Postprint of a Study on the Influencing Factors and Pattern Generalization of U.S. National Intelligence Estimates

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Conducting in-depth research on the influencing factors and operational models of U.S. national intelligence assessment helps national intelligence to guide and serve national security, and promotes the modernization of the national security governance system. [Method/Process] Based on policy process theory and related research, this study constructs a theoretical framework for national intelligence assessment from four dimensions: "assessment principles," "assessment questions," "assessment approaches," and "assessment reports," and introduces 20 cases of U.S. national intelligence assessment work, using crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA) to explore the influencing factors and operational models of U.S. national intelligence assessment. [Results/Conclusion] The study shows that U.S. national intelligence assessment work is the result of a combination of multiple factors, and on this basis generalizes three operational models of national intelligence assessment: the non-organizational model, the intelligence politicization model, and the inter-agency coordination model.

Full Text

Preamble

A Study on Influencing Factors and Model Generalization of U.S. National Intelligence Estimates

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Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] An in-depth study of the influencing factors and operational models of U.S. National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) can help national intelligence lead and serve national security, thereby promoting the modernization of national security governance systems. [Method/Process] Based on policy process theory and related research, this study constructs a theoretical framework for national intelligence estimates from four dimensions: "assessment principles," "assessment questions," "assessment approaches," and "assessment reports." It introduces 20 cases of U.S. NIEs and employs crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA) to explore the influencing factors and operational models. [Result/Conclusion] The research demonstrates that U.S. NIEs result from the combined effects of multiple factors, leading to three generalized models: non-organizational model, politicized intelligence model, and institutional collaboration model.

Keywords: National Intelligence Estimates; Model Generalization; Policy Process Theory; Qualitative Comparative Analysis; csQCA
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President Xi Jinping has emphasized that "ensuring national security is an organic component of modernizing national governance systems and capabilities," and that "adhering to a holistic national security view means achieving overall national security governance." During this special period of national rejuvenation and profound global changes, the President's holistic national security view and the key initiatives for modernizing national security governance systems represent not only crucial planning for safeguarding national security but also clear guidance for future strategic goal-setting, steps, and pathways [1-2]. Advancing the modernization of national security governance systems requires not only coordinating security governance structures and operational functions under the holistic national security view but also enhancing the capabilities of security governance entities to systematically address various security challenges [3]. Throughout this process, the Information-Assessment-Solution chain remains central, with intelligence playing a critical supporting role at all stages [4]. As the renowned Chinese scientist Qian Xuesen noted, "Intelligence is activated knowledge." A key indicator of a modernized national intelligence system is the establishment of strategic intelligence analysis at the core of intelligence work [5]. Therefore, it is essential to explore how "national intelligence" can lead and serve national security, and how it can fulfill its "advisory" role in national security governance system construction.

The National Intelligence Estimate is an intelligence product generated through comprehensive analysis and forecasting of political, economic, and other intelligence to serve decision-making. In the United States, NIEs are considered the most formal and highest-level strategic analytical products of the U.S. intelligence community [6]. Since the Cold War, NIEs have been produced by

specialized agencies whose organizational procedures have undergone continuous improvement, influencing and being influenced by decision-makers in subtle and complex ways [7]. As a global power with a relatively complete and distinctive national security system, the United States has significantly impacted international security order in recent years through its robust national security capabilities [8-9]. Therefore, examining the influencing factors and operational models of U.S. NIEs can not only clarify the main threads behind the country's major strategic decisions but also provide valuable references for developing a Chinese-characteristic national intelligence assessment system and advancing the modernization of China's national security governance.

Accordingly, this study constructs a theoretical framework for national intelligence estimates based on policy process theory and related research, combining the NIE process across four dimensions: "assessment principles," "question formulation," "assessment approaches," and "result reporting." It then examines 20 representative cases of U.S. NIEs using crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis to explore the operational models of American national intelligence assessment.

1 Literature Review

1.1 Conceptual Connotation of National Intelligence Estimates

Strategic intelligence pioneer Sherman Kent proposed that intelligence is knowledge useful for decision-making, the institution engaged in such knowledge exploration, and a highly specialized activity. As the security environment continuously expands, the connotation of national intelligence also evolves. Scholar Hu Hui defines national intelligence as government intelligence involving multiple aspects of national and homeland security [10]. From a functional perspective, national intelligence supports national-level decision-making, focusing on resolving information asymmetry in national policy-making [11]. In essence, national intelligence is born from and serves national security, particularly deserving attention in today's volatile global landscape.

