Review of National Intelligence: An Idea That Has Come of Age, Again?

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More than a dozen years after the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) initiated a program to systematically evaluate and improve the quality of Intelligence Community (IC) analysis, voices inside and outside the IC are questioning the value of those efforts and even the efficacy of the post-9/11 IC Analytic Standards established originally in 2007 and updated in 2015.

The ODNI's most recent focus on tradecraft has ample precedent, with allusions to standards evident in the literature of intelligence as long ago as the 1950s.[1] But it was not until the early 1970s, when faced with White House criticism of its analytical performance, that Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) William Colby and his IC leaders adopted a systematic program of evaluating community intelligence products. Under the aegis of Colby's Deputy DCI for the Intelligence Community (D/DCI/IC) Lt. Gen. Samuel V. Wilson and his Product Review Division (PRD), headed by a CIA senior intelligence analyst and manager, Richard Shryock, the effort may have been ill-fated from the start, surviving only 20 months. The institution of centralized community management methods, including evaluation of its performance, had frustrated Colby's predecessors, and Wilson and Shryock would suffer the same fate.[2] Still, the experience represents a lost opportunity for the IC to benefit from an integrated and systematic approach to the evaluation and improvement of the quality of intelligence the community provides to its customers.

This article examines the factors that spurred the Colby and Wilson initiative; how product evaluation fit into the larger Intelligence Community Staff (ICS) program to assess and improve the quality of IC intelligence; and the role of the *Review of National Intelligence* (*RONI*), the vehicle through which the PRD's findings were disseminated. The publication's reception and the factors that led to the DCI's decision to end the *RONI*'s publication provide insight into the IC's reaction to the evaluation effort.

The article then explores how the focus and nature of the IC's product evaluation efforts changed following the ICS reorganization in April 1976 and the *RONI*'s demise. Finally, lessons gained from the PRD's experience are considered in light of the ODNI's recent and potential future efforts to evaluate and improve the quality of IC intelligence analysis.

The views, opinions, and findings of the author expressed in this article should not be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations or representing the official positions of any component of the United States government.

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Impetus for Efforts to Improve the Quality of Analysis

The dissatisfaction of the Nixon administration with the IC is well known—Nixon having believed that his narrow defeat to John F. Kennedy in 1960 was at least partially due to the actions and inactions of intelligence agencies on the "Missile Gap" issue. But clashes with the IC over other issues, such as capabilities of the new Soviet SS-9 intercontinental ballistic missile, contributed as well.[3]

Nixon was not alone in his dissatisfaction. Andrew Marshall, a key member of National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger's staff, told a senior CIA Directorate of Intelligence officer in 1972 that there was a "sense of general dissatisfaction with the level of 'sophistication' of intelligence production." In fact, Marshall said that Kissinger once told him that "analyses and commentaries in the newspapers were superior to anything he read in intelligence publications."[4] Marshall was, in effect, echoing a March 1971 Office of Management and Budget study prepared under the leadership of future DCI James Schlesinger, titled "A Review of the Intelligence Community," which addressed a number of these problems. In particular, the report asserted that the IC's analysis and production had failed to improve in pace with gains in technical collection.[5]

Nixon moved to address these perceived shortcomings in November 1971, issuing a directive covering the organization and management of the US foreign intelligence community and noting "the need for an improved intelligence product and for greater efficiency in the use of resources allocated to intelligence is urgent."[6]

In a pleasant moment, President Nixon is shown here on his only visit to CIA Headquarters in March 1969. He would, however, have a strained relationship with intelligence. His national security team pressed Intelligence Community leaders to find ways to better evaluate and improve the quality of IC analysis. Photo © Everett Collection Inc / Alamy Stock Photo.

The directive drove IC actions and programs for the next five years and shaped the environment in which the discussion of analytic quality emerged. The directive laid out multiple objectives for the IC, including improving the "quality, scope and timeliness of the community's product."[7] To advance these efforts, the directive established the National Security Council Intelligence Committee (NSCIC), which was to "give direction and guidance on national substantive intelligence needs and provide for a continuing evaluation of intelligence products from the viewpoint of the intelligence consumer."[a,8] For his part, the DCI was given additional community responsibilities and an augmented staff to discharge them.[9]

More detailed guidance was contained in a 23 November IC planning document, which directed the DDCI for National Intelligence Programs and Evaluations to set up a separate entity to handle what hereafter was called "the Product Improvement function."[10] Named the Product Assessment Group (PAG), it would focus its initial efforts in four areas:

a. The NSCIC's members were the attorney general, undersecretary of state, deputy secretary of defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the DCI. The president's national security advisor was its chairman. According to historian Roberta S. Knapp, the committee rarely met. —*The Central Intelligence Agency: The First Thirty Years*, (CIA History Staff, 1990), 306.

