The "Grey" Intersection of
Open Source information and Intelligence

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Abstract

The U.S. Government intelligence community (IC) is relying less on "classified" information as a sole source and is moving toward an "all source" product that includes open source information. Gradually, this change will result in a more comprehensive, virtual IC that will enhance or replace the smaller, classified collections of individual government bureaucracies. This has created an emerging paradigm involving technology, outsourcing, and relationships both inside and outside of the IC that has resulted in "grey intersections" of open source information and intelligence. This paper will define "open source information" and look at specific government actions that have boosted support of open source information intelligence (OSINT), as well as the ongoing struggles within the IC to accept the new paradigm. The intelligence cycle as it applies to open source is described, and examples of the use of open source information are given in the context of their reliability and classification. The paper also discusses the future of open source and intelligence.

Introduction

Open source information has been recognized as a significant source of intelligence by some in the U.S. Government intelligence community (IC) in the mid-to-late 1990s. However, it was always considered the source of last resort by many in the intelligence community until recently. In novels like "*Out Sourced*" by R.J. Hillhouse, which describes how contractors work in Iraq, the line between what was compiled from open source and what some analysts may recognize as "classified intelligence" is blurred. Analysts may recognize some information as being classified; other readers will not know this. However, it is clear that the author appreciates the value of open source information.

Today, however, the IC is relying less on "classified" information as a sole source and is moving toward an "all source" product that includes open source information. Gradually, this change will result in a more comprehensive, virtual IC that will enhance or replace the smaller, classified collections of individual government bureaucracies. This has created an emerging paradigm involving technology, outsourcing, and relationships both inside and outside of the IC that has resulted in "grey intersections" of open source information and intelligence.

The IC is concerned about the grey intersection of open source and intelligence, including reliability, classification needs, and the quantity and quality of information to be analyzed. There are also concerns of how open source will affect the responsibilities of the various members in the intelligence community. The new paradigm has been brought about primarily by advances in information technology which allow for customized systems, federated searching, common platforms that make networking easier and allowing data to be shared and exchanged, and a general decentralization of intelligence systems.[1] The combination of technological changes and the value of open source information have begun to blur some of the distinctions between human intelligence (HUMINT) and open source intelligence (OSINT).

This paper will discuss some of the grey intersections of open source and intelligence and examine how the new paradigm will affect the intelligence community. It will also provide some specifics as to the use, evaluations, and examples of open source by the IC, as well as look at the Open Source Intelligence Cycle and the future of open source and the IC.

Definition of Open Source

The term "open source" refers to information that is derived from overt, non-clandestine sources as opposed to hidden or covert collection.[2] The IC defines open source information as "information which is publicly available and can be lawfully obtained by anyone by request, purchase, or observation."[3] Open source information can be on almost any topic, including economics, health, social and cultural, political, military, energy and the environment, and demographics. It includes media; public data included in government reports, demographics, budgets, conferences, symposia, academic papers, dissertations, theses, and experts; commercial data; and grey literature. However, once open source information is collected, even that which is obtained from outside experts, it may be classified or receive a protective marking or caveat to prevent showing information gaps in the U.S. IC databases or for other reasons. Some reports produced by government contractors may fall into this grey intersection of open source and intelligence.

At what point does open source information become "intelligence"? Open source information becomes intelligence when it is collected, exploited, and disseminated to address a specific intelligence requirement. Intelligence personnel refer to open source "collection," whereas non-intelligence analysts