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The Intelligence Community's Neglect of Strategic Intelligence

Commonly misunderstood, we neglect it at our peril.

The architects of the National Security Act of 1947 would be greatly surprised by today's neglect of strategic intelligence in the Intelligence Community.

by John G. Heidenrich

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the National Security Act of 1947. So many of our most prominent government institutions were created by this Act—the National Security Council (NSC), the Armed Forces as a joint establishment, the U.S. Air Force, and, of course, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). As a "living" document, the Act has outlasted the Cold War, for which it was devised, and much more.

By the 1980s the Act's architects had passed away. Their thoroughness was such, however, that amendments have not radically altered what they essentially put in place. One relatively recent change, the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, in addition to its impact on the interrelationships of the service arms, notably also mandated the creation of an annual *National Security Strategy*, a document produced by the President and reported annually to the Congress.

The original architects, with World War II in recent memory, knew very well the importance of giving commanders enough authority, and they likewise knew the importance of strategy. By 1947 George Kennan had wired his now famous Long Telegram. In March 1947, President Harry Truman announced what we now call the Truman Doctrine, and so initiated America's national (grand) strategy of Communist Containment. Today, decades later, a national strategy is not only advisable for the Republic but legally required. One can almost hear the original architects asking themselves, *Why didn't we think of that?*

But as much as the Security Act's architects would have approved of a published national strategy, they would, I believe, be greatly surprised, perhaps even incensed, by today's neglect of strategic intelligence in the Intelligence Community. Strategic intelligence collection and analysis is a capability they took pains to preserve; we are perilously close to losing it. The reasons are complicated, but they deserve our examination and discussion in this anniversary year.

Does Anyone Know What Strategic Intelligence Is?

Readers can easily get a sense of the problem by conducting a small, admittedly unscientific, survey. Hand someone a report on a foreign-related topic and describe it as "strategic intelligence." Then ask the recipient to explain the term *strategic intelligence* and how the report qualifies. In my own surveys, a typical reply, after an awkward pause, has been that strategic intelligence is information about countries, or about strategic nuclear forces, or perhaps a long-range forecast. Another common reply, commendable in its honesty, has been "I don't know."

Substantively, none of these answers is adequate—and they are downright odd when compared to the straightforward answers many of us would give when asked to define *tactical intelligence*. These might include something like "intelligence information for the tactical battlefield." Logically enough, the official definition the Pentagon uses is equally straightforward: "Intelligence that is required for planning and conducting tactical operations."[1]

This is the Pentagon's official definition of *strategic intelligence:*

> *Intelligence that is required for the formulation of strategy, policy, and military plans and operations at national and theater levels.*[2]

Or, in fewer words, *strategic intelligence* is that intelligence necessary to create and implement a strategy, typically a grand strategy, what officialdom calls a *national strategy*. A strategy is not really a plan but the logic driving a plan. A strategy furthers one's advance towards goals by suggesting ways to accommodate and/or orchestrate a variety of variables—sometimes too many for the strategist alone to anticipate and understand. When foreign areas are involved, in-depth expertise is required, which is what strategic intelligence provides. Without the insights of deep expertise—insights based on a detailed knowledge of obstacles and opportunities, and enemies and friends in a foreign area—a strategy is not much more than an abstract theory, potentially even a flight of fancy. The better the strategic intelligence, the better the strategy, which is why the definition of strategic intelligence should not be so mysterious.

Nevertheless, in official circles and beyond, too many people attribute meanings to "strategic" and "strategic intelligence" that no dictionary supports. Ignorance of the meaning of these words has bred ignorance of the strategic product, with, in my view, enormous consequences. During the past decade and a half, since the Cold War, the production and use of strategic intelligence by the United States Government has plunged to egregiously low levels. This decline is badly out of sync with the broader needs of the Republic, fails to meet the nation's foreign policy requirements, ill-serves the country's many national security officials, and retards the developing prowess of its intelligence analysts.

