

*Interview with John McLaughlin
Former Director of the CIA
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Mithat Bereket: Now intelligence sharing of the US with another country, in the case of Turkey now it is in the news against the PKK organization in northern Iraq, now first of all trying to understand the system. How does the US decide to share intelligence with another country?

John McLaughlin: Well typically, Mithat, these decisions are made on a calculation of mutual interest. That is to say that if two countries, the United States and another, share an interest in some outcome, whether its stability or you name the outcome, then in the United States there's an inclination to want to share intelligence with that country. If you share an interest. A lot of other things come into the equation though. First you have to be confident that the information you're going to share will be treated securely, because typically you're going to be sharing some fairly sensitive information, gathered by difficult and sensitive methods, and so you want some assurance that the country receiving it, the intelligence service receiving it, knows how to handle it in a secure and confident manner. This typically requires a lengthy period of time in a relationship between intelligence services before that trust is built. And typically it involves doing joint operational work together, joint collection work, and exchanging views on a wide variety of subjects until the two sides become confident that they can deal with each other in a secure manner. Those are some of the things involved, there are many many things that come into this calculation.

MB: At the end of the day, who decides? Who makes the decision to share the intelligence of the CIA or military intelligence with some other countries? Is it the President, is it the White House? How do the channels work?

JM: Well there's a system in the United States with an individual in charge who looks at all the intelligence relationships in the world and organizes a view within the American intelligence community, an opinion if you will, on what level of sharing should occur with each country. And this is a dialogue with our intelligence services based on their relations with other countries. That doesn't decide what gets shared at the end of the day, let's say its CIA intelligence that's being shared, the director of CIA would make that determination. If it was a particularly important issue, I'm sure the director of CIA would check with the director of National Intelligence to make sure that everyone was comfortable with the sharing that was going on. So it's a combination of things. Many views are collected, a judgment is made, and then an individual agency chief makes a decision. All of the agencies in the US government that do intelligence, whether it's CIA, the National Security Agency which does communications intelligence, the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency which does analysis of imagery from space, or the Defense Intelligence Agency, which does primarily military analysis, and others, each of those agencies has a set of relationships conducted separately with foreign intelligence

services. Now there's a coordination of all of this at a very senior level in US government, but there are multiple relationships here. The key decision makers are usually the heads of those agencies that I mentioned.

MB: And how do these agencies make use of all of this information coming in from different agencies? How do you make the data work?

JM: Well you gather intelligence by a variety of means. Human sources, classic spies if you will. Technical intelligence which is gathered by satellites and other things. Open source intelligence which is things you learn that are openly available, but which you use to make the picture by adding them to classified intelligence. You do all of those things and you form a series of reports that are available for the US government to use or to share with others.

MB: And also, when you talk about other countries, I think the CIA was working in cooperation with other intelligence agencies as well. Now how do you place Turkey according to your experience? You used to work with Turkey, in many cases together, how was the cooperation before?

JM: Well, it's a very important point Mithat, let me make a couple of observations on that. First, I think the underlying motive for intelligence sharing in the United States is a very simple one. And it is that the United States cannot accomplish what it wants to accomplish in the world alone. Interestingly, intelligence services in the United States have always thought in a multi-lateral way about the world. In other words, there has never been an emphasis on a unilateral approach in the intelligence agencies. So for example, there are parts of the world where someone who looks like me is not going to blend in, not going to be able to do certain things, the average American would have trouble. But if you have an intelligence service that's your partner and that shares your interest, members of that intelligence service can move about freely and do things. Now in the case of why are certain countries chosen, I think its important that we look at Turkey in light of its long standing alliance with the United States in the context of NATO. Turkey has been a NATO member for a long long time, is a highly respected member of NATO, by that virtue shares many interests with the United States, and would be among the countries that would be considered in the upper rank of countries that the United States would be inclined to share intelligence information with.

There are instances in which the United States shares intelligence with countries that are not particularly friendly to it. Of course I'm talking about countries other than NATO countries like Turkey, but those arrangements are made only when there is a strong mutual interest between a country that may be hostile to the United States on some ground, but may share an interest for example in wrapping up Al Qaeda networks that threaten the citizens of that country, even though there may be broader tensions between that country and the United States. So it's a complicated calculus.

MB: During your term in office in the CIA, do you recall any similar incidents with Turkey that you shared intelligence?

JM: I'd have to go back and check. Off the top of my head I don't recall specific instances, but I'm sure that there has been an ongoing sharing relationship with Turkey on many issues over many years. Turkey has been very important to the United States in terms of shared interest, shared values, the basing privileges that Turkey extends to the United States. These are all things that, if you will, prepare the foundation for intelligence sharing.

MB: Just to understand the logic of it, when you are dealing with a mountainous region for example, with an infiltrator, with some terrorists sneaking in and out from a country to another country, which is the best way to use the intelligence? Is it the satellite intelligence, is it the UAV intelligence, is it the manned intelligence? From your experiences, how does the system work?

