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Book Review: National intelligence and science: beyond the great divide in analysis and policy. By Wilhelm Agrell and Gregory F. Treverton.

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Wilhelm Agrell and Gregory Treverton, *National Intelligence and Science: Beyond the Great Divide in Analysis and Policy*, Oxford University Press: New York, 2015, pp240, ISBN: 978-0-19-936086-4

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It is a truism of the contemporary era (and indeed probably all eras) that the world is an increasingly dangerous and complicated place. The role of intelligence within that complex and dangerous arena has hitherto mostly focussed upon the collection, analysis, and dissemination of secret information to assist in the mitigation of threats. The book rightly acknowledges that there is a chasm between the reality and what western publics expect of intelligence forecasting and threat mitigation: the gap exists and so successful attacks degrade public confidence and create political pressure and effect. Agrell and Treverton seek to break ground (within intelligence studies) in asserting that the more productive aim of intelligence practitioners and the governments they serve should be the management of risk and uncertainty in areas that are critical for national (and international) security. They convincingly argue that the established practices of intelligence are now inadequate for dealing with the sorts of rapidly transforming threats that we now see. Furthermore they argue that intelligence practice is facing pressures between the unpredictability of the emergent threats (and for those read across the cyber, hybrid and asymmetric threats) and the need for accurate assessments, delivered to compressed timelines about imminent dangers or those appearing on the horizon. The essential essence of intelligence, which is to blend incomplete information into an accurate account of the unknown is similar to areas of contested natural and physical science. As with Sir David Omand's analogy of intelligence and palaeontology where the core question was how to bridge the knowledge gap of having some unidentified bones with the challenge of drawing a complete picture of a dinosaur, there are similarities with other areas of contemporary science, like environmental science and these are areas in which Agrell and Treverton see much intellectual overlap.

National Intelligence and Science is sensibly and helpfully organised. Chapters 1, 2 and 8 go over the safe ground of where we are as a discipline, how we should view analytical practice and the problems of politicisation. The remaining six chapters tackle the substance of intelligence and science: where the gaps and divides exist and a final framing chapter that seeks to bridge the gap.

The core premise of the book that there has been strong resistance to thinking about intelligence challenges from scientific perspectives for mostly political and cultural reasons. Agrell and Treverton also include a sustained commentary around the (artificial) epistemological barriers that exist between these supposedly divergent disciplines. They also argue that the existing approaches of both intelligence and science are stretched by their contemporary challenges and consequently they will need to reform to remain relevant and effective. They further argue that the concept of risk society is helping to bring science and intelligence more closely together, and

the most prominent contemporary example we have is the use of data analytics in intelligence assessments to provide increasingly accurate risk assessments and to help begin to guide risk mitigation.

National Intelligence and Science extensively explores the fragmented intelligence picture that sits behind any assessment. They are particularly persuasive with their case studies of the 2011 attack by Anders Breivik and the 9/11 atrocities. These examples show that it is not so much the search for a smoking gun, more the search for the individual nuts and bolts of a gun dispersed through a city of haystacks. At their core, Agrell and Treverton convincingly suggest that if the political and cultural barriers between disciplines can be overcome (and it seems likely that this will be substantially easier within practitioner than in academic communities) that there are improvements that can be made to modelling to provide more accurate assessments. For example, 'activity-based' intelligence is highlighted in the book as an area of intelligence activity that – and cue references to the totemic film *Minority Report* – is capable of 'locating unknown unknowns', that is to find answers to questions that have yet to be posed. Of finding a gun in the city of haystacks without knowing that one is searching for a gun. Such data-mining of communications, finance, and geolocation data has been highlighted by the fallout from the Snowden affair, but not discussed in as sober terms as Agrell and Treverton achieve. For students and scholars of intelligence, this should be of considerable interest, as it represents a future focus for intelligence activity and is a scientifically driven response to the sorts of data-gaps that are created in complex and contested battlespaces (such as those present currently in the Middle East), where human intelligence is exceptionally difficult and adversaries understand communications technologies.

Agrell and Treverton spread their focus from social media and big data as a means by which to understand threats, to how the most modern forms of communication are being used to improve business practice within agencies and out to government decision-takers. The use of internal wikis and delivery modes akin to Amazon's *whispernet* where documents just appear on a decision-takers computer or tablet, have the capacity to break down the classical intelligence assessment that would appear in hard-copy in a registry to something more fluid and usable. The breaking down of institutional silos was a big issue in the fallout from 9/11, as has been written about extensively, and has been subject to challenge in the light of the cases of Chelsea Manning and the alleged activities of Edward Snowden, but despite these the orthodox position is that information flow is useful to coordinating government responses to threats.

National Security and Science is an essential read for all those who study or are interested in intelligence practice, or the intellectual underpinnings of intelligence for two key reasons: 1) the discussion about the bunkered disciplines of broadly-science-science and broadly-natural and physical science is worthy of being read by all those engaged in political science and international relations. This element requires a much broader audience, 2) Agrell and Treverton understand very well the direction of travel

that intelligence practice is taking, and articulate it well: Treverton's positioning with the US intelligence community makes it particularly compelling.