

# **HISTORY AND MEMORY IN INTELLIGENCE**

## INTELLIGENCE, SECURITY CULTURE AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

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### **Abstract:**

*This article examines the concept of security culture through a multidisciplinary lens, combining theoretical insights with case studies and empirical data. By reviewing recent and influential publications on intelligence services – including works on the Mossad, the CIA, the FBI, and the Soviet KGB/GRU – the study identifies recurring operational patterns, organizational cultures, and public perceptions that shape contemporary security environments. The analysis draws on both primary sources, such as declassified operations, and secondary data from public opinion surveys conducted in Romania, highlighting the evolving relationship between intelligence institutions and democratic societies. Particular attention is given to how literature and media representations influence public understanding of intelligence activities, complementing official communication channels. The article concludes that a robust security culture – built on cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions – is essential for strengthening democratic resilience in the face of modern threats such as terrorism and cyber-attacks.*

**Keywords:** security culture; intelligence; CIA; Mossad; FBI; public perception; national security; Romania.

### **Introduction**

The world of intelligence services has both fascinated and intrigued people since ancient times. The analyses that have always been essential to political decision-makers in every country have been conducted through a wide variety of methods. Among these, human resources – field agents who collect information and maintain direct contact with the reality of the tactical environment – stand out as the most important. The activity of gathering intelligence regarding the intentions of an “unfriendly” state is not only dangerous, as anyone can imagine, but also difficult to sustain over the long term.

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In recent years, literature addressing the activities, tactics, successes, and failures of intelligence services around the world has been enriched, for the Romanian public, by several works that clarify such matters, presenting the “world” of intelligence services and, in particular, that of secret agents, with all its different accents: double lives, money, planning, unexpected victories, revenge, and intrigue. These documentary-style books can serve as an opportunity for reflection on how information is collected and subsequently used by the consumers of intelligence. Moreover, they help us understand the role of intelligence services in a broader sense, as well as the motivations of those who work undercover in this field.

We refer to them as *documentary books* because, regardless of the form they take – whether monographic or slightly speculative – each documents the activities or events described by relying on a range of verifiable data and facts. In this respect, such publications, intended for the general public, contribute to explaining and understanding various operational methods, reveal activities, or present facts about which little is otherwise known. Thus, works that document the activities of intelligence services play a particularly important role in shaping security culture, by helping to clarify the role and place of intelligence services within a democratic society.

The central research question guiding this study is: To what extent do social representations and documentary literature influence the consolidation of a democratic security culture? First, we will briefly explore the concept of *security culture*. Then, from a descriptive perspective, we will highlight several such editorial works in an attempt to outline some reference points concerning the cognitive dimension of security culture. In a certain sense, the public becomes acquainted with the activity of intelligence services through such publications. Starting from the general knowledge about the intelligence system, taking into account its structural components and the relationships between them, we can later observe the attitudes and behaviours built upon this foundation. The image of intelligence services is continuously constructed, and an important dimension of this image can be verified through opinion polls. In this regard, we will use several national and local surveys to better understand what Romanian citizens know about this

“world” and to identify the main reference points in their perceptions regarding intelligence services and their activities.

### **Security Culture: An Overview**

Security culture is currently studied more intensively by specialists, as recent events and the present context have provided a strong impetus in this direction. However, much like in the case of political culture, an operational approach is required to avoid the trap of assuming that it merely concerns the existence of an informational stock on the subject.

In their book *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1996) comparatively examine the characteristics of political culture, as well as the social structures and processes involved. The study, conducted in the second half of the last century (1958-1960), is fundamental for understanding the political behaviour of individuals as a result of the internalization of values, beliefs, or knowledge that shape political culture. In other words, political culture provides support – a motivational foundation – for various political attitudes that later translate into behaviour. Without delving into the more complex findings of the two authors, we shall highlight how they analysed the concept of political culture, operationalizing it in order to make it measurable.

