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## Political-intelligence elites, Strategic Political Communication and the press: the need for, and utility of, a benchmark of public accountability demands

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores whether the contemporary press adequately holds political-intelligence elites accountable when facing Strategic Political Communication (SPC) during those long periods when whistle-blowers are absent ('journalism-as-usual'). It develops an original benchmark of public accountability demands of political-intelligence elites that the press should be capable of making, thereby providing concrete discursive strategies to facilitate this difficult task. Demonstrating its utility, this benchmark is used to evaluate press oversight during journalism-as-usual and facing Obama administration political-intelligence elite SPC on the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program. This shows that manipulation of the contemporary press occurs through subtle, but effective, SPC techniques involving a certain style of information provision that influences national, international, mainstream and alternative press outlets' accountability demands.

### Introduction

Spectacular whistle-blowing acts periodically propel state intelligence agencies into global headline news, exposing secret practices that contravene human rights, and generating calls for change. For instance, Snowden's leaks in 2013 exposed mass surveillance policies contravening the right to privacy; and leaked Abu Ghraib prison torture photos in 2004 exposed detention and interrogation policies contravening the right to freedom from torture. However, such whistle-blowing acts, and ensuing legislative activity, are rare. This is reflected in Johnson's 'shock' theory of intelligence accountability where major intelligence shocks (scandals, failures) instigate legislative programs of reform, but thereafter oversight returns to relative inattentiveness.<sup>1</sup> As governments maintain that intelligence agencies require complete secrecy to protect ongoing methods, operations and sources, does the contemporary press adequately hold political-intelligence elites accountable during *journalism-as-usual* (those long periods when whistle-blowers are absent), particularly when faced with political-intelligence elite manipulative communication designed to limit calls for political accountability?

Drawing on intelligence and journalism scholarship (two disciplines that rarely cross-fertilize), I establish that the press-intelligence oversight function is under-theorized. Addressing this, I develop a typology (a benchmark) of public *accountability demands*, namely, demands for political-intelligence elite accountability that the press should be capable of. I use this typology to assess accountability demands publicly expressed by the US political-intelligence elite and the press in a case study

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representing a *best-case scenario* for press oversight. The case study is the Obama administration's attempted public closure in 2014 of the torture-intelligence issue: as demonstrated later, elite dissensus and provision of official evidence together provided ample material enabling press oversight. In assessing public accountability demands, I identify contemporary US political-intelligence elite manipulative communication practices and their influence in two testing press environments: an elite US news outlet with a reputation for objectivity and holding political-intelligence elites accountable (*The Washington Post*), and an unruly, globalized, digital environment (news popular on social media network *Twitter*). Finally, I reflect on the practical utility of the benchmark of public accountability demands.

## The press and intelligence agency oversight

Journalism scholarship extensively researches the press' oversight function, articulating principles of public journalism<sup>2</sup> and the necessity of a free, independent press to ensure political accountability.<sup>3</sup> Influential contemporary explanations into why press oversight is compromised include Bennett's *indexing* hypothesis, where the press merely indexes itself to the range of publicly articulated political dissensus, adopting critical positions only if political elites publicly do so.<sup>4</sup> Other explanations focus on political manipulation of the press. For instance, Manheim's research on information and influence campaigns and Strategic Political Communication (SPC) delineates how political actors use an understanding of media environments, human motivation and behaviour to design communication to influence public opinion and create enabling environments for governments' domestic and foreign policies.<sup>5</sup> Standing against such theories of press control, McNair's *chaos paradigm* posits that elites are less able to influence news agendas given developments such as the rise of globalized, digital, multi-channel media environments allowing new voices to be heard in global civil society.<sup>6</sup> While more empirical work is needed on agenda-building impacts, especially in globalized, digital environments, research suggests that political administrations still broadly set media agendas.<sup>7</sup> Whether this arises from political manipulation or other factors is unclear. Undoubtedly, however, journalists operating in digital environments are increasingly time-constrained, experiencing pressures for immediate publication and constant updates.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, journalism is resource-poor as declining paying audiences generate job redundancies, pressurizing remaining journalists to produce copy for multiple news forms.<sup>9</sup> These factors compromise in-depth, time-consuming, investigative or critical journalism, increasing the press' susceptibility to *editorial subsidies*, where Public Relations (PR) practitioners go beyond providing information (facts, statistics or quotes) to providing news stories' editorial framing.<sup>10</sup>

Despite journalism's long-standing literature on press oversight and manipulation, political-intelligence elites' role in this process is relatively unexamined. This lacuna is problematic as, out of all issues, it is on intelligence that the press' oversight function is likely to be most compromised. This is because intelligence has two central characteristics. Firstly, it is uncertain, based on intelligence analysts' risk assessments derived from fragmentary, incomplete, often contradictory material of varying credibility.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, publication of such information is restricted, barring occasional whistle-blowing and sanitized official leaking. These characteristics mean that intelligence, if publicized, is highly manipulable by SPC practitioners, while journalists' ability to assess claims are compromised by absence of independent evidence.<sup>12</sup>

Compared to journalism scholarship, intelligence scholarship is more forthcoming on the press' ability to publicly hold political-intelligence elites accountable,<sup>13</sup> indicating practices positioning the press as a potentially strong force. These practices include exposing unknown policies<sup>14</sup>; maintaining editorial independence<sup>15</sup>; and highlighting intelligence failures and demanding reform.<sup>16</sup> However, intelligence scholarship mostly shows the contemporary press as targeted for manipulation via strategies of secrecy,<sup>17</sup> censorship<sup>18</sup> and propaganda, the latter including practices such as psychological operations,<sup>19</sup> selective authorized leaks<sup>20</sup> and cultivating sympathetic journalists.<sup>21</sup> Yet, while numerous manipulative techniques are apparent, and many are propagandistic, I shall demonstrate that manipulation of contemporary press during journalism-as-usual occurs through subtle, but effective,

SPC techniques involving a *certain style of information provision* designed to *exploit contemporary press environments*.

While there are numerous examples of press manipulation and resistance, the area of press-intelligence oversight is under-theorized. Journalism scholarship neglects oversight issues concerning intelligence agencies; and intelligence scholarship largely attends to internal mechanisms of intelligence oversight (via legislatures and judiciaries) rather than public oversight (via the press).<sup>22</sup> Exceptions include Johnson who suggests that US legislative oversight is energized by intelligence failures accompanied by high media attention.<sup>23</sup> More broadly, Hillebrand theorizes four press roles when covering intelligence, namely: information transmitters/stimulators for formal scrutinizers; substitute watchdogs, where official oversight fails; legitimizers, reassuring the public about intelligence agencies; and uncritical government lapdogs.<sup>24</sup> Such theorization, however, does not address SPC practices thereby ignoring important aspects of press manipulation. Neither does it detail what press oversight of political-intelligence elites could constitute. Bean takes up this question, identifying how journalists can ask questions to achieve accountability (through what he terms 'public dialogue strategies') when dealing with politicians who may be manipulating intelligence for policy goals (as in over-blown claims about Saddam Hussein's Weapons of Mass Destruction [WMD] that led to the 2003 Iraq invasion).<sup>25</sup> Bean's analysis, however, is limited to assessing politicians' public claims about intelligence accuracy and value and, as I argue later, ignores vital elements of political-intelligence elite accountability.

## Research gaps

There are three research gaps. Firstly, the press' ability to publically oversee intelligence agencies is minimally theorized, paying scant attention to core characteristics of intelligence information (uncertain knowledge, secrecy, political manipulability). This obscures understanding of what effective press oversight of political-intelligence elites could constitute. Absence of a benchmark for evaluating press-intelligence relationships means that superficial press critique (for instance, extensively reporting on problems pre-directed by political-intelligence elites) could (erroneously) be viewed as effective public oversight. Secondly, also absent are studies of contemporary SPC practices involving intelligence, and their press impacts, especially during journalism-as-usual. Thirdly, reflecting the minimal understanding of agenda-building dynamics in globalized, digital contexts, we do not know how far US-originated political-intelligence elite SPC reaches across national, international, mainstream and alternative press outlets.