(1) product evaluation; (2) study of production functions; (3) study of pilot or prototype production analysis; and (4) preparation of intelligence objectives and priorities.[11] PAG was to be staffed by personnel who were "relatively senior with both considerable production and analytical experience as well as a good grasp of the community."[12]

Product Review Group and Product Review Division: Missions and Challenges

By early 1972, the DCI had created the Product Review Group (PRG) with a small staff assembled from CIA resources[13] to undertake studies and conduct surveys to evaluate the quality of the community's intelligence product and its worth to consumers.[14] In talking points offered to Bronson Tweedy, the first deputy to the DCI for community management, the PRG chief said the group had, among other things, undertaken a historical review of past attempts to elicit consumer reactions to intelligence products.[15]

By March, according to a memorandum for the record of a conversation with Marshall about the PRG, the group had at least two studies under way. One was a study of the 1971 India-Pakistan War, which had been requested by the NSCIC; the other was a reexamination of analysis of the aforementioned thorny issue of the Soviet SS-9 missile. The possibility of undertaking studies of other crises was also raised.[16] The PRG also was asked to survey IC resources devoted to production activities and to determine whether and to what extent there was a need for products different from those then being produced.[17] In conjunction with these efforts, PRG was directed to use data to analyze the linkage between target priorities and the use of resources.[18]

The TORs assigned PRG "staff responsibility for studies, analyses, and recommendations which will support the DCI in execution of his assigned responsibilities to improve the US intelligence product."

Even as its work was under way, the PRG was developing the group's mission—terms of reference (TORs)—a draft of which was circulating in the IC Staff in May.[19] The TORs assigned PRG "staff responsibility for studies, analyses, and recommendations which will support the DCI in execution of his assigned responsibilities to improve the US intelligence product."[20] They emphasized that PRG would focus on two areas:

- (1) promotion of a meaningful interface between the IC and its consumers to improve the responsiveness of the intelligence product to national security and policy needs; and
- (2) preparation or supervision of studies and reviews as necessary for a comprehensive DCI program of product improvement.[21]

Such studies, the TORs stated, should explore how consumer needs were identified and communicated to the IC and include "evaluations of intelligence products by principal customers." The studies also should examine the IC production process, including "its inputs and outputs, division of responsibilities, extent of duplication, coordination involved, and resources used." Lastly, PRG assessments should investigate "analyst motivations, analytical techniques, tools for analyst support, and other factors involved in an effort to improve the quality of analysis applied to intelligence production."[22]

The record over the next 18 months suggests the PRG adhered to the TORs, although they appear never to have been formally approved. An early 1973 status report on six projects under way in 1972 listed them in three categories: Product Evaluation, Production Improvement, and Consumer Needs.[23] Memorandums during this period provide examples of these efforts, such as an analysis of CIA, INR, and DIA finished intelligence on Southeast Asia published between April 1972 and March 1973, which seemed focused principally on the question of who should be analyzing what. INR, the report deemed, was "the worst offender" in reporting on subjects thought to fall into the purview of either DIA or CIA.[24]

The historical record also reveals that PRG confronted significant challenges in executing its responsibilities. A May 1973 memo containing talking points for a meeting of the D/DCI/IC, then Maj. Gen. Daniel Graham, with William Colby[a] captured as much in its title: "Basic Problems, Prime Responsibility of Product Review Group."[25] The talking points

a. At the time, James Schlesinger was midway through his short tour as DCI. Colby was serving as the executive secretary of Schlesinger's Management Committee, whose job it was to follow through on Schlesinger's decisions.

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summarized the results of two areas of evaluation—"Current and Crisis Intelligence Support to the White House and NSC" and "Estimates and Other In-Depth Analyses"—and offered strategies on addressing shortcomings in both.[a] More importantly from the point of view of the PRG's functioning, the memo addressed PRG's challenges and needs:

> *Over the long haul, we want to be in a posture to review and critique all national intelligence products as they are produced to insure responsiveness, quality, etc. Meantime, we operate in ad hoc task groups to solve known problems. I need personnel sufficiently grounded in the several areas to wind up in the long-haul posture. Also, I need representation from all the production agencies to ensure the proper inputs to our reviews and recommendations.*[26]

This apparent appeal for resources, a more structured organization, and greater IC participation drew a handwritten note from Colby to Graham on 29 May observing: "It's a big bite—maybe too big at one gulp. . . . Shouldn't we select a few nibbles to start."[27]

Though the public record doesn't confirm it, the talking points may have led to an enlargement of the effort with the creation of the Product Review Division early in 1974. Consisting of 13 people—including 10 area and topical review officers—PRD carried on its predecessor's mission and faced many of the same challenges.[28] One such challenge was the continuing lack of a formal charter—as the terms of reference the PRG had developed earlier either were not approved or didn't lead to a more formal document.[29]

On 15 May, the PRD's deputy proposed the creation of a formal charter. In his proposal, sent to the D/DCI/IC, the deputy wrote that the lack of a charter was "something of a handicap." His explanation is worth quoting at length because it presaged the kind of reaction actual evaluations would get:

> *Because much of our mission is inherently difficult and unpopular—we are about as welcome in some quarters as tax collectors—we should make an extra effort to define our role in the Community. . . . The notion that PRD searches without warrants and proposes without proper credentials is not uncommon; it can probably best be refuted by revealing the existence of both—as issued by the DCI and elaborated by his Deputy for the Intelligence Community.*[30]

The proposal went on to acknowledge that the PRD's mission had not been defined in any one document and reviewed the sources of the PRG's and PRD's roles, going back to the president's November 1971 directive and subsequent DCI and D/DCI/IC documents up to December 1973.[31] Although not mentioned in documents directly related to the review, it is hard to imagine that the IC's spectacular failure to warn of the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973 did not affect PRD and IC Staff thinking at the time, as by December the staff had prepared and issued a "preliminary post-mortem" on the IC's performance before the war.[32]

The draft review proposal defined three primary functions: "product review," "product improvement," and "structural improvement." Each of these included numerous—and ambitious—subtasks. (See table on facing page.) Moreover, each contained elements present as recommendations in the post-mortem on the October failure, including improving warning mechanisms and development of a "family of national products."[33]

Systematic Product Evaluation—PRD's Main Business

Apparently the charter proposal went nowhere that spring, but PRD pushed on. By September 1974, the division's leadership had begun to question whether they were doing what they should be doing. In a memo drafted for PRD's chief, his deputy bluntly stated: "I believe the main business of the Product Review Division should be the review of finished intelligence production. I do not think we have been attending to that business properly and systematically except for the postmortems on the Middle East and the Indian nuclear test."[34]

PRD talking points prepared for a meeting a week later identified five projects the office was engaged in and opined, "the objectives of these

a. Essentially, the report found that duplicative and uncoordinated intelligence production was rampant and unhelpful.

