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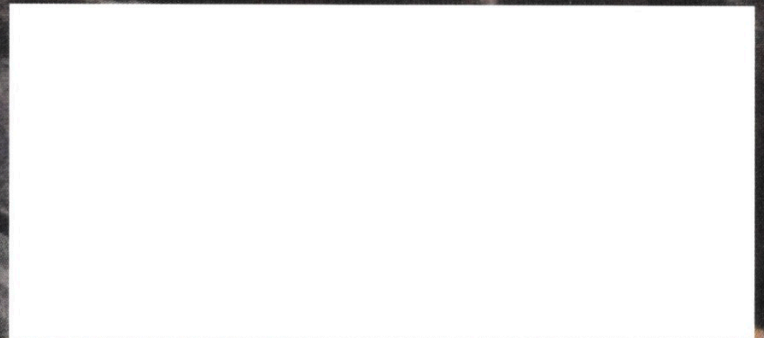
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Rogue message

Intel chief's public directive draws wrist slap, but also sparks ideas

By BEN IANNOTTA

U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Michael Flynn's attempt to refocus the U.S. intelligence apparatus away from what he calls a preoccupation with the enemy in Afghanistan has produced a torrent of e-mails, blog postings and internal discussion about the merits of his approach.

What his directive did not do when it was issued as a report from a Washington think tank was win a warm embrace at the Pentagon. There were no immediate commitments of resources beyond the surge of intelligence equipment and analytical firepower already on its way to Afghanistan. Outside Washington, Flynn, the top U.S. and NATO intelli-

gence official in Afghanistan, has supporters in the NATO leadership, Great Britain and the U.S. military. One American officer said Flynn would need support from Washington policymakers for his idea of immersing decision makers in the details of life in Afghanistan—from tribal allegiances to the status of infrastructure projects. That strategy could be the secret to turning the tide against the insurgency, but it would require “buy in” by multiple agencies, the officer said.

Top among those policymakers would be retired Air Force Lt. Gen. James R. Clapper, the undersecretary of defense for intelligence and Flynn's immediate civilian boss. In an interview in his Pentagon office, Clapper said many of the changes Flynn wants, such

as focusing intelligence collection on the status of infrastructure projects and the perceptions of Afghan people, are in Flynn's power to implement. Clapper said he found no “grand, startling revelation” in the report, “Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan.”

But Clapper, like other officials, did not know the January report was coming. Clapper learned of the report's existence from a public affairs officer and later had “what I will call a mentoring exchange” with Flynn, he said. Even so, Clapper said he continues to support Flynn as a “superstar in intelligence” who has a sense of urgency because of President Barack Obama's December pledge to begin transferring troops out of Afghanistan in July 2011.



U.S. ARMY

Maj. Gen. Michael Flynn, center, director of intelligence in Afghanistan, with Gen. Stanley McChrystal, commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, speaking with Col. Michael L. Howard, commander of 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, left.

The way Clapper sees it, the U.S. is in “year zero” of a new strategy of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan that is already shifting intelligence policy in the direction advocated by Flynn. Changes such as redistributing analysts closer to the field are could be done by Flynn in coordination with Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, Clapper said. Nevertheless, Clapper said his office would provide resources and policy changes if necessary.

The Center for a New American Security (CNAS) published the report by Flynn and

two co-authors, Marine intelligence officer Capt. Matt Pottinger, who is stationed in Kabul, and Paul D. Batchelor, a Defense Intelligence Agency official based in Afghanistan. The authors say the report should be considered “as a directive by the senior author, who is the top intelligence officer in Afghanistan.” It is available from CNAS at www.cnas.org/node/3924.

The report is one of a series of articles called “Voices from the Field” that features the views of military and civilians. It contains “an important message for the Washington policy community, which is why we published it,” said CNAS President John Nagl by e-mail. CNAS was co-founded in 2007 by Michele Flournoy, now undersecretary of defense for policy. Nagl said Flournoy “had absolutely nothing to do with the *Fixing Intel* report; she found out about it after we published it.”

Few in Washington knew the report was coming, but by late January copies were flying through networks. One officer said he saw a version sent out via the military’s secure Internet several days before publication. A spokesman for the White House National Security Council did not return an e-mail seeking comment.

If Flynn wanted to spark a conversation among commanders and intelligence professionals, that’s what he got, several officials said.

The heart of Flynn’s argument is that the U.S. “has fallen into the trap” of collecting intelligence and analyzing it primarily to defeat insurgents kinetically. That should be a “secondary task” to gathering and sharing localized information that could help commanders and decision makers figure out how to win over more Afghans to the U.S. and NATO side.

To shift those priorities, Flynn would establish Stability Operations Information Centers in Afghanistan, some of them run by the State Department, which administers development efforts in Afghanistan. These centers would be separate from the existing regional intelligence fusion centers in Afghanistan, where analysts merge information mostly to target insurgents and terrorists.

In the new approach, civilian analysts who normally do not venture outside the perimeter would be sent out — safety permitting — to act as “information integrators,” much like journalists, according to the report. Information would flow from the bottom up.