This neglect is not only perilous, it is tragic. American ingenuity has made great contributions to the ancient craft of intelligence, contributions worthy of national pride. The most famous is the American spy satellite, a Cold War invention. Less famous but just as ingenious is multi-departmental strategic intelligence, invented during World War II by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

Yet, within the government that created it and that was once its master artisan, this analytical invention is now largely neglected. As my informal surveys suggest, very few employees of the Intelligence Community would say they are working to advance the implementation of the official *National Security Strategy*—or indeed, any strategy. Instead, much of today's intelligence is tactical, tangential, or tied to national strategy only by formal references to high-level strategic planning or guidance documents in forewords, prefaces, or other such administrative front-matter.

Who's Thinking About Tomorrow?

From my perspective, it's not clear that anyone is, or will be—at least not as long as the analyst's primary product is *current intelligence*, which in essence is only the daily news compiled with secret information. This type of intelligence must be desirable since so many consumers do consume it; but like journalism without investigative reporting, it is not strategic intelligence and cannot replace it. As a percentage of the community's workload, however, it nearly has. In a survey of hundreds of community analysts performed by a fellow at CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) about two years ago, these complaints were heard:

> *Our products have become so specific, so tactical even, that our thinking has become tactical. We're losing our strategic edge because we're so focused on today's issues.*
>
> *About 15 years ago, I used to have 60 percent of my time available for long-term products. Now, it's between 20 and 25 percent.*
>
> *[V]elocity isn't a substitute for quality. We've gotten rid of the real analytic products that we use to make, and now we just report on current events.*[3]

Many of the community's elders likewise lament the consequences of a national intelligence effort now so focused upon the immediate:

> *The Intelligence Community really [is] focused on current intelligence, on policy support. It does very little research. It has very little understanding below the level of the policymaker and, in my view, on many issues. I think that, in some ways, these two groups are reinforcing each other's worst habits.*[4]
>
> *A lot of strategic intelligence is not secret. It's out there. You'd better have some people who understand history. Instead, they've gotten sucked into the current intelligence business, which is death. It's death to knowing what's going on.*[5]
>
> *Is American...strategic intelligence up to the demands of the global environment and our national policies and strategies? I think there is a prima facie case that the answer is no.*[6]

Summarizing their concern is this excerpt from the CSI-published conference report from which the preceding comment was drawn:

> *A major [intelligence community] weakness...is its difficulty in providing strategic intelligence—the comprehensive overviews that put disparate events and the fragmentary snapshots provided by different intelligence sources into a contextual framework that makes it meaningful for the intelligence consumer. This criticism applies to intelligence prepared both for a national policy audience and for more specialized audiences, such as battlefield commanders.*[7]

Some supervisors argue that the community is doing more strategic intelligence work than is generally reported. Perhaps. But the excerpt above hints at a deeper, more insidious problem: It describes strategic intelligence as the provision of context. Context is nice, sometimes even helpful, but it does not compellingly excite the average consumer, especially the military one, because it is not strategic support. Yet "context" is what most analysts and consumers assume strategic intelligence is.

Another common assumption is that strategic intelligence is merely a longer range perspective. Officialdom even promotes this, if unwittingly. For example, in the National Defense Intelligence College, a component of the Defense Intelligence Agency, is the Center for Strategic Intelligence Research (CSIR). The center describes itself as "the Intelligence Community's research and publication center devoted to an impartial exploration of medium- and long-range issues of concern to intelligence directors...." Where in that description, however, is there any allusion to national strategy? Or does strategic intelligence exist in a realm without strategy? Should it?

At the risk of waxing nostalgic about the Cold War, in that era many policymakers were voracious consumers of strategic intelligence because it did provide strategic support. Used to tailor the grand strategy of Communist Containment, it deeply assessed the threats the United States and its allies faced, articulated their strengths and weaknesses, and noted exploitable opportunities. It was "current" in that it was timely, but it was also strategic. Directly applicable to the national strategy, it was, in today's terminology, "actionable" intelligence.