Understanding political culture as “a set of orientations toward a special set of social objects and processes” (Almond and Verba, 1996, p. 43), the authors identify three main components of the internalization of these orientations at the individual level:

- 1. Cognitive orientation** – knowledge and beliefs regarding the political system, its roles, role holders, inputs, and outputs;
- 2. Affective orientation** – feelings toward the political system;
- 3. Evaluative orientation** – judgments and opinions regarding political objects (Almond and Verba, 1996, p. 45).

In other words, the political culture of a group of individuals, regardless of size, consists of a cognitive dimension (what they know about the political system they live in), an affective dimension (how they feel toward their political system, relative to its roles), and an evaluative dimension (how they assess the political system, based on information and feelings). This makes the study conducted by Almond and Verba

essential. Following this model, we can operationalize the concept of *security culture*, analyse it systematically, and measure certain components of it at individual or group levels. Otherwise, we risk discussing “culture” (of any type) too generically, emphasizing the quantitative aspect of the information possessed – which, most of the time, is not even comparable.

Recently, studies have explored the balance between democracy and surveillance, or information gathering in today’s society (De Graaff, 2016), while other authors have discussed the importance of social perceptions within the concept of security culture (Chiru, 2016) or the awareness of risks at the societal level (Nicula and Teodor, 2016). In Romania, the security culture – in which citizens understand the role of intelligence services and support their activity – still bears the burden of the past. Fear of intelligence services took shape during the communist period, when contact with intelligence officers was not desired. The ongoing dialogue between post-communist intelligence services and society as a whole, within the context of democratization, represents an essential element in building a genuine security culture (Chiru, 2014). Increasingly, studies have addressed the importance and characteristics of security culture (Matei and Halladay, 2019) within new geopolitical contexts and in light of growing multidimensional threats.

Security culture clearly constitutes an essential framework for a safer society. If we apply Almond and Verba’s formula, we can discuss three dimensions of internalized orientations at the individual level:

- a) Cognitive orientation** – what we know about institutions and their roles;
- b) Affective orientation** – feelings toward security institutions;
- c) Evaluative orientation** – judgments and opinions.

Surveys and interviews could help clarify these dimensions. Certain publications make known to the Romanian public the activities of various intelligence services. How these services operate, the ways they accomplish their missions, their organizational structures, and their successes or failures can all contribute to understanding their roles within the democratic institutional framework. Such a perspective can at least help structuring the cognitive dimension. This definition integrates the elements of security culture as “the totality of notions, ideas, and

information possessed, at a given time, by the citizens of a state, concerning the values, interests, and security needs that form and develop attitudes, motivations, and behaviours” (Nițu, 2012).

When discussing the field of security as represented in various publications, the general public comes into contact with it through engaging works of interest. Some of these belong to former intelligence officers who “reveal” techniques and methods of action that may be useful in everyday life. Such works appeal to readers who imagine that professionals in this field possess “secrets” that make them invulnerable. Among them we can mention *Think like a Spy* (Fisher, 2025) and *Becoming Bulletproof: Strategies for Your Own Security* (Poumpouras, 2022).

Other authors present the domain of security in a structured manner, explaining in detail the intelligence cycle, contemporary challenges, and the importance of the human resource (HUMINT) in intelligence work – for instance, John Hughes-Wilson’s *The Secret World: A History of Intelligence* (2017). Some works are written by former intelligence service directors, whose insights can offer readers either a comprehensive overview, details from inside the profession, or geopolitical trends at regional and global levels – such as *The Mossad Director: Doctrine and Missions of Israel’s External Intelligence Service* (Shavit, 2021).

Chris Whipple, in his book *The Spymasters: How the CIA Directors Shape History and the Future* (2024), analyses the mandates of U.S. intelligence directors, explaining their relationships with the president and the ways in which intelligence is used by political decision-makers.

There are also works written by historians, sometimes spanning hundreds of pages, which trace the evolution of intelligence services or the development of the “world” of espionage from ancient times to the present. Notably, Christopher Andrew’s *The Secret World: A History of Intelligence* (2022) is an exceptionally well-documented study that relies on reliable sources and official documents, tracing the evolution of intelligence services from the era of Sun Tzu to September 11, 2001 – a turning point in global intelligence approaches. Such works, like that of the British historian, seem particularly relevant for specialists and readers passionate about the field.

