

# Opportunities and Optimization of the *Our Eyes Initiative* as the Strategy for Counter-Terrorism in ASEAN

Chastiti Mediafira Wulolo, Tri Legionosuko, Suhirwan, Yusuf

**Abstract**—Terrorism and radicalization have become a common threat to every nation in this world. As a part of the asymmetric warfare threat, terrorism and radicalization need a complex strategy as the problem solver. One such way is by collaborating with the international community. The *Our Eyes Initiative* (OEI), for example, is a cooperation pact in the field of intelligence information exchanges related to terrorism and radicalization initiated by the Indonesian Ministry of Defence. The pact has been signed by Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Thailand, and Singapore. This cooperation mostly engages military acts as a central role, but it still requires the involvement of various parties such as the police, intelligence agencies and other government institutions. This paper will use a qualitative content analysis method to address the opportunity and enhance the optimization of OEI. As the result, it will explain how OEI takes the opportunities as the strategy for counter-terrorism by building it up as the regional cooperation, building the legitimacy of government and creating the legal framework of the information sharing system.

**Keywords**—*Our Eyes Initiative*, terrorism, counter-terrorism, ASEAN, cooperation, strategy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

NOWADAYS, terrorism has become a challenge to many countries in this world; in that, South East Asian countries share these same concerns about it. The bombing terror in Surabaya in May 2018 left a deep sorrow among Indonesians and raised global condemnation towards the terror sponsored by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Experts argued that the attack in Surabaya is an indication of a weakening of terrorist networks; however, terrorism remains a factual threat to national security. The spread of terror networks in almost all regions in South East Asia is the obvious threat that has to be overcome together; especially, ahead of the Asian Games in 2018, as the prominent international event could be exploited to execute terror.

Based on the principles of Indonesian foreign policy which are independent and active, Indonesia's Ministry of Defense, Ryamizard Ryacudu tried to introduce the *Our Eyes Initiative* (OEI), a cooperation to cope with terrorism issues and strengthen cross-nation cooperation in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). OEI is the sub-regional

cooperation that was the main discussion at the ASEAN Defense Minister Meeting (ADMM) 2018 in Singapore [1]. At that event, Defense Ministers from Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Thailand, Philippines and, Singapore have signed this cooperation and named it the 'Our Eyes Initiative'. According to Ryamizard Ryacudu's statement at the Indonesia Defense University General Lecture, the OEI is an intelligence cooperation in the form of a strategic information exchange related to terrorism and radicalism [2]. He said that the OEI was a cooperation for sharing information on determining the exact location of terrorism, and that held no political interest beyond combating terrorism. He asserted that terrorism is not only the enemy of a country but all nations and countries in this world. Therefore, there should be no confidential information for terrorism issues.

## II. OUR EYES INITIATIVE

The *Our Eyes Initiative* adapted the concept of the *Five Eyes* cooperation between the United States with Australia, England, Canada and New Zealand which involves elements of military defense cooperation, law enforcement and intelligence networks together [3]. However, if viewed from the context, these co-operations have a significant difference. The *Five Eyes* cooperation accommodates all communication related to health information, legal and political processes, and communication among them, while OEI is only limited to information related to terrorism issues, which is being shared among involved countries.

According to Lieutenant General Yoedhi Swastanto, the Rector of Indonesia Defense University, this sub-regional ASEAN cooperation is a response towards the incidents of terror in Southeast Asia. For example, when terror occurred in the territory of Malaysia, the victim was Indonesian, and the pirate was from the Philippines. This necessarily requires the sub-regional cooperation of ASEAN. Firstly, there are four cooperation as the effort to counter-terrorism among Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, namely as follows; Trilateral in the field of Maritime, Trilateral in Air Reconnaissance, Army Training, especially for the Special Forces and OEI [4].

At first, OEI was initiated by the three countries and later followed by three other countries such as Brunei Darussalam, Thailand, and Singapore. Thailand was involved because there are terrorist groups of Patani who are also potentially powerful to commit acts of terror. Brunei Darussalam also keeps terrorist assets that need to be supervised, while Singapore has

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many potential factors to optimize this cooperation. OEI has been expected to be the pioneer to increase the sense of awareness for ASEAN from the danger of terrorism.

