

Special Forum on intelligence and theory

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Special Forum on intelligence and theory

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Introduction

Peter de Werd

The literature on intelligence and theory has developed considerably in recent years. This Special Forum takes as its point of departure four recent publications that have made a particular contribution to the developing literature and build on earlier contributions, such as the 2009 volume *Intelligence Theory: Key Questions and Debates* and, the 2018 special issue of *Intelligence and National Security* on 'Developing Intelligence Theory: New Challenges and Competing Perspectives'.¹ Since then, Intelligence Studies has seen a further growth of theoretical contributions that explore new approaches and directions. Various research agendas have been proposed, emphasizing the need for pluralistic evidence-based intelligence research, or introducing labels such as a new Philosophy of Intelligence (PHILINT), Critical Intelligence Studies (CIS) or New Intelligence Studies (NIS). At the same time, (meta)theoretical skepticism remains among some intelligence scholars and practitioners, with questions about the innovativeness or need to articulate subfields or schools of thought.²

This Forum arises from debates at panels of the Intelligence Studies Section of the International Studies Association (ISA) at the 2023 ISA annual conference.³ A range of scholars studying intelligence were invited by the editor, Peter de Werd, to share their views in autonomous statements. They were asked what they see as the most important issue(s), trend, challenge or controversy in intelligence research. Although the format does not allow for in depth elaborations, it is particularly valuable in providing an overview of contemporary academic perspectives and their interpretations. Bringing these together, comparing and contrasting them, contributes to mapping the field and hence can further a constructive academic debate. As a means to channel the discussion – recognizing the shortcoming of any selection – this Forum is organized around four different collective initiatives that have appeared since 2018.

The first of these, *Researching National Security Intelligence: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (2019) advocates a pluralistic approach to intelligence research.⁴ This initiative recognizes the challenge of gaining access to the world of intelligence and makes the case for research and practice to mutually inform and have impact. The focus is on relevant approaches and practices to collect data, such as interviewing, structured behavioral observation, and ethnography, adding to a 'conceptual, empirical, an methodological toolkit' for evidence-based research.⁵ The book explores how Political Science, Public Administration and Organization Theory, Communication Studies and Cognitive Psychology can inform a future research agenda in Intelligence Studies. In particular (ethical) academic challenges for grasping insider experiences are discussed; dealing with confidentiality and cooperating with governments or possibly investigative journalists.

Perhaps in contrast, the second of these, the *Intelligence and National Security* special issue, 'Integrating Intelligence Theory with Philosophy' (2022), seeks to challenge the 'anti-philosophical

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atmosphere' and reductive caricature of Philosophy in Intelligence Studies.⁶ It is problematic, for example, that "'normative" approaches like Philosophy are contrasted with "empirical" approaches, and have been claimed to be unhelpful to practitioners at best, and harmful as a source of politicization and perplexity at worst'.⁷ Exemplifying the merit of a philosophical approach, the idea of objectivity is diversified, and the concept of justified true belief for intelligence analysis is explored as ideal.⁸ Apart from ontology and epistemology, the importance of axiology – the study of value, ethics and aesthetics – is explicitly recognized. It is argued that value theory provides new ways to reconcile some tensions between collective security and individual rights or to appreciate the intrinsic moral value of intelligence analysis irrespective of its impact.⁹ The collection of articles seeks to instantiate the (indirect) benefit of Philosophy as a foundation for both the theory and practice of intelligence, as all scholars are, in fact, *doing* it: they implicitly or explicitly interpret and contextualize facts, make arguments, justify premises, claims, approaches and draw conclusions.

The third is an initiative aimed at advancing the development of 'Critical Intelligence Studies' (2021).¹⁰ This diverse field seeks to critique and destabilize conventional assumptions, essentialist or functionalist images, discourses and practices of (national) intelligence and security. Intelligence is viewed as a historical creation occurring in contexts characterized by power relations, which can politicize and obscure understanding of what intelligence is or how it is practiced. A major emphasis lies with promoting 'uncomfortable dissensus', de-reification, positive conflict or agonizing reflexivity, and a move further away from any positivist objectivist ideal.¹¹ Revealing power struggles, domination, marginalization, abuse or social harm does however 'not necessarily need to come at the expense of intelligence effectiveness'.¹² Moreover, it is difficult to strictly separate the study 'of' and 'for intelligence, and critical reflexive research can thus (indirectly) reveal how intelligence might be configured, for example to support more ethical and democratic decision-making.

Lastly, positioned explicitly as an initiative drawing from outside Intelligence Studies is the volume *Problematising Intelligence Studies* (2022). It advances the idea that contemporary intelligence has become 'an inescapable dimension of the everyday' of people and practices, not necessarily related to intelligence services per se. The aim is to understand multiple social actors and domains connected to intelligence practices by studying the human dimensions of daily practices on the ground. Research thus focuses on an expanding number of empirical sites (e.g., the police organization, prisons, local communities, or the internet). The volume proposes articulating a transdisciplinary New Intelligence Studies (NIS) stimulating a 'reflexive break' away from the doxa of Intelligence Studies. Contributors should refuse 'to take for granted its ideas, assumptions and usual conclusions' and reconstruct intelligence *a posteriori* based on qualitative empirically driven research 'from below' and by giving primacy to the social context.¹³

In Intelligence Studies, there has been mostly supportive acknowledgement towards these different collective initiatives. Overall, scholars view them as positive signs of deeper and wider thinking about intelligence theory, and Intelligence Studies as a discipline.¹⁴ Some see value, for example in NIS documenting the expansion of intelligence beyond state services, but also call for a more balanced perspective when reflecting on the intrinsic nature of intelligence, collaboration mechanisms, or oversight effectiveness.¹⁵ Occasionally, there is outspoken criticism, for example, about 'critical approaches' and their purportedly 'destructive impact' on Intelligence Studies.¹⁶ In the case of the latter, however, one could ask whether the particular interpretation of 'critical' presented is applicable to the wide variety of scholars labeled as such in the commentary. If anything, this only confirms the need for more academic debate.

As mentioned, theorizing in Intelligence Studies has been more extensive than these collective works. For example, recently yet another research agenda was published, promoting interdisciplinary research, as the field becomes more international, broader and diverse.¹⁷ All in all, against these backgrounds, how do scholars reflect on the recent initiatives, situate them, or see connections? What stage of progression are we observing in the research? What can be concluded about new directions in the study of intelligence and the way(s) forward? Perhaps philosophizing on intelligence or learning from other disciplines and fields has been more

extensive than assumed. Is the value of moving beyond functionalism and state-centrism increasingly recognized? In this Forum, pluralism, multi- and interdisciplinarity, functionalism, institutional influence, the meaning of critique and reflexivism are all important themes, which also inform various categorizations of intelligence practitioners, practitioner-scholars and scholars. Not everyone needs to agree, but overall the Forum expresses how engagement from different perspectives is supported and reductive labeling avoided to advance fruitful theoretical debate.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts: making Intelligence Studies more interdisciplinary

Stephen Coulthart

The number of Intelligence Studies articles being published has increased exponentially. In the last 10 years more articles have been published than in the 60 previous years combined.¹⁸ In 2020, there were more than 400 papers published, a rate of more than one paper a day. As I explain below, much of the recent activity in the field is from scholars with diverse disciplinary perspectives in the social sciences. While these are positive developments, we need to start thinking about how to seize the opportunity and leverage the synergies produced by multiple disciplinary perspectives.

During the 1980s and 1990s Intelligence Studies was a subdiscipline of Political Science and History. Today, a variety of scholars from diverse social science disciplines conduct research on intelligence, such as those in Management, Psychology, Criminology, Forensic Science, and contribute to the approximately 20 core journals in the field (as well as their own disciplinary journals). Rorissa and I conducted a citation analysis of the more than 70 years of scholarship and found signs of a multidisciplinary field. We found that there is a diversity in contributing disciplines to intelligence scholarship but limited integration between topics.¹⁹ For instance, there is an opportunity to bridge scholarship from business fields with national security intelligence research. There are many other similar combinations.

