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Policy Proposal

**“Stuck in a Sunflower Field: Lessons Learned
from Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine”**

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SUBJECT: Now You Know What I Know: A Framework for Strategic Intelligence Sharing

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Introduction

Information sharing with key nations built a critical unified front to support Ukraine against the Russian invasion. The United States' decision to share intelligence established trust in U.S. leadership in navigating the issue. By sharing intelligence, the West had time to lay the foundations for a united front and deliberate their response to the invasion. The U.S. Intelligence Community needs to change its view of information sharing by adapting its bureaucratic and cultural structures. We recommend that the United States expands information sharing to nations of strategic interests through the use of Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) analysis in validating and protecting sources.

Background

The United States provided Ukraine with vast intelligence indicating Russia's plans pre-and-post invasion. While the U.S. Intelligence Community began information sharing in November 2021, communication efforts picked up as tensions increased and Russian forces amassed near the Ukrainian border. Soon agencies began releasing vital intelligence to the public with an intensity not seen since the height of the Cold War (Riemer, 2022). The events that the United States Intelligence Community predicted, proved true when Russia crossed into Ukraine with the intent to reach Kyiv. By sharing classified information in tandem with verified OSINT, U.S organizations built more trust with Ukraine, identified targets of Russia's attacks and ultimately lessened Russia's elements of surprise.

In total, the United States shared more information with Ukraine than ever before; Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, LTG Scott Berrier, described this unprecedented level of intelligence cooperation as "revolutionary" (Grady, 2022). As tensions increase globally, we expect to witness a revival of proxy wars in the near future. Russia's posture implies they do not want a direct confrontation with NATO, as seen in their caution during the Poland stray missile incident. Therefore, we expect competition between the U.S. and Russia to be through other actors like Ukraine. To ensure the triumph of U.S. interests in these proxy wars, the United States needs to commit to information sharing, deemed necessary by the Russo-Ukrainian War.

Problem Analysis

Despite the great success of the information sharing in the lead up to and during the Russo-Ukrainian War, U.S. leadership is still treating this as a "special circumstance," a perspective which needs to shift. The rapid speed of information sharing must become the standard going forward. Sharing information with the United States' allies can often be a lengthy process. This is due to two main problems: bureaucratic and cultural.

On a bureaucratic level, intelligence needs to be approved to be shared with foreign nationals. To do so, the intelligence needs to be taken back to its owner and its classification re-evaluated to allow foreign access. The length of this process is determined by the classification of the information, meaning this can be a drawn-out mechanism. Culturally, withholding secrets has been ingrained in intelligence agencies since their inception. Sharing information often poses a

risk to assets, as it could compromise sources and methods. The Intelligence Community, therefore, lacks the motivation to declassify information for sharing. Yet during crises, the Intelligence Community is able to find ways to remove these barriers and enhance the process. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial to our future success.

Recommendations

To counter the changing threat environment, the U.S. needs to posture itself to be continually involved in rapid intelligence sharing with countries aligned to U.S. interests. The Intelligence Community needs to embrace a culture of collaboration in order to protect shared U.S. values around the world. While the logistics of this task may vary by agency, we recommend two potential courses of action:

- 1) Maximize the use of open-source intelligence to enable increased sharing with allies without risking sources and methods (Gdoyle, 2022).
- 2) Establish and sustain a network of officers committed to facilitating intelligence sharing (Gdoyle, 2022).

A core facet of U.S. intelligence is sharing information without the risk of exposing assets. Toward this end, in an effort to utilize the effectiveness of OSINT across both the domestic and international Intelligence Community, we also recommend that the U.S.:

- 1) Standardize OSINT integration processes across the Intelligence Community.
- 2) Embed OSINT analysts with all intelligence teams rather than have separate OSINT operations.

In effect, these courses of action will enable the U.S. to readily share sensitive information using the cover of openly sourced information. Integrating OSINT specialists with other intelligence professionals will allow the open source information to be paired with covert information. This will both validate the open source and provide cover for the covert source, streamlining the Intelligence Community's ability to properly disseminate information.

Conclusion

Processing, declassifying, and sharing vital intelligence with Ukrainian leadership provided important leverage in Ukrainian efforts to fight back against Russian forces. The scale in which the United States has strategically shared intelligence with a non-partner nation has never been done before. To be engaged and ahead of the future fight, the continued sharing of information using OSINT at this scale and efficiency should be replicated with other partnered nations as the United States seeks to maintain order and peace across the globe.

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