



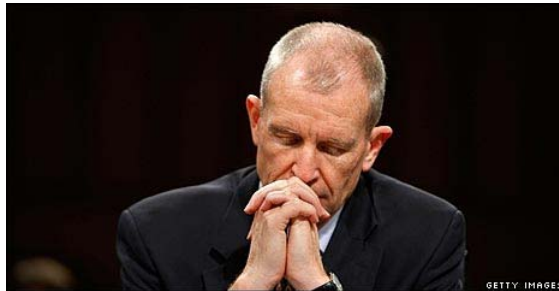
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Can one person oversee every spy?

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By Finlo Rohrer

BBC News, Washington



Dennis Blair is the third director of national intelligence to leave in five years

Dennis Blair is spending his last day as director of national intelligence, but can one person be reasonably expected to oversee the US's huge intelligence apparatus?

Many people outside the US would know who the CIA and the FBI were. Some might even have heard of the NSA (National Security Agency), but the US has a host of intelligence entities beyond these three.

The US Navy alone has two agencies that deal with intelligence, the US Coast Guard has two more. The departments of Energy and Treasury both have their own intelligence services.

If you want the individual to break heads, it is hard to find somebody from within professional intelligence who can do that
 Philip Mudd
 Former CIA and FBI analyst

The sheer volume of agencies and the number of personnel working for them, both in gathering intelligence and analysing it, leave some pundits pessimistic about whether Mr Blair's successor - yet to be nominated by the president - can do his job well.

"As to having one person in control of all intelligence activity, I'm not certain that's possible," says Philip Mudd, former CIA and FBI analyst and senior research fellow at the New America Foundation.

"There are something like 17 intelligence agencies - army intelligence and navy intelligence and so on.

"To expect that one person can have enough of a pulse on these agencies to be the responsible party when there is a perceived gap, as we saw on the 25 December incident [alleged attempt to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab], is not realistic."

No power

The post of director of national intelligence was created in the wake of the 9/11 Commission's recommendations in 2004. The aim was to make sure that the US's different intelligence agencies shared information and co-ordinated their efforts properly.



- Co-ordinates military intelligence agencies and units
- al Intelligence: Provides intel for Treasury
- earch: Works within State Department
- sis: Co-ordinates intel within Department of Homeland Security

The alleged Christmas Day bomb plot led to criticism of security co-ordination
 But some see the fact that there have been three directors already as showing that the post has not worked out.

"He has no power, no leverage. He can't make anything happen. He doesn't control anything of significance in the [intelligence] community," says Mark Lowenthal, former deputy assistant secretary of state for intelligence and president of the Intelligence and Security Academy.

"He is just there to try and get people to listen to him and co-ordinate. He can't. I think we have proved that to everyone's satisfaction."

The intelligence services - and by extension Mr Blair - came under criticism for the alleged Christmas Day plot, and even for the failed Times Square bomb attack.

Political connections

In a recent statement, Mr Blair admitted: "Institutional and technological barriers remain that prevent seamless sharing of information."

Mr Blair himself was reported to have clashed with CIA chief Leon Panetta about the appointment of intelligence representatives around the world.

But could power struggles be resolved and the post of director of national intelligence be made to work?

"Many will watch closely whether the person is a professional intelligence officer or an outsider, someone who has political connections that might give him or her more authority to try to assume a directive role," says Mr Mudd.

"If you want the individual to break heads, it is hard to find somebody from within professional intelligence who can do that."

One option would simply be to abolish the post.



ich I think would be a more realistic situation, a better solution than the status
 research fellow in defence and homeland security at the Cato Institute think
 in the US government. With bureaucracy there is birth but never death."

There is a case for returning to the structure that existed before Mr Blair's post was created, Mr Lowenthal suggests.

The failed Times Square bomb attack focused attention on domestic threats
 Then the job of co-ordinating the intelligence community fell to the director of central intelligence, who also ran