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Edited by Gregory F. Treverton and Wilhelm Agrell

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ONE

Introduction

Gregory F. Treverton and Wilhelm Agrell

A series of investigations, especially in the United States and Britain, has focused attention on the performance of national intelligence services.¹ At the same time, the onset of an era of terrorism has highlighted the role of intelligence in trying to detect and prevent possible terrorist acts. In many countries, intelligence services have expanded and been reorganized, or both, and new training programs for intelligence have sprung up around the world.

In these circumstances, it seemed propitious to take stock of the underlying intellectual substructure of intelligence. What is the current state of research on and relevant to intelligence? This is the question addressed by this book. The project that spawned it was conducted by the Centre for Asymmetric Threat Studies at the Swedish National Defence College, with funding from the Swedish Emergency Management Agency. The purpose of the book is primarily to assess the state of research. However, that purpose runs beyond pure understanding because the book's premise is that for intelligence, as for other areas of policy, serious intellectual inquiry is the basis for improving the performance of real-world institutions. The volume explores intelligence from an intellectual rather than an organizational perspective. Our ambitions do not run to systematically covering the various applications or "subdisciplines" of intelligence (e.g., foreign, domestic, counterespionage, counterterrorism, and covert operations) in the way that

¹ The two most detailed in the United States are those of the 9/11 Commission and the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. Formally, they are, respectively, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (Washington, 2004), available at www.9-11commission.gov; and *Final Report of the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Washington, 2005), available at www.wmd.gov/report. Britain's inquiry into pre-Iraq war intelligence, the Butler report, is *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* (London, 2004), available at www.butlerreview.org.uk/index.asp.

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*Gregory F. Treverton and Wilhelm Agrell*Table 1.1. *Intelligence: From the Cold War to an era of terror*

	Old: Cold War	New: Era of terror
Target	States, primarily the Soviet Union	Transnational actors, also some states
“Story” about target	Story: States are geographic, hierarchical, bureaucratic	Not much story: Nonstates come in many sizes, shapes
“Boundedness”	Relatively bounded: Soviet Union ponderous	Much less bounded: Terrorists patient but new groups and attack modes
Information	Too little: Dominated by secret sources	Too much: Broader range of sources, although secrets still matter
Interaction with target	Relatively little: Soviet Union would do what it would do	Intense: Terrorists as the ultimate asymmetric threat

most traditional accounts of intelligence do. Instead, our aim is to identify themes that run through these applications, including the lack of comprehensive theories, the unclear relationships between providers and users of intelligence, and the predominance of bureaucratic organizations driven by collection.

FROM THE OLD WORLD OF INTELLIGENCE TO THE NEW

With the end of the Cold War and then, a decade later, the onset of Muslim extremist terrorism, the task of intelligence changed dramatically. Table 1.1 summarizes the major differences.

As an analytic challenge, transnational targets, like terrorists, differ from traditional state targets in four main ways. First, although the current Islamic extremist terrorists hardly act quickly but instead plan their attacks carefully over years, transnational targets are less bounded than states. There will be discontinuities in targets and attack modes, and new groups will emerge unpredictably. Second, the new targets deprive intelligence and policy of a shared story that would facilitate analysis and communication. We knew what states were like, even very different states like the Soviet Union: they were geographical, hierarchical, and bureaucratic. There is no comparable story for nonstates, which come in many sizes and shapes.

Third, as former U.S. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown quipped to Congress about the U.S.–Soviet nuclear competition, “When we build, they build. When we cut, they build.”² Although various countries, especially

² From Suzy Platt (ed.), *Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations Requested from the Congressional Research Service* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1989), p. 80.

the United States, hoped that their policies would influence Moscow, as a first approximation, intelligence analysts could presume that they would not. The Soviet Union would do what it would do. The challenge, in the first instance, was figuring out its likely course, not calibrating influence that other nations might have over that course.

The terrorist target, however, is utterly different. It is the ultimate asymmetric threat, shaping its capabilities to our vulnerabilities. The September 11, 2001, suicide bombers did not conceive of their attack plan because they were airline buffs. They knew that fuel-filled jets in flight were a vulnerable asset and that defensive passenger-clearance procedures were weak, and the scheme obviated the need to face a more effective defense against procuring or importing ordnance. Similarly, the London, Madrid, and other suicide bombers conducted enough tactical reconnaissance to shape their plans to the vulnerabilities of their targets. To a great extent, we shape the threat to us; it reflects our vulnerable assets and weak defenses. As military planners would characterize it, it is impossible to understand red (potential foes) without knowing a lot about blue (ourselves).

