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NATO INTELLIGENCE—A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS

Edward B. Atkeson

All is not well regarding the intelligence capabilities of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, but no one quite knows what to do about it. Many of us are familiar with one program or another to improve US support, but few are comfortable that they understand either the full dimensions of the problem, or why, after all these years, the problem has not been solved. Study seems to follow study; task forces meet, report, and fade from view. Still the nagging criticisms persist, reflecting the glacial pace of progress and implying that much of the effort may not have been particularly useful.

What are the real problems, and why do we seem to have such difficulty in dealing with them? Why don't we have a Master Plan, with objectives and milestones and a target date for completion? Why doesn't the Alliance move forward on a common, coherent front on the matter? Why is it that officialdom seems to rediscover problems from time to time, announce programs for solution, only to end up burying the papers in files as interests move on to other, more tractable, questions?

There are many answers to these questions as we will see in the following discussion. None of them, unfortunately, is very good. Some of them indicate that if we had a better understanding of the issues and a broader sense of the relevant values we in the US might well by now have designed a much better approach to Alliance intelligence architecture and to providing the sort of support which would be useful in wartime as well as in peace.

Who's in Charge?

One of the first difficulties is the lack of clear recognition of responsibility. Many players in Washington and in the field pursue projects aimed at incremental improvements at perceived portions of the problem, but there is little common understanding of what should be done or by whom. Many in the US intelligence community view the problem as essentially a European one. There is a school which holds that NATO's intelligence problems, as is the case with so many of its other problems, stem primarily from the political constraints of continental governments which are not really serious about the defense of Europe. These governments, according to the critics, see their strategic options primarily in the areas of detente, deterrence (underwritten by the US), and arms control. They see but marginal need for their own aggressive intelligence surveillance of the opposition, which they seem to believe is Great Power business. Investment in intelligence systems designed primarily for support of forces in the field in wartime may be even less justifiable. If the Europeans view the utility of the Alliance as one primarily for deterrence rather than defense, they would likely see their interests best served by investment in those force elements which are most visible—not in the support components—and certainly not in provocative intelligence capabilities.

Americans who entertain this view of European proclivities believe that the initiative for NATO intelligence improvement should come from Europe. The US is doing its share, they argue; the Allies should do theirs.

Not far behind this school is another American group composed of no-nonsense officials with a quoting knowledge of statutes governing protection of sensitive intelligence sources and methods. They look askance at US initiatives to strengthen international intelligence links, suspecting that the end result will be a raid on the US' innermost secrets. For their own reasons they support those who see the NATO problem as one primarily for the Allies to solve.

Still another school concedes that the US probably has a responsibility in the matter, if only because of its position of leadership. But even within this group there are divergencies. Many see the NATO intelligence problem as essentially a military one, to be resolved or managed within the Department of Defense. Those within Defense tend to view it as a problem for the theater. Theater representatives, with modest charters of authority, tend to define the scope of their efforts in the area so narrowly that a few dollars spent on an information handling system with a terminal at a NATO headquarters passes as "progress toward intelligence support to NATO." Too few people at higher levels really understand the dimensions of the problem in any event, and those who do are hesitant to challenge nominal efforts of the field for fear of provoking accusations of meddling in theater business.

There are other schools, and undoubtedly splinter groups within them. The point is that there are plenty of diagnoses of NATO's intelligence ills. Our purpose is to examine the problems as objectively as we can and to draw our own conclusions. We need first to understand the situation in Europe.

View from the Euro-Strategic Level

Since the establishment of NATO in 1949 it has been understood among the treaty partners that the degree of control of forces to be exercised by the supranational authority would be solely of an operational nature—and then only when the members saw fit to pass such control. Personnel, logistic, and intelligence matters have all remained official responsibilities of the member states.

There has been little difficulty with the personnel dimension. By and large the nations themselves know their own people best, and are usually able to provide suitable officer and enlisted personnel to staff the various elements of the command structure. As long as an individual is professionally qualified for his responsibilities in his own forces and speaks either French or English he can generally find his way in NATO.

