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RETHINKING THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN INTELLIGENCE

INTRODUCTION

The role played by the State Department in the collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence is frequently overlooked. Yet through its posts around the world, the State Department is well positioned to collect certain kinds of intelligence information and to ensure that such information is integrated effectively with information available to the U.S. government from other sources. The Department also performs its own analyses of intelligence issues and participates actively in the preparation of interagency intelligence studies. The primary locus of these activities within the State Department is the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR).

INR was recently upgraded to full bureau status; an assistant secretary was appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. This step suggests an enhanced role for INR within the State Department, but it was taken without any apparent evaluation of the organization's functions or effectiveness, either by the Department or by Congress. Such an evaluation almost surely would have concluded that INR's competence in intelligence analysis is marginal, its contribution to the operations of the intelligence community is often counterproductive or redundant, and its focus has tended to neglect areas where it could play a useful role.

THE ROLE OF INR

When the wartime Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was abolished in 1945, a number of OSS employees were brought into the State Department to form INR, a

*This is the third in a series by the Heritage Foundation State Department Assessment Project. Upcoming studies will address such issues as how the State Department manages U.S.-Soviet relations, the Department's approach to Soviet espionage, and an analysis of the role of Foreign Service Officers.

new research and analysis unit. From 1945 to 1986, INR was called a bureau but operated under a director appointed by the Secretary of State instead of an assistant secretary appointed by the President. Although the National Security Act of 1947 created the Central Intelligence Agency as the focal point of intelligence analysis in the U.S. government, INR continued to function at State, a largely redundant participant in the intelligence process.

INR currently is headed by Assistant Secretary of State Morton Abramowitz, a career foreign service officer (FSO). The bureau has had five deputy assistant secretaries, but the number was just cut to three as part of the Department's 1987 budget reductions. The bureau's staff includes over 200 professionals, of whom half are FSOs on two- or three-year assignments. INR's primary functions are to represent the State Department in the intelligence community and to provide information from the Department to the community and from the community to the senior staff of the State Department.

High Level Policy. INR's influence within the Department stems mainly from its daily intelligence summaries and briefings on current and breaking events (called current intelligence) for the Secretary and other senior Department officials. Many senior State Department officials lack an understanding of the character of intelligence information generally as well as detailed knowledge of specific foreign policy issues. For this reason, INR's current intelligence reports and briefings can directly affect high-level policy judgments and decisions within the State Department as well as in the interagency committees.

All INR offices cooperate in drafting the National Intelligence Estimates (the best known of which is probably the annual survey of Soviet strategic nuclear forces) and other special analytic studies, which are prepared under the aegis of the National Intelligence Council. This is a group of senior government intelligence professionals that works under the Deputy Director of the CIA and reports to the Director of Central Intelligence. INR also conducts independent analyses of selected topics of current interest for use within the State Department.¹

Soft Line. INR sometimes is at odds with other bureaus and offices within the State Department, when they attempt to influence the interpretation of intelligence in ways favorable to their particular policy outlooks. By the same token, INR can be vulnerable to pressure from high levels within State as to the policy preferences of the Department as an institution. INR thus has tended to mirror the basic institutional and ideological outlook of the State Department on sensitive foreign policy and national security issues, especially regarding U.S.-Soviet relations and arms control. In fact, INR positions on such critical arms control issues as verification and compliance have tended to follow a softer line than those of the other State Department bureaus involved in this area, which are consistently more dovish than the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Department of Defense. As the rest of the intelligence community has moved away from many of the assumptions that dominated U.S. intelligence assessments of Soviet intentions

1. An overview of INR and its activities may be found in Jeffrey T. Richelson, *The U.S. Intelligence Community* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger, 1985), pp. 95-98, 253-254.

and capabilities during most of the 1970s, INR has been conspicuous in its continued willingness to give the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt.

INR AND THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

INR is a member of the group of federal agencies that is known collectively as the intelligence community. The other principal participants are the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organizations of the military services.

INR's claim to full participation in the intelligence community rests on the role of the State Department as a collector as well as a user of intelligence. INR is the conduit for the political intelligence gleaned from political reporting by ambassadors and State Department personnel around the world. The trouble is that much of the reporting from posts abroad is little more than translations of information appearing in the local press or media-type reporting on current events. High quality analytical reporting has fallen victim to a system that encourages volume.

Protecting Turf. In any case, INR has little to do with the processing or dissemination of such reporting within or outside the Department and therefore contributes little of value to the U.S. intelligence community. The real reason for INR's presence in intelligence community deliberations is that the State Department insists on being represented there to protect its institutional outlook and interests--to defend its bureaucratic "turf."

