



BACKGROUND

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Strengthening U.S. Intelligence

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Intelligence is our most useful national security tool for preventing terrorist attacks and helping policymakers understand the nimble threats we face. Progressives must advance an agenda for stronger and smarter intelligence capabilities that goes beyond recent reforms, and seizes opportunities to advance U.S. interests.

Intolerable Intelligence Failures

The Bush years have included dramatic intelligence failures, notably the failure to prevent 9/11, and inaccurate intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Part of the problem has been an Administration that has cherry-picked and politicized intelligence on everything from Saddam's stockpiles to North Korea's nukes, and the former Republican-majority Congress that failed to stand up to the White House. The Administration has also failed to provide the intelligence community with the support it needs to fill troubling gaps revealed in multiple investigations. We have trouble collecting information in close-knit communities and closed societies. We have holes in vital skill areas and management positions. We do not share information effectively. In short, we are not keeping pace with our agile adversaries.

Efforts to address these shortcomings have been insufficient. The 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act created a new Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to foster stronger management and coordination, a National Counter-terrorism Center to pool efforts from across the government, and new systems for information sharing. DNI Mike McConnell has urged greater jointness so our different intelligence agencies coordinate as effectively as our armed services. Yet these reforms have yielded limited results; remaining gaps must be addressed with urgency.

An Agenda for Reform

Intelligence reform is about more than moving boxes around organizational charts. The quality of our intelligence will depend upon how the Congress, the next President, and the leadership of our intelligence community follow through in the years to come. A strong progressive agenda must put our national security institutions on the same solid footing for the current era that Harry Truman did when he signed the National Security Act in 1947, creating the CIA and the intelligence infrastructure to keep pace with the Soviet Union.

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Workforce: Human intelligence, not technology alone is the lynchpin for fighting terror. Good intelligence depends on good people with the right skills. That means hiring people who speak languages like Arabic and Farsi, and hiring from a broader pool of expertise and background, including recruiting ethnic applicants who can

understand and blend into different countries and communities. This would require changes to recruitment and clearance systems. Within the government, we need to increase resources for mid-career education - particularly in languages. With America's institutions of higher learning, Congress should fund more programs, scholarships and fellowships in critical areas of study and languages.

Security Clearances: It can take more than a year and tens of thousands of dollars to complete a clearance for one successful applicant to the CIA. For those with extensive travel or family overseas it almost invariably takes longer. And for ethnic or immigrant applicants, the obstacles mount even higher. Meanwhile, each agency has its own requirements and procedures. This prevents the seamless rotation of intelligence officers to different agencies necessary to foster a common culture and coordination within the intelligence community. To



overcome burdens to recruitment and rotation, we should streamline the security clearance process through the DNI's office, bring in best practices from across the government, and draw on private sector models that have expedited clearances - notably in the financial services industry.

Management: The intelligence community must do more to stress good management. A mid-90s hiring freeze - coupled with the post-9/11 hiring surge - has left a huge gap in middle managers. Agencies must start to value management as a skill to be sought, not simply a stop on the career track. Managers should be recruited from private industry. At the top, Congress should consider giving the DNI a fixed five-year term, somewhat like the fixed terms for the FBI Director or Chairman of the Federal Reserve. This could ensure continuity, and help insulate the DNI from politics. The director of the CIA would continue to be appointed by - and serve at the pleasure of - the President.

Sources: America needs more than the satellites and "official cover" spies that helped win the Cold War. To be sure, we should continue to invest heavily in our human intelligence--or HUMINT--which often provides unique insight, but to better understand closed societies and insular terrorist networks, we must also rely on alternate sources, some of which are clandestine but many of which are open. Information from sources such as websites, Internet forums, and foreign newspapers should be further integrated into all of the intelligence community's analysis, and should not be treated as less important than clandestine knowledge. Expertise from non-traditional intelligence sources and agencies must be sought - for instance, the US Department of Agriculture in evaluating threats to the food supply, and biologists for evaluating bioterror threats. Academic expertise should be better integrated into our analysis of emerging trends.

Sharing: America will not be safe if the intelligence community lacks the tools - and rules - that make the sharing of vital information possible. IT acquisition authority should be centralized with the DNI so that technology systems are linked. Systems that sort and filter huge amounts of information should be a priority. Agencies should create career incentives for sharing, not for stove-piping. Congress should fully fund the program manager for information sharing within the intelligence community that would ensure such utilities were carried out (and that was recommended by the 9/11 Commission). And Congress should require regular and detailed reports on progress. Finally, the federal government must support and prioritize the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to provide more information to state and local law enforcement - it may be the cop on the beat, not the agent in Washington, who acts to prevent a plot - and the FBI must enhance its sharing with local law enforcement.

Allies: Breaking up a terrorist network can depend as much on coordination with foreign intelligence services as our own intelligence agencies. Yet many allies have distanced themselves from U.S. counter-terrorism efforts because of the Bush Administration's embrace of practices like illegal renditions and indefinite detentions. It is time to clear the air through rhetoric and action - by renouncing torture, closing Guantanamo, and forging a sustainable framework for global counter-terrorism. This is the right thing to do for our values - and of crucial importance for our security.

Finally, the next President must let the intelligence community do its job free of political pressure. Intelligence should be used as a tool to make good policy - not as a means to sell bad policy. Conservatives have long claimed better stewardship of American intelligence, but the last several years suggest the opposite. Our Cold War national security establishment was largely founded by Harry Truman. Progressives must now update these institutions and capabilities to meet the critical challenges of a new century.

* *With input from others within the United States government*

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