

IN 2015, CIA WILL PROACTIVELY RESPOND TO THE “DIGITAL REVOLUTION”

I noted some weeks ago about how John Brennan – who had failed spectacularly on cybersecurity while at the White House but then learned the joys of hacking targets when he spied on the Senate Intelligence Committee – was rolling out a cyber directorate.

On Wednesday and yesterday, Brennan rolled out that change amid a larger restructuring.

In a troubling sign, the plan twice refers to the “digital revolution” as if it were in progress right now, not something that has already happened and is now our status quo. “Second, we must be positioned to embrace and leverage the digital revolution to the benefit of all mission areas.” But don’t worry, because Brennan says this reorganization will prevent the CIA from suffering the fate of Kodak, which didn’t anticipate digital cameras. CIA is embracing the “digital revolution” so it doesn’t miss the next one, I guess, as it did with the Arab Spring.

With all the focus on the digital directorate, however, I think there are aspects of this reorganization plan that are far more worthy of note.

First, the whole thing reads like a mid-1990s business reorganization plan, organized into “themes” and speaking of “investing in our people” and a new Talent Development Center of Excellence and embracing and modernizing and blah blah blah. That’s troubling, because those jargon-driven reorganizations usually failed after some Mitt Romney type had stripped the entity in question for cash. At least in the unclassified description of the reorganization,

the plan seems better served to attract credulous investors than to effect change.

Just as telling, the unclassified plan says nothing about how CIA will retain what linguistic and cultural skills it has after it shifts to a more topical and less geographic structure. Digital analysis is nice, but there will come a time when someone is going to have read the content that metadata has identified, and we can't simply rely on foreign partners to do this or we'll be susceptible to their disinformation.

Finally, there's this section:

Theme Three: Modernize the way we do business. The pace of world events and technological change demands that Agency leaders be able to make decisions with agility, at the appropriate level, with the right information, and in the interests of the broader enterprise. We must have the capacity to make the sound strategic decisions needed to build a better Agency and run it efficiently, even as we respond to urgent external requirements. We must empower our officers to address the operational, analytical, technological, support, and other issues that are at the heart of what we do every day. Accordingly, we will:

- ***Enhance and empower the Executive Director's role and responsibilities to manage day-to-day organizational functions, including overseeing a revamped corporate governance model.***

- **Create a restructured Executive Secretary office** to streamline core executive support functions, thereby increasing effectiveness and efficiency.
- Even as we improve our ability to govern and make decisions and streamline our processes at the enterprise level, there will be a corresponding effort to delegate decisionmaking and accountability for achieving mission to the lowest appropriate level and to streamline our processes and practices throughout the Agency.

Perhaps I should just trust Brennan here, because he has served as both Chief of Staff to the Director and Deputy Executive Director, so he knows how these critical management roles function. But it also sounds like a bid to have the Director's immediate staff more involved in the nitty gritty of operations, perhaps akin to the way the White House National Security Council (where Brennan has served more recently) has done the same with operations, in part to bypass oversight. If Brennan wants to make it easier to hold officers accountable for fuck-ups, great. But if Brennan wants to make it easier to conduct ill-considered operations

without a grown-up objecting, it'll lead to more problems from the CIA.

Alfreda Bikowsky has been the model of the analyst-who-sticks-her-nose into the operations function that seems to be the goal here. The CIA thinks she's great, but she's also the poster child for hackishness, abuse, and in some cases obstinate stupidity. I wish Brennan the best of luck in making CIA a more effective agency. I just hope he doesn't end up making it still more problematic.