The Future of Intelligence: A Forum on the US Intelligence Community in Honor of Robert Jervis

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Introduction by Richard H. Immerman, Emeritus, Temple University

In January 2023, a year and a month after Robert Jervis passed away, the advisory board of the International Security Studies Forum (ISSF), under the aegis of Keren Yarhi-Milo, Arnold A. Saltzman Professor of War and Peace Studies and Dean of the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, along with its senior managing editor, Diane Labrosse, and managing editor, Jennifer Erickson, renamed it the Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum (RJISSF). By attaching the already-legendary political scientist’s name to this invaluable outlet for publishing scholarship on international relations, foreign policy, and the spectrum of related subfields and disciplines, the board not only paid tribute to Bob, but it also acknowledged what was well known to the readers of and contributors to both RJISSF and H-Diplo: No one was a more ardent believer in the potential of each of the forums and their partnership. Further, no one was more committed to the success of each of the forums and their partnership. Although a political scientist, Bob was as devoted to the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), Diplomatic History, and H-Diplo as any historian. Yet he also appreciated the distinction between IR scholars and historians of US foreign relations. He founded ISSF in 2009 with the purpose of bridging that gap by facilitating and even institutionalizing dialogues among the two, welcoming representatives from other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences as well.

Over the next fourteen years, Jervis nurtured ISSF as a complement to H-Diplo. He contributed to it with astounding frequency, and he conceived of exciting projects with interdisciplinary appeal, to which he wrote many of the introductions. The marriage of H-Diplo and the now-named RJISSF is at its most elemental level a reflection of Bob Jervis: eclectic in its scope, encouraging of innovation and imagination, generous in its openness to new approaches and often junior scholars, never content with the conventional wisdom and forever in search of an original question to address, and always a platform for inclusive, civil debate and discourse. Its roundtables, its reviews, its essays, and its commentaries are read by hundreds of thousands of scholars and practitioners across the globe. It is the realization of Bob’s vision.

While Bob’s scholarship over his lengthy career was so wide-ranging as to defy characterization, he increasingly concentrated, albeit far from exclusively, the last twenty-five years on the study of intelligence. One can trace his interest to the late 1970s, when a temporary consultancy at the CIA led to his selection by his friend and former Harvard colleague, Robert Bowie, to prepare a postmortem on the agency’s failure to anticipate and to provide the Carter administration with warning of the fall of the Shah. Although that postmortem remained classified for decades, it served as a catalyst for Jervis’s emergence in the twenty-first century as, in my judgment and that of many others, America’s most respected scholar of US intelligence. His 2010 The Failure of Intelligence, which he based on his postmortem on the fall of the Shah and a similar

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2 Excluding his numerous contributions to ISSF, Bob in combination published more than a dozen book reviews, articles, and commentaries in H-Diplo and Diplomatic History.

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retrospective analysis of the Intelligence Community’s (IC’s) faulty National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) and parallel judgments about President Saddam Hussein’s alleged concealment of Weapons of Mass Destruction, is canonical. A decade later he helped to organize, contributed an essay to, and guest-edited a special issue of Intelligence and National Security that unpacked the controversial 2007 NIE on Iran’s nuclear program. He subsequently co-edited a volume composed of the articles and supplementary ones that Routledge published the year he passed away. One could teach a course on intelligence and US foreign policy relying almost exclusively on Bob Jervis’s scholarship, which the authors of the essays that follow cite frequently.

Jervis’s audience was never limited to only scholars and students. Bowie invited Bob to write the postmortem on the fall of the Shah as a lessons-learned project for future intelligence analysts. He appreciated that Jervis’s expertise in political psychology, most notably his application of psychological theories to explain perception and misperception in international relations, could be applied productively to intelligence analysis. Jervis appreciated that as well. In addition to the intellectual stimulation that he derived from identifying the pathologies that pervaded the IC, he was committed to serving the national interest by exposing these pathologies so that analysts were at least aware of them. Hence he consulted, wrote other postmortems, and cultivated rich relationships within and throughout the IC. He aimed not to expose but to improve.

It was therefore highly appropriate that senior managing editor Diane Labrosse proposed a forum on the contemporary state of the Intelligence Community to signal the synergy between Bob and H-Diplo | RJISSF. Diane’s guidance was broad. She asked me to assemble experts who could contribute essays on the IC’s current challenges and opportunities and their implications for today’s and tomorrow’s global affairs. I accepted without hesitation, confident that the connection between the name Robert Jervis and the salience of the topic would appeal to a cohort of distinguished scholars, practitioners, and combinations of both whom I thought of immediately. It did; all accepted my invitation. I gave each wide latitude, with the result that readers will be treated to historical and prescriptive essays that address different pieces of a complicated mosaic composed of old and new problems that the contemporary IC faces and its anticipated future requirements. Reflecting the complexity of that mosaic, there is less direct overlap among the essays than many of this forum’s readers might have expected. Yet the extent to which they complement and are in dialogue with each other may prove equally counterintuitive. What will come as no surprise is that the essays are all informed and informative.

Dick Betts’s intimate connection with intelligence studies and the IC dovetailed closely with those of Bob, his colleague at Columbia. His Enemies of Intelligence sits next to the Failure of Intelligence at the center of my bookshelf, and he also served for decades as a valuable advisor to the US intelligence enterprise in a variety of capacities. Betts draws on both of these perspectives to provide what he calls “random impressions” of how the changes in intelligence capabilities and the global environment that have occurred and accelerated particularly since the end of the Cold War present the IC with new opportunities even as they continue to

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8 Bowie told me this explicitly in a private conversation.


pose traditional problems. His key examples include the requirement to conduct net assessments of a range of allies and adversaries; the continuing challenges of classification, overclassification, and balancing information-sharing with protecting sources and methods; and the IC’s need to overcome the barriers to realizing the full potential of all-source intelligence. Betts leaves the reader hoping that intelligence analysis will matter more to policymakers in the future than it has in the past, but he cannot confidently forecast that this will be the case.