Next, we will analyse several publications that can offer reference points regarding how representations of this domain are constructed. Attitudes and behaviours are based on what we know – or believe we know – about reality. In the following section, we will examine several recent works to clarify certain reference points and dimensions of our representations concerning the “world” of intelligence services and their activities and roles.

From a methodological standpoint, this study adopts a qualitative and exploratory approach, combining the analytical review of recent documentary works on intelligence and national security with the interpretation of secondary data derived from public opinion surveys. The objective is to identify and discuss the cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions of security culture as they emerge from public representations and cultural narratives.

### **Eli Cohen: The Lone Wolf of Damascus**

Under the signature of Samuel Segev, a figure closely connected to Israel's intelligence community, Corint Publishing House released the book *Alone in Damascus* (2019). The work recounts the story of Eli Cohen, arguably the most famous secret agent in the history of the State of Israel.

Eli Cohen carried out espionage activities in the Syrian capital from early 1962 until January 1965, when he was captured. Known as “Fighter 88” within the operational structure to which he belonged in Israel, or as “Menashe” in intelligence reports – used as an additional layer of protection – Eli Cohen provided vast amounts of crucial information to political decision-makers. Under the assumed identity of Kamal Amin Thaabet, an Arab businessman recently returned from Argentina, Cohen swiftly established close connections with several high-ranking Syrian officials and military officers, who provided him with essential intelligence regarding Syria's intentions and actions toward Israel.

Charismatic, “Thaabet” skilfully exploited both the vulnerabilities of the Syrian political system and the internal power struggles in Damascus, as well as the personal weaknesses of those with whom he interacted. By organizing discreet social gatherings for political and

military elites, raising funds for political causes, and offering loans to his Syrian acquaintances without expecting repayment, “Kamal” became so deeply embedded in Syrian society that he practically identified with it. The path to this point, however, was far from easy. To construct such a credible identity, Eli Cohen underwent a complex and demanding training process: he enhanced his memory skills, learned counter-surveillance techniques, and mastered the art of disguise (Segev, 2019, pp. 108-123).

He later relocated to Buenos Aires, where he established connections with members of the city’s Arab community and obtained letters of recommendation for his later use in Damascus – thus lending authenticity to his cover story. Once in Damascus, he managed to befriend influential figures across all power circles, gathering information from both civilian and military sources. His contacts came from the highest decision-making levels. Cohen’s hundreds of Morse code transmissions, relayed to Israeli operatives in Europe, proved strategically invaluable to Israel for organizing combat capabilities and military operations along the Syrian border (Segev, 2019, pp. 209 and 243).

Eli Cohen identified and communicated to Israel the strategic positions of the Syrian army on the Golan Heights – a fact that proved decisive in Israel’s capture of the plateau during the June 1967 war (Segev, 2019, p. 11). Though intelligence work comes at a cost, its benefits are undeniable in situations such as these.

Segev’s book, structured in eleven chapters, traces the major moments of Cohen’s career – from his initial attempts to join Israeli intelligence services, to his recruitment, specialized training, creation of his new identity, and infiltration into Syria. Beginning with Cohen’s capture in Damascus in January 1965 – a well-known event in Israel’s collective memory (Segev, 2019, p. 51) – the author builds the narrative in a fast-paced, documentary style reminiscent of a spy novel. Evidence, official documents, intelligence sources, and excerpts from Cohen’s interrogation are presented throughout the book. To some extent, the structure mirrors that of a film, featuring suspenseful moments and storylines that unfold gradually across chapters.

Beyond the operational success achieved by the Israeli agent, the book also gives voice to his frustrations, struggles, and the immense



burden of his mission. Alone in the Syrian capital, without a support network, Cohen appears vulnerable and constantly exposed to danger – far more than agents operating within coordinated teams. Yet this very solitude may have been his greatest advantage. Acting as a “lone wolf” might have provided him with perfect cover: he did not need to meet other agents, use safe houses, or engage in routines that could raise suspicion. When the Syrians finally captured him, they sent a telegram to Israel implying that they believed Eli Cohen to be the head of an extensive spy network operating inside Syria (Segev, 2019, p. 59).

