

Intelligence in the Twenty-First Century

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ABSTRACT

The author concludes that the world will most probably remain rife with conflict even in the twenty first century and that the traditional role of *intelligence* will not only continue but will increase in importance. He characterizes the international situation as being "more of the same historically"; that is, the existence of several different centers of power and mutual conflicts based solely on national interests. In order to protect and promote one's national interests, sovereign states will, on one hand, require its own military forces, and, on the other, its own *intelligence* service. In the future, the goals and priorities of intelligence services will be subservient to the interests of state policies, and the collection and analysis of information obtained by "special means" in support of national foreign policy will apply universally to all world *intelligence* services. The most important changes will take place in the technical aspects of *intelligence*. However, in spite of fears expressed about an "Orwellian" solution, which could in the future be at the disposal of intelligence services as a result of technological advances, the author believes human sources, *humint*, will remain the main intelligence tool. As far as "rules of the game" are concerned, they will also remain the same, though sporadic attempts will be made to devise some internationally acceptable framework for *intelligence* activities.

Introduction

The essence, the *raison d'être* of intelligence is the acquisition of information, which is consciously concealed from interested outsiders either by state institutions or by other social groups like political parties or financial bodies, etc. There is no country which does not have its secrets and would not take steps to pro-

tect them. Evidently, there is no country in the world whose secrets would not be of any interest to some of its international partners. One can safely presume that intelligence is as old as human society. It is mentioned in the Old Testament. The subject of intelligence, or to put it in a cruder way, of espionage, was elaborated on a very high professional level by a Chinese thinker in the fifth century BC.

Thus, intelligence is an ancient phenomenon, the eternal feature of all past and present civilizations. (And, should I add, as honorable as any other institution.)

The volumes of information, which every country considers to be vital to its interests, are mind-boggling not only in totalitarian states but in the societies which are habitually called open. Russia has opened the archives of the USSR. (Something similar, by the way, was done the first time by the Bolsheviks in 1918.) Recently, as we have heard, the CIA started to open a portion of its archives: millions upon millions of confidential and top secret papers (nothing of actual importance, I regret to observe.) One can be quite sure that the other, undisclosed part of the archive is no less impressive in terms of bulk.

But why should one try to penetrate into other people's secrets? A US Secretary of State in the 1920s, when presented with decoded foreign correspondence, remarked: "Gentlemen do not read other people's letters!"

Unlike its citizens, the state cannot afford to be a gentleman. Responsible political leaders cannot be lured into complacency by a cloudless international situation (if such a situation is imaginable in principle!). History never rests and interstate relations may undergo extremely quick changes. One can recollect the rapid transition from "eternal and fraternal friendship" to a bitter confrontation between the Soviet Union and China at the end of the 1950s, or the sudden collapse of Iranian-American relations in 1979, when an American client regime was replaced by bitter foes of the USA. The mission of intelligence is to foresee changes in such situations, to detect potential threats to the national interest at the earliest stages.

Intelligence is not a product of war, conflict, or confrontation. It is a normal, though peculiar, tool of the sovereign state. The paradoxical nature of the situation is quite evident. The activity of any intelligence service inevitably implies the violation of the laws of target countries. An Israeli agent, one Mr Pollard, is serving a life term in an American prison. An American agent, Mr Baranov, is serving six years in a Russian jail. In 1994 the French authorities expelled four American diplomats on charges of espionage. There have been problems concerning Russian activities in the United States.

In brief, every country, be it Russia, France, Italy or

Bangladesh, conducts intelligence activities abroad while perfectly aware that it thus violates or may violate foreign laws. Such is the reality, which to some extent does not answer strict moral criteria. The world we live in is far from perfect, and only in poetic dreams can one visualize a time when all nations will fuse into a happy family and there will be no need for espionage. (Again, even in happy families sometimes there is a need for little spying.)

The Future

This is, in a word, the present state of affairs. And what is going to be the role of intelligence agencies in the twenty-first century?

The future is concealed from us by an impenetrable curtain, and it would be a folly to presume that man or the human mind are capable of tearing down this curtain and predicting with confidence developments for any meaningful historical period.

At the most, we can attempt to chart a possible scenario of the future, always keeping in mind the possibility of new, now unthinkable, circumstances coming into play. This happened, for instance, with the invention of nuclear weapons or with the disintegration of the USSR.

At the moment, one can conjure up several versions of world developments at the beginning of the new century.

