Escaping from American Intelligence: Culture, Ethnocentrism and the Anglosphere

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Abstract

The United States and its closest allies now spend over $100 billion a year on intelligence. Ten years after 9/11, the intelligence machine is certainly bigger - but not necessarily better. American intelligence continues to privilege old-fashioned strategic analysis for policy-makers and exhibits a technocratic approach to asymmetric security threats, epitomized by the accelerated use of drone strikes and data-mining. Distinguished commentators have focused on the panacea of top-down reform, while politicians and practitioners have created entire new agencies. However these prescriptions for change remain conceptually limited because of underlying Anglo-Saxon presumptions about what intelligence is. Although intelligence is a global business, when we talk about intelligence we tend to use a vocabulary that is narrowly derived from the experiences of America and its English-speaking nebula. This article deploys the notion of strategic culture to explain this why this is. It then explores the cases of China and South Africa to suggest how we might begin to rethink our intelligence communities and their tasks. It argues that the road to success is about individuals, attitudes and cultures rather than organizations. Future improvement will depend on our ability to recognize the changing nature of the security environment and to practice the art of 'intelligence among the people'. While the United States remains the world's most significant military power, its strategic culture is unsuited to this new terrain and arguably other countries do these things rather better.

American intelligence continues to privilege strategic analysis for policy-makers. The core of the American intelligence system remains the National Intelligence Estimate process, the legacy of Sherman Kent, the "Founding Father" of the analytical profession.[1] In support of this process, vast technical resources are deployed in collecting secret material that is not available from open sources or from diplomatic reporting, and then subjecting it to elaborate analysis. This is symbolised by the veneration of the President's Daily Brief, a top level intelligence summary that is described by Bob Woodward as 'the most restricted document in Washington'.[2] The White House has characterised the President's Daily Brief as 'the most highly sensitized classified document in the government'. George Tenet, one of the longest serving Directors of Central Intelligence, has insisted that President's Daily Briefs from his period of office were so important that none would ever be declassified and released for public inspection.[3]

Yet veneration is often mixed with exasperation. In the last decade, American intelligence is widely perceived to have under-performed. The headline examples are the 9/11 attacks and Iraqi WMD – but we might also include indifferent intelligence support for the military effort in Afghanistan.[4] Retired practitioners and seasoned academic commentators alike believe the intelligence machine to be in trouble. Ardent pessimists, such as Richard Betts have counselled that policy-makers should simply revise their expectation downwards, attributing current disappointments to unrealistic expectations.[5] Others, including Amy Zegart, believe meaningful reform is possible and have attributed recent difficulties to a kind of institutional arteriosclerosis that obstructs substantial change. Gregory Treverton also favours structural change but focuses on the domestic sphere. Robert Jervis, the doyen of intelligence experts, argues that if analysts had only deployed good political science methods they would at least have avoided some of their more lamentable recent errors.[6]

All of these distinguished commentators are pathologists of the strategic intelligence process. As yet we have failed to step back to ask the wider questions about America's intelligence culture. Is the continued focus on strategic intelligence for policy appropriate for the twenty-first century? A glance at our daily newspapers should quickly disabuse us of the notion that intelligence officers remain a special variant of academic researcher. The agencies know this instinctively because of the changing nature of their work-a-day experience, but the intellectual frame of reference

that we operate in remains one attuned to the support to high policy. Certainly there is still a place for strategic intelligence analysis. However, even here, new security challengers predominate, including migration, pandemics, energy security and global financial instability. Some are asking whether think tanks, private sector intelligence providers, or academics would not do this work just as well at a lower cost.

In the real world, four modes of intelligence now predominate. None of them are about strategic intelligence. The lead activity is a kind of globalised counter-terrorism enforcement operation which involves elaborate co-operation with new partners – mostly the internal security agencies of small states in the global south. This includes the vast effort being poured into security sector reform to boost the capabilities of friends and allies overseas. This activity is largely operational and has called into question both the traditional intelligence cycle and the division between foreign and domestic intelligence activity. Not far behind is intelligence support on the ground for major wars in Iraq, Afghanistan - and more recently Somalia and Libya - which has increasingly seen national intelligence assets deployed to support tactical activities. A third area is covert action and disruption, something which the UK's Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) politely calls 'event-shaping'. Finally, we have a resurgence of counter-intelligence against state-based opponents, both on the street and in cyber-space. Yet our current notions of intelligence are not attuned to these sorts of activities and their discussion induces at best a degree of confusion and at worst a degree of moral panic. Arguably, other states handle these things more elegantly.[7]

Prisoners of the Anglosphere

There is now a sizeable literature about intelligence for policy. While only a small proportion of this might be said to lie in the realm of high theory, much of it is quite conceptual, including the extensive work around the vexed idea of "intelligence failure". The majority of this conceptual writing is strongly focused on the United States and its English-speaking allies. While this work is sophisticated, it has been produced by a community of Anglo-Saxon scholars who often presume that they are describing intelligence universally. Indeed, much academic writing on intelligence tends to view the subject as an adjunct to American foreign policy making, locating the focus of the debate firmly within Washington's Beltway.[8]

