



Deciphering intelligence analysis - The synthetic nature of the core intelligence function

Giangiuseppe Pili

To cite this article: Giangiuseppe Pili (2022): Deciphering intelligence analysis - The synthetic nature of the core intelligence function, *Intelligence and National Security*, DOI: [10.1080/02684527.2022.2041947](https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2022.2041947)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2022.2041947>



Published online: 06 Mar 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Deciphering intelligence analysis - The synthetic nature of the core intelligence function

Giangiuseppe Pili

ABSTRACT

Intelligence analysis is one of the most explored topics in intelligence studies. However, decoding its nature is still challenging. A unifying question must be considered: 'Is intelligence analysis – analysis?' Unfolding the problem leads to an extreme conclusion: intelligence analysis is a way to structure sensory data collection and reduction. It is, namely, synthesis. A systematic scrutiny of the general nature of analysis is considered to compare it to what intelligence analysis is intended to be. As it will turn out, intelligence analysis is much more synthesis – namely, structuring sensory data collection – than analysis *per se*, which is the main conclusion of the argument.

Introduction

Intelligence analysis allows a plurality of different approaches. The prototypical conundrum is fixed by the old question 'is intelligence analysis an art or a science?',¹ whose implicit premise is that intelligence comes in degrees; namely, it shares features of both. Science and art are usually thought to be two extremes of the same spectrum and, therefore, the debate evolved in fixing the point in which intelligence is situated upon the spectrum line. Conceptually, this means that intelligence is elusive and, ultimately, a vague term used to identify something which is not categorical.² This vagueness is not a cognitive mistake if it mirrors reality. War is another vague word, though usually conceived in categorical terms.³ The ambivalence of intelligence analysis parallels the broader conception of intelligence, about which there is no one unifying definition.⁴ At a closer look, intelligence analysis deals with sensory data, indirect data⁵ and information much more than disentangling abstract components of a given problem. This means that intelligence analysis is more about structuring sensory data rather than analyzing them. Synthesis, and not analysis, is the goal of intelligence analysis.

Intelligence analysis is one of the most explored topics in intelligence studies (IS). According to Peter Gill and Mark Phythian's topological partition, it is reasonable to inscribe it inside the IS' definitional/methodological project.⁶ However, intelligence scholars did not pay much attention to a more fundamental question, namely, the analytic nature of intelligence analysis as such. As there are many different definitions of intelligence, so there are also many different definitions of intelligence analysis. As far as the goal here is to understand the extent to which intelligence analysis is analysis, and not something else, the quest for the real definition of intelligence analysis will be left for another paper, though one will be provided as a starting point for discussion.⁷ In addition, there is no need to assume now that intelligence analysis *is* analysis. Then, formulating the intelligence analysis definition would be misleading and, ultimately, premature. Methodologically, judgment is suspended, and the term 'intelligence analysis' from now on will be used neutrally, as a historical given. After all, different countries use the term in different languages to signify the same core