

INTERCONNECTED IN PRACTICE AND INSULAR BY NATURE? THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF THE FRENCH INTELLIGENCE APPARATUS

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Abstract

In our contemporary security environment, intelligence cooperation is a strategic and vital resource shaping French strategic stature. The Bill passed in July 2015 after Paris terrorist attacks (Loi renseignement du 24 Juillet 2015) stated that with the protection of national interest, intelligence must support defence and diplomacy policies. We argue in the paper that the development of French intelligence cooperation is a response aiming at mitigating the uncertainty of the contemporary security environment. Intelligence cooperation has become a natural extension of French intelligence cycle and a means of influence. At the same time, we point out a paradox: While French intelligence services are highly interconnected and involved in numerous cooperation arrangements on a bilateral and multilateral basis, the lack of information available and academic analysis, its history and the French Strategic stature of "autonomy", suggest that the French community remains "insular" (Rovner 2013). The French intelligence community and especially its foreign intelligence services are among the most secretive in Europe regarding cooperation arrangements, and the French Intelligence Studies are still in a state of infancy. The French intelligence cooperation should be investigated through intelligence cooperation studies, international relations theories and the following criteria: 1. Strategic priorities and security environment; 2. Established partnerships. 3. Capabilities. French services incentives to foster cooperation are driven by the likelihood of a potential partner to share information or facilities, and whether the partner shares strategic orientations and faces a common threat.

Keywords: *Intelligence, practice, French, international intelligence cooperation*

Introduction

"For us, the cooperation is very easy and highly automatic through the Five-Eyes system. But for the French services, it is based on a comprehensive and pro-active strategy of partnerships, following strategic priorities. It is harder to

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manage and sustain effectively". Interview with a Canadian intelligence officer, Paris, 2016.

Due to its secrecy and the French scholar's reluctance toward intelligence services, French intelligence 'machinery' remains critically understudied comparing to its American and British counterparts. Nevertheless, French military doctrine (White Paper on Defence and Security, 2013) has promoted intelligence to the first rank of strategic function (knowledge and foreknowledge) before "deterrence", "protection", "prevention" and "intervention". The Bill passed in July 2015 after Paris terrorist attacks (Loi renseignement du 24 Juillet 2015) stated that with the protection of national interest, intelligence must support defence and diplomacy policies. Over the past ten years, France has experienced a process of rationalization, centralization, modernization of its intelligence apparatus to support strategic stature and fulfill its international commitments (Chopin 2017; Chopin & Oudet 2016). The 2008 constitutional review created a Parliamentary oversight body (Délégation Parlementaire au Renseignement), whose effects on international cooperation is yet to come but could be enforced soon. The process of normalization and centralization has engendered the creation of the Coordonateur national au Renseignement (CNR) and the constitution of a formal "community" composed of first cycle services: DGSE, DRM, DRSD (Ministry of Defence), DGSi (Ministry of Interior), Tracfin and DNRED (Ministry of Budget). Plus, a second cycle composed of seven services (Ministry of Interior) in charge of "territorial intelligence".

French services have bilateral relations with hundreds of foreign services, and they may have several counterparts in some countries. For example, in 2013 the director general of the DGSE stated that his services work with more than 200 foreign partners. In 2013, following the "red-line" policy shared by Barack Obama and French President François Hollande, the DGSE released an intelligence analysis reporting biological attacks by the Syrian regime, indicating a sea change in the relationships between French society its intelligence services. Despite its high degree of interconnectedness with international networks of cooperation French intelligence has not received much attention from academics. The French intelligence cooperation should be investigated through intelligence cooperation studies, international relations theories and following criteria: 1. Strategic priorities and security environment; 2. Established partnerships. 3. Capabilities. After a brief reminder of intelligence cooperation conceptual framework, we would like to show that if the French services are very interconnected in practice, they remain insular culturally.

I. International intelligence cooperation: A conceptual framework

I.1. Response to the “new normal” of uncertainty

In the contemporary strategic environment, intelligence cooperation becomes more and more complex and critical for national and international security. This trend is related to four factors: 1. the growing number and intensity of threats, crises, and conflicts which require a reaction from national and international; 2. The increasing importance of precautionary approaches to security that focus on preventive, pre-emptive and anticipatory measures; 3. The need to access advanced technologies and sophisticated tools enabling massive information collecting, processing and disseminating, and knowledge sharing. 4. The opportunity for private, non-state actor or anti-state entities to widely apply intelligence tradecraft (Gruszczak 2016).

