HOW OPEN SOURCE IS CHANGING THE IC

Q: The proliferation of new strategies for collecting information in the intelligence community is driving a fresh look at the people the IC will need to collect that information. It’s also causing a rethinking of the way the IC interacts with the contractors that work with it. Lieutenant General Mary Legere, U.S. Army, Retired, is Managing Director for the National and Defense Intelligence business at Accenture. Open source intelligence, General, is one of the most important drivers that’s changing the way the IC does business. How is that change happening, and what’s behind it?

Legere: Well, I think it’s important to note, because I think you’ve had this discussion before on your show, that open source intelligence has been with us since the intelligence community was created, and probably before that. But the emphasis today is really responsible as a result of the drivers of, you know, the advances in technology, the explosion of the Internet, and just the richness of publicly available information.

Q: Was there a hesitation initially implementing open source, this idea that if it’s readily available it must not be that good?

Legere: You know, that…absolutely true. And I remember reading a Congressional report that was sort of bemoaning the fact that we weren’t making a lot of progress, and one of the biases that they clearly pointed to is we need to overcome an analyst’s preference for traditional, highly classified sources. And I thought, well really, you know, is that true?

But yes, it definitely was there. And I think it’s something that as we have helped our analysts understand, that in places where we have no options, our ability to tap into academics, and social media, and the richness of the country’s own social, political, and descriptions of itself gives us a foundation that we really shouldn’t look away from.
That reduces the friction of declassification and, you know, foreign disclosure, things that sometimes slow down the trust relationship, the collaboration, the exchange. They get that. And clearly this is a generation used to working with many nations, many partners, and they understand that this can be a coin of the realm as we continue these kind of operations.

Q: What is the implication of all of that, the technology that’s involved, the techniques to collect it, all of that, what is the implication there for the workforce that the IC needs to build in the next five to 25 years?

Legere: Right, and it is…it’s a great question, and it’s an important thing to understand, because, because of the simplistic idea or understanding of well, it’s available for open source, so any analyst can use it, and clearly you can use your classified networks that are highly contained to go out on the Internet and search and bring data.

No. It is a specific discipline with tradecraft, with specific skill sets that allow analysts, partnered with data scientists, to cull from the Internet publicly available information that is relevant, to apply tools that computer scientists and data scientists work and collaborate with those analysts to create to find meaning. And so there is a whole art and science to this, there’s a tradecraft associated with it. And to simply say let’s turn the switch on and anybody that has intelligence analyst next to their name or collection, you’re immediately an open source expert, it’s not the case.

And because it was unclassified, and because we worked very hard to keep it that way, it created an ease of sharing with a very robust, but nontraditional set of partners that were there doing great work to try to help those governments and those people survive a very difficult humanitarian crisis.

So when you give commanders and you give analysts examples of this is why it’s important that we embrace it, when we tell them, look, if we can get 80% of the product from open source and you can validate it with traditional sources that you trust, we can release 80% of that information to a partner with whom we do not have a sharing agreement with.
Q: We have about 30 seconds left, General. What is industry's greatest role, or two or three greatest roles that they can play in that transition?

Legere: Okay. We like to say at Accenture meet the customer and meet them where they are. Every single one of the agencies is in a slightly different place. But provide solutions that are specific to their needs. Some are already on the road and have invested in re-skilling, and up-skilling, and changing and increasing the number of data scientists they have available. Some have solved the technology problem of ingestion of data. Some have rich analytic tools and workflows available. Start with where they are. There are others that are clearly at the beginning.

Remember, remember, they're trying to build an enterprise, so as you deal with each of the agencies, don’t bring a solution that is only applicable to that specific agency. Remember that the community is trying to transform to a cloud environment, so everything should be able to be placed in that environment with an idea that it will be shared, and it will be applicable to other analysts that have similar interests.

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This is the one thing, as we bring this new discipline into life, that I would just urge us to pay attention to. We’ve built a lot of silos of exquisite capabilities across the agencies. We are spending tons of time now freeing those silos up so we can create collaboration. With open source, let’s proceed with the idea that we always mean to share. Pay attention to interoperability standards, pay attention to privacy concerns, make sure that you’re thinking about whatever capability you bring may be relevant to the agency that’s engaged for your help, but also will be shared with others.

Q: General, thanks very much for your time today. I appreciate it.

Legere: Thank you very much.