The growing multidisciplinary nature of the field is positive but hampers its long-term progress. In 2019, I wrote about the growing multidisciplinary perspectives in the field, which we captured in the overarching concept of the 'pluralistic approach'.²⁰ However, as a field we cannot remain contented to simply become more multidisciplinary for at least a couple reasons. First, a challenge in multidisciplines is disagreement over key concepts because scholars are not able to effectively integrate their work. For example, the multidisciplinary Urban Studies field has struggled to define 'urban' and even the definition of 'America' is contested in American Studies.²¹ While critical introspection of key terms is valuable, it can cause a stagnation as the subject is repeatedly revisited decade after decade (some have made a similar claim about the effort to define 'intelligence').²² Second, multidisciplines also struggle to integrate research insights and develop a cumulative scholarly conversation between the contributing disciplinary perspectives, a challenge which Marrin has identified as important in Intelligence Studies.²³

I argue that Intelligence Studies should maintain its multidisciplinary character while simultaneously increasing its interdisciplinary content. Interdisciplinary research *synthesizes* more than one disciplinary theory, method, and/or perspective in *a single project* (e.g., an article, book, report, etc.). For example, an article that is written by a legal scholar and a political scientist to explore the use of drone strikes is an interdisciplinary collaboration. Interdisciplinary work is also generated in single-authored projects, although this is less common due to the small numbers of scholars well-versed in two or more disciplines.

Intelligence Studies has the foundation for more ground-breaking interdisciplinary research after a decade plus of significant interest from a growing number of scholars. The shift to an integrated structure will lead to a more cohesive scholarly conversation since authors will engage directly with

those from different disciplinary backgrounds. Some research suggests that interdisciplinary research is better cited as well as has a greater impact on public discourse.²⁴

There are some immediate steps that can be taken to make the field more interdisciplinary. First, professional associations, such as the Intelligence Studies section of the International Studies Association, can help prepare researchers for the challenges of interdisciplinary research. They can hold workshops for Intelligence Studies scholars on how to create and maintain interdisciplinary collaborations. The heart of interdisciplinary work requires collaboration. Such teams are often difficult to form due to diverse disciplinary incentive systems and vocabularies. Second, the flagship intelligence journals can create special interdisciplinary issues on pressing intelligence topics. For instance, the rise of the ‘chip wars’ – the competition between the US, China, and other countries to control global semiconductor production – requires disciplinary perspectives from Economics, Physics, Political Science, and even History, to fully understand the research and policy problems.

We should also explore novel solutions to integrate disciplines into Intelligence Studies, especially from Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) and the Humanities. Few STEM authors outside of certain subdisciplines of Computer Science engage with intelligence scholars. There is also too little engagement from the Humanities on the topic of intelligence (excluding History, of course). I agree with Gaspard and Pili for the need to include normative approaches like Philosophy to help scholars think about ethical and value-based questions inherent in intelligence ranging from covert action to bulk data collection.²⁵ The Humanities can help make sense of these issues.

We can engage STEM and Humanities researchers through grant application collaborations, sharing co-authorship, and inviting them to Intelligence Studies conferences. Another option is the creation of multi-journal special issues involving Intelligence Studies flagship journals with a STEM journal.²⁶ Such multi-journal collaborations can address the tenure and promotion barriers faculty face when they publish outside their disciplinary journals.

I believe pursuing some of these more immediate actions can begin a process that will make Intelligence Studies greater than the sum of its disciplinary ‘parts’ and make it more impactful and relevant for conversations about intelligence.

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A new wave of intelligence theory

Giangiuseppe Pili & Jules J. S. Gaspard

The recognized necessity to contextualize intelligence beyond historical or purely factual narratives is evident by multiple intellectual and theoretical projects in Intelligence Studies. This need is widely acknowledged, as illustrated by various collaborative works recently published by *Intelligence and National Security*. These publications advocate for a multidisciplinary approach to Intelligence Studies. The call to intellectual engagement and discourse has a longstanding history, with influential scholars like Stephen Marrin, Mark Phythian, and Peter Gill initiating extensive discussions on intelligence theory years ago. In essence, there is a collective appreciation that the comprehensive understanding of Intelligence Studies, particularly within its theoretical framework (intelligence theory), cannot be achieved solely through historical and factual narratives.

Historical research outputs divide and breakdown the world of intelligence into different case studies specifically located into space and time, which do not necessarily give any general answer to

open problems within Intelligence Studies. This is reinforced by the peculiar dependency of the world of intelligence on semantics and natural language(s). As a reaction, Intelligence Studies scholars are exploring different ways to unify a field that is still divided by historical, linguistic, and cultural barriers. This trend fully emerged through the production of collections of essays mainly, but not only, published as volumes and in *Intelligence and National Security*, as mentioned in the Forum introduction.

These communal yet disparate intellectual endeavours collectively convey the notion that there is a demand for a new era of research in intelligence. This new (third) wave should be adept at incorporating insights from previous theoretical attempts, marking what could be deemed the second wave of intelligence theory. The first wave emerged in the early 1990s, as Intelligence Studies began to institutionalize as a recognized field of research both within and beyond academia (see below).²⁷

This evolution of intelligence ideas unfolded alongside national efforts to illuminate the secretive realm. Intelligence Studies, being produced and consumed in various languages for diverse readerships across different countries, is influenced by dominant national narratives, particularly in a field closely linked to national security entities such as intelligence agencies. While initial attempts were made by independent scholars to establish a common language, notably in English, for global scientific production, this initial operation resulted in the field remaining divided into multiple subfields, as highlighted by Mark Phythian and Peter Gill.²⁸

The second wave of scientific production commenced around 2005 with the RAND collection on intelligence theory,²⁹ followed by the 2009 collection edited by Phythian, Gill, and Marrin. However, the challenge of unifying the field under a broad and shared framework persisted, given the diverse array of proposals presented. A subsequent collection emerged in 2017, and was then republished as a book in 2019, building on the relatively sparse groundwork initiated in prior years, albeit with significant improvements.³⁰ In recent years, various endeavours have converged to articulate at least a substantial portion of a general understanding of intelligence, exemplified by the special issues in this Forum.

The recent collaborative efforts published by *Intelligence and National Security* mark the third generational attempt to foster diverse schools of thought, all converging towards the common goal of bringing Intelligence Studies closer to a more structured academic discipline. Intelligence Studies is now on the verge of developing a solid intellectual foundation that could accommodate multiple emerging schools. While this production remains diverse in itself, it has yet to fully address the challenge posed by Stephen Marrin in 2016, who envisioned the establishment of distinct schools of thought rather than independent 'thoughts'.³¹ This point still remains valid: the very nature of the peculiar secret world (both public and private, state and non-state) means divisions are almost inevitable, and there is still no unification in the field academically, theoretically or educationally. Hence, these attempts to try and address the natural division of a divisive and divided field that, for a long time, disagreed even on the necessity of its existence.

Two significant efforts are currently underway to address this issue. The first involves integrating more diverse intelligence cultures and national experiences, striving to incorporate insights from national experts into the common scientific discourse offered by Intelligence Studies. The second effort aims to sustain momentum in solidifying the general theory of Intelligence Studies, also enabling future scholars to build on different perspectives and create distinct streams of thought or schools. For the successful coexistence of multiple schools of thought, it is crucial to embrace and understand diverse languages within the field. Just as philosophers use philosophical jargon and historians communicate in historical language, the multiplicity of languages in Intelligence Studies is not a limitation but a reflection of the expansive nature of the topic. Intelligence is a topic big enough to require multiple and parallel projects to exist and co-exist without prejudices due to the extemporary nature of one single preference over a specific jargon. Plurality and

multidisciplinarity have to be taken seriously, a fact recognized by all prior intellectual attempts in one way or another.

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Can the intelligence paradox be solved by strengthening the dialogic nature of Intelligence Studies?