There is little justification for INR to have co-equal status with the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and the military intelligence services in the adjudication of controversial intelligence questions. On many issues of current or long-range intelligence, especially military-related intelligence, INR has little claim to substantive expertise. Yet in the drafting of National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs), INR has as much right as the CIA or defense intelligence organizations to argue a point or include a dissenting footnote. Indeed, observers claim that in recent years INR has been increasingly inclined to add footnotes to National Intelligence Estimates on Soviet military capabilities, Soviet weapons systems, and other areas in which it has little or no recognized competence.

Predictable Dissents. As many participants in the process observe, a contentious judgment in a National Intelligence Estimate concerning Soviet military intentions or behavior typically will find the CIA occupying a middle position, while DIA and INR dissent in separate footnotes for different and conflicting reasons. The effect is to give an aura of ideological dispute to what may well be an issue of serious technical disagreement between CIA and DIA analysts. In fact, INR dissents in NIEs tend to be entirely predictable, as they reflect purely political judgments based on State Department policy biases rather than interpretations of intelligence information by professional intelligence analysts. The perspective of such State Department intelligence analyses or dissents often is not the President's or that of the White House, but the State Department's institutional policy view.

In view of the concerns expressed by many in Congress and elsewhere concerning the potential for politicization of intelligence analyses within the U.S. government, it is surprising that INR's role has not been subject to greater scrutiny by the White House or Congress. In this case, politicization is not by the Administration, but by the bureaucracy, and not for political gain, but to support the policy biases of an institution and its career staff. Of course, the defense intelligence organizations are not completely free of pressure to distort intelligence for policy purposes. Indeed, this was a major reason for the establishment in 1947 of the CIA as an impartial source of intelligence analysis of military affairs.

In contrast to INR, however, the military intelligence organizations have unique technical expertise. With respect to political or economic analyses, INR fulfills no functions that could not be carried out more impartially and professionally by other government entities.

INR DEFICIENCIES

There are good reasons for encouraging diversity in intelligence analyses. This argument cannot be used to defend INR's role, however, because INR is not an intelligence organization. It is an intelligence coordinating unit that also engages in policy analysis using intelligence information. With only some exceptions, its professional staff members are not professional intelligence collectors, analysts, or interpreters, but foreign service personnel and academic style researchers with little or no background or training in intelligence collection or analysis.

Intelligence is a field, moreover, which does notoriously little to advance the careers of foreign service personnel. Foreign service officers are valued as effective operators in foreign societies, as quick and facile draftsmen of cables or reports, as personable representatives of the United States government abroad, and as negotiators of international agreements. The qualities of introspective analysis and relatively narrow specialization that make effective intelligence analysts are rare among FSOs. Most FSOs, understandably, prefer to be operators influencing events abroad, not analysts studying them in Washington. They do not seek, and in many cases actively avoid, assignment to such duties.

Last Resort. Half of INR's staff consists of FSOs on temporary assignment for only two to three years or even less. Often they are assigned to INR as a last resort because more appropriate or desirable positions are not available. Given the State Department's personnel practice of sending new officers to different parts of the world on their first three postings, most FSOs detailed to INR are unlikely to have an extensive substantive background in the area to which they are assigned; virtually none has a prior acquaintance with intelligence analysis. This lack of subject or area specialization, or experience or background in intelligence work, combined with the shortness of most tours in INR, produces intelligence amateurism.

A BETTER ROLE FOR INR

INR performs a number of useful and desirable activities. But there are others that could be handled better at the State Department by a suitably reconstituted INR. It could be argued that an INR that does not attempt intelligence analyses but manages effectively the huge volume of information handled by the State Department, while remaining the primary contact between State and the intelligence community, would be more useful to the nation's national security decision makers.

There is a legitimate requirement for an organization in the State Department to serve as its contact with the intelligence community. Such an organization is needed to process and disseminate current intelligence within the Department, to convey intelligence information, questions, and requirements to the community, and to monitor the progress of longer-term intelligence studies and estimates of interest to the Department that are being undertaken within the community.

Preventing a Rush to Judgment. In addition, the bureau should educate policy makers on the nature and limits of intelligence and on the proper uses of intelligence in policy analysis. Where serious disagreements exist within the intelligence community over issues of particular policy relevance for the Department, INR should ensure that these disagreements are fully understood at the policy level in the State Department, not rush to judgment on the merits of the issue, as is too often the case at present. INR also should be responsible for formulating and coordinating State Department positions on the allocation of intelligence resources and other intelligence policy issues, such as the balance between human and technical intelligence.

