

CIA mines 'rich' content from blogs

By Bill Gertz
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President Bush and U.S. policy-makers are receiving more intelligence from open sources such as Internet blogs and foreign newspapers than they previously did, senior intelligence officials said.

The new Open Source Center (OSC) at CIA headquarters recently stepped up data collection and analysis based on bloggers worldwide and is developing new methods to gauge the reliability of the content, said OSC Director Douglas J. Naquin.

"A lot of blogs now have become very big on the Internet, and we're getting a lot of rich information on blogs that are telling us a lot about social perspectives and everything from what the general feeling is to ... people putting information on there that doesn't exist anywhere else," Mr. Naquin told The Washington Times.

Eliot A. Jardines, assistant deputy director of national intelligence for open source, said the amount of unclassified intelligence reaching Mr. Bush and senior policy-makers has increased as a result of the center's creation in November.

"We're certainly scoring a number of wins with our ultimate customer," said Mr. Jardines, who became the first high-level official in charge of the government's nonsecret intelligence in December.

"I can't get into detail of what, but I'll just say the amount of open source reporting that goes into the president's daily brief has gone up rather significantly," Mr. Jardines said. "There has been a real interest at the highest levels of our government, and we've been able to consistently deliver products that are on par with the rest of the intelligence community."

Mr. Naquin said recent OSC successes have included the discovery of a technology advance in a foreign country. Also, most data on avian flu outbreaks come from open sources, he said.

"Have we got coups out of it? Close to it," Mr. Naquin said. "But certainly we've had more insight than we've ever had before."

The OSC uses powerful computers and software technology to "sift" the Internet for valuable intelligence. It also buys information from commercial databases.

In the past, open-source reports were used mainly by intelligence analysts.

"But now our customer base literally ranges from the president to local police departments," Mr. Naquin said. The Fairfax County police use OSC products, as do police departments in San Diego, New York and Baltimore. The center also provides support to the U.S. military.

A Defense Department official said Chinese military bloggers have become a valuable source of intelligence on Beijing's secret military buildup. For example, China built its first Yuan-class attack submarine at an underground factory that was unknown to U.S. intelligence until a photo of the submarine appeared on the Internet in 2004.

The center took over the CIA's Foreign Broadcast Information Service, known as FBIS, that was formed in 1941 to translate foreign broadcasts.

The OSC is doubling its staff and bringing in material from 32 government agencies that also produce unclassified reports, Mr. Jardines said.