INTEGRATING INTELLIGENCE PRACTICE AND SCHOLARSHIP: THE CASE OF GENERAL INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICE OF THE NETHERLANDS (AIVD)

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Abstract

This text is a revised version of the keynote speech that the author delivered at the 2019 conference of the European chapter of IAFIE. The conference took place in Bucharest and was hosted by the Romanian National Intelligence Academy "Mihai Viteazul". A considerable number of European intelligence and security services participated in this gathering of intelligence practitioners and scholars dedicated to intelligence education. The text makes a case for integrating intelligence practice and scholarship, drawing attention to some of its conditions, reasons and benefits. Several examples ranging from established AIVD routine to some of the service's latest initiatives stress the significance of a close(r) cooperation between intelligence work, its study and other academic disciplines and perspectives.

Keywords*: intelligence education; integrating intelligence scholarship and practice; IAFIE; AIVD*.

Introduction

Intelligence and scholarship may seem like two different worlds. The world of intelligence, traditionally closed, specialized in knowing and keeping secrets, having exclusive sources and privileged access to well-positioned decision makers. On the other hand the academic world, open by nature, transparent about its sources, with reproducible methods and falsifiable results, working from the assumption that knowledge needs to be shared to grow.

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The point I like to make is that these two worlds can and in certain cases and circumstances should not just be connected but even integrated. In order to do so, intelligence and scholarship should be viewed not as two different worlds but as two domains of "knowledge production" that can and, under certain conditions, should be combined (Agrell & Treverton, 2015). I will give a few instances of how AIVD integrates scholarship and academic perspectives with its daily work. Then I will sketch several elements that form the background or context of why such integration is needed. These elements are 1) the nature of some of the main threats against national and international security, 2) the limited, and I suspect decreasing capabilities of states to entirely control or manage such threats, and 3) the question of legitimacy in both academic and intelligence domains.

I will conclude with a few suggestions on what these reflections mean for intelligence education. These are 1) teach and stimulate intelligence officers, not just analysts, to activate their academic (you may also call it reflective or critical) potential, also outside of their intelligence routine, 2) train and enable them, again not just analysts, to apply their newly acquired knowledge and reflective skills within their work, make them learn to ask new questions, and use new sources or use old sources differently, and 3) incorporate and institutionalise academic researchers and research within the intelligence community.

But first let me clarify what I mean with scholarship. The scholars I refer to are not just those working within the discipline of 'intelligence studies', with academic knowledge of the history, cultures, dealings and methodologies of intelligence work. With scholars I mean all those professional academics, from a variety of disciplines and sub disciplines (whether sociology, psychology, international relations, political theory, anthropology, criminology, theology, as well as those academics specialised in extremism, terrorism, technology, public administration and those focusing on certain countries and regions) that can help to understand and to interpret events and trends, people and phenomena that may affect national and international security.

When I talk of integrating intelligence practice with scholarship I must address a possible objection first. There are scholars and surely others who mistrust the objectivity of government institutions,

especially the secretive arm of the state. Quite a lot has been written and said about the undesirable steering of independent scholarship as part of the securitisation of society at large. Where I say integration, some see co-optation and compromise. My plea for integration is about equal partnership, not for meddling or manipulation. To those who remain unconvinced I can say that independence is as much a core value of intelligence and security services in a democratic society as it is for universities and other centres of learning. Practitioners are well aware of the sensitivity and intrusive character of their work and that is an important reason why they should cherish their own objectivity and autonomy but equally those of others. The AIVD motto is a Latin phrase which translates as 'against the current'. As long as both domains cling to their own independence independently, I think they can safely be integrated.

What is inevitable for a more inclusive model is that both domains lose some of their exclusivity. Scholars have to admit that academic contributions can and will be made by others who are not always formally or fulltime part of academia. Just as hard, or maybe even harder, practitioners will have to accept that some of their work can be enhanced and critically assessed by scholars who are not part of their intelligence community. This may well be another objection, and a double-edged one, against being too hopeful about integration. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a sign that in this case integration would not lead to assimilation in which one side would be absorbed into the other, having to conform completely. Leaving these and other objections aside, I proceed to emphasise the benefits.

Scholarship and intelligence practice are different domains, not necessarily different worlds. These domains can profit from each other and (on certain topics relating to national and international security, and on the condition of mutual independence) can reinforce each other mutually when working much more closely together than is usually the case. Scholarship has a lot to teach practitioners, like conceptual clarity, methodological complexity and parsimony, and critical reflection. Intelligence practice, on the other hand, has lots of unique data and the possibility of acquiring even better data, the means to mix open source information with closed sources to produce better informed and more

accurate assessments, and privileged access to the higher reaches of politics. It is the integration of these domains for which I like to make a case.

Instances of integration

Let me give you a few examples. The first instance is a report we published 15 years ago, and which we, and others still draw on today. The second one is a very recent partnership that we started with Delft University of Technology in the field of national cyber security. The third example discusses the final instance which is the joint panel organised by Leiden University, the Academy "Mihai Viteazul" and AIVD on connecting intelligence theory to analytical practice.

