

Synthesizing with Clients, Not Analyzing for Customers

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What if the Intelligence Community were to reimagine itself as a service-provider geared to engaging in goal-focused conversation as a well-defined regular activity? What, in other words, would happen if the IC were to become a provider of knowledge services, rather than a producer of information?
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What is the Proper Distance Between Analysts and Policymakers?

Histories of the early stages of the modern Intelligence Community (IC) concur that by the start of the Cold War, most senior policymakers wanted more information to support their strategies and so tinkered with ways to configure an IC supportive of those efforts. There is no suggestion, however, that they were ever concerned about analysts somehow getting too close to them, and so usurping their policymaking prerogatives. The fear that analysis might be tainted or compromised by proximity to the policy process seems to have come entirely from the analytical community, which struggled from the beginning to keep itself at arm's length from policymakers.

Even though analytic units have begun in recent years to lean closer to policymakers by offering “opportunity analysis” and by sending analysts into National Security Council support jobs, the idea that a firewall between analysts and policymakers is needed remains an IC shibboleth.

For example, the homepage of the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence on CIA's public Web site says that its analysts “help provide timely, accurate, and *objective* [emphasis added] all-source intelligence analysis...[to] senior policymakers,” and it further points out that “While the CIA does not make foreign policy, our analysis of intelligence on overseas developments feeds into the informed decisions by policymakers and other senior decisionmakers in the national security and defense arenas.”¹

The reasons for maintaining this “objectivity” were best articulated by Sherman Kent, the founder of CIA's analytic tradition, but the assumptions on which he based his insistence on a firewall go back at least to the beginning of the 20th century. In his 1949 book *Strategic Analysis for American World Policy*² Kent endorsed a position advanced a quarter century earlier by Walter Lippmann, who had argued in *Public Opinion* that “every democrat feels in his bones that dangerous crises are incompatible with democracy, because the inertia of the

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the authors. Nothing in this article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations.

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Fearing that the newly discovered entity of "public opinion" would inhibit the "very few"—policymakers like President Woodrow Wilson, for whom Lippmann had been a staffer—because of what he called "plebiscite autocracy or government by newspapers,"⁴ Lippmann argued that the only way to ensure "impartial and objective analysis" (Kent's term⁵) was to create what Lippmann termed "intelligence officials" who would be "independent both of the congressional committees dealing with that department and of the secretary at the head of it" so that "they should not be entangled either in decision or in action."

Thus, in Lippmann's words, "The only institutional safeguard is to separate, as absolutely as it is possible to do so, the staff which executes from the staff which investigates."⁶ The alternative, Kent later warned ominously, would be what he called "captured intelligence" or, even more ominously because the term came from the Nazi lexicon, *kümpfende Wissenschaft*, which Kent translated as "knowledge to further aims of state policy."⁷

The problem with this system, however, is that if analysts keep themselves too far apart from policymakers, they have no way of knowing whether the

policymakers want, need, or even use the "objective analysis" they churn out—a problem Kent himself recognized. In a 1948 letter to CIA director Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter about the function of the Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE), Kent warned, "Since [ORE] has no direct policy, planning, or operating consumer to service within its own organization...it is likely to suffer...from a want of close, confidential, and friendly guidance." He offered the following solution.

ORE should be brought into closest and most direct contact with consumers such as the National Security Council...having an ORE officer represent CIA (or participate in CIA's representation) at NSC staff discussions would have two great benefits: (a) It would assure ORE of knowing the precise nature of the consumer's requirements; and (b) it would enable ORE to convey to the consumer the precise dimensions of its [ORE's] capabilities. It is to be noted that these two matters interlock: when the consumer knows ORE's capabilities, he may change the dimensions of this requirement (add to it, lessen it, or reorient it), and, when ORE knows the precise dimensions of the requirement, it may deploy its resources in such a fashion as to enlarge its capabilities. So long as liaison

*between consumer and ORE is maintained by someone not possessed of the highest professional competence in matters of substance and firsthand knowledge of ORE's resources, that liaison is almost certain to be inadequate for the purposes of both ORE and the consumer.*⁸

Closely linking analytic components with their immediate customers was not a new idea even then. Assistant Secretary of State Donald Russell had tried something very similar a few years before Kent's letter, when he attempted to realize the recommendation of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)—a participant in the discussion about the nature of postwar national intelligence—that "the principal intelligence operations of the Government should be organized at the point where decision is made or action taken, i.e., at the departmental, or lower, level and not within any single central agency."⁹

The so-called Russell Plan, however, was never implemented in any meaningful way, in part perhaps, because it had been undercut from the beginning by an interdepartmental Advisory Board on Intelligence chaired by Sherman Kent.¹⁰ Whatever the reason, Russell's warning, that "the policy recommendations of a research unit which is not organizationally integrated with operations are very likely to be theoretical judgments with little basis in reality," was largely forgotten over the decades to come.¹¹

Tactics, Not Strategy

The emergence of the Soviet Union as the West's main opponent obscured a major part of Russell's warning, which specifically concerned strategic policymaking. The kind of analytic support that Kent envisioned—analysts standing behind policymakers “with the book opened at the right page, to call their attention to the stubborn fact they may neglect”¹²—almost inevitably drives analytic support toward tactical intelligence, rather than the strategic, but it worked well for the IC's Cold War glory years, because the nature of the Soviet Union and the means to face it were such that tactics all but merged with strategy.^{a13}

Periodically, however, “objective analysis” came under fire for failure properly to serve the nation's strategic policy goals. In 1966, for example, a CIA Inspector General's study—usually referred to as the Cunningham Report¹⁴—done in response to criticism that the IC had failed to “adequately consider the broader question of the slowly developing Sino-Soviet dispute” concluded the CIA was collecting “too much information and that, failing to get important information, it

^a The deep granularity of IC analysis of the USSR is vividly conveyed by the list of declassified products which is maintained by the Federation of American Scientists—these include such “strategic” products as *Strategic Value of Construction and Road-Building Machinery to the Soviet Orbit* (13 June 1951), *Soviet Strategic Weapons: Background for SALT* (1 November 1969), and *Implications of the 1975 Soviet Harvest* (17 March 1976).