The concept of "estimate/evaluation" generally corresponds to value, risk, and trends, with results often expressed as more or less, high or low, or degrees of magnitude. Kent argued that estimating represents our quest for knowledge when facing the unknown, addressing what might happen next or the direction of contingencies [12]. In the intelligence community, estimative intelligence, which cannot be obtained through direct search, often becomes the rarest and most important among numerous intelligence products [12]. George Pettee was among the first to propose the concept of intelligence assessment and its production organizational structure. Drawing on Kent and other scholars, this study defines national intelligence estimates as forward-looking analysis and strategic forecasting of intelligence concerning core national security affairs. Three key points require attention: First, it involves core national security matters, meaning NIEs represent thorough assessments of situations related to national

security. Second, it provides forward-looking analysis and strategic forecasting useful for decision-making, indicating assessments of possible changes and conclusions about probabilities and possibilities. Third, NIEs are national-level estimative intelligence products with authority and decision-support functions for top leadership, requiring collaborative efforts from relevant agencies through specific organizational structures and processes.

1.2 Related Research

Based on mainstream analytical models and concepts of policy process, this study integrates rational logic, interest logic, political logic, presidential sources, intelligence agency sources, outcome orientation, analysis orientation, single outcomes, and multiple outcomes into a nine-variable influencing factors model for NIEs, drawing on the Rational Actor Model, Advocacy Coalition Framework, Multiple Streams Theory, and the Intelligence Analysis Pyramid Model.

1.2.1 Rational Actor Model Many policy analysis studies use the Rational Actor Model as a blueprint for policy construction. D.L. Weimer and A.R. Vining summarize the rational model's analytical steps as: understanding problems, selecting and explaining relevant goals and constraints, choosing solutions, selecting evaluation criteria, describing alternative policies, evaluating, and recommending actions [13]. According to Weimer and Li Wenzhao, rational decision-making involves two stages: problem analysis and solution analysis, both crucial throughout the rational process [13-14].

1.2.2 Advocacy Coalition Framework The Advocacy Coalition Framework, first proposed by Sabatier in the 1980s, integrates three policy analysis models and has been applied and refined by scholars across numerous fields over nearly 30 years, demonstrating strong explanatory power. Nelson categorizes these three models as progressive, interest group competition, and ideological conflict models [15], which provide insights for analyzing NIE principles.

1.2.3 Multiple Streams Theory Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory systematically addresses why decision-makers focus on specific problems and how these issues reach the policy agenda—essentially why problems become problems and attract decision-maker attention [16]. The theory explains the panoramic process of policy participation, demonstrating how actors influence policy processes through power and resources [17]. This study applies Multiple Streams Theory to explain question formulation in NIEs, exploring how various forces within and outside the decision-making system interact and compete to advance current proposals onto the NIE agenda.

1.2.4 Intelligence Analysis Pyramid Model Kent first proposed the Intelligence Analysis Pyramid Model in his 1968 essay "Estimates and Influence," building on Pettee's intelligence analysis concepts. In Kent's description, the

perfect estimate resembles a pyramid: the base consists of indisputable facts, the sides comprise numerous assumptions, and the apex represents the estimate's conclusion. He identified three approaches to reach the apex: (1) following inferential inertia to a final conclusion; (2) treating the analytical result as a combination of possible factors without final speculation; and (3) observing before concluding, with the first two approaches occurring more frequently [18]. This pyramid model provides theoretical support for exploring NIE product forms.

2 Influencing Factors Model of U.S. National Intelligence Estimates

2.1 Analytical Framework for NIE Influencing Factors

Based on the literature review, this study focuses on four core elements influencing NIEs: "assessment principles," "assessment questions," "assessment approaches," and "assessment reports." Combining policy process theory and related research, it constructs a nine-variable influencing factors model incorporating rational logic, interest logic, political logic, presidential sources, intelligence agency sources, outcome orientation, analysis orientation, single outcomes, and multiple outcomes to better understand NIE operational models. The analytical framework is shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

