

Adapting to Change:

Strategic Turning Points and the CIA/DoD Relationship

by David Oakley

Introduction

In January 2012, the Department of Defense (DoD) published “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century,” outlining U.S. national security priorities for the coming decade.¹ Although the document maintains counterterrorism as a strategic priority, its release shortly after the withdrawal of American military forces from Iraq and its broader focus beyond terrorism, signifies what former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta termed a “strategic turning point.”² Two years after the publication of this document, the U.S. is transitioning in Afghanistan, cutting national security budgets, and reducing the size of the military. Even though counterterrorism operations continue, it appears the U.S. is undergoing a strategic realignment from the “Global War on Terrorism” (GWOT) to a new focus towards the Pacific. While foreign policy and political pundits continue to debate the merits of the administration’s “tilt” toward the Pacific, often ignored in these discussions is the affect of “strategic turning points” on America’s national security organizations.

The GWOT, the Afghanistan War, and the Iraq War have significantly influenced the cultures and identities of DoD and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). These conflicts resulted in a 69 percent increase in military spending, doubled the CIA’s budget, and provided both organizations common foes on which to focus their efforts.³ Although America’s strategic successes over the last twelve years are negligible, operations during this period strengthened the CIA/DoD relationship, resulting in a more effective partnership. These improved relations resulted in less parochialism, with officers from both organizations recognizing the value of collaboration and looking for opportunities to work together.⁴ Even though improving operational coordination should not be the principle objective of either sound strategy or policy, failure to safeguard these gains, even in times of reduced budgets, only increases the cost of unachieved policy objectives. In order to safeguard the relationship gains, it is important to appreciate why the CIA/DoD relationship

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evolved to its current state and anticipate how changing strategic conditions might affect it in the future.

In his famous speech “What is History?” British historian E.H. Carr said a historian “provides general guides for future action, which though not specific predictions, are both valid and useful.”⁵ The economic and strategic

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conditions of the post-Gulf War/post-Cold War period that helped shape the current CIA/DoD partnership offer valuable guidelines for today’s DoD and CIA leaders, as well as policymakers. Similar to the early 1990s, the U.S. is once again facing an economic downturn, while undergoing a transitional period in national security affairs. After twelve years of fighting, the U.S. is suffering from operational weariness and budgetary constraints.⁶ These realities are forcing the U.S. to reassess its strategic focus and the manner in which it prioritizes its national interests and employs its assets. Understanding how choices made under similar fiscal and national security conditions affected the CIA/DoD relationship can provide a better appreciation for how contemporary policy decisions might affect future CIA/DoD relations.

To appreciate how the CIA/DoD relationship might respond during the post-GWOT strategic turning point, it is valuable to look back at the post-Desert Storm/post-Cold War environment. Although the CIA and DoD relationship expanded significantly following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, its foundation was set in the 1990s. During this period, Congressional

policy pronouncements and organizational changes within both institutions increased the communication and liaison partnerships between the CIA and DoD, establishing the foundation for greater interoperability. The changes made in response to Desert Storm and the end of the Cold War established conditions that enabled the blossoming of the relationship since 2001. Although conflict, war, and terrorist threats provided a common focus for partnership development and integration, existence of a structure coupled with previous policy direction resulted in organizational familiarity and partnership prior to GWOT operations.

Strategic Turning Point #1: Desert Storm and the End of the Cold War

Although the Soviet Union did not dissolve until December 1991, the coalition’s overwhelming victory during Desert Storm marked the beginning of a turning point in world affairs. Within one hundred hours, the U.S. and its allies destroyed the world’s sixth largest Army, displayed its operational effectiveness, and silenced the ghosts of Vietnam. Despite success, the coalition’s victory was not without its operational warts. During post-war Congressional testimony, General Norman Schwarzkopf criticized the intelligence community’s performance during Operation Desert Storm.⁷ His criticism highlighted a breakdown in the integration of national intelligence and military forces that resulted in disjointed planning, poor communication, and a lack of common understanding of the operational environment.