His continued success was likely aided by his constant changes in message encryption techniques. After each trip abroad, he received a new code and often a new transmitter, which he used upon his return to send the most critical reports to Israel.

Yet, as Segev clearly points out, toward the end of his mission Eli Cohen became overconfident in his own abilities and tactics. Believing himself nearly untouchable, he began to disregard the strict operational limits of his transmissions (a maximum of nine minutes) and reduced the number of messages he sent to Israel (Segev, 2019, p. 48). This ultimately led to his capture by Syrian forces, aided by Soviet-supplied radio-location technology (the Syrians had been unable to decrypt his messages). Cohen was located through the Morse signal emitted by his transmitter.

After his capture, Israel made every possible effort to secure first his release, then his life, and finally the repatriation of his remains. However, none of these appeals succeeded – the Syrians, deeply humiliated by the exposure of their secrets, refused all interventions: not the French lawyer’s pleas, not those of Eli’s wife Nadia, nor the offers of money, Vatican appeals, or international diplomatic pressure (Segev, 2019, p. 347). On May 18, 1965, at 3:30 a.m., after reciting his final prayer and sending a last letter to his family in Bat Yam, Eli Cohen was executed by hanging in Marjeh Square, Damascus (Segev, 2019, p. 11).

Cohen’s mission in Damascus highlights an essential truth for all intelligence services worldwide: the irreplaceable value of the agent on the ground – whose assessments cannot be substituted by any other source. Military personnel often remark that a disputed territory is truly controlled only when an infantryman “sets foot” on it. Similarly, in the world of intelligence, without field agents physically present in the area

of interest, information collected through other channels lacks the same analytical and operational value. Following Cohen's execution, Meir Amit, then head of Mossad, declared in a speech at the Israeli Embassy in Paris:

"We trained him for two years, and he succeeded in his mission in a way almost unparalleled by anyone else. He established deep contacts with people at the highest levels of the Syrian regime, effectively becoming part of it. Thanks to him, we had a perfect picture of the events unfolding in Damascus. He provided not only data we might have obtained from other sources, but above all, the atmosphere on the ground – a type of information for which there is no substitute." (Segev, 2019, p. 343).

Through the intelligence he transmitted to Mossad, Eli Cohen enabled an accurate understanding of Syria's plans regarding Israel, as well as a precise assessment of the regional situation, leading to appropriate strategic responses. Years later, another Mossad agent, known by the codename "The Angel," Ashraf Marwan – this time an Egyptian official – would provide similarly invaluable information to Israel, used during the Yom Kippur War.

Segev concludes his book with a striking passage:

"Whatever might have happened, the fact remains that Eli Cohen was the only Israeli spy captured and executed as an Israeli, becoming a symbol for all those who operated in enemy states and were caught, tried, and executed as Arabs." (Segev, 2019, p. 350).

Cohen's mission exemplifies how individual heroism and human intelligence operations can shape collective perceptions of secrecy, loyalty, and national sacrifice. In this way we can understand how public representations of intelligence agents contribute to constructing an idealized image of the intelligence community.

### **Adolf Tolkachev, the Americans' "Eye" Beyond the Iron Curtain**

Especially in the early phase of the Cold War, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) struggled to provide U.S. political decision-makers with intelligence on the Soviet Union. The Iron Curtain dividing

Europe was impenetrable to American agents, despite the agency's vast financial resources and in spite of various attempted missions – some verging on suicidal, such as parachuting American operatives into Soviet territory. The KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti*), the Soviet secret police, consistently thwarted any capitalist attempt to “look” beyond the Iron Curtain: it was well prepared and experienced and, above all, suppressed espionage efforts with extreme harshness (Hoffman, 2018).

