

**Conflict Studies Research Centre**



**NATO Intelligence  
and Early Warning**

**John Kriendler**

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## **Key Points**

- \* The dramatically changed security environment has had a significant impact on how NATO shares intelligence.
- \* At the Istanbul Summit, Allies called for improved intelligence sharing and a review of current intelligence structures at NATO Headquarters.
- \* Allies have also recognized the need to intensify exchanges of information and intelligence with other international organizations and with partners.
- \* NATO is also seeking to develop additional technical intelligence capabilities to enhance its ability to deal with terrorism.
- \* Intelligence sharing has increased at NATO since 9/11, but is inhibited by a variety of factors, and it is difficult to reach agreement on reform proposals.
- \* Intelligence sharing could be enhanced by:
  - Providing overall coordination of intelligence sharing in a single office.
  - Establishing a clear lead on the civilian side (as exists on the IMS side).
  - Enhancing the ability to obtain intelligence from civilian intelligence agencies.
  - Establishing liaison arrangements with EUROPOL and INTERPOL.
- \* NATO early warning is a related issue on which considerable progress has been made.
- \* The NATO Intelligence Warning System (NIWS) was designed to be a much more inclusive and user-friendly warning system than its Cold War predecessor and to take account of the risks identified in the Alliance's 1999 Strategic Concept.
- \* The NIWS provides warning of any developing instability, crisis, threats, risks, or concerns that could impact on security interests of the Alliance and monitors de-escalation of a crisis.

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## **Intelligence Support for Decision-Making**

### **Introduction**

Accurate, timely, reliable intelligence is an essential ingredient for informed consultations and decision-making and an area where more changes are needed.<sup>1</sup> As Admiral Giambastiani and General Jones point out in “Strategic Vision: The Military Challenge”, “Intelligence collection, analysis, dissemination and sharing will be critical in reducing the decision time between recognizing a security risk and executing the desired course of action”.<sup>2</sup>

Like so many other aspects of NATO, the dramatically changed context for intelligence sharing and early warning has already had a significant impact. Among other things this changed context includes the broader understanding of security and the need to look at a broader constellation of risks, the greatly diminished risk of a conventional attack and the need to focus on non-state as well as state actors. Also, in striking contrast to the Cold War where the capabilities of antagonists were largely known but their intentions were not, we now have a much more detailed idea of the intentions of at least some international terrorists but much less information about their capabilities.

Allies recognized the need for changes in intelligence sharing explicitly at the Istanbul Summit when they called for “improved intelligence sharing between our nations, including through our Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit and a review of current intelligence structures at NATO Headquarters”.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to intelligence sharing, some advocated that NATO better develop its own capabilities. Former CINCSOUTH Admiral Johnson addressed this issue in the following terms: “Another area critical to the success of every crisis-management operation where NATO must improve its capabilities is that of intelligence collection, analysis, dissemination and sharing. The Alliance cannot simply sit back and hope that once a crisis develops, nations will come forward with the necessary information and intelligence. Rather, it is up to NATO to develop its own intelligence and regional expertise to support ongoing operations as well as potential future missions.”<sup>4</sup> A proactive approach is particularly needed for Warning Intelligence which is specifically designed to warn of developments which are potentially detrimental to the interests of the Alliance. Therefore, timely and pertinent warning – to the appropriate audience – must be given long before an issue turns into a crisis. This is the fundamental *raison d’être* of Warning.

### **Intelligence Sharing at NATO HQ**

To better understand what changes should be considered, it is useful to consider briefly how intelligence sharing is organized at NATO Headquarters. An essential

fact is that NATO has no mandate or capabilities for intelligence gathering except when there are deployments of NATO or NATO-led forces, when such deployed forces perform normal military intelligence functions. Since NATO does not have its own intelligence sources (except when forces are deployed), NATO depends on nations for intelligence, which is then shared with allies and, as appropriate, with PfP partners and other countries contributing forces to NATO-led operations or participating in PfP activities.

