of the analytic initiatives that emerged in the IC between 1972 and 1976. Kissinger's influence is evident in everything from his efforts to get the IC to better serve senior government leaders through the National Security Council Intelligence Committee (NSCIC) to his demands for more sophisticated analytic methods and insistence on earlier and more precise strategic warning.

An Office of Management and Budget (OMB) study, which was titled "A Review of the Intelligence Community" and completed in March 1971 under future DCI James Schlesinger, substantiated several of the problems identified by Kissinger and others in the Nixon administration. The study asserted that the IC's analysis and production had failed to improve on pace with gains in technical collection. The study further noted that "some entirely new organizational units may be needed to perform currently neglected intelligence analysis functions, for example, to conduct research on improved intelligence analysis methods and techniques."²¹ Developments in academia, the business world, and in research think tanks also contributed to the pressure to review how the IC conducted its analysis and engaged with the recipients of that analysis. In particular, the work being done in the "new social sciences" raised questions about why these methods were not being more widely employed in the IC, while business practices fostered a new perspective on policymakers as IC customers and consumers of intelligence.

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Recipients of Analysis as IC Customers

As noted in the Preface, developments in the business world increased pressure to review not only how the IC conducted its analysis but also how well it served its “customers.” Andrew Marshall observed, in a December 1972 progress report on the NSCIC working group sent to Henry Kissinger: “There is nothing equivalent to consumer or market research undertaken by the intelligence community. They show almost no real effort to understand what the consumers need.” When James Schlesinger arrived as DCI in early 1973, he reportedly was convinced that “something was wrong [with the IC] and that adjustments in marketing procedures offered the possibility of immediate payoff.” As he saw it, the community was working under the assumption that “the customer will call if he needs something, if he doesn’t call, he is satisfied.” William Colby, who replaced Schlesinger as DCI, apparently held similar concerns. One of the factors prompting his decision to create National Intelligence Officer (NIO) positions in October 1973 was his belief that they would be “active in marketing and systematically [feeding] back market research to the DCI and his production and collection elements.”

Comparable business influences were evident in a request the Murphy Commission in September 1974 made of Robert Macy—a retired economist who had served in the Bureau of the Budget (OMB’s predecessor), the Agency for International Development, and the United Nations. Macy was asked to assess whether and how “the US Intelligence Community could quickly transform itself from an administratively regulated system to a quasi-market system (nonetheless constrained by consumer and producer-agency budget appropriations ceilings).”

The Center for the Study of Intelligence undertook a study in 1976 at the direction of CIA’s Deputy Director for Intelligence to review “the present market for CIA’s finished intelligence product” and “forecast the direction of change in that market over the next five to ten years.” The study noted that its linchpin assumption was that “the nature of CIA’s finished intelligence product is and will be largely determined by the shape of the intelligence market.”

Sources: “Memorandum From the Director of the Net Assessment Group, National Security Council (Marshall) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),” June 30, 1972, Doc. 279, in ed. David C. Humphrey, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume II, Organization and Management of US Foreign Policy, 1969-1972* (US Government Printing Office, 2006), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/>

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frus1969-76v02/d279; "Marketing of Intelligence: Product and Services," March 3, 1982, CIA-RDP83B01027R000100050018-3, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp-83b01027r000100050018-3>; "Intelligence Markets for Missourian Skeptics," September 4, 1974, CIA-RDP80M01133A001000080030-7, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp-80m01133a001000080030-7>; and Ross Cowey, "The Future Market for Finished Intelligence," *Studies in Intelligence* 20, no.4 (Winter 1976), <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/studies-in-intelligence/archives/vol-20-no-4/the-future-market-for-finished-intelligence/>.

President Nixon moved to address the perceived shortcomings outlined in the OMB study, issuing a directive in November 1971 that addressed the organization and management of the US foreign intelligence community. As Nixon noted, "the need for an improved intelligence product and for greater efficiency in the use of resources allocated to intelligence is urgent." Laying out multiple objectives for the IC, including improving the "quality, scope, and timeliness of the community's product," the Presidential directive drove IC actions and programs and shaped the environment in which the discussion of analytic quality and new analytic methods and techniques emerged. To advance these efforts, the NSCIC was established to "give direction and guidance on national substantive intelligence needs and provide for a continuing evaluation of intelligence products from the viewpoint of the intelligence consumer." For his part, the DCI was assigned additional community responsibilities and an augmented staff to discharge them.²²

More detailed guidance on the IC's product improvement program emerged in a plan drafted by the deputy to the DCI for National Intelligence Programs Evaluation that was released shortly after the November 1971 Presidential directive. Besides reiterating the guidance to establish the NSCIC, this plan directed the setup of a separate operating entity to handle what hereafter was called "the Product Improvement function," with a focus on four areas: product evaluation, production function study, pilot or prototype production analysis study, and intelligence objectives and priorities preparation.²³ During the next five years these efforts were reflected in the agenda of the NSCIC and its working group, addressed in Chapter Two, with much of the work led and executed by the IC Staff's Product Review Group and its successor the Product Review Division, as discussed in Chapter Three.

SCHOLARLY GAP: FOCUS ON FAILURES, NOT INNOVATIVE REFORMS

Beyond IC scandals, investigations, and presidential disdain, historians and intelligence scholars have written at length on the multiple intelligence failures that occurred during the decade (Fig. 1). Shortcomings in intelligence collection and analysis were evident in the failure to adequately warn key policymakers before the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, India's 1974 nuclear test, the loss of South Vietnam in 1975, and—later in the decade—the fall of the Shah in Iran. Indicative of this focus on intelligence failure is the IC's treatment in intelligence history textbooks, such as Christopher Andrew's *For the President's Eyes Only* and Jeffrey T. Richelson's *A Century of Spies*,²⁴ and in works on strategic warning. Erik Dahl's *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond*, for example, discusses the 1973 Middle East War as Dahl examines factors contributing to warning failures and successes.²⁵ In *Why Intelligence Fails*, Robert Jervis uses lessons from the 1979 Iranian Revolution to highlight similarities to and differences from the elements that led to failure in the 2003 Iraq War.²⁶

Factors contributing to these failures, such as the structure and organization of the IC, also have received considerable attention. Leading intelligence scholars, such as Richard Betts, Philip Davies, Loch Johnson, Mark Lowenthal, and Amy Zegart, have written extensively on IC organizational issues and misguided or ineffective reform measures to address them.²⁷ Roots for this academic scrutiny of flaws in the IC organizational structure can be seen in the 1970s work of the Congressional Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy. As available in the CIA Freedom of Information Act declassified database, documents from 1974 show that the Murphy Commission pursued a “study plan” that included, among other areas of investigation, “intelligence and policymaking in the institutional context.”²⁸

Yet, within the scholarly body of work on lessons learned from the IC's evolution during the 1970s, *analytic innovation* during that decade is seldom discussed. If addressed, discussion of the IC's efforts to improve analysis

most often focuses on the infamous “Team A/Team B” exercise in competitive analysis of 1976 or is buried in larger assessments measuring the performance of the DCIs who served during the decade.

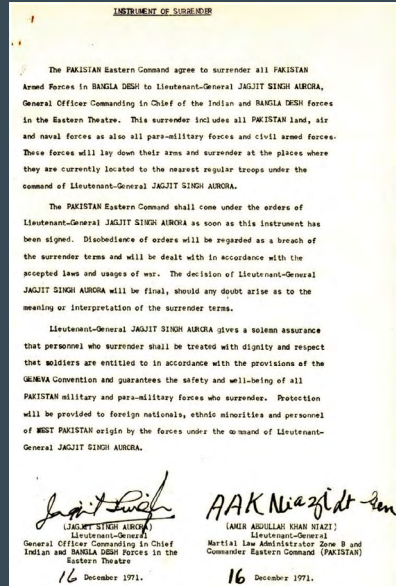
The “Team A/Team B experiment,” further discussed in Chapter Six, rightly received attention for what it was (politicization) and what it was not (a legitimate exercise in competitive analysis). As British historian Philip Davies wrote concerning the exercise: “What is critical from the perspective of intelligence community management is both the divisive effect of the exercise and its political manipulation.” Davies concluded: “Regardless of the merits of competitive or alternative assessment, Team B’s composition and collective conduct blurred the lines between analysis and advocacy.”²⁹ Still, in focusing on the 1976 trial of “Team A/Team B” analysis, scholars largely ignored the broader array of approaches to alternative analysis and other innovative means for strengthening intelligence analysis that the IC explored during the 1970s.

Similarly, studies on the actions and accomplishments of the DCIs who led the IC during the 1970s only briefly examine the community’s analytic practices and the innovation that occurred in those years. Harold Ford’s formerly classified work, *William E. Colby as Director*, focuses on DCI Colby’s larger initiatives, such as the guidance documents designed to drive resource allocation and the intelligence decisionmaking process. Ford, to his credit, at least acknowledges the innovative nature of Colby’s creation and use of NIOs, Key Intelligence Questions, and an elaborate evaluation process to ascertain the IC’s success in meeting key policymakers’ intelligence needs and at what cost.³⁰ In *Directors of Central Intelligence*, Douglas Garthoff also dedicates his attention to issues of organization and budget, with limited discussion of analytic initiatives.³¹

Scholars outside the IC also have only briefly touched on measures introduced by DCIs in the 1970s to better serve and engage senior policymakers, evaluate the quality of intelligence they were provided, and employ new analytic methods to reach and present their findings. Initiatives to restructure how and who provided strategic warning, as well as joint, IC-wide current intelligence and crisis support, likewise have largely been overlooked. For

Key Intelligence Failures of the 1970s

Author's assessment of key intelligence failures and their causes



1971 (December): Indo-Pakistan War: Lack of a focal point for the development, coordination, and transmission of consumer intelligence needs to the IC, as well as the IC's shortcomings in clearly communicating key judgments, contributed to the surprise.



1973 (September): Chilean Coup d'état: Although IC analysts had done well in covering the increasingly turbulent domestic Chilean scene, they were remiss in not adequately warning policymakers of the likelihood of a coup in the near term.

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1973 (October): Yom Kippur War: IC analysts were firmly committed to the (mistaken) proposition that an Arab attack could only result in a disastrous Arab defeat and thus an attack would not occur.

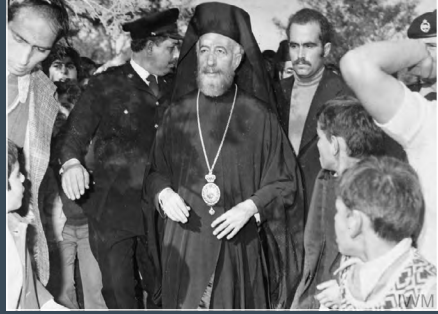


1973 (October): OPEC Embargo: The IC failed to warn of an ongoing shift in Saudi attitudes and incorrectly assessed oil prices would fall in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War—faulty judgments attributed in part to a failure to conduct alternative analysis.

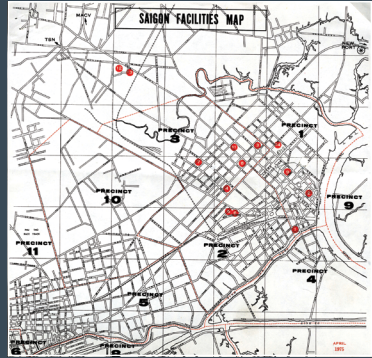


1974 (May): Indian Nuclear Test: Consumer interest in and IC production on Indian intentions and capabilities waned after the publication of a 1972 National Intelligence Estimate on the subject.

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1974 (July): Greek-Turkish War over Cyprus: IC analysts highlighted and implicitly endorsed a report from an “untested source” that the Greek military leader would not move against Cyprus in the near term.



1975 (April): Fall of South Vietnam: Although accurately assessing North Vietnamese intentions, the IC did not foresee South Vietnam's decision to withdraw from major parts of the country without a fight and did not warn of the impending collapse of major elements of the South Vietnamese armed forces.



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1975 (May): Mayaguez Incident: The US Government—intelligence and operational policy communities alike—lacked effective machinery for warning US merchant ships of possible hostile actions; analysts did not see ambiguous reports as harbingers of hostile moves against US ships.



1979 (January): Fall of the Shah of Iran: Multiple factors contributed to the IC's failure to warn, including preexisting beliefs about the Shah, Iran, and Iranian opposition groups, as well as the paucity and ambiguity of the information coming from the field.

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example, Richard Betts, one of the few scholars to note some of these initiatives, largely dismisses efforts to improve consumer satisfaction and engagement and to evaluate the quality of the community's analysis.³²

Perhaps scholars within and beyond the IC can be forgiven to a degree for their inattention because the DCIs of the decade themselves, including Richard Helms and William Colby, recorded incomplete reports for posterity on the initiatives to improve intelligence analysis during their tenures. Helms, for example, gave short shrift to the influence of policymakers—including prominent consumers of IC analysis—on these initiatives as he failed in his memoir to cite the 1971 Presidential Directive that drove analytic and process changes in the IC for the first half of the 1970s.³³ And Robert Gates, who served on the National Security Council from 1974 to 1979 and would become DCI in the early 1990s, downplayed the impact of the 1970s IC initiatives, characterizing them as “largely slow and evolutionary” and “in terms of the way business was conducted day to day, change was quite incremental,” even as he acknowledged the “flurries of activity under directors such as ADM Stansfield Turner, William Colby, and James Schlesinger.”³⁴

Most surprisingly, the scholarly literature published following the passage of the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) has failed to acknowledge the 1970s roots of many of the analytic innovations pursued by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) after 2005 or, if done so, only vaguely. Valuable works by several scholars involved in designing and implementing the post-2005 “Analytic Transformation”—including Thomas Fingar, Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, and Richard Immerman—understandably focus on the actions taken by the ODNI and the IC's response to this “cultural revolution.”³⁵ Earlier efforts at analytic innovation are noted, but usually in passing and without detail, such as Tucker's recognition that “the ODNI has tackled reform in some cases by reinvigorating projects previously unable to gain community-wide support.”³⁶

In summary, analytic innovation in the IC in the 1970s has remained an understudied topic. Other issues—IC abuses, intelligence failures, and the

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need for Congressional oversight—demanded and have received the focus of scholars and intelligence practitioners. The degree and importance of dissatisfaction voiced by senior consumers with the quality of intelligence they were receiving required action, however, and this challenge was met with concerted effort and innovation by the IC. Understanding the community's response must begin with an examination of the NSCIC's establishment and the agenda it pursued between 1972 and 1976.

CHAPTER TWO

“MAKING THE INTELLIGENCE PRODUCT OF GREATER USE”: LESSONS FROM THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE



Dissatisfaction among senior policymakers in the Nixon administration with Intelligence Community (IC) analytic products and processes, as noted in Chapter One, drove multiple initiatives to improve the IC during the early and mid-1970s. None were more immediate than those directed at eliciting greater consumer feedback and involvement in the production and evaluation of “finished” national-level intelligence. These initiatives sought to capture and infuse consumer insights into IC processes or, in the words of a 1975 IC memo, make “the intelligence product of greater use to those for whom it is produced.”³⁷

This chapter examines the role played by the National Security Council Intelligence Committee (NSCIC) and its working group, whose mission was to develop and direct these initiatives. Established in December 1971 and abolished four years later, the NSCIC has received scant attention from

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intelligence historians despite the importance of its key objectives and the reasons for its demise. Harold Ford's formerly classified work, *William E. Colby as Director*, only briefly discusses the NSCIC, asserting it "produced nothing of consequence and in the end simply atrophied."³⁸ Scholars outside the IC have given similarly short shrift to the NSCIC and its work. For example, Richard Betts, in his seminal article "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable," devotes two lines to the NSCIC as part of his discussion of IC reform, noting: "At a higher level, a National Security Council Intelligence Committee was established in 1971 to improve responsiveness of intelligence staff to the needs of policymakers. But since the subcabinet-level consumers who made up the committee were pressed by other responsibilities, it lapsed in importance and was eventually abolished."³⁹ By far the most significant discussion of the NSCIC—albeit limited in scope—is found in Philip Davies' *Intelligence and Government in Britain and the United States*. Davies, like Betts, discusses the NSCIC within his chapter on intelligence reform, providing a concise review of the NSCIC's history, its shortcomings, and its place in the overall development and management of the IC.⁴⁰ This chapter fills the gaps in the scholarly record on the ups and downs of the NSCIC and its working group's efforts to produce intelligence analysis that better addressed the consumer's needs—and the lessons learned that informed later IC initiatives.

NSCIC'S STANDUP AND EFFORTS DURING ITS FIRST YEAR (DECEMBER 1971-DECEMBER 1972)

Henry Kissinger, Nixon's National Security Advisor and chairman of the new NSCIC, acted quickly on the Presidential directive of November 1971 to improve the IC's effectiveness, convening the committee's first meeting on December 3. Noting this was an organizational meeting, Dr. Kissinger stated that the group of mostly senior intelligence consumers "should meet at fairly lengthy intervals," with the primary function "to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the product and to determine what else might be needed." He recommended that the NSCIC's staff work be carried out

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by a working group chaired by a representative of the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI). He then asked each member to prepare a statement of "what his department's requirements for intelligence are," suggesting the group meet in about two weeks to examine the lists and agree upon "a charter and a work program." In the ensuing discussion, DCI Richard Helms agreed it was not necessary to meet very frequently but "stressed the importance of this committee, since this is the first time that the intelligence community has ever had any formal means of receiving the views of its principal consumers on the product." Helms also noted that he thought "it was important not only to assess what is needed and how good it is but also what is not needed."⁴¹

In accordance with Kissinger's direction, the NSCIC working group met for the first time on December 13, 1971, to begin work on its charter and "work program." Chaired by the Deputy DCI for National Intelligence Programs Evaluation (D/DCI/NIPE) Bronson Tweedy, the working group focused on identifying organizational intelligence requirements and mechanisms to elicit and receive feedback from consumer product evaluation. Andrew Marshall, providing NSC guidance, began the session by suggesting "the initial problem was to devise some systematic method of arriving at consumer needs." Although he had "no fixed view" on the manner in which consumer needs were to be reported and monitored, he offered two basic approaches: "[T]he first a systematic cataloging of needs by consumer with some expression of the consumer's view of the relative importance, and second, an approach which selected specific needs and provided a detailed treatment." ADM John Weinel, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) representative, stated that "the group ought to be specific in identifying the consumer, particularly with respect to echelon," while the State Department's Ray Cline warned that "merely asking a consumer 'What do you want?' is of little or no value." Others in the working group noted that mechanisms already existed to receive consumer feedback, such as identifying "gaps and new areas of effort desired in the NIEs [National Intelligence Estimates]." Tweedy concluded the meeting by requesting that all members submit "Consumer Need Statements" before January 17, 1972, with the

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next working group session scheduled for February 4 when those needs and a work agenda would be discussed.⁴²

Tweedy's memo to the NSCIC working group members on January 27, 1972, laid the groundwork for the upcoming February session. Acknowledging that the working group's "Need Statements" were "quite varied," Tweedy wrote that he anticipated "a rather lively discussion."⁴³ The 12 action proposals received fell into three categories: consumer needs, product evaluation, and production improvement. During the February 4 meeting, discussion touched on all three areas as well as the approval process for the "Working Agenda." Dr. Albert Hall, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Intelligence) made clear that the Department of Defense (DoD) position on working group projects was that they "should be... submitted to and specifically approved by the NSCIC itself," adding "the projects submitted to the NSCIC should be few in number and essentially interdepartmental in character."⁴⁴ Ultimately the group selected four projects for NSCIC approval as working group study efforts. Two were descriptive studies of "intelligence and intelligence-related activities responding to US Government needs for intelligence on narcotics traffic and [on] international economic, financial, and commercial developments." The other two involved a "case study" of the India-Pakistan conflict of 1971 and product evaluations of selected intelligence inputs to National Security Study Memorandums (NSSMs), the latter reportedly being favored by Kissinger.⁴⁵ The four projects were forwarded to Kissinger for presentation at the next meeting of the NSCIC, which was anticipated later that month.⁴⁶

During the next six months the NSCIC working group met four times and, although some attention was devoted to establishing the working group's operating procedures, the meeting agendas focused largely on the progress of the work program identified in February. At the June meeting, the group discussed an evaluation of NSSM-69 on US nuclear policy in Asia and its importance. Tweedy declared that "since this would be the first of a series of evaluations to be considered by the Working Group, he felt focus should be on two matters: first, how could the approach taken, the format, the procedures, etc., be improved upon; and second, a clear understanding of the purpose of the exercise—which is to make a synthesis and

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draw conclusions for the NSCIC so that the NSCIC can issue guidance to the intelligence community in accordance with the President's 5 November directive,"⁴⁷ referring to Nixon's 1971 directive on IC production and management. Marshall said he believed "the mechanism of the effort had gone well, although he would want a better mix of participants next time (with fewer who had actually been involved in developing the intelligence inputs)."⁴⁸ Privately, Marshall was much more critical of the working group's efforts, writing to Kissinger at the end of June that "there appears to be no intention to develop the comprehensive product improvement program asked for in the President's memorandum."⁴⁹

NSCIC Working Group Projects Not Pursued

As important as the projects selected by the NSCIC working group were those that it rejected. For example, a "Survey of Consumer Reaction to Intelligence Products" was not chosen based on general agreement within the working group that "questionnaires had had poor results in the past" and were of "doubtful value." Partly underlying these sentiments was a study completed in response to an NSCIC tasking to examine multiple IC surveys completed between 1955 and 1971. That study concluded: "The record of attempts to survey consumer reaction to intelligence publications in order that intelligence producers better understand how to make their products more useful is not encouraging."

Sources: "Notes on Second Meeting, NSCIC Working Group, 4 February 1972," February 4, 1972, CIA-RDP84B00506R000100020026-5, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp84b00506r000100020026-5>; "Minutes of the 4 February Meeting," February 8, 1972, CIA-RDP84B00506R000100020024-7, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp84b00506r000100020024-7>; and "Consumer Reaction to Intelligence Products: A Historical Review," February 29, 1972, CIA-RDP80M01133A000900020001-7, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80m01133a000900020001-7>.

By the fall of 1972, the IC Staff had completed the India-Pakistan conflict study—the most significant of those directed by the NSCIC working group in February to determine how well the IC supported top-level decisionmakers during periods of political-military crisis—and its findings were

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center stage at the working group session on October 3.⁵⁰ Two days later the working group forwarded a memorandum on the study to the NSCIC chairman, seeking to initiate a discussion of the “major issues and problem areas highlighted by the study.” The memo identified three problem areas of particular importance to the NSCIC’s task of giving guidance to the IC: policymakers’ expression of their intelligence needs, IC communication of intelligence judgments to policymakers, and the content and quality of the intelligence response to policymakers’ needs.⁵¹

Key Areas for Improvement

After reviewing the IC Staff’s study of intelligence support to policymakers during the India-Pakistan conflict of 1971, the NSCIC working group cited the following fundamental concerns and encouraged the NSCIC to issue guidance for improvement:

- Policymakers’ expression of their intelligence needs,
- IC communication of intelligence judgments to policymakers, and
- Content and quality of the intelligence response to policymakers’ needs.



Source: “India-Pakistan Crisis Study,” October 5, 1972, CIA-RDP98-00204R000100140074-4, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/cia-rdp98-00204r000100140074-4>.

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The study found that more attention to formally expressing intelligence needs was required of senior policymakers, particularly at the outset of a crisis, noting that while "the use of informal channels is valuable," it "can result in some confusion, lack of control, and, perhaps most important of all, a poorly organized sense of issues and direction on the part of the intelligence community." On communicating intelligence judgments to decisionmakers, the study concluded: "This is an extremely important problem and there may be a need for some system of flagging top-priority intelligence data and judgments for the attention of such key officials as members of the NSC." In doing so, it emphasized "the need for more attention to providing first-rate executive summaries and constant attention to clear, strong exposition of key judgments by the intelligence community." The findings also acknowledged other problem areas, such as "the adequacy of estimates and information on Indian and Soviet intentions" and "the amount of raw information forwarded to high-level consumers." The memo concluded by recommending that, after the NSCIC members had an opportunity to review the India-Pakistan conflict study, the committee should meet to bring "the lessons and issues more sharply into focus and to discuss some of the implications for the interface between policymakers and the intelligence community."⁵²

The working group's India-Pakistan conflict study was placed on the proposed agenda for a NSCIC meeting scheduled for November 29, 1972—a session never held, for reasons that remain unclear.⁵³ In an "urgent action" memo sent to Dr. Kissinger on November 27, Marshall cited the infrequency of NSCIC meetings, noting that the committee had last convened a year earlier. He suggested it would be useful at this next meeting to "review what has been done since the last meeting to implement the President's guidance of November 5, 1971" and "discuss how best in the future to get the NSCIC to perform its primary function—issuing authoritative guidance to Helms and the community."⁵⁴ Despite Marshall's efforts to jumpstart the NSCIC, the committee failed to convene and its working group did not meet again until April 1973 when several other NSCIC-sponsored studies were discussed.

NSCIC SHORTFALLS SPUR CRITIQUES AND RECONFIGURATION EFFORTS (JANUARY 1973-SEPTEMBER 1974)

The lack of action by the NSCIC and the limited accomplishments of its working group did not go unnoticed by their members from both the intelligence and policymaking communities, but it would take nearly two years to rejuvenate the effort to strengthen intelligence consumer-producer interaction. As Tweedy, head of the working group, had admitted in a progress report to the DCI in September 1972:

I think the thing to keep in mind as you peruse this is the fact that the guidelines of the Working Group did not go beyond the very general language of the 5 November directive. We have thus been feeling our way and almost all that has been undertaken has been with the objective of pinpointing areas in the intelligence production process, in the broadest sense, which need improvement. If we are successful in this, even to a limited degree, we should then be in a position... to report to the NSCIC, in the expectation that that body would issue instructions that could form the nucleus for a positive improvement program.⁵⁵

Concerns about the effectiveness of the NSCIC and its working group deepened during the first six months of 1973. In February, a presentation on the activities of the NSCIC working group was prepared for new DCI James Schlesinger—author of the March 1971 OMB study that had prompted Nixon's Presidential directive on the IC that year. The presentation featured the working group's completion of four studies: intelligence support to policymakers in international crisis situations, ways to improve intelligence responsiveness on NSSMs, the adequacy of available intelligence for US needs in particular subject matter areas, and descriptive studies intended to provide background information for members of the working group. Echoing Tweedy's comments from six months earlier, the draft DCI presentation concluded: "Overall, during its first year of operation the working group has been feeling its way. Its undertakings have been intended to pinpoint areas

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in which improved interaction between the intelligence consumers and producers could result in a product more responsive to user needs. The program has proved time-consuming, and difficulties have arisen in obtaining manpower of the type desired, but progress is being made."⁵⁶

In March 1973, Marshall provided a more critical review of the NSCIC working group in a memorandum for the record:

I do not consider the net efforts of the NSCIC's Working Group to be entirely satisfactory. After more than a year in existence only three studies have been completed, one more is nearing completion, one has been cancelled, and one has gone virtually nowhere despite four months of work.... The quality of work in the studies has been mixed.... Also, the general thrust of the studies' conclusions has been on local management and analytical problems in intelligence which do not require the attention of NSCIC Principals. Larger issues have surfaced infrequently, mostly at my initiative.⁵⁷

Marshall attributed the problems to several factors. At the top of his list was "producers dominate the Working Group and the study teams but seem generally unable to criticize themselves." He also asserted that "members of the Working Group, in the absence of some interest from the Principals, have not aggressively pursued their tasks" and suggested "the review effort—and the basic tasks of the NSCIC—may be too demanding in some cases to be handled by part-time interagency groups of analysts."⁵⁸ Marshall's pessimistic assessment of the NSCIC working group's progress mirrored his overall negative view of the IC. Writing to Kissinger five months earlier, Marshall had remarked: "I share, I believe, your doubts that the intelligence bureaucracy can even routinely produce the high-quality intelligence analysis you would find satisfactory. But they can do a lot better than they are now doing."⁵⁹

Following up in May 1973 on the concerns he had expressed to Kissinger, Marshall sent further observations and recommendations to William Colby, who was serving as CIA's Executive Director and tapped to become the DCI in September. Marshall noted the working group had

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done “some useful work in studying the past performance of the intelligence community and ought to continue the work, although I believe it should focus more attention on the quality of the product.” He felt, however, that the area where it had “never succeeded in even getting started [was] that of supporting the NSCIC in carrying out its designated task of giving guidance to the intelligence community on the substantive intelligence needs of the top-level policy process.” Marshall suggested how this might be accomplished: “First, it can review the Planning Guidance to provide comment on its assumptions as to major policy problems, and to add any additional insights and views of its own. Second, it would be useful for the Working Group to describe perhaps a half dozen or so of the major issue areas of high-priority interest to the top-level decisionmakers.” Marshall concluded the memo with additional recommendations, including conducting further research on top-level consumer needs and focusing product improvement initiatives on the “treatment and communication of uncertainty from analysts to consumers.”⁶⁰

Marshall's criticisms and the growing frustrations among the DCI's staff with the NSCIC's lack of progress spurred a push for Kissinger's direct engagement. At the end of July 1973, Colby sent a memorandum to NSCIC Chairman Kissinger boldly stating: “I believe it is essential to improve the user impact on the production of intelligence, and I consider the NSCIC channel most valuable in this respect. However, the intelligence community has not received as much guidance from NSCIC as it should. In my view there are two reasons for this: First, the heavy demands on your time have made it difficult to assemble the NSCIC; second, the Working Group has been too dominated by intelligence producers.”⁶¹ Colby proposed four actions for Kissinger's consideration: name a deputy chairman for the NSCIC so that sessions could be held when Kissinger was unavailable; have other NSCIC principals designate deputies for the same purpose; make the working group chairman a consumer, such as Marshall; and add to the NSCIC membership a representative of the Federal Government's economic activities.⁶²

Although Marshall recommended in September 1973 that Kissinger consider Colby's proposed NSCIC reforms—particularly given Kissinger's

newly added responsibilities as Secretary of State and the need "to institutionalize the important NSCIC functions of guidance and product review"⁶³—no immediate action was taken on Colby's proposals and no NSCIC working group sessions were held for 15 months. Undeterred, Colby wrote another memo to Kissinger in September 1974: "I recommend that the Working Group be completely reconstituted to make it primarily a committee of 'intelligence users' in keeping with the mission of the NSCIC, and that representation be limited to one per NSCIC member."⁶⁴

NEW PLAYERS AND INITIATIVES, ALTHOUGH TRACTION LIMITED (OCTOBER 1974-NOVEMBER 1975)

When the NSCIC working group next met—in October 1974—its leadership and membership had changed dramatically, reflecting one of the most significant recommendations advanced by DCI Colby and supported by Marshall: increasing consumer representation in the working group (Fig. 1).⁶⁵ With the exception of LTG Samuel Wilson, the new Deputy DCI for the IC (D/DCI/IC) who now chaired the NSCIC working group, no IC seniors were in the room.⁶⁶ Instead Wilson had formed an Intelligence Panel—with deputy-director-level representation from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Department of State Bureau of Intelligence Research (State/INR), National Security Agency (NSA), and the National Intelligence Officers (NIO)—to support the working group. The panel's mission was to enable key elements of the IC to "play a consultative role on problems to be considered by the Working Group" and provide a channel to keep the IC informed of the working group's actions. Envisioned functions included proposing "matters on which NSCIC guidance is needed" and reviewing "papers of direct intelligence import prepared within the Community for submission to the Working Group for review."⁶⁷ In Wilson's view, the Intelligence Panel would be "the 'point of the plow share' as the NSCIC plows its furrow."⁶⁸ The panel held its first meeting on October 25 and discussed the topics to be raised at the working group meeting five days later.⁶⁹

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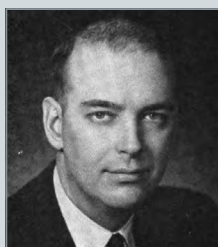
Figure 1. Customer Representation Now Defines NSCIC Working Group

New “consumer/user” representatives joined the NSCIC working group at its meeting in October 1974:

- George Vest, Director, Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, Department of State
- Robert Ellsworth, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
- William Morrell, Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury on National Security
- LTG John Elder, Jr., Director, J-5 (Plans and Policy), Joint Chiefs of Staff
- Richard Ober, National Security Council; representative for Henry Kissinger and Executive Secretary of the NSCIC.



George Vest



Robert Ellsworth



William Morrell (fifth from left)

Source: “NSCIC Working Group and Its Intelligence Panel,” November 1, 1974, CIA-RDP80M01082A000200080005-1, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80m01082a000200080005-1>.

A Fresh Start

LTG Wilson set a new tone when he opened the October 30 session of the NSCIC working group—much as he had with the Intelligence Panel. He began by expressing his hope that “the user/consumer membership of the new [working] group would result in focus on user-oriented agenda items directly relating to the NSCIC mission of providing guidance on substantive intelligence matters and on evaluation of intelligence products from the standpoint of the intelligence consumer.” After briefly explaining the changes to the working group, he then addressed the six agenda items,

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ranging from comments on the DCI's planning documents *Perspectives for Intelligence, 1975-1980* and *Key Intelligence Questions (KIQ) for 1975* to the National/Tactical Intelligence Interface. Wilson concluded the meeting by stating that "the Working Group could be the 'engine that makes the NSCIC work' and could make a dynamic input to solutions of longstanding problems."⁷⁰

Wilson's hopes and plans for the working group appeared to come to fruition when its members reconvened on November 20, 1974. The group had agreed at its October meeting to conduct a "candid discussion of what the members consider is effective and what is not effective in the manner with which the Intelligence Community respond[s] to the needs of intelligence consumers." At the "Critique of Intelligence" session in November, they were expected to provide their personal views as well as what their organizations liked and did not like about the intelligence products now being provided.⁷¹

By far the most vocal and critical participant at the session was Robert Ellsworth, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. Ellsworth began by noting "intelligence consumers often have difficulty finding out whom to ask to respond to their intelligence needs" and believed a handbook for consumers on "the allocation of production responsibilities, status of capabilities, etc." would be useful. He then asserted "consumers are uneasy about receiving 'unqualified conclusions' from the Community," suggesting it "would be helpful if the Community were more fulsome concerning the qualifications and limitations which applied to particular judgments" and believed "consumers should know what the parameters of the uncertainties are." Richard Ober, the NSC representative, asserted that his colleagues were of the same mind, saying "they want more evaluation," to which LTG Wilson responded that "a more explicit qualification of uncertainties seemed needed and that this subject would be taken up with the Intelligence Panel."⁷²

Ellsworth raised several additional issues with intelligence analysis that resonated with NSCIC working group members. The first was that consumers lacked a means of providing feedback to the IC on its products. While he acknowledged this was in part "a problem for consumers," Ellsworth

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thought “the Community could be ‘more invitational’ for guidance on its future efforts.” The State Department’s Leslie Brown, standing in for NSCIC working group member George Vest, concurred and argued there was “need for a systematic process for periodic feedback.” Some of this feedback, as various NSCIC working group members pointed out, could occur via consumer participation in IC product evaluation and production processes. When Brown suggested that consumers help conduct postmortem studies of NIEs, Ellsworth pushed further, recommending that consumers participate in drafting terms of reference for NIEs and “wondered if it would be out of the question to allow key consumers to review the penultimate drafts of important estimates.” Although a few working group members pointed out that mechanisms for consumers to comment on and influence estimates already existed through their organization’s intelligence representatives, Ober urged that “a sub-group should look at the NIEs and NIAMS [National Intelligence Analytic Memorandums].”⁷³ Having consumers evaluate IC products surprisingly may have drawn support from the DCI. In comments 17 months earlier, Colby expressed his belief that a review of intelligence production could be accomplished “best by a panel representing the Department of State, the NSC, etc.,” with individuals on this panel “responsible for assessing the accuracy and adequacy of the intelligence from the viewpoint of the consumer departments/agencies.”⁷⁴

Lack of timeliness and overly restrictive classifications also were identified as troubling issues. Ellsworth observed “a timely rough draft is better than a too-late final paper,” adding “there seemed to be a Community attitude that only SI/TK cleared personnel had ‘a need to know’ and although others finally get a sanitized version, timeliness is lost in providing the latter product.” RADM Robert Hilton from the JCS J-5 (Plans and Policy) echoed these comments, saying “he would like to see the information disseminated in a classification which workers can use.” When the meeting ended after nearly two hours, LTG Wilson promised that “today’s comments would be reviewed to identify follow-on actions and a memorandum would be prepared.”⁷⁵ Wilson’s promised follow-on memo appeared in early December with a program formulated around three elements: briefings,

short summations in handout form, and action projects.⁷⁶ As the specifics associated with each of these elements evolved over the next four months, this framework shaped the focus and efforts of the NSCIC working group and the DCI's IC Staff for all of 1975.

Pressing Briskly Ahead

The NSCIC working group and IC Staff implemented Wilson's action program even as it continued to be discussed during the next two working group sessions.⁷⁷ At the meeting on January 29, 1975, Deputy to the DCI for National Intelligence Officers (D/DCI/NIO) George Carver hit on key areas of working group concern as he briefed on NIO roles and responsibilities, explaining that "each NIO must be cognizant of intelligence resources in his area, know how these resources can be brought to bear" and "is expected to be knowledgeable of user needs and of the capabilities of Intelligence Community consumers and producers."⁷⁸ The IC Staff produced informational papers on subjects such as "Consumer Contact Points within Production Elements of the Intelligence Community" and the "DCI's Family of National Intelligence Guidance Documents," in response to comments and questions raised by NSCIC working group members.⁷⁹ A paper dealing with "the difficult and longstanding problem of expressing uncertainty in intelligence estimates" and a "Handbook on the US Intelligence Community" also were under development.⁸⁰

Most significantly, the NSCIC working group pursued "action projects" throughout 1975. At the January session, LTG Wilson flagged projects in three areas: a review of national intelligence publications, development of an effective process for obtaining consumer reaction to particular products, and a mechanism for working group participation in the Key Intelligence Questions (KIQ) process. In response, Ober, the NSC representative, said he hoped that the working group would form a subgroup for product review, noting he would like to discuss at the next meeting how this might be done.⁸¹ Of note and as discussed in Chapter Three, the IC Product Review Division (PRD) had begun systematically evaluating IC analytic products in late 1974.

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Ober's desire to move forward with a subgroup of consumers to evaluate IC analytic products met with NSCIC working group support. Writing on behalf of Assistant Secretary of Defense Ellsworth, his civilian assistant and national security scholar Anthony Cordesman asserted that the Committees on Consumer Evaluation and Consumer Guidance "could be highly useful." Continuing, he wrote: "The committee for 'Consumer Evaluation of Current Intelligence Products' represents an important step forward in developing the kind of detailed consumer evaluation of the intelligence product, which is essential to support the NSCIC, and to provide the Intelligence Community with a user view of its output." Cordesman suggested "such a committee could not only establish suitable procedures for obtaining user views from different agencies but [also] serve as a mechanism for evaluating major products."⁸²

Ober formally proposed that the "Working Group Action Program-Evaluation Subcommittee" be added to the NSCIC's agenda for its meeting on July 2, 1975.⁸³ He envisioned establishing a task force or subcommittee composed of "users of intelligence, rather than producers" as "a first step in our efforts to conduct a systematic evaluation of Intelligence Community product," suggesting the subcommittee's initial assignment would be an evaluation of the IC's current intelligence publications.⁸⁴ In an accompanying outline, Ober identified both the targeted current intelligence products and the criteria to be used in evaluating the content, proposing the latter include: timeliness, clarity, relevance, uniqueness, accuracy, completeness, identification and evaluation of sources, and resolution or evaluation of conflicting reports. Ober's criteria largely mirror the analytic tradecraft standards that would be promulgated by the IC three decades later (Fig. 2).

In the weeks following the NSCIC working group session, preliminary steps were taken to get the subcommittee off the ground. A panel was established, members were selected, several formal and informal meetings were held, and current intelligence product distribution lists were provided in mid-August. But "because of a divergence of views on the approach to be taken, it was decided to return to the Working Group before proceeding."⁸⁵

Figure 2. Product Evaluation Criteria of 1975 Still Used by the IC

The criteria that the NSCIC working group's NSC representative, Richard Ober, proposed for evaluating intelligence products—timeliness, clarity, relevance, uniqueness, accuracy, completeness, identification and evaluation of sources, and resolution or evaluation of conflicting reports—are reflected in Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203 (*Analytic Tradecraft*), which was first promulgated in 2007 and revised and reissued in 2015.

ICD 203 contains five analytic standards:

1. Objective,
2. Independent of political considerations,
3. Timely,
4. Based on all available sources of intelligence, and
5. Implements and exhibits analytic tradecraft standards.

The fifth, "Exhibits analytic tradecraft standards," encompasses nine criteria:

1. Describes quality and credibility of sources,
2. Expresses and explains uncertainty surrounding analytic judgments,
3. Distinguishes between underlying intelligence information and analyst's assumptions and judgments,
4. Incorporates analysis of alternatives,
5. Demonstrates customer relevance,
6. Uses clear and logical argumentation,
7. Explains change or consistency of analytic judgments,
8. Makes accurate judgments, and
9. Incorporates effective visual information where appropriate.

Sources: "NSCIC Working Group Action Program Evaluation of Intelligence Product," N.D., CIA-RDP84B00506R000100130026-3, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp84b00506r000100130026-3>; and ODNI, ICD 203 (*Analytic Standards*), January 2, 2015, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICD/ICD-203.pdf>.

Ultimately the working group approved a limited pilot study to evaluate current intelligence products from a consumer's viewpoint. Ober briefed the NSCIC working group on the Intelligence Evaluation Project (IEP) at

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a meeting on October 22, 1975, where he acknowledged his proposal was more limited in scope than earlier suggested by LTG Wilson but stressed the IEP's thoroughness by surveying consumers first for general impressions on a given publication and then as often as possible for specific comments on a given article or articles. The project would devote one month to the customer survey, followed by six to eight weeks to analyze the responses and to write the final report. The proposal generated considerable discussion that Deputy National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, then chairing the NSCIC working group, ended by directing: "[T]he Working Group must sign off on a detailed program outline before the project is launched." He also "stressed the importance of such a project which is really key to the Working Group's purpose."⁸⁶

Following the meeting, Ober provided working group members with a memo detailing the IEP's purpose and immediate objective—to evaluate major daily intelligence products written for high-level consumers. Four product lines were identified for evaluation: CIA's National Intelligence Bulletin, DIA's Defense Intelligence Notices, State's daily Intelligence Reports, and NSA's SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) Summary. Selected key consumers would be surveyed twice. A preliminary survey would elicit consumer reaction to and general impressions of each publication. Afterward, a questionnaire would be used at least weekly to evaluate individual articles in the selected publications and gather examples to support recommended changes.⁸⁷ The proposed survey evaluation form would collect consumer comments on six questions, including timeliness, usefulness, and relevance, whether the analysis was distinguishable from the intelligence facts, and whether predictions were clearly presented and their probability assessed.⁸⁸ Ober stressed that this project was "the first systematic evaluation of major foreign policy consumers of intelligence under NSCIC auspices" and he expected that similar projects would follow covering estimative and other IC product publications.⁸⁹

In the end the IEP never got off the ground, but several consumer organizations pursued their own evaluations of IC products—offering guidance that might have proved helpful to the community's intelligence

producers if the NSCIC had taken further action. Treasury, for example, selected and critiqued five IC estimates of interest to its consumers. "Most Intelligence Estimates still suffer from being too general," Treasury argued, noting they are "most useful when they are specific and sharply focused on key policy issues." Treasury also offered that "certain Estimates, such as those on country prospects, could be improved considerably by being more dynamic and less descriptive" and that "to get top readership, an NIE must be brief."⁹⁰ Evaluating National Intelligence Analytic Memorandum (NIAM) 35/36-2-75 (*Arab-Israel Hostilities*), the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) acknowledged the NIAM was "a substantial improvement over the previous draft" and "an important experiment in intelligence analysis," but then criticized its "subjective and judgmental method of analysis to estimate the outcome of possible Arab-Israel wars." OSD concluded that the NIAM did "not adequately describe the major limitations in the data and uncertainties in the methods of analysis used in making evaluations."⁹¹ This evaluation was forwarded to NSCIC members in November 1975 for review and comment.⁹² Of note, Secretary Kissinger had earlier forwarded the *Arab-Israel Hostilities* assessment to President Ford, based in part on his staff's recommendation and their judgment that "this NIAM is a considerable improvement on the earlier one on the same subject published last November."⁹³

Crashing Halt

The NSCIC working group's meeting on October 22, 1975, turned out to be its last. Soon after the major shakeup of senior officials on November 4, when Colby was fired, President Ford established an interagency group chaired by presidential counselor Jack Marsh to study the organization and management of the IC, identify options for possible reorganization, and form proposals for an executive order on intelligence reform.⁹⁴ A background paper on the NSCIC—probably prepared for the IC representative to this group—laid out two options for the NSCIC's future. One was to retain the status quo, with the recognition that "the Working Group is not

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as effective as it should be and may wither on the vine unless it gets guidance periodically from a higher level.” The second option advocated combining the NSCIC with the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, noting the overlap in their functions.⁹⁵ Neither option was adopted, however, and the NSCIC was disestablished in February 1976 with the issuance of Executive Order 11905 by President Ford.⁹⁶ The order assigned a number of the NSCIC’s responsibilities to a newly established Committee on Foreign Intelligence, which was to “establish policy priorities for the collection and production of national intelligence,” and to the NSC itself, which was required to “conduct policy reviews twice a year on the quality, scope, and timeliness of intelligence and on the responsiveness of the intelligence community to the needs of policymakers.”⁹⁷

Other Consumer Engagement Mechanisms

The NSCIC working group pursued other efforts during 1975 to address consumer concerns and broaden their avenues for feedback. One such avenue was a newly created IC Staff publication titled *Review of National Intelligence (RONI)*. This publication, which addressed multiple analytic and collection issues, was seen as a “step in inducing consumer feedback.” To encourage this endeavor, LTG Wilson’s staff proposed that he ask each NSCIC working group member to “assign a particular individual within their respective organizations to act as the focal point for initiating or channeling feedback to the *RONI* editor.” (For an examination of the origins and history of the *RONI*, see Chapter Three.) Another avenue was the postmortem study program of the IC Staff’s PRD. Interviews were conducted with a variety of consumers in the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the NSC staff as part of these studies. Although IC Staff officers conducting the studies had not “sought direct interviews with top people,” they had, when appropriate, “talked with those who were familiar with the views of very senior officials.”

Sources: “Consumer Feedback Arrangements for *RONI*, February 26, 1975, CIA-RDP80M01133 A001100030025-7, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80m01133a001100030025-7>; and “PRD’s Contacts with Consumers,” November 24, 1975, CIA-RDP84B00506 R000100150002-7, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp84b00506r000100150002-7>.

ASSESSING THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE'S LEGACY

Few consumers or senior IC leaders were upset with the NSCIC's passing. Interim progress reports throughout the NSCIC's four-year history documented its inactivity and struggles to fulfill the function for which it was established. As noted in a November 1973 memo drafted by Maj Gen Jack Thomas, USAF (Ret.), who served as the executive secretary of the NSCIC: "A total of six actions have been submitted to the Chairman, NSCIC, all of which called for some response. To date no formal reply has been received to any of the six action requests."⁹⁸ Even in the aftermath of the NSCIC's restructuring and a very active year of work in 1975, many saw its disestablishment as no real loss.⁹⁹

Why did the NSCIC—a group established by Presidential directive—struggle and appear to achieve so little during its existence? The answer can be found in multiple factors, including the organization's design, the nature of its mission, personnel turnover, national and world events, and its low level of support by policymakers and IC leaders.