*The Billion Dollar Spy: A True Story of Cold War Espionage and Betrayal*, David E. Hoffman's 2018 work, tells the story of Adolf Tolkachev – the Americans' unexpectedly “opened” eye behind the Iron Curtain. Across the book's twenty-one chapters, Hoffman traces both the stages through which the CIA's Moscow station passed in its quest for relevant intelligence on Soviet policy and the winding path that brought the Americans their “billion-dollar” spy, who supplied secrets about Soviet radar and research plans for weapons systems. As in Eli Cohen's case, Hoffman's book reiterates a basic necessity for any intelligence service: accurate, on-the-ground information from engaged individuals who can assess trends and provide explanations – things U.S. spy satellites could not deliver during the Cold War.

The volume is compelling also because it presents various espionage methods and techniques used by CIA officers in Eastern Europe and, more importantly, explains how these methods were invented and then became everyday tradecraft. “Espionage is the art of illusion” (p. 15), Hoffman reminds us, and his book offers an X-ray of intelligence activities conducted in the field. While the narrative focuses on the CIA and Cold War espionage, this type of operation is employed by intelligence services worldwide. The book draws on 944 pages of declassified operational files, most importantly the cables exchanged between CIA headquarters and the Moscow station from 1977 to 1985.

Hoffman discusses contact techniques developed within the CIA by officers who entered service in the 1950s-1960s, such as Burton Gerber and Haviland Smith (Hoffman, 2018). The latter, despite initial opposition from agency leadership, developed the *brush-pass* executed during a “time gap” created to shake surveillance. We also learn about the equipment Tolkachev used: first the miniature Molly spy

camera (whose image quality was insufficient for photographing secret documents), then the Tropel (a camera concealed in a key fob), and finally a Pentax ME 35mm single-lens reflex camera (Hoffman, 2018, pp. 153-158). All this illustrates the long road the American service travelled to obtain relevant intelligence.

Operating in Moscow entailed sustained exposure to one of the most hostile counterintelligence environments in the world<sup>1</sup>. As the author notes:

“Counterintelligence plays a vital role in the effort by spy agencies to prevent penetration by the same methods of espionage they use against other agencies. During the Cold War, this required a combination of outward vigilance – that is, tracking every move of the KGB and deceiving it whenever possible – and inward scepticism – that is, ensuring that the CIA itself was not the victim of a deception or double agents. Ideally, counterintelligence would be coordinated with intelligence collection, but there has always been a natural tension between the two.” (Hoffman, 2018, p. 38).

Beyond the gripping details and tension, *The Billion Dollar Spy* also impresses by portraying the qualities required for this work and the dangers faced by those involved. “Everything we do is dangerous,” Tolkachev told his case officer in 1984; the drama of his story intensifies in the book, culminating in his capture by the KGB (Hoffman, 2018, p. 395). In the intelligence world, any misstep means not only failure but also severe repercussions for operations and personnel. Hoffman’s account bears this out: Tolkachev was caught after the Soviets received information from their mole inside the CIA, Edward Lee Howard – the only CIA officer to defect from the United States and receive political asylum in the Soviet Union, in 1986.

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<sup>1</sup> For those interested in the highly disciplined operational methods of the Soviet Union’s security services, Victor Suvorov’s *The Principles of Espionage* (2016) offers a compelling resource. The volume details the tensions between the KGB and the GRU – the military’s intelligence directorate – alongside in-depth accounts of officer training, operational coordination, and the methods employed to ensure maximal efficiency in intelligence work across Western Europe.

Kathy Krantz Fieramosca's portrait of Tolkachev, displayed at CIA headquarters (Hoffman, 2018, p. 422), aptly captures the strain under which the Soviet engineer worked for American interests, photographing thousands of pages of classified documents. For a long time, he was the best source the CIA had in Moscow – a “billion-dollar” spy in the most literal sense – whose reporting kept the Americans abreast of the Soviets' most important military research and, crucially, allowed them to prepare accordingly.

