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Drawing an analogy between the specialist skills needed in fishing to that of strategic intelligence analysis, the authors revisit the selection criteria for analysts. Noting that the global terrorist environment has changed significantly in the post-2001 era, it is argued that additional analytical capabilities need to be considered. These capabilities include not only the traditional expectations of particular personal attributes and intellectual engagement, but the capacity for analysts to operate effectively across multiple agency and jurisdictional boundaries, to integrate knowledge drawn from local regional and global perspectives, and an ability to understand the impact of tactical actions upon strategic objectives.

Dr Ruth Delaforce
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'The Compleat Analyst': Contemplating Strategic Intelligence In An Age Of International Terrorism

Dr Andrew Selth and Professor Michael Wesley

Background

In the mid-Seventeenth Century, a British ironmonger named Izaak Walton (1653, 1935) retired to the countryside to escape the civil war then raging throughout the kingdom. There, he devoted himself to more bucolic pursuits, and in 1653 produced a book entitled *The Compleat Angler, or The Contemplative Man's Recreation — being a discourse on fish and fishing not unworthy of the perusal of most anglers.* Revised several times by Walton during his lifetime, the book has become a classic among the vast library of books written about recreational fishing over the past 350 years.

We have not yet had the luxury of being able to retire to the country (or even to our suburban gardens) to contemplate at leisure the myriad challenges currently facing intelligence analysts at the strategic level. If we did, however, we might come up with a book called *The Compleat Analyst, or The Intelligence Officer's Profession — being a discourse on terrorists and counter terrorism not unworthy of the perusal of most analysts.* We doubt it would make even a ripple in that flood of books written about intelligence and terrorism since 11 September 2001, but it would at least be able to claim the distinction of having been written by two people who between them have more than 50 years experience as strategic analysts, and 25 years studying international terrorism.

In his book, Izaak Walton (1635, 1935) had separate chapters describing different kinds of fish, their various habitats, and the special skills needed to catch them. So, again following his lead, what might our future book cover? Three obvious questions that could be addressed are:

1. What constitutes a strategic intelligence analyst in this day and age, and how might we identify such a rare creature?
2. What is it about modern terrorists and their international habitat that makes them different from other more traditional subjects for intelligence analysis?
3. Are there any special skills needed to catch international terrorists, or at least to analyse and report on modern terrorism?

Strategic Intelligence Analysts

In a forum such as this, we do not need to dwell at any length on the qualities we all expect in strategic intelligence analysts. They are routinely cited as essential selection criteria

in advertisements for jobs in government departments, intelligence agencies, police forces and even some academic institutions. At the risk of stating the obvious, let us briefly remind you of the more important ones.

1. Analysts are required to possess a broad range of *intellectual skills*. These must go beyond simple clarity of thinking and expression, and include the ability to devise and understand complex arguments, judge competing views on their merits and draw judicious conclusions based on the available evidence — or despite the lack of it.
2. Some *special expertise* is also useful, such as knowledge of a particular country or region (such as the Middle East), a broad thematic area (like transnational crime) or an academic discipline (such as political science). Familiarity with a foreign language (like Indonesian) can help with the interpretation of vernacular documents and, more broadly, in appreciating the diversity of worldviews and intellectual frameworks that both allies and adversaries work within. Some recruits might come to the world of strategic intelligence analysis with different kinds of knowledge, or practical experience in the field.
3. Regardless of their academic or professional backgrounds, strategic intelligence analysts need highly developed *research skills* — ranging from the ability to conduct a simple internet search to the manipulation of highly sophisticated electronic data bases — and this is not to overlook the continuing importance of printed sources!
4. Analysts need to have the ability quickly to *read and absorb* large amounts of information, while winnowing out the irrelevant or marginal material, so that they can identify what is useful, understand what is important and respond to what is urgent.
5. Analysts need to be able to recognise *critical developments* when they occur, to identify emerging trends of significance, make patterns from many disparate pieces of information and to construct conceptual models of those issues driving events.
6. Strategic intelligence analysts also need to be able to *communicate* clearly and succinctly, both orally and in writing, so that they can transmit the results of their analyses in ways that best suit the needs of their consumers — whether they are policy makers, operational staff or simply other analysts.
7. Finally, the best analysts are those which are *intellectually curious* — they enjoy the world of concepts and ideas and look for new and innovative ways of understanding and describing world events. Good analysts are by nature sceptical of received knowledge and consensus understandings; they like proposing new and different ways of understanding the world from those which most people hold.

