

information technology (IT) networks, and datasets—that have now, 8 years later, largely been overcome.

An understanding of the responsibilities of different analytic components of the CT community is critical to identifying what went wrong and how best to fix it. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) was created by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) to be “the primary organization in the U.S. government for analyzing and integrating all intelligence possessed or acquired by the U.S. government pertaining to terrorism and counterterrorism².” Intelligence Community guidance in 2006 further defined counterterrorism analytic responsibilities and tasked NCTC with the primary role within the Intelligence Community for bringing together and assessing all-source intelligence to enable a full understanding of and proper response to particular terrorist threat streams. Additionally, the Director of NCTC is in charge of the DNI Homeland Threat Task Force, whose mission is to examine threats to the U.S. Homeland from al-Qa’ida, its allies, and homegrown violent extremists.

Notwithstanding NCTC’s central role in producing terrorism analysis, CIA maintains the responsibility and resource capability to “correlate and evaluate intelligence related to national security and provide appropriate dissemination of such intelligence.”³ CIA’s responsibility for conducting all-source analysis in the area of counterterrorism is focused on supporting its operations overseas, as well as informing its leadership of terrorist threats and terrorist targets overseas. Therefore, both agencies – NCTC and CIA – have a role to play in conducting (and a responsibility to carry out) all-source analysis to identify operatives and uncover specific plots like the attempted December 25 attack.

The information available to the CT community over the last several months – which included pieces of information about Mr. Abdulmutallab, information about AQAP and its plans, and information about an individual now believed to be Mr. Abdulmutallab and his association with AQAP and its attack planning – was obtained by several agencies. Though all of that information was available to all-source analysts at the CIA and the NCTC prior to the attempted attack, the dots were never connected, and as a result, the problem appears to be more about a component failure to “connect the dots,” rather than a lack of information sharing. The information that was available to analysts, as is usually the case, was fragmentary and embedded in a large volume of other data.

Though the consumer base and operational capabilities of CIA and NCTC are somewhat different, the intentional redundancy in the system should have added an additional layer of protection in uncovering a plot like the failed attack on December 25. However, in both cases, the mission to “connect the dots” did not produce the result that, in hindsight, it could have – connecting identifying information about Mr. Abdulmutallab with fragments of information about his association with AQAP and the group’s intention of attacking the U.S.

- The majority of these discreet pieces of intelligence were gathered between mid-October and late December 2009.
- For example, on November 18, Mr. Abdulmutallab’s father met with U.S. Embassy officers in Abuja, Nigeria, to discuss his concerns that his son may have come under the influence of

² 50 U.S.C. § 404o(d)(1).

³ 50 U.S.C. § 403-4a(d)(2).