Interview of Dr. Mike Wertheimer
Assistant Deputy Director of National Intelligence for
Analytic Transformation & Technology

CNN & Federal News Radio

September 5, 2008

CNN:

WOLF BLITZER (CNN): Social networking for the intelligence community. That's the idea behind a brand-new website. Most of us will never even be able to see it, let alone join it.

Let's go to our Pentagon correspondent Barbara Starr. She's got a little sneak peek for us. All right. Barbara, what is this all about?

BARBARA STARR (CNN): Well Wolf, we did get a sneak peek. The next time a real world James Bond blogs on, here's what he might see. Facebook, one of the many social networks where millions meet online. The U.S. intelligence community has been eyeballing all of this, not to spy but to politely steal the whole idea. Welcome to A-Space, perhaps the most exclusive social networking site ever. It's open only to top U.S. intelligence experts. This is like Facebook for spies?

MIKE WERTHEIMER (ODNI): It's much more than Facebook for spies. Finally the spies are not only going to get Facebook, but they're going to get Facebook, they're going to get YouTube and Google.

STARR: You need a security clearance to join this unprecedented online revolution for an intelligence community trained to not share secrets. This is the place for experts to connect the dots.

WERTHEIMER: It's a place not only where spies can meet but share data they've never been able to share before.

STARR: Each analyst has a page like Wertheimer's to post information, ideas, even pictures. All aimed at unfettered discussion.

WERTHEIMER: Work spaces for us are private little enclaves where you can invite five people, ten people, 100 people to work a problem in collaboration with you.

STARR: Analysts from different agencies will be able to chat online about secret matters like a new Osama Bin Laden video, if there is one.

WERTHEIMER: They can put it up in almost real-time and share it with a network of folks working that issue.

STARR: The ultimate hope is this online ability to think out loud and share classified information may someday prevent another 9/11.

WERTHEIMER: I don't know if it is preventable. But when I see analysts working here, I think this is our best chance to prevent it again.

STARR: And Wolf, anticipating a question a lot of people might have, the intelligence community insists it's got plenty of cyber security to protect this site and they even hope President Bush will want his own classified web page. Wolf.

BLITZER: I hope they do have good cyber security. Thanks very much for that Barbara.

Federal News Radio:

MAX CACAS (FEDERAL NEWS RADIO): All right, so Mike, tell us first off about the focus of the Analytic Transformation Conference that just wrapped up in Orlando.

MIKE WERTHEIMER (ODNI): Last year, we had the premier event in Chicago where we announced the analytic transformation and we talked about the concepts and ideas. So this year it was a real report card on what we were able to accomplish over the course of the last 12 months. And we demoed our A-Space initiative, actually went live on it. We talked about all the other initiatives that we had put in place and where they are now and let the audience really take our temperature and feedback whether they think it's healthy or not.

CACAS: Now, in your keynote address to the conference, you mentioned A-Space. You just mentioned it here. Give us an update on what's new with – this is basically a collaboration tool, am I correct?

WERTHEIMER: It definitely is. A-Space is designed for the analytic community of the intelligence community to actually have all the capabilities of social-network tools. We have our version of Facebook, if you will, our version of YouTube. We have our own versions of blogging, all the kinds of social networking tools that people have come to expect in their day-to-day lives on the Internet. But we've plugged in data sources unique to the community from six different agencies, never before able to be accessed from one location. So now our analysts not only have a space to communicate, to be social networked, but also to do the real work of analysis unfettered by all the firewalls and all the security controls we normally place on them.

CACAS: You know, we did some coverage of using Web 2.0 collaboration tools not too long ago. And talking just about exactly the kind of things that A-Space covers, it sounds to me like you've made some remarkable strides in terms of using these social-networking tools made possible by Web 2.0.

WERTHEIMER: It's exactly what we've done. We've done it in a development cycle of only one year. We're issuing new capabilities every three months. And the exciting part for us is September 22nd we go live, which means we are ready to go with two substantive analytic problems that we're going to work – one that will be focused on what we call enigmatic

facilities, facilities that aren't what they appear to be; and another one on the FATA, the foreign-administrated (sic) tribal areas in Pakistan. So those will be two legitimate full-op test suites that we're training the entire analytic community that works those problems. On day one, they're going to be populated and off the ground and running. We're going to learn from them. And then in three months, in January, we have our next major release with increased search capability. Can you imagine, for the first time, analysts not only will be able to search across all our top secret and higher holdings they'll be able to search down to all our secret holdings all in one time. And we're trying to build in, in a future release, the actual ability to search unclassified network all at one time.

