



WELCOME TO THE CIA

By Garrett Jones

Since this is the season for gratuitous and unsolicited advice (see any high school/college graduation ceremony near you), I thought I would join in with some thoughts for General Hayden in his new job at the CIA. I am sure any number of people are sharing with him their thoughts on the future of the world; so I will confine myself to advice on the care and feeding of some of the denizens of the building where he will be taking up his new position. They are certainly meant as helpful, since his predecessor, Porter Goss, seemed unable to make it out of the lobby each morning without causing some sort of internal squabble. For what it is worth:

WE START FROM HERE

Do not try to undo all the personnel changes made by your predecessor. Some officers in fact needed to be pushed out, and as an outsider, fixing things back to “the way it was” is impossible. There may be special cases, like appointing Stephen Kappes, who left in 2004, for the No. 2 or DDO (Deputy Director for Operations) slot. However, a wholesale return will only sow confusion and resentment among the people who remained and an unjustified sense of virtue among those who return.

Stop the reorganizations. Fiddling with tables of organization is not what is needed. When the organization gets healthy, it can be fine-tuned. If there is a mandated organizational change imposed on the Agency from above, label it as such; when it is your idea, tell officers that. At least they will know the difference. But unless there is something that cannot wait, tinker with the organization later. Resist any impulse to “demonstrate who is in charge.” The Agency has never had any problem understanding who is in charge; they have, however, on occasion had trouble believing that the person in charge knew what he was doing.

As Director, you do indeed “do” personnel. Your predecessor said he did not, and it was easily the most resented remark he made during his entire tenure. The right people in the right jobs are what makes the Agency different from the other organizations in the Intelligence Community. This is especially true of the Directorate of Operations (DO), which involves only a handful of people worldwide. You have plenty of talented people working for you now; use them and do not go on a fishing expedition for the “perfect” person, especially among former Agency officers. They don’t make them like they used to, and that is probably a good thing.

YOU AND YOUR ENTOURAGE

Yes, you have an entourage. Goss let his entourage alienate the entire building before he had settled in. Better to make enemies on your own. You probably brought some military aides with you, so you’ll want to remind them that half the Agency does not know the difference between a full colonel and a milkshake; those who do know don’t care. There are GS-13 case officers and analysts working for you who have daily, one-on-one relationships with general officers and politically powerful ambassadors. Colonels and lieutenant colonels are not going to impress the natives just by virtue of their shiny uniform. Your aides have to appreciate that they are not in the chain of command.

Get out of the uniform and make sure your aides do, as well. Agency officers wear no label, so you have to ask who they are and what they do. Give them the opportunity to do the so.

Don’t let anyone be asked to “dumb down” their work product for better understandability. The Director of Operations especially has a jargon that you need to learn. If it becomes a problem, hire a retired officer to help you and your people with the cultural translation. Before you change anything in the culture of the Agency, first you need to understand it.

Get your security detail under control. They want to do the right thing, but more than one or two bodyguards inside the building makes people wonder if you are afraid of them.

The executive dining room is a really bad place to eat for anyone other than VIP guests. You will need to use it from time to time, but your staff would do better to be down in the cafeteria meeting people, not huddled up in a bunker wondering what the workforce thinks.

TALK AND LISTEN

The RUMINT (rumor intelligence) on you is that you like “corporate speak” and prefer large, impersonal gatherings to one-on-one encounters. You are going to have to work on this. Blunt, plain speech will get you farther than anything else with the Agency workforce. Most of its officers feel that they have worked as hard as they can only to be lied to. If there is something bad, they want to hear the truth; if someone erred, they want to hear that, too. If something is going to happen to them, tell them before they see it in the *Washington Post*. You are working with a bunch of spies, so you should not be surprised that RUMINT travels quickly and is surprisingly accurate in this culture. Count on it, and do not lie to them. “I do not know” or “I cannot tell you” are statements the workforce understands and they accept they are sometimes necessary; but they will almost always find out if you lie.

Wander around the building and listen to people. The workforce is surprisingly smart and sophisticated; they will usually tell you what is wrong if you give them a chance. Make time to find out where different units are physically located in the building, at least the big ones. It is amazing what you will learn when you go to them instead of them coming to you. Yes, you will be busy, but your first job, before anything else, is to make the workforce motivated and effective.

THE DIRECTORATE OF OPERATIONS*

Frankly, this is a tough room. You are an outsider with no significant HUMINT credentials. Your best move is to pick someone officers respect to lead them--meaning lead them, not manage them. When you are at some sand-blown flyspeck in Iraq, with your and your agents' lives on the line, you want someone with leadership ability who cares about you and your mission. Not a nice guy who is effective at managing his budget and paperwork.

Once you get case officers a leader, you need to support them and expect the impossible from them. Your expectations and support will drive the quantity and quality of the “risk-taking” the DO will engage in. Right now, everyone is afraid to make mistakes. They are far too risk averse. If you can make it clear you have confidence in them and will back them even if they do not succeed, you are halfway there. The DO exists to run high-risk, high-payoff operations; otherwise, they could be replaced with the *Washington Post*. You need to make it clear that you will support them against all comers as long as they are running “smart” high-risk operations.

