

**PRESIDENTS, SECRET INTELLIGENCE AND OPEN SOURCES:
Past Experience and Future Priorities**

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Since the end of the Cold War, there has been no shortage of public discussion about the future of the United States intelligence community in general and of the CIA in particular. Much of that debate, however, has missed what seems to me to be two crucial points:

The Role of the President

First, most discussion has centred on how intelligence is collected and analysed, very little on how it is used. historically, the weakest link in the intelligence chain has been more frequently in the White House than at Langley. As my book, *For The President's Eyes Only* (HarperCollins), seeks to show, most presidents have not been very good either at managing the intelligence community or at understanding what it can--and cannot--do for them. Over the past two centuries, only four--Washington, Eisenhower, Kennedy (briefly) and Bush--have shown a real flair for intelligence. Unlike most presidents, Washington, Eisenhower and Bush all had extensive first-hand experience of intelligence before their election. Kennedy did not, despite a brief period in naval intelligence, but proved an unusually quick learner after the débacle at the Bay of Pigs.

Under the American system, there are enormous fluctuations in the handling of intelligence from one president to the next. Bush was a former DCI whose second DCI, Robert Gates, was one of his closest advisers, and who himself regularly rang desk officers at the CIA. Clinton, however, had no previous experience of intelligence and has--to put it no higher--found it difficult to establish any rapport with his DCIs. Such contrasts between successive presidents have been common since the Second World War. The first post-war president, Harry Truman, came to office both ignorant and confused about the role of intelligence; as Vice-President he had been kept in ignorance of ULTRA as well as of the building of the atomic bomb. His successor, Eisenhower, by contrast, had been an intelligence enthusiast ever since, and possibly even before, Winston Churchill briefed him on ULTRA; he had personal experience during the Second World War of handling the best SIGINT and IMINT ever available to any military commander and was so committed to the Anglo-American intelligence alliance that he insisted on having a British G-2.

The President's handling of intelligence has always been an unspoken exception to Truman's famous maxim on the desk in the Oval Office, 'The buck stops here'. In intelligence the doctrine of plausible denial, also adopted by Truman, dictates that the responsibility for intelligence failures should never reach the White House and always be offloaded onto the agencies. After the Bay of Pigs Kennedy's approval rating in the opinion polls actually went up.

When the assassination attempts on foreign leaders and

other skeletons began to emerge from the intelligence cupboard after Watergate, the media mostly interpreted them as evidence that the CIA had behaved, in Senator Church's ill-chosen phrase, as a 'rogue elephant'. The reality was that the CIA had done the President's bidding.

Reform of the U.S. intelligence system thus needs to begin in the Oval Office, even if it continues at Langley. The first of the measures proposed in 1996 by the Presidential Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community (the Brown Commission) to improve 'the performance of U.S. intelligence' was directed at policymakers rather than the intelligence agencies:

Intelligence needs better direction from the policy level, regarding both the roles they perform and what they collect and analyze. Policymakers need to appreciate to a greater extent what intelligence can offer them and be more involved in how intelligence capabilities are used.

Last year's Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Future of U.S. Intelligence, of which I was a member, puts much of the onus for reform even more squarely on the President:

Reshaping intelligence is not a task just for the director of central intelligence and the intelligence community....The president, in partnership most especially with the secretary of state, must ensure that the intelligence community serves what he defines to be the nation's foreign policy priorities.

The starting point for reform is, arguably, the CIA's briefing of the incoming President, recently studied in a path-breaking book, *Getting to Know the President*, written by Bush's former DDI and published by the CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence. Anxious to impress each new president with the sophistication and importance of its product, the intelligence community has been reluctant to emphasise both its own limitations and those of previous administrations. It has thus been partly responsible for raising unrealistic expectations in incoming presidents, and for the disillusion which has sometimes followed. 'Of all the presidents I worked for [from 1968 to 1993]', says Robert Gates, 'only Bush did not have exaggerated expectations of intelligence.'

What presidents most need when they enter the Oval Office is an understanding of past experience. In the case of intelligence that means an awareness of how much past successes and failures owe to the actions of his predecessors. Though past experience is not a certain guide to the future, it is the best we have. The largest and most important open-source data base we possess is the history of the human race.

