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Editor's Note:

We live in what Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has called “a world defined by surprise and uncertainty.” In this timely and thoughtful paper, first circulated in draft at a workshop sponsored by the DI's Global Futures Partnership in May 2002, Kent Center Research Scholar Jack Davis reminds us that warning is an analytic discipline and that strategic warning, in particular, is a unique analytic challenge that demands continued reassessment and improvement. Indeed, DI guidance on ‘Best Warning Practices’ stresses the Directorate's longstanding conviction that “every analyst is a warning analyst” and that “sound analytic tradecraft is the best assurance of good warning analysis.”

Jack Davis has been associated with CIA since 1956, first as an employee and since 1990 as an independent contractor. His main field of interest is analytic tradecraft. In this essay, he calls for a disciplined approach not merely to dealing with uncertainty, but to ensure that strategic warning is both persuasive and effective in helping decision makers to prevent or mitigate the negative consequences of tactical surprise. In particular, he argues for new, collaborative arrangements to make strategic warning a governmental rather than merely an intelligence responsibility. Our hope is that the recommendations suggested in this “think piece”--which has benefited from the insightful comments of colleagues too numerous to mention here individually--will contribute to an ongoing, constructive dialogue to improve the doctrine and practice of warning tradecraft.

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### Strategic Warning: If Surprise is Inevitable, What Role for Analysis?

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The dramatic events of 11 September 2001 color this paper, but it is not about the devastating terrorist attacks per se, nor about the daunting challenges of tactical warning. The focus, instead, is on strategic warning.

Warning analysis is charged with applying all-source information, expert insights, and specialized tradecraft to help policy officials prevent or limit damage from threats to US security interests. Tactical warning, as defined in this paper, seeks to detect and deter specific threats to US interests; the objective is to avoid incident surprise and thus block or blunt damage. Strategic warning addresses perceived dangers in broader terms, in order to inform policymaker decisions on general security preparedness—again to prevent or limit damage.

US national security resources are limited. Tactical warning cannot be counted on to pinpoint defensive measures by providing timely notice of all specific attacks and menacing developments. In this context, the challenge of strategic warning is to help policy officials decide—in advance of specific indicators of danger—which of the many plausible general threats to US security interests deserve concerted defensive and preemptive preparations.

Strategic warning, to be effective, has to be credible in assessing contingent dangers and has to facilitate policymaker decision and action to protect against these dangers. This paper tables for consideration and debate several recommendations to advance two goals:

1. *To reconstitute strategic warning as a collaborative governmental function by engaging policy officials responsible for effecting defensive measures in every step of the analysis process, including topic selection and trend monitoring.*
2. *To warrant a distinctive intelligence contribution to a collaborative warning effort by expanding dedicated analytic resources and sharpening requisite substantive expertise and specialized tradecraft.*

## *Tactical and Strategic Warning Analysis*

The central mission of intelligence analysis is to warn US officials about dangers to national security interests and to alert them to perceived openings to advance US policy objectives. Thus, the bulk of analysts' written and oral deliverables points directly or indirectly to the existence, characteristics, and implications of threats to and opportunities for US national security.

Regarding warning of threats, the central analytic task is to peel back substantive uncertainty about the meaning of past developments and the prospects for future developments that could endanger US interests. Prescient, timely, convincing analysis regarding imminent and potential dangers can be an important force multiplier for US officials by reducing the likelihood, first, of incident surprise and, second, of inadequate defensive preparedness for dealing effectively with high-impact potential threats.

In order to identify and evaluate alternatives to current doctrine and practice of strategic warning, a clear, even if arbitrary, distinction from tactical warning can usefully be made.

*Tactical warning* focuses on specific incidents that endanger US security interests, such as military attack, terrorism, WMD developments, illicit transactions, and political crises abroad. Tactical warning analysis is usually characterized by a search for and evaluation of diagnostic information about incident, perpetrator, target, timing, and modalities. The goal is to deter and limit damage by identifying in advance *when, where, and how* a declared or potential adversary will forcefully strike the United States directly, mount a challenge to US forces, personnel, or interests abroad, or make a menacing weapons breakthrough.