The predominance of American approaches in international security more generally has been widely discussed, and in some quarters much lamented. In reality, this state of affairs is hardly surprising, given the genealogical inter-play of writing on international security with the complexities of nuclear strategy during the first three decades of the Cold War.[9] By contrast, the predominance of the American paradigm in the field of intelligence is more of a puzzle, given that most states in the world have a substantial tradition of intelligence and internal security organisations, or else clandestine activity. Even Iceland, with a population of just 316,000, has an intelligence service. Moreover, many non-state entities, including banks, oil companies and terrorist organisations have long maintained significant intelligence capabilities. Given that intelligence entities are so ubiquitous, the conundrum is why the conceptualisation of intelligence remains narrowly derived from the experiences of the United States, the UK and some their closest collaborators – often referred to as the "UKUSA" partners or the "Five Eyes" alliance.[10] In this essay we ask, what are the causes and consequences of this persistent Anglo-Saxon myopia? Moreover, would a more global approach allow us to escape Anglosphere and to realise the true potential of intelligence?

Michael Herman was the first to reflect on "Anglo-Saxon" intelligence. In a landmark study facilitated by Chatham House, he noted that only Anglo-Saxon countries have used the term "intelligence community" and so the very idea is synonymous with a Western outlook. Herman has observed that there is a particular mentality that accompanies Anglo-Saxon approaches, including the development of a national estimative process and the concept of conducting strategic assessments of countries as a whole.[11] Thus the English-speaking world shares 'common dynamics and problems' and while there are clear differences between London and Washington, nevertheless the production of highly refined intelligence briefs for policy is paramount. In both communities 'word-smithing ... ranks high in the intelligence culture'.[12]

This essay contends that we are increasingly constrained by an ethnocentric conception of intelligence that is predominantly Anglo-Saxon.[13] Moreover, this concept bears little relationship to mainstream intelligence activity around the world. Several deleterious consequences flow from this. First, in an era when intelligence is changing fast and unprecedented demands have been made on practitioners, we have an impoverished view of what new forms our own intelligence might take. Second,

we have not fully appreciated the full consequences of a shift of intelligence focus from things to people. We might call this new challenge 'intelligence among the people' - an extension of the term used by General Sir Rupert Smith to denote a new paradigm in which 'all the people, anywhere - are the battlefield'. People are the 'objectives to be won' - yet we remain largely technocratic and so we are behind the curve in the people business.[14] Third, over the last decade, Anglo-Saxon countries have undertaken unprecedented effort to encourage security sector reform by supporting expansion and change amongst the intelligence and security services of the the global south. Yet the prevailing tendency to export advice based largely on our own models may be mistaken.[15]

At first glance, assertions about an intelligence monoculture may seem counter-intuitive. The literature produced by American scholars and their Anglo-Saxon nebula is certainly rich with complex debates focused on the cause of intelligence failure.[16] Scholars have argued over the relative merits of human intelligence, technical intelligence and open sources. They have contrasted problems related to perception and cognition with those arising from organizational weaknesses. They have considered the extent to which intelligence should be receptive to the whims of the decision-maker, or else cloistered to achieve academic objectivity. Yet perceived at a distance, these debates follow a familiar pattern. They are largely about improving strategic machinery for foreign intelligence, since the very concept of domestic security intelligence is intrinsically problematic in the United States. Efforts to improve intelligence tend to focus on better training for analysts or else organizational tinkering. Organizational reform usually means getting even bigger. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence, created in April 2005 to co-ordinate the bloated US system, has itself amassed a staff of 4,000.[17]

The American intelligence behemoth now spends close to $80 billion a year.[18] Reportedly, some 854,000 people hold top-secret clearances allowing them to see high-grade intelligence product, many of them provided by some 2000 private companies. No-one is really sure how much this sprawling enterprise costs or how many people it employs.[19] Certainly the benefits derived from intelligence do not appear to be commensurate with the scale of American spending in this area. Arguably we need to ask different questions - and above all - more comparative questions about the nature of intelligence and what it can deliver.[20] What is French intelligence culture, and why has Paris suffered no large-scale terrorist attacks since

the mid-1990s, despite its large ethnic populations drawn from troubled regions in the Middle East and North Africa? And why have the British and the Spanish faired relatively poorly by comparison on counter-terrorism intelligence? What is the nature of Chinese intelligence culture and does this help us to explain why China seems has proved adept at aggressive intelligence collection in cyber-space? Why are the small intelligence services of countries like Indonesia, Jordan and South Africa highly-regarded amongst professionals and how do they conceptualize their activity?

The idea of 'intelligence amongst the people' is uncomfortable. One of the reasons that out-dated notions of intelligence persist in the West is because they seem hygienic. For the Anglosphere, with its satellites hovering two hundred miles or so above the earth, the ideal forms of intelligence are clean, uncontroversial and focused on foreigners. Such dispositions provoke few conflicts between national security imperatives and core values. Meanwhile, the dystopian obverse has long been the 'counter-intelligence state', typified by the countries such as the former East Germany. Indeed, the Russian tradition has been to celebrate the "Chekists" as guardians of the people against both internal and external enemies.[21] This alternative security universe is now all but extinct, but many former Soviet states, including Putin's Russia, have witnessed the emergence of a more complex state-private kleptocracy with security agencies at their centre.[22]

More broadly, across many of the countries of the Middle East, Africa Asia and Latin America, a case could be made for a general typology of intelligence that is more focused on regime security and upon covert action. Perhaps this post-colonial conception of intelligence, focused on what we might call the 'globalised world of domestic security', is the emerging model. Moreover, the inconvenient truth is that the intelligence services of semi-authoritarian countries are precisely those that the West has been most dependent upon for co-operation against terrorism over the last ten years. Either way, with the advent of the "Arab Spring" these are issues to which we will have to devote more attention. How we conceive of security sector reform in this context is a fundamental challenge.

