When U.S. national security is severely compromised in major spy cases or through other means, the important damage assessments performed by U.S. counterintelligence officials rarely get the attention they deserve in the U.S. government.

That is the view of Michelle Van Cleave, the Bush administration’s national counterintelligence executive.

A systemic improvement is needed to address the problem, she said in a speech Nov. 18 at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies in Arlington, VA.

"Whenever there is a major spy case or similarly severe compromise of national security information, my office oversees and produces damage assessments of what has been lost," she told the audience. In the past, owing in part to security compartmentalization, these damage assessments have received very limited distribution, said Van Cleave.

"There has been little accountability among policymakers or program managers to take compensatory measures." Beyond merely distributing the assessments, there is the challenge of ensuring the assessments have an impact, she noted.

"Even where damage assessments have reached the desks of responsible managers, their findings may be rejected or minimized because of the negative impact on budgets and program and jobs," she said.

Looking ahead, Van Cleave said the counterintelligence community needs to ensure that assessments of what has been compromised are available to decision-makers, warfighters and operators who are responsible for the affected policies, plans and programs.

"And it seems to me that these decision-makers, in turn, should be held accountable to the national security leadership and the president for the hard judgment calls of what to do," she said. "It is their job to identify and make the needed changes in op-plans, weapons systems, intelligence methods and other capabilities and resources put at risk by the acts of spies or other foreign intelligence successes against us." -- Christopher J. Castelli

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