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Crafting Intelligence in the Aftermath of Disaster

The cruelest and most debilitating casualty of the Cold War was neither the economy of Russia nor the American military—it was and remains, United States intelligence—intelligence qua spies and secrecy, but also intelligence qua “smart nation.” Since World War II, an otherwise clever nation has fallen prey to several erroneous premises, among them that intelligence demands secrecy; that technology is a fine substitute for thinking; that national security is primarily about force on force and state versus state; and that the crisis of the moment is a more worthy object for presidential interest than long-term strategic trends in water, food, energy, demography, and culture—what some would call “seventh generation” thinking.

Truth, ethics, and the taxpayer dollar have been casualties of war within the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC). Secret wars and secret vices have fostered a culture that culminates in the deception of the President by his own best men; of the voters by a government that makes policy with a limited appreciation of “ground truth”; and of the very earnest practitioners of the art and science of intelligence, whose isolation has left them stolidly believing they are still the best and the brightest, if others “but knew.” At least \$10 billion a year has consistently been wasted on secret technical intelligence collection systems whose fruits cannot be harvested, and until the Islamist attacks, another \$60 billion was to be squandered over ten years recapitalizing these same secret technical collection systems, so that the IC might collect 100 times more information, and process still less of it. Analysts, analytic tools, and access

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to open sources of information comprise the "collateral damage" of the secret war and its obsession with compartmentation.

FACING THE FACTS

Today's complex reality is not amenable to the kind of simplistic one-at-a-time "war as entertainment" media reporting, nor to the narrowly focused intelligence production process that tailors its daily production for consumption by only the President and a few others, while creating massive generic databases of classified information that do little to address the specific needs of action officers across all of the departments and agencies of government.

In the year 2000 there were 26 severe conflicts between states, 78 less severe but persistent conflicts between states, and 178 violent political and ethnic international conflicts. Astute statesmen have observed this development over time. For example, former National Security Adviser Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski counts 87 million killed in the past century, others count 110 million (Eckhardt), 187 million (Hobsbawn), 280 million (Rummel, including democide). Ethno-nationalist conflicts (state versus nation) are almost half the problem, with interethnic or tribal conflicts and anti-regime wars (state versus insurrection) comprising another quarter. State versus state are just over ten percent of the types, with decolonization wars, gang wars, and genocide comprising the balance of the last quarter.¹ War is constantly in metamorphosis, it does not sit still or hold to any kind of steady-state form, and only constant alertness and total flexibility will allow an adaptation to and confrontation of war on its constantly changing terms.

In addition to this plethora of underreported and little understood real-world right-now conflicts, many nontraditional threats to national security and national competitiveness defy understanding within most modern countries for the simple reason that various kinds of spies, particularly those working for the technologically based agencies, spend \$30 billion dollars a year (in the United States alone) on the small amount of the information that can be stolen, and virtually nothing on the preponderance of the information that is openly available. Worse yet, those who are supposed to be doing the open source reporting—the diplomats and the media—rarely venture far from the capital cities in which they are stationed, and when they do, fall prey to "shows" with preplanned background, foreground, and overflying helicopters. Robert Young Pelton's *The World's Most Dangerous Places* (Doubleday, 2000), and William Shawcross's *Deliver Us From Evil: Peacekeepers, Warlords, and a World of Endless Conflict* (Simon & Schuster, 2000) show that there is nothing intelligent about the way Washington or any other major capital is