To start, the NSCIC's charter was flawed, particularly regarding its membership and operating procedures, both of which directly affected the committee's and its working group's ability to get anything done. Given the NSCIC's "user" focus and Dr. Kissinger's extremely busy schedule, the IC pushed to have a policymaking consumer designated as Kissinger's deputy, rather than the DCI, and the working-group chairmanship assigned to someone other than the D/DCI/IC.¹⁰⁰ Although the latter recommendation was ultimately accepted when Lt Gen Scowcroft became the working group chair in July 1975, Kissinger never replaced the DCI as his deputy on the NSCIC. The overall composition of the working group likewise was an issue. Initially the NSCIC working group comprised an equal number of intelligence producers and consumers, fueling complaints about too many IC representatives unwilling to critique their work.¹⁰¹ This was eventually addressed with the body's reconstitution in 1974 as a "users' group," but problems remained. One memo, for example, pointed out that the working group's "membership was drawn from consumer organizations but the

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members were staff officers with an imperfect understanding of the intelligence process and also not actual consumers of the product.”¹⁰² Another note for the D/DCI/IC questioned whether the working group accurately reflected the policymaker’s perspective, asserting: “But as a group they do not convey with any conviction or cohesiveness a ‘consumer’ view of intelligence.”¹⁰³

The NSCIC and its working group were undermined as well by operating procedures and limited resources. The working group’s charter initially made consensus a requirement before any recommendation was passed to the NSCIC for action.¹⁰⁴ Insufficient or part-time staff to conduct NSCIC-directed studies, particularly during 1972 and 1973, also slowed study completion. Andrew Marshall expressed his displeasure on several occasions with either the nonavailability of personnel or the use of ad hoc, part-time task groups to conduct case studies of intelligence performance or assess the quality of intelligence coverage.¹⁰⁵

The nature of the NSCIC’s mission—assessing the quality of the intelligence the IC provided and determining whether it met the needs of senior policymakers—was inherently challenging. The NSCIC, like the IC, struggled with how to define and determine the quality of intelligence it received and, for that matter, even who the consumer was—as highlighted during a NSCIC working group discussion in May 1973, evaluating an intelligence product on Soviet ICBMs to determine whether it was “meeting the needs of the user.” Edward Proctor, CIA Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI), pointed to the challenges in this task, noting the first was to define “quality and how it is measured.” He offered that “expert consensus should be reached for judgments on such aspects as the method of presentation, clarity, does the analysis support the conclusions, is the estimate really needed.” He ended by warning: “This should not be a numbers game. Whether there were 5 or 20 consumers didn’t mean anything. If the one most important customer is happy, that is the key.”¹⁰⁶ An IC memo nearly a year later expanded on the challenges in evaluating intelligence, identifying factors such as the circumstances surrounding the product, the degree of precision required, and the probability and timeliness needed.¹⁰⁷

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Leadership changes and various domestic and world events were additional factors contributing to the NSCIC's woes. The departure of key advocates in the user community—such as Marshall, who left the NSC in 1973 to launch DoD's Office of Net Assessment—and the turnover in DCI and D/DCI/IC leadership hampered continuity and concerted action. Nixon's resignation and replacement by Gerald Ford, blockbuster revelations of CIA wrongdoing, a new and intense level of Congressional investigation and oversight, and multiple executive branch commissions on intelligence reform diverted resources and precious senior leadership attention.¹⁰⁸ Events abroad—including Nixon's visit to China in 1972, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the fall of South Vietnam in 1975—fully engaged the NSCIC chairman, Henry Kissinger, and other NSCIC senior policymakers.

The NSCIC's most significant shortcomings ultimately were linked to the lack of support from its main constituency—senior policymakers—and the reservations held by the IC against greater involvement by policymaker consumers in intelligence production and evaluation. On the first point, the NSCIC simply was not a high priority for its busy principals, especially its chairman. As a senior IC official wrote, following a discussion with an NSC staff officer: "It was clear throughout our talk that Kissinger and the NSC expect intelligence to improve itself. They don't have the time to spend to give better direction."¹⁰⁹ Similarly, an IC memo summarizing the NSCIC's history in November 1975 concluded: "The problem is that meanwhile the voice of the high-level consumers has faded away.... Repeatedly the NSCIC Working Group—more specifically, the Intelligence Community representation on it—has prepared relevant studies for the NSCIC, only to have these go to waste when the NSCIC failed to convene. In effect, the Working Group has become the highest collective voice of the consumers."¹¹⁰ And the IC was not alone in this assessment. As Marshall acknowledged in a memorandum for the record in 1973: "The Principals have not supported the effort. While I think it is unrealistic to expect great involvement by the Principals, the unavailability of Kissinger and the absence of NSCIC meetings (only one to date) have definitely influenced the vigor of the Working Group."¹¹¹

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The IC's reservations about consumers embracing a larger—in some ways intrusive—role in the production and evaluation of intelligence was another significant factor limiting the NSCIC's success. At one level, concerns about the relationship between consumers and the IC and the potential for politicization were legitimate. A proposal in 1972 to increase consumer involvement in the NIE process—to include having consumers participate in the review of NIE terms of reference, and NSCIC working group members evaluate each published NIE—generated considerable IC pushback. Leading the opposition was the Office of National Estimates' director, John Huizenga: "I think that your proposals to involve the NSCIC and its Working Group in the NIE program are for the most part ill-advised." As Huizenga argued, "the authority of B/NE [the Board of National Estimates] to propose and USIB [United States Intelligence Board] to approve these programs should not be shared or diluted. The present arrangement embodies the principle of separateness and independence of intelligence components in relation to policymaking organs, a principle stressed as basic throughout the Community's history.... And this is no mere academic principle.... Intelligence must be free to produce what it thinks is useful and needed."¹¹²

"...(I)ntelligence cannot succeed if it is blind to the intentions and expectations of those in policy it serves."

— BOWMAN H. MILLER, describing Sherman Kent's argument in *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (repr., Princeton University Press, 2015), in Miller's article, "Intelligence and Policy: The Case for Thin Walls as Seen by a Veteran of INR," *Studies in Intelligence* 62, no. 2 (June 2018): 35–39.

Resistance within the IC to consumer evaluation of IC products was not lost on frustrated policymakers. In summarizing a meeting he had with Marshall, then still serving on the NSC, a senior IC officer wrote: "We discussed the matter of feedback from users to intelligence producers, and

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Andy's view was that his attempts to increase feedback had not shown much receptivity at the intelligence end. He said the primary reaction has been a 'bristling' or a comment to 'get it in writing from Mr. Kissinger' without much else happening."¹¹³ More telling was a Background Paper written for LTG Wilson on the NSCIC working group's Intelligence Evaluation Project that recommended no support for the effort other than the "D/DCI/IC should wish Godspeed to the experiment."¹¹⁴

Even larger concerns were expressed over potential consumer involvement in IC management issues. In a memo drafted in April 1975 for Wilson on the role of the NSCIC working group, the deputy chief of the IC Staff's PRD observed:

One impression that does come through strongly from the Working Group meetings is that intelligence could be improved if in some way consumers (i.e., the Working Group) could play a direct role in the intelligence community's management. In its most extreme form, this would have the Working Group draft, and the NSCIC issue, Objectives and KIQs and prior review by consumers of national estimates. This kind of a role for NSCIC and its Working Group strikes me as highly inappropriate.¹¹⁵

The deputy chief went on to question whether "the DCI really wants the kind of NSC guidance projected."¹¹⁶ Based on declassified records, DCI Colby's expressed views on the NSCIC and its working group indicate mixed feelings about the extent and nature of the IC's interaction with the policymaking consumers. Although Colby expressed receptiveness to consumers evaluating intelligence products, as noted above,¹¹⁷ currently available correspondence suggests ambivalence about their involvement in a wider range of IC matters. For example, in commenting on proposed topics for an anticipated NSCIC meeting in January 1974, Colby advised that he did not want to raise the subject of the NSCIC Working Group's composition at this session, noting "he "would prefer to operate without use of the Working Group, handling matters by ad hoc groups where necessary, but

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generally having the NSCIC function much as the 40 Committee [a secret committee that handled covert operations] does.”¹¹⁸

Exploration of a broader mandate for the NSCIC and its working group persisted, however, with predictable IC pushback. Three months after the IC Staff's PRD had raised its concerns with Wilson, William Morrell, the Treasury Department's representative, proposed this added function to the NSCIC working group's terms of reference: “[M]ake recommendation for improvements in intelligence structure and organization.” In reply, a new IC Staff memo asserted: “I think Mr. Morrell's proposal would in effect force the Group to engage in unwise and unauthorized activities, and therefore I oppose it. It is one thing for customers to comment to a supermarket chain about the quality of meat and produce, but quite another for them to issue specific guidelines on feeding poultry and fertilizing vegetables.”¹¹⁹

Despite the frustrations on both sides of the intelligence producer-consumer divide regarding the scope of the mandate claimed by the NSCIC and its working group, as well as their extensive periods of inactivity, these measures should not define their legacy. Many of their efforts were groundbreaking and innovative—and set the stage for future reforms. The NSCIC—through its taskings—prompted the IC to conduct multiple postmortem studies addressing intelligence production and its use in crisis and noncrisis situations, as well as to explore better ways to determine and express the uncertainty surrounding IC judgments. The organization and its working group also played a role in more clearly defining consumer needs by generating and responding to key community planning documents, such as KIQs and IC Objectives.

In some ways, the NSCIC's failings may be as important as its limited accomplishments. What was not achieved by the NSCIC between 1971 and 1975 probably spurred the IC to find other ways to elicit and gather consumer feedback. For example, in March 1976, the IC forwarded a proposal to create a “Board of Intelligence Users.”¹²⁰ A year later a study produced by the CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence explored in detail the user's role in intelligence estimates and the risks and benefits associated with close user-producer links.¹²¹ Subsequent years saw additional studies on

"Intelligence Production and Customer Satisfaction" and "The Relationship Between Intelligence Producers and Consumers: Theory and Practice."¹²²

The lessons learned from the NSCIC experience also fueled institutional changes to better solicit and receive consumer feedback in the ensuing decades. These initiatives—from embedding IC personnel in consumer organizations to revisions in the NSC's committee structure—all have pushed customers and producers closer together. Today's NSC features Principals and Deputies Committees and supporting Interagency Policy and Sub-Interagency Committees that facilitate interaction between consumers and the IC in ways the NSCIC only infrequently modeled.¹²³

Other efforts launched by the IC in response to the demands of the NSCIC and its working group—such as identifying user information needs, evaluating intelligence products, and surveying consumer opinions on intelligence support—likewise foreshadowed later improvements. With the end of the Cold War, the White House provided DCIs with succinct direct guidance on how Presidential intelligence priorities had shifted as the dominance of the Soviet target receded. In the wake of 9/11, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) reinvigorated efforts to identify and prioritize comprehensively the intelligence requirements of its most important consumers by creating and managing the National Intelligence Priorities Framework (NIPF) and later reintroducing KIQs.¹²⁴ Spurred by statutory requirements in the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, the ODNI launched and has continued to manage an IC-wide program to evaluate the community's finished intelligence production in conjunction with a program to interview consumers systematically. And today's increasingly complex national security environment argues for fresh initiatives to ensure consumers are involved in determining which intelligence is produced and assessing how well it meets their needs.

CHAPTER THREE

MEASURING THE QUALITY OF INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS: FIRST FORAY



At the National Security Council Intelligence Committee's (NSCIC) initial meeting, Chair Henry Kissinger charged the committee to ensure senior consumers received high-quality intelligence that met their requirements. What "quality" entailed was not clear, however, as seen during the NSCIC working group sessions described in Chapter Two. What criteria or standards must this intelligence meet? If agreed upon, who would apply these criteria and evaluate the intelligence the Intelligence Community (IC) was producing? And how would one know if it was truly satisfying consumer needs? Adopting a structured method for evaluating intelligence products seemed central to answering these questions.

This chapter explores the IC's first foray—five decades ago—into systematic intelligence product evaluation. Led by the Deputy to the Director of Central Intelligence for the Intelligence Community's (D/DCI/IC) Product Review Division (PRD), this initial effort to evaluate holistically the quality of the IC's finished intelligence analysis survived only 20 months. In hindsight, however, elements of the PRD's evaluation criteria can be found in the post-9/11 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act

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(IRTPA) of 20 years ago and in the ODNI policy guidance documents that informed ICD 203 (*Analytic Standards*) in use today. And lessons relevant to today's intelligence environment can be gleaned from the challenges the PRD faced in pursuing product improvement.

PRODUCT REVIEW GROUP AND PRODUCT REVIEW DIVISION: MISSIONS AND CHALLENGES

As with almost every IC analytic initiative launched in the early 1970s, the push to evaluate the community's finished intelligence products can be traced to President Nixon's directive in November 1971 and the response it generated. Efforts to evaluate intelligence products began slowly and were largely focused on individual, high-profile studies. By early 1972, the DCI created the Product Review Group (PRG) with a small staff assembled from CIA resources¹²⁵ to undertake studies and conduct surveys to evaluate the quality of the IC's intelligence product and its worth to the consumer.¹²⁶ Among those efforts was a historical review of past attempts to elicit consumer reactions to intelligence products, which began in February.¹²⁷ In March, as noted in Chapter Two, the NSCIC working group requested the PRG conduct a study of the 1971 India-Pakistan war, with the potential for undertaking other crisis-support studies.¹²⁸ The PRG was also asked to survey the resources the IC devoted to production activities and to determine whether and to what extent new and different products were needed.¹²⁹ For these efforts, the PRG was to use data to analyze the linkage between target priorities and resource use.¹³⁰

A draft PRG charter was circulated in May to capture and validate the organization's mission. The draft terms of reference assigned the PRG staff "responsibility for studies, analyses, and recommendations which will support the DCI in execution of his assigned responsibilities to improve the US intelligence product." The charter emphasized the PRG would focus on two areas of activity: 1) to promote a meaningful interface between the IC and its consumers that improves the intelligence product's responsiveness to national security and policy needs; and 2) to prepare or supervise studies and reviews as needed for a comprehensive DCI program of product

improvement. Such studies, the charter stated, should explore how consumer needs were identified and communicated to the IC and incorporate “evaluations of intelligence products by principal customers.” The studies also should examine the IC production process, including “its inputs and outputs, division of responsibilities, extent of duplication, coordination involved, and resources used.” Lastly, PRG assessments should investigate “analyst motivations, analytical techniques, tools for analyst support, and other factors involved in an effort to improve the quality of analysis applied to intelligence production.”¹³¹ In a preview of approaches that would echo for decades to come in the IC, a follow-on memo identified ways to “help sharpen our thinking on what may or should be done to introduce new analytical techniques into the production process.”¹³²

The historical record of the next 18 months suggests the PRG adhered to the charter’s guidance. A 1972 report summarizing PRG efforts categorized them as falling into three categories: product evaluation, production improvement, and consumer needs.¹³³ Memorandums during this period provide examples of these efforts, including an analysis of collateral Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and Department of State Bureau of Intelligence Research (State/INR) finished intelligence on Southeast Asia published between April 1972 and March 1973.¹³⁴

The historical record also reveals the PRG confronted significant challenges in executing its responsibilities. A note in May 1973 to prepare the D/DCI/IC to meet with DCI-designate Colby captured as much in its title: “Basic Problems, Prime Responsibility of Product Review Group.” After conveying the results in two areas of recent evaluation—*Current and Crisis Intelligence Support to the White House and NSC* and *Estimates and Other In-Depth Analyses*—as well as potential strategies on how to address shortcomings in both, the memo concluded by addressing the PRG’s overall challenges and needs:

Over the long haul, we want to be in a posture to review and critique all national intelligence products as they are produced to ensure responsiveness, quality, etc. Meantime, we operate in ad hoc task groups to

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solve known problems. I need personnel sufficiently grounded in the several areas to wind up in the long-haul posture. Also, I need representation from all the production agencies to ensure the proper inputs to our reviews and recommendations.¹³⁵

The PRG's appeal for resources, a more structured organization, and IC participation drew a handwritten note from Colby on May 29 observing: "It's a big bite—maybe too big at one gulp.... Shouldn't we select a few nibbles to start?"¹³⁶ A month later, Colby reiterated his support, stating "there was an across-the-board need for intelligence product improvement."¹³⁷

The new DCI's receptivity to the PRG's appeal may have spurred creation of the PRD in 1974. Consisting of 13 personnel, including 10 area and topical review officers, the PRD shared much in common with its predecessor, including its mission and many of the challenges associated with it.¹³⁸ One challenge faced by both the PRG and PRD was the lack of an approved charter. The memo accompanying the draft PRD charter, sent to the D/DCI/IC by PRD's deputy director, was frank in its assessment that lacking such a document represented "something of a handicap" to the PRD, given its evaluation mission.¹³⁹ The draft PRD charter acknowledged that, although the "mission of the PRD is not defined in any one document," the division's functions and objectives were based on the guidance found in the President's November 1971 directive and subsequent DCI and D/DCI/IC letters of instruction.¹⁴⁰

The PRD had three primary functions as envisioned in the draft charter. First, the PRD—much like the PRG—was to review and evaluate the performance of the IC as a producer of finished intelligence to include assessing "the adequacy and timeliness of reporting, the quality of presentation and analysis, and the responsiveness of the intelligence product to the consumer's needs." As part of this function the PRD was charged—in close association with the National Intelligence Officers (NIOs)—to contribute to the refinement of Key Intelligence Questions (KIQs), which were to provide the IC with intelligence targets of "major current importance to policy levels of government." (See Chapter Nine for a detailed discussion of KIQs, their evaluation, and the challenges associated with the program's implementation.) Second,

again mirroring the PRG and in cooperation with other IC elements, the PRD was to propose and implement “diverse measures to improve the utility and quality of finished intelligence.” These recommendations should encompass “ways to provide high-level consumers with better, more timely, and less redundant products.” Proposals should address ways to improve “analytical methods” and develop regular systems to ensure “serious divergent points of view [were] properly expressed in finished products.” Finally, the PRD was to be responsible for “those organizational issues and problems which affect the quality and timeliness of finished production.” Identified as “Structural Improvement,” this third function directed the PRD to “devise ways and means to ensure that unnecessary production activities [were] eliminated, and that the Community adhere[d] to a rational division of labor.” These efforts also were to encourage “the formation of a closer and more fruitful relationship between the producers and collectors of intelligence.”¹⁴¹

SYSTEMATIC PRODUCT EVALUATION: THE PRODUCT REVIEW DIVISION’S “MAIN BUSINESS”

The PRD pushed on without an approved charter, but by September 1974 the division’s leadership sought to focus its efforts on IC product evaluations. In a memo drafted for the PRD’s chief, his deputy bluntly stated: “I believe the main business of the Product Review Division should be the review of finished intelligence production. I do not think we have been attending to that business properly and systematically except for the post-mortems on the Middle East and the Indian nuclear test.”¹⁴² PRD “Talking Points” for a meeting a week later identified five projects in which the office then was engaged and protested: “[T]he objectives of these projects are much broader than the name Product Review implies. They are designed to review and improve the performance of the community generally—particularly prior to and during crises. The emphasis is on management adjustments and bureaucratic mechanisms. Product review, per se, forms a relatively small part of the total effort.” The paper forcefully argued the PRD should “address more systematically the specific function of reviewing the finished

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intelligence product. Such reviews should have as their main purpose the assessment of responsiveness to KIQs and to consumer needs.”¹⁴³

Support for refocusing PRD's mission grew during the next month. A note attached to the initial proposal commented: “Dick, I like this idea, particularly... the concept that PRD should concentrate primarily and systematically on its primary functions.”¹⁴⁴ A memo for D/DCI/IC Samuel Wilson in late September, titled “Systematic Product Review,” recommended the PRD “initiate immediately a systematic program to review and analyze finished national intelligence products.” Each PRD officer responsible for a geographic or functional area would “prepare on a monthly basis a report covering national intelligence production on his area. These reports will be essentially descriptive in nature, summarizing how much and what kind of production has been devoted to his particular bailiwick.” The memo proposed that the first test study begin in October 1974 focused on two major current intelligence products, the National Intelligence Bulletin (NIB) and the Defense Intelligence Notice (DIN).¹⁴⁵

The slightly revised version of the PRD proposal, sent to LTG Wilson on October 1, further defined the division's refocused mission: “[T]he principal function of the Product Review Division is, as the name (imperfectly) suggests, the review of finished national intelligence. And the principal objective of such review is, obviously, to find ways to improve the quality and timeliness of national intelligence.” Acknowledging the PRD's charter to perform this function, the memo admitted “but, for a variety of reasons...we have **not** done so regularly or in a consistent manner. I believe we should, and I believe we can.”¹⁴⁶

The PRD proposal for systematic review also provided additional detail on its execution. Each of its division officers would review daily “all important finished national intelligence” and “assess the pertinence, adequacy, timeliness, and general quality of coverage on a given topic, as viewed in the main through a Key Intelligence Question prism.” The PRD then would issue a periodical review—tentatively titled the *National Intelligence Review*—drawn from daily assessments. The memo argued that such a regular KIQ-oriented daily review of published intelligence and periodic PRD assessments would serve multiple purposes, including data and background for special PRD studies and postmortem reports. The review would also identify gaps—and perhaps

redundancies—in finished intelligence production and be “a regular source of information and assistance to the NIOs in their responsibilities associated with the KIQ/KEP [KIQ Evaluation Process] enterprise.”¹⁴⁷ The memo concluded by recommending that the PRD test the procedures and concepts outlined in the proposal by conducting a one- or two-month trial exercise.

The PRD briskly engineered the trial exercise with Wilson’s approval. A memo disseminated to all PRD officers on October 7 provided a “review sheet” to guide their actions and ensure “uniformity of approach and some standardization of records.” The review sheet was intended to “serve both as a methodological guide and as a standard form for filing.”¹⁴⁸ Although the actual review sheet used by the PRD has not been declassified, highlights of the October review show the reviewers provided their observations in five categories addressing: 1) adequacy of coverage; 2) quality of articles and publications [tradecraft]; 3) relationship to KIQs; 4) redundancy of coverage; and 5) PRD methodology.¹⁴⁹

Reports filed by PRD action officers covering several geographic regions during October and November 1974 shed light on the trial review’s revelations (Table 1). Based on a review of NIB and DIN products covering Latin America and Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey, one PRD officer concluded that “current intelligence has not focused on the KIQs... there is too much production for production sake... [and] analysts do not often tell the meaning of the facts they are reporting.” He concluded: “It is clear to me that under the right circumstances a systematic product review can help reshape community production into a more efficient form.”¹⁵⁰ A PRD summary in November provided further insight based on its review of 99 current intelligence articles, including 35 National Intelligence Daily publications, 25 NIBs, 35 DINs, and 4 White House Situation Room Memorandums. More than half of the products were rated as “marginal” or “filler” regarding their usefulness. The report also singled out multiple shortcomings in analytic tradecraft, including contradicting previous publications, titles not supported by the article, dubious sourcing, overstatement, and incomplete analysis.¹⁵¹ A holistic assessment of PRD review efforts identified other issues. In a memo, titled “The Solitary Ice Cube Problem,” the PRD’s deputy chief recounted consumer criticisms of the lack of context provided in many

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NIBs and DINs. He cited one consumer who advised: “[T]he articles should, whenever possible, fit into a pattern of other contributions.... Articles which violate [this] principle, and which are not otherwise distinguished, fade quickly from memory, like a solitary ice cube in a glass.”¹⁵² Although the findings for intelligence production in other subject areas—such as current intelligence on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Eastern Europe—were more positive, even here deficiencies were noted.¹⁵³

Table 1. Product Review Division Evaluation, November 1974: National Intelligence Bulletins and Defense Intelligence Notices on East Asia

Evaluation	Item	Explanation
Incomplete analysis	North Korea: MI-4 helicopter inventory increased (26 NOV NIB)	The implications of this inventory increase, if any, are not addressed at all. DIN 730 on the same subject leaves one wondering whether these are new helicopters or whether our old count was just too low.
Non sequitur	PRC: The high level political investigation of military leaders may be entering its final phase (DIN610)	There is no previous reporting on this "investigation." The article is also strongly based on inference from the evidence presented.
Dubious source	Korea: Additional tunnels may be under construction in the DMZ (DIN696)	The source is a "low-level defector" and the article itself suggests it is questionable that the source knows what he's talking about.
Apparent overstatement	PRC: Peking is experiencing difficulty in restoring order and political stability (DIN 532)	This article suggests that there are indications of "...a serious lack of national and local control..." in China.

Source: James Marchio, "Review of National Intelligence: An Idea That Has Come of Age, Again?" *Studies in Intelligence* 62, No. 3 (September 2018): 20, <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/review-of-national-intelligence.pdf>.

The PRD's two-month trial review of intelligence analysis prompted recommendations on future courses of action. One PRD officer urged that the division develop a pilot product, titled *The DCI's Quarterly Report on National Intelligence Production*. This report would be provided to a "very limited audience," including the DCI, the NIOs, and the principals of the major production agencies. As envisioned, "each chapter of the quarterly report would examine the quality of intelligence products provided the national consumer in a specific geographic or topical area. Where appropriate, products would be reviewed in terms of their contribution to the satisfaction of a KIQ." The publication also would include annexes containing data that production managers could use to examine management problems, such as product coverage, product redundancy, and utilization of collection sources in preparing products.¹⁵⁴

A second memo in December, titled "Notes on the *Review of National Intelligence [RONI]*," expanded on the publication proposal, identifying multiple general objectives. The goals stretched from establishing a "regular systematic and effective way of carrying out our mission of product review" to providing "high-level national readers assurance that the community is seeking dispassionately to assess the quality and the pertinence of finished intelligence provided to policymakers." Beyond these general objectives, the proposal sought to "develop a means and a medium for regular feedback from the consumers of finished intelligence," as well as "establish a statistical base concerning such matters as the relationship of produced intelligence to the KIQs, the relative contributions made to finished intelligence by the various collection systems (e.g., SIGINT, HUMINT, etc.), patterns of substantive emphasis in individual publications, and trends in the quality of the finished products." In addition, the *RONI* was seen as a means to "establish for the reviewing body (PRD) a methodology of review and a consistent course of internal intellectual discipline." The memo finished by asserting: "This enterprise is unique and has never been tried before. It is, I think, ambitious but feasible, and I think we need it or something very much like it. It will of course be controversial, and no doubt resented in some quarters. But once established with

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the backing of the DCI it will, I think, be accepted (even if grudgingly) and can be influential. I believe further that it can be effectively responsive to the DCI's mission to guide the work and the allocation of resources of the entire community."¹⁵⁵

REVIEW OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE: CULMINATION OF THE PRODUCT REVIEW DIVISION'S EFFORTS

The PRD staff moved quickly to create the *RONI*, circulating a sample issue in December for limited staff and IC review and comment.¹⁵⁶ True to the PRD's refocused mission and clearly aimed at enlightening an IC audience, the *RONI*'s "Statement of Purpose" read:

PRD's findings have hitherto been presented only in special surveys (e.g., postmortem reports) and in informal reports to individual addressees. This new publication, *The Review of National Intelligence*, brings the work of product review to bear on a broader set of interests and concerns and periodically presents PRD's findings to a larger, community-wide audience. Our fundamental purposes in this enterprise are wholly constructive: to develop a series of extensive—and unique—files concerning various aspects of intelligence and intelligence processes; and to provide the kind of critical appreciation of published intelligence which will be of value to the DCI, to the USIB [United States Intelligence Board], and to the actual producers of intelligence.¹⁵⁷

The sample issue, based on results from the trial systematic evaluation periods in October and November 1974, contained seven sections: "Highlights of the Review," "Special Commentaries" that examined current reporting by area and topic, a "Special Review" that contained excerpts from the IC Staff's preliminary postmortem report on the July 1974 Cyprus crisis, a "Special Studies" section that conveyed the principal findings of a survey of IC periodicals, "Response from Readers," and an "Outside Looking In—The Consumer's View" section. Additional insight

into its contents is limited because more than half of the draft publication remains classified.¹⁵⁸

The Product Review Division Evaluators

The PRD chief responded to questions regarding the qualifications of his reviewers who had contributed to the *RONI* in a memo on April 7, 1975. Stressing their academic credentials and broad IC representation, he wrote: “[A]ll but one have had at least eight years professional experience in intelligence; four officers have had more than 23 years’ experience each.... Academically, the Division can count 12 bachelor’s degrees, 7 masters, and 3 doctorates, awarded by a host of diverse institutions (Notre Dame, Brown, the Naval Academy, Oxford, Johns Hopkins, South Carolina, Cornell, etc.). As is appropriate for a Community enterprise, PRD officers currently in place have joined the IC Staff from DIA, NSA, the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps intelligence organizations, and from three Directorates (DDI, DDS&T, DDO) and the E Career Service of CIA.”

Sources: “Note to General Wilson/Dr. Clarke,” April 7, 1975, CIA-RDP83M00171R000300270017-8, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83m00171r000300270017-8>; and “Talking Paper on Preparation and Dissemination of the *RONI*,” May 15, 1975, CIA-RDP83M00171R000300270011-4, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83m00171r000300270011-4>.

Initial IC-wide Publication and Reception

A revised *RONI* was disseminated to the wider IC in February 1975, mirroring the previous December’s draft with the addition of a special article, titled “Wohlstetter, Soviet Strategic Forces, and NIEs [National Intelligence Estimates].” D/DCI/IC Wilson’s memo forwarding the *RONI* to the USIB Principals on February 18 advised its recipients that “we are seeking through this medium to provide the community with a systematic review and evaluation of finished intelligence products.” The memo noted this was considered a “First Edition” with a “more formal and finished format” and asked USIB principals to indicate the form of dissemination they believed the product should receive within their organizations. Wilson ended by advising

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recipients: "I will not conceal from you my enthusiasm for this venture. I hope you will share it." The February *RONI* also included an endorsement from the DCI:

I welcome this first issue of the IC Staff's *Review of National Intelligence* because I see in this new enterprise an opportunity to further the community's efforts to improve the quality of finished national intelligence.... The reviews and critical appreciations which appear here should permit us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of both our coverage of current events and our estimates of longer-term developments; the special articles and studies should help us to assess a variety of intelligence matters in a broad community perspective; and the statistical surveys should help us to examine the substantive focus of our efforts, their relationship to the KIQs, trends in production, etc. These at any rate are the hopes of the publisher and, indeed, represent my own expectations as well.¹⁵⁹

Reactions to the February *RONI* varied. Although several division chiefs in CIA described the publication as "great" and argued "consumers should see it regularly," USIB members were not as effusive in their praise.¹⁶⁰ The Treasury Department's William Morell viewed the February issue as "too self-congratulatory," while the State Department's representative recommended clearer identification of the *RONI* reviewers. In the same vein, the chief of DIA's China/Far East Division asked: "Who are all these anonymous people?" Minutes from the USIB session of February 28 indicated general agreement that "evaluation of the intelligence product should reflect the consumers' views rather than merely the opinions of intelligence officers." USIB members were divided, however, on whether reviews should be vetted through the NIOs or the NSCIC. CIA's DDI Proctor argued for using the NIOs, while Morell urged that the *RONI* present " 'candidly' the criticisms and proposals of policymaking officials" through the NSCIC working group rather than the NIOs.¹⁶¹ Balancing the feedback received, a PRD officer responded in May 1975: "The aim of the *RONI* is improvement

of product through constructive criticism (and praise). Improvement is a gradual process, never completed, and there are bound to be several minds about the process itself. The *RONI* is an instrument of continual dialogue, not a definitive, perfected statement.”¹⁶²

The June 1975 Review of *National Intelligence* and After-Action Comments

The second *RONI* appeared in June 1975 and reflected minor revisions in coverage and content.¹⁶³ Some changes were driven by the DCI who provided detailed comments on this draft before its dissemination to include adding coverage in *RONI*'s opening section on the Mayaguez incident—the seizure of a US merchant ship by Cambodia's Khmer Rouge in May 1975—and moving conclusions concerning South Vietnam also to the front of the publication.¹⁶⁴

In preparation for discussion of the *RONI*'s June edition at the USIB session on July 29, 1975, the IC Staff delivered a point paper to LTG Wilson that summarized comments received from IC elements as well as suggested remarks. The point paper highlighted the IC's generally positive reception, citing the State/INR director as saying, “he likes it very much and finds it useful.”¹⁶⁵ Comments provided by CIA's Collection Guidance and Assessment Staff were likewise complimentary, noting in a memo on July 22 that “this issue is an improvement over its forerunner,” showing more balance in the substantive presentations. Although CIA's memo also suggested that “more work needs to be done to solicit consumers' views on the quality of the intelligence product,” it went on to conclude that “on... balance this publication provides a useful vehicle to critique the intelligence coverage in certain publications and should be continued.”¹⁶⁶ The IC Staff's point paper also highlighted for Wilson's attention that the issue of who should receive the *RONI* remained unresolved: “We still need to make the decision about *RONI*'s dissem[ination] outside the Community. This prospect creates real concern, but we think the members of the NSCIC Working Group should receive it. A common complaint about *RONI* is that it does not adequately

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represent the consumer's views; one good way to solicit such views would be through the further dissemination of *RONI*.”¹⁶⁷

Debate over what form, how to include consumer comments, and who should receive the *RONI* continued into the fall of 1975. Although a third *RONI* issue was originally planned for publication in October,¹⁶⁸ LTG Wilson was still addressing comments on earlier editions. In responding to a letter from Assistant Secretary of Defense Robert F. Ellsworth dated October 7, 1975, Wilson wrote: “We are currently reappraising the form, content, and purpose of the *RONI*.... We believe, as you do, that *RONI* should pay greater attention to in-depth intelligence analysis (and relatively less to current intelligence) and our next issue will do so.” Wilson concluded: “I should mention that we heartily concur with your notion that *RONI* might serve as an ‘ideal place to communicate what the consumer feels about the Community’s performance.’ We have hoped all along that, inter alia, *RONI* might ultimately serve this function.”¹⁶⁹

The Review of National Intelligence’s Future: One More Try

The PRD chief strove to reboot the *RONI* in December 1975, making his case in a memo to D/DCI/IC Wilson, titled “*RONI*’s Future.” He began by suggesting “it is probably time to consider a revival of the long-dormant *RONI*. We would, in fact, like to produce issue No. 3 in March 1976.” To strengthen his argument, the PRD chief observed that “*RONI* was blessed by USIB in July [1975], partly as a consequence of a general appreciation of the need for some means to evaluate the quality of national intelligence, and partly as a result of a general (though not unanimous) feeling that *RONI* was a step in the right direction.” He then went on to identify a key factor that had delayed its publication, citing House Select Committee on Intelligence “exposures” and asserting that had they not raised “apprehensions,” “issues No. 3 and 4 would now be a part of history.”¹⁷⁰

The remainder of the memo advocating for the *RONI*’s future addressed the question: “What should the next *RONI* look like, i.e., what changes should we make in its form, content, and objectives? Clearly **some** changes

should be made.” The PRD chief pointed to several factors necessitating revisions to the *RONI* to include changes in IC attitudes, leadership, and structure. He also acknowledged that not only “outside interest in the IC’s performance and in evaluating that performance is growing, and *RONI* should reflect (and capitalize on) this particular development,” but also the PRD’s “own perceptions—informed by experience and by reactions to the first two issues”—were changing. The PRD chief then outlined his vision for the revised *RONI*:

We envision, in general, a *RONI* that would be more responsive to the DCI’s interests, broader in scope, open to more contributors, and slanted more toward the concerns of Community consumers. It would be less particular in approach, placing less emphasis on current intelligence, statistical breakdowns, and individual regional and topical commentaries.... All in all, the new book would be less “picky,” more concerned with problems of broad scope, more of an IC Staff (vice PRD) publication. It would not discourage candor, nor would it shun controversy. But its overall tone would be, by design, more clearly constructive than in the past. *RONI*, in short, could serve consumer and DCI alike and become a strong and positive force in the Community at large.¹⁷¹

The PRD chief’s effort to resurrect the “long-dormant” *RONI* was successful, although it was not March but rather August 1976 when its next and final issue appeared. The August issue reflected several of the changes proposed in the chief’s memo of December 1975. The first section, *Matters of General Issue*, was similar in title to the June 1975 *RONI* but the featured topics were broader in nature. For example, one article identified and discussed “Intelligence Community Principles,” a forerunner of what would later be incorporated in the IRTPA of 2004 and ultimately ICD 203’s analytic standards.¹⁷² Another piece addressed “The Practice of Intelligence Analysis,” while a third summarized “DIA’s Experiment with Uncertainty” (see Chapter Four). The other sections in the August *RONI* reflected similar

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changes in focus. Section II—*Specific Commentaries*—was broader in coverage and made no mention of the statistical summaries that were prominent in the first two issues. Additional content included an article dedicated to the Collection Community, and summaries of an IC Staff study addressing the IC's use of new analytical methods and CIA's intelligence support for Foreign and National Security Policy development.¹⁷³

The August publication received positive feedback from some quarters. Deputy DCI E. H. Knoche wrote to Fritz Ermath, the lead for this *RONI*: "This is a first-class piece of work in terms of both scholarship and ingenuity. I wish something like it could have been identified with my short tenure on the IC Staff, though I now feel a little better deep down because it was something along this line that I tried very hard to get the old Product Review Group to turn out. Onward and upward."¹⁷⁴

Sometime between December 1975 and August 1976, however, a decision was made to cease publication. As the preface to the August issue noted:

This will be the last issue of the *RONI*. The recent establishment of the Committee on Foreign Intelligence [CFI, an interagency body, established by Executive Order 11905, to oversee the resource allocation and policy priorities of the National Foreign Intelligence Program¹⁷⁵] and the steadily increasing emphasis of the Director of Central Intelligence on his Community responsibilities have placed heavy new burdens on the Deputy to the Director of Central Intelligence for the Intelligence Community and the Intelligence Community Staff. These burdens are concentrated in supporting the DCI, the D/DCI/IC, and the CFI in identifying, analyzing, and resolving critical issues relating to the allocation and management of resources within the Community.¹⁷⁶

The *RONI*'s preface went on to promise that "assessing the quality and relevance of Intelligence Community production will continue to be a most vital part of this job" and that this function would be performed by the IC Staff's newly established Production Assessment and Improvement Division (PAID). As the preface advised, however, greater emphasis would

be placed on “performance assessment that comprehends the entire intelligence process, from program inception through requirements definition, collection, information processing, analysis, and production, to impact on national policy.” It stressed that “to do this job well even on selected major issues will be an enormous task. It does not appear that our manpower will allow substantive review of national intelligence for these purposes to be efficiently accomplished and effectively communicated through a journal like the *RONI*.” In benediction, the preface concluded: “The *RONI* helped to cultivate a self-critical spirit within the Intelligence Community. Its many authors and contributors are to be commended for their efforts. This office will enlarge on those efforts in future product and performance assessment projects.”¹⁷⁷

THE REVIEW OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE'S DEMISE AND ITS AFTERMATH

What factors led to the cessation of the *RONI* and systematic product evaluation? No declassified memos or other documents discussing reasons for its termination were found. As noted above, the preface of the *RONI*'s last issue identified some factors, specifically citing limited resources considering increased responsibilities to support the D/DCI/IC and the CFI. Other factors that had affected the PRD's operations throughout the previous 20 months, however, undoubtedly played an important role.

One factor was the PRD's mission itself. Evaluating the quality of intelligence analysis was hard and not welcomed by many. The PRD's deputy chief summarized this challenge best when he wrote to the D/DCI/IC in May 1974:

Because much of our mission is inherently difficult and unpopular—we are as welcome in some quarters as tax collectors—we should make an extra effort to define our role in the Community. We should also seek to persuade our clients (especially those subject to our scrutiny) that this role is both legitimate and necessary. The notion that PRD

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searches without warrants and proposes without proper credentials is not uncommon; it can probably best be refuted by revealing the existence of both—as issued by the DCI and elaborated by his Deputy for the Intelligence Community.¹⁷⁸

The fact that the PRD's draft charter—like the PRG's—was never approved speaks to the strength of IC opposition. Pushback from some IC elements on the types of products evaluated¹⁷⁹ and questions concerning the qualifications of the PRD's evaluators similarly highlight the frosty reception the PRD received while trying to perform its mission.¹⁸⁰

Another element undermining the PRD's efforts to implement systematic product evaluation and the *RONI*'s reception was the wider political environment that emerged by mid-decade. Congressional investigations and exposure of the “Family Jewels” contributed to a larger IC sentiment that enough problems were being aired without highlighting analytic quality shortcomings in the *RONI*.¹⁸¹ In fact, no intelligence postmortems had been requested or produced since the 1975 Congressional leaks and the associated unfavorable publicity had surfaced.¹⁸²

Personnel and organizational changes within the IC Staff were other contributing factors. Colby was replaced as DCI by George H. W. Bush in January 1976. Although Bush strengthened the IC Staff and published the final *RONI* edition during his short tenure as DCI, he did not share the stake that Colby held in its creation.¹⁸³ LTG Wilson departed his position as the Deputy Director for IC Affairs in April 1976 to become DIA's fifth Director. Wilson had championed systematic product evaluation throughout 1974 and 1975. His replacement, ADM Daniel Murphy, had neither Wilson's IC Staff background nor a strong commitment to follow through on the efforts begun under his predecessor.

The IC Staff reorganization in April 1976 led to the disbandment of the PRD and the standup of PAID within the Office of Performance Evaluation and Improvement.¹⁸⁴ Although PAID continued to execute some functions performed by its predecessor, PAID's efforts were scaled back and concentrated in fewer areas with new or added emphasis on IC-wide production resources

and planning (Fig. 3). Conversely, product evaluation, postmortems, and KIQA diminished in importance. For example, an October 1976 PAID point paper questioned whether postmortems should be produced in the future:

Postmortems were once PAID's (PRD's) principal product but are they now a thing of the past? Have we moved into a new, less controversial era (the NSC review, etc.)? Should the ICS [IC Staff] continue to conduct postmortems and other special reviews of IC performance and, if so, should they be limited to reviewing only the **operational** aspects of the IC performance (how well did the system function?) and not the Community's **analytical judgments** which always draw heaviest fire?¹⁸⁵

Ultimately PAID decided to conduct postmortems but only as required.¹⁸⁶

Figure 3. Intelligence Community Product Review Organizations of the 1970s



Source: Figure created by author, based on his comparative assessment.

PAID's inability to fill the void left by the *RONI*'s demise and the cessation of the PRD's evaluation effort is reflected in an IC Staff report

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from December 1978. The report—*Systematic Evaluation of Intelligence for Product Improvement and Program Justification*—summarized the results of “a study of two problems faced by the intelligence community: (1) lack of meaningful feedback from users on levels of satisfaction so as to cause product improvement, and (2) nonexistence of qualitative or quantitative data justifying intelligence programs for use in making budget decisions.” Although still overwhelmingly classified, the report’s summary suggests that many of the issues the PRD tried to address through its evaluations remained. In the wake of the PRD’s demise, one of the report’s principal findings was that “there is no community-wide system for intelligence product evaluation,” nor “a rational product evaluation system [that] would generate the management information needed at all levels of the intelligence community for product improvement and budget review.”¹⁸⁷

Despite its disappearance, however, the PRD’s 20-month effort to evaluate the quality of IC analysis reinforced the objective with which President Nixon had charged the IC in November 1971—product improvement. As the PRD chief noted in 1974: “There is... no particular reason why this unit is called the Product Review Division... rather than (somewhat more accurately) the Product Improvement Group, other than the unfortunate acronym formed by the latter. This matters little, but does serve to make the point that, obviously product **improvement** must proceed from a basis of product **review**.”¹⁸⁸

REFLECTING ON THE PRODUCT REVIEW DIVISION’S BEQUEST TO THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE’S OFFICE OF ANALYTIC INTEGRITY AND STANDARDS

Definitively judging the overall success and effectiveness of the PRD is challenging, partially because its full evaluation criteria and its product evaluations have yet to be declassified and also insight is lacking into how PRD product evaluations were received and used by IC organizations.¹⁸⁹ Although fragmentary glimpses are available through the USIB’s meetings

and notes, if and in what form such evaluation feedback reached the working levels in organizations, such as DIA and State/INR, or affected their analytic practices is unclear. These gaps no doubt contribute to the limited academic scholarship on the PRD and its assessed importance, an example being Richard Betts' classic work *Enemies of Intelligence*. Although Betts notes the postmortems that the PRD completed, he fails to mention its role in systematically evaluating finished intelligence or the creation and publication of the RONI.¹⁹⁰

*Nonetheless, the PRD's brief effort to systematically evaluate the quality of analysis in IC products was central to future product review efforts, based on my involvement in ODNI's product evaluation program 30 years later. Arriving in ODNI's Office of Analytic Integrity and Standards (AIS) in August 2006, I was deeply involved in establishing and using the evaluation procedures employed by AIS during the next two decades. In hindsight, glimpses of the evaluation criteria used by the PRD are evident in the 2004 IRTPA and initial ODNI policy guidance documents that laid the basis for ICD 203 (Analytic Standards) and the pilot rating scale used by AIS to launch its IC-wide product evaluation program.*¹⁹¹

The PRD's evaluation program, the *Review of National Intelligence* publication, and the discussion they spawned in the IC helped further identify and refine the criteria that were relevant and integral to rigorous thinking and high-quality analysis. Its efforts in 1974 and 1975 provided a proof of concept that informed procedures and guided future evaluation efforts in CIA by its Product Evaluation Staff and eventually ODNI and the larger IC.¹⁹² The PRD's brief tenure also highlighted many of the challenges AIS would face decades later, from questions concerning the qualifications of its evaluators to who should receive product evaluations. Perhaps most importantly, the PRD's intent and philosophy in pursuing product evaluations was spot on—that of product improvement and learning. With the momentum and backing later provided by the 2004 IRTPA and the Congressional requirement for the Office of Analytic Integrity and Standards to conduct and report back annually on its evaluations of IC products, the PRD might have accomplished more and had an even greater impact on IC

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efforts to evaluate the quality of its analysis. And, as the PRD's legacy bore fruit through the AIS, lessons learned from its efforts to institute systematic IC product evaluation can inform future Community efforts to improve IC analysis and its communication to senior consumers, especially as it seeks to leverage the enormous capabilities offered by artificial intelligence and machine language learning models.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXPRESSING ANALYTIC UNCERTAINTY: “BETTER TO ANNOY THAN TO CON”



How the Intelligence Community (IC) characterized and conveyed analytic uncertainty—as evidenced by the National Security Council Intelligence Committee’s (NSCIC) discussion and the Product Review Division’s (PRD) evaluations—was a focal point for consumer criticism. Even decades later, Deputy DCI for the IC LTG Samuel Wilson, who went on to become Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), wondered why his analysts could not address the likelihood of future outcomes in percentages as weather forecasters did.

How did consumer dissatisfaction with the IC’s ability and means to effectively express analytic uncertainty force the community in the 1970s to review and rethink its approach? The IC’s effort to address policymaker frustration culminated in an “experiment” by DIA in January 1976 to incorporate percentages—reflecting the probability that a given judgment was valid—in two of its major product lines. Although the experiment was short-lived, subsequent decades saw fresh efforts to address the challenges surrounding analytic uncertainty and better capture confidence levels—an endeavor recently renewed by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI).

CONSUMER DISSATISFACTION WITH THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY'S TREATMENT OF UNCERTAINTY

The IC's conveyance of analytic uncertainty quickly became a key element in the overall effort to improve the quality of the IC's products and its analysis. The policymaking consumers' dissatisfaction with what they perceived as the IC's lack of analytic rigor and transparency, its use of unqualified conclusions, and its failure to quantify uncertainty all contributed to the pressure that led to DIA's 1976 experiment with numeric probabilities.

One of the earliest and more vocal critics of how the IC treated analytic uncertainty was Andrew Marshall, Henry Kissinger's NSCIC deputy and key member of the NSCIC working group. In a memo, titled "Displaying Uncertainty to Decisionmakers," that Marshall sent in June 1973 to the DIA Director, the D/DCI/IC, and several other ranking officers charged with improving the quality of the IC's analysis, he noted: "I remain interested in this method of analysis—especially improving the communication of appropriate levels of uncertainty in intelligence judgments. Current methods are unsatisfactory in my view." Marshall also forwarded with his memo a RAND paper that described in detail how uncertainty could be expressed using a variety of different, largely quantitative methods.¹⁹³ In commenting on Marshall's memo, the deputy chief of the IC Staff's Product Review Group (PRG) acknowledged previous efforts by the IC and the PRG to address uncertainty: "This is a matter which has been discussed at one level or another in the intelligence community for more than ten years to my own knowledge, and some experimentation has taken place, but the results are not thus far impressive." Continuing, the PRG deputy admitted that "we attempted last year to get a PRG effort going on this problem, to no avail, but perhaps the time is ripe to form a working group and charge it with coming up with some recommendations for application standards and/or a community R&D [research and development] effort which will result in a set of accepted probability applications and/or methods."¹⁹⁴

Whether the PRG chartered a working group to address analytic uncertainty is unclear. Policymakers, however, continued to express frustration

with the IC's methods and call for change. Dr. Kissinger, in an appearance before the Murphy Commission in January 1974, criticized the IC for failing to "give quantified probabilities whenever possible."¹⁹⁵ Even more pressure and expressions of frustration were forthcoming from leaders in the Department of Defense (DoD).

