INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION PRIORITIES IN AN AGE OF RENEWED SUPERPOWER CONFLICT: TOWARD A MORE EXPANSIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

"I'll welcome the day when someone tells us what we can quit doing, but it doesn't happen." So spoke a frustrated Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Lt. Gen. James R. Clapper before the Aspin-Brown Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community, chaired by Les Aspin and Harold Brown (Commission On The Roles And Capabilities Of The United States Intelligence Community, 1996).[1] While meeting with Commission members on May 4, 1995, at a Training Facility in rural Virginia belonging to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA, known by insiders as "The Agency"), his sense of exasperation welled up from what he viewed as a seemingly endless list of intelligence-collection requirements ("tasking") that had been levied on America's secret services since the end of the Cold War in 1991. "Tasking is additive," he told the commissioners with a pained

[1] James Clapper, testimony (May 3, 1995). In 2010, he would become the nation's fourth Director of National Intelligence or DNI. The Aspin-Brown Commission (1995-96) was headed initially by Les Aspin, former U.S. House member (D, Wisconsin) and Secretary of Defense (SecDef) during the Clinton Administration, until his untimely death at age fifty-six from a stroke on May 19, 1995. He was followed in the role of Commission Chair by Harold Brown, former Secretary of Defense (SecDef) during the Carter Administration and once president of Cal Tech University. The panel had been established in the wake of two significant intelligence failures: first, on the Horn of Africa, where U.S. Special Forces were surprised and eighteen soldiers gunned down by Somalian fighters in 1993; and, second, the unmasking the next year of Aldrich H. Ames, a Moscow mole who had been burrowed into the bowels of the Central Intelligence Agency and passing secrets to the KGB and its successor, the SVR, since 1985---almost a decade of high-level treason against the United States. Both events angered lawmakers on Capitol Hill, provoking them into investigative mode. They established the Commission as a joint congressional-presidential endeavor, with a mandate to review the efficacy and the appropriateness of the activities of the U.S. Intelligence Community in the post-Cold War global environment.

expression on his face.[2] Gen. Clapper was correct and the scope of tasking has only grown wider.

The new global setting of the post-Cold War allowed the United States and its intelligence agencies to broaden the nation's mandate to include the environment, health, the global economy, and terrorism, among other considerations---although the military might of Russia and China had by no means disappeared and considerable resources would remain focused on military threat assessments. This article explores the commitment of the United States to the ongoing mission of knowing about and thwarting military attacks, while at the same time taking into account a new host of once ignored worldwide threats to national security.

The SMO Tasking Imperative

One could understand Clapper's lament, even if one might not have wanted to return to a day-and-age when the agenda in Washington for global intelligence collection consisted mainly of Support to Military Operations---SMO, in the inevitable Department of Defense (DOD) acronym. The Cold War had been an era in which America's intelligence activities were driven by a core focus on these military questions: "What are the global intentions of the Soviet Union; what kinds of weapons does Moscow possess; where are these weapons and accompanying troops located?".[3] In the United States, the national security intelligence agenda was essentially a Pentagon agenda, shaped by the insatiable (and understandable) appetite of admirals and generals to know the plans and practices of armed adversaries.

Not only did this self-defense outlook at the center of DOD planning make sense to the American people and their representatives in government, but the Pentagon had further advantages in the Washington-wide bureaucratic competition for funding and promotion. The Department of Defense was the largest agency in the U.S. government (known until 1946 as the Department of War) and the nation's second most venerable Cabinet-level department, edged out in 1789 only

[2] The author, aide to Chairman Les Aspin at the time, was in the room when Clapper presented his views to the Commission. For more details on intelligence tasking and threat assessment in the United States, as well as IC budget-making: see Loch K. Johnson, *National Security Intelligence*, 3d ed. (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 2024); Loch K. Johnson and Kevin J. Scheid, "Spending for Spies: Intelligence Budgeting in the Aftermath of the Cold War," *Public Budgeting & Finance* 17 (Winter 1997): 7-27; and Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy* 8th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ/Sage Press, 2022).

[3] The secret services of America's democratic allies were also riveted on such matters; see, for example, the comparable activities of British intelligence, as described by Sir Percy Cradock, *Know Your Enemy* (London: Curtis Brown Group, 2002).

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by the founder's establishment of a Department of State two months earlier. The War Department enjoyed an impeccable *raison d'être*: service as a shield against imposing foreign adversaries---at the time, Great Britain, France, and Spain. Over the years, the Department grew more and more powerful, in cadence with America's rising stature as a world power. Its secretary became the most muscular, well-budgeted member of the Cabinet---an "eight-hundred-pound gorilla," in a description sometimes used by Washington insiders in the modern era (whether in dismay or envy).

In today's DOD, the ties of the Secretary of Defense ("SecDef," for short in Washington-speak) to supporters on Capitol Hill and in the nation's munitions industry added incalculably to his dominance (no woman has yet served in this position). Since the Second World War, a trinity of military brass, lawmakers, and arms titans had mushroomed into what President Dwight D. Eisenhower famously referred to in his Farewell Address (1959) ---with alarm in his voice---as America's "military-industrial complex." With 80-to-85 percent of the annual U.S. intelligence budget of some $80 billion going toward military-related global interests, SMO ruled the secret world of national security intelligence (NSI). This meant that the SecDef was the *de facto* tsar of U.S. spending for intelligence---not the nation's formal spy chief, the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) during the Cold War nor, since 2005, the DCI's replacement as America's spymaster, the Director of National Intelligence (DNI). The three largest agencies in the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC)---the National Security Agency (NSA, which gathers signals intelligence; the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA, which photographs intelligence targets from satellites orbiting in space); and the National Reconnaisance Office (NRO, which manages America's orbital espionage) ---are all embedded within the framework of the Department of Defense. They have two unequal bosses: the powerful SecDef and the relatively weak DNI.

This dominance of the SecDef is a core reason why intelligence tasking has focused heavily on the needs of America's fighting men and women, along with everything else that supports the nation's combat forces---from weaponry to precise targeting data and a whole raft of other intelligence desires generated by the Pentagon brass that represent the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. The requirements for combat readiness go back through the ages, as populations and their leaders have always rallied to strengthen and shield the war-fighters who are engaged---or could be engaged at any time---in the existential defense of their country. The great General Napoleon Bonaparte of France had this list of tasking orders for intelligence officers in support of his generals:

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> To reconnoiter accurately defiles and fords of every description. To provide guides that may be depended upon. To interrogate the priest and the postmaster. To establish rapidly a good understanding with the inhabitants. To send out spies. To intercept public and private letters . . . In short, to be able to answer every question of the general-in-chief when he arrives at the head of the army (Roberts, 2015).

Similarly, during the Cold War (1945-1991), the White House and members of Congress expected the IC to focus on the most likely potential dangers to the United States. The No. 1 international threat was widely considered to be---and certainly so inside DOD---the possibility of nuclear annihilation at the hands of the Soviet Union. The scenario consisted of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), tipped with nuclear warheads, streaking from sites in the U.S.S.R. (or possibly China) and passing over the Arctic Circle on their journey to strike all major population centers, along with military bases and facilities, in the United States. The highest-priority targets would include the White House and the Pentagon (together, known as the "National Command Authority" or NCA), along with the nation's dispersed missile silos and air bases. The destruction of the United States would take only a half hour---or just five minutes for the NCA in Washington, D.C., which would be quickly obliterated by submarine-launch-ballistic missiles (SLBM) fired from Soviet subs off the Atlantic coastline---a "decapitation strategy" that no doubt was (and remains) part of Kremlin planning.

