



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Superficial Intelligence**

## Superficial Intelligence<sup>1</sup>

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**A 2016 update to this report:** Since I wrote this essay six years ago, some of my observations in this piece are out-of-date. The technology of *Big Data* has rendered obsolete the idea of “too much data.” Nonetheless, I keep the essay intact, as it has a 2010 dateline, which reflects the technology of that time. I discuss Big Data in another essay. Go to Blog.UylessBlack.com. Scroll to Series 21. Click on “The Internet and You, Part one.”

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Happy New Year.

Some of my recent time has been taken-up by standing in lines waiting for security people to cull me from the profiles of people who should not be passengers on airplanes. These profiles are often inaccurate, or if they are accurate, they are not used. I can deal with inaccuracy. I once served in the intelligence services. I understand the difficulty of obtaining accurate information on shadowy figures. But it is another matter if the information that is available is not used.

As an aside to the main body of this report, one more observation: In order to protect me from embarrassing searches, the civil liberties folks and some politicians are taking the stance that the exposure of peoples’ genitals to scrutiny by scanning machines and prurient security guards is more important than their genitals staying around to fulfill their job descriptions. If their genitals are incinerated from a bomb, but they’ve not been exposed to the humiliating exposure of a security check...well, their privates maintain their integrity. Meanwhile, along with their privates, other parts of their bodies may become toast, courtesy of a terrorist.

### **Sidebar: Would You Prefer a Smiley Face or Sylvester Stallone?**

House Representative Jason Caffetz (Utah) is dead-set against the use of whole-body-imaging (WBI) scanners. He says he is opposed to his wife and child exposing their bodies to total strangers. But he also explains the Dutch are developing a system that will permit the secret and sensitive areas of our bodies to be covered by, as he says, “a cartoonlike image.” Such as a smiley face?

As the operations are refined, perhaps the airport security lines will have a kiosk at their entrances that will allow us to select public cartoon icons to place in front of our privates. What fun.

<sup>1</sup> Image on cover courtesy of:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=iceberg&espv=2&biw=1255&bih=609&tbm=isch&imgil=HJQI4xx9FcccZM%253A%253B2t50DUxYq\\_pIcM%253Bhttp%25253A%25252F%25252Fscience-all.com%25252Ficeberg.html&source=iu&pf=m&fir=HJQI4xx9FcccZM%253A%252C2t50DUxYq\\_pIcM%252C\\_&usg=\\_\\_CThmj-gEKptU0ungIs2kS87Um0Y%3D&ved=0ahUKEWjw9a64I7NAhUW7mMKHQ9aDMgQyjcIKQ&ei=ofxSV67DF5bcjwOPtLHADA#tbm=isch&tbs=ring%3ACXvw5qMYI9OiIjbeIEnb2BDUBeZKMIEVeRbddWRutLV4bHpG9TFI VTW0XinZGJ-NfwgcIx5fKvFP0R6b5GkKubsaSoSCdt4gSdvYENQEQBY1imTDMI3KhIJF5koyURV5FsRizT7PjOPiPMqEgl11ZG60tXhsRGYRU1rDhqKgyoSCekb1MUhVNbREUshIVBzkbFrKhIJeKdkYn41\\_1CARwxR9eZHB694qEglwjHl8q8U\\_1RBHLTDSNZEB08SoSCXpvkaQq5uxpEYfeINE3vjd7&q=iceberg&imgcr=ddWRutLV4bHWCM%3A](https://www.google.com/search?q=iceberg&espv=2&biw=1255&bih=609&tbm=isch&imgil=HJQI4xx9FcccZM%253A%253B2t50DUxYq_pIcM%253Bhttp%25253A%25252F%25252Fscience-all.com%25252Ficeberg.html&source=iu&pf=m&fir=HJQI4xx9FcccZM%253A%252C2t50DUxYq_pIcM%252C_&usg=__CThmj-gEKptU0ungIs2kS87Um0Y%3D&ved=0ahUKEWjw9a64I7NAhUW7mMKHQ9aDMgQyjcIKQ&ei=ofxSV67DF5bcjwOPtLHADA#tbm=isch&tbs=ring%3ACXvw5qMYI9OiIjbeIEnb2BDUBeZKMIEVeRbddWRutLV4bHpG9TFI VTW0XinZGJ-NfwgcIx5fKvFP0R6b5GkKubsaSoSCdt4gSdvYENQEQBY1imTDMI3KhIJF5koyURV5FsRizT7PjOPiPMqEgl11ZG60tXhsRGYRU1rDhqKgyoSCekb1MUhVNbREUshIVBzkbFrKhIJeKdkYn41_1CARwxR9eZHB694qEglwjHl8q8U_1RBHLTDSNZEB08SoSCXpvkaQq5uxpEYfeINE3vjd7&q=iceberg&imgcr=ddWRutLV4bHWCM%3A)

