

# Intelligence Services

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Geneva Centre for the  
Democratic Control  
of Armed Forces

This document is part of the DCAF Backgrounder series, which provides practitioners with concise introductions to a variety of issues in the field of Security Sector Governance and Security Sector Reform.

## What is intelligence?

Intelligence refers to a state's awareness and understanding of its strategic environment, gained by way of gathering and analysing secret and open-source information. Aside from this, intelligence can also denote:

- the organisations producing such knowledge;
- the activities pursued by these organisations;
- the organisational processes directing these activities; and
- the product resulting from these activities.

## What is the purpose of intelligence services?

Intelligence services:

- provide analysis in areas relevant to national security;
- give early warning of impending crises;
- serve national and international crisis management by helping to discern the intentions of current or potential opponents;
- inform national defence planning and military operations;
- protect secrets, both of their own sources and activities, and those of other state agencies; and
- may act covertly to influence the outcome of events in favour of national interests.

## What are the activities of intelligence services?

**Collection** is the acquisition of data. It involves the use of open sources, as well as clandestine sources, such as spies, agents and defectors.

**Analysis** is the screening and collation of data and their transformation into intelligence products that help policy-makers by providing relevant and trustworthy

information designed to make sense of complex situations and issues.

**Counterintelligence** focuses on preventing foreign intelligence services or other foreign-controlled groups from committing espionage, subversion and sabotage against the state. This consists of defensive measures, such as inquiries, vetting and surveillance, and offensive measures, such as conducting operations to penetrate, deceive, disrupt and manipulate these organisations.

Some countries also practice **covert action**. This is the direct influencing of foreign political, military or economic conditions without this influence being attributable to the state. Covert action is an option short of military action to achieve objectives that diplomacy and other policy means cannot. Such action includes, but is not limited to:

- propaganda;
- support to foreign political or military factions;
- assistance to foreign governments; and
- disruption of illicit activities on foreign soil.

In most democracies with multiple intelligence agencies, covert action is performed only by external intelligence agencies.

### How is intelligence produced?

Intelligence is produced in a five-step process: planning, collection, processing, analysis and production, and dissemination.

**Planning** is the management of the entire intelligence production effort, including:

- the request for specific intelligence from the executive, legislative, or agency itself;
- the definition of relevant data needs;

- the prioritisation of issues; and
- the identification of state and non-state actors that warrant surveillance.

**Collection** is the gathering of information using methods such as:

- *open source intelligence* – the assembling of openly available information, such as that provided in the media and academic journals;
- *human intelligence* – information collected from agents, defectors, diplomats; or from reports from counterintelligence operations, interrogations, discussions with foreign personnel, etc.; and
- *technical intelligence* – data and information collected through intercepts; monitoring and localizing of radio, microwave, radar and other means of electromagnetic emission; communications intelligence; electronic intelligence; telemetry intelligence; foreign instrumentation signals intelligence; cryptology intelligence; measurement and signatures intelligence; imagery intelligence; photographic intelligence and computer network exploitation.

**Processing** is the conversion of collected information into a form more suitable for analysis by such means as decryption and translation.

**Analysis and production** is the conversion of information into finished intelligence products. For these products to be useful, the analysis must be relevant, timely and accurate. They should explain how their conclusions have been arrived at and, when possible, the sources used. The primary factors supporting the analysis should be explained, as well as alternative outcomes if these factors change. Effective intelligence also makes clear what remains unknown.

**Dissemination** is the distribution of the finished intelligence product to vetted or otherwise authorised decision- and policymakers.

### What types of intelligence services are there?

In countries with multiple intelligences services, there are several types of agencies.

Intelligence services whose mandate is based on a specific geographical area of operation include:

- **External or Foreign Intelligence Services** that collect, analyse and produce intelligence relevant to the external security of the state and warn of impending external threats;
- **Internal or Domestic Intelligence Services**, often called security services, that collect and analyse data relevant to the internal security of the state and the maintenance of public order and safety.

Intelligence services whose mandates are based on a specific issue or domain include:

- **Military or Defence Intelligence Services** that generate intelligence relevant for defence planning and the support of military operations;
- **Criminal Intelligence Services** that produce intelligence on organised crime, corruption and criminal activities to aid in law enforcement.
- **Specialised national centres** that focus on particular issues, such as the US National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC);
- **Special issue-based coordinating units** that bring together several intelligence actors and/or other branches of government. Examples of this include the Dutch CT-InfoBox, which coordinates anti-terrorism efforts of the intelligence service, National Police, Immigration Service and other agencies; and the US Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence (INF) of the Department of Treasury.