Academic literature usually distinguishes four factors fostering cooperation: 1. No one agency can do and know everything; 2. Developed countries are particularly attractive partners for less fortunate services that can trade human intelligence for the more sophisticated and expensive technical products to which they would not otherwise have access; 3. Ultimately, intelligence cooperation occurs when potential benefits are evident, and the cost or risk of that cooperation well understood; 4. Cooperation can encompass some form of influence and provide. Four factors impede collaboration: 1. The difference in threat perception; 2. The asymmetry in the balance of power between the two parties; 3. Ethical considerations; 4. National legal framework for data sharing and human rights (Aydinli et Tuzuner 2011; Hess 2003; Lander 2004; Lefebvre 2003; Richelson 1990; R. J. Aldrich 2003; R. Aldrich 2011).

I. 2. Intelligence cooperation: definition and taxonomy.

International intelligence cooperation "is the liaison or collaboration between state bodies from one or more countries, responsible for the collection, analysis and/or dissemination of intelligence for purposes including defence, national security and the prevention and detection of serious organized crime"(Born, Leigh, & Wills 2015). It encompasses five types of activities: 1. Information sharing; 2. covert operational cooperation; 3. hosting facilities and equipment; 4. training and capacity building; 5. providing hardware and software.

Scope and depth of cooperation can vary cooperation agreement, regular or one-shot meeting regarding one issue or one collection discipline or Task Force. In December 2015, France was committed within "Task Force Fraternité" aimed at investigating Brussels terrorist attacks. Seven operational

meetings were organized in France, Europol, and Belgium. Currently, two liaisons officers are in charge of intelligence sharing with Europol. The cooperation increased after the creation in January 2016 of "European Counter-terrorism Centre, ECTC" hosted by Europol. Plus, following the emergence of a standard European counter-terrorism policy French police and gendarmerie special forces units (GIGN and RAID) are part of group Atlas grouping special forces units from 26 countries of the Union.

Cooperation can have a bilateral (the deepest for the French community) and multi-lateral form at tactical, operational and strategic levels. For the French intelligence community, they are a strategic resource at the heart of national security policy and are included in Defence agreement signed by France and its counterparts. Moreover, it seems important to undermine an overused cliché: Contrary to what has been portrayed in the media in the days after dramatic events, cooperation has become a natural activity of French services, a natural daily activity aiming at completing the French intelligence cycle. French intelligence has long been internationalized through its counter-terrorism activities since the 1980's. Former head of DST (Direction de la surveillance du territoire) under the Ministry of interior reports in his Mémoires that the domestic service was involved in more than fifty international cooperation arrangements at the end of the 1980's. The then Director of DGSE Bernard Bajolet stated in 2013: "We (DGSE) have a broad and extensive cooperation with foreign partners. DGSE has developed almost 200 partnerships, domestic and foreign services and technical agencies (...). Plus, we have partnerships with countries that could be regarded as adversaries. In matters of intelligence, everyone is partner and adversary at the same time. Some are more partners than an adversary, and conversely".

The statement highlights the defining features of French cooperation strategy. French intelligence services sustain relationships with countries considered as adversaries. In 2016, Patrick Calvar the then director of DGSI (domestic intelligence service) announced that its services cooperation with Russian services about Syrian-Iraqi Chechens channels. In sum, there is not friendly secret services and secret services of friendly states. The hypothesis here is that in a world of uncertainty regarding threats, sustaining intelligence cooperation is a strategic resource.

I. 3. From "need to know" to "need to share."

Over the past few years, intelligence cooperation between domestic and international counterparts has become a "new normal" in political discourse. In practice, this trend marks the shift from one logic to one another:

From the "need to know" and the "tyranny of stovepipes" inherited from the Cold War to the "need to share" and the absolute necessity to "connect the dots". Intelligence services have to reform their "age of Cold war" structures and adapt themselves to the "age of Terror" environment (Treverton 2011). David Omand in his remarkable book "Securing the State" argued that: "The world of intelligence is no longer a zero-sum game" (Omand 2010). Nowadays, the efficiency of intelligence services is assessed through to their abilities to coordinate with their domestic and international counterparts and be fully involved in all sources national threat assessment. It was the idea behind the creation of the French Conseil National du Renseignement, CNR, in July 2008, triggering a process of centralization and normalization of intelligence within the Executive Branch (the weakest equivalent of American Director of National Intelligence, DNI).