*Strategic warning* aims for analytic perception and effective communication to policy officials of important changes in the character or level of security threats that require re-evaluation of US readiness to deter, avert, or limit damage—well in advance of incident-specific indicators. Thus, strategic warning is characterized by inferential evidence and general depiction of the danger. The issues addressed here are *changes in the level of likelihood* that an enemy will strike or that a development harmful to US interests will take place and *changes in enemy mechanisms for inflicting damage*. The goal is to assist policy decisions on defensive preparedness and contingency planning, including preemptive actions, to manage the risks of potential threats.

How are the two aspects of warning analysis related? The ultimate goal of effective warning is to protect US interests. Incident surprise can amplify damage. Fore-knowledge can reduce it. But not always, absent appropriate preparedness for dealing with a specific threat, once it is identified. Moreover, *effective strategic warning is often needed to ensure the subsequent availability of an appropriate level of resources for detecting and preventing specific attacks and harmful developments*. That is, good strategic warning has the potential to enhance both tactical warning and preparedness.

In any case, a strong historical argument can be made that the occurrence of incident or tactical surprise can be reduced but not eliminated. Even the best of intelligence services cannot expect to penetrate every plot or otherwise anticipate every damaging incident. Offensive forces—the perpetrators of military or terrorist attacks, for example—learn lessons from past attempts about how to achieve surprise, just as defensive forces—US intelligence, policymaking, warfighting, and law enforcement professionals—learn lessons about prevention. Moreover, simple applications of denial and deception activities and small innovations in modes of attack by adversarial forces can increase the likelihood of incident surprise.

Regarding the onset of dramatic developments abroad that could damage US interests—internal strife that threatens friendly governments, economic crises with global implications, outbreaks of regional wars—the fluidity as well as the complexity of relationships and rationales of foreign groups and leaders hinder timely specific warnings.

Finally, it is no easy matter for analysts who are convinced they have a sound tactical warning case to galvanize policy officials to defensive action. Distraction of other calls on policy officials' attention, **their** remembrance of unavoidable occurrence of warnings that proved to be false or aborted positives, and **their** concern about high opportunity costs for what could prove to be “unnecessary” defensive measures can cause rejection or delay of preventive actions to ward off a specific threatening incident.

What role for analysis if incidents of tactical surprise are inevitable? A robust strategic warning effort serves as the indispensable analytic supplement to tactical warning—by spurring, in advance of specific, harmful developments, preemptive and defensive measures that can mute the negative consequences of tactical surprise.

To paraphrase a Cold War observation about the danger of a surprise Soviet military attack:

*If surprise can succeed despite robust tactical warning, then defense must utilize effective strategic warning to prepare to succeed despite surprise.*

Think in terms of the analogy between homeland defense and household defense. A concerned and resourceful homeowner cannot always know when and how a burglar or other predator will strike. Despite lack of incident foreknowledge, however, the homeowner (1) can deter many planned “attacks” by investing in ample outdoor and indoor lighting, (2) can abort attempted attacks with superior door and window locks, and (3) can reduce the damage should a break-in nonetheless occur through an alarm system, which will encourage the burglar to grab-and-run, rather than ransack. If concern for security rises sharply—say, the neighborhood becomes a more accessible and attractive target—still more protection can be effected: neighborhood patrols, gated communities, and coordination of police and resident intelligence.

That said, the challenges of effective strategic defense are formidable. The homeowner, like the national security policymaker, has got to be willing to pay the direct costs of heightened defense without being sure an attack will ever take place. Assuming a practical limit to expenditures to prepare for plausible but seemingly unlikely events, how much for flood insurance, for fire insurance, and so forth? Next, what of opportunity costs—inconvenience, reduced alternative consumption and savings? And what of resistance to effort and expenditures (even ridicule) from inside and outside the household? Finally, as the responsible “policymaker,” how best to garner diagnostic information and expert judgment for informed decision making and action taking?

