

Twenty-Four Theses on Intelligence

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The purpose of these notes is to provide a brief, schematic, comparison between the problems facing intelligence in the old, state-centered world and the ones that arise from the new, increasingly globalized and increasingly diffuse, world in which we live today.

The notes are divided into five sections. They are, 1. The nature of the threat; 2. The intelligence organization; 3. The implications that the changing threat has for intelligence; 4. Some things that have not changed; and 5. A few concluding remarks.

Finally, the notes attempt to present a "global" view as far as possible. In other words, they do not focus on the problems facing this intelligence organization or that.

1. The Nature of the Threat.

Old	New
The main threat was overt and came from the uniformed military. Compared to the three and a half million strong Red Army, for example, everything else that the U.S. faced during the Cold War was trivial.	As 9-11 showed, the threat is often covert and comes from people who do not identify themselves by wearing uniform. To make things worse, people and organizations will often claim responsibility for actions they did not commit; as happened in the case of kidnapped Wall Street Journal journalist Daniel Pearl.
The enemy organization was highly centralized and disciplined.	The enemy organization is decentralized and relatively undisciplined. Often it displays a very strong tendency to splinter and form shifting alliances as well as rivalries. A good example of this may be seen in Israel's recent operations against the Palestinians; as the "official" Palestinian security organizations took a beating, their place tended to be taken by the Tanzim which is not as dependent on Arafat.
The enemy had a clear territorial base, marked in the form of a colored patch on the map.	The enemy has no clear territorial base, or else he has one that is capable of being rapidly moved from one place to another. <i>Al Qaeda</i> , which is said to have cells in sixty countries, is a very good example of this.
As a result, there was a sharp distinction between internal and external threat.	As 9-11 showed with particular clarity, the distinction between an external threat and an internal one has become largely blurred. <i>Lucifer ante portas</i> has been

	replaced by <i>Lucifer inter nos</i> !
Generally there was a close link between the size of the opponent and the extent of the threat he posed. Also, for most states, other things equal the closer an enemy the more dangerous he was.	Technological developments have made a big difference in this field. At present, small opponents may sometimes be able to inflict vast damage by using weapons of mass destruction or, perhaps, information warfare. The latter in particular makes distance irrelevant.
The opponent tended to grow incrementally.	A hardly-known opponent may appear out of the blue (and disappear just as fast). As a result, analysts are forced to think of what has been called "potential imaginary threats".
The threat was deliberately created as continuation of policy by other means.	As often as not, the threat is a by-product of other activities, such as drug smuggling, or migration, or destruction of the environment. In other words, the Clausewitzian model does not necessarily apply; nobody is out to commit an act of policy. As likely as not, the threat is produced by poor devils who do what they do not because of evil intent but because they have no other way to make a living.

2. The Intelligence Organization.

Intelligence operations were directed by the state. Each state had its own intelligence organization or organizations.	The state's monopoly over intelligence gathering is being lost very rapidly. Intelligence is more likely to come from mix of public and private organizations.
A "go it alone", approach made sources relatively easy to control and verify.	Given the diffuse nature of the threat, cooperation with other organizations is vital. However, this makes sources much harder to control and verify; it also means less control over the information one already has.

3. Implications for Intelligence.

Since the enemy was operating in the open, he was relatively easy to identify and find.	The enemy has become much harder to identify and find. Owing partly to his decentralized structure, partly to the mobility made possible by modern transportation, very often one only finds part of him.
Although there were always exceptions, normally the enemy's intentions were focused in his leadership which laid down	The intentions of the enemy's leadership are not necessarily decisive in regard to what lower leadership is doing. In

policy.	extreme cases, they may not even be relevant.
The enemy's capabilities were focused in the hands of his leadership, which decided whether and how to activate them.	Many of the enemy's capabilities are diffused throughout the organization. The latter's parts may often use them as they see fit and not as they are instructed.
A broad-area approach to intelligence was often useful, as in mapping, finding military formations, etc.	Intelligence must be much more focused in space. If you are planning to take out a terrorist in his hiding place, even the precise location of the knob on the door may be vital; and the more precise the weapons you have, the more true this is.
The distinction between intelligence gathering and use of force was usually clear.	The distinction between intelligence gathering and use of force is sometimes blurred.
Since it operated abroad against a declared enemy, intelligence did not have to take cognizance of the existing legal framework.	Partly because the distinction between internal and external does not apply in the same form, partly because the Clausewitzian framework does not apply and the "enemy" are just poor devils, keeping within legal framework is vital. Ignoring it risks alienating public opinion and creating more enemies; it may, indeed, be the highway to defeat. The fact that they kept within the legal framework, more or less, is a major reason behind the success of the British in Northern Ireland.
Unless one was caught, the courts were almost irrelevant to intelligence work.	If one is to operate at home as well as abroad, the courts are going to be involved. A much higher standard of evidence may become necessary. Not for nothing is LIC (Low Intensity Conflict) sometimes said to stand for Lawyer Infested Conflict; see the tussle over the rights of El Qaeda prisoners currently being held at Guantanamo.
As a result of the above, intelligence was usually quite different from police work.	Intelligence and police work converge. Even before 9-11 organizations that used to be almost totally separate, such as FBI and CIA, were beginning to come together; swapping information, exchanging personnel, and so on.
Intelligence was often the sole source of information about an issue or a development.	In a world is flooded by information, intelligence is likely to be but one of many sources competing for the attention of decision makers. This has the effect of downgrading analysts and turning decision makers into their own analysts.

4. Some Things That Have Not Changed.

1. In theory, now as ever, the objective of intelligence is to get at "the truth". In practice, now as ever, "the truth" will often be shaped as much by cultural factors, mirror-imaging, wishful thinking, groupthink, and bureaucratic politics as by "objective" intelligence collection and analysis; a good example is the failure of the CIA to forecast the Indian nuclear test in 1998.
2. Reading the enemy's mind is as important as assessing his capabilities, perhaps more so. Again the Indian nuclear test is a very good point in case.
3. Raw data without analysis and evaluation means very little. In other words, the overall theoretical framework is at least as important as the "facts".
4. How to interest busy decision-makers in intelligence was, and remains, a major question facing intelligence. If the analysis agrees with the decision maker's views he or she is likely to say it contains nothing new; if it doesn't, that it is plain wrong. To solve the dilemma there will be an emphasis on "secrets".
5. The OODA (Observation, Orientation, Decision, Action) loop remains as critical as ever. Success depends on speed; old intelligence stinks. Get there half an hour late, and your terrorist-suspect is gone. Speeding-up the loop depends partly on technology, partly on organization.
6. Finally, too much intelligence can be as bad as not enough intelligence, or worse. Three weeks passed from the moment an American satellite took a picture of the massacre of Srebrenica until, alerted by other sources, anybody took a look at it. It is said that each and every citizen of London is photographed 300 times a day on the average; this would mean 3 billion pictures a day, over a trillion a year.

5. Conclusions.

As always, the world is changing in some ways, but remains the same in others which are at least as important. As always, the essence of wisdom is learning to distinguish between the two. What applies to the world in general applies equally well to intelligence. Finally: he (or she) who ignores change and puts his head into the sand will end up by being kicked in the ass.

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