



Beyond Boston: Global security and intelligence

By Kathy Kemper - 05/29/13 09:18 AM ET

Who would of thought to see the Russian Ambassador sitting between two of America's intelligence anchors to discuss cooperation and collaboration?

On May 28, just after Memorial Day, the Institute for Education (IFE) hosted three esteemed members of Washington's brain trust at the Federal City Council to discuss how the U.S. national security landscape has changed in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing in April. As part of IFE's INFO Global Connections Series Roundtable, His Excellency Sergey Kislyak, Russian Ambassador to the U.S.; General Michael Hayden, former director of the CIA and NSA; and Ambassador John Negroponte, former Director of National Intelligence, shared their thoughts, in particular, on the balance Americans have struck between security and freedom.

The very fact that two senior members of the U.S. intelligence community and the sitting Russian ambassador to the U.S. were happy and eager to share a stage and speak candidly about the subject says volumes about IFE's role in fostering collaboration, civility, and common ground. The Honorable Mayor Anthony Williams opened the forum by sharing his experience as mayor of Washington, DC on 9/11. Mayor Williams noted the importance of both emotional leadership and organizational leadership. In the immediate aftermath of September 11, he and senior staff rallied and readily executed emergency response procedures. But the city also needed to heal from psychic wounds, and Washington's leadership had to step up to the plate, even though there wasn't a playbook for emotional recovery.

General Hayden pointed out that the Boston Marathon bombings, unlike 9/11, were "a tragedy, but not a catastrophe." Casualties were limited; the perpetrators were quickly identified and taken into custody; and the channel of communication between the American and Russian intelligence communities is more open than it was before.

There is a good chance, the panel agreed, that the bombing would have been less likely to take place in New York due to the aggressive security measures that the New York Police Department adopted after the city was repeatedly targeted. But the "new normal" in New York hasn't escaped controversy. It is unlikely that the country as a whole would be willing to accept it.

A lot has changed since 9/11. Americans have had to make difficult choices about the degree of freedom and privacy they are willing to give up in exchange for greater security. For now, most people can live with the balance that has been struck. With its top leadership decimated and morale flagging, Al Qaeda and its satellites are on the ropes, and their ability to mount a large-scale attack is seriously compromised.

But the hard truth is, the panel noted, that smaller-scale attacks like the one that marred the Boston Marathon will most likely continue to take place, simply because it would be too costly—both in terms of resources and lost liberty—to make them impossible. The best path forward, General Hayden asserted, may not be even more draconian security measures, but simply a combination of American vigilance ("See something, say something") and British hardiness ("Keep calm and carry on").