THEORY AND PRACTICE IN INTELLIGENCE: KNOWLEDGE DRIVERS

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Abstract

Cooperation with academia is seen by intelligence theorists and practitioners alike as a way to support change management, improve analytic capabilities and better cope with emerging challenges. Intelligence scholars often focus on 'big phenomena' such as social change, the shifting nature of threats or ethics in intelligence, while practitioners are concerned (in public statements, at least) with more mundane issues such as human resource management, workflow streamlining and establishing good rapport with beneficiaries.

Not even apparently clear-cut terms such as "strategic" bear the same meaning within the two groups: theorists seek to correlate social and organizational change, while practitioners are more interested in detecting risks and threats in their nascent stages so as to better prepare for "worst case" scenarios.

Managing the knowledge production process is, unfortunately, a topic which doesn't rank high with the intelligence community.

Keywords: change management, cooperation, theory and practice, knowledge production.

Specific perspectives

In order to ensure knowledge production and innovation in a competitive environment, the ability of an organization to learn and adapt must be enhanced by understanding the dynamics of knowledge processes (from structures and sources, to production, validation and application) (Crompton, 2002, p. 10).

The impact of technological and social evolutions that triggered substantial changes in both business and security environments, have forced intelligence agencies to reevaluate both their organizational structure and their objectives, as, according to Sandra Brizga and Patricia Geraghty, every institutional or personnel change presents particular challenges and opportunities for knowledge management, as there are significant risks of

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knowledge and information being lost in the transition process (Brizga & Geraghty, 2011, p. 7).

Within the process of restructuring, intelligence services take into account both the possibility of outsourcing analytical activities, and of developing a modern way of performing those activities, as well as implementing openness policies. According to Lahneman (2003), a collection and analysis can be outsourced as noncore functions because the intelligence community does not have all the expertise it needs. It is also best to allow the civilian analysts to use their time on more pressing analytical areas.

The influence of new media, the increasing number of private think tanks and companies that can provide analytic support, cybersecurity, the type of relationships established with the political stakeholders are, nowadays, some of the main topics of debate among both intelligence practitioners and theorists.

Magnus Hoppe[1] states that "the knowledge perspective has not been the pinnacle of intelligence research. Instead, the field is dominated by research objectives aimed at delivering practical advice for the practitioner" (2013, p. 60).

From a pessimistic perspective, Joshua Rovner[2] underlined that the intelligence agencies face new challenges from this expanding number of think tanks and private sector analysis firms that "often portray themselves as quasi-intelligence organizations, and some actively recruit government analysts to bolster their credentials"(Rovner, 2013).

Social media have created an explosion in new sources of information, but the rise of private sector intelligence has propelled competition in order to attract policymakers' attention. Both issues raise important questions about whether and how traditional intelligence agencies can remain relevant to policymakers.

Thus, the role of intelligence, the importance of intelligence studies, the transition from a "1.0" to a "3.0" society, the need for applied methods to collect and use intelligence in decision support, and the academic training of intelligence services personnel, all these are of interest for intelligence professionals.

The need to reform in order to adapt to the knowledge society challenges has become a priority of most intelligence organizations and the

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means of accomplishing this objective include, in most cases, consolidating the relationships with the academic world and reshaping those established with the political factor.

But there is a gap between the points of view expressed by each part that lies in the type of activity and the priorities of these actors: the practitioners' stress, above all others, the importance of ensuring national security, whereas the theorists focus on reshaping the theoretical grounds on which the intelligence activity should be based.

Challenges

Technological breakthroughs, regional instability and the risks of conflict in different regions of the world, cyber deterrence, potential rise of non-state actors, climate and demographic changes, terrorism, the increasing demand for food, water or energy are just few of the challenges that intelligence agencies everywhere focus on, in order to ensure national security.

The above mentioned focus on these trends should be synchronized with a proper vision for a consolidated knowledge society that combines the interests of all stakeholders. This perspective encompasses new solutions, a modern vision, a transdisciplinary approach, better human resources as well as a state-of-the-art technological infrastructure.

From a theoretical point of view, this task may seem easy to accomplish, maybe even in a short-to-medium time frame. But the need to provide decisionmakers with timely and efficient analytical products or to detect a risk or a threat in early stages may prevail over issues such as the role or the importance of a consolidated intelligence literature - one of the main topics of debate among theorists –, and not because the subject is of no interest, but precisely because of the pressure exerted in everyday activity by those challenges.

Some of the most important issues of debate among experts are: the nature of intelligence – methodologies, tradecraft; the issue of theory versus practice; intelligence politization; the volume of information faced both by the analysts and policymakers; the tension between civil liberties/human rights and intelligence services' operating practices; ethics; the relationship between national and international security; accountability versus efficiency (Johnson and Shelton, 2013).

As far as intelligence literature is concerned, experts such as Mark Lowenthal and Walter Dorn (Johnson and Shelton, 2013, p. 114) agree that there are policymakers as well as practitioners "far removed" from intelligence studies, as there is no time or no interest in reading "academic" products. Thus, they rarely give feedback on what they read.