At present, about one half of the community's analysts possess less than five years of experience.[8] Strategic intelligence is not their forte; few would have learned it in college, and most have not had enough practice to gain sufficient understanding and expertise to produce strategic intelligence. As intelligence agencies swell their ranks with more and more new analysts, this situation is unlikely to improve anytime soon.[9]

At CIA in particular, General Michael Hayden told Congress last year that for every 10 CIA analysts with less than four years of experience, only one analyst has more than 10 years of experience. "This is the least experienced analytic workforce in the history of the Central Intelligence Agency," he said.[10] One result, warned Carl W. Ford Jr., a former assistant secretary of state for intelligence and research, is that "we haven't done strategic intelligence for so long that most of our analysts don't know how to do it anymore."[11]

Another reason strategic intelligence "isn't done" is that, among today's intelligence consumers, urgency is pushing tactical thinking. *To stop terrorists, I need this specific piece of tactical intelligence—right now.* Consequently, by default, those analytical topics that feel somehow too grand, or too distant in time and place to matter immediately, tend to get ignored.

In fairness to intelligence consumers at nearly every level, they are merely following standard procedure, performing compartmentalized, narrowly focused routines. But reality is not entirely amenable to compartmentalization. Reality is inter-related and messy, involving deadly diseases from AIDS to avian flu; politically disruptive environmental changes; demographic dislocation; endemic corruption; trafficking in everything from people to weapons of mass destruction (WMD); intolerant belief-systems; genocide; shifting centers of economic power; global energy competition; and engineering breakthroughs from bio-manipulation to nano technology. These challenges are so profoundly complex, they cannot be well explained only in current or tactical intelligence.

Even if analysts are doing the reporting, reporting the facts *de jour* is not analysis. At the other extreme, analysis should not exist for its own sake, as though any interpretation of facts is better than none at all. Producing token interpretations, day after day, may keep an analyst employed, but as analytical practice this is only "make work" activity. More often than not, it just dulls an analyst's proficiency while the consumer gets a flow of pseudo-analytic drivel. Effective analysis ought to enhance a product until it empowers a consumer with the maximum advantage an expert's insight can provide. That is actionable intelligence.

At the Creation

Many a reader of *Studies in Intelligence* knows the contributions of Sherman Kent, including his book *Strategic Intelligence and American World Policy*, published in 1949. But to understand from whence modern strategic intelligence originated and where we stand today, we need to look back to World War II, to the work of the Research and Analysis (R&A) branch of the OSS.

At the time, the R&A products that most impressed the US military were infrastructure studies. In 1942, as American forces prepared to invade North Africa, a young Kent at R&A supervised the creation of several studies of that region's ports and railways. Showing vast detail, those studies amazed their military consumers. R&A found most of the raw information quite openly in books, trade journals, statistical abstracts and almanacs, even in the archived project files of cooperative private companies. Kent and his colleagues—all practiced scholars, supported by the full resources of the Library of Congress—knew where to find good information.[12]

Today, by contrast, the typical intelligence analyst rarely exploits open sources as well. Working in environments dominated by secrecy and security concerns, most analysts work in relative seclusion. As a result, compared to an experienced professor or a seasoned business researcher—both proficient at exploiting open sources deeply—most entry-level analysts are novices.

Accurate, detailed information is not necessarily available via the Internet, nor is it always free. Far more exists off the Internet, but the daily deadlines of current intelligence discourage its deep exploitation. So, for reasons of ease, speed, and perhaps a little arrogance, most community analysts confine their raw material to secret information. Secret information may be very good, but information need not be secret to be accurate. And, as we know from the experience of Iraqi WMD, secret information is not necessarily always accurate.

Back to R&A. In 1943, it subjected its famed infrastructure studies to military-economic analysis and, in so doing, invented multi-departmental strategic intelligence. This excerpt from a CIA-published history of the OSS summarizes that phenomenal achievement:

> *Analyses by the Enemy Objectives Unit (EOU), a team of R&A economists posted to the U.S. Embassy in London, sent Allied bombers toward German fighter aircraft factories in 1943 and early 1944. After the Luftwaffe's interceptor force was weakened, Allied bombers could strike German oil production, which EOU identified as the choke-point in the Nazi war effort. The idea was not original with [the] OSS, but R&A's well-documented support gave it credibility and helped convince Allied commanders to try it.... The resulting scarcity of aviation fuel all but grounded Hitler's Luftwaffe and, by the end of [1944], diesel and gasoline production had also plummeted, immobilizing thousands of German tanks and trucks*.[13]