A top British intelligence official echoed Flynn after reading the report. “You’ve got to start your analysis in Sangui” — a small village in northern Helmand province — “on the ground,” said Brig. Jim Hockenhull of the Army’s intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance directorate in Salisbury. He said the “massive databases” maintained by the allies contain information that often goes untapped: “We find it in pools all over the place, without the ability of people to draw from it, to exploit it.”

Flynn’s report tells the story of a recent project ordered by the White House in

which, the authors contend, “analysts could barely scrape together enough information to formulate rudimentary assessments of pivotal Afghan districts.”

Under Flynn’s plan, officials in the White House would have access to newspaper-style

reports. These would be sent up the chain, including to “four-star generals, and even the Secretary General of NATO and the President of the United States.”

That approach would buck the conventional wisdom within the intelligence community, which says experts should assemble information into broader assessments for policymakers to reduce the risk they could misinterpret details. “In fact, top decision-makers and their staffs emphatically do need to understand the sub-national situation down to the district level,” the authors conclude in a section titled, “Tactical Intel Equals Strategic Intel.”

“We need to build a process from the sensor all the way to the political decision-makers,” the report says.

What is at play, one officer said, is Flynn’s determination not to let the U.S. miss the Afghan equivalent of Iraq’s Sunni awakening in 2007, when former insurgents began cooperating with the U.S., a development that many analysts say was the key to the success of the U.S. surge.

“The awakening in Iraq was a local thing at first. It ended up being the turning point of the war,” said Army Col. Jerry Tait, the No. 2 intelligence officer in Iraq during the Sunni awakening.

Tait spoke from Fort Hood, Texas, during preparations for his retirement. He said he spoke to Flynn about the report and provided some advice.

“If the troops on the ground hadn’t noticed

“I don’t try to track what’s going on in village X in Afghanistan.”

LT. GEN. JAMES CLAPPER (RET.),
UNDERSECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR
INTELLIGENCE



AFP

A U.S. military intelligence specialist speaks with a district government representative during a patrol in the village of Mir Kheyli near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

[the awakening], it could have been treated as an anomaly," Tait said.

Spreading the awakening from Anbar province to Diyala required resources — namely, money to pay former Sunni insurgents to go to work, and that meant a high-level recognition and embrace of the strategy.

"It was a jobs program," Tait said.

Then-Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, who was in charge of day-to-day military operations in Iraq, recognized the potential of the awakening, as did his boss, Gen. David Petraeus, Tait said. They provided the resources to spread the awakening to Diyala, he said.

Flynn wants to make sure the same thing happens in Afghanistan.

Tait said the Flynn report is generally being received well. "Out here in the field, I haven't heard anything negative about it," he said. "Everybody's looking for a new approach."

Flynn and Clapper discussed the administration's approach to Afghanistan intelligence during a visit by Flynn to Washington in November. They appear to be deeply divided over the question of what constitutes too much information for policymakers.

Clapper said existing networks and procedures are adequate to alert policymakers to whatever the Afghan equivalent of the Sunni Awakening might look like. "I don't try to track what's going on in village X in Afghanistan, nor do I think anybody else

back here should," he said.

Beyond that, he said it is widely understood in the intelligence community that the wall that existed between tactical and strategic intelligence during the Cold War no longer applies. "That is an increasingly useless distinction — tactical versus strategic," he said. "What goes on tactically in Afghanistan, Iraq or anywhere else, is strategic."

On the stability operations centers, there can't be a grand, multimillion-dollar acquisition program, Clapper said. "There's no time for that."

That said, Clapper doesn't have a problem with the centers if Flynn wants them: "That's fine with me. Whatever he needs. If he wants to set those up, I think our role here is to help him resource [it], if he needs it."

Clapper said the country's ability to gather "grassroots" information is improving because of the surge into Afghanistan. But judging by Flynn's report, he's more concerned with the type of information that is gathered, and how it is shared and reported.

Among those who spoke to Flynn after publication of the report was Canadian Air Force Maj. Gen. A.G. "Glynne" Hines of NATO headquarters in Brussels. As director of the alliance's communications, command and consultation staff, he oversees NATO's information technology work in Afghanistan. Hines said he told Flynn that online tools such as so-

cial networking and blogging could help allies gather and disseminate information. "The first step is going to be Internet access to the [provincial reconstruction teams]," Hines said.

Afghans should be brought into the information effort, he said, adding that the country's civilian communications infrastructure is improving. "Two years ago, I couldn't get my Blackberry to work." He now can, Hines said.

One possible locus for Flynn's stability centers might have been existing fusion centers in Afghanistan. The blueprint offers both praise and criticism of those centers, which were patterned after those in Iraq — "Al Qaeda's top terrorist in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, died as the result of a successful Fusion Center mission," the report notes. But because of this "red" culture — focusing on the enemy — the fusion centers have not provided much support to the provincial reconstruction teams that build wells, irrigation systems and other infrastructure.

When the authors asked people working in the PRTs how much help they received from the fusion centers, "the answer was simply, 'not much.'"

The authors don't want to distract the fusion centers from their red missions, hence the proposal for new Stability Operations Information Centers. But they will have to assemble these centers fast.

July 2011 is coming very quickly. ■