THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE IN THE EURO-ATLANTIC AREA

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Abstract

This article surveys the various approaches scholars have employed to study the role of intelligence in national and international politics. It considers the various methodological and epistemological strategies that have characterized the study of intelligence over the past fifty years and argues that from its inception intelligence studies has been characterized by its inter-disciplinary character and openness to different conceptual approaches.

Intelligence study, analyze, cooperation, organization, information, counterintelligence, policy making, international relations

Background

The first few years of the twenty-first century have witnessed a transformation in the role of secret intelligence in international politics. Intelligence and security issues are now more prominent than ever in Western political discourse as well as the wider public consciousness. Public expectations of intelligence have never been greater, and these demands include much greater disclosure of hitherto secret knowledge[1]. Much of this can be attributed to the shock of the terrorist attacks of September 2001. The need for a better understanding of both the nature of the intelligence process and its importance to national and international security policy has never been more apparent.

It is nearly five decades since intelligence first emerged as a subject of serious academic study with the publication of Sherman Kent's *Strategic Intelligence for American Foreign Policy*[2]. It is some 20 years since two eminent British historians invoked Sir Alexander Cadogan's description of intelligence as the missing dimension of international affairs[3]. The development of intelligence studies as a sub-field of international relations has continued to gather momentum ever since. Initially the terrain of political scientists, the role of intelligence in domestic and international politics now attracts the attention of an ever larger number of historians. As a result, the study of international security has been increasingly influenced by a better understanding of the role of intelligence in policy making. The rapid growth of intelligence as a focus of academic enquiry will surely continue. Recent progress in archival disclosure, accelerated by the end of the Cold War and by changing

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attitudes towards official secrecy and towards the work of the security and intelligence services, has further facilitated research, understanding and debate[4].

Scope and focus: what is intelligence?

Popular perceptions and general understanding of the nature of intelligence and its role in international relations leaves much to be desired. A starting point is the question: what is intelligence? The way intelligence is defined necessarily conditions approaches to research and writing about the subject. Sherman Kent's classic characterizations of intelligence cover "the three separate and distinct things that intelligence devotees usually mean when they use the word"; these are: knowledge, the type of organization that produces that knowledge and the activities pursued by that organization[5]. In most contemporary analyses, intelligence is understood as the process of gathering, analyzing and making use of information.

National Intelligence Council officer Mark Lowenthal reminds us that intelligence is something broader than information and its processing for policymakers and commanders, even when that information is somehow confidential or clandestine. His useful primer on intelligence contains this definition: „*Intelligence is the process by which specific types of information important to national security are requested, collected, analyzed, and provided to policymakers; the products of that process; the safeguarding of these processes and this information by counterintelligence activities; and the carrying out of operations as requested by lawful authorities"*[6].

Yet beyond such basic definitions are divergent conceptions of exactly what intelligence is and what it is for. This is perhaps because, as James Der Derian has observed, intelligence is the "least understood and most "under theorized area of international relations"[7].

Many observers tend to understand intelligence primarily as a tool of foreign and defence policy making. Others focus on its role in domestic security. Still others concentrate on the role intelligence services have played as mechanisms of state oppression[8]. One interesting divergence of views pertains to the basic character of intelligence. Michael Herman (a fanner practitioner) treats it as a form of state power in its own right and this conceptualization is at the heart of the analysis in his influential study *Intelligence Power in Peace and War.*[9] John Ferris proffers a different view, judging that "intelligence is not a form of power but a means to guide its use, whether as a combat multiplier, or by helping one to understand one's environment and options, and thus how to apply force or leverage, and against whom"[10]. Whichever formulation one adopts and whatever the quality of intelligence, it is the judgment of political leaders and their grasp of the value and limitations of

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intelligence that is most crucial[11].

A good illustration of the difficulties inherent in defining intelligence is the controversial question of secret intervention in other societies (most commonly referred to as „covert action"). Scholars have frequently ignored covert action in their analyses of intelligence. As Elizabeth Anderson has argued: "the specific subject of covert action as an element of intelligence has suffered a deficiency of serious study". She further observes that *while academics have developed different theoretical concepts to explain other instruments of international relations - for example, weapons, trade and diplomacy - the separation of covert action from "traditional" foreign policy instruments means that these same concepts have not been applied to covert action*[12].