Assistant Secretary of Defense (Intelligence) Albert Hall wrote DCI William Colby in December 1973 to insist that "the intelligence community must better quantify and communicate to our consumers the uncertainties in our estimates," specifically pointing to the "problems of dealing with uncertainties in ICBM throw weight and CEPs [circular error probable]." Colby's response in March 1974 acknowledged the difficulty of the challenge and the need for "different methods for determining and expressing uncertainty depending on the nature of the judgment—whether missile CEPs or Soviet troop strength in Eastern Europe—and the type and amount of information available." Colby volunteered that "for more subjective judgments, we are experimenting with methods of expressing the likelihood of a given development using Bayesian analysis." He concluded by assuring Hall that the community's National Intelligence Officers (NIOs) were working to ensure the "intelligence products over which they have cognizance contain as precise expressions of confidence and uncertainty as we are capable of making."¹⁹⁶

Continuing DoD dissatisfaction with the IC's treatment of uncertainty was voiced later that spring by DIA's director in a letter to the DCI. VADM Vincent de Poix volunteered that DIA had been "considering how uncertainty in intelligence might be better quantified and communicated to users, particularly assessments of scientific and technical parameters such as weapon system characteristics." De Poix urged that the matter be discussed by the US Intelligence Board and that an "appropriate interagency group be designated to review the subject and provide recommendations for implementation." Based on the work done thus far by DIA, the director proposed that DIA chair the effort.¹⁹⁷ Colby's response—delivered in August 1974 and described as "less than enthusiastic"—again acknowledged the need to discover ways to "best quantify our uncertainties in various judgments." As Colby noted: "This is a problem that has plagued the producers of intelligence for many, many years"

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and “I am not sure that it is one that can be completely resolved but, at least in certain critical areas, I believe that some constructive steps can be taken.” The DCI ended his letter by stating his belief that “we should avoid setting up a new mechanism to take on a task much broader in scope,” but nonetheless urged that “DIA take a leading role in the areas you have worked on.”¹⁹⁸

In another exchange between the DCI leadership and DIA on the matter of quantifying uncertainty in estimates later that summer, the Deputy to the Director of Central Intelligence for the Intelligence Community (D/DCI/IC), Daniel Graham, conveyed his suggested way forward to DIA Director de Poix. LTG Graham suggested that “one of the first steps that should be taken is to poll our primary users of military estimates, i.e., the DoD and the NSC, to find out in which particular areas we should try to quantify our uncertainties to the greatest degree of specificity.” Graham went on to conclude: “I am confident that quantifying our degree of uncertainty is vastly more important in some areas than others” and that “rather than trying to quantify our uncertainties in our judgments across the board, we should find out what is critical and focus on those particular matters.”¹⁹⁹

The NSCIC’s meeting agendas for 1974 and 1975 included multiple sessions to be focused on analytic uncertainty. A draft PRD memo noted a potential agenda item for the NSCIC working group session in November 1974 that was submitted by DoD on “Intelligence Uncertainty.”²⁰⁰ In submitting the proposal, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) observed:

The consumer of most intelligence products dealing with complex subjects generally has an uneasy feeling about many of the unqualified conclusions or estimates that are often presented. He knows that we can’t have high confidence in the answers to some of his questions. He would like a synopsis of the intelligence background and evidence or, if possible, a full-scale development of them, so that he can draw his own conclusions. Where this is not possible... a well-defined statement of the uncertainty is needed to permit the consumer to understand the uncertainty perceived by the intelligence analyst who made the estimate.²⁰¹

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The new year brought more calls for action. An internal PRD memo to new D/DCI/IC Samuel Wilson in February 1975 again included “intelligence uncertainty” as one of several potential NSCIC working group projects, attributing the proposal to Assistant Secretary of Defense Robert Ellsworth.²⁰² Ellsworth’s proposal was apparently advanced at the working group session held the previous November where he argued that “more qualifications and limitations should be applied to particular analytical judgments (i.e., measuring uncertainty).”²⁰³ Then the same DASD who proposed uncertainty as a topic for that November session held forth in April 1975, when providing comments on the first draft of the IC Staff’s *Review of National Intelligence (RONI)* publication: “Very little or no attention is paid to the quality of quantitative analysis or to the reporting on uncertainty. The whole style of the product evaluation is more journalistic than analytic.”²⁰⁴

How analytic uncertainty should be addressed was a major topic of discussion at the NSCIC working group meeting on May 20, 1975. The next day Anthony Cordesman, Product Evaluation Division chief in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), forwarded extensive comments and suggestions pertaining to the problem of expressing uncertainty in intelligence estimates on behalf of Ellsworth. Cordesman went on at length identifying what he and the Deputy Secretary of Defense saw as the shortcomings of IC products, explaining: “[A] review of national intelligence products indicates that far too many often failed to:

- “Explicitly state the limitations of the intelligence available or the methods of analysis used and present them in summary form for quick review. In many cases, even those limitations that are listed are buried in the text or listed only in footnotes or annexes.
- Explicitly describe the methodology used when hard intelligence data is lacking.
- Clearly distinguish reasonable conclusions or logical views from conclusions based on intelligence.
- Describe the uncertainty present in given data, methods of analysis, or conclusions.

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- Quantify uncertainty, fail to describe the method used to quantify uncertainty, or fail to show a range of numbers.
- List the explicit intelligence data on which a conclusion is based and provide only a broad or vague rationale.”²⁰⁵

During the next six months the topic of analytic uncertainty continued to generate interest in the NSCIC and action by the IC Staff. A memo to D/DCI/IC Wilson noted that as a follow-on action from the NSCIC working group session on July 2, 1975: “[W]e owe the Group one or two papers on the problem of quantifying uncertainties.... Amb. Ellsworth and Mr. Morell [NSCIC working group members from DoD and the Treasury Department, respectively] are especially interested in this.”²⁰⁶ By month’s end, Wilson sent a letter regarding the request to CIA’s Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI) Edward Procter, noting that “while this is not exactly a new problem... it is clear that high-level users of intelligence are still seized with it.”²⁰⁷ Wilson observed that he had briefings provided to the NSCIC working group to “address points related to probabilities and confidence levels on topics such as SALT [the US-USSR Strategic Arms Limitation Talks], MBFR [NATO-Warsaw Pact Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction talks], and Warning,” which some members welcomed; however, the working group also suggested “that together they provide only ‘30-40 percent’ of the answer to the broad question.” Consequently, Wilson requested the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) assistance with expressing uncertainties, particularly in “‘softer’ areas—e.g., in political judgments.”²⁰⁸ Responding to LTG Wilson for Dr. Procter, CIA’s Director of Political Research Lewis Lapham cited the work of his Analytical Techniques Group, which was “now testing procedures by which forecasting and estimative techniques currently used by industrial and consulting firms can be applied to the intelligence process.” While cautioning the project was still in an exploratory phase, Lapham offered that “the various facets of forecasting so far examined show considerable promise and may help directly to make explicit the uncertainties inherent in political judgments.”²⁰⁹

In October 1975, Cordesman reminded the IC Staff of Ambassador Ellsworth’s interest in the topic of analytic uncertainty and the importance

of properly conveying this uncertainty: “I am certain that you both agree that the lack of proper uncertainty data represents a critical problem in current national intelligence production. In far too many cases, consumers have no way of knowing the reliability of the data they are given.” Cordesman suggested it would be useful if the IC Staff could provide a progress report at the next meeting of the NSCIC working group, paying particular attention to the extent to which “explicit quantitative statements of uncertainty” are used in figures shown in the NIEs, SNIEs, and NIAMs” and whether “explicit summary statements of the major limitations and uncertainties in the intelligence” are included in these same IC products.²¹⁰ In preparing for the NSCIC working group’s October session, the IC Staff advised LTG Wilson that the new NIE 11-3/8, *Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict Through the Mid-1980s*, reflected “considerable improvement” in expressing uncertainties.²¹¹ The memo to the D/DCI/IC also noted that, in response to his request, CIA’s DDI Proctor had launched a study on analytic uncertainty.²¹²

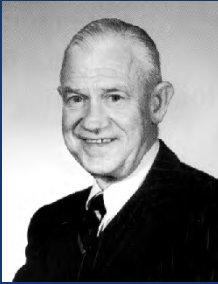
“MATHEMATICIANS” VERSUS “POETS”: CIA EXPLORES BAYESIAN ANALYSIS

Some of the criticism voiced in the NSCIC working group on the treatment of analytic uncertainty certainly resonated with the community’s analysts and leadership. Sherman Kent’s “Words of Estimative Probability” and David Wark’s “The Definition of Some Estimative Expressions”—published in the same 1964 edition of *Studies in Intelligence*—superbly captured this perennial challenge and how “poets” and “mathematicians” within the IC differed on how best to meet it.²¹³

In the decade following the Kent and Wark articles one finds evidence that efforts were made in IC products to quantify the probabilities associated with specific analytic judgments.²¹⁴ The record shows, however, that estimative language, such as *probable*, *unlikely*, and *almost certain*—albeit aided by the work of Kent and Wark—remained the norm for expressing analytic uncertainty within the IC.²¹⁵ This persistence led to fresh calls for clearer expressions of uncertainty. For example, one of the speakers at a seminar on

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"Intelligence Analysis Today in CIA" in August 1975 argued that "intelligence analysis would be improved if the analyst would make a greater effort to assess and express the probabilities he attaches to his analysis."²¹⁶



"Generally speaking, the most important passages of the literature of substantive intelligence contain far more statements of the estimative types... than of the factual type.... This is the case because many of the things you most wish to know about the other man (US adversary) are the secrets of state he guards most jealously. To the extent his security measures work, to that extent your knowledge must be imperfect, and your statements accordingly qualified by designators of your uncertainty.... There is a language for odds; in fact, there are two—the precise mathematical language... and a less precise though useful verbal equivalent."

—SHERMAN KENT "Words of Probability"
Studies in Intelligence 8, no. 4 (Fall 1964)

The push to use numeric probabilities benefited as well from the promise of new social science techniques and the willingness to use them. *Studies in Intelligence* published two articles on the use of Bayesian theory in its June 1972 issue. The first, attributed to former intelligence analyst Jack Zlotnick, described the result of a study CIA had conducted on the use of the Bayes Theorem for intelligence analysis, in which he wisely observed: "The very best intelligence can do is to make the most of the evidence without making more of the evidence than it deserves."²¹⁷ The second, by CIA economic analyst Charles Fisk, described an experimental application of the theorem to crisis warning regarding the Sino-Soviet relationship in the late 1950s."²¹⁸

As detailed in Chapter Five, policymakers as well as IC members saw potential benefit from employing more rigorous methods in determining and presenting analytic uncertainty, such as Bayesian analysis.²¹⁹ Andrew Marshall, for one, urged CIA analysts in an Advanced Intelligence Seminar to try “new forms of presentation and new techniques,” subsequently citing a 1972 DIA project to produce an experimental product using Bayesian analysis.²²⁰

CIA’s *Handbook of Bayesian Analysis for Intelligence Analysis*—published in June 1975—offers even better insight into the perceived value associated with these new methods. In identifying the capabilities and benefits provided by Bayesian statistics, the handbook noted: “The use of quantified judgments allows the results to be displayed on a numerical scale, rather than through the use of terms like ‘probable,’ ‘likely,’ ‘unlikely,’ or ‘possible,’ ” and “OPR’s [Office of Political Research] experience suggests that it is relatively easy to induce analysts accustomed to qualitative expressions of probability to shift to numerical assessments.”²²¹ Unsurprisingly, the IC Staff provided the NSCIC working group members with a copy of the Bayesian Handbook following the group’s October 1975 session.²²²

THE DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY’S UNCERTAINTY EXPERIMENT: LEADERS DRIVE PROBABILITY QUANTIFICATION

In addition to the policymaking customer and internal IC pressures, the outlook and experience of DIA’s leadership were important factors in the agency’s decision to pursue an experiment in expressing analytic uncertainty. LTG Graham, DIA’s director in the 15 months leading up to the experiment, had extensive prior experience in drafting and directing intelligence estimates, both within Army intelligence as well as in CIA’s Office of National Estimates (ONE) and DIA’s Directorate for Estimates.²²³ Graham’s multiple assignments under Sherman Kent’s tutelage at ONE made him very familiar with the challenges of appropriately determining and conveying analytic uncertainty (Table 2). As Kent later wrote: “The most willing followers of my recommended vocabulary were our military colleagues. Years later when

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the DIA reorganized its estimates work under General Daniel Graham, my table of values was printed on the inside cover of DIA estimates and the vocabulary rigorously used in the substance of the document.”²²⁴ Graham gained additional firsthand exposure to uncertainty's complexity when he served as the PRG chief, followed by his appointment as D/DCI/IC from May 1973 through September 1974.

Although neither of Graham's immediate successors shared his extensive experience as an estimator, both were very familiar with the problem of effectively conveying analytic uncertainty. Lt Gen Eugene Tighe, Jr.—who served as DIA's deputy director for 14 months before taking over as acting director from January through May 1976²²⁵—was DIA's representative to the NSCIC working group and was involved in the group's discussion of analytic uncertainty. LTG Wilson was similarly well acquainted with the IC's efforts to appropriately caveat its judgments. Following his tour as DIA's Deputy Director for Estimates, Wilson replaced Graham as the D/DCI/IC, serving in that position until he became Director of DIA in May 1976.²²⁶ In a phone interview with the author, LTG Wilson credited LTG Graham with the idea for DIA's uncertainty experiment but noted both he and Graham were frustrated with the estimative terms used in most IC products and agreed that “if the weatherman could use numbers and be more precise,” intelligence analysts could do better in this realm as well. He opined that “if the analyst and estimator could be more precise in their judgments, consumers could have greater confidence in their assessments.”²²⁷

The most important and immediate factor leading DIA to launch the uncertainty experiment came from OSD and its criticism of DIA's products. Deputy Secretary of Defense Ellsworth was a vocal critic of the IC's efforts in expressing analytic uncertainty as was his office chief Cordesman—an influence reinforced during the author's phone interview with LTG Wilson.²²⁸ As noted in a *RONI* article of August 1976 that described DIA's uncertainty experiment: “This experiment received its initial impulse from high-level DoD consumers—principally Deputy Secretary Ellsworth—who have repeatedly indicated dissatisfaction with vague language of the ‘it is believed...’ or ‘hostilities possibly will...’ character.”²²⁹

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Table 2. Estimative Terms and Degrees of Probability

The table below explains the terms most frequently used to describe the range of likelihood in the key judgments of this estimate.

Order of Likelihood	Synonyms	Chances in 10	Percent
Near Certainty	virtually (almost) certain, we are convinced, highly probable, highly likely	9	99
Probable	likely	8	90
	we believe		
	we estimate		
	chances are good		
	it is probable that		
Even Chance	chances are slightly better than even	6	60
	chances are about even	5	
	chances are slightly less than even	4	
Improbable	probably not	3	40
	unlikely	2	
	we believe ... not		
Near Impossibility	almost impossible	1	10
	only a slight chance		
	highly doubtful		
			1

Note: Words such as "perhaps," "may," and "might" will be used to describe situations in the lower ranges of likelihood. The word "possible," when used to without further modification, will generally be used only when a judgment is important but cannot be given an order of likelihood with any degree of precision.

Under LTG Graham's leadership, DIA published Sherman Kent's probability table inside the cover of its Directorate for Estimates publications, including this Analytical Memorandum on "Soviet Support for Wars of Liberation," published on September 15, 1975.

Source: "Defense Intelligence Agency Directorate for Estimates' Analytical Memorandum Soviet Support for Wars of Liberation," September 15, 1975, CIA-RDP84B00506R000100070011-6, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp84b00506r000100070011-6>, 2.

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In January 1976, DIA launched the uncertainty experiment with the objective of achieving “more precise statements of confidence and probability of intelligence judgments.” The trial run involved the incorporation of both percentages (for example, 90 percent, 50 percent, and 30 percent) and letters (A, B, and C) in the texts of selected Defense Intelligence Notices (DINs) and Defense Intelligence Appraisals and some Defense Intelligence Estimates. The percentages reflected the probability that a given judgment was valid; the letters represented the analyst’s confidence in the source material: A= high confidence; B = medium; and C = low.²³⁰

At the end of the trial period, 750 readers of the DINs were asked to evaluate the usefulness of the experiment; 128 responses were received from a broad spectrum of DoD consumers. A majority favored the use of quantified expressions of probability, believing these measures helped to increase their confidence in the information provided and DIA’s judgment, and particularly helped to give greater credibility to briefings based on the DIA material. As the *RONI* article reported: “There was, however, little enthusiasm for the alphabetized expressions of confidence in sources.... The respondents as a group indicated that expressions of uncertainty would be most useful in current intelligence, somewhat less so in estimative intelligence, and of least value in basic intelligence.”²³¹

Confidence Statements: Origins and Early Use

Prior to 2002, evidence documenting the use of explicit confidence levels (high, medium, and low) is scarce. This is not surprising given that “confidence” language is absent from Sherman Kent’s seminal work, “Words of Estimative Probability,” published in *Studies in Intelligence* in 1964. Nor is “confidence” found in IC glossaries of intelligence terms and definitions completed in the late 1970s and 1980s.

A paper produced in 1953, “Confidence in NIE-65 Production Statistics,” expressed support for this NIE on *Soviet Bloc Capabilities Through 1957* as one of the first instances in which confidence levels are used in an IC product. As the paper explained, “a more reliable” picture of Soviet economic production statistics could be achieved by “recasting each estimate

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to reflect the relative degree of confidence in that particular figure.” As used in this and other estimates produced during the 1950s and 1960s, confidence levels—when identified explicitly—conveyed margins of error in accordance with statistical teachings. In other instances, “confidence” was used generically with estimative judgments.

During the next three decades, elements within the IC incorporated “confidence” into a holistic approach to capture and express analytic uncertainty. For example, generic “confidence” statements, flagged through words including “possible” or “probable,” were cited in a 1966 *Studies in Intelligence* article on military-economic analysis in NIEs. This approach may have reflected the thinking of another early intelligence practitioner, BG Washington Platt. In his “Principle of Certainty,” confidence was one factor considered when estimating likelihood. Platt had argued that assessing uncertainty required “consideration of the reliability of statements of fact, the precision of quantitative data, and the probabilities of estimates and conclusions.” These three concepts were similar, but not quite the same, with varying degrees of reliability, precision, and probability ranging from high to low or in between.

Sources: Sherman Kent, “Words of Estimative Probability,” *Studies in Intelligence* 8, no. 4 (Fall 1964): 49–65, <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/Words-of-Estimative-Probability.pdf>; “Glossary of Intelligence Terms and Definitions,” June 15, 1978, CIA-RDP80M00596A000500020003-7, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80m00596a000500020003-7>; “Confidence in NIE-65 Production Statistics,” April 8, 1953, CIA-RDP79-01206A000200010010-9, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79-01206a000200010010-9>; Julie O. Kerlin, “Military-Economic Estimating: A Positive View,” *Studies in Intelligence* 10, no. 4 (Fall 1966): 35–44, <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/studies-in-intelligence/archives/vol-10-no-4/military-economic-estimating-a-positive-view/>; and Washington Platt, *Strategic Intelligence Production: Basic Principles* (Frederick A. Praeger, 1957).

Based on the survey results, in July 1976, DIA began to quantify the probability (in percentages) of all major judgments and projections in DINs but dropped the alphabetized evaluation of sources. DIA also decided to experiment with similar procedures for selected order-of-battle products and Defense Intelligence Estimates.²³² This practice continued at least through August 1977²³³ and probably in some fashion for another two years.²³⁴

The evidence available suggests that some consumers were pleased with the change. An Office of Management and Budget report on intelligence

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production and customer satisfaction in May 1978 noted that customers in OSD's International Security Affairs singled out DIA's "use of quantitative confidence statements" as one element of support worthy of praise.²³⁵ DIA's products and their use of numerical probabilities reportedly also were favorably received by major commands and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Moreover, in the view of VADM W. D. Robertson, DIA's Vice Director for Production, "the use of numerical probabilities, even in simplistic form, encourages the analyst to think in terms of alternatives and their relative likelihoods."²³⁶

Beyond the changes in its product lines, DIA also directed the Defense Intelligence School and the IC's Information Science Center, located in CIA's Office of Training, to develop courses for its personnel in the assessment and expression of uncertainty. This training, which covered theory and practice, was intended to provide analysts and supervisors with greater confidence and consistency in the use of expressions of uncertainty.²³⁷

A year later the Information Science Center announced a new course called "Statistical Concepts for Analysts and Managers." According to the course description, topics covered included descriptive statistics, combinatorial analysis, probability, confidence interval estimation, hypothesis testing, Bayesian analysis, probability diagram construction, and use of decision trees.²³⁸ A DIA graduate of the course confirmed that the training was geared toward helping analysts and managers apply numerical estimates to their judgments.²³⁹ By early 1979, 210 students—134 from DIA, 44 from CIA, and 32 from other IC agencies—had completed the course.²⁴⁰ That said, a CIA graduate of the course observed that, on returning to his office, he found no support for the application of anything taught in the program to the political analysis in which he was engaged.²⁴¹ That latter reaction would be a harbinger of the experiment's future.

WHY DID THE DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY'S UNCERTAINTY EXPERIMENT END?

Although the definitive answer has yet to emerge from the historical archives, multiple factors probably explain why DIA's use of numeric probabilities

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was discontinued and why this practice was not widely adopted in the IC. One of the most important factors was the departure of several key officials who had pushed strongly for greater focus and precision in conveying analytic uncertainty. Abolishment of the NSCIC in 1976 and the departure of consumers who had led the critical charge for precision, such as Deputy Secretary of Defense Ellsworth in January 1977, as well as supporters within the IC, including DIA Director Wilson seven months later, undoubtedly reduced the impetus for and receptivity to such efforts.

LTG Samuel Wilson, US Army

Throughout the mid-1970s, LTG Samuel Wilson played a leading role in the IC’s efforts to strengthen its intelligence analysis—from improving the IC’s responsiveness to its policymaking consumers and its approach on warning to introducing new product lines and new measures to clarify how analytic uncertainty was conveyed. Building on his operational intelligence experience, LTG Wilson directed these efforts at analytic innovation while serving in various senior positions, including Deputy Director of Central Intelligence for the Intelligence Community (D/DCI/IC) (September 1974-March 1976) during which he concurrently chaired the NSCIC’s working group, and served as Director of DIA (May 1976-August 1977).



Sources: Defense Intelligence Agency, “Past Directors of DIA,” accessed April 11, 2025, <https://www.dia.mil/About/History/Directors-of-DIA/LTG-Samuel-V-Wilson-USA/>; and Steven Pressfield, “General Sam V. Wilson,” *The Creative Process*, July 2010, <https://stevenpressfield.com/2010/07/general-sam-v-wilson/>.

In fact, consumer surveys and IC studies conducted at the time suggested that many consumers did not consider the use of numeric probabilities a critical issue. According to an April 1977 monograph by CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence—based on interviews with 97 individuals comprising consumers and producers—there “did not appear to be much

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concern with the present style of estimative writing, or with the lack of some explicit scale of probabilities. The use of traditional expressions, such as 'probably,' 'likely,' and so forth, seemed satisfactory, though they admittedly do not convey the same meaning to all readers." The study concluded: "The experimental efforts to provide explicit quantitative rating scales for probability apparently have not struck any very responsive chord with users. They were never mentioned as examples to be emulated."²⁴²

The inherent challenges and dangers associated with quantifying uncertainty also may have contributed to DIA's decision to end the experiment and the reluctance in the IC to follow their initial lead. Lt Gen Tighe, DIA's director from September 1977 to August 1981, probably spoke for many when, commenting about a paper on the explicit expression of uncertainties prepared for the NSCIC in 1975, he expressed skepticism that "it could be done or would be useful."²⁴³ Don Mathis, a former DIA analyst who produced DINs during this period, voiced similar sentiments, acknowledging that "putting percentages on judgments did not always work well." He attributed this to insufficient training in some cases and the failure to consistently track the accuracy of analytic judgments, an element essential to providing valid probability or confidence assessments.²⁴⁴

Others were concerned that the use of percentages and "overreliance on new techniques" in writing estimates might imply greater precision in judgments than the facts warranted."²⁴⁵ Several analysts involved in DIA's "experiment" warned that "the statement of percentages could convey to at least some readers a degree of precision not justified by the data at hand or the subjective nature of an analyst's 'hunch' regarding future events."²⁴⁶ Similarly, even Bayesian advocates acknowledged: "An ever-present danger, however, is the tendency to attribute more precision to the numbers than is warranted, and it should be stressed that the numbers are always only approximations."²⁴⁷

Finally, as previously noted, the IC was preoccupied with issues other than analytic uncertainty in the late 1970s. The IC's agenda during this period was dominated by fallout from hearings launched by the Church and Pike Committees, and additional budget cuts. These same years witnessed

a rash of foreign policy crises—from growing unrest in Eastern Europe and turmoil in Iran to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—that further limited the attention the IC devoted to analytic tradecraft issues.

EXPRESSING UNCERTAINTY IN THE ENSUING DECADES

The end of DIA’s use of numeric probabilities in their DINs did not stop the debate within the IC or the demand from consumers to use them. In the ensuing decades, how best to express analytic uncertainty was a recurring theme that resurrected many of the same arguments and solutions raised so vigorously between 1972 and 1977. For example, the DCI sent a memo to the Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment in December 1978 addressing an academic’s recommendation that probabilities be introduced into NIEs. DCI Stansfield Turner commented that he and the deputy director needed to convey that “we’re trying to bring out uncertainties as much as produce categoric predictions if we force the use of probabilities no matter how subjective.”²⁴⁸

Four years later, the NIO for General Purpose Forces forwarded to the Chairman of the National Intelligence Council (NIC) a copy of Kent’s 1964 article, “Words of Estimative Probability,” which he also cited at a NIC staff meeting. In the cover note the NIO remarked: “The charts on pages 55 [The General Area of Possibility] and 59 [Words of Probability] came for a time to represent general guidance for drafters and negotiators of estimates. My impression is that the ‘poets’ have returned to the ascendancy in the estimates business in more recent years, leaving their ‘mathematician’ colleagues in the shade.” The NIO, however, concluded the note by citing a DIA publication that demonstrated “quantification remains a popular art.”²⁴⁹

In line with the NIO’s comment pertaining to the DIA publication, certain organizations—even offices within IC elements—and topics seemed more amenable to quantifying probabilities than others. The NIE on *The Soviet Space Program*, published in July 1983, is a case in point. This NIE alerted consumers in its Scope Note that “we have judged the likelihood of various Soviet space developments as ranging from very low to very high.” The note went on to explain that these judgments would be stated in terms

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of probability of occurrence, and would be done in accordance with a five-step scale ranging from “Very Low = less than 10 percent” to “Very High = more than 90 percent.”²⁵⁰ A “Revised Confidence Level Table”—reflecting this same breakdown of uncertainty—was adopted by the National Foreign Intelligence Board’s (NFIB) Weapon and Space Systems Intelligence Committee the following year. Beyond the “Order of Likelihood” and “Percent,” this table also included verbal “gradations” to accompany each category. For example, an order of likelihood of “very high” and “more than 90 percent” were associated with the expressions “*we know, virtually certain, we are convinced, nearly certain, and high probability.*”²⁵¹ Similarly, a 1987 Technical Intelligence Report on *Projecting Soviet Military Forces and Weapons Procurement* used a methodology explicitly accounting for the uncertainties associated with forecasting individual weapons programs, categorizing uncertainties into four categories: Near Certainty, High Likelihood, Close Call, and Low Likelihood.²⁵²

Most IC assessments in the 1990s continued to employ estimative language to address analytic uncertainty. Several used “Bettor Odds” or percentages to express the probability or likelihood of a key judgment. At least four NIEs disseminated between 1992 and 1994—including high-profile products on Croatia, Iraq, and Russia—conveyed key judgments using such odds.²⁵³

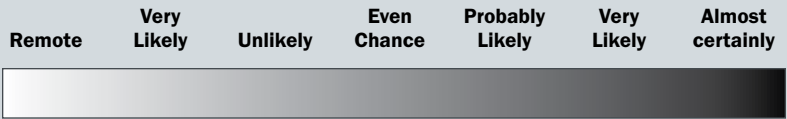
The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the IC’s failure to assess appropriately the threat from weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq two years later reenergized the issue of how to properly express analytic uncertainty. The WMD Commission’s March 2005 report made clear that the IC needed to do better in this area. In Finding 6, the report cited the failure of analysts to “adequately state the basis for or the assumptions underlying their most critical judgments” and concluded “this analytic shortcoming is one that we have seen in our other studies as well, such as Iraq, and it points to the need to develop routine analytic practices for quantifying uncertainty and managing limited collection.”²⁵⁴ Later that year, the NIC incorporated into an NIE the now well-known “What We Mean When We Say” textbox that defined and explained the estimative language used and the analytic confidence associated with the judgments advanced (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. What We Mean When We Say: An Explanation of Estimative Language

We use phrases such as we judge, we assess, and we estimate—and probabilistic terms such as probably and likely—to convey analytical assessments and judgments. Such statements are not facts, proof, or knowledge. These assessments and judgments generally are based on collected information, which often is incomplete or fragmentary. Some assessments are built on previous judgments. In all cases, assessments and judgments are not intended to imply that we have “proof” that shows something to be fact or that definitively links two items or issues.

In addition to conveying judgments rather than certainty, our estimative language also often conveys 1) our assessed likelihood or probability of an event; and 2) the level of confidence we ascribe to the judgment.

Estimates of Likelihood. Because analytical judgments are not certain, we use probabilistic language to reflect the Community’s estimates of the likelihood of developments or events. Terms *probably*, *likely*, *very likely*, or *almost certainly* indicate a greater than even chance. The terms *unlikely* and *remote* indicate a less than even chance that an event will occur; they do not imply an event will not occur. A term such as *might* reflects situations in which we are unable to assess the likelihood, generally because relevant information is unavailable, sketchy, or fragmented. Terms such as *we cannot dismiss*, *we cannot rule out*, or *we cannot discount* reflect an unlikely, improbable, or remote event whose consequences are such that it warrants mentioning. The chart provides a rough idea of the relationship of some of these terms to each other.



Confidence in Assessments. Our assessments and estimates are supported by information that varies in scope, quality, and sourcing. Consequently, we ascribe high, moderate, or low levels of confidence to our assessments, as follows.

- *High confidence* generally indicates that our judgments are based on high-quality information, and/or that the nature of the issue makes

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it possible to render a solid judgment. A *high confidence* judgment is not fact or certainty, however, and such judgments still carry a risk of being wrong.

- *Moderate confidence* generally means that the information is credibly sourced and plausible but not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence.
- *Low confidence* generally means that the information's credibility and/or plausibility is questionable, or that the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make solid analytic inferences, or that we have significant concerns or problems with the source.

After *Studies in Intelligence* published an article by this book's author on the difficulty of expressing analytic uncertainty in 2014, Mark M. Lowenthal wrote: "During the period in which the Iraq WMD NIE was written, I was the Assistant DCI for Analysis and Production and also the Vice Chairman of the NIC for Evaluation. In the aftermath of the NIE I realized that policymakers might not understand estimative language, especially what we meant when we wrote things like 'high confidence' or 'likely,' etc. I asked Robert Walpole, who was the NIO for Strategic Programs... to write a glossary or explanation for policymakers so they could understand how we used those terms.... I think, intellectually, the page is a success. The problem, of course, is this: do policymakers ever read this when they read an NIE?"

Sources: ODNI, *Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States*, NIE 2006-02R, April 2006, 2, <https://www.governmentattic.org/5docs/NIE-2006-02R.pdf>; James Marchio, " 'If the Weatherman Can...': The Intelligence Community's Struggle To Express Analytic Uncertainty in the 1970s," *Studies in Intelligence* 58, no. 4 (Extracts, December 2014), <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/ICs-Struggle-to-Express.pdf>, 38; and Mark M. Lowenthal, "The Origin of 'What We Mean When We Say,' " *Intelligence and Security Academy*, 2015.

Calls for change came from elsewhere within and outside the IC. Steven Rieber, then with the ODNI's Office of Analytic Integrity and Standards (AIS), presented a paper, titled "Communicating Uncertainty in Intelligence Analysis" at the 2006 annual meeting of the International Studies Association, in which he provided an insightful look at the community's struggle to do so. His cogent examination highlighted that, despite sporadic attempts at standardization, the IC never reached agreement and thus the dilemma of how to minimize or eliminate miscommunication in intelligence products remained unsolved.²⁵⁵

Rieber’s proposals to address this dilemma received further attention within the AIS in 2007 and 2008 when standards for assigning uncertainty were drafted but ultimately never approved as IC policy. A report from the National Research Council for the Director of National Intelligence on ways to improve US intelligence analysis drew additional attention in 2011 to the challenge of how analytic uncertainty should be conveyed. The report recommended that the IC routinely evaluate the performance of its analytic methods, urging that it “attach whenever possible numeric probabilities with uncertainty estimates for the events that analysts assess and forecast.” The report further warned:

Without explicit quantifiers, analysts cannot communicate their conclusions clearly or evaluate the accuracy of their analyses over time. Policymakers need to know how confident analysts are and how well they understand the limits to their knowledge.²⁵⁶

Amid these studies, ODNI launched in 2010 an experimental “prediction market,” both to engage a wider range of analysts and to test the utility of a system that offers a kind of precision in estimative outcomes. Elements within the IC had recognized the potential benefits of prediction markets for some time; however, legal concerns if the predictions were used for economic gain—exemplified by the Congressional outcry against a predictive market experiment run by the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency from 2001 to 2003—delayed its use in the IC.²⁵⁷

ODNI’s revision of Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203 (*Analytic Standards*) in 2015 and the changes made to how uncertainty was determined and communicated reflected many of these themes as well. ODNI incorporated a “likelihood” spectrum in ICD 203 that included the option to use numeric probabilities or commensurate estimative language. This adaptation of Sherman Kent’s “General Area of Possibility” table—first proffered to the IC more than 60 years ago²⁵⁸—provided an IC-wide uncertainty lexicon and the flexibility needed to address varied requirements and consumer preferences. Yet challenges remain.

NEVER-ENDING CHALLENGE

The historical record shows that effectively conveying analytic uncertainty has always been difficult and it has not become easier with the passage of time.²⁵⁹ Many of the challenges faced by the IC Staff and IC members, as they sought to develop measures with greater clarity, remain largely unchanged five decades later. Lack of agreement on the meaning of the estimative terms used and debate over whether words or numeric probabilities are the best way to express analytic uncertainty continues within the IC and has become a subject of considerable debate within the academic community. Even the arguments for and against quantifying the likelihood associated with judgments are virtually the same as those expressed in past decades. To use Sherman Kent's characterization of competing camps, the "poets" continue to warn of conveying false precision while the "mathematicians" stress the clarity in using numeric probabilities.

The NSCIC's vigorous examination of how best to convey analytic uncertainty and DIA's experiment with numeric probabilities also suggest that flexibility is needed on how to effectively convey analytic uncertainty. Comments shared during the NSCIC working group sessions and the DIA experiment's outcome show that the way the IC presents analytic uncertainty should be driven by the nature of the issue addressed, the type of judgment advanced, and the consumer's requirements and preferences.

At the same time, DIA's efforts and the NSCIC working group discussions highlight the need for a common lexicon for the IC and its consumers. The NIC's "What We Mean When We Say" essay has served NIE consumers well since its introduction in 2005, as is true for the way uncertainty was treated in the 2015 version of ICD 203.

As of September 2025, ODNI was contemplating whether to revise ICD 203 (*Analytic Standards*) for a second time, and a major element of revision under consideration was how analytic uncertainty is expressed and communicated. ODNI may look to convey uncertainty in new ways, including the use of visuals with coloring and shading to reflect the degree of uncertainty associated with different analytic judgments.

Debate on How To Express Uncertainty

During the past decade a sizeable body of scholarly literature has emerged examining how the IC defines, determines, and communicates uncertainty. Leading the way have been Dartmouth scholars Jeffrey Friedman and Richard Zeckhauser. Their groundbreaking essay, “Handling and Mishandling Estimative Probability: Likelihood, Confidence, and the Search for Bin Laden,” *Intelligence and National Security* 30, no. 1 (2015): 77–99, and follow-up work—such as their joint article “Analytic Confidence and Political Decisionmaking: Theoretical Principles and Experimental Evidence from National Security Professionals,” *Political Psychology* 39, no. 5 (2018): 1069–87, and Friedman’s masterful book *War and Chance: Assessing Uncertainty in International Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2019)—have set the stage for studies greatly advancing the work begun by Sherman Kent decades earlier. These include detailed discussions of the topic by David R. Mandel and Dan Irwin in “Uncertainty, Intelligence, and National Security Decisionmaking,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 34, no. 3 (October 2020): 558–82, and more recently by Robert Levine with “Probability or Confidence, a Distinction Without a Difference?” *Intelligence and National Security* 39, no. 4 (November 20, 2023). Mandel also led several in-depth studies on uncertainty, such as the June 2020 collection he edited: “Assessment and Communication of Uncertainty in Intelligence To Support Decisionmaking,” Final Report of Research Task Group SAS-114. Complementing this research have been studies advocating the use of numeric probabilities, including Alan Barnes’ “Making Intelligence Analysis More Intelligent: Using Numeric Probabilities,” *Intelligence and National Security* 31, no. 3, 327–44.

Ultimately the IC’s struggle with how best to convey analytic uncertainty in the 1970s reminds us that this challenge is likely to remain and perhaps grow as the analytic community is increasingly using artificial intelligence. The past also suggests that no “one size fits all” solution is likely to emerge or necessarily be desirable. As the IC Staff advised LTG Wilson in October 1975 regarding uncertainty, the “D/DCI/IC should promise to keep at the problem but warn the Working Group that there will never be a single, perfect key to fit all types of intelligence products.”²⁶⁰

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Although IC analysts may never be able to convey all their judgments with the precision of a weatherman, the IC must improve upon its past performance. Despite the passage of nearly half a century, certain truths continue to hold true:

- “Poets” and “mathematicians” can argue about estimative expressions, but identifying the basis for their judgments and the underlying uncertainties is most important.
- Tradecraft—including the identification and evaluation of basic assumptions, the assessment of the nature and the quality of the sources, and the search for alternative hypotheses—must not be overlooked.
- Progress depends, in part, on always acknowledging what we know and what we don’t know. As Keith Clark, chief of the Estimates Staff in the Office of National Estimates, advised IC estimators in 1967: “A confession of ignorance or uncertainty may annoy someone who wants practical answers to practical problems, but in the long run it is better to annoy than to con him.”²⁶¹

CHAPTER FIVE

NEW ANALYTIC METHODS: CONDUCTING AND PRESENTING ANALYSIS DIFFERENTLY



The Intelligence Community's (IC) struggles with accurately determining and conveying the uncertainty associated with analytic judgments became a key driver of its efforts to find new ways of producing intelligence during the 1970s. This chapter explores a little-known initiative in the community's history that has implications for challenges the IC confronts today in developing and adapting new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and analytic methodologies to make sense of "big data" in an ever-changing world. Where did the push to use "new analytic methods" in the 1970s originate, what methods did the IC introduce, and did these efforts significantly impact the way intelligence analysis was produced during the decade and subsequent years?

In responding to the need to produce intelligence in new ways—launching research, generating experimental products, creating organizations, and revamping or developing analytic training—the IC confronted significant challenges. Ultimately, its efforts to overcome the inertia of "old ways of producing intelligence" proved disappointing. Lessons for the IC today can be gleaned from this half-century-old experience, however, as the community

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grapples with an increasingly complex international environment, information overload, and a plethora of new analytic tools and methodologies designed to make sense of it all.

PRESSURE FOR GREATER ANALYTIC RIGOR AND QUALITY IN INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY PRODUCTS

An Office of Management and Budget study, titled “A Review of the Intelligence Community,” which was led by future Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) James Schlesinger and spurred the Presidential directive of 1971 calling for more consumer-responsive intelligence analysis (see Chapter One), identified several problems including the failure of IC analysis and production to keep pace with gains in technical collection. As the study noted: “[S]ome entirely new organizational units may be needed to perform currently neglected intelligence analysis functions, for example, to conduct research on improved intelligence analysis methods and techniques.”²⁶²

This wide-ranging recommendation drove IC actions and programs for the next five years and shaped the environment in which the discussion of new analytic methods and techniques emerged. The scrutiny afforded IC analysis was reinforced mid-decade by Congressional investigations. For example, the Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy (commonly known as the Murphy Commission) included as part of its 1974 “Study Plan” for the IC a paper on “Innovation in Intelligence Production.” Part I of the study was to “summarize prior work on probabilistic forecasting and scoring techniques to evaluate intelligence products and forecaster performance,” with “experimental intelligence products” as a classified annex, and Part II was to discuss “new fields for intelligence research” and “new consumers for intelligence support.” The study’s mission was to “assess innovations in information processing, real-time consumer access, and alternative paradigms of analysis,” drawing on interviews with “methodology experts at the Center for Analytical Methodology” and other IC elements.²⁶³

As noted earlier, developments in academia, the business world, and research think tanks also contributed to the pressure to review how the IC

conducted its analysis. The work being done in the “new social sciences” raised questions about why these methods were not being more widely employed in the IC.²⁶⁴ This critique was internalized by the IC; Richards Heuer acknowledged in his article, “Adapting Academic Methods and Models to Governmental Needs,” that members of his office initially “started by accepting the judgment of our critics that the Agency’s approach to political analysis was antiquated, and that many useful techniques which had become routine in academia were being ignored by the intelligence community.”²⁶⁵

The growing complexity in the international environment and information overload that analysts confronted also gave impetus to exploring new methods and tools to conduct analysis.²⁶⁶ As the decade progressed, issues such as arms control, energy, terrorism, and illicit drugs all grew in importance as did the consumer base, which expanded beyond the executive branch to include the legislative branch and the broader public.²⁶⁷ The volume of information that analysts handled also exploded, making their jobs even more difficult.²⁶⁸ At the same time the IC was attempting to adapt and apply new analytic methods, it was wrestling with introducing and integrating automated data-handling systems and the greater use of computers into the analytic production process. One such program, the Support for Analyst File Environment (SAFE), was essentially a message-handling and -filing application developed and used by analysts throughout the IC in the 1970s. DCI William Colby highlighted these challenges in a November 1974 speech on “Changes in American Intelligence,” noting: “As with many other disciplines in our times, however, intelligence has been the subject of accelerated change.... Change has affected the techniques, the subject, and control of intelligence.... The techniques of intelligence have particularly been revolutionized.”²⁶⁹

THE IC RESPONDS: INITIAL DISCUSSION AND EFFORTS

The DCI established the Product Assessment Group (PAG) within his IC Staff in direct response to President Nixon’s 1971 directive on the IC. The group’s mission included the study of “production functions” and “pilot

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or prototype production analysis.”²⁷⁰ The PAG and its renamed successor organizations—the Product Review Group (PRG) and the Product Review Division (PRD)—served to direct and coordinate multiple initiatives to improve the quality of the IC’s analysis for much of the decade, as discussed in Chapter Three.

During the spring and summer of 1972, the PRG engaged heavily with Andrew Marshall and other IC customers to identify the nature and extent of the community’s analytic problems. One stated concern was the perceived lack of research and development (R&D) on analytic techniques. In comments to the CIA’s Advanced Intelligence Seminar in May 1972, Marshall sharply criticized what he called the “total lack of R and D on intelligence analysis” and urged that “experimental products involving unspecified new forms of presentation and new techniques should be tried and floated for a reaction.”²⁷¹ Marshall’s criticisms and recommendations were endorsed by other intelligence consumers, including the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Intelligence), who wrote: “I share Mr. Marshall’s interest in research to improve intelligence analysis and I believe that research in the areas suggested by Mr. Marshall and by members of my staff would be productive.”²⁷²

Marshall’s thoughts on “R&D in Analysis and Presentation” were fleshed out in an August 1972 memo written by a member of his staff. While acknowledging that some attention was being given to “the use of new methods of analysis now,” the memo argued that “the rate of innovation is low” and “DCI-level action is initially needed to give visibility and support to the task.” Support was needed in “introducing analysts to rigorous, alternative approaches to replace their present and, perhaps, overly individualistic intuitive methods.” Organizational behavior, models of decisionmaking processes, psychological evaluative approaches, and Bayesian techniques were all cited as examples of “immediate relevance;” however, “these are only a sample of what may be available in the academic and business community as methods to view problems.” The memorandum suggested that a two-fold approach to R&D was needed: “First, there must be a continuous effort to develop new or find old methods to analyze problems and test their

applicability to intelligence situations. Second, research needs to investigate how the results of analysis can be best communicated to the consumer.”²⁷³

Analysis R&D: Ongoing Challenge

Tradecraft expert and former National Intelligence Officer (NIO) Randolph Pherson noted in an email to the author on creating new analytic methods: “This is a theme I have stressed for decades. Even when funding is allocated, it usually goes to IT [Information Technology] and data mining, almost never to developing analytic tools that analysts can use.... Over my career, I developed several analytic tools—military coup methodology, short-term political instability tool, Mexico collaborative network linking analysts/collectors/policymakers—but none got institutionalized or fully funded. IARPA [Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity] and its predecessors would gladly fund sensors and other collection technologies but not analytic support tools. For example, I submitted a \$380,000 proposal to fund a coup methodology tool that had proved 80-percent accurate and had four NIOs, CIA, DIA, and State on board and was rejected. All the submissions that were accepted that year had to do with collection. I was told that a submission for only \$380,000 must mean the tool has no value; they only pay attention if the amount is over one million.”

Source: Randolph Pherson (IC tradecraft expert), in email exchange with the author, April 18, 2021.

The PRG took to heart Marshall’s criticisms and the recommendations forwarded by his staff. A member of the group acknowledged in a memo written in September 1972 that, despite some effort to introduce new techniques into the production process, “very little progress has been made.” The PRG memo attributed this failure to several factors including disbelief that the new techniques were applicable to IC problems and that the new techniques would “result in a product incomprehensible to the users of finished intelligence.” Potential ways to increase the use of the new techniques were broached. One approach would be to rely on the passage of time, allowing old managers to “fade out and a new generation of analysts, more innovative and better trained” to emerge. The PRG could accelerate

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the process, however, if it were to “select a live, ongoing active intelligence problem for attack by the new techniques.” The group should “then form a group of substantive analysts and information science experts to work together to see how well theory works in practice” and determine whether “the results are persuasive in terms of finished intelligence.” The memo acknowledged limiting factors, such as the personnel available to teach and apply the new techniques are “woefully lacking in numbers.” Challenging the PRG to “jointly think through how we are to get over the formidable obstacles which now prevent a practical test of the applicability of the new ideas to intelligence production,” the memo concluded: “[O]nly demonstrated publicized test[s] with discernible success will overcome the inertia of the old ways of producing intelligence.”²⁷⁴

This PRG memo proved prophetic in how the IC Staff and the larger community would respond to President Nixon's charge and the wider criticisms of the IC's analysis. IC actions during the next five years largely fell into four main areas: 1) research and outreach, 2) application and experimentation, 3) organizational support, and 4) training. Through these endeavors, the IC attempted to address Marshall's charge to “develop new or find old methods to analyze problems and test their applicability to intelligence situations” and “investigate how the results of analysis can be best communicated to the consumer.”²⁷⁵

RESEARCH, EXPERIMENTATION, AND APPLICATION

Efforts to spur and leverage analysis research began early in 1972. PRG Chief Jack Thomas met in February with the RAND Corporation's vice president to discuss possible ways in which RAND could assist with the development of the intended DCI program responding to President Nixon's November 1971 directive. RAND's vice president indicated an interest in becoming involved in conceptual problems, such as a “survey of techniques and modes of analysis (DELPHI, Bayesian theory) and an examination of statistical forecasting techniques such as... [those] used in the stock market, weather forecasting, etc.”²⁷⁶

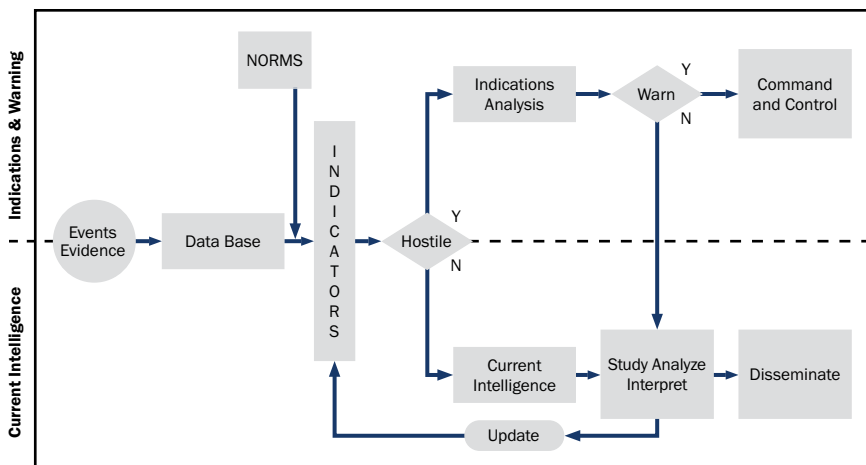
Even greater potential for methods research was seen in expanding and modifying the IC's relationship with the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), established by the Department of Defense (DoD) in 1958 to "direct and perform advanced research and development projects in the fields of space science and technology, ballistic missile defense, and other advanced research and development as assigned by the Secretary of Defense."²⁷⁷ Meetings between PRG and ARPA personnel in May 1972 appeared promising. Jack Thomas, in a memo to the Deputy DCI for National Intelligence Programs Evaluation (D/DCI/NIPE), wrote: "I am convinced that it will be possible for the intelligence community to take advantage of research activities being financed by ARPA at no cost to the intelligence budget." He concluded: "I recognize that some of the 'basic research' which ARPA has sponsored has been described as 'fun and games for professors' but I believe that an interested intelligence committee, working closely with the appropriate ARPA officials, would have a good chance of fostering something which could be directly useful."²⁷⁸ A week later, PRG Chief Thomas forwarded to the D/DCI/NIPE a memorandum for his signature describing a project with ARPA intended to identify research that ARPA "could support and which would be intended to provide improved analytical methodologies for intelligence production."²⁷⁹

Individual intelligence agencies pursued research opportunities as well. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), for example, published a "Conceptual Plan for Development and Experimentation Laboratory Techniques of Analysis" in early 1973 for what was called "Project DELTA" (Fig. 5). The plan provided a "systems concept, definition of objectives, organizational structure, and statement of resource requirements for a DIA RDT&E [Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation] program for improved methodologies."²⁸⁰ Initially, the effort would focus on improving capabilities in the field of operational intelligence and warning, noting that the "development of improved analytical methodology and techniques for current intelligence and warning is analogous to those research efforts in the medical community which are directed at continually improving diagnostic

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routines and treatment protocols.”²⁸¹ In similar fashion, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) established the Center for Analytical Development in the Office of Research and Development (ORD) in 1973.²⁸²

Figure 5. Defense Intelligence Agency's Project DELTA



One of DIA's key objectives for Project DELTA was to establish an RDT&E facility that would develop “improved analytical methodology and techniques for current intelligence and warning.” Among the methodologies to be tested were data mapping, probability (including Bayesian) analysis, regression analysis, modeling, scenario-driven simulation, and gaming techniques. Methodologies that were determined to be effective would be shared with analysts engaged in operational intelligence, providing both indications and warning (I&W) and current intelligence support.