Moreover, you must understand that not all operations will work out. (Actually, you do not yet understand , but you will.) HUMINT is about 1 percent of the Intelligence Community's budget, but 99 percent of the time you lie awake worrying at night, it will be about HUMINT operations.

You will be under pressure to start new programs and directions with the DO, perhaps one of the most touted being moving operations officers to cover that is more commercial. As with most new concepts, it is a good idea in part, but not to the degree its advocates would have you believe. A successful unofficial cover model has simply not been worked out by the DO.

The current model of putting brand-new officers in the field under intricate cover arrangements and then expecting them to go up against some of the hardest targets the Agency faces is not working. The new officers are being overwhelmed by cover arrangements, living in difficult places and attempting to be effective against very difficult and elusive targets, all at the same time.

In the long run, the new officers will gain the experience they need, a substantial weeding out of people will occur, and the officers who remain will become effective in this sort of operational environment. In the short run, there will be many problems and few effective operations following the current model. You may wish to consider an interim step, by identifying those operations officers with substantial experience levels who have entered a phase in their lives where they can accept a change in assignment that will affect their very identity. These officers would range from the newly divorced to those happy couples whose children are out on their own, who would like to begin a new midlife adventure. Those officers who are willing could be deployed to areas of the globe where they have not worked before under alias and commercial cover to handle shorter-term deployments than normally associated with noncommercial cover assignments.

There are of course some potential problems with this approach, but it does have the advantage of getting experienced people in the field under new cover arrangements in the shortest possible time. Frankly, the DO is playing catch-up at the moment with several targets, and some shortcuts will need to be considered. As with any shortcut, there is a downside. Welcome to the risk taking business that is HUMINT operations.

THE DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

This place is a mess. Since the Iraqi WMD fiasco, the directorate has been paralyzed with fear of making another mistake. The result has been the watered-down analysis that you have undoubtedly read in the last few months. This place is going to have to stop and start over. Anyone who was associated with the WMD mess--and there are very senior people still there--needs to be retired, kicked upstairs, or otherwise moved on. It may not be fair, just, or efficient, but you are going to need to do it. This action will not only improve the directorate's reputation community-wide, but it will go a long way to blowing the smell of failure out of the organization. Right now, the place is full of “dead men walking.”

* P.S. Change the name back, no one calls it the National Clandestine Service except Goss.

The second thing you must do almost immediately is get the analysts out of operations. At the moment, amateurs are running many of your operational elements, especially in the terrorist arena. The analysts were put into the joint centers to provide analytical support to operations, not to fill operational slots because there is a shortage of experienced operations officers. Like any armchair amateur, they love the opportunity to poke around outside their field and will fight any change, but that is not what they are being paid for. Get them out of line command of operations and back to analysis, everyone will be better served.

Finally, appoint a real SOB to be the quality-control officer. Here I am not so much speaking about the quality of the analysis, but about the number of hedges and caveats that are included in the analysis. If the report is so heavily hedged that it is correct no matter what happens, why is it being sent to a policymaker? It is not going to help them make a decision.

THE DIRECTORATE OF SUPPORT

You have some ticking bombs waiting for you here, and I am not talking about what problems may or may not have been left behind by the former executive director, Dusty Foggo, recent legal investigations of whom have been widely reported. In the wake of 9/11, there was an unprecedented surge in the scale of outside contracting for the services of retired agency officers and other contractors. In general, the Agency has been very well served by the efforts of these retired officers, but to put it politely, the contracting methods that went with this effort are a rat's nest of exemptions, no-bid contracts, and bad paperwork. In truth, there is probably more a problem of the appearance of incompetence than any real wrongdoing, but the procedures are not defensible. You and your people need to get a handle on this before it is raised on Capitol Hill as an ongoing problem.

A potentially more serious and difficult problem is associated with the contracting for software and electronic components in recent years, done in the name of "efficiency" and "outsourcing." This has led to some potentially disastrous counterintelligence lapses. Outsourcing and subcontracting were not well supervised, and any number of sensitive projects may have been compromised by the involvement of foreign subcontractors and manufacturers. I do not think anyone cares who makes the copier paper used at HQS, but they had better be concerned with who built the electronic components or wrote the software that is installed in the Agency's field stations. The problem is that these sorts of projects were not tightly supervised and at this point, no one knows if or how big this counterintelligence problem might be. The first step will be to stop this sort of outsourcing foolishness, and explain to all involved that sometimes efficiency is inversely related to security. There is no way to know at this time if any of our potential enemies have taken advantage of our laxity, were I in their shoes, I would have certainly tried.

To conclude, the Agency is mostly filled with bright hardworking people. It has its number of odd ducks like any large group, but give them a chance and you will come to appreciate how hard they try to accomplish their mission. If you do it right, this will be the best assignment you ever had.

Finally, good luck! A little of that doesn't hurt, either.

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