OLAQ

July 2014

Impacts of 9/11 on Counterintelligence

Patrick G. Hagen
Naval Criminal Investigative Service

Impacts of 9/11 on Counterintelligence

by Patrick G. Hagen

Deputy Assistant Director
for Counterintelligence

Naval Criminal
Investigative Service

… the urgency of moving information to the fleet and decision-makers and coordinating global movements of personnel, while still grappling with the shock of friends and acquaintances lost, was a monumental and emotional task.

As a senior at Southern Oregon University it was my every intention to enter the international business arena. Nevertheless, I was intrigued by an announcement from the placement center for positions within the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), and decided it was worth a practice interview. The rest, as they say, is history. Upon hiring, I initially worked in the area of criminal investigations and counter-narcotics operations before my assignment to counterintelligence in the Philippines. Now, 16 years after that practice interview, I am the Deputy Assistant Director for Counterintelligence with the NCIS, an organization that is 97 percent civilian with 150 locations around the world. Such is the path that brought me to the normally hectic schedule of directing the global counterintelligence activities of the NCIS and the Anti-Terrorist Alert Center (ATAC) on the morning of September 11, 2001.

The impacts of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were profound and irreversible for the counterintelligence community and NCIS. Due to the sudden compression of time and the requirements for threat analysis, the urgency of moving information to the fleet and decision-makers, and of coordinating global movements of personnel, while still grappling with the shock of friends and acquaintances lost, was a monumental and emotional task. In the hours that followed, the pressure for information grew as people and other organizations overcame the initial shock and began to come online with an information thirst that had no historic equivalent. Initial surprise was quickly overcome by resolve. The emphasis of the ATAC has always been to move terrorism information quickly and directly to the Navy and Marine Corps. The Navy's emergency terrorist message was launched within minutes and the fleet was ready.

On a number of occasions over the past year I have been asked for sensational anecdotes of panic, confusion, or hysteria within the command center that I directed. Admittedly, there was a flurry of activity, sorrow for the victims, concern for the safety of family and friends, a real fear of additional attacks, and a level of anger percolating below the surface. All participants struggled with the desire to stay with the job, be with their family, find those who were lost, and the uncertainty of who was next on the targeting list. The tenuous control of emotions observed on the faces of our co-workers stirred the resolve of everyone, and ultimately moved many to work multiple days without sleep. The mission, the command center, and the work became their focal point.

The exponential increase in appetite for information was not new for the NCIS. One year earlier the attack on the USS Cole had caused a similar surge of activity. Lessons learned from that tragic event had already been inculcated into the task force structure and information flow processes. Speed of response was improved, command center requirements were known, and directives were readily turned into reality. The organizational machine was in high gear within minutes after the World Trade Center attacks.

What was the mission? Collect, analyze, and disseminate relevant threat information to all elements of the Department of the Navy, provide protection where possible to those NCIS was responsible for, support the overall national efforts to quickly acquire information, and prepare for the deluge of information requests. There was also an underlying recognition that we had just entered a new era, still undefined, which would change how we thought and

13

responded, especially in the information arena. Information as a business was about to make an evolutionary leap.

To put context to today's challenges, a historic look back into the past of the counterintelligence community gives some insights into how far information capabilities have evolved. In the 1980s, counterintelligence information sharing was predominantly based on interpersonal contacts across organizational boundaries and the dynamics of institutional agreements. Information was compiled into voluminous documents of sometimes grandiose size whose value was jokingly determined by the document's weight rather than content. Physical libraries of these large volumes of texts and studies, neatly stacked and orderly, could be found throughout the counterintelligence community.

These products had been developed over the course of time and with significant expenditure of intellect. The approaches to information development and use were dominated by a plodding bureaucratic methodology. Speed was not important and production was based predominantly on past needs and not current situations. These gold mines of information were jealously guarded by those who collected and compiled the information. Ironically, access to the information was not always impeded by "need-to-know" for security purposes. In reality, access was dominated by the "need-to-know where to look" in a physical building or room, or "need-to-know the topic as filed." Both of these were serious impediments to the speed, use, and relevant application of information.

The global information age that followed began to automate the electronic systems and caused a nationwide cultural acceptance that information should be more readily available. Information availability slowly evolved, becoming easier to transmit across organizational boundaries, but was still impeded by human relationships and/or institutional arrogance and bureaucratic hoarding. Notwithstanding a much more proficient and automated capability, the user was still hindered by the residual processes of the past. The automated systems were just a faster means to acquire information; the customer was still required to know where to look and forced to labor in the process of "pulling" information.

This simplistic look at counterintelligence information history reveals yet another obstacle to be overcome. The movement toward more accessible information was impeded by the barriers of information power. The "cliché" coin of the realm in the 1980s was "the holders of the most information have the power." Concurrent with the information age of the 1990s, an effort at fundamental change began in information power bases. The new coin gradually became "the speed of information transfer is the power," with integrity and relevance as key components. Organizations in a hoarding mode, making no efforts to push information to the broader customer community, began to find themselves bypassed by other, more agile information competitors. The monolithic institutions still retained significant "hoards" of information, but with digital analytical tools and faster movement of information, their relevance began to diminish as customers realized there were other places to go for information.

The antiquated approach of large products whose value was based upon size was no longer as important as the speed and impact of information. The ability of an organization to compress the time lag from the acquisition of information in the field, through the analysis process, and the ultimate transmission to a customer became the currency of value within the counterintelligence community.