NATO HQ's key focus of intelligence, other than intelligence concerning threats to NATO personnel or installations, is the International Military Staff (IMS) Intelligence Division which, among other tasks, acts "as a central coordinating body for the collation, assessment and dissemination of intelligence within NATO Headquarters." It "manages and coordinates the production and dissemination of NATO strategic intelligence estimates, intelligence policy documents and basic intelligence documents, as well as the maintenance of selected data bases and digital intelligence information services ... and performs strategic warning and crisis management functions".<sup>5</sup> It is staffed almost entirely by military personnel who may be - but are often not - intelligence professionals.

In addition to the IMS Intelligence Division, the Special Committee is the advisory board to the Council on matters of espionage and terrorist or related threats which might affect the Alliance. Members are heads of security services of member countries. This is a forum for active exchange of intelligence.

### **Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit**

The recent establishment of the Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit (TTIU) at NATO HQ is a reflection of the importance that allies attach to sharing intelligence related to terrorism. The TTIU analyses threats by drawing on information from member nations. It also provides its own forward-looking assessments. The unit has a permanent staff of 7 plus additional experts and analysts on loan from nations. It is expected to play an important role in ensuring NATO decision-makers are well informed about terrorist activities.

Allies have also recognized the need to intensify exchanges of information and intelligence with other international organizations and with Partners.<sup>6</sup> This is reflected, for example, in the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism (PAP(T)) which among other issues focuses on (1) Intensifying consultations and information sharing and (2) Information and intelligence sharing, and a joint IMS/IS EAPC-PfP<sup>7</sup> Intelligence Liaison Unit (ILU) has been established for the exchange of information.

### **Intelligence in Peace Support Operations (PSOs)**

It is also useful to note the importance of intelligence at the operational and tactical level. First of all, PSOs make heavy demands on intelligence. As an example, CJ2 (Intelligence) was the biggest military division in HQ SFOR with up to 75 intelligence professionals serving there. It is clear that without a pro-active focus provided by good intelligence, NATO forces or NATO-led forces can only react to the situation rather than shaping it. The scope of the collection assets for peace support operations encompasses collection means that are employed in any military operation: aerial reconnaissance and surveillance, signal intelligence and human intelligence, which is of particular importance in PSOs.

## **Additional Intelligence Capabilities**

NATO is also seeking to develop additional technical capabilities to enhance its ability to deal with terrorism. For example, among the capabilities explicit in the approach by the Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD) is “Joint Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance”.<sup>8</sup> In the CNAD programme for Defence Against Terrorism, one item is “New Technology for Intelligence, Reconnaissance, Surveillance and Target Acquisition of terrorists” (ISRTA of Terrorists).<sup>9</sup>

This was described in the following terms: “ISRTA of Terrorists: One of the toughest challenges in fighting terrorism is finding and tracking the terrorist, as anonymity and secrecy are their tools. To increase our ability to do so, we have set ourselves three main goals: to obtain a detailed understanding of how to determine characteristic features of terrorists organisations; to develop methods and tools for early warning identification of terrorists activities ; and to identify promising future research areas. The Research and Technology Organization (RTO) has begun conceptual scientific work in promising areas, and will subsequently transition its findings to the Main Armament Groups. An industrial study is also considered to address potential new technologies for ISR of terrorists. This year we approved a NIAG (NATO Industrial Advisory Group) Study, we had an exercise in April. The NATO Air Force Armaments Group (NAFAG) is organizing a meeting on HUMINT aspects in September. The results from these efforts would help us in defining the way ahead. The efforts in this area are coordinated by the NATO Counter-terrorism Technology Unit.”<sup>10</sup>

A related issue is the development of the NATO Airborne Ground Surveillance (AGS) system. When operational, this system will provide the Alliance with an airborne ground surveillance capability that is able to detect mobile and stationary targets from a remote distance in all-weather conditions. Both manned and unmanned platforms will gather information and pass it via data links to ground stations located at operational headquarters.<sup>11</sup>

To ensure interoperability, NATO recently agreed on a standard architecture for air and ground intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets based on developing standard interfaces between the various systems used. This will allow each country to develop systems that meet their respective needs, while ensuring interoperability through the use of the agreed interfaces.<sup>12</sup>

## **Limits on Intelligence Sharing**

Although intelligence sharing at NATO HQ has increased since 9/11, several factors continue to inhibit this process. Traditional concerns about sources and methods are compounded by worries that not all allies provide the necessary protection to intelligence they receive. Further, NATO HQ has not adeptly articulated its precise intelligence requirements nor provided clear justifications for its intelligence needs (decision-making support, support for operations, security, defense planning, among others). In addition certain organizational characteristics at NATO HQ inhibit intelligence sharing.