I disagree with Congressman Caffetz. He says we can have privacy, freedom, and other conventional liberties and not give up our security. During these times, if we are going to have more security, we are going to have to give-up some liberties. If we don't want to have more security, we do not give up liberties. Throughout history, it's been a trade-off of liberty vs. security. You name it: castle keeps; great walls; iron curtains; metal detectors; body scanners, and the like.

Can we gain back these liberties if or when this crisis passes? Do we gauge the hypothetical future with more weight than the non-hypothetical present?

### **The Problems**

In order to demonstrate the magnitude of the problems with our intelligence system, I take this license with this report: The events below contain quoted conversations that I have paraphrased from past experiences. I've been careful to reconstruct them as accurately as memory serves me. That, unto itself, and at my age, is no small feat. Nonetheless here goes. I'll organize the report around the topics listed below.

I have readers who are working in the security and intelligence industries. I look forward to your comments. Because I am no longer active in these fields, I might be off-base with my suppositions. If so, let me know.

This report is organized as follows:

### **Background**

#### **Sharing of Information**

#### **Too Much Data**

#### **Information of Dubious Value**

#### **Incompatible Files and Formats**

#### **Action Items and Responsibility for Actions**

#### **Connecting the Dots**

### **Background**

In the 1960s, I served in the U.S. Navy as a Communications/Cryptographic Watch Officer in the Western Pacific. I had access to highly classified information. After this stint, I was assigned to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) in Washington, D.C., where I had access to even more highly classified information. With this background in mind:<sup>2</sup>

### **Sharing of Information**

One of my responsibilities with the Defense Intelligence Agency was to oversee a group of analysts who read intelligence reports sent to the DIA from personnel in foreign embassies and other outposts. The analysts would first categorize and index the information, then decide who would receive a copy of the report; such as the CIA, NSA, and scores of agencies and departments in various enclaves of America's vast intelligence system.

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<sup>2</sup> Parts of this report are sourced from *Frogman*, by Uyless Black.

During my first days on the job, I sat with each of the analysts and learned about their work; how they indexed a report; how they decided to whom it would be distributed. They used felt pad markers to “stamp” on the front page of the report the instructions about the document’s distribution.

One of the markers caught my eye. It read, “Military Eyes Only.” I asked an analyst about this stamp. He responded that certain subjects coming-in from the military attaches were to be seen only by personnel associated with the Department of Defense. I asked, “I don’t follow. The CIA is in charge of activities relating to foreign intelligence for America’s entire intelligence community.<sup>3</sup> So, you’re telling me the CIA is not receiving some of these reports?”

“That’s correct Lieutenant. The CIA does not have a need to know.”

“Need to know! They’re in charge of America’s intelligence gathering and analysis. How can they be denied the very intelligence by which they direct our intelligence operations?”