### *The Imperative to Seek More Effective Strategic Warning*

The terrorist attack of 11 September 2001 is fairly represented in open source commentary as a tactical surprise--if nothing else, a reminder of the inherent limitations of tactical warning. Judging whether there was a failure of strategic as well as tactical warning is a more difficult task, and depends largely on where one places the goal posts.

Evidence on the public record indicates that intelligence communicated clearly and often in the months before 11 September the judgment that the likelihood of a major al-Qa’ida terrorist attack *within* the United States was high and rising. The public record also indicates that many responsible policy officials had been convinced, from intelligence warnings and their other sources of information and analysis, that US vulnerability to such attack had grown markedly. Both governmental and non-governmental studies, in recognition of a mounting terrorist threat, had begun to recommend national investment in numerous protective measures—tougher air passenger scrutiny, greater cooperation between and among intelligence and law enforcement agencies, and stricter enforcement of immigration laws, to name three.

The bottom line? Even after taking account of inevitable hindsight bias that accompanies bureaucratic recollection of prescience of dramatic events, the public record indicates (1) strategic warning was given, (2) warning was received, (3) warning was believed. Yet commensurate protective measures were not taken. Whether in theory this represents a strategic warning success or failure by intelligence, the fact is that the national security components of the Government, intelligence included, failed to generate appropriate and affordable measures for increased preparedness.

Some observers characterize the surprise attending the 11 September terrorist attack as an instance of *inconvenient warning*. Top policy officials, while convinced at one level of engagement with the warning process of the reality of the threat, did not commit fully to the warning as perhaps they would have if the judgment reflected their own conclusion. Thus, they were unwilling to pay the political and economic costs of direct expenditures, inconvenience, disapproving special interests, and breaking of bureaucratic rice bowls.

Whatever the ultimate judgment of the performance of intelligence and policy communities, the impact of the 11 September attacks on the nation’s sense of security warrants a critical examination of the efficacy of strategic warning doctrine and practice.

*How can organizational obstacles to the intelligence professional's responsibilities for perception and communication of threat and the policy professional's responsibility for timely decision and action best be removed?*

The following recommendations have two main objectives:

1. To reconstitute strategic warning analysis as a collaborative governmental responsibility—*vice* an intelligence function—by engaging the policy community much more directly in every step of the strategic warning process.
2. To expand and upgrade the analytic resources devoted to strategic warning, in order to ensure a distinctive intelligence contribution to policy decision making and action taking in response to warning.

### *Recommendations for Strengthening Strategic Warning*

#### ***1. Clarify the Warning Mission***

Any critical examination of the mission of warning analysis should give primacy of place to avoidance or limitation of damage—and not to the unrealistic standard of avoidance of surprise. In other words, the ultimate goal of effective warning is to maximize damage limitation not predictive accuracy.

Acquisition of foreknowledge to reduce incident surprise should be treated as an extremely important means to the larger goal. Security preparedness is also a means to the goal of avoidance or limitation of damage. As indicated by the United States' relatively damage-free navigation of the Cold War, preparedness abets damage avoidance from surprise attacks mainly through the workings of deterrence. Preparedness advances damage limitation through erection of the means for appropriate preemptive offensive and post-attack defensive responses to all kinds of challenges to US interests.

Over the decades, the Intelligence Community has generated many worthy definitions of warning analysis. The one recommended here puts damage avoidance and limitation front and center. It also specifies *decision-enhancing assessments* as a requisite for a successful intelligence warning effort—that is, assessments with good potential to help avoid or limit damage.

*Warning analysis seeks to prevent or limit damage to US national security interests via communication of timely, convincing, and decision-enhancing assessments that assist policy officials to effect defensive and preemptive measures against future threats and to take action to defend against imminent threats.*

Decisions on whether and how to take action and the effectiveness of actions taken remain the responsibility of policy makers and action takers. The analysts' responsibility is to facilitate decisionmaking and action-taking processes by providing, for example,

disciplined depiction of perceived changes in the likelihood or means of the threat and identification and evaluation of US options for preempting, blunting, or otherwise limiting damage from the threat.