A great success. Imagine if R&A's infrastructure studies had not existed, or were produced in haste by amateurs ignorant of the best sources, the results either inaccurate or incomplete. The actual studies were good, of course, but they might have remained strictly tactical intelligence tools, as tactical as a sergeant's field map, nothing strategic. Imagine if nobody had bothered to think any harder, too cautious or too busy to consider, let alone attempt, a thoroughly multi-disciplinary analysis in the hope of creating a decisive advantage. Good information abounded, but information on paper is not necessarily knowledge in an analyst's mind, and therefore not necessarily incorporated into that analyst's impressions and analyses.

Which brings us to the EOU's economists. Quite young, they could have been derided as "a bunch of silly economists ignorant of real war." They did have advanced university degrees and did represent the OSS, but what made them insightful, persuasive, and ultimately successful is what they knew as individuals. They knew what they were talking about and it showed. Their thorough study of the multi-disciplinary material they accumulated made them true subject-matter experts. In the process, they created a new intelligence discipline whose tradecraft transforms vast amounts of scattered information into an individual's comprehensive knowledge and, ultimately, into exceptional insight. The respect they received, they earned.

The OSS did not survive the postwar demobilization of late 1945, but R&A did. Initially transferred to the State Department, it went to CIA because the strategic intelligence capability it embodied was understood to be essential to the national security, whether in war or peace.

Preserving that capability was one of the objectives the architects of the National Security Act of 1947 had in mind. Although the term "strategic intelligence" does not appear, for that term was not yet commonly used among civilians, the Act did call for the continuous production of "national intelligence," a category the Act treats as distinctly different from tactical intelligence.

National intelligence, according to the Act, was to be produced by the Intelligence Community under the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), now the DNI. Tactical intelligence was to be the job of the military services—perhaps not without Intelligence Community help, but that help was not to be the community's main effort. The original architects of the Act knew the mission of producing national (strategic) intelligence would be daunting, which is why they created a central agency, CIA, to not only receive and coordinate the government's intelligence information but, crucially, undertake multi-disciplinary analysis (an endeavor more comprehensive than "all-source analysis") to achieve the great successes R&A had achieved in World War II.

Little wonder, then, that so many veterans of the old R&A, like Sherman Kent, were recruited into the new CIA.

Informative or Ivory Tower?

"Let things be such," Kent advised during the Cold War, "that if our policymaking master is to disregard our knowledge and wisdom, he will never do so because our work was inaccurate, incomplete, or patently biased."[14] Every good analyst knows the importance of objectivity. By following an evidence-based logic, an objective analysis holds the potential to debunk a policymaker's preconceptions, even reveal how his preferred policy actually fails. What keeps the policymaker receptive to such analysis, despite the bad news it may contain, is its claim to objectivity.

Yet, the analyst's need to be objective, and his need to know which topics most interest a policymaker (or other consumer), have posed a dilemma that has been much discussed in these pages and in the literature of intelligence in general. Kent himself rated the risk that analysts would be contaminated by consumers a greater danger than the risk posed by self-imposed isolation.

As a result, the CIA's analytical components tended to be isolated, and at times seemed out of touch with their consumers. Because so much intelligence work is secretive anyway, the isolation would have felt normal. The Cold War itself reinforced the isolation by requiring little daily interaction between analysts and consumers, the Cuban Missile Crisis being a rare exception. More typically, the President and other senior officials received daily intelligence briefings, delivered by a briefer (not an analyst) or as a document. Thereafter, those officials would seldom see or speak with an intelligence officer until the next morning's briefing.

That arrangement worked throughout the Cold War because most policymakers already knew which countries mattered and likewise knew a lot about them. Every US President from John F. Kennedy to George H. W. Bush witnessed the opening of the Cold War as adults, and thus learned the dynamics of the Containment strategy—and the key countries in the game. The Cold War dominated current events, university discussions, and, of course, military planning. Having decades of experience themselves, each president found the Intelligence Community effort to be additional to their own efforts—and thus *only* supplemental, albeit crucially so.