None of this is to suggest that the State Department should not do independent policy analyses based on current intelligence. But this is already being done within the substantive bureaus by the career FSOs who are experts in the geographical area or subject matter for which the bureau is responsible and who usually are the best available officers in that area or subject. If more detachment from current policy is considered desirable for certain reports, they should be written by the Policy Planning Staff, where knowledgeable and talented officers often are underemployed.

Worst Offenders: An area in which a reconstituted INR could play a needed and important role is in reviewing the huge volume of classified documents produced by the State Department and in developing general guidelines and specific recommendations for their declassification and use for policy purposes. The State Department appears to be the worst Executive Branch offender in its casual handling and deliberate disclosure of classified and other sensitive information. Leaking information to promote the Department's agenda is a way of life at State. Indeed, this casual handling of classified information accounts in part for Secretary of State George Shultz's strong objections to the use of polygraphs in the investigation of leaks of classified or sensitive information from the State Department.

Yet in some cases there are legitimate reasons for an Administration to release certain kinds of sensitive information, provided damage to intelligence

sources and methods can be prevented. In recent years, INR has taken the lead in reviewing, revealing, and opposing Soviet "active measures"-- overt and covert propaganda and political influence operations, including disinformation. An INR officer chairs an interagency working group that monitors Soviet active measures and declassifies and disseminates information about them; and the bureau recently created a staff to support this work. This is an important task. But INR could do much more to encourage and accelerate the public release of information on Soviet activities that might be useful in promoting national policy goals.

Hushing Up Soviet Cheating. For example, evidence of Soviet violations of provisions of arms control agreements often is kept confidential, as are the records of U.S.-Soviet discussions of compliance issues. A continuing program to review such information and consider possible advantages to the U.S. of selectively declassifying and making some of it public, and coordinating such declassification and release in the appropriate interagency forums, would be in the national interest. The careful, judicious release of information on Soviet behavior could help provide better insight into Soviet activities and intentions, leading to a more realistic public understanding of the prospect for successful agreements with the USSR.

Perhaps the most important function the INR could perform has little to do with intelligence. Much remains to be done to make the immense volume of diplomatic cable traffic readily accessible and usable throughout the State Department and in other agencies as well. More generally, there is a need for the integration of diplomatic, intelligence, and other information in data bases that are adapted to the needs of the users of foreign service reports, including the national security bureaucracy as a whole. Many valuable cables and analyses by experts now languish in bureau or office files, while potential users are unaware of their existence.

Restructured INR. INR's role could be redefined to give it responsibility for managing State Department information generally. The case for such a separate bureau at State, responsible for information management, is a strong one.² A restructured INR could become a modern information management staff, while remaining the most appropriate locus for State's necessary intelligence functions. Such a bureau could be the vehicle for a revitalization of political reporting within the Department. With greater assurance that significant analytical reporting from the field would not be lost in the welter of routine cable traffic, ambassadors and foreign service officers would have an added incentive to report more systematically and thoughtfully than they do currently.

It is to be hoped that reporting quality would begin to replace quantity or frequency as a measure of a post's or an officer's effectiveness. While the Department always has encouraged quality reporting in theory, many individual officers and supervisors have put a high premium on reporting everything in exhaustive detail. An effective information management bureau should improve that situation.³

2. John Krizay, "Making the State Department Work Better, Heritage Foundation *Institution Analysis* No. 29, July 27, 1984.

3. John Krizay, "Breaking the Logjam in State Department Reports from Overseas," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 615, November 9, 1987.

CONCLUSION

It is time for a fundamental reexamination of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. INR performs an important role in coordinating the transfer of intelligence information to and from the intelligence community and in handling it within State. With regard to intelligence analysis, however, INR performs largely redundant functions that it is poorly equipped to carry out. More important, its analyses are often institutionally biased and provide flawed guidance to the nation's national security policy makers.

Executive action could correct this situation. The President could:

- ◆◆ Issue a directive confining the State Department's participation in the intelligence community to the dissemination of information and analysis on matters for which the Department has responsibility and expertise.

- ◆◆ Task his Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board to review the current intelligence activities of the State Department to determine what INR does that is unique and not done better elsewhere and to recommend ways of improving the quality, availability, and usefulness of the Department's reports to the intelligence community and other users.

- ◆◆ Direct the Secretary of State to convert the Bureau of Intelligence and Research into an information management bureau with responsibility for all of the information resources and requirements of the Department of State.

The Secretary of State could:

- ◆◆ Issue an instruction that independent policy analyses based on current intelligence will be conducted not by INR but by the substantive bureaus or the Policy Planning staff.

Congress could:

- ◆◆ Monitor the conversion of INR to an information management staff and act on this matter if the President does not do so.

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