Denial and Deception as an Intelligence Community Topic

The Intelligence Community performed much “stocktaking” in the aftermath of the Cold War as overall intelligence activities declined and changed focus. Events of the day shaped perceptions of changing intelligence objectives and of evolving obstacles to effective intelligence. For example, our intelligence capabilities were challenged by Iraq before, during, and after the Persian Gulf War. Further, our metal was tested by the Aldrich Ames espionage case, including revelations of Russian double agentry.

Within this stocktaking, Director of Central Intelligence James Woolsey became concerned that the Community must be vigilant against denial and deception challenges posed by the “snakes in the grass” that had become the primary targets of our intelligence collection and analysis. For example, Iraqi denial and deception (D&D) operations had reduced the effectiveness of some of our intelligence efforts, and continuing Russian D&D was exposed in the aftermath of Ames’s career as a spy. There no longer was a single “dragon” conducting D&D operations within a reasonably well-defined strategic struggle. Rather, D&D challenges were popping up in new places on new issues. The age-old subject of foreign D&D was changing faces.

Congressional oversight subcommittees and Directors John Deutch and George Tenet communicated their similar concerns, which they have seen continuously reinforced. In May 1998, for example, India exploded a nuclear weapon and subsequently bragged openly about D&D operations designed to conceal test preparations. Admiral Jeremiah cited Indian D&D as a factor that impeded timely intelligence warning of the event. Later, the Rumsfeld Commission issued a report that challenged the Intelligence Community to overcome foreign D&D operations that seriously threaten our ability to detect acquisition of ballistic missile capabilities and the development of weapons of mass destruction more generally. And even the Cox Committee report generated considerable open discussion by our representatives as well as the me-
dia—of possible Chinese deception operations associated with their nuclear weapons espionage activities.4

Today, we are reaching out to academics and others outside of the Intelligence Community to address this important topic using their special skills and vantage points. All of us are committed to encouraging government policy and decision making that is effective and free of unwarranted influences. Because foreign D&D challenges to these objectives are and will remain strong, our counter-D&D effort must also be strong.

**A Critical Task: Identifying Foreign D&D Operations**

That there are secrets to be uncovered has always been a basic principle of intelligence. Uncovering secrets also is key to exposing deceptions. Consequently, counteracting foreign denial efforts is critical to countering foreign denial and deception. Counterdenial efforts require primarily the development and employment of means to obtain information regardless of its degree of protection or security.

Secrets and deceptions, however, are not so easily exposed through counterdenial efforts alone. All information is seldom obtainable as analytic conclusions inevitably rely on limited data (and not all data is equally obtainable). Further, regardless of whether all information on a subject can be obtained, it can be polluted to incorporate misleading data that supports a deception, which may lead to an incorrect conclusion, no useful conclusion, or a highly tentative or partially correct conclusion.

The identification of denial operation actions to conceal information can help direct limited information-gathering resources toward data that will expose a secret and away from neutral or misleading data. Such identification also might raise suspicions of possible associated deception operations and affect interpretations of all data on the subject.

The identification of a deception operation also can affect judgments on what information might be denied, what information to seek, and how to interpret it. By the term “deception operation” I intend to encompass actions designed to provide misleading information to a target, to include “true lies” and “partial truths,” and even truths imparted deceptively, as a means to skew the recipient’s data to encourage/discourage a conclusion favorable/unfavorable to the deceiver.

**How to Detect Foreign D&D, and Then What?**

The foregoing simply argues that recognizing foreign D&D is an important means towards overcoming it. Less simple are the actual tasks of recognizing it and using this recognition. Faced with an array of information on a subject, the analyst who is to put the pieces of the puzzle together must first determine which pieces to use and which to discard or reshape on the basis of whether it was obtained despite foreign denial operations, as a result of foreign deception operations, or in the absence of either. Such characterizations of the data are