The risk that the lack of intelligence sharing might be responsible for dramatic events (terrorism) and an "intelligence failure" has become unbearable for the western public opinions. This tendency explains never-ending debates in France toward "intelligence failures" where the intelligence services are progressively acknowledged as the "first line of defence" and subject to more and more public and academic discourses. On the other hand, intelligence inner logics and functions remain misunderstood explaining why, after dramatic events, public opinion suspect intelligence failures for reason of internecine feuds, and dysfunction between services at odds with each other. On the European level, a lack of intelligence sharing is suspected to be a mark of national selfishness and a defence of narrow national interest against a common threat. Against this background, it is worth noting that the intelligence realm is experiencing an exponential increase in its cooperation arrangements.

Meanwhile, some scholars have described a double-process of globalization reshaping intelligence affairs. One is the globalization *of* intelligence by the mushrooming of intelligence cooperation arrangements making the international web of cooperation denser and tighter. The other is a process of globalization *in* intelligence related to the transnational nature of contemporary threats intelligence service are facing (A. D. M. Svendsen 2009; Svendsen 2012; Svendsen 2012;) Plus, Europe is experiencing a process of regionalization of its intelligence activities by the strengthening and widening of bilateral cooperation amongst state (horizontal cooperation) and within Union's structures (vertical cooperation) such as Intcen, Europol, Satcen (Geospatial intelligence centre in Torrejon, Spain), Club of Berne-Counter Terrorism Group). France is at the heart of these developments after 2013 Snowden affairs when a consensus appeared among security apparatus that

the improvement of the all-sources collection capabilities to guaranty strategic autonomy was an absolute necessity. Moreover, French services while enforcing their European cooperation refused to open doors for a "European FBI" or "European CIA."

II. French intelligence cooperation stature

II. 1 Strategic priorities and security environment

Foreign counterparts acknowledged the French services for their highly secretive nature. Joshua Rovner argued in 2013 that the French community is distinguishable by its "insular nature." The hypothesis marks a paradox regarding the highly interconnected French community in bilateral and multilateral relationships in Europe and the world. Thus, French services incentives to foster cooperation might be driven by the likelihood of a potential partner to share information, whether the partner shares strategic orientations and face a common threat. French services proclivity to commit themselves in cooperation depends on partner's capacities and competence and if the partner shares the French strategic orientations. What is remarkable with the French situation is that counter-terrorism activities seem to be considered out the scope of national sovereignty. The "need to share" is so high in counter-terrorism affairs that French services share almost 95% of their information, according to a senior representative of DGSE (Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure).

Therefore, French cooperation are experiencing a process of enlargement and deepening. With the autonomy of decision-making, intelligence is also a factor of influence within international organizations (EU, ONU-peacekeeping operations, NATO) and with assistance provided to countries structuring their intelligence apparatus (French-speaking Africa). One of the questions is the standardization of French intelligence cooperation since the reintegration of NATO command in 2008 and despite the refusal of the United States to integrate France into the Five Eyes system. These interactions are closely linked to the degree of trust between services. Patrick Calvar mentions the necessary rebuilding of confidence in non-espionage after 2013.

To put it in a nutshell, French cooperation strategy and the sustainment of all-source capabilities is driven by its incentives to maintain its autonomy of decision-making and means of influence. Nowadays, French intelligence partnerships are naturally part of French security and defence cooperation and were at the heart of discussions during Danish and Indian visits in French last June. Moreover, it is worth mentioning the French

commitment in peacekeeping operations by the Department of peacekeeping. With 940 troops contributing to eight PKOs, France is the second contributor to the members of the Security Council and the only one to deploy forces in support of the PKOs (Minusma-Barkhane; Operation Sangaris-Minusca; Operation Licorne / ONUCI). Moreover, France is the fifth contributor to the PKO budget (6.3%).

II. 2 Established partnerships: "France talks with everyone."

Intelligence cooperation is one of the components of Defense cooperation. This is the case of the Bill authorizing the agreement between the French and Jordanian governments, registered on 21 July 2017, propelled by the fight against Daesh. In 2017, an annual bilateral military cooperation plan formalized the various types of cooperation between the two countries. It provides targeted cooperation in the field of intelligence, air force, and Special Forces. The French Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and the Armed Forces states that "there is also cooperation in the field of military intelligence which, for reasons of confidentiality, is not included in this plan". This suggests that it is structured by other channels, such as DGSE or DRM (Direction du renseignement militaire).