Proposed Product Review Division Charter

***Product Review**—review and evaluation of IC performance in finished intelligence.*

- Assess the adequacy and timeliness of reporting, the quality of presentation and analysis, and the responsiveness of the intelligence product to the consumer's needs.
- Review effectiveness of the community as a conveyor of warning and as a provider of vital information during periods of crisis.
- In coordination with NIOs, contribute to the refinement of Key Intelligence Questions (KIQs), spur the development of the process which accompanies the KIQ procedure, and monitor the KIQ system

***Product Improvement**—improvement of the utility and quality of finished intelligence*

- Provide high-level consumers with better, more timely, and less redundant products.
- Continue development of the concept of the "Family of National Products," both to serial intelligence production and production during crises.
- Propose revamped warning mechanisms, procedures, publications, and doctrine.
- Develop systems (for implementation by NIOs) to ensure that serious divergent points of view are properly expressed in finished products, and it should formulate ways to introduce systematic challenge procedures into deliberations.
- Help find improvements to publication formats and production procedures.
- Find means to strengthen IC analytic resources by finding ways to develop propitious work environments, effective personnel management, highest possible level of individual competence.

***Structural Improvement**—addressing organizational issues affecting quality and timeliness of finished production.*

- Ensure that unnecessary production activities are eliminated and the IC adheres to a rational division of labor.
- Encourage the formation of closer and more fruitful relationship between producers and collectors of intelligence.

Source: Memorandum for the record, "Charter of the Product Review Division (PRD) of the Intelligence Community Staff," 15 May 1974 (URL at endnote #29)

projects are much broader than the name Product Review implies. They are designed to review and improve the performance of the community generally—particularly prior to and during crises. The emphasis is on management adjustments and bureaucratic mechanisms. Product review, per se, forms a relatively small part of the total effort."[35] The paper forcefully argued PRD should "address more systematically the specific function of reviewing the finished intelligence product. Such reviews should have as their main purpose the assessment of responsiveness to KIQs and to consumer needs."[36]

Support for focusing PRD's mission grew over the next month. A note attached to the initial 17 September proposal commented: "Dick, I like this idea, particularly . . . the concept that PRD should concentrate primarily and systematically on its primary functions."[37] Two weeks later, the draft proposal was reformulated into a memo for the D/DCI/IC entitled "Systematic Product Review."[38] The memo recommended PRD "initiate immediately a systematic program to review and analyze finished national intelligence products." As part of this plan, each PRD officer responsible for a geographic or functional area would "prepare on a monthly basis a report covering national intelligence production on his area. These reports will be essentially descriptive in nature, summarizing how much and what kind of production has been devoted to his particular bailiwick." The memo proposed beginning the first test study in October 1974. It would be focused on two major current intelligence products, the National Intelligence Bulletin (NIB) and the Defense Intelligence Notice (DIN).[39]

A slightly revised version of the September proposal was sent to General Wilson on 1 October.[40] It began:

> *The principal function of the Product Review Division is, as the name (imperfectly) suggests, the review of finished national intelligence. And the principal objective of such review is, obviously, to find ways to improve the quality and timeliness of national intelligence. . . . but, for a variety of reasons . . . we have <u>not</u> done so regularly or in a consistent manner. I believe we should, and I believe we can.*[41] (emphasis in original,throughout)

The proposal detailed how it was to be done. Each of its officers would review daily "all important finished national intelligence" and "assess

the pertinence, adequacy, timeliness, and general quality of coverage on a given topic, as viewed in the main through a Key Intelligence Question prism." PRD then would issue a periodic review (tentatively titled the *National Intelligence Review*) drawn from daily assessments. The memo argued that a regular KIQ-oriented daily review of published intelligence and periodic PRD assessments would serve multiple purposes, including providing data and background for special PRD studies and postmortem reports. The review also would identify gaps (and perhaps redundancies) in finished intelligence production, and be "a regular source of information and assistance to the NIOs [national intelligence officers] in their responsibilities associated with the KIQ/KEP [KIQ Evaluation Process (KEP)] enterprise."[42] The memo concluded by recommending that PRD test the procedures and concepts outlined in the proposal by conducting a one- or two-month trial.