Logistics has been a somewhat different matter. While responsibility still ultimately resides with the member nations for equipping and provisioning their own forces, many compromises have been necessary to accommodate the facts of geography. Obviously, all of the nations taking part in the defense of the Central Region (and most especially the US) are dependent upon German real estate, highways, railroads, airfields, and seaports. They are also heavily dependent upon German sources of construction materials, energy, and labor. "Host nation support" has become a standard term for dealing with many questions of a logistic nature. In addition, great effort has been made within the Alliance to rationalize logistic differences among the forces and to

standardize the design of materiel, procedures, and technical specifications. In sum, while far from perfect, logistics has evolved rather sensibly over the years with both national and international aspects.

Intelligence has enjoyed no comparable evolution. While bilateral agreements for intelligence cooperation between parties within the Alliance have proliferated over the years, progress in the multilateral area has been elephantine. The Alliance has developed elaborate procedures for melding national intelligence* contributions in peacetime, including coordinated studies, such as the annual production of "MC-161," the document presenting agreed threat information on the Warsaw Pact. There is also an array of other Military Committee papers and standardization agreements governing the handling of intelligence within the Alliance. What has not appeared in any useful form is an authoritative statement of what information the Alliance can expect to receive in a high stress, dynamic environment (such as war), where that information will come from, how it will come, or how NATO commanders can express their operational concerns to the national contributors with any expectation of receiving replies before their questions are overtaken by events.

Senior NATO officials served by American intelligence sources find themselves much better informed than their counterparts who are dependent on only that information which the member states have revealed to NATO. General Bernard Rogers, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), has commented that 90 percent of his intelligence comes to him from US sources. That leaves 10 percent for all the rest of the NATO nations combined, eloquent testimony to the great disparities in intelligence gathering and analytical capabilities between the US, on the one hand, and the rest of NATO, on the other. The US has developed global systems which the others simply cannot match. As far as intelligence is concerned, within NATO the US stands as a giant among midgets. The peculiar point is NATO's practice of treating intelligence as a national responsibility—as though each of the members could serve the needs of its own forces in war as well as in peace. Implicit in this doctrine is the very dubious proposition that the combat effectiveness of Dutch forces, for example, served by Dutch intelligence, is the best we can expect from the Netherlands. This doctrine does not address the question of what might be gained by establishing links between non-US forces and the US intelligence system. While an arrangement for bilateral sharing of intelligence at high levels has value, it is not the same as feeding operationally significant intelligence directly to allied forces in the field on a time-sensitive basis.

Recently, the problem has acquired a new dimension. SACEUR has developed a concept for European defense which encompasses a capability for mounting deep strikes into enemy rear areas to place follow-on Soviet and

*The term "national intelligence" has two meanings. In one sense it applies to the level of interest, i.e.: national level as opposed to theater (operational) or tactical level. In another sense it refers to national identity (e.g.: US) as opposed to alliance (NATO) intelligence. The latter sense is intended here.

other Warsaw Pact formations at risk while hostile first-echelon forces are being engaged at the border. Essential to the concept is a capacity for near-real-time intelligence on second- and third-echelon dispositions and high quality links between the intelligence apparatus and appropriate deep strike units. At present the US has a virtual monopoly on means for obtaining the requisite intelligence. If the concept is to become a viable one for the Alliance, of course, the machinery must be expanded.

View from the Operational Level

General Chalupa, a German four-star officer, commands Allied Forces Central Europe (AFCENT), stretching some 700 kilometers from the Elbe River in the north to the Austrian border in the south. Immediately subordinate to him are the Northern and Central Army Groups (NORTHAG and CENTAG) and Allied Air Forces Central Europe (AAFCE), with its subordinate 2nd and 4th Allied Tactical Air Forces (ATAF). Whenever the various national force components may be "chopped" to his operational control, General Chalupa can expect to receive much of the benefits of the organic reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities of those forces. He has no other intelligence collection or production assets. His battle staff includes an intelligence section, nominally large enough to perform current information assessments and to permit 24-hour operation in the field, but it is neither designed as an intelligence operating agency nor is it supported by one. General Chalupa's principal battle management functions are the allocation of forces to threatened areas, particularly with regard to the employment of reserves. The US III Corps is designed as his major tool for influencing the early phases of the battle. To accomplish these responsibilities he looks for substantive intelligence from higher and lower headquarters.

