

## **Report on the Workshop “Intelligence Analysis, the Social Sciences and History: Understanding and Explaining International Actors and Outcomes.” ISA Convention 2013**

### **Introduction**

The workshop on 2 April 2013 brought social scientists and historians (many of whom are also former intelligence analysts) together with working intelligence professionals to examine the degree to which it is possible for government intelligence agencies to know and understand the international actor using adaptations of methodologies derived from the social sciences and history. Specifically, the workshop explored foundational concepts—similarities and differences—in the applied epistemologies of both social science and history to determine which have utility for improved understanding of international actors.

One of the purposes of the workshop was to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Of the 22 attendees (12 participants and 10 observers), 15 of them had experience in government, and most of those had made the transition from government to academia. As such, they could speak to the scholarship and theory as well as the practice. One original participant was unable to attend due to loss of funding resulting from sequestration, but the alternate was able to fill in for him, quite ably.

In terms of contributions, most participants presented rough outlines of their research, while a couple of participants presented draft versions of papers. Each panel session was followed by a period of both question and answer and general discussion.

### **Session Overview**

Stephen Marrin opened the workshop with a short overview of the rationale and sequencing for the day’s content. After introductions, the workshop then transitioned to substantive content.

This was followed by the first session on Intelligence Analysis and Philosophy. Philosophy was not identified in the workshop proposal as one of the core foundational methodologies useful for understanding or improving intelligence analysis. But Terry Quist’s forceful articulation of the value of philosophy for the working intelligence analyst provided sufficient justification for including it on the program. As Quist said, “Philosophy is the love of wisdom, the study or knowledge of first things. So philosophy should help us answer at the highest level of abstraction: what is real?; what is true?; why do things happen?, and how do we discover these things” Much the same can be said about intelligence analysis. Workshop discussion of the subject was robust after Quist made his presentation.

After exploring the overlaps between philosophy and intelligence analysis, we then turned our attention to the social sciences and relevance those methodologies might have for understanding or improving intelligence analysis. Much of the literature on intelligence analysis portrays it as employing a form of social science methodology, but is this actually the case? This panel focused on the way in which social science methods are used to understand and explain in general. Mark Phythian provided an overview of the ways in which understanding is achieved in the social sciences, Philip Davies looked at the critical traditions of social phenomenology and social epistemology and the common problems they share with intelligence analysis, and Erik Dahl explored the comparative use of case studies and anecdotes in social science research and intelligence analysis. An extensive discussion resulted at the end of the discussion regarding the degree to which intelligence analysis is like

social science, and whether the methodologies of the two are as comparable as the literature implies.

The third session explored the overlaps between intelligence analysis and historiography. Like historians, intelligence analysts frequently have only fragmentary information about the adversary or target, and use their analytic judgments to tie together these fragmentary data points into a narrative that makes sense regarding the current and future actions and intentions of adversaries. The speakers during this session addressed various aspects of the comparison between the practice of history and the practice of intelligence analysis. Melissa Graves provided an overview of the importance of studying history in improving understanding, and Richard Aldrich addressed the ways in which we learn from the past especially within the particular cultural constraints. The theme that both addressed was the continuing challenge of how best to effectively learn from history. That is an ongoing challenge for everyone, including social scientists, historians, and intelligence analysts.

The fourth session was the one which explored the practical policy-relevant ideas for improving intelligence analysis methodology as established in the first three sessions. Patrick Walsh spoke to how social science techniques and approaches—specifically including ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory--can improve strategic analytic outcomes. William Lahneman addressed the importance of possessing reliable information in the process of knowing and understanding within a data mining context, essentially suggesting that accurate description is a necessary foundation prior to explanation. Julian Richards addressed the practical benefit that directed study into cognitive psychology could have for both understanding the analytic process as well as improving analytic training. Dalene Duvenage presented some ideas on the applicability of complex adaptive systems as a conceptual framework for improving intelligence analysts' understanding of events and actors. Jon Rosenwasser provided some useful commentary from the intelligence practitioners' perspective, highlighting the ways in which this research stream could be useful for those in government actually doing the work of intelligence analysis.

The final session involved a discussion of final thoughts and next steps. One interesting outcome was the realization that many of the aspects of intelligence analysis involve a kind of applied epistemology which could not only borrow from the more established academic disciplines but also contribute to them as well. There may be ways in which the methodologies and approaches used by intelligence analysts could refine and improve the approaches used by social scientists and historians. More work can and should be done in this area.