General Wilson approved the trial beginning in October. A 7 October memo disseminated to all PRD officers provided a "review sheet" to guide their actions and ensure "uniformity of approach and some standardization of records."[43] The review sheet was intended to "serve both as a methodological guide and as a standard form for filing."[44] Evaluators used the review sheet to record the KIQs the paper addressed, notable highlights, and their overall evaluation.[45]

PRD action officers filed critical reports covering several geographic regions during October and November, which began to reveal the lens through which review was to take place. A reviewer of NIB and DIN products covering Latin America, Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey touched on the KIQs, utility, and efficiency: "current intelligence has not focused on the KIQs . . . [and] there is too much production for production sake . . . [and] analysts do not often tell the meaning of the facts they are reporting."[46] He concluded: "It is clear to me that under the right circumstances a systematic product review can help reshape community production into a more efficient form."[47]

Incomplete analysis	North Korea: MI-4 helicopter inventory increased (26 NOV NIB)	The implications of this inventory increase, if any, are not addressed at all. DIN 730 on the same subject leaves one wondering whether these are new helicopters or whether our old count was just too low.
Non-sequitur	PRC: The high level political inventigation of military leaders may be entering its final phase (DIN610)	There is no previous reporting on this "investigation." The article is also strongly based on inference from the evidence presented.
Dubious source	Korea: Additional tunnels may be under construction in the DMZ (DIN696)	The source is a "low-level defector" and the article itself suggests it is questionable that the source knows what he's talking about.
Apparent overstatement	PRC: Peking is experiencing difficulty in restoring order and political stability (DIN 532)	This article suggests that there are indications of "...a serious lack of national and local control..." in China.

Sampling of "bad examples" from November 1974 report on East Asia.

A summary produced at the end of November 1974 concluded that more than half of the 99 current intelligence products published that month were "marginal" or "filler." The report singled out multiple shortcomings in tradecraft, including contradictions of previous publications, titles not supported by text, dubious sourcing, overstatement, and incomplete analysis.[48] While November findings for other areas—such as current intelligence on the USSR and Eastern Europe—were more positive, even there deficiencies were noted.[49]

The two-month trial led to several recommendations.[50] One PRD officer urged that the division produce a pilot product entitled *The DCI's Quarterly Report on National Intelligence Production.* This report, he suggested, would be provided to a "very limited audience" to include the DCI, the NIOs, and the principals of the major production agencies. As envisioned,

> *. . . each chapter of the quarterly report would examine the quality of intelligence products provided the national consumer in a specific geographic or topical area. Where appropriate, products would be reviewed in terms of their contribution to the satisfaction of a KIQ.*[51]

Also suggested were the addition of annexes containing data that might help managers identify problems in coverage, redundancy, and the use of sources.

Another PRD action officer offered a separate proposal, suggesting the creation of a report to be called

"Notes on the *Review of National Intelligence*."[52] The objectives of the publication ranged from establishing a "regular systematic and effective way of carrying out our mission of product review" to providing "high-level national readers assurance that the community is seeking dispassionately to assess the quality and the pertinence of finished intelligence provided to policy makers."

The proposal also sought to "develop a means and a medium for regular feedback from the consumers of finished intelligence" as well as the establishment of a

> *statistical base concerning such matters as the relationship of produced intelligence to the KIQs, the relative contributions made to finished intelligence by the various collection systems (e.g., SIGINT, HUMINT, etc.), patterns of substantive emphasis in individual publications, and trends in the quality of the finished product.*[53]

The author argued that the *Review of National Intelligence* would "establish for the reviewing body [PRD] a methodology of review and a consistent course of internal intellectual discipline."[54] He finished by asserting hopefully

> *This enterprise is unique and has never been tried before. It is, I think, ambitious but feasible, and I think we need it or something very much like it. It will, of course, be controversial and no doubt resented in some quarters. But once established, with the backing of the DCI, it will, I think, be accepted (even if grudgingly) and can be influential. I believe further that it can be effectively responsive to the DCI's mission to guide the work and the allocation of resources of the entire community.*[55]

The *Review of National Intelligence* (*RONI*)

The PRD staff moved quickly to create a sample issue of the *Review of National Intelligence*. In December, they circulated one for limited staff and IC review and comment.[56] The *RONI*'s "Statement of Purpose" read:

> *PRD's findings have hitherto been presented only in special surveys (e.g., postmortem reports) and in informal reports to individual addressees. This new publication,* The Review of National Intelligence*, brings the work of product review to bear on a broader set of interests and concerns and periodically presents PRD's findings to a larger, community-wide audience. Our fundamental purposes in this enterprise are wholly constructive: to develop a series of extensive—and unique—files concerning various aspects of intelligence and intelligence processes; and to provide the kind of critical appreciation of published intelligence which will be of value to the DCI, to the USIB, and to the actual producers of intelligence.*[57]

The trial issue, covering products published during November 1974, as well as excerpts from the preliminary ICS postmortem report on the July 1974 Cyprus crisis and several other "special studies," received mixed reviews from the small test audience.[a] The director and deputy director of CIA's Office of Current Intelligence (OCI), the producer of two of the current products the *RONI* would review, were said to "have no major problems." CIA's deputy director for intelligence (DDI) had no "specific criticisms" but argued to limit distribution and to be "diplomatic" in the writeups. A letter from DIA's director, the recently promoted Lieutenant General Graham, was characterized as "the most critical." He took issue with the tone of the evaluations and the review of the DINs because he did not regard them as national intelligence.[58]

In any event, the first formal issue of the *RONI* went out with a covering memo from D/DCI/IC Wilson, initially to about 75 recipients in February 1975.[59] Wilson's memo advised its recipients, "We are seeking through this medium to provide the community with a systematic review and evaluation of finished intelligence products."[60] A second distribution went to a wider audience in March. Greeting readers on the first page of front matter was a statement from DCI William Colby (see next page), followed by a statement of purpose from General Wilson, which resembled the statement in the December 1974 issue. One change appeared on the cover of the issue: the journal's expected periodicity. The sample promised a bimonthly journal; the February issue promised that it would appear "several times a year."