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was flooding the system with secondary material,” thus “degrading production, making recognition of significant information more difficult in the mass of the trivial.” The reason for this excessive collection, the Cunningham Report charged, was that “there was no definition of what the government really needed from intelligence, so the community operated on its own assumptions, which tended to cover everything, just in case.”

Five years later, in 1971, the Schlesinger Report, prepared when James Schlesinger was at OMB, worried that “the impressive rise in [the] size and cost” of IC operations had not been met by “a commensurate improvement in the scope and overall quality of intelligence products.”¹⁵ The reason for this, just as in 1966, was that

the consumer frequently fails to specify his product needs for the producer; the producer, uncertain about eventual demands, encourages the collector to provide data without selectivity or priority; and the collector emphasizes quantity rather than quality.

In 1976 the Church Committee repeated the Cunningham and Schlesinger charges that “collection guides production rather than vice-versa.” As before, the

reason for this “glut of paper” was that

*evaluation of the intelligence product by the consumers themselves is virtually non-existent.... Rarely, if ever, do high officials take the time to review the product carefully with the analysts and explain to them how the product could be improved and made more useful to the policymakers. The intelligence community, then, by default, evaluates its own performance without the benefit of any real feedback.*¹⁶

The same criticisms surfaced again in 1996 in the report of the Aspin-Brown Commission, “The Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community.” The commission had been convened in part out of concern about the continued cost of the IC, and in part to discuss what the nation's intelligence needs were after the Cold War had ended.

Two of the commission's six major recommendations concerned the analyst-policymaker firewall. Making a point quite like the one Kent had tried to make to Hillenkoetter, the commission's first recommendation was that

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intelligence must be closer to those it serves. Intelligence agencies need better direction from the policy level, regarding both the roles they perform and what they collect and analyze. Policymakers need to appreciate to a greater extent what intelligence can offer them and be more involved in how intelligence capabilities are used.

After recommending measures to increase IC intra-community information sharing and more efficient, less costly production, the Aspin-Brown Report then returned to the analyst-policy-maker issue:

Intelligence producers need to build more direct relationships with their customers, take greater advantage of expertise and capabilities outside the government, and take additional measures to improve the quality and timeliness of their output.¹⁷

Do Policymakers Care About a Firewall?

Although separated by decades, all of the above mentioned reports describe essentially the same phenomenon: the persistent metric for the IC is output, not utility. Ironically, the system resembles a production process in a Soviet-style

planned economy, where higher-order management determines production quotas for what *ought* to be manufactured, without regard for whether the end-users really want or need what is coming out of the production cycle. Kent and his colleagues may have called their end-users “consumers,” just as the IC tends today to call them “customers,” but it is a telling omission that virtually no IC product delivery system has an easy way to check “sales.” The percentage of products actually used, by how many people, of what rank, and for what purpose, is a closely guarded secret in most analytic shops, if that information is even collected at all.

This is not to say that the output of this system has no value to the end-users, but it does mean that it is more by luck than design that a product proves to be useful to a consumer. Although the Schlesinger, Church, and Aspin-Brown Reports all worried about the financial impact of what Schlesinger called the “gross redundancies” of the existing system, the present system continues to flourish because it costs the policymakers nothing. Just as the Church Committee noted that “consumers tend to treat the intelligence product as a free good [so that] instead of articulating priorities, they demand information about everything,”¹⁸ so did Mark Lowenthal, who served as

a senior officer in the National Intelligence Council, characterize IC products 30 years later as “cost-free [newspaper] subscriptions that were never ordered and never have to be paid for, perks of the job.”¹⁹

This does not mean, however, that policymakers will continue to be content with the present “hit-or-miss” system forever. The information provided to policymakers may be free to use, but it is far from free to collect, process, and analyze, a fact which ought to place front and center the question of what precisely is the “value-added” the IC provides in the policymaking process.^a The USSR and its allies were exactly the kind of linear, static, and very *complicated* entities against which Kent-style analysis could operate well—“analysis” coming from the Greek *analyzein*, meaning “to break down” or “reduce.”²⁰

Because it is only possible to break down events that have already happened or objects that already exist, analysis is by its nature devoted to understanding the past. As has already been noted, breaking down processes and events for policymakers worked when the adversary was the USSR, because the same drivers, motivations, and causes would presumably be in play the next

^a It is worth remembering here that both the Russell Plan and the Schlesinger Report were driven by OMB concerns about the *cost* of intelligence, rather than its efficacy. Aspin-Brown too was largely a cost-driven exercise.

time the Soviet system tried to do something, and the only source for such analysis was the information, usually secret, provided by the IC.

