

**Senate Democratic Policy Committee
House Government Reform Committee Minority**

**“A Special Joint Oversight Hearing On
The National Security Consequences of
Disclosing the Identity of a Covert
Intelligence Officer”**

Colonel W. Patrick Lang, (ret'd)
Former Director, Defense Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Service

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Effective human intelligence, or HUMINT, depends on trust. A prospective “agent,” or foreign source, gives his life into the care of a case officer and a foreign intelligence service when he accepts recruitment. A recruited “agent” is completely at the mercy of the service which has recruited him. If that service observes sound practice in protecting the identities of case officers and “agents” then the “agent” has a reasonable chance of surviving to retire some day. If the intelligence agency is sloppy and careless in protecting identities, then the “agent” is doomed. Eventually, someone seeking to detect his existence will “break the code” and find him, and then he is finished. Career, freedom and life are all likely to be lost for the “crime” of sloppiness in protecting identities.

An intelligence service’s reputation for sound practice in such matters becomes well known. The kinds of people likely to become either case officers or recruited “agents” inevitably learn what the prospects are for effective protection by a particular agency of their identities. If the reputation is bad, then the chance of effective recruitment of either staff or “agents” is reduced. That is the last thing needed by a country trying to build a first class HUMINT service.

It is much worse if it becomes widely known that the elected government of the sponsoring state is itself willing and capable of disclosing to the public the identities of clandestine personnel within its own intelligence service. The prospective agent who learns that this is the case will reason that because he would be a foreign “asset” the government; will be even more willing to “sacrifice” his welfare for some trivial and fleeting political advantage.

Once that knowledge becomes general among the “recruitable classes” hope for success at the dark art of espionage will be gone.

Is “Spying” still a good idea? Is it useful? Is it moral?

In an age of satellite photography and collection of enemy signal communications from outer space, the question can logically be asked, is it really necessary to continue the ancient practice of the use of spies in foreign policy and military operations?

The answer is yes.

Clandestine HUMINT, or spying, provides an ability to see into the intentions of an adversary that no other form of intelligence collection can offer. SIGINT, which is the collection of enemy communications, can often give real insights into what the enemy would like to do, but this insight is always partial at best because the parties communicating may not, themselves, have a complete understanding of the situation and therefore may give the “listeners” an incorrect impression of the enemy’s plans. A spy in the enemy’s ministry of war who brings to his masters the complete plan of campaign of an aggressor even before war begins provides an insight that is beyond price. The ability to anticipate an adversary’s “moves” and to counter them without great difficulty is invaluable and contributes directly to diplomatic efforts to avoid war or to a rapid victory with fewer casualties to all concerned.

The wars of the future are probably going to be wars in the “Developing World,” where seemingly obscure ideological movements and rogue rulers are likely to emerge as threats to world order and stability. Such wars will be seen by the great powers as “Wars of Liberation” waged on behalf of indigenous populations for the purpose of freeing the people from the bondage of tyrants and “backwardness.” At the same time, dictators in the “Third World” will undoubtedly continue to try to develop or buy frightful weapons of mass destruction. Poison gas, diseases as weapons and nuclear bombs are all tools of illegal warfare that some countries in Asia, Africa and South America will continue to strive for.

In such wars waged in places with relatively primitive physical infrastructure in communications, highways and urban facilities, the importance of tactical (battlefield) HUMINT can only grow. The ability of armed forces to recruit and successfully “run” agents who can report on troop movements and the plans of guerilla commanders will be invaluable. Recent experience shows that in American forces, the CIA, U.S. Army and Special Operations forces can effectively combine forces to insert case officers and commando observers into areas that are still under enemy control to bring near real-time information to commanders in the field with which to run a campaign in such a way as to preclude heavy loss of life.

At the same time, the existence of worldwide terrorist groups such as “Al-Qa’ida,” shows the clear need to “penetrate” these groups so that their targeting and plans can be known. If the intentions of such groups are known, then they can be blocked in advance and tragedies like the attacks on New York and Washington will be prevented.

Are espionage operations moral? Is the manipulation of human motivations and needs ever justifiable? Each of us must answer this question as a matter of personal responsibility, but the arithmetic of the situation seems clear. Roughly three thousand people died in New York and Washington in the terrorist attacks there. Saddam Hussein killed millions in his wars and reign of police terror. Would it not have been “moral” to prevent these outcomes by bringing a few individuals to accept their duty in helping to prevent such evil?

The problem of “turf”

In just about every country in the world there are at least two Intelligence Agencies. These agencies usually represent the civilian and military sides of the government. They usually regard each other with suspicion and a deep-seated rivalry normally exists between them. This rivalry is a product of the innate competition for power and budgetary support (money) that exists in every government between departments. This competition is particularly counter-productive in the espionage function of a government because the various intelligence groups are skilled in what the Soviet Intelligence services called “conspiratorial work,” and are adroit at undercutting each other and undermining each other’s reputations. At times they have been known to actually “sabotage” each other’s operations by claiming prior proprietary rights to an individual agent or some other destructive stratagem. Such rivalries are serious problems and there have been many solutions suggested to this flaw in organization.

One of the most often suggested is simple amalgamation of all such agencies into one service. This is appealing on the surface of the matter but to do this would be to deprive the armed forces of the country of the specialized capability they need to work against specifically military targets. There is also the well-demonstrated fact that military officer targets are more easily recruited by other officers and not by civilians. These factors taken together have made for effective arguments against amalgamation as a solution.

In the absence of amalgamation of the services the solution most often advocated has been closer coordination of the agencies under the supervision of a central authority. This seems like a good idea but in the United States it has been tried as a solution for decades and has not worked well. The problem has been that the “coordinating authority” is the Director of Central Intelligence (the DCI) who is also the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The wearing of “two hats” by this one person has all too often resulted in the process of “coordination” of activities and operations being skewed in favor of the CIA. This does not really improve relations between the groups.

If there is a solution to this problem of “turf battles” among intelligence groups it has not yet been found.