For the most part, however, the February issue closely adhered to the

a. By the time the first issue appeared in December, the postmortem on Cyprus was complete.

A Statement from the Director of Central Intelligence

I welcome this first issue of the IC Staff's *Review of National Intelligence* because I see in this new enterprise an opportunity to further the community's efforts to improve the quality of finished national intelligence. I look upon this to a degree as a companion of our *Studies in Intelligence* publication, which also deals, in its own way, with matters affecting and attending the development of intelligence as a profession.

The reviews and critical appreciations which appear here should permit us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of both our coverage of current events and our estimates of longer term developments; the special articles and studies should help us to assess a variety of intelligence matters in a broad community perspective; and the statistical surveys should help us to examine the substantive focus of our efforts, their relationship to the KIQs, trends in production, etc. These at any rate are the hopes of the publisher and, indeed, represent my own expectations as well.

W. E. Colby

format and content of the December sample. The tone and nature of some of the critiques were similar as well. For example, the issue noted, "We plan for each period of review to announce the anonymous winners of certain unofficial contests sponsored by the reviewers of the PRD warren."[61]

The enthusiasm for the product General Wilson expressed in his cover memo was not shared by all of his IC colleagues, as was evident in notes of a 28 February USIB meeting that addressed the journal.[62] Lines of criticism called into question the qualifications of the *RONI*'s reviewers and raised questions about who actually should be providing feedback. Implying that too much of CIA's influence was present in the reviews, Treasury's William Morell viewed the February issue as "too self-congratulatory." State Department's representative, implicitly calling into question the qualifications of reviewers, recommended they be better identified. So, too, did the chief of DIA's China/Far East Division, who asked: "Who are all these anonymous people?"[63]

In response, PRD chief Shryock expressed reluctance to be too specific about the identities of his reviewers, but he suggested to General Wilson that he include in the next *RONI* a survey of the qualifications and experience of his staff members. That survey found that

> *all but one have had at least eight years professional experience in intelligence; four officers have had more than 23 years experience each . . . . Academically, the Division can count 12 bachelor's degrees, 7 Masters, and 3 doctorates, awarded by a host of diverse institutions (Notre Dame, Brown, the Naval Academy, Oxford, Johns Hopkins, South Carolina, Cornell, etc.). As is appropriate for a Community enterprise, PRD officers currently in place have joined the IC Staff from DIA, NSA, the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps intelligence organizations, and from three Directorates (DDI, DDS&T, DDO) and the E Career Service of CIA.*[64]

Wilson accepted the recommendation, and the qualifications were included in a note published in the June 1975 issue.

The participants in the 28 February USIB session seemed to reach a consensus that "evaluation of the intelligence product should reflect the consumers' views rather than merely the opinions of intelligence officers." But members were divided as to whether reviews should be vetted through NIOs or the NSCIC. CIA's DDI argued for using NIOs for that purpose, while Morell urged that the *RONI* presents "'candidly' the criticisms and proposals of policy-making officials" gathered through the NSCIC Working Group rather than the NIOs.[65]

Putting the critique in perspective, a senior PRD member observed in commenting on USIB critiques:

> *The aim of the* RONI *is improvement of product through constructive criticism (and praise). Improvement is a gradual process, never completed, and there are bound to be several minds about the process itself. The* RONI *is an instrument of continual dialogue, not a definitive, perfected statement."*[66]

The second RONI (Vol. 1, No. 2) appeared in June 1975. It reflected some revisions in structure, coverage, and approach to content.

Engagement of NIOs in the review of the *RONI* was a sensitive matter, both needed and problematic. As the IC's most senior analytic authorities, NIOs had their own responsibility for encouraging and evaluating the IC's performance in addressing KIQs and improving its analysis in their areas of responsibility. Thus, some in the IC saw NIO engagement in prepublication review as "incestuous," a problem compounded by the fact that NIOs were housed within a CIA structure at Langley and tended to be CIA officers. Thus PRD took care to establish its primacy in its call in May 1975 for NIO review of draft commentary to be included in the next *RONI*:

> *We would appreciate the pinpointing of any factual errors and the identification of any major judgmental differences between our accounts and your perceptions. . . . It is understood by all concerned . . . that while we will give careful attention to all NIO comments, the final authority and responsibility for the contents of the* RONI *must rest with us.*[67]

The June 1975 RONI *and After Action Comments*

The second *RONI* (Vol. 1, No. 2) appeared in June 1975. It reflected some revisions in structure, coverage, and approach to content. The first section was changed from "Highlights of the Review" to "General Commentary on Matters of Interest." This section contained six sub-topics: "Mayaguez," "A Curious Footnote to the Mayaguez Incident," "False Alarms," "Indochina," "The Defense Intelligence Notices," and "The CIA Weekly." All other sections maintained the same titles. The issue included, as had been promised in the February table of contents, letters from readers.[68]

USIB discussed the second issue at its 29 July 1975 session.[69] A point paper prepared for General Wilson for this session summarized comments received from IC elements. The paper highlighted a generally positive reception, citing State Department's INR director at the time, Bill Hyland, who said "he likes it very much and finds it useful."[70] Comments provided by CIA's Collection Guidance and Assessment Staff were likewise complimentary. The staff's 22 July memo to CIA's representative to USIB noted that "this issue is an improvement over its forerunner [with] more balance in the substantive presentations." However, echoing observations about the first issue, the memo suggested that more input from consumers was needed.[71]

Shryock's point paper again raised the issue of who should receive the *RONI*, which was central to resolving the criticism that consumer views were not being sought:

> *We still need to make the decision about* RONI*'s dissem outside the Community. This prospect creates real concern, but we think the members of the NSCIC Working Group should receive it. A common complaint about* RONI *is that it does not adequately represent the consumer's views; one good way to solicit such views would be through the further dissemination of* RONI.[72]

The point paper also promised a third edition in October 1975.[73] It would not appear until August 1976, after which it would not appear again.

