



THE TOM SMITH NEW MEXICO CHAPTER

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2013 MEETINGS RESUME

Wednesday, 11 September 2013

The Egg & I, Menaul just East of Louisiana

11:00 AM: Arrive, Sign in, Order Lunch **11:45 AM:** Program

PRESIDENT’S CORNER

Welcome back from summer break. I hope everyone got in some travel and/or relaxation, and is ready to jump back into what considerations of what I can only think of as the global maelstrom.

I needn’t tell any of you that the current disarray in the worldwide fabric of economies and politics, not to mention some pressing issues in the Middle East and Africa, is enough to give anyone a migraine. Egypt or Syria alone could chew up our discussions for the rest of this year, so I’m going to take a few minutes to tackle the muddy waters of the IC debate.

I am gravely offended, as perhaps you are, by the super-leakers, Manning and Snowden. Whoever gave Manning those clearances and gave him free rein should be drummed out of the service. Snowden’s theft and release of the NSA files is even more egregious, and is already having broader consequences. In hindsight (always and infuriatingly 20-20), I’m appalled that a contractor with obvious technical qualifications but no discernible education, experience or training in the art of Intelligence should have gained access to TS/SCI files in the first place. Booz Allen naturally accepted the judgment of the investigator who did the background check, though I’m uncomfortable with their lack of further qualifying interviews before turning him loose in the system. I believe the background investigation was inadequate for these clearances. I don’t care a whit about pressures of time-to-clear or costs of a thorough investigation; something fell through the crack. Having had a good deal of experience with such background checks, I know that these investigators are a) not all well qualified, b) often not cleared to the access levels for which they’re investigating the candidate, and c) often under pressure to conclude their investigations quickly and at the lowest cost. I also opine that upper-level reviews of these clearance requests by seasoned veterans were lacking, and I’m astounded by the resulting breaches.

I “get” that our Intelligence capabilities needed rapid expansion in the aftermath of 9/11, but government’s propensity for throwing money at expansions and reorganizations usually ends in prioritizing quantity over quality and rarely works out, in my view. Furthermore, although I’m fully cognizant of the value of Special Intelligence sources and methods, my experience long ago led me to a couple of (probably heretical) conclusions:

- 1) Only a small percentage of people who make it into the ranks of “all-source analysts” are actually qualified to perform analysis at that level. I was privileged to work with and for a large number of highly intelligent, dedicated and qualified analysts—both military and civilian—but there were also many who had neither the intellectual curiosity nor the critical reasoning abilities to make effective use of that highly classified information from disparate sources.
- 2) And, while acknowledging the expanded use of, and requirement for, special intelligence, I believe it remains important to mine both Secret-level and open sources, as well.

I am personally unhappy with the knee-jerk reactions to NSA’s collection activities. Of course the general public is “outraged” by revelations that “Big Brother” can monitor anything they do. The general public hasn’t the background or knowledge to permit any other conclusion. As they say, though, “some things are meant to be secret, and to be kept that way.” Snowden and Manning obviously missed that class. Am I uncomfortable with possible surveillance of my own activities? That’s a qualified “no,” depending on who’s doing the surveillance and for what purpose. Without going into who I think is routinely respectful of Constitutional guarantees and who is not, I can say that, in my 20+ years in all-source Intelligence, NSA proved to be the most vigilant about protecting the rights, privacy and dignity of U.S. citizens. I wouldn’t trust everybody with such in-depth monitoring, but if that level of data gathering is essential to our national security and the protection of our country, I’d put my money on NSA to get the job done, and to do it right.

Finally, I have one caveat to offer about Intelligence and its place in our society. The bottom-line requirements for anyone in this line of work are that a) they must recognize and accept the tremendous responsibility that such access presumes and demands; b) they must be supervised by experienced, senior personnel whose job is to see that their analytical pursuits are purposeful and focused, and to ensure that any analyst can explain, at any time, what he’s pursuing and why. It seems to me that professional oversight was sadly lacking in both the Manning and Snowden cases. In point of fact, any good analyst has an unquenchable thirst for information...and then for more information. One can never know enough, yet one can get bogged down by knowing too much; this is where focus and purpose come in, and why someone above needs to be aware when an analyst gets off track. There are reasons for “need to know.” But, at the end of the day, these activities are essential to protecting both the home front and our interests and forces around the globe.

We must try not to allow emotional, fear mongering, ignorant and misguided opposition to cripple these crucial national activities.

The preceding rant is entirely my responsibility, and not attributable to the organization or anyone else. Favorable or un-, your comments are, as always, welcome and appreciated.

CATCHING UP WITH PEOPLE

- Brendan O’Donovan is battling—and still winning—the unfortunate return of cancer. His wife assures me that he is doing well and is in good spirits, but is weakened by the treatments.
- Ron Cuellar says “howdy” from Texas, is also doing well, and wishes he were here.
- Gerre Jones has moved to Show Low, AZ (beautiful country, and we wish him well)

Respectfully submitted,

Pete Bostwick