What of the higher and lower headquarters? Above is the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), below (on the ground) the army groups. These headquarters benefit to a certain extent by being one step closer to the real sources of intelligence, the national ministries of defense, on the one hand, and to the (national) corps, on the other, but like HQ AFCENT, they have no intelligence support of their own. The national entities are presumed to have access to consequential intelligence support through national channels, but with certain exceptions, the headquarters of the Allied Command Europe (ACE) constitute a large network of operational nodes of control with limited capacity for determining the state of play on the potential battlefield.

The theoretical solution to the problem is the expeditious contribution of pertinent intelligence by the member states of the Alliance. In practice we find little basis for confidence that adequate attention has been paid to the needs of the operational headquarters in wartime. Remarkably, seldom have any of the members exhibited a serious sensitivity to the urgency of the wartime function.

Nub of the Problem

Here we begin to approach the heart of NATO's intelligence problem—and the very point which has hobbled so many attempts at improvement over the years. Since its inception, NATO has essentially opted out of the intelligence business. The command structure is almost totally innocent of any inherent capability for detecting or analyzing what is really going on. An almost pathetic aspect of the situation is the occasional effort by well meaning national officers to find ways to feed the very life blood of a viable defense system (intelligence) into a virtual corpse. Farther down the line, in the corps sectors of the less well endowed nations, allied forces charged with serious defensive responsibilities have little intelligence support and no way to

connect with the US system to enhance their combat effectiveness. Not only is the operational command system virtually blind, but the subordinate national entities have intelligence capabilities so varied as to promote conflicting views of the battlefield among the various national and international headquarters. Instead of enhancing the effectiveness of the defense, the NATO intelligence system—which exists more by accident than design—seems to offer more opportunities for dysfunction than for positive support of the enterprise. Without a common intelligence system, over which it has some influence and directive authority, the Alliance is virtually doomed to drift, while a few concerned member nations—most particularly the US—seek inefficient quick-fixes for treating the symptoms of a disease which, if put to the test of combat, has high probability of proving fatal.

The impression we get is that while it may have made sense in the late 1940's to designate intelligence as a national responsibility because of broad similarities in intelligence gathering capabilities among the nations, the matter is much less clear today. The United States, with its global systems, backed by an intelligence budget exceeding the total defense expenditures of most of the other members, has developed systems for supporting its tactical forces which the others can never hope to match. And still they must all be prepared to fight a common enemy on a common battlefield.

Second Order Problems—View from the Tactical Level

As if these problems were not enough, we must look further to grasp the magnitude of the difficulties we create for our own forces by continued adherence to time-honored principle. The concept of national responsibility for intelligence has permeated and manifested itself in virtually all aspects of US force design, training, operations, and deployment. As pervasive as the effects of the doctrine are, we find in the field the potential for a great dilemma: either the acceptance of rigid adherence to the integrity of national formations at the corps level, which could mean collapse of a front while units of a different nationality stand idly by, or the severence of critical intelligence links to our own units whenever they are subordinated to the control of another national corps. This dilemma is easily understood by a glance at the map which depicts the basic scheme for the defense of the Central Region.

From north to south, corps sectors have been designated for the Netherlands, West Germany (I Corps), UK, Belgium, West Germany (III Corps), USA (V and VII Corps), and West Germany (II Corps). The West Germans also share responsibility with the Danes for defense of the Schleswig-