Different collection methods, especially those using technological means, can also give rise to more specialised intelligence agencies. Such entities include imagery, signals and cryptology intelligence agencies. The US NSA, the Russian FAPSI and the British GCHQ are probably the largest of such agencies in terms of staff and budget.

For smaller states, having just one 'fused' intelligence agency is a way to conserve resources and to avoid duplication of effort. The Spanish CNI, the Dutch AIDV, the Turkish MIT and the OSA of Bosnia-Herzegovina are examples of attempts to overcome the traditional distinction between operations on national soil and abroad.

For larger states with multiple intelligence services, the mandates of intelligence agencies sometimes overlap. This redundancy may result in useful competition among agencies if it can reveal differences of opinion and cast doubt on unnecessary assumptions. But it can also prove wasteful, which should be guarded against through close cooperation among agencies.

### What about legislation on intelligence services?

Intelligence services are legitimate only when their exceptional powers are derived from proper legislation. Laws governing intelligence services should provide a clear and specific mandate, including:

- geographic areas of responsibilities;
- subjects of investigation;
- limits of competence and restrictions imposed on activities;
- the relations among the services working within the intelligence community and their coordination;
- the means by which the services are held accountable, including mechanisms of executive control, legislative oversight and judicial review; and
- the legal means to deal with complaints in cases of agency misconduct.

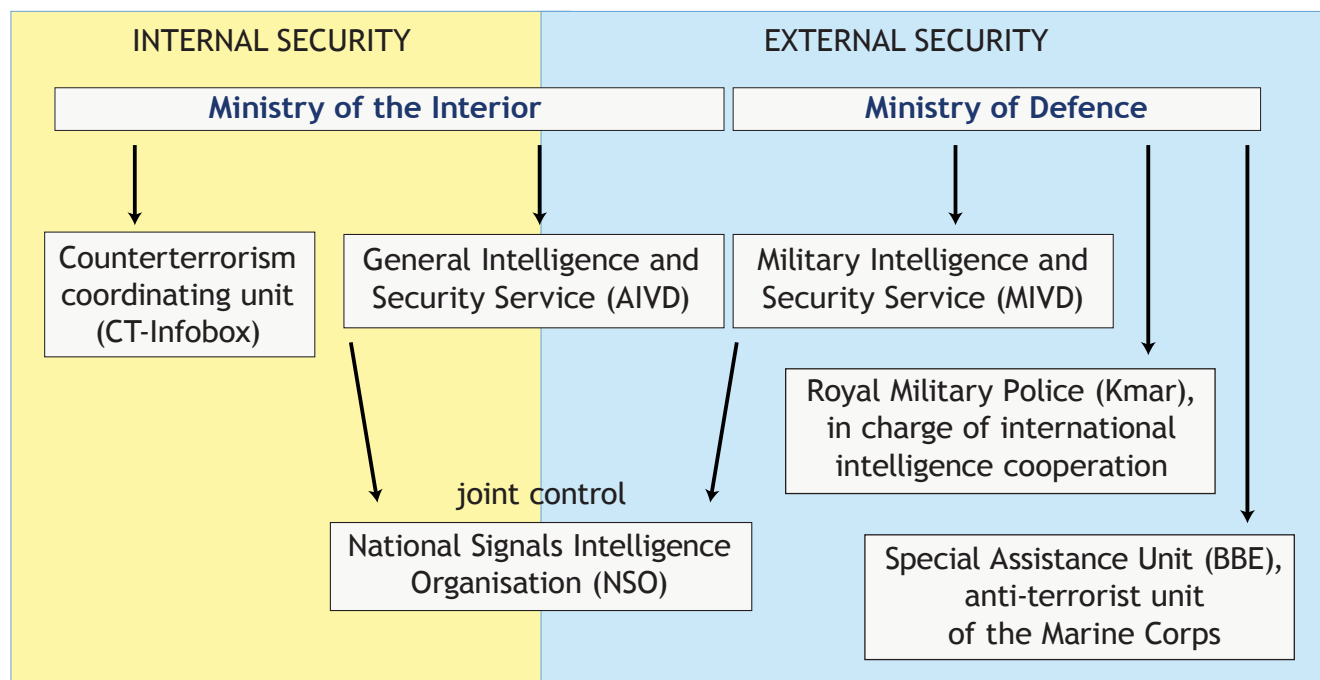
Purposes and targets of external and internal intelligence collection differ, as do the accompanying risks. It is important that management, control and accountability arrangements reflect these differences. The legal framework should require that intelligence services observe democratic standards and norms.