Source: “Conceptual Plan for Development and Experimentation Laboratory for Techniques of Analysis, Project DELTA (Formerly JIRN),” c. 1973, CIA-RDP79M00096A000500060005-8, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79m00096a000500060005-8>, Enclosure 1 (Operational Intelligence).

The IC's multiple efforts to partner with academic and other organizations in conducting analytic methodology development and research soon highlighted the need for better coordination within the community. Deputy Director of Central Intelligence for the Intelligence Community (D/DCI/IC) Daniel Graham conveyed this imperative in a note to the

DCI: “The past several years have seen the growth of both a dialogue and institutional efforts to improve analytical methodology and substantive external research in support of intelligence;... [however,] it has been obvious for some time now that greater coordination is required in this area.”²⁸³ Consequently, LTG Graham, DCI Colby, the ARPA director, and Marshall met on November 21, 1973 to discuss a way forward, including a proposal for the IC to chair a community working group—incorporating ARPA even though not a member of the IC—that would conduct an external research review.²⁸⁴

Following the November 1973 meeting, the DCI wrote a note to his staff laying out the way ahead for the community. He directed that “National Intelligence Officers and others look for substantive projects which might be helped by innovative research or outside research.” Colby also ordered the IC and his deputy directors for analysis and science and technology to “look for **techniques** which could help analysts” and the Research and Development Council to “keep the subject under review and swap ideas,” while ensuring the director of training was kept informed “so new ideas can be included in... discussions and training.”²⁸⁵

“EXPERIMENTAL PRODUCTS” AND “TECHNIQUES” TO HELP ANALYSTS

DCI Colby’s marching orders to the community reinforced efforts that Marshall had begun almost a year earlier to improve the quality of intelligence provided to Dr. Henry Kissinger. According to Marshall, Kissinger said “top-level policymaking was essentially a matter of making complicated bets about the future... and he wished that intelligence would supply him with estimates of the relevant betting odds.”²⁸⁶ Attempting to give Kissinger the betting odds he desired, Marshall commissioned three assessments. One was the likelihood of a Sino-Soviet war, which remains largely classified. A second, produced by DIA, was “An Appraisal of the Probability of an Outbreak of Hostilities on Cyprus: A Case Study Illustrating the Use of Probabilistic Procedures,” which employed the Markov

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modeling technique—a sophisticated mathematical method of predicting the eventual state of a system, based on knowledge of its current situation and the probabilities of transitions through the intermediary states.²⁸⁷ The last was a CIA *Intelligence Memorandum*, titled “Panama: 1973–The Year of the Treaty?” All three products used numerical probabilities in an effort to more effectively convey analysts’ judgments to the consumer; each also explored multiple alternative outcomes and what might lead to them. When asked whether he found these products of interest, Kissinger responded yes, “though still in **very** elementary style.” Kissinger appears to have read all products closely, writing margin comments on each and indicating that he liked the DIA product best.²⁸⁸

Elsewhere in the community similar efforts to identify and apply new methodologies were under way. A CIA memo in August 1973 outlined “A Program for Application of New Analytical Methods to Political Research,” urging “exploring, testing, and applying certain analytical methods and techniques which, as developed in academic and experimental research projects, appear promising to the practical needs of political analysis and policy support.” The memo also recommended establishing within the newly created Office of Political Research (OPR) “an analytical techniques staff directly subordinate to D/OPR to design and develop analytical projects to which new techniques, which have been carefully considered and are found to be promising, can be applied.”²⁸⁹

During the next four years at least a dozen assessments were completed by applying new methodologies or techniques. Building on earlier efforts, Bayesian analysis (statistical inference grounded in probability) was used most frequently, and had been previously employed by CIA in several products, followed by the Delphi technique (an interactive forecasting method).²⁹⁰ These new assessments included an OPR experimental product that applied Bayesian analysis in February 1974 to evaluate evidence of the likelihood that the North Vietnamese would launch a major attack in South Vietnam; the prospects of Sino-Soviet hostilities from summer 1974 to the present; and the likelihood of Arab-Israeli hostilities from autumn 1974 to June 1976.²⁹¹

Various IC elements used other tools and methodologies—drawn from or adapted from the social sciences—to produce intelligence products as well. For example, CIA began the “Gurr project” as “an experiment in adapting a model taken from political science theory to practical intelligence analysis.”²⁹² Dr. Ted Gurr’s model of political violence (*Why Men Rebel*) was modified slightly and operationalized using panels of country experts to estimate the values of 18 variables for each significant political actor group in Argentina, Ethiopia, and Thailand (Fig. 6).²⁹³ The objective was to determine if the model could predict changes in the potential for various types of political violence. As Richards Heuer reported two years later: “[T]he results were mixed, suggesting the need for considerable remodeling in future applications that may be considered.”²⁹⁴ Another example was CIA’s use of cross-impact analysis (a forecasting technique developed for industry) to examine events in Rhodesia. The report issued upon the project’s completion characterized it as a “highly successful test application,” with the technique “very well received by the country analysts” because it seemed to offer “considerable promise as a systematic procedure for dealing with complex interactions.”²⁹⁵ The IC also conducted experimental work with political games and simulations.²⁹⁶

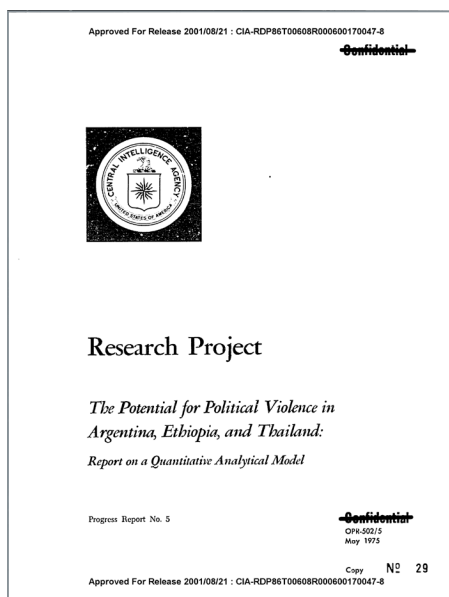
These IC analytic efforts focused primarily on the first half of Marshall’s challenge to “develop new or find old methods to analyze problems and test their applicability to intelligence situations,” but the community launched other initiatives to “investigate how the results of analysis can be best communicated to the consumer.”²⁹⁷ As noted in Chapter Four, the IC discussed and tested various methods to quantify uncertainty to more precisely characterize and clearly communicate uncertainty, culminating in DIA’s “Experiment in Uncertainty” in 1976.

This desire for clearer articulation of analytic confidence levels was highlighted in an exchange of messages in the summer of 1975 between LTG Samuel Wilson, LTG Graham’s successor as the D/DCI/IC, and Edward Proctor, CIA’s Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI), with Wilson requesting the CIA’s assistance in how to express uncertainties, particularly in “‘softer’ areas—e.g., in political judgments.”²⁹⁸ DIA’s “Experiment with

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Uncertainty,” however, probably represented the IC’s most significant and dramatic effort to better convey the results of the analysis to its consumers.²⁹⁹

Figure 6. CIA’s “Gurr Project”



Using Gurr’s model of political violence, drawn from his book *Why Men Rebel*, a panel of CIA country experts applied the estimated values of 18 variables to determine “The Potential for Political Violence in Argentina, Ethiopia, and Thailand.”

Source: “The Potential for Political Violence in Argentina, Ethiopia, and Thailand: Report on Quantitative Analytical Model,” May 1975, CIA-RDP86T00608R000600170047-8, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp86t00608r000600170047-8>.

Beyond the products themselves, the IC developed and disseminated working aids and publications to assist analysts in applying the methodologies and techniques. CIA’s Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) began preparing and disseminating a publication for the Agency, called “Notes on Methodology,” in 1973. This newsletter discussed “some of the newer social science methods or techniques such as Delphi and probability diagrams

which the OCI analyst might beneficially utilize to improve or complement his intuitive analytical judgments,” as well as “approaches originated outside the discipline of political science which can be used to explain political phenomenon.”³⁰⁰ OCI followed up the newsletter with a “Glossary of Terms and Techniques for Political Analysis.” This two-section working aid defined approximately 500 terms and explained close to 100 techniques, methods, or approaches for analyzing political data.³⁰¹ A year later, OPR published a *Handbook of Bayesian Analysis for Intelligence* that was “written for potential users of the technique, both to make OPR’s experience available to others, and to encourage and facilitate its proper use.”³⁰²

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND TRAINING

In conjunction with these efforts to apply new analytic methodologies and techniques, the IC began establishing organizational structures and training. To support research, in December 1973, the IC stood up the Intelligence Research and Development Council (IRDC), which began meeting quarterly.³⁰³ More significant was the effort in 1974 to establish an Analytical Support Center sponsored by ARPA, DoD, CIA, and the IC Staff “to aid those production components of the United States Intelligence Community responsible for supporting policy analysis.” The center was to provide “a continuing source of external institutional support to these in-house efforts that will give intelligence analysts an opportunity to experiment with the use of different approaches to solving policy analysis problems outside their normal production responsibilities, as well as the capability to obtain ad hoc support on a timely basis.”³⁰⁴

Various IC organizations also began to establish methodology elements, with CIA’s effort the most prominent. During 1974, the Directorate of Intelligence created the Analytic Techniques Group (ATG) within OPR. The ATG orchestrated many of the experimental assessments launched that year.³⁰⁵ In December 1976, a CIA reorganization created the Methods and Forecasting Division of the Office of Regional and Political Analysis (ORPA), followed by the establishment of the Analytical Methodology

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Research Division (AMR/ORD) within the Office of Research and Development in January 1977.³⁰⁶

IC elements also provided instruction for their analysts and managers on new analytic techniques and methodologies and, in an early step in the fall of 1972, the community conducted a survey of all analytic methodology training being delivered to the CIA, DIA, and State/INR workforces.³⁰⁷ As noted in a final report on analytical training in CIA submitted in February 1975:

While there is no magic formula for making a good analyst, we do consider that the analyst of the next 25 years will rely less than in the past on documentary and historical tools and more upon mathematical and computer-assisted analytic methods.... We think that new analysts and those already in the Agency and Community (regardless of rank or position) can be helped by formal classroom exposure to some of the newer analytic methods which have been developed in universities and research organizations.³⁰⁸

Across the IC, various elements revised training to incorporate new blocks of instruction, create new courses, and hold workshops and seminars to increase their workforce's familiarity with these methods and their potential uses.³⁰⁹ As early as 1973, CIA's Senior Seminar contained a weeklong block on "New Methodologies of Interest to Intelligence." Topics covered included "New Methods for Foreign Affairs Analysis," "Probability Estimates and Probabilistic Procedures in Intelligence Analysis," and "The Need for New Methods."³¹⁰ CIA's Office of Training also offered general instruction on "Intelligence Information Systems," while individual offices delivered specialized instruction, such as "analytic methods and the uses of machines in economic analysis."³¹¹ Although disagreement emerged within the agency over whether there should be "general offerings in new analytical methodologies," new courses—such as "Statistical Concepts for Analysts and Managers"—were created and made available to the larger IC.³¹²

THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY'S SELF-ASSESSMENT: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

To its credit, the community took stock of its progress in advancing and applying the new analytic methods and tools in 1975 and 1976, carefully weighing the value and the costs associated with them. CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence, for example, sponsored a seminar on "Intelligence Analysis in the CIA Today" in August 1975. Of note, general agreement appeared to emerge that "the variety of analytical approaches, tools, models, and methodologies applicable to intelligence analysis is now very extensive, but that accepted doctrine on how and in what mix they should be applied is much less developed and perhaps should be given more consideration." A speaker at the seminar carried this point further, noting: "We have not given enough studied, doctrinal consideration to the mix of models or methodologies with which we approach political analysis in the CIA, or to the need for a proper integration of multi-discipline approaches."³¹³ A different but equally troubling theme was raised at another analysis seminar a year later: "At this point, in fact, we have available about 100 pounds of methodology and one-half ounce of applications."³¹⁴

More revealing were the findings from an IC-wide survey on the community's use of new analytical methods published in November 1975. The survey provided detailed descriptions of the efforts and initiatives undertaken at CIA, DIA, State/INR, and ARPA with the caveat that "new analytical methods is a notoriously imprecise term" and that, as used in this survey, it referred "only to those techniques designed for political, economic, and military intelligence." Several important themes emerged in the survey report. One, not surprisingly, deemed it would be "premature to judge the value of many of the methods which are described in the body of this report," because "much of the Community's use of new analytical methods, particularly for political analysis, is still tentative and experimental, and appropriately so." Another theme offered that interest in the new methods varied from agency to agency and from office to office due "to the greater susceptibility of some kinds of work to quantitative treatment than others." Lastly, the demands imposed by the new methods needed to be considered. As the survey report concluded: "Some balance needs to be struck, then,

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between imposing additional burdens on already busy analysts and subjecting this preliminary work to the risk of sterility.”³¹⁵

Reaction to the IC survey findings was mixed. Among CIA leadership some saw the survey as premature because “in many cases the analysts who are trying to bend these new techniques to their own purposes are themselves uncertain how productive their effort will ultimately be.” Others were dissatisfied with “its vacuum cleaner approach” and “no real qualitative commentary on what looks promising.” Nonetheless, the study was seen as “worth disseminating to USIB [United States Intelligence Board] agencies and perhaps to the Working Group of the NSCIC [National Security Council Intelligence Committee] as well.”³¹⁶

Additional assessments of the IC effort to advance new analytic methods occurred during the following years. In an August 1976 paper summarizing the results of a brainstorming session on “Analysis in CIA’s DDI: Problems and Issues,” the collective view emerged of a “**gulf between new methodologies and ‘real’ day-by-day analysis.** It’s not that the directorate has neglected to investigate new analytical techniques in the past few years, but rather that it has not managed to put them into serious and sustained use as an integral part of the analytical process. In many cases, new methodologies are little more than ‘showpieces’ that attest to our interest but remain on the shelf.”³¹⁷ Richards Heuer echoed this sentiment but put it into perspective in his remarks to a conference of academics in July 1977: “Because this paper focuses exclusively on methodologically oriented research, the reader might gain the impression that this is a major portion of the Agency’s analytical effort. It isn’t. It is only a very small part of the total political research effort, and it is bound to remain a small part.”³¹⁸

Heuer’s assessment of the community’s progress in adapting and employing new analytic methodologies and tools was reinforced in a 1980 report, titled “Observations on CIA’s Efforts in Developing Analytical Methodologies.” Produced by the CIA’s Science and Technology Advisory Panel along with representatives from other CIA offices, the report began with several “General Observations” that addressed the challenges in developing and applying analytical methodologies. One observation noted

that, although the statistical nature of intelligence was a recurring theme, “quantitative statistical methodology is little used within CIA.” The report continued: “In the political area in particular, analysts generally are aware of the quantitative methods of political science but not much use is made of them, in part because of the heavy premium placed on current intelligence analysis and production.” Another observation recognized that developing analytical methodologies required an understanding of the common features of how analysts work and that “at present there is no common language/framework for describing analysis”—a problem exacerbated by the lack of coordination among some of the responsible offices. Lastly, the report noted the lack of consensus on whether the development of analytical methodologies should be “centralized with ‘offline’ development of the methodologies (ORD) or considered part of the continuing work of the NFAC [National Foreign Assessment Center] offices, such as OSR [Office of Strategic Research], where methodologies are developed in the course of problem solving.” Although either approach would work, the panel judged that CIA management must ensure such development occurred. The report warned that “no one at present has that responsibility” and “the present largely haphazard approach to analytical methodologies will be perpetuated unless management responsibilities and oversight are clearly defined and understood by the participants.”³¹⁹

National Foreign Assessment Center

NFAC was created by DCI Stansfield Turner in 1977 as part of his efforts to reorganize CIA’s analytic architecture. NFAC—which included a Center for Policy Support, Offices of Political Analysis, Scientific Intelligence, Weapons Intelligence, and National Intelligence Officers (NIO)—essentially comprised what had been CIA’s Directorate of Intelligence.

Sources: Richard H. Immerman, *The Hidden Hand: A Brief History of the CIA* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 116–17; and “Establishment of the National Foreign Assessment Center,” October 7, 1977, CIA-RDP80B01554R003300040015-0, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80b01554r003300040015-0>.

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Perhaps Heuer best described the community's progress in developing and applying new analytic methods when he asserted in 1977: "The true test of success is not the reports we produce ourselves, but the extent to which we serve as a catalyst to change the attitudes and procedures of other analysts. In this respect our success has been more modest than we might hope, but nonetheless sufficient to encourage further pursuit of our goals."³²⁰

SINCE THE 1970S: WHITHER ANALYTIC METHODOLOGIES?

Interest in adapting and applying new analytic methods continued in the IC after 1980, but certainly not at the same scale or with the level of support such efforts received during the 1970s. IC publications—including CIA's *Analytic Methods Review*, a classified journal devoted to methodological issues and applications—were produced and disseminated, indicating ongoing interest.³²¹ DIA published a *Methodology Catalog: An Aid to Intelligence Analysts and Forecasters* in 1983.³²² Applying new methodologies against intelligence issues also continued, albeit on a more limited basis. For example, a users' guide for POLICON, a computer-assisted methodology, was published at CIA in 1986. The POLICON methodology was based on expected utility analysis and was billed as "an analytic tool that can help country specialists in the Directorate of Intelligence assess complex situations quickly and with consistency."³²³ Stanley Feder—a former CIA analyst and national intelligence officer, as well as the developer of POLICON—claims he tested this methodology more than 1,200 times during his tenure at the Agency.³²⁴

Some IC leaders in the 1980s and 1990s supported further exploration and use of new analytic methods. Robert Gates, for example, brought greater attention to the analytic process and, by default, structured analytic techniques (SATs).³²⁵ Former NIO Randolph Pherson recalled to the author that Gates, as CIA's DDI, directed him to write a series of papers—the closely-held "Scenarios of Dramatic Political Change"—that offered several scenarios that might prompt a dramatic foreign event, such as the

Saudi monarchy's collapse.³²⁶ In the 1990s, DDI Douglas MacEachin and his successor John McLaughlin picked up where Gates left off in pushing for increased analytic rigor and strong tradecraft.³²⁷

Even with IC leaders' intermittent emphasis, multiple scholars noted the community's work lacked the use of SATs.³²⁸ Stephen Marrin cited his experience as an analyst at CIA during the late 1990s when the "reigning analytic paradigm was based on generalized intuition." Marrin asserted: "No one I knew—except for maybe the economic analysts—used any form of structured analytic process that was transparent to others. No quantitative methods; no special software; no analysis of competing hypotheses; not even link charts."³²⁹

As a product evaluator within ODNI's Analytic Integrity and Standards (AIS) Group for 11 years, I evaluated multiple intelligence products where it was unclear whether SATs had been used. Interviews with analysts confirmed that in some cases SATs were not mentioned or included in the final product to either improve the assessment's readability or were reflected in a higher confidence level associated with a judgment.

– JAMES MARCHIO

The 9/11 and 2003 weapons of mass destruction (WMD) intelligence failures renewed calls for greater analytic rigor and increased use of alternative techniques and methodologies. As specified in the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) was to "encourage sound analytic methods and tradecraft" and "conduct alternative analysis (commonly referred to as 'red team analysis') of information and conclusions in intelligence products."³³⁰ This language was captured and expanded in Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203 (*Analytic Standards*), in 2007. Under analytic tradecraft standard four (*Incorporates alternative analysis where appropriate*), ICD 203 directed "to the extent possible, analysis should incorporate insights from

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the application of structured analytic technique(s) appropriate to the topic being analyzed.” The definition of terms contained in the annex to ICD 203 went further in linking alternative analysis with SATs, specifically identifying argument mapping, key assumptions checks, analysis of competing hypotheses, comparative analysis, statistical tests, and gaming and simulation as examples. ICD 203 directed that “analysts should utilize appropriate structured analytic techniques routinely in their analysis to enhance analytic rigor and critical thinking.”³³¹

In the ensuing years, the IC responded with increased training on the use of SATs, complemented by primers on employing them to improve intelligence analysis and by creation of methodology tradecraft cells within offices and organizations.³³² Scholars and former intelligence practitioners—such as Heuer and Pherson—also contributed to the literature and training available on employing SATs.³³³

When ICD 203 was revised in 2015, one of the most significant changes was deletion of the language on SATs in standard four. As the ODNI action officer responsible for leading the ICD 203 revision, I know this was done partly to eliminate what was perceived to be an incentive for analysts to “check the box” and receive higher tradecraft evaluation scores for standard four by simply using an SAT.

– JAMES MARCHIO

Despite these efforts, the IC's use of SATs in intelligence products remained spotty. In a 2009 presentation to the National Academy of Sciences on the “The Evolution of Structured Analytic Techniques,” Heuer pointed out that even “at the National Intelligence Council [NIC], the use of structured techniques is the exception not the rule.”³³⁴ Stephen Coulthart's detailed study of the use of SATs within the Department of State's intelligence arm was equally alarming: “Despite the US Government's investment in training thousands of analysts, there is no solid evidence on how often or

why analysts actually use SATs.”³³⁵ In the same vein, a 2016 RAND study asserted that “in recent years, the IC has greatly increased its use of SATs,” but acknowledged that “most IC agencies do not systematically track how often their products are using SATs and how SATs are affecting the quality of analysis.”³³⁶ A contributing factor to this knowledge gap is that SATs have yet to be scientifically tested to confirm they improve the quality of analysis.³³⁷ In addition, the use of SATs to produce a given intelligence assessment may not be evident in the finished product disseminated to the consumer or in the unclassified paper available to scholars.³³⁸

NET ASSESSMENT

The historical record confirms the IC made a concerted effort in the 1970s to respond to the criticisms delivered by the executive branch and others regarding the analytic methods it applied and the quality of intelligence it produced. The DCI and his staff provided both visibility and significant support to advancing new analytic methods, techniques, and tools within the IC.

Efforts to produce intelligence in new ways generated multiple management challenges for IC organizations. Widespread acceptance of the new techniques and methods was not forthcoming. For many within the community, the value of these methodologies was still uncertain, and only experimental application was warranted. The skepticism many analysts held concerning these methods was not reduced nor were their mindsets changed during the decade. The expertise and training required to apply these new methodologies also posed resource challenges for IC leaders, as they tried to balance the additional work required to use the new methods with an ever-growing demand for intelligence from an increasing number and variety of consumers.

Striving to overcome the inertia of “old ways of producing intelligence” generated results that were disappointing but not surprising. As Heuer observed decades later about his office’s contributions: “This division did some very good and interesting quantitative work, but as far as I can tell, it

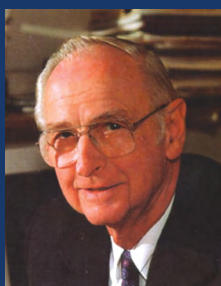
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did not lead to any long-term change in analytic methods.”³³⁹ The experimental assessments produced between 1972 and 1977 highlighted where new tools, techniques, and methods—often adapted from academia and business—could be used by the IC to gain greater insight. This success, however, was dependent on the issue being assessed and the data available to inform the assessment. These “new methods” demanded more information than normally available to analysts. Consequently “old ways of producing intelligence” largely prevailed in the ensuing decades. As observed in Chapter Four, the same was true for the second half of the challenge that Marshall posed to the IC in 1972—communicating the results of its analysis more effectively. DIA’s 1976 “Experiment with Uncertainty” ultimately failed and disagreement continued within the IC over how to express uncertainty. Marshall’s challenge was only partially addressed years later by the NIC’s use of a “What We Mean When We Say” textbox in its products and the revision of ICD 203 in 2015.

The relevance of the IC’s exploration of new analytic methods in the 1970s for today’s community is apparent from even a cursory examination of the 2019 *National Intelligence Strategy* (NIS). The NIS identifies “Anticipatory Intelligence” as one of the IC’s “Mission Objectives” and “Innovation” as an “Enterprise Objective.” In discussing anticipatory intelligence, the NIS states the IC will develop and expand its use of “quantitative analytic methods” and “data analysis techniques and tradecraft.” This infusion of quantitative analysis is to be “done while reinforcing qualitative methods” in order “to improve the IC’s ability to identify, analyze, and forecast changing conditions and emerging trends across multiple portfolios.” Similarly, when describing innovation, the NIS emphasizes exploring “novel applications of technology and other resources to advance tradecraft and achieve mission advantage,” specifically noting “these approaches should increase insight, knowledge, and speed through artificial intelligence, automation, and augmentation.” Tapping themes reminiscent of the effort to expand the analytic toolkit in the 1970s, the NIS asserts that “machine learning research has led to new automated methods for forecasting political instability from social media, news, financial data, web search queries, and thousands of other data

streams. These innovative applications are beginning to revolutionize the future of intelligence to better inform our decisionmakers.”³⁴⁰

Yet, as will be discussed in Chapter Ten, concern and caution involving the promise and pitfalls associated with these new tools are just as warranted today as they were during Colby’s tenure as DCI. Just as IC elements in the 1970s took pains to test and evaluate new or adapted analytic methodologies—for example, DIA’s Project DELTA and CIA’s Center for Analytical Development—the IC of today and tomorrow would be wise to demonstrate the relevance, value, and viability of new tools—particularly AI—before advancing their use in intelligence analysis.



“The kinds of analytical techniques which seem most useful for our purposes are those which help to trace the logical consequences of subjective judgments, extend the mental capacity of the individual analyst, force the analyst to make assumptions explicit, or help to organize complexity.”

– RICHARDS J. HEUER, JR.
Presentation at Strategic Studies Institute, 1977

CHAPTER SIX

SEEKING TO INSTITUTIONALIZE DEVIL'S ADVOCACY IN INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS



The position of *advocatus diaboli* (Latin for devil's advocate) was created by the Roman Catholic Church in the late 16th century to institutionalize the role of one who “argued against the canonization (sainthood) of a candidate in order to uncover any character flaws or misrepresentation of the evidence favoring canonization.”³⁴¹ Although not exactly the function that Intelligence Community (IC) proponents envisioned for a devil's advocate, many—including the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI)—saw value in creating a formal “challenge mechanism” to ensure divergent points of view were properly expressed in finished products.

World events during the early 1970s provided impetus to find new processes and procedures to improve intelligence analysis and limit chances for surprise, including an effort mid-decade to institutionalize the role of devil's advocate within the IC. Proposed by DCI William Colby in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the initiative to create a challenge mechanism failed to produce either an entity or a directive establishing a procedure for challenging an analytic line and encouraging alternative approaches. The lessons learned from this attempt, however, engendered IC efforts to institutionalize

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challenge mechanisms, such as the DCI Red Cell, and encouraged alternative analysis and the use of structured analytic techniques (SATs) in the years that followed.

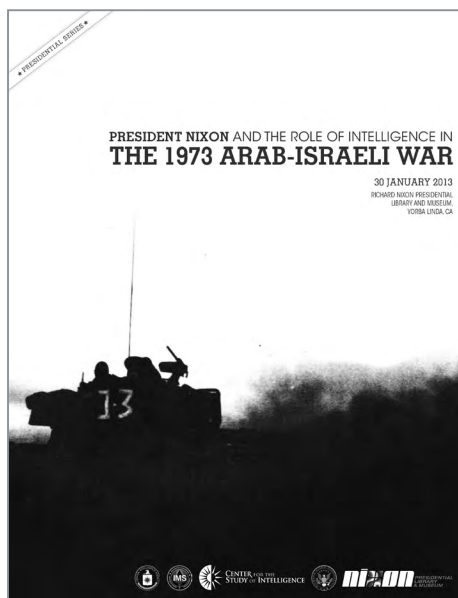
This chapter fills an important gap in the literature surrounding the development of alternative analysis and SATs within the IC. Studies focused on the actions of DCIs Colby and Richard Helms either do not address the issue or only do so in passing, such as Harold Ford's formerly classified study on Colby's tenure that simply acknowledges he "encouraged more competitive analysis and encouraged the airing of unorthodox interpretations and devil's advocate evaluations."³⁴² Other works that address alternative analysis more broadly, such as Micah Zenko's *Red Team*, fail to address challenge mechanisms or efforts to institutionalize a devil's advocate position in the IC during the mid-1970s and instead focus on the Team A/B "experiment" of 1976 (see textbox in this chapter).³⁴³ "Alternative analysis" refers to a range of analytic methods and approaches to include competitive analysis, devil's advocacy, red cell/red teams, other SATs, and simply the systematic evaluation of differing hypotheses to explain events or phenomena.

INTELLIGENCE FAILURE SPURS INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY CHALLENGE MECHANISM INITIATIVE

Although the IC provided consumers with alternative analysis on a few occasions in its early decades, the trigger prompting development of an IC challenge mechanism was the community's failure to foresee the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973, which began just one month into Colby's time as DCI. The Yom Kippur War was widely perceived as a major intelligence failure, spurring multiple actions and recommendations to improve strategic warning and prevent future surprises (Fig. 7).³⁴⁴ Colby surfaced some of these initiatives in a memo to National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger on October 27, titled "Critique of Middle East Crisis." The DCI conveyed that the IC Staff had concluded that "there was an initial analytical failure in the sense that the intelligence community did not issue a clear warning of impending Arab-Israeli hostilities," and acknowledged Kissinger's observation that "this

was not so much a question of turning up ‘facts,’ but one of interpretation and analysis.” Colby assured, “Somehow we must build into our analytical process an automatic challenge or advocacy of variations to the consensus.”³⁴⁵

Figure 7. “Role of Intelligence in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War”



For an overall summary of the 1973 war and an excellent compendium of primary sources, see *President Nixon and the Role of Intelligence in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2013).

Source: *President Nixon and the Role of Intelligence in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2013), <https://www.cia.gov/resources/publications/president-nixon-and-the-role-of-intelligence-in-the-1973-arab-israeli-war/>.

Much of the DCI's October memo to Kissinger drew on the interim findings his staff had provided him. Colby used these findings to task the IC Staff to “develop regular systems to ensure that serious divergent points of view and conflicting elements of information not be submerged by managerial fiat or the mechanism of reinforcing consensus.” His guidance specified

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that “such systems will also be charged with ensuring the establishment of means to provide the views of devils’ advocates, adversary procedures, and use of gaming techniques as appropriate.”³⁴⁶

Alternative Analysis and the IC

One of the earliest mentions of alternative analysis being used in the IC as part of the analytic process was during the 1960s with assessments involving the Vietnam War. At the request of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, CIA analysts produced an assessment, titled *The Vietnamese Communists’ Will to Persist*, that employed a “red team” approach. According to a Center for the Study of Intelligence report, analysts during this period used “solid alternative analysis techniques (red team, devil’s advocate, and competing hypotheses).”

The Nixon administration’s dissatisfaction with the overall quality of IC analysis spurred additional early efforts to produce alternative analysis. DCI Helms sent Kissinger “a new kind of paper” on Soviet Strategic Programs in February 1970 intended for President Nixon. Kissinger, however, never forwarded the assessment to the President and told Helms that, although he thought the memorandum was “an interesting change of pace,” the format was “probably too much of a general essay to be a regular publication.” Kissinger advised Helms that “the trick... is striking the right balance between facts and judgments” and “occasionally, I think it would be productive to play the devil’s advocate and offer alternative hypotheses before choosing, or maybe not choosing.” Similarly, when meeting with Colby in June 1973, Kissinger urged the DCI-designate to ensure “analysts clearly bring out alternative interpretations and possible developments,” requesting that “he not be subjected to any consensus language.”

Sources: *The Directorate of Intelligence: Fifty Years of Informing Policy, 1952-2002* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2002), 40–45; “CIA Memo to the President on Soviet Strategic Programs,” March 6, 1970, LOC-HAK-4-5-2-9, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/loc-hak-4-5-2-9>; “Breakfast with Dr. Henry A Kissinger on 15 June 73,” June 18, 1973, CIA-RDP80M01048A000800050023-6, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80m01048a000800050023-6>.

These and other proposals were presented to the US Intelligence Board (USIB) in December 1973 as “Interim Recommendations.” Two of these

proposals addressed the problems that the challenge mechanism was designed to address and the form it might take. One recommendation was to establish “a community-wide intelligence forum for the purpose of combatting the ‘mind set syndrome.’” The other was to “create a challenge mechanism external to the IC to combat the dual problems of analyst desensitization resulting from long-term exposure to confrontation situations and the problem of reinforcing consensus.” Presciently, the memo forwarding the interim recommendations noted in parentheses: “(Everyone wants a challenge mechanism. Quarrel will be how the details will be worked out.)”³⁴⁷

DEVELOPING A “CHALLENGE MECHANISM”

The IC Staff moved quickly on DCI Colby's directive. The Product Review Division (PRD) was tasked in January 1974 to produce “a study of challenge procedures which could enhance the Community's analytical prowess, and which (through the Community's publications) could help to answer some of the demands of the consumer for a better product.”³⁴⁸ The IC Staff also immediately began experimenting with the use of a Devil's Advocate (DA). Deputy Director of Central Intelligence for the Intelligence Community (D/DCI/IC) Daniel Graham notified Colby in January 1974 that he had one of his staff serve as DA during a community-wide gathering of analysts on China, noting “this is in line with the notion of establishing more effective challenge mechanisms in the production of intelligence.” Graham detailed the DA's actions during the session, then asked, “The question now is: how can DA roles be institutionalized?”³⁴⁹

LTG Graham went on to suggest several ways forward. One approach would have the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) responsible for drafting the estimate designate a DA “who would review previous papers on the subject in order to find loopholes... and highlight these weaknesses with a view toward forcing a fresh examination of the major judgments.” Another method, especially in cases when there was analytic disagreement, called upon dissenting agencies to perform the DA function. Graham qualified this suggestion with the following observation: “But particularly for those

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NIEs [National Intelligence Estimates] which have passed unanimously year after year, it might be helpful to create the DA's 'artificial' dissent. This might be put in an annex to the paper, clearly labelled as an artificial position." Graham concluded the memo by advising the DCI that his staff was working up "a more detailed set of proposals on a challenge mechanism," but meanwhile he believed "the DA concept is worth further experimentation."³⁵⁰

Work on developing a challenge mechanism continued throughout the spring of 1974. A Letter of Instruction from D/DCI/IC Graham to PRD leadership in April specifically charged them to "formulate and gain acceptance of ways to introduce a systematic challenge mechanism into the workings of the finished intelligence community."³⁵¹ In support of this effort, a study on potential challenge mechanisms was launched with completion scheduled for June, although it was nearly six months later before the actual draft proposal appeared.³⁵²

THE CHALLENGE MECHANISM STUDY: IDENTIFYING ISSUES AND OBSTACLES

In November 1974, the PRD completed its response to D/DCI/IC Graham's tasking by publishing "A Proposal for a 'Challenge Mechanism' for the Intelligence Community." The PRD study, which had been nearly a year in the making, began with an introductory note describing its scope and purpose:

This paper looks at the feasibility of **institutionalizing** a "challenge mechanism," or "Devil's Advocate," ... in the Intelligence Community. The paper does not proceed with a full discussion of the pros and cons of formally **institutionalizing** challenge. Rather, it seeks to explore the working milieu in which an institutionalized challenge mechanism would have to function. This should enable interested parties to come to some conclusions about the feasibility of the concept.³⁵³

The study was based primarily on interviews with "individuals who formerly held, or hold now, key managerial positions in **substantive** intelligence

producing organizations, and NIOs.” The PRD employed this approach because of the study’s emphasis on the “feasibility of the challenge in practice, and these folks are critical to the success or failure of the process.”³⁵⁴

History Counters the Challenge Mechanism Proposal

Many factors shaped IC discussions regarding DCI Colby’s directive to establish a challenge mechanism in the aftermath of the 1973 October War. The then-recent precedent of Under Secretary of State George Ball and his stated role of questioning US policies toward Vietnam during the Johnson administration may have contributed to the IC’s hesitancy. Ball, who served as a DA on Johnson’s Vietnam policies, was considered ineffective and repeatedly dismissed in senior policy discussions. Counterintuitively, Ball was explicitly mentioned during IC consideration of Colby’s 1974 proposal. A former CIA Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI) commented that an institutionalized DA “might be done once, as George Ball did on Vietnam in the State Department, but would not work in general.”

Sources: Ross A. Kennedy, “Dissent and Decision-Making: A Study of George Ball’s and John McNaughton’s Opposition to the Vietnam War,” *The Fletcher Forum* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 69–104; David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (Random House, 1972), 596; and “A Proposal for a ‘Challenge Mechanism’ for the Intelligence Community,” November 19, 1974, CIA-RDP80M01133A000700150007-9; <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80m01133a000700150007-9>.

Identifying the perceived problems that the mechanism was designed to address, the study noted an unstated but clear implication of the proposal. It inferred “that in the preparation of major substantive papers, such as NIEs and Interagency Memoranda, at least some key minority views were not being ventilated to the fullest extent, that other views were or could be overlooked, or that important contingencies might not receive full attention.” The study pointed out that NIEs no longer had the benefit of the process once provided by the disestablished Office of National Estimates: multiple levels of review, culminating with a review conducted by the Board of National Estimates. This final level included “a variety of views... with one or more Board members acting in fact as a Devil’s Advocate. Indeed, the role of the Board was

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to probe and question the entire paper.” Also, in the absence of that office’s dedicated drafting staff, “the bulk of all papers prepared under NIO auspices must be produced by substantive organizations geared, in the main, toward producing **current intelligence**.” The study asserted, “there may be a weakness in a system that relies heavily on current intelligence analysts to also prepare estimative and longer-range judgments, at least in the sense of reducing the opportunities for other views to impact current wisdom.”³⁵⁵

The study went on to identify the concerns many had regarding the form that a “challenge mechanism” might take and particularly how it would be implemented. Intelligence officials questioned whether the mechanism was the best way to accommodate dissent and encourage alternative analysis. Many agreed with a former CIA DDI who argued “dissenting views can most effectively be dealt with at the working level of review, indeed as early as possible in the production process.” Another officer endorsed this opinion, contending: “A kind of Devil’s Advocate should be part of the process in working up a paper through the working substantive levels. It is all part of the ‘tightening process’ in producing any paper.” On this point, the study concluded: “[T]he strong inclination is to insist that differing views and judgments can best be threshed out by the analysts and producing offices, rather than by another entity or group organized and tasked specifically to prepare opposing views. This means that at each step along the way, drafters, branch and division chiefs, other offices and colleagues in other agencies should continually question judgments.”³⁵⁶

The PRD identified additional issues involving the creation of a challenge mechanism, ranging from its applicability in many intelligence products to its reception by policymakers. Those interviewed pointed out that not all papers “lend themselves to Devil’s Advocating,” in part due to their nature and in part because “papers must be prepared for the NSC [National Security Council] on very tight deadlines.” The timing of when to introduce a challenge mechanism for best results was also raised, with some arguing that exercising devil’s advocacy could be useful before a paper is written and some contending it would be of most value once a draft was prepared. Others criticized the devil’s advocacy concept on grounds of artificiality, arguing the “DA role drives an individual to take increasingly extreme positions, partly because he and everyone else knows

that he is role-playing, and this contributes to an essentially artificial situation.” Equally significant objections were voiced over how consumers might react to the end product of devil’s advocacy. As one NIO asked, “What can you do after the Devil’s Advocate cites another position—simply ask the policymakers to worry about it, even though we have no basis for conceding that the DA assessment is indeed the correct one?” Echoing these sentiments, the Deputy to the Director of Central Intelligence for NIOs (D/DCI/NIO) saw advancing such an assessment as “confusing policymakers.”³⁵⁷

Analytic practitioners, however, acknowledged that a devil’s advocacy approach might be appropriate in certain instances. For example, a former head of CIA analysis opined that, if the concept of a challenge mechanism has any merit, “it is probably in those cases where the minority view occurrence, should it take place, would have very serious consequences for the US.” His sentiments were seconded by a former Office of National Estimates (ONE) official who asserted, “An estimate or substantive paper should come down hard, as hard as the evidence permits, on a judgment, and it should be pointed and precise as possible. But in those instances where the outcome on the other side of the majority position would be very serious to US interests, then a ‘worst case analysis’ should be undertaken.”³⁵⁸

The PRD study concluded by recognizing that “although [the] sentiment of those reached runs rather heavily against **institutionalizing** challenge, a large number of possible ways to do just that are set out for possible consideration.” The study also acknowledged that “in the spectrum of possibilities, the ones least likely to have a real impact on the substantive community are generally the ones most acceptable to the producing managers, that is, they are disposed to accept them and work with them.” The study then addressed the questions of who might exercise this challenge function and how large the entity needed to be. The range of options stretched from appointing an ad hoc challenger or consultants to establishing a new office of challengers that would need to be equal in size to the NIO structure to have the necessary personnel and resources to succeed in its mission. In between, there were multiple possibilities, including a panel consisting of “three or four very impressive and knowledgeable figures.” Other options focused on tasking

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existing organizations to take on this task, such as the NIOs, the IC's PRD, or CIA's Office of Political Research—a unit formed when the ONE was abolished that welcomed some of that office's former staffers into its ranks. Yet the study concluded by citing one of devil advocacy's proponents: "The institution of a DA is not so important as the philosophy in producing substantive intelligence,"³⁵⁹ a point shared by devil's advocacy opponents as well.

INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY REACTIONS TO THE DEVIL'S ADVOCACY STUDY FINDINGS

Senior IC officials were forthcoming with additional comments during the three months following release of the PRD study on institutionalizing an IC challenge mechanism. Some saw no need to create a new entity to execute a challenge mechanism, suggesting that it would not address the real problems regarding consumer confidence in IC analysis and might make things worse.

Richard Shryock, the PRD chief who led multiple IC postmortem studies including the assessment after the Yom Kippur War, was one such critical voice. In a memo appearing 10 days after the draft proposal, Shryock argued that "the development of a viable challenge mechanism would be more manageable and realistic if the term 'institutionalizing' were taken less literally and if the purpose of the challenge mechanism were more clearly defined." He argued that the primary purpose of a challenge mechanism was not to present dissenting views to the customer but rather a way to "assist production analysts to overcome three occupational hazards to which, according to our postmortems they are generally, and sometimes seriously, subject." Shryock identified these hazards as "preconceptions," "reinforcing consensus," and "the current intelligence syndrome." Thus, he saw the challenge mechanism as a means of "reminding, nudging, alerting the analyst—telling him, in fact, that in spite of his widely acknowledged expertise he may have overlooked or unconsciously suppressed something important." Shryock also had strong views as to who should perform these tasks, asserting the role needed "an individual or group that does not have preconceptions (at least not the same ones as the pros), is **not** burdened by the consensus of colleagues, and does **not** read every scrap

of current intelligence.” “[T]he validity of his challenge,” Shryock insisted, “would rest not primarily on the scope of his knowledge but rather on the different perspective he would bring to the problem at issue, a perspective untrammelled by the occupational hazards of the professional analyst.”³⁶⁰



Although Irving Janis's seminal Victims of Groupthink was published a year before the 1973 Yom Kippur War, I could find no evidence that the book influenced the IC discussion surrounding institutionalizing a challenge mechanism. One of the earliest reflections of Janis's work in IC literature is a book review by Fritz Ermath in Studies in Intelligence in 1974. Perhaps the IC would have been wise to integrate these insights from academia more quickly.

– JAMES MARCHIO, reflecting upon Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972); and Fritz Ermath, “Ermath, Fritz W., Book Reviews of *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* by Graham Allison and *Victims of Groupthink* by Irving L. Janis,” *Studies in Intelligence* 18, no. 1 (July 1996)

D/DCI/NIO George Carver was harsher in his criticism of the proposal and warned that it might create new problems. In a memo, titled “Devilish Advocacy,” Carver wrote: “Institutionalizing the process also raises another potential difficulty.... Majorities are sometimes wrong, but it is rash to make the assumption that they are invariably wrong and such an assumption indicates a rather disquieting lack of confidence in the professionalism (including objectivity) or knowledge of the Community’s analysts.” Nonetheless, he acknowledged, “I do agree, as do my colleagues, that we have to be particularly careful in papers where there is almost unanimous consensus or ones whose

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judgments have a direct bearing on vital US interests along the lines indicated above—i.e., ones in which judgmental errors could be disastrous.”³⁶¹

What form the challenge mechanism might take and who should exercise the function drew even more attention from senior IC officials. Instead of a new entity, one argued in favor of something less ambitious, much along the lines of an “Alert Memo,” a new product being developed by the Strategic Warning community at Colby’s direction. Most, however, were in agreement with Shryock who wrote: “There already is, in being, Community machinery, the NIO system, which could accommodate—effectively, if not easily—the establishment of challenge procedures.”³⁶² Not surprisingly, Carver reinforced this point even more strongly: “What is required here is simply that the NIO responsible for such a paper ensure that the chairman allow full scope to the interplay of debate. The whole NIO structure was deliberately set up to facilitate this and encourage it.”³⁶³ The chief of the IC Coordination Staff likewise believed that if a challenge mechanism were instituted, it should be limited to papers handled within the NIO system, urging that “the D/DCI/NIO should be charged with recommending to the DCI which specific estimates or other key documents involve matters of such evidential uncertainty that a challenge procedure could be used to advantage.”³⁶⁴

Carver spoke for many when he advised the D/DCI/IC: “[T]he problem which led to General Graham’s original suggestion and has stimulated the DCI’s concerns is a real one. My colleagues and I are aware of and as bothered by it as anyone else in the Community. It needs [to be] address[ed], and we are endeavoring to address it. An elaborate, formal devil’s advocate mechanism, however, does not seem to us to be the optimum way to tackle it.”³⁶⁵ The chief of the IC Coordination Staff echoed this point writing: “Essentially, I am very skeptical as to the usefulness of any formalized “devil’s advocate” procedure.” He argued: “[I]t is a responsibility of the head of each production office to ensure that his analysts approach estimative problems with a ‘devil’s advocate’ set of mind so that tentative findings and conclusions are subjected to challenge from the onset. It is at an early phase in the development of an estimate that I consider challenges to analyst thinking most important.”³⁶⁶

THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY STAFF RESPONDS TO COLBY

The proposal that D/DCI/IC Samuel Wilson forwarded to the DCI in February 1975 reflected many of the concerns and suggestions contained in the November study on institutionalizing a channel mechanism and further discussed by Shryock, Carver, and others.³⁶⁷ Wilson began the memo by acknowledging Colby's earlier tasking, noting the DCI's interest in "establishing within the community a regular system for the presentation of the views of devils' advocates, i.e., some sort of system which would ensure that majority views and the conventional wisdom concerning major intelligence judgments would be subject to effective challenge procedures." Wilson conceded that "though few would quarrel with the objectives of the proposal, several have, in fact, questioned the practicality of institutionalizing challenge procedures and have expressed the fear that the system's (non-monetary) costs might outweigh its benefits." He admitted his own mixed feelings on the subject, stating: "I very much favor the concept of regular challenge procedures, particularly as part of the normal production process, but recognize that there will be pitfalls attending their establishment as a separate institution."³⁶⁸

A Call for Devil's Advocacy

In January 1975, one month before D/DCI/IC Wilson sent DCI Colby his compromise recommendations on IC institutionalization of a challenge mechanism, PRD Chief Shryock forwarded to the DCI an IC postmortem on the recent Cyprus crisis that "encourage[d] the establishment of a system of devil's advocacy as a means to challenge conventional analytical wisdom." This postmortem finding rested on criticism of the IC's "inability to foresee critical events—in the face of mounting evidence—[that] seems to rest in part on the familiar analytical bias that ultimately reason and rationality will prevail."

Source: "Cyprus Post-Mortem Report," January 28, 1975, CIA-RDP80M01133A000700160010-4, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80m01133a000700160010-4>.

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A Greek-sponsored coup d'état, with the goal of uniting the island of Cyprus with Greece, was followed by Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in July 1974, seizing control of about one-third of the island. The United Nations established a buffer zone the next month, followed by population displacement and a Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus that still persists.

Source: Wikipedia, "Turkish Invasion of Cyprus," accessed on April 23, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkish_invasion_of_Cyprus.