Cristina Ivan

Up until the first decade in the new millennium, the dominant intellectual paradigm in Intelligence Studies remained 'positivist' and 'objectivist'. The principles of positivist knowledge were so embedded in the practice of intelligence analysis, that practitioners maintained, and perhaps still do maintain, an empiricist epistemology, entwined with an unquestioned conviction that the world exists 'out there', independent of individuals' knowledge of it. Objective social reality, we were told, especially in studies dedicated to intelligence analysis, can be discovered through neutral, 'scientific' analysis of empirical evidence.³² More recent contributions, on the other hand, be they steered from inside or outside the Intelligence Studies field, aim for a more reflexive and critical scholarship, focused on interrogation of and dissent from taken for granted assumptions, routines, behaviors and norms of intelligence production and dissemination, operation, organization, and impact.³³

New research acknowledges that the study and practice of intelligence (be it conducted inside institutional frameworks or competitive markets) occur within contexts characterized by power relations among competing groups. These power relations potentially obscure understanding of what intelligence is, how it is practiced, and the consequences of this knowledge for different groups – and that becomes the new source of focus of intelligence scholarship. Nevertheless, the paradox of Intelligence Studies remains intact. It is a research field by definition secluded and closed. Even competitive intelligence is handled oftentimes as a secretive affair. Hence, a scientific inquiry into the field requires a privileged positioning of the scholar simultaneously inside and outside the field of study, which is in itself a problematic endeavor both in terms of objectivity and regulations. A future Intelligence Studies agenda hence can be only approached if intelligence practitioners and institutions admit and embrace a more inclusive openness towards scholarship, while scholars admit in their turn to procedural restrictions and regulations governing intelligence.

A distinctive strand of theory, initiated by Der Derian in 1993³⁴ and then followed by Arradau,³⁵ Huysmans,³⁶ Ben Jaffel³⁷ and others, argues for a radical critique of dysfunctional practices in intelligence. Such contributions mainly aim to disrupt the existing state of affairs by putting the spotlight on surveillance and fear-legitimated practices which conflict with human rights, emancipation, and democracy.

In an insightful approach, such scholars advocate for a methodological proposal for a future research agenda in which they nevertheless seem to give significant privilege to scandals, controversies and disputes; scandals do make headlines and reach a large audience, yet let us not forget that intelligence operations value their success by not making headlines and not being known, hence the need for a broader outline of what intelligence practices entail. While the topics invoked here signal potential constitutive issues for the practice of intelligence, they may run the risk of limiting an understanding of the core business of intelligence. Needless to say, an interrogation of public reports and expert views on intelligence today reveal that the topics which make the

challenge of intelligence work nowadays transgress mere surveillance and control. For instance, when referring to core intelligence challenges of both internal and foreign services, we can easily spot issues such as: how to create an effective approach to propaganda, disinformation and foreign information manipulation and inference; how to address uncharted territories of virtual and light regulated spaces of interaction, in which violent extremism or radicalization occur; how to address hybrid attacks targeting dual use innovations and cutting edge technologies developed nationally. Competitive (counter)intelligence, on the other hand, oftentimes addresses issues such as how to respond to economic espionage, which is a core challenge that may also benefit greatly from the new approaches and should also remain within the scope of the debate. Contributions in the recently published *Routledge Handbook on Disinformation and National Security*, for instance, provide proof of the multiple and complex identity centered challenges and epistemologies that make the landscape of intelligence work in its attempt to address security related conditions that impact society at large.³⁸

An agenda for the future of Intelligence Studies should therefore be centered on questions of ontology (what can be known), epistemology (how we can know it), and the situatedness of knowledge and actors at the forefront of their investigations. In this respect, the 2018 *Intelligence and National Security* special issue on 'Developing Intelligence Theory' and the special issue on 'Integrating Intelligence Theory with Philosophy' (2022) provide a long due interrogation of foundational truisms and atheoretical skepticism circulated within the field. And perhaps more importantly, opening up a new discussion on ontologies and epistemologies with direct application in intelligence analysis, they also address dilemmas of security, liberty, and sovereignty.

In the same vein, other scholars have tried to mitigate the intelligence paradox by creating a larger dialogue with connected disciplines and methodologies. The 2019 *Researching National Security Intelligence* volume provides a useful toolbox of methodologies at work, encouraging cross-fertilization of intelligence and mostly sociological and political science instruments of investigation. Bridget Nolan's chapter on 'A Sociological Approach to Intelligence Studies', for instance, draws attention to the missing sociological perspective with its focus on informal and formal structures of power, as well as group level orientation, which allows for better understanding of social dynamics.³⁹

I therefore argue for a desired positioning of the future scholar in Intelligence Studies as one similar to that of a cultural anthropologist, working to develop knowledge not from the outside and centrist position of the researcher looking down on other cultures, not from the inside position of a member of that particular culture, but rather through participative observation, placing the researcher simultaneously inside and outside a series of intelligence cultures multiplied inside and outside traditional institutional frameworks. Progress can and shall be looked for in a dialogic format, in which inquiries maintain an inter- and transdisciplinary character with e.g., Philosophy, Cultural Anthropology, Sociology, and Communication and Media Studies, to name just a few of the fields that brought forth interesting cross pollinations of theory and method. This might be the main challenge in creating a future research agenda in Critical Intelligence Studies, as it will have to address the tensions created between the diverse ontological positionings and methodological frameworks embraced by these diverse disciplines. Creating a common ground between disciplines and fields of inquiry is just adding to the complexity of addressing the paradox of intelligence. Each new method will have to be interrogated critically and its viability established for the specific inside and outside simultaneous position required from a researcher in intelligence. Hence, I would plead that a future intelligence researcher, most of all and above all related disciplines, can and should embrace an anthropological stance in Intelligence Studies. More specifically, I would refer here to three significant juxtapositions between Intelligence and Cultural Studies: one is the intrinsic quality of these two domains as fields of scientific investigation rather than disciplines, always open to multiple investigations and correlations to kindred fields of study in e.g., Sociology, Cultural Anthropology, Media Studies, Communication, etc. The second juxtaposition comes from their focus on (contemporary) material, social and symbolic practices of the community that have an impact in power transactions, shape behaviors, values and identities through narratives. Last but not

least, both Intelligence and Cultural Studies focus on practices in synchronicity, such as the collective creation of narratives about security, generating mutations in lived culture and affecting, *inter alia*, the way citizens view their own security and relate to states as legitimate security brokers.

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Reflexive reconstruction versus functionalist assumptions: broadening the field of actors and practices

Hager Ben Jaffel and Sebastian Larsson

Why do we need an alternative approach to the study of intelligence? Firstly, because Intelligence Studies is an inherently uncritical discipline organised around the interests of state authorities. Secondly, because most of its scholarship is restricted by a national security framework that fails to address the expansion of intelligence logics in the field of security and in society more broadly.

Intelligence Studies is heavily populated by functionalist and so-called ‘problem-solving’ orientations⁴⁰ in the sense that there seems to be a strong assumption that research should be beneficial and ‘useful’ for the intelligence community, and by extension, for the state, its military strategists, and foreign policy makers. These functionalist tendencies stem to a large extent from the historically strong connection between intelligence scholarship and intelligence practice.⁴¹ Not only has knowledge in the field been predominantly aimed towards ‘improving’ intelligence work, but much of this scholarship has also been produced by authors with direct connections to state services themselves, e.g., as multi-positioned ‘pracademics’, state-subsidised intelligence historians, or ex-practitioners of Anglo-American intelligence services. This has, in turn, generated a narrow empirical scope whereby these few countries and their services have served as a blueprint for the understanding of intelligence globally. It has also cemented assumptions, largely in line with International Relations realism and grand strategy, that state actors/interests are the most central units of analysis, reducing intelligence (and by extension, intelligence scholarship) into a mere ‘function’ of the state. Intelligence Studies’ functionalism and state-centrism is deeply problematic, we believe, because it renders the discipline into an inherently uncritical effort of producing ‘useful’ and ‘actionable’ knowledge for security professionals and state authorities. Implicitly, intelligence research is supposed to support intelligence practitioners, not question or criticise them. In Intelligence Studies we may thus observe the effects of decades of state intervention into the academic production of its own history and official narrative. Intelligence Studies has as such not only produced orthodox understandings of intelligence, but also contributed to legitimising the operations and violence of state power. In this discipline, the functionalist ontology stands directly in the way of the idea of academic freedom and serious scholarly critique of power.