General Schwarzkopf first identified a need for greater national intelligence support during the planning phase of Desert Storm. Dissatisfied with conflicting analysis and repetitive reporting, the DoD resurrected the Joint Intelligence Center (JIC) concept to integrate the capabilities of the intelligence community (IC) in support of the warfighter. Although helpful in

bringing together the different organizations in support of the combatant commander, the loose and largely informal nature of the organization limited its effectiveness. Once operations commenced, the friction between General Schwarzkopf and the IC only increased due to disagreements over battle damage assessments and what Schwarzkopf perceived as poor intelligence support.⁸

Postmortem Congressional reports criticized the CIA specifically for not providing adequate support to the JIC. The House Armed Services Subcommittee report referred to the CIA's "handoff approach" as one of the reasons the combatant commander did not have an adequate and unified intelligence picture.⁹ Acknowledging the postwar critiques, both the DoD and the IC established organizations that would better enable intelligence support to the warfighter. The DoD established permanent JICs at the combatant-command level, and the IC established national intelligence support teams, non-permanent structures that came together to support joint task forces during operations.¹⁰ In later years, the CIA developed crisis operation liaison teams to provide military commanders direct access to CIA products and to increase CIA/DoD integration.¹¹

Adapting to the critiques of Desert Storm, the CIA established the Office of Military Affairs (OMA) "to enhance information flow and increase cooperation" with DoD.¹² OMA's creation symbolized CIA's evolving mindset and willingness to expand beyond its principle mission of providing policymakers with intelligence to enable decisionmaking.¹³ Although the CIA and DoD had signed previous agreements regarding their relationship during wartime and the CIA provided support whenever possible, its "support to military operations" was always a second-tier mission to the higher priority — "support to the policymaker."¹⁴ The establishment of an organization focused on improving support to the "military customer"

demonstrated the evolutionary changes occurring within the CIA.

Sensing the final collapse of the Soviet Union and realizing its significance on the "changing international landscape," President George H.W. Bush ordered the executive agencies to identify what those changes meant for the U.S. national security apparatus.¹⁵ Domestic fiscal concerns regarding an ongoing recession threatening America's economic health partially drove President Bush's review. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, President Bush called for national security spending cuts amounting to approximately 25 percent. The President and other national leaders believed the global standing of the U.S. was not only contingent on a strong defense, but also on its economic health. The reunification of Germany and the weakening of the Soviet Union provided the U.S. an opportunity to leverage the "peace dividend" and put America's fiscal house in order.¹⁶

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In the 1990s, Congress, also driven by the ongoing recession and informed by the recent collapse of the Soviet Union and the lessons of Desert Storm, initiated reviews of the IC to determine how it should transform to be effective in the post-Cold War era.¹⁷ Although the commissions acknowledged the importance of intelligence to understanding a post-Soviet world, they also highlighted the need to reduce intelligence expenditures. These reviews looked at ways to cut redundancy and streamline the IC to make intelligence organizations more responsive and integrated but at a cheaper

cost to the American taxpayer. Although these reviews focused on the broad structure of the IC, there is little doubt the criticisms of intelligence integration during the Gulf War informed them. Whatever spurred their actions, it is apparent they sought to remedy the relationship between military operations and national intelligence for both practical and fiscal reasons.

The desire to leverage the post-Cold War environment to strengthen the sickly American economy continued into President Bill Clinton's first-term. Part of the Clinton Administration's strategy to revitalize the economy was a determined focus to make federal government more effective and efficient. Sharing the previous administration's belief that a new world order presented an opportunity to cut national security, the Clinton Administration continued the trend of reduced defense spending initiated by its predecessor. Part of this reduction meant looking for opportunities to leverage existing capabilities to cover requirements, and the intelligence needs of post-Desert Storm warfighters was one of those identified requirements.

In 1995, Vice-President Al Gore's committee seeking efficient and effective governance identified intelligence support to the warfighter as a continued failing that

Brown Commission.¹⁹ Informed by previous post-Cold War intelligence reform attempts and motivated by operational lessons, the committee identified a continued lack of support to operational commanders.²⁰ Understanding the increasing importance of operational support to the warfighter, the CIA moved the Associate Deputy Director of Operations for Military Affairs out of the Directorate of Operations and created the Associate Director of Central Intelligence for Military Support. After 9/11, the CIA consolidated this position and the Office of Military Affairs into the office of the Associate Director of Military Affairs (ADMA).²¹

Strategic Turning Point #2: 9/11 Attacks and the GWOT

Ten years passed between General Schwarzkopf's Congressional testimony criticizing intelligence support to the warfighter and the 9/11 attacks. During the intervening years, structures were built to institutionalize the CIA/DoD relationship and the effectiveness of the structures tested during operations in Somalia and the Balkans. The military and CIA became more familiar with each other during the mid to late 1990s, but the lack of a significant unifying threat to the U.S. kept CIA and DoD collaboration at low levels. Out of tragedy often grows common purpose. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon gave the U.S. national security apparatus a new focus and helped establish a common purpose for the CIA and DoD.