Accordingly, Wilson's recommendation reflected a compromise, which envisioned key roles for the NIOs and the D/DCI/NIO. In producing assessments NIOs would ensure "minority points of view and dissents [were] adequately represented and discussed," and they would report to the USIB or DCI "principal issues in dispute, if any, and the extent to which he [the NIO] and his committee pondered contrary opinions and judgments." The D/DCI/NIO, when appropriate, would appoint a devil's advocate to represent dissenting views. Such an appointment would normally occur only when "an interagency paper (1) is considered to be of unusual significance to US interests and policies; (2) contains judgments which are clearly controversial; or (3) makes estimates which, if wrong, would likely have very

important (and adverse) effects on US attitudes and policies.” The DA would be “a senior and experienced officer in the community,” whose role would be to formulate and represent dissenting views throughout the life of the assessment under consideration, as well as solicit the views of other dissenters within the community. Finally, the NIO and DA would provide a written report to the DCI or USIB “in those instances when mistaken estimates might result in very serious damage to US interests.”³⁶⁹

No record has emerged indicating Colby made any decision or acted in response to the D/DCI/IC's memorandum regarding possible IC challenge procedures or that the USIB or any other IC forum undertook further formal discussion of the topic. Available documentation and scholarship suggest that Colby was receptive to and encouraged alternative analysis.³⁷⁰ Conceivably, Colby may have posed no objection to NIOs considering alternatives along the lines recommended in the memorandum but stopped short of formal initiation of an institutionalized system supporting one or more types of alternative analysis.

The Intelligence Community's Notorious Team A/Team B Experiment

The IC's “Team A/Team B experiment” in competitive analysis is certainly better known than its efforts to institutionalize a challenge mechanism. In contrast to the IC challenge mechanism debate, which originated during the intelligence failure of the Yom Kippur War, the 1976 experiment, which occurred under George H. W. Bush's tenure as DCI, resulted from growing hardliner pressures against détente and concerns over the perceived Soviet strategic threat. The impetus for the Team A/Team B experiment was external to the community and not seen in the same light as the IC Staff's exploration of devil's advocacy in IC analytic judgments. The historical record indicates no linkage between the 1975 challenge proposal and the experiment that followed a year later, and D/DCI/IC Graham, a key participant in both, details the Team A/Team B experiment in his memoir but makes no mention of the IC's efforts to institutionalize a challenge mechanism.

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The origins of the experiment can be traced to the President's Foreign Intelligence Analysis Board's (PFIAB) request in August 1975 that a competitive analysis be conducted on Soviet strategic weapon systems. This request was initially deflected by DCI Colby, who promised the 1976 NIE (NIE 11-3/8-75, *Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict Through 1985*) would address the PFIAB's concerns. The PFIAB renewed its request for a competitive analysis to the Ford administration in the spring of 1976 and both DCI Bush and Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Ellsworth agreed to the proposal.

Three Team A/Team B exercises were conducted as part of the 1976 experiment. Team A comprised IC analysts who were already working on updating NIE 11-3/8. The B Teams (Air Defense Panel, Missile Accuracy Panel, and Strategic Objectives Panel) were selected by DCI Bush and a PFIAB committee. Two of the B Teams narrowly focused on military/technical issues—missile accuracy and air defenses—and worked collaboratively, constructively, and without publicity. The third B Team—led by Harvard professor of history Richard Pipes and addressing the broad topic of Soviet objectives—resulted in a lengthy polemic intent on discrediting the Team A analysts. This report was promptly leaked and became another antidétente, “the-Soviets-are-coming” story that angered Bush.

Although Team A/Team B is one of four “contrarian techniques” discussed in a March 2009 tradecraft primer devoted to “Structured Analytic Techniques for Improving Intelligence Analysis,” the 1976 experiment is not remembered in a positive light but rather as a classic example of the politicization of intelligence. Richards Heuer probably spoke for many when he wrote: “The Intelligence Community teaches a couple types of structured debate, which are useful, but they call these by the unfortunate name Team A/Team B. I say this is unfortunate because I'm old enough to remember the original Team A/Team B experiment, and what that brings to mind for me is predictable failure and entrenched warfare between long-term adversaries. I suggest this is not a good model to follow.”

Sources: Daniel O. Graham, *Confessions of a Cold Warrior* (Preview Press, 1995), 104–106; Lawrence Friedman, “The CIA and the Soviet Threat: The Politicization of Estimates, 1966–1977,” *Intelligence and National Security* 12, no. 1 (January 2008): 122–142, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684529708432402>; Richards J. Heuer, Jr., “Rethinking Challenge Analysis,” presentation at the Conference on Learning the Lessons of All-Source Intelligence Analysis, July 1, 2008, Washington, DC, https://pherson.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/01.-Rethinking-Challenge-Analysis_FINAL.pdf.

For a detailed discussion of the 1976 Team A/Team B experiment, see Anne H. Cahn, *Killing Détente: The Right Attacks the CIA* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Micah Zenko, *Red Team: How To Succeed by Thinking Like the Enemy* (Basic Books, 2015), 76–83; Richard K. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 85–88; and Kevin P. Stack, “Competitive Intelligence,” *Intelligence and National Security* 13, no. 4 (1998): 194–202, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02684529808432511>. For the actual IC assessments of the Team A/Team B experiment, see “NSC Staff Request for Evaluations of the A Team-B Team Experiment,” November 16, 1982, CIA-RDP85B00134R000200090002-8, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp85b00134r000200090002-8>.

CONTINUING EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE CHALLENGE MECHANISMS AND ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS

The need for, and push to increase, alternative analysis within the IC did not end with the failure to institutionalize a challenge mechanism in February 1975. Occurring concurrently with the DCI’s challenge initiative were efforts to restructure and revitalize the US warning community.³⁷¹ This push envisioned an important role for the warning community in challenging IC analysis, a theme reiterated multiple times in the ensuing years. A memo from the DCI to the IC’s Ad Hoc Committee on Watch Mechanism in October 1974 observed “that the Watch mechanism’s real value lies in its ability to challenge the conventional wisdom of the rest of the community, particularly as expressed in current intelligence production.”³⁷²

Other signs appeared during the next four years that the discussion sparked by the proposal to institutionalize a challenge mechanism continued to reverberate throughout the IC. A memo in March 1977 to CIA’s DDI noted “this relates to our discussion on February 16 about alternative approaches in intelligence analysis. Four of these—alternative hypothesis analysis, competitive analysis, devil’s advocacy, and alternate conclusions to a best judgment—are discussed in the attached memorandum.”³⁷³

Discussion of alternative analysis also appeared in a 1977 Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) monograph on NIEs. The study noted that, although critics may have overstated the problems of groupthink, of reinforcing consensus, and of mindset in preventing “the adequate exploration of analytical alternatives and the formulation and presentation of alternative

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estimates,” many consumers “nevertheless made it clear they wanted and expected **all** the informed views they could get.” Citing an example of devil’s advocacy in an NIE’s production, the study reported it was found to be “very useful,” but with the qualifier that “it would appear important, however, to confine use of the technique to important areas of estimates where there is substantial uncertainty and debate.” The CSI monograph concluded: “[I]n all this, the problem is to encourage alternative analysis without artificiality and without a drop in the quality and coherence of the product, in a way that stimulates thinking rather than emotion, and within the constraints of available time and resources.”³⁷⁴

Efforts to institutionalize a challenge mechanism—although on a smaller scale and focused on certain areas—did not cease either. One such initiative involved the warning community and its ongoing efforts to avoid another warning failure. Documents discussing the role and requirements of an IC warning system throughout 1978 highlighted the need for a challenge mechanism. A still largely classified paper on “The Role of the DCI in Warning and Crisis Management,” for example, contained a section identified as “Warning and Current Intelligence: The Need for Challenge Mechanisms.”³⁷⁵ Similarly, a talking paper discussing the requirements for a national warning system emphasized: “It must incorporate mechanisms to challenge conventional thinking and bring out alternative hypotheses.”³⁷⁶ The question “What would be the impact of the elimination of the Strategic Warning Staff?” elicited the response: “It serves as a devil’s advocate in challenging conventional (analytic) wisdom. As such, it represents the DCI’s ‘insurance’ against another Pearl Harbor.”³⁷⁷ While not as dramatic, the director of the Strategic Warning Staff echoed the same sentiment four years later when he wrote: “Consumers of intelligence and especially of warning intelligence have for some time—about ten years—pleaded for full expression of intelligence to be known as alternative hypotheses.” He then directed his staff to provide “reasonable hypotheses not covered in other community publications, providing alternate explanations and short-term forecasts for situations of a threatening nature.”³⁷⁸

Outside the warning community, the IC found another unit suitable for a leading role in alternative analysis. When a National Foreign Assessment

Center was formed by subordinating the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence and the NIO office to a single official, the DCI created a review panel (later designated the Senior Review Panel under the National Intelligence Council (NIC)) to provide the center's director with "an independent review of major intelligence products, especially those focusing on problems that have serious policy implications." The community anticipated that "the Panel will serve not only as a Devil's Advocate—reviewing and critiquing selected intelligence production—but will surface alternative conclusions to best judgments (many of what have been described as 'intelligence failures' stem from analysts not giving sufficient weight to worst-case hypotheses), assist in identifying critical intelligence questions that merit formal alternative hypothesis analysis or competitive analysis and taking part in, managing, or monitoring such products."³⁷⁹

In 1982, the chairman of the NIC (a new name given to the NIO office in 1979) solicited the Senior Review Panel's views on more systematic use of a devil's advocate in the estimative process. The panel's response concluded that despite a mixed record: "[T]he technique may have substantial values. Among the most important... are: (a) encouragement of more thorough scrutiny of available evidence and all-source intelligence; (b) heightened analyst sensitivity to alternative hypotheses and inertial mind-sets; (c) increased consumer awareness of probability ranges, indicator ambiguity, and policy sequels." Like the earlier effort to explore institutionalizing a challenge mechanism, the Senior Review Panel anticipated problems impeding its adoption, including "Community Participation, Analyst Comprehension, and Format and Distribution of end products." Consequently, the Panel recommended that the devil's advocacy technique be introduced into the estimative system governed by two principles: First, that it be "tried experimentally on one or at most two subjects;" second, that "the effort be mounted by the analyst production community (including NIC's Analytic Group) [and involve]... those who work the daily materials and the information flow." The Panel concluded, "The aim of the initial exercise should be not only to test the alternative line, array its consequences, and devise sets of early indicators but also to develop methodology and approach for a possibly wider application of the technique."³⁸⁰

REVISITING DEVIL'S ADVOCACY IN THE ENSUING DECADES

The IC's interest in devil's advocacy and other means to elicit alternative analysis was evident intermittently during the next two decades. For example, an article discussing Israel's devil's advocacy office—originally published in Israel's *Defense Forces Journal*—was reprinted in the 1985 winter edition of *Studies in Intelligence*. The article reviewed why the office had been established, how it operated, and what were considered key factors in its success.³⁸¹ The following year an “interesting and provocative” alternative analysis paper was forwarded to the DCI from CIA's director of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. The office director noted that, although “most observers believe that an Iranian victory over Iraq would threaten US interests in the Middle East by emboldening Tehran to export its revolution to other Arab states,” this assessment presented a credible case for how an Iranian victory in the Iran-Iraq war “would reduce the threat of additional Iranian military exploits, foster political moderation in Tehran and Baghdad, and enhance US security ties to Saudi Arabia and the smaller Persian Gulf states.”³⁸²

The 1980s and particularly the 1990s witnessed a push within the IC to improve analytic tradecraft and the methods employed. This push—driven by a small group of senior leaders who recognized the need for rigor and strongly supported initiatives and programs designed to strengthen the IC's exercise of analytic tradecraft—produced new tradecraft manuals, training courses, and ultimately spurred CIA's creation of the Sherman Kent School of Intelligence Analysis in 2000.³⁸³ These efforts were accompanied by the exploration and use of new analytic methods—later called SATs—that had begun in the 1970s as part the IC's response to President Nixon's demand that the community explore new methods and improve the quality of analysis delivered to the nation's senior leaders (see Chapter Five).

World events and shortcomings in the IC's performance further spurred the push for better tradecraft and methods. Although the community had been criticized in the past for failing to provide timely warning and accurate

assessments, including the Soviet testing of an atomic bomb in 1949, the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the outbreak of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and India's 1998 nuclear detonations, none matched the shock and immediate loss of thousands of American lives in the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the failure to find weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq in the aftermath of the 2003 war. In response to the events of September 11, 2001, the DCI commissioned CIA's DDI to "create a 'red cell' that would think unconventionally about the full range of relevant analytic issues," an action accomplished within days. The DCI Red Cell was "charged with taking a pronounced 'out-of-the-box' approach" and "periodically [to] produce memoranda and reports intended to provoke thought rather than to provide authoritative assessment."³⁸⁴ In addition, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) created the position of Devil's Advocate to perform a similar challenge function following 9/11.

Congressional investigations into both 9/11 and the failure to find WMD in Iraq reinforced the need for the IC to expand and improve its use of alternative analysis. The 9/11 Commission Report concluded, for example, that it was "crucial to find a way of routinizing, even bureaucratizing, the exercise of imagination."³⁸⁵ Going further, the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) specified that the Director of National Intelligence was to "encourage sound analytic methods and tradecraft" and "conduct alternative analysis (commonly referred to as 'red team analysis') of information and conclusions in intelligence products."³⁸⁶ This language was captured and expanded in Intelligence Community Directive 203 (*Analytic Standards*) in 2007. Under analytic tradecraft standard four (Incorporates alternative analysis where appropriate), the policy directed "to the extent possible, analysis should incorporate insights from the application of structured analytic technique(s) appropriate to the topic being analyzed."³⁸⁷ The 2005 WMD Commission Report echoed the same message contained in the 2004 IRTPA but was even more explicit in its call for alternative analysis and especially contrarian analysis, singling out the need for competitive analysis and use of red teams and devil's advocates.³⁸⁸ The report argued: "The Community should institute a formal system for competitive—and

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even explicitly contrarian—analysis. Such groups must be licensed to be troublesome. Further, they must take contrarian positions, not just ones that take a harder line (a flaw with the Team B exercise of the 1970s).³⁸⁹

INSIGHTS FROM THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY'S 1970S EXPLORATION OF ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS

DCI Colby's 1973 call to institutionalize a challenge mechanism within the IC can be viewed as a minor initiative that failed to win approval of the larger IC and even apparently saw the DCI's support fade. This initiative, however, represented the most significant effort to date that the IC had made to ensure "serious divergent points of view are properly expressed in finished products."³⁹⁰ Moreover, this 1970s attempt to institutionalize a challenge mechanism holds considerable relevance for today's IC. The insights gained from Colby's tasking and the IC's pushback against it have continued to engender and shape IC efforts to institutionalize challenge mechanisms—such as the DCI Red Cell—and to provide consumers with alternative analysis in the decades that have followed.

The PRD study in 1974, exploring ways to institutionalize a challenge mechanism within the IC, and the ensuing discussion focused attention on key analytic challenges, many of which still confront analysts today. Preconceptions, reinforcing consensus, and the never-ending demand for current intelligence have changed little in 50 years. Neither has their negative impact on the IC's ability to identify and warn of major strategic developments, as witnessed by the Arab Spring of 2011 and the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014.

The objections voiced over institutionalizing a challenge mechanism—some of which were bureaucratic—contributed to the initiative's abandonment in 1975; but this same resistance reinforced the need for the IC to find other ways to incorporate challenge mechanisms and facilitate alternative analysis. One such path was through the processes employed by NIOs and later the NIC to regularly encourage dissent and alternative viewpoints. The imperative to find other methods for addressing the real analytic problems,

which the challenge mechanism was designed to mitigate, also supported concurrent efforts begun in the 1970s to develop and use advanced analytic methods, many of which would become SATs. The development of these techniques allowed the IC to “challenge” and “explore different hypotheses” at lower levels and in a less confrontational, more bureaucratically palatable manner. The analytic tradecraft cells now found at multiple IC organizations—equipped with savvy analytic methodologists—can be traced in part to the valid requirements that the 1974 challenge mechanism was designed to address and the reservations voiced over its adoption.³⁹¹

The standup and success of CIA’s (initially the DCI’s) Red Cell, DIA’s DA, and the greatly expanded use of “red teams” by military commands within the Department of Defense is also partly due to insights from the 1970s effort to institutionalize a challenge mechanism, as well as those amassed from Israel’s experience.³⁹² In 2001, just as in 1973, it took an intelligence failure and strong support from the DCI to force the IC to consider and accept an organization whose mission was to challenge or go beyond mainline analysis. What emerged—a small unit, such as the DCI Red Cell, outside the main producing organization that was selectively engaged on key issues involving significant US interests—conformed closely to the 1974 proposals that gained most acceptance by the IC as mission-enhancing.

Devil’s advocacy, SATs, and other methods to challenge analytic assessments and ensure consumers are made aware of alternative interpretations do not represent “silver bullets.” The intelligence failures since the 1973 Yom Kippur War and 9/11—despite the IC reforms advanced by the 2004 IRTPA legislation—should remind all that overcoming biases and mindsets within the IC is a battle fought each day and not easily won. The analytic challenges have not become easier with the passage of time. For one, the IC’s formal strategic warning structure—once identified as the DCI’s insurance against another Pearl Harbor—was disestablished in 2011.³⁹³ For another, technology, particularly the growing use and importance of artificial intelligence, and the threat faced have evolved.

Yet, the events of the 1970s, as well as recent history—highlighted by the apparent failure by Israeli intelligence to anticipate the massive and deadly

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attack by Hamas fighters in the Gaza Strip in October 2023—suggest the requirement to challenge widely accepted views and analysis certainly will persist in the future. History makes equally clear the importance and continued need to depend on more than a single office or individual to ensure alternatives are introduced to mainline conclusions. As noted in 1974, the philosophy of a devil's advocate must be inculcated “in all the producing divisions so that various and differing views are surfaced normally through the regular production mechanism.”³⁹⁴ This philosophy may be reinforced by the ability to explore alternative scenarios and test different assumptions offered by artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) programs. In that sense, AI/ML capabilities could function as a devil's advocate particularly well suited for use with low probability, high-impact events and issues, supporting analysts to refine estimates of uncertainty and explore different alternative outcomes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REDEFINING THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY'S WARNING ROLE



Of the many challenges William Colby confronted when he assumed the responsibilities of Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in September 1973, none was more immediate or important than addressing the shortcomings in the Intelligence Community's (IC) execution of its warning mission.³⁹⁵ Spurred by the community's failure to warn of the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, Colby pushed to change how the IC was structured to warn, when it issued an alert, and which issues it elevated to senior US leaders.

The scholarly literature discussing Colby's warning initiatives is limited in quantity and scope. When his actions involving warning are mentioned, usually as part of an overall assessment of his performance as DCI, they are largely depicted as not particularly innovative or effective. For example, Harold Ford's formerly classified study of Colby's years as DCI devotes just two paragraphs to Colby's efforts to improve the IC's warning capabilities.³⁹⁶ Douglas Garthoff argues that the DCI's overhaul of the IC's warning system "reflected Colby's vision of the intelligence business as something that had to be viewed end-to-end, as a total system.... By giving DoD [Department of Defense] a greater role in the DCI's warning process, Colby may have hoped to improve DoD perceptions of the DCI's community

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leadership.”³⁹⁷ In academic works dedicated to warning, Colby's initiatives also are acknowledged but downplayed.³⁹⁸

Yet, as this chapter describes, in many ways Colby's warning reforms were another example of how he sought to respond to consumer criticism of intelligence with new processes and products, laying the groundwork for a warning structure and products that continued to serve the US national security community for nearly four decades. Today's complex threat environment calls for the IC to conduct a fresh review of its preparedness to warn.

IMPETUS FOR WARNING REFORM: INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS AND PRESSURES

Recognition that the IC's warning structure, processes, and products needed change certainly predated Colby's arrival as DCI. Both the US Intelligence Board's (USIB) Watch Committee, which produced strategic warning assessments, and its interagency watch office, the National Indications Center (NIC), were seen as “isolated and obsolete” and unable “to do the job.” A study commissioned by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Intelligence) in 1972 on the interface between strategic and tactical warning called for “a drastic restructuring of the Watch Committee, National Indications Center, and the whole complex of agency operations and intelligence centers.”³⁹⁹ The processes and products of the Watch Committee and its NIC also came under fire. Regarding the Warning Report produced by the Watch Committee, a CIA background paper had this critique: “Generally the bland quality of the report is one of its greatest weaknesses. This invariably results from the need to fall back on compromise language to paper over major differences between agency ‘positions.’ ”⁴⁰⁰

Pressure for change also came from those outside the IC. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and his deputy, Andrew Marshall, were among the most important and vociferous critics and proponents of change. Marshall, for example, singled out “the diffusion and blandness of intelligence reporting” as a key shortcoming of IC warning efforts.⁴⁰¹ Kissinger directly engaged Colby on warning issues even before the DCI-designate assumed

his new position. Meeting Colby in June 1973, Kissinger “stressed the need for warning, commenting that this is less a military problem than a political problem.” Colby concurred, with the comment: “I thought it was my responsibility to anticipate his needs and to look ahead to problems on the horizon and call his attention to them at an early stage. I referred to this as political strategic warning.”⁴⁰²

The community's failure to warn of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, as well as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) price hikes and embargo later in 1973, accelerated calls to revamp the IC warning structure and products.⁴⁰³ In the war's aftermath, the IC initiated multiple postmortem actions. In a memo to the DCI dated November 9, Richard Lehman, CIA's Director of Current Intelligence and a central player in the IC's warning structure, mentioned “an idea we had for meeting Kissinger's request to you for some form of broader warning document.” As Lehman described, “[T]his proposal contains the seeds for a possible solution to several other related problems... [such as] what [to] do about an obsolete National Indications Center.”⁴⁰⁴ Three weeks later, a memo to LTG Daniel Graham, the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence for the Intelligence Community (D/DCI/IC), summarized Postmortem Phase II actions planned or in progress: “[F]ollow-up studies... should be undertaken by [redacted]. These involve... valuable work on the warning function, decision analysis as related to the intelligence process, deception, etc.”⁴⁰⁵

During the nine months after the Yom Kippur War, postmortem tasking drove multiple warning studies and initiative proposals. An IC Staff memo in January 1974 on the status of the Middle East Postmortem Phase II tasking indicated that the USIB had been briefed on “the nature of the warning process, as exemplified by the October crisis in the Middle East.” The memo acknowledged that “additional discrete studies will fall out of work currently in progress,” specifically citing as one possibility “a revival and updating of [redacted] study of the NIC/Watch Committee/National Warning Center concept.”⁴⁰⁶

Postmortem work on warning continued throughout the spring of 1974. An IC Staff memo in May identified a “Watch Mechanism” project

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that proposed changes to the Watch Committee and its NIC. The memo recommended that “because of its commitments in this area, PRG [Product Review Group] should provide a critique of these proposals and develop a joint position with the Watch Committee Chairman.”⁴⁰⁷ IC Staff comments were captured and conveyed in a June memo responding to a draft paper, titled “What To Do with the National Watch Center and the Watch Committee.” The memo indicated that “IC/PRD [the PRG was redesignated the Product Review Division (PRD) in 1974] generally agrees with your proposal,” noting it was “a useful first step.”⁴⁰⁸

KEY ISSUES SHAPING REFORM INITIATIVES ON WARNING

The problems afflicting the IC's ability to warn expanded to encompass broader questions that shaped the proposals emerging in the fall of 1974. One such question, raised in an IC Staff memo, involved the nature of warning and what it entailed. Was it enough to just “alert” others in the IC and consumers to a potential threat or crisis? The author, whose identity is redacted, argued this was insufficient. Defining alerting as “the decisions and actions which concentrate resources to respond to a particular tension or crisis situation,” he concluded “warning is not warning unless [such] decisions and actions are implied.” He added that “by applying this principle to the process of alerting the intelligence community, the warning function will have greater credibility when applied to outside consumers.”⁴⁰⁹

Another key question involved the distinction between strategic and other types of warning. An August 1974 memo prepared for the USIB on “Revitalizing the Watch Committee” defined each type in general terms. Strategic warning, the memo asserted, was “a concept which deals with signs of impending military attack on the United States and its overseas bases.” In contrast, nonstrategic warning encompassed “lesser wars or other important international events of potentially significant interest to US policymakers.”⁴¹⁰ These distinctions were identified in discussions in subsequent months as “big-W” and “small-w.”⁴¹¹ The line between them, however, was not always

clear or constant. As DCI Colby acknowledged almost a year later: "The line between big-W and small-w issues cannot be easily drawn, and there is perhaps some justification for the SWS [Strategic Warning Staff] to err on the side of overlap into the small-w area."⁴¹²

Defining that line between the types of warning was one thing; identifying who should be responsible for monitoring and issuing warning for each type was another critical and controversial question that drove debate in formulating warning reform proposals. Disagreement over the nature and extent of involvement by the DCI and DoD in directing and conducting "small" and "big" warning predated the Yom Kippur War, and certainly did not disappear during IC reform discussions in 1974. The same was true on where responsibility for conducting warning would lie. Should it lie primarily with a dedicated warning organization or rather with IC current intelligence elements that daily monitor world events?

EFFORTS TO IMPROVE IC WARNING COALESCE: CRAFTING A PROPOSAL

The final impetus pushing the IC to formulate and implement warning reform probably came during a meeting of the National Security Council Intelligence Committee (NSCIC) in August 1974, when the IC's warning and intelligence support came under fire again. Probably spurred in part by India's surprise nuclear test that May, Kissinger "expressed strong dissatisfaction... at the NSCIC meeting about the community's frequent failure to provide him (and others) with adequate warning of impending crises."⁴¹³ Another IC Staff memo on the meeting elaborated: "Dr. Kissinger noted that after every crisis, key users can read the intelligence which was available, but too often important intelligence does not seem to reach him or the President."⁴¹⁴ Kissinger's comment elicited agreement from the DCI who broached: "[P]erhaps something like an Intelligence Alert Memorandum is needed."⁴¹⁵ The discussion concluded with Kissinger asking the community to look at two categories of warning problems—tactical and strategic—and to report back with what was being (and would be) done to improve these

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matters, particularly in “pre-crisis situations.”⁴¹⁶ (For additional background and insight into the workings of the NSCIC, see Chapter Two.)

Impetus from Postmortem on India's Nuclear Test

Although not formally discussed at the NSCIC meeting in August 1974, the IC's recently completed “Indian Post-Mortem Report” was included as a read-ahead for the session and may have prompted the warning comments. The “Indian Post-Mortem,” most of which remains classified, concluded: “[I]n the months prior to India's 18 May nuclear test, the intelligence community failed to warn US decisionmakers that such a test was being planned.” The report judged: “[T]his failure denied the US Government the option of considering diplomatic or other initiatives to try to prevent this significant step in nuclear proliferation.”

Sources: “Briefing Material for NSCIC Meeting, Friday, August 16,” August 13, 1974, CIA-RDP84 B00506R000100040017-3, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp84b00506r000100040017-3>; and “India Post-Mortem Report,” July 18, 1974, CIA-RDP80M01082A00080 0070012-8, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80m01082a000800070012-8>.

Senior IC leaders and the IC Staff moved quickly on Kissinger's tasking to improve warning functions, leveraging studies completed during the previous eight months that included the aforementioned study by CIA Director of Current Intelligence Lehman.⁴¹⁷ One of the most significant actions was the D/DCI/IC's move to establish an ad hoc community committee “to consider the options for revamping the Watch Committee/NIC mechanism and streamlining the warning process.”⁴¹⁸ The USIB quickly approved LTG Graham's proposal.⁴¹⁹ The Ad Hoc Committee on Revitalizing the Watch Mechanism met for the first time in September, with its work stretching over the next three months.⁴²⁰ Paralleling the activities of the ad hoc committee, the IC Staff led efforts to develop an Alert Memorandum proposal that would address Kissinger's concerns involving “warning intelligence and the handling of information in pre-crisis and crisis situations.”⁴²¹ Subsequently, Colby sent the USIB a proposal for “An Intelligence Alert System,” detailing the logic and processes that ultimately were adopted.⁴²²

Redefining the Intelligence Community's Warning Role

Influencing both the IC Staff and ad hoc committee efforts was an IC Staff “thought piece,” titled “Improving the National Warning Function,” much of which was incorporated into the promised response sent to the NSCIC in the fall of 1974. The thought piece identified three principles—based on the DCI’s comments—that should shape any warning reform proposals advanced by the IC. The first was that “high-level policymakers are not warned unless they are told they are being warned.” In other words, warning had to be clear and explicit. Second, the responsibility for providing warning should be focused on the DCI to ensure more effective accountability. And third, “The bureaucratic mechanisms established (or continued) specifically for this task should be kept as small as possible. They should rely for support primarily on such existing elements of the Community as operations centers and current intelligence offices.”⁴²³

The “Warning Paper for the NSCIC,” delivered by DCI Colby, grew more specific than the IC Staff’s influential thought piece by detailing the problems confronted in providing warning and what measures were needed to address them. The paper noted that “until recently, the intelligence community has had no established mechanism to provide explicit warning to the policymaker except for the USIB Watch Committee,” and “given the narrowness of its charter, it has had little occasion to produce strategic warnings during the 20 years of its existence.” Although intelligence producers after a crisis event have usually been able to demonstrate in one way or another that they forecast the event, they have “generally assumed no responsibility to warn.” To fill this gap in the community’s procedures, the DCI stated he was in the process of developing a new intelligence art form, the Alert Memorandum (AM), with the purpose of providing “a medium explicitly to warn the members of WSAG [Washington Special Actions Group: chaired by the National Security Advisor and including senior officials from the Departments of State and Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and CIA]⁴²⁴ of a foreign development of special gravity in terms of national interests.” The DCI went on to note, however, “[T]he possibility of a military attack against the US or its allies, because of its extreme gravity, requires, in my view, an additional, discrete, and specialized effort.” Consequently, he reported that

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the community's strategic warning mechanism (the Watch Committee of USIB and the NIC) was in the process of being revised. "In its new form," Colby stated, "it will consist of a small national-level committee and a small staff consisting of analysts drawn from the major production elements of the community." Their mission would be to provide "the earliest possible warning of military action against the US or its allies" and "military action in developing crisis situations."⁴²⁵

Just as the IC voiced internal disagreements over the proposed reforms before the DCI Warning Paper was drafted, disputes persisted after the paper's delivery to the NSCIC. The bulk of this debate occurred within the Ad Hoc Committee on Revitalizing the Watch Mechanism and involved three issues centered on strategic warning: mission, subordination, and organization composition and location.⁴²⁶ Although most participants were aware of "two basic remedies for fixing the Watch—one to narrow its charter, the other to extend it," there was no agreement on where to draw the line.⁴²⁷ An IC Staff memo following the September 30 meeting of the ad hoc committee expanded on these different views, noting:

One notion, for example, is that the mechanism should warn of **all** developing crisis situations affecting US interests, not simply those related to Soviet or Chinese military action. But, in our view, such broad warning is already a function of existing elements of the community and is, in addition, one of the DCI's prime substantive responsibilities, one which is performed through established procedures and mechanisms (including the NIO [National Intelligence Officer] system). Further, developing a discrete Watch mechanism responsible for the broad, worldwide warning problem would, in our view, place an unreasonable burden on the committee's small staff or, alternatively, require a substantial expansion of that staff.⁴²⁸

Exchanges between members in the weeks that followed and two hours of discussion during the ad hoc committee's next session on October 17 led to "apparent consensus" on this mission statement: "The warning mechanism

should be responsible for the earliest possible warning of military action by Soviet/Warsaw Pact, People's Republic of China, or North Korean forces directed again the US, its allies, or one another. It should also be responsible for warning of action by those forces in developing crisis situations in any area, which could lead to conflict with US forces."⁴²⁹ The committee chairman used the word "apparent" because the Department of State representative indicated after the meeting that he still thought the statement too narrow and restrictive. At a follow-up meeting on October 22, the DCI and multiple key IC and CIA leaders discussed and revised the mission statement in light of these differences.⁴³⁰

Whether the new strategic warning organization should be subordinate to the USIB or delegated to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) was another contentious question. After transitioning from his position as D/DCI/IC to become DIA's Director in September 1974, Graham made the case to the DCI for replacing the Watch Committee with a small staff located in the National Military Intelligence Center and appointing DIA as the DCI's executive agent, capping a multiyear effort by DoD to exercise greater control over strategic warning.⁴³¹ Although not discussed in detail at the ad hoc committee session on October 17, the IC after-action memo concluded "there was little, if any support for General Graham's proposal to have the strategic warning responsibility delegated to DIA."⁴³² As an IC Staff memo sent to the DCI a month later indicated: "[T]he NSA [National Security Agency] and State representatives continue to have misgivings about what they view as a turnover to DIA of major responsibility for the strategic warning function."⁴³³

The proposed reforms to the IC's warning mechanisms spurred additional debate at the NSCIC Working Group Intelligence Panel session on October 25, with mission questions at the forefront.⁴³⁴ As the meeting minutes noted: "Considerable discussion ensued regarding the difference between Warning with a big 'W' (dealing with nuclear attack or action involving US combat forces and to be handled by the Strategic Warning Committee) and warning with a small 'w' which would be handled by Alert Memoranda produced under the direction of the NIOs."⁴³⁵ The

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session ended with LTG Samuel Wilson, who had replaced LTG Graham as D/DCI/IC, passing out copies of the draft DCI letter to the NSCIC chairman on "Intelligence Warning" and indicating this would be a future NSCIC working group agenda item. Subsequent correspondence from Wilson asked for comments from panel members within two weeks.⁴³⁶

The USIB session held in December 1974 culminated months of work to craft a warning structure, procedures, and products to address the shortcomings that had become evident in the past year. DCI Colby explained to senior IC leaders the need for reform and his reasons for supporting the proposed changes. Colby pointed to the Alert Memorandums' intent, which was to "provide the policymakers with indications of possible crises" thereby alleviating "questions of whether there had been [a] lack of intelligence indications of crises." The DCI expressed his belief that "the Strategic Warning process should deal with possible military attack against the US, its allies, or major interests, rather than dealing with every conflict or potential conflict around the world." Colby went on to describe the proposed new warning organization, including its staff composition and location. He indicated the new mechanism "would be an appendage of the USIB" and "it would be a community effort which would be tied closely to, and situated within, DoD."⁴³⁷

The ensuing USIB discussion covered several areas of contention identified previously. The State Department's representative, William Hyland, raised concerns regarding the new mechanism as well as the proposed definition for Strategic Warning. Hyland judged the definition was "too fuzzy and did not provide for treatment of matters of great interest to policymakers, e.g., Yugoslavia is not an ally and yet would be the subject of major attention should the Soviets attack that country." The Air Force observer commented that he shared State's concerns over the need for a more precise definition of responsibilities. Acknowledging that Hyland's point was well taken, the DCI asked the ad hoc committee to clarify the warning terms and responsibilities, "although he expressed doubt that a really precise overall definition could be achieved because the middle ground was so difficult to define." Hyland also voiced concern that the proposed warning mechanism might

not advise policymakers until “the situation had become really serious.” The DCI responded “that the genesis of this review and subsequent proposal was the feeling that the Watch Committee is not doing what it was set up to do. That is, not looking at the really major issues because of the focus on small problems.” The new group, Colby said, “should be concentrating on the big questions and the daily publications would handle events of lesser significance.” Further, he offered that “the Alert Memorandum would be issued when a situation seemed serious enough to warrant a special warning to our policy customers.” The DCI concluded the session, noting “the overall subject would be reviewed in greater detail by the ad hoc committee, which... [would] submit a final proposal and accompanying DCID [Director of Central Intelligence Directive] to the USIB for approval.”⁴³⁸

CULMINATION: NEW ORGANIZATIONS, WARNING PROCESSES, AND PRODUCTS

As promised by DCI Colby, a draft of DCID 1/5 (Strategic Warning) was circulated for IC review and comment in early 1975, soon after the ad hoc committee completed its rework of the directive in mid-December 1974.⁴³⁹ The draft drew minor comments that were resolved prior to the USIB’s meeting on February 26.⁴⁴⁰ The revised DCID was approved by the USIB and became effective March 3, 1975.⁴⁴¹

DCID 1/5 created a new warning organization, as well as processes and products. In place of the Watch Committee and NIC, the directive established the position of Special Assistant to the DCI for Strategic Warning, supported by an SWS. Their mission was to advise and assist the DCI in fulfilling his duty to provide strategic warning intelligence. DCID 1/5 defined strategic warning “as the earliest possible warning that the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, the PRC, or North Korea is considering military action by its armed forces beyond its borders or is employing its military capabilities beyond its borders in ways that might threaten military confrontation with the US.” When warranted, the Special Assistant and SWS were to issue strategic warning notices (SWN) to the DCI, who would

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notify the President and National Security Council or take other action as he deemed necessary. Also, they were to conduct studies on further ways to improve the community's strategic warning capabilities.⁴⁴² DCID 1/5 concluded with the requirement to "review the functioning of the strategic warning process and report periodically—at least annually to the USIB on its findings."⁴⁴³

Paralleling the DCID 1/5 efforts, the USIB approved procedures for AMs in January. These procedures mirrored those broadly outlined in the memo Colby sent to USIB members in August 1974 when he first proposed "An Intelligence Alert System."⁴⁴⁴ Although a DCI-issued AM produced by CIA was first disseminated in September 1974,⁴⁴⁵ the AM was now deemed an interagency publication, issued by the DCI on behalf of the community, to provide "explicit warning of possible developments abroad of major concern to the US." Alerts could be proposed by any USIB principal, by an NIO, or by any senior officer of the intelligence or foreign affairs communities, with the responsibility for preparation and coordination of the AM normally resting with the appropriate NIO. The procedures approved by the USIB emphasized that "since the primary purpose of an AM is to warn, it will present the information required to make the warning intelligible" but would not "replace existing intelligence publications."⁴⁴⁶

DCID 1/5 and the other changes made to the warning process were quickly presented and explained to senior policymakers at an NSCIC working group session on March 12, 1975. The Special Assistant to the DCI for Strategic Warning, Lt Gen Lincoln Faurer, briefed the group on the "Changes in the Strategic Warning Mechanism," describing his SWS and the procedures they would use. Faurer reported that the SWS would ultimately consist of 10 analysts: CIA, DIA, Army, and Air Force who were already on duty, along with analysts from NSA, State, and Navy who were expected soon. The organization would be in the National Military Intelligence Center (NMIC) in the Pentagon. Faurer also noted that, in addition to strategic warning notices, the staff would produce a monthly report for the DCI on developments in the warning field, which would also be disseminated to previous recipients of the Watch Report.⁴⁴⁷

The ensuing NSCIC working group discussion highlighted consumer concerns, including the analytic expertise required for nonmilitary strategic warning issues. D/DCI/IC Samuel Wilson emphasized that “the present arrangement for the handling of warning was not easily arrived at,” recognizing that IC civilian elements were sensitive to housing the SWS in NMIC alongside the National Military Command Center. Wilson argued this was advantageous, “put[ting] the Staff at the hub of indications activities and, in the event the situation escalated to use of US forces, next to those who would act.” He also acknowledged that because “political and economic aspects would be particularly important in some situations,” it was necessary “to ensure that the Strategic Warning Staff was properly balanced” and was provided “civilian analysts to augment the NMIC Staff. He felt that if State, CIA, and NSA provided the proper kind of analysts, there need be no concern about the handling of political and economic indicators.”⁴⁴⁸

The timeliness of warning was another concern. Robert Ellsworth, then-Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, “hoped the system for providing warning to users would err on the side of fast reaction and under coordination,” a point that drew general agreement. Richard Shryock from the IC Staff added: “[T]he ‘Small-w’ warning problem and function involves the entire Intelligence Community and timeliness of reporting is an across-the-board problem.”⁴⁴⁹

The potential overlap between current intelligence and warning provided through AMs also evoked considerable discussion. L. Dean Brown, the State Department’s representative on the NSCIC working group, asked “how ‘Little-w’ and current intelligence connect.” He noted that “State officials get daily briefings which cover the same material he felt Alert Memoranda might deal with” and wondered “if questions of timing or use of separate groups were involved.” D/DCI/IC Wilson replied that “the same people may be involved, but the Alert Memorandum belongs to the NIOs and current intelligence is a responsibility of the DDI [CIA’s Deputy Director of Intelligence].” Another NSCIC working group member went further, stating “the principal difference between the Alert Memorandum and normal current intelligence reporting is the matter of focus. The NIB [National

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Intelligence Bulletin] may cover 15 or 20 situations, but the Alert Memorandum is a vehicle by which the DCI can inform senior officials of particular matters on which he considers they should focus.” The NSCIC working group discussion of strategic warning developments ended with a description of new automated messaging and voice systems that were “intended to assist in the handling of intelligence during crisis periods and the handling of crisis situations by enabling more rapid coordination.”⁴⁵⁰

THE STRATEGIC WARNING STAFF: OPERATIONS AND FEEDBACK

Both the newly established SWS and the IC's NIOs actively monitored world events and, when appropriate, issued warnings throughout 1975. Senior community leaders, including the DCI, paid close attention to the performance of the SWS and aggressively sought consumer feedback on the usefulness and value of the new warning products being disseminated. Although largely positive, this feedback revealed challenges that the IC encountered in its efforts to revamp its warning structure and processes.

The SWS produced its first Monthly Report in March and its second in April. These Monthly Reports were “designed to sensitize the Community to foreign developments that have strategic warning implications.” The SWS also compiled a weekly Alert List (AL), which was sent primarily to IC collection elements to ensure focus on a range of strategic warning issues. During these first two months, the SWS had no occasion to issue an SWN.⁴⁵¹

Interest in the SWS's performance was quickly apparent. In April, the DCI wrote to Special Assistant to the DCI for Strategic Warning Faurer, commending him and the SWS members on their first Monthly Report,⁴⁵² and followed up with a personal visit to the staff in May. In a cover memo prepared with “talking points” for Colby's visit, D/DCI/IC Wilson noted that SWS's second Monthly Report “showed a marked improvement over its March report” and “our earlier concern that the staff was spreading its focus to cover essentially small-w areas has largely abated.” The memo recommended that Colby comment favorably on the selectivity displayed in

the April Monthly Report (and in the ALs) and on “the explicit way in which subject matter is related to strategic warning.” The visit guidance also urged the DCI to engage Faurer and his deputy on how the SWS views “its relationship to the NIO structure on the warning process” and to inquire whether there was anything he, as DCI, should do to ensure effective coordination between the two. Lastly, the memo noted pressure from some IC elements to prepare daily notes similar to the former NIC Notes and suggested Colby “discourage the publication by the SWS of any kind of daily product, largely for the resources required to do so.” Echoing many of the themes in the memo prepared for the DCI’s SWS visit, Wilson sent the USIB an update on strategic warning efforts since the SWS standup. He emphasized that the Monthly Report and AL “reveal that the Strategic Warning Staff is maintaining good discipline in distinguishing between strategic and small-w warning areas and is concentrating on the former.”⁴⁵³

Consumer reaction to the revised warning operations took longer to emerge and was less effusive. A memo for the D/DCI/IC in September 1975 acknowledged that, although no official consumer poll of reactions to the Monthly Report had been conducted, “we do know that there are many varying reactions to this new publication.”⁴⁵⁴ A few weeks later, a background paper provided to Wilson stated: “The Director, SWS has recently been informed that the SWS Monthly is read closely by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Director DIA. On a somewhat broader military front, the Monthly has received very favorable reactions from NORAD [North American Air Defense Command], SHAPE [Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe], and PACAF [Pacific Air Forces] headquarters.”⁴⁵⁵ Limited feedback from NIOs on the SWS AL suggested the list “has potentially more utility to field command collectors than to Washington analysts, since the latter should be able to determine for themselves what are the key questions.”⁴⁵⁶

In accord with DCID 1/5’s requirement to review the functioning of the strategic warning process and report periodically to the USIB on its findings, Wilson briefed the board in October on the successes achieved and challenges encountered thus far in producing the Monthly Report. The talking paper prepared for the USIB discussion observed that the SWS’s propensity

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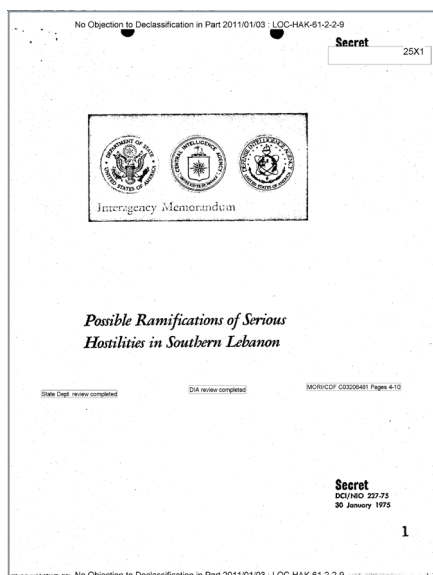
to pay too much attention to small-w warning areas “seems to have diminished in recent publications.” The Monthly also drew praise for including “broad think-pieces on warning matters” and using “innovative approaches,” such as Bayes charts, on a possible North Korean attack. Conversely, the talking paper acknowledged continued SWS staffing shortfalls—there were no analysts from State, Army, or Navy—and suggested Wilson emphasize “the SWS can do its job more effectively with full support and membership from all USIB offices.”⁴⁵⁷ The paper concluded by noting Wilson’s intention to convene the first meeting of the Strategic Warning Review Group in November to discuss SWS operations, including procedures for issuing an SWN and the need for SWS access “to all appropriate intelligence.”⁴⁵⁸

The AM came under even more scrutiny, in part because this warning vehicle had been produced since September 1974 with 15 memorandums disseminated during its first year (Fig. 8).⁴⁵⁹ An interview in July 1975, conducted with staff serving the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, found that “General Brown received all of the DCI’s Alert Memoranda expeditiously, that there were no filters which shortstopped these warning messages, and that General Brown personally read them all.” His staff also noted that “while seldom if ever did the AMs provide information that was new or startling—this information, when provided to the Chairman in the form of an AM, served as a means of focusing his attention on the specific trouble spot defined by the AM.” They also expressed the opinion that the volume of AMs “was about right and that if the volume was increased significantly the AMs would quickly lose their impact.”⁴⁶⁰

A larger, more systematic effort to assess the effectiveness and value of the AMs was completed in August. The AM study—prepared by the IC Staff’s PRD—was intended to answer the DCI’s question about “how well the system has served him and the community and how well it has served the high-level consumer.”⁴⁶¹ The review employed a case study approach. For each AM, the PRD interviewed those persons who were key to its initiation and production; consulted with others in the community on their views of the production and coordination process; and sought the views of consumers concerning the impact of the AMs and their value to the policymaking process.⁴⁶²

Redefining the Intelligence Community's Warning Role

Figure 8. Alert Memorandum from the IC's Strategic Warning Staff



In an accompanying note to National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, DCI Colby raised concerns that “a resumption of serious Israeli-fedayeen fighting in southern Lebanon” could destabilize “diplomatic movement concerning the Golan Heights and the Palestinians.” Kissinger’s Senior Director for Middle East and South Asia Robert Oakley added his own warning: “This is a very real threat.”

Source: “Lebanese-Israeli Border Problems,” February 6, 1975, LOC-HAK-61-2-2-9, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/LOC-HAK-61-2-2-9.pdf>.