In part, explanations for the delay could be found in the ongoing debate over fundamentals—what form, how to include consumer comments, and who should receive the *RONI*—which continued into the fall of 1975. General Wilson continued to address such concerns related to earlier editions and revisited fundamental questions about the journal's content. In responding to a 7 October 1975 letter from Assistant Secretary of Defense Robert F. Ellsworth, Wilson stated:

> *We are currently reappraising the form, content, and purpose of the* RONI. . . . *We believe, as you do, that* RONI *should pay greater attention to in-depth intelligence analysis (and relatively less to current intelligence) and our next issue will do so.*

Wilson ended by remarking:

> *I should mention that we heartily concur with your notion that* RONI *might serve as an 'ideal place to communicate what the consumer feels about the Community's performance.' We have hoped all along that, inter alia,* RONI *might ultimately serve this function.*[74]

In fact, effort had been expended to increase consumer involvement

Knoche may have had some other principle in mind, but for the RONI there would be neither onward nor upward.

in evaluation during this period. For example, in June 1975 a member of the NSCIC Working Group proposed creation of an NSCIC Sub-Committee on Evaluation.[a, 75] By fall, consumers were engaged in limited product evaluation, with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) having offered an evaluation of National Intelligence Assessment Memorandum (NIAM) 35/36-2-75: "Arab-Israeli Hostilities," 13 June 1975. The evaluation acknowledged that the published draft was a "substantial improvement over the previous draft," but it noted that the NIAM was "experimental in approach" and "relies on a subjective and judgemental method of analysis to estimate the outcome of possible Arab-Israeli wars."[76]

RONI*'s Future and Its Swan Song*

By December 1975 and well beyond the hoped-for October publication of the next edition, PRD's Chief Shryock expressed hope in a memo to his boss that, with USIB approval the previous July to continue, his unit could return to producing the next issue of the *RONI*, offering a March 1976 publication date.[77] The reason for delay, he indicated, was the work of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (the "Pike Committee"), which had by December essentially completed the investigatory phase of its inquiries into CIA and intelligence in general. That investigation included examinations of analysis as well as the better known supposed abuses of collection and covert action. Though the memo didn't say so, doubtless the IC staff had been heavily committed to providing material to both the Pike and Church investigations, which took place simultaneously in 1975. Were it not for the House demands, the chief wrote, "issues No. 3 and 4 would now be a part of history."[78] Unmentioned in the memo was the probability that William Colby, a prime sponsor of the *RONI*, was on the way out—George H. W. Bush replaced Colby on 30 January 1976.

In his December memo, once again, the chief took up existential questions about the *RONI*: "What should the next *RONI* look like, i.e., what changes should we make in its form, content, and objectives? Clearly some changes should be made." He pointed to a number of factors necessitating revisions, including changes in IC attitudes, leadership, and structure. He also noted that "outside interest in the IC's performance, and in evaluating that performance, is growing, and *RONI* should reflect (and capitalize on) this particular development." Lastly he acknowledged that PRD's "own perceptions—informed by experience and by reactions to the first two issues" were changing. The chief then outlined his vision for the revised *RONI*:

> *We envision, in general, a* RONI *that would be more responsive to the DCI's interests, broader in scope, open to more contributors, and slanted more toward the concerns of Community consumers. It would be less particular in approach, placing less emphasis on current intelligence, statistical breakdowns, and individual regional and topical commentaries. . . . All in all, the new book would be less 'picky,' more concerned with problems of broad scope, more of an IC Staff (vice PRD) publication. It would not discourage candor, nor would it shun controversy. But its overall tone would be, by design, more clearly constructive than in the past.* RONI*, in short, could serve consumer and DCI alike and become a strong and positive force in the Community at large.*[79]

Shryock's effort to resurrect and restructure the "long dormant" *RONI* was successful, although it was not in March but in August 1976 that the next, and final, issue appeared.[80] By then an IC Community Management Staff reorganization had taken place and General Wilson and Shryock, the journal's chief advocates, had departed. The change put senior officer Fritz Ermarth—a future director of the National Intelligence Council—in charge of the assessment enterprise, and clearly, as his preface to the August issue explained, his unit had other priorities and insufficient resources to generate the publication.[81]

a. Eileen Roach Smith—who served as the Executive Secretary for the NSCIC Working Group in 1975 and later in the IC Staff—made this point in a telephone interview with the author in March 2018. She cited her experience at NSA in the early 1970s, when she was part of an office that provided products to and sought feedback from deputy assistant secretary-level customers. She noted some IC elements held a mindset that was concerned about "getting too close to the consumer.