Corps Sectors of Military Responsibility in NATO's Central Region

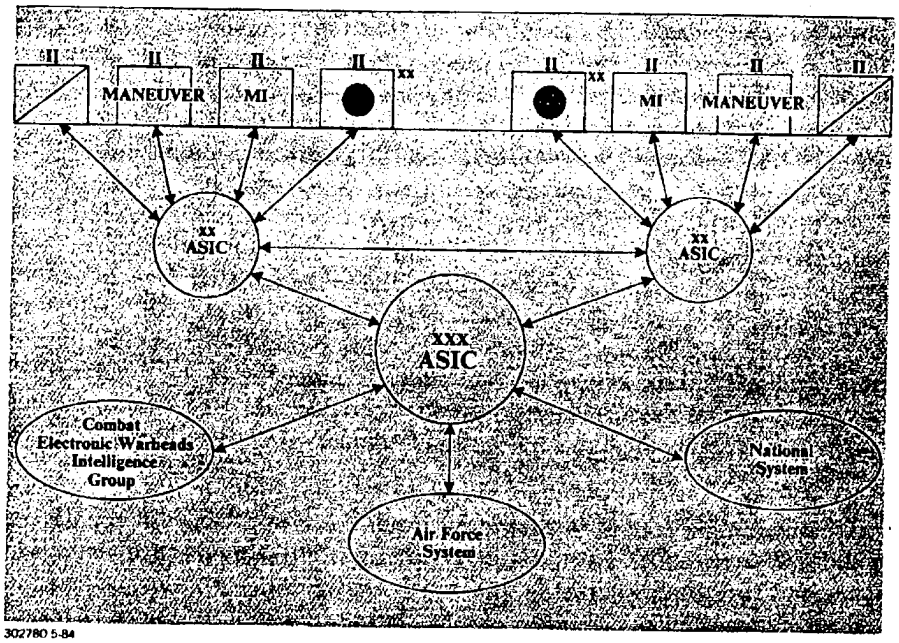
Holstein area north of the Elbe in the Allied Forces Northern Europe (AFNORTH) Region. The scheme illustrates the multilateral nature of the defense and the fundamental requirement for as much homogeneity of combat effectiveness as possible across the front to minimize risks of a breakthrough in a weak sector which could lead to envelopment of all friendly forces.

Notably lacking in the scheme is any central entity or authority for coordination of the various national intelligence efforts. They are presumed to be operating in support of the national sectors with appropriate information being fed up the chain from the corps headquarters or injected into the ACE structure from above (e.g.: from a national ministry of defense).

In an extract from US Army doctrinal literature, we see the All-Source Intelligence Center System (ASICS) serving the corps and subordinate division level headquarters tying in with other relevant US centers. There is no specific requirement for support either to the ACE structure or to allied forces responsible for the defense of other sectors. The same Alliance doctrine which designates intelligence as a national responsibility effectively obviates concern within the national corps for coverage of other sectors. US Army doctrine clearly reflects this in the tightly closed national system shown. While nominal allowance is made in Army manuals for providing intelligence support to combined (international) operations "in accordance with multinational agreements," there is no provision for coverage of other than US sectors, and the principal thrust is clearly inward toward national element support.

Army doctrine envisions the point of interface between national and tactical levels of intelligence at corps. This accords with the NATO concept, but it does not take into account significant dynamic pressures on the battlefield which militate for frequent mixing or cross-assignment of differing national units within the command structure. Simulations of hypothesized combat in the ACE Central Region invariably result in the assignment of US divisions and separate brigades to allied corps and vice versa. The pressures for

All-Source Intelligence Center System



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using whatever reinforcing troops may be available (and they are usually US) to avert an enemy breakthrough invariably outweigh arguments for a tidy command structure. Units are sent where they are most urgently needed, not where they might be administratively most convenient.

The awkwardness of this development is apparent. US units assigned to other than US corps can expect to have their vital links to US national intelligence sources severed at the very moment they may need the support most acutely. Allied corps, like ACE operational headquarters, have no access to US intelligence, so amputation is virtually complete. Worse yet, most Army theater intelligence aviation units intended for providing support to tactical commanders are concentrated at the corps level. The intermingling of units across the front thus isolates these intelligence resources from many of their intended beneficiaries. Moreover, the resources may be largely wasted because, while the sensor platforms continue to fly the US corps sectors, the corps themselves may be assigned allied units which have no terminals for receiving the sensor products.

We must conclude that while our Alliance doctrine rather obliges us to behave as we do, the practice of assigning US tactical intelligence aviation and the large ground mobile terminal complexes for down-link of national intelligence systems to corps level is wasteful and illogical. Absent a higher national level of control within the theater, these systems must be packed into the corps structure, sardine fashion. (More than one humorist has compared the concentration of vehicles connected with these systems in a corps sector with patterns in the Pentagon parking lot.)