The United States and the rest of the Human Race

The second element largely missing from the public and media debate on the future of U.S. intelligence is some sense of the relevance of the experience of the rest of the human race to the solution of American problems.

The Brown Commission concluded in 1996, after visits to

Britain and other intelligence allies: 'In general,...the United States is deriving great benefit from these cooperative relationships.' The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Future of U.S. Intelligence reached a similar conclusion and called for greater intelligence sharing with foreign agencies.

Though belief in the desirability of intelligence liaison has remained fairly constant during the CIA's first fifty years, awareness in Washington that there is anything worthy of imitation in the experience of foreign intelligence communities has actually declined. This is exemplified even by the generally admirable report of the Brown Commission. The Commission acknowledges that, as a result of the Aldrich Ames case, the CIA's most important Russian agents were executed and others imprisoned. Yet its report also states as a self-evident truth: 'Without question, the United States has the most capable intelligence apparatus of any country in the world.' At no point does the Commission point to anything that American intelligence operations might *learn* from the experience of the rest of the human race. Such breath-taking self-belief ('the Middle Kingdom complex', as it used to be called) has always been a defining characteristic of superpower--or almost superpower--status. It is crucial, for example, in understanding the old mindset of the *Pax Britannica* or the French *mission civilisatrice*. But it is a serious impediment to understanding the past record and future role of the American intelligence community.

U.S. technical collection capability is, of course, in a class by itself. But it does not follow that the 'intelligence apparatus' as a whole is unquestionably the best in the world. One of the lessons of the Vietnam War was the degree to which the United States had overestimated the importance of its vastly superior technology.

So here are two friendly suggestions from across the Atlantic on ways in which Old World experience may still have some relevance to the American intelligence colossus, as regards both the management of its intelligence community and the relationship between secret intelligence and open sources:-

First, the relationship between the chief executive and his or her intelligence chiefs. (Both pronouns are necessary when discussing the British, though not--so far--the American, record.) According to one recent British intelligence chief (as shy of being publicly identified as most SIS and MI5 officers), 'An important part of my job was to tell the Prime Minister what he or she did not want to know.' If Presidents are to make good use of their intelligence chiefs, they must be ready to listen to uncomfortable messages without blaming the messenger.

The great weakness of authoritarian intelligence systems has always been that, as in the Soviet Union, however good their intelligence collection, their intelligence analysis was distorted in order not to upset the political prejudices of the policymaker. The former head of political intelligence at the KGB Washington residency, Oleg Kalugin, who is speaking at this conference, recalls in his memoirs how U.S. intelligence documents he obtained in 1968 showing that the Prague Spring

was not an American plot were shredded in Moscow in order not to upset the leadership's anti-American conspiracy theories.

Avoiding the politicisation of intelligence is a smaller, but still significant, problem in the West. It is not helped by making the DCI a political appointment. Until twenty years ago, no DCI was changed simply because of a change in the administration. Jimmy Carter's decision to sack George Bush in January 1977 set what seems to me to be an unhappy precedent (as well as changing the career of George Bush). Ever since 1977 the assumption has been that when administrations change, so does the DCI. Viewed from the other side of the Atlantic, that does not seem the best way run an intelligence community. Neither does the practice (of which there have been two recent examples) of making the DCI a cabinet member. The role of the DCI as a candid intelligence adviser is necessarily damaged if he becomes a policy-maker.

British intelligence chiefs are civil servants, never ministers. And, like all senior civil servants, they continue from one administration to the next. It may be that such continuity is no longer possible in the United States. But it is at least worth considering.

The second humble suggestion from the other side of the Atlantic concerns the coordination of secret intelligence and open sources, and the preparation of intelligence assessments agreed both by the major ministries and the intelligence agencies. Ever since the Second World War these tasks in Britain have been the responsibility of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) composed of senior officials of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Treasury, the heads of the three intelligence agencies, the Intelligence Coordinator and the Chief of the Assessments Staff. The JIC is responsible, subject to ministerial approval, for setting national intelligence requirements and producing a weekly intelligence digest known as the Red Book. The assessments staff produce regular, agreed interdepartmental reports, based on both intelligence and open sources, on issues of concern such as Bosnia.