Surreal. I was debating a GS-11 about a serious national security issue. Regardless of his humble civil servant rank, he understood my perplexity. He then informed me of another disturbing practice:

“Look at this report. It’s about Soviet cryptographic sniffing going on in or around our embassy in Moscow. It was submitted by an Army attaché. The attaché’s choice of the words in the subject line and the text forces me to label it Military Eyes Only. In fact, some of these reports can only go to the department to which the attaché is attached: Navy, Army, Air Force, and so on.”

I asked, “So, our setup is to deny the NSA, which is responsible for crypto intelligence, reports about crypto intelligence?”

“That is correct Lieutenant.”

Cut to 2016. I’ll wager these practices---perhaps not to this level of absurdity---are still in existence. I’m no longer involved with the intelligence community, but the media reports on TV and the newspapers offer ample evidence that these turf battles continue.

But the issue goes further. The allies are reluctant to share information about their technologies on jamming techniques of, say, a Drone because---guess what?---it’s a secret. Yet, the insurgents are actively employing jamming techniques on the Drones. It’s fair to say the sharing of jamming information would result in the cross-breeding of more effective counter-jamming measures.

In the meantime, the number of deaths from IEDs continues to increase: December, 2009: 32 deaths; December, 2010: 60 deaths.

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<sup>3</sup> No longer. The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 created the office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), which took over many government intelligence functions.

### **Too much Data**

Another of the DIA departments I headed was responsible for the analysis and classification of photos received from foreign agents and attachés. I noticed my staff examined what seemed to be hundreds of pictures of the same Soviet airplane; one classified as the “Bear” surveillance and targeting craft (the Tu-95RT). I had seen this plane several times, because USSR aircraft occasionally flew over our task force in the Western Pacific. One day, I asked the lead photo analyst (Jim) how many pictures of this airplane had been processed and stored by the DIA. His answer was, “Thousands.”

I replied, “If you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all. Why does the DIA not issue a directive to instruct the field to stop sending photos of this plane? The practice seems wasteful.”

Jim pulled-out a photo of the airplane. He pointed to a small glass-like dome on the fuselage of the body, “A couple years ago, the CIA noticed the shape of this dome had changed from previous pictures. The analysts concluded the Russians may have modified the dome to accommodate upgraded gear.” (The dome was thought to be part of the plane’s electronic system, but some intelligence reports made reference to photo systems as well.)

“I see. Did the dome’s change reveal the nature of the equipment upgrade?”

“No. In fact, the change may not have indicated a change to anything but the dome itself. Maybe it was done to reduce wind-drag. Who knows?”

Week-after-week, the department collected, categorized, and stored thousands of photos of the Soviet Bear and its variations. This episode is just one example of many other intelligence collection efforts. America’s intelligence community was (and is) drowning in “data”---much of it worthless---with the hope of somehow coming across a rare piece of valuable information.

The major challenge to (and problem with) the field of intelligence is not the collection of information. It is the collection of too much information and/or worthless information. So much is collected that it often becomes impossible to correlate or associate seemingly disparate facts into something meaningful.

But what is too much? What is worthless? And how can so much data be analyzed to reveal something useful? The answers to these questions may only be known after the fact; after a Pearl Harbor; after a *USS Cole*; after a 9/11.

**Drones’ Data Gathering.** Today, I was watching a TV news program about the success of the Drone surveillance aircraft. One part of the report stated the planes were gathering so much information, so many images, that no one could analyze or interpret it. The commentator said there were Drone videos whose total volume would take twenty-four years to view. That’s over 200,000 hours that people (and computers) must go-over. In turn, that translates into 5,000 forty-hour weeks of work. At the very least, because the data must not only be “looked-at,” it must be studied. Consequently, for this one operation, it is fair to assume hundreds of people are needed to “analyze” the data.

Even if computers and intelligent software can aid this specific program, it is evident there is so much data being collected that it is clogging up any rational effort to make sense of it.

