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## REVAMPING THE US INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

Three years after the horrific events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, following the re-election of the Bush- led White House, legislative changes are to be made to the way the world's only superpower does intelligence. Having passed through the House (at the remarkable 336 to 75) and the Senate already, the bill, which comes 6 months after the release of the findings of the Congressional committee that investigated the attacks against the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, represents the most significant alteration of the Intelligence Community (IC), since the original National Security Act of 1947 which created the modern US IC and turned the wartime OSS into the Cold War's CIA. This is despite the numerous congressional committees and reform efforts that were initiated in past decades after various intelligence failures and scandals (from the Bay of Pigs to Watergate and the Iran Contra debacle). What can America's allies expect and how much of an impact on intelligence gathering and lessening of US vulnerabilities will the 600 page reform package bring?

### The Weaknesses: the responses

Although the 9/11 commission report, with addenda, runs to over 1,000 pages, the main messages were clear:

- enough circumstantial and primary evidence existed at the various levels of law enforcement and the US IC for far clearer and imminent threat assessment to have been made concerning the attacks;
- and the Director of Central Intelligence is not what his name would suggest. This political cabinet appointee has more than enough responsibility in running the CIA and being the chief adviser on intelligence to the President. He is not in position to coordinate and rationalise the work of the 14 other US intelligence agencies<sup>1</sup>, nor

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<sup>1</sup> *These include the Office of the Director of Central Intelligence; the Central Intelligence Agency; the National Security Agency; the Defense Intelligence Agency; the National Reconnaissance Office; other offices within the Department of Defense for the collection of specialised national intelligence through reconnaissance programs; the intelligence elements of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of the Treasury, the Department of Energy, and the Coast Guard; the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the Department of State; and elements of the Department of Homeland Security concerned with the analyses of foreign intelligence information.*



does he have the requisite powers to control budgets and personnel issues outside of the CIA.

These problems are meant to be resolved by the bill's creation of the National Intelligence Director's position, similarly a politically appointed individual, but who in this case will have a say in spending of the 40 billions dollars spread annually across the IC, (mostly by the Pentagon). Additionally a National Counterterrorism Center is to be created as a national clearing house for intelligence data. In fact, the latter will not need to be built from the ground up as the recently created CIA Terrorism Threat Integration Center, or TTIC, will be renamed and rolled into the new function.

### A Safer America? – cultural, political factors

Of course, it is far too early to predict the efficacy of the reform measures as approved by Congress and the President. The majority of analysts are in agreement that changes were urgently required, and for many reasons. The most obvious of these is the lack of effective sharing of operational data across US agencies. Not only does there exist a culture of competition and non-disclosure between the FBI and CIA, but the unusual political architecture of the United States also complicates matters. The separation of competencies and authorities into Federal, State and local levels has in the past in itself created numerous natural obstacles to interoperability and timely forwarding of intelligence. Then there is the unique cultural and political evolution of the US IC that saw a wartime OSS focused on the Axis powers change almost overnight into a civilian CIA with exclusively foreign intelligence mandates aimed toward the USSR and Warsaw Pact nations, whilst at the same time the FBI began its life almost completely focused on the enforcement of laws related to federal crimes such as bank robbery and kidnapping. The FBI's later brief of counter-intelligence and spy-catching was very much a 'tag-on' and severely influenced by the particular exigencies of the Cold War. Additionally the law enforcement origins and overall mind-set of the FBI has led to an operational style which understandably focuses on information that will stand up in court and secure prosecution. This is a wholly different level of information gathering than that which is required by 'purely' CI agencies, such as MI5. The recent creation of the Department for Homeland Security (DHS) has not markedly solved these problems, as the a jealous FBI was able to clip the operational wings of the DHS even before it began functioning in earnest.

There are, of course, some very broad ontological questions to answer if one hopes to effect a successful reform of any organisational structure. In the case of the US IC, there are two burning sets of such fundamental questions. The first concerns whether or not the quality of intelligence gathering will be better served by centralisation or decentralisation? Is the latter perhaps more apposite given the oft-cited Achilles heel of 'stove-piping', and the fact that the present enemy, in the form of al Qaeda, is far less centralised than it is a globally dispersed, organisationally flat structure? Given the scale of the US IC and its complexity is there really one person out there that can supervise the whole gamut of the communities activities and remain unsullied by unprofessional political demands and win the respect of career analyst and operations officers?

The second group of questions, if dealt with inadequately will negate all the effort and money spent on intelligence, in toto, and these concern the 'sexing up' or tailoring of the IC product. Perhaps the greatest damage in this respect has been made to services in the



UK, with the allegation that the PM's office exerted direct pressure to alter threat assessments on Iraq, but the US IC is also vulnerable in this regard. One individual who should be deemed a credible source is Michael Scheuer, renegade CIA author of the recent book *Imperial Hubris*, and who was in the late 1990s head of the bin Laden unit of the Counter Terrorism Center (CTC). In an interview released this week, just days after his resignation from the CIA, Scheuer states: "the Administration seems to be making it clear that it is not interested in analysis from its intelligence community, if that analysis doesn't mesh with or support the Administration's views, policies and perceptions."<sup>2</sup> More than damning enough.

Even if intelligence officers and analysts have not been doctoring reports to suit the political elite, the actions of cabinet members such as Donald Rumsfeld have done much in terms of damaging IC morale. The creation of 'private' intelligence assets and cells inside the DoD and elsewhere which function in a fashion more to the liking of the politically appointed is a dangerous trend that can undermine the IC integrity as a whole. On this point it is interesting to note that the wording of the new reform bill includes a sentence which is expressly there to protect DoD interests within the activity of intelligence gathering.

## Conclusion

Although it is unwise to believe in the excessively negative Hollywood depictions of the US IC, or even necessarily with those Congressmen who see the CIA, for example, as a "rogue elephant", the time has clearly come for some shock therapy. Although DC is being very tight-lipped concerning the new NDI's identity, irrespective of the final candidate, he or she will have to start work in an environment shaped by the wake of resignations and personnel changes that followed Porter Goss's arrival at the CIA. At the moment, however, the future appears to be largely dependent on exactly that choice of personality. Will the NDI be recognised by his immediate and lower-down subordinates? Will he have the ear of the president? Will he be seen as apolitical? Only if he, or she, can satisfy all three of these severe requirements, will that person be in a position to begin to address the problems identified within the IC over the last several decades.

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<sup>2</sup> "Are We Winning the War on Terror? - an interview with Michael Scheuer", *Terrorism Monitor Special Supplement*, Jamestown Foundation, Dec. 14 2004, Vol. II, Issue 13, [www.jamestown.org](http://www.jamestown.org) .