The Brown report acknowledges that the relationship between intelligence agencies and policymakers works less well in the United States than in several of its allies. For the past fifty years the British JIC has proved better than the NSC or any other American body at resolving turf battles, setting intelligence priorities, coordinating assessment by Intelligence, Foreign Office, Defence and Treasury representatives, and gaining the confidence of policymakers. The JIC Red Book almost certainly attracts greater attention from consumers than U.S. National Intelligence Estimates, which some policymakers do not to read at all. The CIA maintains close, but unavowed, liaison with the JIC.

The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on the Future of U.S. Intelligence found that, outside the Defense Department, most government officials 'do not much value the [intelligence] analysis they receive'. The Task Force, like the Brown Commission, concluded that Washington could profit from the

example of the JIC. There is much more in the experience of outside world which has been ignored in the curiously parochial media and congressional debate on the future of the American intelligence community. The Brown Commission's conclusion that 'the concept embodied in the JIC can also be made to work in the United States' makes it the more surprising that it did not, apparently, find anything in the operations of foreign intelligence services which merited serious consideration by the American intelligence community.

Secret Intelligence and Open Sources

For most of the twentieth century senior intelligence consumers have tended to fall into one of two categories. Either they have too readily assumed that intelligence from a secret source is automatically more important than information from open sources. Or they have been cynically disinclined to believe that secret intelligence can add anything of real importance to what they can learn from open sources. Both attitudes defy common sense, but, as Mark Twain famously remarked, 'Common sense is very uncommon'.

The importance of information deserves to be judged not by the exoticism (or otherwise) of its source, but by its relevance, reliability and usefulness. Sometimes all the information worth having is available from open sources. Sometimes secret intelligence can add something of real importance. But there are few hard and fast rules on how much intelligence can add, simply because the boundaries between open and secret sources are changing all the time. What is highly classified at one time and in one place may be unclassified at another time and another place (or vice-versa). In the middle years of the Cold War the two superpowers had a monopoly of satellite imagery. Nowadays it is available commercially (though not yet with state-of-the-art image resolution). Satellite imagery has neither ceased to be important nor become more important because so much of it has become open-source.

As is well-known, there has been an open-source information explosion over the last generation. We sometimes forget that there has been a secret intelligence explosion also. 60 percent of the items in the 'President's Daily Brief', which reaches Bill Clinton early each morning, do not appear in the press at all, even in unclassified versions. NSA is reliably reported to pluck from the ether each day as much information as is contained in the Library of Congress, though the contents of the Library of Congress are doubtless more important.

Past experience suggests two guidelines for the relationship between open sources and secret intelligence:-

1. Secret intelligence rarely makes any sense unless it is combined with open source material. The 'intelligence failure' in Iran twenty years ago derived far less from a shortage of intelligence than from a failure to understand from open sources the revival of Islamic fundamentalism, as epitomised, for example, in the Ayatollah Khomeini's tape-recorded sermons.

2. The chief business of intelligence is to collect information from 'denied areas'. Though 'denied areas' change over time, as well as fluctuating in number and importance, the history of the human race makes it highly unlikely that they will ever disappear. Since people have kept secrets throughout recorded history, they are unlikely to stop now. There will always be rogue regimes and other dangerous institutions who will seek to keep their intentions secret.

The future of intelligence will depend on getting the balance between open sources and secret intelligence right--and knowing how to use the product. Let me apply that simple but important platitude to the problems of global security at the dawn of the next millenium.

