



CALL FOR PAPERS

NISA – Netherlands Intelligence Studies Association

International conference 2019

Old wine, new bottles?

The transforming discipline of intelligence collection

For the past few years, the world has been receiving mixed messages about the world of intelligence. On the one hand, we are told that ‘the trade’- the techniques used to gather intelligence - has changed markedly: we now live in an information age, in which big data and social media intelligence transform *signals intelligence* at its core. Adding to that *human intelligence* has to adapt, since cameras are everywhere and covers are blown in the blink of an eye. On the other hand, despite the changing face of it, at heart intelligence collection seems to revolve around the same principles. Disinformation might now be spread through Facebook and Twitter trolls, but it is still disinformation, a phenomenon that has been around forever. What is more, hostile intelligence services still use ‘illegals’ who still seem to use one-time pads and short-wave radio transmissions. This raises the question whether the intelligence collection disciplines have truly adapted to an environment that has fundamentally changed – or should do so – *or* whether this is old wine in new bottles.

The *Netherlands Intelligence Studies Association* (www.nisa-intelligence.nl) invites scholars and practitioners from all over the world to reflect on this. For our upcoming conference, which will take place at the HSD Campus in **The Hague** (the Netherlands) on **Thursday 21 November 2019**, we welcome papers on topics related to intelligence collection, including the different collection disciplines ranging from humint, sigint, masint, socmint, and everything in-between, that address the way these disciplines have developed – from past, present, to future. Papers can focus not just on the practice of intelligence collection itself, but also on the broader political, bureaucratic, and social environment of intelligence communities, by addressing issues such as management, tasking, public-private cooperation, and oversight. A more detailed description of the theme is presented below.

We would like to offer the opportunity for a presentation in a plenary setting, as well as an interactive session or presentation in a ‘workshop’ setting. Please let us know for which setting your proposal is.

Please send your paper proposals (250 words) and resume (one pager) as one PDF document to Clotilde Sebag at Leiden University, at c.c.sebag@fgga.leidenuniv.nl.

A broader introduction to the theme

The 21st century brought massive changes to the global security architecture and to the field of intelligence. Punctuated by 9/11, this century saw the emergence of new threats and new actors, with terrorism becoming the main security concern. This, alongside technological developments and new global governance norms in democracies, has changed the security environment. The Intelligence Community has had to adapt to this new environment, its new roles within national security, and the wider global changes. As a result, its tradecraft, most notably intelligence collection, has undergone significant changes. Four of these changes are referred to in the literature.

First, as Lord argues “...today’s emerging digital environment has the potential to wholly transform the foundation upon which intelligence rests: secrecy” (2015, 666). He points to technological innovations that led to the rise of new collection disciplines (2015, 666). These include, *osint*, *socmint*, and *masint*. Lim argues that another important change is the rise of Big Data (2016, 619). This is likely to have impacts in combination with other *ints* – Eldridge et al. stress the “potential value of open-source information for intelligence-related purposes” (2018, 391). According to Rovner, these developments cause “an explosion in new sources of information” (2013, 261) that intelligence and security services have deal with, possibly risking “information overload” (2003, 15) as for example Dupont argues. Additionally, the rise of cyber threats has become an issue, and thus, having a “comprehensive cyber posture” has been recognised as a strategic priority by the American Intelligence Community in their 2025 vision (Pomerleau 2018).

A second consequence is seen in the impact of the technological revolution on *humint*. Not only does it create a whole new operational environment – one has to think only about creating digital personae on social media or discussion forums –, but according to Lord, “cover identities and tradecraft... cannot withstand digitally-enabled counterintelligence” (2015, 667).

Thirdly, the rise of new technologies enabling mass-surveillance and various leaks, not least those of Edward Snowden, have stirred debates about oversight and accountability of intelligence and security services, such as those on whether “more proactive surveillance and intelligence collection methods have resulted in an unsustainable and intolerable level of infringements of the privacy rights” (Walsh and Miller 2016, 346). Finally, these changes caused the traditional state agencies conducting intelligence work to rely more on their “civil society partners”, thereby creating “new practices of public-private ‘collection’” (Petersen and Tjalve 2018, 21).

Whilst these changes are mentioned often, there also seems to be some doubt about their extent and actual effects. Osint is now said to constitute “as much as 95 per cent of all useful intelligence” (Lim 2016, 634), but is that really the case? Has intelligence collection truly been revolutionised, or is it simply a shift in balance among *ints*? Cogan, for instance, thought that despite all praise for sigint, *humint* would become a much more important collection method, characterised by an “offensive hunt strategy” (2004, 316). This is highlighted by the focus Gina Haspel, the CIA’s new director, who claimed to “recruiting more foreign spies” (Younes 2018). Furthermore, despite concerns about Russia’s recent “willingness to escalate intelligence operations beyond established norms”, Devine believes that some “informal restraints remain at play” and that this is not a new era of no-rules spying (Council on Foreign Relations 2018).

This, all, leaves us with many questions. Do all these changes mean that the intelligence field has been completely overturned? Are intelligence collection disciplines totally different from the twentieth century? Have their fundamentals changed, has their role in the entire intelligence production process? It is time to take stock of where the intelligence community stands in terms of collection. There is a need

for a wide and comprehensive overview of the development of intelligence collection – it is not possible to compartmentalize this from broader societal changes, and from changes in different collection disciplines; all the issues are closely intertwined.

