
Intelligence Community Reform: A Cultural Evolution

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We need to focus more on cultural change—less observable and less measurable—but infinitely more important than [who] is in charge of overseas intelligence operations.

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in Studies 54, no. 3 (September 2010). When this was written, the Robert Cardillo was deputy director of the Defense Intelligence Agency and deputy director for DIA analysis (since 2006). He

would become the first deputy DNI for Intelligence Integration under DNI James Clapper in 2010. In 2014 he became director of NGA, serving until 2019, when he retired from federal service.



Many recent commentaries on the state of Intelligence Community (IC) reform have focused on the provisions of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) and the organizational issues associated with the creation of the Office of Director of National Intelligence (DNI). Government organizations in particular gravitate to these kinds of observable developments and demonstrations of authority as measures of success or the lack thereof.^a I believe we need to focus more on cultural change—less observable and less measurable—but infinitely more important than whether the Central Intelligence Agency or the DNI is in charge of overseas intelligence operations. From my perspective, we have achieved significant cultural change since 2004.

Technology's Edgar Schein, a well-known scholar of organizational culture, defines it as

A pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration—that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.^b

In the IC, *our analytic tradecraft is our culture*. We often talk about changing the culture, but we can't just make it happen by articulating goals in a strategic plan. There must be some demonstrable change in our tradecraft—our actual daily business processes—and it has to work “well enough to be considered valid”

There are many ways to define culture. One of the most useful essentially focuses on how we do business. Massachusetts Institute of

a. See, for example, Patrick Neary, “Intelligence Reform, 2001–2009: Requiescat in Pace?” *Studies in Intelligence* 53 no. 3 (March 2010).

b. E.H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3rd edition (Jossey-Bass, 2004)

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before we can begin to achieve cultural change.

Culture change often results from a crisis—the so-called burning platform—exemplified by our intelligence failures early in the decade and the corresponding investigative commissions. Under DNI leadership, the IC has implemented several game-changing initiatives to address two major problems: the quality of the analytic process (identified in the WMD Commission Report) and information sharing (identified in the 9/11 Commission Report). Analytic quality has been largely a top-down process driven by policy changes, especially IC Directive 203, “Analytic Standards,” of 2007. Information sharing has changed through a combination of demographics, technology, and customer requirements, with policy catching up only recently. Great progress has been achieved, but we need to continue pressing on both of these issues to institutionalize changes to the point they become basic assumptions—in other words, part of the analytic culture.

Schein notes that culture can also evolve if driven by leadership with vision and persistence. He suggests that leaders identify a new problem or problems that an organization must address and over time develop the processes and patterns that work against that problem. In that vein, I would challenge the Community to focus now on where we need to be in five to 10 years and begin to drive the cultural changes required to survive and thrive. IC leaders must reinforce the enhanced expectations

of our analysts and hold the chain of command responsible.

We are at the pinnacle of our resource growth. Even with our currently healthy top line, in reality, our resources are shrinking as customer requirements continue to expand. I expect that we have as many analysts as we will get in the next 10 years—and I believe we’ve got to leverage this pool of talent more effectively if we aim to avoid strategic surprise.

Analytic Quality

Since I joined the analytic ranks of the Defense Intelligence Agency in 1983, the Community has certainly evolved. However, prior to the current round of IC reform, I don’t think we changed the fundamental analytic culture. We learned our skills from mentors—most training was on the job—in a guildlike mentality that emphasized, to different degrees in different agencies, our uniqueness. I exaggerate for effect, but the worst-case view was that we thought we had better information than anyone else, and we didn’t feel the need to explain ourselves to our customers or even to each other. Sure, there were intelligence surprises and shortfalls, but nothing that forced us to fundamentally reexamine our tradecraft—in other words, our culture. And while 9/11 was a spectacular failure in terms of the impact on our country, there was plenty of blame to go around. It was the national intelligence estimate on Iraq’s WMD capabilities that provided the real shock to the analytic system—and shook our cultural foundations. At the highest

levels of our trade, we produced a document that was fundamentally wrong. We had to change.

From my perspective, one of the most significant accomplishments in IC reform was the promulgation of ICD 203. ICD 203 codified good analytic tradecraft—much discussed but seldom formally documented in the 50-year history of the IC. Coupled with ICD 206, “Sourcing Requirements for Disseminated Analytic Products,” analysts are now forced to “show their work.” Doing so injects rigor into our processes and products and holds analysts and managers accountable for results.

It has not been a seamless transition. We have struggled with integrating the standards while maintaining the clarity and flow of our written products. But I think that everyone supports the basic premise. More than any other element of the ODNI’s analytic transformation effort, it has forced a change in the analytic culture—because it has redefined our business process.