We are sure that you can think of other basic requirements but, to a greater or lesser extent, these are the kinds of qualities that intelligence agencies, police forces and others have traditionally sought when recruiting strategic analysts. But are they enough? Can these same qualities be readily transferred to the analysis of international terrorism as it is manifested today? Or is there something different about this particular target that demands different approaches and an even wider range of skills? Before we can answer this question, we need briefly to consider the nature of modern terrorism (the next three sections draw on Wesley, 2004).

The Nature of Modern Terrorism

Writing in the 1990s, the US academic Walter Laqueur (1993) despaired of any government ever being able to mount an adequate intelligence effort against international terrorism. The problem was so complex and so widely distributed across countries, disciplines and agencies, that he simply could not contemplate the vast resources and complicated mechanisms required to tackle it effectively. Since 11 September 2001, and the declaration of the global 'war on terror', resources are less of an issue. Indeed, there are some who claim we have gone too far, and that too many resources have been devoted to the analysis of this problem, compared with those allocated to other strategic concerns.

Despite the efforts made since 2001, however, the problem of international terrorism has grown in size, range and complexity. Al Qaida has suffered some serious reverses since 2001, and in recent years the tempo of Islamist terrorist attacks seems to have waned — at least outside Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet Al Qaida has not abandoned its goals, and its call for global jihad continues to inspire Muslims around the world, as seen most recently in Mumbai. Over the past seven years, a wide range of groups in a large number of countries have conducted terrorist attacks. Many others have been planned, but never been implemented. There appears to be no shortage of recruits, even for suicide attacks. Increased security measures have reduced the risks, but can never eliminate them. Indeed, it seems likely that we will face the threat of international terrorism for at least another generation.

Modern terrorism now encompasses much more than the traditional, nationally-based, hierarchical organisations and state-sponsored groups with which we became familiar in the 1980s and 1990s (see, for example, Selth, 1988). The greatest threat now is from a vast free-masonry of extremists around the world whose most common feature is allegiance to a rather ill-defined politico-religious ideal. Some are part of formal structures, of different kinds, but most are members of networks or loose alliances that wax and wane depending on specific circumstances. Independent cells have already emerged — including in Australia. In the future we may even see the appearance of 'lone wolves' who, inspired by reports on the internet or news media,

act without significant contact with, or practical support from, other extremists.

The 'battle of ideas' against Islamist terrorism — what Gilles Kepel (2004) has called 'the war for Muslim minds' — is nowhere near won, partly because of the range and complexity of the issues that seem to drive people to embrace such extreme causes. This problem is exacerbated by the pervasiveness of the international news media, and the consequent difficulty of consistently influencing public perceptions. Global Islamists like Al Qaida try to gather all perceived Muslim grievances together into a single narrative, focussed on opposition to the US and its allies, and to globalised Western culture. Increasingly, however, Islamist terrorism arises from, or is in some way underpinned by, deep-seated nationalist and local issues, which defy easy resolution.

We are still trying to understand the process of radicalisation, and the way in which extremist organisations form and grow. Linkages between groups and individuals are usually made on the basis of shared beliefs and goals, and are cemented by common ethnic backgrounds, social contacts or family ties. Cells often coalesce around terrorist 'entrepreneurs' — often charismatic individuals, perhaps with direct jihadist experience, who can attract and inspire young Muslims by exploiting their political naivety, manipulating their idealism or appearing to solve their personal problems. Some of these figures have links with established terrorist networks, while others seem to derive their inspiration largely from the internet and the news media.