Comparing diverse intelligence cultures in search of new models is likely to be difficult. While we have basic descriptive accounts of the more obscure national intelligence services, these are often little more than verbal wiring diagrams. We lack meaningful analysis of the majority of the world's intelligence communities or their underlying conceptions of what intelligence means.[23] Above all we lack alternative

models of how intelligence might relate to individual human being and notions of community. This essay seeks to take a first step by using the concept of strategic culture to consider why an outdated idea of intelligence developed by the United States and its UKUSA partners remains pre-eminent. Our explanation also draws on the notion of ethnocentrism first outlined by Jack Snyder and later developed by Ken Booth. It explores in outline the possible sources of a reconceptualization of intelligence, including the approaches adopted by China and South Africa.[24]

Intelligence culture and ethnocentrism

Culture is rightly viewed as a slippery concept. Nevertheless, the notion of strategic cultures commands wide consensus, and if states have strategic cultures then they most likely also have related intelligence cultures.[25] Some of the first explorations of strategic culture were offered by Jack Snyder in 1977. In attempting to understand how Moscow thought about nuclear weapons, he suggested that we might consider how the total sum of ideas, conditioned behaviours and historic patterns of thought affected a national strategic community. The implication was that a nation's sense of its own politico-military experience over time was important. For Snyder, strategic culture also conjured up the dangers of ethnocentrism - a feeling of 'group centrality and superiority' that contributed to a lack of intellectual challenge and which could potentially result in imprisonment inside ones own culture.[26] Despite these intriguing ruminations, Snyder eventually came to cast doubt on the value of cultural explanations, insisting that cause and effect were so distant that it would be difficult for political scientists to demonstrate any linkage in a rigorous way.[27]

Ken Booth was less anxious about deploying strategic culture.[28] In a classic monograph penned in 1979, he related both strategic culture and ethnocentrism to the problem of 'groupthink' with its subliminal tendencies towards bureaucratic consensus. He argued that while ethnocentrism does not automatically lead to groupthink, it increases the likelihood that groupthink will occur, with the desire for consensus overriding realistic appraisals of alternative ideas and courses of action.[29] Booth asserts that ethnocentrism and groupthink work in tandem to produce stereotyped images of the 'outgroups' and a tendency for collective judgements to be self-confirming and therefore riskier than would otherwise be the case.[30] Intriguingly,

although much of what Booth argued had an obvious importance for intelligence analysis and strategic assessments, the thrust of the debate over culture in international security has ignored intelligence and has instead focused on action and reaction cycles. Typically, Colin Gray describes strategic culture as modes of thought that relate to *behavioural patterns* with respect to the use of force which derive from national historical experience.[31] Accordingly, these notions have become caught up in a complex methodological debate about how far it is possible to use the concept in the context of strategy.[32]

Booth was actually deploying the notion of intelligence and culture in two senses, one of them specific and one of them more general. In the specific sense, some of these issues about the impact of culture upon perception had already been raised by figures such as Robert Jervis.[33] Indeed, as early as 1973, Antony Marc Lewis, who had run a foreign area studies programme within the CIA, argued that internal Vietnam War case-studies showed conclusively that 'hidden cultural assumptions crippled the CIA's ability to perform its advisory functions'.[34] Over the next decade, the revered area studies specialist Adda Bozeman became an evangelist for 'cultural understanding' as a prerequisite for both improved net assessment and for strategic thinking.[35] Bozeman also argued that shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behaviour, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives and historical traditions influence collective decisions in the security realm.[36] Since then, numerous in-service training programmes for intelligence analysts have sought to address the problem of cultural confinement.[37] The importance of cultural awareness and "tribal" intelligence has also been periodically rediscovered in the context of counter-insurgency, although academic anthropologists are understandably unnerved by the eager embrace of the intelligence community.[38]

Importantly, Booth was also using the idea of strategic culture in a more general sense to capture the idea of a world-view. What we might call a fundamental cognitive orientation. Culture constrains how we think our intelligence institutions relate to a globalising world, what tasks they should perform and what we think intelligence might be.[39] In this wider sense, we are all potentially prisoners of the ethnocentric dungeon. Moreover, while there is an emerging consensus that we need to take account of culture in the study of national security policy, it has not yet impacted upon realm of national intelligence communities.[40] Conversely, we might ask, can we Philip Davies is one of the few academics who have deployed the idea of

culture in the context of intelligence, comparing the British and American analytic systems.[41] Arguably, the idea of culture has the potential to take us further in the realm of intelligence, explaining the role of institutionalised norms and values that countries associate with their intelligence communities, together with their place in the national psyche.[42] Escaping the cycle of pessimism, can we perhaps become conscious and strategic users of culture to achieve our intelligence goals.[43]