We are not the first to point out that the world that policymakers and analysts now face is not so much complicated as it is *complex*. The complex world is not Newtonian but more resembles that described by quantum physics. As Heraclitus famously argued, today's river may look like the river of yesterday, but it is not; rather, it is a different river every time we enter it. The past two decades are teaching us the power of networks, showing us how events can cascade and feedback loops can amplify effects that we did not see coming or dampen ones that we predicted were inevitable.²¹

The wars we face are increasingly asymmetrical, fought over causes that can seem incomprehensible to those for whom we fight, with results in which "victory" can look much more like "defeat," or vice versa.^a Low-probability-high-impact "black swan" events are no longer the stuff of theory, and it grows ever more difficult to define who precisely is "the enemy."²² In fact, for some of the issues the IC is beginning to take on as part of the security portfolio, e.g., global warming or pandemics, *we* may be the "enemies."

^a By way of illustration, who may be said to have "won" the Israel-Hezbollah conflict of 2006, the Russia-Georgia conflict of 2008, or the Israel-Hamas conflict of 2008-09?

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The complex world is not one in which policymakers need "more information." Forty-four years ago they may have complained of an "information explosion,"²³ but that was not yet a world in which humans create the equivalent of the contents of the Library of Congress *every 15 minutes*,²⁴ where flying drones are able to collect so much video and other sensory information that it would take 24 days to process what is captured in a single day,²⁵ where Google *for free* offers a cache of more than *1 trillion* fully searchable sites²⁶—a number that itself is reckoned to be only a tiny fraction of what it is possible to find in the so-called deep Web, which search engine spiders cannot index.²⁷

What Do Policymakers Want?

Policymakers require information as much as ever, but the IC is no longer the exclusive, or even a privileged, provider. Writing recently in these pages about his experience in supporting policymakers on the Afghan team at the NSC, Paul Miller characterized many IC products as "irrelevant and wasted" because, though "highly polished," they often compete poorly against other information sources on which the policymakers may draw, which can include "an undergraduate professor of political science, per-

sonal experience, [and] the headlines of the *New York Times*."²⁸

What the policymakers he saw wanted, Miller wrote, was "the ability to reach out for basic fact-checking, rapid analysis, and short 'gut-check' pieces." While Miller saw some pieces in his time at the NSC that "approach[ed] the line of recommending policy," he

never heard a White House official complain that intelligence had crossed the line. If anything, White House officials tended to want more of such analysis from the community, not less.

Miller's experience sounds very like that reported by Thomas Fingar, in a speech he gave after he had retired as deputy director of national intelligence for analysis:

[I remember] an exchange I had with Secretary Albright after I had briefed her on new information regarding a country in the Middle East. When I finished, and after she had asked a few factual and analytic questions, she said, "What should I do about this?" I replied, "Madame Secretary, I'm an analyst; you know I don't do policy."

Miller and Fingar make clear that at least some senior policymakers welcome opportunities to talk situations through with analysts.

She said, "Right, and I don't do analysis. Now, what should I do?" I demurred a second time, saying that I didn't think I knew enough about her objectives and the broader policy context to provide an informed answer. Her response: "Tom, I asked your opinion because I respect your judgment. That doesn't mean that I am going to do what you suggest, but I do want to know what you think." In response, I framed the problem as I thought it should be considered and suggested a course of action to deal with the problem.²⁹

Although Secretary Albright's request discomfited him, Fingar was able to do as she wished. This may have been because at the time Fingar worked in State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR). Officers in INR work comparatively closely with a small set of senior policymakers on policy issues that are reasonably well-known in the organization. While Fingar claimed not to know the secretary's objectives as well as he would have liked, he was able to offer not only information, but also judgments about what "new information" might mean and the possible effects on a given policy. This is very like what Miller argues the NSC White House staff welcomes in

analytic products that highlight courses of action, flag potential pitfalls, or that "draw attention to historically analogous situations in current challenges."³⁰ Miller and Fingar make clear that at least some senior policymakers welcome opportunities to talk situations through with analysts.

The experiences of Miller and Fingar also highlight another aspect of such exchanges that we argue is of enormous value—they could be kept secret. Since the IC's inception, it has been obsessed with *getting* secrets, to the extent that many people, especially within the IC, argue that intelligence is "secrets." There is strong evidence, however, that many policymakers do not necessarily want or need the secrets the IC offers them, and that an obsession with paying attention *only* to secrets may blind analysts to obvious things that are out in the open. Part of the culture of *getting* secrets though is that the IC also has a well-developed culture of *keeping* secrets. Though this may be incidental to the IC's original purpose, its capacity to keep secrets is arguably among the most important "value-added" it might offer policymakers.

Of course the IC has a great deal more for policymakers than its secret-keeping culture. The IC also has thousands of skilled people who have thought long and hard about all

sorts of issues, trying to figure out why things have happened and what might happen next. They care about our country, its safety, and its success. They are smart, articulate, and resourceful. Add secret-keeping to that mix and it is plain to see that the IC is uniquely qualified to provide policymakers with precisely what Secretary Albright indicated that she lacked, a secure "sounding chamber" in which she could share the burden of transforming information into policy with someone who could offer insights about the costs and benefits of various policy paths—and *who would not talk about it.*

The IC as a Knowledge Service and Policymakers as its Clients

That being the case, what would happen if the IC were to accept that it can no longer continue to collect secrets simply because they are interesting and to accept that policymakers are going to continue to make policy whether or not they use the Community's "highly polished products?" What if instead the IC were to reimagine itself as a service-provider geared to engaging in precisely the kind of goal-focused conversation that Secretary Albright initiated with Fingar, now, however, not on an *ad hoc* and uncomfortable basis, but rather as a well-defined regular activity? What, in other words, would happen if the IC were to become a provider of *knowledge services*, rather than a producer of information?