The focus of Sarah Jane-Corke, who ranks in the top tier of historians (in contrast to political scientists) who write about intelligence and who co-founded the North American Society for Intelligence History, is the establishment, evolution, and prospects of the US Director of National Intelligence (DNI), the juxtaposition of the DNI and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (DCIA, previously the Director of Central Intelligence, or DCI), and the salience of their relationship for the IC’s future effectiveness. The proposal to create the DNI and an office to support it garnered little support and must resistance among the IC’s senior leadership. Congress nevertheless included its establishment as integral to the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA), thereby all but preordaining bureaucratic competition between the DNI and the DCIA, who previously ruled over the IC and also served as the president’s chief intelligence advisor. Corke provides a history of this competition, manifested initially with the tenures of John Negroponte and Peter Goss, to uncover the extent to which it infected ODNI’s relationship with the CIA, and for that matter other elements of the IC as well. She observes much-needed improvement beginning with the succession of Michael McConnell and Michael Hayden, but seamless integration and collaboration remain works in progress.

One can make the argument, and I will make it, that no one brings to the study of US intelligence, and particularly the question of the IC’s current state and future prospects, the profound expertise and insightful perspective that Thomas Fingar does (full disclosure: Tom was my boss when I worked at ODNI). A PhD in Political Science, he spent decades in the IC, rising to the head of the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (with the rank of Assistant Secretary of State) and Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis. Since returning to academia, he has been remarkably prolific. Having played a central role in the IC reforms that followed the IRTPA legislation, the subject of one of his books,11 Fingar writes in his essay about the IC’s need to adapt to a new environment punctuated by information overload, especially but not exclusively that generated by Artificial Intelligence. This condition will require its interfacing with an array of non-governmental entities, its development of deeper and broader expertise, and its exploitation of new tools and techniques. But Fingar cautions against exaggerating the consequences of this brave new world. The core mission of the IC will not change, and machines can never replace analysts in terms of the analysis they produce and their relationships with the “customers” (whether policymakers, warfighters, or law enforcers) they support. Fingers counsels that the effectiveness of the IC’s support will depend on how well it strikes a balance between competition, integration, and collaboration.

The first holder of the Francis DeSerio Chair in Strategic and Theater Intelligence at the US Army War College after it was transformed into a full-time position, Genevieve Lester is likewise concerned with analysts and their customers, with an emphasis on the latter. She has spent much of her career educating senior military officers in the nuances of intelligence and how most effectively to exploit it. Her essay evolved from that perspective and her experiences. Prompted by the questions raised by Jervis and unwittingly engaging Fingar, Steve Marrin, and Amy Zegart in a conversation (none of the contributors knew the subjects of the others’ essays), Lester unpacks the relationship between the producers and consumers of intelligence. She describes this relationship as historically “asymmetric,” with primary responsibility, particularly for

failures, ascribed to the dominant partner: the producer. That needs to change, Lester argues, and it is changing. As is already evident in the Russo-Ukraine War, technological advances in collecting and communicating intelligence and the requisites of sometimes instantaneous decision making are dramatically altering this balance toward more equitable burden-sharing. She proposes a series of measures to prepare consumers better for this increased responsibility.

Steven Marrin, a former CIA analyst and the current editor of *Intelligence and National Security*, writes about the value and limits of strategic intelligence, a subject about which he is especially expert.\(^\text{12}\) Like Betts, Marrin appreciates that intelligence plays a lesser role in policymakers’ decisions than it should—and much of the public believes it does. Nevertheless, he argues that better intelligence does not necessarily produce better outcomes. A case in point is the suicide bombings that were integral to the 9/11 tragedy. The problem, he claims, paralleling Lester, lies more with policy than intelligence, or the nexus between them. Building on the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, Marrin argues that for strategic intelligence most effectively to influence decision making, there must be a much tighter and more cohesive relationship between intelligence analysts and policymakers so that the intelligence produced by the analyst becomes the policy makers’ knowledge.

For decades Amy Zegart has produced scholarship that exposed the deficiencies that have been baked into the IC’s, most notably but not exclusively the CIA’s, organizational structure since its inception.\(^\text{13}\) The growth and evolution of the IC through the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the fall-out from 9/11 did not eliminate these deficiencies, and some even metastasized. As she writes in this essay, their legacy will affect how the United States confronts what she labels “two tectonic shifts”: the rise of China and its resultant strategic rivalry with the United States, and the emergence and convergence of new technologies, especially but not limited to the connectivity produced by the Internet, the potential of Artificial Intelligence, and the capabilities of commercial satellites. The question she addresses is how the IC can adapt, and the answer, she makes clear, is not more money. Or at least it can’t involve only more money. The IC’s budget is insufficient, but increased appropriations will not inexorably translate into improved performance and greater effectiveness in safeguarding US interests in a world that the emerging technologies are revolutionizing in myriad ways. Indeed, agreeing with many of Fingar’s claims, but not all of them, Zegart asserts that the convergence of these technologies confronts the IC with a “moment of reckoning.” She is not pessimistic about the prospects for the IC’s adapting to the new environment. Her prescription will, however, surprise many readers of this forum and probably generate pushback from many in the IC: the creation of an open-source intelligence agency.

