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Editor's Note:

This engaging, anecdote-rich essay, was delivered as a keynote speech on 23 May 2002 at the Kent Center Conference on “Understanding and Teaching Intelligence Analysis: A Discipline for the 21st Century.” In it, Professor Wilhelm Agrell of the University of Lund, Sweden reflects on the evolution of the practice of intelligence analysis into a modern profession. Highlighting what intelligence analysis is and, importantly, is not, he questions the recent fascination with applying “the concept or perhaps the illusion of intelligence analysis” too broadly, such as to “information processing activities that are not really intelligence in the professional sense of the word.” Professor Agrell sounds a cautionary note that is timely at a historical juncture when intelligence analysis is receiving unusual public attention. By stressing the importance of linking theory and practice, he provides useful guidance for those establishing academic training programs in intelligence analysis and echoes the mission of the Kent Center and these Occasional Papers in promoting the development of intelligence analysis as a professional discipline.

This essay has been edited lightly from the original speech for presentation as written text.

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When everything is intelligence – nothing is intelligence

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Some time ago, or to be more precise, in the mid-1970s, I had just been employed as a junior analyst in Swedish air force intelligence. A colleague and I were fresh out of university; I had studied history and he political science. I was assigned soviet tactical aviation and he naval aviation – which he incidentally had never heard of before. We were supposed to be professionals, though we felt more like misplaced amateurs. But we tried to keep a straight face and look over the shoulder of senior colleagues to pick up something here and something there.

Then one day my colleague caught sight of a short news item in the morning paper about something very odd. At one of the universities there was going to be an academic course in what was described as "Social Intelligence," something about the common need for governments, organizations, and companies to employ intelligence to pursue their goals. The course was organized by a Yugoslav émigré, Stevan Dediđer, and a number of international celebrities were supposed to lecture. It sounded a bit "wicked," but it was about intelligence, and some kind of education.

Our boss, an old air force colonel, was not overly enthusiastic. But he did not say no. He said he would think about it and talk to the chiefs of military intelligence. A few days later he called us in. The answer was negative; military intelligence saw no need for sending someone to a course like this. If we wanted to study Russian or some other useful subject it was all right, but intelligence? It was like sending the combat pilots to the fun-fare to train in the roller coaster. But then he said he also talked to the security branch people, and *they* were interested. Not in the contents, which they did not care for either, but about those who attended and their purpose. So, if any of us volunteered as an under-cover agent it was okay to go.

This was precisely twenty-seven years ago. And relate this little story because it illustrates the passing of times and the magnitude in changes in perceptions and attitudes.

The intelligence work that I joined in the 1970s was thus not based on training programs, specific education, or theoretical knowledge. It was certainly professional, but not a profession in the full sense of the word--rather a kind of semi-profession, resembling an early form of organized skills like a medieval guild. Here the secrets of the craft were transferred from master to apprentice through a process of initiation and sharing of silent

knowledge. The craft was not developed but reproduced; its knowledge was static and the process cyclic.

As well as craftsmen there were highly skilled “doctors, field surgeons, and healers” in early days. But in medical history we cannot talk of physicians as a profession until the advent of modern medical science, anatomy, and pharmacology. The work of a profession is not the successful miracles of the gifted amateurs or the skilled craftsmen but a systematic employment of knowledge, where methods are visible and verifiable, their employment can be tested, and the results can be predicted.

The dual link between science and practice, between the world of theories and the world of action, is essential. In the First World War inventors turned up with thousands of suggestions on new weapons and other technical devices to break the deadlock on the Western Front. Many of the inventors were highly skilled but practically none grasped the complexity of warfare and military innovation. In the Second World War scientists and engineers were mobilized by military organizations accepting the concept of scientific advice and new technology. The successful and destructive result was the birth of military R&D, of the military-industrial and military-scientific complexes.

