

The “Intelligence Game” after the Cold War

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Intelligence services must provide the basis of knowledge for a state; they must also, at all times, be able to warn of impending crises and detect possible surprises, dangers, threats or attacks in advance. The main task for an intelligence service is to alert and support decision makers (Political or Military) on issues with which they have to deal. Over the past twenty years, western intelligence services have had to adjust themselves to a succession of radical changes. The world of the 21st century is likely to be fraught with new perils, coupled with more uncertainty and unpredictability than at any other time in history.¹ The international arena has become more complicated with the multiplication of actors, sources of crises, means of conflict, increasing economic interdependence, accelerating technological developments and the growing interconnectivity of information and communications; therefore new dynamics and vulnerabilities have come into play. The rapid evolution of the strategic, political and economic environment since the end of the Cold War has furthered the quest for information on security issues that governments will have to pursue.

Under such scenarios some authors argue that we have entered into an era in which security threats are rapidly evolving, and becoming increasingly trans-national in nature and that the role of states as originators of security is shrinking. However, sources of trans-national security threats such as the smuggling of arms, human beings, or narcotics, the spread of diseases like AIDS, environmental degradation, or terrorism, may not be entirely divorced from states, but the role of non-state or sub-state agents is paramount.

Therefore, as we observed in the last incident of the CNI with a traitor, who sold information to the Russians, the role of the states in the “intelligence game” is still paramount. To gain strategic advantage in order to avoid war and bloodshed, nations require accurate information and insight. As a report of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States argued in 1995, *“the end of the cold war has not eliminated the need for effective intelligence. Then it has increased the necessity both in the old way and the new one. Besides, effective intelligence can only be produced by an intelligence community of a size that approximates its cold war predecessor, although it is not only a question of size”*.²

With conventional military threats diminishing, new risks and dangers connected with proliferation, globalization and destabilization, multiply the security challenges. These realities make assessments more complex, developments less predictable and crises and conflicts less calculable, therefore affecting the intelligence services. In a field where a great deal of emphasis is placed on reducing uncertainty³, it is true that it must be necessary to adapt the intelligence services to the new requirements of the 21st Century, but it is important to keep in mind that the very nature of the intelligence services has not been disappeared as the Spanish intelligence services have verified. Even today when it is commonly accepted that intelligence cooperation is basic to face the threats of the dawn of the 21st Century, nation competition is still there, and so is the necessity of information. Furthermore there are always countries ready to pay for relevant information from other countries.

Today, almost two decades ahead of the end of the Cold War, the “War of Intelligence” between states is still alive and it will become more presing in the years to come. It is not a surprise that there are traitors ready to sell national secrets for money, they always have been, and always will be. “The Spanish leak” is an example of how countries are interested in others’ secrets, even when the fundamental emphasis is on translational threats. In this situation how can we argue that it is fundamental to move forward, sharing information between countries to deal with these transnational threats? The answer to this question is to increase the role of Counter-intelligence.

The first responsibility of counter-intelligence is, therefore, to protect information. The world of Counter-intelligence is one in which truth, lies and deception combine themselves in perhaps the most sophisticated manner. As a result of this reality, intelligence organisations are forced to take extensive measures to ensure that the right people are employed and that in the event of a breach, damage is limited. In attempting to weave their way in a most effective manner through this intricate maze, a balance must be struck between security and operational effectiveness.

The protection of acquired knowledge is a vital function of any intelligence organisation, yet no amount of extensive security and stringent assessment checks will guarantee that an employee will observe the rules. It would also be logical to assume that if a person has access to any piece of information then it can in all likelihood be compromised. In holding the responsibility of protecting their knowledge, intelligence organisations are faced with two dilemmas in their selection of employees. Firstly, the instruments of psychological and behavioural measurement hold accuracy rates that are below 100%, allowing individuals who may pose a security threat to be cleared for employment.⁴ Secondly, attempting to create a profiling system that identifies future betrayers would be an imperfect process leading to the allocation of resources towards the wrongfully suspected rather than those well trained in evading detection.⁵ Given the complexity and importance of this problem it seems somewhat surprising that so little scientifically grounded paradigms exist for the detection and prevention of such espionage methods.⁶

Furthermore, another major function of Counter-intelligence is clearly to frustrate the efforts of foreign intelligence operatives in stealing sensitive information. As we have pointed out in a recent paper "Critical Issues in Contemporary Counter-Intelligence" the greatest foreign intelligence threat facing democratic states today, is that of Chinese and Russian foreign intelligence organisations.⁷ In fact, as with all states that require a system of intelligence gathering beyond their borders, Russia has been no exception. Russia retained its foreign intelligence apparatus after the collapse of the Soviet Union, creating the *Sluzhba Vneshney Razvedki Rossi (SVR)* from the KGB's former First Chief Directorate. Russia's foreign intelligence capabilities owe much to the KGB, particularly as the Counter-intelligence sections of most foreign intelligence agencies proved to be no match for the KGB.

Innovative solutions and the re-thinking of traditional methods will be required to maintain effective cover and stealth in a 21st Century operational environment. And so, if the problems of contemporary Counter-intelligence are to be dealt with, it is critical that those responsible for ensuring national security rapidly respond to the shortcomings of their present day efforts. Too great focus on terrorism at the price of neglecting other critical threats, as it is the case today, can indeed be the wrong decision.

There are some voices that have criticized the performance of the Spanish Intelligence services making public the issue of the traitor. But the truth is that, the first few years of the 21st Century have witnessed a transformation in the role of secret intelligence in international affairs. Intelligence and security issues are now more prominent than ever before, in Western political discourse as well as in the wider public consciousness. Public expectations of intelligence have never been greater. The tendency in the intelligence game is to fulfil the public expectations, and the Spanish case is neither the only one nor the more notorious,⁸ and surely this will be tendency in the years to come.

End Notes:

1. John C. Gannon, "The role of intelligence Services in a globalized world", *National Intelligence Council (NIC)*, (21 May 2001), at: www.cia.gov/nic/speeche_globalizedworld.html.
2. "Intelligence Authorization Act for fiscal year 1995," *Report of the permanent Select Committee on intelligence*, House of Representatives, 103d Congress of the United States of America 2d Session (9 June 1994)
3. Mark M Lowenthal, (1992): *U.S Intelligence :Evolution &Anatomy*, Westport, CT Praeger, pp.19; Also see: Gregory F. Treverton, (2001): *Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information*, Cambridge University Press, p.21
4. Theodore R. Sarbin, Ralph M. Carney, and Carson Eoyang, eds. (1994): *Citizen Espionage: Studies in Trust and Betrayal*, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, p.70.
5. Op cit. Sarbin, p.70.
6. Frederick L. Wettering "Counter-intelligence: The broken Triad", *International Journal of Intelligence and counter-intelligence*, n.º13, (2000), p. 270
7. Kaveh Moravej y Gustavo Díaz, "Critical Issues in Contemporary Counter-Intelligence", *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 13, (enero 2007), at: <http://www.ucm.es/info/unisci/revistas/Gustavo13c.pdf>
8. "Korean spy chief talks up role in Taliban negotiations", *International Herald Tribune*, 6th September 2007