What kind of counter-narrative can we then find in the emerging subfield of ‘Critical Intelligence Studies’ (CIS)?⁴² Not an entirely convincing one, since this project remains attached to many of the commonsensical views that have for so long structured Intelligence Studies. CIS have not moved away from its core discipline’s state-centrist and realist assumptions, nor have they questioned its history of close association with state bureaucracies.⁴³ Perhaps most tellingly, nor does the project challenge the strong functionalist disposition in Intelligence Studies. It is rather reproduced, with authors stating that even ‘critical’ scholarship could ‘aid’ the practice of intelligence and increase its ‘effectiveness’.⁴⁴

For these reasons, we believe a true 'critical' and alternative approach needs to abandon functionalist studies 'for' intelligence in favour of a reflexive study of intelligence. It needs to be seen not as a rational state function, but as a space of actors whose practices generate more or less violent effects on society. Such an approach stems from growing awareness in broader Critical International Relations and Security Studies scholarship about the fundamental problems with Intelligence Studies' dogmas and assumptions and its role in 'naturalising' state power.⁴⁵ Similar ideas have also been developed in the study of other seemingly 'disinterested' international and state phenomena like human rights⁴⁶ and the United Nations.⁴⁷

Assuming that scholarship is never 'neutral' but always produced by someone for some purpose, the first step in a reflexive approach is to break with received wisdoms in established scholarship.⁴⁸ This entails problematising, as above, the discipline's historical emergence and the socio-professional interests underlying it. Given their positions, we cannot take for granted what these scholars see or understand as intelligence. On the contrary, only if we first reject pre-existing conventions about intelligence, or at least take a step back from the literature and introduce a certain degree of reflexive awareness of the knowledge produced, are we able to see that established scholars and state practitioners in fact are part of the same network of shared relations, interests, and loyalties.

The second step involves reconstructing intelligence as an analytical object. Through careful empirical observation paired with a critical engagement with existing literature, intelligence should be rebuilt from scratch by paying close attention to the variety of actors, relations, and practices constituting it and generating effects in a variety of everyday sites and spheres of human activity. When intelligence is analysed along its actual practical and relational lines, it immediately emerges as a far more complex, pluralistic, heterogeneous, and conflictual space of actors, irreducible to state agencies alone. Intelligence involves not only secret services at the heart of government, but also actors involved in counterterrorism, policing and law enforcement, digital surveillance, border controls, counter-radicalisation work, compliance regulation, financial flow management, prison surveillance, and more. Even ordinary citizens, private business, technological developers, and law firms are involved in (re)defining what counts as intelligence work today.

Consider how today's societies are rendered by more and more (in)securitization processes. That which constitutes a threat to our ways of life has, firstly, become increasingly difficult to define in the last few decades, and now seems to exist at all levels of society. The threatening Other is, all at once, constructed at the highest political level as an enemy state, portrayed in law enforcement as a faceless terrorist, assumed at the border to be an immigrant, or just spotted in the streets as a 'suspicious individual'.⁴⁹ In response to this ever-expanding threat construction, a multitude of instruments and technologies of security now clutter our societies. At almost any given time and place, knowingly or not, people are monitored, steered, controlled, coerced, or blocked by some 'security measure' for some 'security purpose'. Security practices have thus come to intersect with most elements of life, spanning the exceptional to the mundane.⁵⁰ Here, intelligence gathering has come to play a crucial new role. It has transformed from simply covert 'spying' on a select few into the broad activity of gathering information on everyone, secretly or openly, to enable pre-emptive and exclusionary action in the name of security. This has drawn in more and more actors, from traditional services to police organisations to local communities, and imposed intelligence gathering activities as a more or less constant feature of our everyday lives. A state-centric analytical lens delimited to national security issues will, suffice it to say, have a difficult time capturing this everyday reality, richness, and messiness of contemporary intelligence practices.

Again, this is why we propose a reflexive sociological approach to the study of intelligence – one freed from dogmas in the literature, one whose understanding of intelligence as an 'inescapable dimension of the everyday'⁵¹ comes not from a priori theorising but from empirical observations of society and the logic of intelligence in it. Our radical scepticism concerning the extent to which functionalist and state-centric Intelligence Studies can capture contemporary intelligence practices, broadly understood, is what sets our approach apart from others currently trying to formulate

counternarratives to mainstream intelligence scholarship. A reflexive approach to intelligence seeks ultimately to emancipate research on intelligence from state practices, policy work, and the presumed necessity to fix the intelligence machine. More specifically, we believe that any serious critique of Intelligence Studies must divorce itself fully from such functionalist orientations. Critical intelligence scholarship should, in a sense, be anti-functionalist and 'useless' from a practitioner's perspective since it is indeed impossible in our view to be critical and serve the interests of power at the very same time.

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Co-option, remediation, and the reinvention of Intelligence Studies

Damien Rogers

From my perspective as a former intelligence professional in New Zealand, critical approaches to the study of intelligence contribute to our collective understanding of how and why intelligence is a troubling and deeply problematic phenomenon in contemporary world affairs when it occasionally relies on torture, systemically breaches privacy rights, and routinely enhances state violence that deliberately generates intense suffering for fellow human beings, especially in societies formerly colonized by Europeans. Yet the value of these normative approaches, which deepen our understanding of intelligence practice, is at risk of being diminished by scholars who hold a somewhat boutique attachment to criticality, especially when they inspire, curate, and contribute to special issues and edited volumes under the banner of Critical Intelligence Studies (CIS). Positioned 'as an evolution of Intelligence Studies', CIS addresses deficiencies in the field by 'critiqu[ing] and destabiliz[ing] taken-for-granted concepts and normative commitments' but, importantly, 'does not necessarily need to come at the expense of intelligence effectiveness'.⁵² Proponents of CIS normalize those deficiencies by continuing to prioritize research which, in the name of constructive criticism 'highlighting poor practice', is offered in the service of intelligence professionals embracing the New Security Agenda.⁵³ Casting CIS's normative purposes in emancipatory terms can help justify increasing diversity within the field, but is similarly instrumentalized. Even though CIS scholars recognize the value of more radical critiques of intelligence as a state-making practice, some desire fecund debate between those who produce knowledge on intelligence practice and those who produce knowledge for practitioners.⁵⁴ There is a lack of the deep sense of criticality meant by Robert W. Cox when he explained that 'it stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came about . . . does not take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing'.⁵⁵ Nor is this consistent with Michel Foucault's notion of practicing criticism as 'a matter of making facile gestures difficult'.⁵⁶

Critical approaches that re-conceptualize intelligence in politico-social terms under the auspices of New Intelligence Studies (NIS) reveal deformities in Intelligence Studies as a field of scholarly inquiry, specifically its 'historical Anglo-Americanism, its long tradition of reinforcing state ontologies, and its deeply functionalist disposition that limit the question of intelligence to one of

improving intelligence services and assisting policymakers'.⁵⁷ NIS begins to remediate the field's deformities by drawing attention to neglected sites of investigation,⁵⁸ the scale and complexity of everyday transnational intelligence practice and the spectrum of individuals and groups engaging in, or impacted by, intelligence work,⁵⁹ and the contention among academics over how to theorize intelligence work and their variegated relationship to state power.⁶⁰ This approach stands apart from those who are keen to ensure their work's policy relevance by reproducing the logics of state security, embracing a methodological nationalism of sorts, and transforming their pedagogies into an academic appendage to state security apparatuses. Yet there is here an insufficient regard to the secret violence of the state and its violation of human rights, which may be remedied by a focus on the 'socio-genesis of violence historically and state transformation, on the transnational dimensions of the field of intelligence and its impact on the quality of political regimes in relation to their own population and their attitude towards their allies'.⁶¹ Didier Bigo suggests scholars concerned with the phenomenon of intelligence abandon the field of Intelligence Studies to embrace the international political sociology of the wider field of Security Studies.