The CIA/DoD partnership took off shortly after September 11, 2001, when combined cross-functional teams supported the Northern Alliance's efforts to overthrow the Taliban.²² The melding of the DoD's military capabilities with the CIA's intelligence and paramilitary capabilities provided a good template for counterterrorism operations that were increasing in importance for both organizations. The CIA/DoD partnership continued to grow

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needed to be remedied.¹⁸ Responding to the reverberating argument for increased support to the warfighter, President Clinton ranked intelligence support to military operations as the number one priority for the IC and established the Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community, known colloquially as the Aspin-

during the Iraq War, with CIA providing valuable pre-war intelligence and planning support and both organizations collaborating during operations.²³ Because of these battlefield experiences, the CIA/DoD “relationship has never been stronger,” resulting in changes to both organizations’ structures, cultures, and identities.²⁴

The CIA/DoD interaction occurring throughout both organizations spurs relationship growth and strengthens the partnership. In the early 1990s, there were only a handful of DoD liaison officers located at CIA headquarters; today there are hundreds of uniformed personnel (active, National Guard, and reserve) serving in the building. In addition, the CIA has representation at dozens of military commands and professional military schools.²⁵ Interaction is occurring at multiple levels throughout both organizations; for example, the CIA’s Special Activities deals directly with the theater special operations commands and CIA’s Counterterrorism Center deals directly with U.S. Special Operations Command. In addition, CIA’s geographic division chiefs interact with special operations personnel in their regions, and coordination occurs between special operations forces and other CIA centers, such as the Counternarcotics Center.²⁶ The numerous interactions between the CIA and DoD build redundancy in the relationship, which protects against organizational stove-piping and enables unity of effort.

While many of these relationships develop out of necessity during operations, both organizations are making efforts during training to cultivate the partnership. Beyond serving as a gateway into the CIA, ADMA has instituted various programs focused on increasing DoD/ CIA partnership, by cultivating non-parochial leaders who are familiar with both organizations and aware of the value each brings.²⁷ For example, to build a greater familiarization of the CIA’s mission, ADMA hosts numerous military

professionals during visits to CIA headquarters. Recognizing the increased interaction between special operations forces and the CIA, ADMA has also started bringing newly minted Special Forces captains to CIA headquarters to brief them on the CIA’s mission and introduce them to CIA personnel.²⁸ ADMA also works to educate the CIA workforce on the military mission and culture, provides pre-deployment briefs to CIA officers, and serves as an accessible resource to learn about the military or obtain contact information for military units.

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Cross-pollination is also strengthening the relationship. A recent training class at the CIA’s renowned “Farm” had over 25 percent military students, and even more telling, a significant portion of the instructors serving at the “Farm” are from military services.²⁹

Beyond the networking opportunities joint training creates, the bond forged through shared training experience foundationally shapes the mind-set of younger officers and results in organizational integration becoming a way of life and not merely a mandate.

A senior CIA officer previously responsible for overseeing training throughout the organization stated in an interview that the “showcasing” of the military during training, the presence of military colleagues, and the operational experience in war zones are all contributing to a more “enlightened” institution and CIA officer when it comes to working with the military.³⁰

Strategic Turning Point #3: Post-GWOT

The end of the Iraq War and the drawdown in Afghanistan marks another strategic turning point for the U.S. The 2012 “Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century” focus on the Asia-Pacific signals America’s shifting priorities away from the decade long counterinsurgency fight and toward more traditional state balance of power conflicts.³¹ Considering the significant cost of the GWOT in both blood and treasure, this transition is not surprising. Since 2001, the U.S.

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has lost 6,795 service members and spent over \$1.4 trillion on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.³² The overall cost of these conflicts will continue to accrue even after America’s withdrawal from Afghanistan, with one study estimating that the wars will cost between \$4–6 trillion.³³ The tremendous cost of these conflicts coupled with America’s current economic condition makes this strategic turning point understandable.

The shifting strategic focus and economic slump are also affecting DoD and the CIA. The DoD “estimates a twenty percent drop in the overall defense budget,” and the Army, which saw significant increases during the two wars, is in the process of reducing its active duty strength from 570,000 to 420,000 and cutting twelve brigade combat teams.³⁴ The IC budget has fallen by 15 percent since 2010, and the Director of National Intelligence James Clapper

is cautioning against a “damaging downward spiral” similar to the 1990s.³⁵ These budget reductions coupled with shifting strategic focus will result in changing priorities for the CIA and DoD. These changing priorities will inevitably influence the course of the CIA/DoD partnership, but whether the relationship grows stronger or becomes contentious is up to the two organizations.