If I were still teaching courses on intelligence and US foreign policy, I would make this forum required reading. Now retired, the best I can do is make it recommended reading for us all.

**Contributors:**

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\(^{12}\) See, for example, Stephen Marrin, “Why Strategic Intelligence Has Limited Influence on American Foreign Policy,” *Intelligence and National Security* 32 (September 2017): 725-742.

\(^{13}\) Begin with Amy Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, the JCS, and the NSC* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).
Francis Deserio Chair in Strategic Intelligence at the US Army War College. A former SHAFR president and author of several books and articles on intelligence, he is currently a co-editor, along with Stacie Goddard and Diane Labrosse, of The Jervis Effect, and along with Susan Brewer and Doug Little, of Thinking Otherwise: How Walter LaFeber Explained the History of US Foreign Relations. Both are scheduled for publication in 2024, with Columbia University Press and Cornell University Press, respectively.

Richard K. Betts is the Leo A. Shifrin Professor Emeritus at Columbia University and formerly Director of Columbia's Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and Director of National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. Among his books related to intelligence are Surprise Attack (Brookings Institution, 1982); Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises, 2d edition (Columbia University Press, 1991); Military Readiness (Brookings Institution, 1995); Enemies of Intelligence (Columbia University Press, 2007); and American Force (Columbia University Press, 2012).

Sarah-Jane Corke, PhD, is the co-founder and past-president of the North American Society for Intelligence History (nasih). She is currently an associate professor of history at the University of New Brunswick. Her first book, US Covert Operations and Cold War Strategy: Truman, the CIA and Secret Warfare, was published by Routledge in 2008. Her second book, an edited collection with Mark Stout, Adventures in Intelligence History: Stories from The International Spy Museum and Beyond is under contract with the University Press of Kansas. Her third monograph, The Nine Lives of Patricia and John Paton Davies was awarded a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (sshrc) grant in 2022. She also plans to continue working on the history of the DNI.

Thomas Fingar is Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center Fellow at Stanford University. Previous positions include Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis, Chair of the National Intelligence Council, and Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research. His recent publications include From Mandate to Blueprint: Lessons from Intelligence Reform (Stanford University Press: 2021); Fateful Decisions: Choices that will Shape China's Future, co-editor with Jean C. Oi (Stanford: 2020); Uneasy Partnerships: China and Japan, the Koreas, and Russia in the Era of Reform, editor (Stanford: 2017); The New Great Game: China and South and Central Asia in the Era of Reform, editor (Stanford: 2016); and Reducing Uncertainty: Intelligence Analysis and National Security (Stanford: 2011).

Genevieve Lester is the De Serio Chair of Strategic Intelligence at the US Army War College. Her areas of interest are intelligence; accountability; leadership, and decisionmaking. She is also an Associate Fellow for Strategic Intelligence at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. She holds a PhD and MA in Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley, an MA in International Economics/International Law and Organizations from the Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies, and a BA in history from Carleton College. She is the author of When Should State Secrets Stay Secret? Accountability, Democratic Governance, and Intelligence (Cambridge University Press, 2015) and numerous other publications on intelligence and related matters.

Stephen Marrin is the Director of the Intelligence Analysis Program and Professor in the School of Integrated Sciences at James Madison University. He is the editor of the journal Intelligence and National Security (Taylor & Francis), the premier scholarly journal in intelligence studies. Previously Dr. Marrin spent 10 years as the chair and program chair of the Intelligence Studies Section at the International Studies Association, as well as 3 years on the board of the International Association for Intelligence Education. He has also been on the advisory boards for a number of intelligence studies journals to include the International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence. Dr. Marrin is a holder of a BA (political science) from Colgate University and MA and PhD degrees (foreign affairs) from the University of Virginia. He is the author of the book Improving Intelligence Analysis: Bridging the Gap between Scholarship and Practice (Routledge, 2011) as well as many articles on
intelligence analysis. Before his academic career began he spent 5 years as an analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the US Government Accountability Office (GAO).

Amy Zegart is the Morris Arnold and Nona Jean Cox Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, and Professor of Political Science by Courtesy at Stanford University. Her most recent book is *Spies, Lies, and Algorithms: The History and Future of American Intelligence* (Princeton University Press, 2022).
Members of the US Intelligence Community (IC) are again being told that they can and must make dramatic changes in order to remain relevant and useful.¹ Calls for reform and/or restructuring of the intelligence enterprise are probably as old as the profession of intelligence; so too are assertions that the IC is stuck in the past, reluctant to change, and incapable of meeting new challenges.² Common characterizations and caricatures of the IC exaggerate its resistance to reform, ignore the frequency and magnitude of evolutionary change, and trivialize factors which require a high degree of stability.

Tools and methods change, but the fundamental missions of intelligence, providing warning, information, and insight to national security decisionmakers, and maintaining trust between intelligence professionals and the people they support must not be diminished by infatuation with new ideas. The Intelligence Community is very different today than it was when I first obtained codeword clearances in 1970. It is also different than it was before passage of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, and after the changes adopted during my tenure as Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis in 2005–2008.³ Most changes were and will be driven by developments in the international situation, the scope and priorities of the national security establishment, and the availability of new tools and techniques. They were adopted and adapted to meet new requirements and to enhance performance of enduring responsibilities.

Some prophets and proponents of change emphasize the potentially transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other uses of big data. Others point to increasing competition from groups using only or mostly open source information. Most advocate the continued separation of intelligence and decisionmaking as necessary to ensure objectivity and prevent politicization.⁴ In contrast, a small but growing number of commentators seem to imply that intelligence findings or judgments should drive or even dictate policy decisions.⁵ It is a very small step from asserting that AI judgments about national security issues will often be more accurate than human judgments to implying that AI algorithms should determine policy responses.

