

The Intelligence Community-Academic Partnership: Of Smarts and Secrets

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“...there is now a greater proportion of mysteries to secrets in estimative questions [;] the solution lies in paying more attention to outside and open sources of information.”¹

In this era of globalization and information explosion, no one entity, person, discipline, perspective, or nation can know everything it needs to know to ensure its security, inform its policies, and keep it abreast of external developments and trends. Those in the U.S. intelligence community, and there are some, who conclude that “outsiders” have nothing to offer them since only insiders holding security clearances have access to the nation’s collected intelligence, are guilty of the utmost in short-sightedness – if not intellectual hubris. That same minority appears to know little, if anything, of the history and value of the long-standing, if occasionally bumpy, relationship between academic specialists and officially-employed intelligence analysts. In the following discussion, we will retrace some of that history, recall the mix of sensitivities and motivations which tend to drive the relationships, and sketch and evaluate the current status of them. Our bottom line, however, is that engaging the expertise of qualified outsiders becomes a “force multiplier” for the U.S. intelligence community, one it can ill afford to shun, since the mandate for intelligence is to exploit the best minds and most relevant knowledge, wherever they or it is to be found.

At the Creation: Intelligence, Formed and Populated by Academics

“Old-timers” will recall that in the fateful, founding era of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during and post-World War II, the titans of American academia were summoned to Washington to lead strategic and other analysis by the emerging intelligence community. In mid-1941 William Donovan recommended to President Roosevelt that, in organizing the foreign intelligence service he had been tasked to do, it should “draw on the universities for experts, with long foreign experience and specialized knowledge of the history, languages, and general conditions of various countries.”² That core focus resulted in the essential composition of the OSS. They were, in many

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¹ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Peering into the Future,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 73, No. 4 (July/August 1994), p. 90.

² Quoted by then- D/DCI for Intelligence Robert M Gates in a speech at Harvard University, “CIA and the University,” February 13, 1986.

respects, the intellectual elite of the country and represented the cream of the Ivy League and other top-flight American institutions of higher learning.

It was this special generation that provided the judgments which guided post-war policy formation, broke adversaries' codes in the war, and led the process of National Intelligence Summary and National Estimate production as well as efforts at producing net assessments. When the Board of National Estimates was created, it replicated the OSS approach in culling out the brightest minds in American academe to draft those estimates. There is, indeed, a pantheon of these path-breakers recorded in U.S. political and intelligence history, and most of them emanated from, and often later returned to, the halls of academe. The relationships between those still "inside" the intelligence world and those on its margins were sustained – and they fed off each other's expertise and insights.

Jumping ahead, into the 1950's, 1960's, and early 1970's -- in the era of Vietnam, the Bay of Pigs debacle, and abuses of U.S. intelligence capabilities in Latin America, elsewhere in the "Third World," and at home -- the intelligence relationship with the academic world became strained, nearly to the breaking point. The Church-Pike congressional inquiry into domestic spying, the fatal over-reaction of Ohio National Guardsmen at Kent State, FBI illegal monitoring of the civil rights movement, and other developments prompted many academicians to publicly and stridently distance themselves from any cooperation with U.S. intelligence, particularly the CIA. Agency (and military) recruiters were banned from or spurned on campuses; professors were excoriated for contracting or consulting with intelligence agencies; and "intelligence" seemed to have become a four-letter word. Even the Church Committee, however, also acknowledged that U.S. intelligence "must have unfettered access to the best advice and judgment our universities can produce."³

By the 1980's, the pendulum's swing was headed backwards, and the collection and analysis of intelligence regained the status of something deemed both necessary and legitimate, even as the Cold War's unexpected denouement approached. Just as President Reagan heralded the stature of the U.S. armed services and restored a sense of pride and optimism among Americans after the Iran hostage situation was resolved, he furthered the restoration of the U.S. intelligence community to its rightful, appropriate place in government, national security, and in the policy process. This positive trend even withstood the costly episode of the "Iranian arms to the Sandinista opposition" Contra affair.⁴

Even though various levels of policy-makers in Washington saw (and, at times, were responsible for) the ebb and flow of the intelligence-academic relationship (to

³ Gates 1986 speech at Harvard, op. cit.