Little succor would accrue in the thoughts of dying Americans that at least the ICBM silos of their own victimized nation were probably empty by the time the Soviet rockets arrived, with DOD being warned by satellite surveillance of the in-coming enemy missile attack and having already fired back against the perpetrator's homeland. The end result: mutual assured destruction or MAD, in that chilling acronym from the Cold War---and still relevant today. Or perhaps the end of the entire world, since some computer simulations indicate that a "nuclear winter" would freeze the Earth's surface as radioactive mushroom clouds and soot from burning debris blocked out the sun's rays. Even a small-scale, regional nuclear war could disrupt the global climate for a decade or more (Ehrlich et al., 1983).[4]

[4] For more recent research, A. Robock, L. Oman, and G. L. Stenchikov, "Nuclear Winter Revisited with a Modern Climate Model and Current Nuclear Arsenals: Still Catastrophic Consequences" *Journal of Geophysical Research* 112 (July 6, 2007), DOI 13107, and C. G. Bardeen, *et al.*, "Extreme Ozone Loss Following Nuclear War Results in Enhanced Surface Ultraviolet Radiation," *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres* 126 (September 10, 2021), DOI:10.1029/2021JDO35079.

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Such scenarios are the stuff of nightmares, but also a potential reality that shapes intelligence-tasking priorities. Given the nature of this global threat that continues today, accompanied by the ever-present political clout of the DOD, little wonder so much of America's intelligence dollar has been dedicated to a military defense against Soviet and now Russian, as well as Chinese, strategic intentions and capabilities. During the Cold War, the fact that both of these nations possessed the capacity to unleash Armageddon against the United States (although with a much larger nuclear arsenal held by Moscow) captured attention at the White House, the Pentagon, and Congress---not to mention citizens across the land. That attention remains lively today, in light of the sharply deteriorating relationships in recent years between Russia and China, on the one hand, and the United States, on the other hand.

Threat Assessments

In the United States, intelligence tasking priorities are sorted out during "threat assessment" meetings held by the National Security Council (the nation's top decision-making forum for foreign policy and national security). Early during the beginning of each new presidency and periodically thereafter, NSC members and staff engage in major annual reviews and periodic emergency meetings in between to discuss the global threat profile (Inderfurth & Johnson, 2004). Participants array possible threats into different levels, often referred to as "tiers," from the most pressing global threats downward to other topics that---although less immediately dangerous---still require close attention. At the top of the list, Tier 0 is reserved for in-play U.S. war-fighting zones. Here is the subject of greatest concern, say, Korea from 1950-53 and Vietnam from 1964-1973 during the Cold War---locations where U.S. soldiers were fighting and dying. Almost as high, at Tier 1A would be the questions of Soviet and Chinese military capabilities and likely war-fighting intentions. Down another rung, Tier 1B might address the uneasiness among Washington's decision-makers regarding the spread of WMDs (weapons of mass destruction) around the globe, say, to Iran or Saudi Arabia.

Then, at Tier 2, would come a range of lesser concerns, yet nonetheless topics on the minds of NSC participants, say, Chinese foreign aid activities in Latin America; or, throughout the Cold War and today, the vulnerability of Taiwan to an attack by mainland China. Next, Tier 3 might reflect worries about the flow of conventional weaponry to hostile factions in Africa; or---at last something not having to do with military matters---rising economic competition from Beijing (steadily since the end of the Cold War), or the unwillingness of the Japanese to

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trade fairly with the United States---most notably with respect to automobile sales during the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, at Tier 4, the NSC might place on the list the uncertain matter of political leadership succession in other countries (say, Brazil), or perhaps the ongoing threat posed by drug cartels smuggling heroin, cocaine, and other illegal narcotics into the United States---a never-ending challenge until Americans stop consuming these poisons.

At these lower levels, consensus is less evident, with debate scattered and sometimes intense as someone in the Cabinet Room might suggest that global economic competitors in addition to China warrant close attention from America's spy apparatus; or perhaps---prior to the Covid-19 pandemic---a lonely (and usually dismissed) voice might bring up the question of how potential global epidemics ought to be given more serious attention by intelligence planners. In whatever manner the host of candidates for lower levels of threat may fare, intelligence targets listed on Tiers 0 through 2 will end up attracting most of America's espionage resources---which is to say that mainly the SMO agenda pressed by Pentagon participants in NSC deliberations will dominate threat-assessment outcomes.

A primary reason why these tasking sessions result in large expenditures for DOD intelligence agencies is the high cost of spy hardware designed to monitor military developments abroad, especially the design and manufacturing of foreign weaponry (from their specifications and testing, to their locations and mobility), along with base and missile sites and troop-movements. The array of intelligence-gathering hardware---collection "platforms" ---is vast. It includes: space-based surveillance satellites with sophisticated cameras able to read from deep in space the word "Wilson" on a tennis court ball; low-and-high altitude reconnaissance aircraft (the U-2 the most famous during the Cold War, replaced recently by the RQ-180 and other advanced drones); and large-scale ground-based listening antennas deployed around the world for eavesdropping purposes. Just the launching of a major surveillance satellite can cost over $1 billion, let alone the added billions for various "bells and whistles" attached to these spheres.

Just as the building of ships and tanks provides jobs in congressional districts across the United States and, therefore, lawmakers are happy to fund intelligence programs---the building of surveillance satellites and drones, for instance---that will boast employment opportunities among their constituents. Today, President Eisenhower would have to revise his Farewell Address to speak of a "military-industrial-*intelligence* complex," with fortunes to be made by industrialists not only from weapon systems but from the construction of expensive spy platforms

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as well, and votes to be won by lawmakers from citizens back home grateful for new employment opportunities.

SMO and the Cold War

This spending on military intelligence can pay off in times of war. The accuracy of U.S. weaponry---on the ground and from the sea or air---has steadily grown over the years since 1945, swiftly so with the advent of reliable and ever more detailed satellite "imagery" surveillance since the 1960s and concomitant precise target-location in the photographs. In the last throes of the Cold War, 1990-91, the United States and coalition allies thoroughly dominated the battlefield in a war against Iraq (the First Persian Gulf War). Not only did the U.S. military possess enormous conventional firepower, such as cruise missiles launched from warships in the Red Sea, but commanders enjoyed virtual battlefield transparency in Iraq and, therefore, battlefield dominance. In addition to the massive fire-power, this enormous intelligence advantage came from America's possession of large satellites overhead ("Battleship Galactica" with high-resolution cameras able to take quick and detailed photographs of the enemy's positions); reconnaissance aircraft, including U-2s and lower-flying aircraft that filled the skies over Iraq; ubiquitous listening capabilities from NSA satellites and its field-based antennas; and the occasionally old-fashioned, but still useful, human spy on the ground.

The Iraqis had a few of the latter as well, but the surveillance odds were heavily stacked against the government in Baghdad, with the U.S. military in a position comparable to hawks eying the broad landscape below in search of the next rabbit. One hundred and forty-seven American troops perished in this war-fighting, compared to upwards of 50,000 Iraqi troops. While the life of even one soldier is one too many, this is historically an enviable ratio for battlefield commanders.

During most of the Cold War, though, the Soviet Union and secondarily the other communist behemoth, China, remained the persistent Tier 1A concerns. This could be seen vividly in a rare open hearing held by Congress in 1985 to review a National Intelligence Estimate on the U.S.S.R.[5] An NIE is a detailed, usually lengthy research document put together by the Intelligence Community, guided

[5] For an account, see Christopher A. Williams, "The Story Behind the Unprecedented Open Testimony on Soviet Strategic Forces," *Studies in Intelligence* 67/2 (June 2003): 19-30. For a recollection of how President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) had to constantly fight against an inflated---and, in his view, far too costly---military threat assessment regarding Soviet prowess, see Evan Thomas, *Ike's Bluff* (New York: Little, Brown, 2012).