## ***2. Increase Resources for Strategic Warning***

Which is the more important intelligence responsibility—tactical or strategic warning? A strong argument can be made that the vital role of technical and clandestine intelligence collection in executing tactical warning justifies its dominant command on analytic resources. But intelligence scholars have argued that a government adequately prepared to respond to hostile action and other damaging events which receives no warning of a specific incident is better able to limit damage than a government that receives warning but is inadequately prepared to respond. This calls into question the extent to which the current division of analytic resources favors tactical over strategic warning.

The official doctrine of CIA and other Intelligence Community analytic units is that every analyst is a warning officer. Probably so, if intent rather than effect is the standard. At the Agency, at least through the 1980s, a rough balance prevailed between tactical and strategic, if all forms of event reporting and crisis management support were generously defined as tactical warning, and all forms of research and estimative work were similarly defined as strategic warning.

A major post-Cold War downsizing of analytic resources in the 1990s seemed to cut much more sharply into strategic warning analysis and in-depth, mid-term analysis generally than it did into tactical warning analysis and overall current policy support efforts. Understandably, the initial response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks was for intelligence leaders to effect a sizeable additional shift of total available analytic resources into the tactical warning effort.

For the Intelligence Community to meet its professional responsibility to prevent and limit damage to national security in the uncertain years ahead, leaders now should expand substantially and quickly its capacity to execute a more robust strategic warning effort. This includes attention to (1) doctrinal development, (2) staffing levels for in-depth analysis generally and thus for strategic warning, (3) career incentives, (4) continuous leadership engagement, and (5) especially tradecraft training to ensure that policy officials receive warning analysis they see as *decision-enhancing*.

Even before 11 September, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, whose position affords considerable influence over the partitioning of intelligence resources, called for increased effort to avoid strategic surprise. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz is long on record with charging intelligence analysts with “helping policymakers decide which seemingly unlikely threats to pay serious attention to.” Since 11 September, other key policy officials have taken actions that indicate they have joined this chorus.

## ***3. Strengthen Strategic Warning as Sound Estimative Analysis***

Intelligence analysts, as strategic warning officers, regularly make a convincing case for a judgment that a danger overlooked or understated by policymakers is likely to occur. Analysts leverage the strengths of the warning process at its best—mastery of collection guidance, collaborative multidisciplinary substantive expertise, well-structured all-source information, sound tradecraft for dealing with uncertainty, awareness of but some distance from the daily policymaker pressures to “get things done.” The analysts produce an assessment about a looming danger that is prescient, timely, and convincing, and thus provides a window for effective policy decision and action.

Many of the examples on the public record of strategic warning as sound estimative analysis—such as the successful US defusing of India-Pakistan war preparations in the early 1990s—depend on exploitation of all-source information that, while not conclusive, is determinative to the accomplished analyst. As a rule, it is the favorable balance between evidence and inference that galvanizes responsible policy officials into action.

While the overall record on “making the call” is a respectable one, doctrinal emphasis on specific estimative prediction is a root cause of high-profile warning failures. The analysts’ expertise, in effect, is trumped by the hazards of estimating. Available data on a complex issue is inherently ambiguous, open to manipulation by denial and deception, and otherwise subject to misinterpretation. The analysts’ understanding of how things usually work on the subject at hand, what one academic observer calls “normal theory,” does not adequately account for seemingly unprecedented or exceptional developments, overlooked key variables, foreign actors’ distinctive risk-benefit calculations.

This was more or less the case with the September 1962 Intelligence Community estimate that judged the Soviet Union would not install nuclear weapons in Cuba. The US analysts, for example, did not know the extent to which Nikita Khrushchev as dominant Soviet decision maker was misinformed about the seriousness of US warnings against the introduction into Cuba of offensive nuclear weapons.

Increased numbers of better-trained analysts, greater leadership engagement, and more robust warning tradecraft (addressed in sections below) will improve the success record in terms of making the right call as well as galvanizing policy officials to timely action. But as with tactical warning, strategic warning as sound estimative analysis will inevitably produce what are perceived to be “intelligence failures” that can reduce the willingness of policy officials to rely on intelligence warnings.

