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The Role of U.S. Intelligence in American Foreign Affairs in the Post-Cold War Era (Literature Review)

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Abstract:

The end of the Cold War initiated a revolutionary era for the American intelligence community. This literature review analyzes the new era of uncertainty and reform the intelligence community is currently facing. First, it presents the background and structure of the intelligence community. Next, it presents an analysis of the intelligence community during the Cold War era. Finally, it analyzes the contending arguments and theories on the future of the American intelligence community.

This review takes an in-depth look at the principle groupings that characterize current thought on the future role of intelligence. The two principal schools of thought on the future role of intelligence are (a) those who believe intelligence is no longer needed, and (b) those who recognize a continuing need for intelligence. The second school of thought is then subdivided into two fields: (b1) literature advocating reduced spending on intelligence, and (b2) literature advocating reorganization and restructuring of the intelligence community and its components.

Finally, this literature review suggests avenues for future research. Suggested areas of research include (a) the need to redefine the term "intelligence," (b) the need to update the mission statements of intelligence agencies, and (c) the need to increase intelligence gathering and information on regions which were not emphasized during the Cold War.

Historical Background

From 1940 through 1989, United States' security policy could be summed up in one word: containment. Containment of Soviet military power and Soviet global expansion dominated American international relations. The Soviet Union posed a military, political, and ideological threat to the United States, and US intelligence and intelligence gathering was molded around the single doctrine of protecting US National interest and containing Soviet influence.

In his 1992 article, "Winds of Change," J.L. Gaddis stated, "During the Cold War, the primary purpose of the US intelligence community was clear. American intelligence was the spyglass focused on the Soviet Union" (p. 102). Keeping track of Soviet military research and development and watching Soviet activities throughout the developing world dominated the intelligence community.

Now the Cold War is over. Adversaries of the US are less apparent. There is less clarity about the purpose of intelligence and national security. The virtual disappearance of the Soviet threat, or any other comparable threat, and the disappearance of a doctrine to guide American foreign affairs mean that the intelligence community must devise a new mission in a now unstable world. Redefining the purpose of intelligence and the role intelligence will play in the now uncertain world has moved to the forefront. As American foreign policy enters a new era, intelligence policy is in the spotlight.

This literature review will present the current arguments and theories on intelligence reform. First, there will be a definition of intelligence and a brief overview of the intelligence community. Second will follow a summary of the role of intelligence during the Cold War. Next, the two primary schools of thought which structure present-day intelligence theory and its future role in foreign affairs will be presented. Finally, there will be a discussion of the gaps within the research on intelligence reform, and suggestions for other fruitful avenues for future research.

The Intelligence Community

This section discusses the definition of intelligence and provides a brief overview of the intelligence community. Defining intelligence will help generate insight into how to analyze and critique the current formation of the U.S. intelligence community.

Defining Intelligence

The definition and scope of intelligence has been in a state of continuous evolution since its inception. In 1955, intelligence, as defined by the J. Edgar Hoover's FBI administration, "dealt with all the things which should be known in advance of initiating a course of action" (Ransom, 1970). This definition was broad and idealistic. In the 1960s, seeking a more realistic definition of intelligence, ex-Director of Central Intelligence Admiral William F Raborn defined it as "information which has been carefully evaluated as to its accuracy and significance" in terms of national security (Ransom, 1970). In the Dictionary of United States Military Terms for Joint Usage, intelligence is defined as:

The product resulting from the collection, evaluation, analysis, integration, and interpretation of all available information which concerns one or more aspects of foreign nations or of areas of operations and which is immediately of potentially significant to planning.

In spite of the evolution and variation in the defining of intelligence throughout the years, one link is apparent. The definition of intelligence has always varied depending on one's position and role.

Great diversity is found in the definition and application of the term
“intelligence” amongst agencies, foreign policy elites, and administrators. As a result, intelligence has been open to personal interpretation, and has been a term used to cover everything from clandestine activity to espionage. Ultimately, the misuse of the term has resulted in a loss of precise meaning. Intelligence inherently suggests a foreknowledge of intentions and information for better decision making, and most of the definitions in print concerning intelligence imply this fact. However, the precise definition of intelligence has become hazy. The limits and boundaries of the activities and objectives which are included in the bounds of intelligence have begun to elude the political community.

The haze surrounding the definition of intelligence becomes important in terms of an analysis of the framework within which the debate on the future role of intelligence is occurring. If intelligence is not clearly defined, it is impossible to agree upon which intelligence activities should continue or be classified as “intelligence” in this post-Cold War era.