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by CIA-based National Intelligence Officers (NIOs) and analysts throughout the IC, on some aspect of world affairs deemed of high importance by NSC members and the nation's policy and intelligence leaders. In this instance, senior intelligence officials (including future DCI Robert M. Gates, at the time chair of the National Intelligence Council) provided a declassified briefing on this top-secret NIE regarding the status of the Soviet military apparatus. The audience: members of two jointly meeting Subcommittees, one from the Senate Appropriates Committee and another from the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The backdrop was the hawkish Reagan Administration, which had turned the "Cold" War into its hottest phase since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, inspired by President Ronald Reagan's long-time practice of a Red Scare approach to American foreign policy. While the public nature of this hearing was extraordinary, the content of the message was not. In scores of closed hearings in Congress during the Reagan years, similar panels of lawmakers had listened to a parade of Administration witnesses (chiefly from the DOD and the White House) present shrill prognostications about the rising superiority of the Soviet military---at the very time, as the world would soon learn, the U.S.S.R. was falling apart.

The themes in this hearing, although with an extreme interpretation of Russian troops as ten-feet high, were common-place GOP tropes (shared by conservative Democrats). Their wide adoption in Washington during administrations of both parties suggest why the NSC's threat-assessment meetings guaranteed the positioning of Soviet military and Kremlin machinations at the top of U.S. intelligence-funding priorities. In the hearing, lawmakers were warned that:

- For decades, Moscow had engaged in a buildup of nuclear forces;
- The Soviets were pursuing a modernization of its nuclear weaponry, especially with respect to their Strategic Rocket Forces---not only ICBMs but SS-20 medium-range weapons as well;
- The Soviet intelligence services, the military's GRU and the KGB, had redoubled their espionage operations against the United States; and,
- The U.S.S.R. was involved in possible arms control violations related to the SALT I Agreement on ICBMs, as well as the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty that placed limits on the development of ballistic missile shields. The possible ABM Treaty violations were considered by many experts at the time as a fatal blow to an

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> established reliance on nuclear deterrence as a peacekeeper between the superpowers.

The chief CIA briefer warned that "nearly all" of the Soviet ICBMs and heavy bombers would be replaced; new mobile ICBMs and cruise missiles were being manufactured; SLBMs were being replaced by "new and improved systems"; the number of deployed strategic-force warheads would increase "by a few thousand over the next five years"; Moscow's leadership offices would be hardened against a U.S. attack, accompanied by a Soviet deployment of ABMs and "high-energy lasers" designed to knock down any incoming American missiles; and a "new, heavy ICBM" would soon supplement the Soviet strategic posture, leading to (as an accompaniment to Moscow's mobile systems) a "silo-based ICBM force of a substantial proportion."

One can imagine the GRU and KGB reporting to their Kremlin masters a similar accounting of U.S. military plans for the future. Some progressive Democrats present at the hearing complained that the purpose of the briefing struck them as political in nature. The event was "partisan and even ideological," observed Senator Gary Hart (Colorado), who was seconded by Senator William Proxmire (Wisconsin). For them and some of their colleagues, the hearing had been designed to shore up the Reagan Administration's embattled military budget.

In defense of the briefing, Gates (a Soviet analyst at the CIA for most of his intelligence career) replied that it was important for the IC to put on the table "a commonly agreed set of facts for discussion on Soviet strategic force development." He conceded that the study of the Soviet military was not "a particularly exact science," and that the IC was able to know only "what we see on the ground in terms of their military capability." Here was the classic approach to intelligence tasking taken by the DOD and IC participants at NSC threat-assessment sessions: first give us the proper resources for the various "ints" (intelligence disciplines, such as signals intelligence or "sigint," and imagery intelligence or "imint," photographic intelligence with today's new name of geospatial intelligence or "geoint"). Then, so continues the classic argument, we will be able to see (or hear) our adversaries on the ground; we will be able to provide empirical evidence about the activities of America's most dangerous rivals. For many, it was a compelling argument during this 1985 briefing---as it always has been in NSC threat-assessment gatherings.

Even after the end of the Cold War, those who thought about strategic military issues---conservatives and liberals alike---placed an emphasis on the ongoing need for substantial budgetary support to the IC for intelligence collection against

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the Soviet and Chinese targets. In 1991, the DOD budget plummeted with the (temporary) end of the Washington-Moscow confrontation on the world stage. As the threat from Russia diminished for a couple of decades, so did spending by the Intelligence Community---although in a less dramatic decline than the Pentagon's budget (see Figure 1). While in some civilian quarters, the rationale for spending vast sums on a fleet of dazzling spy satellites no longer seemed quite as compelling as during the Cold War, support for SMO retained a dedicated constituency at the DOD that would soon rally to reverse this decline in the Defense budget---the end of the Soviet Union to the contrary notwithstanding.

During the intelligence inquiries in 1995-96 carried out by the Aspin-Brown Commission, the two panel chairs---both former SecDefs---strongly supported a continuation of fulsome military intelligence spending. Aspin devoted a substantial portion of his time as Commission chair engaged in dialogues with experts on the subject of IC collection against the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War. On specific IC's predictions about the development of new Soviet weaponry, the record revealed both successes and failures (Johnson, 2011).

Human intelligence ("humint") is a far less costly approach to spying than "techint" (satellites and other technical intelligence platforms); nonetheless, it can reap important informational rewards. Thanks to humint during the early Cold War---say, in the example of defector Adolf G. Tolkachev, Russian electronics engineer with access to highly classified Soviet documents---the CIA was able to debunk the bomber and missile "gaps" that seemed to favor the Soviet Union over the United States. As it turned out, U.S. Air Force Intelligence had inflated the Soviet lead in these categories to assist arguments for budget supplements advanced on Capitol Hill by the brass in that branch of service. There were, in fact, such gaps---*but in the opposite direction*: the United States was substantially *ahead* of the U.S.S.R. in both bomber and missile advances. Further on the plus side of a Cold War intelligence assessment of U.S. successes and failures, in all important instances America's IC had managed to acquire essential data on Soviet technological advances in arms developments---far in advance of Moscow's production of the new weapons systems.

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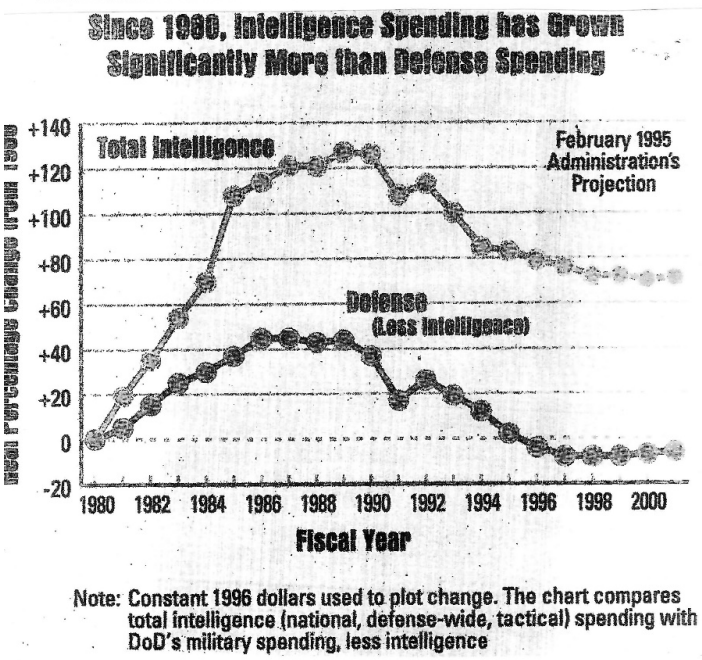
Figure 1

U.S. National Security Intelligence Spending: January 1980 – February 1995

Figure 1. U.S. National Security Intelligence Spending: January 1980-Feburary 1995



Source: *Preparing for the 21st Century: An Appraisal of U.S. Intelligence*, Report of the Commission on the Rules and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community (Aspin-Brown Commission), March 1, 1996: 131.