For policymakers, the benefits of the change would probably be immediate, and comparatively large. In addition to having more straight-forward benefit from the kind of expertise and insight that Fingar possessed and Albright tapped, policymakers would gain the use of the entire IC as a “sounding room” for the policies they might be contemplating. Here they could explore policy ideas, tap into the expertise of the IC about possible consequences of a policy—potential downsides and unanticipated benefits.

Instead of offering ideas coyly through “opportunity analysis,” IC officers and their analysts could engage in straightforward consultations. Policymakers could send up “trial balloons” privately without having to fear, as they now do, that words intended for one audience will be instantly available elsewhere, with undesired effects. They would also have the benefit of being able to iterate and refine policies as they advance while the IC helped to observe and judge whether or not progress was being made toward a policy’s goal.

To be sure, this would require adjustment for policymakers. Just as the IC would have to grow comfortable with making policy recommendations, so would policymakers have to get used to asking questions about something more than “data nuggets.” Indeed, a knowledge service-client system would require more than what Albright and Fingar achieved in that moment, which does not

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seem to have contained the real feedback the Church Committee Report had called for in 1976.^a

This new relationship would require a continuing *conversation*. In a true client relationship, policymakers would have to get accustomed to having analysts question them, at least for the purpose of better understanding what question it is the policymaker is really seeking to answer. A model for this conversation might be the “reference interview” for which librarians are trained, in order to help patrons understand more precisely what their own information needs are—which, as one Web site puts it, “may turn out to be different than the reference question as initially posed.”³¹ At present, analyst-policymaker exchanges are one-way, a kind of call-response that will not do much to help policymakers sharpen their questions, particularly if the IC’s response is only that “we have no information on that.”

Policymakers do face very real possible costs in moving from

the present system to one in which they and analysts share in shaping policy. In such a world it would no longer be possible to divide events into “policy successes” and “intelligence failures.” This increased responsibility has another consequence, policymakers would have to formulate their goals more precisely. The present system, particularly at the highest strategic level, too easily permits formulation of goals that, while desirable, are so nebulous that there is no way to tell whether progress is being made toward them. Just as a financial services provider might help a client whose initial stated goal is to become rich redefine that aim into something more specific—a retirement fund of \$n million by a certain age—so might IC “client advisers” help policymakers articulate more specific policy goals, rather than “good-to-have” desired end states like “democracy” or “freedom.”³²

What Client Service Might Mean to IC Analysts

The change for analysts, and the IC, would be more dramatic than it would be for policymakers. The biggest will be that the IC’s default response to criticism in the present collection-centric system—typically enlarged collection efforts based on the presumption that additional data collection, rather than improved analysis, will provide answers³³—will be

^a To be fair, the feedback that the Church Committee wanted seems both unrealistic—what policymaker would ever take the time *after* an event to, in effect, “grade” the analysis he or she had received?—and of little value in anything other than a mechanistic, linear world, rather like the many after-action reviews that concern themselves only with whether or not proper tradecraft was practiced, not whether the analysis was of use.

What is most needed in the client-service system is imagination not ingenuity in collection.

obsolete. It will no longer be enough to say that the IC has done its best to obtain more secrets or other kinds of information.³⁴ In the new “service-centric” model, the IC’s responsibility will be to *make hypotheses of meaning* about information that it does have. Sometimes more information might help, but usually *understanding* of information will be required, not more collection. What is most needed in this system is *imagination* not *ingenuity* in collection.

The differences between the two systems are precisely those that exist between “puzzles and mysteries,” Gregory Treverton’s famous analogy about the challenges of intelligence. Malcolm Gladwell, in his *New Yorker* article about Enron’s collapse highlighted the same differences as being those between “transmitter-” and “receiver-dependent” models of understanding.³⁵

Both Treverton and Gladwell distinguish between *information problems*, which for resolution require more data, access to which is controlled by an opponent or other entity, and *understanding problems*, those for which problem solvers already have enough information but which require perception, imagination, or cognition for understanding.

The fact that those grappling with problems of understanding can never be certain

whether their jobs are done is only part of the burden in the client-service relationship. For them, the issue is not whether information is “objectively true” but whether the *way* in which information has been used has value; as a result the solver’s intellectual burden shifts from *trusting data* to trusting the *service provider*. In other words, client service depends upon the creation and maintenance of *trust*, rather than the intrinsic value of any particular piece of information, the particular platform, or the clandestine asset that produced it.^a

Thus, in a client relationship, the client places trust not in analytical products or collection platforms but in a provider’s ability to place data in context, to understand how actions, events, and actors might all intersect and interact to affect outcomes. One need only look to the havoc wreaked by the sudden explosion of Iceland’s Eyjafjallajökull volcano to remember that events can be discontinuous as well as linear. What is important in a client relationship is not whether the

^a Even Sherman Kent appears to have recognized this, for one of the odder passages in his *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* seeks to exculpate analysts who make mistakes by arguing that no one would fire “the dentist who pulls out the wrong tooth” or “the lawyer who loses a case.” (Kent, 194.) While it is difficult to imagine anyone retaining such an incompetent dentist, it is much easier to agree with Kent that one might indeed keep a lawyer who had lost a case—*provided one continued to trust the lawyer*.

volcano’s eruption was predicted, but how well the client and the “service team” adjusted to the new circumstances while still helping the client move toward desired goals and destinations. This process would include deciding with the client how new circumstances might have changed the goal, the costs that achieving the goal might now incur, or the pace at which it might proceed—all characteristics of working in complex systems, where every action changes the circumstances and outcomes. In this circumstance, the client who trusts the service team that didn’t forecast a volcano will remain a client. Conversely, as DCI Richard Helms once said, “No power has yet been found to force presidents of the United States to pay attention on a continuing basis to people and papers when confidence has been lost in the originator.”³⁶

Enter the “Synthesist”

It should be stressed that this new model of client service would not do away with the need for the skills and information necessary to make informed hypotheses of causality about past events. Unlike the present system, however, where the analysis, the “break down,” of what has already happened is the endpoint of the process, in a client-service model this work would provide the foundation on which policy proposals would be based. Analysis would thus provide the elements that could be combined in imaginative ways to create something new, a process the

Greeks saw as the antithesis of analysis, or *synthesis*.