2.1.1 Impact of Assessment Principles on NIEs (1) Scientific Logic. According to the Advocacy Coalition Framework, Nelson divides policy analysis theories into progressive, interest group competition, and ideological conflict models, reflecting three situations people face in pursuing scientific knowledge: rationality and science, interest 博弈 and coordination, and ideological conflict. The traditional school of intelligence analysis and decision-making believes that rational and scientific thinking can greatly enhance objectivity, preventing intelligence work from deviating from its fundamental mission and ensuring impartial products [19]. Therefore, in NIEs, maintaining value-neutral scientific spirit can suspend all value preconceptions and interest positions to obtain objective knowledge. As scholar Gao Jinhu notes, national intelligence needs to maintain distance from decision-making to avoid distorting facts to satisfy decision-makers' subjective intentions [20], thereby ensuring objective products. However, opponents argue that emphasizing absolute rationality, objectivity, and completeness may alienate decision-makers and prevent effective guidance and feedback, hindering intelligence work. Based on this analysis, this study identifies scientific logic as a variable to explore its impact on NIEs.

(2) Interest Logic. Interest 博弈 and coordination: Under irrational influences, the Advocacy Coalition Framework suggests that competition among different actors affects government behavior to serve particular interests. Due to cognitive limitations and external constraints, complete rationality is often unattainable, allowing irrational influences to affect NIE processes. Scholar Zhang Li

notes that the essence of NIEs lies in analysis [21], reflecting assessors' cognitive processes of objective matters and thus being susceptible to mainstream consciousness of assessment subjects. Under this understanding, Zhang proposes rational coordination of resources among intelligence agencies to better serve NIEs [21], a view corroborated by British NIE concepts: when interests drive malignant competition among agencies, it reduces NIE efficiency and limits assessment perspectives. Standing at the national level for resource coordination and interest reconciliation avoids wasteful resource allocation and facilitates smooth NIE implementation [22]. Based on this analysis, this study identifies interest logic to explore how interest 博弈 and coordination principles influence NIEs.

(3) Political Logic. Ideological conflict in the Advocacy Coalition Framework stems from competition among different ideologies formed by varying approaches to social problems [23]. In intelligence work, this manifests as intelligence operations or products influenced by political factors—NIEs affected by individuals or organizations advocating certain political ideologies. This politicization always incorporates decision-makers' subjective opinions, reducing product objectivity. This influence was most profound during the Cold War, when ideology-driven intelligence politicization became prominent, whether to better serve U.S. global policy or to gain decision-maker trust, severely damaging product objectivity [24]. In such contexts, NIEs often become advocates for decision-makers. Therefore, under ideological conflict, decision-makers may pressure NIEs to provide products meeting their special preferences rather than objective reality, or NIE organizations may proactively produce products that, while violating objectivity, satisfy decision-maker needs. Consequently, this study identifies political logic to explore its impact on NIEs.

2.1.2 Impact of Assessment Questions on NIEs According to Multiple Streams Theory, Kingdon explores why problems become problems and how they enter government agendas as priority issues. This study applies the theory to clarify how important individuals or organizations influence different problems' impact on NIEs, and how interactions across different levels and organizations drive NIE progress. The U.S. NIE process involves three tiers: intelligence community leadership, assessment management departments, and participating agencies. Intelligence community leaders (including the Director of Central Intelligence and Director of National Intelligence) are primarily responsible for initiating assessment questions and production plans based on decision-maker needs and their own judgment.

(1) Presidential Source. NIEs essentially represent forward-looking analysis and strategic forecasting of core national security affairs by decision-making groups. The U.S. political system's unique characteristics mean the President often plays a key role in question formulation. Zuo Xiying's research shows that: first, the President's personality and beliefs affect how they view "how the world is" and "how we should be," thus influencing issue characterization;

second, presidential advisors provide critical information and recommendations affecting question formulation; third, relationships between the President and other officials affect structural power, determining which issues advance on the agenda. Therefore, the presidential source (top-down) manifests as leaders bargaining to maintain organizational interests [25], directly influencing NIE task direction. Based on this analysis, this study identifies presidential source to explore its impact.

(2) Intelligence Agency Source. The "bottom-up" perspective refers to assessment management departments and participating intelligence agencies that execute and provide feedback. As grassroots organizations, these agencies represent organizational behavior viewed as organizational output. Bottom-up question formulation exhibits clear organizational process model characteristics [25]. On one hand, based on their responsibilities, agencies propose more realistic assessment questions from their domain expertise and overall strategic direction, being more sensitive to real threats than high-level leaders. On the other hand, for organizational autonomy maintenance, different agencies propose different questions due to resource competition and functional domain differences. Thus, bottom-up agency sources influence NIE task direction. Based on this analysis, this study identifies intelligence agency source to explore its impact.