A full material assessment of the intelligence Tolkachev provided was never thoroughly conducted by the Americans, but some preliminary estimates concluded that the value amounted to many billions of dollars (Hoffman, 2018). Numerous U.S. military procurement programs were updated as a result – beyond the raw insight into Soviet intentions. And the price paid to Tolkachev for all this was negligible compared to the intelligence delivered.

The story of Adolf Tolkachev illustrates the ethical and psychological tensions inherent in intelligence work. His actions highlight the paradox of loyalty and betrayal, raising questions about moral justification and personal conviction within espionage. The public can understand the intelligence as both a field of high moral stakes and profound human vulnerability, and this tension enriches the cognitive and affective dimensions of security culture.

### **Mossad: the Hidden Force of Israel**

The way an intelligence service structures itself in its early stages is a subject less frequently documented. Intelligence organizations have existed – under various forms adapted to their times – since antiquity. Consequently, it is difficult to fully grasp how their formative evolutions have left a mark on the institutions we know today.

In the case of the State of Israel, the book *Mossad: The Bloody History of Israeli Espionage*, published by Litera in 2019 and written by Michael Bar-Zohar and Nissim Mishal, offers readers the opportunity to analyse a series of declassified operations of Israel's secret service, from its inception – events that are, historically speaking, not far removed from our time. The authors' main goal is to present the declassified missions of Israeli intelligence and, more importantly, to illustrate the markedly different nature of the operations carried out by Mossad

officers. These agents act in highly hostile environments, most often without any logistical support on the ground from their headquarters. When captured, Israeli agents rarely benefit from the customary prisoner-exchange practices typical of the intelligence world – such as those conducted during the Cold War between the Americans and the Soviets<sup>2</sup>.

In *The Bloody History of Israeli Espionage*, the authors undertake a difficult task: to shed light on “the most important missions and the bravest officers of Mossad, as well as the mistakes and failures that, more than once, stained the agency’s image and shook it to its core” (Bar-Zohar and Mishal, 2019, p. 11). The book presents numerous Mossad missions with factual accuracy, also exposing the darker side of certain operations – the assassinations carried out by or on the orders of the Mossad. Among the names mentioned are Rezaei-Nejad, the physicist involved in Iran’s nuclear program, assassinated in 2011; Ali Hassan Salameh (the “Red Prince”), mastermind of the terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics; and Mahmoud Abdel Rauf al-Mabhouh, a Hamas leader killed in a famous operation in Dubai – all vividly described in the pages of the book (Bar-Zohar and Mishal, 2019).

A key chapter in the volume offers a detailed account of the kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann from Argentina and his transfer to Israel for trial (Bar-Zohar and Mishal, 2019). This Mossad operation was one of the most famous of its time and contributed to numerous legends about the agency’s methods of action. To understand the importance of Mossad’s involvement, it is essential to note that Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem represented a turning point for the Israeli state – perhaps the most significant political event after its founding.

For readers of Bar-Zohar and Mishal’s work, the book offers an opportunity for reflection. The region in which the Israeli secret service operates is an extremely complex one, and Mossad’s methods are equally diverse. For this reason, its legendary operational successes are often balanced by notable failures.

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<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth examination of such practices, Giles Whittell’s *Bridge of Spies* – first published in 2011 and reissued in 2020—offers valuable insights. The book explores the exchange of prisoners during the Cold War in Berlin, shedding light on one of the most emblematic episodes of espionage diplomacy of the era.

Another work by the same authors, *The Amazons of the Mossad* (2024), discusses the role of *katsa* women – field officers. In the early days of Israeli intelligence, women played mainly supporting roles, accompanying male agents to provide them with better cover. Over time, however, women were accepted as fully-fledged officers, indicating that the struggle for gender equality has also yielded results within the intelligence community.

The Mossad case underscores the complexity of intelligence work within a hostile geopolitical environment, revealing both the operational brilliance and the ethical dilemmas associated with covert action. The Mossad actions lead to a dual narrative – one of national pride and one of moral ambiguity. These representations contribute to shaping the affective component of security culture. For a security service, operational success coexists with questions about legality, transparency, and democratic oversight.