What might a client-service relationship require of today's intelligence synthesists if they are to develop and maintain their clients' trust?

- Stovepiping of information or knowledge would no longer be possible, as client service would require analysts not only to have expertise but to know how to find and engage other experts.
- Analysts could no longer depend solely upon what collectors had fed their inboxes.
- Analysts would have to look beyond their particular "account" and would have to be able to work with others to see how information meshes, and how further information might change a picture.
- The Intelligence Community would have to abandon its present taboo on analysts factoring the effects of US actions or policies into their work and recognize the implications of US actions on their analysis.

A new relationship would also be likely to lead to a new approach to the warning function. The current system is threat-focused and causes tension between "warners" and those who are warned ("warnees"), as Sherman Kent outlined in one of his last talks before retirement.³⁷ Kent noted that the present system encourages analysts to "overwarn," because they incur few

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costs for flagging possible dangers, while "warnees," or policymakers, have very strong incentives to "under-react" because anything they do in response to a warning—even simply to convene a meeting to talk about a warning—incurs costs. In a "synthesist-client" relationship the costs would be more evenly spread. Because "warners" face potential costs—at least to their reputations and to their relationships with clients—they would have incentives to think more carefully about when and what they warn.

Even more importantly, the "synthesist-client" relationship would encourage the examination and understanding not just of negative phenomena, but also of the positive. At present the IC rarely, if ever, tries to understand why things *haven't* happened. IC analysts don't examine why some states, actors, or situations are *not* failing, dangerous, or threatening, and they never posit desired outcomes with speculation about what it would take for those outcomes to be realized. Today, the closest the IC comes to making what might be termed "positive warnings" are the "opportunity analyses"—suggestions, gingerly offered, about what *might* be possible in a given situation. Such timid leaning over Kent's firewall, however, only continues Lippmann's nine-decade-old separation of "the staff which

investigates" from "the staff which executes," committing the analyst neither to the process of policymaking nor to its outcome.

This points to another way in which things would change in a client-system: synthesists will have to be able to make plain to their clients how data they receive fits in to the implementation of policy. In the existing system, analysts' allegiance is to their data. Their faith in an "objective reality" allows them to create their own standards for choosing information and thus, by implication, for interpreting it and sustaining their own beliefs, biases, and assumptions. In client relationships, synthesists must, of course, have faith in the data they advance, but they must be able to put that data into policy contexts. This presumes that synthesists will have spent long periods of time gaining substantive expertise—meaning they will have learned their areas of specialization *and* the ways and needs of policymakers (whether through rotations, special training, or other means) before being able to claim the new title of "synthesist." Having achieved that status, the synthesist would then at some level accept the policy goal as legitimate and desirable, even though the way in which he or she best serves the client is in arguing—strenuously if need be—about the tac-

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tics by which a strategy might be achieved.

The Risks

This brings us to the potentially most painful aspect of the client-service model. What are synthesists to do if they believe policy goals are wrong? To ask such a question supposes that a synthesist has already attempted to convince a client why a particular goal is undesirable, may be more costly to achieve than the client supposes, or will not obtain the results the policymaker hopes to achieve. Certainly the synthesist will have done due-diligence to determine whether a policy is illegal, domestically or internationally, and will have advised the client accordingly. Conceivably the synthesist may even have argued to the policymaker that the proposed policy would be bad politics, because in the US system it is the voters who are the ultimate judges of whether or not policy goals are desirable.

In this circumstance lies the starkest difference between Sherman Kent's model of analysis and that of client service. Kent accepted Lippmann's notion of "intelligence officials" who would have life tenure, revokable only following "trial by their colleagues." Of course, not all analysts have been content to remain in the IC, even with that faculty-like job pro-

tection, but when they have resigned they have often done so publicly and acrimoniously, protesting that senior policymakers have "politicized intelligence."

In a client model, there would be no such option—a client-service provider, a lawyer for example, can always refuse to take a particular client, but that is not a matter about which lawyers have any particular reason to go public. What it does mean, however, is that a lawyer is no longer employed by a particular client. When the client is the government and its policymakers, the refusal of intelligence synthesists to "take a case" would mean that in the end they must be prepared to surrender their access to that policymaker.

Does that mean a synthesist must resign from government service entirely? Perhaps, if a client-service relationship has gone spectacularly wrong. But this is not likely to occur in the publicity-seeking way it has in the existing system. It is more likely, however, that a synthesist sufficiently senior to have worked closely with policymakers would have valuable analytic skills that could still be of service, or he or she could find other policy clients. For the time being at least, the IC is the monopoly intelligence provider to the government, which

provides a very large pool of potential clients.³⁸

No Prescriptions, but a Few Descriptions

Just as there is no transitional stage halfway between ice and water, so is there no real middle ground in a shift from the customer-product model to the client-service model. The policymaking and the analytic communities of today mirror one another, conceptualizing the world in the same ways, carving problems up into the same geographic and functional subsets³⁹—all of which are funded, or not, by a congressional system that also follows the same basic taxonomy.