The key findings of the study, which were briefed to the USIB in September, were largely positive. The study concluded that the basic concept of AMs was “sound,” and those AMs produced to date had “by and large done what they were designed to do.” The study found that the memorandums “are being seen—and their message noted by principals and senior aides in the national security decision process.” Interviews also revealed that the “system was not being seriously abused by overuse” or conversely for “neglecting the AM form when it might have been used.” Not surprisingly, views differed on points of form and substance, including the criteria AMs should address,

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their format, and whether they truly represented an IC effort. Overall, the recommendations for change were minor. Among the most important were to increase community involvement in the production of the memorandums; notify Washington-area intelligence operations centers of the decision to produce an AM; and, when time permitted, notify embassies and field elements and solicit their comments and suggestions on the product.⁴⁶³

On January 23, 1976, in one of his last acts as DCI, Colby presided at a USIB session that addressed the strategic warning changes he had initiated two years earlier. In discussing "Procedures for Strategic Warning," Special Assistant to the DCI for Strategic Warning Faurer reviewed the SWS's activities throughout the past nine months and shared his thoughts on what the SWS should tackle in the future. Although Faurer intended to have the staff continue with a Weekly Alert List, Monthly Report, and an occasional Special Report, he also wanted "it to involve itself in broader efforts to improve warning," noting SWS analysts were now engaged with other IC members "in the complex business of developing indications and warning target sets." Following general discussion, USIB principals approved the "Procedures for Strategic Warning."⁴⁶⁴

WARNING'S EVOLUTION IN THE FOLLOWING YEARS

Much of the impetus for implementing and supporting the warning reforms that Colby had championed dissipated during the next 18 months. The departure of key players pushing these changes (such as D/DCI/IC Wilson and Special Assistant to the DCI for Strategic Warning Faurer), the rapid transitions in DCI leadership (William Colby – George H. W. Bush – Stansfield Turner), and the overall turmoil in the IC resulting from hearings held by the Church and Pike Committees all diverted attention and energy from the warning mission. Indicative of this inattention is that the IC issued no AMs between August 1976 and December 1978.⁴⁶⁵

Community leadership, however, continued to debate and discuss strategic warning during those months, laying the groundwork for future changes to the IC's warning structure and processes. For example, CIA's Acting Deputy Director for Strategic Research sent the D/DCI/IC a memo on June 7,

1976, regarding the "Organization and Function of the Strategic Warning Staff." The memo reopened old wounds thought closed by the signing of DCID 1/5, arguing that the SWS was "not equipped, nor does it operate, in a manner which enables it to give strategic warning of hostilities." The acting deputy went on to assert that "strategic warning is a function and responsibility of the entire intelligence community" and "the charter of the SWS should be changed to relieve it of that responsibility." The memo concluded by offering "consideration might be given to designating the director of the SWS as the NIO for Strategic Warning," so the SWS could "provide the community a unique and valuable service not now being performed by any agency."⁴⁶⁶

The Deputy Director for Strategic Research's memo drew a quick response from the former SWS director, an alternate CIA member of the Strategic Warning Review Group, and CIA's Director of Current Intelligence. In their response, the three stated they believed "it would be premature to make any major shifts in the organization or functions of the Strategic Warning Staff." Pointing out that the SWS had been established only 18 months earlier, after "extensive community discussions," the memo articulated one of the key points of contention within the IC over warning:

The SWS was established to provide a better "second-look" at strategic warning than the old Watch Committee structure did. It was designed to **supplement** the work being done by current intelligence units in the community in ringing the warning bell. But it was based on the principle that there must be a place where the **sole focus** is looking closely at the warning indicators, without being bogged down by any requirements to produce current intelligence on many related topics.⁴⁶⁷

The trio finished by arguing that any shifts in the role or organization of the SWS would be "premature." Rather, they recommended that "renewed efforts be made to flesh it out to its full strength, so that all NFIB [National Foreign Intelligence Board] agencies are giving it the support it deserves."⁴⁶⁸ In July 1976, the Deputy DCI commissioned a review of "the functioning and product of the Strategic Warning Staff... to ensure that the SWS receives

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the full support and cooperation from the collection and analytical resources available within the Agency.”⁴⁶⁹

New intelligence failures and Congressional pressure forced the IC to revisit and consider how to further the changes to warning structures and processes begun by Colby. The unrest that erupted in Iran during the fall of 1977 and eventually forced the Shah to flee the country in early 1979 highlighted continued shortcomings in the IC's warning performance. Work the IC began during 1977—to solidify the DCI's role in providing strategic warning and leading intelligence support during crisis situations—culminated with a draft study in June 1978 produced by a working group of officers from the National Foreign Assessment Center and the National Intelligence Tasking Center.⁴⁷⁰ The IC's reexamination of strategic warning was reinforced that August by the findings of a House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) study of the performance and capability of the community in fulfilling its warning mission.⁴⁷¹ The HPSCI report acknowledged that, although policymakers expected more of intelligence than it could deliver,



Frustration with the IC's warning shortcomings was dramatically highlighted in a New York Times article, "President Criticizes Intelligence Effort on Crisis Prediction: Memo to Top Aides Said to Arise Mainly from CIA Failure To Warn of Turmoil in Iran," published on November 23, 1978. Many of President Jimmy Carter's criticisms were later confirmed in a CIA postmortem study of the Iran crisis.

- JAMES MARCHIO, drawing upon Richard Burt, "President Criticizes Intelligence Effort on Crisis Prediction," *New York Times*, November 23, 1978; and Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Cornell University Press, 2010), 34–122

awareness of warning was low in both the intelligence and policy chains of command. Recommending more training and better tools for analysts, the study also urged the DCI to fortify the IC's warning structure by appointing a senior official to provide leadership and focus on warning.⁴⁷²

Many of the recommendations included in the IC and House reports were adopted by the IC with the revision of DCID 1/5 in May 1979. This DCID created the position of National Intelligence Officer for Warning (NIO/W), ensuring a focal point for warning matters in the community. The revised directive also broadened its definition of warning beyond military threats to encompass "events of major importance to the security of the United States." This consolidated the IC's ability to alert senior policy-makers to "small" and "large" warning concerns under the NIO/W, ensuring issues which previously generated AMs would fall under his purview. Equally important, the May 1979 directive clearly stated: "All Community organizations and personnel have substantive responsibility for the detection of developments requiring warning, especially strategic warning and for prompt alerting."⁴⁷³ Production of AMs had resumed six months earlier, with 23 AMs issued between November 1978 and the winter of 1981.⁴⁷⁴ Philip H. J. Davies notes that the IC was able to point to several warning successes after revising DCID 1/5, including "accurate intelligence Alert Memoranda concerning the political crisis in Poland, the triggering of the Iran-Iraq War, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan."⁴⁷⁵

One recommendation in the IC's 1978 reexamination of strategic warning that drove additional discussion and a subsequent revision of DCID 1/5 four years later involved the role of the SWS. The 1978 report recommended deferring decision on the long-term future of the SWS, or a replacement for it, for a test period of 18 months.⁴⁷⁶ The memo "*Quo Vadis* the Strategic Warning Staff," sent by the Assistant NIO for Warning to IC partners in January 1981, summarized an internal paper that explored six potential options for the staff, ranging from increasing its size and responsibilities to eliminating it entirely. The memo concluded by recommending the SWS be replaced with "an NIO/W staff of six professionals drawn from the Community and located at Langley whose

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function would be to support the NIO/W in publishing alternative hypotheses on budding crises and in-depth research papers on warning issues.”⁴⁷⁷ An option close to this recommendation was ultimately incorporated into the further revised DCID, which became effective October 1982. The SWS was disbanded and replaced by a National Warning Staff to support the NIO/W.⁴⁷⁸

REVAMPING THE WARNING STRUCTURE IN HINDSIGHT

The reforms set in motion by DCI Colby had a profound impact on the structure, processes, and products used by the IC to provide warning and inform policymakers of pending crises of national security concern. Although these reforms proved incomplete, they laid the foundation for the structure and processes used by the IC for the next four decades. The principles Colby expressed—policymakers are not warned unless they are told they are being warned; the responsibility for warning should be focused on the DCI to ensure accountability; and the elements established for this task should be kept as small as possible with support provided primarily by existing elements in the community—served to guide the IC's actions and revisions made to DCID 1/5 following Colby's departure as DCI in 1976.⁴⁷⁹ In the decades that followed, a central point for strategic warning was located under the DCI and later the Director for National Intelligence. A senior officer served as the focal point for warning—first the Special Assistant for Strategic Warning and then the NIO/W—supported by a small interagency staff of officers. AMs remained the primary vehicle to disseminate warning throughout this period. Not until 2011 was the foundation that Colby created dismantled, when then-Director of National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper disestablished the NIO/W and the National Warning Staff—their role in the community having been diminished during the post-9/11 era with its overwhelming focus on terrorism.⁴⁸⁰

Colby recognized and responded to the changing international threat environment that confronted the United States and its allies and expanded

the types of intelligence needed by senior leaders. His emphasis on political and not just military warning, and his creation of the AM—a product “designed to highlight a **potential** problem, and not necessarily a **highly likely** one”—helped policymakers see and react to multiple crises in the ensuing decades.⁴⁸¹ Increasingly, as Colby realized, it was less about warning of military confrontation and more a matter of avoiding surprise to the President, the National Security Council, and the Armed Forces by foreign events of major importance to US national security writ large.⁴⁸² Colby's creation of the Special Assistant to the DCI for Strategic Warning and the supporting SWS reflected his belief that *potential* military conflict warranted a “second look” and deserved the attention of analysts not bogged down with daily production responsibilities. He saw the primary function of the SWS, short of issuing a strategic warning notice, as keeping “the intelligence community on its toes with respect to strategic warning issues.”⁴⁸³ At the same time, his empowerment of the NIOs to produce AMs and to leverage the IC's current intelligence capabilities minimized duplicative effort while retaining a focal point and an advocate for warning.

Colby's efforts to revamp warning apparently met with initial success. A 1975 survey “revealed substantial agreement among both producers and senior-level consumers that the basic concept [for delivering warning] is sound; that Alert Memoranda are being seen—and their message noted—by principals and senior aides in the national security decision process; and that, so far, the system has not been seriously overused nor, except possibly in the Mayaguez incident, underused.”⁴⁸⁴ Colby himself subsequently reflected on the value and success of the AM in his memoir, writing: “The box score on these, after a year or so, showed a certain number of ‘Wolf’ cries. But it also showed many solid warnings, on some of which our customers took the warnings seriously enough to act to ensure that the predicted event did not take place—not a statistically satisfying effect but a credit to the real purpose of intelligence.”⁴⁸⁵

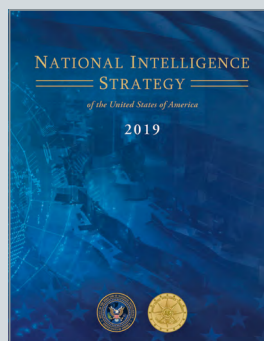
Additional revision, however, was required to make the structure and processes he bequeathed more effective and evolve with a changing threat environment and consumer demands. The changes implemented highlight

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the inherent and difficult challenges associated with the warning mission. Questions of what to warn about and when, by whom, and in what form alerts should be disseminated have driven debate in the IC since its inception. Even though “anticipatory intelligence” has largely replaced strategic warning in today’s IC lexicon, these questions—particularly whether a dedicated office and specialists are required if warning is every analyst’s responsibility—still evoke discussion.

Anticipatory Intelligence

The 2019 *National Intelligence Strategy* identifies *anticipatory intelligence* as “collecting and analyzing information to identify new, emerging trends, changing conditions, and undervalued developments, which challenge longstanding assumptions and encourage new perspectives, as well as identify new opportunities and warn of threats to US interests.” Former National Intelligence Council Chair Gregory Treverton further distinguishes between anticipatory intelligence and warning in his book, coauthored with Robert Hutchings, *Truth to Power: A History of the U.S. National Intelligence Council*: “Warning is client-centered and focused on alerting those policy clients to possible events that are both fairly specific and relatively imminent. AI [anticipatory intelligence], by contrast, is less focused on the specific and imminent..., seeking [instead] to position intelligence to better understand the trends and anticipate their results.”



Sources: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *National Intelligence Strategy of the United States of America*, 2019, <https://archive.org/details/5691925-National-Intelligence-Strategy-2019>; and Gregory F. Treverton, “From Afghanistan to Trump: 2014-2017,” in *Truth to Power: A History of the U.S. National Intelligence Council*, eds. Robert Hutchings and Gregory F. Treverton (Oxford University Press, 2019), 191–93.

Yet in many ways today’s threat environment demands both renewed emphasis on these “what, when, and who” warning-related questions as well

as a deeper discussion of the task of warning itself and the analytic challenges it poses. Given an increasingly aggressive Russia as demonstrated by its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the growing potential for conflict with China and North Korea, and ongoing terrorist and cyber threats, all these questions appear just as relevant and important for the IC in the 21st century as they were in the 1970s. Historically—and even more so today—analysts confront complex warning issues often set in the future. They are armed with incomplete, ambiguous, and contradictory information further distorted by deliberate adversary efforts to deceive and misinform. What's more, as noted by former DNI NIO for Warning Kenneth Knight: “[F]ailure in the form of an unwarned threat materializing, or missing a strategic opportunity, can have significant, if not existential consequences,” thereby “increasing the pressure to avoid over-or-under warning.” Knight rightly suggests this analytic piece needs more attention from the IC, with questions ranging from whether warning is a natural byproduct of what analysts do day-to-day or is fundamentally different requiring specialized training and tradecraft. Equally important, what constitutes and enables good warning analysis (methods, mindset, and persistence)?⁴⁸⁶

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE “NATIONAL FAMILY OF PRODUCTS”: ORIGINS OF COMMUNITY PUBLICATION



The Intelligence Community’s (IC) historical efforts to produce finished intelligence products of value to national-level consumers have received limited attention from intelligence practitioners and intelligence scholars. The literature addressing intelligence and particularly *current intelligence* products reaching national decisionmakers can be found in three general areas. One encompasses the challenges associated with producing current intelligence and includes Jeffrey R. Cooper’s *Curing Analytic Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis*, which addresses the “tyranny of current intelligence.”⁴⁸⁷ A second area devotes attention to the President’s Daily Brief (PDB) and specific National Intelligence Estimates (NIE). David Priess’s *The President’s Book of Secrets: The Untold Story of Intelligence Briefings to America’s Presidents from Kennedy to Obama*, one of the more recent works, details the mechanics behind the PDB and the preferences of its primary customer, as does John L. Helgerson’s *Getting to Know the President*.⁴⁸⁸ Controversial NIEs—particularly those produced on Iran and Iraq—also generate considerable scholarship, including Gregory Treverton’s

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article, “CIA Support to Policymakers: The 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran’s Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities.”⁴⁸⁹

A third area of scholarship surrounds Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) William Colby’s tenure and performance. Here the primary works are Harold P. Ford’s formerly classified *William E. Colby as Director of Central Intelligence, 1973-76* and Douglas F. Garthoff’s *Directors of Central Intelligence as Leaders of the US Intelligence Community*. Ford credits Colby with transforming the CIA’s Current Intelligence Bulletin into the National Intelligence Bulletin (NIB)— the first joint IC current intelligence product—and providing a forum for other agencies’ dissenting views.⁴⁹⁰ Garthoff also acknowledges that Colby took “steps intended to make the community work together better and to enhance his ability to perform as DCI,” such as striving to make the primary daily intelligence product “a more community document.”⁴⁹¹

Given this gap in the literature, this chapter examines a significant but little-known initiative launched by Colby in 1973 to create a “national family of products” to improve intelligence support to senior consumers in crisis and noncrisis situations. Addressing longstanding problems involving redundant and sometimes conflicting intelligence, Colby’s push led to publication of the NIB and testing of a National Situation Report (NSR) during international crises. Although these initiatives failed due to IC agencies’ pushback, they laid the groundwork to address similar problems decades later under the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI)—and can inform the efforts of today’s IC to deliver intelligence analysis of the highest quality.

IMPETUS FOR AN INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY LINE OF PRODUCTS

The driving force behind Colby’s push to create a “national family of products,” like so many of the IC initiatives in the early 1970s, was President Richard Nixon’s directive in November 1971 to improve the quality of intelligence provided to US leadership. One area specifically cited for action was the “product formats and production procedures” used by the community,⁴⁹²

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further specified as the “development of improved techniques and disciplines of analysis & production,” as well as the “development of improved methods of presentation.”⁴⁹³ The National Security Council Intelligence Committee (NSCIC) questioned whether the “current intelligence-type publications” served the consumer adequately.⁴⁹⁴ In fact, senior consumers complained of “too much event or ‘newspaper’ style reporting, too little in-depth analytical production, a lack of coordinated judgments, and a lack of clearly stated dissenting views.”⁴⁹⁵ Dissatisfaction was also expressed over the intelligence support provided during international crises.⁴⁹⁶

An IC Staff study conducted during the first half of 1973 looked at crisis and noncrisis finished intelligence in detail.⁴⁹⁷ Drawing on the staff’s review of existing national products and interviews with national consumers and national intelligence production managers, the study identified “consensus criticisms” and, in turn, objectives to pursue to improve the intelligence provided to national consumers. The IC Staff’s findings and recommendations on how to address the shortcomings identified were briefed to the US Intelligence Board (USIB) in October 1973.⁴⁹⁸

Although the reaction of national consumers to existing products and their views concerning proposed hypothetical products varied widely—in part because the consumers perceived their needs differently—the IC Staff study acknowledged that several criticisms were frequently raised. First, very few products were perceived as “coordinated national intelligence; instead, they represent the views of a single agency.” Consumers directly linked their second common complaint to the first: products were frequently “overlapping and redundant”⁴⁹⁹ Here, the evidence was mixed. Another IC Staff study in September 1972 found there were 316 current intelligence publications—a figure described as “frightening.” Noting, however, that “146 of these are published by the various unified and specified commands and 90 of them by NSA [National Security Agency],” this study pointed out that “the publications issued by the overseas commands are, for the most part, for internal command distribution” and that the NSA publications were concerned with very narrow subject matter. Consequently, the study concluded that “over 2/3 of all the publications studied fall within these two broad categories”⁵⁰⁰—and were not necessarily redundant.

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Consumers also expressed in the IC Staff survey of early 1973 “a preference for having conflicting views clearly exposed rather than subsumed in hedged and muffled judgments.” Finally, consumers conveyed their belief that they received inadequate support during crisis situations, citing the 1971 India-Pakistan war as an example of the IC placing “too much emphasis on factual reporting” and “too little emphasis on the analytical and estimative products which they [the consumers] desired.”⁵⁰¹ The IC’s shortfalls in serving the President and other senior US leaders during the October 1973 Yom Kippur War undoubtedly reinforced this sentiment.⁵⁰²

The consumer complaints detailed in the IC Staff study helped shape Colby’s thinking on intelligence production and how the IC should respond to Nixon’s charge to improve the quality, scope, and timeliness of national intelligence. Colby expressed his views in the DCI’s *Perspective of the Intelligence Environment*, published in August 1973:

Many of our principal national-level consumers are not being well served by our current intelligence efforts....We are issuing an excessive number of current intelligence products, and I intend to reduce the number. In times of crisis, we have deluged decisionmakers with current items, for the most part uncoordinated and sometimes contradictory. We must improve our system to provide a timely and concise analysis of the situation, directed to the policy issues under consideration, without submerging justifiable divergent judgments.⁵⁰³

Taking up the charge, the IC would translate the President’s tasking into several subobjectives, including “to increase community participation in the production of national intelligence and reduce the number of serialized publications by developing a family of coordinated national intelligence products which use the analytic capabilities of the individual departments and agencies to best advantage.”⁵⁰⁴ These objectives resonated with Colby who attempted to foster broader community participation in multiple areas.⁵⁰⁵

ENVISIONING A “NATIONAL FAMILY OF PRODUCTS”

The objectives laid out in the 1973 IC Staff study shaped the measures considered by the USIB and ultimately what changes were adopted in crisis and noncrisis intelligence production and procedures. In laying the groundwork for its recommendations, the IC Staff formulated six primary objectives for the proposed products. Products, the study argued, should be focused on national consumers and, because of the time constraints they face, the number of products provided should be limited. The IC Staff added context to its third objective—products should normally reflect community judgments—noting that, although the Current Intelligence Bulletin (CIB) was sometimes called a national product because the Department of State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (State/INR) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) were consulted on its articles, general perception held the CIB was not a community but rather a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) product. The study also urged that factual reporting should be limited to a degree consistent with clarity while, at the same time, analytical reporting and, where the community was in disagreement, conflicting objectives should be highlighted. Lastly, to ensure the products were meeting consumer needs, consumers should be involved in the production procedures. The objectives advanced for crisis reporting and production mirrored those identified above but emphasized the need to resolve “communication problems between producers and consumers.” Improving the timeliness of intelligence products to top-level consumers and incorporating information on US military and diplomatic activities that might fuel foreign reactions were also noted as objectives.⁵⁰⁶

The IC Staff divided the study’s recommendations into crisis and non-crisis areas. To prepare for crisis situations, the study recommended that the Watch Offices of the national agencies and departments be connected by a secure voice conferencing network, becoming the basis of the National Operations and Intelligence Watch Officers Net (NOIWON). This networking capability was to be complemented by the creation of a National Operations and Intelligence Analysts Net that would come into play as tensions rose. Crisis intelligence products would not be produced for national

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consumers on a periodic basis but only when events dictated. These products would include a National Watch Officers Bulletin, a National Analysts Summary, and a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE). SNIEs—which had been used by the community for years—would be modified to include a feedback mechanism to adjust requirements as the situation unfolded.⁵⁰⁷

For noncrisis production, the IC Staff study recommended that a “National Intelligence Daily” be developed as a “true community product” and that it “be developed in such a way so as to permit all production elements to originate articles and participate actively in the coordination process.” The study also proposed creating a National Intelligence Weekly to summarize significant worldwide developments for the national consumer. Such a product “would contain items originated by all intelligence agencies within a single national publication.” The Weekly, the study argued, would “allow agencies with views differing from those of the DCI on any issue to have their views provided to national consumers in a national publication,” while also providing “an opportunity for the community to summarize the available information on a particular subject.” NIEs would be produced during noncrisis periods in accordance with current procedures. If ad hoc production was needed, the study recommended using the existing National Intelligence Analytical Memorandum format, noting it could be tailored to ensure “the right consumer gets the right product.”⁵⁰⁸ In sum, only the Watch Officer Bulletin and National Analysts Summary during crises and the National Intelligence Daily and Weekly at other times would be new products.

The IC Staff caveated its recommendations, noting the “main thrust of this proposal is to take maximum advantage of the national security organizational structure as it now exists” and the package was “not one that must be accepted in totality or at all.” In fact, the study suggested “incremental implementation” and did not recommend immediately eliminating any agency departmental publications with the “hope that superior products will drive out less superior ones.” The study offered that products should be as flexible as possible, and that scheduled production be kept to a minimum.⁵⁰⁹

Initial reaction to the study and its recommendations was mixed. A detailed CIA comment on the proposal was indicative of this mixed reaction, noting:

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The valuable central idea is that the community should be equipped to produce more of its intelligence in a national form. The proposal occasionally pushes this idea too far; given the uneven capabilities throughout the community on such topics as economics and non-military science, coordination would be more trouble than it was worth. Nevertheless, it is a valid criticism to assert that the consumer receives too much unilateral and overlapping material, particularly in crisis situations.⁵¹⁰

The CIA memo went on to state that “the central weakness is the proposal’s silence on direction,” questioning who would initiate these products, exercise quality control, and have the authority to approve or reject items. CIA concluded by urging caution: “Overall, we should in any event move with some deliberation from the products we have toward what we propose to have; we cannot produce both at once, and we should test carefully to see whether new mechanics and structures will in fact bear the weight we would put on them.”⁵¹¹

Follow-up action on the IC Staff study began with a briefing for the USIB in January 1974 on the status of the Family of National Intelligence Products recommendations, as amended by USIB membership recommendations. Beyond informing members about the changes made, the briefing sought to elicit USIB approval for two actions—testing NOIWON, and forming an IC-chaired subcommittee to work out detailed procedures for implementing the proposals for national intelligence daily and weekly publications.⁵¹² An IC Staff summary following the USIB session described the project as supporting “the DCI’s objective to make all analytical products as responsive to consumer needs as possible, to avoid overproduction and duplication, to improve and expand substantive coordination in the community and facilitate the expression of contrary views concerning topics of particular importance.”⁵¹³

Preceding but paralleling the discussion of the “National Family of Products” was Colby’s initiative to remake CIA’s primary current intelligence product using a newspaper format to “emphasize the more important items and to offer the recipient the choice between a quick headline summary and reading in depth.” As Colby saw it, what was called the National Intelligence

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Daily (NID) provided him with a mechanism “to ensure that intelligence reports and assessments went to the senior officials and were not screened out by their staffs” and “that all the key officials were regularly briefed on the major world problems rather than only on the particular ones their own offices might be concerned with.”⁵¹⁴ CIA began publishing the NID in January 1974 and, although its customer base was different from what would become the NIB's, their early histories were closely intertwined.⁵¹⁵

CONCEPTUALIZING THE NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN AND NATIONAL SITUATION REPORT

The USIB-approved subcommittee—chaired by the director of the DCI's Product Review Group and including CIA, DIA, and State/INR representation—held its first meeting on February 15, 1974. The subcommittee addressed multiple questions related to the publication of a daily national intelligence product, ranging from under whose aegis the product should be produced to where the offices of national products would be located.⁵¹⁶ In the weeks that followed, the subcommittee held a series of meetings that resulted in a jointly agreed proposal for a daily national product called the NIB.⁵¹⁷ This proposal was reviewed at a subcommittee session in March and forwarded to USIB principals for approval at their meeting on April 4.⁵¹⁸

The subcommittee's proposal stipulated that the NIB would be published daily except Sunday and holidays. Its format was to generally follow the CIB with a similar distribution, most likely of senior and mid-level policymakers and military commanders.⁵¹⁹ Under the DCI's direction, the CIA's director of the Office of Current Intelligence was to serve as the executive agent for NIB production, with editorial and publication offices located at CIA headquarters. During the NIB's first year, CIA was to fill the position of managing editor, with DIA and State/INR invited to assign senior officers for tours as assistant managing editors. The proposal also explicitly addressed how dissent would be expressed in the NIB, for example, incorporating succinct dissents into the NIB article or, when the dissent is long or complex, publishing “alternative views as discrete pieces.”⁵²⁰

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At the April session, USIB principals approved what was described as "the implementation of the first of the new products included in the 'National Family of Products,' " with the NIB replacing the CIB. As the IC Staff Activities Report noted, the NIB's principal features included "its emphasis on intelligence of specific interest to consumers of national intelligence, the fact that the principal intelligence production agencies will be able to submit original articles for publication, and the opportunity it provides for these agencies to state their dissenting views."⁵²¹

Proposed changes to crisis production procedures took longer to emerge. Although efforts to create new means and improve the ability of IC elements to exchange information and analysis in crisis situations continued throughout 1974, the USIB took until January 1975 to form a committee to explore the feasibility of producing a national-level product during crises.⁵²² In a memo to the DCI in December 1974, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence for the Intelligence Community (D/DCI/IC) Samuel Wilson was blunt in laying out the need for the committee and for change in crisis-related production: "The reporting and analysis provided national consumers during an international crisis is overlapping and redundant," as well as costly. The memo asserted that 90 percent of the material contained in various CIA, DIA, and State/INR crisis situation reports was redundant; the differences in data and analysis in the reports "tended to confuse rather than clarify;" and "readers of the various crisis SITREPS [Situation Reports] have complained to us about the problems created by these redundant products."⁵²³ LTG Wilson argued that it was time "to see if these problems can be diminished through a joint, USIB-sponsored effort." He suggested the DCI address the issue at the upcoming USIB session in January, using talking points Wilson had provided.⁵²⁴

In a memo sent to USIB members on January 3, 1975, Colby proposed an IC-prepared national intelligence situation summary for delivery to senior intelligence consumers during times of international crisis. He suggested that the IC proceed in the "spirit of learning to walk before we run" and establish an ad hoc committee under the IC Staff to examine the feasibility of such a proposal, much along the lines that had been done with creation of the NIB.⁵²⁵ Subsequently, a committee comprising representatives

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from CIA, DIA, NSA, and State/INR and led by the IC Staff's Product Review Division (PRD) met to discuss the feasibility of producing an NSR during a national security crisis. Committee members agreed that a test of the concept and procedures would be held later that winter. Although everyone concurred that producing a national SITREP was a "desirable objective," the participants also voiced significant reservations at this initial session. All pointed to concerns about coordinating and issuing a SITREP given the time constraints imposed during a crisis. DIA and State/INR representatives also worried that a "requirement to produce a national situation report might be in addition to, not in lieu of, the existing agency crisis products and thus add to rather than diminish the analysts' workload." DIA went even further, expressing reservations about the impact such a SITREP would have on its roles and missions.⁵²⁶

A second ad hoc committee session in February worked out minor procedural adjustments to test the concept in March. Discussion focused on two principal issues—which agency would draft the various sections of the report and who would be the final authority in determining what would appear in the NSR. The procedures ultimately approved for the March 18 test stated that "any agency" could assume drafting responsibilities, although DIA preferred to "be responsible for the military situation," leaving "political and economic matters" to CIA—as well as coordination, communication, and control procedures. The committee also created a checklist for analysts and supervisors—not an exact outline to be rigidly followed—with five sections: *Summary*, *Military Situation*, *Political and Economic Situation*, *US and Friendly Actions Bearing on Enemy/Other Actions*, and *Assessments*. The test would use the real-world current situation in Indochina and Thailand.⁵²⁷

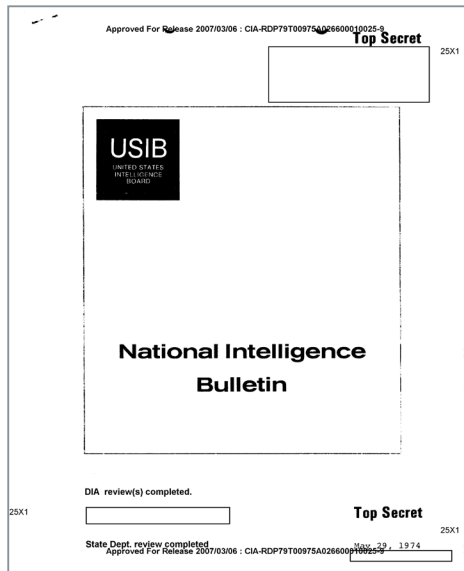
NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS LAUNCHED, BUT PROBLEMS FOLLOW

On May 29, 1974, the USIB published the first issue of the NIB, which was praised a little over a month later by the *Armed Forces Journal* (Fig. 9). The journal article, titled "Advise and Dissent," emphasized how the new

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IC publication, at National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger’s insistence, “candidly includes the dissenting views of the community.” Reporting that an average of just four footnotes—a mechanism used in many IC products to capture dissenting views—had appeared each year in the discontinued CIB, the *Armed Forces Journal* stated that, in the new NIB, “dissent is almost a daily occurrence.” The article also highlighted that the NIB staff, who worked for the DCI, “give the views of the Central Intelligence Agency the same weight as other contributors.”⁵²⁸

Figure 9. Inaugural National Intelligence Bulletin



Among the developments featured in the first NIB, published by the USIB on May 29, 1974, were:

- Israel: Parliamentary approval anticipated for Rabin's cabinet.
- Cambodia-China: Ranking Khmer Communist completes talks with Chinese leaders.
- Middle East: France may participate in Suez mine-clearing operations.

Source: “National Intelligence Bulletin,” May 29, 1974, CIA-RDP79T00975A026600010025-9, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79t00975a026600010025-9>.

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The NIB's reception within the IC was more muted and mixed than the praise contained in the July 1974 *Armed Forces Journal* article. Deputy to the DCI for National Intelligence Officers (D/DCI/NIO) George Carver, for example, solicited reactions to the NIB and suggestions for improvement from all National Intelligence Officers (NIOs). Noting that the NIB's format was slightly different from the product it replaced, he observed: "[T]here are a few more articles in each day's issue (perhaps too many) and somewhat more stress is laid on coordination."⁵²⁹ More significantly, within four months of the NIB's initial publication, issues arose involving the role of a major IC contributor, DIA. A memo from the IC Staff's PRD chief on September 26 observed that "in view of newly implemented DIA current intelligence procedures—which have involved the elimination of the DIA IntSum [Intelligence Summary] and the creation of the Defense Intelligence Notice (DIN)—questions have been raised concerning the NIB and, in particular, the role of DIA in the production of that publication." The memo went on to recommend the NIB Working Subcommittee meet and review the NIB's charter.⁵³⁰

The major issues raised when the Working Subcommittee for the NIB met on October 3, 1974, concerned "an expanded role and greater visibility for DIA in the publication of the NIB." DIA advanced three proposals in support of this expanded role. The first two proposals called for "more specific accreditation for NIB articles to include the name of the analyst and the identification of the agency originating the article" and for a separate "military intelligence section within the NIB." Lastly, DIA requested that a military intelligence editor be assigned to the NIB staff who would be "responsive primarily to the Director, DIA." Although the first of DIA's proposals gained some support, the latter two generated pushback. Subcommittee members argued that including a separate military section would "logically require further compartmentation to include sections on political intelligence, economic intelligence, terrorism, etc." Such an approach, they noted, had been considered in the subcommittee's early meetings but was ultimately rejected. The push for a military editor drew an even harsher response, with some arguing that establishing a military editor for the NIB staff would "lead to the creation of an adversary relationship within the NIB

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staff and would likely sound the death knell for the NIB." The October 3 session ended with no decision regarding DIA's proposals but instead bumped that task up to the next level with the recommendation that "the principals be convened to make decisions related to the DIA proposals."⁵³¹

The IC Staff held a series of meetings with CIA, DIA, NSA, and State/INR representatives during the weeks that followed to discuss the adjustments to the NIB production procedures proposed by DIA. The memo for the USIB on these discussions reported in December that the participants had reached "unanimous agreement" on two points, with which the USIB agency principals concurred. First, the NIB "should increase the amount of military intelligence being provided [to] the national consumer." Second, the "principal author(s) of NIB articles and their parent agency(ies) would be identified, if they so desired." What this memo did not capture were the comments contained in an IC Staff summary sheet that hinted at differing community views and factors, which ultimately contributed to the NIB's demise. The sheet began by acknowledging "this seemingly bland memorandum is the tip of the iceberg." After providing background on the issues raised during the preceding months' discussions, the summary sheet cautiously concluded: "We believe that these adjustments to NIB production procedures give DIA more of the visibility it is seeking without damaging the basic concept of the NIB as a product not of a single agency but of the DCI."⁵³²

The accuracy of the "tip of the iceberg" assertion in the IC Staff summary sheet on NIB production procedures of December 1974 became all too clear early the next year. A lengthy memo written for CIA's Director of Current Intelligence in March 1975 detailed the challenges encountered in publishing the NIB during the previous year as well as potential "solutions that will be acceptable—though far from perfect—to all concerned, including Mr. Colby, the IC staff, DIA, and our own people."⁵³³

The memo's author—whose name is redacted—began by identifying several significant problems that prevented the NIB from achieving its goals. One NIB goal was to increase participation by key intelligence-producing components in the community. Although acknowledging DIA and NSA were regular contributors, the memo emphasized that State/INR declined

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to participate and was unlikely to change its position. A second goal driving the NIB's creation was to encourage "more alternative and contrasting assessments." Instead of increasing alternative analysis, however, the tendency was to "compromise, water down or withdraw an article rather than deal directly with dissenting opinion." A third aim was to limit and prioritize the topics presented. Here, too, reality differed, with actual daily production numbers much higher than the original goal of 10 articles per issue.⁵³⁴ Production challenges, such as early deadlines required for coordination and the uneven quality of input from major contributors, further undermined the NIB's success. Early coordination deadlines resulted in the NIB not being timely, while DIA and NSA submissions were often "narrowly focused... and lacking in-depth analysis." The memo also acknowledged that DIA felt it had justifiable complaints against CIA, including that CIA analysts were "too often uncompromising in defending their positions" and that "they take advantage of the fact that the NIB is headquartered at the Agency to pressure DIA into coordinating a CIA article or withdrawing a DIA piece." Conversely, a memo the previous month had noted: "There are suspicions in CIA—and probably justifiable ones—that Gen. Graham [then DIA Director] still wants to put CIA out of the military reporting business altogether."⁵³⁵

The memo of March 1975 concluded with options to address the NIB's shortcomings. Acknowledging "pros and cons" in having the NIB as a national product, the memo also asserted "the cons considerably outweigh the pros at this juncture." The seven options that were offered ranged from leaving the NIB as it was to producing the NIB as a total byproduct of CIA's NID, with essentially the same material run in two different formats. Ultimately, none of the options identified in the memo were adopted exactly as stated.⁵³⁶

Some of the challenges encountered in publishing the NIB also afflicted efforts to produce an NSR. The NSR feasibility test was conducted in March 1975 as planned. In a postmortem memo to the DCI in May, D/DCI/IC Wilson judged that, although the community could produce a national crisis report within a six-hour timeframe, the "test was not a success in terms of manpower savings and improved product." LTG Wilson attributed these failings to "technical and bureaucratic" shortcomings.⁵³⁷ On the technical

side, his postmortem concluded that “the current means of communicating between agencies is inadequate” and “until CONTEXT [Conferenced Text Editing: secure telephone and computer connection across IC agencies to permit intelligence managers, watch officers, and analysts to create, edit, and coordinate in a conference setting] is fully operational, we will not have the means to edit text between remote locations.”⁵³⁸

Wilson deemed the bureaucratic shortcomings identified in the NSR feasibility test “potentially more serious.” His postmortem revealed that DIA “strongly resisted” production of the DCI’s national crisis report at CIA’s Operations Center and argued instead that “crises, particularly those with a strong military character, should be directed from the NMIC [National Military Intelligence Center].” The report noted that “DIA agreed to participate in the test only after it was clearly spelled out that its participation did not constitute agreement that the center for producing a national situation report should be at CIA.” Wilson then recommended that the NSR project be “shelved temporarily” until CONTEXT was operational, which was anticipated by 1976, and opined: “[O]nce we prove that we can talk and edit text, we will be in a better position to tackle the bureaucratic problem.”⁵³⁹ Colby agreed with Wilson’s recommendation, commenting at the USIB session in June 1975 that the NSR test had “run into a snag—the principal problem being our present inability to communicate and adjust text at remote locations on a real-time basis,” so further testing would be delayed until CONTEXT was operational.⁵⁴⁰

DETERMINING SUCCESS: REDUCING REDUNDANCY, IMPROVING ANALYTIC QUALITY

The challenges encountered in producing the NIB spurred larger questions pertaining to its success in reducing redundancy among the myriad finished intelligence that the IC sent its consumers and in improving the quality of the products they were receiving. A DCI memo to USIB members on December 30, 1974, asked each agency “to review the rationale for its own production program and—equally important—to examine its requirements

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for publications produced elsewhere.” A recent survey of IC periodicals had concluded that, although “a review of the title and dissemination of these journals [did] not reveal any obvious significant duplication or gaps in coverage,” it was “safe to say that the community produces too many periodicals.” The DCI’s memo suggested that “consideration be given to the elimination or merger of some publications; the reduction of the frequency of issuance of others; and the paring down of dissemination lists for all.”⁵⁴¹

Follow-up efforts to the DCI’s requested review of publications continued during the spring and summer of 1975. In April, D/DCI/IC Wilson asked USIB members to provide the IC Staff with updates on and changes to their production since the December survey, including the elimination of any periodicals, the institution of any new series, and any updates to the distribution lists of existing periodicals.⁵⁴² Compiled for LTG Wilson in July, the results of this canvassing effort indicated a noteworthy achievement by NSA in reducing its gross number of periodicals by 20 percent. The overall results, however, revealed “there were no other significant reductions in periodical production by agencies other than NSA,” noting “a small net increase in both the number of periodicals being produced and the number of customers who receive periodicals.”⁵⁴³

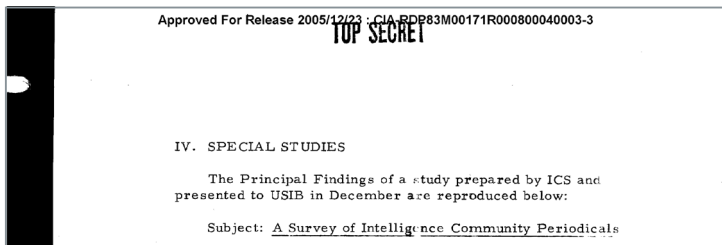
Efforts to evaluate the quality of the finished intelligence reaching consumers also yielded mixed results regarding the NIB and other community products. The DCI’s PRD began conducting a “systematic program to review and analyze finished national intelligence products” in the fall of 1974.⁵⁴⁴ PRD personnel evaluated the intelligence production in their assigned areas, focusing on quantity and types of production. The first test study examined three of the community’s major current intelligence products: the IC’s NIB, CIA’s NID, and DIA’s DIN (see Chapter Three on the *Review of National Intelligence (RONI)*).

A summary of the PRD’s findings, based on the fall 1974 evaluations, appeared in the February 1975 issue of the *RONI* (Fig. 10).⁵⁴⁵ One finding observed, “no discernible dearth of current intelligence coverage during the review period.” As the PRD continued, “On the contrary, if the national consumer had a problem with these publications, it was more likely the

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consequence of community overkill: too many publications, too many articles, and too many items of marginal interest.” A second finding identified key distinctions among the three current intelligence publications. PRD evaluators judged that the NID was “clearly a superior publication,” based on containing the greatest number of articles counted as “especially significant and/or as particularly well-presented.” Conversely, the PRD concluded the “greatest number of problems—most notably those concerning the presumed value and quality of coverage—were found in the Defense Intelligence Notice (DIN).”⁵⁴⁶ A separate evaluation that contributed to the findings featured in the *RONI* was even more direct about perceived shortfalls in community production. The evaluator, whose name was redacted, asserted this about the NIB and DIN: “[T]here is too much production for production sake; that analysts do not often tell the meaning of the facts they are reporting;... and that there appears to be a competitive relationship between the producers of the DIN and NIB, which on one occasion, at least, has led to faulty analysis, and which often leads to redundant production.”⁵⁴⁷

Figure 10. Survey of Intelligence Community Periodicals



As the *RONI* reported in February 1975, an IC Staff survey discovered that the IC “issues a surprising number of intelligence journals... [including] some 130 hard-copy intelligence periodicals at least twice a year,... 73 periodicals which are disseminated only electronically, and some 241 which are published regularly but not more than once annually.” Indicative of many analytic initiatives during this period, efforts to track intelligence production and reduce duplication—as well as the vehicle in which they were highlighted in the *RONI*—were abandoned the following year.

Source: “Review of National Intelligence,” February 1, 1975, CIA-RDP83M00171R00080004 0003-3, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83m00171r000800040003-3>.

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Monitoring and evaluating the NIB and other IC current intelligence products remained a key mission for the IC's PRD, even as the NIB was rarely discussed throughout 1975—at least as seen in declassified correspondence.⁵⁴⁸ Consumers—led by members of the NSCIC working group—pushed to assess and provide feedback to the IC on its range of current intelligence products.⁵⁴⁹ Writing on behalf of Assistant Secretary of Defense Daniel Ellsworth, Anthony Cordesman emphasized: “The committee for ‘Consumer Evaluation of Current Intelligence Products’ represents an important step forward in developing the kind of detailed consumer evaluation of the intelligence product which is essential to support the NSCIC, and to provide the Intelligence Community with a user view of its output.” He suggested “such a committee could not only establish suitable procedures for obtaining user views from different agencies but serve as a mechanism for evaluating major products.”⁵⁵⁰

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN DISCONTINUED, RENEWED EMPHASIS ON NATIONAL SITUATION REPORT

The NIB's creation was driven by DCI Colby's desire to enhance the current intelligence provided to national consumers through greater community participation, explicit discussion of alternative views, and linkage to key priorities. Not surprisingly, the NIB's publication ceased three months after he stepped down as DCI in January 1976. New DCI George H. W. Bush, in a memo sent to USIB members on April 12, noted that a review of current intelligence products found that “the daily intelligence needs of our main consumers can continue to be well served and that a substantial savings of several hundred thousand dollars can be realized by discontinuing the National Intelligence Bulletin.” In its place, Bush proposed to meet consumer needs by producing “a cabled version of the National Intelligence Daily.” He also proposed that the NID become “a fully coordinated publication” with drafting done by CIA. DIA's DINs and other departmental intelligence publications—as well as submissions for special articles from DIA, CIA, State/INR, and NSA—would be used for input.⁵⁵¹

IC reaction to the NIB's death was muted at best. All USIB principals agreed that the NIB should be discontinued.⁵⁵² Most had only minor recommendations regarding its replacement and how NID publication procedures might be modified.⁵⁵³ The loudest objections came from the IC Staff—and these objections were not over its discontinuation but rather about the way it had been accomplished. As a memo to D/DCI/IC Wilson on April 14 began: "The National Intelligence Bulletin has lived long enough, and we do not resist the DCI's move to kill it. But we certainly have problems with the way the death-dealing blow is being delivered—to our offspring!—and we would have welcomed (and should have had) a chance to recommend other procedures and a different sort of memo to USIB principals."⁵⁵⁴ Detailing how the consumer survey leading to the NIB's death was conducted by CIA's Office of Current Intelligence without even consulting the IC Staff,⁵⁵⁵ the memo went on to recount the NIB's troubled existence, observing: "But we (who have had to monitor the NIB account and arbitrate disputes between the agencies concerned) can testify that no one was ever very happy about the NIB as a joint effort."⁵⁵⁶ That said, within months of the NIB's demise, a study was launched exploring the benefits and challenges associated with creating a National Center for Current Intelligence. Its author, who had directed the NIB for two years, concluded: "[W]e found general agreement that in the abstract the concept was not a bad one, but in practice it would be very difficult to implement," with major problem areas in personnel and costs.⁵⁵⁷

The NIB was not the only Colby initiative to die in 1976. Efforts to update the "Survey of Intelligence Community Periodicals," which he had launched in December 1974, continued to run into problems. For one, CIA and DIA redefined what they identified as an intelligence periodical to "significantly reduce the number of periodicals they now report that they publish (DIA's total dropping from 204 to 4!)." Another major problem involved the inability—given the resources dedicated—to look at some 400 IC periodicals in a way that permitted identifying "what duplications or gaps exist."⁵⁵⁸ Driven in part by these challenges, the D/DCI/IC advised the USIB that there was "no further need for an annual updating

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of the "Survey of Intelligence Community Periodicals." He urged, however, that each agency "continue to review the rationale for its own periodical production program and re-examine its requirements for publications produced elsewhere."⁵⁵⁹

Consumer pressure and world events drove renewed interest in developing an NSR, which had languished after its May 1975 test. An April 1976 memo to the chief of the IC's former PRD (renamed the Production Assessment and Improvement Division) alerted him to the National Security Council's (NSC) concerns over "the plethora of reports received in the past at the White House during periods of crisis." The volatile situation in Lebanon and the potential for war was driving NSC interest in the "management of intelligence reporting in order to preclude a heavy volume of raw, duplicative, and often conflicting reports deluging the White House."⁵⁶⁰ In response to the NSC's concerns, DCI Bush stated:

The Intelligence Community is now prepared to produce for senior consumers a national intelligence situation report (sitrep) during crises. Under my auspices, the principal producing agencies (CIA, DIA, State/INR, and NSA) will, when international events and the needs of the NSC and its staff so demand, cooperate in the preparation of an all-source **national** intelligence sitrep which will reflect Community views and clarify any important Community disagreements over substance.⁵⁶¹

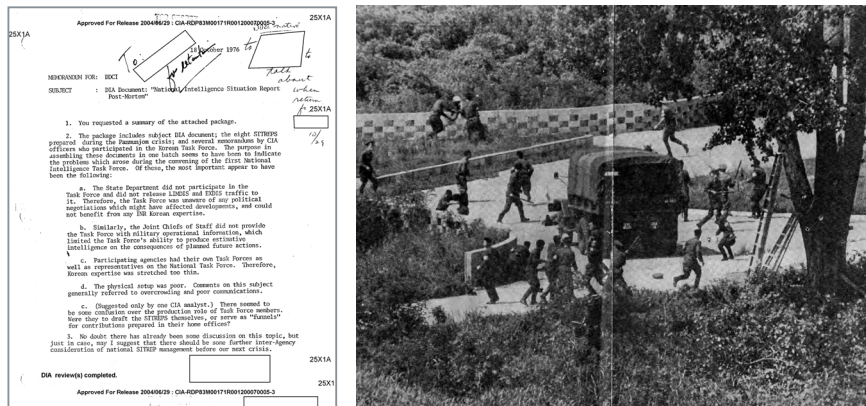
The DCI's pledge was quickly followed by the IC Staff sending drafted procedures for producing an NSR to the National Foreign Intelligence Board for review.⁵⁶²

Events in Korea, not the Middle East, in August 1976 provided a real-world test for the new NSR procedures. An international crisis erupted along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on August 18 when North Korean soldiers axed to death two US Army officers, while they were part of a work party operating in the Joint Security Area. DCI Bush responded the next day by directing that an interagency Task Force be created to produce National Intelligence Situation Reports on the crisis in Korea, with DIA

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designated the executive agent for assembling the task force and issuing the NSR.⁵⁶³ The Task Force operated for the next eight days and issued eight SITREPs (Fig. 11).⁵⁶⁴

Figure 11. First National Intelligence Situation Report, August 20, 1976



After North Korean soldiers killed two US Army officers in the Korean DMZ on August 18, 1976, the DCI directed production of National Intelligence Situation Reports, with the first published on August 20. Following crisis talks with his advisors, President Gerald Ford authorized a show-of-strength operation in the DMZ, conducted on August 21 and designed not to escalate conflict. The national Korea Task Force issued its final NSR on August 27 with the summary: “Both North Korean and UN Command forces remain on alert, but no indications of hostile actions are evident, and the situation seems stable.”

Source: “DIA Document: ‘National Intelligence Situation Report Post-Mortem,’ ” October 18, 1976, CIA-RDP83M00171R001200070005-3, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83m00171r001200070005-3>; and Wikipedia, “Korean Axe Murder Incident,” accessed on February 24, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_axe_murder_incident.

The Korea Task Force’s operations highlighted several challenges seen in the NSR “test” of March 1975 and other larger issues impeding joint IC production efforts in general. One, the Task Force was not fully joint or inclusive. DIA’s and CIA’s postmortem assessments noted “the State Department did not participate in the Task Force” and “had no role in the production

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or... coordination of the sitreps.”⁵⁶⁵ Another challenge was that, rather than conserving analytic resources, Task Force operations actually stretched them further and did not reduce duplicative efforts. DIA’s postmortem observed that “participating agencies had their own Task Forces as well as representatives on the National Task Force. Therefore, Korean expertise was stretched too thin.”⁵⁶⁶ Going further, CIA’s report stated: “The national intelligence sitrep system adds another to the long list of task forces which emerge in crisis situations. At the Pentagon last week, there was a DIA task group, a Crisis Action Team, the usual NMCC [National Military Command Center] mechanisms—and our own [CIA] task force.” Finally, the quality of the Task Force NSRs left much room for improvement, with the sitreps rated at best as “fair to good.”⁵⁶⁷ Moreover, State/INR’s failure to participate in the Task Force or to release LIMDIS and EXDIS (Limited and Exclusive Distribution, respectively) traffic to it ensured “the Task Force was unaware of any political negotiations which might have affected developments.”⁵⁶⁸ The same was true of the unwillingness of the Pentagon’s J-3 (Operations) section to share operational military information.⁵⁶⁹ The lack of access to this information—albeit not the fault of the Task Force—ultimately undermined the quality of the SITREPs and the Task Force’s ability to provide consumers with a truly integrated product.

