

Lint Center Scholarship for National Security Studies

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“The Need for Human Intelligence”

Weather. It changes, it comes and it goes. And for the Intelligence Community, the weather has changed. From 1977 to 1981, President Carter moved away from human to electronic intelligence. He imposed restriction on collection techniques, participation in domestic activities and reemphasized the ban on assassination. He also gave priority to the improvements of National Security Agency and other agencies which promoted the use of signals intelligence and photoreconnaissance. Perhaps in that era, when we were still in the midst of a cold war, it was appropriate for us to rely on such means. However, the weather has once again changed. Our enemies are not attacking our armed forces, but our citizens. Our enemies are not solely targeting American citizens in foreign soils, but they are bringing the war to our cities, our towns and our homes. Today, American forces find themselves fighting against children and against civilians who pose as non-combatants, against armies that use asymmetric fighting techniques. Intercepting electronic communication and capturing satellite images are great methods, but asymmetric warfare calls for asymmetric tactics. Dr James Jay Carafano said this best,

In the era of state-to-state tensions, US strategic intelligence, especially the kind provided by satellites, proved invaluable in recognizing threats posed by other countries to US national security. However, emphasis on technical means of collection, at the expense of human intelligence, has proved to be a disadvantage when dealing with non-state threats such as terrorism (Carafano 1).

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Based upon these facts, it is in the best interest of the United States to revitalize its human intelligence (HUMINT) program. There are three areas that I'd like to focus on. First, I will explore the need for human intelligence. Second, what can be done to improve our HUMINT program. Third, how can the Intelligence Community (IC) create a HUMINT program that endures even the most dramatic changes in the socio-political climate.

Why do we need human intelligence?

HUMINT can be used to reveal the plans, scientific developments, ideas and intentions of foreign governments or terrorist groups. Although the US is well known for its technological savvy, there have been no form of technology able to predict dreams, ambitions, plans or ideas. It takes a human being to discern, comprehend and even predict the thoughts of another man.

Moreover, HUMINT is required to provide coverage and access. Technical collection systems have limitations. A high definition image may show us where a vault is located but "Access is what is required, and that comes through human intervention "(Clark p32). There are locations like underground facilities that cannot be surveyed by technological means. These locations require human intelligence which can provide coverage of hidden locations.

Lastly, analysis and assessment is an inherent HUMINT activity. In order to know someone's personal attributes, ideological affiliation, political and religious beliefs, human interaction is necessary.

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What can we do to improve our HUMINT program?

Improving our HUMINT requires radical restructuring and refocusing of national efforts which utilize covert operatives. For instance, the Central Intelligence Agency's National Clandestine Service uses case officers who pose as employees of foreign embassies or as American businessmen. But their effectiveness is in doubt. The reality is that they are far from the real action and unable to collect any useful information. Current case officers are irrelevant and are not able to penetrate terrorist groups. NCS needs to assign its case officers away from the embassies and close to the targets .

The IC need to increase the number of nonofficial cover officers (NOCs). The focus should not only be on increasing the number of agents, but producing a new breed of agents with the ability to assimilate into the "culture and... mimic the Islamic activist organizations that attract young militants"(Gerecht). Current NOCs are only working for short periods of time and are often trapped by their business cover. This severely limits the ability to have a breakthrough in high-priority, high-level targets which can only come from association and developed relations with militant groups and Islamic extremists.

What can we do to create a HUMINT program that endures even the most dramatic changes in the socio-political climate?

Changes in the socio-political climate are inevitable. Emphasis on recruitment and retention is key to providing continuity. Training case officers and NOCs require time and money. If we want to penetrate terrorist cells, we need to find individuals who have high language proficiency and who understand the customs and traditions of the locals. Moreover, we need to identify potential threats

and develop a HUMINT program in those countries. Doing so will allow us to have a pro-active posture with respect to our HUMINT objectives.

More importantly, the IC should have a lucrative recognition program for its agents. Agents who have been residing abroad and have done valuable work should be duly compensated. IC should also look at their training program, career development, and financial incentives. Emphasis should be given on ensuring that their employees are receiving competitive compensation and benefits.

Bottom line is that the Intelligence Community should re-align their budget in such a way that they are investing their monies in their most valuable resource...their human resource.

Conclusion

I have presented reasons why we need HUMINT, what can we do to improve our HUMINT program and how can the IC create an enduring HUMINT program. I would like to emphasize that my findings is only relevant to the current challenges that we are currently facing. When the adversary alters their fighting techniques... so must we.

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