Following the preface that Ermarth used to announce the reorganization and the demise of the journal, the August issue reflected a number of the changes Shryock proposed in December. The first section—"Matters of General Interest"—was similar in title to the June 1975 *RONI,* but it covered broader topics; four of them were:

- *Intelligence Community principles*—presaging what would be incorporated in the 2004 Intelligence Reform Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) and ultimately Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203;[82]
- *The Practice of Intelligence Analysis;*
- *A National Sitrep*; and
- *DIA's Experiment with Uncertainty*.[a]

The August issue's other sections reflected similar changes in focus. Section II—*Specific Commentaries*—was broader in coverage and did not make use of the statistical summaries that had been prominent in the first two issues. The August *RONI* also included an article dedicated to the collection community and summaries of a staff study addressing the IC's use of new analytical methods and CIA's intelligence support for foreign and national security policymaking.[83]

The issue received very positive feedback from some quarters. Hank Knoche, then the deputy DCI, wrote to Ermarth,

> *This is a first-class piece of work in terms of both scholarship and ingenuity. I wish something like it could have been identified with my short tenure on the IC Staff, though I now feel a little better deep down because it was something along this line that I tried very hard to get the old Product Review Group to turn out.*

Almost as though he had not noticed the issue was the last, Knoche capped his note with the cheerful phrase, "Onward and upward."[84]

Another element undermining PRD's systematic product evaluation efforts and the RONI was the larger political environment that emerged by the mid-1970s.

Knoche may have had some other principle in mind, but for the *RONI* there would be neither onward nor upward. Ermarth nevertheless promised that "assessing the quality and relevance of Intelligence Community production will continue to be a most vital part of this job" and that this function would be performed by the PRD's replacement organization, the Production Assessment and Improvement Division (PAID) within a new Office of Performance Evaluation and Improvement (OPEI).[85]

The job, he advised, however, would place greater emphasis on "performance assessment that comprehends the entire intelligence process, from program inception through requirements definition, collection, information processing, analysis, and production, to impact on national policy." He stressed that "to do this job well, even on selected major issues, will be an enormous task. It does not appear that our manpower will allow substantive review of national intelligence for these purposes to be efficiently accomplished and effectively communicated through a journal like the *RONI.*"

He concluded: "The *RONI* helped to cultivate a self-critical spirit within the Intelligence Community. Its many authors and contributors are to be commended for their efforts. This office will enlarge on those efforts in future product and performance assessment projects."[86]

The Aftermath

What factors led to the cessation of the *RONI* and systematic product evaluation? Fritz Ermarth's preface in the August issue had focused on resources and other responsibilities to a new D/DCI/IC and Committee on Foreign Intelligence (CFI) to explain his decision. But signs of disaffection were clearly evident in the 20 months in which the *RONI* existed, and these undoubtedly played important roles.

One factor was the mission itself. Evaluating the quality of intelligence analysis was hard and not welcome by many, as PRD's deputy chief had summarized in urging in May 1974 the establishment of a charter for the journal. The fact that PRD's draft charter—like the PRG's terms of reference—was never approved speaks to the strength of IC opposition.[87] Pushback from some elements on the types of products evaluated[88] and questions concerning the qualifications of PRD's evaluators similarly

a. See "If the Weatherman Can . . . " The Intelligence Community's Struggle to Express Analytic Uncertainty in the 1970s," *Studies in Intelligence* 58, no. 4 (December 2014):19–30.

With the last issue published, PAID tried to carry out some of its predecessor's functions, but those were scaled back and concentrated in fewer areas.

highlight the frosty reception the PRD received in some quarters.[89]

Another element undermining PRD's systematic product evaluation efforts and the *RONI* was the larger political environment that emerged by the mid-1970s. Congressional investigations and exposure of CIA's "Family Jewels" contributed to a larger IC sentiment that there were enough problems without highlighting shortcoming in analytic quality in the *RONI*.[90] In fact, no intelligence postmortems had been requested or produced since the 1975 congressional leaks and the associated unfavorable publicity had surfaced.[91]

Personnel and organizational changes within the IC staff were other contributing factors, among them Colby's departure. Although DCI Bush strengthened the IC Staff and the final *RONI* was published during his short tenure as DCI, he did not share the stake that Colby did in its creation.[92] General Wilson left his position as the deputy director for IC affairs in April 1976 to become DIA's 5th director. Wilson had championed systematic product evaluation throughout 1974 and 1975. Wilson's replacement, Adm. Daniel J. Murphy, had neither Wilson's IC staff background nor a strong commitment to follow through on his predecessor's effort. In addition, the prime manager of the *RONI*, Richard Shryock, retired in June 1976.

If Not RONI, *What?*

With the last issue published, PAID tried to carry out some of its predecessor's functions, but those were scaled back and concentrated in fewer areas with new or added emphasis, such as IC-wide production resources and planning, while product evaluation, postmortems, and KIQs diminished in importance.[93] For example, an October 1976 PAID point paper questioned whether postmortems should be produced in the future:

> *Postmortems were once PAID's (PRD's) principal product but are they now a thing of the past? Have we moved into a new, less controversial era (the NSC review, etc.)? Should the ICS continue to conduct postmortems and other special reviews of IC performance and, if so, should they be limited to reviewing only the operational aspects of the IC performance (how well did the system function?) and not the Community's analytical judgments which always draw heaviest fire?*[94]

Ultimately, PAID decided to conduct postmortems but only as required.[95] PAID made one attempt to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the quality of IC intelligence as part of the *Semiannual NSC Intelligence Review*. However, unlike the *RONI*, the review overwhelmingly was based on interviews with users and producers of intelligence. The insight the *RONI* had provided through product evaluations, the identification of the collection sources used, and the linkage to KIQs was absent. The semiannual review program was discontinued after only one review.