An additional structural factor is the absence of comparable focus on intelligence on the civilian side of NATO HQ (compared to the IMS focus described above) despite the fact that various divisions and offices utilize intelligence, when it is available, and perform analytical or assessment functions. For instance, the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, including the Economics Directorate,

engages in extensive assessment and analysis. In general terms, the Alliance has been relying too heavily on specific capabilities of allies' military intelligence agencies, which is out of sync with the current strategic and security priorities. Virtually all of the substantive divisions could benefit from increased access to intelligence from civilian intelligence agencies. In addition to the separation of civilian and military intelligence, the approach to intelligence at NATO HQ is, in general terms, too disparate, ad hoc, uncoordinated and, to some extent, duplicative.

### **Proposals to Enhance Intelligence Sharing**

Various proposals to rationalize existing processes and units have been considered but allies have not agreed on how to proceed, and, in light of the sensitivity of intelligence issues, agreement soon is unlikely. The following principles could offer guidance when considering how to enhance intelligence support for consultations and decision making: (1) provide overall coordination of intelligence sharing at NATO HQ including both civilian and military intelligence, (2) enhance the ability of the civil and military authorities to seek intelligence from both civilian and military intelligence agencies, including EUROPOL and INTERPOL on matters related to terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, (3) clearly identify where responsibilities for intelligence sharing functions reside, (4) enhance synergy and (5) rationalize staff time to avoid duplication.

These principles might be implemented as follows: (1) establish a single office, at an appropriately high level, tasked to provide overall coordination of intelligence and address the other issues listed above; and (2) establish a clear lead on the civilian side (as exists in the IMS) to address intelligence issues, including identifying intelligence requirements and providing a point of contact for nations to provide intelligence, 3) establish liaison arrangements with EUROPOL and INTERPOL. A less desirable alternative would be to make the IMS Intelligence Division the focus of a joint intelligence office, mirroring the NATO HQ C3 Staff, which has reporting lines to both the IS and IMS.

In the view of some analysts, the single greatest weakness of NATO intelligence is the paucity of dedicated analytical capability within the IMS Intelligence Division and the Terrorist Treat Intelligence Unit. Closely linked to this weakness is the inability to direct or task the nations' analysts (also in most cases woefully inadequate in terms of numbers). The ability of a nation to provide intelligence, the willingness of a nation to share this intelligence and the time required for this intelligence to be disseminated to NATO are all constraining factors which compromise the overall NATO intelligence effort.

### **NATO Early Warning**

NATO early warning is a related issue on which considerable progress has been made.

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has been on a steep learning curve. It took years — too many years — for the Alliance to take action to stop civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. NATO reacted far more quickly over the Kosovo crisis, but still too late to prevent ethnic cleansing and terrible human rights abuses. More recently, the Alliance intervened in Southern Serbia and in Macedonia before tensions exploded into open conflict — with the result that mass bloodshed was averted, and peace maintained at a relatively low cost.

The lesson of the past decade in the Balkans and elsewhere is clear. Early warning of impending crises is vital. Early action — and the right action — is invaluable. But knowing how and when best to become involved in an emerging crisis is extremely difficult. It requires rapidly obtaining as clear a picture of the situation as possible and adopting a course of action designed to achieve the best outcome.

In recent years, many international organizations have sought to develop and improve capabilities in the field of early warning. The United Nations has, for example, established its own Humanitarian Early Warning System and the European Commission sponsors the Conflict Prevention Network. Moreover, many academic institutions, think tanks and non-governmental organizations have also built useful expertise over the years. But given that NATO has unique crisis-management capabilities, it has been particularly important for the Alliance to enhance this dimension of its activities.

The benefits of early warning of emerging crises are obvious. It provides more time to prepare, analyze and plan a response and, in the event of intervention, enhances its likelihood of success. Early warning can also contribute to the establishment of goals to be achieved, development of courses of action and their comparison, leading eventually to implementation of chosen options, and finally analysis of the reaction of the parties involved and potential scenarios. Because of the importance of early warning, crisis-management and conflict-prevention procedures focus in the early stages on information acquisition, assessment and analysis.

