



Intelligence – Talking Points & Takeaways

The US Intelligence Community is a Big Tent – It Includes 17 Organizations. From stand-alone organizations such as the CIA and the FBI, to specialized intelligence wings in the Defense and State Departments, the US Intelligence Community is not a single entity.

Post 9/11 Reform: the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act. This law was intended to foster greater unity of effort throughout the intelligence community. It created the position of The Director of National Intelligence (DNI), which is supposed to coordinate overall intelligence efforts and act as the principal advisor on intelligence matters to the President.

There's a lot that's new under the sun: terrorism, cyber-security, environmental threats, and economic trends. During the Cold War, the US intelligence mission was relatively straightforward: knowing what the Soviet Union and its allies were up to. Today's Intelligence Community faces a wider array of threats that require new thinking, new skills, and new policies.

Old-School Intelligence Activities Still Count: Working with – and against – other countries. Although new threats and challenges are clamoring for the attention of the Intelligence Community, the US continues the critical task of working closely with the intelligence services of friendly nations, and working to infiltrate and obtain new information about less friendly nations. Human intelligence - not just fancy toys - is critical to this mission.



U.S. Intelligence Community

Seventeen organizations comprise the Intelligence Community. This includes the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) – created in 2004 – which oversees community-wide intelligence coordination. The Director of National Intelligence (DNI) acts as the President's principal advisor on intelligence matters.

Office of the Director of National Intelligence

Department of Justice:

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)

Department of Defense:

Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)
National Reconnaissance Office (NRO)
National Security Agency (NSA)
Air Force Intelligence
Army Intelligence
Marine Intelligence
Navy Intelligence

Central Intelligence Agency

Department of Energy:

Office of Intelligence and Counterintelligence (OIC)

Department of Homeland Security:

Coast Guard Intelligence
Office of Intelligence and Analysis (OIA)

Department of State:

Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR)

Department of the Treasury:

Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence (TFI)

We gain crucial information from our allies

The United States works closely with the intelligence services of friendly nations – so-called foreign liaison partners – to obtain critical information on a wide array of threats. This is especially critical where the US lacks the cultural or linguistic resources to comprehend certain information, or when the US cannot easily acquire intelligence due to geographic constraints (i.e., places we cannot go).

Bolstering these sorts of relationships is essential to US intelligence efforts.

- In 2003, the U.S. and Pakistan worked together to capture alleged 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Muhammad.
- Close cooperation between the U.S. and the United Kingdom in 2006 thwarted a plot to destroy civilian aircraft over the Atlantic Ocean.
- In January 2009, AFRICOM hosted foreign liaison officers from 14 countries to discuss security & peacekeeping on the continent and common security concerns facing African nations.



Intelligence Today Must Focus on Other States and on Non-State Actors, such as Terrorists



Terrorists - non-State Adversaries - are now the Intelligence Community's primary mission. Since 9/11, the Intelligence Community has prioritized early-warning and denial of a terrorist attack on the U.S. homeland as a primary mission. Intelligence support to counterterrorism operations and law enforcement is a critical component within all U.S. government efforts to deter, deny, and remove the base of support for militant radical groups at home and abroad.



However, we Must Still Gather Intelligence on Other Countries. Despite the increased emphasis placed upon identifying non-traditional threats, the Intelligence Community must also maintain its capability to conduct more traditional intelligence assessments relating to the intentions and capabilities of potentially hostile states like Iran and North Korea, as well as those of potential global powers such as China, India, and Russia.

Going Deeper: Traditional State-Based Threats



Hard Targets. Also known as "State Actors," these include countries that are potential adversaries; it is difficult to get good information on them. These would include Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and even Cuba. Having intelligence on these countries is often important for our military security. For example, US intelligence revealed in March that China will deploy a new fighter jet in 2018 that could rival the premier US fighter jet.



War Zones. The IC provides actionable intelligence support to the war-fighters in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama's revised US strategy in Afghanistan is only "marginally relevant" to overall US Afghan strategy, focusing too much on killing the Taliban and not enough on mapping Afghanistan's social landscape and gaining information from locals.



