

Analysts also have a responsibility to tell customers about important disagreements within the Intelligence Community. We were told by some senior policymakers that it sometimes took weeks to get an answer to a question—not because the answer was difficult to obtain, but because analysts were hesitant to admit to Intelligence Community disagreement on an issue. This is not how intelligence should function. Analysts must readily bring disagreement within the Community to policymakers’ attention, and must be ready to explain the basis for the disagreement. Such disagreement is often a sign of robust independent analysis and should be encouraged.

In addition to conveying disagreements, analysts must also find ways to explain to policymakers degrees of certainty in their work. Some publications we have reviewed use numerical estimates of certainty, while others rely on phrases such as “probably” or “almost certainly.” We strongly urge that such assessments of certainty be used routinely and consistently throughout the Community. Whatever device is used to signal the degree of certainty—mathematical percentages, graphic representations, or key phrases—all analysts in the Community should have a common understanding of what the indicators mean and how to use them.

Finally, analysts and Intelligence Community leaders have a responsibility to take note, whenever possible, of what their customers are doing and saying, and to tell those customers when actions or statements are inconsistent with existing intelligence. We do not mean to suggest that analysts should spend all of their waking hours monitoring policymakers, or that analysts should have a “veto” over policymaker statements. Rather, when aware of upcoming speeches or decisions, analysts should make clear that they are available to vet intelligence-related matters, and analysts should—when necessary—tell policymakers how their statements diverge from existing intelligence. Having fulfilled this duty, analysts must then let politically-accountable policymakers determine whether or not a statement is appropriate in light of intelligence judgments.

Serving the President and Senior Policymakers

The new legislation designates the DNI as the person primarily responsible for ensuring that the President’s day-to-day intelligence needs are met.²⁵ This means that the Office of the DNI, not the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, should have the final authority over the content and production of the

President's Daily Brief (PDB)—or whatever other form intelligence support to the President may take.

We also believe that the DNI will have to work closely with the President and the National Security Council to reconsider how intelligence should best be presented to the President, because we are dubious that the PDB—in its current incarnation—is the right answer.

Our case studies, primarily Iraq, highlight several flaws indicating a need to rethink the PDB.²⁶ PDB pieces are typically limited by space constraints. While sophisticated, in-depth analysis can be presented in this abbreviated fashion, the task is considerably more difficult than drafting a more immediate, less research-intensive piece that updates the reader on current events and provides a more limited, near-term analytic focus. As a result, we worry that individual PDB articles fail to provide sufficient context for the reader. This view was reinforced by one senior intelligence officer's observation that policymakers are sometimes surprised to find that longer, in-depth intelligence reporting provides a different view from that conveyed by the PDB. The same individual noted that when a policymaker is given a piece of information about a certain subject, the policymaker will often ask questions about the information, leading to follow-up on that subject, thereby exacerbating the current intelligence bias.²⁷ Moreover, the PDB staff tends to focus on today's hot national security issues, or on issues that attracted the President's interest the last time they came up. This can lead to repeated reporting on a given topic or event; a drumbeat of incremental "hot news" articles affects a reader much differently than the same information presented in a longer, contextualized piece that explains the relationship between the various reports. Finally, the PDB sometimes includes excessively "snappy" headlines, which tend to misrepresent an article's more nuanced conclusions, and which are, in our view, unnecessary; a two or three-word indicator of the piece's subject (such as "North Korea-Nuclear") would tell policymakers which pieces were of most interest to them without obscuring the subtle contours of an issue raised in the text.

Having identified these potential problems, we are hesitant to suggest how the PDB process should be altered. Only the President can say for certain how often and in what format he prefers to receive national intelligence information. We do, however, recognize that the creation of the DNI will shift what

has been a CIA-centric PDB process to more of a Community one—shepherded by the Office of the DNI.

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The President's Daily Brief should be restructured. The DNI should oversee the process and ensure a fair representation of divergent views. Reporting on terrorism intelligence should be combined and coordinated by the DNI to eliminate redundancies and material that does not merit Presidential action.

Regardless of the structure of the PDB process, the DNI will need to respond to the demands of senior advisors and the President. We recommend that the DNI create an analytic staff too small to routinely undertake drafting itself, but large enough that its members would have expertise on a wide range of subjects. The staffers would task the appropriate experts and agencies to draft responses to decisionmaker requests. They could also perform last minute editing and would—in every case—ensure that the pieces reflect any differences of opinion in the Community.²⁸ In our view, it is simply not enough to present dissenting views from the Intelligence Community only in longer, more formal assessments like National Intelligence Estimates. Rather, because policymakers tend to be significantly influenced by daily intelligence products, we believe it is essential that those products offer as complete a perspective on an issue as is feasible. This is not to suggest that the production of each daily briefing for the President or others should recreate a mini-NIE process; in many cases, relatively few intelligence agencies need be involved. But when agencies have sharp differences, the DNI's analytic staff should be responsible for ensuring that the final memorandum clearly reflects these competing conclusions and the reasons for disagreement.

Equally important, we believe that the DNI should seek to combine—with the President's concurrence, of course—the three primary sources of intelligence that now reach the President. Currently, in addition to the PDB, the President receives the President's Terrorism Threat Report (PTTR), which is prepared by the National Counterterrorism Center and is appended to each day's PDB. The President may also be verbally briefed by the Director of the FBI who uses material from a "Director's Daily Report" prepared by his staff.

We have reviewed these materials and discussed the briefings with many regular participants. There are plainly redundancies that should be eliminated, but we are also concerned that the channels conveying terrorism intelligence are clogged with trivia. One reason for this unnecessary detail is that passing information “up the chain” provides bureaucratic cover against later accusations that the data was not taken seriously. As one official complained, this behavior is caused by bureaucracies that are “preparing for the next 9/11 Commission instead of preparing for the next 9/11.” It may be difficult to stem this tide, but the new DNI is in the best position to bring order to the process. We recommend that the DNI be given clear responsibility for combining terrorism intelligence into a single, regular Presidential briefing (whether a daily briefing is required should depend on the pace of events). This briefing would resemble and would perhaps be combined into the PDB.

In the same vein, several senior officials told us that they read the PDB not so much for its content (for it often did not necessarily include especially critical information) as much as to stay apprised of matters on which the President is briefed. In this light, although the DNI and the PDB staff must be free to make a professional judgment about the intelligence to present on any given day, we recommend that the DNI encourage suggestions from policymaking agencies like State and Defense about topics that could usefully be presented in the President’s briefing. By taking this step the PDB would likely become more attuned to a wider variety of pressing national security issues.

We fully recognize that the DNI’s role calls for a delicate balance. It will be tempting for the DNI’s analysts to become the primary drafters themselves, and analysts in individual agencies will continue to face demands from those in their chain of command to respond to requests directly. The former would turn the office of the DNI into one more analytic entity putting forward its own views. The latter problem recreates the situation we have today, which often results in a multiplicity of uncoordinated views appearing before senior decisionmakers. The DNI’s analytic cadre, whose responsibility it is to understand and to put forward the views of the Community’s experts, wherever located, must ensure that analytic differences in the Community are not suppressed and, equally important, are not presented to decisionmakers in a piecemeal fashion that forces senior officials to sort out the differences themselves.