I address these gaps by generating a typology of demands for holding political intelligence-elites accountable (what I term *accountability demands*). Each accountability demand comprises component 'public dialogue strategies'; Bean's term for concrete discursive strategies that journalists can use to hold politicians accountable.<sup>26</sup> My typology identifies specific ways by which the press can hold political-intelligence elites accountable, thereby providing a practical benchmark both for scholars evaluating press oversight, and for journalism practitioners attempting to effect public accountability of political-intelligence elites. I apply the benchmark to a contemporary case study: declassification of the US Senate Intelligence Committee *Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program*, hereafter referred to as the Senate Intelligence Committee (SIC) Report.<sup>27</sup> This allows in-depth examination of varying SPC techniques and reaction from diverse press genres from the USA and internationally. This addresses the central question: does the contemporary press adequately hold political-intelligence elites to account during periods of journalism-as-usual when facing political-intelligence elite SPC?

## Methods

### **Case study: the SIC Report**

The post-9/11 detention and interrogation policy (2001–8) of George W. Bush's administration comprised Enhanced Interrogation techniques (EITs), extraordinary rendition and secret detention of Al

Qaeda terrorist suspects. Fifty-four nation-states' governments were complicit, hosting secret detention sites, refueling rendition planes and sending detainees for torture.<sup>28</sup> The secret policy was exposed after American press published leaked Abu Ghraib prison torture photos in 2004. The policy was terminated as President Obama took office in 2009, and a US Senate Intelligence inquiry was initiated to assess the policy, culminating in the SIC Report: its Executive Summary was declassified in December 2014. This paper examines US political-intelligence elite SPC, and the press' resulting ability to publicly hold political-intelligence elites accountable, across 2014.

This case study is useful for three reasons. Firstly, given the detention and interrogation program's contravention of international human rights and multiple countries' complicity, the US political-intelligence elite treats official revelations on this issue carefully, elevating them to SPC (as demonstrated later). Secondly, by furnishing two elements, the declassification overcomes standard silences characterizing intelligence. The first element furnished is evidence: the SIC Report provided the first official public evidence of EITs' ineffectiveness. The second element furnished is elite dissensus: from the investigation's inception (2009), intelligence community members including the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) fiercely disputed its critical conclusions. According to Bennett's *indexing* hypothesis, during elite dissensus the press will voice the widest range of critical voices.<sup>29</sup> Together, these elements make this moment a *best-case scenario* for press oversight of political-intelligence elites during journalism-as-usual. Thirdly, release of the SIC Report's Executive Summary generated intense press and social media coverage, presenting an opportunity to explore SPC's reach not just in American mainstream press, but also in what McNair's *chaos paradigm*<sup>30</sup> regards as a less controllable, globalized, digital environment – news popular on social media.

### **Theoretical sampling**

This is a qualitative, theory-building study. Adhering to *theoretical sampling* tenets,<sup>31</sup> I selected samples to maximize the likelihood of the phenomenon of interest appearing – namely SPC and accountability demands concerning the SIC Report – and to explore SPC's influence in two testing press environments (*The Washington Post* and news popular on *Twitter*).

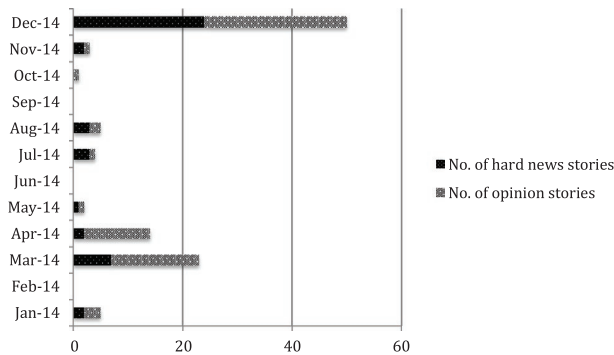
### **Sampling to detect SPC**

As detailed later, there were two US political-intelligence elite SPC phases: on declassification day there was an *information glut*, but prior to this, SPC comprised an *occasionally punctured silence*. The SPC *information glut* phase was identified by examining the pattern of release of official documents since the SIC investigation started in 2009. All publicly released official documents were scrutinized (an exhaustive sample) comprising four documents declassified on 9 December 2014: the SIC Report's Executive Summary<sup>32</sup>; Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views<sup>33</sup>; Senate Intelligence Committee Minority Views<sup>34</sup>; and the CIA response.<sup>35</sup>

The SPC phase of an *occasionally punctured silence* was ascertained by longitudinal, qualitative analysis of *The Washington Post's* coverage of the SIC Report across 2014, including declassification day. Longitudinal, qualitative analysis enables detection of small, seemingly insignificant SPC instances (as political-intelligence elites drip-feed items to the press). *The Post* was chosen for this task because, being Washington policy-makers' newspaper of record, it is likely to closely attend to political machinations around the SIC Report, thereby facilitating identification of SPC information provision tactics.

### **Sampling to detect SPC's influence in The Washington Post**

Analysing SPC's press influence during periods of official *silence* is challenging: frequently, hard news stories have nothing to report given absence of official documentary evidence. However, as declassification of the SIC Report was eagerly anticipated and extensively discussed, examination not just of hard news stories but also opinion stories (commentaries, letters, blogs and editorials) maximized the likelihood of finding press coverage. Furthermore, examining both hard news and opinion stories is



**Figure 1.** Number of stories in *The Washington Post* (Jan–Dec 2014) on Senate Intelligence Committee Torture Report.

important in understanding SPC's potential influence, as the public may be influenced by any aspect of press coverage.

*The Washington Post* was chosen to analyse the impact of political-intelligence SPC because *The Post* provides a tough test. More generally, *The Post* has periodically made public demands for political-intelligence elite accountability since Watergate<sup>36</sup>; specific to this case study, *The Post* was the first US press outlet to provide evidence in 2005 of a torture-intelligence *policy* (rather than accepting Bush administration spin that any evidence of torture resulted from isolated abuse by 'bad apples' in the military).<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, *The Post* has a commitment to journalistic objectivity which, at least in theory, should make SPC more difficult to achieve.

To ascertain SPC's impact across its two identified phases, *The Post* was examined in the year prior to declassification day (the period of *occasionally punctured silence*) and declassification day itself (the period of *information glut*). Keyword searches ('Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program' and 'Senate Intelligence Committee Torture Report') in *The Post*'s online database (1 January–31 December 2014) returned 107 relevant items (44 hard news stories; 63 opinion stories in the form of 26 blogs, 26 commentaries/opinions, seven letters and four editorials), with the biggest spike being declassification day on 9 December (15 hard news stories; 16 opinion stories comprising 10 blogs, two letters, three commentaries/opinions and one editorial) (see Figure 1).

All political-intelligence elite and press documents described above were qualitatively and systematically analysed to ascertain if, and on what aspects, the US political-intelligence elite and *The Post* make accountability demands. All accountability demands were noted, disaggregated according to whether they are made by political-intelligence elite members (for instance, in their declassified documents or via the press through quotes, leaks, commentaries and letters) or whether they are made by other actors, including directly by journalists (for instance, in opinion stories). This enables a systematic comparison of accountability demands made by the US political-intelligence elite and *The Post* in the SPC phase of *occasionally punctured silence* (pre-declassification day) and in the SPC phase of *information glut* (declassification day). However, analysis of *The Post* alone does not give a proper flavor of SPC's impact during *information glut*.

