

Intelligence Community and Intelligence Committee Reform

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Before the

House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

United States House of Representatives

1st Session, 118th Congress

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee: Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the state of the intelligence community (IC).

We meet over two decades after the last major reform of the community following the 9/11 attacks. I lean against another major reorganization of the IC at this time. This is not meant to suggest that what we now have is optimal—being neither a producer nor a consumer, I am not in a position to judge—but that there is simply too much going on of consequence in the world just now to be distracted and disrupted by wholesale organizational change. It tends not to be a good idea to rebuild the operating room when a patient in critical condition is on the operating table.

That said, the Committee should look at the authorities of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) when it comes to funding and personnel and explore whether the resources given to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) are adequate. I would think it makes sense to speak with former and current producers and consumers of intelligence. Consumers should include both military and non-military, i.e., those at the National Security Council and the various departments. Such an assessment could and should also consider reforms undertaken subsequent to the creation of the ODNI.

I would also encourage the Committee to look at how the IC has performed since the creation of the ODNI. Above all, I would examine the record of analysis. How did the IC do when it came to predicting the outbreak and the course of the Arab Spring? Changes to China's domestic and foreign policies under Xi Jinping? The fall of Afghanistan? The quality of Russian armed forces? North Korea's nuclear and missile programs? Protests in Iran? Brazil's politics?

Mexico under AMLO, India under Modi, and Germany under Scholz? Post-Brexit UK? Global action (and inaction) vis-à-vis climate change and the pandemic? Where there were mistakes, was the problem organizational, procedural, personnel, cultural, or something else? What seems to account for when the IC got it mostly right?

I would also suggest the committee take a good look at the allocation of assets and how this matches up against the world. This is a demanding time. China is the most important “target” for analysis, yet as important as it is and will be to the security of this country, we simply do not have the luxury of devoting the preponderance of intelligence assets to that country. Power in the world is too widely distributed in too many forms—what I have described as non-polarity—to allow for that. We cannot afford to replicate the sort of emphasis and focus we maintained on the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Nor should we maintain the focus on counter-terrorism and the Middle East that characterized the post-9/11 era.

Going forward, the first priority for analysis should be on the principal geopolitical actors: China, Russia, Europe, Japan, and India. The IC should seek to assess these countries’ internal political, economic, and societal strengths and weaknesses as well as their national security intentions and capabilities.

A second priority should be weak states: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, South Africa and a good many others. Here one would want to know their likely trajectory, what explains it, and the probable consequences of further weakening or even failure.

A third focus would be on so-called middle powers, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, North Korea, and Iran. Again, one would want to know the likely trajectories of their capabilities and behavior.

A fourth focus should be global challenges, above all climate change and both infectious and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). What is likely to affect the pace and consequences of climate change? What can we expect from particular governments? From particular technologies? Regarding disease, it would be useful to assess lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic, prospects for future outbreaks, and assessment of the likely consequences. It is also important that the IC continue to look at NCDs given their enormous economic consequences.

A fifth realm of focus might be described as factors or phenomena with large consequences. For example, we live in a dollar dominated world. What is the possibility this might not endure? What would accelerate any transition away from the dollar? What would be the likely alternatives and with what consequences? Or take sanctions, a frequently used or arguably over-used instrument of foreign policy. What have we learned about their impact? To this list one could add democratic backsliding, both what is causing it and what can be expected. There is the growing importance of non-state actors. Demographic trends also call out for sustained analysis, as do expected innovations in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, and other emerging technologies.

I would think this committee would look at resources available to intelligence. This is a demanding world. One can imagine major military operations in three geographies: Europe as we are already experiencing, as well as the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East. Do we have sufficient funding and do we have personnel with the language, area, and technology skills adequate to the moment and to what is anticipated? If not, how might this gap be closed? Is there enough opportunity to bring in functional and regional specialists from the outside for projects or limited terms?

Throughout history there was often the challenge of too little information; in today’s world there is the opposite reality, one of massive information availability and flows. Does the IC have a good handle on open-source information? Is there a bias in favor of secret material that is no longer warranted? Is open-source and classified material adequately integrated? Such questions suggest that the more important reforms are likely cultural and procedural rather than organizational. My sense is to avoid creating a stand-alone open-source-only agency,

something that would seem to compound the problem rather than address it, and instead to focus on the effective integration of classified and non-classified material by analysts.

One final subject for committee scrutiny comes to mind. Over the last year we have seen growing use of selective release of classified material in order to alter behaviors of friends and foes alike. A year ago it involved Russian preparations for war and more recently China's consideration of increased help to Russia. What have we learned about this tool and how should it be employed in the future? Have we done a good job of weighing the potential costs to sources and methods against the potential benefits of sharing this intelligence? A related inquiry might focus on the question of alleged over-classification of material.

There are of course any number of other subjects that could be usefully addressed, and I look forward to discussing the topics I have raised as well as others. Thank you for this opportunity to meet with you today.