A shift to a new model of interaction between policymakers and those who assist them with intelligence would require fundamental transformations on both sides, but it is not the goal of this article to lay out precisely what a client-synthesist relationship might look like. The experiences of organizations like IBM, which have made comparable transitions⁴⁰—in IBM's case from selling mainframes to "making governments smarter"—suggest that there is no one template or model. IBM and consultant services like it build systems of methods and approaches, not processes, all of which iterate and evolve as client-provider partnerships move toward the chosen goals of their clients.

Still, it is clear that certain things would be necessary if the IC were to move toward the client-service model. Most important, of course, is the *will* to change.⁴¹ If the DNI's *Vision 2015: A Globally Networked and Integrated Intelligence Enterprise* is to be taken at face value, that will already exist in the document's assurance that the analyst of the future will ask policymakers not, "what are your intelligence priorities?" but rather, "what do you want to accomplish?"

If we indeed start asking policymakers what they want to accomplish and they begin trusting us enough to listen to our answers, a number of changes seem inevitable.

Analytic outreach would no longer have to be mandated. The value of information provided to a client would not be measured in the cost of its acquisition and protection, but in the utility of that information in serving a client's purpose.⁴² Synthesists trying to serve policymaker clients would have no incentive to hoard information and every incentive to look for information and insight, wherever they might be found.

Formal analytic standards, as currently imposed, would be starting points in a client service system rather than end points in themselves. Today's formal standards were instituted to address the same criticisms noted in the

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Cunningham, Schlesinger, Church, and Aspin-Brown Reports—policymakers are cut off from the collection of information and do not know how to evaluate, put in context, or otherwise use what comes off the end of the "finished intelligence product" assembly line. Formal standards of analytic tradecraft were imposed to address aspects of that problem but still do not ensure that policymakers receive the information they want or need. Present tradecraft standards require only that products be relevant to US national security, but as the Church Committee pointed out, absent consumer guidance, what defines that relevance is merely the opinion of an analyst, rather than stated policymaker needs.

Repurposing the IC would probably require viewing our human resources in a different light. At present we hire large numbers of people who have experience in foreign countries, speak foreign languages, and understand foreign cultures, and then we limit their foreign travel and contact with foreigners. As Brookings scholar Kenneth Lieberthal noted in a recent critique of the IC analytic community's ability to understand China, "Those numerous Americans who have had enough exposure to China to gain deep personal insights

are almost systematically excluded from bringing those insights to bear in the IC analytical community [because they can't clear the hiring security process]. Indeed, should they be one of the few such individuals that come into the community, they will have to give up their ability to keep their understanding fresh through the types of exposure to Chinese realities that they have learned to master." As a result, "to the IC analyst, China—even as it has opened up to an unprecedented extent—is overwhelmingly a place that exists on paper but not one that provides personal experiences that generate real insights."⁴³

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What else might change?

- A client service organization would have to find the means of measuring value other than as units of output. This would tend to reward personality types for their ability to share and be creative, as opposed to their ability to absorb and retain information. The new system would require more empathetic extroverts and fewer introverts.
- Management styles and criteria would have to evolve—client-service organizations tend to be much flatter and more nimble than are product-creation ones.
- The IC’s existing, hyperspecialized account structures are deeply incompatible with a client-service model, where it is never possible or justified to claim something is not in one’s “lane.” No good service provider can justify the expense, and the large staff, implied by the degree of IC specialization. The client service model rewards flexibility, curiosity, and broad inquiry, since there is never a way to be certain that a piece of information or way of thinking is irrelevant.
- Products would have to change. As Mark Lowenthal has noted, the regular delivery of bland, “corporate-voiced” written products has a

lulling effect, making everything the IC does seem to be of equal value, with nothing in the product stream “that screams ‘read me now.’”⁴⁴ Miller made the same point, arguing that production of “‘duh’ reports and analysis...desensitizes policymakers to quality intelligence products.”⁴⁵

- We would have to move away from the conviction that “anything can be solved by adding more facts.”⁴⁶ Alfred Rollington, the CEO of Jane’s most responsible for transforming the company from a purveyor of locked-down, hardbound sets of defense-related encyclopedias to being an “information group” with the stated mission “to help our clients make the best decisions,”⁴⁷ argues that in today’s policy world “few respect information’s authority,” in part because “the clients believe they have as much to contribute as the specialists.”⁴⁸
- A client-synthesist relationship would be more conversation than “product,” a series of iterative loops in which both sides would get smarter, drawing on resources and making connections that neither might have been aware they had and, when necessary, going out to find them when they don’t. In short, the “deliverable” in such a rela-

tionship would be a process, not an endpoint, and would be measured by the degree to which it promotes *cognition*, not by the number of its pages.

Challenging? Yes. Frightening? Beyond a doubt.

Will it work? Although it is one of the many hallmarks of the networked, complex world that nothing is fully predictable, there are grounds for confidence. Some activities already are underway that have important characteristics of what the new relationship might look like. Interactive gaming, situation-response simulations, and scenario-forecasting exercises all put analysts and policymakers (or members of their staffs) together in activities which—when done well—approximate what a client-adviser relationship might look like. While it remains based in the current analyst-policymaker world, the “Asking Better Questions” training course offered through the Department of Defense’s Institute for Analysis does give analysts a sense of how they might iterate with policymakers even within the present system to help both sides draw closer to answering the “question behind the question” and thus make the analytic product potentially more useful. The private-sector experience of both IBM and Jane’s also helps argue that the gulf between the two systems can be bridged.