ICD 203 mandates regular review of intelligence products for compliance with the standards. Regular self-examination should be a vital part of intelligence analysis, whether it is a formal lessons-learned process or grading against the analytic standards. DIA’s Product Evaluation Board (PEB) has been in operation for more than two years, providing feedback to analysts and managers as well as providing invaluable experience for board members to deepen their own appreciation of the standards. According to DIA’s PEB data, as well as data from the ODNI evaluators, our performance against most of the analytic standards has steadily

improved. My sense is that analysts and managers are still not entirely comfortable with this process, but over time this feedback will become the norm and part of the culture. And a key attribute of that culture needs to be a continual self-assessment and self-correction.

There has been some criticism that the standards drive analysts away from “making the call” because of the emphasis on evidence. My experience tells me this is not the case—the standards simply force us to be clearer about the evidence we have and the evidence we lack. There are plenty of ways analysts can communicate uncertainties when the evidence is lacking. Alternative analysis is one approach, and we need to become more sophisticated in employing alternative analysis in a way that will add value to our customers. Overall, given the potential for the IC to take less analytic risk in the post-WMD environment, I believe analysts are stepping out to make clear, crisp, relevant calls—and the process supports and encourages that. I do believe we must be quicker and clearer—as opposed to later and homogenized—and not be afraid to reveal analytic seams in the IC on key issues.

We’re still working through the second- and third-order effects of ICD 203. One of the most contentious issues during my tenure in DIA has been the analytic review process. Analysts believe their products take too long to get through the system—and there is some truth to that. Analytic managers believe they are providing much needed improvements to ensure products are meeting standards—with often differing

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interpretation of standards. We have developed general guidance to streamline the review process, based largely on an article written by former CIA Deputy Director for Intelligence Martin Petersen in this publication several years ago, with modifications to incorporate the analytic standards.^a

This is still a work in progress, and I’m not delusional in thinking that we have discovered the solution that will make everyone happy. I suspect this conflict is as old as the IC—it also exists in journalism and similar professions. But if we can sustain open dialog along the way, the end result will be better analysis.

Training is an integral component of any cultural change and has been particularly important in light of the large numbers of entry-level analysts joining the Community since 9/11. DIA has developed and shared a comprehensive entry-level analytic training program, which has continuously evolved and been improved based on feedback. Course work builds fundamental skills in data gathering, critical thinking, analytic methodologies, analytic standards, IC collaboration (incorporating the Intelligence Community 101 Course), and communications skills. We have also built and continue to tweak midlevel training to deepen those skill areas and prepare analysts for leadership positions. As we build senior-level expert training, I am particularly interested in emphasizing the leadership aspects of senior intelligence analysts and senior intelligence officers, because they play significant

roles in shaping and retaining our analytic workforce as they teach the culture to our new members.

Information Sharing

The track record is mixed, but I am optimistic that ICD 501 of 2009, “Information Sharing,” ultimately will have the same impact on our culture as did ICD 203. Progress thus far has been driven to a certain extent by the workforce, by technology, and by the customer, but with business processes now in place, we are poised to make huge strides.

Our workforce is forcing us to change. Almost a quarter of the DIA Directorate for Analysis workforce is 30 years old or younger. Whether we believe in generalizations about the generations or not, we have to acknowledge that those who have grown up with the internet are used to having information available at their fingertips, collaborating online, and networking as a way of life. We baby boomers in leadership have been able to keep up with them, though barely, with technology that leverages these strengths.

A-Space is a virtual work environment that provides IC analysts a common platform for research and analysis and connecting with colleagues. DIA agreed to be the IC executive agent for A-Space in 2007, and it has been gaining capabilities and adherents ever since. ASpace includes HCS/G/ORCON intelligence, for the first time visible to all users on the system rather than by-name

a. Martin Petersen, “Making the Analytic Review Process Work,” *Studies in Intelligence* 49, No. 1 (2005).

communities of interest. This mitigates against the catch-22 of having to prove you need access to material before you know that the material even exists.^a

A slightly different approach is being used in the *Library of National Intelligence* (LNI), where you can see the “card catalog” entry for all products but not necessarily access them without the right credentials. As outlined in ICD 501, analysts have the “responsibility to discover” and “responsibility to request” access to products that are relevant to their mission. We have to watch closely to see if this business process works as advertised. If analysts are rewarded for being entrepreneurial—the process works “well enough to be considered valid”—over time we will develop a culture characterized by intellectual curiosity. If they are thwarted or if the process is cumbersome and time-consuming, we will be reinforcing a culture in which analysts rely on what is easily found on their desktop.