Interest in and efforts to address the NSR shortcomings, which were identified in the wake of the August 1976 crisis in Korea, continued in the ensuing years, with particular emphasis on getting access to diplomatic and military operational sources.⁵⁷⁰ Nearly two years later, however, in referring to Colby’s initiative to establish an NSR, the Deputy Director of the National Foreign Assessment Center wrote:

Many of us thought that, however desirable this was in theory, it would be exceedingly difficult in practice and would result in the NSC apparatus receiving a less timely, less comprehensive, and less responsive product. *Inter alia*, agencies would simply be unwilling to give up their analysts when they needed them most. We are left, however, with a standing agreement and confusion in the Community as to its

continuing validity. We would therefore like to give Colby’s decision a quiet burial.... We doubt that other agencies will fight for it.⁵⁷¹

Consumer pressure forced the community to frequently reexamine how best to support key policymakers during times of crisis. Although the national Task Force and its NSR were never constituted as such again, they did provide a model for later IC efforts, such as the Balkans Task Force that operated effectively throughout much of the 1990s.⁵⁷²

AFTERMATH OF COLBY’S COMMUNITY PRODUCT INITIATIVE

By 1978, it was clear that Colby’s vision for his “National Family of Products” would not be fully achieved. The NIB’s demise, the failure to increase alternative analysis in IC products and reduce duplication, and struggles to wholly implement and use an IC Task Force to issue NSRs during crises all indicated the limits to realizing his goals.⁵⁷³ Colby’s objective to increase the amount of community participation in producing finished national intelligence also largely went unrealized. And whether the efforts to elicit greater IC collaboration led to less-timely products and watered-down judgments is unclear, amid the finger-pointing by key IC elements.

Many of the factors that contributed to this lack of success were neither unknown nor new to the IC. Competing bureaucracies and control issues were probably the most important of these factors. Providing daily current intelligence to the nation’s most senior leaders before and during crises entailed enormous prestige and resource implications for IC members. Colby’s effort to exercise some control over the processes and products provided to these leaders was the role a DCI should fulfill. As noted in an IC Staff memo a year after Colby’s departure, the NSR “must be the foundation stone for the DCI maintaining control over IC production and collection assets during crises short of general war.”⁵⁷⁴ Pushback from DIA, State/INR, and even his own agency, however, highlighted the limits of the DCI’s authority and his ability to mandate and implement change.

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Different agency “cultures” also help explain the problems that contributed to the NIB’s demise. A 1977 monograph by CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI), which explored the benefits and challenges associated with establishing and operating a National Center for Current Intelligence, cited the diversity of cultures across the IC as a key challenge, particularly at the Center’s start. The CSI study also offered some hope this might change: “Although there doubtless would be severe culture shock at first, personnel of the participating agencies might gradually develop the habit of working together, freer from the frictions and jealousies that seriously detracted from their collaborative efforts in the production of the late National Intelligence Bulletin, a recent experiment in the direction of a joint intelligence product.”⁵⁷⁵

Colby’s push for more joint intelligence production and efforts to reduce redundancy also were constrained by the legitimate requirement to produce departmental intelligence publications and SITREPs. Although both Colby and later Bush recognized this fact and attempted to provide the flexibility to meet these requirements, DCI initiatives to centralize and consolidate crisis and noncrisis current intelligence production generated considerable suspicion and pushback from agencies seeking to protect their turf and fulfill their missions.⁵⁷⁶

Finally, the “National Family of Products” may have been an initiative ahead of its time, whose relevance and significance would become apparent only decades later.⁵⁷⁷ Colby’s initiative presaged efforts begun following passage of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 to broaden community involvement in the production of current intelligence, increase alternative analysis, and foster a joint IC culture. Led by ODNI’s Deputy Director for Analysis Thomas Fingar, these efforts were highlighted by his push to widen the contribution base to the PDB and make it a community rather than an almost-exclusively CIA product. In similar fashion and reminiscent in some ways of the NIB, Fingar developed and published under ODNI auspices the Executive Intelligence Summary as “a daily, web-based compendium summarizing “relevant, high-quality finished analytic products from across the IC.”⁵⁷⁸ Fingar also strongly backed multiple

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measures to build a joint IC culture, including IC-wide analytic tradecraft standards, common training, and joint duty assignments.⁵⁷⁹

That several of Fingar’s initiatives—like Colby’s—met resistance and failed to survive long after his departure should remind us that many of the same issues continue to challenge today’s IC. Debate continues over the need for separate product lines for different consumers, ways to reduce duplication, how best to incorporate dissent, and whether there should be a national or multiple crisis task forces and who should lead them. Lessons from Colby’s efforts in the 1970s to introduce a “National Family of Products” bear revisiting nearly a half-century later for the insights they may provide the IC on delivering high-quality intelligence to our nation’s most senior leaders.

CHAPTER NINE

“AN INNOVATIVE EXPERIMENT”: NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS AND KEY INTELLIGENCE QUESTIONS



Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) William Colby's appointment of National Intelligence Officers (NIOs) in October 1973, upon disestablishing the Office of National Estimates (ONE), represented the Intelligence Community's (IC) most innovative and significant response to President Nixon's 1971 directive to improve its analysis and better meet the needs of its key consumers. Tasking the NIOs to respond to senior consumer complaints by integrating IC production and collection efforts in an efficient, cost-effective manner, Colby's "new approach"⁵⁸⁰ was his "most significant innovation"⁵⁸¹ and demonstrated his "readiness to showcase change,"⁵⁸² as scholars have written on his time as DCI. Although these scholars—Philip Davies, Harold Ford, and Douglas Garthoff—dedicated more attention to his creation of the NIO system than any other analytic innovation during his tenure, their treatments of the Key Intelligence Questions Evaluation

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Process (KEP) and the role the NIOs played in it are limited in depth. This chapter details the creation of this evaluation process and other significant responsibilities the new NIOs held in serving policymakers and evaluating the quality of intelligence produced by IC elements—roles that generated objectivity and politicization concerns.

As with other initiatives during the decade, the KEP reform met bureaucratic resistance and proved inadequate during its two-year run. Ultimately, however, this initiative laid the groundwork for reform measures that reshaped the role of the NIOs and contributed to the creation of National Intelligence Managers (NIMs) nearly four decades later following passage of the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA). Still, matching Colby's vision for an encompassing evaluation process assessing production, collection, costs, and consumer satisfaction remains unfinished business as the IC faces fresh challenges today.

ORIGINS AND OBJECTIVES OF COLBY'S NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICER INITIATIVE

The idea and model for the NIO positions that Colby created in October 1973 can be traced to the actions of his predecessor DCIs. In the mid-1960s during the Vietnam War, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William F. Raborn, Jr., created the position of the DCI's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs (SAVA). This position—a single official under the DCI responsible for supervising assessments on the situation in Vietnam—was used effectively by Raborn's successor Richard Helms as well as by DCI James Schlesinger who created several other special advisor positions covering Middle East and Soviet issues.⁵⁸³

Another impetus—closely related to creation of the SAVA position—was the growing dissatisfaction with ONE and the Board of National Estimates.⁵⁸⁴ This dissatisfaction, voiced most strongly during the Nixon administration, resonated with Colby. In his memoir, he noted: "I had another idea, based in part on some doubts as to the value of the Board's contributions and in part on my own thoughts as to what intelligence needed and what I would need in the

years ahead." Colby pointed to an "ivory tower mentality in the Board" and "the way Nixon and Kissinger had excluded them from some of the White House's most sensitive international dealings." His solution was to "dissolve the Board and use the twelve positions thus made available to appoint twelve senior assistants to report directly to me on each of the main issues facing me. In short, I would apply to the rest of the world the scheme Helms had devised for Vietnam [SAVA] and Schlesinger for the Middle East."⁵⁸⁵ Colby's move also reflected, as noted earlier, his belief that the NIOs could market intelligence and provide direct insight into consumer requirements and satisfaction.⁵⁸⁶ As he later wrote: "I am glad I made the change. I am certain that I could not have done my job without the NIOs, especially when I was later involved so intensely with Congressional investigations."⁵⁸⁷

A third force pushing for the creation of NIOs was President Nixon's November 1971 Presidential directive to improve the support provided to the IC's top-level consumers.⁵⁸⁸ NIOs, as Colby saw it, would play a key role in identifying and responding to their intelligence requirements.

In the summer of 1973, an IC Staff paper speculated on the responsibilities NIOs might hold in national intelligence. The memo argued that "NIOs should play an important production management role," and identified "qualities" NIOs should possess and the authorities they would need to succeed. Among the qualities needed were "deep substantive knowledge of their geographic or functional area," "a high degree of management ability," and "sufficient personal stature and rank" as to be able to deal with senior policymakers. These qualities were needed as the paper asserted, "NIOs will be expected to trade upon reason and persuasion as well as their delegated authority because they often will be functioning in areas where their lines of authority are unclear." As to their authorities, the IC Staff paper stated, "NIOs would need delegated authority to speak with consumers as the personal representatives of the DCI," and "to translate consumer needs into product requirements, the NIOs should be able to effect changes in production and collection activities."⁵⁸⁹

Concerns and questions regarding the NIO concept and how they would operate accompanied Colby's proposal as it was circulated among

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US Intelligence Board (USIB) members. In a memo to USIB principals, the DCI acknowledged that “several USIB members and other interested parties have expressed concern over the relationship of the National Intelligence Officers and the USIB.” This concern may have been tied to what an internal CIA memo identified as “considerable worry among USIB members about being ‘cut out of the pattern’ by NIOs. Put bluntly, there is even now concern in DIA [the Defense Intelligence Agency] that the NIOs will comprise a group of ‘George Carvers’ [Carver was serving as the SAVA at this time] who can operate independently of USIB advice.”⁵⁹⁰

Different but even more significant concerns were expressed by Andrew Marshall, Henry Kissinger’s deputy. In a September 1973 memo to the National Security Advisor, Marshall wrote, “The organization of the National Intelligence Officers on a geographic or topic basis should help the DCI to coordinate the collection and analysis efforts now organized by function.” He went on to note, however, that “the NIOs will resemble product or project managers in industry. They will have unclear lines of authority over other organizations, a demanding task of coordination, and a need to rely on personal influence.” Marshall voiced his concern that “the implementation of Colby’s plan may falter on this point. The people chosen may see the job as primarily producing NIEs, etc., rather than making sure there is a community-wide collection and analysis strategy for delivering improved products in their area.” Marshall concluded, “I am doing what I can to make sure that the implementation is effective and tries to do more than just be another way of producing the NIEs.”⁵⁹¹

Colby pushed ahead to appoint the NIOs. In a memo to the USIB principals on October 3, 1973, the DCI reported that he would appoint NIOs for geographical areas and functional subjects as he “deemed necessary.” Colby emphasized that “each National Intelligence Officer will be the Director’s personal representative and will report directly to the DCI on his area of responsibility.” The DCI laid out the roles and responsibilities of NIOs as he saw them, stating “the primary function of an NIO will be to provide contact laterally on his subject across the functionally organized Intelligence Community and with customers and outside consultants as

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required." Colby went on to highlight the NIO production and evaluation responsibilities. NIOs would provide "Intelligence Community coordinated products" and "assist the Director in identifying customer needs for National Intelligence, evaluations of product and program effectiveness, uncertainties requiring collection guidance, analysis, or production and national policy problems on which National Intelligence might offer assistance." He further stressed that "each NIO will maintain close personal contact with the NSC [National Security Council] Staff and other principal intelligence consumers and contributors at the department level" and that "every NIO will be charged with presenting for the Director's review fully objective presentations of alternate views and interpretations."⁵⁹²

The First National Intelligence Officers

The initial set of NIOs whom Colby nominated represented a distinguished group of experienced senior intelligence officers and reflected a mix of IC agencies, think tanks, and military organizations. The NIO for Conventional Forces, for example, was RADM Daniel Bergin who had previously served as the Deputy J-2 (Intel) for the US European Command. The NIO for Economics was Hans Heymann from the RAND Corporation, while Evelyn Colbert from the Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research (State/INR) served as the NIO for the Japan/Pacific region. Not surprisingly, the largest number of NIOs were drawn from various CIA offices, such as Howard Stoertz (Strategic Programs) and John T. Whitman (USSR and Eastern Europe). Just as is often the case today, the initial set of NIO deputies came from a different agency.

Source: "National Intelligence Officers," Annex B, N.D., CIA- RDP93T01132R000100010005-8, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp93t01132r000100010005-8>.

Carver, who became the DCI's Deputy for NIOs, would describe their duties in similar, albeit more direct terms, to the National Security Council Intelligence Committee (NSCIC) working group in January 1975. He referred to the NIOs as "the DCI's Roving Linebackers" in geographic or

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topical areas. Carver emphasized that, although the NIOs assumed the Board of National Estimate's (BNE) functions, they "have a broader scope since BNE was not concerned with collection capabilities." Carver also highlighted a key function the NIOs performed but had not been explicitly identified in Colby's October 1973 memo, which was crafting KIQs [Key Intelligence Questions] that served as the "NIO tool for focusing the Community on major, current concerns." While opining "in a perfect world the NSC Staff would draft these KIQ," Carver acknowledged that, "as a practical matter, the NIOs seek to anticipate the needs of major users and develop the KIQs in concert with Community colleagues." As he stressed to the NSCIC working group members, "the KIQs were more than a requirements list" and "the components of the Community need a more definitive focus." Carver pointedly argued his case to this group of senior intelligence consumers that "the KIQs provided this kind of tasking, but if the system is to be effective, there is a need for an expression from consumers as to what is needed and what can be done without."⁵⁹³

Thus, the KIQ function—identified only in the "Other Responsibilities" section of the NIO concept paper that had been circulated in the summer of 1973—ironically and almost immediately occupied most of the newly appointed NIOs' time. The concept paper had suggested "the key intelligence questions developed by the DCI and the NSCIC could serve as a principal focal point of the NIO's efforts in coordinating community activities."⁵⁹⁴ Although the KIQ initiative faced challenges in accomplishing this purpose, the KIQ crafting and evaluation process certainly would consume the lion's share of the NIOs' attention and effort during 1974 and 1975.

LAUNCHING THE KEY INTELLIGENCE QUESTION INITIATIVE: THE "SHAKEDOWN CRUISE"⁵⁹⁵

Planning for and discussion of KIQs began in 1973 in conjunction with Colby's NIO proposal. The initiative's purpose, in Colby's words, "was to replace an enormous paper exercise called the 'requirements process'—which

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pretended to tell the community precisely what it should be reporting on—with a simple set of general questions about the key problems that we should concentrate on.” Once each KIQ was formulated, IC agencies would discuss what they would do to answer the question. This, Colby recalled, “was to be followed by a statement of the resources that each agency would apply, so that an initial judgment could be made as to whether too many or too few were involved in the resolution of each KIQ.” The last step in the exercise “was to be an assessment by the National Intelligence Officers of how well each agency had done in answering the KIQs.”⁵⁹⁶

The initial KIQ set was disseminated to USIB members for review and comment on October 30, 1973. During the next two months, the set went through several revisions, emerging in January 1974 as 72 KIQs organized under 10 section headings and covering 31 topics.⁵⁹⁷ In discussing these revisions in a memo to Colby, DCI Deputy Director for the Intelligence Community (D/DCI/IC) Daniel Graham noted that “the recourse to an organization around policy issues was taken because of the large volume of proposed additions to the KIQs which were received from NSCIC and USIB.” Graham highlighted what he saw as “some problems that we will have to address,” to include “more KIQ than are manageable for FY74 evaluation purposes” even though “many of the proposed additions made by various NSCIC and USIB members have not been accommodated in the revised KIQ.” Graham recommended that Colby send letters to each of the contributors thanking them for their input but highlighting the KIQs were to encompass only “truly key questions” and that the NSCIC and USIB comments had been provided to the appropriate NIOs for use in the development of their NIO programs.⁵⁹⁸

In the weeks that followed, the DCI engaged both the NSCIC consumers and the USIB to explain the purpose of the KIQs and the proposed pilot evaluation program. In a letter to Kissinger on January 9, 1974, Colby wrote: “In my opinion, fundamental obstacles to the achievement of the related goals of improved product and better resource management have long been the separation of the substantive functions of intelligence from the allocation of resources, and the absence of a system for evaluating performance.

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Overcoming these obstacles will be difficult and any approach will have to be evolutionary, but I am initiating the effort through the articulation of the Key Intelligence Questions.”⁵⁹⁹ Later that month, USIB members were briefed on the KIQ/KEP process. Following up on this session, the DCI forwarded a list of 12 KIQs to the members and commented: “[A]lthough I expect a positive and informative input from this process, I recognize that the first performance period is essentially a pilot run. In this respect your comments and observations are invited to make successive iterations a more effective management tool.”⁶⁰⁰

D/DCI/IC Graham provided more detailed instructions on the KEP to the USIB in February. In memos written to each member, Graham reminded all that “the evaluation process does provide a means of identifying the principal questions before the community and facilitates an examination by each of the community members of their activities with respect to these questions.” He also reiterated that the principal feature of the KIQs “will be the acceptance of responsibility by appropriate individual intelligence agencies of the obligation to collect or produce on individual Key Intelligence Questions.”⁶⁰¹

While almost all the KIQs remain classified 50 years later, the forms proposed to collect the data needed and the overall mechanics of the pilot fiscal year (FY) 1974 evaluation process are not. The KEP instructions described the process as “an iterative procedure, providing a continuous evaluation and regeneration of KIQs through the participation of the NSCIC, the National Intelligence Officers, the Intelligence Community Staff, and the USIB agencies.” The instructions also made clear that “the NIOs are the primary action officers in the KEP for the KIQs assigned to them. They are responsible to see that each of the pre- and post-performance inputs and reports are accomplished, and to prepare the Baseline and Performance Reports.” The process relied on a “Pre-Performance Baseline” that sought to capture “What We Know, What We Want To Know, and How We Expect To Get It,” culminating with a “Performance Report” that identified “What We Learned, What We Still Don’t Know, Expectations vs. Performance, Level of Effort, [and] Problems Experienced.”⁶⁰²

Sample Key Intelligence Questions

Although most KIQs are still classified, a smattering from the NIO/Special Programs of FY 1975 have been approved for release. Ranging from broad political-military perspectives to highly specific weapons capability, they include:

- What are Soviet objectives, policies, deployment plans, and perceptions relating to strategic weapons and the strategic balance? How do the Soviets justify their strategic weapons programs and what goals have they set for themselves in the area of strategic weaponry vis-à-vis the United States? Catching up or some sort of superiority?
- What are the accuracies of the Soviet SS-X-16, 17, 18, and 19 ICBM systems?
- What doctrine and plans do the Soviets have for the deployment, command and control, and use of nuclear forces, including Soviet reactions to US policy on selective uses of nuclear weapons?
- What progress are the Soviets making toward acquisition of an effective capability for open-ocean submarine detection and localization?

Source: Attachment B, "Key Intelligence Questions in the NIO/SP Area—FY 1975," N.D., CIA-RDP 80B01500R000200230026-0, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80b01500r000200230026-0>.

The baseline review of each KIQ sought input on the community's analytic production and collection efforts. Section A of the form contained an assessment of the specific KIQ and solicited analytic data in five categories beginning with a "Community KIQ Assessment Brief: Summary of knowledge concerning the subject matter of each KIQ." A second category included "a brief statement of important uncertainties and the level of confidence which applies to what is currently known and what is not known." The next two areas solicited "a listing of not more than six finished intelligence products which present current knowledge relating to the KIQ" and, in their order of importance, "a listing of no more than five principal information deficiencies." The final input identified "the production agencies and respective components which have agreed to participate in the analysis and/or production of finished intelligence... [and] the general type of production to be noted:

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NIE [National Intelligence Estimate], IM [Intelligence Memorandum], Estimates.” Section B requested preperformance collection and processing data “to identify the collection sensors and techniques which might help answer the specified KIQ information deficiencies and to identify which specific collection programs are to be tasked to collect against them.” These data were to include the “Probability of Collection,” as well as a “yes or no” response regarding the impact on other collection and processing.⁶⁰³

The KIQ Performance Report, not surprisingly, mirrored the baseline report format. Section A required a “Statement of Gain” listed by KIQ deficiency, by “degree of fulfillment (marginal, substantial, complete); information gains in order of importance, and uncertainties/differences arising or remaining.” Section B was to identify “Post-Performance Collection” by KIQ deficiency and the relative contribution to resolving the deficiency offered by each collection technique or platform. The last two sections attempted to capture data for both analytic and collection efforts, calling for specifics on the producer, product, level of effort, problems encountered, for example, manpower, skills, methods, processing, and lack of raw information, in addition to an assessment of “User Satisfaction.” This final section was designed to allow each NIO to provide feedback from consumers with whom they had contact, calling for a judgment about whether the intelligence provided “helped to identify decision and/or policy options; contributed to the selection of a Preferred Policy Option; [and/or] answered KIQ.” Input for this entry was to be characterized as “Crucial, Important, Useful, [or] No Value” and to address whether it “increased understanding, provided new basic knowledge, updated information base, confirmed previous knowledge, [or] did not contribute in any way.” Lastly, the evaluator was to determine whether the KIQ had been satisfied or whether it required regeneration.⁶⁰⁴

INITIAL INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY RECEPTION SIGNALS PROBLEMS TO FOLLOW

Those most directly involved with introducing and managing the KEP quickly voiced significant concerns with the initiative. At a January 1974

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meeting, recently appointed Deputy to the Director of Central Intelligence for NIOs (D/DCI/NIO) Carver emphasized to the NIOs that "the DCI is putting strong emphasis on the KIQs and the evaluation of the responses to individual KIQ, so it was important that each NIO concern himself directly with the proposed system for evaluating community response to individual KIQs since each NIO will be deeply involved." Nonetheless, "considerable concern" was expressed by several NIOs at "the prospect of being overly burdened by bureaucratic actions." Other problems identified during the session included the inability of the NIOs to rate the value of collection systems since this was a task for "analysts who work with the raw information." The memorandum for the record on the meeting closed by noting: "Overall, while some of the NIOs seemed to be skeptical about KIQs and the whole evaluation process, they recognize that the KIQ program has strong DCI support, and they must play an active role in making the system work."⁶⁰⁵

The concerns and issues voiced by the NIOs were echoed across the IC in early 1974. In a February memo to D/DCI/IC Graham and D/DCI/NIO Carver, CIA's Associate Deputy Director for Intelligence, pointed to multiple problems with the KEP. While acknowledging that "the basic purpose of the KEP is sound," he suggested "that the complexity of the proposed reporting system may hinder rather than facilitate meaningful evaluations and that it, along with numerous other reporting requirements, may impose excessive burdens on those who are attempting to bring about the desired substantive results." He went on to argue that "the purposes of the KEP could be achieved through much simpler programs not requiring the generation of paper of questionable value and usefulness," suggesting "that all concerned keep track of the costs involved in this evaluation process so that, at the end of this test, we might assess the value of KEP against these collective costs."⁶⁰⁶

Different but equally significant reservations were raised during a March IC Staff briefing on the KEP to DIA's Collections Division. In a memo documenting the meeting, which went far longer than scheduled due to this dissent, the staff member wrote: "My impression of the concerns reflected in the extended question and answer period is that DC [DIA Collections] has no problem with the KEP as such, but is very sensitive to any intended, or

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possible, utilization of the KEP in resource allocation processes.” He offered that “they seem to have an almost paranoiac fear that the KIQs/KEP will be used as a means to identify marginally effective collection assets and hence identify primary candidates for decrements or elimination purely on the basis of their performance.” In addition, he noted “there was considerable comment that the cost of administering/accomplishing the evaluation process would transcend any possible utilization, vis-à-vis, the stated objectives of the process.”⁶⁰⁷

Possibly informed by some of the criticism and pushback that his staff was receiving, as well as difficulties in scheduling an NSCIC session, Colby sent a memo on March 9, 1974, to the NSCIC principals requesting their individual concurrence and comments on the KIQs. As he acknowledged: “[T]his really represents a ‘shakedown cruise’ on a program I am hopeful will provide a good management tool for measuring the effectiveness with which the Intelligence Community responds to intelligence topics identified as being of major current importance to policy levels of the Government. What I am seeking, as you are aware, is a better linkage between the substantive functions of intelligence and the allocation of resources.”⁶⁰⁸

During the next three months, Colby’s March request drew varied reactions from the NSCIC principals. Dr. Kissinger called the KIQs a “promising beginning,” going on to say: “[T]his process is precisely the sort of step which the President looked for as a follow-on to his November 5, 1971, letter revitalizing the Intelligence Community. This set of questions and the pilot evaluation process should form the basis for an even more useful set of KIQs for the coming year.” Other NSCIC members, such as Treasury Under Secretary Paul Volcker, considered the KIQ list a “good first effort.”⁶⁰⁹ Concerns, however, were raised by both Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements and ADM Thomas Moorer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS). Clements offered that, although he supported the KIQ/KEP process in principle, he believed “the specific KIQs for FY 1974 submitted to the NSCIC lack the precision needed for effective resource allocation and performance evaluation.” The CJCS was even more critical, warning “your proposed Evaluation Process, which provides an assessment of performance

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based solely on the responsiveness of resources to the NSC, could impact adversely on defense intelligence." He elaborated by noting that defense intelligence "support also includes those below the upper policymaking level" and that "national intelligence planning should recognize DoD [Department of Defense] intelligence requirements, and resources must be provided to accommodate these requirements." ADM Moorer ended his response to the DCI by offering: "I feel that the instrument would prove a more valuable management tool if the focus of priority intelligence interest were sharpened, and the number of questions reduced."⁶¹⁰

"It is not my intention that the KIQ/KEP process should impact adversely on departmental intelligence interests.... Using KIQs as a management tool should thus be beneficial to both national and departmental efforts, even though, of course, they do not cover all requirements, whether national or departmental.... As you perceive, the question of user satisfaction is integral to the whole KIQs evaluation process. It is my plan to have the NIOs deal with all senior departmental, as well as national, entities in their work and provide the first cut at evaluation of performance against the KIQs. Their report will be provided to the USIB for review and subsequently to the NSCIC."

- DCI WILLIAM COLBY, responding to the KIQ critique from ADM Thomas Moorer, CJCS, "Letter to Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, USN," May 9, 1974, CIA-RDP80M01048A000400100008-1

Colby took steps in May and June to respond to these and other KIQ/KEP-related criticisms. In a May memo to the USIB, the DCI admitted: "[W]e have learned a good deal from the first part of the initial effort which will permit us to clarify the instructions and to make significant improvements in the FY 75 Baseline Reports." Consequently, Colby stated that he had "asked the National Intelligence Officers to work with you [USIB] in developing the KIQs for FY 75, bearing in mind my FY 75

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objectives for the community as submitted to the President and our understanding of the most critical needs of our principal policymaking consumers." He went on to warn: "[A]s several NSCIC members have noted, we need to carefully limit the number of KIQs in order to focus clearly upon the current key questions." Colby concluded with this reminder about the KIQ/KEP initiative: "I believe the importance of this effort is evident to all of us as a direct response to the President's charge to relate intelligence resources to intelligence substance and to improve both our product and the effectiveness of our resource allocations."⁶¹¹

Perhaps the most serious objections to the KIQ/KEP initiative emerged from within Colby's own IC Staff. In a memo to the DCI on June 5, 1974, LTG Graham alerted Colby to "KIQ-KEP Issues Bothering the NIOs." Echoing themes first aired in January, the memo noted: "[S]ome of the NIOs are questioning whether the whole thing is really necessary." The D/DCI/IC further observed: "[S]ome NIOs have not gotten 'the word' (or don't understand it) that the DCI is serious about the KIQ-KEP program and that it is the single most important responsibility they have. **All NIOs not on board yet.**" His memo also cited two recent events that had stoked the NIOs' ire: first, the DCI's FY 1975 KIQ/KEP call had not been discussed with them prior to its dissemination and, second, "stacks of completed Baseline data forms [were] forwarded to them without comment or instructions." Lastly, Graham conveyed the sentiment of some NIOs that the FY 1975 development time schedule is "too tight."⁶¹²

An even more disturbing and far-reaching critique of the KIQ/KEP initiative emerged within days of D/DCI/IC Graham's memo on the NIOs' anger. An IC Staff paper—the author of which remains classified—highlighted shortcomings associated with the KEP approach, especially from the collection side. Beginning with a reference to President Nixon's charge to clearly understand and evaluate "the link between substantive intelligence needs and intelligence resources," the author asserted:

The most difficult problem facing the DCI in meeting this charge is that **there is no such link.** The main reason the Intelligence Community

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could never have had an effective evaluation process (assuming it wanted one) is the tremendously wide gulf between the establishment of requirements and priorities on the one hand and the allocation of resources and evaluation on the other; never the twain meet. This is a pervasive problem.⁶¹³

The IC Staff paper went on to note that "the KEP, of course, was designed mainly to bridge this gulf and, in effect, to provide the link which so rightly concerns the President. But even when operational, the KEP will address only the tip of the iceberg, and there are major problems ahead in making it work at all." The author elaborated by identifying problems with "effective community management," such as the "nature of the requirements process" and "the absence on the collection side of the community of any capability to review the total collection task." In his eyes, "this void on the collection side is perhaps the single most serious obstacle to successful implementation [of the KEP]." Thus, he concluded: "Clearly some structural changes are needed."⁶¹⁴

Building on criticisms leveled against the FY 1974 pilot, the KIQ/KEP Program for FY 1975 quickly came under fire. In a memo sent to the DCI, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Albert Hall charged that "earlier DoD comments on the KIQ/KEP have not been adequately recognized." Hall reiterated the need for "a short list of specific, factual questions, the answers to which would demonstrably impact major near-term decisions." Hall added that he was also "concerned about the lack of user participation in the KEP." This limited participation was exacerbated by the role played by the NIOs in the evaluation process. As he saw it, "the NIO is put in the position of evaluating his own performance." Hall offered: "[W]ithout detailed user inputs to the KEP, it is unlikely that much of value will be achieved" and argued that "instead of having the intelligence community tasking and evaluating itself,... the NIOs [should] work directly with the users in the preparation of the KEP reports."⁶¹⁵

D/DCI/NIO Carver was quick to respond to the concerns raised by Hall. Carver began: "As you well recognize, the KIQ/KEP program

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is an innovative experiment designed to achieve several objectives.” He then directly addressed Hall’s comments regarding the role of NIOs in the KEP, writing: “Despite misleading appearances, the NIOs are not engaged in evaluating their own performance. Instead, they are engaged—on the DCI’s behalf—in an effort to monitor the Community’s performance in meeting the intelligence needs of our major consumers within the NIO’s respective areas of functional or geographic responsibility.” Carver acknowledged Hall was correct in stating that neither the NIOs nor the USIB nor the NSCIC adequately represented the users. He concluded: “[I]t is for this reason that the NIOs do indeed work directly with the principal consumers of intelligence, engaging in a continual dialogue with Cabinet-level members of the NSC, their senior subordinates and staffs and even (through the DCI) the President himself.” Carver stressed: “[T]hese policy-level consumers are senior officials and busy men who cannot be asked to engage themselves directly in the KEP process” but were “consulted on a continuing basis to ensure the accuracy and validity of our perception of their requirements.”⁶¹⁶

Dr. George Carver: Intelligence Innovator

National security expert George A. Carver, Jr., had a distinguished 26-year career with the CIA and broader IC, serving as the SAVA under three DCIs—originating the NIO role—and as the first D/DCI/NIO. His leadership on intelligence initiatives earned him the Distinguished Intelligence Medal, CIA’s highest award, as well as DoD’s Distinguished Civilian Service Medal. After growing up in China, where his father taught at the University of Shanghai, he graduated from Yale University and then earned a doctorate in philosophy from Oxford University. Following his government service, Dr. Carver was a senior fellow with the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Sources: Wolfgang Saxon, “George Carver, Jr. Security Expert and CIA Official Is Dead at 64,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/30/obituaries/george-carver-jr-security-expert-and-cia-official-is-dead-at-64.html>; and “George Carver Dies,” *Washington Post*, June 28, 1994, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1994/06/29/george-carver-dies/8b80fdf7-3be0-42af-ad6e-89e6e7c527b3/>.

INTERIM ASSESSMENT AND BASELINE REPORT ON THE EVALUATION PROCESS, FALL 1974

After the FY 1974 KEP pilot program's performance period ended on August 31, 1974, both the "interim" status report, which appeared six weeks later, and the final report published in November seemingly were positive. Although significant portions of each report remain classified, what is available suggests the pilot effort was perceived as largely successful.⁶¹⁷ The interim report, for example, concluded that "analysis of performance reports on FY-74 pilot program KIQs received thus far shows that evaluation of community performance on KIQs is feasible through identifying information gains, determining the degree of deficiency fulfillment and associating production and collection costs with KIQ efforts. In brief: The KEP as designed **can work!**"⁶¹⁸

The November Baseline Report reinforced this message but qualified its tone. The Executive Summary stated that "the baseline process, despite some ambiguity both in guidance and operation, is feasible and productive." The report asserted that "it [KEP] has the capability of determining a baseline of knowledge and eliciting explicit intelligence production and collection commitments from NFIP [National Foreign Intelligence Program] managers" and concluded that, "[conceptually], the KEP is a viable evaluation methodology, but needs some modification."⁶¹⁹

The November 1974 report also provided some specifics regarding analytic and collection deficiencies and IC efforts to address them for 11 pilot program KIQs. The report indicated that 49 information deficiencies had been identified and of these the largest number (41 percent) were in the political category. In addition, 21 analytical deficiencies were identified, with the majority (11) related to methods, aids, or management priorities. On addressing these gaps, the report noted that, although 170 production commitments had been made, "the pilot program did not appear to stimulate any new production commitments against the KIQs." On the collection side, 317 collection commitments were made against 49 information deficiencies, with COMINT [communications intelligence] representing the highest number (21 percent) of these commitments.⁶²⁰

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Lessons learned from the KEP pilot effort were included as well in the November report. For instance, the report indicated that “information deficiencies in some cases were written too broadly and in too general terms,” while analytical deficiencies were perceived as constituting “a plea for greater analytical effort.” The report also noted that two views on the nature of the KIQs had emerged, with the first “that KIQs should be broadly written to provide the basis for evaluating the full range of intelligence activities” and the second that “KIQs must be specific to facilitate detailed analysis, including resource expenditures.” To accommodate both views, the report indicated that “the FY 75 questions will be presented in broad terms; where appropriate, sub-questions will be developed to address individual subjects.”⁶²¹

ONGOING CHALLENGES WITH THE KEY INTELLIGENCE QUESTION AND EVALUATION PROCESS IN FY 1975

The FY 1975 KIQ/KEP program was launched in June 1974 without the benefit of insights gained from a completed pilot program and a verified evaluation methodology. KIQ drafts were simply forwarded to the NIOs and the USIB for review and comment. By July 31, final KIQs were disseminated to the community, with the USIB and the Intelligence Resources Advisory Committee (IRAC) tasked to proceed with developing Production and Collection Strategies for each of the KIQs and gathering “baseline” inputs.⁶²² Perhaps unsurprisingly, the interim and final FY 1974 performance reports included almost as much discussion of the ongoing FY 1975 program as they did of the recently completed pilot effort. Particular focus was given to problems already plaguing the FY 1975 program.

The October “interim status report” captured some of the frustration expressed by IC members with this situation. The report observed that the FY 1975 KIQs were “accompanied by only a broadly outlined evaluation methodology” that had caused “some confusion.” It warned that some elements had “formed adverse judgments about the direction and potential efficacy of the KEP” and were responding to the task of “developing FY 75 Collection and Production Strategies on the basis of those premature

perceptions." The report went on to identify multiple problems plaguing the FY 1975 effort. For one, the approaches being used to develop FY 1975 KIQ Strategies were "neither uniform nor commonly structured," and the "NIOs do not have a common approach to developing strategies." How taskings should be submitted and through whom was another challenge. The report cited "the number and the organizational diversity of action officers seeking production and collection commitments from individual agency collection and production components" as having "caused considerable confusion in the community." In other instances, USIB Collection Committees were circumvented, or production managers were reluctant to respond to individually requested KIQ actions, in part because KIQ/KEP focal points had not been established. In sum, the interim report stated, "There is confusion in the community about what is wanted, who is (or should be) doing it, and how it should be done."⁶²³

The Interim KIQ/KEP Status Report recommended that—"to avoid chaos"—the IC Staff should be established as the community entity for KIQ/KEP management matters, program managers should designate a single individual within each program as the focal point through whom to work, and the program managers should be notified that "their organizations are expected to participate fully in supplying data and meeting deadlines." As the report warned: "It is not clear yet whether or not a 1975 KIQ/KEP program, as now defined, can be made to provide the link between substance and resources which you [the DCI] are seeking."⁶²⁴

Indications of continuing problems were captured in a memo documenting a meeting on October 25, 1974, between the Assistant Deputy to DCI Colby and D/DCI/NIO Carver during which both agreed to "complete the FY 74 pilot program, expedite the completion of FY 75 KIQ strategies, and, upon completion of these two activities, to work out the details of the FY 75 KEP." The memo noted that "with five months of FY 75 already gone,... it is essential that the FY 74 pilot program assessments be completed YESTERDAY so that the community can be told what to do with the strategies (and how to do it), both being necessary if there is to be a credible evaluation program in FY 75."⁶²⁵

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The ensuing months saw continued flux in the FY 1975 KIQ/KEP program and struggle to balance the DCI's desired objectives for the KEP against the workload involved. Carver perhaps put it best in a note to Colby on January 23, 1975: "I would like to keep chipping away at this approach to see if we cannot, through it, come close to developing a document that meets your needs without involving large amounts of mechanical reporting and elaborate bookkeeping."⁶²⁶ Success in achieving such a balance remained elusive. Six weeks later Carver acknowledged in a memo to recipients whose names are redacted:

As you are all well aware, we are still wrestling with the problem of devising an evaluation report which the NIOs can prepare after the end of the fiscal year.... The problem is to devise an approach, hence a form, which will be manageable (in terms of the work required to pull it together) and will still give the DCI the kind of information and evaluation he needs to have a clear idea of how the Community has done, how efficiently its efforts have been orchestrated, how well its resources have been applied, and what changes (if any) in direction or resource allocation he ought to initiate, encourage, or—where he can do so—direct in order to improve the Community's performance.⁶²⁷

Carver's February 1975 memo went on to detail the "dichotomy between the approach instinctively preferred by this [NIO] office and that advocated by some components of the IC Staff," probably referring to the Management, Planning, and Resources Review Division (MPRRD). This dichotomy centered on the amount and nature of detail the KEP should require, with some pushing a "full-bore systems analysis approach." Carver's memo suggested that the DCI was torn between this path and a less data-driven methodology that recognized "the realities of the amount of work involved in assembling various types of data and the actual utility of this data, once assembled."⁶²⁸

Later that month, the NIOs met with MPRRD members to "explore heretofore unreconcilable differences on performance evaluation." Representatives from both sides identified areas of agreement and disagreement,

with all concurring that "there would be a KEP in one form or another—that KEP's existence could not be at issue." Nonetheless, the differences remained largely unresolved. An unattributed memo to the D/DCI/IC in March 1975 that summarized the meeting pessimistically concluded: "As you can see from the foregoing, the residual 'problems' are of a fundamental nature; further staff meetings can only prolong what has already been an unconscionably long delay in deciding the nature of the FY 75 KEP. Accordingly, I think we should seek an early audience with Bill [William Colby] to get this show on the road in whatever form, and with whatever advertising he decides."⁶²⁹

THE LAST HURRAH

The KIQ/KEP initiative continued as did its problems throughout 1975. The original schedule called for KEP Performance Reports due in May—six weeks before the end of the 1975 fiscal year on June 30—and IC KEP reports due in August.⁶³⁰ It was not until January 1976, however, a few weeks before Colby's departure as DCI, that results for the FY 1975 process became available.⁶³¹

The draft findings, which landed on Colby's desk on January 12, 1976, appeared favorable. The "FY-75 KIQ Performance Evaluation Summary" concluded that "about two-thirds of the FY-75 KIQs were satisfactorily answered" and that "on 42 KIQs the IC essentially achieved the production and collection goals set forth in applicable strategies—at a cost of about one-third of the IC's O&M [Operations and Management] operating budget for FY-75." These preliminary figures were based on "NIO subjective performance assessments, and performance data provided by Community producers and collectors." The memo to the DCI concluded on a positive note: "On balance, it seems clear that in the main, the KEP has provided insights into resource utilization and program execution at a reasonable management cost. One might conclude that the approach and methodology set forth in the FY-75 Guidance and Instructions was a useful first step in an evolutionary approach to evaluating Community performance on a substantial and very important portion of Community effort."⁶³²

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Members of the IC Staff and other community elements, however, were not nearly as positive about the FY 1975 findings or the process by which they were derived. The January report itself acknowledged that some of the KIQ/KEP's significant shortcomings affected the evaluation process's findings: "[D]espite the detailed nature of the production performance data provided by IC production authorities, it has been extremely difficult—almost impossible—to **measure** Community production performance given the differences in approach, precision of expression, and level of detail in production strategies."⁶³³ Disagreement over the nature of the KEP approach also persisted. A January 1976 memo for the chairman of the IC Staff's KEP Review Group made clear that the fundamental disagreement over the scope and detail of KEP inputs had not been resolved. As the memo noted: "One school contends that evaluation should be limited to an assessment of the performance of individual agencies, and the Community, on individual KIQs. The other school believes, with equal conviction, that to achieve the DCI's objectives the efforts and achievement of each agency and program must be aggregated and analyzed in program and NFIP terms."⁶³⁴ Whether the best interests of the IC would be served by disseminating the FY 1975 results was contentious, as some cited "the documentary base for the KIQ/KEP process, the extravagant claims made on its behalf by responsible authorities; the profound changes which have occurred in the structure of National Intelligence and in both the detail of interest and the nature of Congressional perceptions of the desirability and efficacy of intelligence management."⁶³⁵

These persistent criticisms and shortcomings put the future of the KIQ/KEP program in doubt. Heated discussion had taken place just two months earlier about whether the effort should continue. A memo to the acting chief of the IC Staff's MPRRD office stressed that, before a decision on the FY 1976 program could be made, "we must decide how much frustration we are willing to endure, how determined is the DCI in achieving his announced objective and, perhaps more to the point, what are our chances for success in getting George Carver to argue philosophy and practicability before the DCI for the purpose of getting clear-cut direction from the

Director on the FY-76 KEP." The memo identified "fundamental issues" that must be resolved, including who was in charge of the process, how much more management cost the DCI would accept, and what roles the IC Staff elements—Collection and Processing Assessment Division and Product Review Division (PRD)—would play in the process.⁶³⁶

Colby's departure at the end of January 1976 removed the KIQ/KEP's most important advocate and the initiative fell by the wayside, with few, if any, disappointed to see its exit. Nonetheless, one final effort to continue the KIQ/KEP program arose following President Ford's issuance of Executive Order 11905 on IC reform. In May, five options were proposed to continue the effort albeit with significant revisions directed at addressing many of the problems that had plagued the process during the previous 24 months.⁶³⁷ These options ranged from limiting the number of KIQs and prioritizing them to shifting full management responsibility to the IC Staff and eliminating resource expenditures from the evaluation process. Not surprisingly, none of the options was adopted even though discussions continued. A memo on an NIO meeting in July 1976 concerning the KIQ/KEP process perhaps best captured the sentiments of many: "The NIOs were agreed that the KIQ/KEP process has failed as a device for setting super priorities, for allocating resources, and for accounting for resources. The KEP part of the process, particularly, should be interred with a stake through its heart."⁶³⁸ In his own postmortem, Richard Betts—one of the few scholars to even mention the KIQ/KEP process—cites its fate as illustrating "the frustration of many innovative attempts to set requirements."⁶³⁹

NIOS TACKLE BROADER RESPONSIBILITIES, ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

The NIOs confronted the challenge of trying to evaluate the quality of intelligence analysis as part of the KIQ evaluation process—even as this responsibility extended to a wide range of products, including the IC's daily production. Questions arose about who should conduct these evaluations, when, and on which products, as well as what role the NIOs should serve

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in the process? Some of the problems plaguing the overall KIQ and KEP process—multiple players, unclear lines of authority and relationships, and full workloads—impeded the effectiveness of the NIOs in evaluating this broader range of intelligence analysis. These challenges, for example, came to light as the NIOs took a leading role in commenting on the new *Review of National Intelligence (RONI)* publication.

D/DCI/IC Samuel Wilson's decision to move forward with the systematic evaluation of the community's finished intelligence products in the fall of 1974 and to produce the *RONI* in 1975 brought into focus the ill-defined roles and evaluation responsibilities between the IC Staff's PRD and the NIOs. The PRD's deputy chief, in a memo linked with LTG Wilson's decision to systematically evaluate IC analytic products, noted that "PRD's relationship with the NIOs is not clearly defined and varies considerably from one NIO to another." Nonetheless, he suggested that "PRD could probably provide useful support to the NIOs in the area of product review but would need NIO guidance on what products they wanted reviewed."⁶⁴⁰

The lack of clarity over NIO-PRD evaluation responsibilities was fully exposed in early 1975 with the circulation of the first two editions of the *RONI*. At a USIB meeting on February 28, Wilson solicited comments on the publication. Edward Proctor, CIA's Deputy Director for Intelligence, voiced his view that the geographic and topical reviews in the *RONI* "should be 'vetted' to the NIOs responsible, as only they [the NIOs] can add the views of the consumer."⁶⁴¹ Proctor's comments—echoed by other USIB members—spurred action in the weeks that followed. In a note to the NIO for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Assistant D/DCI/IC acknowledged that "the problem you identify can probably best be overcome by closer consultation between PRD and the NIOs in the production of the *RONI*," adding "this would be wholly consistent with the position taken in the USIB discussion of the *RONI* on 28 February that the NIOs, as the element of the community in closest touch with consumers, should have an opportunity to review the sections on the geographical and topical areas."⁶⁴²

Although consensus existed for greater NIO involvement in the production and review of the *RONI*, some in the IC raised fresh concerns about the NIOs' role in evaluating their own work. Although the PRD chief agreed with the USIB's recommendation that "the NIOs should have a larger (consultative) role in the production of the *RONI*," he qualified his endorsement: "**But**—the work of the NIOs, as major elements of the production community, is a proper subject for review in the *RONI* and will sooner or later inevitably be critiqued in the *RONI*, at least by inference." He advised that the PRD "will have to ensure that appropriate consultation with the NIOs does not inhibit its primary function of reviewing national intelligence. I think we can walk this tightrope, but we should all be aware it exists."⁶⁴³

Details on how the NIO-PRD relationship would function evolved during the next two months. A memo for the record issued on April 9, 1975, indicated that the PRD would henceforth show portions of the *RONI* to appropriate NIOs before publication, stating "we view this, in general, as a move to improve contents and, in particular, as a means to ensure accuracy." The memo qualified the new procedure by adding: "The NIOs will be invited to comment on accuracy and substance. They will not be asked to suggest editorial changes or to coordinate."⁶⁴⁴ Several weeks later, the PRD forwarded to the D/DCI/NIO draft PRD contributions to the next issue of the *RONI*. As the PRD chief said, "[W]e would welcome any comments the NIOs wish to make concerning these contributions" and "would appreciate the pinpointing of any factual errors and the identification of any major judgmental differences between our accounts and your perceptions." He then concluded, "[I]t is understood by all concerned, I think, that while we will give the most careful attention to all NIO comments, the final authority and responsibility for the contents of the *RONI* must rest with us."⁶⁴⁵ How well this arrangement might have functioned is unclear because only one additional *RONI* issue was produced before it ceased publication in August 1976.

Concerns regarding the ability of NIOs to remain objective went beyond evaluating their own analytic efforts and those of others. DCI Colby had created the NIO positions to closely interact with and better serve the

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nation's most senior national-level consumers. In doing so and abolishing the ONE, Colby's initiative spawned questions on whether the NIOs would produce objective intelligence free from politicization. In fact, in discussions surrounding the NIO proposal during 1973, a former Board of Estimates officer who was later appointed as the first NIO for East Asian Affairs warned Colby: "[I]f the NIOs became close to policymakers, they would lose their objectivity as professional intelligence officers and become policy advocates." He also cautioned that, "by their senior status and forcefulness," NIOs would "be able to cow junior-ranking representatives from other agencies of the Intelligence Community."⁶⁴⁶

Procedures similar to those exercised by the IC Staff's Product Review Division vis-à-vis the NIOs—that is, circulating studies for comment but not coordination—were used by the ODNI's (Office of the Director of National Intelligence) Analytic Integrity and Standards office for evaluation studies it produced during my service there from 2006 to 2017.