### **Sampling to explore SPC's wider influence in the information glut phase**

During SPC's *information glut* phase there was a surfeit of official information and a corresponding spike in press coverage (as indicated in Figure 1, with the December spike). As public attention is a finite resource, SPC's impact is best analysed by examining what, out of the plethora of news stories available, people actually engaged with. Thus, in the *information glut phase*, as well as analysing *The Post*, my focus widens to explore SPC's reach in news popular on social network, *Twitter*. As this is an open, unruly, globalized forum (as described by the *chaos theory*), this provides another tough test of SPC's influence: for SPC to be influential here, it must be widely disseminated and engaged with.

**Table 1.** News outlets making accountability demands in top tweets on declassification day.

Type of News Outlet	Specific News Outlet
US mainstream broadcasting/press	<i>ABC News</i>
	<i>Bloomberg</i>
	<i>CNN Breaking News</i>
	<i>NBC News</i>
	<i>New York Times</i>
US investigative journalism	<i>The Washington Post</i>
	<i>Frontline</i>
	<i>Mother Jones</i>
	<i>ProPublica</i>
	<i>Vice News</i>
US collaborative journalism	<i>MuckRock</i>
	<i>Mashable</i>
US political proceedings channel	<i>C-Span</i>
US TV conversation/debate show	<i>Moyers &amp; Company</i>
British mainstream broadcasting/press	<i>Guardian</i>
	<i>ITV News</i>
	<i>The Independent</i>
	<i>The Telegraph</i>
International news agency	<i>Reuters</i>
International news channel	<i>al-Jazeera America</i>
News aggregator	<i>Bipartisan Report</i>
Citizen journalism	<i>Abby Martin</i>
	<i>Negar Mortazavi</i>
	<i>Kevin Gosztola</i>
	<i>Daily Kos</i>
	<i>InfoWars</i>

*Twitter* (rather than other big social networks) was chosen because, at least for US users, tweets from news outlets make up a significant portion of a user's feed; and users are more interested in news about government and politics than posts from family and friends (as with *Facebook*).<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, *Twitter*'s users demonstrably engaged with the SIC Report, evidenced by '#TortureReport' trending on declassification day. This sample, then, maximizes the likelihood of finding news stories on the SIC Report that actually engaged people. The sample, of course, is not meant to be nationally representative of the general population's engagement with press coverage of the SIC Report, as *Twitter* audiences are typically younger and better educated.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, this news sample organically derived from social media popularity is methodologically useful in indicating what a specific audience in an unruly media environment found compelling enough to engage with (through retweeting, liking and commenting).

From declassification day, top tweets (namely, tweets that *Twitter* users most engaged with) circulating via '#TortureReport', as well whatever website they hyperlinked to, were gathered. This material was qualitatively analysed, generating 200 accountability demands, disaggregated by who made the demand, in what form (hard news versus opinion stories or tweets) and in what news genre. Over half (115 accountability demands) were made by news organizations, comprising diverse American, British and international news outlets across mainstream and alternative news genres (see Table 1). Most of these accountability demands came from news outlets' tweets and links via *Twitter* to their news stories; or by non-news entities (such as NGOs, think tanks and independent citizens) linking, via their tweets, to news stories making accountability demands.

## Generating the benchmark of accountability demands

This research uses thematic analysis, a qualitative method involving iterative processes of prior theorization and inductive study to generate theoretically-informed, data-supported themes.<sup>40</sup> Informed by journalism and intelligence scholarship, and refined by systematically comparing and testing emerging themes suggested by this literature against the above data-set, I delineate a typology of accountability demands and component public dialogue strategies (see Table 2). (The sample of accountability



**Table 2.** Benchmark of Accountability Demands (AD) and Public Dialogue Strategies (PDS) to hold political-intelligence elites to account.

Accountability Demands	Public Dialogue Strategies
AD1: Accuracy & value of intelligence	PDS1. Strength of analysis underlying an administration's public characterization of intelligence PDS2. Level of consensus across the intelligence community PDS3. Level of uncertainty regarding intelligence assessments
AD2: Political response to intelligence controversies	PDS4. Level of further work needed to achieve full accountability PDS5. Extent to which political responsibility is taken
AD3: Ethics, morality & legality of how intelligence is gained/used	PDS6. Whether human/civil rights are compromised PDS7. Whether principles of fairness/justice/ morality are compromised

demands described above enabled *theoretical saturation* of the typology, as no new variations on the public dialogue strategies were forthcoming.)

The first accountability demand concerns *the accuracy and value of intelligence* (AD1). Intelligence reports, being based on uncertain, fragmentary knowledge, are vulnerable to political manipulation and politicization.<sup>41</sup> Research identifying political manipulation of intelligence risk for public consumption includes Kaufmann's examination of Bush administration inflation of the WMD threat to justify invading Iraq<sup>42</sup>; and Bakir's examination of Bush administration public manipulation of intelligence on EITs' legality and utility.<sup>43</sup> Given such manipulation, critical press responses are vital. Accordingly, Bean outlines three Public Dialogue Strategies (PDS) for journalists: *assessing the strength of analysis underlying an administration's public characterization of intelligence* (PDS1); *determining the intelligence community's level of consensus on a given issue* (PDS2); and *uncovering the level of uncertainty regarding intelligence assessments* (PDS3) (see Table 2, Row One).<sup>44</sup> However, as well as demanding accountability concerning intelligence accuracy and value, it is important to demand accountability for political responses to inaccurate, or otherwise problematic, intelligence. As Johnson observes, intelligence failures may be caused by policy-makers ignoring intelligence due to arrogance, time pressures and political biases.<sup>45</sup> In such cases, it is imperative that the press publicly scrutinizes political responses to intelligence failures or controversies.

I therefore propose a second accountability demand concerning *political responses to intelligence controversies* (AD2) (see Table 2, Row Two). Studies find journalists succumbing to politicians' desire for closure on controversial security issues. Schlosberg's empirical analysis of British news coverage of alleged corruption by British AeroSpace Systems (BAe) finds that as this case culminated, BAe's interpretation dominated (that it was reformed), negating need for further sanction.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Bakir finds that once the Bush administration's secret torture-intelligence policy was exposed, public inquiries and investigations were generated with tightly defined remits focusing on military involvement, concluding that mistakes had been rectified, and diverting attention from intelligence agencies.<sup>47</sup> Given such artificial issue resolution, and misdirection to tangential areas where reform has already happened, I propose that a fourth public dialogue strategy should *assess the level of further work needed to achieve full accountability* (PDS4).

Research on the detention and interrogation program shows that politicians denied the existence of this secret policy by presenting perpetrators of torture caught on camera (Military Police at Abu Ghraib) as abusing policy rather than enacting the secret torture-intelligence policy, thereby shielding politicians from responsibility.<sup>48</sup> As global monitoring of torture depends not just on exposing torture, but holding state agents responsible for torture conducted on their watch,<sup>49</sup> I propose a fifth public dialogue strategy to *assess the extent to which political responsibility is taken* (PDS5). Yet assessing political responses to intelligence controversies ignores wider ethical, moral and legal frameworks (for instance, of international human rights) within which political-intelligence elites should, but may not, operate. Such frameworks transcend narrow frameworks of acceptability such as being 'in the national interest'.



As such, I offer a third accountability demand concerning *the ethics, morality and legality of how intelligence is gained or for what it will be used* (AD3) (see Table 2, Row Three). In national security and intelligence issues, nation-states may contravene established international ethical or legal norms to protect their national interest. For instance, the Bush administration, apparently desperate to prevent another 9/11 by eliciting actionable intelligence from detained Al Qaeda suspects, secretly generated complex legal arguments to buttress their stance that EITs did not constitute torture: US national security concerns thereby negated the universal human right to freedom from torture.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, I propose a sixth public dialogue strategy to *assess whether human and civil rights are compromised through acquisition or use of intelligence* (PDS6). International human rights and humanitarian law are not the only source of ethical guidelines, however. People invoke many codes of morality, informed, for instance, by religion or a sense of fairness. Thus, emerging in a data-first manner from this case study, is the seventh public dialogue strategy: *assessing the extent to which principles of fairness, justice and morality are compromised through acquisition or use of intelligence* (PDS7).