Customers have forced us to share more information. Since 2004, the IC has deployed significant numbers of analysts forward to Iraq and Afghanistan—developing into what I call the expeditionary analytic workforce. Greater operational engagement is occurring—we’re leveraging information from the battlefield at the national level and allowing the staff on the battlefield to leverage national capability like never before. Stakes are higher and timelines are reduced.

This type of interaction has become the new, highly demanding norm. In Afghanistan, driven by the International Security Assistance Force’s counterinsurgency strategy,

we are pushing beyond the traditional boundaries of the IC—aggressively seeking access to critical information from other US government agencies such as the US Agency for International Development and sharing broadly and routinely with our allies. Of note, we have built on our theater experience with allies to create the first-ever multinational intelligence fusion center in Washington in the DIA Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force. This fusion center can be a laboratory for building the new processes and ultimately culture of information sharing. Our new expeditionary culture is changing not only how we do business, but for whom we do it, as we must engage the broader US government and international partners to address challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Lagging somewhat behind technology, demographics, and mission imperatives was the formal implementation guidance for information sharing. DNI McConnell signed ICD 501 as one of his last official acts, and DIA initiated the first official ICD 501 “case” in 2009. We have worked through many of these issues—mostly to DIA’s satisfaction. If we continue to work the system and get results, without compromising sources and methods, which is the driving force in the old culture, we will ultimately institutionalize the change.

Positioning for the Future

While I’m more than satisfied with our progress to date, we must begin to position ourselves for the future. I believe we need to start planning now for the inevitable decline in budgets

and resources. Analysts are a finite resource; we need to make the best use of their time and natural talents—first, making each analyst even more effective, and second, making our Community more effective—by creating processes and a culture that enable IC analysts to successfully address the most important challenges facing our nation.

Analysts currently spend a lot of time doing work that is somewhat ancillary to analysis. Data gathering is one challenge. Between open-source resources, message-handling systems, Intellipedia, Intelink, A-Space, LNI, and discrete dissemination mechanisms for sensitive intelligence, analysts could spend all day, for many days, seeking data. Once gathered, data can be cumbersome to array and analyze in ways that help make sense.

Moreover, as an unintended consequence of ICDs 206 and 501, analysts are spending a considerable amount of time on the mechanics of sourcing and metadata tagging their products, which is not the best use of their time. We need to support them with better tools so they can spend more time on the actual analysis as opposed to the front- and back-end of the process.

However, better tools will enable us to produce more products—they won’t necessarily drive analysts to do more analysis. DIA and the larger defense intelligence enterprise are very product- and task-driven cultures. We have many customers with a multitude of requirements, and we pride ourselves on our responsiveness. We almost never say no.

Making analysts more efficient, without creating other measures, will

a. A-Space was open to other users and renamed I-Space in 2013.

simply enable analysts to respond to more tasks. They won't necessarily be more effective against our long-term intelligence challenges. As we all know too well, what the customers ask about today may not be what they need to know about tomorrow. If we aren't performing analysis on strategic long-term issues that may result in a crisis 10 years from now, we aren't doing our jobs. But because no one is asking and tasking, we don't do as much as we should.

The balance between current and strategic analysis has been an issue for as long as I've been an analytic manager, but given the prevailing forces of our customers and our culture, it is likely to worsen without significant management attention. We initiated defense intelligence strategic research plans in 2009, and we are continuing to develop and refine the plans and the business processes associated with them. Only through senior-level attention to results—tasking the organization to solve the problem—will we sustain focus on long-term analysis.

Sharing the Burden

Even in the best of worlds, DIA could not do it alone, which brings me to my second point. We need to do a better job of burden sharing to make ourselves more effective as a Community. *Intelligence Today* has great potential to drive information- and burden-sharing among IC organizations. While the publication's intent is to better support our customers by providing the best production from across the Community, it will create an impetus to collaborate and share as analysts have more insight into what

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other organizations are producing. If nothing else, perhaps we'll be embarrassed by the redundant and duplicative production—about which we can no longer claim ignorance.^a

We still work in a free-for-all environment: agencies are writing on what they want to write. We are still competing against one another on many issues, the proverbial kids' soccer game. While competitive analysis is good to some degree, we cannot afford to compete in everything. With ever-expanding requirements and likely declining resources, we need to think now about how to task organize ourselves better.

During the last major downsizing of the IC in the 1990s, we created the DoD Intelligence Production System, now the Defense Intelligence Analysis Program (DIAP). We squeezed out some duplication among the services by creating the Combatant Command Joint Intelligence Centers and distributed coverage of foreign weapons systems among the service intelligence centers.

