



Center for Strategic & International Studies
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THE MISSING DIMENSION OF INTELLIGENCE: OPEN SOURCE INFORMATION

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On March 27, 2006, the Transnational Threats Project at CSIS hosted a roundtable to release its new report, *Open Source Information: [The Missing Dimension of Intelligence](#)*.

Judge William Webster opened this event by emphasizing the crucial need to look beyond the world of classified intelligence and to recognize the growing value of open source information. Project co-investigators Arnaud de Borchgrave and Tom Sanderson elaborated on this imperative with a presentation on the report's origins, findings and next steps.

While some in the U.S. Intelligence Community view open source data and expertise as useful tools, many do not accept open source information as a credible part of counterterrorism intelligence collection. Today's complex and multi-layered threats, reflected in the worldwide advance of politico-religious ideologies and their resulting terrorist fringe, can no longer be understood by drawing almost exclusively on top-secret intelligence reports for analysis. A successful counterterrorism campaign will not be realized without leveraging new sources of information freely available in the public realm as well as the specialized knowledge of non-governmental experts.

Richard O'Neill, President and Founder of the Highlands Group, and Jeff Jonas, Distinguished Scientist at IBM, spoke to the future of open source by highlighting the use of technology for open source data-sharing. O'Neill spoke to a growing shift in the power of information sharing away from the institution and towards the individual. New democratizing technologies (such as cameras, blogs and text messaging) are enabling people to share their "street" knowledge with the world. It is now important to engage in strategic listening to these voices for useful open source information and intelligence analysis. Jonas stressed the problems of data collection that arise from the exponential increase of available data. He introduced systems that will scale down and filter through duplicated information to minimize the level of data "noise."

De Borchgrave and Sanderson detailed the project's formation, the scope of the problem, findings and the strategic direction for the second phase of this open source study. Over the past year, CSIS worked with a talented advisory group to examine how to successfully include "outside" expertise and information in the wider counterterrorism campaign. The project leaders interviewed more than 170 non-governmental specialists from numerous disciplines, as well as current and former intelligence, law enforcement and other government officials in Europe, the

Middle East, North Africa and North America. After two international conferences, during which a wide range of experienced individuals "tested" a model for sharing terrorism-relevant information, the project concluded that new and aggressive approaches were necessary to better exploit open source information and engage worldwide expertise.

Findings from the report included:

- Government counterterrorism and intelligence collection methods cannot be properly applied without the understanding and calibration that open source information and nongovernmental expertise can provide;
- There remains a failure to recognize the new unbounded forces of international terrorism, which requires a major focus on open source collection to complement intelligence collection;
- U.S. military, intelligence and law enforcement remain seriously challenged by terrorism and in the last four and one-half years since September 11th, they have been operating with only a partial understanding of the problem;
- The effort to engage open source nongovernmental expertise across borders is meant not to supply actionable intelligence but to provide context and information about the terrorist;
- While the intelligence communities are aware of the value of open source information, there is no comprehensive program to exploit this talent. Outside experts are most often engaged and consulted in a one-off basis, rather than as core central participants in the intelligence process; and
- Unlike the Cold War, much of the value added information or intelligence on today's threat resides in foreign language databases and in foreign minds. The United States does not have reliable access to either.

Following the roundtable, the Transnational Threats Project launched the second phase of this open source study. In partnership with an international group of non-governmental experts, CSIS is now operating a Trusted Information Network that collects, shares and analyzes open source information. The focus of this network collaboration is "The Roles, Activities and Impact of Islamist Extremists on European Security".

The second phase of this project will conclude with a final report to be released in spring 2007.