In the military as well, limited interaction prevailed. Behind their salutes and outward camaraderie, many intelligence and operations personnel were actually a little suspicious of each other, mutually afraid of security leaks. Contingency war planning was considered so sensitive that the intelligence people, ostensibly supporting the operators, were told remarkably few specifics by those very operators devising the plans.

That did leave many analysts with more time to hone their craft. Consider what they had to learn: In strategic intelligence especially, though not exclusively, every issue involves multiple disciplines: politics, economics, organizational behavior, infrastructure studies (terrain, transportation, telecommunications), engineering, and military science (ground, naval, air, space, nuclear, unconventional). Cultural awareness is imperative—which means knowing more than just some stereotypes. Every ethnicity, religion, and organization has a culture, usually several, their diversity and dynamics revealed only through study. Another analytical skill is to see events in true proportion, using historical experience to investigate across time and distance. An obscure event may possess more lasting significance than today's headline story—the former brewing as a future crisis, the latter likely to be forgotten within days.

Intertwined with analysis is communicating it. This can be remarkably difficult because many habits of ordinary conversation tend to be remarkably sloppy. *Well, everybody knows what I really mean! Same difference!* Little better are many habits of writing. In 1953, decades before instant e-mail rendered a quick spurt of typing preferable to a carefully crafted essay, Kent expressed his “sense of outrage at the infantile imprecision of the language” being used even then.[15] To craft language which is literal, concise, and not misleading requires editing, editing, and more editing. Analysts are thus encouraged, though less so these days, to write strategic studies on their own initiative: typically a few pages long, including an executive summary.

The luckiest studies somehow avoid a consumer’s immediate toss into his burn bag of classified trash, instead gaining a temporary but honored place on his desk, ready for a spare moment’s reading because the content remains relevant for at least six months, in some cases for years. Yet, even if the only readers are the analyst's colleagues, every study results from practice.

What’s In A Name? Sometimes Some Misunderstanding.

The efforts of Kent and his fellows to promote semantic precision could not, alas, counteract decades of Cold War routine. Misconceptions were spread, now all too common, of what “strategic” means and hence what strategic intelligence supposedly is.

One misconception is that strategic intelligence must pertain to a long period of time. In truth, strategic intelligence pertains to strategy, whereas the particular strategy of Containment lasted a long period of time. Containment emphasized patience: hold back the Communist bloc states until their internal troubles compel either their reform or their implosion. Since a long wait was expected, many strategic intelligence studies produced back then were trend analyses, forecasts, and multiyear estimates. If the timeframe of a strategic issue is short, however, as several are, the strategic intelligence should mirror that.

If that seems obvious now, it was not so obvious then. Even less obvious was a Cold War routine which encouraged the idea that “strategic” means long range. In 1947, the new US Air Force saw in nuclear weapons a means to inflict so-called *strategic bombing*—defeat an enemy by bombing his national assets, particularly his industrial cities. The US Army wanted nuclear weapons, too, for so-called battlefield use—to destroy Soviet Army formations in eastern Germany if they tried to invade the West. Two nuclear roles, strategic bombing and battlefield use, thus created two categories of nuclear weapons, strategic and tactical. Hence the assumption, still prevalent throughout the military today, that strategic means long range while tactical means short.

That assumption is false. Would a thermonuclear blast on a “tactical” battlefield have strategic ramifications? Of course. Consequently, today’s experts in nuclear arms control cannot easily define, in precise legalistic treaty language, what makes a nuclear warhead exclusively “tactical” or “strategic.” Not even the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), some 800 pages long, attempts to define the word “strategic.” START defines delivery systems, such as heavy bombers and inter-continental ballistic missiles. Its negotiators could have defined “strategic” as merely some agreed number of kilometers. Yet they did not, indeed quite sensibly.

Beware of What You Wish For...

By the time Bill Clinton assumed the Presidency in 1993, the Cold War was over and the world had changed.

