Mission over Mechanism:

Reorganizing the Intelligence Community to Meet the Challenge of Asymmetric Warfare

_____

Diana Raschke

In the age of asymmetric warfare, intelligence is tantamount to national defense. Our terrorist adversaries are too dispersed to destroy and too fanatical to deter. Our best hope of security is accurate, timely, accessible information and actionable analysis. We need to organize the Intelligence Community (IC) by mission—not collection mechanism—to take full advantage of our technical proficiency and analytic expertise.

Today, the IC is divided into an alphabet soup of organizations, with key agencies focusing on a single collection discipline, or "-INT." The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) specializes in human intelligence (HUMINT), the National Security Agency (NSA) specializes in signals intelligence (SIGINT), the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) specializes in imagery intelligence (IMINT), etc. This focus on function has enabled each agency to develop and refine the technologies and best practices associated with its particular collection capability, but the challenge of asymmetric warfare calls for a different organizational design. Structuring the IC by mission instead of collection mechanism would improve the depth and transparency of our intelligence analysis. The reorganization would act as a force multiplier for our existing analytic resources.

Reorganizing the IC is by no means a novel idea, but the argument for doing so often comes from a managerial perspective, centering on efficiency for efficiency's sake.[1] This paper

_____

[1] See Kindsvater, Larry C. "The Need to Reorganize the Intelligence Community: A Senior Officer's Perspective." *Studies in Intelligence* 47 (1), pp. 33–37.

argues that the IC must reform itself in response to the nature of asymmetric warfare, and that an organizational structure based on mission instead of collection mechanism would improve not only the management but also the overall quality of U.S. intelligence analysis.

A Changing Threat

The IC's fundamental structure is a legacy of the Cold War. Organizing agencies along functional lines made sense when our adversary was a vast bureaucracy; we matched the Soviets office for office, program for program. Science emerged as a major battleground, and we poured resources into technology research and development. The conflict was strategic and slow, with plenty of time for intelligence collection, analysis, coordination, and decision-making. We had only one real adversary, and this adversary had political leadership, public infrastructure, and interests mirroring our own.

Today's threat is different. The demise of the Soviet superpower ushered in the age of asymmetric warfare. Our terrorist adversaries are not our competitors; they are killers, kidnappers, and saboteurs. Many of them aspire to die in the act of murdering Americans. We face an unknown number of committed enemies who are only loosely organized into myriad cells and flexible networks, blending into local civilian populations the world over. They have virtually no infrastructure to target. Their capabilities outlast their leaders. They are experts at leveraging scant resources to devastating effect. To fight these terrorists, the United States needs to be as resourceful as they are.

We must not be a victim of our Cold War-era success. Partitioning the IC by collection mechanism no longer makes sense; we have assured our technical dominance in every "-INT."

(Al-Qaida will never have better satellites than we do.) Our divided organizational model creates stovepipes, hidden data caches, and other unnecessary obstacles to rapid, responsive intelligence fusion. The IC needs to shift its organizational focus from ever-greater collection mechanisms to improved communication, aggregation, and coordination.