Given these explanatory limitations of both CIS and NIS what might now be done to better comprehend the phenomenon of intelligence today? An archeological contemplation of the present moment might recover and disclose forgotten possibilities, disguised by circumstances that gave rise to Intelligence Studies as an extension of Strategic Studies and Political Realism during the early Cold War, to reconstitute Intelligence Studies within the academic discipline of International Relations' evolving contours, broadening boundaries, and theoretical developments. The discipline appears to be on the threshold of moving beyond its politico-strategic, politico-economic, and politico-social preoccupations, as well as its marginalized perspectives and silenced voices, and (auto)critiques, towards a greater recognition of how the violent pathologies of the politico-cultural project of modernity animates, saturates, and structures the conduct of contemporary world affairs.⁶² Taken collectively, the theoretical perspectives comprising the discipline might equip intelligence scholars with a myriad of analytical approaches to comprehensively explain the politics of intelligence practices. This might, in turn, call into existence a metaphysics of intelligence theorising and practice within disciplinary International Relations, rather than merely integrating 'intelligence theory within [the academic discipline of] philosophy'.⁶³

Reinventing Intelligence Studies in this holistic way might entail a commitment to *re-academicize* its traditions and cultures of inquiry in the sense meant by Stanley Fish when he wrote that 't[o] academicize a topic is to detach it from the context of its real world urgency, where there is a vote to be taken or an agenda to be embraced, and insert it into a context of academic urgency, where there is an account to be offered or an analysis to be performed'.⁶⁴ Under these terms, if research and analysis is undertaken to assist intelligence professionals rather than to advance collective understanding, then that knowledge must be more clearly eschewed as non-academic and something to be done beyond the university without the protection of academic freedom. In New Zealand, where the law governing universities is very clear, scholarly enterprise requires a staunch commitment to an intellectual independence from the prevailing configurations of executive, legislative, and bureaucratic power.⁶⁵ This does not preclude a sustained and meaningful engagement between intelligence scholars and security professionals under the auspices of 'pluralism',⁶⁶ but it underscores the need to be mindful of the glaring disparities in power between professionals playing the game of security and academics who produce knowledge for its own sake if we are to ensure the production of knowledge on intelligence practices is not subordinated to, or fettered by, state power.

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Ivory towers and garbage cans

Hamilton Bean

Take your average U.S. intelligence analyst, manager, or official from any of the eighteen organizations that comprise the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC); ask them if they recognize the names of any of the contributors to this Forum, and chances are they will shake their head and say, 'No'. The odds that your average analyst, manager, or official from a European intelligence service would recognize any of the contributors are slightly better (mostly because some of the contributors are affiliated with those services); however, the connections between academic theorizing about intelligence and the practice of intelligence are notoriously thin.⁶⁷ Few would argue that the ideas offered in this Forum will have much (if any) near-term impact on the day-to-day work of your average intelligence analyst, manager, or official in the United States, Europe, or elsewhere.

For some scholars, the lack of Intelligence Studies' institutional influence is not only acceptable it's desirable. They find investigations of intelligence and investigations for intelligence more-or-less incompatible. Even the development of a nascent Critical Intelligence Studies (CIS) subfield, they claim, will keep Intelligence Studies an instrumentalized 'prisoner' of its association with state bureaucracies. The goal should instead be 'the study of the people and practices that are relationally entangled with intelligence',⁶⁸ which seemingly excludes studies of (and for) intelligence analysts, managers, or officials. This broader conceptualization of intelligence as a 'transversal field of struggle'⁶⁹ is useful and overdue, but it potentially reinforces the image of an Ivory Tower unwilling to engage with the actors whose institutions it would transform.

To say that CIS might influence institutional practice or contribute to effectiveness is not an endorsement of state violence. Effectiveness can include practices that expose decisions to more democratic accountability. For example, a more critical intelligence analyst might consider how the removal of a key briefing slide could fundamentally undermine the norms of cooperative argumentation upon which the IC's deliberative process is built, leading to war under false pretenses.⁷⁰ A more critical intelligence manager might recognize how unreflective diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives can paradoxically entrench values that perpetuate inequality and discrimination.⁷¹ A more critical intelligence official might consider how the creation of an open source agency could help make intelligence more citizen-oriented and participatory.⁷² Here, studying intelligence involves coming down from the Ivory Tower to confront the 'garbage can', recognizing that institutional decision-making – especially in intelligence contexts – involves a messy mix of problems, solutions, and actors possessing different intentions and all varieties of human behavior.⁷³ A CIS inclusive of the study of intelligence services aims to provide analysts, managers, or officials with intellectual resources needed to defend transparency, accountability, and democratic values more effectively from within.

Whether or not one is open to an inclusive version of CIS, this Forum reflects a generational change as younger intelligence scholars, many of whom have been trained in critical approaches, have entered the field and seek to challenge the prevailing ways of understanding and studying intelligence. The nascent discussion of CIS offered in the pages of this journal in 2021 sparked debates over which version of 'critical' we should attend to, which one was less 'therapeutic', more 'transformative', and so on.⁷⁴ For me, these debates are welcome, for once CIS is too comfortable with itself, producing an overriding consensus, can it really be called 'critical' anymore? I believe that CIS is expansive enough to include *both* the Ivory Tower and the garbage can.

That said, one overarching commitment that could bind those who claim to study intelligence from critical perspectives is a focus on power. My doctoral training is in organizational communication, and I was greatly influenced by the work of communication scholar and theorist Stanley Deetz.⁷⁵ For those who are interested, there are plenty of paths to be taken in Intelligence Studies in examining: 1) how historical/social processes have constituted the authority and legitimacy of intelligence institutions in ways that stakeholders have come to see as necessary, natural, and self-evident; 2) how discourse works to suppress conflict between competing groups in the intelligence

arena; 3) how dominant techno-rationality comes to prohibit alternative reasoning and decision making processes; and 4) how techno-rationality invites and compels consent from citizens. Following Deetz, we might also ask, what do members of the intelligence discipline (both practitioners and scholars) think is true? What are their warrants for the truth claim? In other words, what are the assumptions on which the claim and the evidence depend? What are their processes of dispute and adjudication of competing claims? How is knowledge relevancy determined? What are the practices of knowledge formation, distribution, and institutionalization? Answers to these questions are produced under real conditions of inequity in specific historical conditions and for specific problems. As this Forum demonstrates, the time is ripe for Intelligence Studies to attend to the ethics and politics of constructions of intelligence more explicitly.

Critical scholars might also share a commitment to the premise that all constructions of intelligence – whether in professional settings or in academic conferences, and whether those constructions are official, semi-official, someone else's, or our own – are laden with values that advantage some choices over others and some people over others. Constructions of intelligence occur under specific conditions of power. Any version of Intelligence Studies would do well to better examine who produces knowledge about intelligence, whose knowledge is prioritized, and how this knowledge influences policy and practice (whether within intelligence services or outside them). Thus, as Deetz argued, sophisticated theories of power are needed to describe not only visible power relations, but the ways in which advantage is *invisibly* embedded in constructions of intelligence. The myth of intelligence objectivity hides the value system embedded in positionality and the multiple ways that values enter into social reproductions of intelligence and decision-making.⁷⁶

CIS's unmasking and critique of invisible value systems can provoke intense backlash. Conducting critical research is not without risk, and there may be some who will attempt to intimidate you and silence your voice. But to conclude on an upbeat note, I provide orienting questions guided by the work of communication scholar Bryan Taylor: How willing are we (both the contributors to this Forum and the readers of this journal) to reflect on the ways our debates about the study of intelligence foreclose alternate voices and interpretations? How willing are we to broaden those debates to consider those alternatives? What would we risk in this process? What might we gain?⁷⁷

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Rethinking contradictions and revising the dominance of the positivist paradigm

Peter de Werd

It is important to recognize that recent theorizing in Intelligence Studies is broader than the four calls for multidisciplinary research, a new Philosophy of Intelligence (PHILINT), Critical Intelligence Studies (CIS) or New Intelligence Studies (NIS) referenced in the introduction of this Forum. An elaborate discussion of other collective works cannot be offered, yet it is worth mentioning how special issues of *Intelligence and National Security* on reflexivity, politicization, or bringing in the public clearly demonstrate how the social context, knowledge construction and its impact, (ab)use of power, or democratization and privatization have been important themes for intelligence scholars.⁷⁸

Additionally, as we examine what encompasses or distinguishes the four recent contributions, to what extent is there a certain overlap? Part of the call for 'PHILINT' is Mary Manjikian's article on feminist epistemology, an explicit critical theory approach that questions traditional ways of knowing and seeks to include marginalized voices in the production of knowledge.⁷⁹ Bernardino Leon-

Reyes's reflexive study of intelligence oversight provides a valuable vantage point to inquire on the symbolic power of intelligence and oversight, the role of grass-roots civil society coalitions, and the limitations of national oversight.⁸⁰ In my view this fits with the critical commitments outlined in the CIS special issue. In turn, for CIS, an (indirect) potential to 'improve' intelligence by making practices more ethical and democratic links to an existing body of literature on intelligence ethics.

