

Kund Miklós Regényi¹

International Cooperation between Intelligence Services

Nemzetbiztonsági szolgálatok nemzetközi együttműködése

The article is dealing with the key components of international cooperation. It gives a short overview of the development of international cooperation from the historical point of view, then the conditions and levels of it, finally, it describes the professional areas and the persons involved in international cooperation. At the end, the article emphasises the importance and relevance of international cooperation between national intelligence services.

Keywords: *international cooperation, secret services, national security services, protocol, shared repositories, joint operations*

A cikk a nemzetközi együttműködés legfontosabb összetevőit mutatja be. Rövid áttekintést ad a nemzetközi együttműködés fejlődéséről történeti szempontból, bemutatja annak feltételeit és szintjeit, végül pedig leírja annak szakterületeit és az abba bevont személyi kört. Zárásként a cikk hitet tesz a nemzetbiztonsági szolgálatok közötti nemzetközi együttműködés lényeges és fontos volta mellett.

Kulcsszavak: *nemzetközi együttműködés, nemzetközi együttműködés hírszerző és biztonsági szolgálatok között, protokoll, megosztott adattárak, közös műveletek*

At the beginning of the 21st century, at least in Europe, all seemed to be about international cooperation, as the lives of the Europeans are largely determined and improved by the supranational organisation known as the European Union. There has also been an extensive international cooperation between the secret services and the national security services, but as it will be seen, it functions still on a completely different level and quality.

¹ Adjunktus, PhD, Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem, Polgári Nemzetbiztonsági Tanszék – Senior Lecturer, PhD, University of Public Service, Department of Civilian National Security. E-mail: regenyi.kund@uni-nke.hu, ORCID: [0000-0003-1833-9523](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1833-9523)

1. Secret service cooperation in the 19th–20th centuries

What path has led to a relatively broad state of international co-operation of secret services, if their function can be described and characterised by a much narrower scope than those of other spheres? Initially, at the birth of the classical secret services, that is, in the 19th century, the services acted like the states themselves. They put their own interests and goals in the first place, and looked at everyone else as a competitor. Allies and alliances were of an occasional nature, aimed at achieving a well-defined goal for certain duration. It is clear that similar to other areas of public life, secrecy was decisive for the secret services. Cooperation, if any, was not necessarily in accordance with the principle or practice of equal partnership. In other words, the economically, politically, militarily stronger party subtly or less subtly persuaded the subordinate one to accept its privileged role. This kind of collaboration was of course also found in the 20th century; see the example of the South American operations of American intelligence² or even the operation of the secret services of the Allies – either Western or Eastern – who won World War II in Germany.

The next characteristic is that the cooperation is tied to a specific task. Cooperation besides a specific joint task is atypical. A very good example of this is the activity of American intelligence in the Middle East, Afghanistan, when in the 1970s and 1980s they supported expansively the Mujahedeen against the Soviet Union and Islamic-based foreign extremist individuals and organisations, including those whose roles were completely revalued a few years later. It is enough to mention the name of Osama bin Laden.³

In the early phase of the collaboration the organising principle – which of course still exists nowadays –, namely that ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’, was well demonstrated. A good example of this was the cooperation between American intelligence and the Sicilian mafia after the allied forces had landed in Sicilia.⁴ The mafia was quite hostile to the fascist Italian state which intended to break its power and acted hard against the organisation.

How this level can be exceeded? Long-term common interests and values are needed, and only along these principles may the close co-operation between intelligence services be ensured. A good example of such common, long-term values and interests is the cooperation that took place during and after the Second World War. The best known of these is the so-called ‘five eyes’, whose existence has not been officially confirmed to date. The ‘five eyes’ is the cooperation primarily but presumably not exclusively in the field of signal capture and decryption between the five Anglo-Saxon powers, which includes the secret services of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.⁵ It is noteworthy that non-Anglo-Saxon

² See for instance ‘CIA and Assassinations: The Guatemala 1954 Documents’, The National Security Archive.

³ See for instance Steve Coll, *Ghost wars: the secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

⁴ See for instance Tim Newark, *Mafia Allies. The True Story of America's Secret Alliance with the Mob in World War II* (Saint Paul MN: Zenith Press, 2007).

⁵ See for instance James Cox, ‘Canada and the five eyes intelligence community’, Strategic Studies Working Group Papers, 2012.

powers are excluded from this cooperation, be it either Germany, or France or Japan. Thanks to the global relay capability of the ‘five eyes’, it has come into the spotlight again and again, enough to think of the so-called Echelon⁶ scandal of the 1990s.