Proposed Organizational Model

This paper recommends reconstituting the IC as a technical core of collection capabilities feeding an analytic corps whose members are grouped by mission. These missions can be considered as overlapping areas of responsibility (AORs). Some AORs would be geographic, as in the Defense Department's joint military command structure. Other AORs, such as cyberwarfare and terrorist finance, would be conceptual. Configuring AORs in this way would address both the geopolitical and global aspects of today's threats to our national security. The intelligence agencies as we know them would effectively be dissolved, leaving only the two interdependent groups of collectors and analysts. The figure on the next page is a rough sketch of what this redesigned IC might look like.
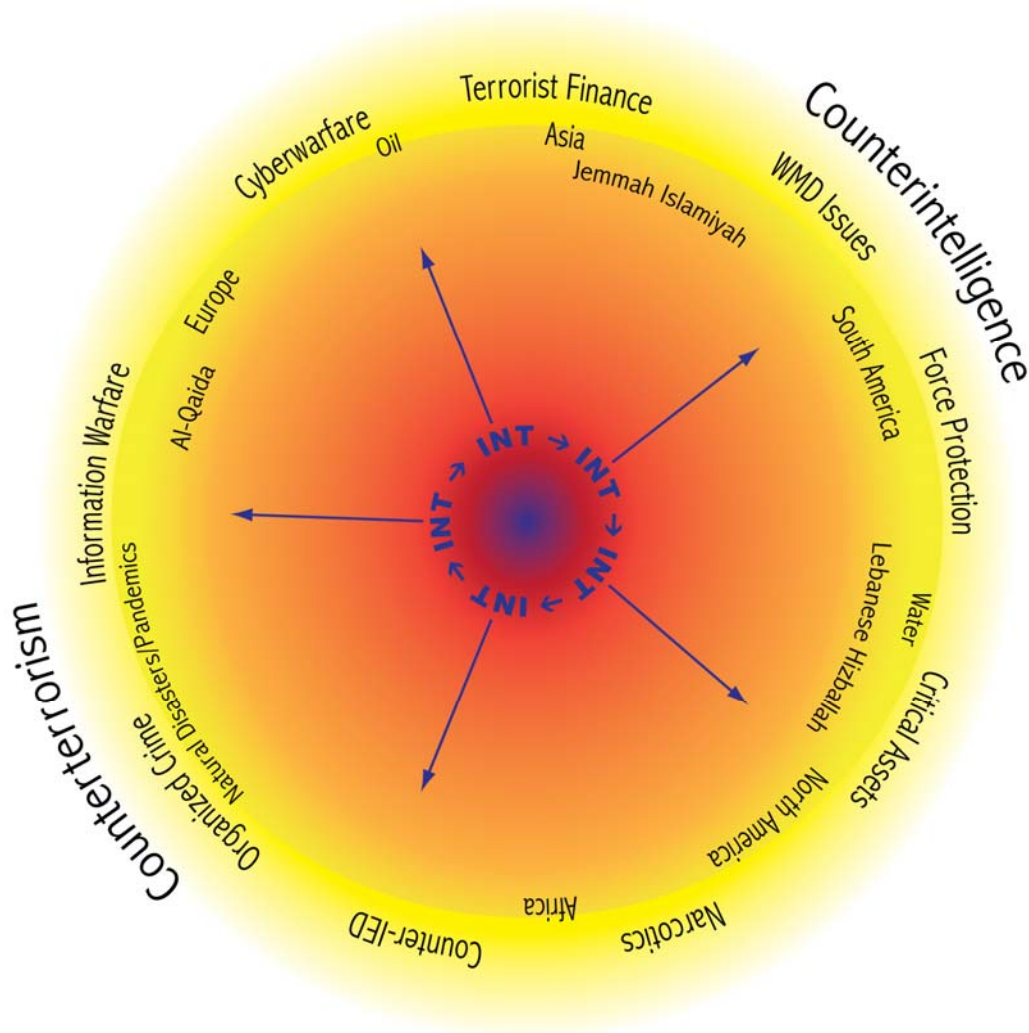
In the figure above, the blue inner circle represents the technical core of intelligence collection. The yellow outer ring represents the IC's analytic corps. (AORs identified in this diagram are only examples of relevant topics and do not represent a proposed plan for grouping intelligence analysts.)

This schematic is intended to represent a practical but dynamic way of leveraging collection resources. All the "-INTs"—including open-source intelligence (OSINT) —would be administered by a single governmental entity, for a coordinated national intelligence collection

effort. (OSINT experts integrated with other collectors will likely meet requirements that would otherwise become a costly job for a technical collection discipline or a risky task for HUMINT.) Every appropriately cleared analyst in the IC would have equal access to collected intelligence. Every analytic group would have the same opportunity to request further collection, and requests would be prioritized by the urgency of the associated threat. The collectors' "customers" would be the entire corps of IC analysts, not just their local leadership or analytic team.

Benefits of the Proposed Model

This organizational design is radically different from the standard bureaucratic org chart. The analytic AORs would grow, shrink, splinter, fuse, and fade away as needed to meet the challenges of a dynamic threat environment. In the age of asymmetric warfare, we no longer have the luxury of decades to assess the adversary; a terrorist cell can form, strike, and dissolve much faster than an intelligence organization can re-orient its various hierarchies. We will be able to adapt only by building a fluid organizational structure that embraces change instead of arrogantly (and repeatedly) promising that *this* re-org will be the last.

