Prospectus

Understanding Analytic Tradecraft in the Intelligence Community

Public Policy and Administration – Terrorism, Mediation, and Peace

Walden University
Prospectus: Understanding Analytic Tradecraft in the Intelligence Community

Problem Statement

The United States currently spends over $50 billion a year to support a national intelligence program employing hundreds of thousands of people in worldwide locations for the purpose of collecting and analyzing information “necessary for the conduct of foreign relations and the protection of the national security of the United States” (Office of the Director of National Intelligence [ODNI], 2011a; ODNI, 2011b, p. 7; Priest & Arkin, 2010). Few would argue the need for the United States to maintain a robust national intelligence program, or that national intelligence is “fundamental to America’s national security” (Obama, 2011). Given the criticality of the intelligence function, the amount of national capital invested in it annually, and the number of people putting forth their best effort on a daily basis; the national Intelligence Community (IC) still suffers from seemingly routine “intelligence failures.”

Following the 9/11 surprise attacks and the mischaracterization of the Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program, the largest reform effort since the creation of the IC occurred under the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA). The belief that poor analytic tradecraft in the IC played a significant role in those failures was prevalent enough that the IRTPA specifically addressed the issue of improving tradecraft. The assumption within the IRTPA is that improving analytic tradecraft will result in fewer intelligence failures. While the underlying premise may be valid, achieving those improvements without an understanding of analytic tradecraft is unlikely.

What constitutes the analytic tradecraft is still an undeveloped aspect of the IC (Marrin, 2011; Varouhakis, 2013). A cogent argument can be made that much of what is written and
believed to be true about analytic tradecraft is based less on research and more on opinion or legend (Bruce and George, 2008; Johnston, 2005; Mangio & Wilkinson, 2008). Not surprisingly, tradecraft reforms adopted as a result of legislative impetus have not changed the pattern of intelligence failures. Rather than being the explanation for failure, analytic tradecraft itself is in need of explanation. The purpose of this study is to conduct research which results in a better understanding of analytic tradecraft. Improving tradecraft and reducing intelligence failures is unlikely without an effort to do so.

**Significance**

Based on the findings from the 9/11 Commission Report, the IRTPA mandated the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to address the issue of analytic tradecraft in the IC (IRTPA, 2004, 118 STAT. 3644, 3650). In response, the DNI has already instituted a number of IC-wide initiatives from training programs to policy (ODNI, n.d.c). Addressing tradecraft issues without a clear understanding of the current state of the art risks creating the well intentioned “pathologies” that Betts (1978, pp. 84-85) warns can set the stage for the next failure, or at best develop irrelevant changes to procedures.

As the IRTPA approaches 10 years of implementation and tradecraft enforcement, there are few indications that newly implemented community tradecraft standards have improved analysis and reduced intelligence failures. Community wide reform in the IC is costly and in an era of declining budgets and fiscal austerity the nation should not expect to fund a reform effort based on incomplete research. Nor can the IC avoid the issue of analytic tradecraft in the quest to improve intelligence support. A more comprehensive understanding of how analysts approach
intelligence problems and operate within their environment will help to identify true shortfalls and tailor future tradecraft improvements.

**Background**

The United States Intelligence Community (IC) is the loose confederation of 17 organizations and agencies which comprise the national intelligence program (ODNI, n.d.a; ODNI, n.d.b). Following 9/11 and Iraq’s WMD program assessment, a flurry of literature addressing intelligence reform from scholars, practitioners, and policy makers emerged. The role of analysis in intelligence failure, suggestions for improving analytic tradecraft, and the limitations of the IC all figure prominently in these post 9/11 offerings.

The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States Report (the 9/11 Commission Report) and the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction Report (the WMD Commission Report) both addressed shortcomings in the IC generally and analytic problems specifically. The 9/11 Commission Report famously identified a “failure of imagination” (2004, pp. 339, 344 – 348) within the IC as a key contributor to 9/11. While the 9/11 Commission investigated how the IC could completely fail to identify a new threat, the WMD Commission looked into how the IC could also fail to accurately characterize a target which it had been studying for well over a decade, epitomized in Secretary of State Colin Powell’s speech to the United Nations in February 2003. The WMD Commission (2005) found the IC was “dead wrong in almost all of its pre-war judgments” constituting a “major intelligence failure” (p. 2).

