

INTELLIGENCE STUDIES IN THE UK

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- Feel I am somewhat of a fraud speaking in this session – am a past practitioner and now an outside observer of intelligence activities – but not an academic and certainly not up with academic studies of intelligence – occasionally provide some advice to post-graduate students, but no inclination to do academic research myself – have contract as Investigator for the ISC which keeps me busy – some might call it applied research – but must stress am speaking today in purely personal capacity.
- Thought I might inject a few slightly cynical thoughts on intelligence studies as an insider – what I perceive as some of the problems of intelligence studies are – add some grit to the oyster and hope it grows a pearl.
- Should make clear I am not talking about academic courses to train intelligence analysts – no UK equivalent to DIA's Joint Military Intelligence College which am sure does a very good job – UK intelligence analysts learn on the job, with some in-house training.
- Instead, looking at academic experts on intelligence and courses specialising in intelligence studies.
- First problem – few academics have personal experience of working as practitioners in field of intelligence – whole raft of WW II academics co-opted into intelligence who went on to write historical studies – prime example Harry Hinsley, who was responsible for History of Intelligence in WW II – decision to publish caused great angst at time – seems strange now, but FCO argued that this was thin end of the wedge which would open the way to others – and so indeed it proved.
- Why is lack of experience a problem?
- Must understand pressures of working in intelligence – Scott enquiry into Iraqi super-gun episode fatally flawed because Justice Scott could simply not appreciate pressures on the analysts – how many topics and pieces of information they had to deal with – if super-gun was only concern, criticisms might have been justified – but on the margins of main work at the time against Soviet Union.
- If drawing lessons for present day must also be reasonably up-to-date on operating environment – step-change at end of '80s – end of Cold War – for past 13 years or so world has been very different – move from strategic through operational to tactical.
- Gulf war a defining experience – significance of targeting – many overseas military deployments since then – move from long-term and rather leisurely analysis to 24/7 support to operations – lessons from Cold War not applicable to present-day issues.

- Must also recognise impact of technology – intelligence today and tomorrow is being transformed through application of IT – old stovepipes and hierarchies being junked in favour of fluid working – virtual team concept.
- In UK Mike Herman now probably only academic researcher and writer with post-WWII experience as an intelligence practitioner – was Director at GCHQ – knows reality of intelligence – but happy to admit his experience is now out of date.
- Others have been involved with intelligence through involvement in JIC process – Sir Percy Cradock – former Chief of the Assessments Staff – Margaret Thatcher’s personal advisor on foreign affairs – Chairman of the JIC for 6 years – great experience of intelligence as a consumer and analyst – but cannot think of any more – Stella Rimington’s memoirs do not count.
- Next problem – sources – unlike US, very limited release in UK – Security Service and GCHQ have released up to end of WW II – SIS has released nothing – JIC material available up to 1964, but only in part – major JIC papers have been declassified but not shorter-term material.
- Problem Percy Cradock acknowledges in his latest book “Know Your Enemy” – excellent review of Cold War crises – but cannot track progression of JIC involvement in each crisis because shorter-term papers not available – cannot rate performance of JIC in run-up to final period.
- Most UK official records subject to 30-year rule – released to Public Records Office after 30 years – intelligence material not included – Lord Chancellor has provided exemption under what is known as the “intelligence blanket” – on occasion more can be obtained in US through material released under Freedom of Information Act.
- But even full access to historical records might not give full story – example JIC minutes – when was Secretary JIC tried to record arguments over major papers – often had to make debate sound more coherent than it was – should help future historians – but other Secretaries simply provided brief précis of each paper – no feel for discussion.
- So most academic studies are by outsiders peering through a tiny window – murky at best – opaque at worst.
- Next issue – not sure really a problem – but comparatively small number of academics studying intelligence issues – most are outside looking in – but a few (Christopher Andrew the best example) have been given privileged access to Agency records – Security Service looking for an historian to write official history to mark centenary in 2009 – no signs so far that SIS intend to follow suit.
- Leads to suspicions being expressed that those with special access have in some way been seduced by the Agencies – don’t believe that is true – but doubts cast over impartiality of resulting studies.

- Another problem in UK is a number of journalists with a strong anti-intelligence bias – either scoff at need for intelligence, saying it never get things right and is a waste of money – or build it up as an over-powerful bogeyman – sometimes manage both in course of same article!
- May lead to feeling on some academic quarters that intelligence studies are vaguely disreputable – glad to say however no shortage of high-quality applicants to join the Intelligence Agencies and the DIS.
- Further issue – where material is available, can be tendency to study it as subject in its own right – if looked at in historical context, is only one strand of events – needs to be integrated with everything else – Percy Cradock’s book makes brave attempt, but as I have said hampered by incomplete historical record.
- I’ve kept this short because, as I have said, not an expert on subject – but would like to leave you with some questions: what are intelligence studies for? Do they form a discipline of their own or are they simply one of the many threads of historical research – one which needs to be integrated with the others to have meaning? Are these studies “academic” in the sense of “having no practical value” or can they assist current practitioners – and, if so, how?
- And, looking at it the other way round, can academics bring something to present-day intelligence analysis? Earlier this year the ISC hosted a meeting of oversight bodies from around the world – Professor Paul Rogers spoke at one open session – argued strongly that intelligence assessment work should bring in academics to add depth to analysis – one can see practical problems, but worth a thought.
- Over to you.