On the failure side of the equation, the IC had limited surveillance capabilities during the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s---the early stages of the Cold War. Michael Herman, the British scholar of Intelligence Studies, noted (for instance) that Western intelligence---the United States as well as Great Britain---reported during this period the existence of 175 Soviet Army divisions, without realizing that only a third of these troops were combat ready. "This led to a drive for nuclear weapons to offset the inflated Soviet threat," Herman (personal communication, April 6, 1992) concluded. As techint became more sophisticated in the 1960s and beyond (U-2 flights, surveillance satellites), however, so did the accuracy of IC reporting on the U.S.S.R. This collection assignment continued to be challenging, though. For instance, Pentagon and CIA analysts disagreed on the purpose of the Soviet Backfire Bomber: was it a tactical weapon as it appeared to be; or, was Moscow's intention to give its Backfire pilots kamikaze

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orders, in which case the bomber became a potent strategic weapon designed for one-way attacks against the American homeland?

Further complicating matters was the Soviet ploy of attempting through disinformation (one of its specialties) to trick the West by exaggerating its military prowess---even using inflated rubber submarines floating in Russian ports for the purpose of trying to fool U.S. satellite cameras. “They wanted us to believe they were stronger than they really were,” recalls a senior CIA analyst (L. K. Johnson, personal communication, May 12, 1995). The purpose: to bolster the credibility of Soviet deterrence. The unblinking and discerning eyes of U.S. spy orbs, though, were not fooled. Les Aspin came away from these Commission discussions in 1995-1996 convinced that poor data bases explained the IC’s occasional errors about Soviet military capabilities---the same beguiling, and largely true, argument that usually won the day for SMO in sessions of the NSC. How could the United States improve the data base? Why, suggested a series of SecDefs and DCIs, the answer is obvious: with more spending on intelligence to peer behind the iron curtains that continued to hide the military capabilities of the communist superpowers.

Snakes in the Jungle---and New Intelligence Collection Priorities

During the Cold War and even after, many Washington officials (like Aspin and Brown) remained riveted on the question of Russian and Chinese military capabilities. From 1991 on, though, there were new---or, when not new, better acknowledged---global claimants as overseas targets for the intelligence dollar in Washington’s threat-assessment and budget cycles. One of the early post-Cold War DCIs, R. James Woolsey (1993-1995) vividly commented on the change in world affairs that would upend the traditional exclusivity of SMO and the preeminence of superpower adversaries when it came to America’s intelligence tasking. Observing that the United States had successfully slain the Soviet dragon, Woolsey (1993) warned that “we live now in a jungle filled with a bewildering variety of poisonous snakes”.

Among the snakes---potential intelligence collection targets, one and all---were global terrorists. Nothing in the modern era would so underscore the presence of danger to the United States beyond Russia and China than the events of 9/11. In 2001, the Age of Terrorism had arrived in the United States, with an exclamation point. Yet terrorism was not the only new threat to compete with SMO among America’s intelligence priorities in the post-Cold War era. When the Soviet Empire cratered, the United States and the rest of the world faced a broad assortment of other threats and opportunities---all of which triggered the

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emergence of a litany of formerly slighted intelligence-gathering priorities that one senior policymaker or another now wanted the secret agencies to track.

Environmental Intelligence

A conspicuous illustration was the CIA's growing interest in environmental intelligence in 1995 during the Clinton Administration. Part of the intelligence budget would now go toward---of all things---the greening of intelligence! Had the NSC fallen into a stupor; or had its members suddenly, inexplicably, discovered the joys of tree-hugging? This new direction was the product of the end of the Cold War, with the opportunity that moment provided to think more expansively about security threats to the United States---in this instance, the seemingly (for some) distant danger of global warming. A Soviet ICBM strike would have come with alacrity and meant a quick end to the U.S. and Soviet civilizations. Both nations would have been consumed in nuclear witch fires that turned their advanced civilizations into smoldering, radioactive rubble.

This threat of nuclear annihilation created a bipartisan "Cold War Consensus" that made the U.S.S.R. the highest priority of the Intelligence Community. In contrast, environmental threats move more slowly, are less alarming to many, and consequently lack a similar degree of consensus. For presidents and lawmakers in the past, the degradation of the ozone layer; deforestation; erosion of the coral reefs; melting of the world's ice floes; rising sea levels; vanishing clear air to breathe and clean water to drink; the weather-wrought destruction of crops; and the worldwide spread of human and animal diseases incubated in the hothouse temperatures that were beginning to blanket the planet have been less dramatic than a sudden nuclear winter---even if ultimately just as deadly.

While potentially catastrophic, eco-threats can seem remote; the Soviet and Russian Rocket Forces were, in contrast, palpably observable through the eyes of NGA satellite cameras. Such dramatic geoint sells SMO in high-level councils like the NSC and congressional oversight committees---both of which are often dominated by military-minded officials---far more effectively than pictures of polar bears and their cubs adrift on coffins of ice because of global warming.

Decision-makers at all levels of government, and in every country, tend to focus on the immediate horizon, not what the distant future may hold. Repairing potholes and bridges in New Orleans in 2004 garnered immediate attention among local politicians, rather than spending the large sums of money necessary to prepare dikes for the unlikely arrival of a Level 5 hurricane---which is exactly what would sweep across the city the very next year, wreaking billions of dollars'

worth of damage to one of America's favorite cities. Or decision-makers may suffer from delusional misdirection on the world stage, as when Washington officials concentrated on Iraq as an exaggerated mortal danger to the United States from 1991-2003, rather than pouring money into establishing security measures---tightened airport security, sky marshals and sealed cockpits of commercial airplanes, closer surveillance of Al Qaeda members---against an act of aerial terrorism that would target the United States on 9/11. This attack by Al Qaeda downed three airliners and killed almost 3,000 people during the aerial attacks aimed at New York City and Washington. Both the Clinton and Bush II Administration ignored this possible danger, even though they had been warned about aerial terrorism by the CIA's Counterterrorism Center as early as 1995 and repeatedly thereafter (Johnson, 2011).

The absence of an immediate Soviet threat in 1991---there was no more Soviet Union---gave some breathing room to officials in Washington during their NSC threat-assessment powwows. Into this space came the new tasking considerations. Furthermore, another policymaking dimension was at work in the case of environmental intelligence: a key personality. Such influences in high office can be important, even if often overlooked by political scientists. Now attending NSC meetings, beginning with the Clinton Administration in 1993, was Vice President Al Gore, a former Democratic senator from Tennessee. He was one of the most knowledgeable and enthusiastic environmentalists in the country---something of an anomaly at that level of government in the United States. While still in the Senate, Gore had already queried the CIA in 1990 about its potential capacity to use spy satellites as a means for exploring environmental trends on the earth below, based on the fact that these machines had been observing the planet's surface from space for over thirty years. As a CIA science officer has put it, "We have photographed the evolution of the planet" (L. K. Johnson, personal communication, April 16, 1995). Once Gore became Vice President, he had the status to raise at NSC meetings---which normally dealt with such esoteric topics of missile velocities and throw-weights---the specter of doomed polar bears as casualties of global warming. Audible groans from Pentagon brass would sometimes greet Gore's periodic forays into environmental security issues.