Knowledge, the core of intelligence mission

According to Ruben Arcos (2013), "business, non-profit, and governmental organizations in general have become aware of the need to manage relationships with their stakeholders if they want to succeed in accomplishing their missions".

Like other governmental agencies, intelligence organizations must address their mission timely, competently and efficiently in order to provide good products and satisfy decisionmakers' requirements. There may be cases in which intelligence agencies do not have the ability to obtain public support for their actions, considering the covert nature of some of the operating practices. A lack of public perception or understanding of their mission and practices can decrease consumer support.

In the last years, the role of the academic world in the field of intelligence has become strategic, as it is seen, nowadays, as an asset available to intelligence agencies in the knowledge production process for decisionmaking.

Under the new intelligence paradigm, the intelligence agencies have acted in order to develop a framework to manage their relationships with academia, as the academics have what should be considered as the core of the intelligence mission – knowledge (Arcos, 2013).

Like media journalists, academics are among those categories of stakeholders that have the capability to find and interpret information about intelligence developments both in their countries and in other, and thus become key-actors in shaping public opinion, media or even policymakers.

In the context of the openness policies implemented by many intelligence agencies, in the last years, the academic world can provide support for building an accurate public perception of the governmental agencies mission, process and role in defending national strategic interests. Furthermore, the academic world can play a role in providing value as a place to send personnel for obtaining knowledge or expertise or ways to improve intelligence analysis practices.

Human resources in the knowledge society

The present society, where everything is or at least tends to be open, is marked by innovation and a constant reduction of boundaries. Managing uncertainty is a process that intelligence agencies cannot fulfill without qualified human resources.

From this perspective, some experts state that "individual talent is becoming increasingly important in the 21st century. What one knows and can do with their knowledge in different contextual formats drives their employability. In other words, people who can innovate and generate new

value with their knowledge will lead employment growth. Those who do not will be replaced by machines, outsourced, or be outmoded by those who can" (Moravec, 2013, p. 10).

Collecting and analyzing information in the abundance of data and sources has become an increasingly difficult task for intelligence practitioners and ensuring new and improved technological means is not enough. The role of technology in human potential development for creative employees (IT&C skills) cannot be denied, but that is not enough for maximizing the process.

More skilled human resources can also be ensured by applying a range of principles, such as improving competencies from different areas of expertise (from history to mathematics or linguistics), constant learning or nonformal analytical processes (critical thinking, imagination, intuition).

As intelligence has become an important part of the academic field, a wide variety of intelligence education programs sprung up, in order to meet the demand for more focused education and training. Also, the literature on teaching intelligence has expanded.

In this context, more and more universities (in countries such as United States, Great Britain, France, Spain or Romania) have developed programs (undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate) dedicated to this field of expertise, with many civilian or military experts as lecturers.

The courses include basic knowledge of intelligence activity – information gathering and analysis, ethics, intelligence activity history, limits of intelligence activity –, as well as more specialized studies – on military operations, terrorism and counterterrorism, counterintelligence, strategic intelligence, business intelligence, foreign policy, organized crime, economy, political sciences, databases management etc. Also, there are courses dedicated to advanced search and analysis methods, creativity, critical thinking or social media.

A relevant case is that of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which sponsored the Centers of Academic Excellence Program, in response to the increasing need for Intelligence Community professionals educated and trained with skills, capabilities and knowledge in order to carry out security objectives. Ten universities were part of this program.

In an article published in International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence, Ruben Arcos (2013, p. 332) underlined that "the establishment of intelligence outreach programs and policies in countries like the United States and Canada perhaps best expresses the emergence of a new intelligence approach for facing the threats and challenges of today's dynamic security landscape". In this context, the expert also offered an insight on the results achieved in Spain through the National Intelligence Centre's (CNI) Intelligence Culture Initiative.

In 2005, CNI signed several agreements with Spanish universities, in an attempt to compensate the lack of academic research and programs on intelligence. This initiative led to the rise of university research teams on intelligence and the emergence of a Spanish network of universities and scholars.

The main objectives of this academic initiative were: to make intelligence a discipline for study and research, encouraging its inclusion in university curricula, and leading to research projects on relevant issues; to allow the country's intelligence services to benefit from the knowledge and experience of scholars on relevant issues and matters of interest for intelligence services (Arcos, 2013, p. 341).

Ruben Arcos also noted that "getting the stake of expertise from scholars of many different academic disciplines and areas also requires the stake of understanding by academic scholars of these organizations' mission, support from the government, and a program for educating these publics to effectively obtain the stakes that they hold and that the service seeks, namely expertise" (Arcos, 2013, p. 340).

Key issues: politization and ethics

Transparency is the fundamental principle of democracies and, from this perspective, finding the proper way to communicate to the public opinion what intelligence is, the mission and priorities of an intelligence agency, the services it provides and how it carries out its functions is essential in order to ensure the support of all stakeholders involved in protecting national security. Thus, the process of educating the public about intelligence issues, processes, and functions is very important.