Having developed the typology, the data-set is systematically analysed to see if it contains an accountability demand (via Public Dialogue Strategies 1–7), and if so, whether it is a weak demand (pointing out problems, but falling short of calling for subsequent action) or a strong demand (calling for action, reform or redress). If any of these texts exhibited more than one type of public dialogue strategy, or both a weak and strong version of the same public dialogue strategy, each different public dialogue strategy or version was recorded as separate instances of the accountability demand. But repeated examples within a text of the same accountability demand or public dialogue strategy version (weak or strong) were counted as one instance of the accountability demand. Hence, this analysis highlights the range of accountability demands made across these various texts.

Table 3 presents only the strong accountability demands found in the data-set, disaggregating these by actor and time (there were no strong demands concerning AD1). Columns One and Two respectively show the political-intelligence elite's strong accountability demands made in the year before declassification day, and on declassification day. Columns Three and Four respectively show *The Washington Post's* strong accountability demands made in the year before declassification day, and on declassification day. Column Five shows strong accountability demands made by news popular on *Twitter* on declassification day. Table 3 shows how some strong accountability demands and component public dialogue strategies (for instance, PDS4's demand for *transparency*) are made by all actors throughout 2014, whereas others (for instance, PDS5's demands to *hold the Bush administration to account*) are made only by the press. Drilling down further shows how some public dialogue strategies are made only at certain times and by certain elements of the political-intelligence elite or press. It is to this level of granularity that the analysis turns.

## SPC in the torture-intelligence issue across 2014

### *Before declassification day: an occasionally punctured official silence*

That political-intelligence elite revelations on the SIC Report were elevated to SPC is evident in the type and quantity of information publicized. While the SIC Report was completed in 2012, it took two years for declassification of its Executive Summary, the delay enabling the political-intelligence elite, including the CIA, to orchestrate a public response. During these years, the US political-intelligence elite largely maintained a silence, withholding official documents and refusing to speak officially about them. Nonetheless, analysing the year prior to declassification shows that this silence was occasionally punctured by two modes of discourse:

- (a) *Political-intelligence elite-driven claims involving allegations and opinions, but lacking evidence.* Examples include public allegations by Dianne Feinstein (Senate Intelligence Committee chair) of CIA spying on the computer database of the Senate Intelligence Committee panel investigating the detention and interrogation program<sup>51</sup>; and opinion stories from Bush administration

**Table 3.** Strong Accountability Demands (AD) and Public Dialogue Strategies (PDS) before and on declassification day (D-Day).

Strong AD/PDS	Pol-Intel Elite (before D-Day)	Pol-Intel Elite (D-Day)	Washington Post (before D-Day)	Washington Post (D-Day)	News on Twitter (D-Day)
AD2: Political response to intelligence controversies					
PDS4. Level of further work needed to achieve full accountability	<i>Transparency</i>	<i>Transparency</i>  <i>Greater CIA accountability:</i> • Better civilian oversight • Internal CIA reform  <i>Enact policies to make torture less likely:</i> • Legislate Obama's CIA Executive Order • Make water-boarding illegal • Improve CIA controls in managing covert actions • Strengthen DoJ review	<i>Transparency</i> <i>Hold medics to account</i> <i>Greater CIA accountability:</i> • Better civilian oversight • Prosecution • Apologize/Reparations	<i>Transparency</i>  <i>Greater CIA accountability:</i> • Prosecution  <i>Enact policies to make torture less likely:</i> • Legislate Obama's CIA Executive Order	<i>Transparency</i>  <i>Enact policies to make torture less likely:</i> • Ban CIA from detaining • Give ICRC detainee access • Protect whistle-blowers • Allow torture victims to sue • Make following illegal orders invalid defence
PDS5. Extent to which Political Responsibility is Taken			<i>Hold Bush admin to account</i>  <i>Recognize other countries' complicity</i>	<i>Hold Bush admin to account</i>  <i>Recognize other countries' complicity</i>	<i>Hold Bush admin to account</i> <i>Hold Democrats to account</i> <i>Hold torture-ban politicians to account</i> <i>Recognise other countries' complicity</i>
AD3: Ethics, morality & legality of how intelligence is gained/used					
PDS6. Human/civil rights compromised		<i>Never torture again</i>	<i>Never torture again</i>	<i>Never torture again</i>	<i>Never torture again</i>
PDS7. Fairness/justice/morality compromised	<i>Never use EITs again</i>	<i>Never use EITs again</i>	<i>Never use EITs again</i>	<i>Never use EITs again</i>	

political-intelligence elite members such as Jose Rodriguez Jr. (former head of the CIA's National Clandestine Service) on the program's high value.<sup>52</sup>

- (b) *Political-intelligence elite-driven authorized leaks of selected facts, but lacking evidence.* The main example is the drip-feed across 2014 of the SIC Report's key findings. Note that officially sanctioned leaks are a well-recognized mechanism of securing political advantage for the side leaking.<sup>53</sup>

Through these two modes of discourse, one comprising claims, the other comprising selected facts, but both lacking supporting evidence, the political-intelligence elite aired several accountability demands before declassification day. As demonstrated later, these demands set up the CIA to credibly take all blame for the detention and interrogation program on declassification day, while propagating the idea

that the SIC Report's partial declassification was the most important act in securing accountability, with no further action required.

### ***Declassification day: a coordinated information glut of misdirection***

After years of silence, four official documents were released on declassification day, two blaming and two defending the CIA. The most substantial document at 528 pages is the Executive Summary, summarising the SIC Report's 6700 pages. It repeatedly evidences how EITs failed to produce good intelligence, noting the CIA's dishonesty to the White House and Congress about EITs' efficacy. Mostly supporting the Executive Summary is a 27-page report expressing additional views from five senators.<sup>54</sup> The CIA response comprises 136 pages rebutting the Executive Summary's conclusions.<sup>55</sup> The 167-page Senate Intelligence Committee Minority Views<sup>56</sup> report largely echoes the CIA response.

These political-intelligence elite documents and manner of release indicate SPC on three fronts. Firstly, it indicates PR coordination between different political-intelligence elite elements. In a single day, after years of official silence (barring occasional claims and authorized leaks), the press was provided with an *information glut*. While all four official documents were completed at different stages across 2012–14, they were declassified on the same day, totalling 858 pages, with the SIC Report's Executive Summary provided to the media only 24 h in advance (embargoed) to give it a head start.<sup>57</sup> This strains the press' scarce resources of time and personnel (to analyse), making it more likely to rely on interpretive frameworks provided by others (as in Jackson and Moloney's *editorial subsidies*).<sup>58</sup> Secondly, the SPC compensates for this strain by providing a specific interpretive framework, through two substantial documents that blame, and two documents that defend, the CIA. This offers elite dissensus on a specific point (whether the CIA is to blame) enabling the press to achieve professional ideals of balance and critique. Indeed, *The Post* embraces this format of balance in its most data-rich hard news story on declassification day: this story links to the four declassified official documents thereby offering a balanced set of links (two blaming, and two exonerating, the CIA).<sup>59</sup> Thirdly, the critique offered is limited, making few strong accountability demands, and it is here that *misdirection* occurs. This following section demonstrates this by examining each accountability demand and component public dialogue strategy, highlighting those offered by the political-intelligence elite before and on declassification day, as well as the press' response in two tough press environments (*The Post* and news popular on *Twitter*).