There is also substantial, if rarely articulated, divergence in approaches to studying intelligence. Scholars tend to approach the subject from three relatively distinct perspectives, in the pursuit of relatively distinct objectives. The first approach, favoured among international historians in particular, but also characteristic of theoretical approaches that seek to explain the relationship between organizational structure and policy making, conceives of the study of intelligence primarily as a means of acquiring new information in order to explain specific decisions made by policy makers in both peace and war. Close attention is paid by these scholars to the process of intelligence collection, to the origin and nature of individual sources of intelligence, and to the precise use that is made of intelligence as it travels up the chain of decision.

A second approach strives to establish general models that can explain success and failure in the intelligence process. Characteristic of political science approaches to the discipline, it focuses almost exclusively on the levels of analysis and decision. Decisive importance is attributed by adherents of this approach to structural and cognitive obstacles to the effective use of intelligence in the policy process. The aim is to identify and analyze the personal, political and institutional biases that characterize intelligence organizations and affect their performance in the decision making process. The emphasis is on the role of preconceptions and underlying assumptions in conditioning the way intelligence is analyzed and used. The result has been a range of insights into the nature of perception and misperception, the difficulty in preventing surprise, and the politicization of the intelligence process[13]. Both of the first two conceptual approaches focus primarily on intelligence as a tool of foreign and defence policy making.

A third approach focuses instead on the political function of intelligence as a means of state control. The past decade, in particular, has seen the appearance of a range of historical and political science literature on this subject. Many of the scholars engaged in this research

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would not consider themselves as contributing to "intelligence studies". Their focus is instead the use of intelligence sources to understand better the role of ideology and state power in political, social and cultural life. Yet there are strong arguments for embracing this scholarship under a broader definition of "intelligence studies" and no reason to remain confined by disciplinary boundaries that are porous and arbitrary. One area of contemporary social science that has clear relevance to intelligence studies is the concept of surveillance.

Intelligence and the study of International Relations

A further objective of this article is to assess both the influence and importance of intelligence studies in broader debates concerning the history and theory of international relations. Intelligence has attracted limited interest from scholars of political philosophy and International Relations (IR) theory. Tsun Tsu is much quoted for the importance he attaches to military intelligence, but later thinkers on war were less interested and less impressed. Von Clausewitz held that knowledge of „the enemy and his country" was the "foundation of all our ideas and actions"[14].

Writing in 1994 Michael Fry and Miles Hochstein observed that, while intelligence studies had developed into an identifiable intellectual community, there was a noticeable "failure to integrate intelligence studies, even in a primitive way, into the mainstream of research in international relations"[15]. In Britain the academic study of intelligence has developed overwhelmingly within international history, and thus reflects the methodological predisposition towards archive-based research characteristic of this sub-discipline. Common methodological cause between British and US historians has not prevented robust and fruitful exchanges and debates on the subject[16]. In North America, however, political scientists have played at least as prominent a role as historians in the study of intelligence in international relations. Their contributions have provided students of intelligence with a range of theoretical reflections on the nature of intelligence and its role in decision making. But interest in intelligence within the political science community has been confined mainly to those scholars working on theories of decision making. Intelligence is all but absent, conversely, in the work of most international relations theorists, and does not figure in key IR theory debates between realist, liberal institutionalist, constructivist and post-modernist approaches. It is interesting to note that, while there exists an implicit (and sometimes explicit) assumption that the study of intelligence falls within the realist camp, contemporary neo-realist writers have largely ignored intelligence in their reflections.

Rathmell[17] argues that intelligence services must make radical changes in terms of both conceptual approach and organizational structure to adapt to the social, cultural and

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technological conditions of the twenty-first century. The end result is what Rathmell calls the "fragmentation" of threat. What is needed, he argues, are different conceptual approaches to understanding the nature of security threats and radical changes in the way intelligence agencies collect and process knowledge on these threats. Obvious questions arise about how these new approaches might be implemented in practical terms. What is also necessary is greater awareness of the political role of the analyst in the construction of threats and threat assessments for makers of security policy of all kinds[18].