⁴ One of the most vital aspects of the intelligence-academic nexus occurred in 1987 when the CIA began funding a program at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government to conduct seminars for intelligence professionals on "intelligence and policy" and to compile case studies "...helping to illuminate issues related to the use of intelligence by policymakers." David Kennedy and Leslie Brunetta, "Lebanon and the Intelligence Community," *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 37, No. 2, Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, p. 35.

include think tanks and technology development entities), at a more discreet level it was being sustained and expanded all along. This clearly featured close cooperation and huge amounts of funding for pivotal advances in technology with specific, sensitive intelligence aims and applications. In analytic collaboration, this prominently featured Soviet studies and analysis. The intelligence agencies also gave strong backing to the study of foreign languages and cultures, even as U.S. intelligence furnished many graduates – holding degrees in these areas – with post-graduate employment where their knowledge and expertise could be fully utilized and commensurately be rewarded.

This paper purposely leaves aside the S&T arena, one less penetrable by this author and enormously complex, not to mention being an area as yet quite sensitive in terms of disclosing just how the U.S. intelligence apparatus engages with outside technology experts and funds some of their research and applications. This aspect of intelligence-researcher collaboration remains less transparent, largely to protect the development of sensitive intelligence systems and counter-measures against inadvertent, public disclosure to America’s adversaries – and even to our economic competitors. Thus, even though there is now an approximate intelligence-world counterpart to the Defense Advanced Research and Projects Agency (DARPA), science and technology encompass a vast arena beyond the scope of our primarily analytic focus here. That said, just within the last month {February 2008}, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) named five new academic “centers of excellence” involving eleven colleges and universities to help innovate, develop and test security and countermeasures technologies “...to provide scientific expertise, high-quality resources, and independent thought—all valuable to the security of America.”⁵

Access and Expertise

As noted above, some small-minded intelligence professionals hold the opinion that no one lacking their security clearances and access to sensitive intelligence can possibly know and analyze the world as, and as well as, they do. This “I know something you don’t (and can’t) know” attitude does great discredit to those government analysts who hold it. What they fail to recognize is how vast, complicated, and inter-connected the world of the 21st century is – and how many routes there are to information, insight, and expertise. There is truth in the clichés of “two heads are better than one” and trusting in the “wisdom of crowds.” At the same time that human intelligence (HUMINT) collectors are seeking to spot, assess and recruit clandestine agents to report on foreign capabilities and intentions, U.S. [or foreign] scholars (be they teaching or research professors) have an impressive cadre of informative contacts, counterparts, and “sources” in virtually every society on earth. Moreover, the academic’s ability to reach out and elicit information from those trusted relationships is not complicated by sensitive intelligence tradecraft, information protection needs, or an ulterior motive beyond that of feeding one’s intellectual curiosity and information base and the desire to broaden and exchange perspectives. Indeed, many who live their lives outside the government have

⁵ Quoting Jay M. Cohen, DHS Under-Secretary for Science and Technology, “DHS Names Academic Institutions to Lead New Centers of Excellence,” February 26, 2008, www.dhs.gov/universityprograms, accessed 27 February 2008.

much more (and often more current) information than does the government, notwithstanding its many agencies, analysts, efforts, and tentacles. Academic specialists pry open countless niches of information around the world in greater depth than the government can or wants to; academic theorists pronounce new models and hypotheses about how the world is ordered and changing, the nature of conflict, and expectations of alternative futures.

Managing the mass of information in today's world – even that huge proportion to which intelligence analysts are exposed – is a daunting task. In addition, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the intelligence community workforce is stretched very thin. Like six-year-olds playing soccer, a majority of analysts chase after the proliferation and terrorism priorities – leaving most of the “global playing field” virtually uncovered. Grappling with a deluge of information, while trying to find those few key data points of value in doing threat analysis and analysis to support policy-making, remains fundamental both to the official mission to supply information and intelligence of value to policy consumers and to the always challenging task of performing relevant all-source analysis in support of decision-making.