States Contributing to Regional Instability. Volatile areas such as Israel/Palestine, Somalia, and Colombia could lead to failed states or international conflict. The US needs to be able to anticipate such threats before they become realities. For example, forecasting a "Yugoslavia-like fate" for Pakistan, the National Intelligence Council & the CIA prepared the Global Futures Assessment Report to monitor regional stability.

Going Deeper: Non-State and Transnational Threats



Terrorism. US intelligence focuses on combating both terror groups (AQ and affiliates) and identifying their safe havens (e.g. Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen). When the CIA predicted in February that AQ would attempt an attack on the US homeland within 6 months, intelligence leaders sought more freedom from Congress to take terrorism suspects into custody & conduct investigations.



Proliferation. US intelligence monitors the nuclear capabilities of countries like Iran and North Korea and the prospect of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Many – including President Obama – believe nuclear terrorism is the single greatest security threat in the world, which means intelligence agencies need to keep on top of the spread of nuclear weapons.



Narcotics. International crime networks and narco-traffickers in Afghanistan (Taliban), Colombia (FARC), and Mexico (cartels) threaten international stability and the rule of law. They also present unique challenges for US intelligence. The Afghanistan Intelligence Fusion Center, begun in 2004 and run by an American contractor under US Air Force direction, produces timely, actionable counter-narco-terrorism intelligence for US and coalition forces.

Going Deeper: New, cross-cutting threats



Cyber-security. China has been implicated in cyber-attacks on U.S. nuclear laboratories, the Pentagon, and a variety of US industries in order to steal proprietary data. Chinese and Russian cyber-spies have even hacked into the US electric grid, leaving behind programs that could allow them to disrupt the system. Efforts to combat such attacks and disrupt adversaries' cyber-activities – is one of the top intelligence issues facing the US today.



Economic Trends. With the rise of global economic powers such as China and India, as well as the potential for economic dislocation and underdevelopment to provoke conflict, the intelligence community is working to monitor the links between economics and political stability. This is a previously understudied, and important, new area.



Disease and Environmental Issues. Climate change, natural disasters, and global health issues are now receiving attention from the intelligence community. Natural disasters can lead to mass migrations and create populations where extremists can hide and recruit, while climate change dries up scarce resources such as water and food, potentially leading to conflict and migratory pressures. At the same time, pandemic diseases such as swine flu hold the potential to kill millions of Americans quickly.

Major intelligence reform occurred after 9/11 - but results are mixed, at best

The 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act. After reviewing the intelligence failures that made it possible for 9/11 to happen, this law was intended to foster greater unity of effort throughout the intelligence community. To do so, it created the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC).

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) is responsible for overseeing community-wide intelligence coordination. The Director of National Intelligence (DNI) leads ODNI, and acts as the principal advisor on intelligence matters to the President, the National Security Council, and the Department of Homeland Security. However, the DNI has been given responsibility without authority. The DNI cannot task other intelligence agencies, change their budgets, or hire or fire personnel. Many believe that the DNI job is not workable as a result.



The National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) is defined by the law as the "primary organization in the United States Government for analyzing and integrating all intelligence." The NCTC is responsible for connecting the dots on terrorism, to make sure that disparate pieces of information from across the intelligence community are collected and assembled into a complete picture of the terrorist threat. After the Christmas-Day bomber, a review faulted the NCTC for not doing this job well.

Some reforms were – and remain – controversial



FISA & Amendments. Congress passed the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) in 1978 to limit wiretapping of US citizens. After it was reported in 2005 that the National Security Agency was illegally wiretapping US citizens, Congress looked to amend FISA to make it easier to wiretap suspected terrorist suspects. The FISAAmendments Act of 2008 made that happen.