It is a general desire to see the strengthening of positive tendencies which have been shaped during the second half of the present century: the growing role of the UN; the gradual fusing of regional organizations into a harmonious universal system; lowering the level of military might and elimination of the most dangerous weapons of mass destruction; solution of conflicts in a peaceful and equitable manner.

This scenario seems to be an illusion without roots in the past, without foundation in the present, and without hope in the future. Let us better leave it to science fiction writers and political demagogues. Intelligence must always be prepared to face harsh realities.

There is another, equally distant possibility. The world has a single center of might, a sole super-power that is capable of imposing its will on all of humanity. The role of such a super-power might be played solely by the United States of America, whose leading position is persistently, and one must concede, quite justifiably, stressed by the administration and is accepted by the international community. History, however, never stops and there is nothing immutable and eternal. Maintaining the leading global role might become an unbearable burden even for the USA. Occasional flashes of isolationist moods in the domestic politics of the USA are not accidental, they testify to the existence

of certain premonitions within the American establishment. One may believe that the doctrine of the leading US role will undergo some changes and may acquire a more modest character under pressure from domestic factors and formidable outside resistance.

Thus, the natural order of things to which we have been accustomed for decades and centuries is likely to prevail: there will be several independent but interconnected centers of power which will continue to exist in a state of relative equilibrium, partnership and rivalry - something similar to the world depicted by George Orwell but maybe without his imaginative extremes.

The twentieth century dashed the hopes of past thinkers. It brought neither peace nor well being to humanity. People are apt to hope for the better but at all times they have to be prepared for the worse. Unfortunately, the coming century, like its predecessor, may betray our optimistic expectations.

Look at the Balkans, Latin America, Africa, the Near East, look at the former USSR. The conclusion of our century happened to be more troubled and more sanguine than the end of the nineteenth century.

It seems that local conflicts of different intensity will continue to poison the life of humanity for foreseeable future. Moreover, they may grow in bitterness and scale.

One can predict the inevitable growth of rivalry for the control of limited natural resources, the spread of this rivalry over new territories, where Russia occupies a special place, and the sea-floor. It is possible that in the next century new sources of energy will be developed, but will that mean the slackening of competition for energy? This is not supported by historical experience. When oil came to be the main source of energy, struggles for the control of oil-fields produced many a bloody conflict. One can also observe that the development of atomic energy hardly improved the general international picture.

We witness rapid and large-scale deterioration of the environment which is aggravated by considerable population growth. This presents a real threat to mankind, and it is in this sphere that collisions of national and regional interests are inevitable. Naturally, the strong will solve their problems at the expense of the weak. Even now environmentally unsafe industries are shifted towards less-developed countries. They are becoming a world garbage dump for hazardous industrial waste.

No doubt, the problems of natural resources and the environment will continue to be tackled by the joint efforts of the international community. But, alas, in reality they will be solved by economic, political, and even military compulsion. As a

result one can expect the growth of tension between the rich giants and the rest of the world, a phenomena which quite recently was called the fight against neocolonialism. What is labeled now as Islamic fundamentalism is just an offshoot of these phenomena.

Unfortunately, there is no reason to expect that the twenty first century will witness a decrease in ethnic conflicts. Rather they will become more brutal not only due to their intrinsic character, but as a result of global rivalry for the resources and the environment. Ethnic minorities will be manipulated by outsiders.

It would be a thankless job to enumerate all of the factors which may affect future developments. My task is very modest: just to show that the world of ours will hardly become a quiet and comfortable place to live in. (Possibly no proof is needed at all.) The state of affairs will be determined not so much by the harmony of national interests as by their clashes.

This fact leads to at least two pessimistic conclusions:

- sovereign states will need national armed forces;
- sovereign states will need special intelligence services.

The Perspective of Intelligence

Being the tool of the policy of their states, the intelligence services, naturally, influence the decision-making process but do not determine its outcome. The situation can hardly change in the future. Objectives and priorities of the services will be subordinated to the interests of national policy.

Only effective intelligence can provide timely warnings of threats to national security, detect opportunities for the promotion of national interests, and use them in a specific intelligence manner.

This is, roughly, the essence of any intelligence doctrine at the end of the twentieth century. One can safely bet that the essence, if not the wording, will remain the same in the next century. Acquisition and analysis of information which can be reached only by specific means and support of national foreign policy will, in my opinion, remain universal values for the services of all countries. And, of course, within this very broad framework every service will act in its own particular manner in accordance with national laws and traditions.