Expertise, the Paramount Commodity

“To fulfill this information-clearing house function ***will require us to be far better attuned to the work being done in the academic community***, other governmental institutions, industry, and the myriad of other entities that collect and analyze data.”⁶ [Emphasis added] Academic and other non-government experts thus not only provide depth of vision and insight; they also, of necessity, can help ensure some level of attention and monitoring on that huge array of countries and issues which go relatively neglected by analysts and agencies focused on the challenges *du jour*. Indeed, it is the wise analysts and astute managers who realize how much invaluable interchange can occur between “un-cleared” scholars and those whose views are, in part, “informed” by access to the nation's collected and evaluated intelligence.⁷

This institutional attitude is well illustrated by the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) where expertise is very highly prized, analysts are encouraged to maintain academic contacts and scholarly credentials, but where staff are continually reminded to be conscious of how it is that they have come to know certain things, i.e., through intelligence sources and methods. Intelligence agencies, large and small, increasingly import and exploit outside expertise in symposia and conference settings. State/INR alone hosts well over 100 such conferences annually.⁸ Larger, national agencies, with broader mandates and deeper pockets, do likewise.

⁶Russ Travers, “The Coming Intelligence Failure,” *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 27.

⁷ See also the author's essay, “Improving All-Source Intelligence Analysis: Elevate Knowledge in the Equation,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 2008), pp. 337-354.

⁸ In the late 1980's INR's management decided, largely for two reasons, to focus on conference approaches rather than contracting for academic papers. Experience tended to show that, in seeking to address State

Let me cite two illustrative instances in this context. Area studies specialists across the nation, most with extended periods of foreign residence and even teaching experience along with proven cultural sensitivity and language capability, have their own networks of unpaid, but generally eager and forthcoming, “informants.” These include: foreign scholars and informed observers; former students; government and non-government officials whom they know and who return their trust; counterpart researchers in third countries; journalists and pollsters; and more. Their international email connections hum with daily reporting and dialogue. Many of these same academic area experts spend part of each year in the regions or societies in which they specialize. They read regularly the local press (increasingly on-line), indigenous journals and commentaries, and the burgeoning literature on their areas of expertise.

For their part, on the other hand, government intelligence analysts [leaving aside the clandestine collectors for now] may be lucky to visit their overseas “portfolios” for two weeks every two or three years and are, in many agencies, banned from communicating with or attending conferences involving foreigners. They often lack the depth of experience, language skills, and cultural *Fingerspitzengefuehl* of their academic counterparts – or betters. Indeed, it is the smart analyst who keeps open an airway to his former university instructors from whom he or she may acquire unique insights, even if secondhand. And, with over half of the U.S. intelligence analyst workforce registering less than six years experience in the field, those links loom very large indeed.

A second example of how critical the intelligence-outside expertise nexus is to the business of U.S. all-source analysis, in monitoring warning signals, and in preparing estimative intelligence is well-illustrated in concern over the threat of pandemics. You may ask what is secret or clandestine about the onset or prevalence of contagious disease, but we know full well that some governments and societies have tried to conceal such outbreaks in order to dispel civil unrest, retain a tourism economy, protect threatened commercial interests, and more. The U.S. intelligence community cannot and does not maintain a vast web of “early warning health radars” across the globe; however, an Internet-based entity called *ProMed* does. This enterprise brings together a complex, credible, expert medical network of both informants and medical validation capabilities encompassing much of the globe. It tracks the outbreak of diseases, known and unknown, on a daily basis worldwide. Moreover, among its network is a sizeable force of dedicated physicians and forensic medicine experts who help analyze, diagnose, and track outbreaks of disease wherever they are reported and by whatever means.⁹ Thus, it is such a capability, in which the U.S. government plays no direct role but wisely monitors, which provides part of America’s early warning capability for epidemic disease, coupled with the work of the Center for Disease Control and its foreign bilateral and regional counterparts.