JM: Well again it's very complicated, and I have to be very careful not to talk about specific intelligence sources and methods, because if I do they won't be useful anymore. But generally I would say that there is no one specific source of intelligence that is superior to others in that situation. Almost inevitably, you need to correlate, integrate sources from human reporting, satellite reporting, communications reporting, you have to integrate all of these things in order to form a picture. Every once in a while you will get an individual report from a specific type of source that opens your eyes dramatically, but that's rare. It's usually a matter of solving a puzzle. I often say that intelligence is like trying to solve a jigsaw puzzle but without benefit of the picture on the box. In other words you don't know what the final picture is and you're getting these pieces, these fragments, and you have to look for the theme among them, and that's more than likely what we're talking about in this case.

MB: And it seems that it needs to be a long term process, intelligence gathering.

JM: It has to be a long term process. There are very few types of intelligence that you can ramp up quickly or swarm onto a certain target. One of the difficulties in the intelligence business is you have to place your bets. You have to think in advance, what am I going to be interested in two years from now, three years from now, five years from now, ten years from now? Some of the technical systems develop literally five to ten years to develop. Human sources can require years to develop before they are fully functioning as reporters. And if you choose to follow the wrong subjects you may find that two years from now or three years from now, you're well positioned in some part of the world or in some particular issue, but in the meantime, some other issue has jumped up to surprise you. And you're not well positioned on that issue because you can't do everything equally well. This is where analysis comes in. You need a core of people who do what I would call strategic analysis that is thinking ahead. Where are we going to be in a given country five years from now? Where are we going to be in a region five years from now? Ten years from now? Forming a picture that removes some, you can never remove all, but some of the uncertainty. And that allows you then to place your

bets with a little more confidence in allocating your resources, trying to recruit human agents, building technical systems with certain capabilities. Does that make sense?

MB: Yeah, yeah. And also, with the technology, I wonder where does it take you in the intelligence world? I mean, will there be a point where the human intelligence will be really decreased?

JM: No. No, because human intelligence is one of the few ways you can get the most difficult thing that you try to discover, which is motivation, intentions. You can see a building from space, but you can't look through the roof. It's often only a human source who can be inside the building or know someone who's inside the building and tell you what's going on in there. So you need all of these things working together. And on technology, typically the intelligence community has to be ahead technologically of where the world is. Because once there is technology commonly understood, commonly available in the world, all of your adversaries know how to use it as well. So typically in intelligence you always need, in the American system at least, a research program that is pushing the frontiers of technology and science, so that you can be a step ahead technologically of where your adversary is. For example, imagine if we'd had cell phones twenty years ago or thirty years ago, what a jump that would have been in terms of communicating with people at a time when cell phones were not commonly available. Well now cell phones are commonly available, and they're not of much use from an intelligence point of view.

MB: For example yesterday, we went to a company called GeoEye, who is operating satellites and satellite images. And they said that anybody can, given the money, anybody can obtain those pictures. How does the CIA work? Does it have its own spatial satellites or commercial satellites?

JM: Well, commercial satellites have been developing in the last twenty years or so, and they are now part of the information that's available for people in the intelligence business. But not all of the satellite pictures come from the commercial satellites. There are US Government satellites that take pictures with sharper resolution. Here's an important point though. Once satellite imagery is so available – after all, this is the google earth generation – it declines in value as an intelligence source. That's exactly the point I was making, because everyone has it. Now it's still valuable, because militaries have to train, right? They have to maneuver. You cannot do everything at night. You cannot hide everything. So it's still useful but people have learned to deceive it, so it's not uniquely useful instrument it was say in the late 1950s or early 1960s when it was invented by the CIA and the Air force here in the United States. Now in time of war, I think that US law permits that some restrictions can be placed on the sale of commercial imagery, commercial satellite photos produced in the United States. I'm not completely clear on the law there, but there are some laws in place that restrict the sale of imagery to your adversaries in a time of war.

MB: And lastly, an interesting an important aspect of this intelligence world, real time intelligence. There's a lot of talk in the news between Turkey and the United States in

the sharing of intelligence, most of them said to be real time intelligence. What does it mean, and how do you get real time intelligence? Through which means?

JM: Well, real time intelligence is really about, not so much the acquisition but the transmission of it. So today, if you went back 50 years when you got an agent report, typically you had to send it home on a slow moving cable of some sort. Today, in the fiber optic era and the era of email which can be encrypted, communication of all sorts of intelligence moves more rapidly. So when intelligence of any sort is collected, it is today more readily available to you than it was 20 or 30 years ago. So real time intelligence means literally that. You are sharing intelligence that is freshly collected within a matter of days.

MB: So following someone or something, like a target live?

JM: That's rare. About the only source that allows you to do that...there are some sources that allow you to do that, like the predator aircraft, but most sources do not allow you to follow a subject live. It's not quite as good as it is in the movies.

MB: And very lastly, where do you think this whole game of intelligence is going towards in the future? With the technology, with the internet, all different aspects?

JM: I think that we're on the verge of a new era in intelligence. I would almost call it an era of renaissance potentially, because while there is all of this data available and so many ways to collect things today, if you think about it there's a lot we don't know. It's a bit like the period after World War II when there was much we didn't know and we had to devise collection methods that allow us to see and penetrate into the Soviet Union. Well there's so much we don't know today, about terrorists, about countries with uncertain futures that could be ultimately adversaries or partners. I think we are at a moment in time when intelligence actually has become more important than it has been since any time, certainly since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

MB: Mr. McLaughlin, Thank you very much for your time and appearing on my program.

JM: Great, good to see you.