I find it inconceivable that policymakers will abdicate fundamental responsibilities to a machine. They will not and should not do so. But machine-generated assessments and empirically based policy recommendations will

become increasingly common and compete for attention with other inputs to the already-crowded decisionmaking environment. This will add to, but not fundamentally change, IC responsibilities and the relationship between national security decisionmakers and the intelligence professionals who support them.

*Competition*

Much has been written about the need for the IC to adjust to a world in which non-governmental organizations are increasingly capable and eager to collect, analyze, and provide “intelligence” input to the policymaking process.6 Some putative competitors utilize classified intelligence; others rely solely on unclassified information. Types of information once accessible only to US Intelligence Community analysts, such as satellite and drone imagery, is now available commercially. Indeed, non-US Government (USG) customers can sometimes task the collection of imagery on places or developments in the same way—albeit less bureaucratically than—IC analysts can task collection by USG systems. General and specific fruits of collection can be utilized by analysts in-and outside the IC.7

Having more eyes on a problem increases the opportunities to detect and analyze developments, but it also introduces the potential for counterproductive competition in the form of ill-considered interpretations (by private or IC organizations) that affect public perceptions and pressures on policymakers to “do something” about the problem. Expansion of the number and scope of alternatives to IC collection and analysis will have multiple consequences, some more disruptive than others. More eyes and minds on problems should enhance understanding by bringing diverse perspectives to bear and facilitate larger critical masses of expertise. But the quality of resultant assessments is bound to be uneven, and there will be fewer mechanisms to evaluate, compare, and adjudicate judgments than exist within the Intelligence Community.

Peer review and equivalent mechanisms take time and will become even more problematic as the volume of output increases and expert reviewers are overwhelmed by requests. Quality control within academic units or firms will help, and reviews by independent organizations would be beneficial albeit difficult to structure. Initially, however, and probably for some time, primary responsibility for assessing the quality of externally produced analysis will fall to the Intelligence Community.

For non-urgent subjects and developments, cooperation (peer review) among competitors and even in conjunction with the IC is desirable and feasible, but probably difficult to achieve. Part of the reason it will be difficult is captured by the idea of competition. In an ideal world, insights and judgments would compete on the basis of quality, utility, and timeliness. But in the real world, the desire to scoop competitors and the ability to disseminate products instantaneously will pose formidable obstacles to both quality control and integration into IC thinking and products.

This is not a new problem. One of the challenges I faced when charged with leading the transformation of IC analysis two decades ago was the use of the term “competitive analysis” in Executive Orders and IC guidance.8 The clear intent of the term was to ensure that all problems would be examined by at least two

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7 See, for example, Jeff Wise, “The DIY Intelligence Analysts Feasting on Ukraine: Meet the Would-be Jack Ryans of OSINT,” *Intelligencer*, March 4, 2022, [https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/03/the-osint-analysts-feasting-on-ukraine.html](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/03/the-osint-analysts-feasting-on-ukraine.html).


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independent organizations as a form of check-and-balance in order to ensure against single-point-of-failure errors. That was the intent, but competition was too often interpreted to mean being the first to produce a judgment and/or having one’s own interpretation accepted and utilized by policymakers. Being first has no virtue if the judgment is wrong and could have been made less wrong by some form of peer review or independent analysis of the same information.

Regardless of how good (or bad) the information and judgments provided by non-IC actors are, they are likely to be disseminated by digital media as quickly as the producers can move them into the marketplace of ideas. At a minimum, this will mean that the IC must discover, evaluate, and comment on externally generated products as quickly as possible. This will entail significant opportunity costs. Failure to quickly jump on input of uncertain quality risks having erroneous ideas shape the thinking and statements of policymakers who are eager to be first to pronounce on a proclaimed problem or opportunity. Reeling them in after they have internalized and committed to defective judgments is neither easy nor a process that is likely to win the confidence of IC customers.

AI-generated analyses will sometimes be as good as those produced by human analysts. But not always. Determining which are good and which are flawed (and how and why they are flawed) will be a daunting challenge. Among other reasons is the fact that humans cannot realistically process anywhere near the volume of information utilized by AI algorithms. Expanding the scope and volume of information utilized, whether by humans or machines, magnifies the necessity and the difficulty of identifying faulty, deliberately misleading, and in other ways problematic “facts” and judgments.

Nevertheless, increasing use of AI—inside and outside the IC—is inevitable. This means that IC analysts and managers must determine soon and continuously how AI’s capacities are to be utilized. Machines can do things that humans cannot, and obviously should be used where and how it is advantageous to do so.

The addition and intensification of competition compounds the perennial challenges of the Intelligence Community. For example, more information about more developments, and the likelihood that some will be depicted as worrisome, detrimental to US interests, or opportunities to be seized without delay will fuel the already excessive proclivity of specific constituencies and/or officials to “do something” about the problem. Doing something, preferably quickly, is not the same as doing something that is prudent or effective. Providing information and insight to help decisionmakers avoid blunders and devise strategies and policies to achieve desired outcomes is a core mission of the IC. This can be, and will be, a time-consuming task that diverts attention and effort from support to other missions and customers.

Day-in and day-out operation of the IC—targeting collection, enhancing understanding of developments and what shapes them, and addressing the declared and implicit needs of customers across the national security enterprise—is guided by policymaker-established priorities and routine monitoring requirements. The system requires prioritization of tasks, including assignments of and to people, but it also requires agility and expertise to respond quickly to pop-up developments and new policymaker requirements. The more external or competitive inputs are added to the mix, the greater the difficulty of performing all missions and satisfying all customers.