That fact has awkward implications for intelligence, especially foreign intelligence that, in many countries, has been enjoined from examining the home front and, less formally, is worried that getting too close to “policy” is to risk becoming politicized. Moreover, to the extent that intelligence now becomes the net assessment of red against blue, that too is something that has been the province of military, not civilian, agencies.

Finally, given that most Cold War adversaries of the Western nations were closed societies, Cold War intelligence, analysis included, gave pride of place to secrets – information gathered by human and technical means that intelligence “owned.” Terrorists are hardly open, but an avalanche of open data is relevant to them: witness the September 11 hijackers whose true addresses were available in California motor vehicle records. Then, the problem was too little information; now, it is too much. Then, intelligence’s secrets were deemed reliable; now, the torrents on the Web are a stew of fact, fancy, and disinformation.

These changes frame all the chapters that follow, and a number of common themes run through them. One is risk. Intelligence always has been a hedge against risk but now, as the nature of the threat has changed, so has the nature of the risk. Terrorists willing to die for their cause as suicide bombers, for example, cannot be deterred from acting in any way similar to the way that states could. Thus, there is all the more pressure on intelligence, which now has to be not merely good enough to structure deterrent threats

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but also must reach deeply enough into small groups – their proclivities and capabilities – to prevent them from acting.

A second theme throughout the chapters of this book is the corresponding expansion in the consumers of intelligence. National intelligence used to be primarily of use to a relatively small set of political and military leaders of states. Now, in principle, it would be of use to a huge number of consumers, extending to police officers on the beat and private-sector managers of major infrastructure. Intelligence has moved, as the catchphrase goes, from “need to know” to “need to share.”

A third theme is the increased number of needs for – hence, kinds of – intelligence, across a variety of time horizons from immediate warning to longer term understanding. Much of Cold War intelligence was puzzle-solving: looking for additional pieces to fill in a mosaic of understanding whose broad shape was a given.³ Those puzzles – for example, how many warheads did a Soviet missile carry? – could be answered with certainty if only we had access to information that, in principle, is available. Puzzle-solving is inductive. Mysteries are different; no evidence can settle them definitively because, typically, they are about people, not things. They are contingent. Mystery-framing is deductive: the analysis begins where the evidence ends. There were mysteries during the Cold War, but the era of terrorism seems especially rife with them. For instance, many of the national military capabilities could be treated as a puzzle during the Cold War, but now even the capabilities of terrorists are a mystery: those capabilities depend, not least, on us.

A final overarching theme is boundaries, of both law and organization. During the Cold War, democratic societies drew boundaries, with varying degrees of sharpness, between intelligence and law enforcement, between home and abroad, and between public and private. The first two boundaries, in particular, were drawn to protect the privacy and civil liberties of a nation’s citizens. In the circumstances of the Cold War, those boundaries made sense. However, they set up nations to fail against a terrorist foe who respected none of those boundaries. Now, the balance between security and civil liberties is being struck anew and, in the process, the organizational distinctions, like that between intelligence and law enforcement, are being erased.

³ On the distinction between puzzles and mysteries, see Gregory F. Treverton, “Estimating Beyond the Cold War,” *Defense Intelligence Journal*, 3, 2 (Fall 1994); and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Peering into the Future,” *Foreign Affairs*, 77, 4 (July/August 1994), 82–93.

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FROM DEFINITIONS AND HISTORY TO POLITICS AND OVERSIGHT

Intelligence first must be defined, and that is Michael Warner's task in Chapter Two. Although common usages of the word *intelligence* have not changed much since Shakespeare's time, the fault line also remains: Is intelligence support for a decision maker and thus composed of anything that will help, or is it the quiet or secret component that leaders deploy in dealing with their adversaries, both foreign and domestic? Intelligence has to be defined before it can be compared across countries. Warner focuses on intelligence systems, not – as most comparative analyses do – on either the characteristics of agencies or how those agencies approach particular challenges, such as early warning of attack. Warner argues that three main factors – strategy, regime, and technology – determine the nature of a regime's intelligence system. They do so from the perspective of sovereigns, where "state" is synonymous with sovereignty; however, not all sovereigns are states and, thus, nongovernmental groups also have intelligence systems.

