

**100 EMIRATES LECTURE SERIES**

**The Future of Intelligence  
in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Mark Birdsall**



**The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research**

## **The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research**

The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR) is an independent research institution dedicated to furthering the scientific investigation of contemporary political, economic and social matters pertinent to the UAE, the Gulf and the Arab world. Since its establishment in 1994, the ECSSR has been at the forefront of analysis and commentary on emerging Arab affairs.

The ECSSR invites prominent policy makers, academics and specialists to exchange ideas on a variety of international issues. The *Emirates Lecture Series* is the product of such scholarly discussions.

Further information on the ECSSR can be accessed via its website:  
<http://www.ecssr.ae>

### **Editorial Board**

Rashed Al Shamsi, *Editor-in-Chief*

**EMIRATES LECTURE SERIES**

**– 100 –**

**The Future of Intelligence  
in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Mark Birdsall**



Published by

**The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research**

*This publication is based on a lecture presented on May 1, 2013. The views expressed in this study do not necessarily reflect those of the ECSSR.*

© The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2013.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the ECSSR.

First impression 2013

ISSN 1682-1238

ISBN 978-9948-14-677-3 paperback edition

ISBN 978-9948-14-678-0 electronic edition

All correspondence should be addressed to:

Editor-in-Chief

**Emirates Lecture Series**

ECSSR

P.O. Box 4567

Abu Dhabi

United Arab Emirates

Tel: +971-2-4044541

Fax: +971-2-4044542

E-mail: [pubdis@ecssr.ae](mailto:pubdis@ecssr.ae)

Website: <http://www.ecssr.ae>

## *Introduction*<sup>\*</sup>

**W**hat is intelligence? Many people believe intelligence is simply a generic term for information. It is not; it is far more important. The intelligence process is the result of raw data or information sourced from a multitude of areas (see Figure 1). The primary intelligence collection categories are:

HUMINT – Human Intelligence

ELINT – Electronic Intelligence

COMINT – Communications Intelligence

SIGINT – Signals Intelligence

IMINT – Imagery Intelligence

OSINT – Open Source Intelligence

MASINT – Measurement and Signature Intelligence

GEOINT – Geospatial Intelligence

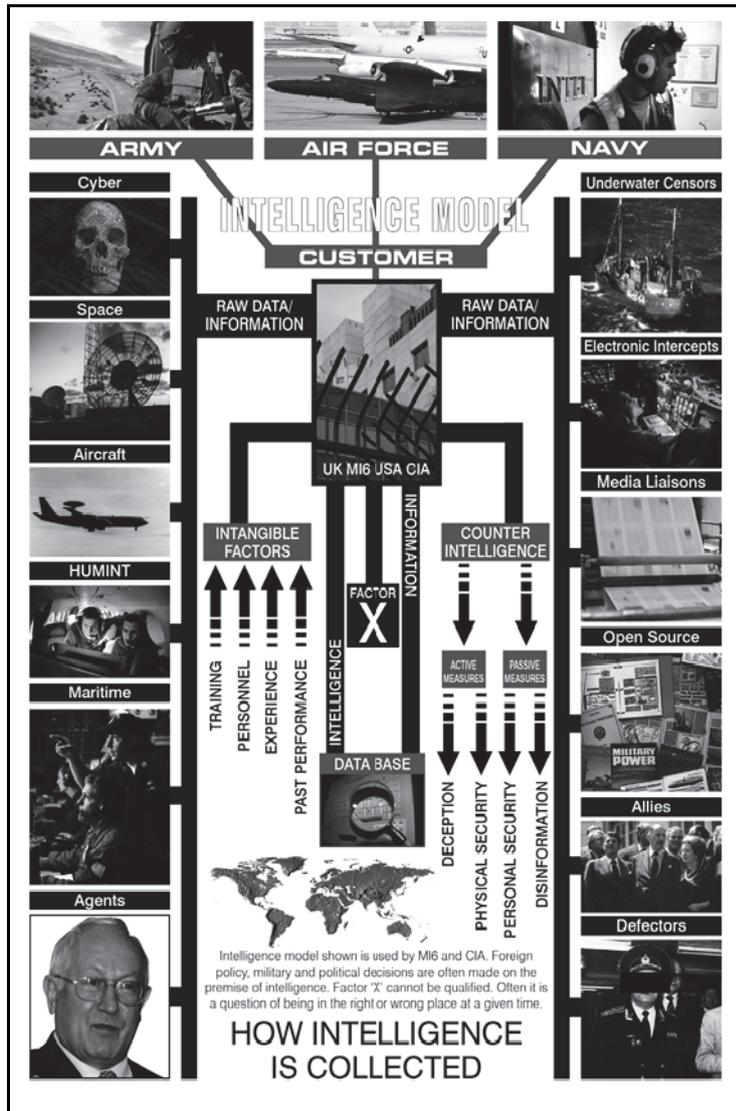
TECHINT – Technical Intelligence

FININT – Financial Intelligence

---

<sup>\*</sup> This paper is dedicated to Donald Plisko, who served with the National Security Agency from 1954 to 1979.

