

Intelligence in Deep Trouble

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Since the terrorist acts perpetrated on 11 September 2001, there has been impassioned debate about whether those terrible events could have been predicted and prevented. The focus has been on “intelligence failure,” meaning the failure of intelligence organizations to predict precisely the timing of the incident. Among intelligence experts, however, the phrase “intelligence failure” carries with it the connotation of categorical criticism of intelligence organizations by intelligence recipients who do not understand the intrinsic vagueness of intelligence.

In December 2002 the *Final Report of the Congressional Joint Inquiry Into September 11* was published. It concluded that “the Intelligence Community, for a variety of reasons, did not bring together and fully appreciate a range of information that could have greatly enhanced its chances of uncovering and preventing Usama Bin Ladin’s plan to attack these United States on September 11th, 2001.” The report also makes several recommendations, chief among them the statutory appointment of a “Director of National Intelligence,” a suggestion which deserves further comment. According to this proposal, the Director of National Intelligence “shall be the President’s principal advisor on intelligence and shall have the full range of management, budgetary and personnel responsibilities needed to make the entire U.S. Intelligence Community operate as a coherent whole.” The proposal further stipulates that, “To insure focused and consistent Intelligence Community leadership, . . . no person may simultaneously serve as both the Director of National Intelligence and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, or as the director of any other specific intelligence agency.”

Although this eye-catching suggestion might seem rather novel, to intelligence researchers it is simply one of several proposals that have periodically resurfaced throughout the long history of the US intelligence community. In 1999 Jeffery T. Richelson of the National Security Archive published his masterpiece *The U.S. Intelligence Community*—a famously meticulous and comprehensive study—in which he stated “A proposal that has consistently found some advocates and is superficially attractive, in the sense of an idealized intelligence community, but that is a horrendously bad idea is the recurrent proposal for the establishment of a Director of National Intelligence (DNI) detached from the CIA or any other agency.” He continues: “the likely outcome of the separation would be a Director of National Intelligence with far less actual power than the present DCI (Director of Central Intelligence)—for the result would be a DNI with no resources trying to establish control over the CIA, the NSA, and the DIA, all of which, as a result of their control of collection and analytical resources, would have far more influence than the DNI.”

To find a realistic alternative, then, one must look beyond the findings of the Congressional Joint Inquiry.

Although 9/11 was indeed an event of enormous magnitude, its significance in intelligence terms has been exaggerated, since the fundamental change in the circumstances surrounding intelligence had already taken place—in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. The fall 2001 edition of *Orbis* carried an article by Bruce Berkowitz of the Hoover Institution entitled *Better Ways to Fix US Intelligence*. In several ways this is an extremely impressive treatise, not least because many people believed that it was written soon after 9/11, whereas it had in fact been written before. This illustrates perfectly that the change in intelligence circumstances occurred not after 9/11, but immediately after the end of the Cold War. In his article Berkowitz points out that “U.S. intelligence has yet to leave its Cold War-era methods and structure behind”, and insists that there is a consensus emerging on how to produce effective intelligence in the post-Cold War era—one that encompasses the following five concepts: a wide field of vision, agility and flexibility, efficiency and focus, multiple lines of communication, and direct interaction and transparency. Why, then, has it become so difficult for the intelligence community to implement these tenets? His answer is that it is the fault of bureaucracy; his solution is to make the intelligence community operate less like a bureaucracy.

This author is in wholehearted agreement on this score, and the idea merits further examination from the point of view of the traditional intelligence cycle. In the CIA’s *Factbook on Intelligence*, the intelligence cycle is defined as “the process of developing raw information into finished intelligence for policymakers to use in decisionmaking and action.” The process is initiated by requests for intelligence (often referred to as “requirements”) from policymakers (often referred to as “customers”). However, since the end of the Cold War, as threats have rapidly diversified and as interests have become more complicated, customers have not been able to clearly articulate their requirements to the intelligence community. It is well beyond the abilities of any intelligence agency to satisfy a request to “Determine whatever threats might arise anywhere in the future.” In any case, such a request is too vague to even merit the term “requirement.” Yet, if a threat materializes, it will be the intelligence agency that will come in for harsh criticism and that will be blamed for an “intelligence failure.” Some intelligence agencies might be courageous enough to propose cooperation with policymakers. However, this would undoubtedly be rejected using traditional arguments regarding the dangers of intelligence being developed to support a specific policy and thus lacking objectivity, and of policymakers being subjected to disinformation.

To find a way out of this *impasse*, the following simple but fundamental question must be posed: why do requirements arise? The answer, too, is simple enough: because of national interests. In order to protect or to further national interests, policymakers develop intelligence requirements; based on the responses to these requirements, they then formulate and implement policies for the sake of those national interests. According to traditional arguments, cooperation between the intelligence community and policymakers involved in formulating specific policies is potentially problematic. However, under certain circumstances, frequent dialogue between the customers and the intelligence community—with a view to establishing just what the national interests actually are—is quite different from the involvement of the intelligence community in policymaking. It would help policymakers—who are usually much less knowledgeable than their counterparts in intelligence—to appreciate exactly what is involved in the protection and furtherance of their interests. Thus, a review of the traditional intelligence cycle and a review of the traditional relationship between intelligence customers and the intelligence community in terms of interests (rather than in terms of policies) are urgently required.

About the Author

Hajime Kitaoka is a graduate of the Law Department at Tokyo University and also holds an M. Litt. from Oxford University. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1979, and, after serving as Counsellor of the Japanese Embassy in Finland, he rose to become Director of the Intelligence Coordination Division. In 2001 he was seconded to IIPS.