The ease of international travel has made it difficult for security agencies to monitor suspect individuals, and prevent them receiving specialist training. Also, globalised communications enable far flung groups to work together, and to observe and adapt the most effective terrorist techniques used elsewhere. Often the most dangerous trans-national flows are not people or goods or money, but ideas and information — whether it is the doctrine of global jihad, guidance on how to obtain a false passport, or practical advice on how to make an improvised explosive device. The internet in particular has permitted the formation of a 'virtual' jihadist community which inspires and supports extremists around the world. Such links are very difficult to detect and prevent.

Some of these characteristics have echoes in the past, but most are different either in nature or degree. Taken together, they form what Marc Sageman (2004) has called a new type of terrorism — one which demands new approaches and analytical techniques.

Analytical Challenges

Terrorism itself is not a new problem for strategic intelligence analysts. However, the complex nature of modern Islamist extremism, and the greatly increased priority given to international terrorism since 2001, has highlighted a number of major challenges.

Before 9/11, most analysts were accustomed to a Cold War environment in which the lines between sides were clearly drawn, events were relatively straightforward and predictable, and the actors more familiar. Attention was focussed on a small number of secretive but strictly hierarchical and highly centralised states, as they developed over decades. Most threats were essentially military in nature, and thus based on armed forces that — albeit with difficulty — could be identified and analysed. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was still possible to specialise in the analysis of a particular country's leadership, politics, economy, strategic perspectives and military capabilities, and have a high degree of confidence in the analytical product that was produced.

Strategic rivalries and geo-political trends have not lost their importance. However, contemporary terrorism does not fall into the long accepted and well understood logic of international relations. The normal rules of state behaviour do not apply. Terrorism now occurs in an environment characterised by rapid and unpredictable change, populated by committed and adaptive adversaries who have harnessed advanced technologies and the benefits of distributed, decentralised networks. To quote the 2002 US National Security Strategy, their 'most potent protection is statelessness.' By definition, they cannot be stopped by one country acting alone. Yet they are highly resistant to standard multilateral responses.

The analysis of modern terrorism is thus a relatively new discipline that requires different — and often quite radical — approaches. There needs to be new analytic tools and technologies and, in particular, new ways of thinking. While some major advances have been made since 2001, we have yet fully to refine established methods of analysis, or to develop the necessary concepts, techniques and practices. Traditional evidence-based approaches to intelligence analysis and country-specific expertise are inadequate in a highly fluid, non-linear environment characterised by logarithmic and unpredictable change. The kinds of training we gave strategic analysts in the days before 2001 has needed to be looked at again and new curricula devised.

To take one obvious example, reporting on the intentions of one or even several members of a terrorist group does not necessarily reveal the intentions or capabilities of the whole network. And, as decentralised actors who constantly adapt their behaviours to deal with local requirements or immediate demands, it is difficult to build up a picture of a network incrementally. To quote the academic jargon, we are looking at emergent behaviours, in which the dynamic reactions of agents to local situations give rise to collective behaviours that are more flexible and complex than a centralised, hierarchic organisation would be capable of. In such circumstances, analytical forecasts — of the kind routinely demanded of intelligence agencies — are almost impossible.

There is a danger that insufficient knowledge and experience in this complex field will

lead analysts to impose inappropriate concepts, models and practices derived from elsewhere, or an earlier time. Those analysts who developed their expertise following the terrorist groups of the 1980s and 1990s, for example, or who lack in-depth understanding of Muslim societies and cultures, may well misinterpret the nature of global terrorism seen today. It is also important that analysts who developed their skills in past decades recognise the changed nature of the global strategic environment, the increased importance of transnational issues and the impact of the technological revolution.

Also, terrorism blurs the usual distinctions between the strategic, operational and tactical levels. Analysts are often asked to describe inter-state relations, as they are affected by terrorism, and to provide broad overviews of the threat and its international impact. Yet this can only be done by examining closely the fine grain of specific transactions between terrorists, and interactions between terrorists and governments. It may even require investigations into individual psychologies, personal relationships and group dynamics. This can be extraordinarily difficult. As Herb Meyer (2003) has observed, 'the toughest question to ask in intelligence is: what do they think?' At the same time, there is an increased demand for accurate, near real-time, actionable intelligence.

