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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC #00596-88
16 February 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
                  Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: David D. Gries
                  Vice Chairman

SUBJECT: How Your NIOs Can Help You

1. During a conversation before Christmas, you asked for ideas on how the National Intelligence Officers (NIOs) could save you time, keep you informed, and extend your reach in the Intelligence Community. I think you might get some good ideas from a brief review of how your predecessors used their NIOs. Afterwards, I will offer a few recommendations.

Origin of the NIO System

CIA Director Colby put the system into place in 1973, but it was actually Dr. Schlesinger's idea, conceived while he was still at the Office of Management and Budget, to appoint senior intelligence officers as Intelligence Community referents for key geographic and functional areas.

Schlesinger asserted that much of CIA analysis was irrelevant because analysts were out of touch with the policy community. He was not the only critic:

-- President Nixon faulted then CIA Director Helms for not exerting enough control over the Intelligence Community.

-- Kissinger complained that National Intelligence Estimates had lost their edge and that they sometimes reached unsupported conclusions.

-- Directors of other US intelligence agencies alleged that the Estimates were biased toward the CIA viewpoint.
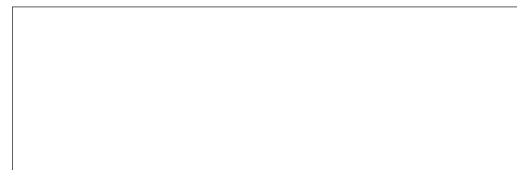
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Colby himself saw the need for improved staff support on substantive issues. Stretched thin by other demands, he could not afford to waste his time canvassing the Intelligence Community for information. As he commented in Honorable Men, My Life in the CIA (page 352):

> "I was troubled over how badly the machinery was organized to serve me. If I wanted to know what was happening in China, for example, I would have to assemble individual experts in China's politics, its economics, its military, its personalities, as well as the clandestine operators who would tell me things they would tell no one else. . ."

To help him with these problems, Colby appointed a number of senior, experienced people who combined intellectual energy with operational effectiveness, calling them NIOs. Thus, from the beginning, a close and special relationship existed between the Director and the NIOs.

Colby's successors, Directors Bush, Turner and Casey, retained the NIO system while imposing their own style and emphasis. Though the numbers and portfolios of individual NIOs have varied according to each Director's concerns and interests, the system has served all of them as a powerful yet flexible means of finding things out and getting things done.

The NIOs Under Colby

Colby assigned the NIOs the following functions (my breakdown, not his):

-- To provide staff support to the Director on substantive intelligence issues. Better one immediately accessible NIO on China than a roomful of China watchers. Colby used his NIOs variously to provide briefings, oral and written early warnings, unconventional analysis, and back-up support at meetings and on trips abroad.

-- To help the Director coordinate Intelligence Community activities. Colby realized that if the DCI was to take charge of the Intelligence Community as President Nixon was demanding, he had to have help. Not only could the NIOs give him advice in their areas of specialization; in some cases they could act in his stead. They were charged with organizing the key Intelligence Community players in their specialized areas; conveying to them the Director's goals, strategies, and priorities; and advising the Director of any weaknesses they saw in Community collection and analysis.

-- To manage the preparation of Estimates and other coordinated interagency products. In particular, Colby wanted the NIOs to ensure that these products represented the absolute best the Intelligence Community had to offer and that they accurately reflected the views of the whole Community.

-- To help make intelligence products more relevant to the needs of the policymakers. Colby wanted the NIOs to be his eyes and ears. He directed them to greatly increase and improve their contacts in the policy, business, and academic communities in order to identify the issues the Intelligence Community should be addressing and in what priority. Then the NIOs were to advise intelligence collectors and producers about any gaps in their efforts.

The NIOs Under Bush

Bush was not in office long enough to have much impact on the system, though he did issue a statement of goals for the NIOs--it was similar to the above breakdown--and he made a start toward formalizing the Director's control over their activities.

The NIOs Under Turner

Upon taking charge, Turner decided that the NIO system needed more structural coherence and discipline. To increase accountability and promote collegiality among the NIOs, he created the National Intelligence Council structure you see today. The basic NIO functions stayed the same:

-- Provide support to the Director. Turner met frequently with selected groups of NIOs to discuss intelligence topics; these meetings were usually scheduled some days in advance, but the discussions were unstructured except for an opening presentation. He took NIOs along with him on most of his trips abroad.

-- Coordinate Intelligence Community activities. Turner installed the NIOs as key players in various Community groups that examined requirements, gaps, and critical problems.

-- Supervise interagency production. Turner believed that managing the production of Estimates was the key function of the NIOs, and he stressed presentation of competitive viewpoints in Estimates.

   -- Turner regarded the practice of expressing dissent in footnotes as rarely helpful to policymakers. He insisted that dissents be highlighted and explain why two or more analysts with access to the same information should come up with different conclusions. As he wrote in Secrecy and Democracy (page 244), "The most valuable NIEs are those that present differences of substance clearly."