Intelligence has gone through these stages in the development of a profession, starting in improvisation and emergency. The first volume of the major work on the history of Norwegian intelligence in the Second World War is thus called “The Time of the Amateurs.” This pioneer period was followed by the “guilds,” the time of the skilled craftsmen in well-fenced, closed organizations. And now we have reached or are at least entering the period of a modern profession.

Today, many intelligence analysts not only have an academic background, but also some kind of academic education or training in their specific field. No one thinks it is a weird thing to give courses in intelligence and its applications in various fields. The limiting factor is hardly reluctance to attend courses but the availability of appropriate and sufficiently qualified lecturers, courses, or training programs. If a modern profession is characterized by the transformation from improvisation and master-apprentice relations to formalized education and training programs, then intelligence analysis has come a long way.

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Some people are never at ease with the way things are. First, they constantly argue for changes, and when changes finally occur they are the first to criticize them for being too slow or too fast (or both), going in the wrong direction, or not producing the expected outcome. Running the risk of appearing as one of these, I would like to highlight a number of areas where the rapid development of the concept and profession of intelligence analysis, in my opinion, is facing serious problems and hazards.

One of my concerns is the far too broad application of the concept of intelligence. From being the activity of closed organizations, surrounded by myths, misunderstandings, and taboos (*Dirty Work*, to quote the title of a famous or perhaps infamous book), intelligence

has become regarded as a key element not only in business but virtually in all fields of public and private affairs. Intelligence is seen as a concern for every organization and nearly every individual.

To some extent this reflects the practice to rename things. “Business Intelligence” is not an invention of the 1980s. It is of course as old as business, or slightly older since the first successful business transaction probably was preceded by the first successful application of business intelligence. But the word “intelligence” was not put on the door.

Stockholm’s *Enskilda Bank* (today *Skandinaviska Banken*) was founded by the Wallenberg family and became the core element in their growing financial empire in the 1920s and 1930s. Today, one of the chief financial analysts of the bank is called *Head of Intelligence Department*. But the only thing new is the title printed on his business card. In the early 1920s a young bank employee was sent to France to learn credit intelligence at the French bank *Credit Lyonnaise*. Back in Stockholm he was put in charge of an organization copied from the system developed by the French, but rather than intelligence it was called *External and Internal Statistics*.

To rename things and call them what they are is generally a good thing for everyone concerned. The same goes for the application of intelligence methods and intelligence analysis in fields and for purposes where its specific virtues can meet the complex dual challenge of globalization and increased insecurity. Such fields are in law enforcement; first of all police criminal intelligence and customs intelligence. In Sweden, no criminal intelligence agency existed until the mid-1990s, when it was hastily established to meet the demands of information exchange within Europol. Before then, Sweden did not harbor any serious organized crime, or so it was perceived by the top echelon in the police. One of the first things that the criminal intelligence service came across when it started to operate was the extensive network of domestic and international organized crime, invisible as long as the police worked on a case-by-case basis.

The problem is not in law enforcement but in the application of intelligence analysis in fields where its specific virtues are not adequate, not actually needed, or even might become counter-productive. Intelligence analysis can, employed in the right context, considerably enhance over-all performance. But in the wrong context “intelligence” could be just another dead weight--wasting resources, complicating procedures, or creating unrealistic expectations of gains or results. What I am referring to could be described as the application of the *concept* or perhaps the *illusion* of intelligence analysis to various information-processing activities that are not really intelligence in the professional sense of the word. Broadening the concept is one thing – to flatten it out is something quite different.

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This leads me back to the title of this speech. There is an old saying from the debate over the drawbacks of a closed intelligence culture in the 1960s and 1970s: “When everything is secret – nothing is secret.” The meaning of every concept is in the limitation. A word for

everything is a word for nothing specific. Intelligence analysis runs the risk of ending up here. When everything is intelligence – nothing is intelligence.

To some extent this is the result of the rapid change in the cultural connotation of intelligence from "spying" to a management catchword. Let me give you just a few examples.