More broadly, increasing methodological pluralism, and multi-, inter- or transdisciplinarity is relevant. But as Intelligence Studies as a field seeks to define itself, how fruitful is it to maintain (or perhaps construct) a fence between researchers 'inside and outside' Intelligence Studies?⁸¹ Rather than for scholars to take a 'reflexive break' from Intelligence Studies,⁸² all scholars should seek to reflect on their own assumptions, trajectories and 'allegiances'. So-called practitioner-scholars studying intelligence are certainly part of this. Indeed, given their (former) access to the world of intelligence, perhaps reflexivity is an even more prominent theme for them. Yet presenting research strictly as either functionalist or reflexivist is, for me, a too simplistic division.

A critique by NIS is that while CIS approaches can be valuable in examining classical Intelligence Studies, they are also constrained by their state-professional lineage. CIS has thus far indeed been more concerned with intelligence services, while NIS explicitly seeks to study intelligence as part of the everyday. Yet some of the same concepts and literature are referenced.⁸³ In a general sense, both view intelligence as a social *process* with an increasing number of stakeholders. As far as there is overlap, as scholars we all could make an extra effort to recognize this. Articulating new research agendas is valuable to stimulate debate and move Intelligence Studies forward, but more recognition of overlap will at times also lead to more modesty about the novelty or innovativeness of approaches.

Overall, when looking at the recent growth of intelligence literature, one could ask to what extent we can still speak of a dominant positivist objectivist paradigm in intelligence (meaning that neutral, logical, rational 'scientific' analysis of empirical evidence leads to the discovery of an objective social reality)? There has indeed been skepticism towards interpretative, reflexive, critical or other *a priori* (meta)theoretical contributions.⁸⁴ Needless to say, I disagree. No-one denies the need for more *a posteriori* evidence-based research on secretive and shielded intelligence practices. But as Gaspard and Pili note: why present empirical and normative approaches as competing or opposites?⁸⁵

Regarding critical theory⁸⁶ I see no fundamental argument to ignore or categorically dismiss all such approaches.⁸⁷ Moreover, there is value in examining contemporary practices from multiple angles, such as 'disclosures' of intelligence. National intelligence organizations, private intelligence companies and citizen collectives communicate more and more in public. Already, Ofek Riemer's research identified instrumental and performative dimensions to explaining the rationale for revealing state secrets, as a foreign policy tool.⁸⁸ By extension, taking Jurgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action (TCA) as a starting point can serve as a lens *and* normative perspective to study the way intelligence sensemaking and communication manifests.⁸⁹ It identifies instrumental, strategic, and dramaturgical action (all oriented towards achieving success), and shared normatively regulated and cooperative communicative action (aiming to reach collective understanding). In complex real-world situations these models of social action are all present to some extent.

While Habermas's view of dramaturgical actors as opportunistic manipulators can be interpreted as more pessimistic, one could read Ervin Goffman as remaining more open to the option that (intelligence) actors can also be more sincerely aiming to increase understanding among social groups.⁹⁰ Habermas's ideal of communicative action⁹¹ is perhaps unattainable, especially when related to the uncertain, secret (and manipulative) world of intelligence. Yet, despite its challenges, it might serve as a moral compass and normative reference, generating relevant critical questions: how does the intent to disclose intelligence relate to the actions taken and the perceptions of relevant social actors and audiences? Does 'public intelligence' enhance democratic debate and the advancement of more universal moral norms and ethics? Or is harm done and are more parochial interests served? For example, does it expose violations of international law and contribute to ending conflict, or drive parties further apart?

Although public intelligence can genuinely be deemed reliable and credible by those that publish it, in principle, any type of public intelligence is incomplete, out of context, and highlights only certain aspects of policy problems to mobilize and prompt action.⁹² There thus lies a danger in the 'oracle quality' and 'aura of certainty and conviction'.⁹³ As intelligence is 'weaponized'- shifting from sensemaking to becoming an instrument – what space is there for opposition and alternative voices? How are groups framed or perspectives absent, such as on the impact of violence on civilian life? As the disclosure of intelligence increasingly occurs and can become an instrument of international politics and coercive power, a critical perspective like TCA can enrich our understanding of such practices and processes in light of democratic and ethical ideals.

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Intelligence as a problem of the present

Hedvig Ördén

The fact that the nature of intelligence changes with the world appears to be a noncontroversial claim uniting conventional and critical scholars. Gill and Phythian, for instance, underline the importance of revisiting the seemingly perpetual question 'what is intelligence?' in the light of contemporary technological change.⁹⁴ Answering the same question, Warner and Stout point to the existence of 'recurring patterns' of intelligence practices while recognizing that the nature of intelligence is heavily dependent on specific 'bureaucratic and political circumstances'.⁹⁵ The contemporaneity of intelligence has furthermore been used to suggest a variety of critical approaches in the field. Bean, de Werd and Ivan argue that intelligence is always practiced in a context of power relations which need to be continuously critiqued with an ambition of emancipation.⁹⁶ Finally, refusing to ascribe to a 'critical' label, Ben Jaffel and Larsson emphasize the situatedness of intelligence when suggesting that, to understand what intelligence is today, we need to consider all the actors bound together through a 'stake in intelligence'.⁹⁷ In other words, the nature of intelligence is not static. The concepts and practices of intelligence are situated in the world and depend on worldly conditions. But what does this commonly taken for granted assumption imply for Intelligence Studies?

By connecting back to an ambition of turning to Philosophy for enriching Intelligence Theory,⁹⁸ I would like to say a few words about what it means to consider intelligence a *problem of the present*. In Foucault's lecture 'What is Enlightenment?' from 1983, the theorist pinpoints a core question raised in Kant's oeuvre: 'What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?' In Foucault's view, Kant's critical work on the enlightenment aims to reflect 'on the contemporary status of his own enterprise'.⁹⁹ This is a way of understanding critique, not as necessarily emancipation from predefined power structures (although they might well be important to consider), but as a 'reflection on "today" as difference in history and as motive for a particular philosophical task'.¹⁰⁰ If this is the meaning of critique – to find out where we, so to speak, stand today – it could perhaps be a unifying endeavour for Intelligence Theory, but also a disappointing one for those who want Intelligence Studies to be carefully confined within a predefined set of boundaries.

If Intelligence Studies is to take seriously the problem of the present, if it is to be 'critical' in this sense of the word, intelligence cannot be the only object, practice or phenomena under scrutiny. We need to ask questions like: what problem is intelligence an answer to today? How do these problems arise as problems for intelligence? In short, seeing intelligence as a problem of the present requires

a recognition of theorizing as a situated practice aiming for clarification of what intelligence 'is', and how it came to play this role, in our sociopolitical present. The ambition to capture such uncharted territories, rather than trying to solve a set of predefined problems in a functionalist manner, is perhaps why some scholars discard the labels of 'Intelligence Studies' and even 'Critical Intelligence Studies' (CIS).¹⁰¹ While I do not discard the possibility of intelligence scholars offering insights to intelligence practitioners, I agree with Ben Jaffel and Larsson in their criticism of functionalism in Intelligence Studies outlined in their volume. To pursue research with an explicit ambition to solve a set of problems articulated by the intelligence community, or indeed in policy, works counter to the ambition of clarifying how problems arise as problems for intelligence. The benchmark for the kind of critical inquiry proposed here cannot be a conception of 'usefulness' negotiated within a specific professional community. Notwithstanding this, if Intelligence Studies is equipped with a broader conception of the 'critical' enterprise, the field itself can be more inclusive, but also more confident in its potential for contributing to broader contemporary discussions.

As intelligence scholars, we should recognize that intelligence offers a unique point of departure for engaging with a set of wider contemporary social and political issues. This is particularly true for concerns arising in the nexus between democracy and security – a topic which has long been the preoccupation of, for instance, Critical Security Studies. Hence, like Coulthart et al., I suggest a move toward more interdisciplinary approaches where attention to intelligence may be useful for throwing light upon the *shared problems* that constitute our present condition.¹⁰² Notable examples of such problems are the emerging internal and external pressures on liberal norms, institutions and practices, and the global decline of democracy.¹⁰³ Using intelligence as an entry point for speaking to such concerns allows for a novel set of questions, such as: What is the role of intelligence in a time when the liberal international order is under pressure? How can emerging public-facing intelligence practices, such as intelligence disclosures or the attribution of disinformation, be understood in the light of contemporary struggles for epistemic authority? What does it mean for intelligence to 'serve the public interest'¹⁰⁴ in a context where the possibility of arriving at common truths is currently being undermined? These are only few examples of problems in relation to which the question of what intelligence *is* can provide a fruitful departure point for understanding a wider sociopolitical present.