The role that intelligence organizations should play in relation to policy is also a much debated subject. From a theoretical point of view, policymakers and intelligence services need each other: without a receptive audience, any intelligence product would be worthless, but as international politics are characterized by ambiguous data, the secret information provided by intelligence can reduce uncertainty.

It should be stated that there are limits to what "analytical objectivity" really is and the degree to which such thing can be accomplished (the same principle applies to the so-called independence of the analytical process).

Stephen Marrin (2013, pp. 1-4) underlined the wide variety of conceptions related to the degree in which intelligence influence or should influence policy. Thus, intelligence role is regarded either as a limited one – to inform, assess, and/or forecast (the focus in on the production of information and knowledge) – or as part of a more complex interpretation: a support to decision and a means to reduce uncertainty and the incidence of surprise.

A greater distance between intelligence and policy (the traditionalist perspective) may produce a more accurate but less influential product whereas increased closeness (the activist perspective) leads to higher influence but decreased accuracy.

The author advanced a new term used for describing types of politization – analytic politization, that can lead to poor decisions and, as a consequence, to policy failure, as political desires and pressures can push the expert analysis and advice further from the truth (Marrin, 2013a, p. 34).

Stephen Marrin also quotes Gregory Treverton's opinion, according to which politicization can have at least five meanings, which can apply simultaneously: direct pressure from senior policy officials; a "house line" on a particular subject leading to the suppression of alternative interpretations; "cherry picking" - in some cases, senior officials choose their favorites out of a range of assessments; the asking of leading questions or asking questions repeatedly; a common "mindset", whereby intelligence and policy share strong presumptions (Marrin, 2013a, p. 39).

As part of this politization debate, the researchers also focus on the critical issue of trust, in order to ensure the lack of any sign of political abuse or misuse of intelligence. The matter of politization should be weighted for its costs and benefits in terms of achieving policy goals, but there is a thin line between political contamination and presenting intelligence assessments in ways that engage decisionmakers' concerns.

The so-called "political contamination" can be avoided by a strong democratic control over intelligence activity that, according to Amit Steinhart and Kiril Avramov (2013), depends both on a country's history and its constitutional and legal systems, and on the extent of democratic tradition and political culture.

Ensuring the creation of public value and a good public perception on intelligence services' activities and national security matters may prove to be a very difficult task for every intelligence agency, as public opinion is an important intelligence stakeholder. Whereas citizens expect effective protection against vulnerabilities and threats (corruption, terrorism, organized crime etc.), they also want law abiding intelligence activities, conducted with the protection of civil rights and liberties. From this perspective, one of the most important elements that can modify public perception and determine public trust in the intelligence services is the media.

It may be that proper employment of secrecy that serves the public interest, but there have been cases that underlined the limits of openness policies, as national interest is, above all, the main objective of any intelligence agency.

As terrorism and cyber defense are two of the most important threats mentioned in the security strategies drafted and adopted by all developed countries, at least in the last few years, it would have been almost impossible for intelligence practitioners to avoid the debates regarding the issue of ethics or protecting the freedom of speech.

Sir David Omand and Mark Phythian (2013) observe that a decade ago, the literature regarding the relationship between ethics and intelligence was very limited. The post-9/11 world changed both the role of the security agencies – turned into key-players in the war against terrorism –, and the way the public opinion understands security.

Mark Phythian notes "many ethical dilemmas that face intelligence professionals, agencies, and governments arise from a simple fact: national intelligence agencies are precisely that – national", meaning that "their responsibilities and obligations are defined by reference to the state for which they are an information-gathering and early-warning arm" (Omand and Phythian, 2013).

The results of many opinion polls conducted in recent years regarding the task of ensuring national security conducted by governmental agencies have shown citizens trust their governments and sometimes even approve the methods used in order to ensure their safety. But beyond this trust (more or less reliable), intelligence services must still prove in every instance their practices are consistent with national law and ethics.

The recent debates regarding the highly classified electronic surveillance program developed by the National Security Agency may be considered from the perspective of what Mark Phythian called "social acceptability" (Omand and Phythian, 2013, p. 44), which means that "to be able to demonstrate, or argue with a degree of plausibility, that something is legal impacts on the way people come to view it".

As some experts observed, the first reactions to the reports revealing the NSA program were that "it killed trust in web freedom" and "it threatened individuals' online privacy" (Cheong, 2013). This kind of perspective takes us back to some of the questions mentioned before regarding transparency and accountability, but it leaves out the relevance issue – also essential for democratic governance, but less important in this context.

It is a well-known fact that the Internet and social media have become the main medium of communication for non-state actors. And indeed, the authorities can always reassure the public opinion that their programs were or are used for valid foreign intelligence purpose.

Yet a brief or commonly accepted justification or explanation would be almost impossible to provide, as it would be ensuring a balance between privacy/human rights and national security concerns.

Conclusions

A "synchronization" of intelligence theorists and practitioners' priorities is possible, but not in the near future.

The first usually seek to correlate social and organizational change and issues, such as improving analytical methods, and the nature and role of intelligence studies are very important.

The latter, although very much concerned about the same issues mentioned before, will always be mostly preoccupied with detecting risks and threats so as to ensure national security.

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