The future choices made by the CIA and DoD regarding their partnership will be shaped by its leaders, national security requirements, policymaker preferences, and fiscal considerations. Over the last twelve years, there have been leaders within the CIA and DoD who appreciate the partnership and understand the importance of collaboration to achieve America’s national security objectives. Although these leaders have made strides toward institutionalizing the partnership, parochial bureaucrats replacing the current collaborative leaders could halt or degrade progress. Even if the current crop of leaders remains in place, their collaborative efforts could be affected by changing national security requirements and the absence of operations to drive CIA/DoD collaboration.

Strategic refocusing might also result in a changing partnership between the U.S. military and the CIA. For example, over the last decade, the CIA has largely served in a “supporting” role to the military’s “supported” status.³⁶ The end of the Iraq War and the planned drawdown in Afghanistan could result in significant role reversals between the two organizations. At the very least, the interaction between the two organizations will evolve from a predominantly war-focused, military-driven relationship into a non-war zone partnership. This dynamic change marks an important period in the CIA/DoD relationship, one that will determine if the comprehensive partnership of the last twelve years is permanent or fleeting.

Conclusion

This past December marked 22 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a major “strategic turning point” for the U.S. and an operational transition for the CIA and DoD. Both organizations grew out of the 1947 National Security Act, and their institutional cultures/identities were shaped and largely consumed by the Cold War.³⁷ Despite significant budget reductions and the dissolution of an enemy both organizations were created to confront, the CIA and DoD were successful in establishing a foundational relationship during the 1990s. When tragedy struck and the GWOT began, the foundation set over the previous decade quickly blossomed into a valuable and productive partnership.

Although the end of the GWOT is not as significant as the collapse of the Soviet Union, strategic reframing and economic concerns are once again resulting in reduced defense spending and challenging institutional identities that were cultivated on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan. Only time and possibly another strategic turning point will determine if the CIA/DoD partnership adapted and flourished during this transitional period. **IAJ**

Notes

- 1 <http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf>, accessed on January 17, 2014.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 For military spending increases, see <<http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2013/03>>, and for CIA spending increases, see <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/28/AR2010102807237.html>>, accessed on January 17, 2014.
- 4 CIA analyst, interviewed by David Oakley, Fort Leavenworth, KS, August 12, 2012. Both the after-action review and the interview highlighted the willingness and creativity of officers to break down barriers to accomplish mission objectives. Historians within the CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence stated that interviews with CIA personnel highlight significant improvement in CIA’s relationship with other government organizations since 9/11.
- 5 E.H. Carr, “What is History?” <<http://library.universalhistory.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/What-is-history.pdf>>, accessed on January 31, 2013.
- 6 Rowan Scarborough, “Panetta Says 2013 Defense Budget to Cut Land Forces,” *Washington Post*, January 26, 2012.
- 7 Molly Moore, “Schwarzkopf: War Intelligence Flawed; General Reports to Congress on Desert Storm,” *Washington Post*, June 13, 1991, Section A.
- 8 “Intelligence Successes and Failures in Operations Desert Storm/Shield,” U.S. Congress, House Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., 1993, pp. 2–4.
- 9 Ibid., p. 6.
- 10 Michael Warner and J. Kenneth McDonald, *U.S. Intelligence Community Reform Studies Since 1947*, Center for the Study of Intelligence, Washington, 2005, p. 33 and James Lose, “Fulfilling a Crucial Role: National Intelligence Support Teams,” <<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/>

kent-csi/vol43no3/pdf/v43i3a08p.pdf>, accessed on November 14, 2012.

11 Michael Pick, “What the Joint Force Commander Needs to Know about CI and HUMINT Operations,” 2002, <<http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA405644>>, accessed on February 3, 2013 and History Commons, “Profile: Crisis Operations Liaison Teams,” <http://www.historycommons.org/entity.jsp?entity=crisis_operations_liaison_teams_1>, accessed on February 3, 2013. These organizations were used in Iraq and Afghanistan to successfully facilitate CIA/military partnerships.

12 Persian Gulf War Illness Task Force, “CIA Support to the U.S. Military During the Persian Gulf War,” Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, June 16, 1997, p. 7.

13 After 9/11, the CIA consolidated the ADCI/MS and OMA into the office of the Associate Director of Military Affairs (ADMA). See CIA Public Website, “Military Affairs/History,” <<https://www.cia.gov/offices-of-cia/military-affairs/historm.html>>, accessed on March 4, 2013.

14 Richard L. Russell, “Tug of War: The CIA’s Uneasy Relationship with the Military,” *SAIS Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Summer/Fall 2002, p. 8.

15 George H.W. Bush, “National Security Review 29: The Intelligence Community,” <<http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsr/nsr29.pdf>>, accessed on November 17, 2012.