A reader may note that this contribution does not propose any specific methods or theories for Intelligence Studies. By evoking Foucault's work, I do not mean to suggest that intelligence must perpetually pursue 'genealogies' or commit to 'discourse analyses'. Attending to the present instead means that we should use whatever means appropriate for clarifying a broader set of concerns in which intelligence plays a part today. By embracing a broader understanding of what it means to be 'critical', and seeing theorizing as a situated practice, Intelligence Studies can have a wider impact while preserving its distinctiveness as a field.

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Moving towards Critical Intelligence Studies as an analytical frame

Christian Kاونert and Samantha Newbery

Our central suggestion is that the move from Intelligence Studies to Critical Intelligence Studies (CIS), can – and should – take inspiration from the critical turn taken by Security Studies.¹⁰⁵ We specifically

created a title for our work that is modelled on the famous research work by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*.¹⁰⁶ In a sense, we are advocating drawing inspiration from debates that have already been held, and need to fertilise the debates in Intelligence Studies.¹⁰⁷ Aradau and McCluskey¹⁰⁸ refer to a collective discussion article on critical approaches to intelligence in the journal *International Political Sociology*¹⁰⁹ and work by Bean and his co-authors,¹¹⁰ yet also recognize the relevancy of earlier critical scholarship on security. Securitization, the product of critical scholarship initiated by the Copenhagen School, has been one of the most successful outcomes; a speech act whereby an actor presents an issue as an existential threat in order to justify extraordinary measures to deal with the threat.¹¹¹ This framework has expanded to include routines, practices of security professionals, as well as new political issues, such as migration, asylum, health or other 'soft security' issues. While some have criticized this approach recently, we maintain that it is a good starting point for such a research endeavor.

This does not mean that all aspects needs to be slavishly followed, however, we suggest that it is necessary to bring the debate on Critical Security and on Critical Intelligence explicitly together for very significant reasons: (1) intelligence is intrinsically linked to security (national and international), and (2) consequently, the study of intelligence needs to reflect the study of security. We acknowledge the feeling by some intelligence scholars is that Intelligence Studies has for decades already been reflexive, and are aware that security problems are broadening and complex. Yet, the conclusion that 'critical reflexive approaches' bring nothing new, would be completely wrong-headed. Let us go through these arguments in more detail.

Intelligence Studies scholars remain overwhelmingly focused on the activities of state intelligence agencies working in support of national security.¹¹² While it may be true that, in the abstract, traditional intelligence scholars may accept that security problems are broadening, in the concrete analysis of intelligence, this is rarely taken into account, with some exceptions outlined in this Special Forum.¹¹³ We need to broaden this out in several ways¹¹⁴: (1) state intelligence agencies already pay attention to non-traditional, non-military threats, leaving Intelligence Studies scholars behind the curve in reflecting this practice; (2) intelligence work is not restricted to state employees but is also undertaken in and for the private sector; (3) there is some work to do to catch up with practice and a critical turn in Intelligence Studies can provide a much-needed theoretical framework with which to achieve this. So far, publications that engage with Critical Security Studies, do so briefly and without theorising the intelligence directly to security. This is a major issue that can be improved upon. The 2021 'Critical Intelligence Studies' special issue of *Intelligence and National Security* is a good starting point, as are the articles by Berma Klein Goldewijk's examination of Critical Security Studies and Critical War Studies, and Cristina Ivan, Irena Chiru and Rubén Arcos's study of digital communication.¹¹⁵ The 2018 study by Hamilton Bean – 'Intelligence Theory from the Margins' – identifies a range of theoretical approaches beyond the traditional to be applied to the study of intelligence.¹¹⁶ Hager Ben Jaffel, Alvina Hoffman, Oliver Kearns and Sebastian Larsson also contribute to this debate in a 2020 article that proposes intelligence and 'national security' be understood as a social phenomenon.¹¹⁷ Yet, these contributions tend to focus if not on state intelligence actors, then on the benefits and function of intelligence for the state rather than for private actors.¹¹⁸ Doubtlessly, important points to make – and yet, not sufficient to fully develop the field in terms of CIS. Klein Goldewijk¹¹⁹ developed her thinking further, positioning CIS in the broader field of International Relations and drawing explicitly on critical theory – again doubtlessly an important exercise, but without teasing out the implications empirically for CIS.

What are thus the empirical implications of a broadening and deepening of intelligence? The broadening and deepening of the concept of security, as seen in the critical turn in Security Studies, is already reflected in state intelligence practices: securitization theory was developed in a broader attempt to redefine the concept of security, as it introduces a wider security perception, which comprises not only military security but also political, societal, economic, and environmental security. Leonard and Kaunert suggest 'not to follow too closely the traditional and narrow definition of security as advocated by the Copenhagen School as it may hamper the understanding of "real life"

security dynamics'.¹²⁰ Alternatively, they assert that securitization occurs even when the security issue is located at the lower level of the normalcy/existential threat spectrum. Thus, securitization does not necessarily incorporate aspects of emergency, exceptionalism or illegality. In that sense, we support Leonard and Kaunert's view, which reflects how security issues are being perceived and dealt with in reality. Thus, threats are not 'real' but 'perceived', securitization theory focuses on the process of how issues intersubjectively transform into security threats. In other words, an issue becomes a security threat not because it constitutes an objective threat to the referent object, but rather when an audience accepts the securitizing actor's position that the issue constitutes an existential threat to the referent object.¹²¹ This is an important point that is rarely, if ever made in the literature on intelligence, with some exceptions.¹²² Yet, it is vital for intelligence because it provides the necessary underpinnings for why intelligence is collected in the first place. Intelligence activities may cover many different security areas, whether it be political, economic, social, environmental, health or cultural. Further, its ability to cover this wide range of areas is considered to be an indicator of intelligence professionalism and institutionalisation. In other words, just as in the case of securitization, 'widening' lies at the centre of intelligence activities that attempt to handle various security issues and threats at a professional level. Security is the main point of intersection for both securitization and intelligence. In fact, the overriding *raison d'être* or the object of intelligence is security (again military, political, societal, environmental and economic).

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Notes

1. Gill, Marrin & Phythian (eds.). *Intelligence Theory*; Gill & Phythian, "Developing Intelligence Theory."
2. Davies, "Theory and Intelligence Reconsidered," Gentry, "Ideology in Costume."
3. In particular, the roundtable on "New Directions to the Study of Intelligence" initiated by Hager Ben Jaffel and Sebastian Larsson.
4. Coulthart, Landon-Murray & Van Puyvelde (eds.), *Researching National Security Intelligence*.
5. *Ibid.*, 6.
6. Gaspard & Pili, "Integrating Intelligence Theory with Philosophy."
7. *Ibid.*, 767.
8. Rønn, "The Multifaceted Norm of Objectivity in Intelligence Practices.;" Whitesmith, "Justified True Belief Theory for Intelligence Analysis."
9. Gaspard et al. "Integrating Intelligence Theory with Philosophy." 771.
10. Bean et al. "Critical Intelligence Studies."
11. *Ibid.*, 467–473.
12. *Ibid.*, 467.
13. Ben Jaffel & Larsson, *Problematising Intelligence Studies*, 249.
14. For example, Cox, "A Fundamental Re-Conceptualization of Intelligence," 199, Dover, *Hacker, Influencer, Faker, Spy*, 82.
15. Bolsinger, "Intelligence Studies: Problem or Solution?"
16. Gentry, "Ideology in Costume."
17. Dover et al. *A Research Agenda for Intelligence Studies and Government*.