Proper theories are needed to examine in this research, so these theories could analyze the process that can be used as the academic rule. This research will use two theories to further analyze the opportunities which exist in OEI. The first is the Theory of International Cooperation that will be used to discover what opportunities subsist in OEI. The second concept is the New Craft of Intelligence which proposes to formulate the flow of sharing intelligence information's strategies from an intelligence point of view.

### III. THE OPPORTUNITIES OF OUR EYES INITIATIVE AS SUB-REGIONAL COOPERATION

On the topic of cooperation, Michael Haas said cooperation was an effort for helping each other, to cooperate and allied with a partner to implement a project/work/task/activity [5], whereas from the international relations' perspective, cooperation is divided by its sector and characteristic. From the sector perspective, cooperation consists of ideology, politic, economic, social and culture, and defense and security. While it depends on the characteristic, cooperation also consists of bilateral, trilateral and multilateral cooperation. Nowadays, cooperation has been formed into a pact, letter of intent, memorandum of understanding, treaty, etc.

Based on the theory above, it can be understood that OEI is categorized as a defense cooperation. It was formed by the common interest of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines for counter-terrorism. However, since the three countries are in the same ASEAN region that is potentially a place for terrorists, their involvement is quite helpful for expanding the information network; therefore, the multilateral cooperation opportunity which the OEI creates in order to cope with terrorism, involves:

#### *A. Creating Effective Coordination among the Our Eyes Initiative's Members by improving the Counter-Terrorism Strategy Implemented by Intelligence Information Exchange through the Our Eyes Initiative*

Being an initiator of OEI was an excellent first step for Indonesia to strengthen its international image as a country which has taken part in maintaining world peace. In addition, Indonesia's bargaining position in the ASEAN community will also be considered by all members of the region itself. Furthermore, if this cooperation can be developed properly, so that it can optimally cope with the problem of terrorism in ASEAN, then another member that has not ratified this cooperation will include them self to participate in signing and building up the coordination pattern of terrorism information exchange; a move that would help the make OEI an effective and comprehensive cooperation.

As was mentioned earlier, the handling of terrorism issues could not be done by a single country. There is a need to cooperate with other countries to jointly overcome the real

threat of terrorism. The sharing of intelligence information in the OEI's multilateral cooperation becomes a prospective platform for optimizing counter-terrorism itself, because each of the member countries has potential radical groups and terrorism within their borders. In addition, the alliance with Singapore was an appropriate step for advancing the OEI cooperation. As we know, Singapore has a qualified intelligence capability able to gather strategic information about the specific location of terrorists and radicalism. Singapore is also known as a country that is highly aware of the developments of the strategic environment and is able to quickly adjust in order to respond to this dynamic environment.

#### *B. Increasing the Trust among Our Eyes Initiative Cooperation Members, Especially for the Sharing of Intelligence Information*

In the cooperation of intelligence, trust becomes the most important condition that should be held among involved members. The OEI, as the intelligence sharing cooperation, is a step towards building trust among those countries signing the cooperation to work together, since terrorism is a common threat for all members. According to the Indonesian Defense Minister, Ryamizard Ryacuddu, terrorism is a nation-wide problem, and therefore, information about the existence of terrorism should be accessible to anyone who demands it [6].

Based on the above explanation, the eradication of terrorism has become a common focus of many nations around the world. This goal can be achieved through information exchange cooperation, where ASEAN member countries that have the same interests agree upon entering this agreement. Therefore, the OEI provides an important opportunity to become a strategic regional forum to overcome terrorism in Southeast Asia through the exchange of intelligence information.

### IV. OPTIMIZATION OF OUR EYES INITIATIVE

The way to optimize OEI as a forum is to formulate a strategy to combat terrorism; it can be planned through ends (goal), means (tools) and ways (strategy). The purpose of this collaboration is to destroy the threat of terrorism; the tool is the OEI itself. At the same time, the way to achieve this is through the counter-terrorism actions reflected in the policies and strategies that will be discussed below.

