Reflections on Integration in the Intelligence Community

Jim Clapper and Trey Brown

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I was pleased that *Studies in Intelligence* asked me to provide some reflections on the state of integration in the Intelligence Community. Having lived a good bit of the history of the IC over the last 58 years, I agree that the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks is a most appropriate milestone to look back at our journey, consider where we are now, and look ahead. In doing so, I asked Trey Brown, my partner on my book *Facts and Fears: Hard Truths from a Life in Intelligence*, to collaborate on this mini reprise. I believe the position of director of national intelligence was created to serve as the full-time champion for intelligence integration. If someone were to generate one of those word bubble charts from speeches Trey wrote and I gave when I was DNI from 2010 to 2017, I'm certain the words "integration" and "integrate" would stand out prominently.

To make sure we're all on the same terminology page, I dusted off my old (hard copy, to be sure) edition of *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (11th edition) just to review the formal definition of the verb "integrate" and found it to mean

DNI Clapper delivering the annual threat briefing to the SSCI in January 2014. © James Berglie/ZUMAPRESS.com/Alamy

"to form, coordinate, or blend into a functioning or unified whole." This is a formal, sterile academic rendering of the meaning of the term. It really doesn't capture what integration represents for the IC. It omits the important dimension of time—that is, the historical evolution of integration, which continues yet today. Integration in the IC is, in other words, a work in progress, a continuing journey where the nirvana destination is never fully reached.

My instinctive approach to assessing the state of integration in the IC is to recall and compare now with what it was like when I first joined what we now think of as the IC, in 1963. I began my career in signals intelligence. I recall very vividly my first of two-year-long tours in Southeast

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Asia, in South Vietnam, 1965–66. Coincidentally, my tour and my dad's overlapped for seven months, and we became roommates. He was a career Army SIGINT officer and was assigned as the deputy chief of the NSA presence in Vietnam. Back then, intelligence integration was not a term you'd ever hear, let alone a concept you might consider practicing. Based on my many after-hours discussions with him, I can attest that NSA and CIA might as well have been on different planets. There was little "integration," coordination, or blending (to borrow from Webster). It simply didn't happen, and no one seemed particularly concerned that it wasn't.

Intelligence wasn't the only endeavor so segmented. For convenience, and to avoid any operational conflicts, North Vietnam was divided into what were called air strike "route packages" (six, as I recall) and the Air Force and Navy avoided each other by either designating that certain route packages on given days would be reserved for one service or the other or by flying strike missions on alternate days. So, "silos" or "stovepipes," as we later came to call them, were pretty much the standard protocol, whether in operations or intelligence.

Over time, of course, this all changed. For the military, the most famous milestone of this profound change was the Goldwater-Nichols Act, which mandated jointness among the military services. That's

not to suggest that joint things didn't happen before this landmark legislation, but then it became the standard. Goldwater-Nichols did for the Department of Defense in 1986 what the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act would do for the IC in 2004. To be sure, coordinated, integrated intelligence activities occurred prior to this, but they didn't become the standard until the legislation required it.

Intelligence Integration Conceptually

I've always been careful not to confuse integration with elimination of agency silos or stovepipes. Although these terms are often thought of pejoratively, they serve to delineate the specialized culture and unique tradecraft behind each discipline or "INT," and through these silos, the agencies generate, advance, and advocate the respective tradecrafts that represent great strengths of the US intelligence enterprise. It requires certain unique skill sets to conduct SIGINT, HUMINT, GEOINT, etc., and integration shouldn't equate to homogenization.

The point is that the IC needs to bring to bear a diverse set of tools to any problem or project, rather than a box full of different-sized hammers, and when we bring the specialized knowledge and skillsets from each component together to address the same problem, invariably higher confidence levels ensue. This makes for sounder decisionmaking by policymakers, commanders, and other users of intelligence.

The best example of what I'm talking about here is the takedown of Usama bin Laden in May of 2011, almost 10 years after the 9/11 attacks. While the CIA appropriately deserves the lion's share of the credit for this achievement, it could not have happened without the crucial SIGINT and GEOINT contributions of NSA and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, respectively. The resulting operation will forever serve as a dramatic example of intelligence integration and, in turn, an equally dramatic integration of intelligence with special operations. It also demonstrated that the most compelling motivation for integration is the imperative of the mission. As DNI, I didn't have to say or do much to promote integration for that operation.

Another dimension to intelligence integration, apart from the temporal one, is directional. By that I mean integration is both "horizontal" and "vertical." We traditionally think of integration as being between and among the now 18 components of the IC. It is certainly that, but "vertical" integration is also important. As a result of the 9/11 attacks, the IC had to attend to integrating intelligence efforts with state, local, territorial, tribal, and private-sector entities as well. A great deal of progress has been made here, but there is still room for improvement. "Vertical" integration is simply less mature than the traditional "horizontal" form.