USA PATRIOT Act. The "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act" was passed after 9/11. In the name of fighting terrorism, it gave US officials new tools such as enhanced surveillance activities and increased authority to freeze financial assets. Critics argue that the sheer size of the legislation, and the quickness with which it was passed, has opened the door to civil rights abuses, without actually helping gain quality intelligence to stop terrorism.



Targeting American citizens. Former DNI Blair announced in February that government agencies may kill U.S. citizens abroad who are involved in terrorist activities if they are taking seemingly threatening action. Supporters of this approach cite the prominent case of the US-born cleric, Anwar al-Aulaqi, who assisted the Fort Hood shooter, while critics argue for clarification of the threshold for targeting Americans with lethal action.

A big controversy – the torture memos

Early in his administration, President Obama forbade the use of “enhanced interrogations” (see section on Torture for more). After a heated debate within the administration, he also made the controversial decision to release the so-called “Torture Memos,” which detailed “enhanced interrogation” tactics used during the Bush administration. The CIA opposed the decision, while other agencies, such as the DoD with its multiple intelligence bodies, supported it.

Case FOR Releasing the Torture Memos

Defense Sec. Robert Gates and Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen supported the release because they thought it was inevitable the info would come out and because CIA officials were promised they would not be prosecuted.

Since torture had been forbidden, there was no reason to keep it secret.

Releasing the memos placed responsibility squarely on Bush administration, and would end concerns about US treatment of detained terror suspects.

Case AGAINST Releasing the Torture Memos

CIA Director Leon Panetta – and his 4 most recent predecessors – opposed the release on the grounds that it would lead foreign governments to doubt US ability to keep intel sources secret.

Foreign governments that cooperated with US on such interrogations might be embarrassed.

Conservatives who wrongly believe that torture is an effective interrogation tool argue that disclosing torture methods will allow terrorists to train against U.S. interrogation tools.

Challenges Faced by the Intelligence Community

Some Progress, Some Challenges. Although the IC has prevented 9/11-style mass casualty attacks on US soil, recent events – the Underwear Bomber, the Times Square Bomber, the Ft. Hood shootings – underscore the need for further intelligence reform.



The ODNI and the wider Intelligence Committee. Many intelligence agencies, including the CIA, were skeptical of the creation of ODNI, concerned that it might erode their own powers. For ODNI to work properly, it must have the political backing and power over other agencies necessary to ensure that there is a unity of effort throughout the intelligence community.

Strengthening the Director of National Intelligence. This position – which is charged with overseeing all US intelligence efforts – has been seriously hamstrung by a lack of authority to carry out initiatives and a lack of control over intelligence funding matters. To make the position effective, this will have to be redressed.

Sifting Through the Data. The IC is producing more data than the NCTC can sift through. The Christmas Day bombing attempt in Detroit is a case in point. Info that could have stopped the attempted attack was available to analysts at the NCTC, but the analysts didn't identify the information in time to act. The NCTC will need more resources to avoid this problem in the future.

Meeting the Post-Cold War Challenges

The Intelligence Community is still struggling reform to meet the challenges of the post-Cold War world, 20 years after the fall of the Soviet Union.



Strengthening Understanding of Other Countries. Intelligence is an attempt to gain knowledge about two things: the capabilities of your adversary, and their goals. We do not worry about France having nuclear weapons, because we do not believe they wish to cause us harm. Satellites, radar, and other technology can help us determine capabilities -- but only an understanding of other countries and of terrorist groups can tell us what potential adversaries may or may not wish to do to the US and our allies. One of the reasons the State Department's tiny intelligence agency has had an excellent success record in determining threats is its greater understanding of adversaries' goals - not just their capabilities.

Increased human intelligence – Gadgets Are Good, but speaking a foreign language is better. During the Cold War, the US relied to a great degree on "signals intelligence" - information gathered from satellites and sensors. This made sense, since we thought we understood the USSR. But breaking terrorist groups and understanding the goals of countries like China requires more "Humint" or human intelligence to infiltrate small groups of close allies. This means more funding for people, languages, and training and less for technology.

Intelligence – Sources

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