Department desires for long-range analysis, academics were often too long-winded (yielding texts no policy maker would read) and/or too averse to making written (and thus recorded) predictions or forecasts.
⁹ See <http://www.promedmail.org>, operated by the International Society for Infectious Diseases.

Alternative/Competitive/Team B Analysis

One key way in which university scholars, think tank experts, and others contribute vibrantly to the production of national intelligence (and some other U.S. intelligence community assessments) is in reviewing and commenting on the work of those analysts employed in the community. These cleared, expert reviewers provide unique insights, alternative views, additional information and perspectives, and, most importantly, an independent, objective cross-check of the findings and judgments of government analysts. Such Senior Review Panels and their counterparts help fulfill the mandate of the Congress, contained in law, that the U.S. intelligence community must improve its performance and analytical prowess by incorporating more competitive, “Team B” kinds of analysis in its culture and analytic methodology.¹⁰ Encouraging qualified, seasoned outsiders – who are not subject to politicization or the same organizational biases – to render their own judgments, sometimes even their own alternative estimates, is fundamental to ensuring that the output of the analytic community is balanced, well-informed, and leavened with expertise from all relevant disciplines and perspectives.

The CIA has long used a coterie of outside experts to help sharpen its analytic production and to provide insights into complex analytic questions. While raw numbers and spending amounts are not on hand, hundreds of participants and millions of dollars are involved. Many of these scholars have worked with the Agency and the wider U.S. intelligence community for many years, and remuneration is seldom their first or primary motivation. Rather, they have ideas and information to convey; they want U.S. intelligence to render relevant, timely, and accurate analyses for decision-makers; they have confidence (as intelligence insiders also do) in their own expertise and judgments. Some of them comprise a cadre of “reserve experts” or “associates” who draw a small retainer but can also be called upon to review analyses, render their own brief assessments, present views and moderate panels at symposia, and monitor foreign events.

Another key area of analysis, in which outside entities and experts both excel and have the mandate to explore ideas and potential solutions, is in case studies and modeling. Government experts seldom, if ever, have the time or full panoply of skills and backgrounds to effectively describe and model risk analysis solutions, structural indicators approaches, experimental diagnostic models for conflict anticipation and analysis, econometrics, and more. This is an area in which outside expertise is frequently called upon, mined, and/or deployed for purposes of trying both to better manage information volume and for mapping and tracking intelligence indicators. While many of these efforts often encounter dubious analyst receptions, they remain fundamentally

¹⁰ See IRTPA (Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004), Public Law 108-458, 17 December 2004, Sections 1017-1019 “Alternative Analysis of Intelligence by the Intelligence Community” which stipulates “alternative analysis” and mandates an “analysis integrity officer”; see also Section 1052 “Open Source Intelligence” which, inter alia, calls on the Director of National Intelligence to “ensure that the intelligence community makes efficient and effective use of *open-source information and analysis*.” [Emphasis added.]

important as the intelligence community seeks to refine analytic methodologies and tackle ever-expanding challenges.

One of the inescapable facts of contemporary intelligence life is that the world has become too complex and varied for any one government, let alone a single agency or intelligence community, to monitor all of it continually and effectively. But such is the globalization phenomenon, and the role of U.S. world leadership, that there is really no part of the world that America can actually afford to ignore. Indeed, one internal government study in the last decade indicated that a large majority of cases in which the U.S. intervened – militarily, economically (with either positive aid or negative sanctions), and in humanitarian terms – were found in those countries least regularly observed and analyzed by U.S. intelligence agencies. Thus, it is not simply an added convenience that the government can call upon outside experts who do follow what are otherwise too often neglected corners of the globe; it often has proved to be essential, if the U.S. is to see problems looming on the horizon or is to react quickly to an unexpected event, be it a riot, a coup d’etat, a disease outbreak, a civil war, or a tsunami. For those and other reasons, every good analyst has an electronic “rolodex” of outside experts upon whom he or she can call for information, cross-checking data, and comparing analytic views.

