

Intelligence and National Security: Adjusting to a Post-Cold War Environment

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Current Environment

The post-Cold War environment is probably as challenging for intelligence services as it is for the rest of us. The demise of former structures - like the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia - stimulated discussion about the reorganization of international associations such as NATO and OSCE. Especially with its enlargement into former Soviet bloc territory and the new memberships of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, NATO has become more of a political association and less of a purely military organization. In addition, OSCE stands every chance of being used by the international community in the future as a launching pad for preventive diplomacy, so that emerging crises can be dealt with already in an early stage before they become full-blown conflicts.

The security threats of a bipolar world with two military alliances poised against one another appear to have abated with the demise of one of the super-powers. Our gain is that the danger of world extermination through super-power nuclear warfare has been averted. Our loss is the relative clarity that this bipolarity implied. Now, instead, we are confronted with transnational threats such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime. These threats were always there. But, they have taken on new potency precisely because of the demise of bipolarity and the concomitant emergence of new states, some of which are still quite fragile. Now the

threats are more numerous, less visible, more underground and - in an age of fast transportation and communication - much more immediate.

And, here is where the current environment really does offer something new: transnational criminal and terrorist elements are powerful enough to span the globe and emerge as virtual equals to national entities. Nowadays, it is not just the illicit activity itself that crosses borders (like drugs or money laundering), it is the purveyors themselves who control networks that ignore national boundaries.

Viability of States

Today, criminality and corruption are truly transnational phenomena. Some organized crime networks are so large and powerful that they have the capacity to hold an entire small state hostage, to infiltrate government agencies and to merge illegitimate activities into legitimate enterprises. Law enforcement agencies and even intelligence services can be corrupted and their members co-opted.

An even more insidious dimension of the problem, however, is the corrosive effect on society at large. There is the danger that the population of a newly emerging state could begin to perceive criminality and corruption as ineluctable elements in the process of transition. There are probably only two directions from such a point once it is reached: acceptance of criminality and corruption as permanent elements in society, or rejection of the entire transition process and of democratization.

Neither path is positive.

Four Proposals

In the interests of successfully modernizing national intelligence services, the author proposes four actions that can be undertaken by individual governments and by the international community. These are: strengthening governmental and Parliamentary oversight; enhancing salaries of intelligence operatives; incorporating operatives into mainstream exchange and training programs; and, initiating a program of special support to intelligence assets of states in transition.

Let me describe each of these four proposals in more detail.

Strengthening government oversight

Traditionally, civilian oversight over is administered through Parliamentary committees or through subordination to the highest level of government officials, such as the Prime Minister or President. But such relationships place a tremendous burden on these government officials. They also presuppose the proper

functioning of the highest levels of government.

Recommendation: In order to assist newly emerging states with this challenge, the U.S. and its Euro-Atlantic partners should continue to provide assistance aimed at strengthening governmental oversight over intelligence activities. Specifically, we can work together to ensure that Parliamentary committees, in many states very rudimentary and weak, develop genuine oversight capabilities.

Priority to salaries

Another aspect of the issue is the relatively low salaries paid to employees of intelligence services in emerging democracies. Obviously, intelligence operatives will be attractive targets to hostile or criminal elements not only because the operatives possess a needed trade-craft, but also because the outsiders often can provide better remuneration for services than domestic agencies in emerging states.

Recommendation: Governments in new states should re-examine the priority in salaries given to intelligence operatives. At the same time, international programs designed to provide budget support to these states should take into consideration this crucial area.

Education and training

Still another aspect of the challenge is in educational and training opportunities for intelligence operatives and their superiors. Ideally, an intelligence service and its employees should share in the political and social commitment of the entire state through its period of transition. This cannot be achieved if the service's operatives are not well educated, or have gone through a training process segregated from the population at large.

Recommendation: Governments of emerging democracies should strive to ensure that high-quality educational and training opportunities are available to intelligence service employees. Moreover, the international community - in its exchange programs directed at states in transition - should not overlook the utility of including intelligence service operatives.

Program of alternatives

Intelligence operatives in countries where the transition period is incomplete, imperfect, or perhaps not succeeding at all, would seem to make prime targets for hostile services, criminal and even terrorist elements. The expertise and trade-craft of these employees can be a valued commodity for international organized crime networks and the services of unfriendly states. In some countries, this phenomenon is abetted by an overzealous democratization process that expels intelligence operatives of a former regime for

reasons of past affiliation. These former employees sometimes disperse into society at large, where their talents are lost to future versions of their home services. In addition, they are frequently not able to make individual transitions smoothly into these new societies. In other states, even if the operatives are retained in their home services, they could suffer from low wages and lack of motivation described above.

Recommendation: In order to blunt the possible impact of this problem, the Euro-Atlantic community should launch the same sort of program the U.S. initiated for Russian nuclear scientists in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Under that program, the U.S. provided millions of dollars, not so much in direct wages as in alternative employment opportunities. We should do the same for valuable intelligence operatives in states in transition. Though some might dispute the overall success of our program aimed at Soviet nuclear scientists, the principle behind it stands as an outstanding example of an innovative preventive initiative designed to head off a potentially explosive problem. As in the case of Russia's nuclear scientists, there is a dark side to the alternative: if we do not initiate such a program, someone else - international organized crime or hostile services - will.

Conclusion

In sum, the future challenges for intelligence services in states in transition posed by international organized crime and corruption are real, potent and immediate. They can erode the very fabric of society, especially in a newly emerging democracy that is struggling to adopt the political, economic and social reforms necessary for becoming a modern state. In some cases, they may even be eroding the psychological support we in the West assume exists among the populations of these states for reforms, democratization and free market entrepreneurship.

Intelligence services are not immune to these corrosive processes. Given the special advisory role these services play in every government, it would seem prudent for us all to consider ways to strengthen their professionalism.

In the end, they may be no stronger than the states they serve. But, they can provide significant support for the positive directions a state and its people have chosen to go.

