

National Security Proposal #3

Modernizing Our Intelligence Force

A half decade after 9/11—America’s greatest intelligence failure since Pearl Harbor—our intelligence services still suffer from a shortage of agents with the new skills needed to counter the threats of the 21st century. To fix this problem, we need a landmark initiative to recruit and train talented young Americans for service in our intelligence force in the form of a new “Intelligence Officers Training Corps.”

THE PROBLEM

A shortage of 21st century intelligence agents

America’s intelligence apparatus was built to win the Cold War. The system of satellites we launched into space to cover the Soviet Union and to track enemy submarines, missiles and bombers was an extraordinary technological feat and continues to provide us with unparalleled advantages in terms of information gathering and military targeting. However, the threats of the 21st century present the intelligence community with new and different challenges. Investments in technology will be necessary, but insufficient. Penetrating terrorist cells, insurgencies, and rogue regimes requires old-fashioned human spying with a 21st century twist. America needs both a larger force of human agents and a more diverse force of agents—a force with greater linguistic, cultural, and analytical capabilities than in the past.

The American intelligence community suffers from a critical shortage of agents with mission-critical cultural and linguistic capacities.

The 9/11 Commission Report recommended that the CIA “should emphasize transforming the clandestine service by building its human intelligence capabilities.”¹ Unfortunately, the CIA has failed to implement this requirement. The CIA is 3 years behind on its goal of a 50% increase in its human spying capacity by 2010.² Only 5% of the CIA’s undercover spies are ethnic Middle-Eastern, Asian or South-Asian (meaning Arab, Iranian, Chinese, Pakistani, etc.).³ On 9/11 there were no more than 8 fluent Arabic speakers in the FBI; as of January 2008 there were still only 9.⁴

We are not leveraging our world-class colleges and universities to meet our security needs.

The 9/11 Commission Report also recommended that the CIA should develop a “stronger language program, with high standards.”⁵ We already have the infrastructure to make this happen, but American universities are not educating

enough potential candidates with the necessary language skills. In 2005, just 21 students in the U.S. earned BAs in Arabic; there were 0 in Persian and 3 in the Pakistani languages. In contrast, 90 students earned degrees in Latin and 39 in ancient Greek. In other words, of those American students who were in their first semester of college on 9/11, nearly twice as many graduated with the ability to translate Homer's *Odyssey* as graduated with the ability to translate an al Qaeda email about an impending terrorist attack.⁶

There is no adequate effort underway to fix these deficiencies.

The only current program designed to recruit and train America's best and brightest for careers of service in the intelligence community is totally inadequate. Congress created an intelligence scholarship program in 2004, but it has almost no resources (awarding only about 60 scholarships this year), and it is so little known that its existence might as well be classified. The magnitude both of the threats we face and of the adjustments the intelligence community must make to meet those threats demands a far more aggressive and systematic solution.

THE SOLUTION

The Intelligence Officer Training Corps (IOTC)

We must provide a high-profile, fully funded program to educate and train the recruits we need for an 21st Century Intelligence force. The answer is the IOTC—an intelligence recruitment and college scholarship program based on the successful military model.

A prestigious, competitive program for only the highest quality candidates.

The admissions process for IOTC would be highly selective. Staff working for the Director of National Intelligence would review and select the best candidates. This staff would also serve as advisors to the students, overseeing their academic work and helping introduce them to the clandestine world.

Modeled on a program with a proven track record of success.

The IOTC would work like the military's highly successful Reserve Officer Training Corps, which prepares college students for service as military officers. Like ROTC, the IOTC would provide free tuition and living stipends for a select group of outstanding college students in exchange for a commitment to serve in the intelligence community for a period of time after graduation. During their time in school they would be required to obtain certain language and cultural skills, as well as intern and train at their agencies. The aim of the IOTC would be to train about half of incoming intelligence agents, which is roughly the percentage of officers that ROTC provides to the Army.⁷

A vital and cost-effective human-capital investment.

IOTC would cost about \$300 million per year for 2,160 students. This amounts to less than 1% of the non-classified intelligence budget. This program invests a tiny fraction of the intelligence budget to help the intelligence community put the right people in place to frustrate the hostile plans of terrorists, insurgents and rogue regimes who threaten America and its interests in the 21st century.

See Appendix A for policy details on the IOTC.