#### ***4. Strengthen Strategic Warning as Alternative Analysis***

Almost by definition, an effective strategic warning effort should also be focused on threats to US security interests that are surrounded by considerable, even impenetrable, substantive uncertainty—potential threats that may or may not mature. Here, the analysts address a danger they judge to be plausible and potentially highly damaging, but about the details of which—timing, location, modalities, triggers, indicators, indeed, likelihood—they retain important doubts.



Analysts address some issues, such as the threat of Soviet nuclear attack during the Cold War, because they judge that the danger, however unlikely, could prove to be so devastating that it has to be better understood. On other issues, analysts warn when they judge a danger was previously understated or has increased in magnitude or likelihood, and when policy officials seek help in refining contingency plans. But, again, for these strategic warning exercises, the danger addressed is either judged unlikely under prevailing conditions or is seen as too highly dependent on poorly understood factors and contingencies to assess its likelihood with confidence.

Strategic warning analysis, in these circumstances, is a branch of “alternative analysis,” in that its tradecraft places emphasis on disciplined and value-added assessments of threats that, for the most part, are seen as unlikely or indeterminate. Related forms of alternative analysis—including High Impact-Low Probability Analysis, What-If Analysis, Gaps in Information Analysis, and Devil’s Advocacy—share the requirement with warning analysis to marshal all-source information, expert insight, and specialized tradecraft to illuminate developments that analysts judge to be potentially damaging but unlikely.

CIA’s Directorate of Intelligence in recent years, in response to criticism of its warning performance, has increased tradecraft training in and production of alternative analysis. Unfortunately, in some circles, alternative analysis has picked up a reputation as an exercise in analysis for its own sake that is largely ignored by policy clients.

But alternative analysis rarely should be executed as an end in itself. The goal of strategic warning as alternative analysis should be to provide distinctive intelligence support to policy officials as they undertake the difficult task of deciding whether and how to deal with threats to US strategic interests before the advent of specific indicators rings the alarm bell. Here too expansion of analyst ranks and leadership attention and enrichment of tradecraft are needed to capture the policymakers’ confidence.

Here, too, there is reason to believe Intelligence Community programs that connect strategic warning to an enhanced alternative analysis effort will receive policymaker support. A key proposal of the 1998 *Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States*, which was chaired by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and on which Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz also served, called for expanded efforts by analysts to address high-impact dangers they thought unlikely. More specifically the report called on the policymakers to probe analysts to ensure they were not too quick to dismiss dangers simply because of a lack of hard evidence or clear precedent.

##### ***5. Assign the Strategic Warning Effort to Regular Analytic Units***

Most of an expanded strategic warning effort should be undertaken by production units also responsible for tactical warning and other analytic deliverables. The goal should be to increase the number and warning skills of analysts—not the complexity of the table of organization. Closeness to substantive colleagues provides benefits to the warning analyst in terms of policymaker contacts, databases, and substantive expertise. Multi-

function production units, admittedly, open the age-old danger of current policy support analysis driving out in-depth analysis by management fiat or implicit career incentives. Intelligence leaders have to get the word out that Peter is not to be robbed to pay Paul.

Line analysts engaged in strategic warning will often occupy the uncomfortable position of seeming to discredit their colleagues' established assumptions and conclusions about the issue at hand. This would warrant an important role as well for specialized entities, including the National Intelligence Officer for Warning, to produce independent strategic warnings and to provide a temporary base for line analysts to engage in a strategic warning effort removed from the pressures of their home unit.

## ***6. Expand Tradecraft Training and Research***

Since strategic warning analysis often focuses on depicting plausible future developments that would contradict the prevailing judgment of analysts as to the likelihood, timing, modalities, or security implications of a potential threat, effective execution requires special skills in alternative analysis tradecraft. This includes disciplined assessment of the following factors (*the italicized hypothetical text illustrates how strategic warning tradecraft would critically examine the judgment that the short-term stability of a pro-US regime is underwritten by the loyalty of its security forces*):