New Ways to Think About Problems

In addition, the intelligence community has wisely sought out the expertise and research acumen of many in the academic world who are capable of devising new analytic techniques and methodologies. It is they, as resident scholars or ad hoc consultants, who also can often spot the frailties and potholes in the community’s analytic culture and processes from the standpoint of an objective, observant outsider. If “group think” tends to mark the analytic approach to a key issue, the outsider is more likely to spot this phenomenon and call it to the attention of those who can repair the damage and ward off its recurrence. They not only function as expert, outside analysts but also, if you will, as meta-analysts who can give the government cadre of managers and analysts an objective portrait of how they work, think, accumulate and evaluate evidence, render judgments, and couch their conclusions and forecasts.¹¹ Again, Gates made this a key ingredient in his Harvard speech over 20 years ago: “We are particularly interested in ideas that challenge conventional wisdom or orthodoxy. We know what we think, but we need to know what others think also.”¹² Experience in government and in community analysis shows that the problem is more that the intelligence community has too many “me too” yes-men, not too few. Open-ended research and assessment too often falls prey to seeking data with which to prove a pre-conception.¹³ To think out of the box sometimes requires that the thinker himself live outside the bureaucratic box of government service.

¹¹ For a telling example of this kind of outside perspective, see Rob Johnson, *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study* (Washington: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005).

¹² Gates, 1986, op. cit.

¹³ For the classic work on understanding the challenge of analytic mindsets, see Richards J. Heuer, Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (Washington: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999), esp. chapters 6, 8, 9 and 10.

Academic Motives, Attitudes, Limitations

For their part, many academic experts bring with them some issues and preconceptions that also have to be attended to in the partnership. For one, hubris is hardly reserved for bureaucrats. One occasionally encounters the university scholar whose intellectual ego would have it that no one in government has a fresh, good, or even relevant idea -- or any observation worth noting. Getting academics to write tersely, to focus more on their findings and less on the preambular, contextual backdrop, and to venture future outlooks in their **written** assessments has often proved difficult. Thus, as noted, the tendency in an organization such as the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) is not to ask academics or think tank specialists to write analyses, but rather to have them participate in symposia where the academic participants can be enjoined to focus on core questions, are bound by short speaking-time limits, and can make their comments and appraisals with the added assurance that they are operating in an off-the-record, not-for-attribution setting.

Indeed, it would be hard to understate the importance of allowing conference participants (and all outside experts) the opportunity to speak candidly and to "think out loud" without fear of being quoted, if one is to reap the full value and richness of the insights of "outsiders." In addition, unlike those working inside the government, outside experts can and generally do comment critically on U.S. policies, assumptions, and attitudes, filling what otherwise remains a void. Government analysts enjoy neither the right nor writ to comment on the actions, attitudes, statements or policies of the U.S. government. Those who do, and are not bona fide whistleblowers or dissent channel users enjoying their specific protections, do so at their peril. Thus it is that all public speaking and publications by intelligence professionals, and many other government employees, require prior review and approval by public affairs officials. In the case of intelligence personnel, an added security review is required lest sensitive information be divulged in the public domain.

Academicians, think tank specialists, and professional commentators also get some ego nourishment from participation in official dialogue over current policy and analytic issues, especially given the chance to critique either U.S. intelligence community performance or a chosen U.S. policy course. State Department leaders and National Intelligence Officers have little trouble recruiting the nation's first rank of academic specialists when it comes to briefing outgoing ambassadors, examining key analytic questions, or delving vexing foreign and security policy issues. Such inquiries and their participants, for example, have had a field day over the decision to invade and the course of the war in Iraq -- and the precursor National Intelligence Estimate of 2002 on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

The academic world, however, also benefits from the opportunity within this partnership to test their own ideas and theories in a pragmatic, policy-imbued setting and to subject them to the scrutiny by both fellow scholars and by policy makers as well as analytic practitioners. Writing an op-ed commentary for a newspaper on a foreign policy

issue is one thing; having the opportunity to discuss it firsthand with a senior policy-maker or a group of senior analysts is quite another. And, of course, such interactions have the potential not only to inform government insiders, but to influence their attitudes and actions. In this way, the intended cross-pollination between intelligence analysts and academic specialists takes place, with identifiable profit to both.