## **Accountability demands in the torture-intelligence issue across 2014**

### ***AD1: accuracy and value of intelligence***

While no strong accountability demands concerning intelligence accuracy and value (AD1) are made, there are plenty of weak accountability demands.

### ***PDS1: strength of analysis underlying an administration's public characterization of intelligence***

Pre-declassification day, parts of the political-intelligence elite made weak accountability demands through authorized leaks from the SIC Report, claiming that the CIA exaggerated EITs' intelligence yields; on declassification day, the SIC Report's Executive Summary repeatedly evidences these claims.<sup>60</sup> This is only a weak accountability demand, highlighting a problem, but not calling for further action (such as demanding a higher minimum standard of evidence before enacting controversial policy decisions). Repeatedly across 2014, both before declassification day (15 hard news and four opinion stories) and on declassification day (two hard news and six opinion stories), this weak demand surfaces in *The Post*. For instance: 'The committee's 6,000-page report accuses the CIA of systematically misleading government officials on the severity of the methods and their effectiveness.'<sup>61</sup> Similarly, on declassification day, the most frequent public dialogue strategy in news popular on *Twitter* is a weak version of PDS1 pointing out the ineffectiveness of CIA torture: it is found in British and US mainstream news, US collaborative

and investigative journalism, US political proceedings channel, US television conversation and debate show, an international news channel, and citizen journalists. For instance, British mainstream news (Julian Borger, *The Guardian's* diplomatic editor) tweets: 'Not a single case holds up' Sen Dianne Feinstein on CIA claims torture produced actionable, lifesaving intelligence. #CIA #TortureReport.

### ***PDS2: level of consensus across intelligence community***

Throughout 2014, the political-intelligence elite was divided on the value of intelligence yielded by the program, their dissensus reflected in the press. For instance, on declassification day, out of *The Post's* 31 news items, six hard news stories and seven opinion stories mainly or totally voice the SIC's Executive Summary (that EITs failed to generate valuable intelligence), with two hard news and two opinion stories mainly or totally voicing the CIA's rebuttal (that the SIC Report's conclusions on intelligence value are flawed given inadequate methodology and unfamiliarity with how the CIA uses intelligence). News popular on *Twitter* replicated this pattern on declassification day. As no part of the political-intelligence elite or press suggested consequential action, reform or redress arising from this lack of consensus (for instance, that controversial policy decisions should not be enacted without a more consensual intelligence community response), this is only a weak version of PDS2.

### ***PDS3: level of uncertainty regarding intelligence assessments***

The political-intelligence elite only minimally addressed the inherent uncertainty of intelligence assessments. Only on declassification day does a CIA fact sheet draw attention to the unknowability of whether intelligence gained through EITs could have been obtained otherwise: a weak accountability demand pointing out a problem without suggesting a remedy. Accordingly, this weak demand appears in *The Post* on declassification day (one hard news and two opinion stories) referencing the CIA fact sheet. For instance:

The fact sheet stated that the agency 'takes no position' on whether the intelligence information gained through its enhanced interrogation techniques 'could have been obtained through other means or from other individuals. The answer to this question is, and will remain, unknowable.'<sup>62</sup>

News popular on *Twitter* on declassification day does not make this accountability demand, either in weak or strong forms.

## ***AD2: political response to intelligence controversies***

### ***PDS4: level of further work needed to achieve full accountability***

Before declassification day, the US political-intelligence elite frequently demanded greater *transparency*, namely that the SIC Report be declassified with minimal CIA redactions (see Table 3, Column One). On declassification day, Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views continues to strongly demand transparency (see Table 3, Column Two).<sup>63</sup> Similarly, both before and on declassification day most of *The Post's* strong demands were for such transparency (see Table 3, Columns Three and Four). For instance, its editorial states:

We don't discount warnings that releasing the report might rouse anti-American sentiment in the near term. But in the long term, the United States will benefit by demonstrating a commitment to transparency and self-criticism.<sup>64</sup>

Strong demands for transparency were evident mostly in its opinion stories, but also in hard news stories: pre-declassification day there were strong demands across 15 opinion stories and one hard news story; on declassification day there were strong demands in two opinion stories and one hard news story. Where *The Post's* hard news stories made strong pro-transparency accountability demands, they quote other actors such as Hina Shamsi, ACLU's National Security Project director,<sup>65</sup> and Sen. Rockefeller.<sup>66</sup> In news popular on *Twitter* on declassification day, there are only two instances of strong demands for transparency. One is a tweet from British mainstream news (*The Telegraph*): '#TortureReport: We can only hope that its release will spur further steps towards the truth'. The other strong demand comes via a *Washington Post* journalist's tweet that links to a 2007 *Post* hard news story reporting that

Sen. Rockefeller (then Senate Intelligence Committee chair) planned to investigate the fate of missing detainees when examining the rendition program.<sup>67</sup>

Beyond demanding transparency, before declassification day the political-intelligence elite is silent on other strong accountability demands concerning political responses to intelligence controversies (see Table 3, Column One). However, *The Post* is more assertive in this period, for instance, strongly demanding (via an opinion column and letters) that the *medical community be held accountable* for its role in CIA torture (see Table 3, Column Three):

I want to know whether trained medical personnel – physicians, psychologists – attended the torture sessions. I'm sure the relevant professional associations and licensing boards would like to know as well.<sup>68</sup>

The other strong demand made by *The Post* before declassification day is for *greater CIA accountability* (see Table 3, Column Three). This appeared in two hard news and seven opinion stories, with demands for better civilian oversight, to further investigate and fire CIA staff for spying on the Senate intelligence committee panel, for criminal prosecution of American interrogators, and for the CIA to apologize and issue reparations. For example: 'There is only one appropriate response ... Acknowledge that the agency did wrong, issue a formal apology, and, where appropriate, pay reparations.'<sup>69</sup> By declassification day, sections of the political-intelligence elite also strongly demand greater CIA accountability (for better civilian oversight of intelligence agencies and for internal CIA reform) (see Table 3, Column Two), this demand emanating both from Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views<sup>70</sup> and the CIA.<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, at this point *The Post* makes minimal calls for action, redress or reform (see Table 3, Column Four), only once demanding prosecution of illegal acts described in the SIC Report (citing Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch [HRW]). Instead, overwhelmingly it makes weak demands concerning CIA accountability, detailing how the CIA avoided oversight and ignored internal criticisms. As with *The Post*, news outlets popular on *Twitter* on declassification day frequently echo the weak demand that the CIA impeded oversight, appearing extensively across US and UK mainstream news, US television conversation and debate show, and US investigative and collaborative journalism.

Another strong accountability demand from the political-intelligence elite on declassification day is to *enact policies to make torture less likely in the future* (see Table 3, Column Two). Feinstein's Foreword to the SIC Report demands to legislate Obama's 2009 Executive Order restricting the CIA from holding detainees and limiting interrogation techniques to those used in the Army Field Manual.<sup>72</sup> Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views articulates many more policy recommendations to make torture less likely, comprising making waterboarding illegal; improving CIA controls in managing covert actions; and strengthening review processes at the Department of Justice's (DoJ) Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) for legal opinions on sensitive intelligence activities, such as its since withdrawn Bush-era 'torture memos' justifying EITs.<sup>73</sup> While on declassification day the political-intelligence elite makes many strong demands on enacting policies to make torture less likely, *The Post* is more selective (see Table 3, Column Four), only citing Feinstein's demand but ignoring other policies called for in Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views:

Indeed, as committee Chairman Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) noted, President Obama's self-imposed executive order to restrict the CIA from holding detainees and to limit interrogation techniques to those in the Army Field Manual 'could be overturned by a future president with the stroke of a pen'. As Feinstein argued, 'They should be enshrined in legislation.'<sup>74</sup>

By contrast, news popular on *Twitter* is more expansive. For instance, a *Reuters* blog<sup>75</sup> written by Roth (HRW) suggests giving the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) regular detainee access; improving whistle-blower protection; allowing torture victims to sue for compensation in American courts; and stating that following clearly illegal orders is an invalid defence (see Table 3, Column Five).