Doggedly working his way through this skepticism, Gore convinced President Bill Clinton to declassify more than 800,000 spy-satellite photographs related to the research concerns of U.S. environmental scientists, distributing them to labs on university campuses and in the private sector. Important, too, in this environmental intelligence movement was Lawrence Gershwin, a CIA analyst

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who lobbied inside the Agency's Headquarters Building for more attention to ecological hazards around the world.

Although the DOD continued to rake in most of the budgetary resources for intelligence, now some of the threat assessment ante went toward protecting the United States---and Mother Earth---from the slow-motion ruination that climate change might inflict. With Gore's backing, DCI John Deutch (1995-97) created a DCI Environmental Center (DEC) at the CIA and, for the first time in U.S. intelligence tasking, a serious interest in "environmental security" had entered into NSC and IC planning and spending. High among the DEC's priorities was the statistical modeling of environmental futures, crafting alarm systems that could alert NSC members to impending ecological events potentially harmful to the United States---and its military forces spread around the world (a clever linkage woven at NSC sessions by Gore, who understood the ongoing dominance of military criteria in NSC decision-making).

As the world was becoming more aware of climate-related threats, which appeared to be growing exponentially (the world experienced months of record-breaking temperatures in 2023 and during the previous eight years), the State Department found itself increasingly involved in diplomatic negotiations related to environmental concerns, such as the Kyoto Conference on Greenhouse Emissions in 1997. International conferences require intelligence backup, and so the CIA soon had a fresh set of intelligence consumers: that portion of the nation's diplomatic corps focused on global environmental issues. Beyond the Department of State, the DEC discovered other opportunities to demonstrate the value added of "green intelligence" to new cliental, explaining to them that this new term referred to the collection of environmental issues, not the environmentally friendly collection of intelligence.

One of the first examples was the International Affairs Division of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Soon an Agency liaison officer was assigned to the EPA and assisted its work by bringing relevant satellite-acquired and other intelligence data of interest to America's premier environmental organization (Johnson, 1996). Prior to the DEC's reaching out to EPA, the latter had little understanding of the enormous help decades of IC global photography of the Earth's surface could provide to the research concerns of its own government scientists. While the IC's imagery focused mainly on Soviet and (subsequently) Russian, plus Chinese, military installations, these photographs also provided ancillary views on the life histories of forests, coral reefs, deserts, ice floes, and other top ecological concerns from across the meridians.

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The DEC also entered into a compact with top environmental scientists in the nation's universities, think tanks, and industry, through a project known as MEDEA (pronounced "ma-day-a"), named after the indomitable sorceress of Colchis in Greek mythology who assisted Jason of the Argonauts steal the Golden Fleece.[6] The *quid* for the *pro quo* was for the scientists to help the CIA think through the national security implications of global environmental degradation. In return, the Agency provided the outside scientists with unique declassified geoint that mapped the evolution of the planet's surface since the advent of modern space-based surveillance technology in the United States. While for this ecological intelligence gathering the IC released only 1 percent of its satellite-collection capacities for MEDEA, that still contributed in a valuable way to the subject of environmental security---once a shunned orphan at NSC meetings. Another dimension of possible IC involvement in environmental matters was the task of verifying compliance with new limitations on greenhouse emissions, in the same manner it verifies compliance with arms-control agreements. Not everyone (to say the least) was thrilled by having "liberal" environmental concerns displace funding---however small the amount---from the "real threats" posed by foreign militaries. Further, as Clapper's earlier comment captures, there was only so much time in the day and what was the best way for the IC to spend this time: tracing the presence of military hardware abroad that could suddenly destroy the United States or be used to invade fellow democracies---or pouring over maudlin pictures of polar bears lost at sea on random ice floes?

Some wished to really push the intelligence boundaries in this new pursuit of environmental intelligence by tasking CIA officers abroad (and their humint assets) to keep an eye out for a broad spectrum of useful eco-data. Yet, echoing Clapper in comments before the Aspin-Brown Commission in 1995, former DCI Gates (1993-1995) complained to commissioners that "the intelligence agencies are not looking for more work. They're overwhelmed already" (personal communication, May 4, 1995). He told a reporter later in the day that "the CIA is probably more heavily tasked today by policymakers than at any time in the past" (Risen, 1995).

Commission staff conversations with intelligence officers at Langley elicited unalloyed ridicule about this form of "green" tasking from many operatives---the

[6] See "The Greening of Intelligence," in Loch K. Johnson, *Bugs, Drugs, and Thugs: Intelligence and America's Quest for Security* (New York: New York University Press, 2000): 50-72; and, Evan Barnard, Loch K. Johnson, and James W. Porter, "Environmental Security Intelligence: The Role of U.S. Intelligence Agencies and Science Advising Groups in Anticipating Climate Security Threats," *Journal of Intelligence History* (December 2021): 1-16.

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men and women overseas on the cutting edge of U.S. espionage and covert action operations. It struck one seasoned case officer as a "rather squishy" mandate. Another Directorate of Operations (DO) officer inquired with a smirk: "What are we supposed to do, creep around Patagonia counting the number of blind rabbits?" (L. K. Johnson, personal communication, April 10, 1995). This was a reference to scientific findings that retinal damage in local rabbits revealed harm being done as a result of a hole in the ozone layer above Argentina and Chile. Said another DO skeptic, "I'm concerned about questions of military and political instability. If the DEC wants to know if the Dnieper River is polluted, they can go find out for themselves" (L. K. Johnson, personal communication, July 15, 1994).

During the Bush II Administration, which was staffed with many climate change deniers, MEDEA lost much of its steam. In 2008, though, it went through a revival with a new Democratic Congress and support from the Obama Administration. The CIA established a Center for Climate Change and National Security in 2009, an updated version of DCI Deutch's DEC. Yet, with the advent of the Trump presidency, the White House closed the doors on MEDEA. In addition, his Administration withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation, even though in 2015 practically every other nation in the world had signed on. The Administration also engaged in constant bickering with the Intelligence Community, a sparring in which the President took a gleeful lead. Nevertheless, in 2020, the Intelligence Community managed to publish its first National Intelligence Estimate focused on climate change. The Estimate presented three Key Judgments or KJs (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Key Judgment excerpts from a NIE on climate change, 2021

In 2021, the Intelligence Community published its first NIE focused on climate change. The Estimate offered three KJs:

Key Judgment 1: Geopolitical tensions are likely to grow as countries increasingly argue about how to accelerate the reductions in net greenhouse gas emissions that will be needed to meet the Paris Agreement goals. Debate will center on who bears more responsibility to act and to pay—and how quickly—and countries will compete to control resources and dominate new technologies needed for the clean energy transition. Most countries will face difficult economic choices and probably will count on technological breakthroughs to rapidly reduce their net emissions later. China and India

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will play critical roles in determining the trajectory of temperature rise.

Key Judgment 2: The increasing physical effects of climate change are likely to exacerbate cross-border geopolitical flashpoints as states take steps to secure their interests. The reduction in sea ice already is amplifying strategic competition in the Arctic over access to its natural resources. Elsewhere, as temperatures rise and more extreme effects manifest, there is a growing risk of conflict over water and migration, particularly after 2030, and an increasing chance that countries will unilaterally test and deploy large-scale solar geoengineering—creating a new area of disputes.

