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READERS' FORUM

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The Open Source Program: Missing in Action

I read Hamilton Bean's article, "The DNI's Open Source Center: An Organizational Communication Perspective" (*IJIC*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Summer 2007, pp. 240–257) with deep interest. He provides an excellent integration of his newfound skills in Communication Science with his past exposure to varied aspects of both government and private sector Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) as practiced within the Washington Beltway. In commenting on the article, I am using it as a catalyst for both retrospective examination and forward-thinking engagement.

My primary purpose is to offer constructive commentary that might finally inspire the current and the former Directors of National Intelligence (DNI) to act on the general proposition that many of us as individuals, and the Aspin-Brown Commission and other bodies, collectively, have put forward: United States government access to OSINT is "severely deficient" and should be a "top priority" for both funding and attention. In my view, this should apply both within and outside the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC).

My secondary purpose is to correct errors, note omissions, and provide useful information that complements the original work. In so doing, let me first emphasize that I consider Mr. Bean's article to be the very best overview available so far, at least within the constraints of avoiding offense to the established stakeholders, and also avoiding explicit attention to the continued and substantial inadequacies of the marginally-reinforced open source endeavors within the secret world.

The time has come for the two DNIs—the former DNI, John Negroponte, now Deputy Secretary of State and the obvious best sponsor of the Open Source Agency (OSA) and Open Source Program within Program 150, and the current DNI, Admiral Mike McConnell, as sponsor of the Open Source Intelligence Agency and Open Source Program within the IC—to put the OSINT magic into play.

HISTORICAL OBSERVATIONS

Civil War General, and later President, Ulysses S. Grant was among the first American military commanders to understand the value of open sources of information, and consistently did well for himself in this regard.

Since the National Security Act of 1947, a constant tension has existed among the Departments of State and Defense, the intelligence and counterintelligence arms of the Executive Branch, and the reality that most of the useful information to be gathered is in foreign languages not spoken by most Americans, even those in the Intelligence Community. Virtually every single government commission since then has observed America's deficiencies in foreign languages and, to one extent or another, the open sources they represent; and every single President, Secretary, and Director of Central Intelligence has seen fit to ignore these concerns, persisting with the understandable but necessarily erroneous view that the U.S. Intelligence Community is in the business of finding and delivering "secrets for the President."

Allen W. Dulles was the first Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) to tell Congress that open sources of information provided 80 percent of his information, and a later DCI, William E. Colby, confirmed that reality when he addressed the annual Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) Conference in 1994. What neither was willing to address, however, were the budgetary implications—the Return on Investment (RoI) implications—of spending next to nothing on that 80 percent, while spending tens of billions of dollars on secret collection, most of it technological, yet not having any single place where both secrets and non-secrets could be processed coherently and with all available automated tools. This condition remains the untreated cancer in the world of intelligence.

Within the IC, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) was the first modern effort to exploit open sources, along with the Joint Research Publications Service (JPRS), the first now renamed the Open Source Center (OSC), the latter defunct since the 1990s. Sherman Kent understood clearly that the primary value of strategic analysis demanded the integration of subject-matter expertise with open sources in all languages, rather than focusing only on secret collection and kludge analysis *en passant*.

The primary explanation for the demise of FBIS under varied DCIs has to do with two facts: the first is that the consumer departments and agencies are considered by the IC to be responsible for their own open source information collection, processing, and analysis; and the second is that bureaucratic politics made it imperative for the IC to develop unique capabilities that did not infringe on their customers' own claimed capabilities. This led to