



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL AND SECURITY STUDIES
AT MARYLAND (CISSM), SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

John Steinbruner
4113B Van Munching Hall
College Park, Maryland 20742-1821
301.405.4578 301.403.8107 FAX
JSteinbr@umd.edu

January 27, 2008

From: John Steinbruner, Director
To: Robert Hickey, Office of the Director of National Intelligence

Thank you for agreeing to receive the follow-on study to our *Future of Intelligence Analysis Project*. The project's final report, issued in March of 2006 summarized a series of discussions among experienced members of the intelligence community regarding its emerging requirements. The recommendations that were generated by those discussions emphasized the importance of greater integration across the 16 separate agencies that comprise the community. The exercise was originally intended to have a subsequent phase in which issues of implementation would be considered.

Independent review of the report noted that greater integration was a prominent theme of several previous assessments and that comparable recommendations had not been implemented even though they were generally endorsed and not inherently radical in character. The report and its predecessors implicitly assumed that all of the existing agencies would continue their traditional operations, and in fact no one is prominently suggesting that any of them could be merged or disbanded. The widely perceived need for redirection within the community has not yet motivated any substantial consolidation or institutional innovation.

That fact reflects basic realities of the situation. Global circumstances have created a new context for security but have not entirely eliminated traditional forms of threat. Established agency missions continue to be relevant and are plausibly judged necessary even if they are not as a whole sufficient. The American political process has not yet formulated an authoritative determination of what would be sufficient. No guiding concept for major reform has yet emerged.

It is nonetheless reasonable to anticipate that the intelligence community will eventually have to undergo very substantial reconfiguration in order to respond to changes in the scale and character of primary threat. It is important to explore the implications even if they currently appear to be outside the bounds of consideration. This memorandum and of the attached paper extend beyond the original report in order to encourage that exploration regardless of what organized implementation effort might be made.

The Enduring Legacy

The existing community was developed in the aftermath of World War II as an instrument of global strategic confrontation. Although it aspired to provide all of the information that political decision makers and military commanders would require in whatever circumstance, as a practical matter its primary mission was to prevent a large scale surprise attack on the United States or its principal allies. Reflecting that priority, the community's efforts were heavily concentrated on the force deployments of the Soviet Union's opposing alliance system – the most plausible source of a strategically decisive attack – and those efforts were fundamentally successful. Presented with the historically unprecedented danger posed by nuclear armed ballistic missiles in particular, the community was able to assess the emerging WTO threat reasonably accurately and did assure that a decisive surprise attack could not be undertaken.

Those accomplishments were achieved principally through external observations of the size, location, technical configuration and operational practices of deployed forces. Elements of the community also attempted to penetrate the internal deliberations of the opposing governments, but that effort proved to be less reliable as most prominently illustrated by the fact that the deployment of Soviet missiles to Cuba in 1962 – considered to be the most aggressive move of the period – was not definitively realized until deployment signatures were observed on the island. Similarly the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was not anticipated despite accurate observations of the force deployments involved. Throughout its formative history, the United States intelligence community concentrated on large scale military operations and demonstrated much better understanding of capability than of intention.

With the dissolution of the opposing alliance system, the burden imposed by the traditional mission has been reduced but not eliminated. There is no concentration of conventional forces anywhere in the world that could rapidly produce an engagement of the size once possible in Central Europe. Vigilance is necessary on the Korean peninsula, but that situation is not as demanding. The continuous active coupling of US and Russian deterrent forces remains essentially unaltered, however, and the practical destructive potential essentially undiminished despite nominally large reductions of nuclear weapons inventories. Since deterrent force operations create what is by far the largest physical threat to the United States, the intelligence community will have to monitor that threat as long as it exists even though explicit political demand for that service is largely dormant at the moment.