Policies and strategies for optimizing OEI in counter-terrorism efforts are obtained through the identification of how to build a concept of counter-terror itself. The definition of counter-terrorism is a combination of military practices, tactics, and strategies used by government, military, law enforcement, business and intelligence agencies to combat or prevent terrorism [7]. According to Ami Pedahzur, there are several counterterrorism models that are distinguished based on the strategy pattern, among others; defensive, reconciliation, criminal justice, and war (see Table I).

TABLE I  
COUNTER-TERRORISM MODELS [7]

Model	Defensive	Reconciliatory	Criminal-justice	War
<b>General Features</b>	Terrorism is a physical and psychological threat	Terrorism is a political problem	Terrorism is a crime	Terrorism is an act of war
<b>Goals and Methods of the State</b>	Protecting potential targets and victims	Addressing the root causes of terrorism	Arrest and punish terrorist according to the rule of law	Eliminate terrorism through military force
<b>Legal Aspects</b>	Corresponds in most cases to the elements of liberal democracy, with exceptions when practices undermine civil liberties	Corresponds with the law	Corresponds with the law and is subject to constant judicial oversight	Corresponds to laws of war, or may ignore law entirely
<b>Agents</b>	Police, Private, security companies, fire-fighters and paramedics, other state and municipal agencies	Politicians, policymakers, brokers, diplomats	Police and the criminal justice system	Intelligence and military units

Based on the concept shown above of the counter-terrorism model, the OEI is classified as a Reconciliation Counter-terrorism model; however, for the implementation the stage will lead the actors of counter terror by the war method to be able to act appropriately and quickly. This counter-terror model signifies terrorism as a political conflict which must be resolved from its roots through diplomatic ways. Therefore, countries, through its decision makers -minister of defense- responded by signing OEI cooperation agreements as a platform for members to share information in the form of the ASEAN sub-regional multilateral cooperation.

The counter-terrorism model of reconciliation will benefit the war counter-terrorism model conducted by intelligence actors and armed forces. For the war counter-terrorism model, terrorism is defined as an act of war committed by radical groups. The method used to combat terrorism is by eliminating terror groups through military action; considering the law should not be ignored in the act of counter terrorism.

The establishment of OEI is the implementation of the policy realized in the agreement of each country in order to solve terrorism, and is intended towards the soft approach. Through these policies, an agreement is established for each country to be loyal in providing information about terrorism. However, the policy still has to be deliberated continuously to maximize its function as a counter-terror strategy [8]. Here is the author's opinion on how to optimize the cooperation of the Our Eyes Initiative:

#### A. Formulating the Our Eyes Initiative as the Regional Cooperation

Essentially, OEI continues to face many obstacles to optimize it as an effective regional cooperation. As was mentioned before, OEI was offered by the Ministry of Defense of Indonesia at the ADMM 2018 in Singapore. The cooperation has a lot of potential opportunity to be developed by its members. The new idea is to make the OEI as a regional platform to share intelligence information, which is described in Fig. 1. From this figure, the new idea for making this potential cooperation as the regional cooperation that must be ratified by all ASEAN members, as the best way to optimize this cooperation. One of the obstacles preventing all ASEAN members from signing the OEI agreement is the non-intervention principals of the region; non-member countries of the OEI still consider that joining the pact will impact on the situation of domestic security policy.

The other reason is that the OEI will remain a discourse without real action to develop it. As we know, the OEI was signed by six ministries of defense. These countries do not have an intelligence deputy. Furthermore, as each country has its own super body for national intelligence, questions are raised about what kinds of information that they want to share. Another problem is to whom the shared information will be given; even ministries of defense have no power to control a national intelligence agency.

Building upon the problems outlined, ideas proposed to promote OEI as a regional cooperation, so it can be ratified by all members in ASEAN, are as follows (Fig. 1):

- 1) Propose the OEI New Formula at the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM).

It is necessary for all initiator members of the OEI to present this new formula. The challenge is that the interests of every ASEAN member are different; these differences can be addressed by negotiating the OEI as the strategy to counter-terrorism in the intelligence perspective.

Based on the "New Craft of Intelligence", a shared global open source network and a home-front network that will provide an asymmetric advantage in dealing with any challenges [9], this concept is in line with the OEI that called for intelligence collaboration through several members of ASEAN for countering terrorism and radicalism.