**Overview of the Intelligence Community**

The actual scope and size of the intelligence community’s budget and personnel remains uncertain due to the culture of secrecy in which the community and its activities are set. However, some information about the structure and composition of the intelligence community is well known. The U.S. intelligence community is composed of 13 agencies that are managed by the Director of Central Intelligence. The DCI exercises his authority through the National Foreign Intelligence Board and the National Intelligence Council. The DCI is responsible to the National Security Council and, through this council, to the President.

The Department of Defense (DOD) is the largest component of the intelligence community. Two-thirds to three-fourths of the federal intelligence budget is spent within this department. Intelligence for branches of the armed services, the National Security Agency, the National Reconnaissance Office, Central Imagery, and the Defense Intelligence Agency all fall under DOD intelligence units. This information is valuable for understanding some of the schools of thought in the literature on intelligence reform and the departments targeted for reform.

Another crucial fact concerns the creation of agencies within the intelligence community. Most of the agencies within the intelligence community were created by executive directive to counter a Soviet initiative during the Cold War. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is the only agency created by legislation with a mission separate from Cold War objectives.

**Intelligence during the Cold War**

To understand why intelligence reform is an issue, one must examine the role of intelligence during the Cold War. A Cold War analysis of intelligence will provide the background needed to understand the context of current suggestions for reform.

In Abram Schulsky’s 1992 essay, “What Is Intelligence? Secrets and Competition Among States,” he states that before the Cold War the United States did not have a very extensive and active military of intelligence establishment. During World War II, the department of Research and Analysis within the Office of Strategic Services relied heavily on open sources to aid the war effort. “The United States relied heavily upon social scientists, historians, and other academics to provide foreign policy information.” (p. 19). This wealth of human talent provided relevant information concerning the war effort.

However, when the Cold War began, a different kind of intelligence problem was posed to the United States. The United States could no longer rely solely on academics to serve as open sources to provide information concerning the Soviet Union, because the Soviet Union did not provide open in formation about the internal workings of the country: “Information that other countries published as a matter of course (e.g., defense budget or maps) was regarded as secret in the Soviet Union, and either was not published or was published only in a distorted fashion” (p. 22). As a result, the United States was forced to construct specialized mechanisms for researching Russia in order to address U.S. national security interests. The United States began to form and develop an array of technical collection methods to acquire information about the Soviet Union. The formation of these methods of intelligence gathering inevitably revolutionized American foreign policy and historical intelligence organizations. “Various sorts of technical collection existed previously, but this new type of intelligence had the important characteristic that it did not totally depend on the other side not knowing you were engaged in it” (p. 23). The phenomena of technical collection proved very different from human intelligence gathering, and soon the intelligence community evolved, serving as a countervailing force in a then bipolar world. New organization were created to sustain the intelligence community. “With the exception of the CIA, which was created by legislation, the other major community organizations were created by executive directive to cope with requirements generated by the Cold War” (p. 148).

Through the decades of the Cold War, national funds flowed into the intelligence establishment based on public perception of the Soviet threat. The biggest economic boost for the intelligence community occurred in the 1980s. “There was a broad political consensus in the early Reagan years that intelligence needed to be strengthened with expanded covert action programs, personnel, and technical collection assets” (p. 25). The early Reagan years became the “fat years”
for the intelligence community. The result was an unprecedented buildup of U.S. intelligence assets: collection and information procession technologies, personnel, and infrastructure. Although some of the growth of the intelligence community was a result of new requirements, most of the increase was a product of the emphasis being placed on Soviet and East-West issues by the administration.

Now that the Cold War is over, academics and foreign policy leaders and elites must decide what kind of intelligence system will best suit the needs and interests of the United States in the future.

**Literature on the future role of intelligence:**

**Two primary schools of thought**

Two primary schools of thought seem to dominate the debate on the kind of intelligence system needed by the United States to meet the challenges of the future. The two principal schools consist of the literature by authors who (a) believe that the intelligence community is no longer needed, or (b) believe that intelligence is still a vital component of the American foreign policy system. The literature in the second category is further subdivided into two subgroups. The first subgroup (b1) is comprised of literature arguing for reduced spending within the intelligence community or reduction of intelligence as a whole. The second subgroup (b2) is comprised of literature advocating a reorganization of the internal dynamics, roles, and purposes of the intelligence community.

**No need for intelligence**

Some analysts argue that the U.S. intelligence community should be abolished. Marcus Raskin, author of the essay “Let’s Terminate the CIA” (1992) and cofounder of the Institute for Policy Studies, argues that in the post-Cold War world, “The CIA and other intelligence agencies of the United States should be dismantled or transformed not merely reorganized.” Advocating a cooperation model for international relations, Raskin proposes that the CIA and other intelligence agencies be abolished or transformed because their presence has created a “culture of suspicion and secrecy that is dangerous to a democratic society” (p. 55). Raskin criticizes the way in which the CIA and the intelligence community has an “above the law” status in American society. He proposes that abolishing the present CIA will further the quest toward a more idealistic American foreign policy.

