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Ivory Tower Meets James Bond

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IVORY TOWER MEETS JAMES BOND

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As I look at the intelligence community, it should not "support" or "oppose" an administration. It should be professional, factual and give the best possible analysis, regardless of where the chips may fall.

SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN

Senator Feinstein's comment, found on a November 2004 memo written by then–CIA director Porter Goss regarding potential politicization of intelligence analysis, could serve as the preamble to this book. The editors, Roger George and James Bruce, themselves respected career intelligence analysts, have assembled a compendium of essays by leading lights of the U.S. intelligence community, essays that examine the history, efficacy, pitfalls, and achievements of U.S. intelligence analysis roughly from World War II to the present. They also make a number of recommendations for improving analysis, thereby reducing the likelihood of "intelligence failures" that have so frequently been in the media spotlight over the past several years.

Curiously enough, in their introduction George and Bruce cast this book as one of a precious few that examine intelligence as a profession, and indeed they pose the direct question: "Is there a professional discipline known as intelligence analysis?" As a career intelligence officer myself, my initial reaction to this question was that it is unworthy of serious discussion, as intelligence craft in the United States has been institutionalized (most notably) within the CIA since 1944, or as far back as the creation of a distinct Office of Naval Intelligence in 1882. Yet upon further reflection, I can attest that this is a fair question, and this book takes a crack at answering it.

Over the course of my career, I have frequently encountered the debate of science versus art regarding the field of intelligence. Few doubt the science behind the technologies committed to intelligence collection

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and to exploitation of the data. From satellites to cross-referenced computer databases to unmanned vehicles, the U.S. intelligence community has been at the cutting edge of technology and has pushed the limits of the ability of science to collect and turn myriads of data points into value-added knowledge for decision makers. Yet it is on the analytic side, which is what George and Bruce largely address, that art enters. Even the most accurate raw data must ultimately be synthesized and interpreted by human minds, and thus varying conclusions, let alone predictions, are inevitably drawn. Even with today's advanced computing power, life factors of the analyst and the analyzed are many and unpredictable, and they do not lend themselves well to straight-line logic or laboratory replication. So a consideration of the degree of professionalization of intelligence analysis is welcome.

While the editors declare that the major thrust of this work centers on intelligence analysis as a professional discipline, only a single chapter actually addresses it. The book examines the fields of law, medicine, and library science as exemplars of a defined "profession." In short order, chapter 3 concludes that "to the extent that intelligence analysis has remained idiosyncratic and lacks oversight mechanisms by which all its practitioners systematically acquire, share, and produce knowledge, it is not yet recognizable as a full-fledged discipline."

This, of course, is debatable. There are many factors that argue otherwise, not the least of which is the large number of individuals who have dedicated the better parts of their lives to producing intelligence. Others include a common lexicon that exists across the intelligence community and a similarity of approach toward assessment making among most intelligence organizations. Yet this provocative conclusion gets the reader's attention, and it serves George and Bruce well as a point of departure for the rest of the volume. Organized into six sections of three chapters each plus a conclusion, *Analyzing Intelligence* ends up being much more than an excursion into the issue of intelligence analysis as a professional discipline. In fact, it covers a broad array of intelligence issues, including a short history of U.S. intelligence, the matter of professionalization of the discipline, and a number of lessons learned, methodologies, and management approaches that can serve to improve the quality of intelligence analysis. Taken as a whole, George and Bruce have succeeded in providing a book that is more primer than an effort to answer the question of professionalization of the discipline. (Indeed, it has recently come to my attention that the volume is required reading for new analysts at the Office of Naval Intelligence.)

