
Shedding Light on the Secret World

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Hamilton Bean: *No More Secrets: Open Source Information and the Reshaping of U.S. Intelligence*

Praeger, Santa Barbara, CA, 2011, 218 p., \$49.95.

Robert David Steele (Vivas) entered on active duty with the United States government in 1976, holding full clearances until 2006. Since 1988 he has been perhaps the most ardent proponent of intelligence reform, with an emphasis on multinational information sharing and sense-making, in conjunction with a greater reliance on Open Source Intelligence (OSINT). Mr. Steele is the former Chief Executive Officer of OSS.Net, Inc., and the volunteer Chief Executive Officer of Earth Intelligence Network, a 501(c)3 public charity.

Over the years, and in various publications and forums, I have reviewed over 300 non-fiction books on the intelligence profession specifically, and another 1,500 books on reality across nearly 100 categories. In that context, I praise Hamilton Bean's volume.¹ At this time in the evolution of United States intelligence, he comes to the same conclusion that I do: too much secrecy, not enough intelligence; too much money, not enough security.

No More Secrets was published a decade after the attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., of 11 September 2001 (9/11), ten years and trillions of dollars of spending (including a trillion a year borrowed each year over that period) for a global military, the "war on terrorism," "homeland security," along with a massive increase in classified intelligence and contracting for classified intelligence. A sharp redirection was ordered of both the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) away from conventional operations and toward assassinations—from the sky by the CIA, using remotely piloted vehicles (referred to as Drones and Predators), and from the ground by the DoD using Joint Special Operations Group (JSOG) teams who are now also training assassins for other countries, including Mexico.

DEFINING THE TOPIC

As a preamble to summarizing and analyzing Bean's book, a definition of two terms is in order:

INTELLIGENCE. At a strategic level, "intelligence" has been defined as war by other means or secret war, as strategic analytics, and since 1995, as "creating a smart nation." At root, intelligence as a function is supposed to be about "decision support," but at the national level has tended to be more about "executive action." Counterintelligence within this construct is intended to root out domestic enemies of the Republic. As the world becomes more complex, and as catastrophic combinations of natural and man-made disasters occur with greater frequency, the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC) has yet to be required to provide warning for "whole of government."²

DEFENSE. At a strategic level, "defense" has been defined as the minimum necessary force in being needed to deter attacks on the Republic, and to proactively defend U.S. interests abroad, including lives and property.

Both terms are most meaningful in relation to the U.S. Constitution and its various amendments, including the First. Both terms are vital in defining "what kind of Nation" Americans strive to perfect, and how the country is perceived and received by the rest of the world.

My focus therefore—and, in my view, the focus of Bean's book—is on the soul of the Republic. Has the Republic lost its soul? Has the U.S.

government—and the secret Intelligence Community in particular—become so corrupt as to be, in the words of Sherman Kent, “beyond the bounds of reasonable dishonesty?”³

OPENING THE PROCESS

Hamilton Bean's *No More Secrets* originated as a doctoral dissertation, studying communications, discourse, and institutional resistance to change. It posits Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) as the most substantive challenge to the culture of the secret world, and examines two conflicting views of how best to address open sources: the first view, dominant to date, treats OSINT as an “in-house” function subordinate to the culture of secrecy and not to be shared with the public; the second view, persistently present but not yet ascendant, treats OSINT as a foundation for informed citizen engagement and open government, and a root contributor to an Open Society and Open Government.

Former U.S. Senator Gary Hart (D-Colorado), in his Foreword to the book, points out that not only did the Soviet Union's collapse and the emergence of the Internet occur more or less in tandem, but that the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-New York) was correct in often observing that secrecy within the U.S. government is more about keeping information from the American public than from the country's enemies and competitors

who already know much, even most of that information.⁴

Bean opens the work with a real treasure, the first documented call for an Open Source Agency (OSA), in 1969, in the pages of the CIA's in-house journal, *Studies in Intelligence*.

