Differentiating Intelligence Roles

Moreover, given this diverse phase-space, conflating three distinct roles played by all-source intelligence adds to the underlying confusion over intelligence missions and functions, the priorities among them, their requirements, and the capabilities needed to make each effective. The traditional assumption that there were only two sets of intelligence consumers, each with distinct mission needs, often led to contraposing support to military operations, which was assumed to be tactical in focus, and national user support, which was assumed to demand deep analysis. In reality, meeting the disparate needs of the users intelligence must serve requires recognizing three distinct roles for all-source intelligence.\(^\text{16}\) Two of them, Support to Military Operations (SMO) and Support to Policy Operations (SPO), focus primarily on issues needing immediate information capabilities to assist decisionmaking on current operations. Although SMO and SPO issues are of interest to both national and departmental users, the third role, Warning and Estimative Intelligence (WEI), largely emphasizes issues that are almost exclusively the province of national users and usually take place over longer time horizons.\(^\text{17}\)

In all cases, however, although it still uses the term “support,” the Intelligence Community must move beyond the notion that it is segregated from the rest of the national security community and that it merely provides apolitical information to decisionmakers. Intelligence has now become an integral element of both the policy and military operational processes; and the success or failure of its judgments can have the most significant consequences in both domains.\(^\text{18}\) Increasingly-integrated military operations, in which intelligence directly drives operations, and command centers in which intelligence personnel are fully integrated, are tangible evidence of such changes. As a result, it is important that intelligence appreciate not only the central-

\(^{16}\) It is important to recognize that these regions have fuzzy boundaries, overlap to some degree, and are not totally distinct.

\(^{17}\) The intelligence role that often leads to confusion over appropriate categorization is warning, and especially the tactical warning component. Because warning is intimately connected to a decision on a responsive action, it is sometime mistakenly considered to be a decision-support activity; in reality, it is more appropriately seen as a part of the informative function that assists policymakers in thinking about issues before they occur, helping to create coherent, contextualized reference frames. Moreover, because tactical warning is tactical, it is often forgotten that it is of principal concern to high-level strategic users because it almost always involves activities that could have the most serious political and strategic consequences. Thus, these three roles cover two distinct functions: SMO and SPO emphasize situational awareness and immediate decision support, while WEI focuses on anticipation of future circumstances.