### What are the democratic standards that should govern intelligence services?

Intelligence services have to do much of their work in secret; the disclosure of sources, methods, resources, or successes could seriously compromise their effectiveness. This means that they cannot be as transparent as other government entities and that special mechanisms are required for their oversight. (For additional information on this issue, see the DCAF Backgrounder on Parliamentary Oversight of Intelligence Services.)

- Democratic control of intelligence services begins with a clearly defined legal framework stipulating that the intelligence community must respect the rule of law and recognise the human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens. This law should also establish the bases for all aspects of intelligence scrutiny, including internal control mechanisms (such as an Inspectors General or Ombudsmen), clear executive control through the appropriate officials or ministries, a solid basis for judicial review and the appropriate mechanisms for parliamentary oversight.
- Intelligence services must also be subject to all laws on personal data and communications privacy. If special circumstances require the secret monitoring of communications, then law should establish a judicial mechanism with vetted personnel who are authorised to review these actions.

### Example of a Fused Intelligence Sector: The Netherlands



Abbreviations indicate the name of the organisation in Dutch.

- If intelligence services are to operate appropriately, they need intelligent tasking from the executive, supported by an effective management system that ensures responsible direction.
- A distinction is sometimes made between the behaviour of intelligence services in-country, where they are required to respect domestic laws, and the un-regulated nature of their behaviour abroad. In today's international environment, national accountability for actions abroad needs to be reinforced. For example, in the case of covert action, national legislation should require a clear chain of command between the actions of agents in the field and the highest levels of the executive branch. This is essential if the liability of elected officials is to be secured.
- Intelligence services need to be professional and non-partisan; intelligence services need to be able to serve the nation effectively, notwithstanding changes of government and policy.

### Further Information

Oversight and Guidance: The Relevance of Parliamentary Oversight for the Security Sector and Its Reform

*Born, Fluri and Lunn (eds.), 2003*

[www.dcaf.ch/\\_docs/dcaf\\_doc4.pdf](http://www.dcaf.ch/_docs/dcaf_doc4.pdf)

Reforming Intelligence: The Challenge of Control In New Democracies

*Bruneau and Dombroski, undated*

[www.ccmr.org/public/library\\_file\\_proxy.cfm/lid/5258](http://www.ccmr.org/public/library_file_proxy.cfm/lid/5258)

### Related Issues

- Contemporary Challenges for the Intelligence Community
- Parliamentary Oversight of the Intelligence Services
- Intelligence Fusion and Coordination

### Acknowledgements

Fred Schreier and James Stocker contributed the material for this Backgrounder. James Stocker also provided editorial assistance.

## Types of Intelligence Services in Selected European Countries

Country	Fused	External	Internal	Criminal	Military	Signals
Austria			X	X	X	X
Belgium			X		X	X
Bulgaria		X	X	X	X	X
Czech Rep.		X	X		X	X
Denmark			X		X	
Estonia			X			
Finland			X		X	
France		X	X	X	X	X
Germany		X	X		X	X
Greece			X			
Hungary		X	X		X	X
Ireland					X	
Italy			X		X	
Luxembourg			X		X	
Netherlands	X				X	
Norway			X		X	
Poland		X	X		X	
Portugal			X		X	
Romania		X	X	X	X	
Serbia	X					
Slovakia	X				X	
Slovenia		X			X	
Spain	X				X	
Sweden			X		X	X
Switzerland		X	X		X	X
Ukraine	X				X	
United King.		X	X	X	X	X

An 'X' indicates one or more separate agency devoted to these jurisdictions, purposes or methods. Note that the absence of a checkmark does not mean that these countries do not perform functions in this area, but rather that they do not have an separate agency that deals with the subject. Denmark's DDIS, for instance, is primarily an internal service, but it also tracks the movements of extremist groups abroad, which in other countries is a function of the external intelligence service.

Source: individual country and agency websites.



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David Law, Senior Fellow in DCAF's Operation Division and SSR Advisor with DCAF's International Security Sector Advisor Team (ISSAT), is the editor of the Backgrounder series.

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