Bearing that in mind, while many of the in-house mandarins of OSINT declined Bean's request for interviews, he has nevertheless excelled at understanding the missions, cultures, personalities, bureaucratic labyrinth, and general outcome of recommendations to date to improve the process. While he is not getting much into the financial aspect, he observes that since 9/11, the budget of the Foreign Broadcast Information Agency (FBIS), converted into an Open Source Center, has declined by fifty percent.

He does not study the Department of Defense (DoD), where no less than \$3 billion a year is being wasted on a potpourri of analysts, studies, and other pretensions to the mantle of OSINT.⁵ But he does study the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and its use and abuse of OSINT in the context of national and federal dialogs about “national security.” And he concludes that “national security” is not an objective, universal, or stable phenomenon with fixed assumptions or expressions, but rather that the term serves as a touchstone for deep ideological, bureaucratic, and financial struggles for primacy among competing elements of government. Bean quotes one of his

sources noting impediments: "The biggest barrier to open source... is the closed source intelligence community.... [T]here is no question that the secret side has interfered with the development of a full and complete open source capability."

My appreciation for Bean and his work grows throughout the book for one simple reason: this book and its author have integrity—they represent as ably as possible the role that open sources, and the inclusion of citizens in the national dialog about what kind of nation and what should be done or not done "in the People's name," must play in a robust democracy. Bean is particularly compelling in observing that open sources of information, fully shared with citizens, might have prevented the abuse of power since 9/11.

Minor Drawbacks

Two small negatives slightly weaken *No More Secrets*, both very serious aspects of the communications discourse Bean seeks to study. He accepts "secrecy" and "intelligence" as interchangeable terms—they are not. He also tends to accept the disdainful classification of OSINT by the IC's secret mandarins as nothing more than information. This is not correct either. Dr. Joseph Markowitz, the only lasting Director of the Community Open Source Program Office (COSPO)—until its dismantling by then-Deputy Director of Central Intelligence for Community Management, Joan Dempsey—sought

to distinguish among data, information, intelligence (decision-support), and validated intelligence (only the all-source analyst can validate OSINT). Intelligence is a process that integrates the definition of requirements, collection management, source discovery and validation, multi-source fusion, machine and human translation and analytics, and the timely presentation of a compelling actionable document to a "decider." In my view, the darkest secret of the U.S. secret world is that it does not really "do" intelligence. Instead, it is driven by dollars for collection, nothing for processing, and only a slight regard for humans, be they collectors, analysts, or external subject matter experts.

Hamilton Bean's marvelous final chapter, "Open Source, Democracy, and the Future of U.S. Intelligence," can and should be used as a stand-alone extract for courses about intelligence, governance, society, and ethics.⁵

REFERENCES

¹ All reviews can be viewed within each of the 98 categories at Phi Beta Iota the Public Intelligence Blog (<http://www.phibetaiota.net>). The majority of the intelligence reviews can be viewed at *Worth a Look: Book Reviews on Intelligence (Most)* easily found online by searching for <intelligence (most)> without the brackets.

² The easiest way to understand the huge chasm between what the U.S. secret world does and what the Whole of

Government needs is to consider the following four references together, all at Phi Beta Iota and easily found by searching for their full title: "Perhaps We Should Have Shouted: A Twenty-Year Retrospective," *Journal of Public Intelligence (JPI)*, 3 August 2009; "Intelligence for the President—AND Everyone Else" *Counterpunch*, 2–3 March 2009; "Rebalancing the Instruments of National Power—Army Strategy Conference of 2008 Notes, Summary, & Article," *JPI*, 9 May 2009, and "Open Source Intelligence," in Loch K. Johnson, ed. *Strategic Intelligence* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), Volume 2, Chapter 6, pp. 95–122.

³ This quote appears in C. Michael Hiam, *Who the Hell Are We Fighting?—The Story of Sam Adams and the Vietnam Intelligence Wars* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth, 2006), p. 122.

⁴ See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Secrecy: The American Experience* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁵ In "The New Craft of Intelligence," forthcoming in Robert Dover, Michael Goodman, and Claudia Hillebrand (eds.), *Routledge Companion to Intelligence Studies* (Routledge, 2012), I outline my vision for the future of intelligence and integrity. It is available online at Phi Beta Iota the Public Intelligence Blog.