**Figure 1**  
**Intelligence Gathering Process**



This listing is far from concise and within many of the topics numerous, other elements exist. A more recent addition that sits comfortably alongside these subjects is intelligence gleaned from cyberspace (CYBINT). Similarly, new phrases and terminology appear frequently as intelligence collection evolves. Air, land, sea and space intelligence all fall within these collection categories. The most controversial method of securing intelligence is often referred to as espionage. OSINT is perhaps the largest provider or category where information can be gathered and secured, whilst HUMINT can often prove the most important. However, collectively, the information secured and channeled through these collection points is the life blood of government. Its value is not necessarily found in volume, but in its accuracy and honesty. Once information has been secured it can be analyzed, assessed, distributed, stored or discarded. Ultimately it is used by governments and can augment, drive or dictate operational decision making in all areas, including foreign and domestic policy, security, economics, research, technology, and military theaters etc.

### *Intelligence Value*

Therefore, intelligence is of paramount importance to all governments and it is a very valuable commodity. In an uncertain and changing world, its true value cannot be accurately appraised until it is tested. Intelligence is not the sole domain of government but is used by everyone in

decision making. However, in this research paper I focus only on that which is sought after and utilized by officialdom, which means examining the world of secret intelligence as seen by services and organizations such as MI6 or the CIA. Intelligence has never been more in demand; nor has it ever been more complex and difficult to manage. The world of intelligence is a mosaic of puzzles and is often misunderstood by the public. However, events over the last 20 years such as 9/11, the London bombings, terrorist attacks in Mumbai, Bali and elsewhere, reveal why it is so important that governments should have an intelligence system. Such events also thrust the subject of intelligence into the public gaze. Terrorism is simply one element that the world's intelligence services seek information on, but it could be argued that at this moment it is the most important.

Organizations such as MI6 are made up of directorates that are charged with various tasks, from counter-espionage to monitoring the shipping lanes off the Horn of Africa. Nations such as the United States have intelligence systems that incorporate and link dozens of large and small executive agencies and all play a role—from the port authority to border agencies, counter-intelligence and the domestic security service better known as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Some are linked to military intelligence services such as the Defense Intelligence Agency operated by the Pentagon. The United States Intelligence Community (USIC) is immense, and has the

ability to react quickly, operate globally and interact with its allies.<sup>1</sup> The United States is but one player in this fascinating industry and most modern nations have intelligence systems in place. Yet size does not necessarily guarantee success; functionality, finance, adaptability, resources, technical support and experience are all important factors.

### *Research Objective*

Described as the world's 'second oldest profession,' espionage was born from the often desperate need of our ancestors to find out what our adversary or enemy or neighbor was doing or preparing. Intelligence therefore, has been sought after and used for thousands of years, especially in times of conflict. This research paper endeavors to predict what the world of intelligence may look like later this century. To simply hypothesize or second guess makes no sense, there are far too many imponderables; yet there are clues emerging today, and trends from yesteryear that we can examine – as well as incidents that have changed history – and analyzing this information could provide a useful and compelling insight.

### *An Historical Perspective*

I was privileged to attend the ECSSR's 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in April 2013.<sup>2</sup> At that meeting one lecturer said the modern era of intelligence began in 1909. This is correct in that the UK established the Secret Service

Bureau (SSB), which was staffed by a few dozen military and civilian intelligence men, police officers and civil servants. A decade later the Service divided into what we know today as MI5 and MI6, or to give them their proper titles: the Security Service and Secret Intelligence Service. However, for hundreds of years Britain operated a loose intelligence network that operated spies both at home and abroad but there was little organization.<sup>3</sup>

The emergence of MI5, and especially MI6, provided Britain with a global insight into events and happenings across its empire. When World War I broke out in 1914, MI5 was charged with tackling subversion and enemy spies at home, whilst MI6 did its best to collect intelligence in Europe. Having a domestic and foreign intelligence capability proved a useful model 100 years ago, and the system has been adopted and is still maintained by many countries today. For example, Russian domestic security is controlled by the Federal Security Service (FSB),<sup>4</sup> whilst overseas the country's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)<sup>5</sup> gathers foreign intelligence. I see no reason why this should alter in the future.

In the 1930s, a new threat emerged on the horizon—Nazism. By 1939, Britain was again at war with Germany. However, by this time another operational intelligence service in the UK had been created, and one that was to prove its worth and save millions of lives. The Government Code and Cipher School (GC&CS) was born from a secret