Roger Hilsman, in the article, “Does the CIA Still have a Role” (1995), contends that ever since the demise of the Soviet Union, the CIA has been “scrounging to justify its existence,” and the money it requires as well, which totaled $3.1 billion in its request to Congress late last year (which year?) (45). Hilsman’s argument attacks two of the main intelligence-gathering roles of the CIA: espionage and covert action. Hilsman contends that espionage (to which he refers as “the stuff of spy-thriller fiction”) makes no significant difference to foreign policy “its contribution to wise decisions in foreign policy and defense is minimal. But the cost in lives, treasure, and intangibles is high” (1995). To support this idea, Hilsman uses examples from World War I to the Cold War in his effort to prove that espionage is difficult to coordinate and maintain, because the process of espionage is intricate, dangerous, and time-consuming. Covert action, or, as Hilsman calls it, “cloak and dagger gimmickry,” was “a fad” used to solve every problem during the Cold War (p. 45). Covert action, according to Hilsman, helped the United States get around the “moral problem of intervention and the political problem of appearing to be a bully” (p. 46). Like Raskin, Hilsman believes that covert action has created an aura of secrecy and suspicion within the democratic society of the United States. However, he believes that the largest issue in discussing covert action is the manner in which “Covert action has been overused as an instrument of foreign policy,” and the consequent suffering of the reputation of the United States (p. 48).

Hilsman’s argument concerning the CIA diverges from Raskin, as Hilsman does not believe the CIA should be entirely abolished. Hilsman is a proponent of using certain forms of intelligence-gathering within the CIA, prioritizing those intelligence-gathering forms, and dismantling those which are ineffective. “The United States should get out of the business of both espionage and covert political action. However, the CIA should still have an important role to play as the independent research and analysis organization contemplated in the 1960s” (p. 48). Hilsman believes that implementing this type of reform in the CIA will result in the elimination of substantial duplication and substantial savings.

**Need for Intelligence**

Another school of thought argues that intelligence is still needed. Most intelligence scholars believe that the end of the Cold War is not the end of conflict of threats to American national security. Although this category shows diversity in opinion and suggested reform, all of the literature acknowledges the need for continued intelligence and intelligence-gathering. The diversity arises when discussing the kind of intelligence system the United States will require in order to meet the challenges of the future. Opinions diverge when discussing the two key areas, budget and policy priority.
Reduction-Based Restructuring of the Intelligence Community

The literature in this school of thought is based on reform aimed at restructuring the financial and programmatic priorities of the intelligence community. This literature is founded on the common thread of thought that the intelligence community no longer requires the substantive funds it needed during the Cold War. Conflicting opinions arise in the literature over the extent to which reform needs to occur and what the new priorities should be. One main argument binds the literature that supports reduction-based reform: the ideal intelligence configuration will be able to provide foreknowledge on adversary intent, even in the midst of a streamlined budget.

Less Capital

The first subgroup within reduction-based restructuring of intelligence is literature that advocates reduced intelligence-gathering capacity and less money for intelligence-gathering. These authors argue that intelligence is needed, but they contend that in this time of peace, we do not need to “recklessly use funds on intelligence” or boost the intelligence community with additional funds. Lauren Spain (1995) argues that although the federal government has cut defense and national security spending for the U.S., spending in many areas was only 7 percent lower than Cold War spending levels. In her essay, she discusses why she believes deeper budget cuts should be made.

Other literature suggests diminished allocations to the intelligence community and advises against spending money on new projects. O’Hanlon (1995) discusses “reducing the emphasis on nuclear deterrence and shaping forces more explicitly for multilateral military activities” (p. 32), in an effort to curtail the U.S. defense budget to 75 percent of the average Cold War level. Thomas McNaugher (1996) also advocates reduction-based reform: “The defense budget cannot afford intelligence readiness and new weapons—something has to go.” McNaugher contends that the Cold War mindset—“excessive money equals the road to power”—will have to go in order to successfully pursue a post-Cold War foreign policy (p. 27).