What is our alternative? It has already been 44 years since the Cunningham Report warned,

The unmanaged state of intelligence [meant that] analysts were becoming superficial because of the piles of paper in their inboxes, and any analysis in depth was becoming out of the question.... Much of what intelligence considered its responsibilities were our own response to vague guidelines or transient indications of interest at top levels. More and more, the community was talking to itself.⁴⁹

At a time when the US federal budget deficit is expected to exceed \$1.17 trillion, and the federal debt is 14 times larger still, it doesn't take much analytic expertise to wonder how long the country's policymakers will continue to fund these "subscriptions they never wanted," especially if all they contain is the IC "talking to itself."



In Sum

Former Jane's CEO Alfred Rollington in a 2008 presentation on open-source intelligence expressed as well as anyone the reasons for shifting from customer-service to client-service partnerships. "As analysts and consultants," he wrote, "we have to be aware of the new client requirements for actionable intelligence that will measurably save them people, time and money, bearing always in mind that Intelligence must be designed for the action and the understanding of the final user." As a final admonition, he also reminded analysts to "continually re-educate yourselves to ensure that someone in another country who you will never meet, cannot take your job." As an aid to contemplate what this change might mean, we offer the following schematic:

<i>Analyzing for policymakers</i>	<i>Synthesizing with policymakers</i>
What do you want to know?	What do you want to accomplish?
Threat focused	Opportunity focused
Past oriented	Future oriented
Tends to be tactical	Must be strategic
Product	Process
Search for comparisons and analogies	Attention to contrasts and the unique
Interest in objects and nuggets	Interest in contexts and relations
Reactive	Proactive
Introverts and accounts	Extroverts and conversations
Tends to focus on what has failed	Allows examination of what has succeeded
Rewards ingenuity—big systems, more manpower, specialization, broad programs	Rewards imagination—agile, adaptive systems, less hierarchy, more networked
Collection	Cognition

Endnotes

1. <https://www.cia.gov/offices-of-cia/intelligence-analysis/index.html>, accessed 19 November 2010.
2. Sherman Kent, *Strategic Analysis for American World Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), 200.
3. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1922), 272.
4. Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920), 61.
5. Kent, *Strategic Analysis*, 200.
6. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 386, 384.
7. Kent, *Strategic Analysis*, 200.
8. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945-1950: Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, document 339, 9 February 1948, at http://web-doc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/p/2005/dep_of_state/www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/325_339.html, accessed 10 July 2010.
9. *Ibid.*, document 81, 3 November 1945.
10. *Ibid.*, “Department of State Intelligence,” introduction.
11. *Ibid.*, document 82, 29 December 1945.
12. Kent, 182.
13. See http://www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/net_sov.htm.
14. The *Cunningham Report* was presented in December 1966 and has not been declassified. Lines from it are quoted in the *Church Committee Report—Foreign and Military Intelligence: Book 1: Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, April 26, 1976* (hereafter noted as *Church Committee Report*). In addition, the *Cunningham Report* was quoted and also summarized in “A Historical Review of Studies of the Intelligence Community for the Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy,” dated December 1974 (document TS-206439-74), declassified 27 February 2003, and available at: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB144/document%208.pdf>.) That text does not always distinguish clearly between quotation and summary. Quotations taken from this source will be noted as *Cunningham Report*.
15. “A Review of the Intelligence Community” prepared by the Office of Management and Budget under the direction of OMB Deputy Director James Schlesinger, 10 March 1971, pp. 1, 9. Quotations from version at <http://www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/review1971.pdf>, accessed 10 July 2010.
16. *Church Committee Report*, 277.
17. *Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community, Preparing for the 21st Century: An Appraisal of U.S. Intelligence*, 1 March 1996, xv–xvi, <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/int/index.html>, accessed 22 July 2010. (Hereafter *Aspin-Brown Report*.)

18. *Church Committee Report*, 275.

19. Mark M. Lowenthal, "Tribal Tongues: Intelligence Consumers, Intelligence Producers" in Loch Johnson and James J. Wirtz, eds, *Strategic Intelligence: Windows Into a Secret World*, (Los Angeles CA: Roxbury Pub, 2004), 235.

20. For a fuller discussion, see Anthony Olcott, "Revisiting the Legacy: Sherman Kent, Willmoore Kendall, and George Pettee—Strategic Intelligence in the Digital Age," *Studies in Intelligence* 53, no. 2 (July 2009).

21. The 6 May 2010 Wall Street "flash crash," during which the market plunged nearly 1,000 points in just 16 minutes, is perhaps the most vivid recent example of this kind of dangerous cascade. According to an SEC report on the event, released 1 October 2010, the flash crash was triggered by a single "sell" order placed by a brokerage in Kansas, which had one faulty line in the "Sell Algorithm" controlling the pace of sales of "E-Mini S&P 500 futures contracts." See "Findings Regarding the Market Events of May 6, 2010: Report of the Staffs of the CFTC and SEC to the Joint Advisory Committee on Emerging Regulatory Issues," at URL: <http://www.sec.gov/news/studies/2010/marketevents-report.pdf>. Although one purpose of that report was to help regulators avoid repetitions of this flash crash, the executive summary ends with the reminder that "the events of May 6 clearly demonstrate the importance of data in today's world of fully-automated trading strategies and systems. This is further complicated by the many sources of data that must be aggregated in order to form a complete picture of the markets upon which decisions to trade can be based. Varied data conventions, differing methods of communication, the sheer volume of quotes, orders, and trades produced each second, and even inherent time lags based on the laws of physics add yet more complexity." Recent reports of frequent "mini flash crashes" that subject individual stocks to the same kind of extremely short-lived vertiginous drops in value suggest that this cascading behavior is not yet fully under control. See Graham Bowley, "The Flash Crash in Miniature," *New York Times*, 8 November 2010.

