

**Prepared Remarks for 2008 ODNI Open Source Conference
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The Best Open Sources

Good morning. What I would like to do this morning in our abbreviated session is to throw out a few ideas about the characteristics of the best open sources.

As a starting point, I'd like to offer an observation about the conference. Our discussions this year have moved well beyond the "whether and why" of using open sources in American intelligence - the philosophical issues -- and much more about taking on the legitimate challenges and opportunities - the "how" -- associated with using open sources in an intelligence enterprise. We have moved well beyond the myth that open sources are "free, cheap, and easy" or the myth that secrets no longer matter in an explosively open world.

What are the best open sources? Rather than give you the ones that are my preferences, let me suggest that they are always contextual, based upon what you need to know? But I do believe that we define some characteristics of those sources. Let me offer three this morning:

Analysis

First, the best open sources are the ones that are highly analytic in nature, and directly contribute to the analytic mission. They provide context, perspective, and insight.

We live in interesting times. Technologists tell us that data, computing, storage will be ubiquitous in five years. Give 'em ten!

If you are a student of U.S. intelligence, you also know that the functions of analysis and open source - historically, two of the most under-valued dimensions of intelligence - are under their most important scrutiny in almost five decades. That's a good thing. Some of you know, for example, of the ODNI's Analytic Transformation efforts that run parallel to this one.

If you study U.S. intelligence you will know that we have for some years imagined in intelligence a state of "persistent surveillance" the notion that combinations of sensors could provide us some information about anything we wanted to know, all the time. Some of the ideas there were difficult to implement or unaffordable.

But I'd suggest we think about it a different way: when you remove the boundaries between secret and open information we're there.

The problem in this world, one awash in data, is the ability of anyone – junior analysts, politician, ideologue – to dip into that data either innocently or deliberately and find seven pieces of information that prove any point that they want. This is going to place a large premium on the questions that intelligence analysts ask, how their analysis is conducted, how it is critically reviewed, and other criteria.

Analysis and open source in this world, ladies and gentlemen, cannot survive without each other. They are necessary bedfellows for substantive and bureaucratic reasons.

Diversity of Sources

Second, the best open sources are those that combine the best elements of the physical domain, the electronic domain, and human expertise. Each has comparative advantages relative to the other.

The problem here is that there's a wide variation in our emphasis and understanding of these comparative values, and their complementary strengths. In the physical domain, we seem to have forgotten many of the skills associated with acquiring and exploiting good old fashioned books, maps, specialized dictionaries and other sources that represent important open sources. Long after they were left for dead, there's a new day for folks in the library sciences and others that help us manage information.

The electronic domain – what is available in cyberspace – is of extraordinary potential. (This is evident from the many strong capabilities we see at the exhibits). This is the area that captures the multitude of our attention, although a newer problem emerges when some companies with state-of-the art capabilities shy away from helping the government for reasons that I'll talk about in a minute.

The human domain – human expertise – still remains largely unexplored in terms of getting access to it, evaluating it, and using it within an overall analysis. Far beyond the traditional workshop or conference approach is emerging many new methods for evaluating human expertise precisely, immediately, collectively, and continuously, over time. Even good enough for intelligence purposes. In a world where each of us proudly promote our networks, the key is being able to use those networks dynamically, and with confidence, to understand exactly what we need to.

Ease of Use and Access

Finally, the best open sources are ones that are devoid of unnecessary control and regulation. Doug Naquin set this discussion up for me nicely yesterday when he told us that “the more successful we are, the harder it gets”

Why is that? Because a combination of tradition and culture in intelligence holds a disbelief in the possibility that for any single topic – including very sensitive ones – can be credibly understood from “outside” the system. Another myth we have been able to debunk together is that open sources are good ONLY for generally open topics like trade and finance.

As we work through that perspective, what emerges is a series of very important issues at the seams between open and secret information, but especially open source and HUMINT and open source and SIGINT. We have to avoid discouraging both people and organizations from cooperating because of what I call the “regulatory creep” associated with open source. In other words, rethinking definitions, controls, source credibility and synergies between open and sensitive sources are among the hard work yet to be done to optimize the use of both within our intelligence enterprise.

Perhaps, just perhaps, the reason that this debate about open sources has been so difficult is that it starts to strike at the question of what the government might keep secret, long an important element of strategy and tactics. But the information age seems to bring a new perishability to sources, methods and any other thing the government wants to keep secret.

Decision Advantage

Let me close with a comment on the overarching theme of the conference, decision advantage. This was the same theme of the Analytic Transformation conference in Orlando last week.

As our own discussions about the role of open sources continue, we should not forget a dimension of advantage that they enable – understanding our adversary. As we strive for crisper, clearer, and more insightful understanding of a more complex world, our ability to understand what our adversaries know – or could know – becomes at once easier yet even more important to true decision advantage.

Thank you.