- (1) Evidence and inference that support alternative views about what drives the situation (key variables).
  - *In country X, analysts assume security force loyalty is the key to regime survival, but what if public anger over deteriorating economic conditions, which the government may mask in official statistics, is the more potent driving force?*
- (2) Similar tough-minded probing about the most likely path of future development of these key variables or drivers.
  - *Even if security force loyalty is the key, what if intelligence collection has under-reported growing populism among junior officers, who then would not be as ready to follow orders from more elitist senior officers to crack down on disturbances?*
- (3) Triggering events or developments that could set off the alternative dynamics and paths.
  - *A major threat to the regime could be triggered by such destabilizing factors as (a) greater public exposure of elite corruption, (b) breakdown of the antiquated food distribution network, (c) a truce between feuding populist leaders, (d) growing populism and nationalism within the officer corps.*

(4) Signposts or indicators that would signal increased (or decreased) danger for the United States.

- *Changes in the tenor of opposition, popular, and officer corps opinion about the status quo are often reflected first in informal newsletters, Internet commentary, and church sermons. Also the quality and price of rice usually correlates with the temper of the popular mood, including for the families of junior officers.*

These and related analytic skills for disciplined assessments of seemingly unlikely dangers are key to distinguishing strategic warning analysis from exercises in worst-case speculation. As addressed in detail below, the analysts' strategic warning effort is most likely to generate timely action if policy professionals have an analytic stake in all steps of the process—from selection of priority warning issues to co-ownership of indicator lists. Policymakers would be more likely to engage in such close collaboration if intelligence analysts develop specialized expertise that generates distinctive analytic value-added for the difficult decisionmaking processes of strategic planning.

That said, a research initiative is much needed to expand the armory of warning analysis tradecraft. Whereas much has been written about the causes of warning failure, a search for a science or even a theory for strategic warning success is well beyond reach. What can be developed are doctrinal and skills refinements that give all participants in the strategic warning process—collectors, analysts, policy officials—increased confidence in identifying, weighing, and tracking threats. For the most part, tradecraft developments that serve to improve the quality and policy utility of warning as alternative analysis would also improve performance of warning as sound estimative analysis.

One promising area for more robust analytic tradecraft would be techniques for evaluating the authenticity and diagnosticity of information.

- Regarding authenticity, use of denial and deception (D&D) is usually central to the planning of US adversaries, because of its effectiveness in compensating for other power weaknesses. From obsessive operational security to distractive reports about planned attacks overseas, D&D probably increased the odds for success for the 11 September terrorists. The Intelligence Community has made important strides in understanding how a less powerful opponent can use D&D against the United States. The main frontier for improving warning analysis is conversion of this awareness into practical analytic tradecraft for identifying and countering an adversary's manipulation of intelligence and open source information.
- Regarding diagnosticity, the rapid expansion of both classified and open source information can be a burden as well as a benefit to the warning analyst. More than ever, powerful yet practical tradecraft is needed to distill information that serves as reliable "signal" from the mass of collected information that is distracting "noise." Sharper analyst insight on what new information is central to

reducing uncertainty must then be used to rationalize intelligence and open source collection efforts.

## **7. Encourage Warning Analysts to Engage in Action Analysis**

Also to ensure that policy clients take strategic warning seriously, analysts have to be better prepared to address with distinctive intelligence value-added the “so-what” of their assessments. This includes addressing not only the likely implications of a threat to US interests but also, in cost-benefit terms, measures the United States can take to reduce the likelihood and magnitude of potential damage.

Managers and senior analysts regularly join in policymaker efforts to identify and evaluate alternative measures the United States can take to avoid or limit damage from developments that would harm security interests. This form of action or opportunities analysis is usually delivered in oral forums—including telephone exchanges, in-office briefings, teleconferences, and Interagency Working Groups and other decision-oriented meetings. The analyst’s professional role in action analysis is to identify and evaluate; policymakers retain the professional responsibilities to recommend and choose.

All analysts, especially strategic warning analysts, have got to be well trained in the doctrines and skills associated with this professional division of labor—in effect, a replacement for the previously imbedded doctrine that sets a wall of separation between intelligence analysis and policy-support activities in any guise. Once analysts sense that policy clients have bought into the need to review defensive preparedness and contingency planning in response to a strategic warning effort, the analysts can best ensure continued contact and guidance by directing their substantive and tradecraft expertise to these “so-what” issues.

