CENS INSIGHT

A Review of Global Open Source Intelligence

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The Centre of Excellence for National Security is a constituent unit of IDSS. Its mission is to develop intellectual capital on selected national security issues, providing useful perspectives for policy makers and the wider national security community. As part of this mission, CENS produces a weekly report (OUTLOOK) on a wide range of national security issues, with a particular focus on finding faint signals from potentially high impact issues that are not on the "radar screen" of most other agencies and institutions. CENS also produces INSIGHT on an occasional basis to bring focus and clarity to possible low probability but high impact events.

<u>Should We Be Teaching "Intelligence"?</u>

One of the most remarkable aspects of human history is the continuity of strategic surprise and the associated intelligence failures. Perhaps even more interesting is that the causes of the failures appear to have been consistent over history. They have been repeatedly studied and then the failures have re-occurred, usually for the same reasons.

According to Ephraim Kam, one of the foremost writers in the area, the issue of strategic surprise is still present. In a book chapter entitled *Is Surprise Attack Inevitable*?, Kam makes some rather pessimistic observations. He states in the last paragraph that:

> "History does not encourage potential victims of surprise attack. One can only hope to reduce the severity- to be only partly surprised, to issue clearer warnings, to gain a few days for better preparations and to be more adequately prepared to minimize the damage once a surprise attack occurs."

Even more pessimistically, Kam observes that military surprise is likely to continue to be a reality as well. His conclusion on this matter reads:

> "Each case has to be explained on its own merits. This may mean that successful surprise attacks are the general rule while their prevention is the exception."

While the two key failure areas are intelligence sharing (stove pipes) and mindsets, it is also clear that there is a common element behind those failures. This is a failure in part of the intelligence cycle. *The most problematic part of the cycle may be direction*, in that many decision makers do not know what kinds of questions need to be asked until a crisis is looming. By then it is too late.

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The Intelligence Cycle: Direction, Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination

The intelligence cycle is normally referred to as a cyclical process whereby consumers of intelligence make their demands known (direction). Following the demand, the intelligence community attempts to gather the necessary data (collection). The data is then processed (analysis) and passed back to the consumer (dissemination). In actual practice, the intelligence cycle represents an ideal which is not usually reached in the day-to-day workings of the community. It remains, however, one of the most useful ways of understanding the intelligence process as well as analyzing failures in that process.

Intelligence and Government

Given a dynamic and complex threat environment, a developed country now faces the need for an increasing number of people who can see and understand the bigger picture. National security is no longer the sole responsibility of the intelligence, law enforcement and military defence communities. It requires an all-of-government response to what is rapidly become an all-of-government problem.

It is unrealistic to expect that every senior leader, staffer and senior analyst within the government can gain the required knowledge of intelligence matters from "on the job" experience. This is not an effective means of learning a complex and frequently abstract subject. The costs of on-the-job learning failures are increasingly prohibitive.

The Need for Education

Broadly disseminating knowledge know about the types of failures that we have experienced does not automatically mean we are learning lessons. There has been a relatively widespread failure to drive home the "lessons learned" so that the next generation of leaders can learn from previous mistakes.

One thing that can be done today to prepare for intelligence and national security problems of tomorrow is education. Those who will have to play future roles in the direction of intelligence need to begin learning the major issues now.

Education and Intelligence

The importance of intelligence is nothing new. Various referrals are made to it in the classical works of Sun Tzu and in Thucydides some 2400 years ago. However, it was only in the 1880s and 1890s that governmental intelligence institutions even started to form. Since then, intelligence has been a growth industry and most governments now have it as a permanent institution. As an academic discipline, however, the study of intelligence only began to take root in the 1970s. In the UK, there are now a wide range of universities that offer specialized intelligence courses. Moreover, at least four universities award Masters Degrees in intelligence studies. To a limited extent, this trend is occurring in other countries as well.

The formal, academic teaching of intelligence, especially the larger issues of intelligence capabilities, strategic assessment (early warning), technology and the management of intelligence organizations is worth mulling over carefully. Education could be useful and a number of different approaches could be taken to the study of intelligence.

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Stafford Thomas, a Professor of Political Science at California State University, details four approaches to studying intelligence:

- The *historical* approach, which examines case studies or the experience of leading individuals in the field;
- The *functional* approach, which examines processes and the abstract issues behind them,
- The *structural* approach, which examines the agencies and organizations, and
- The *political* approach, which examines the connections between politics, policy and the intelligence community.

Wesley Wark, an intelligence scholar from the University of Toronto, has elaborated a more detailed program which includes:

- The research project which exploits archival information;
- The historical project which uses the case study method;
- The definitional project which attempts to define the field of intelligence;
- The use of case studies to advance theory;
- The use of memoirs to learn from primary source experiences; and
- The study of popular culture and the role of intelligence in various entertainment media.

The Benefits of Education in Intelligence

Teaching intelligence as a formal academic subject, either as an individual course in a wider strategic studies degree, or as an entire degree unto itself, would not be that difficult an undertaking. The general approaches and subject matter are already known. Education for junior and mid-career professionals would be a relatively low cost initiative that would provide benefits in numerous areas. Among those benefits would be:

- Improved intelligence products shaped by professionals who better understand the intelligence process and its capabilities,

- Easier integration of the intelligence capabilities of various agencies because common principles and understandings would be at work,

- Enhanced opportunities for networking among intelligence professionals. This could help foster the identification and dissemination of ideas, best practices and other ways to collectively enhance the capacity of national governments to reduce the chances of strategic surprise in a variety of domains.