The first two chapters briefly outline the history of U.S. intelligence for the uninitiated, and those from chapter 4 on effectively review the bidding of some of the key pitfalls of intelligence analysis, as well a number of recommendations toward improving the objectivity, quality, and predictive nature of the analysis

produced by the intelligence community as a whole. From the perspective of a career intelligence officer, I found most intriguing the chapters "Policy-Analyst Relationship" and "Enduring Challenges." These pieces are written from the benefit of hindsight by some of the most senior and experienced intelligence officers and analysts in the community. To name a couple, there are John McLaughlin, former deputy director for intelligence at CIA, and James Steinberg, former deputy national security adviser to the Clinton administration. They lay out several keen insights, such as the inherent dichotomies between the analytic and policy-making communities. For example, McLaughlin makes the point that the policy world is by necessity a culture of optimism, where obstacles, including contrary intelligence assessments, are meant to be overcome. Intelligence analysts, on the other hand, are focused on threats and dangers, leading to a darker culture, more marked by skepticism. Steinberg points out that this natural friction between policy makers and intelligence analysts is exacerbated by unrealistic expectations and lack of appreciation. Policy makers and other intelligence consumers crave clarity and certainty, whether in execution of political initiatives or military operations, and often do not understand the limitations of intelligence. Analysts, for their part, often do not appreciate the many factors, of which intelligence is but one, that weigh upon policy makers.

McLaughlin and Steinberg offer several strategies to overcome these frictions, such as embedding intelligence analysts into policy-making circles, informing leaders of intelligence limitations, and producing and presenting intelligence assessments as tools that help policy makers think through the problems, rather than as data dumps. McLaughlin makes a particularly salient point where he asserts that surprise (the thing most irksome to leaders) "is almost never the result of an easy-to-predict shift. It almost always creeps up on you." Clearly, one of the greatest services analysts can perform is keeping leaders a step or two ahead of major changes.

Several contributing authors use the failure of the intelligence community to warn of the events of 9/11 and the inaccurate assessments of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) prior to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion as central lessons for improved analysis in the future. One chapter focuses on the imperative for the analyst to avoid politicization yet remain relevant to the issue at hand. Another chapter reviews the analytical dangers of foreign denial and deception, which was clearly evident and effective in the case of the nonexistent Iraqi WMD programs and stocks. A point is made that though denial and deception is more about the limitations of intelligence collection than analysis, the savvy analyst must remain cognizant of these limitations throughout the analytical process—easier said than done. Surprisingly (in that I am a career

intelligence professional), by the end of the book I was better informed regarding what went wrong with intelligence support surrounding 9/11 and the Iraq War, a benefit of taking the time to read this book.

I would be remiss not to comment on chapter 9, which concerns challenges to U.S. military analysis. David Thomas, a senior analyst at the Defense Intelligence Agency, points to several "perennial" problems, such as the ponderous, bureaucratic behavior of military organizations, which in his view impedes creativity and dissemination. He also points to "new" problems, such as the increased speed of modern military operations, the diminished analytical capabilities of defense intelligence agencies due to numerous reorganizations, excessive focus on current intelligence, and (perhaps as a result) the attrition of experienced analysts, both in uniform and out. I can attest to some of these points, especially the one about the detrimental impact of reorganizations. I experienced this during tours with the Joint Staff, Navy Staff, and the Office of Naval Intelligence. Some of these initiatives had positive outcomes, but they were clearly taxing to the organizations, especially to the long-term civilian workforce.

Wrapping up their book, George and Bruce are cautiously optimistic that the intelligence lessons of the past several years, combined with a better appreciation of collection limitations and some new approaches to analysis (e.g., computer-aided analysis of competing hypotheses and others), will lead to more objective and reliable intelligence assessments. Yet they also admit that "fixing analysis seems a perennial and elusive goal," even given the several reasonable fixes proposed in this book. One of these recommendations involves greater educational opportunities for analysts, to include job rotation for analysts into American academia, and likewise for academics to take up temporary residence within intelligence community organizations. This should resonate with, at a minimum, the military service colleges and the National Defense University, convenient places for the integration of academia and intelligence analysis. Call it Ivory Tower meets James Bond. Call it what you will, but it is an idea whose time has come, and *Analyzing Intelligence,* although not fully convincing about the lack of a "professional" discipline of intelligence analysis, is worth the read for those concerned with effectively "connecting the dots" ahead of the next crisis on the horizon.