The main intelligence asset that analysts bring to the table for action analysis is their expert knowledge of the history and culture, political and leadership dynamics, and back-stage agents of influence of the countries and organizations that threaten US interests. While this substantive expertise is also central to the risk analysis phase of strategic warning, the goal in action analysis is to help US policy officials determine how best to divert, deter, disrupt, and generally leverage a threatening foreign entity.

One thing needed here is more extensive analyst training in the instrumentalities of US power and influence and in decisionmaking processes regarding their use. Agency analysts have come a long way from the point some 20 years ago, when a CIA Deputy Director for Intelligence observed that his analysts knew how every government in the world worked—except their own. But a continued shyness toward including action analysis in written assessments probably reflects analysts’ insecurity about their understanding the policymaking process as well as about the ethics of their selective engagement in the process.

## *8. Select Strategic Warning Issues Carefully*

If the goal is to provide distinctive analytic values that policymakers incorporate into their national security decision making and action taking, the strategic warning effort will be resource intensive. In the CIA context, the analysis will usually require a multidisciplinary team of analysts, well connected to the collection community, analytic colleagues in other agencies and peer-level policy staffers. The National Intelligence Officer for Warning would serve to provide guidance on tradecraft and process, and to ensure access to and credibility with key policy officials and Agency leaders. The Sherman Kent Center's Global Futures Partnership and the DI's Strategic Analytic Group would help to arrange for contributions to in-depth strategic warning efforts from non-governmental substantive and methodological experts.

The resource requirements for effective strategic warning efforts, thus, will dictate careful selection of topics—in a sense a triage approach. As a rule, topic selection should favor the national security threats deemed potentially most damaging rather than those viewed as most likely—that is, the plausible developments whose consequences well-informed policymakers fear most. Again, the main value of an expanded strategic warning effort should be damage limitation not predictive accuracy.

This is not a call to avoid working on what was described earlier as strategic warning as sound estimative analysis. What is to be avoided are disguised “training exercises,” where the warning mission is used for analysts to build their credentials on a subject with nothing much new to convey to well-informed policymakers who already have the dangers addressed well in mind.

Illustrative examples for selection of topics on developments that could do the most damage to US security interests include the prospects for a collapse of political stability in Mexico (or in Pakistan or Egypt or China); and for the outbreak of regional warfare in the Middle East or in South Asia. Catastrophic terrorism, environmental or humanitarian disasters that have a global reach, and economic and societal breakdowns in Russia or Japan might also be topics on which strategic warning analysis could play a major role in identifying, assessing, and monitoring major potential threats to US security interests.

Initially, while strategic warning resources are still scarce, policymakers should play a major role in topic selection, to ensure their active participation in the warning analysis process. That is, a production unit's main policy clients should be polled on what developments they fear most—that keep them awake at night.

Once policymakers gain confidence in the utility of a strengthened strategic warning regime, and closer ties between the warning and policy planning process are thereby established, more of the initiative for topic selection can reside with intelligence producers. Even then, validation of topic selection should be obtained from the policy clients whose active participation is required for an effective strategic warning effort.

The objective is not to forfeit the responsibility of the intelligence professional to call policymakers' attention to dangers they seem to be overlooking or understating. But rather to increase the likelihood the busy policymakers' attention will be gained when the intelligence professional issues such warnings.

### *9. Expand Policymaker Role in Warning Analysis*

Relations between the strategic warning and contingency planning processes have demonstrated considerable variation over the decades, depending in good measure on the centrality and urgency of the threat addressed. At one extreme, during the Cold War, the intelligence analysis and policy planning cycles regarding estimating and countering future threats from Soviet nuclear weapons development were closely tied and timed both to the Department of Defense yearly procurement planning schedules and to Congressional budgetary calendars.

Longstanding crises, such as the Vietnam War, produced more ad hoc relationships—but lines of communication that regularly put intelligence community assessment and policy community planning on the same page, even if not always harmoniously.

