

Shifting Lines: Evaluating Politicization and Regulation Influences on Corporate Intelligence

Matt Burdetteⁱ

Abstract

Intelligence analysis and production has expanded rapidly over the last twenty years outside of the governmental sphere and into the corporate sector. That growth has occurred by the addition of intelligence units inside businesses, usually tied to the corporate security department. Likewise there was a significant growth in companies that provide intelligence analysis to businesses and non-governmental organizations. In both sectors, politicization is a significant threat to the quality and reliability of intelligence. In the private sector however, the analysis production is exposed to a wide range of possible influences, yet some of these are necessary for the business. The intent of these influences, driven by the impetus for corporate growth and regulatory requirements, can be either benign or directly counter the original analytical content and conclusions. One specific influence driver is the duty of care responsibility for businesses which has recently come to use intelligence in different ways to enhance employee safety and security. Corporate intelligence teams need to exercise constant vigilance in recognizing and mitigating such potential influences while at the same time accepting the necessity of their existence.

Keywords: Intelligence, corporate, business, politicization, duty of care

i Chief of Intelligence for UnitedHealthcare Global Risk. E-mail: Matt.Burdette@uhcglobal.com.

Nothing in this paper should be construed as reflecting upon the author's current employer. All work, opinions and errors are my own.

Introduction

Intelligence as a product and a process has spread and diversified beyond the traditional government sector since the fall of the Soviet Union. The incorporation of intelligence into the corporate sector has occurred in various forms since then, such as market intelligence and competitor intelligence; however, in addition, in the last 20 years, there was a substantive development drive within the corporate¹ sector that evaluated global issues such as geopolitics, security and development via a product and process that is analogous to that within the government. In this time frame and continuing onward, most major companies either built their own internal security intelligence units, hired external vendors, or both, due to a growth in internal consumers who need to know what is transpiring in their areas of functional and geographical interest. While existing outside of the classified world, corporate intelligence is nonetheless often attempting to answer the same questions and largely is using the same methodology as government intelligence.

This article briefly explores two factors that are affecting corporate intelligence, which are not experienced in the same way within the government sector: the intentional and at times necessary politicization of that intelligence toward the interests of the business; and the expansion of a legal and regulatory responsibility by companies and organizations for their personnel (referred to as “duty of care”) directly involving the intelligence product and process. These two factors represent shifting lines in both the thinking and methodology underlying intelligence within the corporate security field. Those differences are becoming intrinsic to corporate intelligence, and yet that more direct engagement of the intelligence with these factors runs a higher risk of polluting the intelligence product than would be the case within government intelligence where such factors would traditionally be filtered out of the end product. This risk reinforces a need for strong oversight of the internal intelligence product and process within corporate intelligence units to mitigate those units becoming useless, or worse, liable.

The rapid growth of intelligence generation and usage within the corporate sector allows for that evolution to occur without appropriate guidelines, not just in the production process but in understanding influences that can affect the end product itself in both a positive and negative ways. These influences require active consideration with their specific application to corporate intelligence; aside from the practical value, there is also the theoretical contribution, as corporate intelligence is incorporated within the academic field of Intelligence Studies, even though the existing literature remains scarce to define it as a distinct field of study. Thus, presently, corporate intelligence is treated more as an adjunct to the more classical studies of intelligence. Yet, while there are similar factors between government and corporate intelligence, the nature of how those factors are engaged within corporate and government intelligence is different enough that they need to be actively recognized and mitigated by practitioners of corporate intelligence