One added element for consideration in examining the ties between insiders and outsiders in the world of analysis, in particular, is the vast diaspora of retirees from the worlds of both analysis and academe. Many of these people carry with them decades of institutional memory, analytic tradecraft in practice, and the wisdom of earlier intelligence successes and failures. Taking advantage of such experience, not lost on any agency of the community or of the Congress (which legislated elements of an intelligence reserve corps in the IRTPA of 2004), is a boon to analytic accuracy and output. Moreover, some of these same seasoned analysts serve as vital mentors and educators for a generation of successors, with different backgrounds, technology orientations, and met challenges than those of the departing generation. It is virtually a cliché in Washington that defense and intelligence personnel do not retire but only leave the government payroll for that of a contractor or consultancy. On the other hand, it is a wise use of an available, often part-time, talent pool whose insights and bureaucratic wounds can be usefully deployed to the benefit of a younger, energetic, and highly-educated group of up and coming analysts.

As more and more colleges and universities inaugurate programs, or at least coursework, in intelligence studies (along with homeland security and related fields), they routinely reach out to find some faculty with direct intelligence experience. The CIA, in another vein, has deployed “Officers in Residence” (a program modeled on the State Department’s “Diplomat in Residence” program) in colleges and universities since 1985, with notable success in availing students and faculty of the insights of intelligence practitioners in their midst and teaching in their classrooms.¹⁴ Indeed, a healthy mix of those primarily drawn from the scholarly world with those who have learned much from life in the intelligence trenches is welcome among students. In effect, that kind of blend, mixing veterans of intelligence with its academic experts, brings reality into the classroom without gravitating into lectures made up of anecdotes and “war stories.” The ideal, of course, is to have both aspects represented in individual faculty members, but that is not always possible. Having the combination of diverse orientations and backgrounds is the next best thing.

Unfinished Business

Secrecy remains a major stumbling block to a full partnership with elements of the world of external expertise. Since Americans alone are not the world’s experts on everything, least of all foreign cultures and the geography of foreign minds, ideologies, and religions, finding more and better ways for intelligence analysts to engage (with

¹⁴ For more details, see John Hollister Hedley, “Twenty Years of Officers in Residence,” *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 49, No. 4, at http://www.csi.cia.ic.gov/studies/vol49no4/Officers_in_Residence_3.htm, accessed 3 February 2008.

caution) well-placed, knowledgeable foreign interlocutors is still a major challenge. Another is effectively mining the ever-expanding world of open sources while determining which of them is both useful and credible. Yet another is to find effective means with which to allow some community analysts and scholars to exchange places and roles – while retaining such things as rank, tenure, clearances, and the like which remain crucial to upwardly mobile intelligence professionals. All too often those who leave for the private sector do so with no path available, let alone enticing, with which to re-enter the intelligence community later, and with added experience and exposure.

And, for this paper, I offer one final note: analysts dearly want to be able, in some instances, to exchange ideas with other intelligence analysts (working the same issues) from other countries' services. This has remained one of the toughest nuts to crack, even as internet connectivity offers boundless possibilities for such exchanges of ideas, without reference to sources and methods. To give credit to some courageous actors in the CIA, who have been pathfinders in this context, there is now an embryonic Global Futures Forum.¹⁵ This innovation brings together, both in annual plenary meetings and in selected communities of interest, analysts from over 30 participating countries who exchange views and concerns on shared threats and problems at the unclassified level. This effort, along with such as those in the Defense Intelligence Agency, which bring together symposia of regional intelligence chiefs and other senior players to build networks of information and cooperation, mark the beginnings of a potential new era for U.S. intelligence. As the globalizing world presents more and more baffling challenges and impenetrable mysteries, the U.S. intelligence capability will rely increasingly on assembling all the "smarts" we can muster, not solely on what knowable secrets we can unearth.

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¹⁵ The Global Futures Forum, formerly known as the Global Futures Project, is an unclassified, passworded network of government and private analysts accessible only by invitation and subscription.