At times, strategic warning analysis and contingency policymaking develop useful lines of connection on certain issues through the efforts of individuals in both camps who actively seek it and institutions such as Interagency Working Groups that are charged with effecting it.

That said, strategic warning on most issues, most of the time has largely been an intelligence function, the practitioners of which hope will be taken seriously in policymaking. And contingency planning has essentially been a policy function, the practitioners of which hope to garner useful Intelligence Community support. While the record shows a mixture of successful and unsuccessful connections, policy community criticism of strategic warning comes across more vividly in the record than does praise.

Two common complaints by key policy officials about strategic warning efforts—before 11 September 2001—were (1) inadequate influence over the timing and focus of National Intelligence Estimates and other assessments, and (2) concern that periodic warning reports showed inadequate sensitivity to the wrenching shift in defensive resources that would be required if the warnings were taken seriously.

- Regarding timing, one former intelligence analyst who had crossed over to serve as a policy official observed that her analyst colleagues seemed not to understand that policy decisions will be held up for many reasons—but not for lack of a well-timed intelligence input.
- Regarding periodic warning lists, one senior policymaker expressed his indignation at what he saw as the bureaucratic imperative to warn to meet weekly deadlines and quotas.

To overcome producer-consumer disconnects, strategic warning should be reconfigured, as advocated throughout this memorandum, as a *governmental responsibility* rather than an intelligence responsibility. The policy officials who will have to make the challenging decisions about resource commitments for defense against future threats should have a direct role at every phase of the strategic warning process, including (1) intelligence resource allocations, (2) topic selection, (3) general analytic standards, (4) specific warning methodologies, and (5) selection and monitoring of indicators of change in likelihood, impact, timing, and character of dangers.

Under a collaborative system, when participants judge warning thresholds to have been breached and difficult policy decisions have to be made, policy officials would see the strands of their own analytic thinking in the warning process, ideally amplified by the all-source information, expert insights, and distinctive tradecraft of intelligence analysts.

A rough (and perhaps romanticized) model for the relationship would be the workings of the United Kingdom's Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). The main JIC deliverable is a "Government Assessment," in all phases of which serving policy officials participate alongside intelligence professionals. The policy officials are supposed to wear their "intelligence hat" when appropriate, and when appropriate their "policy hat."

Would such a system eliminate the phenomenon of "inconvenient warning" in the United States—where the numbers of bureaucratic entities and people involved are greater and the lines of intelligence-policy communication more stretched out than in the United Kingdom? Probably not. But it should reduce its frequency, and also set up feedback loops and other mechanisms for continual refinements of the processes of intelligence-policy cooperation needed to underwrite effective strategic warning.

What of the dangers of policymaker domination of the strategic warning process, to the derogation of analysts' integrity and specialized expertise? The US record on certain highly contentious issues—Vietnam in the 1960s; Central America in the 1980s—is a reminder that professionals do not always wear the "appropriate hat."

What is needed here is commitment of top leaders of the intelligence and policy camps to zero tolerance of abuses of established warning ethics down the line, and not walls that promote analysts' irrelevance in the name of protecting their integrity. On their own, analysts can warrant policymaker respect for their integrity by demonstrating command of distinctive warning expertise and tradecraft that help get the difficult contingency planning job done.

The spate of post-mortem critiques of intelligence analysis performance issued during the 1990s in fact called for closer relations between the analytic and policy communities across the board. For example, the 1996 *Report of the Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community* judged that the greater obstacle to an effective intelligence contribution to sound policymaking was analysis that was ignored because of inadequate connection to consumers and not that of analysis that was politicized by relations that were too close.

Perhaps the greatest danger is a rush to atone for assumed warning shortcomings surrounding 11 September with changes for change's sake. A more deliberate pace of change, which takes account of the insights of leaders of the policy community, Congress, and leading thinkers of the non-governmental community as well as of experienced hands of the Intelligence Community, is more likely to generate the robust strategic warning regime the nation deserves. The points that have been argued here are intended to contribute to a constructive dialogue on such change.