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The Smart Approach to Intelligence:[FINAL Edition]

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Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has recommended a dramatic change in the management of intelligence -- the most far-reaching since passage of the 1947 National Security Act, which established the CIA. He would consolidate authority for intelligence activities in the Department of Defense under a new undersecretary of defense for intelligence.

My experience with intelligence leads me to question the wisdom of this move, which could be adopted without much fuss, even though it preempts findings of the investigation by the joint intelligence committees of the House and Senate. Rumsfeld's proposal has the potential to weaken both the vital intelligence function of providing support to military operations and the ability of the director of central intelligence (DCI) to coordinate programs of the intelligence community.

For the Defense Department, intelligence is not an end in itself. It uses intelligence to leverage military forces and increase the effectiveness of joint military operations. Intelligence provides near-real-time information that is collected mainly from satellites and other sensors, then analyzed and communicated in a way helpful to military commanders. The key elements are setting priorities for collection, processing and exploiting the collected information and communicating the results to the appropriate levels of command. Taking a picture isn't enough; it must be analyzed and communicated in a way that is both usable and useful.

The ability of intelligence to provide commanders with knowledge about the disposition and movement of enemy forces is part of the so-called revolution in military affairs that promises to maintain

U.S. superiority in conventional military forces for the foreseeable future. So, clearly, support to military operations is one of the highest intelligence priorities and helps explain why key intelligence agencies such as the National Security Agency (responsible for signals and communications intelligence collection) and the National Reconnaissance Office (satellite collection) operate within the Defense Department. These agencies, in effect, have two bosses: They report to both the secretary of defense and the director of central intelligence.

Intelligence support to military operations has a compelling implication for the alignment of responsibilities and organization in the Department of Defense. To be effective, intelligence activities must be integrated with the command, control and communication of military forces. For this reason, there has been, for many years, an assistant secretary of defense for command, control, communication and intelligence -- called C3I.

It would be folly to separate the "I" from these related C3 functions under a new undersecretary for intelligence. It would diffuse the focus on serving the military user of intelligence and undermine the integration required to achieve this end. And it would be curious for one element of the C3I function -- intelligence -- to report to an undersecretary, a position of higher rank than the assistant secretary (C3I) responsible for integrating intelligence with the other activities.

Given the central role that getting intelligence into the hands of battlefield commanders plays in preserving our military superiority, it would make better sense to elevate the assistant secretary (C3I) to the rank of undersecretary. That would strengthen this official's hand in the critical function of integrating C3I and related military and intelligence space activities of the Pentagon. It would be logical then to have an assistant secretary for intelligence reporting to an undersecretary for C3I. This arrangement would improve the defense secretary's control over military intelligence and would accelerate C3I's contribution to the transformation of the country's war-fighting capabilities.

Rumsfeld's proposed creation of a new undersecretary of defense for intelligence would also further distort the already unequal balance of authority between the DCI and the defense secretary over these national intelligence agencies. This is not just a matter of bureaucratic turf or officials' ego. While support to military operations is a key intelligence priority, it is not the only one. It is the DCI's job to manage these priorities and balance the needs of other users, including the president and his senior foreign policy team. But the proposed undersecretary of defense for intelligence would advance military intelligence objectives at the expense of a broader national perspective. Further, because the intelligence community budget is part of the defense budget, the proposed undersecretary would be in an ideal position to set budget priorities and say no to any proposal put forward by the DCI.

Post-Sept. 11 there is an urgency to harmonize intelligence priorities, particularly as efforts that support homeland security and law enforcement compete with military users for scarce intelligence assets. A recent commission headed by Brent Scowcroft, head of the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, reportedly recommends strengthening the DCI's authority over the budgets and planning of the intelligence agencies. The commission concluded that support to both military and other users of intelligence would be improved by increasing the authority of the DCI to allocate resources to intelligence agencies and requiring integration of the intelligence activities in the Defense Department and other government agencies -- e.g., the FBI. An intelligence review in 1996, carried out by Les Aspin and Harold Brown for the Clinton administration, came to similar conclusions. Based on my experience in both in defense and in the intelligence community, I believe this is the right approach.

Organization does matter, because it reflects a fundamental decision by the president about how intelligence is managed. Either he gives greater authority to the director of central intelligence to do the job of managing the intelligence community and intelligence priorities or he permits authority to be divided among a number of officials -- the DCI, the secretary of defense, the attorney general and others. Combating terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction reaches well beyond the capability of any single

agency. We should recognize that the security of Americans is better served by an approach that integrates the efforts of several agencies rather than one that permits each agency to consolidate its turf. Congress should not take action on this Defense Department proposal until its inquiry is complete and it has received the president's proposal about how intelligence should be best organized to combat terrorism.

The writer was deputy secretary of defense and director of central intelligence in the first Clinton administration. He is now institute professor at MIT.

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