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## Intelligence Studies:

### The New Academic Discipline in Security Studies



#### Dr. Shady Abdelwhab Mansour

Executive Editor-in-Chief of Trending Events Periodical

Head of Security Studies Unit, Future for Advanced Research and Studies

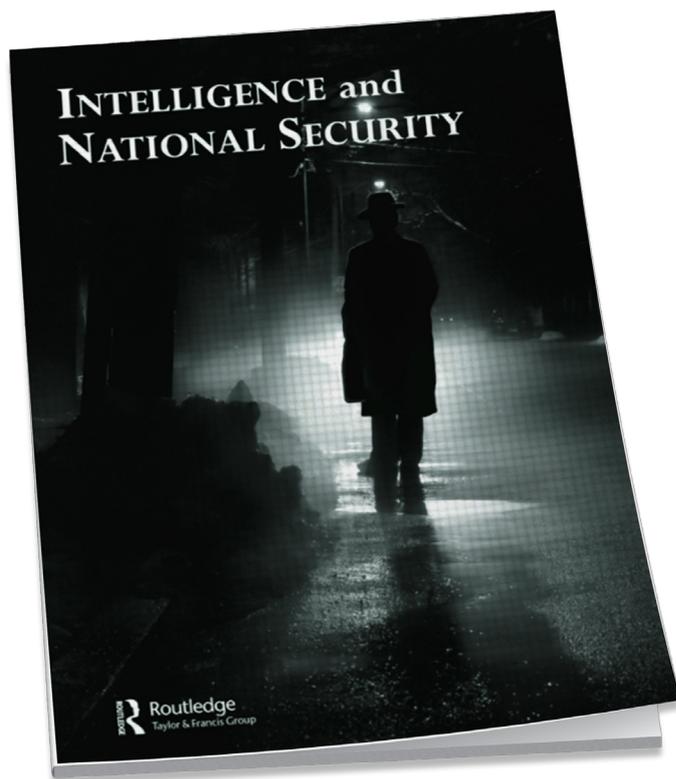
Intelligence studies is considered a sub-sub-level of international relations, falling under the security or strategic studies. It is considered an example of realist policies in action, as intelligence is one of the activities that states undertake to protect and further their strategic interests as defined by a notion of national security. That is why most universities that deliver intelligence courses links intelligence with security in their title<sup>(1)</sup>.

Furthermore, intelligence occupies a central place in structural realist thinking. According to realist school of thought in international relations, states can never be certain about the intentions of other states. As John Mearsheimer points out "states ultimately want to know whether other states are determined to use force to alter the balance of power, or whether they are satisfied enough with it that they have no interest in using force to change it". The aim of intelligence through collection and

analysis is to reduce uncertainty about other states' current and future intentions to provide advance warning of any potential threat.

In addition, state investment in intelligence is premised on the existence of anarchy, wherein trust among states is low, and war can occur because there is nothing to prevent them, as Keneth Waltz argued<sup>(2)</sup>.

This paper will focus on the development of intelligence studies



as an academic discipline, and present the factors that supported its advancement. Then it will present the different definitions presented by academics and professionals, and finally, it will refer to the most important topics that are discussed within this field.

### First: Definitional debates

As in any other field of study, there is no agreed upon definition of intelligence, and hence this section will shed light on the most prominent definitions of intelligence or “the missing dimension of international relations”<sup>(3)</sup>, presented by both academics and practitioners.

Michael Warner defined “intelligence” as “secret state activity to understand or influence foreign entities”. While others define “intelligence” as “what intelligence agencies do”<sup>(4)</sup>. Still, a former senior Canadian military intelligence officer defined it as “hard information”; that is, “information that is hard to get because someone doesn’t want you to have it”<sup>(5)</sup>. However, all these definitions are rather vague, and focus only on one aspect of the concept.

Milton Diaz (2010), a retired US Air Force officer, interviewed 66 ‘intelligence professionals, military theorists, and academicians’ in the United States and presented the following

definition: “Intelligence is any process producing knowledge that might be used in making a decision or influencing the processes, knowledge, or decisions of competitors and in the face of competitors’ efforts— real or imagined—to affect one’s own processes, knowledge, or decisions in matters of national policy”<sup>(6)</sup>.