The predominance of American intelligence culture

Why do we think American when we think about intelligence? The reasons are potentially complex and have much to do with military technology. Certainly, no country has harnessed the power of information on the battlefield more successfully as the United States. Over more than a century, the challenge of increasing strategic mobility and the attendant possibility of surprise attack has resulted in a demand by states for elaborate warning systems. During the Second World War, the collection of intelligence on an industrial scale through radio monitoring and code-breaking at locations such as Bletchley Park and Arlington, was a typically technocratic Anglo-American response to the challenges presented by new modes of warfare.[44] The advent of nuclear weapons only served to accentuate concerns about strategic surprise. Moreover, the arrival of ballistic missiles and satellites in the late 1950s helped to conjure up a complex world in which intelligence, targeting and decision-making were inter-linked as never before. More recently, the close association of battlefield surveillance with the idea of a Revolution in Military Affairs has further underscored the nexus between intelligence, information dominance and military power. Partly because the Pentagon ‘owns’ a large share of the American intelligence community, intelligence and strategic weaponry have become closely intertwined as part of America’s rise to globalism.[45]

Paradoxically, American ideas have also flourished because of Washington’s relative innocence in the realm of intelligence. At the outset of the Second World War, Washington lacked a central intelligence machine for producing national assessments. It was forced to raid the East Coast universities for intellectual talent to

create analytical centres developed by the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA. These academics then returned to their university classrooms and took the idea of centralised intelligence in their knapsacks. The result was a precocious interaction between intelligence agencies and universities, typified by Sherman Kent, diplomatic historian and also the bookish creator of the National Intelligence Estimates system.[46] As early as 1958, the United States could claim four sophisticated texts on national intelligence estimates, while the rest of the world had produced almost nothing.[47]

No less important to America's dominance of the idea of intelligence has been a remarkably open attitude to secrecy. Alongside a vigorous intellectual interest in intelligence, we have also witnessed a unique American public debate about the place of intelligence in American foreign policy, stretching over more than half a century. All this reflected the First Amendment of the US Constitution which, despite significant caveats, has facilitated a uniquely open approach to the discussion of intelligence in the American broadsheet press. This applies not only to intelligence, but other security subjects which many states regard as taboo. It remains unusual unheard of for US journalists to face legal action for writing about intelligence and it remains easier for most foreign journalists to cover US intelligence than to discuss the secret agencies of their own country.[48]

The American public debate over intelligence has been intensified by covert action. Although covert action has historically been a small part of the CIA's portfolio, nevertheless episodes such as the Bay of Pigs, Iran-Contra, or more recently the killing of Osama bin Laden, have become entwined with mainstream debates about the nature of American foreign policy. Covert action contains within it a unique ability to evoke wider philosophical tensions between interventionism and isolationism, between presidential foreign policy and congressional control – even between national security imperatives and America's core values. Paradoxically, for the United States, secret activity is often a public symbol of prevailing attitudes to American involvement in world affairs. Typically, when Ronald Reagan was campaigning for office, one of his high-profile election promises was to 'unleash the CIA'.[49] In short, the very idea of an intelligence agency, and of the CIA in particular, has gradually become symbolic of wider issues in American national security in a way that is quite different from other countries.[50]

The American intelligence community has responded to revelation with counter-revelation. Acerbic public criticism of intelligence – and of covert action in particular - has prompted a forward strategy of public engagement by the American authorities in an effort to explain their activities. As early as the 1980s, the CIA began to promote 'Intelligence Studies' as an academic discipline by sponsoring conferences, promoting university teaching of the subject and declassifying documents for scholars as part of deliberate effort to aid public understanding. The CIA now hosts a respected Center for the Study of Intelligence and publishes a journal that scholars are pleased to be published in. Remarkably, the CIA has made some four million declassified documents available on an open access database at the US National Archives. As a result of this relative openness to intellectual inquiry, scholars in other countries have often chosen to study the US intelligence community in preference to their own. Accordingly, the intelligence community of United States, together with its immediate allies, boasts a public profile and an accompanying literature that has no parallel in terms of its scale or depth.[51]

The effort made by the American intelligence community in the realm of public understanding can only be welcomed and has helped to spawn an academic industry with its own conferences, journals and degree courses. The UK intelligence community has begun to follow in its wake. Yet this also has its downside. It has also had the unintentional effect of promoting a monoculture in which – just as Snyder and Booth suggested – risks an absence of intellectual challenge. Arguably, in a globalised world, in which we see ever more diverse and exotic combinations and co-operation between intelligence partners, the prevailing Anglo-Saxon ideas of intelligence stand in some need of revision. Current conceptions of intelligence – often focused on an out-dated strategic intelligence cycle - are restricting our understanding of the complex global intelligence ecosystem which is now emerging.[52]

Intelligence as Information: China and "Netspionage"

