

Why intelligence should never be politicized

6th February 2020

As geopolitics and the rise of business-is-war raises tensions and concerns, the business world has hit upon what seems to be a solution: taking support, often at board level, from security services and government bodies, to provide a measure of comfort and reassurance as to their actions. However, while the organisation names may offer cachet, they rarely in practice can offer the exact services that companies need – and those that think this is the epitome of securing their intelligence and security needs can often be disabused of this in a way that can be reputationally and financially damaging.



The advantages seem clear: having an effective voice of the state to advise on contentious matters should in theory offer a unique pathway not available elsewhere. But an immediate and common problem is, this will only be *advisory* – it is not *investigatory*, and there is quite a difference between the two. A department of trade, or a quiet source from an intelligence agency, will have neither the time nor the budget to appropriately look into a matter themselves and may not even be able to do so to the degree and depth required – doing a fusion-relevant investigation incorporating OSINT, HUMINT and cyber-support, on very specific terms of reference, requires far more input than merely giving ‘advice’ is able to provide.

The politicisation problem is also highly present, and ultimately more damaging. This can be summed up, as it was by Robert Gates in his classic CIA treatise on guarding against politicisation in 1992, as the deliberate distortion of analysis or judgement to favour a particular line. The most obvious manifestation of this is in the limits, explicit or otherwise, of how far an agency will go, and what it will say, in service to the private industry. For instance, a trade department, whose *raison d’etre* is to drive business and good relations between the two countries, will be highly unlikely to discourage investment in a country, but equally will be unwilling to say anything negative it may find for fear of contributing to political disharmony. Therefore, it might deliberately say nothing, and this could lead to a company considering a report of nothing negative as, in other words, positive – putting them in grave financial and reputational risk if, as is expected, problems to materialise.

So not only do corporates not get the full picture that they need, they also risk getting a picture that the government wants them to see. If, as was once remarked, ‘one dinner between a prime minister and an ambassador destroys three years of patient diplomacy’, one disclosure of how the security and diplomatic forces really feel about a situation, even given out to a third party and second-hand, could have major policy implications.

And even though the private sector is staffed with former military professionals, ex-service personnel and past government officials, the key is that they are now acting in a private capacity and free of the biases, and constraints, that comes as a consequence of their past history. Those that act on behalf of government will be unable to bring this to the table.

This might be seen as a reversal of what is an increasing trend (not least in America) of engaging private companies to directly assist with government intelligence work. While this might largely be down to budgetary and staff cuts at the federal level, it impinges upon what is supposed to be an agency-driven, unique product perhaps to its detriment – and this works just as well (or badly) the other way around as well. Politicisation is at its best, unwitting interference, and at its worst, outright bias. Long has been the fight to eliminate it from intelligence agencies – it should not be allowed to creep into the private sector too.

KCS Group Europe - Strategic Intelligence & Corporate Security

A leading provider of security and intelligence services, we operate discreetly in some of the world’s most difficult environments on complex cases of fraud, theft, corruption, or market dynamics. We gather intelligence through the discreet use of human sources to level the playing field and help our clients to identify and deal with any risks, weaknesses and threats which could impact on their business financially or reputationally.

Our key areas of expertise include:

- Corporate Intelligence Services
- New market or sector entry research
- Know your customer screening

In addition, through our specialist team at KCS IS, we also offer a unique service in the areas of Cyber Security and Cyber Risk. This covers penetration testing, vulnerability assessments, intelligence gathering and cyber security audits, providing unparalleled, analysis, contingency planning, and implementation for our clients.

**To find out more or to arrange a meeting to discuss your business needs, please...
email the team at info@kcsgroup.com or call (00 44) 2072451191**
