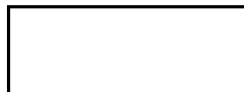


Production (1)

IC 74-2137

27 November 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR:



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SUBJECT:

Challenge Mechanism

1. I think your paper is a valiant effort to explore the feasibility of institutionalizing a challenge mechanism. Certainly the comments of your highly qualified contacts are informed and persuasive--and a little frightening. In spite of the effort to be objective, their message comes through very clearly. They appear to believe that the producer of finished intelligence is almost always right and that he should be left alone to get on with the job. Destroying ONE was an "institutional" mistake and saddling the producer with a challenge mechanism would only compound the error. Given your premises and the backgrounds of your interlocutors, your rather pessimistic conclusions are hardly surprising.

2. It seems to me that the development of a viable challenge mechanism would be more manageable and realistic if the term "institutionalizing" were taken less literally and if the purpose of a challenge mechanism were more clearly defined. Taking the latter point first, it is my view that the primary purpose of a challenge mechanism should be to assist production analysts to overcome three occupational hazards to which, according to our post mortems, they are generally, and sometimes seriously, subject. These are:

- Preconceptions: the tendency to discount information that runs counter to long-held convictions;
- Reinforcing consensus: the tendency for divergent views of individual analysts to be submerged in a sea of conventional collective wisdom;
- The current intelligence syndrome: a myopic view of the wood because of too great a focus on the current intelligence trees.



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3. Under this definition, a challenge mechanism is not a means of presenting dissenting views to the customer. (This is a different problem and is already being acted on in various ways.) It is a means rather of reminding, nudging, alerting the analyst--telling him, in fact, that in spite of his widely acknowledged expertise he may have overlooked or unconsciously suppressed something important.

4. Who, then, is going to perform the function of saving the analyst from the built-in weaknesses of his profession? Clearly the answer is not to try to set up a competing "challenge" group that in knowledge, background, acumen, and access to information has the same attributes as the analysts being challenged. The challengers would inevitably suffer the same weaknesses as the challenged. Clearly what is needed as challenger is an individual or group that does not have preconceptions (at least not the same ones as the pros), is not burdened by the consensus of colleagues, and does not read every scrap of current intelligence. To be a responsible and believable critic, the challenger would presumably have to know a great deal about the substance of the matter he is critiquing. The validity of his challenge, however, would rest not primarily on the scope of his knowledge but rather on the different perspective he would bring to the problem at issue, a perspective untrammelled by the occupational hazards of the professional analyst.

5. Where would you find such people? In my view, they are scattered throughout the community and in relatively large numbers. They are the "old China hands," "the old Near East hands," the former Kremlinologists, or even the bright, young case officer just returned from the field--people who can be expected to have all kinds of interesting and perhaps useful insights into developing intelligence problems but who, at least currently, have no direct role in the production of finished intelligence.

6. How then do you arrange to transmit to the production analyst the different perspectives and possibly useful insights of these outsiders? This gets to the problem of "institutionalizing" and management style, particularly the DCI's. I think a possibly useful analogy is what Mr. Colby has done on the (small w) warning problem. Instead of thinking in terms of new bureaucratic entities, new lines of communication, and new assignment of responsibilities (as many in the community did, as revealed by the attitudes of USIB representatives

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at the first meeting of the ad hoc committee set up to review the problem), Mr. Colby said simply that when the community believed that the policy maker needed to be warned, he (the DCI) would warn him through the medium of an Alerting Memorandum. The NIOs would be responsible for preparing the memorandum for the DCI's release, but any element in the community could propose, or even initiate, it.

7. In the case of a challenge mechanism, the person to be warned is, of course, the production analyst rather than the policy maker. But in other respects the two systems would appear to me to have a great deal in common. Any member of the community (and perhaps even consumers of intelligence) would be encouraged to prepare a "challenge" memorandum whenever, in his view, a particular product was significantly misguided or weak. These memoranda would be addressed to the producer--the NIOs in the case of NIEs, the Editor of the NIB in the case of articles therein, etc.

8. The production analyst would be under no obligation to modify his views as a result of "challenge" memoranda, any more than Dr. Kissinger is under any obligation to take seriously an Alerting Memorandum sent to him by the DCI. Whether, in either case, the message "gets through" will in the last analysis depend on its quality.

9. As for institutionalizing this concept, I would suggest that all that is needed (as in the case of Alerting Memoranda) is for the DCI to explain it to USIB and say "Let's do it." I think that at a minimum it would be an interesting experiment.

BSI
 [Redacted]
 Deputy Chief, PRD

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