Subsequent globalization has not homogenized it. What globalization has done is link more localities than ever before—via television, e-mail, phone calls, postal packages, and airplane flights. Usually the results are beneficial, a worthy trade in goods, services, and ideas. But whenever the “locals” somewhere grow restless, the response time left to “outsiders” (actually distant participants) is now acutely short.

Since a Soviet affairs expert is no longer “qualified” to speak intelligently about Africa, the Far East, Latin America, or even about today’s Russia, specialized expertise in that foreign area is now indispensable. Since terrorist networks can thrive in even the most anarchic and impoverished places, every country, indeed every province, now merits at least some intelligence attention.

In other words, today ought to be a golden age for strategic intelligence. Instead, what began in the 1990s as a needed intelligence reform—an attempt to reduce the analyst’s isolation from the policymaker—has overcompensated, the bureaucratic pendulum pushed from one extreme to another.

Some critics accuse the reform itself of having “politicized” intelligence, for it encourages more analyst-consumer interaction than was preferred during the Cold War. More interaction does raise some risks, of course, but there were risks, too, when the analysts were isolated. Kent himself realized this late in his career. Though he remained concerned about the potential for “group think,” he taught that analysts and consumers must communicate well enough that when an analyst warns of a coming international crisis, the consumer breaks away from his busy schedule and does respond, quickly—for he trusts in that analyst’s competence. Otherwise, without that trust and easy access, without that professional bond, warnings are too often ignored. “Warning is like love,” Kent quipped. “It takes two to make it.”[16]

The reform was initiated by Robert Gates when he was the DCI (1991-93). Drawing upon his experience as an analyst and an NSC consumer, Gates observed and proclaimed:

> *Unless intelligence officers are down in the trenches with the policymakers—understand the issues and know what US objectives are, how the process works, and who the people are—they cannot possibly provide either relevant or timely intelligence that will contribute to better-informed decisions.*[17]

Others agreed, including an important advisory body in 1996, the Clinton administration’s Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the U.S. Intelligence Community. Among its recommendations was this advice:

> *Intelligence must be closer to those it serves....The Commission believes [that the objectivity] problem is real but manageable. The need to present the “unvarnished truth” to policymakers is at the core of every analyst’s training and ethos....[At the same time, as one expert testified,] “if an intelligence analyst is not in some danger of being politicized, he is probably not doing his job.” The Commission agrees.*[18]

Hence the phenomenal change, one which the “Long War” on terrorism has since intensified. Whatever the consumers ask, the analysts now endeavor to answer with unprecedented single-mindedness. Likewise in the military, operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq have encouraged a much closer interaction between intelligence and operations personnel. Close intelligence support has enabled successes as spectacular as the capture of Saddam Hussein. And it tracks down terrorists.

...You May Get Your Wish—But Nothing Else.

Unfortunately, when the consumers’ obvious preference is for current and tactical intelligence, strategic intelligence faces neglect. Those analysts who grew up in the period when attention to strategic intelligence permitted them to deepen their skills and become genuine subject-matter experts have been dwindling away. Many have retired from government service for private sector jobs, or left the field entirely.

Meanwhile, a decade’s worth of younger (albeit very bright) analysts are being promoted with much less experience in that past crucible of analytical development. It is lacking because the skills necessary for strategic intelligence do not thrive in the equivalent of a crisis center, rushing from task to task, fact-sheet to fact-sheet, and blurb to blurb. “It's like cramming for finals, except we do it every day.”[19] If current trends continue, the high analytical standards of the past will go from standard procedure to “old school” to possibly a dead art.

Both the 9/11 Commission and the WMD Commission have noted this strategic intelligence deficiency, the latter’s report adding:

> *Managers and analysts throughout the Intelligence Community have repeatedly expressed frustration with their inability to carve out time for long-term research and thinking. This problem is reinforced by the current system of incentives for analysts, in which analysts are often rewarded for the number of pieces they produce, rather than the substantive depth or quality of their production*.[20]

Under the tutelage of the National Intelligence Council (NIC), there is now a unit of analysts, on rotation, officially devoted to strategic intelligence work. As beneficial as their work can be, however, the NIC itself has only 18 members. How many of the community’s thousands of analysts can they mentor personally? Not the mediocre, presumably. A former chairman of the NIC, Robert Hutchings, has even expressed concern that the NIC staff, the chosen few, has gotten too involved in doing current intelligence work in order to help produce the DNI’s daily morning briefings for the President.[21]