In Sweden we had a company with the name *Pressklipp*, literally translated "Press cutting." It was a perfectly adequate name since that was exactly the service that the company offered its customers--cutting out and sending copies of newspaper articles on specified subjects or search-words. In the mid-1990s the company changed its name to *Observer Media Intelligence*. It still supplied most of its customers with the same press cuttings, with the exception that you could get them by email, along with video-recordings and links to pages on the Internet. This is certainly media information – but it is hardly media intelligence. The word "intelligence" has simply, like in numerous other cases, been added to attract customers and to create an impression of qualified analysis.

A few weeks before this conference I was contacted by a consultant offering university-based courses to external customers. He asked me if I could give a course in intelligence analysis to some of the staff at the regional federal police department. I replied that I already a few years ago had given a course for their intelligence analysts. Yes, he knew that, but this time it was not the intelligence people but the central administration. They wanted a course to improve their ability in describing threats, trends, and future tasks in a convincing way in their budget proposal. This was of course a quite legitimate need, but far more in the domain of public administration than in intelligence analysis. I tried to explain this difference when the consultant objected: "But isn't that more or less the same thing?"

The answer is no. Not because of any intellectual territoriality or desire to preserve an aura of hidden knowledge. It is simply not the same thing. Analytic skills are important in most fields, and so is ability to handle and use information in the electronic age. But information is not intelligence and only a fragment of all kinds of analysis is *intelligence* analysis.

So, what is the specific quality? What *is* intelligence? A great many books have been written on this issue, and we will deal with it later in this conference. Let me just make a brief remark.

Memorials are dubious sources, at least when it comes to the true virtues of the deceased. I would anyway like to quote what the Director of Swedish Signal Intelligence (FRA) wrote about an old colleague and veteran cryptanalyst: "In the world of intelligence it is vital to see, with an intuitive ability, potential intelligence values." There are two key words here, intuitive and potential.

Intelligence analysis is not about information processing. The main element is instead a specific form of uncertainty and the core intellectual element how this uncertainty is handled or even exploited. In this, intelligence analysis combines the dynamics of journalism with the problem solving of science. There is no mystery around it. The experienced news-editor,

the innovative researcher, and the independent-minded intelligence analyst share the same specific, but unfortunately quite rare, intellectual and psychological qualifications.

This leads back to the issue of professionalization, to the development process from learning-by-doing to learning-by-training, based on theory, verifiable methods, and self-reflection.

My critical remarks on the broad application of the concept of intelligence analysis are also – at least to some extent – valid for a number of emerging training programs:

- There is too much focus on useful hints but with little or no theoretical fundament. Again, there is nothing wrong in this, but to be regarded as an academic discipline there must be an interaction between theory and practice.
- Information processing, information screening, and informatics are sometimes described as intelligence analysis, which they are not.
- The actual content of intelligence analysis in many courses with this title is in fact limited.

But maybe this is no major problem. All disciplines must start somewhere; their development is by nature incremental, making use of or combining pieces from other fields, disciplines, or courses. And of course, if intelligence analysis as a discipline was not a concept easily accepted by the intelligence organizations, the same goes for the academic world.

Which leads me to my concluding anecdote. A few years ago I got the idea to establish a center for intelligence analysis at my university. We had a few relevant courses and a few individuals scattered among various institutions. To create some kind of platform would, in my opinion, be a first step toward establishing something more permanent that in the end might end up as a discipline. So I went to see my boss, the institute director. He was not negative, but he saw the obstacles. He said he would think about it and talk to the influential people in the faculties to get their opinion. After a few weeks he came back to me. The result was negative. First, there was no money for a project like this and, secondly, there were some serious doubts about the purpose. Or, as one of the senior professors had put it, "Intelligence? Isn't that what we all are engaged in at the university?" But there was still some hope; we could simply call it something else, like "knowledge management." Business administration had a *lot* of funding for *that*.

Sometimes you get this strange feeling that you have been through it all before.