-- Help make intelligence relevant. Like Colby, Turner relied on the NIOs to ensure that Community production addressed the needs of the policy community. And like Colby, he encouraged the NIOs to make outside contacts, though he kept them on tighter leashes than Colby did.

The NIOs Under Casey

Eager to make a strong impact on the workings of the Intelligence Community, Casey turned early and often to his NIOs as agents of change. Interested in substance, he invited regular contact with NIOs he found congenial and helpful. He once remarked to the others that, "I don't see you very often, and that's your fault." Though Casey greatly increased the workloads of the NIOs, he allowed only a modest increase in their number: he wanted a small, hard-hitting cadre to whom he could relate personally. Despite considerable changes in style, the NIOs continued to:

-- Provide staff support to the Director. Casey expected instant expertise from his NIOs, the ability to produce on demand a three- or four-sentence update on any issue within their purview.

    -- He frequently telephoned or met NIOs to ask questions. They became his reference library for quick response items that came up during the day. He often asked for topical briefings before meetings of the National Security Council or other senior-level groups.

    -- He encouraged the NIOs to prepare short think-pieces on subjects they believed he should address--he specifically welcomed dissenting views and offbeat approaches that might illuminate an issue from a new angle.

    -- He continued Turner's practice of taking NIOs on many of his foreign trips.

    -- He often held short, unstructured, wide-ranging discussions with NIOs on subjects within their competence. Sometimes he would assign work during such discussions; more frequently he just listened and asked questions in an effort to increase his own knowledge.

-- Coordinate Intelligence Community activities. Casey was less interested than his predecessors in this function, and he tended to rely on his NIOs to represent him within the Community and to keep him informed about what was happening there. But he did worry about gaps in collection, and he urged his NIOs to keep the Community current on anticipated collection needs.

-- Supervise interagency production. Casey was determined to increase both the quantity and quality of Estimates. The number of Estimates produced more than doubled, with NIOs deeply and personally involved at every stage of the process.

-- Casey further upgraded the importance of dissenting views.
   Under Casey, these became "alternative views" that sometimes
   received nearly as much prominence as the majority view.
   Casey also pushed the presentation, where appropriate, of
   alternate potential outcomes.

-- He directed that Estimates routinely discuss relevant gaps in
   collection and production, and he expected the NIOs to take
   the lead in formulating and reviewing collection guidelines.

-- Help make intelligence relevant. Even more than Colby and Turner,
   Casey was determined to make Intelligence Community products
   address the issues that concerned the policymakers--and in ways
   that would help them make informed decisions.

   -- Casey put many of his NIOs in contact with Cabinet officers.
      In turn, some of them used NIOs as intelligence advisors both
      in Washington and on foreign trips.

   -- Under Casey, many NIOs spent fully a third of their time
      attending interdepartmental meetings and discussions at State,
      Defense, and the National Security Council and visiting
      corporations, universities, and think tanks. He also arranged
      for more NIO briefings of very senior officers, e.g., the
      President and Vice President.

   -- Casey believed that through such close and continuing
      interaction with the policy, business, and academic
      communities, NIOs would be able to identify subjects that
      needed analytical attention and help set priorities for
      Community analysis.

Recommendations

The NIOs are uniquely positioned to save you time, keep you informed,
and extend your reach.

What the NIOs can do for you:

-- Identify the few really important issues in each of their areas (so
   that you do not waste your time searching them out yourself) and
   then track these issues on your behalf. They can be your eyes and
   ears.

-- Provide you with one-stop shopping. The NIOs are just a phone call
   away whenever you need oral or written analysis of an issue. They
   can usually get it to you faster and more authoritatively than
   anyone else, and in whatever form you want. They can provide a
   Community viewpoint to complement or supplement the CIA viewpoint,
   and they are usually more aware of the views of the policymakers
   than anyone else.

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-- Represent you at various Intelligence Community and national security meetings.

-- Help you improve your ties with important outlying intelligence customers such as the regional military commanders.

-- Add to your intellectual capital in various ways, for example, through frequent discussions of developing problems in major issue areas.

-- Identify and help you focus on and rectify problems within the Intelligence Community, especially gaps in collection and weaknesses in analytical capabilities.

-- Serve as your principal agents in enforcing your standards of objectivity, creativity and usefulness in the Community's analytical activities.

-- Help you bridge the philosophical and structural gaps among the CIA's four directorates and among the various agencies that comprise the Intelligence Community. Community positions are often disparate, conflicting. When you need a single view, a bottom line, the NIOs can help you.

What you can do for the NIOs:

If you are to get the most from your NIOs, you will need to spend some time with them. You should make it easy for an NIO to get on your schedule for a brief discussion of something the NIO thinks you should know. You might ask an NIO for a quick and dirty update on something you are about to discuss with the Secretary of State or Defense at a White House meeting. Over time, you will learn which NIOs provide the best value in return for modest investments of your time and attention. With them you can then work out your own comfortable, informal, efficient, give-and-take arrangements.

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