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SOURCES AND METHODS: A PRIMER FOR CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRY

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The most common error which oversight authorities fall prey to in contemplating the value of "sources and methods", is to permit those who would avoid scrutiny to use the specter of betrayed human assets to obscure five fundamentally distinct aspects of the issue.

"Sources and methods" *per se* are indeed worth protecting from discovery, in that selected techniques, such as secret writing, lose most of their value once their existence is generally known. Much of the success of "sources and methods" comes from obscurity rather than undetectability. Once identified or even suspected, the thin veneer of secrecy is soon stripped away.

There are, however, severe flaws in the current argument that anything having to do with "sources and methods" must be exempt from Congressional or any other kind of scrutiny.

The largest flaw is that "sources and methods" really must be evaluated and understood in terms of five different aspects of intelligence operations:

-- The source or method, that is, the specific identity or technique, which, in isolation, is precious. Examples include the real identities of specific human sources, the fact of a technical capability such as the ability to eavesdrop on Politburo mobile telephones--a capability destroyed overnight by a U.S. President's public mention--and the existence of techniques, largely in support of surreptitious entry or clandestine communications, which if known to exist would be readily detected when employed.

-- The process within which that source or method is utilized. Giving a secret camera to an agent who is easily identified by the local counterintelligence service because the agent's case officer is a young person operating out of the local U.S. Embassy and without the time to do exercise good counter-surveillance techniques, makes a mockery of our professed reverence for "sources and methods". As Mr. Richard Haver, the recently reassigned Director of the Intelligence Community Staff has observed, "We have to stop lying to ourselves." Until we have a clandestine service that is truly clandestine and not easily identified because of its "gross" approach to operations, then it is the clandestine service itself which is betraying "sources and methods", and this of itself should be a cause for both Congressional and public outrage.

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-- The context within which "sources and methods" are employed. Too often, the clandestine service employs "sources and methods" because these are the only tools they understand or which are available to them, when in fact the risk of exposure is such that the operation, if discovered, would be far more destructive than the value of the information obtained--especially when the information could be easily obtained through open sources. As former Director of Central Intelligence The Honorable William Colby has noted, running clandestine operations against Canada would fall in this rubric. This contextual issue also arises in all of our Embassies overseas, in that the clandestine service is the only organ of government readily able to pay for information, but it requires its informants to agree to secret relationships and to betray their country and their employers as part of the bargain--at the same time that vast quantities of solid open source information cannot be obtained by the rest of the Embassy for lack of time and funding.

-- The objective. As the Commission on Intelligence has noted, many intelligence questions can be answered by the consumers themselves, using predominantly open sources, and it is the Commission's judgement that under such circumstances, the Intelligence Community should not be tasked for collection or analysis, and the consumer should be the primary party responsible for obtaining and analyzing the information sought. "We should not send a spy where a schoolboy can go", and urgently require a fundamental reassessment of how each element of our government is or is not trained, equipped, and organized to collect open sources and to analyze open sources.

-- The return on investment integrates all of the above issues, and ultimately informs the responsible policy-maker as to the risk, the cost, and the value of applying specific "sources and methods" to specific national intelligence topics. Unfortunately, the entire system breaks down because "the problem with spies is they only know secrets" and they are unable to properly understand what is available through open sources, or to advise the policy-maker of the relative trade-offs between classified and unclassified approaches to a specific intelligence question.

In conclusion, one must observe that the break-down of objective oversight regarding "sources and methods" is not limited to clandestine espionage alone, but in fact applies even more strongly to technical collection and especially to the significant disconnects between very expensive national imagery capabilities which are not well suited for wide-area surveillance, and the very cheap and responsive commercial imagery capabilities which are--the two need to be integrated. This issue of "sources and methods" also applies to intelligence analysis, where a heavy reliance on cheap and largely inexperienced community analysts, to the exclusion of a broad community of world-class experts in the private sector, levies both real fiscal costs as well as real opportunity costs, upon the public and the policy community.

The fastest way to redress these imbalances and dramatically improve the fiscal return as well as the political return and the intellectual return on our intelligence capital, is to establish an honest and open method of appraising the *transaction costs* of classified versus

unclassified "sources and methods", and to ensure that oversight covers all five of the aspects and is not stone-walled by those who would deny the flaws in process, context, objective, or return on investment. We will always need spies and satellites, but by improving our oversight, we can quickly move toward "just enough" secrecy while simultaneously making significant improvements in our ability to collect, process, and deliver open source intelligence to the policy-maker, commander, business leader, and citizen.

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