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Times and Tools Change but Fundamentals Do Not

Older people tend to think the future will be much like the past and that what they/we did in the past will be appropriate for the future. There is also a tendency for younger people to dismiss lessons offered by their elders as largely irrelevant for the problems of today. Both views are wrong. During my five decades in the IC, I have seen many new approaches and technologies to improve intelligence analysis. Many have promised silver-bullet answers to real and imagined analytic challenges. Most have been disappointing but some have changed the way analysts work. None has changed the core missions of intelligence analysis.

My 2011 book Reducing Uncertainty described the dramatic increase in the volume of information and the scope of intelligence analysis after the Cold War.\(^9\) The phenomena and trends it described twelve years ago continue at an accelerating pace. Intelligence analysts continue to be asked to provide more precise information and analytic insight on more issues to more diverse customers, and to do so more quickly. Analysts today and in the future will have more information to work with but less time to evaluate, interpret, and analyze what it means and how it is relevant to the missions and customers that depend on the IC for support.

As in the past, governments and non-state actors will try to protect secrets, and collectors will have to deal with more and better denial and deception efforts. Secrets will be harder to find and harder to unravel. But unclassified information will remain as—or more—important for most analytical challenges.\(^10\) On most subjects of importance to decisionmakers, the analytical challenge will be to cope with a surfeit of information, not absolute scarcity. The most fundamental mission of intelligence is the same as it has always been, namely, to provide information and insights that help decisionmakers to understand the situation they face and to make better informed—and hopefully better—decisions. Sometimes this involves providing warning of potential dangers, but it should also alert decisionmakers to possible opportunities to shape the trajectory of events. Discovering secrets is a small but important part of the mission. But because something was secret or previously undiscovered does not automatically make it important or relevant to the mission that is being supported. More common, and often more important, tasks include explaining puzzles, solving mysteries, and interpreting developments that may (or may not) be relevant to decisionmaker responsibilities and objectives.

Understanding the responsibilities and objectives of the agencies and individuals being supported is a prerequisite for providing helpful intelligence support. Let me underscore this last point by asserting that intelligence analysis that is not helpful to decisionmakers is not good in any meaningful definition of that word. Scanning the horizon to discover things that no one has yet focused on can be informative, but looking for interesting things is not a major responsibility of intelligence analysts. Others can and should do that. The primary responsibility of intelligence professionals is to provide informed insights that help national security decisionmakers to do their jobs.

Decisionmakers receive copious input from myriad sources.\(^11\) Intelligence differs from other input for reasons beyond its access to classified information. What makes it unique and uniquely valuable is its presumptive objectivity and its direct utility to specific customers and missions. One-size intelligence is an

\(^9\) Fingar, Reducing Uncertainty, chapter 1.
oxymoron. To be useful, intelligence must be tailored and timely. Meeting those requirements requires close, even intimate knowledge of primary customers and their missions.

**Intelligence-Policy Interface**

One of the most harmful myths about intelligence is that objectivity and avoidance of politicization require arms-length separation from policy customers. Physical, and more importantly interpersonal distance is a serious impediment to useful intelligence support. The danger that analysts will be co-opted by the people they support and skew information and analysis to please their primary customers is far less than the danger that their work will be unhelpful because the analysts—and thus the IC—do not properly understand what the customer knows, does not know, wants to know, or what, in the judgment of the analyst, the decisionmaker needs to know in order to understand the issue or situation. Good intelligence support also requires knowledge of what the customer is trying to do and when key decisions will be made. The best intelligence in the world is unhelpful if it arrives after key decisions have been made.

Acquiring such knowledge requires both frequent interaction and a high degree of mutual trust. Decisionmakers will not share what they need or want to know if they fear that an analyst will abuse their trust. And analysts cannot provide tailored support unless they understand what is desired or needed. We are a very long way from the time when decisionmakers confide in and take guidance from an advanced version of the *Star Wars*’ robot C-3PO. Decisionmakers expect and need intelligence analysts to help them in three ways.

One way is to serve as their eyes and ears by tracking developments germane to the missions and responsibilities of the decisionmaker and his or her agency. Policymaking subordinates are supposed to do the same thing and they do. Intelligence analysts are the second line of defense against surprise and failure to note developments with the potential to affect decisionmaker performance. Performing this function obviously requires accurate understanding of what the decisionmaker is trying to do.

The second way is to obtain, evaluate, and assess additional information germane to agency missions and decisionmaker responsibilities. This requires knowing what information the decisionmaker already has and what he or she thinks is needed. It also requires sufficient understanding of decisionmaker thinking to be able to assess what he or she needs but has not requested. To perform this role, analysts must know what to ask and where to seek the desired information, usually through a combination of classified collection and use of unclassified sources.

The third way is to put information and developments into a strategic context by explaining how they fit into broader patterns and megatrends. Most decisionmakers are very focused on immediate tasks (the in-box) and

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12 See, for example, Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, chapter 3.
15 Fingar, “Understanding and Using Intelligence.”
do not have time or the inclination to ask bigger questions about longer term trends. They need analysts—which generally means intelligence analysts—to do that for and with them.\textsuperscript{16}

Presenting decisionmakers with more secret information or machine-generated speculation does not assure utility. To be useful, new information and insights must be germane to the mission being supported. Life is full of noise. Merely adding to the noise bombarding decisionmakers is not helpful. Indeed, it can be a distraction that discredits both the analyst and the function of intelligence. Conversely, being useful is the best way to build and sustain confidence in both analysts and the intelligence enterprise, and to reinforce habits of collaboration that facilitate sustained high-quality intelligence support.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Good Analysis Requires Good Analysts}

More information and better tools are desirable, but they are not a substitute for good analysts who employ good analytic tradecraft. Access to more information is usually preferable to having to make do with scant, inconsistent, and problematic intelligence, and the ability to use machines and smart algorithms to separate wheat from chaff is almost always better than having to plow through great stacks of information in hopes of finding nuggets of potentially useful data. But not even the most sophisticated algorithms or smartest AI system can produce good analysis without help from good analysts.