A British view of intelligence

The self-image of British intelligence professionals is that of turning information into wisdom and "speaking truth unto power". Understanding the conceptual and organizational dimensions of intelligence is central to understanding British intelligence. This self-image, so central to the identity of the public servant, has been the cornerstone of both the structure and the culture of British intelligence. It is represented as the fundamental safeguard against the politicization of intelligence, which is often alleged to be a defining characteristic of autocratic and totalitarian regimes. Clearly this image of an independent and apolitical intelligence community has been called into serious question by the "Iraq Dossier" affair. Much of the study of intelligence concerns the relationship between power and knowledge, or rather the relationship between certain kinds of power and certain kinds of knowledge.

A sophisticated exponent of this view has been Michael Herman, writing on the basis of 25 years' experience at Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and the Cabinet Office. Herman has received wide acclaim for his expositions of the process of intelligence and has been described as "an historian and philosopher of intelligence"[19]. Although an advocate of broadening the scope of the subject, Herman's primary aim is to promote greater public understanding of intelligence. Yet, it is also undeniable that, in engaging with critical issues about the practice of the intelligence process, Herman seeks to legitimize that process. The work of both Herman and Cradock epitomizes the prevalent self-image of the intelligence mandarin as providing objective, "policy-free" analysis to decision makers. Sir Percy Cradock's characterization of the JIC and its staff as "having an eye always to the future and to British interests, and free from the political pressures likely to afflict their ministerial masters" reflects the self-image of the intelligence community as guardian of the national interest against transient and feckless politicians.

The idea of speaking truth unto power has clear bearing on the relationship between government and academia. But only recently, has a culture of greater openness begun to foster greater engagement between Britain's intelligence community and its universities. Further

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evidence of engagement was the appointment of academic historians to write the centenary histories of MI5 and SIS.

The professional and public responsibility of academics who study intelligence is to foster greater understanding of the nature and role of intelligence, including not only its value but its limitations. These include understanding the limitations of our knowledge of what is done in secrecy by the government. Nevertheless, the opportunities for studying intelligence in Britain, and the opportunities for studying intelligence in Britain, and the opportunities to study them by means of differing methodological and theoretical approaches have never been more propitious.

National and international intelligence co-operation

One other relatively neglected aspect in the study of intelligence is cooperation between different intelligence services at both the national and international levels. At the national level, efficient co-operation between secret services is crucial to the effective exploitation of intelligence. The importance of a rational system of inter-service co-ordination was highlighted, once again, by the events of September 11, 2001. Insufficient co-operation between various US security and intelligence services is consistently cited as a central factor in the failure to prevent the successful attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The question of intelligence co-operation at the international level has received more attention, particularly from historians. The origins, development and functioning of Anglo-American "intelligence alliance" since 1940 have been the subject of relatively intense study from a range of perspectives[20].

Michael Herman and Richard Aldrich have both provided useful reflections on the nature of international intelligence co-operation[21]. This will assist the growing number of scholars now researching the potential role of intelligence in international organizations such as NATO, the European Union or the United Nations[22]. Important work has also been undertaken on the role of intelligence in international police work. The changing parameters of intelligence collaboration after September 11, and increased public awareness of this cooperation, suggest that this will be an area of great potential growth in the field. When a British arms dealer was arrested in August 2003 attempting to sell a surface-to-air missile to FBI agents posing as terrorists, news of the role of SIS and MIS was immediately made public, illustrating changing attitudes towards disclosure as well as in practice[23]. One neglected aspect identified by Len Scott in this collection is the role of intelligence services in conducting clandestine diplomatic activities with adversaries, both states and non-states[24].

Nowadays, the successful prosecution of the present "war on terror" depends largely

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on the ability of national intelligence services to collaborate with one another effectively in rooting out international terrorist cells. The relationship between politics and intelligence has never been more important. There is a clear need for more systematic study of this area.

Conclusions

The publication in 1946 of the lengthy and detailed Congressional Report on Pearl Harbor attack provided the primary raw material for one of the founding texts in the intelligence studies canon[25]. Roberta Wohlstetter's marriage of communications theory with detailed historical research in *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* demonstrated the rich potential of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of intelligence and policy making[26]. Whether or not the recently published Congressional Report on the surprise attacks of September 11 produces another seminal text, the events of the past three years are bound to have profound implications for the study of intelligence.