An example of a similar type of cooperation can be found in the Eastern Bloc, however, the congeniality of interests and values existed only at the level of declaration. The best-processed example of that co-operation under the Warsaw Pact was a fairly wide-ranging and precise collaboration in the field of reconnaissance of agency radio broadcasting, which apparently ended after the end of the Cold War.⁷

2. Conditions conducive to intelligence cooperation

Why is an organisation such as a national security service, which preserves the ancient, competitive nature of nation-states, initiates or joins international cooperation?

It is clear that the primary goal of the international cooperation is to unite capabilities for a common aim and success. Specifically, the goal is most often to increase the level of information and knowledge, either it is about a common opponent or a new phenomenon, or even more often a target person or a potential collaborator. A good example of complementing skills is to take advantage of the different features of a geographical location. In the late 1950s, the operational range of the U.S. stratosphere reconnaissance planes did not yet allow it to fly across the ocean from its homeland, so its takeoff happened in Turkey and the landing in Germany or in the United Kingdom.⁸

Let’s take a look at the other areas of capability supplementation. A typical example for that is the financial cooperation. One organisation provides financial assistance, the other requests for or accepts it. Obviously, the ulterior motives may differ. Financial support may be used to increase one’s own influence or to reciprocate assistance that cannot be offset by other means of the same quality.

3. Levels of international cooperation

Level zero of the international cooperation is the protocol one, which should not be underestimated. The content of cooperation at the protocol level is easy to deduce: the parties assure each other of their intentions and goodwill for cooperating with each other. Typically, a face-to-face meeting is held with senior officials from the top management or the supervisory state body, ministry, whose program usually does not include an in-depth discussion of details, but it is rather a general overview of the topics of common interest. Obviously, this does not mean much in itself, but we must keep in mind that, especially in the world of intelligence, ‘the longest journey

⁶ See for instance Martin Asser, ‘Echelon: Big Brother without a cause?’ BBC News.

⁷ Imre Dobák and Ferenc Endrődi, *A magyar rádióelhárítás nemzetközi együttműködésének története (1955–1990)* [Brief history of the international cooperation of the Hungarian radio traffic countering (1955–1990)] (Budapest: Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem, 2014).

⁸ ‘Francis Gary Powers’, Find a grave.

always begins with the first step'. If we do not take the first step, or do not cultivate level zero, even if it does not bring a tangible result, then no further steps will be taken, or only with a disproportionate effort and uncertain outcome. Therefore, it is a mistake to underestimate the importance of the protocol-level collaboration. An organisation that endeavors capabilities and means for that purpose, even without gaining significant results, is doing the right thing.

A common first or next step in the international cooperation concerns the field of education and training. Obviously, there is also a need for capacity development on the part of the hosting party. Taking over the experiences and best practices of the cooperating partners is a quick and cheap way to develop. Again, the underlying interest of the facilitator is only to expand its own working methods, and thus its influence, and additionally in terms of technical means its marketing aims. We have already mentioned the technical help, be it either an operational technical device, or an encryption device, or a computer hardware and software, where the possible interfaces for technical cooperation are quite diverse. It should be noted here, however, that for example taking over a cryptographic device without modification, to say the least, gives the possibility for our benevolent partner to diligently read our mails with us as well.

The next level of cooperation is the creation of common knowledge bases. This can be realised through bilateral exchanges of views or multilateral conferences, which usually result in a commonly agreed document, which includes the common standpoint of the participants on a particular issue of great interest. Obviously, for utilising this common knowledge, a data repository can be created, into which the participants of the cooperation – during a certain period of time – can upload and query information and data.

Considering the uploading and retrieving, we need to mention two important features of international cooperation between intelligence services. One is that the information remains in the possession of the original owner and he/she decides how to use it. Typically, he/she determines the circle within which the information can be passed on and shared with. Of course certain actors can be excluded from the cooperation. The other is the *do ut des* principle, which is particularly well accepted when using the repositories. Specifically, if one just queries a database and does not contribute to its content with own knowledge, it will be sooner or later eliminated from the circle of international cooperation.

The importance of this type of cooperation presented above is well illustrated by the fact that most of the international security cooperation forums also take place at this level.

Perhaps the highest level of international cooperation is the joint operations, such as the joint maintenance of a human source, or a technical attack or the joint conduct of a radio frequency control. It is clear that the highest level will only take place when there is already trust between the parties, and the aforementioned lower levels of cooperation have been mutually beneficial to them, and the information provided has not fallen into the wrong hands or has not been leaked.