Proliferation

The absence of war between great powers for the last half-century is not to be confused with perpetual peace. Conflict elsewhere within the international system has never ceased and will doubtless continue for the foreseeable future. The most important foreseeable threat to global security at the beginning of the next millenium, wholly predictable from the open-source historical record, derives from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Proliferation is sometimes seen simply as a short-term epilogue to the much more dangerous East-West nuclear stand-off of the past half-century. There are even those who assert that it poses only a limited threat, and has been deliberately inflated by intelligence agencies anxious to invent threats capable of justifying their existence after the end of the Cold War. Seen in historical perspective, however, the problem of proliferation is as old as *homo sapiens sapiens* and likely to last as long. Every human invention since the wheel has sooner or later spread around the globe. It is idle to suppose that weapons of mass destruction will prove the first exception to this iron law of history. The main priority of intelligence agencies at the beginning of the next millenium will be to monitor and slow down this ultimately unstoppable trend.

The immediate danger comes at least as much from chemical and biological warfare as from the better-advertised threat of nuclear proliferation. During the Cold War the threat of a thermonuclear Armageddon between the superpowers diverted attention from the horrendous legacy of biological and chemical warfare experiments by the Germans and Japanese before and during the Second World War. The Japanese dropped plague-infected fleas over Chinese cities to cause epidemics, and poured cholera and typhoid cultures into wells and water supplies. Nazi experiments with poison gas culminated in the use of Zyclon-B in the single greatest atrocity in modern warfare--Hitler's attempt to exterminate the Jewish people. Sarin, the nerve gas used by the Aum Shinrikyo cult on the Tokyo subway in 1995, was also originally developed by Nazi scientists.

Because the Cold War accustomed us to rank the nuclear

danger far above all others, the threat posed by the Soviet Union's preparations for biological and chemical warfare attracted surprisingly little international attention. Those preparations, however, were on a vast scale. One of the most important sources in revealing the extent of the Soviet programme was Vladimir Pasechnik, a leading Russian scientist who made contact with the British foreign intelligence service, SIS, during a visit to France in 1989, and was exfiltrated to Britain. Pasechnik, who formerly held the rank of major-general, was one of the scientific directors of Biopreparat, a Soviet institute employing 15,000 people which claimed to be developing biotechnology for medicine and agriculture. In reality, though Mikhail Gorbachev was never willing to admit it, Biopreparat ran the world's largest and most advanced biological warfare programme.

The well-publicised threat of nuclear proliferation from the former Soviet Union may well be a smaller immediate menace than the less-publicised spread of its formidable expertise in other weapons of mass destruction. Smuggling chemical and biological warfare out of Russia is a far simpler matter than exporting nuclear materials. All that former Biopreparat scientists need to make a handsome living in terrorist states is already stored in their brains. The materials they need to manufacture weapons of mass destruction can mostly be obtained locally. The incentives for Russian scientists to emigrate and sell their expertise to the highest bidder are considerable. A senior researcher at the Academy of Sciences currently earns \$70 a month; a night in a hotel room in central Moscow costs at least three times as much. There is recent evidence that former Biopreparat scientists are now at work at the Syrian chemical and biological warfare research centre near Damascus. President Assad may already possess Biopreparat-designed VX warheads capable of being fitted to his Scud missiles.

Just as Biopreparat attracted little interest in the West during the 1980s by comparison with the Soviet nuclear strike force, so far more attention was focused during the early 1990s on Saddam Hussein's nuclear programme than on his preparations for chemical and biological warfare. Saddam and Muammar Qaddafi, among others, have long dreamt of continuing the Nazi biological warfare programme. Some years ago Saddam used Sarin to massacre the population of the rebel city of Halabjah. The main reason why he failed to use similar weapons in the Gulf War of 1991 was his fear of retaliation. In the words of one senior Israeli general, 'He knew that, if he put chemical warheads on his Scuds, we'd nuke him.' In the aftermath of the Gulf War, Saddam successfully concealed most of his chemical and biological warfare stockpile. Intelligence from defectors and other sources, however, has since made clear how vast that arsenal is. The UN special commissioner, Rolf Ekeus, has concluded that the Iraqi stockpile is large enough 'to destroy the world's population many times over'.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction will threaten the international system in the early twenty-first century with three new kinds of crisis:-

(1) crises in which rogue regimes with weapons of mass destruction directly threaten Europe and NATO;

(2) threatened conflicts in the rest of the world in which the combattants seem likely to use weapons of mass destruction against each other;

(3) the use of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups

These are not simply theoretical dangers which may or may not occur at some future date. The first examples of all three have already occurred. Further crises of these kinds are likely to figure among the main priorities of the major Western intelligence communities at the dawn of the new millenium.