More precisely, some CIA officers define intelligence as an “activity and a product of that activity”. Thus, intelligence is the activity of collecting raw data through methods such as surveying, investigating, interrogating, and its processing into a product that enables sound decision making<sup>(7)</sup>.

In the same vein, Intelligence is defined as “information collected and analyzed in an attempt to achieve a deeper understanding of subversive activities at home or political, economic, social, and military situations around the world”. In other words, it is the attempts by leaders

to understand potential risks and gains on a national or international level<sup>(8)</sup>.

This emphasis on information and its processing could be attributed to the fact that the overwhelming percentage –sometimes more than 95%– of the information provided to America’s decision-makers in the form of intelligence reports is based on open sources<sup>(9)</sup>.

Gill and Pythian added another dimension to the understanding of intelligence, which is covert action. They came to understand intelligence as “an umbrella term referring to the range of activities, from planning and information collection to analysis and dissemination, conducted in secret, and aimed at maintaining or enhancing relative security by providing forewarning of threats or potential threats in a manner that allows for timely implementation of a preventive policy or strategy, including where deemed desirable, covert activities”<sup>(10)</sup>.

in this vein, it is important to pinpoint that there exists a difference among intelligence agencies to what constitutes “intelligence”. According to US Intelligence community vocabulary, “intelligence tends to refer to finished intelligence that has been put through a process of all-source

analysis and turned into a product that provides predictive advice for decision-makers". On the other hand, the British understands it as "raw" intelligence presented to policy-making circles without passing through a separate analytical stage<sup>(11)</sup>.

Furthermore, US intelligence adds the operational function of intelligence, such as propaganda, covert operations and paramilitary conflict within the definition of "intelligence"<sup>(12)</sup>. This is attributed mainly to the fact that intelligence is both a "decision support mechanism and a policy execution tool"<sup>(13)</sup>.

### **Second: The Evolution of Intelligence Studies**

The study of intelligence as an academic field did not start until the 1960s, as intelligence and its related activities such as covert action were subject to strong formal and informal rules of secrecy that the necessary evidence-base for intelligence studies simply did not exist<sup>(14)</sup>.

However, this came to change by the second decade of the 21st century, which witnessed the evolution of the academic study of intelligence, as evident in the growth in periodicals, books, as well as the opening of undergraduate and postgraduate academic courses that focus on Intelligence<sup>(15)</sup>.

In addition, publishing articles on intelligence studies was not confined to journals specialized on intelligence such as "Intelligence and National Security" and "International Journal of Intelligence and Counter-intelligence", but also by periodicals that examine matters of foreign policy and national security, like "Comparative Strategy", "Foreign Affairs", "International Security" and "International Studies Quarterly"<sup>(16)</sup>.

The main purpose of intelligence studies is to complement the practice of national security intelligence, through providing "a base of knowledge for intelligence practitioners to interpret their past, understand their present, and forecast their future". It also provides the basis for a better understanding of intelligence for other government officials, academicians, and the public<sup>(17)</sup>.

Several factors have contributed to the evolution of intelligence studies and assisted the dissemination of information about intelligence agencies and their findings, which could be summarized as follows:

**1- Governmental support:** It is important to pinpoint in this context that governments supported the evolution of intelligence studies. For instance, the US government contributed to the field advancement through CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence, and National Intelligence University's Center for Strategic Intelligence Research. Other governments such as Britain, Romania, Turkey, and Spain have also begun to support intelligence studies research, especially through intelligence studies associations<sup>(18)</sup>.

**2- Promotion of certain policies:** There was an increasing willingness, by some politicians, to release classified information publicly to support certain political decisions, as in the case of America's utilization of intelligence information regarding Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

**3- Utilization of intelligence in incriminating terrorists:** Various intelligence agencies, especially in the US, came to depend on intelligence in incriminating terrorists and criminals before the courts<sup>(19)</sup>.

