

In the expectation of a Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) later in 2015 Nick Watts Deputy Director General of the U K Defence Forum sat down with Sir David Omand who was previously Deputy Undersecretary of State for defence policy in the MOD, and Intelligence and Security Co-ordinator in the Cabinet Office. He was also a member of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) as well having been Director of GCHQ.

It should be remembered that the S in SDSR refers to Security. It is expected that a National Security Strategy, as well as the Comprehensive Spending Review will feed into the SDSR of 2015. So the first question for any government has to be 'what is security?'

"It is a psychological matter. Does the population feel secure? Can they go about their business freely? Is market sentiment stable? When you have that you have confidence, you see things like tourism and inward investment. When you look at unstable states you can see that progress slows down. So it is a fundamental responsibility of Government to give that sense of confidence to the population that risks are being managed."

Sir David is careful to make the point that managing the risk is not the same as eliminating it. There are many risks in the world. Some are natural; floods, hurricanes and pandemics. Some risks come from malign sources such as terrorism and cyber attacks. The public can be protected from the worst effects by creating a resilient society. Resilience can be defined as an ability to bounce back from natural disasters or from a terrorist or cyber-attack.

In the post-Cold War era, with the Intelligence and Security Services publically 'avowed', a better dialogue can exist between the citizen and government over the work of the Intelligence community. In the previous era, the government wouldn't even admit the existence of the Intelligence Services. "Now that we live in an age of multi-dimensional threats, the government needs to explain to the public what is being done in their name. In the Cold War it was NATO versus the Warsaw Pact and 'spy versus spy'; now it is about using information to protect the public." With a nod towards the revelations of Edward Snowden Sir David explains that this includes: "How digital information is obtained for the purposes of keeping us safe."

Sir David is clear that "There has to be a deal between the intelligence community, parliament and the public. In return for empowering the security and intelligence authorities they have got

to stay within the law." He points out that Judicial and parliamentary oversight now exists, which was not the case during the Cold War. The 1989 Security Service Act and the 1994 Intelligence Services Act placed the intelligence services on a statutory footing. The 1994 act also established the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee to provide parliamentary oversight. Judicial oversight is vested in the Investigatory Powers Tribunal and the Intelligence and Surveillance Commissioners, former senior judges.

Another element of a multi-dimensional threat is that of international serious and organized crime. As Sir David points out: "The more the cyber-criminal develops methods of defrauding institutions through the internet the more we have to be prepared to take the fight back to them in the intelligence space." The 1989 and 1994 legislation enables the security services to support law enforcement for detection of serious crime – and related criminal activity outside our jurisdiction. The police need this capability to establish who is responsible for attacks and to gather evidence. But it remains the case that the Security Service has no arrest powers and therefore has to work very closely with the police.

Traditional intelligence activity in support of national military and strategic objectives still continues, to address threats such as whether the UK's interests are being prejudiced by a dictator overseas. Sir David is keen to stress that Intelligence activity is not about predicting events. "The main task of the intelligence agencies is not predicting the future. The future is, by and large, unpredictable. You need machinery that can be very flexible and swing quickly into operation when a threat begins to manifest itself. As the crisis begins to loom it can provide a good explanation of what is going on, and situational awareness and that can provide the needed clues for further investigation."

For the longer term examination of events, Sir David prefers to speak of 'strategic notice.' "By studying developments in technology and shifts in global power you hope to give yourself some advanced notice of things you might want to pay attention to. Such developments may not be inevitable but if they occur it will be important to have prepared for them. Then the intelligence community can be used to look for the first signs of those things beginning to occur."

The next step in the chain of intelligence activity is to make sense of the material obtained. This has both political and professional elements. Sir David would not be in favour of a political appointee as a 'National Intelligence Czar' in the Cabinet. The current system whereby the

Home Secretary is in charge of the domestic Security Service and the Foreign Secretary of external intelligence activity by MI6 and GCHQ seems to work, with a Security Minister in the Home Office in support. This system provides direct political accountability for the security and intelligence services.

The assessment machinery in Whitehall is based around a central point, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). This is supported by MI6 and GCHQ and by the Security Service as well as input from Defence Intelligence and the operational level assessments of the Joint Terrorism Advisory Centre (JTAC). Assembling the material is one challenge, understanding it is another. Sir David is agnostic on whether traditional Humint (Human intelligence) methods of intelligence gathering are superior to using technical means. "A country the size of the UK needs to use all the available capabilities on the problem you are trying to solve."

Edward Snowden has shown that digital intelligence is really important. Terrorist groups are now going to great lengths to avoid using electronic communication. "When you are interested in individuals – the terrorist, the criminal, or the dictator; you want information about [such things] as their location and movements, and their finances. You can infer a lot through digital traces."

The Intelligence and Security Services are funded through the Single Intelligence Account. Currently this is about £1.9 bn. Funding has increased since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and again after the attack in London in 2005. Sir David says that the greater problem is likely to be shortage of very experienced staff following these rapid increases.