A further reevaluation apparently took place late in 1976 or early in 1977. A point paper dated in January addressed what its unnamed author or authors saw as the key issues in the *RONI*. It noted concerns voiced by General Wilson and Knoche in December 1975 over "the amount of time PAID staffers had to give to producing the *RONI*—time taken away from other priorities." The paper went on to discuss what a product like the *RONI* should and should not be used for. It argued that it should not assess the adequacy or inadequacy of intelligence products involving only one community element. Echoing General Graham's comments from two years earlier, it noted that

> *. . . assessments of this sort, which are often generated to initiate corrective actions, would not serve a constructive purpose if "washed" before the entire Community. Indeed, such exposures could be unnecessarily counterproductive because institutional hackles would inevitably be raised, bureaucratic trenches built, and a lot of otherwise useful counter-battery staff time expended.*

The paper also asserted that the *RONI* should not be used as a vehicle to provide "macro-assessments relating to the adequacy/inadequacy of national intelligence products," e.g., material that could be included in the *Semi-Annual NSC Intelligence Review*, or "as simply a journal containing articles of intelligence nature prepared by contributors from various Community elements."[96]

If the *RONI* was to have any role, the paper went on, it would have to provide a "serious evaluation of the

quality, timeliness, usefulness and adequacy of the IC substantive intelligence performance" and "demonstrate and assert the DCI's leadership role." Ultimately, it concluded that the "potential value of *RONI* as a vehicle to improve IC performance is extremely limited."[97]

PAID's inability to fill the void left by the RONI's demise and the cessation of PRD's evaluation effort is reflected in a December 1978 report. The report—*Systematic Evaluation of Intelligence for Product Improvement and Program Justification*—summarized the results of "a study of two problems faced by the Intelligence Community: (1) lack of meaningful feedback from users on levels of satisfaction so as to cause product improvement and (2) nonexistence of qualitative or quantitative data justifying intelligence programs for use in making budget decisions."[98]

The report recommended the DCI sponsor a conference of CIA, DIA, and the service intelligence agencies to work out procedures for instituting a community-wide product evaluation system. While other forces may have contributed, the Center for the Study of Intelligence conducted an IC seminar on "Evaluating the Intelligence Product" 16 months later.[99]

Lessons for Today: Enduring and Evolving Challenges to Evaluating Quality

Many of the challenges confronted by the Product Review Division and its successors are similar to those the ODNI's Analytic Integrity and Standards (AIS) Division has faced. Certainly, determining the analytic quality of finished intelligence products has not gotten easier over time. Despite having a charter established in the 2004 IRTPA, AIS, just as PRD in the mid-1970s, has met with resistance from some IC organizations in executing its mission to evaluate IC finished intelligence products.

The closest the IC has come to such a product was AIS's annual report to Congress. Perhaps it is time to consider recreation of such a vehicle. . . .

AIS—like PRD—has had to respond to questions from IC organizations pertaining to the qualifications of its evaluators and the evaluation methodologies it employs.AIS also has had to exercise care in how its product evaluations are phrased to avoid the criticism levied against the PRD for using condescending or "cute" language. Product evaluations, customer surveys, and interviews are key tools for AIS, just as they were for PRD four decades earlier. Moreover, concern about who sees the evaluations is mirrored as well today. The information AIS shares with Congress and even other IC organizations remains a cause of disagreement.

As the ODNI continues to considers ways to improve and integrate its intelligence evaluation methods, what lessons do these efforts of four decades ago offer today?

Holistic evaluations are valuable and needed. PRD was ahead of its time in employing multiple evaluations in attempting to provide an integrated and complete view of analytic quality. The systematic product evaluation program launched by PRD in November 1974 closely examined what finished intelligence was produced, determined if the production was duplicative, and whether it addressed the IC's KIQs. PRD examined tradecraft and drew on surveys to incorporate feedback and insights from consumers.

ODNI's Mission, Priorities, Analysis, and Collection (MPAC) Group is currently considering steps that in many ways resemble PRD's holistic efforts, trying, for example, to integrate separate evaluation efforts by its collection, requirements, and analytic tradecraft groups. Such an initiative is becoming more important given new product formats, sources, issues, and consumers served by finished intelligence in the 21st century.

Regular feedback to IC members highlighting best practices as well as shortcomings on a broad range of issues affecting analytic quality continues to be important. The *RONI* was a vehicle for such feedback. It addressed multiple elements, from collection challenges to postmortems and the latest developments in analytic methods. There has not been a publication like the *RONI* in the years since the last issue in 1976.

The closest the IC has come to such a product was AIS's annual report to Congress. Perhaps it is time to consider recreation of such a vehicle—published regularly—to communicate integrated evaluations to those in and outside the IC. Such a publication would aid in capturing and injecting valuable lessons learned into IC training and work processes.

Perhaps the most important lesson provided by PRD's 20-month effort to evaluate the quality of IC analysis and publish the *RONI* is to remind us of their end objective—product

improvement. As PRD's chief noted in 1975:

> *There is . . . no particular reason why this unit is called the Product Review Division . . . rather than (somewhat more accurately) the Product Improvement Group, other than the unfortunate acronym formed by the latter. This matters little, but does serve to make the point that, obviously product improvement must proceed from a basis of product review.*[100]

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Editor's note: Wherever possible, sources are hyperlinked to locations at which they can be retrieved. The redacted and declassified documents can be found through the CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), though here they are directly linked to CIA's electronic reading room.

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