Michael Herman has argued that, Governments and people's views of intelligence will be permanently affected by the events of September 11[27]. While this is debatable, it is undeniable that intelligence occupies a more prominent place in the public sphere than ever before. Quite apart from the fabrication of secret intelligence on Iraq, debates about the practice of intelligence now take place on a scale and at a level that would have been inconceivable three years ago. Issues such as the relative importance of human intelligence as against "technical assets", the importance of international intelligence collaboration and the cognitive obstacles to effective analysis and warning have all been debated. As Wesley Wark is surely right to argue: "Learning to live with an open-ended "war on terrorism" will mean learning to live with intelligence"[28]. These developments will doubtless provide both challenges and opportunities to scholars interested in the study of intelligence.

Should the terror attacks in New York and Washington force us to rethink the subject we are studying? Will they change the nature and conduct of intelligence operations forever? If so, how will this affect the study of intelligence and its role in world politics? These are questions that bear further reflection in any exercise aimed at establishing a future agenda for intelligence studies. The evidence so far suggests that, while the role of intelligence in international politics has certainly evolved, and scholars will have to adjust to its evolution, the changes may not be as revolutionary as they first appeared. As in other areas of world politics, the immovable object of change confronts the irresistible force of continuity.

It is true that there was no Pearl Harbor precedent for the debates about the ethical restraints on intelligence activity. Nor was there much public discussion of the need for trans-national intelligence co-operation. These differences reflect changes that have taken place in

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world politics since the Second World War. International norms have evolved and now place greater limitation on the exercise of power than those that existed during and after the Second World War. Globalization, and in particular advances in information technology, have thrown up new challenges that require new solutions. But there are nonetheless remarkable parallels between debates over Pearl Harbor and the aftermath of September 11. In both instances, predictably, the overwhelming focus was on learning lessons and prescribing policies. Many of the themes are very similar: the inability to conduct effective espionage against a racially or culturally "alien" adversary; the failure to organize and co-ordinate inter-service intelligence collection and analysis; the lack of resources for both gathering, translating and analysing intelligence and, finally, the failure of political leaders to understand the value and limitations of intelligence. The surprise attack on United States territory in December 1941 killed over 2,000 people and precipitated the United States' entry into war in Europe and Asia. Pearl Harbor portended a transformation in the US role in world politics, and indeed in world politics itself. The surprise attack on United States territory on September 11, 2001 killed a similar number of people (though these were not military personnel and included many hundreds of non-Americans). It too precipitated US wars - in Afghanistan and Iraq. How far it has transformed world politics will remain open to debate. The context in which intelligence is conducted and studied continues to change. This collection will hopefully provide some guidance and illumination along the dimly lit pathways that lie ahead.

NOTES

[1] *The Study of Intelligence in Theory and Practice*, Intelligence and National Security, Vo1.l9, No.2, Summer 2004, pp.139 - 169.
[2] Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1949).
[3] Christopher Andrew and David Dilks (eds), *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press 1984).
[4] An important recent development in the evolution of more liberal classification and declassification policies in the United States is the implementation of Executive Order 12958 Classified National Security Information in April 1995, although the significance of this has been contested. The Blair government has been largely unsuccessful in its attempts to establish a similar regime in Britain. For an interesting perspective on US attitudes towards government secrecy see the report of the "Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy" established in Washington in 1995: *Secrecy: Report of the Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office 1997); and Daniel Moynihan, *Secrecy* (New Haven, CT: Yale).
[5] Kent, *Strategic Intelligence, The Debate Continues* (Basingstoke: Pal grave 2003), p. 308.
[6] Mark M. Lowenthal, Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2002 [second edition]), p. 8.