### ***PDS5: extent to which political responsibility is taken***

The political-intelligence elite rarely suggested that further political responsibility be taken for the detention and interrogation program, making no strong accountability demands on this point (see Table 3, Columns One and Two). Its weak demands on political responsibility were also rare, limited to the CIA occasionally pointing out in opinion pieces published in the year preceding declassification that

the Bush administration and Bush-era Democrats had approved the CIA program. While such statements assign political responsibility, they do not suggest further action, and so remain weak accountability demands. By contrast, *The Post* is more assertive pre-declassification day (see Table 3, Column Three), its opinion stories strongly demanding greater *accountability from the Bush administration*, as in this editorial:

What the CIA did after Sept. 11, 2001, was part of a covert action program authorized by the president; when the full report comes out, we hope for a debate that goes beyond just the CIA. It should be about decisions made by President George W. Bush.<sup>76</sup>

On declassification day, *The Post* continues its strong demands for greater Bush administration accountability (see Table 3, Column Four), quoting others in its hard news stories, such as United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism, Ben Emmerson<sup>77</sup>; and in a video-based opinion piece by Roth (HRW).<sup>78</sup> News popular on *Twitter* on declassification day offers a fuller set of strong demands than *The Post* concerning US political responsibility (see Table 3, Column Five). Many news tweets and linked news stories (both hard news and opinion stories) call for indictments and legal investigations of Bush administration officials and war criminals. These comprise a hard news story by collaborative journalism outlet, *Mashable*, citing UN Special Rapporteur Emmerson<sup>79</sup>; multiple tweets from *The Guardian's* diplomatic editor, Borger, again citing Emmerson; a *Reuters* blog post penned by Roth (HRW)<sup>80</sup>; an old blog post by Glenn Greenwald on the *Guardian's Comment is Free*<sup>81</sup>; a hard news story by investigative journalism outlet, *VICE NEWS*, citing Steven Hawkins, Amnesty International US executive director<sup>82</sup>; and tweets from news aggregator *Bipartisan Report*. For instance, accompanied by a group photograph of the Bush administration in the White House, captioned 'Torture. Yes we did', *Bipartisan Report* tweets, 'We deserve an indictment from Bush/Cheney criminals #TortureReport'.<sup>83</sup> Citizen journalist Abby Martin's tweet strongly demands that Bush-era Democrats who sanctioned torture be held accountable: 'Remember when Pelosi said "impeachment is off the table" for Bush? Democrats didn't want to be implicated and are just as guilty #TortureReport'; Finally, a Washington DC lawyer in *Frontline's* opinion story demands that politicians who want to ban torture should be held accountable for subsequent terrorist acts.<sup>84</sup>

Compared to political-intelligence elites, the press is also more assertive in strongly demanding that *countries complicit in the detention and interrogation program should accept political responsibility*. Pre-declassification day, *The Post* demands in an opinion piece<sup>85</sup> and a hard news story<sup>86</sup> that Poland accepts responsibility for its complicity (voicing the European Court of Human Rights and Open Society Justice Initiative) (see Table 3, Column Three). On declassification day, *The Post* in a hard news story voices NGO Reprieve calling for the UK to acknowledge its complicity (see Table 3, Column Four): 'The UK's behind the curve in terms of examining their behavior'.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, in news popular on *Twitter* on declassification day, an opinion story in *The Telegraph* by Open Society Justice Initiative's senior legal officer for national security and counterterrorism, calls for publicization of British and other foreign governments' complicity (see Table 3, Column Five): 'Torture report is a vital step for US, but what was Britain's role?'<sup>88</sup>

### ***AD3: ethics, morality and legality of how intelligence is gained/used***

#### ***PDS6: whether human/civil rights are compromised***

Before declassification day, the political-intelligence elite eschews strong accountability demands concerning compromised human or civil rights (see Table 3, Column One). While some, including Obama and Senators, note that torture and secret detention are illegal, no demands for action, reform or redress accompany such statements. As such, these statements remain weak accountability demands. It is not until declassification day that Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views strongly demands accountability – namely, that *torture should never happen again* (PDS6) (see Table 3, Column Two).<sup>89</sup> Unlike the political-intelligence elite, both weak and strong accountability demands concerning compromised human or civil rights surface in *The Post* both before and on declassification day, each time



apparent in hard news and opinion stories (see Table 3, Columns Three and Four). For instance, a pre-declassification day commentary strongly demands: 'We can also act to ensure torture never happens again'.<sup>90</sup> Less forceful than *The Post*, news popular on *Twitter* frequently air PDS6 in weak versions (stating that torture is illegal) but almost never in a strong version (see Table 3, Column Five). The sole example of a strong accountability demand is *Frontline* whose tweet links to its opinion story in 2005 with US lawyers and law academics, some of whom articulate the need to uphold the torture ban.<sup>91</sup>

### ***PDS7: whether principles of fairness/justice/morality are compromised***

Rather than dwelling on whether EITs constitute torture, or on torture's illegality and human or civil rights contravened, the political-intelligence elite often describe EITs simply as 'wrong' and 'un-American' – Feinstein's favoured adjectives throughout 2014. This weakly invokes PDS7 (pointing out that fairness, justice or morality have been compromised). The political-intelligence elite also strongly demand throughout 2014, that *EITs should never be used again*, being careful to use this euphemism rather than 'torture' (see Table 3, Column One), this strong demand continuing on declassification day (see Table 3, Column Two). This strong demand surfaces in *The Post*, albeit infrequently (see Table 3, Columns Three and Four). For instance, an opinion story cites Feinstein: 'declassifying the report would "ensure that an un-American, brutal program of detention and interrogation will never again be considered or permitted"'.<sup>92</sup> More commonly, however, it was weak demands that appear in *The Post*, across both hard news and opinion stories, again usually citing Feinstein. News popular on *Twitter* makes only weak accountability demands (see Table 3, Column Five).

## **Discussion**

### ***Utility of the benchmark***

In theorizing what constitutes effective press oversight of political-intelligence elites, I have developed three Accountability Demands operating through seven Public Dialogue Strategies, presented in weak forms (documenting problems, but refraining from calls for action) and strong forms (demanding action, reform or redress) (see Table 2). Directing attention not just to the intelligence (as Bean advocates),<sup>93</sup> but also to political responses and wider ethical, moral and legal questions provides a benchmark both for scholars assessing the press' ability to hold political-intelligence elites accountable; and for journalists seeking to make fuller accountability demands of political-intelligence elites.

### ***Using the benchmark to evaluate press oversight of political-intelligence elites***

#### ***Political-intelligence elite SPC***

Examining Obama administration SPC confirms and refines the strategy of secrecy identified in intelligence scholarship. Prior to declassification day, the US political-intelligence elite maintained an *official silence, occasionally punctured* by (a) political-intelligence elite-driven claims involving allegations and opinions, and (b) political-intelligence elite-driven authorized leaks of selected facts. As both modes of discourse fail to present supporting evidence, it is difficult to challenge political-intelligence elites' interpretations. Together, these modes of discourse generated weak accountability demands that malign the CIA's character (for exaggerating the program's intelligence yields [PDS1] and for evading official oversight [PDS4]), while limiting strong accountability demands to calls for transparency (PDS4) and for EITs to never happen again, being wrong and un-American (PDS7) (see Table 3, Column One). This sets the stage for partial declassification of the SIC Report to constitute the most important act in securing accountability while credibly setting-up the CIA to shoulder all blame for the detention and interrogation program.