2.1.3 Impact of Assessment Approaches on NIEs Existing research divides NIE approaches into outcome-oriented and analysis-oriented categories. Since intelligence forecasting is essentially a top-down benchmarking method guiding specific assessment work [26], approach differences affect numerous NIE stages, including collection, exchange, and coordination, ultimately influencing product quality [27-28].

(1) Outcome Orientation. Outcome orientation emphasizes achieving specific results or decisions, judging process quality and assessment quality by supported decision outcomes. While this can improve efficiency and reduce costs in complex intelligence domains, it may cause assessors to neglect whole-process attention, creating management "black boxes" that negatively affect efficiency [29]. As scholar Niu Xinchun notes, although intelligence work directly links to decision effectiveness, using outcome orientation to judge entire intelligence work is problematic [30]. Based on this analysis, this study identifies outcome orientation to explore its impact.

(2) Analysis Orientation. Analysis orientation focuses on full-cycle intelligence assessment exploration, using comprehensive, systematic methods to integrate intelligence into knowledge that provides options for actors [28]. Through analysis orientation, intelligence achieves coordination, interaction, and integration systematically and dynamically, improving NIE quality, effectiveness, and accuracy [31]. However, compared to outcome orientation, analysis orientation requires establishing systematic processes. Immature processes can create barriers and isolation between intelligence, decision-making, and action, ultimately affecting efficiency and quality [32]. Based on this analysis, this study identifies

analysis orientation to explore its impact.

2.1.4 Impact of Assessment Reports on NIEs Intelligence products refer to reports formed through analytical procedures, including estimates, forecasts, correlation analyses, and other analytical products [33]. These are the lifeblood of intelligence work and crucial for judging NIE value. Based on the Intelligence Analysis Pyramid Model, NIEs follow different approaches: following inferential inertia to a final conclusion (single outcome) or narrowing results to limited possibilities without final speculation (multiple outcomes). Whether product forms meet decision-maker needs determines adoption, and different report forms affect NIEs.

(1) Single Outcome. Single outcome products more easily satisfy decision-makers, who show relatively less interest in multi-hypothesis forecasts. Products that directly guide action can focus on decision-maker intelligence needs, effectively responding to questions, even becoming "tailor-made" [34]. However, this often politicizes NIEs, making them tools for advocating decision-maker positions. Based on this analysis, this study identifies single outcome to explore its impact.

(2) Multiple Outcomes. Multiple outcomes involve assessors developing several hypotheses and scenarios for future forecasting because intelligence collection limitations make complete truth mastery impossible, only allowing uncertainty reduction. Multiple outcomes represent more objective and professional reports that avoid politicization. Based on this analysis, this study identifies multiple outcomes to explore its impact.

2.2 Research Method, Cases, and Measurement

2.2.1 Method Applicability Analysis This study employs crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA) for configurational analysis. Compared to traditional statistical methods, csQCA offers two advantages: First, traditional methods favor large samples, while QCA handles 10-80 medium-to-small samples. This study's 20 representative NIE cases suit this method well. Second, csQCA handles dichotomous variables—after setting condition variables, each case shows variable presence (1) or absence (0). These condition variable combinations represent the studied outcome or complex social phenomenon's influencing factor combinations—precisely what this study seeks to explore regarding NIE influencing factors and operational model pathways.

2.2.2 Case Selection NIEs are primarily produced by the National Intelligence Council for decision-makers and have played important roles in historical events. The most recently declassified NIE was produced in 2006, titled "Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States," publicly released on September 30, 2011 due to national security classification principles. This study strictly follows csQCA requirements for case quantity (10-80) and quality (typical, diverse, and clear outcomes). Selection principles include: (1)

representativeness and significant influence matching study variables; (2) diversified characteristics; (3) completed phases; and (4) comprehensive supporting materials enabling cross-verification for high reliability. Based on these criteria, 20 representative U.S. NIE cases were selected, as shown in Table 1 .