Is it possible to step outside the Anglosphere and to think about doing things differently? Precisely because culturally derived notions of intelligence are ambient, they are likely to be hard to challenge. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile asking how

other major powers conceive of their intelligence effort, how does this relate to their national strategies and what do they prioritise? China is the epitome of a rising power, yet for Beijing, the strategic intelligence process to support policy-making is remarkably unimportant, while intelligence to implement policy means rather more. Mao Tse-tung was always sceptical about the value of intelligence and explained this to Kissinger: ‘ ...when your President issues and order, and you want information on certain question, then the intelligence reports come as so many snowflakes. We also have our intelligence service and it’s the same with them. They do not work well.’[53] Mao’s observations reflect the fact that the senior Chinese decision-makers tend to emphasise the strategic intentions of their opponents, and spend less time attempting to measure their capabilities or doing net assessments. Their self-conception is largely defensive and focuses on the perceived thwarting of China’s legitimate ambitions. This is a long term trend in Chinese foreign policy, currently reflected in the way that foreign policy think tanks have come to play an increasing role not only in policy making but also in intelligence analysis.[54]

The boundary between centres of intelligence analysis and think tanks in China is notably thin. The core of China’s national security community in Beijing is focused upon by think tanks and other research entities with strong links to state institutions. PLA2, the military intelligence wing of the Chinese Army works closely with a group of research bodies that analyse intelligence, undertake open source research and exchange and conduct outward facing roles. A good example is the China Institute for International Strategic Studies which is headed by the senior military officers who also overseas military intelligence. The rapid expansion and acceleration of Beijing’s national security think tanks, and their ability to interact freely with overseas scholars is fascinating. On the one hand, these entities are genuinely fulfilling the role of think tanks, yet on the other hands their ties to the Chinese intelligence community are substantial. They appear to embody the advantages of both secrecy and yet relative openness.[55]

This in turn reflects the fact that, traditionally, the Chinese vocabulary has not distinguished between “intelligence” and “information”. Accordingly, their agencies operate differently from other espionage organizations by collecting large quantities of open material. They employ businessmen, academics or students who will be in their host country only a short time, rather than spending years cultivating a few high-level foreign sources or double agents. Where long-term espionage *is* conducted, the

agents are often ethnically Chinese but well integrated into the society of the target country. The culture of Chinese espionage also reflects “Guanxi” the custom of employing personal networks for influence. Western counter-intelligence agencies find the traditional Chinese “human wave” technique of collection bewildering. This is not so much because of the numbers of people involved, but more because their activities focus on the painstaking collection of many pieces of “grey” technical literature which may be sensitive rather than secret. This challenges Western conceptions of what spying is. We know from recent defectors that some Chinese embassies abroad were discouraged from engaging in what we might call classical espionage operations. At the same time there was an increasing distinction made between espionage *per se* and what was politely described as "general research”.[56] Other defectors have suggested that China’s informant network in Australia numbered approximately 1,000 people.[57]

The conception of intelligence as information offers China notable advantages in an era characterised by the expansion of cyber-operations. The growth of Chinese “netspionage” is a good example of the widespread effort to acquire foreign military technology and scientific information. In order to fulfil its long-term military development goals, China plunders Western technology using a network of scientific, academic, and business contacts together with a sizeable programme of cyber-hacking.[58] In 2011, leaked State Department cables appear to have confirmed what some experts have been muttering about for several years, that China is now ahead of the United States in the shadowy world of backdoor computer access. It appears that China has been able to access terabytes of secret information – ranging from passwords for a State Department database to designs for nuclear weapons.[59] This computer-based espionage is especially interesting since much of this appears to be carried out by networks of private hackers on behalf of, or alongside, government ministries. The ability of Chinese espionage to use privateers and to absorb the product seamlessly into its own industrial process reflects China’s national economic complexion with its mixture of free-market and state corporatism.[60]

China’s cyber-espionage programme certainly has a strategic purpose, but it is not “strategic intelligence” as we understand it. In a recent hearing of the House Judiciary Committee, FBI Director, Robert S. Mueller, stated that: ‘China is stealing our secrets in an effort to leap ahead in terms of its military technology, but also the economic capability of China. It is substantial threat.’ By mining vast amounts of

public data and accumulating information a drop at a time, even the West's secret programmes can be mapped in outline. The Chinese intelligence philosophy that underpins this approach emphasises that: 'There are no walls that completely block the wind'.[61] Once access to computer networks has been gained, the hackers often implant software that logs keystrokes or else control programs which will permit access to further information. One of the most recent waves of computer attacks to be analysed is known as "Ghost Net" and has included the recording of sound and video over embedded microphones and webcams. "Ghost Net" successfully accessed some State Department computers. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of Chinese intelligence remains the acceleration of economic growth, rather than classical inter-state espionage. Their intelligence targets are focused on a long term-goal pursued over decades and is designed to exploit fundamental weaknesses in the security infrastructures of the West. [62]

Meanwhile, China attaches a high priority to its own information security - indeed its cryptographic security is famously difficult to penetrate. Beijing has poured resources into counter-intelligence – a field which the West has sorely neglected since 2001. China probably spends more money on internal security than external security and while some would see this as oppressive, the Chinese would argue that this is less provocative than a pre-emptive strategy that seeks to address threats beyond her borders.[63] It is also worth noting that the conception of human security in Chinese translates not as "ren de anquan" or the security of the individual human being, but as "renlei de anquan" or the security of humankind. The collective idea of the group interest being more important than the individual is significant, not least because it is suggestive of China's recent history as a constitutive part of its strategic culture.[64]