While research documents a range of manipulative techniques involving intelligence agencies, this study adds to that list the technique of a *coordinated information glut of misdirection*. On declassification day, the Washington political-intelligence elite provides a coordinated information glut of declassified official documents. By declassifying two official documents that blame, and two that defend, the CIA,



this plays to the professional practice of objectivity in news outlets such as *The Post*, while encouraging journalists to focus on a narrowly circumscribed point of elite dissensus – namely, whether the CIA was to blame. Here, strong accountability demands in the political-intelligence elite's two most prominent official documents – SIC Report<sup>94</sup> and the CIA response<sup>95</sup> – focus on strengthening intelligence oversight via internal CIA reform, *misdirecting* attention from wider political responsibility or accountability, for instance, from policy-makers, the executive or lawyers responsible for the detention and interrogation program (see Table 3, Column Two).

### **Press oversight**

This SPC has variable success in influencing the press' accountability demands. *The Washington Post* is better able to hold the political-intelligence elite to account when SPC comprises an *occasionally punctured official silence* (the period prior to declassification day) than when SPC comprises a *coordinated information glut of misdirection* (declassification day). This is evident in two ways.

Firstly, prior to declassification day, *The Post* presents a wider range of strong accountability demands than offered by the US political-intelligence elite (see Table 3, Columns One and Three). These concerned PDS4, demanding (via opinion stories) that the medical community be held accountable for its role in CIA torture; and demanding (via hard news and opinion stories) greater CIA accountability in terms of oversight, apologies, reparations and prosecutions. They also concerned PDS5, demanding (via opinion stories) greater accountability from the Bush administration; and demanding (via hard news and opinion stories) that other countries accept political responsibility for their complicity.

Secondly, on declassification day, as SPC switches to a *coordinated information glut misdirecting* journalism towards the tightly circumscribed dissensus focussing on the CIA, *The Post* largely follows suit, as follows:

(a) *The Post* extensively presents weak accountability demands that reflect those of the political-intelligence elite in focusing on the CIA (observations that the CIA exaggerated intelligence (PDS1), that the CIA disagreed with this claim (PDS2), and that the CIA avoided and impeded Congressional oversight (PDS4)). This CIA focus is reinforced by occasional strong demands for greater CIA accountability – namely, for prosecution (PDS4).

(b) *The Post* presents a narrower range of strong accountability demands than it did in the preceding year (see Table 3, Columns Three and Four). Those that disappear are demands for greater accountability from the medical community (PDS4); and certain avenues of holding the CIA accountable (civilian oversight, apologies, reparations) (PDS4).

(c) *The Post* fails to present those strong accountability demands that are not endorsed by the entire political-intelligence elite. *The Post* does not present calls for policies to make torture less likely (PDS4), such as making waterboarding illegal or strengthening the DoJ's review process, where: (i) these calls are made only by part of the political-intelligence elite – namely, Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views; and (ii) which extend the focus from the CIA to other elements of the political administration, such as those who ordered waterboarding and the DoJ (See Table 3, Columns Two and Four).

Significantly, during times of SPC characterized by a *coordinated information glut of misdirection*, this pattern found in *The Post* (of extensively presenting weak accountability demands that reflect those of the political-intelligence elite, focussing attention on the CIA) is replicated by most of the news organizations popular on *Twitter* making accountability demands. This confounds the *chaos paradigm's*<sup>96</sup> expectations concerning unruly media environments. Given that industry reports show that *Twitter* (and *Facebook*) users across all demographics are increasingly using the social networks as news sources,<sup>97</sup> the fact that a *coordinated information glut of misdirection* is able to shape accountability demands in *Twitter's* top tweets – an open, globalized forum – is a significant finding.

Yet, this is not the full story. While news popular on *Twitter* focused on scapegoating the CIA, thereby succumbing to SPC, it simultaneously expressed a wider range of strong accountability demands. For instance, compared to *The Post* on declassification day, news popular on *Twitter* called for a wider range of specific *policies to make torture's recurrence less likely*; for *prosecution of Democrats* who agreed to the detention and interrogation program; and for *greater political accountability from politicians who want*

to ban EITs (see Table 3, Columns Four and Five). Notably, where these strong accountability demands appear in news popular on *Twitter*, they do so only in: (a) old hard news stories in US mainstream news outlets (*The Washington Post*); (b) in contemporary hard news, opinion stories and tweets in US non-mainstream news outlets, comprising citizen journalism (Abby Martin's tweet), collaborative journalism (*Mashable's* hard news), investigative journalism (*Frontline's* opinion story; *VICE News's* hard news), and a news aggregator (*Bipartisan Report's* tweets); and (c) opinion stories in international mainstream news outlets, comprising an international news agency (*Reuters's* blog) and British press (*Guardian's* tweets and blog, *The Telegraph's* tweet and opinion stories). Significantly, these strong accountability demands are totally absent from contemporary US mainstream news popular on *Twitter*. This indicates the importance of press diversity and of international press engagement if strong accountability demands concerning the US political-intelligence elite hegemon are to be prominently circulated on social media.

To conclude, where political-intelligence elite dissensus is managed by SPC comprising an *occasionally punctured official silence*, the press (exemplified by *The Post*) goes beyond the Washington political-intelligence elite's limited accountability demands, and so does a more robust job of demanding real world change: a *watchdog* role. Where political-intelligence elite dissensus is managed by SPC comprising a *coordinated information glut of misdirection* designed to bring closure to the issue, so the press does a less robust job of calling for real world change (indicated by the contraction in strong accountability demands expressed in *The Post*, and by the fact that all news forms popular on *Twitter* predominantly focused on the CIA as the scapegoat). This shows the extensive reach of *misdirection*, as a wide range of news outlets (from *The Post* to news popular on *Twitter*) accept Obama administration political-intelligence elite *editorial subsidies*<sup>98</sup> thereby *indexing*<sup>99</sup> the Washington political-intelligence elite consensus about what should be openly problematized. Indeed, during a *coordinated information glut of misdirection*, the press' watchdog role (in making strong accountability demands) is maintained on *Twitter* only by old US mainstream press and current US alternative and international mainstream press stories, but not by current mainstream US press stories.

### **Using the benchmark to facilitate better press oversight of political-intelligence elites**

Given that this case study presents a best-case scenario for press oversight of political-intelligence elites during journalism-as-usual, but that press oversight is found lacking when SPC comprises a *coordinated information glut of misdirection*, what concrete steps could the press have taken to generate better accountability?

In the torture-intelligence issue, the press could have used the benchmark as follows. Concerning Accountability Demand 1, editors could ask themselves if it is it enough to convey the lack of valuable intelligence that EITs delivered (weak accountability demands, merely pointing out problems). It was undoubtedly important to document problems with the intelligence, given long-standing, unsubstantiated counter-claims made by supporters of the detention and interrogation program; and given that a small majority of Americans thought that the interrogation methods were justified.<sup>100</sup> However, the press' failure to also make strong accountability demands means that nobody demanded that processes be implemented to prevent exaggeration of intelligence yields recurring in other policies; that in future, lack of intelligence community consensus should be reflected in resulting policy decisions; or that political-intelligence elites should make clear, when suggesting untested intelligence-gathering techniques (like EITs), that they have no way of assessing their effectiveness. Concerning Accountability Demand 2, rather than focusing on the detention and interrogation program as being entirely the CIA's fault, as portrayed by Obama's political-intelligence elite, more of the press could have demanded that responsibility be taken by the Bush administration that secretly ordered the program; or by its lawyers that secretly legalized it to avoid CIA operatives from retrospectively being charged with torture. On Accountability Demand 3, editors could reflect upon whether it is enough to call for EITs to be shelved on the basis that they were un-American and wrong. More journalists could have reminded the public

that EITs constituted torture: a wilful contravention of international human rights, and a charge that demands that state agents are held accountable.

