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Review Essay

Derek S. Reveron

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REVIEW ESSAY

BUILDING AN INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

Derek S. Reveron

Negroponete, John. *National Intelligence Strategy*. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2005. 32pp.

Negroponete, John. *Strategic Human Capital Plan: An Annex to the US National Intelligence Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2006. 47pp.

(Both documents are available online at www.odni.gov.)

Spurred by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the poor analysis of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs, and numerous studies, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 created the Office of Director of National Intelligence (ODNI). Run by former ambassador John Negroponete, ODNI is an independent agency meant to oversee U.S. government intelligence activities

and to transform the American intelligence community. Guiding Director Negroponete's efforts are two very different lessons learned from 9/11. First, that attack has been characterized as a failure to "connect the dots." If only intelligence agencies had shared their data, analysts could have predicted al Qa'ida's plan to attack, though the dots were not specific enough to connect the overall plan with individual names. To share intelligence, to "connect the dots," is now a national priority. Consequently, the slogan is "share, share, share." The second lesson, derived from prewar intelligence on Iraq, offers a contradictory lesson—to "collect more dots." While there was

Derek S. Reveron is associate professor of national security affairs at the Naval War College and a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve. He has received a diploma from the Naval War College, a master's degree in political science, and a doctorate in public policy analysis from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He specializes in U.S. foreign policy, civil-military relations, and intelligence. He is the author of Promoting Democracy in the Post-Soviet Region (2002), the editor of America's Viceroy: The Military and U.S. Foreign Policy (2004), and the co-editor of Flashpoints in the War on Terrorism (2006). Author of numerous book chapters and articles, he sits on the editorial boards of the Defense Intelligence Journal and this journal.

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human intelligence informing of Iraq's weapons programs, it proved to be wrong. The slogan, however, is "collect, collect, collect."

Given these lessons and guiding legislation, ODNI is tasked to integrate U.S. intelligence, bring depth and accuracy to analysis, and ensure that resources generate future capabilities. However, the task to unify sixteen different agencies across six different departments will not be easy. With such a Herculean effort before him, Negroponte is well positioned to offer insight into the first-ever *National Intelligence Strategy* and its accompanying *Strategic Human Capital Plan*. Both documents outline mission objectives that will provide better intelligence and enterprise objectives to transform the intelligence community.

The *Strategy* includes topics that have been long-standing intelligence requirements, such as warning, counterproliferation, and counterterrorism, problems that transcend the private sector and touch all levels of government: federal, state, local, even tribal. This all-encompassing approach will likely have a dramatic impact on an intelligence community that fiercely guards its sources and methods. While it is relatively easy for the CIA and FBI to share information, there are legal, cultural, and technological factors that prevent the CIA from sharing intelligence with the Rhode Island State Police, for example. Further, though much attention has been focused on sharing intelligence within the U.S. government, the *Strategy* also recognizes the importance of sharing intelligence across national boundaries. Since 9/11, the United States has cultivated intelligence relationships with traditional allies like the United Kingdom, new allies like Russia, and nontraditional partners like Yemen. Intelligence sharing is not only essential in the war on terrorism but also provides a nonpublic way for governments to cooperate with the United States.

Perhaps as a reflection of his diplomatic career, Negroponte notes that the intelligence community must identify opportunities for democratic transformation, and he warns of state failure. Although the promotion of democracy has been a national priority for several decades, it is seldom linked to the intelligence community. While the community's role may be misinterpreted as limited to direct action against dictators or supporting regime change, it is more likely that the intelligence community will, for example, build on its decade-old partnership with the Political Instability Task Force at the University of Maryland. This task force attempts to understand why states fail, which should result in aid packages targeted to ward off state failure. As President Bush acknowledged in his 2002 National Security Strategy: "America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones." The challenge for Negroponte is to find a balance between potential peer competitors (an institutional preference) and states where American intervention will likely occur.

The *Strategy* makes it clear that the United States has interests throughout the globe. Negroponte states that “the Intelligence Community should develop, sustain, and have access to expertise on *every region, every transnational security issue, and every threat* to the American people.” With such a large goal, the strategy emphasizes drawing from experts outside the government and upon open-source data.

The *Strategic Human Capital Plan* outlines an approach to build an agile, all-source force, win the war for talent, and create a culture of leadership at every level. The *Plan* is also expected to determine the “optimum mix of military, civilian, contractor, and other human resources” necessary to support the objectives detailed in the strategy.

The *Plan* is marked throughout by sober assessment of the challenge for real human capital. The intelligence community is handicapped by a lengthy hiring process, stringent clearance requirements that generally exclude potentially valuable bilingual noncitizens, and a personnel system that is not designed for a new generation of workers who frequently change jobs. The *Plan* also notes that the intelligence community faces “critical shortfalls of experienced mid-career professionals,” because it skipped “a generation of new hires.” Also nipping away at midcareer personnel are contractors who recruit their own employees, already cleared and trained at government expense, and then “lease” them back to the government at considerably greater expense. Finally, the *Plan* notes that in spite of its name, the intelligence community (IC) is no community at all. By building a “national intelligence service,” integrating training, education, and career development, and fostering an ethos of service, integrity, and accountability, Negroponte hopes to “bring more Community-wide coherence and cohesion than ever before to the way IC agencies lead and manage their people.”

Negroponte’s assignment to transform the intelligence community comes at a difficult time, when “adversarial states have learned to mask their intentions and capabilities” and “terrorists and other non-state actors use commonplace technologies to boost their striking power and enhance their elusiveness.” Equally daunting is the prospect of developing human intelligence sources for hard targets. Doing so in a totalitarian country like North Korea or Iran is unrealistic. Those countries’ intelligence services deprive American operatives of recruitment opportunities. The intelligence community has learned how difficult it is to penetrate even English-speaking urban-ecoterrorist groups in the United States, let alone a Pashto-speaking tribe in Pakistan. Negroponte recognizes these challenges and sees developing “innovative ways to penetrate and analyze the most difficult targets” as a core objective. These ways include creating “red teams” to get “inside the heads” of potential adversaries and developing

relationships with foreign intelligence services that might be better positioned to access hard targets.

The ultimate importance of these documents, and his own tenure, will depend on Negroponte's ability to lead the way to change in a very large, disparate intelligence community. Without direct budgetary control, he will have to inspire, cajole, and perhaps somehow coerce the leaders of the sixteen different intelligence agencies to cooperate. With the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence reforming defense intelligence and "protecting defense assets," Negroponte will likely focus on the civilian agencies. It is too early to say how a former CIA director as the new secretary of defense will affect this process. Ultimately, Negroponte's success will be based on the benchmarks listed: "to provide accurate and timely intelligence and conduct intelligence programs and activities directed by the President" and "to transform our capabilities faster than threats emerge, protect what needs to be protected, and perform our duties according to the law."

We are unlikely to see widespread change soon. It will not be until fiscal year 2008 that Negroponte's objectives will be fully reflected within the different agencies. In fact, with the parallel transformation of intelligence agencies and the competing priorities among defense, civilian, and law enforcement intelligence agencies, we may never see the unity that the Office of Director of National Intelligence was intended to bring into being.