China's own internal security policy is changing. Over several decades it has moved from a strategy of widespread security prosecutions to one of deterrence, with less than 0.5% of court actions now focusing upon counter-revolutionary activity.[65] This is not to suggest that the West should emulate China and begin a campaign of wholesale computer espionage against commercial targets or praetorian security policing. However, China's radically different definition of what its security priorities are, what intelligence is and how it might benefit national purpose is worth reflecting upon. Moreover, China's mixture of state and private activity is beguiling. Despite the predominance of state political control, its ability to harness private providers of

intelligence and its ability to disseminate the product to corporate users is impressive.[66]

Intelligence and Security Sector Reform: South Africa

The private laments of CIA officers for the decline of the "Mukhabarat", the feared security services of the Middle East, sit uncomfortably with the West's public rhetoric concerning democratisation and security sector reform.[67] Approaches to co-operation with such services oscillate between two extremes. First, the utopian view that engagement with such services is beyond the pale and that Western intelligence co-operation should be limited to the Anglosphere, together with the agencies of a few other hygienic countries such as Switzerland and Norway. Second, the view taken by some former CIA practitioners that the hard-nosed services that once characterised Egypt, Libya and Jordan, and which are still in place in countries like Saudi Arabia are admirable because they brook no restriction and that we must become more like them.[68] Neither attitude constitutes a sensible approach to intelligence across the global south.

Partnerships with tough services have provided the United States with much of its security intelligence since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, many of these relationships are much older. The United States is one of the few countries in the developed world with the resources to sustain truly global intelligence gathering operations. However, its focus on technocratic intelligence to support policy and large-scale military operations has led to a historic neglect of human espionage. Recently retired intelligence officers have revealed that the CIA still has few Non-Official Cover Officers and relatively few long-term penetrations overseas. Culturally, the CIA remains a curious foreign intelligence service with most of its staff based in Washington trapped behind byzantine layers of management.[69] Meanwhile, the CIA's increased drone operation over Pakistan and the Arab Peninsula are a perhaps symbol of this technocratic approach, constituting an activity that is carried out "above" rather than amongst the people.[70]

The American approach to intelligence in the global south has been transactional to some degree. The United States had tended to trade other security commodities with exotic allies in return for human intelligence provided by services

that are the veteran agent runners in remote regions. As a result, Washington has the recurrent problem of depending too heavily on information obtained through liaison with foreign services rather than taking the time and making the effort to develop its own sources. Across the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa the intelligence services of Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt, France and Israel have filled the gap. More recently the CIA has developed a close relationship with the intelligence services of the Sudan, despite the fact that Sudan is itself on the State Department list of state sponsors of terrorism.[71]

The "Mukhabarat" are now melting away with the arrival of the "Arab Spring". The Egyptian and Libyan intelligence services are in disarray and even those still in business have been dismayed by America's public disavowal of authoritarian leaders. Jordan's long-feared security chief has been removed by the King as a gesture in the direction of democratisation. Perhaps the "Arab Spring" will succeed where endless blue-ribbon panels of intelligence reformers have failed – forcing the United States to reappraise how it conducts intelligence business across a vast swathe of the global south.[72] If we are indeed entering a new period of democratic transitions it is worth considering some of the recent unsung successes of intelligence and security sector reform. Although the public tend to perceive intelligence in these countries through the one-dimensional prism of press stories about general thuggery, in reality, there have also been some substantive achievements here. The West has exported good governance to countries as afar afield as Romania and Indonesia, not just in the narrow area of intelligence oversight, but also in the wider domain of security practices, resilience and counter-terrorism legislation. Arguably this should be a two-way street and there are things that we might consider importing from countries that boast radically different intelligence cultures.[73]

The South African intelligence story is redolent with references to culture. In the 1990s the post-apartheid government declared that change was 'not only a matter of organisational restructuring' it was instead about seeking to 'establish a new culture of intelligence' indeed even a new 'philosophy of intelligence'.[74] Moreover, it tells us much about the perils and promise of intelligence during democratic transitions. Transitions are periods of fragility and often require an increased rather than reduced intelligence capacity, yet this must be reconciled with democratic oversight, public confidence and an anticipation that intelligence should now support the rule of law. In the 1990s, the narrow state security focus of South African

intelligence was broadened to encompass criminal targets as a result of concerns about poverty, unequal distribution of resources and even unemployment. Indeed, some African states have proved to be admirably creative in re-defining the mission of intelligence communities in socio-economic terms in the expectation that helping to support human security will help to rehabilitate these services whose past reputations were less than enviable. This was a conscious change of style in the direction of community ownership and has delivered some successes.[75]