(1) Crises in which rogue regimes with weapons of mass destruction directly threaten the West

The non-European power which has so far come closest to challenging the West with weapons of mass destruction is Iraq.

President Bush's decision to launch Operation DESERT STORM was powerfully influenced by alarming intelligence reports on Saddam's attempts to build an arsenal of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. But for DESERT STORM, Iraq would now probably be a nuclear power. There will be further challenges to the West in future from other states who set out to assemble an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction.

Probably the most dangerous rogue regime at present is Iran, which began a nuclear weapons programme in 1985 under the late Ayatollah Khomeini. 'Today', declared Secretary of State Warren Christopher in 1995, 'Iran is engaged in a crash effort to develop nuclear weapons.' In all probability, that effort continues.

(2) Threatened conflicts in the Third World in which the combattants seem likely to use weapons of mass destruction

The compression of the world into a global village increases the threat to Western security from the use of weapons of mass destruction against non-Western targets. The first such crisis, little noticed by the media, occurred in the Indian subcontinent in the spring of 1990. India massed 200,000 troops, including five brigades of its main attack force, in the disputed territory of Kashmir, close to the Pakistan border. In a conventional war, Pakistan would have risked a repetition of the disastrous two-week defeat of December 1971.

Intelligence reports to Bush concluded that Pakistan had assembled at least six nuclear weapons, and might already have deployed them on her American-built F-16s. Nuclear planning, CIA analysts suspected, was in the hands not of the Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, but of President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, and the Army chief of staff, General Mirza Aslam Beg. Both, the Agency believed, were capable of ordering a nuclear strike against New Delhi rather than run the risk of another

humiliation at the hands of the Indian Army. India, with a larger nuclear arsenal than Pakistan, would certainly respond in kind.

In mid-May Bush sent Robert Gates as his personal representative on an urgent mission first to President Khan and General Beg in Islamabad, and then to the Indian Prime Minister, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, in New Delhi. One of the speakers at this conference, the Deputy DCI, Richard J. Kerr, who coordinated intelligence assessment during the crisis, concluded that, 'We were right on the edge....The intelligence community believed that without some intervention the two parties could miscalculate--and miscalculation could lead to a nuclear exchange.'

As in the Indo-Pakistani crisis of May 1990, intelligence will continue to have a crucial role to play in alerting the United States and its NATO allies to the threatened use of weapons of mass destruction before conflict begins. In any renewal of the Bosnian conflict, for example, there would be a serious risk that such weapons would be used. While peace talks were underway at Dayton, Ohio, in November 1995, UN forces discovered the remains of a Serbian factory near Mostar designed to manufacture Sarin.

(3) The use of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups

One of the most striking characteristics of terrorism before the 1990s was the relatively small number of people it killed. During the century before the Oklahoma bombing, there were less than a dozen terrorist attacks which murdered as many as a hundred people. Traditional terrorists, such as the IRA, though happy to kill handfuls of people, have usually been more anxious to cause panic and publicise their cause than to bring about major massacres.

All that is changing now. Today's religious and cult-based terrorists are much more menacing than their twentieth-century predecessors. The most dangerous delude themselves into believing that they are doing the will of God in destroying the forces of Satan. According to Yoshihiro Inoue, the intelligence chief of the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo, 'We regarded the world outside as evil, and destroying the evil as salvation.' Seen in historical perspective, there is nothing very surprising about such delusions. The aim of many fanatics in the age of religious warfare was to exterminate, rather than simply to terrorise, their opponents.

The lack of long-term perspective in the study of terrorism has led some analysts to underestimate the increasing threat from a new generation of terrorists who have more in common with the religious fanatics of early modern Europe than with most of their twentieth-century predecessors. Thirty years ago there was not a single religious or cult-based terrorist group anywhere in the world. As recently as 1980 only two of the world's 64 known terrorist groups were religious. Since then, however, Shia groups alone have been probably responsible for a quarter of the deaths from terrorism. Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, the cleric found guilty of inspiring the World Trade

Center bombing, told his followers, 'We have to be terrorists....The Great Allah said, "Make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including seeds of war, to strike terror into the enemies of Allah."'