Increased collection, machine translations, programs to identify information germane to the problem at hand, and other advanced tools increase the size of the intelligence haystack and provide help in winnowing the pile down to more manageable amounts. Advanced tools and other algorithms are increasingly helpful for identifying patterns, trends, trajectories, and discontinuities, and AI has the potential and probably the likelihood of assisting and accelerating the transformation of data into insight, but for the foreseeable future, it will remain a contributor to good analysis but not a substitute for good analysts.

Assembling large amounts of data is not the same as—and is much less useful to decisionmakers than—data that has been processed through the heads of experienced and knowledgeable analysts. Stated another way, until intelligence is processed in the mind of an analyst, it is just data. Delivering “data” to decisionmakers with the expectation that they have the time and skill to evaluate, assess, and interpret what it means is an unhelpful abdication of analyst responsibility.

AI requires and can make use of larger and larger amounts of data, but that is of little value unless it is working with the “right” data with the dual objectives of producing insights that are germane to the missions and objectives of specific customers in the national security enterprise and identifying anomalies and discontinuities that might be consequential. In other words, it must combine the analytic responsibilities to enhance understanding of developments, trends, and trajectories and provide timely strategic warning. Good analysts do this all the time with regularly updated knowledge of policymaker goals, concerns, and understanding of the issues involved. Machines can probably be built and trained to issue warning and deepen understanding at the same time, but it is hard to imagine how AI-assisted analysts without the continuous updating of information that comes from daily interaction with decisionmakers could have equal or greater


ability to provide timely, tailored, and truly useful input to national security customers. They can assist but will not replace skilled IC analysts who have constant and trusted interaction with the people they support.

Computers have become far more capable, and the compilation of data has become much more sophisticated and useful for producing better large-N studies of all kinds of phenomena. But most large-N studies produce answers to small questions. Such studies are more helpful to academics seeking promotion than to decisionmakers seeking useful insight. Most decisionmakers, most of the time, are interested in big questions involving intentions, the cumulative effects of interactions across time and space, and whether, when, and how nascent problems might resolve themselves or become threats or issues requiring action. Stated another way, good data and good AI can probably provide pretty good predictions about how a specific military unit that is commanded by a particular officer will utilize the weapons at its disposal in a defined situation. But AI cannot predict decision outcomes of deliberations at the top of opaque political systems because requisite high-quality and reliable data are not available.

Even with the development and adoption of increasingly capable data processing and AI analytics, producing truly useful intelligence support to national security customers will require knowledgeable, experienced analysts able to work collaboratively with colleagues in and outside the US government. Use of computers will further reduce the number of intelligence tasks amenable to human-wave approaches that utilize many relatively unskilled people to compile data, but they will not replace trusted analysts as providers of useful support relevant to the kinds of problems on which decisionmakers turn to intelligence and intelligence analysts for assistance. Decisionmakers turn to intelligence when they wish they had better understanding of a problem, development, or situation; when they know they need more information, better information, and better understanding of the information they do have; and when they want help to decide whether and when they must act, and what actions are most likely to produce desired outcomes and avoid unwanted ones. The key link between such requirements and the intelligence enterprise is the analyst.

To serve as this critical link, an analyst must understand the situation or problem as well as or better than the decisionmaker who is being supported. In other words, the analyst’s expertise on the policy or problem area must be equal to or better than that of the decisionmaker being supported. That is a high bar. Analyst expertise is also required to recognize and understand how the decisionmaker views the matter under consideration; what information, interpretations, and assumptions likely undergird current judgments; and what information or insight might deepen or even change decisionmaker understanding and preferred courses of action. Without such knowledge, the analyst is reduced to simply responding to—or referring to other analysts or to AI programs—specific questions posed by the decisionmaker. Expertise is needed to determine whether the questions posed are the right or best questions to deepen understanding and reduce uncertainty, whether those or alternative questions can be answered in the timeframe specified by the decisionmaker, and where to seek the information required to answer the most germane questions.

Getting the question right is a critical first step. Chasing data on questions that probably cannot be answered in the time available can only produce unhelpful input to the decision process. It takes expertise and experience to formulate the right questions. The converse is also true. Providing intelligence or insight on matters unrelated to a decisionmaker’s responsibilities is unhelpful and can be a distraction. Knowing who needs such information and when they need it is not always self-evident. Mass dissemination of the “Dear Boxholder” variety is unlikely to reach the right decisionmakers. Targeting of information is an analyst responsibility.

Developing the right questions requires expertise on what information is available or attainable, what prior assessments have concluded, and on how to convey requirements to intelligence collectors. Conveying requirements requires knowledge of both collection systems and where desired information might be obtained. When I was Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis, I repeatedly told my analysts
that they could not levy requirements unless they could tell collectors where to look for the answers. Being able to provide that kind of guidance requires substantive expertise as well as understanding of the intelligence system.

