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The Typical CIA Political Analyst and What He Does

The typical analyst in the Office of Regional and Political Analysis is a 38-year-old male, (one of every four analysts is female), married, has done graduate work beyond the Master's degree, has a working knowledge of at least one foreign language, and has 12 1/2 years of CIA experience. The typical analyst is a GS-13 and has traveled to the area he is currently working on at least once in the last four years. His range of working contacts—apart from those in the Agency—include the NSC Staff member working on his area, the State desk officer and intelligence officer dealing with his country, as well as his counterparts in DIA and NSA and occasionally in USIA, ISA, Treasury, and Commerce.

He is a member of a learned society and has attended one of its recent conventions. He is conversant with the work going on in the universities on his subject and knows some of the more illustrious academicians in his field either by virtue of studying with them or under them in graduate school or through participation in professional conferences and seminars. He is also familiar with foreign experts, both governmental and nongovernmental, and is a regular reader of scholarly publications and journals containing articles on his specialty.

Within the past year, our analyst will have briefed or debriefed the US ambassador to his country or countries of responsibility and several members of the country team, including the Department of Defense attache. He will

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have briefed one or more members of Congress, a journalist or two, and
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He will, in addition, have contributed to articles appearing in the *President's Daily Brief*, the *National Intelligence Daily*, the Regional and Political Analysis publication for his area, and the *Weekly Review*. He will have written at least one intelligence memorandum, and within the past two years he will have produced a basic research report in his field of expertise.

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In the course of the average day, our analyst scans hundreds of pages of text. He makes at least ten phone calls and receives more in return.

During the day, he will have to coordinate an item for a current publication that impinges on his area if he has not written one of his own requiring coordination. In the latter case, he will often receive a phone call in the evening from the night duty officer regarding newly received information bearing on his piece. On the average of once a week he will be involved directly or indirectly with the preparation of an item to be transmitted to the White House situation room in a hurry. He will have spent at least part of his day on a Presidential Review Memorandum—either writing, coordinating, or attending an agency or interagency meeting. In the course of the previous two weeks he will have evaluated the reliability of a report from a covert source for the Directorate of Operations and within the previous month will have prepared a specific set of priority requirements to be used by a particular collection asset.

When he arrives in the morning, the analyst faces the overnight collection of State cables, Defense attache reports, DDO reports, FBIS output, and foreign and US press reporting. His first couple of hours are spent processing this mail and deciding whether there is anything that must be done immediately with it, such as volunteering an item for the daily newspaper. By midmorning, he will have waded through about 75 individual reports.

Should he decide to proceed with a current item, he will consume the better part of the day seeing it through the substantive review and editorial and coordination processes; coordination is usually particularly trying. There are also a good number of meetings to attend, such as working sessions on proposed Presidential Review Memorandums and National Estimates that can easily take two to three hours. In between the phone calls, the requests for memorandums, the drafting, and the coordinating, our typical analyst must keep abreast of the constant flow of mail throughout the day, discarding the junk and deciding what to do with the rest—where and how to file it.

Trying to husband enough time to sit back and think or to prepare a long analytical memorandum is a real challenge in a phone-jangling office of four or more analysts. This often requires that the analyst stay late or come in on the weekend.

In addition to keeping up to speed on his own area of responsibility, our analyst will have a back-up responsibility for another area. This is required to maintain the necessary flexibility in coverage to cope with such unpredictables as sickness, leave, and, above all, crises. If, for example, there is a flareup between Greece and Turkey, the analyst assigned that responsibility for the area cannot possibly handle it all by himself. Task forces must

be manned around the clock to meet the demands for current information. Moreover, every crisis invariably produces its wave of requests for basic information and new assessments or estimates—to which the analyst struggling with the current situation must also make an input.

There is, of course, no such thing as the typical analyst. We have tended to stress the current demands placed on the analyst's time. The Office of Regional and Political Analysis, however, is committed to basic research, as well as current and midterm analysis, and our goal is to have 20 percent of our work devoted to long-range, in-depth analysis. To do this, it is necessary for us to shelter the analysts involved in this kind of research from all current demands. We want our analysts to be able to do long-term analysis as well as current and midterm analysis, and they have a shot at all three.

To appreciate the analysts' role it is necessary to keep in mind the key aspects of his job. Among these are: (a) the many occasions which require him to produce from his available fund of time, knowledge, experience, and wisdom; (b) the material he receives in the way of current informational input and what he must do with it; (c) his essential data base and how he goes about acquiring it; (d) the process of analysis and how he goes about producing what he proposes to write or say; (e) his role in the progression from first draft to disseminated analytical product; and (f) what still may be required of him after he has presumably finished. The procedures for intelligence production are by no means cut and dried, and the ways in which analytical problems are solved are as numerous and varied as the problems that require analysis.