Key Judgment 3: Scientific forecasts indicate that intensifying physical effects of climate change out to 2040 and beyond will be most acutely felt in developing countries, which we assess are also the least able to adapt to such changes. These physical effects will increase the potential for instability and possibly internal conflict in these countries, in some cases creating additional demands on US diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, and military resources. Despite geographic and financial resource advantages, the United States and partners face costly challenges that will become more difficult to manage without concerted effort to reduce emissions and cap warming.

Key Takeaway: We assess that climate change will increasingly exacerbate risks to US national security interests as the physical impacts increase and geopolitical tensions mount about how to respond to the challenge. Global momentum is growing for more ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reductions, but current policies and pledges are insufficient to meet the Paris Agreement goals. Countries are arguing about who should act sooner and competing to control the growing clean energy transition. Intensifying physical effects will exacerbate geopolitical flashpoints, particularly after 2030, and key countries and regions will face increasing risks of instability and need for humanitarian assistance.

The Biden Administration was diverted from a full-blown return to global environmental concerns by a host of other pressing challenges that included a stumbling military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-2022, along with inflation woes and a GOP House of Representatives in the grips of a right-leaning "Freedom Caucus" that whipsawed the President and his Administration on a daily basis. As the world dithered on carrying out the Paris Agreement, the deteriorating state of the global environment moved forward, indifferent to these human vacillations. In 2023, the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC) reported that, globally, "fine particulate air pollution remains the greatest external threat to public health" (Greenstone & Hasenkopf, 2023). On August 28, 2023, England recorded the first child in history among its citizens to have listed on her death

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certificate: "Cause of death: air pollution" (BBC News, 2023; Perera, 2022).

Health Intelligence

Another non-military topic that was a hard sell at NSC threat assessment evaluations during the Cold War was health intelligence---warning about the presence of potential pandemics or other mortal distempers that afflict the world from time to time.[7] This, despite the fact that the 1918 flu had killed over one million Americans, or more than twice as many as the number of fatalities among U.S. troops in the Second World War. Or that Covid-19 had struck down another one-million-plus Americans and seven million other people around the world; that the economic toll of the Covid-19 menace on the United States alone was expected to reach fourteen trillion dollars by the end of 2023; and that all the experts agreed that pandemic pathogens were certain to emerge again, including a range of corona viruses. Yet the topic continued to lack a sense of immediacy among NSC officials increasingly focused on superpower threats from China and Russia. Lacking, too, at key NSC meetings was a strong proponent of health intelligence, in the manner of the role Al Gore had played on behalf of environmental intelligence. Periodically during the Cold War, global disease surveillance had attracted some attention at high levels; President Ronald Reagan, for instance, issued a directive for federal agencies to build a model that could predict the worldwide spread of AIDS and its demographic effects. For the most part, though, health intelligence was never taken with sufficient seriousness by the NSC during the Reagan Administration and its initial confrontational stance toward the Soviet Union---sometimes characterized as a "Cold War II" by journalists.

Finally, though, in 1992---a year after the end of the Cold War, in a time when the NSC was more open to intelligence tasking beyond traditional targets---the DOD elevated an obscure Army medical intelligence corps into a nascent global disease surveillance unit within the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA, part of the IC and the Defense Department). Then, in 2008, this organization was further upgraded within DIA and given the name National Center for Medical Intelligence (NCMI). The military brass had decided that health intelligence

[7] See "Spies Versus Germs: A Worldwide Resurgence of Bugs," in Johnson, *Bombs, Bugs*: 72-94; and P.F. Walsch, J. Ramsay, and A. Bernot, "Health Security Intelligence Capabilities post-COVID-19: Resisting the Passive "New Normal" within the Five Eyes," *Intelligence and National Security* 38/7 (August 2023): 1095-1111. For a lengthy report on the connections between environmental degradation and global disease, see Annie Gowen, Niko Kommenda, and Salyna Bashir, "Climate-Linked Ills Threaten Humanity," *Washington Post* (September 6, 2023). As the authors note, the hotter the planet's temperatures, the more rapidly pathogens and toxins spread across national boundaries.

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needed a higher profile after all, since U.S. troops were being stationed in more and more locations around the world where exotic diseases are known to lurk (such as Ebola in Africa).

The NCMI proved its mettle during the Trump Administration, providing the President with a heads-up that the Covid-19 outbreak in China had the potential to reach pandemic proportions. As noted earlier, the disease had killed over one million Americans from 2020-2022, on a scale similar to the effects of the 1918 influenza, and people around the world were still dying from this disease as 2023 approached its end. The NCMI had an advantage over pandemic-watchers at the World Health Organization (WHO), namely, access to humint reporting from the CIA and military intelligence agencies with assets in China and other countries. The CIA's spies around the globe were beginning to notice heightened activity in hospital emergency rooms within various countries, along with signs of the virus in various refugee camps (including a large one in Syria) and multiple other sources that pointed toward a spread of the Covid-19 peril. Although NCMI managed to insert this warning data into the *President's Daily Brief*, indeed repeatedly, policy advisers in the White House proved reluctant to bring the bad news to the attention of Mr. Trump, a man known for his volatility. An intelligence lesson: a smaller spy unit might be able---at last---to attract funding in the NSC's tasking wrestling match against such powerful competitors as NSA, NGA, and NRO, but that didn't necessarily mean its intelligence findings would be read and acted upon by key decision-makers.

Economic Intelligence

Less of a hard sell at threat assessment sessions after the end of the Cold War was another policy domain at times slighted during that superpower standoff (but less so than environmental or health intelligence), namely: global economic intelligence. This topic has always been somewhat in the picture. For the sake of the nation's prosperity, robust international trade has been a staple of U.S. success on the world stage since colonial days, fueled steadily by the zeal of business entrepreneurs. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the first DCI in this new epoch, Robert M. Gates, began to guide the vast IC bureaucracy away from its nearly full obsession with the U.S.S.R. and its military capabilities, miraculously reducing---all within a couple of years---the focus on All Things Moscow by some 80 percent of U.S. intelligence resources. He managed to achieve these changes against strong inertial forces. It was a miraculously steering in a new direction of a large and unwieldy bureaucracy. Washington got it: the Cold War was over. These were new times.

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Despite the usual dominance of SMO even after the end of the Cold War, economic intelligence was beginning to have more success at the NSC tasking trough. (Bill Clinton's presidential election mantra in 1996 had been "It's the economy, stupid.") President Clinton's DCI, James Woolsey, spoke even more than his immediate predecessor Robert Gates about the need to shift U.S. foreign policy attention toward world trade challenges. As he would testify to Congress in 1995, "We are being asked today to do much more on a whole set of world economic issues" (Wines, 1999).