Academic literature assumes that in democracy intelligence cooperation are closely related to foreign policy. Under no circumstances can cooperation become forms of counter-diplomacy or para-diplomacy. In May 2017, French Ambassador in Washington, Gérard Araud, declared to *National Review* that "Our military-intelligence-sharing cooperation with the Defence Department improved dramatically under former defence secretary Ash Carter. And Secretary Mattis has told us he is ready to go beyond the existing agreement. So for us, it has been critical. For instance, in the Sahel region (of Africa), it is millions of square kilometres and it is very, very tough in terms of intelligence. But the Americans are providing a lot of technical intelligence so that we can strike the terrorists when they cross the border from Libya into Tunisia, or from Mali into Niger. We have absolutely no complaints. We have no signals that things will be different under President Trump. And after the Paris attacks, the U.S. immediately volunteered to help us — to increase the exchange of intelligence — and on our side, at least, we are very satisfied". Then he was asked: "Do you believe, especially in the field of NSA signal intelligence, that the U.S. has helped save French lives in France?" He answered: "Really, I don't know — it's not because I am trying to underestimate what's happening. I am out of the intelligence channels" and added: "I receive a lot of notes coming from our intelligence services, but they

are notes on the political aspect. There are notes on topics where it's normal that I would be informed. The exchange between the NSA and France – I don't know why I would know. The principle we have in France is 'the need to know'. Assuming that M Araud is telling the truth, his two answers portrayed the French intelligence services role and positioning in French external action: *they support French diplomacy by collaborating with foreign counterparts, outside the official diplomatic channels*. Nevertheless, we cannot argue that this understanding is more than a hypothesis in the absence of information from others embassies with which to compare.

The internal reform of the community modifies the capacity of certain services to cooperate. Tracfin financial intelligence unit is now a member of the six services of the first circle of the French community. The expansion of the international cooperation is linked to his transfer to a specialized intelligence service in the financial field. Facing terrorist financing networks, Tracfin is developing its cooperation with Europol, which has hosted a secure exchange between European Financial Intelligence Units since January 2016. Tracfin is involved in the FATF (Financial Action Group created in 1989) and MONEYVAL and EGMONT in charge of the operational exchange of information between the 164 financial intelligence units existing in the world. In charge of the operational exchange of information between the 164 financial intelligence units existing in the world. Tracfin strives to ensure that operational exchanges take place in a short period. The unit has been developing and conducting bilateral cooperation with Belgium, Qatar and the Chinese services since 2015. Visits by delegations are also a reliable indicator of collaboration: 9 for the year 2016: Argentina, Egypt, Madagascar, United States, Ukraine, Belgium, Poland, Tunisia, Italy. Tracfin received in 2015 members of the US Congress and intervened before this institution. In 2016 France was at the initiative of a meeting day with their American counterpart. Tracfin received information from 99 CRF in 2016.

Additionally, alongside alliances and international organizations, there is an increasing interconnection between terrorist threat analysis centers such as the British Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, the Danish Centre for Terrorism Analysis and the Coordination Centre in Germany. One of the challenges for French cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism will be the integration of the recently created CNCT (Counter-terrorism national centre under the supervision of the National Intelligence Coordination) and the articulation with the cooperation agreements already committed by the French services. The CNCT was created in June 2017, and it is too soon to speculate about its international cooperation and the shape it might take.