Intelligence services in emerging democracies certainly require clear mandates provided by legislation, central co-ordination, together with both judicial oversight and parliamentary accountability. However, in transitional or fragile states these mechanisms are often imperfect and need to work in tandem with a free press, civil society and traditional community networks to provide checks and balances.[76] Increasingly, informal mechanisms operate as the cutting edge of intelligence oversight, with the more formal mechanisms tending to follow along in their wake examining abuses uncovered by others. As such, intelligence and security sector reform in itself is unlikely to work without the wider context of democratic transition. Equally, major structural change represents the best opportunities for intelligence reform and for seeking to combine intelligence effectiveness with new conventions focused on ethical behaviour. David Omand has emphasized the importance of achieving public confidence in the intelligence community in a world of increasing respect for human rights and concern for personal privacy.[77]

Intelligence and security services have much that is positive to contribute to new democracies. Visible reform of the intelligence services is an important symbol of regime change and is a crucial element if populations are to offer wholehearted support to new state structures. Yet in numerous cases, in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa, the retention of former intelligence officials from the old regime has caused difficulties. These can manifest themselves in the creation of old factions within the principal intelligence services and the creation of parallel intelligence organs. South Africa is a valuable case study precisely because all has not gone well. Some have worried over the placement of ANC loyalists in key positions within the intelligence services and a tendency of officers to align with rival factions within the ruling ANC. Certainly we have seen periodic spates of resignations - first amongst inspectors general in the 1990s and more recently amongst intelligence chiefs.

Arguably these problems should be taken, not as evidence of failure, but instead as a signal that a local form of constitutionalism is working and evolving.[78]

South Africa is often held up as an example of the application of external models of intelligence accountability drawn from the Anglosphere. In fact, sensitivity to local requirements has been combined with selective policy transfer in the area of oversight and accountability, producing a hybrid model that is locally grounded and yet aspires to meet international expectations and norms.[79] Intelligence oversight in South Africa incorporates both formal and informal mechanisms, creating a robust system that has served as a reference point for other the countries in the region as they have puzzled over matters of democratic governance and international intelligence co-operation.[80] In South Africa, together with Kenya and Ghana there is now a considerable body of law placing the intelligence services on the statute books and regulating their powers and behaviours of the intelligence services. The systems for supervision and oversight are improving and there are clear lines of control of budgets.[81] Perhaps the most impressive aspect of intelligence development in Africa is the creation of the establishment of the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) in 2004. Proposed by the Angolan Foreign Intelligence Service, this group encourages cooperation between different African services with a focus on countering mercenary activity and terrorism. CISSA works increasingly closely with the African Union's Peace and Security Council on current conflicts in the region and seeks to radiate out common conventions and professional practice - not unlike cognate bodies within Europe.[82]

What we seeing emerging in Sub-Saharan Africa is not just a middle way but genuine hybridity. Laurie Nathan has rightly criticised the polarised debate over the nature of the relationship between the constitution and the intelligence services, a battle between "intelligence exceptionalism" and "strict constitutionalism". It is obvious that during a democratic transition effectiveness will be measured in terms of adherence to democratic principles, practices and ideals, but it should also be born in mind that there are alternative roads to be followed by countries when moving towards good governance and democracy. What is acceptable operationally and the parameters in which intelligence services are allowed to operate are a product of values, beliefs and interests of the society in which they operate.[83]

Security sector reform is often viewed as part of state-building by the international community, a kind of externally-driven social engineering project.

Instead we need to view transitional states as hybrid political orders with the potential to generate new options for security. The set of expectations placed on formal constitutional mechanisms for intelligence accountability in developing countries is probably is too great at present, while community values such as trust are under-valued. Moreover, wholesale introduction of external systems risks losing the vernacular approaches that deliver the most effective routes to 'intelligence amongst the people'. We need to combine state mechanisms, customary institutions together with new elements of citizenship and civil society in networks of security which are embedded in local societal structures.[84] It has been suggested that we are moving towards "postmodern intelligence", but a case might also be advanced for the postcolonial intelligence.[85] Such a model might offer genuine hybridity, challenging Western ways of thinking, delivering good governance but also strong regime security at a time of state fragility.[86]

More importantly, there is something here for us to learn about public trust and confidence. In our own societies, intelligence is no longer the preserve of a few obscure agencies. Intelligence, security and resilience activities now suffuse all areas of government, even local government. The corporates, including the banks, airlines and the telecoms, are all consumers of intelligence and increasingly important producers of intelligence. Even individual citizens are exhorted to be 'alert not alarmed' and to report what they see. The boundaries between intelligence and information, between state and citizen are dissolving amid a new kind of knowledge intensive security. Intelligence in the twitter age will not be owned by government and in what has already become a much more inclusive environment, confidence and trust will be crucial. If security sector reform is about increased public confidence and trust in the security agencies then the Anglosphere needs security sector reform no less than the transitional states. Certainly some African services understand the importance of cultivating public trust rather better than we do.[87]