### **“A Disgusting but Vital Necessity” to Understand and Influence Events Abroad**

If the beginnings of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States are inextricably linked to the name of J. Edgar Hoover, the history of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) – another key and widely recognized component of the U.S. security architecture – lacks such a singular founding figure. Both institutions, with their successes and failures, are thoroughly analysed in Tim Weiner’s works. His two major books, *CIA: A Secret History* and *FBI: A Secret History*, were both translated into Romanian and published by Litera Publishing House in 2019.

While the CIA is regarded as the quintessential U.S. intelligence agency, the FBI is often perceived, in the public imagination, as a law enforcement institution. However, the Bureau’s counterterrorism efforts and counterintelligence activities mean that many of its operations are, in practice, comparable to those of an intelligence service. Indeed, since its inception, the FBI has had such prerogatives – Hoover’s obsession with Soviet influence in the United States being a foundational element of the Bureau’s functioning. As integral components of the U.S. security system, the two agencies have collaborated on various levels and

operations. Yet, as with other intelligence organizations worldwide, this collaboration has also been marked by a degree of rivalry.

Both books are extensive and based on a rigorous analysis of official documents concerning the activities of these two institutions, providing a detailed x-ray of their organizational histories. While Hoover's "shadow" continues to loom over the FBI's past, many of the practices he instituted became the foundation of numerous contemporary operational procedures. The strict recruitment standards he imposed, the image he crafted for the Bureau within American society, and the internal discipline he enforced were, without doubt, key elements of its success. Hoover's personal discretion – contrasted with his relentless desire to know everything about everyone else – made him a figure around whom countless rumours were constructed.

What makes Weiner's book on the FBI particularly fascinating is the meticulous way it traces the Bureau's early operations, during a time when many of its activities easily escaped legal oversight (Weiner, 2019). This was largely due to Hoover himself, who built an empire of information encompassing virtually everything that happened within the United States.

President Eisenhower's statement that espionage is a "disgusting but vital necessity" (Weiner, 2019a) resonates strongly throughout Weiner's other book. The CIA was built slowly, over many years, and its beginnings are described as "the failure of the most powerful nation in Western civilization's history to build a first-rate espionage service" (Weiner, 2019a, p. 9). Tracing the agency's evolution to the present day – its involvement in various coups d'état, its role during the Cold War, and the inevitable successes and failures of such a history – Weiner highlights the critical moments when the CIA either receded into the shadows of the White House or stood at the forefront of U.S. policymaking. There were times when presidents side-lined the agency and others when they relied exclusively on its assessments in decision-making, thereby reinforcing its position within Washington's power structure (Weiner, 2019a).

Weiner concludes his analysis by questioning how the agency will adapt to the world of the future. The revival of the CIA – criticized for its role in the flawed analysis of Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction – will depend, in his view, on a new generation of agents, visionary leadership, and the substantial resources that the American government appears more willing than ever to allocate to the agency in its fight



against terrorism and hostile states<sup>3</sup>. At least, this is Tim Weiner's own conclusion, with which the book ends.

### **How Romanians Perceive Intelligence Services**

Studies and analyses addressing the public's social representations of intelligence and national security remain relatively scarce. In the early years of Romanian democracy, a 2002 opinion poll conducted by IRSOP (the Romanian Institute for the Study of Public Opinion) examined the public awareness of Romanian intelligence services, the visibility of their directors, and citizens' overall perceptions of these institutions.

When asked how well-prepared Romanian intelligence services were to ensure national security, respondents were divided almost evenly: 48% believed the services were well prepared, while 42% considered them insufficiently prepared, with the remainder being unsure or unwilling to answer (IRSOP, 2002).

As essential components of a democratic state, intelligence services faced a difficult path in post-communist Romania. Burdened by their former image as instruments of repression under the communist regime, these institutions had to convince citizens that they had become pillars of the new democracy. The transition was not easy. A similarly dated but relevant study, conducted in 2004 at the level of Sibiu municipality, revealed that 27.9% of respondents believed intelligence services had not yet transformed into democratic institutions comparable to Western models, while 37.8% believed they had undergone such transformation (the remainder being those without an opinion) (Department of Political Science/ULBS, 2004).