If the ADMM forum accepts this OEI as the new strategy for counter terrorism, the firm concept of the New OEI can be shown to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

- 2) Proposing the Our Eyes Initiative New Formula into the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as the appropriate platform to share information.

In this step, the president of each member country should attend the forum and participate in OEI discussions. The urgency to make the new platform of sharing intelligence information of terrorism in ASEAN will become the focus of the main discussion in this step.

If this cooperation is approved by the members of ASEAN in ARF, the next step is developing a charter to be ratified by all members.

- 3) Building up the *Our Eyes Initiative Charter*.

The OEI Charter should be ratified by all ASEAN members. The ratification is an integrity pact that should be obeyed by all signed members.

- 4) Formulating the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Sharing Information as the regional sharing information platform.

As the continuation steps, as the OEI will be the new

platform for regional information sharing, and in order to make it effective, it should have its own committee within the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Sharing Information. The most important thing is creating a Deputy for handling counter-terrorism.

As shown in Fig. 1, a secretary-general will be appointed to head the organization, while a deputy will be named for the special handling section. The Secretary-General post will be first occupied by Indonesia as the initiator of the *Our Eyes Initiative*, while the Secretariat posting would be placed in Thailand.

Deputy One will be responsible for counter-terrorism. This post could be given to the Philippines, since the country has a super body for countering terrorism.

Deputy II will be responsible for Border Security. This post could be given to Malaysia, since the country is experienced in the South China Sea problem.

The post of Deputy III would be concerned with tracing the financial sources of funding for terrorism, and would be occupied by a representative of Brunei Darussalam. As it known, Brunei Darussalam has in place the Financial

Institution Division (FID) which was established for tracking terrorism funding. The FID also cooperates with the Brunei International Financial Center (BIFC). Brunei Darussalam can be a potential country for supporting the trace of financing related to terrorism.

The Deputy IV post will be given to Singapore due its experience and effectiveness in international relations. This deputy will be responsible for developing a plan for establishing collaborations with *Our Eyes* through lateral platforms, for example is *Five Eyes*. It can create the *Our Eyes plus Five Eyes* as a platform for bilateral collaboration, which is important for developing a wider network for intelligence information sharing.

Other regional countries like Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos would be welcome to join as a member of OEI; however, they will be the subject of *Our Eyes Initiative Charter*. These nations must ensure they fully observe the guidelines established under the agreement and openly provide information about all aspects of terrorism threats in the interests of this regional cooperation.

