



National Intelligence and Science: Beyond the Great Divide in Analysis and Policy

By Wilhelm Agrell, Gregory F. Treverton

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Intelligence is currently facing increasingly challenging cross-pressures from both a need for accurate and timely assessments of potential or imminent security threats and the unpredictability of many of these emerging threats. We are living in a social environment of growing security and intelligence challenges, yet the traditional, narrow intelligence process is becoming increasingly insufficient for coping with diffuse, complex, and rapidly-transforming threats. The essence of intelligence is no longer the collection, analysis, and dissemination of secret information, but has become instead the management of uncertainty in areas critical for overriding security goals--not only for nations, but also for the international community as a whole. For its part, scientific research on major societal risks like climate change is facing a similar cross-pressure from demand on the one hand and incomplete data and developing theoretical concepts on the other. For both of these knowledge-producing domains, the common denominator is the paramount challenges of framing and communicating uncertainty and of managing the pitfalls of politicization.

National Intelligence and Science is one of the first attempts to analyze these converging domains and the implications of their convergence, in terms of both more scientific approaches to intelligence problems and intelligence approaches to scientific problems. Science and intelligence constitute, as the book spells out, two remarkably similar and interlinked domains of knowledge production, yet ones that remain traditionally separated by a deep political, cultural, and epistemological divide.

Looking ahead, the two twentieth-century monoliths--the scientific and the intelligence estates--are becoming simply outdated in their traditional form. The risk society is closing the divide, though in a direction not foreseen by the proponents of turning intelligence analysis into a science, or the new production of scientific knowledge.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Wilhelm Agrell is Professor of Intelligence Analysis at Lund University, Sweden and Visiting Professor at the Swedish National Defence College, Stockholm. He has a background in Swedish intelligence and military service in the Middle East. As an academic scholar, he received a Ph.D. in history at Lund University in 1985 and has written over 25 books, primarily dealing with Cold War history and Swedish security. He has been active in establishing intelligence analysis as an academic field and became the first Scandinavian professor in the subject in 2006. In addition to his academic work, he has also written several novels, some of which were translated into Finnish and German.

Gregory F. Treverton is Director of the RAND Corporation's Center for Global Risk and Security and a Visiting Scholar at the Swedish National Defence College, Stockholm. In government, he has served the first Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the National Security Council, and as Vice Chair of the National Intelligence Council. He has taught at Harvard University and Columbia University as well as the RAND Graduate School. He is the author or editor of three dozen books and major monographs, principally on intelligence, strategy, nuclear issues, Europe, and Latin America.

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