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Intelligence Support for Aviation Security

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Abstract. This article describes an introduction to and critique of intelligence support for aviation security.

The four classes of intelligence activities are all germane to effective aviation security programs. These four classes comprise intelligence collection, intelligence analysis, covert/clandestine action, and counterintelligence.

Intelligence collection is of two types—human and technical. Human intelligence refers to people as the actual collectors of information. This information, hopefully, will be relevant to desired goals of an aviation security program. Although a common perception among people outside the intelligence world is that most of this information will be that which is being protected by those who already possess it, a truer perception within the intelligence community is that most of this information is not being protected but is openly available. Technical intelligence comprises information—again relevant to aviation security—directly collected through technological apparata. Collection examples include but are not limited to a telephone tap picking up a voice or a reconnaissance satellite or aircraft picking up images.

Intelligence analysis comprises the human and technical processing of information so as to generate meaningful statements about Issues germane to aviation security. Human processing is dependent on prior knowledge and cognitive capabilities of the human analyst—as well as all other factors contributing to human performance. Examples of technical processing include the systematic application of algorithms to data via computer software so as to identify predictive hypotheses. In some cases, these algorithms can change during the processing that accompanies analysis reactive to and contingent on the nature of the collected data.

Covert/clandestine action comprises all human action intentionally taken to influence the world in a manner supportive of aviation security—with the caveat that some combination of the action's planning source, the identity of the actors, the nature of the action, and even the action's consequences are hidden, masked, or suitably distorted to defy their accurate perception. Examples include covertly distributing money among favored political actors in an election to help influence an electoral result, covert assassination, and various propaganda and disinformation campaigns. Most examples of covert/clandestine action are deemed to be legal, ethical, and moral activities by the perpetrators and the converse by the targets—save for the deep recesses of the hearts and minds of the most Machiavellian targets.

Counterintelligence comprises all intelligence activities taken to deter adversarial intelligence activities or to minimize the success of these activities. One variant of counterintelligence, counterespionage, denotes efforts to deter or prevent the success of adversarial attempts to obtain information that is being protected. Another variant is the covert/clandestine action of disinformation that can induce beliefs in an adversary so that even successfully obtained data that were being protected can still be misinterpreted during the adversary's intelligence analysis.

All four classes of intelligence activities are interdependent and can be related to a continuously iterative intelligence cycle that also includes the production and transmission of analyzed information for the consumption of aviation security policy and program decision makers and managers.

In the immediate and mid-term aftermath of 9/11, allegations about three significant shortfalls of intelligence activities have most often been featured in public discourse. The first is that human intelligence collection and analysis is woefully inadequate because there are not enough individuals representing and constituting intelligence organizations with the requisite language and cultural expertise to obtain and understand information relevant to aviation security or to influence events in a desirable direction. The second is that technical intelligence has been too successful so as to outstrip capabilities to attend to and analyze it in a responsive and meaningful fashion. The third is that all intelligence activities—but especially intelligence analysis—have been captured by political leaders so as to subvert the potential accuracy, relevance, and value of these activities. According to this last allegation, political leaders make decisions first and then seek to employ intelligence to support these decisions—even if most primers on intelligence in support of security advocate for intelligence informing decisions.

Although there is some merit in all three allegations of intelligence shortfalls, there are also meaningful counter-contentions. For example, human intelligence shortfalls may be mitigated by the competence of human intelligence case officers who possess and exploit expertise in identifying, developing, running, and terminating intelligence agents—and, through these agents, subagents. With such generic competence, the need for expert knowledge in language and culture remains attractive but not vital.

The shortfall due to the technical intelligence collection hyper-success may be mitigated (either gradually or with breathtakingly sudden speed) through novel developments in automated analytic methodologies. Another possibility of mitigation includes more judicious development and application of collection methodologies including the delineation and prioritization of essential elements of information that could result in a higher ratio of relevant to irrelevant information within a lesser amount of collected information.

The alleged shortfall related to the political capturing of intelligence activities is a timeless one and transcends specific cultures and historical eras. Thus, it may signify truth, may be intractable and immutable, and may constitute an aviation security vulnerability. On the other hand, some political theorists of security and power might suggest that there is less here than meets the eye. In this regard, one might note that adversaries could have a similar problem. One might also note that there are generic tools of implementing power against adversaries and increasing one's security that transcend adequate intelligence. Third, it is certainly the case that intelligence analysts and operational planners may be wrong and political leaders right about the nature of the world and what to do about it—in some situations. Intelligence officers have no necessary privileged status in matters of the Truth.

A fourth shortfall of intelligence activities is less often discussed but may be the most significant. Any specific piece of information may vary through time in terms of its meaning and relevance for aviation security. Decisions about what to collect and how to analyze may, therefore, be correct at one point in time and wrong at another. Negative consequences for aviation security comprise information both ignored or discounted that later would have proven useful and at one time useful that later becomes irrelevant, inaccurate, and/or different. More often than not, static perception loses, dynamic perceptual change wins. (See Bar-Joseph, U., & Kruglanski, A. W. (2003). Intelligence failure and need

for cognitive closure: On the psychology of the Yom Kippur surprise. Political Psychology, 24, 75-99; Eyck, T. (2001). Does information matter? A research note on information technologies and political protest. Social Science Journal, 38, 147-160; Hergovich, A., & Olbrich, A. (2002). What can artificial intelligence do for peace psychology? Review of Psychology, 9, 3-11; Pech, R. J. (2003). Inhibiting imitative terrorism through memetic engineering. Journal of Contingencies & Crisis Management, 11, 61-66.)