The general consensus was that this was the early stages of a conversation which had potential to pull out themes which could contribute to both scholarship and practice. Agreed next steps were to present fully-fleshed out papers at the ISA 2014 conference and pull those papers together for submission as either a themed issue of a journal, or a book project.

## **Actual Program**

### **9:00-9:30am: Introduction and Overview**

- Stephen Marrin, Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies, Brunel University, UK

### **9:30am-10:15am: Intelligence Analysis and Philosophy**

- Terry Quist, Colonel, US Army. Deputy for Capabilities on the Undersecretary for Defense (Intelligence) ISR Task Force

### **10:30-12:00pm: Intelligence Analysis and the Social Sciences**

- Erik Dahl, Naval Postgraduate School, USA: *Qualitative social science methodologies: comparing the use of case studies and anecdotes in social science & intelligence analysis*
- Mark Phythian, Leicester University, UK: *Intelligence Analysis and the Social Sciences: Insights from Politics Research*
- Philip H.J. Davies, Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies, Brunel University, UK: *Social phenomenology, Social Epistemology, and Intelligence Analysis.*

### **12:30-1:30pm: Lunch**

### **1:30-2:45pm: Intelligence Analysis and History/Historiography**

- Richard Aldrich, Warwick University, UK: *Dan Reiter's Learning Theory Applied to Intelligence Analysis*
- Melissa Graves, Center for Intelligence and Security Studies, University of Mississippi, USA: *Historical Methodology: Does It Apply to Intelligence Analysis*

### **3:00-4:45pm: Applying Ideas/Lessons from the Comparison to Improve Intelligence Analysis**

- Patrick Walsh, Charles Sturt University, Australia: *Applying Qualitative Social Research Designs & Methodologies to Improve the Rigor of Strategic Intelligence Analysis Practice*
- Julian Richards, Buckingham University, UK: *Using Cognitive Psychology to Improve Intelligence Analysis Training*
- William Lahneman, Towson University: *Power of Data Mining in Social Science Context*
- Dalene Duvenage, Intelligence practitioner/trainer and independent scholar; South Africa: *Applying Complex Adaptive Systems Theory to Improve Intelligence Analysis*
- Jon Rosenwasser, Office of the Director of National Intelligence; USA: *Using a Data Analysis Prism to Overcome Challenges in Intelligence Analysis*

### **5:00-6pm: Discussion, Wrap Up, Next Steps**

#### **Other Participants/Contributors:**

- Ruben Arcos; Rey Juan Carlos University, Spain
- Tim Walton; James Madison University, USA
- Ehud Eiran, Haifa University, Israel
- Paul Maddrell, Aberystwyth University, UK
- Aaron Frank; George Mason University; USA
- Rhian McCoy; George Mason University; USA
- Randy Pherson, Pherson Associates, USA
- Paul Boxer, Brunel University, UK.

#### **Planned Output:**

The ISA workshop was part of a broader collaborative research agenda involving understanding and improving intelligence analysis. The kick off event took place through a

conference organized by Brunel University's Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies in 2012. The came the 2013 ISA workshop. A July 2013 workshop organized by the University of Mississippi's Center for Intelligence and Security Studies will continue along these lines. It will be followed by two panel proposals for ISA 2014 involving eleven participants from the workshops. The two ISA 2014 panel proposals are:

- **Panel 1:** Improving Intelligence Analysts' Understanding of International Actors and Outcomes through Social Sciences and History. This panel will evaluate whether the social sciences and history have utility for improving intelligence analysts' understanding of international actors and outcomes. The goal of this panel is to more clearly link the intelligence studies subfield and its literature on intelligence analysis to its foundational academic disciplines and their associated epistemological questions.
- **Panel 2:** Improving Intelligence Analysis: Best Practices from the Social Sciences and History. The purpose of this panel is to produce policy-relevant research which increases our knowledge about intelligence analysis while having the potential to improve its actual practice within government. The objective is to contribute to the body of knowledge on intelligence analysis as well as ideas for improved intelligence practice to include increases in the accuracy of intelligence assessment and fewer intelligence failures.

Planned publication outputs involve compilation of the by-products of these various events into themed issues of scholarly journals, a compilation book project, and other policy-oriented publications.

**Stephen Marrin**  
**Brunel University**  
**7 June 2013**