DIAP is not perfect by any means. However, there is an effective business process in place to task across organizations. Something that was revolutionary when it was introduced now is ingrained in the defense intelligence community culture. It is simply assumed that an intelligence requirement on submarines will be routed to the Office of Naval Intelligence and that a requirement on

tanks will be routed to the National Ground Intelligence Center and that they have the right expertise and will respond appropriately. There is a level of trust that we need to build in the larger IC.

One of my earliest discussions with my leadership team was over our mission statement. We got hung up on the question: Is DIA defense intelligence or intelligence for defense? Our current charter says that "DIA shall satisfy military and military-related intelligence requirements." My view is that we are operating as "intelligence for defense" when we should be operating as "defense intelligence" and deferring to other IC organizations with greater capability on many issues. Threat finance and sociocultural analysis are examples of mission areas in which we are engaging with few resources and to little effect, but we are unable to realign more dollars or people from traditional missions such as military capabilities without creating unacceptable risk.

Yet every time I've suggested that we rely more on other organizations for certain topics, my analysts and managers express a lack of confidence that those organizations will be as responsive as required when a flag officer or senior political appointee needs an answer. I cannot speak for other organizations, but I suspect there is a well-founded fear that the DoD behemoth would quickly take over all available bandwidth if allowed to task at will. But nothing will

a. In January 2013, *Intelligence Today* ceased operation after congressional budget cuts.

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work if there is no process, much less confidence that the process will work as advertised. We need to develop a process that addresses both of these fears and to demonstrate that it will work before we can begin to build a true Community culture.

Envisioning the Future

In many respects it took 20 years for the results of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act to change the culture of the US military. Joint duty is not just mandatory for promotion to flag rank, it is seen as desirable for any military career. Officers without regard to service affiliation are now fully integrated in combatant command structures up to the highest levels. It used to be assumed that an Army or Marine officer would be in charge of the US Central Command—it is, for the most part, aligned for land warfare. And the US Strategic Command would always be run by an Air Force general or a Navy admiral—who else would know how to launch nuclear missiles? It wasn't until the past decade that this paradigm was broken (General Cartwright at USSTRATCOM in 2004, Admiral Fallon at USCENTCOM in 2007). Thus, what these changes really challenge is our culture, which is the hardest to achieve but offers the greatest payback.

What might the IC analytic community look like in 2025, 20 years after passage of the IRTPA? I would expect that on the individual level, analysts will be active and adept at seeking out information from all

sources—IC, other government agencies, allies, and open sources. They will routinely ask for, and usually receive, access to highly classified intelligence that relates to their subject area. They will be able to ingest and filter enormous quantities of data with advanced tools, and perform multiple structured techniques to array, evaluate, and display information. They will seamlessly apply the analytic standards as part of their thought process and routinely incorporate feedback, evaluations, and lessons learned into their work. They will be practiced at developing products (whether written, oral, or multimedia) that clearly communicate assumptions, evidence, and assessments to our customers and will easily tailor products to different audiences and classification levels.

At the organizational level, the National Intelligence Analysis and Production Board (NIAPB)^a will have assigned each member specific topic areas on which that member is expected to maintain the IC's knowledge base. These organizations will have developed deep, specialized experience in the areas assigned. Our analysts will be fully networked and they will know whom to call for expertise on a specific issue, and we will be able to route requirements, regardless of customer, to the appropriate organization. The NIAPB and the National Intelligence Council will have identified long-term strategic research requirements, assigned responsibility for them to specific organizations, and will regularly assess progress, identify

shortfalls, develop mitigation strategies, and reevaluate the need.

In Sum

Just as was true for Goldwater-Nichols and DoD, the DNI is challenging the IC culture at its core. Where it was once insular and guarded, the analytic environment is much more interconnected and open. This attitude and acceptance are not uniform across the board to be sure, but real change has begun. And the newest generation of analysts brought on during this last decade knows no other way. With this foundation of collaboration and engagement, I cannot be more excited about the prospects for IC leadership as this generation moves into the senior ranks over the next decade.

We have had a very successful track record thus far in changing the way we do business. I commend the ODNI staff, the analytic leadership of all IC organizations, and the analysts themselves for redefining our trade-craft and our culture. But IC reform is a continuous process. I challenge all of us to consider the next phase, identify the problems we must solve, and create the new processes that will take us into the future.

It is the responsibility of IC leaders to set the conditions that will allow the newest, talented generation of analysts to help our customers succeed. The raw materials are in place, much of the structural foundation is there, and we're engaged with our customers like never before. Our challenge is to realize this potential.



a. Now the National Intelligence Analysis Board (NIAB).