Reviewing old information and analyses to determine whether ideas that might have shaped decisionmaker (and analyst) understanding of the problem under study also requires expertise, experience, and a trusted relationship with key customers. So too does the interpretation of new information considering what was known and judged previously and utilizing both old and new information to provide timely and targeted input to decisionmakers. As new and old information is being considered, good analysts convey preliminary judgments to decisionmakers to make them a part of the process. They do so to capture the expertise and evolving thinking of the people and missions being supported. Answering the “right” questions entails not just the “what question, if it can be answered in the time available, promises to produce the most insight” challenges, but also determining whether decisionmaker thinking about the problem has changed significantly. If decisionmaker thinking has evolved, analytic support must do likewise. Better answers to questions already overtaken by events may be useful outside the national security enterprise or at some time in the future but are not very helpful to dealing with immediate problems. All these requisites for good—useful—intelligence support depend ultimately on the expertise of the analyst and the nature of the analyst’s relationship with the decisionmaker who is being supported.

They also depend, of course, on good analytic tradecraft: utilizing all available information, whether classified or unclassified; evaluating information and interpreting what it means by using logic and the laws of evidence and inference; clearly identifying information gaps and the means—such as analogies or assumptions—used to close the gaps to produce a coherent story; and clearly articulating judgments about probability and levels of confidence in the information used and the judgments reached. Customers need to understand what is known, what is not known, and the means used to produce judgments on matters they want to understand. Advanced tools and interaction with outside experts can help, but it will not be a substitute for trust-based integration into a single system linking intelligence to policy decisions.

Smart Analysts, Smart Tools, and Smart Systems

Over time, the quantity and character of information have changed, but core missions, key relationships, and essential requisites of good intelligence analysis largely remain the same as they have always been. What is different, in addition to the volume of information available, is that analysts are now expected to monitor and analyze a wider range of developments in more places with greater precision. They are also often expected to do so while meeting deadlines that approximate real-time. Recent examples that illustrate the tendency to assign to the Intelligence Community primary responsibility for assessing developments that once would have been considered largely outside its areas of expertise and responsibility include President Joe Biden’s directive to the Intelligence Community to investigate the origins of the COVID-19 virus and the IC’s investigation into the causes of Havana Syndrome. Both of these examples clearly have an intelligence dimension, but the

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18 Fingar, Reducing Uncertainty, chapters 1-2.
core issues are medical ones. Both reports were criticized for, among other reasons, the IC’s failure to produce definitive answers.\(^{20}\)

Increases in the volume of information; number, complexity, and scope of subjects to be analyzed; and demands for speed and precision will continue for the foreseeable future. They will also continue to intensify more rapidly than increases in personnel or funding devoted to intelligence analysis. Intelligence professionals in the United States and around the world will require higher levels of expertise, but deeper expertise and more experience alone will not be adequate. Meeting increased demands and rising expectations will require smarter analysts, smarter tools, and smarter systems.

My observation that we will need smarter analysts can be disaggregated to underscore the importance of three different types of expertise and experience. One type refers to substantive knowledge about specific places and problems, such as China or Iran, and/or economic development or nuclear proliferation. This is not a new requirement, but requisite levels of knowledge are higher than before and typically take longer to acquire. To acquire the necessary levels of substantive expertise generally will require more formal training and longer time on an account. Specialization will be more important than general analytical skills. Analysts will also need greater understanding of what smart tools can and cannot do, how to use data mining and other tools, and how to complement and magnify their own expertise by tapping the expertise of colleagues and counterparts inside and outside the analyst’s home organization and even the US Intelligence Community.\(^{21}\) This is different than substantive expertise but no less important. To do the job in the time available, analysts must know where to look for help and how to use the ever-more-capable tools available to them.

The third requisite for becoming a smarter analyst is to develop and master systemic arrangements to clarify what customers want and need, share information and ideas with collaborators, and integrate work done by multiple analysts in multiple organizations into a single, coherent, timely, and useful product. This entails developing and exercising networks of collaborators, habits of cooperation, and procedures to ensure quality and timeliness.\(^{22}\)

Networks and partially systematized arrangements to capture information and insights within and beyond the Intelligence Community have existed for a long time and are becoming more common. But they lag far behind where they should be and must be to meet the intelligence needs of the national security enterprise and to utilize the capabilities of new tools and non-USG analytical organizations. Nearly twenty years ago, when I was assigned responsibility for transforming the US intelligence establishment, we had only scattered elements of an integrated system. I think we made important steps toward creating and utilizing a more integrated system, but what exists today in the United States still falls short of what is necessary and possible. Expanding and enhancing collaborative, outreach, and integrating mechanisms can no longer be characterized as “nice but too hard to do.” The passage of time, technological advances, and the proliferation of entities

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\(^{21}\) This point is developed further in Thomas Fingar, *From Mandate to Blueprint: Lessons from Intelligence Reform* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), especially 131-165.

created to provide empirically based analysis to the national security establishment have made it imperative and urgent to develop more systematic procedures.

There are many obstacles to the creation and use of more integrated systems to produce better intelligence support to decisionmakers, but my own subjective judgment about which obstacles are most important is that most intelligence establishments would rather impose greater demands on analysts to be smarter or better, or expect smart tools to compensate for analyst and systemic defects than to tackle the hard tasks of systemic reform. This, in my judgment, is a misplaced hope.

The four most important factors differentiating the IC from all competitors are its proximity and integration into specific components of the national security enterprise (the IC is an integral part of the national security team), its statutory and professional obligation to be objective and eschew policy recommendations, the ability of the IC to utilize the full array of US government capabilities to acquire specifically desired information, and the bonds of trust and confidence between individual policymakers and the IC professionals (usually analysts) with whom they work daily. No external competitor has the same access, experience-based trust, or detailed understanding of decisionmaker wants, needs, objectives, and preferred ways to acquire information.

