

Geointeresting Podcast Transcript

Episode 10: Former director of the CIA and NSA, Michael V. Hayden

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Welcome to Geointeresting, presented by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. For today's podcast we sat down with former CIA director, General Michael Hayden, to talk about innovation, leadership and transparency in the intelligence community.

NGA: Thanks so much for agreeing to sit down with us today.

Hayden: Thank you!

NGA: One thing we wanted to talk about first is we talk a lot about the importance of transparency; can you explain a little bit more how you envision the IC embracing transparency and how can we maintain transparency and keep the public's trust without giving away too much?

Hayden: It's a dilemma, and I have no solution. This is a condition to be managed, not a problem to be solved, and the fact of the matter is we are going to have to let the American people have a greater understanding of what we do on their behalf or they are not going to let us do it. Now, when I say this to public audiences, my next line is "Don't fool yourself." The more we say publicly, the less effective we will be. We will be shaving points off of operational effectiveness. But the bottom line is we are not going to get to do this stuff unless the American people know more about what it is we do, so we've got to find the right spot. Let me offer you one more thought, OK? We are already the most transparent, most overseen intelligence community on the planet. So our line of departure is way ahead of every other intelligence service. But we are not marking this on the curve. It's an absolute scale, and the American people expect some things from their intelligence services that other democracies don't expect of theirs.

NGA: Great. So let's briefly talk about unclassified data. NGA and other intelligence communities are entering where there's a lot more unclassified data coming to them. So as we look to nontraditional partners with unclassified data how do we — you talk about speed a lot. How do we go through that with speed and accuracy and security and all that tied in with unclassified data?

Hayden: So this is another restructuring both to how much you say publicly and, who do we identify as being our partners? One of my great discovery moments in my post-government [career] is how much true intelligence work is done by the private sector, and I don't mean intelligence-like or intelligence-light; it's intelligence. It's collection, it's analysis, it's dissemination. They begin with priority intelligence requirements and so on. We need somehow to take advantage of that; we in the intelligence community, narrowly defined, need to take advantage of what it is the broader society is doing. We need to be careful because if we do it clumsily, we actually might get in the way of what the broader society is doing. So I'm an American airman. I've been in the Air Force 39 years. I often say that the American Air Force is the military expression of American aviation. Why can't the American intelligence community, particularly the analytic community, be the intelligence expression of what the broader American



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society brings to the process? There's another dynamic here, too; let me just pile on. Given the fundamental changes in information and information available, we're going to have to steal less information to be good at our job than we have in the past. Doesn't mean we won't have to steal, and stealing is kind of our unique task, but if you have a pie chart here of all the information you need, the slice that has to be stolen is a smaller proportion of the pie than it used to be, and so we need to keep in mind that we're not just the teller of secrets; we're the tellers of truth, and so much more truth is going to be widely available if we know about how to get it.

NGA: Another thing we talk about a lot is risk taking and innovation, and here at NGA, our workforce has been encouraged to take calculated risks to help us develop new ways of doing things; better ways to serve our customers. What's your view on that?

Hayden: Yes, in fact, in general I'm a little concerned about the intelligence community. It seems to be risk averse, over layered, over bureaucratized, over lawyered, over time and over budget. And so, to the degree, we can kind of shake off those chains of the past. Look, I get it — we're government agencies; there's extensive oversight. We actually layer things because we're government agencies. I get it. It's really starting to cost, though. It makes us incredibly [inaudible]. I used an example a few minutes ago in the auditorium. About two years back, the president said, "You know, we should have a cyber-threat intelligence integration center," and so the intelligence community set out to do that. We finally have something set up on the old NGA campus in Maryland, and it's taken us longer to do than it took the American Army to get from Normandy to the Old River in World War II. I mean, you got to ask some questions now.

NGA: Do you think it's a mindset change, or do you think it's a policy change?

Hayden: All of the above, but it will require some policy changes. There's a movie about it. I think it's called "Zulu." It's a Michael Cain movie, and it's about a British [inaudible] that was wiped out in the Zulu rebellion in South Africa at the turn of the last century. And in one of the scenes, you have the ammunition train with the sergeant major in charge of that forcing people running back from the front lines to fill out requisitions to thoroughly document the ammunition that he was giving them. And after the battle, he and everyone in line and their bodies are lying there in the midst of all the ammunition that was not distributed. That's probably an overly dramatic expression of this, but there's a lot of that kind of stuff that seems to be going on now that as we follow these processes, we are actually creating effects that are harmful to our final outcome.

NGA: So on the opposite side of the spectrum, we talked about change; we talked about change of the past. If you had to put on a hat that said, "I can predict or see the future," what are some tools or some practices that you have seen or you think may be coming to the geospatial industry?

Hayden: So number one, you guys really are on the cutting edge of what I was suggesting earlier, which is taking advantage of the broader society. So you're out there in front of all the other three letters in regards to commercial imagery and bringing that in. You have changed your value-added formula. I'm old enough to remember that your value added was that you're the only guys who take pictures in space, period. Now I can do that on my home computer and look at what's being stacked in North Korea with sufficient resolution to make my own

judgement, so what's the value added for the institution? I think all the three letters are going to have to go through it. You're going through it in front of them with intellectual curiosity and innovation, so good on you.

NGA: Looking back on your career, what's the best advice you were ever given.

Hayden: Bloom where you're planted, and do the job you have in front of you. Don't be planning moves three and four moves down the board. You're here for a reason — it's either the will of the president or just some divine power pays your money; takes your choice. But you're there, and you're expected to do the best you can in the moment. That's how you do it.

NGA: Great, thanks. And finally, our director and deputy director have a professional reading list that they've shared with the workforce, and we actually just added your book to it.

Hayden: Thank you.

NGA: Do you have any other recommendations for us? Books you've read recently?

Hayden: You know, I have actually gotten a great deal out of reading books on the American Civil War. Shelby Foote trilogy actually talks about Americans in stress and under crisis. [inaudible] said the best example of expository English prose he has ever read are General Grant's memoirs, and I've read and digested them. Here are men faced with incredibly difficult circumstances, making decisions and moving on. I think there are a lot of good lessons in there.

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