The Sovietologists and Sinologists are a special breed. They are dealing with closed societies whose newspapers are intended to proselytize, not to inform, their readers, and whose leaders strive to conceal the political process from their people as well as from foreign observers. The available data base is composed of disjointed, unverifiable, and often distorted fragments that must be woven into a coherent picture to be meaningful and useful to our consumers. In the labyrinthine world of Chinese politics, some major political events come as a surprise to the leadership itself.

The analytical process for all our analysts requires: marshaling what data are at hand, researching other data if there is time, levying requirements if it is determined that essential information is missing, finding out what others can contribute, thinking (exploring alternative answers is an essential part of the thought process), and self-review once an individual text is at hand.

To get to the writing, however, the analyst must decide how to utilize the data base available to him, and this will depend on: what has inspired his analytical undertaking, the kind of interpretative problem he faces, and how much time he has. All analysts personally retain records of previous

production, standard reference works, and current information files. How elaborate the last is, and how usefully assembled, will vary a good deal. In every case, space is a seriously limiting factor on how large a collection of data any analyst may retain immediately at hand, and frequently he will have to resort to retrieval of information from the Office of Central Reference or the Agency records

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A few examples may serve to demonstrate the diversity of approaches that may be involved in the effective use of the data base in producing an analytical memorandum.

(1) Assume, for instance, that an analyst is requested to comment within two hours on a press wire report of a new statement on a comprehensive test ban by a Soviet official in Geneva. With this kind of deadline, there are not a great many things the analyst will have time to check into. But before even attempting to make an evaluation, he would at least look into such things as the following: whether the wire service is a reliable one and the statement complete and accurate; when, where, and on what occasion the statement was made; who the official is and whether he is anyone of importance; what else he has recently said relevant to the test ban and how that relates to the known Soviet position; whether other delegates to the Geneva disarmament talks have recently made proposals on a test ban to which the official may have been responding; and what in general is the status of the negotiations. The analyst can, of course, be expected to know or recall some of these things, but if he does not, then he will have to try his best to find them in his files or appeal to those who may be in a position to lend assistance.

(2) At the other extreme, assume that a recent bombing episode in Madrid has been attributed to a far-right terrorist organization with Europe-wide connections and that the episode has inspired a member of the NSC Staff to request the Agency to "look into" the possibility that rightwing movements may be making a comeback in Europe generally. The deadline is a month away. Chances are there is no analyst who regularly follows this topic (in fact, none does). In this instance, then, the problem is one of assembling a data base. Without going through the whole process, the sorts of things the assigned analyst will do would include: searching the files of his fellow European analysts, calling upon his DDO colleagues to do likewise, initiating an OCR machine run and retrieval, consulting any work that State or DIA may have done on the subject, researching the material available in the public domain, and perhaps even seeking the assistance of better known experts in the field.

(3) A third example might be the production of a basic research paper on Iran within a six-month period. Here is a case where the analyst has ample time to sink his teeth into the problem. He might well start with a list of essential questions he would like answered. In addition to talking to knowledgeable people who have served in Iran, he would visit various archives and libraries that might have basic source material. He would not overlook the various foreign experts who have written books on the subject. Finally, he would plumb the Intelligence Community's data base for answers still eluding him. Out of all this, and from his own personal knowledge and feel for the country, he would produce a first draft to try out on his supervisor and other reviewers in the office standing further away from the problem. He would incorporate their comments as appropriate and send the draft on to the editors and finally the printers. In some cases an analyst working on a research paper of this sort might be authorized a trip to the country or area of concern in order to gain firsthand knowledge of the problem.

As we have seen, the basic charge laid on our corps of analysts is to keep abreast of developments, trends, and happenings around the world, ranging from the balance of power among the members of the Soviet Politburo to a change of government in Bangkok. They are called on to issue a quick analysis of an event whether it be a coup, a major policy statement, the Katangan invasion, or state elections in India. They are also expected to render interpretations of a series of events or trends in countries or regions. And while they may be called "political" analysts, who in today's world really understands what is going on without some capability in the other disciplines?

Thus, the deeper requirement, rather than merely keeping up with the daily "take," is for the analyst to maintain a broad competence along with an area or substantive specialty. This is done by relying on books, scholarly and journalistic articles, travel, attendance at meetings, and interchange with experts. The input may not be directly relevant to intelligence for policymakers, but it is necessary in order to enable the analyst to acquire new ideas and to develop new insights.