### **Cold War Procedures**

During the Cold War, NATO used a system of indications and warning, which could provide early warning of strategic attack and track developments. At the time, "indications" were essentially steps an adversary would have to take to prepare for a military action and which could be expected to become visible to outside observers at some stage. "Warning" was the formal alerting of political and military decision-makers and commanders to the potential for crisis or attack. The indications and warning system used during the Cold War focused largely, although not exclusively, on military indications that tended to be largely quantitative.

Changes in the security environment at the end of the Cold War obliged NATO to revise its indications-and-warning methodology. As a result of reduced risk of armed conflict between states and increased risk of conflict within states, the Alliance has broadened its approach to early warning in a number of ways. Firstly, the range of potential risks addressed has been extended well beyond the threat of direct aggression to Alliance territory to encompass non-military risks and even unconventional threats such as terrorism. Secondly, increased interaction with members of the EAPC further contributes to early warning. And thirdly, NATO has developed a new Intelligence Warning System (NIWS).

In general terms, NATO seeks to obtain early warning through a variety of mutually reinforcing processes. These include meetings of the North Atlantic Council, the Policy Coordination Group, the Political Committee and the Military Committee, as well as other committees, in which Allies share intelligence and information about potential and ongoing crises. In addition, EAPC meetings and meetings of committees in EAPC format provide a forum for Allies and Partners to share information which can contribute to early warning and to consult on developing crises. And regional working groups, meeting under the auspices of the Political

Committee, bring together national experts once or twice a year, usually with Partners, to examine trends in different geographic regions.

Contacts with individual Partners, where they have the opportunity to discuss potential crises of concern to them, provide another opportunity to gather information on impending crises. Allies also share intelligence both with other Allies and with Partners in the context of ongoing crisis-response operations and Partnership-for-Peace activities. NATO's Situation Centre monitors incoming messages and open-source information around the clock. And NATO's International Military Staff's Intelligence Division monitors developments — on the basis of intelligence reporting by Alliance member states — in particular through the Production Branch (formerly the Intelligence and Warning Branch).

The NIWS was designed to be a much more inclusive warning system than its predecessor and to take account of the risks identified in the Alliance's 1999 Strategic Concept. To accomplish this task, the NIWS is based on the informed judgment of analysts. Accordingly and in contrast to its predecessor, the NIWS relies on qualitative analytical processes, not the more mechanical measurement of multiple, precisely defined and specific events. As such, it covers not only threats to NATO, but also a wide variety of military and non-military risk indicators, including uncertainty and instability in and around the Euro-Atlantic area, and the possibility of regional crises on the periphery of the Alliance. Moreover, it both provides warning of any developing instability, crisis, threats, risks, or concerns that could impact on the security interests of the Alliance and it monitors de-escalation of a crisis. After a Warning Problem is established, the NIWS will monitor it on a monthly basis, or more if required.

It is important to understand that "warning" is not an event, but a cyclical process in which an identifiable crisis or threat is assessed, a problem is defined and a critical indicator list is developed. NIWS will not only assess an identifiable crisis or threat but will identify an issue of concern to the Alliance as early as possible, establish a critical indicator list which provides indicators of how and how fast this issue is developing, and provide warning as appropriate. Clearly, this is more difficult in today's more complex and varied security environment. Next, the critical indicators are continuously monitored and the assessment matrix is updated as required. Warning is issued, and the cycle resumes. The crucial sub-text to this process is recognition that the effectiveness of the warning is dependent upon the extent to which it is integrated into the crisis-management and response measures available to decision-makers.

### **Identifying Critical Indicators**

The crises that shattered European stability in the decade following the end of the Cold War did not come as a surprise to analysts of conflict. In Kosovo and in Macedonia, for example, an eruption of violence had been forecast for many years before latent tensions boiled over into bloodshed. Indeed, the United Nations had even placed a small force, UNPREDEP, in Macedonia between 1992 and 1998 to help stabilise the country in its early years as an independent state and prevent it disintegrating in warfare in a similar fashion to other former Yugoslav republics. The key issue for early-warning systems, however, is determining the factors that will correctly predict when political tension will degenerate into crisis and helping to shape a crisis response that will inevitably be based largely on subjective, analytical judgements.



