Human Intelligence Operations
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Intelligence agencies gather and analyze data in order to produce information that enables decision makers to create good policies. These policies are critical for governments, since government actions that are not a part of some policy are often drowned in bureaucracy. Policies allow governments to make quick decisions, and good policies lead to rapid and beneficial results. The production of accurate information is clearly essential for the efficient functioning of a government, which risks either being mired in bureaucratic debate or making tragic decisions without accurate information. The accuracy of information depends on the quality of the data analysis as well as the quality and quantity of the data collected.

There are a variety of ways to divide the labor in intelligence agencies, but a fairly common way (used by the American CIA) is to focus on collection (operations) and analysis. Analysis is typically a desk job that turns data into information. Collection, however, is often a field assignment that finds its agents operating throughout the world. Although images of James Bond come to mind when thinking of field agents, the mercenary stories of secret agents are quite inaccurate. Field agents come in three kinds: peeping toms, manipulators, and thieves.

The role of the peeping tom, previously played by human agents in airplanes and on the ground, is today played by imagery satellites orbiting miles above the earth. The use of satellites has been broadly welcomed in the American intelligence community because of the objectivity of the images and the safety involved with its collection capabilities. Today's imagery intelligence community has made repeated breakthroughs that have led to marked improvements in the quality of the images collected. The quantity of images collected has increased as well, although this development is a mixed blessing at best, flooding analysts with data to the point of overload.

Manipulation and thievery have remained in the domain of direct human operations. Stealing sensitive documents, smuggling classified reports across borders, and convincing people to talk are the activities pursued in human intelligence operations. The quality of the data is often determined by the intelligence agent involved in the operation, particularly in the case of manipulating people to reveal what they know. Because of the shadowy and risky nature of human intelligence, governments are often hesitant to pursue and endorse these operations. Even more important is the reliability of data gained from human intelligence. As the argument goes, whereas satellite imagery is clearly reliable and straightforward, human intelligence operations produce results that are subjective and possibly dis-information. If human intelligence is uncomfortable for both the government (unreliability) and the public (immorality), why should the practice continue?

As mentioned above, imagery analysis today suffers from data flooding. This overload not only slows the analysis process, but also threatens to shut down the databases that store the images. Even if this problem is solved with advances in information technology, there will still be a need for human intelligence. Some of the most interesting (and security-relevant) facts in the world are found in documents and people's heads. Imagery analysis can tell you that troops are moving to flank an armor column and a nuclear missile silo is near an old-growth forest. But images can't determine who is ordering the troops and why the silo is in <u>this</u> forest. Signals analysis

(message interception) can provide the answers to these questions, but suffers from the same data overload that imagery analysis does. In fact, human intelligence can be seen as a peculiar form of signals analysis; instead of finding the residue of a conversation between two people, you simply ask one of the participants about what they discussed.

Intelligence agencies are basically concerned with the actions and intentions of certain people. Some of these actions and intentions can be inferred from imagery or intercepted communications. But a significant fraction of this data can only be collected through covert and/or deceptive means. Not all human intentions are spatially inferable or recorded in an interceptable medium. Because of this fact and the critical importance of quality data in national policy-making, the risks and moral qualms associated with human intelligence operations are clearly outweighed.