
A New, Twenty-first Century Role for the Intelligence Community

John L. Petersen, The Arlington Institute

1. Throughout history there has been an exponential acceleration in the size and significance of each successive era. Each era has been about one-tenth of the length and produced orders of magnitude more knowledge than that preceding it. The rate of the rate of change is increasing exponentially and the amount of knowledge is exploding.
2. The unprecedented revolution both in information technology and in information production that is taking place in the world now is far more significant than anything that has happened before in recorded history. The magnitude and rate of change are unparalleled.
3. One of the byproducts of this revolution is that the very definition of power and value is, and in the future will almost exclusively be, derived from information and knowledge. In the developed world, traditional measures of power (geography, natural resources, work forces and conventional armies) will very quickly -- within a decade -- begin a precipitous decrease into essential insignificance. *Information is the capital commodity of the future.*
4. The very nature of this new metric of power changes the fundamental equation by which humans measure wealth. Land, minerals and armies can only be owned by one entity. When someone else gains ownership, the original owner loses it. It is a zero-sum game. Conversely, when knowledge is transferred to someone else, both parties retain ownership of it. Regardless of how many times it is given away, it always remains with those who have been exposed to it.
5. The information revolution we are experiencing will dramatically change every aspect of life in the developed world. It will fundamentally change the larger environment -- the context -- and that, in turn, will produce profound change in how humans understand and relate to each other. In particular, history clearly shows that the information revolution will produce parallel revolutions in human relations and economic development. These changes, if the historic relationships remain the same, will take place during a period of 50 years. It appears we are some 20 years into that half-century upheaval -- with the brunt of it confronting us in the next 20-30 years.
6. This change clearly threatens the status quo. Governments and others holding power in societies have, in the past, responded to this "threat" in two general ways: *defensively* [trying to control the explosion of information in order to maintain the integrity of the familiar past. e.g. Catholic church during renaissance/enlightenment; USSR] and, *giving it rein* [providing an open environment where it can flourish and expand unfettered. e.g. America and the telegraph and telephone.]

Those governments and institutions that have tried to control the expansion of information have never succeeded, and in the process of trying to constrict the proliferation they have guaranteed that their country is not in the forefront of the new era that evolves.

7. In the same way that most new technology is now dual-use, most intelligence can have value both inside and outside of government. When it is made available to the general public, particularly through the exploding global network of interconnected personal computers, it will multiply itself very fast as it is communicated throughout the society, thereby quickly enriching and enabling those who come in contact with it. Knowledge is at the same time both fungible and potentially unlimited. It is the currency of the future that can either be hoarded or spent.

8. The future of the U.S. hinges on how the government responds to this information revolution. Our society's ability to adapt to this extraordinary time of change is directly dependent upon it having large amounts of information available from which it can derive the new ideas that will allow it to fashion the new organizations and relationships necessary to deal with and exploit the rapidly changing environment.

9. The intelligence community is the largest single collector of information in the country. It could be the country's Fort Knox of the future. But it spends 80% of its effort on accumulating (rather than disseminating) information, provides many of its products to the wrong internal customers, and uses classification to hoard vast amounts of information that is the potential life blood of the country's ability to adapt to the new environment.

10. Knowledgeable inside experts estimate that at most, 10% of the products produced by our intelligence community need to be classified. Others tell me that most of what is collected does not get processed. At the same time, by focusing on "secrets," the intelligence community is failing to leverage the capabilities of our nation's other information agencies such as universities, business and the media.

11. The intelligence community has a new, very important role to play in this new world that is emerging. It could be the engine that sustains our country through this extraordinary period of change, but the whole concept of its role in our society and government would have to be recast. If it was thought of as a national information service, functioning broadly in the society like, say, the weather bureau does in its area, it would be an extraordinary national resource. Of course, some information would continue to need to be classified, but if the vast majority that remained was made available to anyone who wanted it, even in raw form, it would revolutionize American society and provide a huge shot in the arm to our economy. To start with, unclass intel could be a direct contributor to national competitiveness.

12. This would be a great opportunity for the government to provide additional value to the country without additional cost. Just dump the information on the Internet. It would compound the already huge interest in the Internet and would drive up the value and importance of the "information highway" in the private sector by providing content for the Vice President's network. The value of the information would become self-evident. CNN would rely on it. The size of NEXUS would quadruple overnight. Bundles of businesses would be started to effectively mine this new lode of information and make the access transparent for the average person. Everyone would become dependent upon it, much like the weather service.

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