– JAMES MARCHIO

What customers were seeking from the IC during the early 1970s certainly provided fertile ground for such fears. Intelligence consumers clearly wanted more interaction with the IC and through different means than in the past. NSCIC working group discussions in early 1972, in which the members sought a greater role for consumers in shaping National Intelligence Estimates (NIE) (see Chapter Two), as well as similar comments nearly three years later, made this evident. During the NSCIC working group session, titled "Critique of Intelligence," held on November 20, 1974, these senior consumers expressed their frustration with what they saw as "the lack of adequate mechanisms to enable consumers to influence the scope, focus, etc., of the intelligence production process" and their desire for "more direct contact between consumers and NIOs in the formulation of NIE terms of reference." As voiced by Deputy Secretary of Defense

Robert Ellsworth, they also wanted the opportunity to "review penultimate drafts of NIEs."⁶⁴⁷

A PRD memo to D/DCI/IC Wilson, summarizing and responding to the senior consumer comments made at the November NSCIC working group session, recommended that direct consumer involvement in the intelligence production cycle be limited and that consumers rely heavily on the NIOs for providing their input and critiques. Regarding greater influence on NIEs, the PRD suggested that "the Working Group discuss the matter directly with the NIOs and propose a mechanism for conveying consumer views to them on NIE terms of reference." On reviewing NIE judgments, the PRD was unequivocal in warning: "To permit consumers to directly influence judgments in NIEs, however, would inevitably raise a conflict-of-interest problem, i.e., the possibility that policy biases were distorting independent intelligence judgments."⁶⁴⁸

Although the declassified record has significant gaps, it appears that fears of politicization—while warranted—were overstated. A 1977 Center for the Study of Intelligence monograph, "National Estimates: An Assessment of the Product and Process," addressed those concerns as well as the potential benefits from increased consumer-IC interaction:

Encouraging producers and users to discuss the scope of the paper is not to ignore the danger that either might attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to predetermine or alter the outcome of the estimate by posing the issues in terms of "loaded" questions. This appears to be a manageable risk and is likely to be outweighed by the benefits of a close and continuing exchange. The best insurance against bias is probably a careful and continuing review of the process by managers and participants. We found little, if any, concern among producers or users with the possible slanting of estimates as a result of a "cooking" process involving the way issues are posed.⁶⁴⁹

The study—based on interviews with both consumers and IC members—also found that most policymakers considered efforts to improve

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communication with the IC as “necessary and desirable.” Policymakers, in fact, credited the NIOs with helping to “bridge the gap between policy officers and the producers of intelligence” while admitting “much remains to be done.”⁶⁵⁰

A FAILED OR UNFINISHED “EXPERIMENT”?

Responding to Assistant Secretary of Defense Hall’s criticisms of the KIQ/KEP initiative in 1974, D/DCI/NIO Carver called it “an innovative experiment.”⁶⁵¹ In the same vein, CIA leaders had described the NIO concept as “a radical departure from the Agency’s traditional way of doing business.”⁶⁵² Years later, the degree to which these experiments had failed outright, succeeded in some ways, or been abandoned before they had run their course remains unclear. Like other initiatives during the decade, creating the NIO positions and instituting KIQ/KEP procedures met bureaucratic resistance and fell short of expectations. Nonetheless, both initiatives laid the groundwork for reforms following the passage of the 2004 IRTPA that achieved many of the objectives DCI Colby had envisioned for each.

By mid-1976, the KIQ/KEP program evidently would not survive Colby’s departure. Despite its laudable objectives and the modest success achieved by the FY 1974 pilot program, the multiple problems that had plagued the KIQ/KEP initiative from its inception ensured it would not be continued without strong support from the new DCI.

As previously discussed, the initial IC reception was in many ways indicative of the response and problems that would plague the initiative throughout its existence. The task—identifying production and collection deficiencies, the degree to which they were satisfied, and at what cost—was daunting. As one IC element described it: “We were asked to measure the unmeasurable.”⁶⁵³ Part of what made the task so daunting was the methodological approach to gathering and analyzing the information required to answer these questions. Its scope, nature (assessments were often subjective), and complexity generated confusion, frustration, and—not surprisingly—pushback from IC Staff and community elements. The level of detail

required for the evaluations, the number of organizational entities involved (many outside the DCI's control), and constantly changing guidance all contributed to an enormous workload that overwhelmed the NIOs charged with managing the process.⁶⁵⁴

Beyond the process itself, the potential consequences associated with the end result of the KIQ evaluation program may have sealed its fate. As Colby observed regarding the KIQ/KEP initiative: "This degree of precision about budget allocations was initially met with some reserve, and by the bureaucracy's infinite ability to obfuscate, especially since the fourth step in the exercise was to be an assessment by the National Intelligence Officers of how well each agency had done in answering the KIQs. And this had the hidden danger of serving as the basis for budget cuts for those who showed marginal results."⁶⁵⁵ Beyond these concerns, newly appointed DCI George H. W. Bush also had bigger problems—such as Congressional investigations and a new Executive Order—to address than ensuring the continuation of Colby's KIQ/KEP initiative.

How the NIOs would fare after DCI Colby's departure was less certain. Some senior policymakers praised the NIOs for their ability to quickly pull together IC resources in response to consumer requests. One memo in August 1974, for example, lauded the actions of the NIO for Southeast Asia in coordinating an IC response to a short-fused tasking.⁶⁵⁶ Nonetheless, one year into Bush's tenure, criticisms voiced since the standup of NIOs in the fall of 1973 had not abated. One of the NIOs' harshest critics, Anthony Cordesman in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, argued: "[T]he 'absolute monarchy' of the Board of Estimates has been replaced by the 'feudal system' of the NIOs... [and] the NIO system presents the problem that it substitutes a series of 'feudal baronies' for effective substantive management."⁶⁵⁷

Most criticisms, however, still involved the working mechanics of the NIO system and its relationship with IC agencies. As early as October 1973, elements in CIA had acknowledged that "its [the NIO system's] success depends, in large measure, on the interrelationships between the NIOs and the Agency's production offices." The CIA note identified the "core of the problem" as "ensur[ing] that NIO, as a staff organization, is able to carry

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out its assigned missions effectively, and that it works through existing lines or organizations without disrupting or supplanting established channels of command and control.”⁶⁵⁸

Almost three years later, in a memo to newly appointed DCI Bush, the NIOs addressed some of these concerns, conceding that the existing NIO system was “far from perfect.” The memo acknowledged that “the NIOs are criticized for undercutting and running athwart lines of command by commandeering analytic talent at subordinate levels.” Addressing proposals to improve the quality of Estimates through “a collegial review process,” the memo attributed the “lack of formal collegial review within the NIO system” in part to “the heavy present workload for most NIOs.” The NIOs went on to identify several changes to address these shortcomings, concluding: “In sum, we believe that the NIO system, as originally conceived in Bill Colby’s charter of October 1973... and with the kinds of modifications suggested above, will come closer to realizing the DCI’s key objectives—a high-quality product and an equitable process—than any alternative solution so far proposed.”⁶⁵⁹ As their memo suggested, the NIO position was still an evolving concept. Two years later, several of the recommendations contained in the NIOs’ note to Bush were implemented, including the creation of the National Intelligence Council (NIC) and the position of NIC Chairman.⁶⁶⁰

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE FUTURE

DCI Colby’s efforts in establishing the NIO cadre and launching the KIQ/KEP process fell short in achieving many of the objectives he envisioned for them. The challenges and deficiencies highlighted in implementing both initiatives between 1973 and 1975, however, laid the groundwork for the IC-wide changes that followed passage of the 2004 IRTPA. Even so, no program implemented by the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) since 2005 has been as significant or as far-reaching as what Colby proposed and tried to implement. And yet the need for the feedback envisioned from the KIQ/KEP initiative is even more critical in today’s increasingly resource-constrained environment.

"An Innovative Experiment"

Under Colby, the NIOs were asked to fulfill two roles: substantive expert and IC manager of analytic and collection resources. One of the key challenges for the NIOs as part of the KEP was crafting a "strategy" to integrate collection and analytic production efforts to fill gaps identified with each KIQ. This goal—although no longer assigned to the NIOs—was still aspired when James Clapper became DNI in 2010. Lt Gen Clapper and his Deputy Director for Intelligence Integration, Robert Cardillo, were keen to better integrate the IC's analytic and collection efforts. They attempted to do so in several ways. One was to abolish the separate ODNI directorates of analysis and collection and combine them into one. An even more definitive step was the establishment of the NIMs and Strategy Boards. Using the Iran Mission Manager as a model, Clapper created 17 NIMs with geographic and functional areas of responsibility analogous to the DoD combatant commands. NIMs were to be the IC seniors who knew IC capabilities, shortfalls, needs and gaps, and who could report to the DNI on the state of health of any of them. Each manager was charged with generating a "unifying intelligence strategy" that would detail those components. Clapper envisioned that "each NIM would create a strategy to make the most of the IC's collection and analysis capabilities and to identify where we should invest in new ones." After creating unifying intelligence strategies for their areas of responsibility, the NIMs "would be able to work together to put rigor behind the compilation of all the government's intelligence needs, the top tier of which was made up of the president's priorities."⁶⁶¹

In sum, DNI Clapper's challenges and objectives in creating the NIMs were quite similar to DCI Colby's in launching his dual NIO and KIQ/KEP initiatives. As the DNI described in 2011, "How do we make adjustments, see gaps, move emphasis and resources, and change priorities—and how to manage that on something other than the anecdotal, episodic, one-off basis, which has been our history" in order to give "decision makers and policy makers a better product."⁶⁶² The NIMs were certainly part of Clapper's response to his rhetorical question.

Creating KIQs was another part of his answer. Whether Clapper was aware of or remembered Colby's KIQ/KEP experiment nearly four decades

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earlier is unclear. The historical record thus far reveals no such direct connection. Although certainly part of Clapper's strategy to better integrate IC production efforts, these new KIQs were not nearly as detailed or designed to be part of an overall evaluation process assessing production, collection, costs, and consumer satisfaction. Such an enormous challenge—one Colby undertook—remains unfinished business for the IC as of the mid-2020s.

CHAPTER TEN

DAYS OF FUTURE PAST



As of this book's writing, a half-century has elapsed since many of the analytic initiatives discussed here were launched. Two decades ago, the US Congress passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) and several of the analytic innovations begun 30 years earlier—in the 1970s—were brought to fruition. The passage of time and, even more important, the challenges confronted today by the Intelligence Community (IC) suggest this book conclude by addressing three interrelated questions. First, were the 1970s a decade of analytic innovation? To fully answer this question, a second question must be addressed—that is, what was the impact of these analytic initiatives, both then and in the years that followed? Lastly, what is the importance of these analytic initiatives for today's IC? Can insights gained from studying the analytic initiatives launched by Directors of Central Intelligence (DCI) Richard Helms, James Schlesinger, and William Colby, and by examining their implementation and reception, serve the IC as it tackles an ever more diverse and complex threat environment?

THE 1970S AS A DECADE OF ANALYTIC INNOVATION

The historical record suggests that, for the most part, the multiple initiatives launched during the 1970s to address nearly all elements of intelligence

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analysis and production were innovative (Fig. 12). Even as the new approaches to engaging with policymaker customers and conducting analysis reflected, in part, advances in the 1970s business and academic communities, the IC initiatives were ahead of their time. Indeed, the scope, nature, and pace of innovation—from the community's interaction with consumers to its evaluation of the quality and cost of its production—far exceeded anything seen in ensuing decades.

The National Security Council Intelligence Committee (NSCIC) working group, for example, represented the most ambitious initiative ever attempted to involve consumers in determining which intelligence was produced and directly assessing its quality and usefulness. In similar fashion, the systematic evaluation of the community's finished intelligence analysis by the DCI's Product Review Division (PRD) had never been tried before, and the breadth and nature of its *Review of National Intelligence* has not been matched since the final issue in 1976.

The IC's push to more precisely characterize uncertainty through the use of numeric probabilities and assessments of confidence in their sources—exemplified by the Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) "Uncertainty Experiment"—was groundbreaking. This effort was enabled and complemented by initiatives to draw on the social sciences and apply techniques and methodologies from them in new ways in the realm of intelligence analysis.

Intelligence failures, a changing threat environment, and demands for greater efficiency in light of increasing resource constraints drove innovation as well. DCI Colby's push to institutionalize a "challenge mechanism" in the aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur War represented the most ambitious effort to date to ensure serious divergent points of view were properly expressed in finished intelligence products. Colby's efforts to radically revise the country's strategic warning mechanisms and products to better respond to consumer demands and a rapidly evolving threat environment were ahead of their time, as was his initiative to create a "National Family of Products" that provided consumers with nonduplicative current and crisis intelligence reporting. Creation of the National Intelligence Bulletin (NIB)—the first

joint national current intelligence daily—and the National Intelligence Task Force Situation Report were not replicated until 30 years later.

Introducing the position of National Intelligence Officer (NIO) and launching of the Key Intelligence Question and Evaluation Process (KIQ/KEP) represented in many ways the most far-reaching and radical innovation of the decade. DCI Colby's idea to use the KIQ/KEP initiative—with the NIOs as his point men—to identify “a better linkage between the substantive functions of intelligence and the allocation of resources” in such detail had never been attempted.⁶³ Nothing the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) has implemented since the first DNI was appointed in 2005 has been as significant or broadly encompassing as what Colby sought to establish with his KIQ/KEP initiative.

Figure 12. Intelligence Community Analytic Innovations of the 1970s

- 1971 (December):** National Security Council Intelligence Committee established
- 1972 (January-June):** IC Staff creates Product Review Group, later Product Review Division (PRD)
- 1973 (First half of year):** “National Family of Products” proposed
- 1973 (January):** DIA introduces Project DELTA (Advanced Analytic Techniques)
- 1973 (October):** Center for Analytical Development established in the Office of Research and Development
- 1973 (October):** National Intelligence Officers created
- 1973 (October):** Key Intelligence Questions (KIQ) pilot launched
- 1973 (November):** “Experimental” Intelligence Products produced for National Security Advisor Kissinger
- 1973 (December):** Intelligence Research and Development Council established
- 1973 (December):** IC Postmortem project launched

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- 1974 (N.D.):** Directorate of Intelligence creates Analytic Techniques Group in Office of Political Research
- 1974 (January):** Challenge (“Devil’s Advocate”) Mechanism proposal initiated
- 1974 (May):** National Intelligence Bulletin published
- 1974 (June):** FY 1975 KIQ Program launched
- 1974 (August-September):** Alert Memorandum and Strategic Warning Reform initiative launched
- 1974 (October):** PRD Program To Systematically Evaluate Intelligence Analysis launched
- 1975 (February):** First issue of *Review of National Intelligence* produced and disseminated
- 1975 (February):** “Challenge Proposal” sent to DCI Colby
- 1975 (March):** DCID 1/5 (*Strategic Warning*) approved
- 1975 (March):** National Situation Report feasibility test conducted
- 1975 (June):** CIA’s *Handbook of Bayesian Analysis for Intelligence Analysis* published
- 1975 (July):** Consumer-led Intelligence Evaluation Project advanced
- 1975 (Fall):** First full cycle of KIQ and Evaluation Process (KIQ/KEP) completed
- 1976 (January):** DIA’s “Uncertainty Experiment” launched

Source: Figure based on author’s assessment of key intelligence innovations.

The successes achieved during the 1970s, however, were often limited and short-lived due to several factors. One was the difficult, multifaceted nature of the problems these initiatives were targeting and the sheer challenge of effecting significant changes in a large enterprise. Setting a goal of measuring the quality of analysis—no less improving it—and effectively conveying uncertainty generated a wide range of opinions on how best to do so. The same was true of how to improve support to consumers without politicizing the intelligence they received. Moreover, the decade’s experience should

remind all of the limits confronted by the DCI—and now the DNI—in trying to mandate and implement change when bureaucratic interests and resources are at stake.

Another factor influencing the initiatives' success or lack thereof involved the multiple leadership changes within the IC and in the executive branch. Four different DCIs attempted to drive innovation between 1972 and 1976. This turnover was mirrored in the IC Staff, resulting in different approaches and priorities and limiting the ability of energetic DCIs, such as Colby, to amass the support needed to achieve their reform objectives. The departure of key advocates in the consumer community, such as the National Security Council's (NSC) Andrew Marshall, did not support either continuity or concerted action. President Nixon's resignation and replacement by Gerald Ford, revelations of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) wrongdoing, and multiple Congressional investigations all diverted precious senior leadership attention. Events abroad—including the US opening to China in 1971, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the fall of South Vietnam in 1975—fully engaged senior policymakers during this critical time of reform.

Bureaucratic pushback from within the IC further undermined the implementation pace and integration of these innovative reforms. Mature organizations, including the IC, are slow to embrace change and new approaches, and IC behavior during the 1970s provided data to support this truism. The larger structural and management issues afflicting the IC, about which numerous scholars have written, contributed as well to the difficulties encountered in winning acceptance of many IC reform efforts of the 1970s, particularly when mission or resource equities were involved.

IMPACT OF 1970S ANALYTIC INITIATIVES AND ROADS NOT TAKEN

Assessing the direct impact of these analytic initiatives launched between 1972 and 1976 is challenging because much of the record remains classified or is otherwise inaccessible. At a bare minimum, however, the analytic

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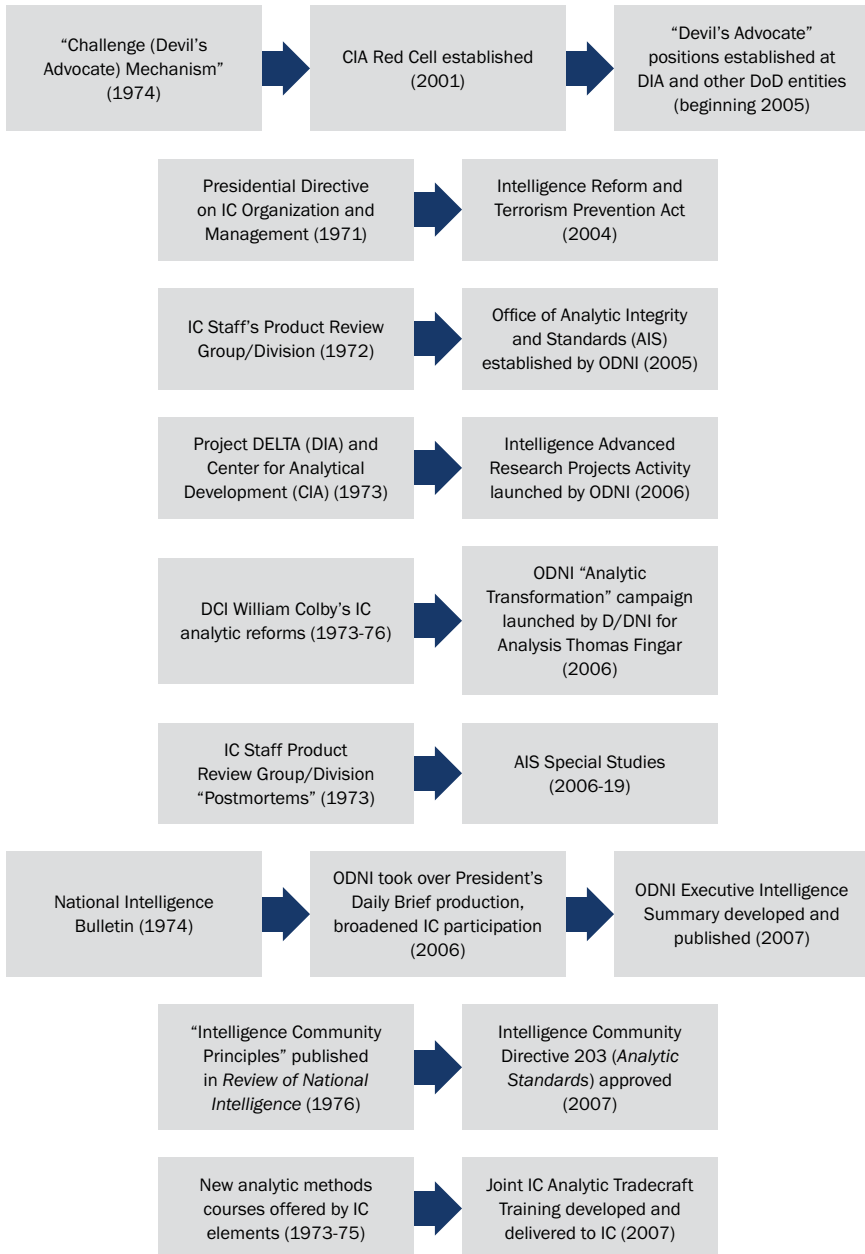
innovations of the 1970s laid the groundwork for the significant reforms launched in the wake of the passage of the 2004 IRTPA (Fig. 13).

Product evaluation and analytic tradecraft are two areas where the impact of the 1970s initiatives appears quite evident. The actions taken by the DCI's PRD in attempting to evaluate the quality of the IC's finished analytic production set a path for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's (ODNI) Office of Analytic Integrity and Standards (AIS) to follow three decades later. The criteria employed by the PRD to evaluate the quality of analysis—relevance, rigor, timeliness, and so forth—provided the basis for the standards contained in Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203 (*Analytic Standards*), and subsequently used by AIS and the IC to perform this function. Similarly, the IC's efforts in the 1970s to better characterize uncertainty were initially reflected in 2007 as a dedicated tradecraft standard within AIS's ICD 203 and, after the directive's revision in 2015, the inclusion of a numeric probability scale for IC elements to employ.

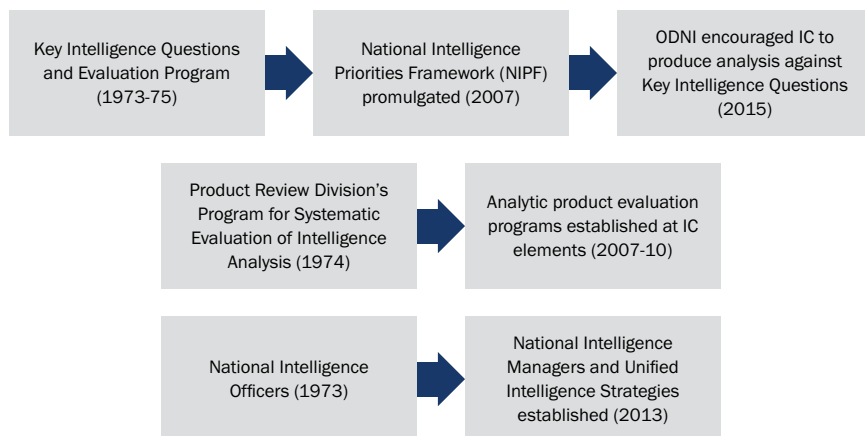
The push during the 1970s to develop and use new analytic methods and address alternative views and outcomes also gained renewed emphasis after 2004. The creation of CIA's Red Cell a few days after 9/11 and the use of a Devil's Advocate in DIA and other IC elements benefited from DCI Colby's push to institutionalize "challenge mechanisms" as part of IC processes. The evolution of structured analytic techniques and creation of tradecraft methodologist positions throughout the community can be traced as well to these earlier initiatives.

Other influences from the 1970s were seen in the post-IRTPA "Analytic Transformation" pursued by ODNI. The ODNI's Executive Intelligence Summary (EIS)—much like its 1970s predecessor, the NIB—attempted to draw on relevant high-quality finished intelligence from across the community to provide consumers a daily, one-stop current intelligence product. ODNI's Deputy Director for Analysis Thomas Fingar—mirroring in some ways Colby's earlier actions—used the EIS, as well as his push to widen the contribution base to the President's Daily Brief, to build a joint IC culture.⁶⁶⁴

Figure 13. 1970s Innovations Mapped to Post-2000 Analytic Initiatives



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The IC's analytic initiatives in the 1970s addressed many of the same problems that were highlighted in the aftermath of 9/11 and failure to find weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq in 2003 and that still confront the community today—from clearly conveying analytic uncertainty, ascertaining consumer satisfaction, and employing advanced analytic methods to evaluating the quality of IC intelligence analysis and identifying ways to make it more usable, rigorous, and accurate. This table illustrates some comparable initiatives first introduced in the 1970s and later renewed by the ODNI and its IC elements.

Source: Figure based on author's comparative assessment of key intelligence innovations.

A few initiatives that failed to take root in the 1970s also reemerged in new forms under the DNI, addressing many of the shortcomings that had led earlier to their abandonment. For example, DNI James Clapper's creation of the National Intelligence Manager (NIM) positions and the NIMs' efforts to build collection and production strategies—aided by the identification and sharing of agency KIQs—avoided overburdening NIOs and enhanced IC integration efforts against key targets.⁶⁶⁵

One must wonder what might have been had the analytic initiatives begun in the early 1970s continued and been fully supported in the decades that followed. The IC's analytic community probably would have benefited in multiple ways, from the development of more advanced and wider use of structured analytic techniques to greater precision in its treatment of uncertainty and communication of its judgments to its key consumers. A policy

document comparable to ICD 203 might have been generated earlier to guide the production and evaluation of the community's finished intelligence analysis. Leveraging such a document—as in the years since 2007—IC elements could have launched their own product evaluation programs, distilling lessons learned and sharing analytic tradecraft best practices to improve the quality of their analysis. At a minimum, the starting point or baseline from which Fingar launched the ODNI's "Analytic Transformation" drive in 2006 would have been higher and his efforts might have gone further.

Sustaining the analytic innovations of the 1970s might not have prevented the intelligence failures, including the tragic events of 9/11, that occurred in the decades that followed. Nonetheless, perhaps the Iraq WMD intelligence failure could have been avoided or at least the tradecraft errors that contributed to it.

The analytic initiatives launched by DCIs Helms and the particularly ambitious Colby were unlikely to succeed or have a lasting impact without organizational changes, such as strengthening the DCI's scope and authority or creating an entity such as the ODNI. Indeed, the size and scale of the intelligence failures in 2001 and 2003 may have been the only way to push Congress and the executive branch to mandate the changes necessary to create an IC environment that ultimately allowed the analytic innovations begun in the 1970s to be developed more fully and widely adopted in the 21st century.

SIMILAR TASKS AND CHALLENGES TODAY

Part of the ongoing influence of these earlier analytic initiatives stems from the reality that most tasks the IC was asked to perform in the 1970s are still required today. Many of the challenges to completing these tasks also are the same. Certainly, the need to elicit and respond to consumer feedback on how well the IC is addressing their requirements and assessing the quality of the IC's work has not diminished. "Marketing intelligence" in the 21st century—particularly given the many other sources of information available to consumers—is essential. The 1975 charge to make "the intelligence product of greater use to those for whom it is produced"⁶⁶⁶ is just as

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essential and difficult today as it was then. Concerns about the potential for politicization when engaging consumers also remain valid, especially in today's highly charged political environment. Demands on consumers' time have not diminished and, in fact, have become more severe since the 1970s. Effective communication between intelligence suppliers and policy consumers also continues to need constant tending. The findings of the NSCIC-directed study on the India-Pakistan crisis of 1971—which indicated “a two-way communications problem” involving the “expression by policy levels of intelligence needs” and “communication of intelligence output to policy-makers”—apply equally well in the 21st century.⁶⁶⁷

The challenges confronted by the PRD of the 1970s are similar to those faced by the ODNI's AIS and other IC product evaluation elements. Determining the analytic quality of finished intelligence products has not grown easier over time. Despite having a charter established in the 2004 IRTPA, AIS has met resistance from some IC organizations in executing its mission to evaluate IC finished intelligence products,⁶⁶⁸ just as the PRD did in the mid-1970s. AIS has also seen its personnel cut sharply since it was stood up in 2005 and—again like the PRD—has faced pushback from IC organizations challenging the qualifications of its evaluators and the evaluation methodologies it employs. Product evaluations, customer surveys, and interviews are key tools for AIS, just as they were for the PRD decades earlier. Moreover, concerns regarding to whom evaluations are disseminated are mirrored today. AIS information-sharing with Congress and even with other IC organizations remains a source of disagreement.

The historical record shows that effectively conveying analytic uncertainty has always been difficult and the current environment is no different.⁶⁶⁹ Many of the challenges faced by the IC Staff and IC members remain largely unchanged five decades later. Lack of agreement on the meaning of the estimative terms used and debate over whether words, numeric probabilities, or confidence levels are the best way to express analytic uncertainty continues within the IC. Even the arguments for and against quantifying the likelihood associated with judgments are virtually the same. To use Sherman Kent's characterization of competing camps, the “poets” continue to warn

of conveying false precision while the “mathematicians” stress the clarity of using numeric probabilities. Today’s discussions over how to characterize findings emerging from the application of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) models, illustrate this multiplicity of thought. Congress, in fact, has drafted requirements to ensure ICDs appropriately account for AI/ML tools in intelligence products.⁶⁷⁰

At the macro level, the rapid technological change and more complex threat environment that confronted the IC in the 1970s clearly holds relevance for today’s community. As Lloyd Jordan wrote in his article, “The Case for a Holistic Intelligence,” in the summer 1975 issue of *Studies in Intelligence*: “The central thesis of this paper is that the increasing complexity of national security problems requires the Central Intelligence Agency [to] adopt a new approach to intelligence analysis.”⁶⁷¹ Colby recognized this evolving threat environment and pushed for changes in how IC warning was done and which issues it tracked. Similar but more diverse and rapidly changing threats confront today’s community—a state that should generate debate over how and who should perform the critical function of warning in an AI/ML world.

INSIGHTS FROM THE 1970S: LESSONS FOR THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY OF THE FUTURE

As in 1975, a growing body of literature points to the increasingly complex and challenging threat environment confronting the IC, both now and in the future.⁶⁷² Distinguished scholar of IC history Amy Zegart, for example, acknowledges “we’ve seen technological advances before. But never have we seen the convergence of so many new technologies changing so much so fast.” She points to AI/ML and internet connectivity as driving the nature and pace of change. These technological breakthroughs, Zegart notes, are “generating new uncertainties and empowering new adversaries,” cautioning the IC to worry about tech giants and startups, as well as governments and terrorist groups. She also emphasizes how “data volume and accessibility are revolutionizing sense-making,” the IC’s core enterprise.⁶⁷³ The 2023 *National Intelligence Strategy* reinforces much of Zegart’s warning, noting how the “United

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States faces an increasingly complex and interconnected threat environment” and “emerging and disruptive technological advances.”⁶⁷⁴

Intelligence practitioners have been equally engaged in addressing today's new technologies and their importance for the way analysis can and needs to be done. Alice Borene was ahead of many of her IC colleagues when she wrote in 2020: “As with other industries, the question is not so much if machines will be incorporated into the work but how and when and in what capacities.” Borene was also one of the first to highlight the promise and challenge of employing these new tools, opining “the premise that AI/ML will unlock correlations and relationships inaccessible to the human mind—often mixed with a dash of magical thinking—underlies much of the IC's interest in the field.”⁶⁷⁵

Building on this theme, Dennis Gleeson discusses the problems that intelligence analysis produced using AI/ML technologies poses for consumers, particularly given the limited “insight into or an understanding of the basis for the answers they [AI/ML] generate.” In his 2023 article on “Artificial Intelligence for Analysis,” CIA's former director of strategy for analytic systems highlights the importance that data quality plays in AI/ML. For organizations looking to implement generative AI, he argues that the data are “going to have to be sufficiently transparent and explainable for analysts to take it [the result] seriously.” To best exploit AI, as Gleeson suggests, IC elements may need to realign corporate structures, rethink analyst responsibilities, and reimagine their training. He concludes: “Rather than try to adapt a brand of AI to all enterprise data, it may be best first to go through a period of A/B testing of various AI offerings.”⁶⁷⁶

Community efforts to develop a strategy and guidance for the introduction and use of AI have been ongoing for years but culminated on January 17, 2025, with the DNI's approval of ICD 505 (*Artificial Intelligence*). ICD 505 is a major policy document that provides direction and a structure for managing AI's use in the IC. The directive lays out the need for AI's use, the risks involved, and the responsibilities assigned to offices in the ODNI, such as the IC Chief Data Officer and the ODNI Civil Liberties and Privacy Officer, and in the IC elements. At the heart of the policy guidance is the creation and empowerment of an IC Chief AI Officer “to establish and

oversee the strategic direction of AI for the IC.”⁶⁷⁷ This officer is charged with working closely with ODNI and IC element counterparts to implement ICD 505 and to coordinate agency AI-related initiatives.

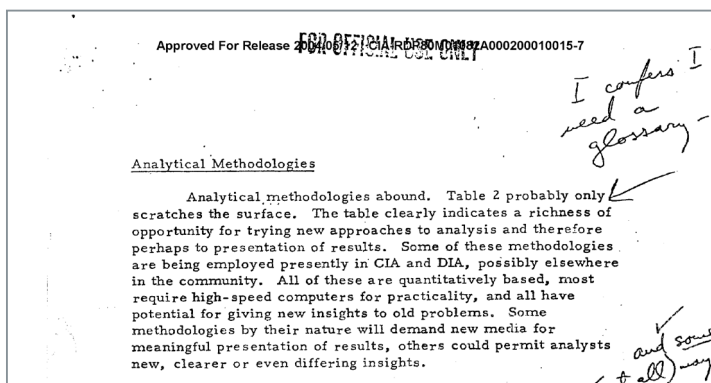
Given the directive’s broad nature and need to address the responsibilities of multiple offices and functions across the IC, ICD 505 contains little guidance on using AI specifically as a tool in analysis. The policy document, however, directs that AI be used in accordance with existing IC tradecraft guidance: “When relevant, IC AI shall be designed and deployed to enable IC personnel to adhere to analytic standards, including those established in ICD 203 and ICD 206 (*Sourcing Requirements for Disseminated Analytic Products*). ICD 505 also mandates transparency: “[R]ecipients of IC data shall be informed, such as through a watermark, when they receive IC data produced or substantially influenced by IC AI, unless operational, sources and methods protection, or security considerations prevent notification.”⁶⁷⁸ Such a requirement, if adhered to, would greatly aid in alerting consumers to the use of AI, with analysts responsible for making clear how AI influenced or shaped their judgments. That said, the hard work of adapting and integrating AI into the IC’s analytic tradecraft largely lies ahead.

Concerns about the growing use of AI/ML—both within the information industry and by foreign adversaries—are apparent not only in the imperative laid out in the ODNI’s 2019 and 2023 *National Intelligence Strategies* and ICD 505, but also in multiple other forums. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, for example, sponsored a series of colloquiums in 2021 on the “Revolution in Intelligence Affairs,” focused on how emerging and disruptive technologies are in the process of facilitating a revolution in intelligence affairs. Discussants asserted that “these technological drivers will impact intelligence strategy, operational and organizational concepts, and contribute to shaping the future strategic environment” and will “create new threats, opportunities, and challenges for the US Intelligence Community.”⁶⁷⁹ With these concerns in mind, what insights should the community take to heart from the IC’s experience during the 1970s that can help it adapt and apply new analytic methods, techniques, and automated tools to an evolving and complex threat environment?

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Probably the most important insight from the 1970s is that the IC must demonstrate the relevance, value, and viability of the tools and methodologies it advances (Fig. 14). The methodologies and automated tools and technologies employed by the IC today should be appropriate for the issue they are applied against, and the data required for these tools to function effectively and with sufficient transparency should be available. To better guarantee an appropriate match of data, tools, and outcome, the offices and analysts addressing policy-relevant issues should be linked with those designing the methods and tools, with both teams working together to make sure the finished products are comprehensible for the IC's consumers. The 1975 warning from CIA's Office of Current Intelligence that "much of the information with which it works cannot be expressed numerically without grave distortion and that... some of these methods demand more time and preparation than the character of the office's work allows" is still relevant today.⁶⁸⁰ And doctrine is needed to assist all with when, why, and how to use these methods and tools.

Figure 14. Analytical Methodologies



Illustrating that the IC needs to ensure its products are digestible by consumers, in May 1974, DCI Colby added a margin comment within a memo discussing new analytic methodologies and ways to present their intelligence findings: "I confess I need a glossary."

Source: "Memorandum for DCI from Dr. (Sanitized) on New Intelligence Presentation Means," May 22, 1974, CIA-RDP80M01082A000200010015-7, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80M01082A000200010015-7>.

Senior Support for Innovative Analytic Methods in the 1970s

In nominating CIA's Deputy Director for Intelligence Edward Proctor for the National Civil Service League's Career Service Award in 1975, Colby particularly noted that Proctor "nurtured" new approaches to intelligence analysis:

Throughout every office of the Intelligence Directorate, Mr. Proctor has nurtured the development of more sophisticated analytical techniques, borrowing new methods developed in the academic world and harnessing the power of the computer to thinking about international affairs. For example, in the Offices of Current Intelligence and Economic Research, staffs have been created whose chief function is to ensure that analysts are trained to use the latest techniques of data interpretation, statistical manipulation, model building, and analytical methodology.

Source: "Letter to Mortimer Caplin from W. E. Colby," April 16, 1975, CIA-RDP84-00313R000300040018-6, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84-00313R000300040018-6.pdf>.

The IC experience of the 1970s also drives home the need to secure support from IC senior leaders and analysts if the community is to successfully incorporate AI/ML into its work. DCI Colby's personal interest in and support for efforts to better use new methodologies and tools to improve the quality of the community's analysis was critical. As Richards Heuer observed in 1977: "Our early efforts benefited greatly from Mr. Colby's personal support, as the simple statement that the Director liked our work opened many doors—and minds."⁶⁸¹ Richard Immerman, former Assistant Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analytic Integrity and Standards, gave Heuer's point 21st century currency when he stressed in his article, "Transforming Analysis," that "dynamic, even aggressive leadership from the DNI is absolutely essential to overcome the sources of resistance."⁶⁸² Indeed, opening minds, particularly in the management chain and the analytic corps, ensuring useful training is available, and hiring personnel with the necessary skill set are all equally critical.⁶⁸³ Colby recognized this need for open minds, training, and skills mix—plus collaboration among those with differing skills—in 1974, when he asked in commenting on a memo outlining "New Intelligence

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Presentation Means": "Do we face a 'two cultures' gap between the traditional liberal arts analyst and the technology-buff analyst?"⁶⁸⁴

Pulling together the necessary elements to introduce and integrate new analytic methods and technologies in the 1970s IC also required review and some revision of the management and organizational structure within the community. A Center for the Study of Intelligence monograph, "The Future Market for Finished Intelligence," in 1976 observed: "[T]he new analytical approaches usually necessitated increased use of teams of analysts from across disciplines and organizations, thus complicating and increasing the managerial load in producing such intelligence." The study noted that "more individual analyst time is required in the new analytical approaches, with additional needs for meetings, coordination, etc., both inside and outside the Agency," as well as "inputs of data, opinions of experts, activities of contractors, etc., from outside the normal intelligence community."⁶⁸⁵ Certainly the IC's 1970s experience in trying to capitalize on resources and coordinate outreach with external organizations—such as the Advanced Research Projects Agency and academia—is equally relevant today.

The lessons of the 1970s also hold cautionary notes for the current and future IC. Now—as during that earlier decade of analytic innovation—methods and tools are no substitute for rigorous thought, but rather a means to enhance it. A think piece in 1973 on CIA's exploration of new analytic methods for political analysis warned that, although there clearly is "merit in a more ambitious and systematic program for experimenting with the new methods,... the new methodologies must not be regarded as a panacea."⁶⁸⁶ As the IC moves forward today—harnessing AI, expanding data sources, and applying new analytic methodologies—it should not lose sight of the sage advice Heuer shared in 1977: "Our work to date indicates that the kinds of analytical techniques which seem most useful for our purposes are those which help to trace the logical consequences of subjective judgments, extend the mental capacity of the individual analyst, force the analyst to make assumptions explicit, or help to organize complexity."⁶⁸⁷

So, the IC's longstanding fundamentals that support rigorous and relevant intelligence should be thoughtfully preserved, even as they are

enriched by technological advances. To this point, more recent intelligence practitioners echo Heuer's warnings. Senior analyst Andrew Gilmour, for example, in his 2023 article, "The Enduring Importance of the Humanities in the Work of Intelligence," argues that "the AI revolution is bringing the humanities deficit in the IC to a tipping point." He raises the concern that "the decline of the traditional humanities disciplines is changing the pool of applicants for the intelligence analysis profession, privileging STEM, social science, and physical science degrees" and potentially leaving new hires "ill-equipped to manage the value and culture questions associated with foreign leaders and their political communities."⁶⁸⁸ Although *Studies in Intelligence* editor Joe Gartin acknowledges that AI/ML are fast becoming essential parts of the analytic process, he also contends "that, as in Kent's day, a significant portion of intelligence analysis still consists of sense-making, the cognitive shortcut of putting new developments into a heuristic framework that we all use to categorize events and anticipate the future." Consequently, Gartin advances a mix of tradecraft- and technology-linked recommendations, concluding: "[N]ot every analyst needs to be a data scientist, but every analyst needs to know how to leverage data science."⁶⁸⁹

The analytic innovations of the 1970s offer insights on how to accommodate and leverage new technologies such as AI/ML, but they also suggest ways to advance the quality of IC analysis through more traditional mechanisms, such as customer engagement and product evaluation. The time may be opportune to revisit and build upon some of the NSCIC's initiatives to solicit greater consumer feedback on the quality of intelligence they receive. Today's online technology enables the IC to see which consumers are using their products. Digital customer survey forms allow for easy and immediate feedback forums. Virtually every one of the IC's 18 member organizations gathers consumer feedback and runs a customer evaluation program; however, the results are not collected or integrated in a holistic fashion at the ODNI level.⁶⁹⁰ Sharing and integrating the insights gained from the customer-evaluation programs of individual IC organizations would bring us closer to fulfilling the vision that inspired the creation of the NSCIC in 1971.

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Serious consideration should also be given again to involving consumers in IC product evaluation. The ODNI—using rating scales and procedures developed in the years since 2006—could easily construct joint consumer-producer teams to conduct postproduction analytic tradecraft evaluations of IC products. Such integrated evaluation teams would represent a significant step forward in creating the type of mechanism that the NSCIC saw as essential to improving the overall quality and usefulness of the intelligence produced by the IC.

Another model from the past for holistic product evaluations is the PRD's employment of multiple evaluation looks to provide an integrated and complete view of analytic quality. The systematic product evaluation program launched by the PRD in November 1974 closely examined intelligence products for duplication and whether they addressed the IC's Key Intelligence Questions. The PRD also examined the tradecraft used in these IC products and drew on surveys to incorporate feedback and insights from consumers. The ODNI's Mission Performance Analysis and Collection (MPAC) division has considered taking steps resembling the PRD's holistic evaluation efforts, including integrating separate evaluation efforts by MPAC's collection, requirements, and analytic tradecraft groups. New product formats, sources, issues, and consumers served by finished intelligence in the 21st century make such holistic evaluations increasingly important.

An equally critical lesson from the 1970s is the value of regular feedback highlighting best practices as well as shortcomings on the quality and tradecraft of IC analysis. The PRD's *Review of National Intelligence (RONI)* was just such a vehicle. This publication addressed multiple elements, from collection challenges to postmortems and the latest developments in analytic methods. Since 1976, the closest the IC has come to producing and disseminating a publication similar to the *RONI* has been the ODNI/AIS's Annual Report to Congress. Perhaps it is time to examine recreating such a vehicle—published on a regular basis—to communicate integrated evaluation results to those in and outside the IC. Such a publication would aid in capturing and injecting valuable lessons learned into IC training and work processes.

In sum, these opportunities to expand upon innovative ideas from the 1970s provide hope for strengthening the IC, even as the historical record also suggests a cautionary note. As Immerman observes: “Change within the IC has been uneven, backtracking is not uncommon, and not all the changes have produced positive dividends.”⁶⁹¹ Thus, if the IC’s future is to be one of progress, perhaps the most important lesson from the analytic innovations launched in the 1970s is that the community’s push to improve the quality of its analysis and the rigor of its tradecraft must be continuous, not intermittent.⁶⁹² The daunting challenges confronting the IC—now and in the future—demand that the community make good use of all available resources, including the insights distilled from its past analytic successes and shortcomings.

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS



AIS	Analytic Integrity and Standards
AL	Alert List
AI	Anticipatory intelligence
AI	Artificial intelligence
AI/ML	Artificial intelligence and machine learning
AM	Alert Memorandum
AMR/ORD	Analytical Methodology Research Division, Office of Research and Development
ARPA	Advanced Research Projects Agency
ATG	Analytic Techniques Group
BNE	Board of National Estimates
CEP	Circular error probable
CFI	Committee on Foreign Intelligence
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIB	Current Intelligence Bulletin
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
COMINT	Communications intelligence

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CONTEXT	Conferenced text editing
CSI	Center for the Study of Intelligence
DA	Devil's Advocate
DASD	Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
DC	DIA's Collections Division
DCI	Director of Central Intelligence
DCID	Director of Central Intelligence Directive
D/DCI/IC	DCI's Deputy Director for the Intelligence Community
D/DCI/NIO	DCI's Deputy Director for National Intelligence Officers
D/DCI/NIPE	Deputy Director for Central Intelligence/National Intelligence Programs and Evaluations
D/DDI	CIA's Deputy Director for Intelligence
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DIN	Defense Intelligence Notice
DNI	Director of National Intelligence
DMZ	Demilitarized zone
DoD	Department of Defense
EXDIS	Exclusive dissemination
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
FY	Fiscal year
HPSCI	House Permanent Select Committee for Intelligence
HUMINT	Human intelligence
IARPA	Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity
IC	Intelligence Community
ICBM	Intercontinental ballistic missile
ICD	Intelligence Community Directive
ICS	Intelligence Community Staff
IEP	Intelligence Evaluation Project
INR	State Department/Bureau of Intelligence and Research
IRAC	Intelligence Resources Advisory Committee
IRDC	Intelligence Research and Development Council
IRTPA	Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff

Glossary of Abbreviations and Acronyms

KEP	Key Intelligence Question Evaluation Process
KIQ	Key Intelligence Question
LIMDIS	Limited distribution
MBFR	Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions
ML	Machine learning
MPAC	Mission Performance Analysis and Collection
MPRRD	Management, Planning, and Resources Review Division
NFAC	National Foreign Assessment Center
NFIB	National Foreign Intelligence Board
NFIP	National Foreign Intelligence Program
NIAM	National Intelligence Assessment Memorandum
NIB	National Intelligence Bulletin
NIC	National Indications Center (Watch Committee)
NIC	National Intelligence Council
NID	National Intelligence Daily
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NIM	National Intelligence Manager
NIO	National Intelligence Officer
NIO/W	National Intelligence Officer for Warning
NIPF	National Intelligence Priorities Framework
NIS	National Intelligence Strategy
NMCC	National Military Command Center
NMIC	National Military Intelligence Center
NOIWON	National Operations and Intelligence Watch Officers Net
NRO	National Reconnaissance Office
NSA	National Security Agency
NSC	National Security Council
NSCIC	National Security Council Intelligence Committee
NSSM	National Security Study Memorandum
NSR	National Situation Report
OCI	Office of Current Intelligence
ODNI	Office of the Director of National Intelligence
OMB	Office of Management and Budget

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ONE	Office of National Estimates
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OPR	Office of Political Research
ORD	Office of Research and Development
ORPA	Office of Regional and Political Analysis
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
OSD/ISA	Office of the Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
OSR	Office of Strategic Research
PAG	Product Assessment Group
PAID	Production Assessment and Improvement Division
PDB	President's Daily Brief
PFIAB	President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board
PRD	Product Review Division
PRG	Product Review Group
R&D	Research and Development
RDT&E	Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation
RONI	<i>Review of National Intelligence</i>
SAFE	Support for Analyst File Environment
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SAT	Structured Analytic Techniques
SAVA	Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs
SIGINT	Signals intelligence
SITREP	Situation Report
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate
SWN	Strategic Warning Notice
SWS	Strategic Warning Staff
USIB	United States Intelligence Board
WMD	Weapons of mass destruction
WSAG	Washington Special Actions Group

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To Innovate Today's IC, Learn from 1970s Initiatives

The Intelligence Community (IC) faces major challenges—from rapidly evolving global threats to adaptation of artificial intelligence—that will require innovation in its collection and analysis, much like the era of reform following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. But an earlier period, the 1970s, also saw comparable geopolitical and technological shocks, driving initiatives to strengthen the quality of IC analysis. This book explores the IC's response to tests ranging from mistrust following intelligence failures to the dawn of the computer age—and why the lessons of that earlier era remain relevant today.

James Marchio's 40-plus years in intelligence analysis, including as senior evaluator in the Analytic Integrity and Standards office of the Director of National Intelligence after 9/11, inform his examination of 1970s initiatives and their relevance for future IC innovation. A Professor Emeritus at National Intelligence University, Dr. Marchio continues to serve as a senior intelligence analytic standards evaluator and contributor to *Intelligence and National Security* and *Studies in Intelligence*. He earned a Ph.D. in US-East European History from American University, MAs in International Relations and American Civilization from St. Mary's University and the University of Pennsylvania, respectively, and a BA in American Studies and Economics (*cum laude*) from Amherst College.