By far, most of the writing on intelligence, if not the serious research, is history. Chapter Three, by the eminent historian of intelligence, Christopher Andrew, reflects on the state of historiography of intelligence. It is not surprising that most of that history deals with operations, especially what is called *covert action* – that is, operations intended to influence foreign politics, not merely penetrate them for espionage purposes. However, because American investigations into intelligence produced massive amounts of material, most accounts of the Cold War are the "intelligence equivalent of one hand clapping" – devoting considerable attention to the covert operations of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) but virtually none to those of the CIA's Soviet counterpart, the KGB.

Similarly, although the breaking of the German code during World War II captured the imagination of both historians and the public when it was revealed in 1973, the interest "usually ceases at V-J Day." The implications of postwar signals intelligence (SIGINT) for either the United States or the Soviet Union have been neglected; what history there is on Soviet intelligence treats neither covert action nor SIGINT but instead focuses on Moscow's espionage, or human intelligence (HUMINT). In setting out principles for official histories of intelligence, Andrew emphasizes that they must include interactions with policy makers because it is in the use of intelligence that Andrew locates the greatest weakness of postwar U.S. intelligence.⁴

⁴ See Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

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In Chapter Four, Jennifer Sims turns to theory, picking up the central themes of both Warner and Andrew. If, as Warner argues, scholars have not developed techniques for assessing the relative intelligence capabilities of states and other actors, neither have they asked whether and how those capabilities matter in international politics. On that score, what exists is from histories – thus, anecdotal and, as Andrew underscores, partial. If intelligence is about power, international-relations theory should have explored it in detail. Sims defines *intelligence* as a means of seeking comparative advantage; indeed, “intelligence failure may be less about inaccuracy than about losing advantage.” She then seeks to measure that advantage across four critical intelligence functions: collecting information on competitors, anticipating new competitions, transmitting information across the divide between intelligence and decision makers, and degrading competitors’ efforts to do all of these. About each function, she asks what work is relevant to each and what are the obvious gaps (and opportunities).

Chapter Five, by Wilhelm Agrell, forms a bridge between the first two parts of the book. The second part focuses on the major change in intelligence after the Cold War – which is the change after September 11, July 7, 2005, and March 3, 2004 – from a primary focus on states to a strong focus on nonstate transnational groups. His chapter begins with his own experience, as a young Swedish military analyst, of the institutional “failure to comprehend new knowledge.” Agrell applies Thomas Kuhn’s pathbreaking insights about the structure of science to understand intelligence. Like Kuhn’s “normal science,” intelligence too is often puzzle-solving, where new information is incorporated into an established frame of reference and results that do not fit are rejected. For Agrell, the canonical notion of an intelligence cycle from collection to analysis to dissemination ratifies that failing in a compartmented and hierarchical structure. Intelligence was slow to absorb the changes of the 1990s, and Agrell is skeptical that even the dramatic shocks of terrorist attacks can inspire the required creativity and imagination within existing – and traditional – intelligence organizations. For him, the fundamental problem is not how intelligence is directed or organized; rather, it is how intelligence *thinks*.

Terrorism is not only a nonstate threat; it is also the ultimate asymmetric threat, adjusting its capacity to its targets’ vulnerabilities. It thus represents a very different challenge from the nation-states of the Cold War; Chapter Six, by Neal Pollard, surveys research that is relevant to understanding that challenge. This threat is not only abroad but rather both at home and abroad. It is less bounded than the threat posed by states, and it comes with no “story” comparable to the story about states, shared in the minds of

intelligence and policy personnel. Although secrets still matter, so do a plethora of credit-card transactions, motor-vehicle records, and the like. Perhaps most uncomfortable for intelligence because the threat is so asymmetric, it is impossible to understand without significant knowledge about the home country – something that cuts across preexisting boundaries between foreign and domestic intelligence. All these factors bear directly not only on how intelligence does its work but also on how it relates to policy – in Pollard's opinion, especially to strategic planning.

The change in targets has also reconfigured intelligence collection, including by technical means, and those changes are the subject of Chapter Seven by Jeffrey Richelson. For most countries, especially the larger ones but also including Sweden, technical collection consumes most of the national resources for intelligence. In Chapter Seven, Richelson primarily examines research relevant to the technical issues confronted by collection, but he also comments on the legal issues at play. For imagery, the main question is relevance: Imagery was critical in understanding nation-states that had addresses, but how important can it be now against terrorist targets that lack addresses – all the more so because imagery's methods are well known? SIGINT is more relevant and more critical. The technical issues run into legal ones: If SIGINT needs to both get closer to the signals of interest and collect more domestic signals, how does it do so both technically and legally? What research is relevant to the answers to these questions?