In recent years the problem of cooperation or the interaction of different services became the subject of lively, open and confidential discussions. In general, such cooperation is rightly considered to be important in counteracting common threats, namely, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and related materials, terrorism, narcotraffic. Quite often, the idea of this cooperation is presented as something entirely novel, something that became possible only with the end of the "Cold War". An outsider

may get the impression that this very cooperation will be the mainstream of intelligence activities in the future.

This view runs counter to the facts of life. The cooperation of intelligence services is possible only in those fields where the interests of their respective states coincide, which happens rarely enough and practically never in full measure. Even the mentioned sinister triad - nuclear weapons, terrorism and drugs - is far from being the matter of primary concern for every country. Thus, one may speak only about cooperation between some services in some matters. Even with the best and closest relations between the services, their cooperation extends, as a rule, to the exchange of information, joint analysis and estimate of certain situations, sometimes to operational support, i.e. it is limited to areas removed from the heart of every service - its sources. The inherent secrecy of the intelligence work puts natural limits to the closest cooperation. Those who disregard this principle may pay dearly for it.

Certain apprehensions exist that the real sovereignty of smaller and weaker countries will continue to be impinged upon. In this case it could not be ruled out that their intelligence potential will be exploited by stronger partners under the guise of cooperation.

So, it is difficult to foresee any dramatic changes in the function of intelligence or a substantial move for the better in our conflict-ridden world. Possibly, some miracle will take place though the historical experience of, at least, two millennia teaches that to count on positive miracles would be somewhat risky.

There are grounds to presume that the most significant changes may take place on the technical side of intelligence. The progress of science, regretfully, cannot be stopped, and practically each scientific achievement is turned to intelligence and military uses. The progress may not be limited to the quantitative side alone: better satellite spies, better super-computers for breaking ciphers, higher sensitivity of listening, watching, recording devices, new means of surveillance, etc. The cost of technical gadgets will inevitably increase, the processing of the information obtained by technical means will demand an increasing number of analysts, and correspondingly, the cost of the product will go up. The limits here will be set, as ever, by the financial considerations and the common sense of state leaders. Naturally, the development of the technological capabilities of intelligence will call for corresponding defensive means of counterintelligence, which never lags far behind.

But a qualitative breakthrough in intelligence work may take place exactly in the technological field. It concerns the possibility of remote control of the human mind. The practical experience of a number of years makes me very skeptical as far as sensations are concerned. There were many charlatans and honest but mis-

guided enthusiasts who tried to muddle our collective brain with bizarre inventions. Nevertheless, the pessimistic view of scientific progress makes me believe that we may face something entirely novel in the field of remote mind control. The party, which achieves this, will gain a great, though transitory, superiority over its opponents, partners, and allies. There can be no doubt that intelligence in the future will resort to the increasing use of modern technologies. Nevertheless, its main and most effective tool will remain the man, "asset", "source", and "agentura". It is the man, "humint," who allows to separate truth from lie, to detect decoys and misinformation, to give true bearings to analysts. ("Humint" is relatively cheaper than technical and analytical effort, though in individual cases it may look quite expensive.)

This assertion is borne out, in particular, by contemporary Russian experience. Our society became entirely open to the world and still the intelligence services of our international partners are conducting "humint" activities on an unprecedented scale all over the former Soviet Union. "Humint" does not solve only the problems of today, it lays the foundation for future work, allows the service to be prepared for changes of the circumstances.

One can safely presume that the significance of "humint" will not be reduced by the march of technical progress. Moreover, it may increase, especially in the field of "covert operations" or, in old KGB parlance, "active measures," in other words, influencing the solution of this or that problem by specific intelligence means. Intelligence services have been actively, though silently, participating in all major and minor international conflicts. They did not always succeed, which meant bloodshed and material expense. Their potential was not fully utilized. Evidently, the role of intelligence in future collisions will increase and that will mean a greater demand for "humint."

And, finally, a question arises whether there can be significant changes in the unwritten rules of the game. The present rules are defined by the goals set before services by political leadership and by the price which the leadership is prepared to pay for a failure, the price in terms of prestige, money, lives, etc. The principle will hardly change so long as intelligence lives and works, though occasional attempts to evolve some internationally accepted framework for its activities cannot be ruled out.

The more the world changes the more it remains the same. Come to think of it, it is an optimistic view of history.