Terrorists deranged enough to believe that they are doing the will of God are liable to believe that they have divine authority to massacre as many victims as they wish. The Shiite fundamentalists who tried and failed to topple the World Trade Center planned to kill tens of thousands of New Yorkers. So did the plotters who planned to free the Trade Center bombers by laying waste much of central New York, including the United Nations building. In December 1994, a group of Algerian fundamentalist hijackers was captured at Marseilles airport aboard an *Air Algérie* plane which they had planned to crash on the centre of Paris with equally horrendous loss of life.

As well as becoming far more bloodthirsty, the new generation of terrorists is also experimenting with much more dangerous weapons. Both the World Trade Center and the Oklahoma bombers had nothing more dangerous than traditional explosives. Their successors, however, will not be satisfied for long with the bomb and the bullet. Rogue regimes such as those of Iraq, Iran, Libya and Sudan, are perfectly capable of supplying weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups. The use of Sarin on the Tokyo underground in 1995 has proved previous predictions that some terrorist groups are already capable of manufacturing weapons of mass destruction for themselves. According to Aum Shinrikyo's intelligence chief, the cult planned to follow its attack on the Tokyo underground by releasing ten tonnes of Sarin in Washington and New York. The FBI has completed plans for the construction of a \$150 million laboratory at its training headquarters in Quantico, Virginia, to research ways of countering the use of chemical and biological weapons by terrorist groups.

Countering the coming use of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups and the rogue regimes which sponsor them will require a combination of both intrusive intelligence gathering and open-source, historically-informed research. Since terrorist groups do not usually give advance notice of when and where they are going to strike, then will never be any substitute for secret surveillance and penetration of them. But open-source research is equally essential.

At first sight, the most dangerous terrorists of recent years--among them the Aum Shinrikyo cult, fundamental Shiite extremists, the wilder fringes of the militia movement--appear to have little in common. Closer analysis in historical perspective reveals that all belong to one relatively common and extremely dangerous historical type. All the people who have done most damage to the 20th century--among them Hitler, Stalin, the fanatics of the Cultural Revolution, and Pol Pot among them have been possessed by vast conspiracy theories and a determination to exterminate the mostly imaginary conspirators, whether Jews, Trotskyists or variously-defined 'enemies of the people'.

The new generation of terrorist groups are also conspiracy theorists anxious to eradicate large numbers of imaginary

conspirators. Not all extreme conspiracy theorists are terrorists of course, but all the most dangerous terrorists are conspiracy theorists. And, fortunately, all the world's conspiracy theorists advertise their theories on the internet--fantasies about one-world government, the United States as the Great Satan, and totalitarian cults who desire damnation for non-believers.

At present there are few better ways of identifying those groups most likely to contemplate the use of weapons of mass destruction than surfing conspiracy web-sites.

Though the timing of further proliferation crises of the types outlined above is impossible to foresee, it is barely conceivable that the crises which have already occurred will be the last of their kind. Public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic, however, does not take seriously the threat of proliferation to global security. It is unlikely to do so until there is a major catastrophe. Most people find it difficult to take new threats seriously until they actually happen. There are no votes to be won by devising counter-proliferation measures. The situation at present somewhat resembles that a decade ago, before the 1986 Chernobyl disaster in the Soviet Union. Most Western experts who had studied Soviet Bloc nuclear power stations knew that they were unsafe and that, probably sooner rather than later, there was a serious risk of disaster. But before Chernobyl their warnings had little impact on Western governments and even less on Western public opinion.

The present gap between public perception and the coming threats to global security is worryingly wide.

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[Previous](#) [Striking a Balance: One Warfighter's View of the Need to Balance National, Commercial, and Tactical Source Acquisition](#)

[Next](#) [Remarks on The Intelligence Community Today and Well, What Should We Do? AND Has the Community a Future?](#)

[Return to Electronic Index Page](#)