

TITLE: Communications to the Editor:
 An Unworkable DI Process

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COMMUNICATIONS TO THE EDITOR

An Unworkable DI Process

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argued that most of the DI is troubled by the process and that some were "pessimists" who believed the entire edifice was rotten; some were "cynics" who believed it cannot be fixed but are content to live with it; and some are "optimists"—no further definition of this breed, whom I have never encountered, is necessary.

I would argue that there is another group, "the guerrillas," who regard the review process as a major liability in the DI's war for the consumer's attention—a war we are losing. The guerrillas believe that most of the edifice is rotten, are not content to live with it, and believe that the process should be focused on winning the war. Because the guerrillas see the costs of the war as they interact with consumers regularly, they are in no way advocates of gentlemanly debate.

The DI is fighting for the minds of its consumers. It competes with the proliferation of readable, fast, and informative open-source publications and electronic information services. Standing at their side are small intelligence shops at almost every agency we profess to serve. These undermanned but not outgunned units cull intelligence from much of the same sources the DI uses, and they get it quickly and efficiently to consumers they see every day, targeting the information with deadly accuracy.

Meanwhile, in the DI, an Intelligence Memorandum (IM) on the same subject on which the most interested deputy assistant secretaries have already been briefed, wends its way to its fourth or fifth reviewer. This situation prompts the guerrillas to ask: If the review process is killing us slowly, is this any time for reasoned debate?

I believe that most guerrillas would concede the DI does a good job in many respects. For example, task forces and working groups under considerable

pressure put together publications rapidly, and daily intelligence is served by editors who ask the right questions and put out a corporate product of which we can be proud. But this is a small proportion of what the DI does. IMs, which were envisioned as quick responses on current topics, remain bogged down in the same old process.

It is particularly troubling that many of the genuine strides the DI made under the prodding of former DCI Gates—a cult hero to DI guerrillas because of his demands for alternative scenarios and more creative ways of looking at problems—are hurt by a process that brings these products to a consumer too late. I have even heard reports that consumers would be willing to bear the burden of split infinitives and the occasional misplaced comma if the information could be made more timely.

The Russian military had a saying: "The perfect is the enemy of the good." It strikes the guerrilla observer as a cold irony that if the DI does not follow that advice it is likely to face the same budget constraints as those who made the phrase famous. At this point, an "optimist" might dismiss a radical change by saying that we cannot allow standards to slip without losing a product that has a unique corporate identity. According to the guerrillas, however, something has to be done or this painstakingly created product will be dismissed by consumers.

As a first step toward greater timeliness, each DI paper that faces the review process should bear a "policy due date." This date would verify to everyone that the paper is policy relevant and that someone in the producing office has had contact with the potential recipients of the information and knows when they want it. The author or his immediate supervisor should know the policy atmosphere so well that he or she can easily argue why this particular

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Communications

date works. Someone with authority should have a daily tracking sheet for the product, using the due date as an absolute barrier: if the paper is not produced on time then the entire project gets trashed, and no one gets credit for his effort. If for some valid reason the product cannot be produced on time in writing, an oral briefing should be delivered.

Another way to speed up the process would be to allow each reviewer a single shot at the paper. Most managers should be able to fix what troubles them in one reading. As self-confident achievers, they should

be able to trust their judgment and allow a paper to go forward after one look.

If the DI does not take such steps to break the bureaucratic gridlock inherent in the existing review process, the guerrillas believe much of the work of the Directorate's well-trained and dedicated experts will be of little value to its key consumers.

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