

Synopsis of “A Canadian Perspective on Global Issues”

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I am going to approach “global issues” from two angles - the challenge of global coverage, and the need for assessment organizations to comment on the global futures debate.

In common with other smaller assessment services, it is a challenge for the Canadian Intelligence Assessment Secretariat to achieve global coverage. It is not easy in the Canadian context to select priorities. Canada is involved in a wide variety of alliances, participates actively in peacekeeping and other military missions, receives immigrants from many countries, derives 45% of its GNP from trade, and of course, lives next to the world's great superpower. There are few countries that analysts can ignore. The IAS has to work closely with its customers, leverage all available resources, and be both selective and flexible in choosing the files to be covered.

For smaller assessment services the desire is not so much to access broader and deeper data banks through open sources, but to have quick access to information that will enhance their surge power - the ability to re-assign an analyst to a new topic and read into it quickly.

The challenge becomes even greater as smaller services need to cover topics which go beyond country or regional studies –proliferation, ecological damage, international crime and health crises among many others.

Following and commenting on the debate about the shape world events will take in the coming decades is also necessary for all assessment services as leaders themselves need to take longer term strategic decisions as well as tactical ones.

The mental map or operating assumptions we have about the future will influence our analysis. Today we see five maps to analysis in common use - globalization, the campaign against terrorism, the growth of democracy, ecological change, and the position of the US.

Each of these frames of reference has a degree of validity. It is important that we don't accept any one as our exclusive perspective, because we will tend to misinterpret the significance of some events and trends. This

happened more than once during the Cold War period when the image of the spread of communism sometimes obscured the impact of other forces at work, particularly nationalism.

The debate over global futures is an open source debate, present but somewhat imperfectly reflected in the material available to us through the internet - that great global filing cabinet whose contents are both invaluable and too often disreputable.

If we were to achieve a portal available to a network of friendly intelligence agencies, as the head of a smaller assessment service I would look for three things. First, a situation update service that borrowed more from military models than the off and on coverage of newspapers. Second, I would hope to see a regular commentary on cross-boundary issues such as organized crime.

My most important wish would be to be able to tune into the debate over global futures via this special portal. It would combine the academic input of an Oxford Analytica, the literature survey of the Future Society's Future Trends and the capacity of the editorial board of a quality newspaper to summarize, synthesize and offer commentary on the progress of the debate and the ideas and theories put forward.

It might even give me the opportunity to participate.

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