18. Coulthart & Rorissa, "Growth, Diversification, and Disconnection."
19. Ibid.
20. Coulthart et al. *Researching National Security Intelligence*.
21. Klein, "Crossing Boundaries."
22. Johnson & Shelton, "Thoughts on the State," 110.
23. Marrin, "Improving Intelligence Studies."
24. Okamura, "Interdisciplinarity Revisited."
25. Gaspard et al., "Integrating Intelligence Theory with Philosophy."
26. Gannon & Mullen, "Two Journals are Better."
27. For instance, Wark, "Introduction: The Study of Espionage", Andrew & Dilks, "The Missing Dimension."
28. Gill & Phythian, "Intelligence Studies: Some Thoughts on the State of the Art", Gill & Phythian, "What Is Intelligence Studies?."
29. Treverton et al., *Toward a Theory of Intelligence*.
30. Gill et al. *Intelligence Theory*, Gill, Marrin & Phythian (eds.), *Developing Intelligence Theory*.
31. Marrin. "Improving Intelligence Studies as an Academic Discipline."
32. Gill et al. *Intelligence Theory*, Gill & Phythian, *Intelligence in an Insecure World*, Gill, et al., "Developing Intelligence Theory.", Marrin, "Analytic Objectivity and Science."
33. See for instance Klein Goldewijk, "Why Still Critical?", Bean et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies," Newbery & Kaunert, "Critical Intelligence Studies: A New Framework for Analysis."
34. See Der Derian, *Critical Practices in International Theory*.
35. Aradau & McCluskey, "Critical Security and Intelligence Studies."
36. Aradau & Huysmans. "Critical Methods in International Relations."
37. Ben Jaffel et al. "Collective Discussion."
38. Arcos et al. *Routledge Handbook on Disinformation*.
39. Nolan, "A Sociological Approach to Intelligence Studies."
40. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders."
41. Ben Jaffel & Larsson, "Why do we Need a New Research Agenda."
42. Bean et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies", Newbery et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies: A New Framework for Analysis."
43. Ben Jaffel et al., "Why do we Need a New Research Agenda," 14–16.
44. Bean, et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies", 467.
45. Ben Jaffel et al., *Problematising Intelligence Studies*, Ben Jaffel et al., "Collective Discussion."
46. Madsen, "Reflexivity and the Construction of the International Object".
47. Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*.
48. Bourdieu & Wacquant, "An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology," 8–11.
49. Bigo, "The (In)Securitization Practices."
50. Huysmans, "Security Speech Acts and Little Security Nothings."
51. Ben Jaffel et al., *Problematising Intelligence Studies*, 1.
52. Bean et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies", 467.
53. See Newbery et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies: A New Framework for Analysis," 2. See also Phythian, "Conclusion: The Development of Critical Intelligence Studies."
54. See Bean et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies."
55. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Order", 262.
56. Foucault, M 1988. "Practicing Criticism", 155.
57. Ben Jaffel et al., "Why do we Need a New Research Agenda", 18.
58. Hanon, "Manufacturing Intelligence", Rogers "Transversal Practices of Everyday Intelligence Work in New Zealand", Larsson "The Techno-Legal Boundaries of Intelligence."
59. Kaleem "Citizen-Led Intelligence Gathering under UK's Prevent Duty", Sheer "Prison Intelligence in France."
60. Ben Jaffel et al., "Why do we Need a New Research Agenda," Ben Jaffel & Larsson "What's the Problem with Intelligence Studies?"
61. Bigo, "Violence Performed in Secret by State Agents", 221.
62. Pettman, *World Politics*, Pettman, *World Affairs*, and Pettman, *Reason, Culture, Religion*.
63. Gaspard et al., "Integrating Intelligence Theory with Philosophy," 763.
64. Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time*, 27, Fish, *Versions of academic Freedom*.
65. Under section 268 of the Education and Training Act 2022, New Zealand universities "are primarily concerned with more advanced learning, the principal aim being to develop intellectual independence; their research and teaching are closely interdependent and most of their teaching is done by people who are active in advancing knowledge; they meet international standards of research and teaching; they are a repository of knowledge and expertise; they accept a role as critic and conscience of society. A university is characterised by a wide diversity of teaching and research, especially at a higher level, that maintains, advances, disseminates, and assists the application of knowledge, develops intellectual independence, and promotes community learning."











66. Coulthart et al., "Conclusion", 225.
67. Stout & Warner, "Intelligence is as Intelligence Does.", Gaspard et al., "Integrating Intelligence Theory with Philosophy."
68. Ben Jaffel et al., "Why Do We Need a New Research Agenda", 16.
69. Ibid., 10.
70. See Mitchell, "Team B Intelligence Coups."
71. Bean & Fischer, "Queering Intelligence Studies."
72. Zegart, "Open Secrets."
73. Cohen et al., "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice."
74. See citations for Bean et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies."
75. Deetz, "Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization."
76. Marrin, "Analytic Objectivity and Science."
77. Taylor, "Postmodern Theory."
78. Warner, "Intelligence and Reflexivity", Marrin. "Revisiting Intelligence and Policy," Petersen & Rønn. "Introducing the Special Issue: Bringing in the Public." Also see Dover, Dylan, Goodman, *A Research Agenda for Intelligence Studies and Government*.
79. Manjikian. "Feminist Philosophy and the Problem of Intelligence Analysis." Recognized as another milestone for CIS is M. Manjikian. *Gender, Sexuality and Intelligence Studies*.
80. Leon-Reyes, "Towards a Reflexive Study of Intelligence Accountability."
81. For example Ben Jaffel et al., *Problematising Intelligence Studies*, Aradau et al., "Critical Security and Intelligence Studies."
82. Ben Jaffel et al., *Problematising Intelligence Studies*, 252.
83. For example Aradau & Huysmans, "Assembling Credibility" or Räsänen & Nyce, "The Raw is Cooked."
84. For example Davies, "Theory and Intelligence Reconsidered." or Lillbacka, "Realism, Constructivism, and Intelligence Analysis."
85. Gaspard et al., "Integrating Intelligence Theory with Philosophy", 766.
86. Meant in a broad sense rather just referring to the Frankfurt School, hence without capital letters.
87. Gentry, "Ideology in Costume." I find Klein Goldewijk, "Why Still Critical?" essentially an informative and constructive comparative effort, raising important questions.
88. Riemer, "Politics Is Not Everything."
89. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*.
90. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.
91. Open, honest, respectful communication to resolve differences and make collective decisions in democratic societies to further or maintain a just and inclusive public sphere.
92. Riemer & Sobelman, "Coercive Disclosure", 277, Hasted, "Public Intelligence."
93. Hasted, "Public Intelligence," 427.
94. Gill et al., "Developing Intelligence Theory", 467.
95. Stout et al., "Intelligence Is as Intelligence Does," 518.
96. Bean et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies."
97. Ben Jaffel et al., *Problematising Intelligence Studies*, 5.
98. Gaspard et al., "Integrating Intelligence Theory with Philosophy."
99. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", 413.
100. Ibid., 413–414.
101. Ben Jaffel et al., *Problematising Intelligence Studies*, 19.
102. Coulthart et al., *Researching National Security Intelligence*.
103. These topics have been widely debated by International Relations scholars. See for instance the special issue on "Challenges to the Liberal International Order" in Volume 75 of *International Organization*, 2021.
104. Gill et al., "Developing Intelligence Theory," 470.
105. Newbery et al. "Critical Intelligence Studies: A New Framework for Analysis."
106. Buzan et al., *Security*.
107. Aradau et al., "Critical Security and Intelligence Studies."
108. Ibid.
109. Ben Jaffel et al., "Collective Discussion."
110. Bean et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies."
111. Buzan et al. *Security*.
112. Newbery et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies: A New Framework for Analysis," 781–783.
113. Ben Jaffel et al., *Problematising Intelligence Studies*, 249, Dover et al., *A Research Agenda for Intelligence Studies and Government*.
114. Dover et al., *A Research Agenda for Intelligence Studies and Government*.
115. Klein Goldewijk, "Why Still Critical?", Ivan et al. "A Whole of Society Intelligence Approach."
116. Bean, "Intelligence Theory from the Margins."

117. Ben Jaffel et al., "Collective Discussion."
118. Ben Jaffel et al., *Problematizing Intelligence Studies*, 249; Bean et al., "Critical Intelligence Studies."
119. Klein Goldewijk, "Why Still Critical?."
120. Leonard & Kaunert, *Refugees, Security and the European Union*.
121. Ibid.
122. De Werd, *US Intelligence and Al Qaeda*.

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