

your budget! They will be interested in such a message. The National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) is a prime example of gigantism and lack of discipline. Smallness will create urgency and coherence, and skilled professionals keep their edge when they are harassed and reacting to threats. The Italian intelligence operation, which Luttwak joined for a time after 9/11, was hapless, but because it was small, it quickly became serious and then competent. The DNI should stop pressing for interorganizational coordination, which he calls a fantasy. A committed group of analysts needs to be able to ignore others and not be hemmed in or slowed down with constant merging and checking.

But don't we need to have a large reserve of analysts, for when the targets shift to some other threat? Luttwak says that we have such a reserve at hand—civil society! Walter J. Levy was an oil man who had encyclopedic knowledge of the German oil industry. He offered his knowledge to the Office of Strategic Services and they took it. Terrorism threats come and go quickly, so the IC does need to pick up quickly, but it should also drop targets. (He noted that Jihadists had a foothold on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa, but the natives decided that they preferred beer and popular music instead, and they drove out the fanatics by themselves.)

IC analysts could lobby Congress for permission to radically declassify, put everything in a wiki, and then join the journalists. Today, all analysis is in-house, and an analyst is forbidden from calling up journalists to ask for details. However, it is not outlandish to cultivate such partners. Britain in World War II decided to publish widely what they knew about radar, minus some technical details. The result was that the Belgian underground learned what radar was and what it looked like, and they were able to find and destroy the German radar stations.

Byzantium eventually failed—after 1,000 years! They were never outmaneuvered intellectually, and they were able to resist an implacable Islam for centuries. After a brief hiatus of European colonialism, we are back to the same situation with Islam.

The audience was impressed with Luttwak, though nothing much could be done to implement his ideas. I blogged my notes, and there was an outpouring of commentary, but nigglers on Byzantine history (focused practitioners?) took over the discussion, and the event was soon forgotten.

Robert Steele in the Open

Alvin Toffler once profiled Robert Steele in a chapter on the future of the spy.¹⁷ Steele had succeeded as a spy of the past, by recruiting

sources and finding secrets, but he soon realized that much of what he collected didn't matter and that gathering secrets put people at risk. The information that mattered could often be collected more easily, reliably, and safely by working with what was in the open (meaning information that could be collected without theft or deception). It is important to note that Steele wasn't simply saying that more information had become available, but that open sources were actually better for the problems faced by decision makers. Several senior military officers, among them General Anthony Zinni, agree with Steele, explaining that they rarely use secrets and often rely on openly available reports, and often from organizations not in the IC. This is not an argument for skipping all secrets, but for radically redefining how to serve the decision maker. Steele built a Marine Corps organization around open sources, and later when working as an independent contractor wrote manuals for NATO and others, and supported several Combatant Commands with news scanning and rapid collection and specific questions. Some of his military clients had stopped asking the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) for help because DIA simply could not answer questions swiftly. DIA analysts would actually laugh at the requests from special operations personnel because DIA was completely unable to respond. Through the nongovernmental network that Steele assembled, he could offer world-wide coverage in all languages, using trained local investigators who performed piecemeal. (Local investigators did not know who was asking the questions or why.) Steele was able to outperform not only the government but also several larger commercial services. He won a timed contest pitting himself and a telephone against a team of CIA experts, and he was even able to supply a better map during that test. While he is just a node, his network is powerful. Several governments have paid attention to his methods and have taken training.

In agreement with the recommendations of the 9/11 and WMD Commissions, Steele pushed to form a strong open source intelligence agency to serve all federal users. The preexisting organization that collected foreign media was renamed to the Open Source Center, but little else was done. Steele's criticism became increasingly strident as President George Bush's radical agenda developed. When it became clear that Steele was no longer welcome in government, he reconceived his program as a more comprehensive system for serving the common good, which he called Public Intelligence. He borrowed a United Nations list of global threats to use as intelligence priorities, which differs greatly from U.S. government priorities. He writes: "... In the

context of poverty, disease, genocide, and all the other effects of our corrupt mis-management of Earth, terrorism is a traffic accident.”

He doesn't recommend retreat from terrorism. He instead recommends addressing the crisis of missed intelligence across the IC in terms of developmental dynamics. He continues to promote a shared human network and to attract participants, and in many ways the nodes are already coming together on their own, though having an institutional home would certainly help. He had piloted a Public Daily Briefing, parallel to the President's Daily Briefing, only better. There are problems, of course. Public Intelligence can look a lot like the news or think tank papers that we have today. What differs is the insistent questioning and testing for whether the work is for the common good. The result is a floating, unstable synthesis of a variety of informed (and sometimes fringe) perspectives. What the system would be able to do is detect unnecessary assumptions, such as those used by the at-risk practices. And there would be optional actions to pursue at all levels, with notes on what can be learned from further monitoring and experiments. It is a platform for inquiry as well as reliable information about the global crisis situation and its players—all of us.

