

However, as several Intelligence Community officers told the Joint Inquiry, in practice, the lack of adequate separation between the tiers made it very difficult to choose between priorities, and the intelligence prioritization process was often confusing. Former National Counterterrorism Coordinator Richard Clarke noted that the White House "...never really gave good systematic, timely guidance to the Intelligence Community about what priorities were at the national level." Deputy National Security Advisor Steven Hadley responded to Joint Inquiry questions by stating that Bush Administration officials were told by Clinton Administration officials during the transition that "this priority-setting process [PDD-35] ... was not effective for communicating changing priorities over time." Joint Inquiry interviews with Intelligence Community officials indicate that many felt that the prioritization process was so broad as to be meaningless.

Moreover, PDD-35 was never effectively adapted before September 11 to meet the changing nature of the threat, despite specific language in the document that required an annual review. As certain threats, including terrorism, increased in the late 1990s, none of the "lower level" Tier 1 priorities were downgraded so that resources --money and people-- could be reallocated. For much of the Intelligence Community, everything became a priority since its customers in the U.S. Government wanted to know everything about everything all the time.

The growing inadequacy of the PDD-35 structure fueled an overburdened and increasingly ineffective requirements system within the Intelligence Community. At NSA, for example, an official described the PDD-35 requirements system as "cumbersome." NSA analysts acknowledged that they had far too many broad requirements -- some 1500 formal requirements by September 11 -- that covered virtually every situation and target. Working from these 1500 formal requirements, NSA had developed almost 200,000 "Essential Elements of Information" that were desired by its customers. While they understood the gross priorities and worked on the requirements that were practicable on any given day, several NSA analysts acknowledged that the [page 53] priority demands sometimes precluded them from delving as deeply into certain areas as they would have liked.