An IC based on analytic mission instead of collection mechanism would be a force-multiplier. Today, each individual intelligence organization maintains a group of analysts for each area of intelligence concern (Iraq, Iran, North Korea, etc.). Each group may be only a handful of people who are relatively isolated from other subject matter experts, and this isolation changes the analyst's job. A North Korea analyst, for example, may be less focused on filling IC-wide intelligence gaps than on knowing everything he can about North Korea in order to be his

agency's authority on the matter. The current organizational model creates countless "mile-wide, inch-deep" analysts but few true experts.

The mile-wide, inch-deep problem will only grow worse as threats to our national security proliferate. The U.S. State Department's annual list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) provides a high-level snapshot of the counterterrorism threat environment. In October 2001, the list named 28 groups.[2] The April 2007 version included 42 FTOs and an additional 43 "groups of concern."[3] Futurists such as John Robb argue that terror will become more and more decentralized, and that globalization and technology already permit very small groups and even individuals to wage war against entire nation-states. "In the future," Robb writes, "it will become harder and harder to put a name and a face to our enemies. Just as the attacks will be smaller and more numerous, so will the armies that carry them out against us."[4] In the not-so-distant future a single analyst may be responsible for her entire agency's body of knowledge on a dozen separate terrorist groups. In the age of asymmetric warfare, a group need not be large or well-funded to pose a credible threat. Any one of these dozen terrorist groups would warrant her full attention, but the over-tasked analyst must divide her efforts among all of them. Pooling analytic resources instead of dividing them by agency would enable this analyst to coordinate with her counterparts, so they can divide the work and develop deeper understanding in key areas instead of juggling competing general responsibilities.

---

[2] U.S. State Department Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. "2001 Report on Foreign Terrorist Organizations," 5 October 2001. Accessed on 27 October 2007 from http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rpt/fto/2001/5258.htm. Additional non-FTO terrorist groups were named in the "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report for 2000, but they were not labeled "groups of concern" and the FTO list released separately did not mention them.

[3] U.S. State Department. "U.S. Designates Foreign Terrorist Organizations," 30 April 2007. Accessed on 27 October 2007 from http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=April&x=20070425112939idybeekcm0.9128382.

[4] Robb, John. *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization*. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley and Sons, 2007. Quotation p. 137. See also Robb's blog, http://globalguerrillas.typepad.com.

This deeper understanding could include historical analysis and forecasting, two critical aspects of comprehensive assessment that are often sacrificed to the pressures of operational tempo. Rob Johnston's 2005 ethnographic study of the IC[5] found that time constraints and a focus on current production negatively affect U.S. intelligence analysis. In the words of Johnston's subjects:

> I'm so busy putting out today's fires, I don't have any time to think about what kind of catastrophe is in store for me a month from now. (p. 13)

> We've gotten rid of the real analytic products that we used to make, and now we just report on current events. (p. 14)

> Our products have become so specific, so tactical even, that our thinking has become tactical. We're losing our strategic edge, because we're so focused on today's issues. (p. 15)

If today's conflicts are but battles in what the Bush Administration calls "The Long War," then we will need historians and futurists as well as analysts focusing on the problem of the moment. Unless we pool the resources currently divided among different agencies, our analysts will remain fixated on the present, unable to find the time for retrospect or forecast.

Organizing intelligence by mission would improve performance at every stage of the intelligence cycle. Planning and direction would focus on actual intelligence missions instead of

---

[5] Johnston, Rob. *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study*. Washington, D.C.: CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005.

the technical means of collection. A consolidated, coordinated collection effort would fill

intelligence gaps in the most efficient, appropriate way. Centralized processing and exploitation

would dramatically reduce the overall cost of certain kinds of intelligence. (For example, today a

captured file in a foreign language may be translated two or three times by different

organizations.) Pooled resources would enable deeper analysis and increased production, as

described above. Finally, the open organizational design would improve information-sharing and

ensure the widest possible dissemination for finished intel as well as raw intelligence

information.