4. Professional areas of international cooperation

The next group of questions worth reviewing is the common professional areas of collaboration and those areas where the cooperation is rare.

As a rule of thumb, mostly the transnational challenges need the most extensive cooperation, especially when detecting a common enemy is essential. Communism was such a transnational, nation-independent, non-state challenge to western democracies during the 20th century. After the end of the Cold War, this place with dubious glory was occupied by the international terrorism. The national security and law enforcement community of each state is continuously working closely together to seize terrorist organisations. And of course, in the meantime, everyone is trying to achieve their own underlying goals as long as it does not jeopardise their shared success.

An equally important area is the issue of international organised crime, drug trafficking, as well as the backflow and bleaching of related or derived financial instruments. In particular, the ever-tightening banking rules, the narrower interpretation of banking secrecy, the gradual but irrevocable disappearance of anonymous accounts and sight deposits also show the importance and success of the international fight against money laundering.

It is clear that international cooperation is also needed in the fight against illegal migration. However, this type of cooperation is complicated by those circumstances that there are differences in the intentions of the issuing and hosting countries. The situation is similar to the cooperation on dual-use and internationally controlled products and technologies, as well as on the embargo regimes governing these issues.

5. What are those areas where the cooperation is less typical and extensive?

It is clear that counter-intelligence or even joint intelligence operations are such that very high level of common interests, shared values and mutual trust are needed in order to involve other partners, since the own purposes and interests are so primary that they override everything else, at least in the vast majority of cases.

6. Persons involved in international cooperation

Who are involved in international cooperation? The foreign representation of each service is provided by persons with diplomatic status, the so-called open or revealed liaison officers. Of course, smaller countries often take the opportunity to send out (and fund) only one liaison to represent the entire intelligence–national security community as a whole. Accredited representatives of the cooperating services are contacted by the departments of each organisation specialised in international cooperation. It goes without saying that these persons do not have detailed competencies in professional matters, so it is common that the representatives of the given field, the so-called

experts, take part in the discussions as well. During joint operations – which is a rare and high level of cooperation – the representatives of the individual fields and the staff assigned to cooperate are playing the major role.

It is worth referring to the language challenges as well. Interpreting, if necessary, makes the process of cooperation and collaboration very difficult and slow, so a high level of foreign language proficiency – usually either the language of one of the cooperating partners or a general intermediary language, such as English – is a must for successful international cooperation.

7. Outlook

This study briefly summarised the most important aspects of international cooperation between intelligence services. The overall picture is apparently quite controversial. The author believes that international cooperation of intelligence services is not only needed because of ‘the spirit of our age’, or because of the possibility for certain executives or employees to travel to exotic landscapes from taxpayers’ money. International cooperation is a must for effective actions on transnational challenges. Perhaps even more important is that the level and content of international cooperation plays a significant role in the acceptance and appreciation of a certain service. This is the condition for that if external help is really needed once, then that request meets with warm response. Therefore international cooperation is the central element of the success or the failure of a service. That is why it is necessary to strive for it – and it is worth managing it well.

References

- Asser, Martin: ‘Echelon: Big Brother without a cause?’ *BBC News*. Online: [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/820758.stm](https://www.bbc.com/2/hi/europe/820758.stm) (15. 11. 2020.)
- Coll, Steve: *Ghost wars: the secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*. New York, Penguin Press, 2004.
- ‘CIA and Assassinations: The Guatemala 1954 Documents’. *The National Security Archive*. Online: <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/index.html> (15. 11. 2020.)
- Cox, James: ‘Canada and the five eyes intelligence community’. *Strategic Studies Working Group Papers*, 2012. Online: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.357.5576&rep=rep1&type=pdf> (15. 11. 2020.)
- Dobák, Imre – Ferenc Endrődi: *A magyar rádióelhárítás nemzetközi együttműködésének története (1955–1990)* [Brief history of the international cooperation of the Hungarian radio traffic countering (1955–1990)]. Budapest, Nemzeti Köszolgálati Egyetem, 2014.
- ‘Francis Gary Powers’. *Find a Grave*. Online: www.findagrave.com/memorial/2118/francis-gary-powers (15. 11. 2020.)
- Newark, Tim: *Mafia Allies. The True Story of America’s Secret Alliance with the Mob in World War II*. Saint Paul (MN), Zenith Press, 2007.