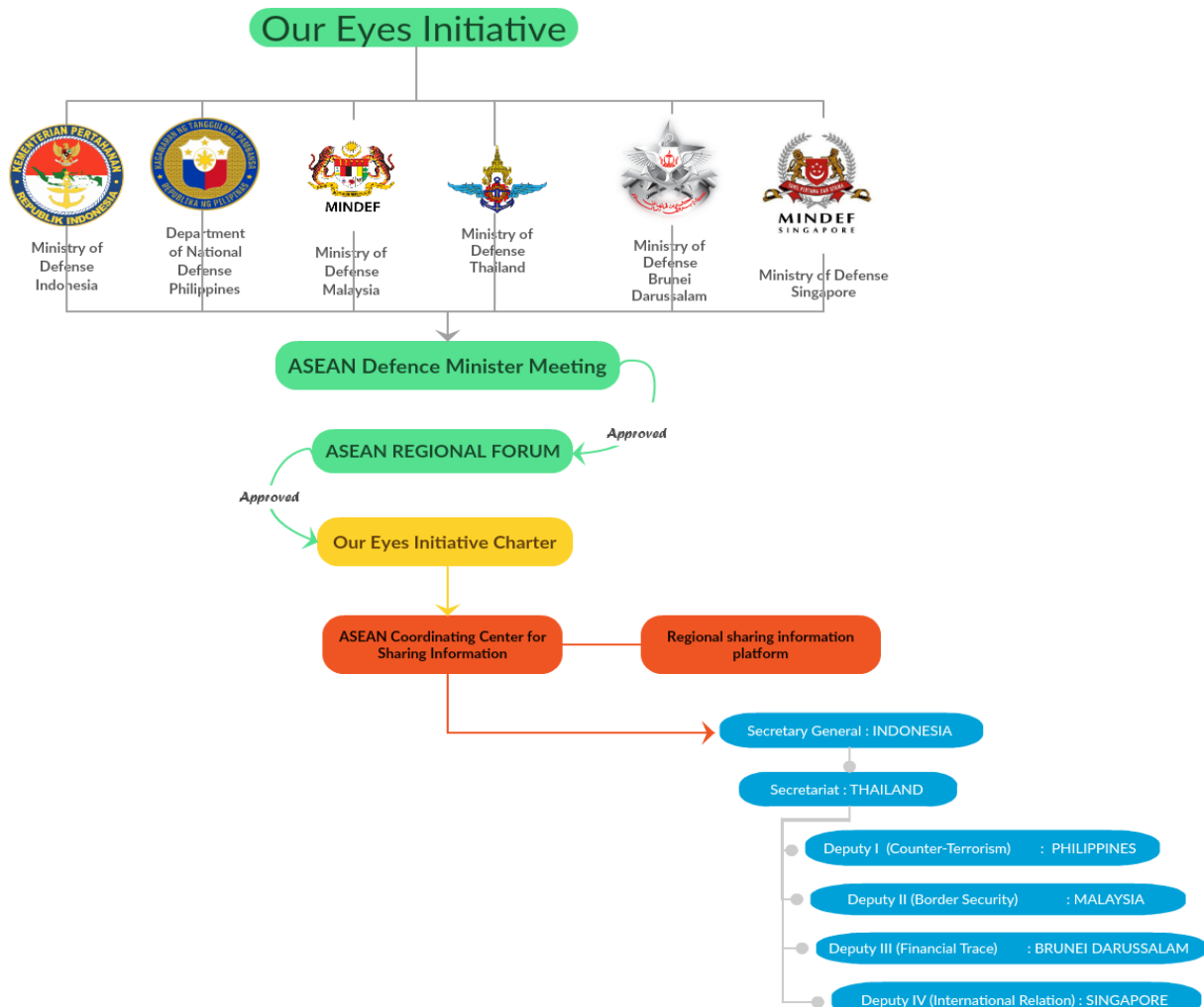


Fig. 1 Optimization Our Eyes Initiative by making it as a Regional Cooperation

*B. Controlling the Circumstance of Domestic Information to Maintain the Legitimacy of Government*

As mentioned before, since terrorism is a factual threat for Southeast Asia, the OEI was established as a platform for intelligence information exchange about terrorism and radicalism, in order to support counter-terrorism activities.

However, this initiative cannot be efficiently implemented without a specific strategy to secure the exchange of information.

Adopting the concept of counter-insurgency by David J. Kilcullen, information is an estuary to control national power; it takes an important role in countering insurgency [10].

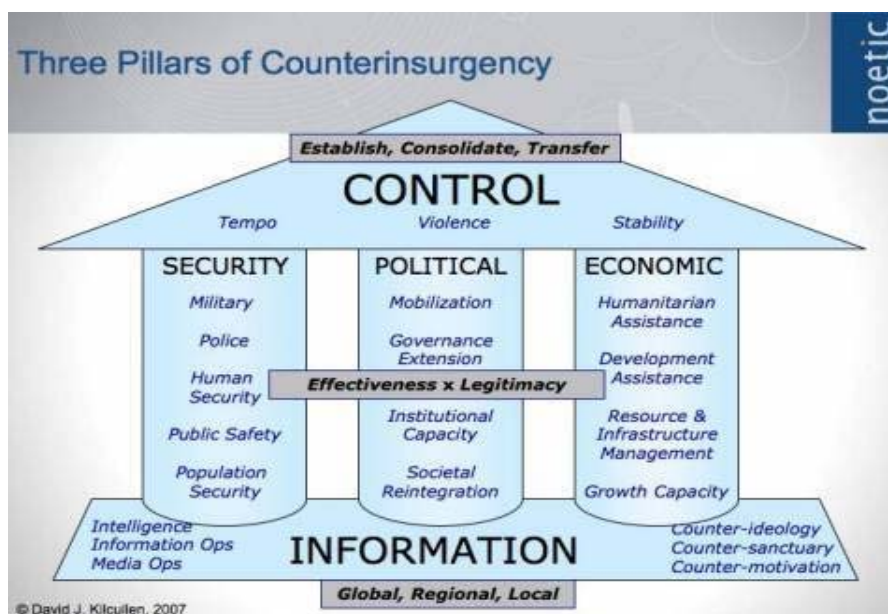


Fig. 2 Three Pillars of Counter-Insurgency [12]