That does not mean that external information providers can play no useful role in the national security enterprise. As noted above, the fact that they will produce and disseminate ever more products means that they will play greater roles in the policymaking process. The IC will be called upon to evaluate and comment on externally produced assessments that are pushed directly to decisionmakers and the media. Since non-IC produced materials will influence the thinking of IC customers and other relevant constituencies, it would be better for all concerned if those products are factually correct and methodologically sound. It would not be in the interest of either the IC or the United States to have the intelligence community win a putative competition because competitors are perceived to have failed in important ways.

A far better arrangement would be one of collaboration through an expanded and regularized form of the outreach to non-IC experts that has long been an under-utilized tool in the IC toolbox. The Office of the Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis made a valiant effort to expand outreach during the mid-2000s, but inertia and counter-intelligence arguments proved to be formidable impediments. In a reimagined IC, external players should be treated as partners rather than rivals.

Establishment of working relationships should—must—involves institutional as well as individual ties. Expanding the pool of experts to achieve synergies and greater overall capacity makes sense and should be considered a necessity. Capable external partners might operate entirely in the realm of unclassified information, but they might also be given access to classified intelligence with the goal of establishing independent interpretive capabilities. Even at a time of increased salience of mishandled classified documents, one should debate rather than focus exclusively on the risks and dismiss the possible benefits of expanding the number of actors using classified materials.

Collaboration with external entities could take multiple forms, ranging from the exchange of preliminary assessments and discussion of the reliability of individual pieces of information to contractual arrangements whereby the entities would become subcontractors of the IC. Two-way exchanges on the development and use of analytic tools and methods could prove mutually beneficial. Another form of collaboration that might

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involve outsourcing or subcontracting could be used to prepare some of the unclassified reports assigned to the intelligence community or for which the IC provides input to policy agencies. A more valuable type of subcontracting could be used for subjects on which the IC does not have a comparative advantage but is asked to provide support because it is there, has a can-do attitude, and is a free good to other parts of the US government. Candidate topics include work on global health/pandemic disease, effects of global warming, economic and trade developments, and human rights conditions around the world. The added value of classified intelligence reporting on many such issues is minimal, and using classified information makes the resultant products harder to use. It might be better to collaborate in order to enhance confidence that the analyses were done in accord with IC standards and methods and to put a bit of distance between the judgments and the USG.

**Division of Labor and Lanes in the Road**

Many forecasts depict increasing collection and analytical capabilities of non-IC organizations as a threat to the privileged place and influence of the US intelligence community. Imputation or assertion that competition from such entities will displace existing intelligence-policy relationships and produce more accurate, more timely, and/or more useful insight and information are overwrought and display a woeful lack of understanding of the intelligence process.

One of the principal ways that IC support to policymakers differs from input generated by academics, think tanks, and other individuals and entities is the IC’s knowledge of what the people and organizations they support think that they know, what they find worrisome, and what they are trying to accomplish. In theory, and in the future, there may be ways to collect and analyze sufficient data on individual predilections, operational codes, etc., to predict how they will act individually and collectively under specified conditions, but that capability is still in the realm of science fiction. For the foreseeable future, there will be no substitute for regular and trusted interaction between IC professionals, usually analysts, and the decisionmakers they support.

This is important because decisionmakers need more than just more information and more fulsome and more accurate interpretations of what that information means. They also need information and insight that is tailored to their understanding of the situation (e.g., to enhance or erode confidence in their understanding), what they are trying to accomplish, and their timelines for decision. Providing great answers to irrelevant questions is not helpful.

As a general principle, having more eyes and minds working on a problem is better than having fewer, but that is true only if the result is a net increase in coverage, insight, or utility to customers. More data does not automatically yield greater understanding, and flawed interpretation of available information can lead to ineffective or counterproductive policy responses. Fresh perspectives and independently produced insights can provide valuable prods for the IC to rethink assumptions and reassess analytical methods. Competition that does so would be highly beneficial. But a precondition for using competitive products in this way is confidence that the information and analytical techniques used to produce them are reliable and unbiased. Determination of reliability is a prerequisite for decisions on whether to use a competitor’s products instead of those produced by the IC.24

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Given the near certainty that policy customers will have neither the inclination, the time, nor in some cases the competence to make such assessments and the likelihood that evaluation by an expert and trusted third party (if one were to be established) would slow the process and decrease the timeliness and utility of the analysis, evaluation of the competitor’s product would have to be made by the Intelligence Community. That would also slow the process and divert effort from other tasks.

Calling input from non-IC entities competitive intelligence, even if produced using commercial collection capabilities, more open-source information, and advanced artificial intelligence programs, does not make it fundamentally different than inputs from scholars, think tanks, lobbyists, foreign governments, media outlets, or any of the other long-extant competitors. Government customers have long received voluminous input from inside and outside the US government. Some is methodologically sound and incorporates information neglected or evaluated differently by IC analysts. Regardless of other virtues of such analyses, under current and foreseeable conditions, they will be less well-informed about customer knowledge, concerns, and objectives than the work of IC professionals. They will also be assumed to be less objective than the work of IC analysts.

Changing conditions, new requirements, and new tools will, as in the past, necessitate and shape the continuous evolution and adaptation of the US Intelligence Community. But the core responsibilities and fundamental structural dimensions of intelligence-policy relationships in the national security arena will not change nearly as much or as quickly. Utilization of AI and other advanced tools by analytic entities outside the USG will create new opportunities and pose new challenges for IC professionals, but it will not diminish the centrality of the Intelligence Community in the national security enterprise.