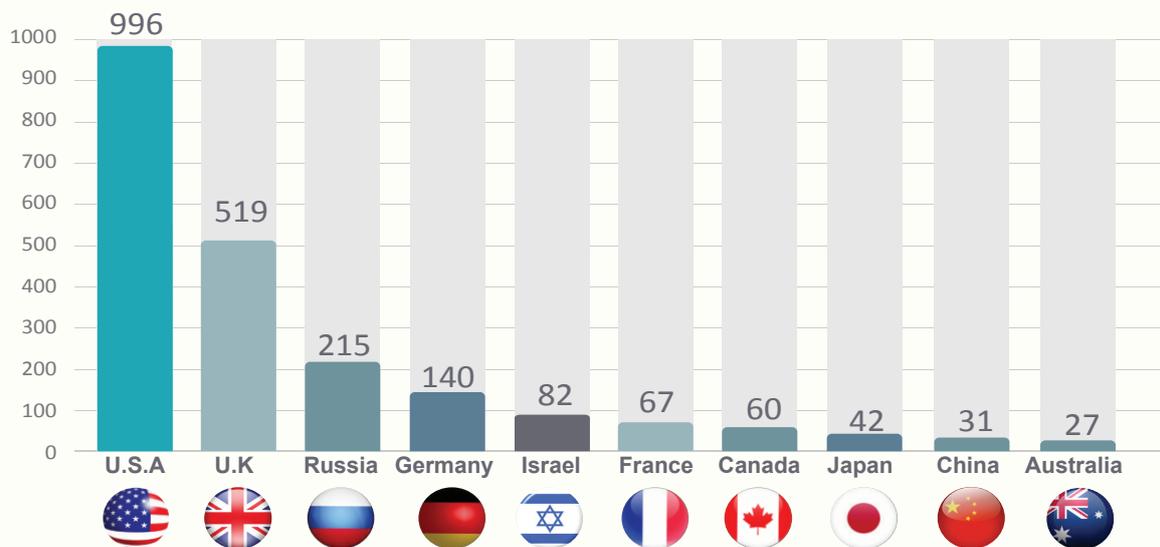
**4- Intelligence failure:** One of the factors that stimulated the study of intelligence is the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the talk about intelligence failure in preventing these attacks<sup>(20)</sup>.

**5-The role played by academia:** Simultaneously, academia has contributed to the evolution of this new field through the development of a cadre of intelligence studies professionals primarily in political science and history departments<sup>(21)</sup>. A recent survey calculated that there are at least 840 courses on intelligence studies in the United States, spread across more than 100 civilian institutions. Another investigation, conducted in 2003, suggested that the study of intelligence is taught at 14 British universities. Similar programs do exist in both Spain and France<sup>(22)</sup>.

Furthermore, intelligence professionals participated in conferences organized by various academic and professional associations, and presented research papers that led to the advancement of the field<sup>(23)</sup>.

**6- The experience of ex-intelligence officers:** Another development that advanced intelligence studies was the experience of former CIA officers, who retired, and assumed academic positions like Bruce D. Berkowitz, Carnegie Mellon, William

### Top ten countries with the highest number of articles published on their respective intelligence agencies (1986 – 2015)



Damnie Van Puyvelde & Sean Curtis, *Standing On the Shoulders Of Giants: Diversity And Scholarship In Intelligence Studies, Intelligence And National Security*, Vol. 31, No. 7, 2016, P. 1046.

J. Daugherty, and Michael A. Turner.

Still, others who made significant contributions to intelligence studies while serving in the intelligence community, include CIA officer Arthur B. Darling and Jack Davis. Similar developments could be traced in Britain, where former British intelligence officers joined academia. One prominent example is Sir Pery Cradock<sup>(24)</sup>.