With the convergence of foreign policy priorities, cooperation at the strategic level is conditioned by the harmonization of perceptions of threats and the emergence of needs. This harmonization can be the result of analytical collaborations such as the one that took place in 2016 between the French external services (DGSE-Interaxions) and Canadian (CSIS) liaison services. DGSE is at the origins of the Think Tank "Interaxions". For the first time in its history, DGSE was part of a joint workshop conducted under the Chatham House rule, leading to the publication of a post-Daesh environment assessment. It is considered by the DGSE as a significant step forward and a milestone in international cooperation and synergy with French academics. During informal interviews I have had with former intelligence officers (DGSE), they confessed the cultural turn Interaxions represents for the French services, and the pride to see something that has never been done before! DGSE stated publicly that: "Interaxions is a privileged meeting place for interacting with all French and foreign academic, academic and professional expertise on the criterion of excellence. Everyone, through their experience and their specific approach, has one of the many keys to understand reality. It also allows external participants to benefit from the unique expertise of our analysts. Interaxions contributes to the dialogue between the various actors. The events organized by Interaxions are open to the French intelligence community, our institutional partners and national correspondents and to the French ecosystem of strategic thinking, the contribution of Interaxions brings it. Some events are organized with our foreign counterparts". It is worth mentioning that, alongside their counterparts, French domestic services are involved in the process of internationalization. The French DGSI (Délégation générale à la sécurité extérieure) has a significant territorial network. It also has a large number of posts (the number remains classified) outside the International Co-operation Directorate of the Directorate General of the National Police. The Directorate of International Cooperation (DCI) is the first joint directorate between the National Police and the National Gendarmerie, which brings together the two internal security forces. It brings together police officers and gendarmes who work, side by side and in concert, to the international police cooperation set up by the State to better protect its citizens and its interests. Created on 1 September 2010, it has been fully operational since 1 January 2011. The various threats, such as terrorism, drug trafficking or cybercrime, originate outside our borders. Countering these threats requires close cooperation between countries. The network of Internal Security Attachés (ASI), made up of 250 police and gendarmes deployed in 93 embassies and covering 156 countries, is a sure bet. The creation of the DCI is in line with the general policy review. Indeed, it reduces costs and improves performance by

bringing together, in a single structure, the major players in international cooperation. It also makes it possible to draw all the consequences of the attachment of the National Gendarmerie to the Ministry of the Interior. Its missions are as follows: Implementation of the Ministry's international strategy and the implementation of France's foreign policy on internal security; To lead and coordinate the operational, technical and institutional cooperation of the National Police and Gendarmerie, except matters exclusively of intelligence services.

II.3 Capabilities: All source collection and modernization

France is one of the few European countries to have access to all civil and military intelligence and civilian intelligence services, including technical intelligence, including electronic intelligence (SIGINT). There can be no question of enumerating all the French capacities. To sum up, France has a unique human intelligence capability (Humint) in the Middle East, Maghreb, and West Africa. France is a privileged partner for all the security problems of the region, especially with the G5 Sahel countries with which France provide intelligence support regarding capabilities and training. In the same vein, the network of embassies (163), permanent representations (16) and its maritime area (2nd EEZ and 1st underwater zone) provide France with a worldwide presence and cooperation and collection points. Worth mentioning is that the strengthening of satellite capacities and the development of partnerships over the last few years. France has space cooperation with Germany (5 SAR LUPE satellites), Italy (4 satellites, Cosmo-Skymed), 2 Hélios satellites, 1 Pléiade satellite. While there are collecting and operating centers in six countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, and Greece), CMOS de Creil remains the "system center" responsible for supplying foreign partners. The modernization process in Creil (40kms away from Paris) ("Intelligence campus") is accompanied by enhanced cooperation with European structures such as the Satcen, notably in the field of training and education. In 2016, as part of the National Imagery Analyst's Initial Course and the NATO International IMINT courses, two readings were given at the Creil Center. Cooperation with the Satcen also involves the liaison of a Seconded National Expert (SNE). They are seven for a total of 132 employees. Similarly, it should be noted that of the 41 visits and receptions of delegations to the Satcen in 2016, five concerned French representatives, more than any other member of the EU. Since the end of the 1990s the daily cooperation of intelligence SIGINT between France, Germany, and Holland. With Denmark and Belgium, it is estimated that a "Group of Five" is progressively structured around this information-gathering technique.

Conclusion

In the hypothesis of an "insular nature" of the French community, the proclivity to engage in cooperation depends on the characteristics (capacity, relevance, trust) of the partner potential. The likelihood of French cooperation will increase with a partner involved in the same strategic area of interest or facing the same threat, if the lack of cooperation can be perceived as national egoism and have consequences on domestic policy, if there are French and foreign forces engaged in the same theatre of operations or if the partner is a member of the Five Eyes. Finally, it must be stressed that all the impediments of cooperation cannot be overcome naturally in the "top-bottom" creation of dedicated international organizations. It requires trust and synergy between analysts from different countries (Palacios 2016). Building trust is a fundamental dimension of cooperation (Hoffman 2002; Igoe Walsh 2006; Cook, Hardin, & Levi 2007; Elhardt 2015 Van Milders 2017) that could be resolved by building a joint European intelligence culture through the harmonization of training processes and an epistemic community of analysts, but also by harmonizing perceptions of common threats at the strategic level and taking into account national foreign policies agendas.

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