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L2 The Long Term Health of the Intelligence Community



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THREE YEARS AGO, President Carter signed Executive Order 12036 establishing a new system to manage and oversee American intelligence. Since that new beginning, the Intelligence Community has been tested by world events and influenced, not only by those same events, but by changing national priorities, demand for greater public accountability and the need to continue to produce a high quality intelligence product.

Since then, our best substantive performance has been in areas where we have traditionally excelled. Support for SALT II, for example, demonstrated the Community's broad and diverse collection capabilities as well as perceptive and unbiased analysis. Timely and accurate assessments of events in Vietnam and Afghanistan drew creatively on a variety of ambiguous indicators to provide clear warning.

There have been important procedural and organizational accomplishments during this same period which will affect the long term health of the Intelligence Community. For the first time in our 33-year history, a closely reasoned, truly integrated National Foreign Intelligence Program budget now provides the means for judging competing intelligence programs against national needs. Vastly improved relations between the CIA and the FBI have engendered this country's strongest counterintelligence program in over a decade. A renewed and expanded dialogue with the academic and business communities is invigorating our analytic effort.

However, challenges remain. Just functioning effectively in a world which during the 1970s learned more about intelligence operations than was ever known is a serious challenge.

Recognizing and assessing small but potentially significant degrees of political and social change has become increasingly important and can severely test the most discriminating observer. Analysts must try to draw conclusions from a gallimaufry of factors ranging from religious and ethnic to socio-economic, generational and institutional. The problem of collecting this kind of raw intelligence demands not only a heightened sensitivity to subtle clues, but often new techniques, both human and technological.

The Community is further challenged today by the greatly expanded range of issues with which intelligence must deal. Not only must we continue to study Soviet military capabilities, but more and more attention must focus on other areas which have the potential to disrupt international stability. The growing commerce in narcotics, the spread of terrorism, population growth, famine, disease and the accessibility of goods and raw materials are but a few.

While the Intelligence Community's plate is full and the task may seem overwhelming, I have every confidence that we will be able to continue providing the best quality of intelligence to the policy maker. But to do that, every intelligence organization, along with the business community, which has for so many years brilliantly provided us with the technological means to do our work, must play an important part.

The functions of individual intelligence services were reasonably distinguishable at one time. Today they are much less so. Despite E.O. 12036, the structure of the Intelligence Community and its sometimes divergent interests understandably still tend to encourage competition for functions and resources. Competition in the analysis we do is healthy and to be sought. Competition in system development or collection wastes resources and risks limiting our capabilities unnecessarily. Within the Community, we must work to prevent the destructive fractionalizing of the intelligence budget, or the building of new structures to circumvent it, which will only result in increased costs without commensurate return.

American business can help by recognizing that while we all would hope to remain on the frontiers of technological innovation, that is not always financially possible. The Intelligence Community, the United States and the interests of business are better served when marginal gains at great cost are identified for what they are and funds as well as creative effort are directed toward areas where there is greater confidence in and need for the gains to be achieved.

None of these problems can be solved overnight, nor goals reached by a single effort. But as T. S. Eliot said, "History is now." What we do today to capitalize on the formidable capabilities we have and to solve the problems we can identify will strengthen our contribution to a history we can all be proud of. It will require open minds, an uncommon willingness to subordinate parochial interests to measures which are more in the long-term good of the country and frequent checking to ensure we are all looking through the right end of the telescope. None of that is easy, but we will not succeed without it.