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DCI-DESIGNATE
BRIEFING BOOK
4 March 1987NIC ORGANIZATION AND MISSION

The National Intelligence Council (NIC) is that Office of the Director of Central Intelligence charged with the preparation of National Intelligence Estimates and that constitutes the most senior, authoritative analytical/estimative body within the US Intelligence Community. As such, the NIC, as a successor organization to the original Board of National Estimates, continues a history of producing NIEs that was first established in 1950, and that--unbroken--has been continued since that time in support of the President.

As an organization, the NIC is directly responsible to the DCI, and although its members sit at CIA Headquarters, it is an Intelligence Community -- not a CIA -- function. Its members include CIA officers and selected senior officers from the National Security Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, the uniformed military services, academia, learned institutes, and the private sector.

The Chairman, Major General (select) Frank B. Horton III, USAF, oversees the activities of 16 National Intelligence Officers -- or NIOs -- with the advice of two Vice Chairmen. Each NIO serves as the Director's senior estimative officer for a region of the world such as East Asia; or a transnational issue such as terrorism; or a functional issue such as Soviet strategic programs. In addition to managing the production of estimates, NIOs are responsible for serving as the Director's personal adviser and representative in his area, preparing think pieces, briefing senior policymakers, and working with intelligence analysts and outside experts to spot new developments worthy of immediate policy attention. The NIC also has a small supporting contingent of about 12 senior Intelligence Community analysts -- called the Analytic Group -- who draft estimates and who seek out new areas for attention outside NIO responsibility areas.

THE PRODUCTS

There are four types of coordinated Intelligence Community papers. The most formal and authoritative of the four is the National Intelligence Estimate -- the NIE. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Such country specific NIEs are becoming less typical, as we seek to broaden our estimates

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regionally and functionally. Special National Intelligence Estimates -- or SNIEs -- are similar to NIEs but deal with more time-urgent issues. SNIEs are often specially requested by a policymaker and written in a matter of weeks or days.

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The two other forms of estimates are: Interagency Intelligence Memoranda (IIM) and Interagency Intelligence Assessments (IIA). Both are issued by the Chairman of the NIC, rather than the DCI. IIMs address more detailed topics, and IIAs are quick turn-around but usually of less immediate concern to senior policymakers than SNIEs. Finally, Memoranda to Holders may be issued for any of these four types of estimates, to update or amplify its judgments.

The total number of estimates produced between 1979-86 steadily increased to an almost even balance of NIEs, SNIEs, IIMs and IIAs. In mid-1986 the annual production plan was restructured to implement the DCI's decision to undertake more estimates that cut across traditional analytic disciplines and to reduce the number of conventional-style country oriented NIEs, particularly on areas of marginal policy relevance. This year the plan includes about 100 estimative products: a bit below the high levels of recent years with a mix of issue specific and cross-cutting papers.

THE PROCESS

In order to be useful to policymakers, estimates must deal with topics that are relevant and timely, and must reach the right officials before -- not after -- key decisions on the particular issues are made. The first and, in some ways the most critical, step in the estimate process is the generation of ideas and selection of topics to be considered. A policymaker or the Director may ask that the Community take a thorough look at an issue. Alternatively, an NIO or the Chairman of the NIC may initiate an estimate in order to anticipate policymakers' needs -- i.e., what he needs to hear, not necessarily what he wants to hear. Thus, successful NIOs are constantly in touch with their key consumers as well as specialists in their field.

In assembling these ideas, the NIC involves all of the components of the Intelligence Community in the rigorous process of developing and coordinating an annual production plan that is constantly updated throughout the year. Three DCI panels also participate in this process by providing advice on the analytic soundness and policy relevance of the plan and on key estimates in their fields. (The Military Advisory Panel is composed of 8 retired flag officers, former Ambassadors, systems analysts, and a university professor. The Science and Technology Advisory Panel is made up of 9 leading individuals in industry; and the in-house Senior Review Panel includes among its 5 members former Ambassadors, retired flag officers, and a distinguished academician.)

With DCI approval of the plan as a whole or of ad-hoc requests, the estimative process proceeds through 5 rather complex stages that involve all components of the Intelligence Community.

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Concept Paper/Terms of Reference (CP/TOR). The CP addresses the estimate's origin and purpose and asks key questions to be answered; the TORs outline in greater detail the central or pivotal issues to be addressed in the estimate. The CP/TOR are reviewed by the Community; representatives of National Foreign Intelligence Board (NFIB) agencies meet to discuss and amend them, and they are then approved by the DCI.

Writing of Estimates. The NIO supervising the preparation of the estimate selects a drafter from the NIC, or from the analytic offices of the CIA or one of the other agencies of the Intelligence Community. When the draft is completed, it is reviewed by the NIO and the NIC's front office, and by the DCI's Senior Review Panel. When possible, estimates are also reviewed by specialists outside the Community and other DCI panels to provide fresh perspectives. Estimates accommodating these comments as appropriate are sent to the DCI with a recommendation that they be sent out to NFIB agencies for formal coordination.