In 2005, AIVD published *From dawa to jihad* (the Dutch version was published the year before). It was an unclassified report aimed at the general public. You can find it on our website and other spaces on the internet. It is a text which, certainly then, was not considered a typical intelligence product. It is among other things a conceptual exercise, defining the specifics of Islamic radicalisation and its connections to jihad. It also elaborates the notion of democratic legal order, both as a form of government and a kind of society (AIVD, 2005). Its definition of dawa (the propagation of radical Islam) even made it into the Dutch dictionary. The report is based on the interpretation and generalisation of the intelligence that our service assembled in its investigations into jihadism and radical Islam, as well as on academic consultation and on literature from several disciplines like sociology, political theory and religious studies. We and others still draw on the main findings of that report and the report that followed (AIVD, 2007). I mention those unclassified reports written for a wider audience as early examples of integrating intelligence practice and scholarship. Several European agencies now write public reports with a comparable mix of intelligence and scholarship. A very recent example is the theme report on the background of right-extremists in Norway by PST, the Norwegian security service (PST, 2019).

Since several months Delft University of Technology and AIVD cooperate closely on national cyber security. A full professor of that university, an expert on the intersection of technological innovation and

public administration, has recently joined our ranks part-time, together with a colleague with the same background from Leiden University. They bring with them five researchers (both PhD and postdoc). The programme will run for a five year period. Some of the topics to be researched and published on involve data-driven innovations, machine learning, the complexity of cooperation on national cyber security, and private or citizen intelligence. In order to come up with new and relevant conclusions they join as part-time colleagues, and will have access to anonymised (big) data. One of the side effects of incorporating scholars may be that other colleagues get actively involved academically, and can be triggered to lecture, publish, or perhaps start their own PhD research. By incorporating scholars and activating colleagues in such a way, many new questions arise. How to select and prepare data? What kind of data can be declassified or kept unclassified? Do such data yield different results than publically available data? Most of those questions trigger responses and new practices that will further enhance the integration of scholarship and intelligence practice.

The AIVD archive has a modest reputation for academic, mainly historical disclosure. Two authorised histories of the BVD, AIVD's forerunner, were written by a former colleague as an in-house historian who had access to considerable parts of the archive. The first of those books was also his doctoral dissertation (Engelen, 1995). The last one deals with the cold war period and dates from 2007 (Engelen, 2007). Since then several studies were undertaken, always with restricted access for academic outsiders (Wiebes, 2015, Hijzen, 2016). We have very recently decided to put our archive's hidden treasures to even better use, as well as the expertise and experience of some our colleagues. A selection of historians among them, with either a master's or a doctor's degree, are specifically tasked. For a limited amount of their time they will look at the archive from an historian's point of view, to determine which events, episodes and epochs deserve special attention, and may be prepared for further research and publication. To do this well, these colleagues need to be or get up-to-date with relevant literature and stay or get into contact with professional scholars. This is what I call the activation of academic potential. One of the advantages, I

hope, is that this may pave the way for integrating outside scholars, a sensitive issue, to do justice to the historical value of our archive without of course compromising sources or secrets or those of partner services.

A fourth and final example is the conference's panel on how to tailor analytical approaches to real-world intelligence problems, which AIVD organised jointly with the Academy "Mihai Viteazul" and Leiden University. The topic was chosen to stress the importance of bringing academic theory and intelligence practice to bear on each other. We opted for a panel organised collectively to underline the need to approach this particular topic together, combining the efforts of an intelligence academy, a university and a security and intelligence service. Under the title 'How to analyse what?' we address several methodological challenges such as complexity and the integration of diversity into teaching intelligence practitioners. Seeing the number of participants at this conference on mapping the future of intelligence education, among which so many partner services, and given the recent founding of Intelligence College in Europe (ICE, 2019), I am convinced that the cooperation between the domains of scholarship and intelligence practice will still grow closer.

Need for integration

Why is the integration of intelligence work with scholarship important? A short answer from the perspective of an intelligence- and security service such as AIVD is that it helps us to safeguard national security. A more mutual answer, which includes a more academic point of view, is that without it will be hard to understand and interpret the threats and challenges that face all of us. I like to add some layers of context or background. Three of those layers are the nature of the threats, the diminishing capacity of governments to control or manage them adequately and finally the question of legitimacy. The significance of integrating intelligence practice and scholarship depends on all three.

In the first place, the nature of today's threats demand joint efforts. What threats like terrorism, extremism, espionage, foreign state interference, cyber threats and others have in common is that they defy easy categorisation and require all the help we can find. National security is not something that can be secured by intelligence- and

security services just by themselves, not even when we cooperate as closely as we do. Take the well-known but poorly understood threat of ultra-orthodox Islam known as Salafism. What is it exactly? When and why is it a threat? What makes it different from other ultra-orthodox belief systems? And so on. Or look at the manipulation of information and information technology. When exactly is it a threat to national security? How to separate foreign and domestic threats? These are questions for which intelligence and security services need a hand. Or two.