#### Third: Anglo-Saxon domination

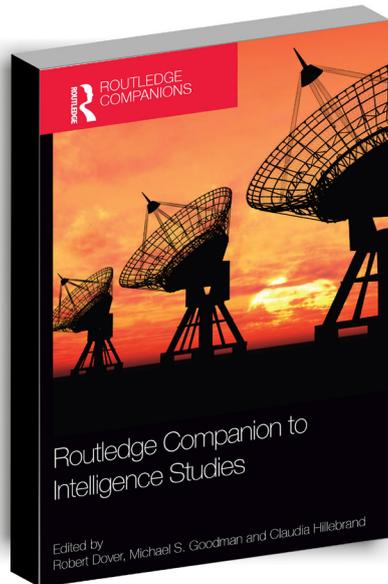
Intelligence studies is relatively absent in the Arab region. This could be understood against the backdrop of the fact that academic interest of the European continent in intelligence remained at a low level. For instance, the academic study of intelligence in France did not flourish until the mid-1990s, and it focused on three main themes; management, history and political science<sup>(25)</sup>.

Consequently, the study of intelligence is dominated by studying the American and British intelligence agencies. In a quantitative review of all articles published by two main journals in the field, "Intelligence and National Security" and "International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence" during the period 1986 – 2015, it was found that 71.2 percent of academic papers focused on Anglo – American cases. Moreover, research on other intelligence agencies used to refer to both cases as points of reference for comparison<sup>(26)</sup>.

In the Arab World, this field remains understudied. By reviewing the literature on Arab countries' intelligence services, one will find that it is very rare and mainly written by non-Arabs. One prime example in this context is the book entitled "A History of the Egyptian Intelligence Service, A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910–2009". This book is written by Owen Sirrs, who served as a senior intelligence officer on Iran for the US Defense Intelligence Agency<sup>(27)</sup>.

It should be taken in consideration that not much academic work has evolved, despite the fact that many ex-intelligence officers are trying to draw on their expertise and act as analysts for major developments in the Middle East, especially when coming to analyzing terrorist attacks or civil wars. They did not translate their expertise in trying to produce academic writing.

This is partially attributed to the fact that intelligence studies is still seen as a taboo, especially as many Arab countries do not have laws that allow the release of classified intelligence archives after a certain period of time. Furthermore, there is no governmental support for producing such academic work in the Arab world, which was vital for the academic study of intelligence elsewhere. Therefore, one can easily assume that intelligence studies will not make inroads into the Arab world, due to the sensitivity that is attributed to the work of these



agencies in the region.

### Third: Field of Study

Intelligence draws on a number of academic disciplines, as it was studied by relying insights from politics, sociology, international relations, psychology, etc<sup>(28)</sup>. Political science provided intelligence with theoretical framework on political culture and bureaucratic politics, which assist analysts in understanding how politicians behave and make decisions. While sociology and social psychology have been influential in developing intelligence methodologies such as social network analysis<sup>(29)</sup>.

On the other hand, intelligence came to count on disciplines such as psychology, for instance, when coming to deal with terrorism, or when analyzing the psychology of the subject doing the analysis. Moreover, intelligence history remains a defining part of the field, supported by periodic releases of historical archives of intelligence agencies<sup>(30)</sup>.

Another main feature of intelligence studies is that there is no single principal debate or theory that dominates Intelligence studies as an academic field. A thorough review of the intelligence studies reveals that it evolved throughout history to focus on the following topics:

**1- The historical study of Intelligence:** This was stimulated mainly by the release of information relating to the role of intelligence in World War II, and the subsequent release of the governmental

archives after the end of the cold war. In addition, the adoption of “freedom of information laws” by many western countries, which allows partial disclosure of previously unreleased information and documents controlled by national governments was another contributing factor<sup>(31)</sup>.

One of the main drivers of this study is to investigate whether a better performance, in part of intelligence agencies could have prevented intelligence failure<sup>(32)</sup>, and thus deriving practical lessons for better decision-taking in the future<sup>(33)</sup>.

However, there are two schools of thought regarding intelligence failure. The first is the orthodox school, which emphasizes that surprise attacks are inevitable due to inherent limits of intelligence process, whereas the revisionist school is far more optimistic, and assumes that intelligence failure is a result of avoidable mistakes, and thus can be remedied<sup>(34)</sup>.