16 Michelle R. Garfinkel, “The Economic Consequences of Reducing Military Spending,” *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review*, Vol. 72, No. 6, November/December 1990, p. 49.

17 Warner and McDonald, pp. 33–36.

18 “Commonsense Government: Works Better, Costs Less,” National Performance Review, <<http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/npr/library/nprprt/annrpt/pdf/com02.pdf>>, accessed on November 18, 2012.

19 William Jefferson Clinton, “Presidential Decision Directive-35: Intelligence Reform,” Government Printing Office, Washington, March 2, 1995, and Loch Johnson, *The Threat on the Horizon: An Inside Account of America’s Search for Security after the Cold*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, Kindle edition, 2011, p. 243.

20 “Preparing for the 21st Century: An Appraisal of U.S. Intelligence,” Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1996, p. XXIII.

21 CIA public website, “Military Affairs/History,” <<https://www.cia.gov/offices-of-cia/military-affairs/history.html>>, accessed on March 4, 2013.

22 Garry Reid, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict, interviewed by David Oakley, September 19, 2012.

23 In 2003, Colonel David Perkins was a Third Infantry Division brigade commander leading the “Thunder Run” into Baghdad. Later LTG Perkins recalled during an October 2012 interview how a CIA officer arrived at his tactical operations center on the eve prior to the assault into Baghdad. The CIA officer, who turned out to be the future Baghdad Chief of Station, asked if he could accompany Perkins into Baghdad. Perkins not only agreed, but also upon arrival to Baghdad the CIA and Perkins began to cooperate and support each other’s operations.

24 Reid interview.

25 National Clandestine Services Senior Intelligence Service (SIS) Officer, interviewed by David Oakley, Washington, August 28, 2012; Lieutenant General Kurt A. Cichowski, CIA Associate Director for

Military Affairs, interviewed by David Oakley, Langley, VA, August 29, 2002; and Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2014, p. 33. Gates mentions the improving partnership between the CIA and DoD.

26 Reid interview.

27 See <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/additional-publications/the-work-of-a-nation/cia-director-and-principles/the-office-of-the-director.html>>, for description of the ADMA mission.

28 Military liaison to CIA's Office of the Associate Director of Military Affairs, interviewed by David Oakley, Langley, VA, August 28, 2012.

29 National Clandestine SIS Officer interview.

30 Ibid. Historians within the CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence stated that interviews with CIA personnel highlight significant improvement in CIA's relationship with other government organizations since 9/11. These improved partnerships have resulted in less parochialism and increased mission success. Most important, the officers recognize the value of these partnerships and are now more receptive to engaging their interagency colleagues instead of operating alone.

31 Council on Foreign Relations webpage, January 5, 2012, <<http://www.cfr.org/defense-strategy/panettas-remarks-defense-strategic-review/p26978>>, accessed on January 17, 2014.

32 "Cost of War," Costs of War Project webpage, Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies, <<http://icasualties.org>> and <<http://costsofwar.org/article/economic-cost-summary>>, accessed on January 19, 2014.

33 Linda J. Blimes, "The Financial Legacy of Iraq and Afghanistan: How Wartime Spending Decisions Will Constrain Future National Security Budgets," HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP13-006, March 2013, Harvard Kennedy School webpage, <<https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/workingpapers/citation.aspx?PubId=8956>>, accessed on January 19, 2014.

34 "Defense Budget Priorities and Choices—Fiscal Year 2014," United States Department of Defense website, <<http://www.defense.gov/pubs/DefenseBudgetPrioritiesChoicesFiscalYear2014.pdf>>, accessed on January 19, 2014.

35 Marshall C. Erwin and Amy Belasco, "Intelligence Spending and Appropriations: Issues for Congress," September 18, 2013, Congressional Research Service, <<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/intel/R42061.pdf>>, accessed on January 19, 2014; Lance M. Bacon, "Chief, Congress and DoD Hammer Out Army's Future Manning Levels," Oct. 7, 2013, Army Times webpage, <<http://www.armytimes.com/article/20131007/NEWS/310070003/Chief-Congress-DoD-hammer-out-Army-s-future-manning-levels>>, accessed on January 17, 2014; and Claudette Roulo, "Army to Cut 12 Brigade Combat Teams by 2017, Odierno Says," Department of Defense webpage, <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=120361>>, accessed on January 17, 2014.

36 National Clandestine SIS Officer interview. The possibility of transitioning from a "supported" to a "supporting" role and how it would be handled was one of the issues the NCS officer brought up in our discussion.

37 Intelligence Authorization Act of 1947, <<http://www.intelligence.senate.gov/nsaact1947.pdf>>, accessed on January 19, 2014.