

Combined Intelligence Fusion Center Helps Thwart Terrorist Attacks

Press Release

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PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. ? It used to be a standing joke: Military intelligence? Isn't that an oxymoron?

Since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, few people laugh about military intelligence and especially not the analysts assigned to the Combined Intelligence Fusion Center (CIFC) here.

CIFC analysts pulls together information from myriad sources to create an accurate, timely and clear picture of potential threats so North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command can take action to deter, prevent and defeat threats against North America.

?Our goal is to connect the dots,? said Mike (last name withheld for security reasons), explaining how a tiny bit of disparate information can be used to flesh out the picture of a potential threat. Mike is the command?s director of intelligence.

In addition to scanning, sorting and analyzing information, CIFC analysts also ?fuse? the data with information from law enforcement agencies to try and ?predict? threats, Mike said. Because privacy rules prohibit the military from collecting information on U.S. citizens or information that does not have a ?foreign threat nexus,? analysts rely on intelligence collected by other legally authorized agencies, including the National Geo-Spatial Intelligence Agency, U.S. Border Patrol and Department of Homeland Security.

Although the CIFC is part of the command?s intelligence division and one of many sections providing ?situational awareness? to the NORAD and USNORTHCOM commander, its mission had been kept close hold until recently when a group of local, national and international journalists toured the CIFC ? for the first time ever ? as part of a media event.

The media also toured the Cheyenne Mountain Operations Center and the Domestic Warning Center in an effort to understand some of the changes that have taken place in NORAD since September 2001 and the mission of USNORTHCOM.

Today, NORAD not only monitors U.S. and Canadian airspace for threats coming from outside North America but also those coming from inside. NORAD also provides aerospace defense measures against hostile actions against North America. On the other hand, USNORTHCOM provides homeland defense and coordinates military assistance to civil authorities during a presidential declared disaster or emergency.

Just like USNORTHCOM, the CIFC came into being following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Previously the center, known as the combined intelligence center, provided intelligence and warning analysis for foreign space, missile and air operations relevant to NORAD and U.S. Space Command. But after the terrorist attacks and the creation of USNORTHCOM, the CIFC underwent a name and mission change.

More than 120 military, government and contract civilians staff the center, providing ?24/7 coverage,? said the CIFC commander. The colonel, whose name also is withheld for security reasons, said the military staff includes people from all four branches, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Canadian Forces.

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“It (the building) looks a little empty now because a lot of our people have left for the day. They started their shifts at 2 a.m.,” the colonel told journalists as he escorted them into the bowels of the 35,000 square-foot CIFIC building.

Mike said the CIFIC “is the heart” of the command’s information fusion process, which is designed to defend against “asymmetric and strategic threats.” He defined “asymmetric threats” as those coming from outside North America.

Though all combatant commands have intelligence analysts, Mike and his people are unique because they serve a command whose area of responsibility includes the homeland. That means CIFIC analysts must accomplish their mission while ensuring the rights of U.S. citizens are not violated. “Winning the war (on terrorism) at the expense of our Constitutional rights is no victory at all,” said Mike.

He said the key to the center’s effectiveness is the “rigorous training” staff members receive plus the fact that the center is closely scrutinized by the offices of the command inspector general and staff judge advocate, assistant secretary of defense for intelligence oversight and the Department of Defense general counsel.