<center>Challenges to the Proposed Model</center>

The benefits of reorganizing the IC by mission outweigh the potential objections,

particularly those related to the overall integrity of intelligence analysis.

One could argue that consolidating analysts would create a misleading sense of

consensus, and that the current approach of conducting the same analysis in different places

creates the opportunity for varied assessments that provide policymakers with a better overall

intelligence picture. However, dividing the IC along agency lines and sending each agency's

assessment up the command chain separately can mislead policymakers in other ways.

Competing intelligence assessments could mean either a) Agency A and Agency B interpreted

the same information differently, or b) Agency A had additional information it chose not to share

with Agency B, and this additional information accounted for the difference of analytic opinion.

Policymakers would most likely receive high-level briefings stripped of the technical detail

needed to identify such a discrepancy in information. Conversely, multiple agencies could use

the same source but name it differently, so a policymaker might misinterpret circular reporting as thoroughly corroborated information. The reorganized IC described in this paper could guard against artificial consensus by dedicating a portion of its pooled analytic resources to red cells and other forms of alternative analysis.

One may also argue that reorganizing the IC by mission would hinder the development of our collection disciplines. Without an agency devoted to, say, SIGINT, would our SIGINT capability erode? No—research and development would be a key aspect of the technical core of intelligence collection. Today, different agencies can spend money developing identical technologies or technologies that already exist in another part of the IC. Unifying technical collection capabilities would actually be a boon to research and development because it would guard against redundant spending, making more funds available for more innovative projects. However, to compete for funding and other resources, SIGINT practitioners would need to prove not only their technical ability but also its utility to the analyst.

Information-sharing is a fundamental goal of the organizational model proposed in this paper, and any move toward increased openness in intelligence is by definition an increased security risk. The free flow of intelligence, unfettered by agency restrictions, would naturally expose more information to more people who do not have what would typically be considered a mission-critical "need to know." However, the risk is relatively small (these are, after all, people who hold security clearances) and the potential payoff is great. Today, agencies reserve troves of data and analysis tools for their employees' exclusive use; other analysts may be provided tearlines or allowed access to a scaled-back version of a database, but the best information often stays in-house. The messages underlying this information-hoarding are that the agencies are competitors and that some agencies grant clearances to untrustworthy people. Both messages

undermine the "community" aspect of the IC. Opening all collected information to any analyst

cleared to receive it would not only produce more informed analysts but also promote trust and

cooperation, helping us move from a "need to know" to a "need to share" culture.

Conclusion

This paper argues that developing and sustaining an intelligence capability that will

protect this country in the twenty-first century means adapting to the changing threat at the

organizational level. The IC that won the Cold War is not optimized for asymmetric warfare.

Dividing the IC into agencies largely defined by their dominant collection mechanisms creates

barriers to coordination, cooperation, and information-sharing. Our stovepiped bureaucracy is

not flexible or fast enough to cope with the innovations of our proliferating global adversaries.

We need to centralize both collection and analysis in order to leverage our technical and analytic

expertise most effectively. Restructuring the IC as a technical core of collection capabilities

surrounded by an analytic corps organized by AOR would improve not only overall efficiency

but also the depth and transparency of intelligence analysis itself.

_____

Diana Raschke is an all-source counterterrorism analyst with The Analysis Corporation (TAC). She currently works in document/media exploitation and watchlisting. She holds bachelor's degrees in English and Journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia and is pursuing a master's degree in Management - Intelligence Analysis from Johns Hopkins University.

Works Cited

Johnston, Rob. *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study*.

Washington, D.C.: CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005.

Kindsvater, Larry C. "The Need to Reorganize the Intelligence Community: A Senior Officer's

Perspective." *Studies in Intelligence* 47 (1), pp. 33–37.

Robb, John. *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization*.

Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley and Sons, 2007.

U.S. State Department Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. "2001 Report on Foreign

Terrorist Organizations," 5 October 2001. Accessed on 27 October 2007 from

http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rpt/fto/2001/5258.htm.

U.S. State Department. "U.S. Designates Foreign Terrorist Organizations," 30 April 2007.

Accessed on 27 October 2007 from

http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-

english&y=2007&m=April&x=20070425112939idybeekcm0.9128382.