22. This difficulty is particularly evident in the growing literature around cyberterrorism. See for example William Jackson, "DoD Struggles to Define Cyber War," *Federal Computer Week*, 12 May 2010.

23. The term is used in 1966, in the *Cunningham Report*, iii.

24. <http://www.resourceshelf.com/2009/10/24/library-of-congress%E2%80%99-national-digital-information-infrastructure-and-preservation-program-wins-government-computing-news-award/>

25. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/11/business/11drone.html?scp=4&sq=predator&st=cse>

26. Google announced on 25 July 2008 that the company had indexed more than 1 trillion unique URLs (<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2008/07/we-knew-web-was-big.html>). Presumably the number is far larger now. As an aid to comprehension of what this means, Cro-Magnons were drawing bison on the caves of Lascaux, France, approximately 1 trillion seconds ago.

27. This article [http://aip.completeplanet.com/aip-engines/help/largest_engines.jsp] calculates the "deep Web" to be 40 times larger than the crawled web, while this one [<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=jep;view=text;rgn=main;idno=3336451.0007.104>] says it is 3,000 times larger. Other figures can be found.

28. Paul D. Miller, "Lessons for Intelligence Support to Policymaking During Crises," *Studies in Intelligence* 54, no. 2, cited from <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol.-54-no.-2/lessons-for-intelligence-support-to-policymaking.html>, accessed 11 July 2010. Another officer has remarked that, in his experience, most policymakers get their information from: first, TV news; then the *New York Times* and other newspapers of record; then their own trusted associates and friends; then the Internet, either directly through their own searches or through those of their staff; and only fifth from the IC.

29. Thomas Fingar, Payne Distinguished Lecture Series 2009, "Reducing Uncertainty: Intelligence and National Security," Lecture 2: "Spies Collect Data, Analysts Provide Insight," Stanford University, 19 May 2009.

30. Miller, "Lessons for Intelligence," 8.

31. See http://liswiki.org/wiki/Reference_interview, accessed 17 July 2010.

32. Author Marc Hetherington cites data in his book to argue that more than half of Americans believed that LBJ's "War on Poverty" would actually eliminate poverty in the United States. *Why Trust Matters* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 138.

33. Tom Fingar made this point in 2006: "Decades of analysts going to collectors and saying, 'I want more,'...more of everything; more of whatever you can get" with the result that "our collection mechanisms have become vacuum cleaners on steroids." Speech given 21 August 2006. Text at http://www.dni.gov/speeches/20060821_2_speech.pdf, accessed 23 July 2010.

34. For a brief list of the drawbacks of this approach, see Josh Kerbel, "For the Intelligence Community, Creativity is the New Secret," *World Politics Review*, 25 March 2010.

35. Gregory Treverton, "Risks and Riddles," *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 2007 and Malcolm Gladwell, "The Formula," *The New Yorker*, 8 January 2007.

36. As quoted in Johnson and Wirtz, 100. Aspin-Brown also spoke of the IC's need to restore public confidence in the "intelligence function," which can happen only as the IC "earns the trust and support of those it serves within the Government, including the elected representatives of the people." *Aspin-Brown Report*, xvi.

37. Jack Davis, "Sherman Kent's Final Thoughts on Analyst-Policymaker Relations," Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis, Occasional Papers, vol 2., no. 3, June 2003.

38. The DNI's 2009 "A Consumer's Guide to Intelligence" lists 18 entities as part of the IC, while a guide to the "Non-Title 50 Intelligence Points of Contact" lists 37, some of which overlap with the DNI's guide.

39. For a fuller discussion see Josh Kerbel, "Lost for Words: The Intelligence Community's Struggle to Find Its Voice," *Parameters*, Summer 2008.

40. <http://www.ibm.com/solutions/us/en/>, accessed 18 July 2010.

41. It is worth recalling the bitter joke from 1971: "How many Schlesingers does it take to change a light bulb? Just one-but the bulb has to really, really want to change." See David Omand, "How Many Schlesingers Would it Take to Change a Light-Bulb?" *Intelligence and National Security* 24, no. 3, June 2009.

42. Even in 1976 the Church Committee noted that the IC's reputation for innovation was not applicable to the analytic sphere, where the Intelligence Community "expends relatively little effort on R&D," because "the analytic community has suffered from the secrecy that surrounds the work of the intelligence community as a whole." (*Church Committee Report*, 273.)

43. Kenneth Lieberthal, *The US Intelligence Community and Foreign Policy: Getting Analysis Right*, Brookings Foreign Policy Paper Series, September 2009, 34.

44. Lowenthal, "Tribal Tongues," 235.

45. Miller, "Lessons for Intelligence," 7.

46. *Cunningham Report*, F1

47. <http://www.janes.com/aboutus/vision.html>, accessed 27 April 2010.

48. Alfred Rollington, "Open Source Intelligence for the 21st Century: Electric Shock in Four Parts," May 2008. A Powerpoint presentation available on <http://www.osif.us/articlesofinterest.html>

49. *Cunningham Report*, F2.

