Understanding modern intelligence analysis

David Omand

Session 1 Defining and Understanding Intelligence

The course starts with an introduction to the English language intelligence studies literature in terms of historical, functional, organizational and political types of source material. Definitions of intelligence are compared and a preferred approach described in terms of added public value through reduction of risk in decision-taking. The different uses of intelligence are considered and the consequential role of intelligence in modern national security strategy is highlighted, comparing and contrasting the examples of the United States and the United Kingdom. The historical part played by the UKUSA ‘5-eyes’ community is outlined. The importance of preemptive secret intelligence (information that others wish to keep secret from us) is examined in relation to the achievement of public security objectives. The changing relative importance over time of the traditional sources of intelligence, including human and technical sources, is discussed, and the modern concepts of open source intelligence, digital intelligence and social media intelligence are added.

Required readings:

Omand, D Securing the State, London : Hurst, 2010 reprinted paperback 2011, chapters 1 and 2


Recommended readings:

Assignment for this session: No specific assignment is set for the first module. Students should come prepared to exchange views on what intelligence is, and how much of it needs to come from secret sources. Intelligence on WMD including the Iraq war will be discussed as a case study. The San Seriffe case study Part 1 is introduced in class, and the exercise on Parts 2 and 3 will be set at the end of this module, for handing in by 21 February.

Session 2 The craft of intelligence analysis

The balance between theory and practice in intelligence analysis is examined. The problem of inductive reasoning in intelligence analysis is illustrated with short case studies. Surprises and paradigm shifts are examined. Examples are discussed of how different professions cope with epistemological and methodological issues including the application of modern scientific method. Different models of intelligence analysis are evaluated, as a way of examining the concept of intelligence failure and the dangers of conceptual biases in intelligence analysis. A Bayesian approach is taken to the evaluation of the significance of new information, and the analysis of competing hypotheses and ‘discrimination’ between them. The overlapping functions of accessing relevant intelligence and the elucidation of its meaning are considered through the example of counter-terrorism.

Required readings:


Heuer, R.J., Psychology of Intelligence Analysis, CIA: (2007) available online at


Recommended readings:


Johnston, R. Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community, CIA: Centre for the Study of Intelligence, 2005, available at https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-
Assignment for this session: Be prepared to discuss whether intelligence analysis is any different from any other disciplined intellectual activity. Compare the experience of other professions.

Comments will be given on Parts 2 and 3 of the San Seriffe exercise, and the exercise for Parts 4 and 5 will be set for handing in by 14 March.

Session 3 Modelling the intelligence cycle

The traditional intelligence cycle is introduced, and a critique of it provided that places emphasis on the role of the user of intelligence and the concept of intelligence for action. The value chain in intelligence and the problem of assessing quality in intelligence is examined. A modern network model of intelligence is presented. The process for capturing the requirement for intelligence and the problems of prioritization of competing demands are discussed. The provision of strategic notice through horizon scanning is illustrated. Historical examples are discussed of the part played by secret intelligence in enabling deception, covert action and back-channel diplomacy. The domestic security intelligence and external intelligence functions and their interaction are considered.

Required readings:

Omand, D Securing the State, London : Hurst, 2010 chapter 5.

Recommended readings:

Peter Pirolli, P. Card, S. The sensemaking process and leverage points for analyst technology as identified through cognitive task analysis, 2006, PARC paper, available at http://vadl.cc.gatech.edu/documents/2__card-sensemaking.pdf
Omand, D., 'Learning from the Secret Past’ in Dover, R., Goodman, M.S., (Eds.) Learning from
Assignment for this session: Be prepared to discuss how far in the internet age intelligence can be a linear process of requirements, collection, analysis and dissemination. Is it better to push intelligence reporting to customers or leave them to pull it when and where they need it?

The outcome of Parts 2 and 3 of the San Seriffe exercise will be discussed in class.

Session 4 The relationship with the customer for intelligence

The different types of customer and the outlooks of analyst and policy maker are contrasted and different ideas presented about the best relationship between analyst and customer for intelligence. The use of estimative language and probabilities and its interpretation by policy makers and military commanders is considered. A comparison is made between single source intelligence reporting and all-source assessment. The US National Intelligence Estimates process and the British Joint Intelligence Committee are compared. The dangers of politicization of the intelligence process are examined. The importance of strategic narratives and historical analogies in the interpretation of intelligence by policymakers is highlighted.

Required readings:
Omand, D Securing the State, London : Hurst, 2010 chapters 7 and 8.

Recommended readings:
Cradock, P., Know Your Enemy: How the Joint Intelligence Committee Saw the World, London: John Murray, 2002. (especially the chapter on ‘Intelligence and Policy’).
Kent, S., Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965).
**Assignment for this session:** Be prepared to discuss how far we should think of surprise and warning failures in intelligence as inevitable and whether customers for intelligence must therefore expect to be disappointed. What should be the right relationship between the producers of intelligence and their customers to avoid politicisation?

The outcome of Stages 4 and 5 of the San Seriffe exercise will be discussed.

The final exercise on intelligence assessment will be set for handing in by 4 April.

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**Session 5 Intelligence Ethics and Secrecy**

Changing public attitudes to secrecy in relation to intelligence activity are examined together with controversies over the balance in a democracy between fundamental rights to security and to privacy, all in the light of the revelations of Edward Snowden. The legal and ethical issues associated with human and technical intelligence collection, analysis and use are explored. A set of ethical principles for ‘just intelligence’ are derived using the ‘just war’ approach. The concepts of proportionality and necessity are applied to intelligence activity, with examples from the Northern Ireland security campaign. The part played by Intelligence Oversight authorities in preventing abuse of power and maintaining public confidence is examined.

**Required readings:**

Omand, D Securing the State, London : Hurst, 2010 chapter 10


**Recommended readings:**


Assignment for this session: Be prepared to discuss the concept of intelligence ethics and whether it is a contradiction in terms. What limits if any would you want placed on national intelligence activity and why?

Session 6 Future intelligence communities

In the final session, the conclusions of the earlier sessions are brought together to illuminate the concept of a modern intelligence community. The growing importance of national intelligence communities in public safety and security is highlighted together with the identification of obstacles that prevent the development of cooperation spanning domestic and external spaces and intelligence and law enforcement functions. The key drivers and trends in international affairs, technology and social attitudes likely to affect the future development of intelligence activity and national intelligence communities are identified and discussed, along with a description of the likely characteristics of the intelligence community of the future. The role of the private sector in intelligence is evaluated. A likely evolution of public debate over “mass surveillance” and social media monitoring is suggested.

Upon completion of the course students will be able to demonstrate:

- an appreciation of the ways in which intelligence plays a role in governmental affairs.
- familiarity with the methodological issues associated with the study of intelligence, within the wider context of governmental decision-making.
- an ability to engage critically with the English language literature on the subject.

Required readings:

Omand, D Securing the State, London : Hurst, 2010 chapters 9, 11 and 12


Recommended readings:


Nye, J.S. 'Peering into the Future'. Foreign Affairs. 73:4 (1994), pp.82-93
Assignment for this session: Be prepared to discuss the challenges that globalization might pose for intelligence communities. What would you recommend as solutions? What issues do you see being the key topics for an intelligence studies course in 10 years time?

Feedback will be given on the outcome of the final written intelligence assessment exercise.