The Challenge of Achieving Wisdom  
in Intelligence Products and Processes

This is a short ‘think piece’ to which the author encourage responses: mmandregg@stthomas.edu

The word “wisdom” almost never appears in intelligence literature. Here are some reasons why.

1. Taskings almost never ask for “wisdom.” They ask for data often, knowledge, action and options often, collection constantly, understanding sometimes, but wisdom almost never.

2. “Wisdom” (whatever that is) is supposed to be provided by politicians and other policy makers. When that thought came up in a room packed with intelligence professionals from many countries and types, it sparked hearty laughter followed by a hollow sucking sound as people realized what that meant in practice. It could spell Armageddon ;-)!

3. Wisdom is very hard to define or measure. That bothers some managers and analysts.

4. Wisdom thinks long-term, while politicians and bureaucracies have short time-horizons.

5. Wisdom requires ethics, which bothers politicians, complicates operations and frightens bureaucracies.

6. Wisdom tends to be global, while taskings and most policy makers seek local advantage of someone or something over others, often at the others’ expense. Win-Lose, zero-sum outcomes thus often prevail over more enlightened solutions to common problems.

7. Some bosses don’t want employees to outshine their ‘superiors’.

8. Many bosses are in a big hurry, but wisdom craves time for reflection.

9. Some extremely bright people never do get wise, so taskings for that just add stress to already stressful lives. And employers tend to hire for skills and obedience, not wisdom.

10. Contractors seldom make money by producing wisdom. Those that don’t make money fire their staff, so staff who want a future concentrate on proven products or deliverables.

11. Secrecy inhibits wisdom and hubris corrupts it. These are common in intel bureaucracies.

12. How about you add your answer here? ____________________________________________

Then send it to the author or an editor, with or without attribution, please.

Thanks for your help with this difficult and unusual, yet universal problem. The kaleidoscope of complex, interdisciplinary problems we survey today challenges us all. Of one thing only we are certain: A little more wisdom would help with solutions. Please add some, whatever your role.