Few organizations within the U.S. government have the multiplicity of mis-

> … access to the information was not always impeded by "need-to-know" for security purposes. In reality, access was dominated by the "need-to-know where to look" … or "need-to-know the topic as filed."

sions uniting law enforcement, counterintelligence, military, and security into one compact capability. NCIS developed and launched a strategy to exploit this unique capability. NCIS began to combine these disparate professions and their respective information sources to better frame the threat and to provide a unique service that many traditional counterintelligence and intelligence organizations could not emulate. NCIS also went on a campaign to place personnel within the various customer organizations to more readily understand their needs and better craft future products. Internal shifts in priorities and directed counterintelligence activities were made to match the new customer needs that surfaced during the customer integration effort. The integration effort showed dramatic differences in each customer's priorities and interests. This resulted in an information priority shift from the "cold war" one-size-fits-all product to the customizing of products to each customer's needs. Standardized approaches gave way to a continual remixing of counterintelligence and law enforcement methodologies creating a somewhat amorphous approach to the new world problems.

Due to the global nature of the Department of the Navy and the complexity of an extremely mobile force, the "pulling" of information was deemed inadequate to the organizational needs of the Department. This problem set was acknowledged by the counterintelligence community and the aforementioned integration effort provided great insights into addressing this problem. Business marketing thought was interwoven into the age-old standard military requirements process. NCIS became more cognizant of customer routines and timetables for decision-making processes, and began a transition to identify means whereby information could be "pushed" to the customer, on time, and in a more usable form. This simple concept of "push, not pull" is at the forefront of all modernization efforts by the

counterintelligence community and NCIS.

Post USS Cole, the U.S. counterintelligence community initiated a number of incremental steps to change information use and distribution channels. The attacks on September 11 took those ongoing efforts and compressed them into a six-month revolution of change. The genetic makeup of the counterintelligence community will never be the same and has forced new information-sharing initiatives that didn't exist in the past. Parochial information boundaries are crumbling, and new systems and analytical tools are displacing the traditional library and historical filing processes. These are taking the form of "piles of digital data" used by multiple consumers with diverse needs. Each consumer can produce products based upon various needs not necessarily linked to the original requirement for the data.

The competitive counterintelligence bureaucracies that entered the 21st century are now seeking ways to support and assist each other. Competition is giving way to a "coalition" between law enforcement, counterintelligence, military, and intelligence organizations. Technology is paving the way for information sharing that is not based solely on interpersonal relationships. Rather than creating redundant systems that would facilitate the "hoarding of data" in the traditional sense, these previous competitors are seeking to exploit each organization's strengths and work closer to shore up the weaknesses. Institutional efforts to control the entire global counterintelligence market are giving way to organizations seeking ways to identify their own specific "market" niches, and through automated collaborative systems provide information to the larger coalition.

Another element of change is in the analysis of information by professions and outlooks previously deemed to be only

> This simple concept of "push, not pull" is at the forefront of all modernization efforts by the counterintelligence community and NCIS.

15

supporting roles. Counterintelligence organizations are seeking personnel outside of the traditional law enforcement and military professions that have fed the counterintelligence community. Those institutions that are able to hire across a diverse professional backdrop are quickly learning that diversity of backgrounds and perspectives are sometimes as much a key to analytical success as the primary information collected.

> NCIS is drawing on our nation's diverse culture to enhance our abilities to protect. The use of diverse ideas is also the antithesis to the narrow focus and single-mindedness of terror.

The critical nature of intelligence analysts and librarian functions cannot be overstated during this new era. The compilation of information, combined with ensuring appropriate information flow, data storehouses, and pipelines for dissemination are crucial to organizational viability. Almost any organization can acquire data through field activities. It is through the analytical process that raw data becomes usable information. NCIS and the counterintelligence community are aggressively increasing the number of information specialists at the cost of more traditional assets, thus ensuring that the heart of the organization remains strong and viable. The transmission of data from the field to the analyst and hence from NCIS to the customer can be almost instantaneous. It is the ability to filter information through an informed knowledgeable cadre of analysts that impacts on speed. Information reaching a customer after a terrorist attack occurs defeats the entire mission of the organization. In the never-ending effort to provide relevant and timely information to the customer, it is critical that sufficient resources, systems, and manpower are applied to this phase of the process.

Notwithstanding the positives, change does not come without stress. One impact on this new information sharing revolution is a breakdown of the past incentive structure. Who gets the credit for stopping the next

terrorist attack? The mutual reliance on each other results in spreading the credit and making exclusivity difficult. This is further exacerbated as each organization seeks to retain identity, while supporting the coalition and balancing customer requirements.

NCIS is currently in the middle of the ongoing effort to create an environment in the counterintelligence community that facilitates daily communication among the organizations. This is necessary to meet the challenges presented by global situations that are constantly changing. NCIS is drawing on our nation's diverse culture to enhance our abilities to protect. The use of diverse ideas is also the antithesis to the narrow focus and single-mindedness of terror. Our universities, institutions, government, and for my part, the counterintelligence community must retain this ability to evolve if we are to succeed against hostile entities. It is incumbent upon those managing these efforts to ensure progress, while maintaining diligent oversight and balance in the protection of individual rights, as we strive to ensure our nation's security. ✍

Editor's Note

Click here for more information:

United States Intelligence Community
http://www.intelligence.gov/index.shtml

USIC—Counterintelligence
http://www.intelligence.gov/
2-counterint.shtml

Naval Criminal Investigative Services
http://www.ncis.navy.mil/

NCIS—Counterintelligence
http://www.ncis.navy.mil/
activities/Counterintel/Counterintel.html