The purpose of intelligence tasking related to the global marketplace is to help the United States "manage the economy" (Porteous, 1996).[1] Among this set of requirements placed upon intelligence collectors was the goals of ensuring fair access for American businesses with trading partners across all the latitudes, and more effectively helping U.S. negotiators prepare for international trade conferences. (A tasking question related to the latter: "What is the secret fallback negotiation position for Japanese diplomats on automobile commerce with the United States?") Important, too, was the closer monitoring of imposed global sanctions, such as prohibitions on the flow of oil and arms into rogue regimes; and tracking the activities of "bad actors" in the world who launder money or sell fissionable materials around the world on a black market.[8]

Terrorism Intelligence

Outside of the purely military domain, the easiest sell of all to NSC threat assessors in the post-Cold War period was a concern about terrorist activities---especially, of course, in the wake of 9/11 in 2001. This new tasking concentration was aided significantly by the obvious military component that would have to attend counterterrorism operations. Events in the Middle East and Southwest Asia had already sounded an early alarm about new global concerns for the United States, with a devastating terrorist attack against the U.S. embassy in Beirut in 1983 that claimed the lives of sixty-three Americans and their Lebanese co-workers. This tragedy led, in 1986, to the creation at the CIA of a Counterintelligence Center (CTC). The Beirut terrorist attack was followed by war in Iraq in 1990-91 against a terrorist-like regime and the Qaeda bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, along with its assault on the *USS Cole* moored off Yemen in the Sea of Aden in 2000. Yet, for U.S. intelligence analysts at the time of the *Cole* incident, the general sense was that Al Qaeda had

[8] See "Stocks and (James) Bonds: Spies in the Global Marketplace," in Johnson, *Bombs, Bugs*: 32-49; and Loch K. Johnson, *Secret Agencies: U.S. Intelligence in a Hostile World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996): 146-173.

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indeed become a major danger to the United States, but overseas with far less of a chance of an attack directly against the American homeland. Then the Twin Towers came falling down.

In the aftermath of that indelible day in 2001, the Bush II Administration and Congress created a Director of National Intelligence (DNI) in 2004, as well as---managed jointly (and awkwardly) by both the DNI and the White House---a National Counterterrorism Center. The NCTC began to attract some 40 percent of the total funding in the DNI Office. Propelled by the *Cole* and the 9/11 attacks, terrorism rapidly shouldered its way to the forefront of Tier O status and soon surpassed tasking on Russia, China, and North Korea combined. Still, SMO continued to dominate the NSC's intelligence "requirements list," thanks to the Pentagon's involvement in counterterrorism drone attacks (in coordination with the CIA's paramilitary wing). Contributing as well to SMO's supremacy at the NSC was a Second Persian Gulf War against Iraq, beginning in 2003. The Council also recognized the ongoing necessity of monitoring adversarial nations with devastating nuclear arsenals: Russia, China, and increasingly North Korea, which was on the verge of developing ICBMs capable of reaching any target in North American.

Ongoing SMO Tasking Dominance

The end of the Cold War had opened up the intelligence tasking process in Washington to some extent, although this diversification should not be overstated. When it came to intelligence tasking, SMO continued its commanding position in threat-assessment exercises, chiefly as a result of ongoing anxiety in government councils about aggressive military activities in Russia, China, and North Korea, among other locations around the globe, along with the continuation of terrorist activities in the Middle East and beyond. While environmental, health, economic, and terrorist intelligence gained greater attention than in the past, when it came to the listing of priorities via intelligence tasking tiers, several important policy challenges continued to receive inadequate attention. Among them was the need for a more robust intelligence gathering regarding the flow of illegal narcotics into the United States. Improved intelligence-gathering in this domain would have improved the interdiction rate, which has gained some ground over the years but a high volume of dangerous drugs---especially fentanyl---still making their way onto the streets of American each year. Ultimately, while improved surveillance of America's borders would help, ultimately this remained chiefly a demand (not a supply) problem faced by

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the United States. American consumers are the ones who buy these harmful narcotics and, thereby, aid the unraveling of the fabric of their society.

Other tasking "orphans" have included data on human-trafficking and international crime syndicates beyond the drug cartels. Moreover, the greater use of drones and satellites, tied into quick-reaction border patrol forces, could slow illegal border crossings into the United States. Better reliance on these intelligence platforms offers a far less expensive and realistic approach to protecting U.S. sovereignty than the quixotic notion of building a trillion dollar "Chinese Wall" along America's southern perimeter. Critics emphasized, too, that on this list of legitimate topics for expanded intelligence tasking should be greater attention to cybersecurity designed to combat the flooding of social and other media in the democracies with Russian and Chinese disinformation operations. These communist nations massively infuse global social media with lies and deep-fake technology designed to weaken the democracies, along with the use of cyberespionage and cyberwarfare attacks meant to disrupt and ultimately destroy the free nations. Further tasking seemed imperative, as well, to help block the misuse by foreign dictators of artificial intelligence (AI) aimed at sowing dissention in the democracies.

In the meantime, while Presidents Clinton and Barack Obama had less than warm relations with Moscow and its latest autocrat, Vladimir Putin (the Russian leader since 2000), in contrast Presidents Bush II and Trump had surprising close ties to the Russian dictator. At times, Trump seemed to fawn over the Russian President, even publicly accepting his word that Russia had not meddled in the 2016 presidential election on Trump's side---at the same time the nation's intelligence leaders publicly and unanimously accused Putin of exactly that, based on irrefutable clandestinely derived evidence. It was a strange role reversal from the days of the Cold War, when Democrats sought out ties with Moscow in a limited manner (mainly for purposes of arms control), while Republicans were unalloyed Cold Warriors with a steady stream of vituperative directed toward Moscow and all other communist regime. While this odd realignment in U.S. partisan global allegiances continued throughout the months of the approaching 2024 president election year, the tectonic plates of world affairs were beginning to shift again---this time in a direction that had all the hallmarks of a renewed Cold War.

A Resurgence of Superpower Strife

The souring of relations between the United States and both Russia and China began to show itself most apparently during the presidential years of Trump and

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Joe Biden. While Trump was friendly with Putin, he often criticized China for unfair trade practices, even placing heavy sanctions on selected Beijing commerce with the United States. Under Biden, these relations with China remained strained; and fresh tensions arose in U.S.-Russian ties as Putin invaded Ukraine and Biden rallied NATO against this blatant transgression against a free, democratic state. The President ordered the Director of the CIA (D/CIA), Robert J. Burns (2021-present), to provide early warning intelligence to Ukraine about Red Army invasion plans, along with daily intelligence assistance to its soldiers after the invasion began on February 22, 2022.

At one point during this war, Putin vowed to use tactical nuclear weapons against Ukraine. In response, Biden reminded the Russian leader of how such a fateful act could trigger a strategic nuclear war between NATO and Russia. While Biden spent much of his foreign policy time drumming up support for the counteroffensive against the Russian Army in Ukraine and chastising Moscow for its constant hyper-use of espionage and disinformation against the United States and its allies, Putin---an authoritarian who could easily dominate the state media inside Russia---tried to scare his citizens into believing the absurd idea that NATO intended to invade and destroy the Russian homeland. Added to the mix was Putin's boasting of having developed hypersonic missiles that could reach the United States from Russian territory within minutes.

Biden's relations with China were also spiky and, as with Trump, chiefly on grounds of trade disputes. These tensions were further inflamed by a burgeoning Chinese Navy (the largest in the world, although with less firepower than the U.S. Navy) and an expanding nuclear weapons program. On top of these strains came harsh anti-American rhetoric from Beijing with respect to the U.S. defense of Taiwan, coupled with China's support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The upshot: the world had become a more tense place, with NATO and Asian democracies lining up against the world's multiplying autocratic regimes. The effect on intelligence tasking was predictable: SMO flexed its muscles again during NSC threat-assessment jockeying for funds. Pushing terrorism to a Tier IB status, superpower conflict had climbed again into the 1A ranking with SMO at its side. Every sane person hoped the overheated superpower conflict superpower would stay far away from a cataclysmic radioactive reckoning at Tier 0.