Simply ordering the community’s analysts to produce more strategic intelligence may seem the obvious solution, but decrees alone cannot change an analyst’s opinion of which product types would best advance his career. As long as any “strategic intelligence” products provide only “context” and not actionable strategic support, how can the tradecraft not actually languish? Whenever a crisis grabs the headlines, a bellicose Iran or North Korea for example, analyses are published of the “strategic ramifications.” But if those reports fall within the domain of strategic intelligence, they hardly fill it.

Garnering less attention are the less interesting issues and countries, presumably resulting in less expertise. There is some renewed interest in doing longer forecasts, but those particular analysts are generally separated from the rest, their experience confined mostly to themselves. Rotational assignments might help, but many years will pass before that specialized experience pervades the larger community. Furthermore, strategic intelligence work is something a young analyst should begin with, develop with, not “graduate” into after years of ignorance of it.

Who Says Nobody Wants It?

The need for strategic intelligence products actually does exist in today’s environment. To conduct counter-insurgency (COIN) operations, for example, the Army’s elite Special Forces have long used socio-cultural assessments of foreign peoples, the detail almost anthropological. Such strategic support is now needed by civilian and military agencies to contend with foreign corruption, terrorism, and civil affairs challenges. Consider these words from the Army’s journal *Military Review*, addressed to every American company commander in Iraq and Afghanistan:

> *Counterinsurgency is a competition with the insurgent for the right to win the hearts, minds, and acquiescence of the population...Know your turf. Know the people, the topography, economy, history, religion, and culture. Know every village, road, field, population group, tribal leader, and ancient grievance. Your task is to become the world expert on your district...Neglect this knowledge and it will kill you*.[22]

Also needed are multidisciplinary studies of the inner dynamics of countries and groups, their politics, economies, socio-cultural factors and so forth. Such studies are called Operational Net Assessments (ONAs) and produced (tellingly) largely by private companies fulfilling military contracts, not by the Intelligence Community directly. A study by the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board (DSB) has warned that “US military expeditions to Afghanistan and Iraq are unlikely to be the last such excursions.”[23] Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo—since the end of the Cold War the United States has initiated what are now called stabilization and reconstruction operations every 18 to 24 months, the average operation lasting five to eight years.[24]

Extraordinary in scope and detail is the intelligence such operations require. Likewise the military's most advanced theories and operating concepts, called *network-centric warfare* and *effects-based operations*, emphasize individual initiative, situational awareness at every level, and "self-synchronization" by everyone from a theater-level combatant commander to the lowly "strategic corporal." That support, whether labeled an Operational Net Assessment or mislabeled as "tactical intelligence" to garner it more attention, Kent and his R&A colleagues would have recognized as strategic intelligence. Most of the raw information required is even openly available, as the DSB study notes:

> *Open source information can be used to develop a broad range of products needed for stabilization and reconstruction operations—such as genealogical trees, electricity generation and grids, cultural materials in support of strategic communication plans, and background information for noncombatant evacuation operations*.[25]

The most vocal proponents of open source information assert that it could support as much as 80 percent of our intelligence needs, albeit as raw information.[26] But being openly available does not mean that it is entirely free, entirely on the Internet, entirely in English, or of impeccable quality. To effectively find, process, and analyze it requires the skill associated with dedicated strategic intelligence work.

Strategic intelligence must also support today's grand strategy of global democratization and its corollary, strategic communications, used in the global war of ideas. *Where throughout the world might transnational terrorists draw recruits and hide out? Where might illicit WMD be smuggled?* Among the possibilities are at least 50 countries so institutionally deficient in political freedom, managerial competence, and economic development that they teeter at the brink of state failure, their precarious situation too complex to judge with current and tactical intelligence alone. Whatever one's opinion of global democratization as a grand strategy, whatever the institutional capacity and transparency it either creates or fails to create, strategic intelligence is the means to identify its obstacles, opportunities, progress, and pitfalls.