THE ROLLOUT

Ideas for launching and publicizing the IOTC

Press conference highlighting the 20th anniversary of the creation of al Qaeda:

Al Qaeda was founded on August 11, 1988 in Peshawar, Pakistan, near the Afghan border.⁸ Twenty years later, al Qaeda leadership has reestablished a safe haven in the same region and is planning attacks against the United States. Give a speech highlighting that 20 years after al Qaeda was created, our intelligence agencies have still not fully adapted to confront the threat we face. Offer the IOTC as an innovative solution that provides the human intelligence capabilities our force needs to defeat al Qaeda. Local law enforcement officials responsible for homeland security could speak regarding the importance of intelligence in preventing attacks.

CRITIQUES & RESPONSES

The IOTC

This won't fix the Intelligence System

The IOTC, of course, would not solve all of our intelligence problems, but it is one important step toward ensuring we have a trained, dedicated and qualified group of 21st century intelligence agents ready to take on modern threats. The 9/11 Commission Report highlighted the lack of attention paid to human intelligence and the need to rapidly increase our agency's understanding of foreign languages. This proposal will help address a key weakness our intelligence agencies currently face.

There's already a program in place.

As they did in so many other aspects of national security, here conservatives in Congress responded to a crisis too late and with too little support. The existing "Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholarship Program" is a half-measure that barely scrapes the surface of the problem. They have dedicated a meager \$1.6 million for this program this year, enough money for less than sixty scholarships.⁹ And this program is so unknown that you'd think trained spies were guarding knowledge of its existence as a classified secret.

Teaching college kids to spy would be dangerous.

Such fears about the IOTC are misplaced. These students would not be trained in spy-craft during the college years; they would merely be learning the cultural and language skills they will need when they become intelligence officers. IOTC scholarship recipients would be forbidden from collecting any information on anyone while a student in the program to ensure that no one's privacy would be threatened.

IOTC students could be targeted by IOTC opponents and/or foreign nations.

Students who are selected for IOTC scholarships will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement and the source of their scholarship will be known only to them. Their professional advisors will introduce them to the requirements of working in the intelligence world, including the demands of confidentiality and discretion.

APPENDIX A

Detailed Proposal for the IOTC

The Intelligence Officer Training Corps (IOTC) would serve to attract highly qualified college graduates into service with the intelligence agencies. Modeled on the military's ROTC, it would provide free college tuition (plus a stipend) in exchange for a service obligation, completion of required language/cultural training courses and internships and training with the agencies.

Admissions:

The Director of National Intelligence will be required to organize a panel to review and select the best candidates. This staff will also serve as advisors to selected students, helping them choose language and culture studies. They will also help students maintain confidentiality and mentor them on working in the classified setting of intelligence collection.

Members of Congress would be encouraged to highlight the program when they provide information to high school seniors about military academy nominations.

Benefits:

Full tuition, books, fees and a living stipend.

Study abroad program required for 2 semesters.

Requirements:

At least one "mission-critical language" course each semester (Arabic, Pashtu, Persian, Mandarin, etc.).

Two summer internships at 2 separate intelligence agencies.

Service Obligation:

Graduates must serve 6 years in an intelligence agency.

Safeguards:

Absolutely all types of intelligence collection, either domestic or foreign, would be forbidden until after graduation and the beginning of formal employment.

Scholarship recipients' identifications held in strictest confidentiality and recipients required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Full background check for all IOTC applicants.

Random drug tests for IOTC participants.

Cost:

\$300 million is the overall cost, based on 2,160 students accepted each year.

Benefit levels: \$25,000 for tuition, fees and books, plus \$6,000 for living expenses. This would leave \$30 million for program overhead, advertising, etc.

Endnotes

¹ The 9/11 Commission Report, p. 415

² USA Today, "CIA sees boost in minority hiring," September 30, 2007, by Richard Willing, available at http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-09-30-cia_N.htm

³ USA Today, "CIA sees boost in minority hiring," September 30, 2007, by Richard Willing, available at http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-09-30-cia_N.htm.

⁴ Lawrence Wright, "The Spymaster," *The New Yorker*, Jan. 21, 2008

⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report, p. 415

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, "Table 258. Bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by sex of student and field of study: 2004-05," *Digest of Educational Statistics*, 2006

⁷ Government Accountability Office, "Military Personnel: DMDC Data on Officers' Commissioning Programs is Insufficiently Reliable and Needs to be Corrected", March 8, 2007

⁸ Andrew Wander, "A History of Terror: Al-Qaeda 1998-2008," *The Guardian*, July 13, 2008

⁹ Office of Senator Pat Roberts confirmed budget number by phone, January 28, 2008