As a result of these intelligence failures, the largest reform effort since the creation of the IC occurred under the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA)
Developed under a broad bipartisan mandate, IRTPA reforms targeted the organizational structure and underlying responsibilities and authorities within the IC; supporting technology; personnel management; and analytic tradecraft (Negroponte & Wittenstein, 2010; ODNI, 2006).

Organizational structure reforms adjust the bureaucracies of government in order to achieve efficiencies and improvements in management; improvements to the supporting technology can range from the launch of a new satellite to the fielding of collaborative software for classified information networks. Personnel management, or human capital reforms, address the need to recruit, train, and retain quality personnel. These types of reforms have occurred in the IC since its creation and are generally well understood (Betts, 2002; Warner & McDonald, 2005). However, reforming analytic tradecraft is less concrete and certainly less well understood. While the strengths and weaknesses of different organizational relationships or the capabilities of a new technology can be identified and debated, what actually constitutes the analytic process and analytic tradecraft is still essentially unstudied (Marrin, 2011; Varouhakis, 2013).

**Framework**

The theoretical framework guiding this proposed study is the Actor Network Theory (ANT). ANT was originally developed as a means to understand how knowledge in the scientific community was created - “knowledge” defined to be the end result of a social effort to combine disparate and heterogeneous elements into some material form (papers, presentations, etc.) (Law, 1992). The ANT approach is a means of allowing the actors in a social effort to describe their environment and their activities in their own words, and then trace, or map, the assembled network from their own descriptions (Latour, 2005). With the parallel between the
creation of knowledge in the scientific community and the creation of analytic judgments in the intelligence community, the use of ANT in this study is fitting.

Law (1992) states that “to understand the power of mechanics and organisation it is important not to start out assuming whatever we wish to explain” (p.2). The resulting methodological principles of ANT are agnosticism, or removing any preconceived notions of the network; the use of a generalized symmetry in which every actor in the network is considered an equal player; and finally the use of free association to establish the relationship between actors (Crawford, 2004; Delukie, 2009). Given the inherent complexities of the IC and analytic tradecraft, a theoretical framework that requires a holistic approach and a clean slate could prove beneficial in a study on the subject. ANT has been used in previous studies (Czarniawska, 2009; Ranerup, 2008; Weiss and Domingo, 2010) to examine how individuals synthesize information and arrive at decisions which ultimately produce influence beyond their immediate sphere.

**Research Questions**

The following central research questions will be addressed in the study:

- How does an intelligence analyst move along the process of analysis, from becoming aware of the need for an intelligence product to creating the finished product?
- What is the environment in which that process takes place? What software, hardware, tools, people, knowledge, etc., populate that environment and how does the analyst move within it?
- What skills are needed to navigate the analytic environment?
Nature of the Study

This study is designed as a qualitative narrative study. Narrative research, analyzing the detailed stories of individuals in their own words to understand specific experiences, is a recognized approach within organizational studies (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). To better understand how analysts do their job, and the specific skills and techniques they use to do it, having them inform us in their own words of the experience of creating an intelligence product is a sound approach.

A narrative analysis can be guided by a theoretical framework (Creswell, 2007). The principles of ANT, combined with the rich description found in the storytelling of narratives, can combine to provide a description of the translation of information and knowledge into an intelligence product. Instead of telling analysts what tradecraft is and asking them how they apply it, the narrative approach will allow analysts to describe their environment and the activities therein in their own words.

Possible Types and Sources of Information or Data

Primary: The primary participants of this study will be current IC analysts whose tradecraft is the focus of this study.

Supporting: the curriculum of analytic training classes, policies and directive on analytic methodologies, and other documentary materials to complement information gained in the interviews (Patton, 2002).

Possible Analytic Strategies

Data, in the form of stories told by the subjects transcribed into text, will be coded and analyzed guided by the tenets of ANT. A coding structure will not be created prior to the
analysis phase so as not to project my vocabulary and pre-conceptions onto the subject’s voices; this approach to analysis will help to avoid determining beforehand the structure of the actor-network (Latour, 2005).

NVivo software will be used to automate the coding and organization of data and the mapping of the analyst’s actor-network. NVivo has been successfully used in previous research efforts with ANT as the theoretical framework and interviews as the basis for data collection (Brandt, Dalum, & Thomsen, 2013; Valentine, 2007).
References


http://www.odni.gov/electronic_reading_room.htm