### 2- The study of intelligence as a social science

**field:** Many early intelligence scholars perceived the importance of social sciences to intelligence analysis, or even viewed intelligence as being a social science<sup>(35)</sup>. Consequently, intelligence utilizes different data collection and analytical techniques from social qualitative research methodologies in order to enhance intelligence collection and analysis techniques, to gain a deeper understanding of the rising strategic threats and opportunities, and finally reducing analytical bias<sup>(36)</sup>.

In this respect, some intelligence analysts argued to make use of case studies as one of the tools utilized by social scientists. The goal of this tool is to look for factors or variables that tend to produce similar outcomes, in order to determine why something happened the way it did, and try to predict the possible development of similar situations in other places, or at different times<sup>(37)</sup>.

In addition, intelligence analysis came to utilize historical methodology, as intelligence analysts have only partial information about the adversary or target, and use their analytical judgement to tie them together into a narrative that makes sense regarding the current and future actions and intentions of adversaries<sup>(38)</sup>.

It should be taken in consideration that Intelligence analysts tried to explore the utility of quantitative approaches in intelligence analysis. Nonetheless, some of these efforts found that

it places "severe limits on its applicability to the needs of intelligence agencies concerned with foreign affairs, since most of the variables of interest cannot be quantified"<sup>(39)</sup>.

**3- Intelligence Analysis:** This subset of intelligence studies focuses on how intelligence is collected, processed and distributed within intelligence agencies. The aim is to improve and enhance intelligence analysis for practitioners, through answering questions like: how can the quality of intelligence be evaluated? what are the methods used in intelligence analysis? and how it can be improved?<sup>(40)</sup>

There is some criticism directed at this subfield of intelligence studies. It revolves around the fact that intelligence analysis is a purely academic quest that is detached from the day-to-day issues of practitioners, and thus irrelevant to them. Furthermore, it is argued that the real knowledge worth having in part of intelligence analysts is the one gained by experience. However, this criticism could be countered by the fact that most of literature in the intelligence field consists of lessons derived from the experience of practitioners who later became academics, and began disseminating knowledge of what they were doing as practitioners and how they could have done it better<sup>(41)</sup>.

**4- The comparative analysis of intelligence institutions:** The comparative study has been widely advocated in the 1980s, but there is a lack of actual in-depth systematic comparative study so far<sup>(42)</sup>. It is related in part to the lack of enough information on a range of national cultures of intelligence, especially in many Asian and African countries<sup>(43)</sup>. The focus of comparison was on the main characteristics of intelligence agencies employed by different countries, and how those agencies approached certain types of events or activities (especially when dealing with surprise events)<sup>(44)</sup>.

Also, under this section, intelligence activities and departments developed by law enforcement agencies is studied, as a number of police organizations in Western countries, especially US and UK, were either developing or already possessed intelligence capabilities, in their attempt to counter rising terrorist threat. They tend to focus on issues like: intelligence mandate and guidelines; oversight; counterterrorism structure and tasks; information sources; and communication within and among agencies<sup>(45)</sup>.

Moreover, interaction between national intelligence agencies and its counterparts in the police led to the incorporation of the former methodologies, doctrines, and processes into the practice of intelligence agencies established under the police<sup>(46)</sup>.

**5- Oversight over Intelligence agencies:** This debate is multi-dimensional. In one aspect, it is related to the fear of politicization of intelligence owing to unwarranted political pressure. The other aspect is related to the political oversight of intelligence agencies, and fear of endangering individual rights through broadening the prerogatives of these agencies in using signal intelligence, and hence the debate revolves here around the proper limits of intelligence gathering methods and intelligence sharing in democracies<sup>(47)</sup>.

In conclusion, Intelligence studies as an academic field is evolving by drawing upon the expertise of ex-intelligence officers, and academics, who are looking for ways to improve the discipline, by reviewing past practices, and utilizing the techniques of social sciences. However, such development will not be paralleled in the Arab world due to the previously mentioned obstacles that will hinder the evolution of intelligence studies in the foreseeable future. Without governmental support such development will be harder to materialize.

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Future for Advanced Research and Studies

📍 P.o.Box, Abu Dhabi, UAE 111414

☎ Tel: +971 24444513

📠 fax: +971 24444732

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