

# Open Source Intelligence Clarifies Global Threats

*Untapped asset offers partial remedy to budget cuts, multipolar challenges.*

By Robert D. Steele

Open source intelligence, which has received mostly short shrift in the past by the intelligence community, offers the potential of illuminating most of the threats that will confront the United States through the balance of the 1990s.

Once known as scholarship, journalism or investigation, open source intelligence (OSCINT) is finally coming into its own. It provides a remedy for those needing analysis of threats for which the existing collection and production capabilities are unsuited.

Open source intelligence also offers a return on investment that far exceeds that of any other discipline. A commitment to OSCINT, with a commensurate effort to support national education and national enterprises, offers a means by which both legislative and executive leaders can support national competitiveness without diverting or undermining classified capabilities. For these and other reasons, it merits serious attention from industry.

As the intelligence community restructures itself and adjusts to changing fiscal and threat environments, three issues are on the minds of those committed to changing the way the community does business.

First, it must be determined what multimedia data sources and products can be collected, processed and sold by the private sector to meet government needs. In other words, the intelligence community, working closely with business, must find a way to define and then privatize much of the government's appetite for open source information.

Next is the requirement to identify the tools, technologies and methodologies already on the shelf or emerging that can be of assistance to government and the private sector as each seeks to exploit open sources for competitive advantage. This approach presents an opportunity to cut costs by standardizing and integrating data bases, applications and technologies.

The intelligence community also must determine what joint endeavors, such as cooperative agreements to digitize and share Third World data, can be assumed by government and the private sector to collect, process and disseminate open source data helpful to the nation's competitiveness.

While a full commitment to this discipline within the national intelligence community has yet to be articulated, a growing number of people believe that OSCINT requires a marked increase in investment. The recent appointment of an open source coordinator by Robert M. Gates, director of Central Intelligence, should provide a focal point for developing a concrete and broad program—in full partnership with the private sector—to meet the unfunded deficiencies in open source multimedia collection, processing and dissemination.

That official will be critical to the nurturing of industrial and academic capabilities and the establishment of a truly national program, which benefits all sectors of government, as well as the private sector.

Outside the intelligence community, under the management of the administrator of the Defense Technical Information Center, an extraordinary semi-official group, the Commerce, Energy, National Medical Laboratories, Defense and Interior consortium (CENDI) brings together managers of scientific and technical information resources and serves as a model for interagency cooperation on open source issues. CENDI, together with the open source coordinator and perhaps with such industrial organizations as the Information Industry Association, offers a basis for coordinating a significant expansion of government investment in open source capabilities and products.

A systematic approach to OSCINT as a separate discipline is the only means by which this discipline can be cultivated and managed in an era of declining funding from Congress. This approach must be unconstrained by clandestine human intelligence management while also fully integrating requirements and capabilities related to public signals and commercially available imagery, including multispectral imagery. Such an effort is best undertaken by a national organization or consortium independent of the intelligence community. This approach also must ensure that government does not act alone, but works closely with all elements of the private sector to form a national partnership.

## Defining Open Source

Remembering that intelligence presumes processing and analysis, not simply the dissemination of raw data, OSCINT can be defined as coherent analysis reflecting access to multimedia open sources. Those sources are not classified at their origin, are not subject to proprietary constraints other than copyright, are not produced by sensitive contacts requiring obscurity and are not acquired through clandestine or covert means.

Although existing intelligence community requirements and priorities processes can be considered as applicable to OSCINT, as they are to other disciplines, no real channel exists for consolidating open source requirements and assigning open source capabilities. Despite efforts in the 1980s by the Open Source Council, sponsored by the Human Intelligence Committee, and follow-on efforts by the Information Handling Committee and the Intelligence Producers Council, OSCINT never has received serious support within the intelligence community except as narrowly defined by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service and other community elements that focused on Soviet scientific and technical literature.

Many analysts will testify that their management and their culture are actively biased against the exploitation of open sources. It is much easier for the analyst to seek classified capabilities than to obtain foreign literature, transcripts of foreign video broadcasts or commercial imagery products. This is the case even though classified sources, by definition, have a narrower focus and restricted production.