Conclusion

George Smiley, the celebrated central character of John le Carré's spy-fiction, was wearily suspicious of intelligence reformism. Smiley recalled many 'spurious cults' during his government service and noted that: 'Each new fashion had been hailed as a panacea.'[88] Smiley was alluding to the multifarious cults of bureaucratic reformism

that overtook all the OECD countries, eventually manifesting themselves as "New Public Management". A variant of this reformism afflicted the world of intelligence with its emphasis on semi-privatisation, strong automation, flat hierarchies and user choice.[89] Yet the cult of management has proved unequal to the challenge of reforming intelligence precisely because the core problems are cultural rather than bureaucratic. Paradoxically, the bureaucracy has become worse, compounded perhaps by the complexity and disaggregation that market-inspired reforms introduced. It is remarkable how many recent memoirs by CIA field officers – often figures who have departed government service in a state of disillusionment - identify problems of corporate vacuity, endless bureaucratic re-ordering and elaborate process as the key enemies of good intelligence. Collectively, their writing is testimony to the deleterious consequences of a bureaucratic personality which increasingly stifles individual creativity and initiative.[90]

Our current thinking about intelligence is enmeshed within a set of self-limiting ideas about what intelligence might be. We are destined to revisit time-worn debates about an elaborate technical and analytical process that are increasingly irrelevant to our national purposes. Discussions about issues of organizational reform or else problems of perception and cognition seem far removed from the real business of intelligence services in the twenty-first century. Politicians and academic writers on intelligence have made things worse. Even more than managers, they have an appetite for bureaucratic tinkering and have found themselves mired in the tar-pits of intelligence reformism. Precisely because the United States and its English-speaking allies preside over an intelligence apparatus of fabulous size and complexity, change is difficult. Meanwhile other countries are ahead of the curve in terms of attuning their communities to the complex demands of global uncertainty or generating civic trust.

Culture is partly about difference and each intelligence community has its own unique interface with national strategy. Appreciating the importance of associated norms and values is central to understanding how they function. Our comprehension of what intelligence culture might be will only have value when this is derived from close observation of real behavior and when we have enough substantive data to undertake meaningful comparison. Understanding the culture of intelligence beyond the Anglosphere is now a priority if we are to realise our own potential.[91] Meanwhile, US intelligence agencies continue to flounder - not so much because of self-interested

bureaucrats who resist change, but more because we find it hard to imagine what meaningful alternatives might look like.

If we are to do things differently we will need new approaches. The danger is that attempts to incorporate “culture” into our calculations opens up the chasm of discourse analysis and the linguistic paradigms that have engulfed some areas of social science in Europe. Nevertheless, if we are to compare intelligence cultures we need something that moves beyond materialist ideas of causality offered by the more traditional approaches within political science and international relations. We could do worse than consider the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his idea of "habitus", which is in essence a more sophisticated version of the concept of socialisation in which material factors and ideation factors are allowed to inter-play.[92] Bourdieu’s focus is precisely the problem of what leads to an unconscious acceptance of particular ideas and an exclusion of others.[93] Equally, one could imagine this subject being approached through learning theory, which emphasises the importance of formative historical experiences in shaping the mentality of bureaucratic communities over extended periods of time.[94]

Bourdieu also points out that the paradox of globalization is at the core of so many of these concerns.[95] Why, he asks, has the nation-state been so keen to accelerate processes which are detrimental to state sovereignty? In the realm of intelligence and security this has manifested itself most clearly in the corrosion of the Anglospheric distinction between foreign intelligence services that observe things abroad and domestic security services which watch people at home. The collapse of this Westphalian boundary between foreign and domestic intelligence – and the need for close co-operation on transnational targets – is a further reason to prioritise intelligence multiculturalism. Globalization prompts us to export out belief in civil society, but we must also be prepared to learn afresh about how to conduct intelligence amongst the people.[96]

Can we escape from the Anglosphere? Change and improvement is not impossible. The South African story – a narrative of hybridity - shows us that intelligence cultures are far from immutable. It also suggests that challenging security situations can be addressed by intelligence and security services without the abandonment of our core values. However, first of all we will need to know more about how others think about intelligence and we will then need to rethink our own assumptions about what intelligence ought to be. We should not expect instant results.

Precisely because our habits of thought about the nature of intelligence are culturally determined they are deeply engrained and hard to challenge. It is unlikely that the United States and its Anglo-Saxon allies will learn to think differently about intelligence in the short term, partly because our agencies tend to be cautious and conservative. Meanwhile we will continue to live within a set of alternatives and analogies mostly drawn from our own experiences. Garret Jones, a long-serving CIA intelligence officer, has put this rather well: 'If you liked the past, you are going to love the future.[97]

Elements of this paper were given at the International Studies Association conference in San Diego in April 2012 and at the Nuffield College Oxford Intelligence Seminar. We wish to thank the participants there and also the anonymous referees for their input. Errors remain the responsibility of the authors. We gratefully acknowledge support from the AHRC 'Landscapes of Secrecy' project (RES-451-26-0480) based at the Universities of Warwick and Nottingham.

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[12] *Ibid.* p.107. See also Michael Herman, *Intelligence Service in the Information Age* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

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[95] Pierre Bourdieu's essay 'Against the Policy of Depoliticization', in his collection, *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market 2* (New York: The New Press, 2001). pp.49-50.

[96] See especially, Simon Chesterman, *One Nation Under Surveillance: A New Social Contract to Defend Freedom Without Sacrificing Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press 2011), pp.32-44.

[97] Garret Jones, 'It's a Cultural Thing: Thoughts on a Troubled CIA', Part One, *Orbis* 50:1, 2006, pp.23-40.