As shown in Fig. 2, information is the basis of all other activities, as perception is a crucial part in developing control and influence towards population groups. In order to ensure effectiveness of security, political and economic measures, government should have an efficient information strategy. The purpose of the information campaign is to consolidate and unify a message by means of intelligence collection, analysis and distribution information operations, media operations, public diplomacy, and ways to counter insurgent motivation, sanctuary and ideology. Obviously, the other pillars of counterinsurgency cannot be effective without the collaboration of every actor to develop information. In addition, the information's campaign has to be conducted at a global, regional, and local level, based on modern insurgents' growth [11].

These three pillars of counterinsurgency can be applied as the basis of a strategy for counter terrorism. While insurgency and terrorism are considered different kinds of asymmetric warfare, both tend to use violence to pursue their goal; the main differences are in their targets and methods. An insurgency needs to win the hearts and minds of the people in order to gain their support. Terrorism uses the terror attack to show their existence among a wider population and governments. Nevertheless, they tend to use a vicious method to chase their subversive goal.

This way of thinking can be adopted for optimizing OEI as a strategy to counter terrorism. Every member country must sustain its own domestic information flow in order to maintain

consistent and effective security information at the regional level. The OEI is ranked as public diplomacy; thus, it can be used to send the message that the ASEAN region could be united under OEI to counter terrorism.

By exercising effectiveness of control on these three pillars, it is possible for a country to sustain the legitimacy and effectiveness of its government both in the eyes of its public and the world. The stability of a government's legitimacy will have a big impact on the development of the OEI, especially for the coordination of shared intelligence information. It is vital to maintain the trust between all members of OEI in order to ensure the effectiveness and continued existence of the lateral agreement.

*C. Formulating the Accessible Legal Frameworks for Intelligence Information Sharing*

Intelligence information is a sensitive topic for any country; thus, it is necessary for the OEI to formulate a legal framework in order to build a sustainable and effective body. Based on the research of Asaf Lubin and Thaya Uthayophas, the recommendations to formulate an accessible legal framework of intelligence information sharing include [12]:

- 1) For Legislative Bodies
  - Establish the intelligence information sharing agreements to guarantee the sharing information, so it can be accessed by oversight bodies.
  - Support for transparency as the principal of intelligence information sharing related to terrorism by making the

limitation of information sharing.

- Periodical audits conducted by the bodies overseeing the agreement ensure that the OEI is far from being in the interests of an individual nation. This audit can identify and assess all risks when sharing information in order to improve the OEI's performance.
- Ascertain the internal mechanisms by which staff may disclose concerns regarding intelligence sharing and address the allocation of financial resources.

#### 2) For Executive Bodies

- Conduct reviews of the compatibility of such regional agreements with the domestic and international laws of member countries.
- Share revisions of agreements to maintain good coordination between member nations.
- Develop regular written reports on intelligence information sharing with foreign partners and maintain the database of the information gathered.

#### 3) For Intelligence Agencies

- Develop outbound and inbound sharing to establish a continuing obligation to correct or update information shared regarding its reliability.

### V. CONCLUSION

The Our Eyes Initiatives is a sub-regional ASEAN cooperation that has been created as the platform for sharing of intelligence information to counter-terrorism activities in the region. This cooperation was adapted from the *Five Eyes* cooperation between the US, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The OEI offers various opportunities to be optimized as a strategy for counter-terrorism; the establishment of a regional cooperation creates a wider network to share important information and builds trust between ASEAN members.

The paper proposes several ideas to optimize the Our Eyes Initiative that include formulating the lateral agreement as the regional cooperation, controlling domestic information to maintain the government's legitimacy, and formulating the legal frameworks for intelligence information sharing.

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