It is nonetheless evident that the consensus priority historically directed to the large magnitude threats of continental scale warfare and massive nuclear attack is being diluted by concerns about terrorism generated by the engagement of US military forces in the chronic civil conflicts emanating from the Middle East region in particular. The threats in question are much smaller in scale in any given instance and fundamentally different in character. They are far more difficult to track by remote observation, and their principal effect comes not from the direct damage they inflict but rather from the self-destructive reactions they provoke. There is a widely recognized possibility, however, that these emergent forms of threat might interact with the residual potential for large scale destruction if violent dissidents are able to gain access to nuclear explosives or even more ominously to exploit potentially vulnerable features of deterrent force operations. Those possibilities have been implicitly discounted up to this point but are bound to be reconsidered if the apparent surge of fundamentalist ideology produces the sustained political context for confrontation originally provided by the Cold War.

It is understandable and virtually inevitable that the various institutions that comprise the US intelligence community would seek to adapt their traditional operations to these emerging conditions rather than fundamentally revising them. There is ample justification for that effort, and it is a natural human tendency. It is prudent and in fact urgent to consider, however, the more extensive changes of method and of institutional configuration that radical changes of circumstance might be expected to compel.

The Implications of Globalization

Changes in the scale and character of threat are largely a result of the globalization process whose principal features are readily apparent even though they are imperfectly measured. Enabled by dramatic advances in the efficiency of storing, processing and transmitting information, leading economic activity is expanding to global scale and is spontaneously creating a globally integrated economy with at least four major implications:

1. Assuring economic performance has become the central objective of all governments but their ability to do so is limited by sovereign jurisdiction and is weakly developed on global scale.
2. The pattern of growth so far generated by the globalizing economy is highly inequitable, creating areas of endemic austerity which appear to be generating crime, civil conflict and associated terrorism locally; that is, significantly independent of any larger scale strategic or ideological impulse.
3. Access to global communication and to destructive technology is enabling violent dissidents to pose a major threat to the various commodity flows and infrastructure services on which global economic performance depends.
4. These conditions in combination are making the defense of global legal order the central problem of international security and ultimately therefore the central concern of the intelligence community.

The traditional operations of the intelligence community will certainly not be adequate to cope with these circumstances and will probably interfere with the development of capabilities that might be. Although an extensive effort will inevitably be made to track terrorists and civil conflict combatants using legacy sources and methods, that effort cannot reasonably be expected to achieve a standard of fidelity comparable to what has been accomplished on a larger scale. Remote observation, electronic intercept and clandestine penetration will not be able to anticipate smaller scale globally dispersed threats to the same extent. The higher resolution assessment necessary to deal with such threats will predictably require intimate collaboration across all major sovereign jurisdictions in order to conduct protective monitoring of critical assets, dangerous commodities and financial transactions on a global scale for mutual benefit. That emerging priority will collide with the tradition of illegal or at any rate unauthorized penetration for purposes of national advantage.

The same advances in the handling of information that are driving the globalization process do in principle allow high quality protection against the more serious forms of clandestine attack. If there were international protocols for doing so, nuclear explosive materials could be continuously monitored and protected in a manner that would make any unauthorized access or use far more difficult to accomplish than it currently is. In general any commodity and many activities can be monitored and regulated if there is sufficient will to do so.

The incentives to do so that are emerging from the globalization process appear to be powerful enough to make techniques of enforced transparency a leading edge of international security practice. Global application of those techniques would have to be based on the principle of providing equitable protection for all legitimate participants and would have to be accompanied by robust provisions for preventing misuse of the information involved. The institutions trusted to manage the information would have to embody that basic principle and the associated rules of use. It is extremely doubtful that any legacy intelligence agency would be so trusted.

In an effort to encourage productive public discussion, the attached paper explores the implications of this situation. It suggests that protective monitoring and the organized exchange of detailed information involved will require the formation of new organizations, separate from existing intelligence agencies, whose functions are likely to become vital for the overall performance of the intelligence function and indeed for national and international security generally. Admittedly that vision of the future implies a very dramatic revision of prevailing security concepts, operating principles, political attitudes, institutional arrangements and applicable laws. Such things are not readily accomplished, but there are powerful reasons for taking the prospect quite seriously.