Private companies and think-tanks can help, but only help. They do offer many fine products, but using those to fill every strategic intelligence gap will not end our neglect. For the quality of the Intelligence Community lies ultimately in its employees. Innately competent, their proficiency with high-technology is undoubtedly unprecedented. Yet, in comparison to generations past, have today's intelligence analysts achieved the highest intellectual breadth, depth, and rigor needed for these dangerous times? Are their consumers supported by analyses made as meaningful as possible? And as prudently strategic?

If these are deficient, the solution is in the performance of deeper research and greater practice performed inside the community's agencies themselves. Only through research that is thorough and multidisciplinary, honed by perseverance and humbling in its lessons, can the ostensibly "expert" knowledge of those analysts be enhanced to the level of truly superior insight.

Even then, strategic intelligence cannot render an analyst, or an agency, infallible. Sometimes even the smartest analyst will get it wrong. "It is when the other man zigs violently out of the track of 'normal' behavior that you are likely to lose him," complained Kent, speaking of Nikita Khrushchev and the Cuban Missile Crisis.[27] Saddam Hussein was another behavioral challenge. Good strategic intelligence can improve our odds of getting our analysis right, but only by demanding of us a lot more practice.[28]

Leaders Must Lead

Certainly the consumers deserve to be supported. We ought to remember, however, that the average consumer of intelligence was never asked, nor ever did he ask, to be made, in effect, responsible for how the Intelligence

Community runs itself, its priorities limited to his priorities, its only objective his daily whims. Hardly a prophet of future intelligence needs, many a consumer is just trying to survive the day, filled as it is with busy routine and deadlines so close that his own "long term" is usually measured in only months, weeks, or days.

With a schedule so tight, the intelligence support he wants is not for some nebulous "context" but for very specific information to help him avoid unpleasant surprises. Even then, he may not utilize that support until he finds the time, only to then complain that his intelligence needs are not satisfied. Yet, for all his complaints and demands, the average consumer does trust that the community knows its craft better than he. Someday, if not already, he will require more strategic intelligence than the community now offers, and he will expect those needs to be anticipated without his having to ask.

So what would improve the community's production of strategic intelligence? Putting analysts back into isolation would not be a solution. The interaction of analysts and consumers has had tangible benefits in today's complex era.

Another wrong approach would be to e-mail some directives, categorize the latest reports and studies, tally up what is produced in each category, especially the "strategic intelligence" category, and then report the supposed progress. That bureaucratic model would fail because for too many analysts the very definition of strategic intelligence remains mysterious. The community could multiply its official production of the things it is now doing and remain unchanged. Even if every analyst were ordered to attend a class of instruction, its lessons might soon be forgotten amid the "real work" of current intelligence production back at the office.

Still, a community-wide class on the fundamentals of strategic intelligence is needed. The class should be part of a campaign, with intelligence analysts gathered into auditoriums and given this message:

> *Strategic intelligence is essential, both for its products and in the experience of its production, for it constitutes nothing less than the integral intelligence support of a strategy, very often the national strategy.*

At the forefront of this campaign should be office chiefs, directorate chiefs, agency directors, even the DNI himself. When analysts see their senior chain-of-command taking this matter seriously, including a discussion of what strategic intelligence really is, they, too, will take it seriously. Of course many consumers will continue to want current and tactical intelligence, but they will no longer be treated as the only authority concerning what types of intelligence ought to be produced.

Once informed by strategic intelligence, a consumer who begins neither globally attuned nor strategically savvy can become both. Otherwise, going without it is like crossing a misty marshland without a guide. Even if every step forward is landed cautiously—a purely tactical consideration—the ignorant can still wander into quagmires where no informed traveler would venture unprepared. Consumers may not always call for strategic intelligence, but they will always need it. We must never neglect it.

Endnotes

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[23] Defense Science Board, "Executive Summary," in *Transition to and from Hostilities* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, 2004), iii.

[24] Ibid, iv.

[25] Ibid, xv. See also pages 147-52.

[26] Ibid. See also www.oss.net, the Web site of the private firm Open Source Solutions (OSS), Inc.

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