Reform of certain intelligence-gathering forms

Other literature reflects the increasing skepticism concerning specific forms of intelligence-gathering. Doherty (1990) examines the broadening skepticism in Congress about covert aid programs. He analyzes the consequent change in voting on the budgets of covert aid programs, noting a significant decrease since the end of the Cold War. Schlesinger (1993) also acknowledges domestic political limitations on intelligence spending. He notes, “While America may have the physical strength to carry on three of more discrete operations simultaneously, it is not physical resources that constrain it. Our political capital, both domestic and foreign, is limited and should not be spent recklessly” (p. 22).

Peace Dividends

Others who favor reductions and reforms of intelligence operations argue that “peace dividends” created from the reduced levels of intelligence and defense expenditures should be spent on domestic programs such as education, homelessness, or deficit reduction. For example, Korb (1996) addresses the need to “decrease defense and intelligence spending to reduce the budget deficit” (p. 24). Carlucci (1992) advocates spending the “peace dividend” on reduction of the U.S. deficit.

Reform in Foreign Policy Approach

Among those advocating a reduction in intelligence activities, there are some analysts who favor reducing intelligence spending and encourage an isolationist foreign policy agenda in the post-Cold War era. Clarke (1995) states that America needs to distinguish between “sentimentality and reality” and rediscover its “duty to itself” (p. 45). Clarke also believes that if the United States would stop acting as a world police force, the substantive funds required for intelligence would not be needed. According to this view, a more isolationist foreign policy will require less intelligence-gathering capacity. Others refer to this literature as “backward-looking,” since these opinions aim at trying to avoid the mistakes and faults the intelligence community made during the 1980s, instead of necessarily taking into account the uncertainties of what lies ahead.

Reorganization of Intelligence

This category of literature advocates a reorganization of intelligence capacity using similar or additional budget allocations. The literature promoting reorganization within intelligence is based on reform aimed at altering and revising the current intelligence community, using “forward looking” techniques. This literature advocates using former intelligence structures only as a guide for what not to do in the future. Focusing on the uncertainty of the changing world, these authors note areas in which the intelligence community is weak. They cite the need to build upon those weak areas, equipping the intelligence community to deal with potential future threats. These analysts diverge when discussing which elements and agencies of intelligence-gathering need to be priorities. However, the arguments found in this literature can be classified as advocating changes in the goals, infrastructure, emphasis, and overall priorities of the intelligence communities.
Goals
Some authors believe that the intelligence community needs to construct a new overarching purpose to replace the Cold War purpose of containing Soviet global expansion and presence. Former Congressman Dave McCurdy (1994) contends that the Cold War doctrine provided a uniting vision of objective for the intelligence community, where everyone knew their mission and the primary reason behind their actions. Therefore, an uncertainty concerning the responsibilities and duties of the intelligence community accompanied the end of the Cold War. McCurdy believes, “The U.S. intelligence community needs a new defining purpose that serves to focus and justify the community’s efforts” (p. 127), a purpose which will provide “the leaders of U.S. intelligence with a grander notion of what they are about and a more sweeping notion of their job” (p. 129). McCurdy suggests that the following three points should be a part of the new and reformed mission for intelligence: “Revitalizing U.S. economic strength and competitiveness, maintaining a strong defense posture, and promoting democracy abroad” (p. 129).

In his article, “Intelligence Backing into the Future,” Ernest May (1994) contends that in this changed world, we need an intelligence community that will “serve the needs of the government as a whole in an effective and timely manner” (p. 67). According to May, “serving the needs of the government as a whole implies generating information and analysis about new subjects and new things” (p. 68). Therefore, May contends that the goal of the intelligence community should be striving for a higher level of preparedness in all areas, especially non-traditional areas.

Godson, May, and Schmitt (1995) believe that the reform debate concerning intelligence in the mid-1990s became a dispute over “whether U.S. intelligence had reach a kind of bureaucratic ‘old age’...no longer up to its job and incapable of changing its ways” (p. 7). However, these authors believe that the real question “is not whether intelligence will be a factor in the future but whether the large intelligence bureaucracies spawned by World War II and the Cold War continue to suit U.S. national security needs” (p. 9).

In his article, Intelligence for a New World Order, “ Stansfield Turner (1995) argues that information is the key to power. Thus, the goal of U.S. intelligence should be obtaining information that will boost its hegemonic power and “identifying today exactly what information will give us the most power a decade or so from now” (p. 153). Turner believes that this goal can be achieved by maintaining and expanding human intelligence efforts and by building a robust network of satellites with a variety of sensors. Turner suggests that the preeminent threat to U.S. national security lies in the economic sphere.