Likewise, 14 years after 1989, 33.3% of respondents in Sibiu believed that some people were still being monitored by special services, while only 27.6% believed such practices no longer occurred (Department of Political Science/ULBS, 2004). Again, the difference up to 100% consisted of respondents uncertain or unwilling to answer.

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<sup>3</sup> For those seeking further explanations regarding the CIA's failures, James Olson's *To Catch a Spy* (2020) offers twelve detailed case studies and situates the reader within the contemporary world of espionage. The book elucidates the distinct approaches employed by various global actors, including the United States, China, Russia, and Cuba, providing comparative insights into their operational styles and strategic objectives.

Presenting such survey data today serves more as an “archaeological” exercise – tracing the layers of social representation regarding intelligence services – than as a current assessment. Nonetheless, these findings can help us understand the gradual evolution of public perceptions of intelligence and the foundations of today’s security culture.

In March 2014, IRES (the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy) published a study addressing public perceptions of the Romanian Intelligence Service (IRES, 2014). According to this research, 77% of respondents who had heard of the institution believed that the Romanian Intelligence Service plays a “very important” role. The same percentage (77%) agreed that the agency had undergone reform since 1989.

Although these results cannot be directly compared – given differences in sampling, scope, and questionnaire design – they nonetheless reveal a significant shift from the 2004 Sibiu data, where only about 38% of respondents considered intelligence services to be reformed.

In the absence of longitudinal studies, we can rely only on snapshot data that capture a moment in time without explaining its broader evolution. Still, the public image of intelligence services is crucial because of their role in a democracy. Decision-makers require accurate intelligence reports to make informed choices, while citizens expect a degree of transparency and communication from such institutions – especially today, in a world facing new and complex challenges such as terrorism and cyber-attacks.

## Conclusions

Security culture is of paramount importance in today’s context. It is grounded in the knowledge we possess about the intelligence system, in the way we relate to it, and in the evaluations, we make regarding its effectiveness. In their activities, intelligence services must operate discreetly. However, in a world where terrorism is no longer a local or regional phenomenon and where cyber threats affect everyone, intelligence agencies must also demonstrate a degree of transparency. Naturally, within a democratic society, such institutions must remain properly supervised and accountable.

In this article, we aimed to review several recent publications – released by relatively well-known publishing houses with solid

distribution networks – in order to clarify analytical frameworks relevant to the concept of security culture. Examining these works helps identify the “lenses” through which citizens perceive the activity of intelligence services. What reaches the general public through this type of literature represents, to a certain extent, what the public knows – or believes it knows – about the field. This type of information and knowledge complements the official communication produced by intelligence services.

Furthermore, by using several secondary data sources – namely, the results of studies concerning the public image of intelligence services in Romania – we have attempted to observe how citizens evaluate these institutions. We believe that understanding these dimensions can offer valuable insights into the state of security culture in contemporary Romania. For greater analytical clarity, a systematic, longitudinal study of the public image of intelligence services – and, more specifically, of Romanians’ social representations of them – would be necessary. Such data would help us understand how perceptions of the intelligence system evolve over time and reveal potential vulnerabilities within Romania’s security culture.

A security culture that supports democracy could be conceptualized along three main dimensions: cognitive, affective, and evaluative. A systematic study of security culture would enable a deeper understanding of the vulnerabilities and threats we face in the current geopolitical environment.

Two pillars seem to strengthen Romania’s security culture: sustained investment in civic education and strategic communication by intelligence institutions. Collaborative programs between universities, think tanks, and intelligence agencies could enhance citizens’ understanding of security challenges. By fostering dialogue between the intelligence community and society, Romania can develop a security culture that supports national resilience.

The main limitation of this study lies in the fact that it is based on secondary data and documentary sources. Future research should adopt a longitudinal design and include empirical data collection through surveys or focus groups. In this way we can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Romanians conceptualize security culture in a rapidly evolving geopolitical environment.

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