The third part of the book turns to the politics on intelligence in democratic societies, starting with Olav Riste's overview in Chapter Eight. Like it or not, intelligence in democracies is increasingly the subject of political debate. The specific concern is *politicization* – that is, the risk that intelligence will be under pressure, usually more implicit than explicit, to produce assessments that suit the preferences of national administrations. That concern ran through the American and British investigations of intelligence assessments in the run-up to the 2003 war in Iraq. Yet, protection against politicization needs to be balanced against its opposite: intelligence that is not relevant to any policy question at issue. These issues are the subject of Chapter Eight. Riste also considers the larger public – and political – debate about intelligence. Using intelligence to defend the homeland has necessarily opened up intelligence. What can be learned from research on the state of that debate and its boundaries?

The change in intelligence's targets and the consequent need to expand surveillance at home is stretching democratic oversight of intelligence, as public debates over the boundaries of SIGINT in both Sweden and the United States testify. In Chapter Nine, Wolfgang Krieger surveys research

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on intelligence oversight or democratic control of intelligence services. He does so in an explicitly comparative perspective, suggesting how different practices and experiences are reflections of the different national ways of dealing with intelligence. In fact, they reflect different political cultures, different relationships between elites and the public (because intelligence services are a most exclusive part of national governments), and different ways of defining and managing power. For example, consider the contrast between Britain and France, which still believe they are global powers, and countries like Germany and the Netherlands, which do not. Thus, it is not surprising that the attitudes toward intelligence, particularly to covert action, are very different. In Europe's case, there is the specific issue of overcoming the legacy of communist regimes and their intelligence personnel, a task that has only just begun in Russia.

The change in intelligence's targets also raises ethical issues, and Chapter Ten, by the distinguished former practitioner, Sir David Omand, assesses relevant research. The campaign against terrorism not only is mixing military force and intelligence in new ways, it is also straining the limits of both – from the limits of preemption to the use of covert action away from the battlefield. Intelligence is expanding dramatically, in both expense and breadth of activity, some of which is controversial. At the same time that intelligence is seeking and being given new powers, technology is providing new opportunities to survey major amounts of information about individuals. The irony is that intelligence will be more effective the less terrorists understand of its scope and methods – which constrains the scope of the public debate.

Finally, the concluding Chapter Eleven, by the editors, sums up the volume by drawing together key themes of the various chapters, focusing on the development – or, rather, nondevelopment – of intelligence toward an established set of methods and standards and, above all, an ongoing scientific discourse. Here, in the transformation from an experience-based protoscience to a science of intelligence in-being, the authors argue, lies perhaps the most fundamental challenge for a field of immense impact on the international community, on nations, and on individuals.

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PART 1

DEFINING THE FIELD, ITS THEORY,
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TWO

Building a Theory of Intelligence Systems

Michael Warner

From a hobby of kings and a staple of lurid tales, intelligence has gradually become a proper topic of scholarship. During the last generation, various scholars have voiced impatience with the insightful but ad hoc pattern of studies in this new field and have called for research agendas oriented around cross-national comparisons. Such agendas, however, have not yet emerged. Various well-known factors help to explain this deficit of truly comparative analyses: the paucity of reliable, declassified data to analyze; the general lack of interest among government agencies in sponsoring such studies by in-house experts with access to the files; and the methodological divide between the academic historians (and their official counterparts) mining the available documents and their colleagues trained in political science who draw generalizations from the historical findings. Unfortunately, these perennial obstacles seem immune to quick or easy solutions. Another reason for the lack of comparative studies, however, is closer to home and perhaps easier to address: the lack of agreement, among both scholars and practitioners, of just what would be compared in a comparative approach to intelligence studies.

A great amount of writing, and some excellent research, has been done on intelligence activities and personalities. Not so much has been done on the *collective* authorities, resources, oversight, and missions assigned to parties officially assembled to perform intelligence duties of particular nations. Still less has been done to compare these collectivities across nations, cultures, or eras. What has been written is not comprehensive. Researchers use conflicting concepts and definitions, do not mine other disciplines for insights, and rarely regard the “literary record.” Furthermore, little has been done to build taxonomies of intelligence-related variables and to chart their relationships.