Steele will sometimes assert that there is a right answer and will rail against others who disagree. At times, he seems to share with Buckminster Fuller a nonreflexive faith that a technical design can be found that works for all and that can be imposed. Yet rather than shy away from such a battle, he invites people to take him at his word and contend over what is right to do now, it all its complexity. Just don't use an ideological starting point, but argue anew from the situation and the common good. The plan of inquiry does not need to settle into a reassuring set of answers, and would be dangerous if it did. Steele has been more than vigorous in attacking cognitive weaknesses of at-risk practitioners. He is also reshaping himself and giving a running account of how his thinking is changing through extensive reading and interaction with vital practitioners. Recent reading, he writes in his blog, “moved me further down the road toward Evolutionary Activism (focus on connecting all humans to all information, not on arriving at specific answers).”¹⁸ That is a perfect way to marry his combative energy with a reflexive stance.

The ideal client for a public intelligence function would be a governance function in pursuit of the common good. The two functions, intelligence and governance, would tend to draw each other forth. Partisanship, however, is a structural feature of U.S. politics

that creates distortions, and it has rarely yielded to direct challenges. The public intelligence function may at least reduce these and other distortions. In a simple case, personal financial corruption on the part of a public official might be reduced by an intelligence function that improved surveillance of potential conflicts of interest. In another simple case, a public official might be ignorant because of poor staff work and might have nothing better to rely on. In a more difficult case, there may be a systemic bias toward “low cost” alternatives where costly externalities have been left out of the accounting. Creating better intelligence on holistic cost could remove distortions and make the common good alternatives more plain both to the public official and to the citizens. Once plain, the public good would be more difficult to avoid.

We don't need to have the ideal governance function in order for the public intelligence function to be effective. The knowledge that it generates will be avoided or denigrated by officials committed to distortions, but the knowledge will nevertheless expose distortions for more to see, which, through citizen pressure, will help drive the governance function toward the common good. In those instances where the common good is genuinely sought by decision makers (such things are known to happen), the work will have been done and available through the intelligence function that has been waiting for such clients.

While professional intelligence analysts may be free of many of the pressures placed on public officials, they can also be guilty of distorted thinking due to poor understanding, ignorance, or illusion. A proven way to reduce this distortion is to generate intelligence from a crowd whose members are biased toward the common good and to relevant truth. The members of the crowd are selected to engage in a process of inquiry and correction. Participants must develop and maintain a reputation among their peers as pursuers of the common good and relevant truth, or else they are dropped from participation. Judgment requires interpretations. The intelligence crowd would serve the governance function by elaborating alternative interpretations that would be a plausible basis for wise judgment.¹⁹

Nevertheless, in Steele's opinion, there is a pervasive deficit of integrity that thwarts good governance. Steele toyed with the idea of running for Congress as a libertarian, giving him license to attack partisans and demonstrate the kind of governance function that he would want to serve. He also considered taking an offer of a tour in Iraq where his speed and honesty is appreciated and his rough

manner tolerated. He recently took a task with the United Nations where some have appreciated his vision. Wherever he goes, he has decided to be a zealous advocate of the public intelligence process and will subject himself to its rules, not lock into a bias or assumptions other than a bias to consider the alternatives openly, and to continued learning with others who are similarly committed. Here is a sample of his political platform, which is continuous with his intelligence platform:

The central problem of our time is the failure of human organization—its failure to scale, to adapt, to assimilate. We believe the failure stems directly from a rejection of diversity and a falsification of feedback loops—the absence of integrity. We’ve come to the conclusion that the discord between politics and intelligence is contrived—there is no inherent opposition between politics (choice of best path for all) and intelligence (presentation of best achievable truth for all) provided one condition is met: integrity among the majority of individuals engaged in each. If intelligence loses its integrity and allows itself to be politicized or worse, ignored, then intelligence fails. Similarly, if politics loses its integrity and overplays the secrecy card while also shutting out the diversity of views that are essential to achieving a sustainable consensus, then politics fails.²⁰

John Bodnar on the Inside

Beginning in 2001, John Bodnar, then a senior analyst at Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), took advantage of the new atmosphere of reform and tried a new approach for researching the secret weapons labs of adversaries. He patiently identified and built relationships with analysts at other agencies, made full use of open sources, and shared notes in a simple hypertext collection. (Contrary to what many people imagine, few intelligence analysts have advanced tools. Microsoft applications are one or two versions behind what the outside world uses.) This work became a strong foundation for defining gaps, testing hypotheses, and linking new data. Without official approval, this small cross-agency group of analysts met weekly. Each person was asked to share the week’s “take” of data. A language expert from one group had known little about the technical subject of weapon labs, but after listening to the others was able to produce a photo showing lab leaders. The location of the photo was not known, but the overhead imagery analyst was able to match the building shown in the background of the photo. The linguist continued to collect innocuous notices from newspapers and journals that