Two other groups—journalists and scholars—treat foreign areas or affairs. Both make a useful input to the world of intelligence analysis; neither is a substitute for it. The journalists report, quite a few of them analyze, and a smaller number are able to interpret events and trends. The scholar, on the other hand, can do such interpretation, but for the most part he writes in a different time frame and rarely addresses issues relevant to policymakers. The scholar is driven more by what he wants to write than by what events and customers dictate.

Maintaining intellectual capital for the individual analyst is a most difficult task given the demands and near-instant deadlines for briefings, analyses, and commentary. To acquire and then maintain a deep understanding of how a country or region or political system works requires time to read, to reflect, and to commit the results of reflection to paper for the consideration, argumentation, and reassessment by others. The pressure of reactive analysis is the enemy of this process. But this intellectual capital must be maintained, or the vital perspective that separates our people from the better journalistic analyst will be lost.

Another problem is maintaining a balance between expertise in depth on principal subjects and areas and the capability to shift resources to areas of interest as they develop throughout the world. Africa is a hot topic today. Three years ago a handful of people were all that it required. Now it constitutes a separate division, and we had to bring a number of people up to speed very fast to cope with the demands of those we serve. Next year's hot area might be Indonesia or Mexico, and we have to have people prepared to assume responsibility for such areas on a moment's notice.

Our typical analyst does not necessarily remain on one desk throughout his career. He will probably have shifted assignments at least once in the last 10 years. If he has not, and if for any reason he needs a change of pace, there are several possibilities open to him including such things as: a sabbatical year at a university, attendance at a senior service school, a rotational assignment in another office, a night senior duty officer position, or, very



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The Analyst's Viewpoint

Perhaps the major factor complicating the life of the average regional and political analyst is that he is many things to many people.

- To the Current Reporting Group, he is the logical person to produce articles on his country for the *National Intelligence Daily* and the *President's Daily Brief*;
- To his office's management, he is the source of midterm analysis for its regular publications and for intelligence memorandums focused on longer range questions;
- To the National Intelligence Officer for his area, he is almost always the best qualified analyst to respond to ad hoc requests from various consumers and to draft National Intelligence Estimates and other interagency assessments;
- To the Director of Central Intelligence, he is the source of Congressional and Presidential briefings and of ad hoc memos on particular aspects of his country;
- To the Assistant for Press Relations, he is the person to turn to for "no attribution" political briefings requested by various journalists;



- To the Directorate of Operations, his office is the only one qualified to evaluate clandestine political reporting on a continuing basis;
- And to a legion of people around town, his office—with the most extensive political files in Washington and the longest political memory on most countries—is the most reliable place to turn for quick answers to both esoteric and basic questions and for brief analytical comments on fast-breaking developments.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that, generally speaking, none of these requesters seems to know what the others are doing. As a result, the average analyst frequently has to juggle requests from several sources at the same time. If an overload develops, the only way to parcel out time—short of an analyst's own common sense and management instincts—is to ask the immediate superior to set priorities.

At present, for example, I am working simultaneously on current, midrange, and long-range projects. The political situation in my country requires frequent coverage in the *National Intelligence Daily* and the *President's Daily Brief*. When the current production pressures ease, I switch to a memorandum—about one-third completed—on the internal party problems facing the Communist chief in my country. At the same time, I am committed to draft this month for the National Intelligence Officer, portions of a National Intelligence Estimate (on nuclear proliferation) and of an Inter-agency Memorandum on the prospects for West European Communism. Each day, meanwhile, a stack of mail 2 or 3 inches thick must be read and marked for filing.

While all of this is taking place, the average analyst on a busy country is fielding a seemingly endless stream of phone calls, responding to various ad hoc requests. When some crisis erupts—a government collapse, a coup, an assassination—it is not at all unusual to spend most of the morning handling phone requests from people in the building and around town who turn instinctively to the regional and political analyst for the latest word on what's happening—usually in order to brief the Director of Central Intelligence, an undersecretary in one of the executive departments, or a general at the Pentagon. Frequently, it is early evening before the furor dies down sufficiently to permit enough reflection to draft a comprehensive article for the morning publications.

As hectic and frustrating as all this is, it is not without advantages. My personal view is that the pressure to stay on top of events, and to formulate concise and accurate judgments quickly, helps keep one in analytical trim. And the constant dialogue with people interested in the country exposes one to a wide spectrum of views and consumer concerns. Thus, when a memorandum does have to be done on a short deadline, much of the research has been frequently done in the course of coping with various daily pressures.

The system is far from perfect, however. Perhaps the greatest problem is that during a particularly hectic period some aspect of an analyst's work is bound to suffer from lack of time and someone is bound to think that his request is getting short shrift—even if, as frequently happens, one has put in a long string of 12-hour days.