In his 1992 essay, “Thinking About Reorganization,” James Q. Wilson, once a member of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, believes that there are two types of agencies. The first type includes the agencies that produce outcomes that can be specified in advance. “The State Department, the FBI, the DEA, and the CIA are agencies of the second type; we cannot say in advance what we want these agencies to produce and we will not find it easy to agree on whether they have produced it: (p. 30). Wilson believes that the goal of reorganizing type-two agencies should be “deciding what operating culture we wish to produce amongst rank-and-file employees and then designing an organizational structure that will increase the chances of that culture being created and sustained” (p. 32). From his earlier experience as a reorganizer for the Drug Enforcement Agency, he believes that the most unsuccessful reorganization ventures have been those that have sought to alter the outputs of an agency rather than looking inward. Thus, by understanding the daily work and operating culture of the agencies within the intelligence community and finding the breakdown in the link between these routines and the policy objectives they should fulfill, effective reorganization can occur. “The reason for my suspicion is that reorganization plans tend to be developed by staff people who are brought in from outside the government and know little about the agencies they propose to change” (p. 32).

Infrastructure
During the Cold War, the intelligence community acted in secrecy, with activities hidden from the scrutiny of public opinion. In this period, there was little coordination between intelligence agencies, between intelligence agencies and policy makers, between intelligence agencies and the military, and between the intelligence community and the general public. Some analysts believe that cooperation within the infrastructure of intelligence will produce a more efficient and thorough intelligence community, as well as erase past Cold War mindsets of interagency separation.

In the article, “U.S. Intelligence in an Age of Uncertainty: Refocusing to Meet the Challenge,” Paula Scalingi (1992) predicts that “the effectiveness of U.S. intelligence will depend on how well Congress, the executive branch, and the community cooperate in undertaking the necessary initiatives” (p. 148). Scalingi contends that the demise of Soviet and other international conflicts has birthed a new demand for “constant congressional monitoring” (p. 148). Scalingi implies a need for reform aimed at restructuring the traditional relationships between the intelligence community and its consumers by reducing secrecy.

Bruce Weinrod (1996) agrees with Scalingi’s advocacy of reform aimed at
greater communication and more joint coordination among the intelligence community and other members of the political community. "The intelligence community in the post-Cold War era can make its information and reports as user-friendly as possible" (p. 88). Weinrod and Scaligi both propose that the United States will require an intelligence community that is uniformed and networks from within in order to produce efficient foreknowledge and maintain its superpower status.

**Areas for further research**

The literature indicates a broad range of opinions as to how intelligence should be defined, structured, and funded in the post-Cold War era. Much of the diversity found in the literature can be directly linked to the fact that what qualifies as intelligence has not been revisited or revised as the intelligence community has evolved.

In the post-Cold War era, the redefining of intelligence is crucial to the larger debate over the reorientation and restructuring of the intelligence community. As stated earlier, the definition of intelligence is outdated, lacking precision and specificity. As a result, it has been manipulated and used to cover a host of activities. The term intelligence and consequently the application of the term has been open to individual interpretation since the evolution of the intelligence community.

A definition helps bind and provide ceilings and walls within which to contain the concept being defined. Now, as ways of restructuring and reorienting intelligence are being discussed, it is also necessary to wade through what has been illegitimately and what has been unjustly called intelligence in the past, and to determine which activities will qualify as intelligence in the future. This process of "separating the sheep from the wolves" will streamline many agencies and rid the intelligence community of financially draining projects created during the 1980s and mistakenly categorized as intelligence due to bureaucratic momentum.

It has been often stated, "There cannot be agreement on a solution if there is no agreement on how to define the problem." Actual implementation of revisions to the community will be fleeting and sparse, until a rechartering of the definition of intelligence occurs. Without a rechartering of the term and what it entails, the intelligence community will continue trying to provide foreknowledge to its consumers following an outdated mission encased within an unrestrained definition. Wilson (1992) states, "Reorganization is a favorite Washington activity; not because it is a proven method for achieving certain policy goals, but because it is a strategy that can accommodate so many motives...inevitably it's like pushing a wet string" (p. 31). Miles (1977) wrote, "Repetitive reorganization without proper diagnosis is like repetitive surgery without proper diagnosis; obviously an unsound and unhealthy approach to the cure of the malady" (32).

The United States cannot fight the non-traditional issues it currently faces in its foreign affairs with Cold War tactics. New mission statements need to be constructed to increase effectiveness and precision of duty within the intelligence community. Modified mission statements will also cut down on the large amounts of overlap found within the intelligence community. Additional research into the two subgroups within the literature on intelligence reform is also necessary. A common suggestion by policymakers and members of Congress is for intelligence involving less secrecy and more cooperation. Suggestions also include an increase in the amount of information being disclosed to the American public, and a greater check and balance system for the intelligence community. There is an inherent conflict between the secrecy involved in covert operations and democ-
References