Quo Vadis?

Military absurdities are traditional reservoirs for humorists, but the defense of Europe is a serious subject. We need to address the problem of NATO intelligence seriously. Whatever the political constraints and parochialisms which inhibit reform, we do ourselves little credit by prolonging our marginal attempts at symptomatic treatment. We must address the crux of the matter. This is not a narrow technical question which can be left to the generals—least particularly to those with the limited resources and policy prerogatives of field commanders. The fundamental question goes to the heart of the Alliance. Major issues of national pride, technical capacity, and strategic design are at stake. There must be a reconciliation between the great differences in intelligence gathering and processing capacities of the United States and its allies that we have noted, on the one hand, with the obsolete doctrine of intelligence as a national responsibility within NATO, on the other. There must also be a reconciliation between the needs for protection of sensitive US intelligence sources and methods and the urgency of providing

the Alliance with a coherent, in-place warfighting intelligence system capable of providing the quality and level of detail necessary, on a time-sensitive basis, to all echelons of force control, from the lowest maneuver elements to the highest authorities. The mechanisms must stretch laterally from the North Cape of Norway to the eastern provinces of Turkey, and cover the territories of the Warsaw Pact to the east and the seas westward to the shores of the North American continent. This is no undertaking for the faint hearted or the parochial bureaucrat. It calls for imagination, patience, and perseverance.

Where to start? Central Europe. This is the stage of ultimate decision for the Alliance. As systems and procedures are established and developed for the AFCENT Region, they should be extended outward to encompass the entirety of the Alliance. Each step should be undertaken in consultation with the affected allies so that the greatest operational compatibilities are achieved. We must bear in mind that intelligence is a support service—not an end in itself. It is not like postage stamp collecting where the object is the assembly of "full sets." The object in intelligence is to provide that specific information which the commander requires at the time he requires it so that he can realize the maximum value from his forces. As a support activity it must be functionally subordinate—responsive—to the field commanders. Higher commanders, regardless of nationality, must have the authority to designate priorities among competing subordinates. If, in General Chalupa's opinion, the most critical sector is held by the Dutch, that is the area which should be given highest priority. We must recognize that in the final analysis it is in the US' own best interest that the defense succeed. It is futile to ensure the defense of Bavaria under an American flag if the rest of the NATO line crumbles for lack of capability to detect and to properly interpret the rapidly changing threat.

None of this is to say that the US must suddenly go public with its most sensitive sources and methods. What it does mean is that the US must find a way to provide the fruits of its intelligence system to NATO commands and to other national organizations on as expeditious a basis as it now provides them to its own forces. By solemn treaty the US has identified its most cogent national interests with the security of Western Europe. It makes little sense to withhold vital intelligence of direct relevance to the success of the battle from allied commanders endeavoring to achieve the same objectives as we have set for our own.

Of course, we are primarily concerned here with conditions of emergency or war—far less particularly with practices in peacetime. However, in order for the physical collection means, the communications systems, the trained analytical staffs and the facilities which they require for operation to be in place in emergency or war, they must be designed, programmed, budgeted and installed in peacetime. Further, they must be exercised to develop their efficiency and to familiarize non-US NATO staffs with the products so that exploitation can be a matter of course and not a curiosity. Dummy loads can usually accomplish almost as much for exercise purposes as can the flow of actual data. A network of small US intelligence support detachments with appropriate mobile or hardened communications linking them with the US intelligence system could provide intelligence support to non-US headquarters just as US

nuclear warhead custodial detachments do in the field today to allied artillery and missile units. The establishment of the communications and coordinative means for accomplishment of the intelligence function should never be confused with laxity in the protection of significant details of the operation itself. Properly constituted, US intelligence support detachments, interfacing with relevant US intelligence fusion nodes and activities, could serve all levels of NATO and its subordinate non-US national commands without necessarily revealing details of sensitive sources or methods of intelligence operations.