2.2.3 Variable Measurement Variables were dichotomously coded [35] based on specific criteria shown in Table 2 .

3 Model Generalization Analysis of U.S. NIEs

This study analyzes complex solution results, as shown in Table 3 . The overall consistency and coverage exceed 0.9 [36-37], indicating strong explanatory power for the 20 selected cases. This means U.S. NIEs result from several complex factor combinations. Based on five statistical results, this study generalizes three operational models: early non-organizational model, politicized intelligence model, and institutional collaboration model.

3.1 Early Non-Organizational Model

Table 3 shows the first combination "scientific logic * ~political logic * presidential source * ~intelligence agency source * outcome orientation * ~analysis orientation * single outcome * ~multiple outcomes" and the second combination "scientific logic * ~political logic * ~presidential source * intelligence agency source * outcome orientation * ~analysis orientation * single outcome * ~multiple outcomes." Cases explained only by the first combination account for 20% of total cases; those explained only by the second account for 10%. Common factors in this stage include scientific logic, outcome orientation, and single outcome, with presidential source or intelligence agency source affecting under different contexts. This reflects that NIEs were primarily influenced by scientific logic: assessments based on objective evidence, rigorous analytical processes, and standards. Meanwhile, outcome orientation indicates the assessment process focused on explaining and demonstrating key conclusions, thus presenting single outcomes. Although intelligence agencies served decision-making and provided timely products, they maintained scientific objectivity. The first result shows assessment questions influenced by presidential decision-making groups, while the second shows influence from various intelligence agencies.

These two results are summarized as the early non-organizational model. In NIEs' early stages, the operational model remained uncoordinated and non-organized. As an independent agency from decision-makers, NIEs upheld scientific neutrality, with question formulation primarily originating from presidential decision-making groups. During this period, Director of Central Intelligence Smith, referencing Houston's suggestions, advocated coordinating all intelligence agencies, with CIA responsible for providing clear guidance to departments. Smith's previous role as Chief of Staff under Eisenhower gave him high status in the community, enabling him to secure attendance from all depart-

ments at assessment meetings. The 1948 National Security Council Intelligence Directive No. 3 established coordination standards for agency participation, but this interagency coordination stemmed primarily from Smith's personal authority rather than genuine institutional mechanisms, rendering the coordination report ineffective. Consequently, question formulation was affected by multiple sources, such as in 1946 when the Central Intelligence Agency was tasked with producing an estimate on Soviet war potential, after which Air Force, Navy, and Army departments only addressed questions relevant to their own capability assessments. In summary, the early NIE model operated in a non-organized, uncoordinated state. As an independent agency from decision-makers, it upheld scientific neutrality, with question formulation mostly originating from presidential groups. During this period, Director Smith advocated for interagency coordination after his appointment, increasing departmental intelligence activity and making question formulation subject to various agency influences, though overall coordination mechanisms remained lacking. NIEs still addressed specific problems, with reports typically presenting single outcomes.

3.2 Politicized Intelligence Model

Table 3 shows the combination "~scientific logic * interest logic * political logic * presidential source * outcome orientation * ~analysis orientation * single outcome * ~multiple outcomes," accounting for 15% of cases. In this stage, influenced by interest and political logic, inter-actor interest 博弈 affected assessment work toward self-serving behaviors. Political logic manifested as assessments oriented toward decision-maker needs, providing actionable analysis from the decision-maker perspective. Consequently, question formulation primarily originated from presidential decision-making groups. To satisfy presidential needs, despite multiple possible interpretations, assessment reports chose to support decision-maker intentions, presenting single outcomes.

This result is summarized as the politicized intelligence model. Intelligence politicization often reflects unhealthy intelligence-decision relationships, stemming from their inherent adversarial nature and manifesting as tension between intelligence objectivity and decision-making effectiveness [38]. When NIE principles aim to satisfy vested interests of 博弈 parties and support decision-makers, agencies deviate from scientific neutrality, while decision-makers need ideal assessment products to counter opposition voices. For example, during the Vietnam War, since the CIA was marginalized since President Kennedy's administration, objective assessments risked suppression. After interest 博弈, the CIA chose to support President Johnson's policy goal of "saving the South Vietnamese regime at all costs," requiring NIEs to prove the war was winnable. To attract decision-maker attention, assessment agencies had to alter objective judgments and produce conclusions against their convictions. On Viet Cong strength estimates, actual assessments ranged from 500,000 to 600,000—far beyond what decision-makers could accept and potentially causing President Johnson to lose re-election due to perceived incompetence on Vietnam. Therefore, for political

reasons, the actual reported estimate was understated. Meanwhile, question formulation remained dominated by presidential decision-making groups. Although U.S. security decision-making authority is distributed among the President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and security advisors, with these mid-level groups actively driving the agenda, final decision-making power remained with the President and Secretary of State.