Most of today's and tomorrow's threats and challenges to (inter)national security are too complex, too multi-layered and too unmanageable to be handled in the old fashioned way, by seemingly omnipotent governments. That holds true for many issues, but certainly matters of national security are especially important as far as the diminishing capacity of any government working in a democratic way is concerned. Control and certainty are in short supply nowadays. One of the possible effects is democratic regression, the rise of a certain kind of politics that promises simple solutions and complete control. This situation affects the legitimacy of governments and their intelligence and security agencies negatively. At the same time, the authority and the legitimacy of independent scholarship is also put under stress. Both domains have a common interest in maintaining their authority and independence. For these interconnected reasons the integration of scholarship with intelligence work, on specific topics and under certain conditions, is significant.

The third layer is that of diminishing legitimacy. Of states, but along with it, also of intelligence services. At least since Edward Snowden they confront an increased political, legal and public demand for compliance, oversight, and, if that is the right word, transparency. Pierre Rosanvallon's term 'legibility' is perhaps more appropriate, since it is tied to acute democratic requirements (Rosanvallon, 2018). In times of endless availability of information and organised distrust, secrecy is no longer always an advantage. A much closer connection with the academic domain may be part of the answer. By joining forces what may be called a crisis of legitimacy can be confronted. Both domains face similar challenges in a time in which fact and fiction are easily confused and manipulated, and in which nonsense and ill-

founded fears of conspiracies are cultivated. The trustworthiness and authority of both academics and intelligence practitioners (as well as other categories such as journalists) is questioned. Working more closely together on matters of national security may help both domains to maintain their own integrity and independence.

Benefits for intelligence education

What does a tight connection between intelligence practice and scholarship mean for the future of intelligence education? Please allow me to approach this from an agency-centric point of view. I distinguish three steps which are mutually reinforcing but also have a logical and chronological order: 1) teach and stimulate intelligence officers, certainly not all of them but not just the analysts, to use their academic reflective and critical skills and contacts to *activate* academic potential from within the agency; 2) train and enable them to *apply* and perhaps *adapt* academic concepts, conclusions, doubts and criticisms and so embed them deep within the intelligence process, and 3) *incorporate* scholars and academic institutions within the intelligence community. These steps, and you can see that they are formulated from the point of view of an agency, may sound intrusive and will sometimes be hard to realise. Intelligence education may help to ease the way.

Firstly, how to academically activate a part of the intelligence workforce? Let me be clear, I am not making the case for turning many intelligence officers into professional academics. But I suggest more can be done with the academic backgrounds, interests, skills and connections than is now often the case. But what holds these people and their organisations back? A main reason is that working with(in) intelligence can be, and often is, restrictive business. From the first day on the job you are immersed in a totally new environment in which confidentiality and compartmentalisation are the standard. You get taught how to devise a cover story, and are given many reasons why not to talk about what kind of work you do. You learn how to turn the conversation to other subjects than those that interest you professionally. All with good reason. But there are equally good reasons to also teach how to engage actively in a public, academic setting.

One way of doing that is by educating intelligence officers throughout their careers to invest in learning and networking. Intelligence officers can be taught how to contribute to academic research, to teach, maybe supervise students, encourage some to publish, maybe do doctoral research and write a dissertation, educate them how to balance the conflicting demands of having access to sensitive sources, information and *modus operandi* and being confident about contributing publicly to discussions on matters that concern national security.

After activating the academic potential you need to apply what you have learned deep within your organisation. Put differently, you have to internalise it organisationally. How can intelligence education help to accomplish this? You should train your staff to match practice with theory. Let me give a few examples. For instance, a fairly recent topic in terrorism studies and in criminology is the so-called crime-terrorism nexus. There is a lot of theorising on how criminal and terrorist pathways intersect. How to test and apply these insights and theories? By applying them, I suggest, to data to which intelligence officers have privileged access, maybe by adding them to their own hypotheses. Do we see criminal and terrorist trajectories intersect? Do our 'targets' make more sense with one of several theories in mind? Or, reversely, can certain theories be improved on the basis of our data and analysis?

Let me give an example from a different academic discipline. If you truly want to understand how autocrats, elected or not, behave and position themselves in their our own countries or geopolitically, you must eavesdrop and know what they are plotting, but equally important is the logic of autocratic politics about which you can find plenty in the literature. Intelligence officers are extremely well placed to apply and test such insights and theories, or maybe even enhance these insights and theories by having learned from applying them consciously and carefully. The application of academic knowledge and methodology is something that can and, I think, should be part of intelligence curriculum.

The third and final phase, to incorporate scholars and academic institutions within the intelligence community needs little explanation. Representatives of two domains in which critical thinking is endorsed, many disciplines merge and an endless array of perspectives are

considered and reconsidered will easily find themes and topics to address jointly. Eventually, the presence of professional academics within intelligence communities is itself an incentive for even more scholarly activation and application as they become part of what you may call an educational intelligence cycle. This may well lead to an increase of intelligence practitioners in academic roles and functions. With their mutual incorporation intelligence practice and scholarship become truly integrated.

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