I suspect the Drone example is the tip of the iceberg. I suspect the spy agencies have so much data that they have no idea of how to assemble it to meaningful information.

### **Information of Dubious Value**

My assignment to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) placed me in a department dealing with the analysis and dissemination of intelligence reports. Because of my clearance, I was also given the auxiliary job of a “librarian” for the National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs). This repository was used to store and disseminate NIEs to all units within DOD that did not receive them as part of a CIA distribution list. The documents were stored in a large vault. My boss (an Air Force Lt. Colonel), a senior civil servant, and I were the only people with day-to-day access to the vault.

I spent many lunch hours inside the vault. After reading more NIEs than I would care to admit, I came to the realization that the vast amount of intelligence contained in the papers---collected, analyzed, written, guarded, and disseminated at a cost of staggering proportions---was not all that insightful; or all that secret. As one example, the NIE on Cho En-lai (a high-ranking official in Communist China) offered thoughts that I had read in various newspapers and trade journals. Cho En-lai’s biography was no more insightful than the passages in the book by Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*.

Again, the costs to support the NIE program were and are huge. Yet I found much of the material was no more valuable than the OP/ED pieces from the weekly newspapers.

### **Incompatible files and formats**

Let’s assume the issues of turfmanship and excessive volumes of data can be put aside. In many instances, this vital (?) intelligence data cannot be shared anyway because it is stored on computer files that are not exchangeable between the various spy groups.

We’re told the intelligence community is “making progress” in this arena. Making progress? This problem began in the early 1960s. Time and again, these organizations were warned, cajoled, even threatened to establish (a) inter-agency standards for data files and (b) communications protocols for exchanging this data.

The good news is that goal (b) has been achieved. The reason is not due to the competence of the intelligence services. It is because of the pervasive use of the Internet protocol standards, such as TCP/IP, which allow the transparent transfer of data. Goal (a) has been partially achieved, again because of some additional Internet standards. Nonetheless, incompatible files remain a problem--a problem that many industries solved *decades* ago (for example, the banking industry).

### **Action Items and Responsibility for Actions**

From my now distant view, it appears the intelligence community has not yet devised a workable plan to assign unambiguous responsibility for action items. That is to say: Who is to take the lead on specific problems and events. The problem is compounded by the proliferation of intelligence

services and by an almost bewildering array of data gathering and information analysis operations.

I don't envy the job of the people who work in the intelligence services. I'm certain they are dedicated to their work. But, as this report states, major problems exist and continue to persist, in spite of the dangers that are evident from such a dysfunctional system.

### **Connecting the Dots**

Even if the amount of data were not overwhelming; even if all data could be shared and exchanged, the intelligence community seems to suffer from an inveterate inability to bring-together some of the data into meaningful and actionable information. The data *shouts-out*: Look! Certain associations are evident and intuitive.

As stated earlier, it is not a simple task, and I am trying to be fair. But some instances of America's intelligence failures are downright scary and pathetic. Take the 2009 Christmas flight incident as one example (Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit):<sup>4</sup>

- 1) The "alleged" bomber bought a one-way ticket.
- 2) He paid for the ticket in cash.
- 3) He left no contact (next of kin or friends) with the airlines.
- 4) He checked no bags.
- 5) He was on a security watch list in Britain (after trying to obtain a visa to attend a "dubious" English university.
- 6) He broke off contact with his family to join the war on the West, after which his own father met with a CIA officer in Abuja to report him as a possible threat.

God help us all. If the intelligence community cannot connect these dots---at least to prevent this man from boarding a plane---what dots can they possibly connect? We are spending billions of dollars of taxpayer and Chinese money for our intelligence services. We are getting a bum deal.

Read the original 9/11 Commission Report. It will not only curl your toes, it will do a number on other parts of your makeup, such as your mental well-being about your physical well-being.

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Duffy and Mark Thompson, "The Lessons of Flight 253," *Time*, January 11, 2010, p. 26.