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TECHNICAL
R E P O R T



Assessing the Tradecraft of Intelligence Analysis

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This research was conducted within the Intelligence Policy Center (IPC) of the RAND National Security Research Division (NSRD). NSRD conducts research and analysis for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Commands, the defense agencies, the Department of the Navy, the Marine Corps, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Intelligence Community, allied foreign governments, and foundations.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available for this publication.

ISBN 0-8330-3958-X

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Published 2008 by the RAND Corporation
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Summary

“Analysis” in the U.S. Intelligence Community is definitely plural. It encompasses a range of styles, levels, and customers. It ranges from solving puzzles (such as whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction—a question that could be answered definitively if only the United States had access to information that in principle was available) to framing mysteries (those questions that are future and contingent, which no information could resolve definitively). It would surprise many citizens to learn that the big “collectors,” such as the National Security Agency or the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, have more “analysts” than the Central Intelligence Agency.

The vast majority of what all those analysts do is current and tactical, more question-answering than producing deep understanding of critical issues. That tyranny of the immediate has become more entrenched, for a variety of reasons, not least that technology now permits the take from big national collection systems to be retrieved in time to help warriors on the battlefield. In our conversations, that tyranny was sometimes applauded—as providing policymakers, including the president, what they wanted—but more often bemoaned. However, it always was noted.

There is no shortage of analytic tools being created, inside and outside the Intelligence Community. But there are concerns about the connection between those tools and the needs of analysts. Too often analysts regarded the tool-builders as in a world of their own, building tools that analysts could not quickly master. As one analyst from a Service intelligence organization put it, analysts are imprisoned not by organizations or sources but, rather, by tools.

At the same time, the analytic community faces both opportunities and challenges in dealing with a large cohort of new, young analysts, who are computer-savvy and networked. They take for granted an ease of access to information that has been the opposite of the Intelligence Community’s compartmentalization and “need-to-know.” They can become the drivers of a sea-change in how the Community thinks about analysis and sharing. Or they will be lost to the Community.

It was plain in our informal survey of the Intelligence Community that every agency has a separate set of research priorities and product lines. These varying missions and products serve a range of customers, from the president and his immediate advisors and Cabinet members, to key military leaders charged with day-to-day actions to secure the lives of Americans worldwide, to state and local law enforcement officials engaged in the war on terrorism. This broad constituency drives needs for a wide range of activities in both research and development,

training, and education that are a challenge to coordinate across the nation's entire intelligence enterprise. Yet none of the agencies knows much of what its colleagues do, still less works with them consistently in testing and validating analytic techniques or in training analysts.

Accordingly, we concluded that the establishment of a research agenda and a training and education curriculum with a Community-wide perspective is critical to future analytic tradecraft. It is all the more important now, given the creation, in December 2004, of a director of national intelligence; and the establishment of a National Intelligence University is a welcome first step. Also important is a common reference point for judging the tradeoffs among stakeholder pressures for the various analytic tasks—pressures that bear on the Community at large in different ways. Our research also identified shortfalls in analytic capabilities, methodologies, and skills, and it recommends actions to take to address these gaps as well as a strategy for meeting future challenges.

Table S.1 presents a summary set of recommended actions for the Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis, DDNI(A), as well as for the Chancellor of the National

Table S.1
Summary Set of Recommended Actions

<p>Establish DDNI(A) as a focal point to evaluate opportunity costs and assess “right balance” in analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Collection-driven versus issue-driven — Current reporting versus longer-term analysis — In-house versus outsourced
<p>Foster better integration of methods and tools for analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Establish focal point to connect R&D and tool-building community (government and industry) to Intelligence Community analysts — Develop minimum common tool set for community-wide use
<p>Institute community-wide tradecraft training and education components</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Develop tradecraft curricula for community-wide use — Institutionalize lesson-learning as process of performance improvement, not assessing blame
<p>Get and keep the next generation of analysts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Build partnerships with academia (e.g., Media Lab), industry (e.g., Futures Lab), and government (e.g., NRO/AS&T/FL) and link new hires — Track promotion, retention, and erosion rates for new hires over decade — Align training, incentives, processes, and metrics with performance
<p>Innovate in analytic methods and data-sharing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Promote a variety of experiments and field tests, mostly “inside the security fence,” as demonstrations and validations — Recognize that the nature of secrecy is changing
<p>Evaluate the boundaries of all-source versus single-INT analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — End the distinction at mid and high levels of analysis; analysis is not distinguished by the number of sources — Develop portfolio of “Day After” games, and other simulations, to nurture transitions
<p>Rethink new kinds of intelligence, especially law enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Focus on usefulness, necessity of “domestic/foreign” divide — Use gaming to explore gray areas

Intelligence University, to move toward a future analytic community with enhanced and more agile tradecraft that will be essential in addressing a fundamentally different and uncertain era of global challenges over the long term.

Since the December 2004 legislation and the major post mortems, a number of initiatives have moved in directions we recommended. Perhaps most important is the DDNI(A) position itself. Just as the Director of National Intelligence has the possibility to build authority commensurate with responsibility for the entire Intelligence Community, so the DDNI(A) has the opportunity to become a real hub for a Community-wide perspective on goals, training, and tradecraft in analysis. So, too, establishing a National Intelligence University, whose chancellor is also the Community's Chief Training Office, can provide a focal point for training, including training in analysis; creating the National Counterterrorism Center and other centers can shift intelligence, including analysis, toward an organization around problems or issues, not agencies or sources; building a Long Term Analysis Unit at the National Intelligence Council can lead away from the prevailing dominance of current intelligence; and forming a DNI-managed Open Source Center can be a seedbed for making more creative use of open-source materials, as well as, perhaps, developing a model for other initiatives in analytic tradecraft.

These are promising actions, but they are works in progress. Perhaps they can begin to change the attitude that lies behind specifics. For all the admonitions and exhortations, the national and Community leadership devalues intelligence analysis today. For all the language about the importance of intelligence analysis, data-sharing, fusion priorities, and the like, the price of doing better is seen as too high for the likely results. Now is the opportunity to change that attitude.