For that matter, integration can be within individual components. When I served as director of NIMA/NGA, the challenge was to blend the antecedent, and up-to-then separate (but very much related) fields of imagery and imagery intelligence on

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one hand, with mapping, charting, and geodesy on the other. Similarly, I later saw DIA and then CIA form mission-oriented centers to integrate previously stovepiped activities. Such undertakings are daunting cultural challenges, which require constant and consistent leadership to keep everyone focused on the same vision. Most people are inherently reluctant to change, so patience and persistence by leadership in gaining buy-in by the working levels are crucial. We can't simply announce such a change and expect it to happen by close of business next Friday. It simply doesn't comport with the reality of human nature.

Integration and Foreign Partners

Yet another dimension of integration is with our expanding array of foreign partners. Accelerated and amplified by our mutual focus on countering terrorism, these associations have mushroomed, and while these relationships all can be mutually beneficial, they must be managed carefully and astutely. That means keeping an eye on the risk we take in trusting foreign partners, but perhaps more importantly, realizing the benefits of taking bold, reasoned risks.

As DNI, I saw—and often approved—intelligence-sharing exceptions that allowed virtually complete access by individual intelligence officers from the other Five Eyes nations who were working in US intelligence facilities. I think we should normalize this practice and make it uniform. Before leaving office, and often in the ensuing years, I have advocated what I realize some will regard as a radical change in our approach to the Five Eyes intelligence alliance. I believe we should give serious consideration to eliminating

the NOFORN restriction (and the other four partners' equivalents), to extend dual-citizenship privileges (and, to be sure, obligations) to Five Eyes partners whenever we are in each other's intelligence footprint. This would maximize the benefits we gain from our relationships with our closest intelligence partners.

I realize there are some legal impediments to doing this but I also believe they can be overcome. I recognize this would also require a significant cultural change for all of the member nations, particularly for US intelligence organizations, but the payoff in efficiency, flexibility, productivity, and trust is worth the investment and far outweighs the risk of compromise.

Tools for IC Integration

That covers intelligence integration to partners outside the US Intelligence Community. To promote integration within the IC, I found four tools to be most useful. First and foremost was the lever of money. The law creating the position of DNI is admittedly ambiguous on many points, but it does give the DNI influence over the allocation of resources by virtue of the DNI's role as manager of the National Intelligence Program (NIP). This can be—and has been—effectively used as leverage to impel components toward more integration.

A second such tool is joint duty; in my view, this has done more to change the sociology of the IC than perhaps any other single factor. When I served in Vietnam, I rarely encountered civilian intelligence

professionals. With our multiple combat zones since 9/11, thousands of civilian IC employees have deployed—many, multiple times—and have been profoundly influenced by their experiences. There is no substitute for experiencing the same hazards, risks, and privations as military members do in a combat setting. The mission imperative forges integration among intelligence elements, and in turn with the military forces they are supporting. I saw this happen time and again both institutionally and personally among the workforce.

I became director of what was then called the National Imagery and Mapping Agency two days after 9/11. Our driving mission imperative suddenly became Afghanistan. As part of what was a dramatic shift in priority, energy, and resources, we began deploying NIMA civilian employees to what became a combat zone. When these employees returned home, I'd frequently have them give brief accounts of their experiences during our daily agencywide videoteleconference "stand-ups." I will always remember the emotional testaments that many of these long-serving employees shared with their colleagues. They saw the professional value of deployments, and the impact of intelligence integration, because they had had an intensely personal experience demonstrating its operational merit.

The third such tool for promoting integration is technology. Pushing for a consistent, interoperable IT architecture is another force for integration and coordination. During my time as DNI, we emphasized what we called ICITE, the IC Information

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Technology Enterprise. This, too, proved to be a challenge, since for various reasons both substantive and emotional, people and organizations resist such commonality of function. But I believe it is the right thing to do; it affords opportunities for significant cost reductions and greater efficiencies. It promotes both more sharing and enhanced security.

Finally, the fourth tool for promoting integration in the IC is the personnel rewards system. If leaders wish to promote change in behavior, then the desired behavior must be recognized and rewarded publicly and consistently. During my time as DNI, I saw countless examples of integrated intelligence teams, big and small, which did great things for the country and the IC. To reward and encourage this, we created and sustained an awards system to recognize regularly and publicly integration, collaboration, and coordination.

All this notwithstanding, barriers remain to integration in the IC. The causes range from institutional insecurity or protective instincts; security concerns—both real and contrived; and practical considerations such as physical separation and commuting distances. If the COVID pandemic has shown us anything, it is the need to be able to operate securely and cooperatively on a broadly decentralized basis.

Bottom Lines

In sum, integration is not a panacea for institutional ills in intelligence. It can be a powerful tool in producing better intelligence. Integration is not a natural bureaucratic act, so there needs to be a full-time champion who can look across the IC, draw on the respective strengths and complementary capabilities of each component, and where appropriate, meld them to produce timely, accurate, relevant intelligence in which users can have confidence. That, to me is the ultimate value-added by the position of the DNI. The Intelligence Community is the better for working as a team—whether large agencies, or small groups. The sum is always greater than the parts.

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