A significant point must be emphasized with regard to the operational control of the organization. At each level of command the supporting intelligence detachment must be responsive to the priorities and interests of the commander, regardless of his nationality. As a whole, the organization must conform to the operational focus of the NATO force. We cannot, for example, allow the desires of a US corps commander to override those of his superiors at army group or HQ AFCENT. Each commander with responsibility for battle management must have the authority to establish priorities and to focus reconnaissance effort within his area as he sees fit. The national identity of a commander should not be the criterion by which intelligence support is assigned or withheld.

The simplest way to attain this responsiveness and conformity with the operational effort would be to subordinate the overall American intelligence structure in the theater (less those units organic to front line brigades and divisions) to NATO control. Intelligence assets with capacities for general support to the entire region should be liberated from the straitjacket of corps-level assignment and distributed and employed as is most expedient from the theater perspective. A senior US intelligence official should exercise command over all of the assets thus made available and should deploy them in accordance with the desires of the ACE commander. General Rogers, as SACEUR (not as Commander-in-Chief USEUCOM) should have full control, with authority to set priorities; within the AFCENT Region, General Chalupa's concerns should determine the operational tasking of units.

A more effective organization could be achieved by operationally linking the corresponding intelligence activities of the other NATO nations with the US theater structure, in effect creating a NATO intelligence command. Ideally, the components would develop common working procedures and sufficient familiarity with each other's capabilities as to permit easy transformation to an operational support role in time of war. Whether this is politically possible at this juncture is unclear; in any event, there should be no hesitancy in reconfiguring the major player—the US element—to meet the immediate demand for a basic intelligence support system.

As we proceed, we must be sensitive to the perceptions of our allies so that we do not create false images of a US "takeover" of NATO intelligence. The fact of the matter is quite the other way around. In a sense we are advocating a NATO "takeover" of US intelligence, with wartime direction emanating from ACE operational commanders rather than from US administrative headquarters. This may be a difficult concept for some to grasp, particularly

at political levels where peacetime threat and indications and warning information tend to be fuzzed with political interests. At such levels the effort probably could be explained most effectively as a peacetime precaution to insure wartime effectiveness, thereby contributing to deterrence and reducing the chances that the Alliance could be perceived by the opposition as a sham, an incoherent coagulation of military forces which are fundamentally blind on the battlefield.

Experiments have been made over the years in efforts to bring about a sensible use of the great American intelligence capabilities for support to tactical commanders. Unfortunately, as we have seen, too many of the efforts have been poorly focused, inadequately conceived, and relegated to officials too low on the policy ladder. The matter is now becoming even more urgent as we enter the era of greater reliance on prompt battlefield intelligence to "see deep" and to strike simultaneously with front line and deep strike units.

We need a much better understanding of the problems at all levels, and we need relief from obsolete doctrine. It is not a task for any single level of responsibility. In the US Government there should be a National Security Council senior interdepartmental group (SIG) to formulate policy on NATO intelligence matters and to coordinate the efforts of the various agencies and departments on the subject. At NATO, the US Mission and the Senior US Representative to the NATO Military Committee should be focal points for reshaping NATO doctrine on intelligence to secure Alliance understanding and cooperation in the development of a viable warfighting support intelligence system.

Within the US Department of Defense there necessarily will be a redefinition of past guidance to the services to clarify responsibilities for intelligence support to the Alliance. The Department of Defense will have to work closely with the Department of State to resolve "burden sharing" issues with the allies. If the US is to pick up responsibilities for virtually all operational intelligence for the Alliance in wartime it should be compensated by relief in other areas. Tradeoffs should be designed which will increase the overall strength of the common defense.

US military service programs and budgets will be affected, and some priorities will require reordering in order to fit the new concept. Service agencies for doctrinal development and equipment research and development will also require much more specific guidance in order to fulfill their roles in the effort. The need for appropriate force training exercises and professional education of the officer corps will also have to be taken into account.

The core problem is deeply embedded in decades of custom and practice, and will not easily be overcome. Nevertheless, if we are sincere in our oft-repeated protestations about a search for a viable conventional warfighting capability in Europe, we must soon get to the heart of the matter and put the critical intelligence component of that capability in order.

~~*This article is classified SECRET/NOFORN.*~~