In summary, under the politicized model, assessment agencies—under interest 博弈 and political power influence—either anticipate decision-maker intentions and proactively submit products satisfying their demands, or passively produce satisfactory assessments under pressure. Both scenarios represent departures from objective assessment through interest and power compromises. Question formulation continued originating primarily from presidential decision-making groups. Due to intelligence compromise, agencies adopted outcome orientation to 迎合 decision-maker expectations, with products manifesting as single outcomes.

3.3 Institutional Collaboration Model

Table 3 shows two combinations: "scientific logic * interest logic * ~political logic * ~presidential source * intelligence agency source * ~outcome orientation * analysis orientation * single outcome" and "scientific logic * interest logic * ~political logic * ~presidential source * intelligence agency source * ~outcome orientation * analysis orientation * multiple outcomes." Cases explained only by these combinations account for 50% of total cases. Common factors include scientific logic, interest logic, intelligence agency source, and analysis orientation, with products showing both single and multiple outcomes. This reflects NIEs adhering to scientific logic—based on objective evidence, rigorous processes, and standards—while conducting intelligence cooperation across levels through multi-actor interest coordination. Question formulation primarily originated from various intelligence agencies' initiatives and drives. Product forms included both single and multiple outcomes.

This result is summarized as the institutional collaboration model. In this stage, NIE processes and procedures matured. As an independent agency from decision-makers, NIEs could operate smoothly through reasonable organizational structures and coordinated production-user institutions, ensuring objective and effective assessment products, thus manifesting parallel scientific and interest coordination logic. Under CIA's unified coordination, various intelligence agencies and departments fulfilled responsibilities and division of labor, conducting assessment cooperation across levels. NIE drafters were not limited to CIA but included participants from other agencies like the National Intelligence Council, Defense Intelligence Agency, and State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Therefore, question formulation was influenced by multiple intelligence agency sources as interest groups. This meant NIE agencies were pure production departments, while product usage tasks were assigned to high-level decision-maker committees. The entire process was

"analysis-oriented," focusing intelligence work on "analysis" through comprehensive, systematic methods to address information gaps and uncertainties. Finally, NIE products coexisted as single and multiple outcomes. Multiple outcomes, requiring no judgment, only provided decision-makers with intelligence support, often presenting several possible explanations for an issue. For example, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, assessment results presented multiple policy options: doing nothing to accept the Soviet fait accompli, or armed invasion and blockade of Cuba.

4 Conclusion and Outlook

Based on reviewing NIE conceptual connotations and policy process theory, this study constructed an influencing factors model for U.S. NIEs across four dimensions: assessment principles, questions, processes, and reports. Using 20 representative U.S. NIE cases and qualitative comparative analysis, the theoretical model was tested, yielding five factor combinations generalized into three operational models: early non-organizational, politicized intelligence, and institutional collaboration.

Clearly, as a country with a vast and complete national security system, the United States' rapid post-WWII rise, enhanced intelligence system construction after 9/11, and significant international order impact through robust national security capabilities are closely related to its substantial investment in national intelligence work [39]. As the most formal and highest-level strategic analytical product of the U.S. intelligence community, NIEs effectively integrate diverse intelligence resources, enhancing U.S. strategic-level intelligence analysis, production, and consumption capabilities, providing solid foundations for strategic decision-making. Therefore, exploring the logic and internal mechanisms behind U.S. NIE operations, and how this process interacts with U.S. decision-making and intelligence communities, can provide references for developing China's NIE system under the holistic national security view. As the President emphasized in the holistic national security view, we should selectively learn from other countries. Especially in today's complex and severe international environment, adhering to the holistic national security view and advancing national governance system and capability modernization are key to pioneering a Chinese-characteristic national security path. In this context, China's NIE work will face multi-level planning and design challenges. How to develop a Chinese-characteristic NIE institutional system and strengthen close ties between NIE work and high-level decision-makers while broadening pathways for assessment products to be known and adopted by decision-makers [40] will be an urgent and important direction for China's national intelligence development.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.