

Setting the Stage for Information-Sharing in the 21st Century: Three Issues of Common Concern to DoD and the Rest of the World

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The more I read and talk to people as I work up for this the more I think it comes down to three issues:

1) Inter-agency coordination of information-sharing focal points, much as we have for HUMINT but casting a much wider net outside USG. Such focal points must have the knowledge, tools, and procurement authority to serve as facilitators both for sharing internal information, and for orchestrating joint procurements of information that must be purchased from the private sector.

2) Agreeing on a web-based common architecture that it *totally COTS* and can be used by anyone with a laptop and Internet connection. GDIN is a very ugly baby, but I think it is a litmus test for DoD approaches.

3) Establishing concepts, doctrine, and *resources* for the *purchase* of commercially available information and information services. Commercial imagery and commercial imagery analysis are the most obvious, but civilian ground reconnaissance, victim debriefings, logistics availability information, a whole range of other OSINT and OSIF type "supplies" need a procurement authority and earmarked funding. This aspect appears to be totally absent from both GDIN and DoD discussions to date.

In my personal view, and based in part of a good understanding of how Embassies operate and what the information environment is like in the Third World, I believe that our information-sharing architecture must consider three "pipes" through which unclassified information, including commercial imagery, will feed into the all-source intelligence and the cross-CINC information operations architecture:

1) INTERNET. Although the INTERNET is seriously over-blown as a *source* of useful information, it will get better and we need to look closely at the Dutch model for Internet exploitation—centralized discovery and decentralized exploitation. What this really means is that the INTERNET is an emerging resource where specialized skills are still needed or we risk losing substantial analysis time in fruitless searching. A common set of bookmarks and distributed responsibilities for monitoring specific subject areas of interest—a DoD/GDIN segment for the World Wide Web Virtual Library, would be a good starting point.

2) Information-Sharing. As we all know, this is much harder to do than to agree to. Although organizations are beginning the difficult process of creating Intranets, we are ten to fifteen years from seeing this as a common standard. DoD nurturing of a common standard for both securely sharing electronic information, and for enabling online consultations through video and on-the-fly translation, would be helpful. Part of this solution must include an Internet-based directory and related "lists" for allowing

anyone to “pull” restricted but unclassified information to their desktop. We also need—and I would stress this in relation to the Virtual Information Center and the Future Collaborative Information Environment—a means for easily sharing information with anyone in the world who has a telephone, a laptop, and/or a video adapter on their workstation. Such an architecture must be inherently generic, cheap, and open, i.e. not subject to the kinds of physical and electronic security barriers characteristic of the DoD C4ISR system.

3) Investment. There is no getting around the fact that most of what we need to support operations in the future can and should be bought from the private sector. This is the part that has been missing from DoD and GDIN discussions to date. This is also the part that has very significant implications for how we train, equip, and organize our forces and our supporting establishments for information and intelligence operations. I will list just a few:

A. The Intelligence Community is not the open source business. The Aspin/Brown Commission on Intelligence has clearly said that operators and acquisition managers must find answers on their own when such answers can be obtained “predominantly” through open sources. We need to develop concepts and operations for open source intelligence (OSINT) support to every mission area and every acquisition program, and we need to budget operational and acquisition funds for OSINT support.

B. Most of the subject-matter and regional experts are not in the IC and not in DoD. This has personnel, security, communications, cultural, and legal implications. We have yet to start on this discussion. The reality—and we have learned this with coalition operations—is that any given contingency is going to require the rapid formation of transnational tiger teams, including civilians, most of whom did not know each other the day before. We cannot leverage this knowledge if we persist in our old model of selectively importing open source information into the SI/TK bunker. Instead we must reduce the SI/TK footprint and default to validated OSINT as the common standard for information operations and intelligence support to the commander.

C. The “information explosion” has created a new “intelligence gap”. My partner, Dr. Mark Lowenthal, developed this idea. Forget the fact that the IC focuses on hard targets. Forget the fact that most of the key people in the future will not be cleared for classified access. The *real* problem we face is that the amount of available information is climbing exponentially, while each of us still has a 24-hour day. There is one answer, and one answer only, for resolving this problem, and it lies in the private sector. It is the private sector that is going to develop the services of common concern to discover, discriminate, distill, and deliver open source intelligence, and we need to start planning now for both investing in OSINT procurement from the private sector, and in guiding or nurturing selected “centers of excellence” where the development and maintenance costs can be shared with others.

D. There is another aspect to this “information explosion” and it has to do with one’s model for acquiring open source information. So many new sources, so many

new softwares, so many new services arise each day that the old model of “just in case” collection is not only dead, it is seriously counter-productive and expensive. We have to structure our information operations and open source intelligence pipelines so that we can do “just enough, just in time” collection from the best available sources and services when we need them—not before.

One last comment. I started advocating greater use of open sources in 1992, with help from Larry Prior on the Hill and from Bill Studeman and from DIA, and that is my focus. I do, however, have some substantive experience in the advanced information technology arena and in standing up the Nation’s newest national intelligence production facility, so let me end with a cautionary note on technology. *There is no silver bullet.*

Information technology more often than not leads to less intelligence production and reduced analyst productivity. Fancy visualization and decision-support packages are only as good as the raw all-source information coming in. We need to solve the conceptual and doctrinal and source procurement issues before we over-invest in complex technologies that we do not fully appreciate and probably cannot afford.

At the end of the day, information operations and open source intelligence support for the commander and the acquisition manager are going to succeed because we helped smart people talk to each other and tap into each other. Most of those smart people are in the private sector or in international organizations with no patience for our Cold War approach to C4ISR.

We have to decide whether our approach is going to continue to be driven by unilateral technical and security concepts, or by global content and information-sharing opportunities when those are the best responses to newly emerging intelligence and policy needs..

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