

# NATO intelligence

*At the crossroads of informal intelligence sharing and institutional streamlining*

Bob de Graaff

In public parlance NATO intelligence for a long time seemed to be an oxymoron. And indeed, in spite of inter alia the existence of both a Civilian and a Military Intelligence Committee a civilian Intelligence Unit, a military Intelligence Division, a Situation Center and, since 2003, a Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit, lack of trust and a common culture among the member states obviated large-scale intelligence sharing. NATO intelligence was more or less US intelligence, in as far as the US was willing to share intelligence with its partners. The appointment of Arndt Freytag von Loringhoven as NATO's first Assistant Secretary General for Intelligence and Security in late 2016 must have come as a surprise to many and should be a clear sign of the recognition of today's relevance of intelligence to NATO's alliance. However, NATO has been involved in (counter)intelligence much longer than often thought. James L. Mader's Ph.D. dissertation about NATO's 450<sup>th</sup> Counterintelligence Detachment in the 1950s, which he defended at the University of Utrecht on November 28, 2017, shows that NATO multilateral (counter)intelligence cooperation has existed much longer than people often think.

The occasion of Jim Mader's Ph.D. defense and the presence of professor Joseph S. Gordon of the U.S. National Intelligence University as one of the members of the reading committee were seized upon by both the Department of History of International Relations of Utrecht University and the Netherlands Atlantic Association to organize a symposium about NATO and (counter)intelligence at the University of Utrecht. Both speakers were introduced by Eleni Braat of Utrecht University, who sketched the opportunities and obstacles for international intelligence cooperation in general and thus set the tune for a lively participation by the audience. Daniel Pronk of the Netherlands Ministry of Defense joined the other speakers to add the Dutch angle to their story. Together the three speakers more or less covered the (counter)intelligence story of NATO from its early stages up till the present day. In this special section in *Atlantisch Perspectief* you will find the gist of their presentations, which will be introduced by this contribution.

Mader's thesis offers a few insights that are still relevant today. One of them is that the effectiveness of NATO's counterintelligence depended on two important characteristics. First, NATO members accepted the hegemony of the US in the field of counterintelligence, which e.g. was demonstrated by

the fact that the 450<sup>th</sup> double-hatted as a NATO and a U.S. Army unit. Second, the international cooperation hinged upon informal networks created by the 450<sup>th</sup> military, who styled themselves as diplomat-soldiers. Their contacts were mainly with French and Italian (counter)intelligence authorities.

The US hegemony in the field of intelligence is still there, but today the leading part of the US may no longer be as self-evident as it was in the first decade after the establishment of NATO. Now that intelligence becomes a formalized part of NATO it may stumble over the principles of national sovereignty and parity among the member states much more than it did in the 1950s. Efforts of harmonization, standardization and streamlining run the risk to be counterproductive. The public's insistence upon accountability and transparency, furthered by the Snowden revelations, will hamper to recreate the informality and flexibility that existed more than half a century ago.

The national intelligence cells during NATO's operations in former Yugoslavia sometimes realized informal ways of exchange. An effort to formalize exchange in the form of the Multinational Intelligence Coordination Cell at Moleworth, UK, amounted to little.



A more recent NATO experience in operational intelligence cooperation, the NATO Intelligence Fusion Centre (NIFC), established in 2006 and discussed in this issue by professor Gordon, showed already its value during operations in Libya, Afghanistan, Kosovo and the Horn of Africa. To a certain extent it followed the example of rather informal cooperation under US preponderance, which the 450<sup>th</sup> had demonstrated during the 1950s. This time it was a US initiative, modeled after the U.S. Joint Intelligence Center doctrine, under American command, which was NATO approved and to which other NATO members adhered through a memorandum of understanding. All NATO nations except Iceland and Luxembourg are now represented. Even seven non-NATO states participate for specific missions. The intelligence the NIFC produces is not subject to unanimous approval of the NATO's Military Committee. In spite of successes, the NIFC also showed that its primary goal, intelligence sharing, still does not materialize easily.

Against this background the probably most important intelligence reform in NATO's history took place. In 2016 a Joint Intelligence and Security Division (JISD) at NATO headquarters was created, soon to be headed by Freytag von Loringhoven, a former Deputy Director of the German Federal Intelligence Service BND. It tries to create a holistic approach, both military and civilian, using both classified and open sources, while inter alia producing strategic, operational and warning intelligence. The JISD will support decision-making by both the North Atlantic Council and NATO's Military Committee, besides advising its Secretary General on intelligence issues. The challenge for Freytag von Loringhoven and his office will be to pull together all intelligence initiatives, which are spread over the JISD, the NIFC, Centres of Excellence in various fields, throughout NATO's

command structure and several committees representing the intelligence services of the member states, without doing away with the advantages of organically grown successful informal networks, communities of interest and case-by-case liaison. Meanwhile, there will be a continuous call for reducing duplication. True, redundancy comes at a price, but maybe the NATO member states should be willing to pay that one, if it leads to greater effectiveness. Because in the end it is not efficiency that counts, but effectiveness.

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Maybe the JISD would already accomplish a great goal if it would succeed in furthering a shared meaning of the word 'intelligence' and the processes it implies among the 27 member states, which all have their national meanings of intelligence and created intelligence processes fitting in with their national histories, cultures and administrations but which may not necessarily lend itself for the purposes of the interest, value and identity community which NATO constitutes. Dialogue is fine, but shared outlooks and practices are better.

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