**SUBJECT: Presidential Intelligence in Support of Presidential Agenda**

DATE: 25 June 2018

**1. Background.** The US secret intelligence community provides “at best” 4% of what the President needs, and virtually nothing for most Cabinet leaders.[[1]](#footnote-1) It fails to address eight of the high-level threats to everyday Americans,[[2]](#footnote-2) does not do “compare and contrast” analysis (for example in relation to trade and specific industrial competitiveness) and over-invests on expensive secret technical collection of which it only processes 1% while neglecting human and open sources as well as multi-lingual holistic analytics and true cost economics. At the same time, according to Ellen Seidman, a former Special Assistant to the President on the National Economic Council, “*Treasury, Commerce, and the Fed are terrible at the business of intelligence – they don’t know how to produce intelligence.”* A national open source intelligence capability has been discussed at the national level five times: in the National Security Act of 1992 (not enacted); the Aspin-Brown Commission (recommended as a top priority); the 9/11 Commission (recommended as a separate agency); and with individual senior Office of Management and Budget (OMB) officials (O’Keefe in 2000, Perloff in 2010). What the secret world calls Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) now is passive and fractional – nothing more than online monitoring.

**2. Challenges.** Amy Zegart, a protégé of Condi Rice, concluded in a PhD dissertation subsequently published as a book that the dysfunctionality in US secret intelligence is so broad and so deep that it cannot be transformed unless the President personally commits to demanding a total transformation. “Fix big” or don’t fix at all. The secret intelligence community has with malice aforethought refused two major transformative opportunities since the late 1980’s: Open Source Intelligence (OSINT), which can answer 80-90% of all Executive decision-support needs for under $3 billion a year (with the advantage that the decision-support can be broadly shared with Congress, allies, media, and the public); and Thin Thread, the meta-analytics program that can rapidly identify illicit financial transactions as well as all smuggling channels, simply by looking at existing open as well as secret databases. The “leadership” of the secret intelligence community is focused on budget-building instead of mission accomplishment.

**3. Opportunity.** The President is not being well-served, and the public is not receiving a good return on an investment of over one trillion dollars spent on secret collection since 9/11. If the President’s agenda is to receive decision-support for all policy domains at all four levels of action (strategic, operational, tactical, technical), a Presidential Initiative is required. The President can mandate the creation of an Open Source Agency (OSA) to serve as his personal public intelligence agency, separate from the secret intelligence community but providing all that it collects, processes, and analyzes to the secret world. Such an agency, at an Initial Operating Capability of $125 million toward a Final Operating Capability (FOC) of $3 billion a year, could fully integrate Thin Thread into its open big data operations, and provide the President with “good enough” very inexpensive decision-support covering all threats, all policies, and all costs. There is no finer way of reinforcing the President’s agenda going forward, with the added advantage that most – not all – of the decision-support can be shared with the public.

**4. Additional.** The OSA can help downsize and reinvent both government and secret intelligence.

1. According to General Tony Zinni, USMC, then Commanding General US Central Command, while running 2 wars. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In this priority order: poverty, infectious disease, environmental degradation, inter-state conflict, civil war, genocide, other atrocities including human trafficking, proliferation, terrorism, and transnational crime. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)