While I have focused on a single case study, the benchmark of accountability demands should be useful in any assessment of the press' ability to hold political-intelligence elites accountable during journalism-as-usual. For instance, in July 2016, the Chilcot Inquiry severely criticized how the British government took Britain to war in Iraq in 2003, presenting evidence of deceptive practices in the Blair administration's public manipulation of intelligence about the threat posed by Iraq's WMD capabilities and intent,<sup>101</sup> but avoiding 'characterizing this as deception or questioning Blair's good faith'.<sup>102</sup> In this case, the benchmark of accountability demands could be used as follows. Concerning AD1 on the accuracy and value of intelligence, the Chilcot report presents a letter written by Tony Blair to Bush on 28 July 2002 in which Blair states that it would be 'hugely persuasive' in building a coalition for invading Iraq to present evidence that Saddam Hussein was a threat. Blair suggests that, 'we recapitulate all the WMD evidence; add his attempts to secure nuclear capability; and, as seems possible, add on Al Qaida link'<sup>103</sup>; but does the press demand to know the strength of intelligence analysis underlying all these evidentiary elements? Concerning AD2 on political responses to intelligence controversies, Blair's immediate response to the Chilcot report was to take responsibility for his bad decisions concerning the war while denying that he ever lied about what he thought the severity of threat posed by Iraq to be<sup>104</sup>; but does the press accept this, or does it demand that the Blair administration should also take responsibility for deception over the threat's severity? Concerning AD3 on the ethical, moral and legal questions of how intelligence is used, the Chilcot report presents evidence that Blair had secretly decided that regime change in Iraq was necessary regardless of what the intelligence showed about the severity of Iraq's WMD threat<sup>105</sup>; but does the press demand to know what Blair's ethical, moral or legal basis was for intelligence to be so ignored? In all of this, does the press make any strong demands for subsequent action, reform or redress concerning the Blair administration's public manipulation of intelligence to justify going to war, or is Blair's apology for making bad decisions in good faith accepted as sufficient?

While absence or orchestration (via SPC) of critical political voices may mean that hard news stories eschew making certain accountability demands (for instance, due to practices of *indexing*), having the benchmark to hand as a critical mental framework when constructing their stories may make journalists less susceptible to SPC and *editorial subsidies*. Furthermore, there is ample opportunity in opinion stories, and in investigative and campaigning journalism, for such accountability demands to be made. The accountability demands themselves are framed at a fairly general level, and do not assume in-depth knowledge of secret policies. Rather, they provide an inroad for this knowledge to be publicly built up. It is only through continuously asking such critical questions that the press can educate themselves and the public about political-intelligence elite activity, thereby creating a stronger epistemic position from which to better hold political-intelligence elites accountable.

## Notes

1. Johnson, *National Security Intelligence*, 160–1.
2. Schudson, *Why Democracies Need*, ch.2.
3. Arnold, *Congress*, 1.
4. Bennett, "Press-state"; Bennett et al., *When*, 49, 132.
5. Mannheim, *Influence*, ix; Mannheim, *All*, 7.
6. McNair, *Cultural*, Preface.
7. Eshbaugh-Soha, "Presidential", 1.
8. Bivens, "Internet", 123–6.
9. Jackson and Moloney, "Inside", 2.
10. *Ibid.*, 7.
11. Johnson, "Sketches", 44.
12. Hastedt, "Public", 427.
13. Hillebrand, "Role", 690.
14. Chung, "Pictures", 1136.
15. de Vries, "1967 Central", 1080.

16. Moran, "Intelligence", 685–6.
17. Matei, "Media's", 91.
18. Magen and Gilboa, "Communicating", 497–8; Matei, "Media's", 94, 97.
19. Kaufmann, "Threat", 7–8; Magen, "Mossad", 156.
20. Hastedt, "Public", 421.
21. Magen and Gilboa, "Communicating", 497.
22. Johnson, "Sketches", 50.
23. Johnson, "Intelligence", 1.
24. Hillebrand, "Role", 705.
25. Bean, "Rhetorical", 513.
26. Ibid.
27. SIC Report, "Executive Summary".
28. Open Society Justice Initiative, "Globalizing"; Blakely and Raphael, "British", 1.
29. Bennett, "Press-state"; Bennett et al., *When*, 49, 132.
30. McNair, *Cultural*, Preface.
31. Miles et al., *Qualitative*, 31–3.
32. SIC Report, "Executive Summary".
33. Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views, "Committee Study".
34. Senate Intelligence Committee Minority Views, "Committee Study".
35. CIA, "Memorandum".
36. de Vries, "1967 Central", 1077.
37. Bakir, *Torture*, 125–31, 146–7, 152.
38. Barthel and Shearer, "How".
39. Duggan, "Demographics", 3; Beevolve, "An Exhaustive", 1.
40. Miles et al., *Qualitative*.
41. Johnson, "Sketches", 45–6.
42. Kaufmann, "Threat", 8–9.
43. Bakir, *Torture*, 61–90.
44. Bean, "Rhetorical", 513.
45. Johnson, "Sketches", 47.
46. Schlosberg, "End", 237.
47. Bakir, *Torture*, 134–5, 183, 206.
48. Ibid., 130–40.
49. Rejali, *Torture*, 43.
50. Bakir, *Torture*, 62–89.
51. Miller et al., "Feinstein".
52. Rodriguez Jr., "I Ran".
53. Hastedt, "Public", 427.
54. Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views, "Committee Study".
55. CIA, "Memorandum".
56. Senate Intelligence Committee Minority Views, "Committee Study".
57. Rizzo, "The Legal", 32.
58. Jackson and Moloney, "Inside", 7.
59. *The Washington Post*, "The Senate".
60. SIC Report, "Executive Summary", 2, 8, 13.
61. Miller, "CIA Director".
62. Eilperin, "CIA".
63. Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views, "Committee Study", 14.
64. Editorial Board, "The Horrors".
65. Miller, "CIA wants".
66. Mufson, "Six".
67. Linzer and Tate, "New".
68. Robinson, "Opinion: The Senate's".
69. Cole, "Torture".
70. Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views, "Committee Study", 2, 12.
71. CIA, "Memorandum", 16–18.
72. Feinstein, "Foreword", 4.
73. Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views, "Committee Study", 26–27.
74. Marcus, "Exposing".
75. Roth, "The Great".
76. Editorial Board, "The CIA".

77. Witte, "CIA".
78. Roth, "Opinion: Human".
79. *Mashable*, "CIA".
80. Roth, "The Great".
81. Greenwald, "Obama's".
82. Leopold, "Senate".
83. *Mashable*, "CIA".
84. *Frontline*, "The Torture".
85. Cole, "Torture".
86. Goldman, "European".
87. Witte, "CIA".
88. Singh, "Torture".
89. Additional Senate Intelligence Committee Views, "Committee Study", 17.
90. Stief, "CIA".
91. *Frontline*, "The Torture".
92. Blake and O'Keefe, "Hayden".
93. Bean, "Rhetorical", 513.
94. SIC Report, "Executive Summary".
95. CIA, "Memorandum".
96. McNair, *Cultural*, Preface.
97. In 2015, 63% of both *Twitter* and *Facebook* users said they get news from social networks; in 2013, this figure was 52% (*Twitter*) and 47% (*Facebook*) (Lichterman, "New").
98. Jackson and Moloney, "Inside", 7.
99. Bennett, "Press-state"; Bennett et al., *When*, 49, 132.
100. Pew Research Center, "About".
101. Chilcot, "The Iraq", Section 4.3, 290.
102. Robinson, "The Chilcot".
103. Blair, "Letter: Note", 4.
104. Blair, "In Full".
105. Blair, "Letter: Note", 1.

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