One of the central questions that attended these dynamics was the fate of intelligence collection of behalf of the most notable NSC orphans: environmental, health, and economic intelligence tasking. Prior to the seeming

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emergence of another Cold War when Russia invaded Ukraine, these previously tertiary concerns had suddenly found some of the tasking jam placed at lower shelves where they could reach it. *Was it possible in a time of a renewed superpower rivalry to maintain sturdy funding for SMO while, at the same time, allow support for the often-downplayed intelligence requirements that fall outside strictly military and counterterrorism domains?* In NSC threat-assessment sessions, can such topics as global food, water, and health insecurity, as well as climate change, maintain some success during the crafting of the NSC's tasking agenda? What about the activities of global mercenary predators, such as the activities of the pro-Russian Wagner group; and the revolution in technology underway, with AI developments the most controversial aspect?

Current D/CIA Burns has recently expressed interest in each one of these non-SMO requirements, along with the need for greater attention to the continent of Africa (whose population will double by mid-century) (W. J. Burns, personal communication, July 2023). Will the Pentagon brass work with him, the IC, and the White House on addressing a wider range of global peril points beyond SMO matters related to Russian and Chinese military activities and strategic intentions? And within the Intelligence Community itself, will D/CIA Burns be able to partner with DNI Avril D. Haines (2021- present) in the development of a modern playbook for the U.S. intelligence services that pays homage to a panoply of intelligence requirements beyond the Pentagon's wish list?

Searching for a More Balanced Tasking for America's Secret Agencies

Answers to these questions are bound to be subjective, with expressions of skepticism at DOD, and of hope at such places as the State Department, the Treasury and Commerce Departments, the EPA, and the Centers for Disease Control. Practically all agencies in the IC, though, had learned something about the importance of staying alert to economic opportunities, as well as climate, health, and terrorist dangers, around the world. Did the NSC and the DOD really wish to treat these largely non-SMO threats in a cavalier manner---say, the possibility of another zoonotic disease coming from China's "wet markets" ---or from biological labs in that or any other nation---that could kill another million North Americans or more?

It seemed as though the time had come for the United States and other democratic societies to provide adequate resources to improve intelligence warning and related capabilities not just for military concerns, but for environmental challenges and worldwide health surveillance, as well as support to global

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diplomacy, trade, and counterterrorism objectives. The U.S. military itself has come to appreciate in recent years that its own well-being and success can pivot around matters of climate change and combating pandemics. Traditionally, ice floes have been good places to hide submarines at sea, for example, and record heatwaves can affect training and battlefield conditions. Vanishing lakes and rivers can stir political and military conflict in parts of the world; and pandemics strike down people, whether they are in or out of uniform.

As always, any such considerations immediately arrive at the question of funding. That should not be a major deterrent against progress in satisfying multiple tasking needs of the United States and other democracies. Much of the "auxiliary" intelligence gathering discussed here---the orphans---can be met through humint sources, which compared to costly techint are a proverbial drop in the budget bucket for spy activities. Take global disease surveillance: keeping an eye on foreign hospital ER patients through a reliable humint asset within the nursing (or even janitorial) staff comes at a bargain rate, in contrast to the staggering sums required by large sigint and geoint satellites.

Moreover, it is time to revisit the debate over large-versus-small surveillance satellites. The large ones can be useful, especially when stationed over a battlefield, but they are an enormous drain on intelligence spending and are highly vulnerable to shoot-downs. For a fraction of the cost---say, cutting from the budget one large surveillance satellite---the United States could fill the skies with thousands of basketball-sized observation orbs that have excellent listening and photographing capabilities, and are relatively inexpensive to build and launch. Collectively, they can also cover more territory, and are less dangerous when they fall back to earth (all satellites wear out).

Further, a policy of budget enrichment for intelligence tasking could come in part from improved taxation of U.S. and multinational corporations, who could benefit from the information yield regarding economic matters that may impinge upon their profit margin---say, the unmasking of foreign patent violations or outright theft. Here was a potentially useful MEDEA-like partnership between the Intelligence Community and America businesses. The IC could provide other useful economic insights, even helping to ferret out foreign spies in U.S. corporations. Some trimming might be done, also, with respect to current intelligence expenditures that may have become bloated. Some critics say this is true for both the CIA's CTC and the DNI's NCTC. Counterterrorism remains important, of course; here is an ever-present danger in modern global society. Yet the democracies have made significant strides toward dampening down this

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threat and some of that funding can be moved over to the more overlooked threat orphans---perhaps (for example) resulting in invaluable data about global environmental threats that, in the longer run, might help save humanity from extinction.

Finally, much could be achieved by combining global intelligence capabilities among the democratic nations---and sometimes even by working hand-in-hand with Russia and China on selected topics of common concern, as the United States did during the Cold War with Moscow when it came to overlapping dangers (such as terrorism and international crime). This sharing initiative ties in the matter of tasking to the question of intelligence liaison. The Five Eyes nations, involving intelligence "burden sharing" among Australia, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, and the United States, has functioned well. This approach can be slowly, carefully expanded to include other free countries, starting step-by-step as trust and confidence are built, beginning with NATO members and Japan. Perhaps even Russia, China, and the democratic regimes can eventually help one another combat mutual environmental and pandemic concerns, just as they once use to on counterterrorism. It could also include cooperation between the IC and established international environmental and health organizations, say, sharing potential pandemic findings with WHO before a disease spreads into a worldwide disaster.

Here is a new world leadership role for the Five Eyes and NATO: using the power of intelligence---information and knowledge, much of it beyond what one can acquire in libraries and research labs---to guide nations and nonpartisan international organizations toward a common defense against universal enemies of humanity, whether global hunger, climate change, or emerging pandemics. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has urged, one starting place could be improved intelligence sharing between NATO and Japan---"a very close and important partner for NATO," he notes, and a nation that already has an intelligence-sharing agreement with the United States on some subjects (A. Doi, personal communication, July 19, 2023). Such cooperation does not spring from the brow of Zeus; it takes time, trust, incremental steps. An example is the UKUSA Agreement on sigint cooperation (pronounced "Eu-Koo-SA"), which was initially called BRUSA, signed by the United Kingdom and the United States in 1946. Subsequently, the pact expanded to include Canada in 1948, then Australia and New Zealand in 1956---all a precursor to the Five Eyes success story.

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While these steps toward intelligence-sharing have to be taken cautiously, with the utmost care for the protection of sensitive sources and methods, the Five Eyes alliance has shown the way. This is not a concept for the naïve; intelligence liaison can be replete with challenges.[9] Yet successes can be achieved. One thing is certain: no nation can afford to stand alone in this hazardous world; collective action is mandatory, especially among the democracies as they face an expanded number of autocratic regimes in the world. Should a nation violate the rules for the access and protection of classified documents in this envisioned expansion of an intelligence alliance, it would be immediately expelled from the union and thereby forfeit the important decision advantages that come with membership in a wider intelligence liaison relationship.

Much rides on the willingness of national security officials in the open societies to broaden their intelligence tasking agendas, both within their own nations and in cooperation with reliable allies. The future of global democracy may well depend upon the ability of the open societies nations to share at least some of their intelligence tasking and findings with one another, toward the common goal of protecting and advancing both liberty and security---not only against military threats but the host of other world dangers confronted by contemporary societies, from future pandemics to ongoing climate change challenges and several other non-traditional intelligence tasking possibilities.

[9] See, for instance, Annette Freyberg and Loch K. Johnson, "German-American Intelligence Relations, 1969-1997: An Ambivalent Partnership," in Detlef Junker, ed., *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1968-1990*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004): 171-177; and Jeffrey T. Richelson and Desmond Ball, *The Ties That Bind: Intelligence Cooperation Between the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985).

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