NIWS methodology calls for analysts to decide well in advance which events, or critical indicators, can serve as decision points for any given warning problem. These events are intended to be so critical that, if they occur, they indicate a significant change in ongoing developments and therefore require a comparable change in judgement of the likely end state of the emerging situation. By focusing on these critical indicators, analysts no longer base judgements on a mathematical, mechanical and quantitative approach to indications and warning. Instead, they can provide qualitative, forward-looking, predictive assessments for the outcome of a clearly defined situation.

By definition, a critical indicator is intended to be a significant clue about what is happening and the eventual end state of a series of events. An obvious example in the case of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was the leadership situation. Would President Slobodan Milosevic step down, win re-election or be overthrown? To fulfil their intended functions, critical indicators must be defined so that they occur early in the evolution of the crisis in such a way that, if identified, decision-makers have time to react. They also have to be reliable so that policy-makers are willing to take decisions based on them. In general, indicators must be collectable and identifiable, so there is a realistic expectation of perceiving them if they exist.

The NIWS is a useful mechanism for anticipating crises, but no matter how well-structured an early-warning system, its success depends, above all, on the judgment and vision of political authorities. Ultimately, the political will to act, individually and collectively, and, if necessary, to intervene is more important than any early-warning tool. However, political will depends on more than an analysis of the likely evolution of a conflict and is clearly affected by a host of other issues, including electoral cycles, competing domestic priorities and public opinion. It is especially difficult to muster in the early stages of a crisis, when the parameters and stakes involved may not yet be clear, and may still be lacking much later. In light of the importance of ensuring that the nature and level of the warning that is being provided is understood, feedback is essential.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on two previously published papers and a book chapter on related topics: 1) Kriendler, John, "NATO Headquarters Transformation: Getting Ahead of the Power Curve, Conflict Studies Research Center, Special Series, 5/29, June 2005,

<http://www.da.mod.uk/CSRC/documents/Special/05%2829%29-JK.pdf>, accessed 13

February 2006 2) Kriendler, John, "Anticipating Crises," *Nato Review*, Winter 2002,

<http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2002/issue4/english/art4.html>, accessed 13 February

2006 and 3) Kriendler, John NATO Crisis Management and Conflict Prevention in Kronenberger, Vincent and Jan Wouters, editors, *The European Union and Conflict Prevention, Policy and Legal Aspects*, The Hague: TMC Asser Press, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Giambastiani, E P and Jones, James L. "Strategic Vision: The Military Challenge", Allied Command Operations and Allied Command Transformation, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> NATO, Istanbul Summit Communiqué, 2004

<sup>4</sup> For intelligence sharing for operational purposes NATO nations have established the NATO BICES Agency. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, Admiral Johnson also describes establishment by Joint Forces Command (JFC) Naples of the Joint Information and Analysis Centre (JIAC) to bring together intelligence collected from all NATO operations to provide an integrated intelligence product. Johnson, Gregory G. (2004) "Examining the SFOR experience", *NATO Review*, Winter 2004,

<http://www.nato.int/docu/review/pdf/0404-eng.pdf>, pp23-25.

<sup>5</sup> NATO Handbook, <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb1103.htm>; updated 29 October 2002.

<sup>6</sup> NATO, Declaration on Terrorism Issued at the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Foreign Ministers Session held in Brussels on 2 April 2004

<sup>7</sup> Is: International Staff; EAPC: Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council

<sup>8</sup> NATO, "NATO Capabilities Planning, brief to delegations on 12 September 2005

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> NATO Website, accessed 9 January 2005. During the April 2005 CNAD meeting, a contract was signed for a Risk Reduction Study, which was projected to take six months. Allies will then have the necessary information to decide whether they want to participate in the program, so that AGS can move into the Design and Development phase.

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## **Want to Know More ...?**

See:

Kriendler, John, "NATO Headquarters Transformation: Getting Ahead of the Power Curve, Conflict Studies Research Center, Special Series, 5/29, June 2005, <http://www.da.mod.uk/CSRC/documents/Special/05%2829%29-JK.pdf>, accessed 13 February 2006

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NATO, NATO Handbook, Chapter 11, Military Organization and Structures, available on line at <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb1103.htm>; accessed 16 March 2006

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