Coordination. Formal coordination meetings with representatives from the Intelligence Community are held, in which any differences are either resolved or highlighted, with emphasis on the latter when they are significant. Such dissenting views are clearly stated in the estimates as alternative language or footnotes.

NFIB Approval. Once an estimate has been so coordinated, the DCI reviews the paper. If he is satisfied with the quality of the product, he submits it to NFIB Principals for final coordination. NFIB, comprised of the heads of the government's intelligence agencies, reviews the estimate, sometimes challenges its judgments and adds additional alternative language or footnotes, and recommends that the DCI approve or remand it.

Feedback. Once an estimate is approved and published, feedback is sought from the policymakers concerning the relevance of the analysis. Further retrospective analysis is done as the topic is being prepared for treatment again to determine how the Community's views may have changed and why.

ASSURING QUALITY/RELEVANCE

A good estimate digs deep, probes for factual bases of disagreement, highlights the critical uncertainties, and raises questions that need more attention. Top quality estimates do not simplify a policymaker's job; rather an excellent estimate widens the policymaker's agenda and pushes the individual toward more extensive reflection. Getting a high quality, highly relevant product out of a process involving several agencies is a difficult task that involves several methods:

- NIOs attempt to integrate traditional areas of analysis such as policy, economic, social and military in many broad estimates. For instance, an estimate is in production on Islamic fundamentalism

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that will look at this as a regional phenomenon. This study will examine the influence this religious revival is having on the social patterns, economic practices, and political behavior of key Arab states as well as discuss the implications for the United States.

- Where appropriate, estimates cut across regional and functional analytic lines. For example, the NIC has produced an estimate on the prospects for counterterrorist cooperation among developed countries, and is preparing an estimate on the outlook for US foreign basing and access rights worldwide.
- NIOs attempt to challenge the Community to reexamine the conventional wisdom and in the process often includes alternative scenarios as well as indicators which will alert policymakers to a possible change in trends. An estimate [REDACTED] written in 1985 discussed a broad range of less likely succession possibilities which could be used in developing policy options. Estimates before 1983 had focused only on what the Intelligence Community believed to be the most likely scenario.
- When various agencies differ on an important issue, an NIO does not seek a consensus. Rather differences are highlighted either through parallel text or footnotes. In a groundbreaking estimate titled DOMESTIC STRESSES ON THE SOVIET SYSTEM, the main text stated that Soviet domestic problems are likely to push Gorbachev to seek a restoration of detente. The Defense Intelligence Agency and the Air Force took a different tack, arguing that Soviet internal problems are not a significant variable concerning Moscow's foreign policies.
- The product is reviewed at every stage and at the end, feedback is sought from policymakers, through formal and informal channels. One such channel is the NIC's recently-formed Policy Intelligence Review Group, involving State, DoD, and the NSC Staff, that looks at disconnects between estimate and ultimate policy. Less formally, it is enormously helpful when a senior official takes the time to write a note or call an NIO to give views on an estimate -- positive or negative.
- Finally, retrospective analysis. Each time an estimate is started on a topic previously addressed, NIOs take a hard look at the last estimate to see where judgments were right or wrong and why.

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ESTIMATES CHALLENGING CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Occasionally the press charges that judgments in some estimates were written to justify a particular pre-existing policy preference. The sensitivity of the intelligence business is such that these charges cannot be answered publicly. Examples of estimates that challenged the

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conventional wisdom, in some cases contradicted the assumptions underlying an Administration policy, or were in some way not congenial to these policies are listed below. These examples, moreover, were picked from a much longer list.

One recently published estimate concluded that for the next few years constraints on Soviet hard currency would not be serious enough to spur a major shift in foreign policy nor push Moscow towards fundamental economic reforms. The White House and some advisers at the NSC disagreed.

In three estimates on Libya spanning five years, the Community was far more cautious and pessimistic about the impact of US political, economic, and covert sanctions on Qadhafi than some Administration policy officials.

Major estimates on Soviet strategic programs have often dealt with controversial issues. [REDACTED]

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UPCOMING ESTIMATES

A few examples of estimates which will be published this year highlight the current thrust of integrating various analytical disciplines and crossing traditional country lines.

- One will take a regional look at ASEAN rather than the usual country or event-specific approach.
- Another will give policymakers a better understanding of the rapid shift in economic power to the newly industrialized countries in East Asia.
- The last is a totally new type of estimate, one specifically designed to focus on the unconventional. The estimate will look at about ten international high-impact, low probability events. Individually, the probability of these events occurring is low; however, their occurrence would have a dramatic impact on the international system. The Estimate will provide warning indicators of their potential emergence.

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