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[7] James Der Derian, *Antidiplomacy: Spies, Terror, Speed and War* (Oxford: Blackwell 1992); see also Michael Fry and_Miles Hollstein, - "Epistemic Communities: Intelligence Studies and International Relations", *Espionage: Past, Present, Future?* (London: Frank Cass 1994), pp: 14-28 also published as a Special Issue of *Intelligence and National Security,* 8/3 (1993)).
[8] Examples of the last approach include Richard Thurlow, *The Secret State: British Internal Security in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell 1994), Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1993), Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990).
[9] Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power and War,* Cambridge University Press, 1996.
[10] John Ferris, "Intelligence" in R. Boyce and I. Maiolo (eds), *The Origins of World War Two: The Debate Continues* (Basingstoke: Pal Grave 2003), p. 308.
[11] For an excellent analysis of US presidents and their use of intelligence see Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (London: Harper Collins 1995).
[12] Elizabeth Anderson, The Security Dilemma and Covert Action: The Truman Years, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence,* 1114 (1998/99), p. 404.
[13] See, for example, Michael 1. Handel, *The Diplomacy of Surprise* (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University 1980), idem, 'Intelligence and Military Operations' in idem (ed.), *Intelligence and Military Operations* (London: Frank Cass 1990), pp. 1-95; Richard Betts, 'Analysis, War and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures are Inevitable', *World Politics,* 3111 (1978), pp. 961-88; and Robert Jervis, "Intelligence and Foreign Policy", *International Security,* 2/3 (1986/87), pp. 141-61.
[14] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (ed. by Anatol Rapoport, New York: Pelican 1968), p. 162. For analysis of Clausewitz on intelligence see John Ferris and Michael Handel, "Intelligence, Uncertainty and the Art of Command in Military Operations", *Intelligence and National Security, Oll* (1995), pp. I-58.
[15] Fry and Hochstein, "Epistemic Communities", p. 14.
[16] See in particular the reflections of John Lewis Gaddis, "Intelligence, Espionage, and Cold War Origins", *Diplomatic History,* 13 (Spring 1989), pp. 191-212, and D. Cameron Watt, Intelligence and the Historian: A Comment on John Gaddis's "Intelligence, Espionage, and Cold War Origins", ibid, 14 (Spring 1990), pp. 199-204.
[17] Andrew Rathmell, "Towards Postmodern Intelligence", *Intelligence and National Security,* 17/3 (2002), pp. 87-104. See also the work of James Der Derian who has written extensively on aspects of intelligence from a post-modem perspective. See, for example, his *Antidiplomacy.*
[18] This is a central focus of the interesting and important work being done in France by scholars such as Didier Bigo and others, whose work is most often published in the journal *Cultures et Conjlits.*
[19] Hennessy, *Secret State,* p. xiii. See also Lawrence Freedman, "Powerful Intelligence", *Intelligence and National Security,* 12/2 (1997), pp. 198-202.
[20] See, among others, Jeffrey Richelson and Desmond Ball, *The Ties that Bind: Intelligence Cooperation between the UK-USA Countries* (Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin 1985); Christopher Andrew, "The Making of the Anglo-American SIGINT Alliance", in Hayden Peake and Samuel Halpern (eds), *In the Name of Intelligence: Essays in Honor of Walter Pforzheimer* (Washington, DC: NIBC Press 1994); Aldrich, *Hidden Hand;* idem, "British Intelligence and the Anglo-American Special Relationship during the Cold War", *Review of International Studies,* 24/3 (1998), pp. 331-51; David Stafford and Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones (eds), "American-British-Canadian Intelligence Relations 1939-2000", Special Issue of *Intelligence and National Security,* 15/2 (2000); Stephen Twigge and Len Scott, *Planning Armageddon: Britain, the United States and the Command of Western Nuclear Forces*

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(Amsterdam: Routledge 2000).
[21] Herman, *intelligence Power,* pp. 200-219, Aldrich, "British Intelligence and the Anglo-American Special Relationship".
[22] An excellent example of such an approach is the important recent monograph by Cees Wiebes, *Intelligence and the War in Bosnia, 1992-1995* (Munster: Lit Verlag 2003).
[23] Briton arrested in terror missile sting, www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/ 3146025.stm, 13 August 2003.
[24] Scott, "Secret Intelligence".
[25] *Hearings Before the Joint Committee on the investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, 79th Congress* 39 vol. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office 1946).
[26] Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press 1962).
[27] Herman, *Intelligence Services,* p. 228.

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