CACAS: Wow, that's incredible. We're talking to Mike Wertheimer, the Assistant Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analytic Transformation and Technology about the aftermath of the Analytic Transformation conference just wrapped up in Orlando. Mike, could you talk to us a little bit about the impact that A-Space and other directives such as the outsourcing standard are expected to have on the intelligence community? These are some remarkable tools you put together.

WERTHEIMER: The tools just drive the creativity of the analyst. That's the beauty of Web 2.0 tools. They become for the first time able to manage their own environment. So what we've found is that agencies, as they've become aware of A-Space and their analysts are starting to demand more access, agencies are actually ponying up more databases so they can expose more of what they collect for more analysis. It's having an actual cascading effect, which is I want to be in now instead of why I don't want my folks – it's just another tool. They're actually seeing it as the environment it needs to be.

We're hoping not just about collaboration and not just about more data but the exposure of thinking and alternative hypotheses, where you get the power of a community to drive out bias and actually highlight more and more of the alternative analyses that in the past were so under the noise that we never gave alternatives. We took one viewpoint. And we're driving those away. And everywhere we go, and everyone we talk to, the analysts just feel for – just for the first time free. I gave a metaphor during the conference that the analytic community is as if they've been in the middle seat of three seats on an airplane with their seatbelt tight – nowhere to move, no flexibility. And we're telling them, not only throw off the seatbelt; but we'd appreciate it if you'd walk around the cabin.

CACAS: There you go. Now, Mike, give us a little update also on C-Space. We understand that ODNI is developing C-Space for those who gather intelligence in the intelligence community.

WERTHEIMER: Well, if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we are very flattered, because the excitement and the capabilities of A-Space caused the collection community – that's what the C stands for – to put in requirements for C-Space. Our CIO who has been our partner in building A-Space has now put together a plan to take the best of A-Space and instead of build a duplicate C-Space to expand A-Space to have also collectors participate without losing any of the excitement that the exclusivity gives, yet still allows the greater community to participate. I suspect we're about two years out from having that full up and vetted, because the collection

community will have to be modeled just like the analysts did. Give them the kinds of capabilities that they're excited by.

CACAS: Wow, that sounds terrific. Mike, can you talk to us a little bit about the Multi-Intelligence Working Group and how they're doing in some of their work?

WERTHEIMER: The Multi-Intelligence Working Group is a very, very exciting program where we have set aside about $5 million a year to invest in experiments that involve at least two agencies and two different kinds of what we call INTs, so maybe it's a signals intelligence and human intelligence. And these are experiments where no one agency feels they can afford to pay for the entire experiment or the risk is too high for them to bear alone. So they applied for grant money to a committee that I chair. And we take this money and we farm it out to entrepreneurs within the community.

The beauty of it is that in one case – let me give you one case just this year. We invested $500,000 for a new initiative that everyone thought couldn't succeed and no one was willing to invest in, in and of themselves. It involved about five different agencies. It has to do with drugs in the Caribbean. And within one year, this program not only succeeded but interdicted over a quarter of a billion dollars worth of drugs and drug paraphernalia in one year. And this is the story we get over and over again.

The beautiful part of this is for every dollar we spend, almost on average we get a dollar of investment from the community. We've had over a 50-percent success rate of our experiments actually transitioning into operations. I think it's a very rare experimental program that for every dollar invested is matched by a dollar from the community and then has a 50-percent success rate of being a persistent capability. And we are hitting home runs left and right through this.

It's all about empowering analysts. It's empowering people who don't have a vehicle when they're only in one agency to reach out and meet another agency, be creative in how you can mix different kinds of intelligence together. That's what collaboration is about. And the MINTWG – our way of saying the Multi-Intelligence Working Group – is helping to fund that.

CACAS: Sounds good. Mike, do we have another Analytic Transformation Conference to look forward to in 2009?

WERTHEIMER: I sure hope so because if the story we can tell next year is anything like the story we told this year, we are going to knock that mission ball out of the park.

CACAS: Very good. And where will that be held?

WERTHEIMER: Don't know. It's up to the INSA – the Intelligence and National Security Alliance that has been our partner and our sponsor in this. And it's up to them. They lead an industry group of very, very interesting and talented people. And they demand – as long as they keep demanding, they want to know about – as long as they continue to demand to know about analytic transformation, I promise we'll be there.

CACAS: All right. Sounds good. Mike, thank you very much.

WERTHEIMER: Thank you.