In this sense, terrorism analysis is a little like forensic police work, and requires close cooperation with law enforcement agencies. This leads to another set of conceptual and practical boundaries. In recent years, law enforcement agencies have been asked to take on a role well beyond their traditional boundaries, and to work more closely with national intelligence agencies. Yet strategic intelligence assessment is essentially forward-looking, seeking to predict events and estimate threats to states and societies. Police work, on the other hand, tends to focus on tactical or operational intelligence, and to involve the collection of evidence on a case by case basis, after a crime has been committed.

Recent years have seen these approaches converge. Security intelligence on terrorist groups has begun to resemble operational intelligence to a much greater extent, while modern policing techniques are making much greater use of tracking and predictive technologies to forecast and anticipate crime trends.

The inevitable cultural and procedural differences aside, this can lead to practical problems with regard to the sharing of information. For obvious reasons, intelligence agencies can be unwilling to let material gathered covertly be used in open courts. Important sources and methods can be compromised. For their part, police forces are reluctant to let information crucial to a continuing investigation be passed outside the bounds of the investigation, whether it be for evidentiary reasons or simply from a fear of inadvertent disclosure. Similar concerns have been raised about close links with government bodies that usually do not usually work closely with intelligence agencies, and may be unfamiliar with their procedures and requirements.

There are other practical difficulties. Since 2001, enormous resources have been poured into intelligence agencies around the world, specifically to tackle the terrorism target. This has increased the importance of co-ordinating and efficiently tasking the collection agencies — a challenge that is being met, but probably still has some way to go. In turn, they have vastly increased the flow of data to analysts — now likened to drinking from a fire hose — who are required to go through it all, filter out the wheat from the chaff, and identify material and patterns of immediate priority from that of longer term importance, or of no real importance. The sheer effort of managing all this information is enormous.

Organisational Challenges

At an organisational level, terrorism is challenging traditional intelligence structures and arrangements. It is blurring the distinction between domestic and international intelligence collection, and between intelligence and law enforcement agencies. It is bringing collectors closer to assessors, particularly at the strategic level, but also at the operational or tactical level. Also, the boundaries between the public or state sphere and the private or societal sphere of security are now much less defined. This has some real advantages, but also carries dangers.

As terrorism is widening the threats to states, more government agencies are getting involved, not only as consumers of intelligence but also as contributors to intelligence analysis. The vulnerability of societies and their infrastructure to terrorist attacks has brought Immigration, Customs, Health, Transport and other departments into domestic security structures, making coordination across the whole of government much more important. Closer links have been forged with business and private infrastructure companies, such as those managing transport and petro-chemical industries. At the same time, the demand for intelligence has increased, particularly for tactical intelligence related to early warning and response mechanisms.

In a number of countries, these demands have led to the creation of special centres (like the National Counter Terrorism Centre in the US) where different agencies can pool their data and ensure that all pieces of the terrorist jigsaw puzzle are considered together, to form the most complete and accurate picture. Expertise too can be shared, so that analyses are cross-fertilised with the experience and knowledge of officers drawn from a wide range of government (and even private) backgrounds. Such centres are also better equipped to coordinate the tasking of collection agencies, and to manage the competing demands for long range strategic analyses and current intelligence.

Another response has been to establish cross-agency and cross-jurisdictional centres (like Australia's National Threat Assessment Centre) that allow a special

focus on terrorist threats. They permit a useful distinction to be made between the management of this more immediate aspect of the terrorist problem, and associated operational responses, and longer term analytical demands. However, there is still a need for close liaison between the different levels. Threat analysts need to understand the strategic aspects of the problem in order to make the best judgements of short term threats, and understanding of specific threats is important in making broader judgements and longer term predictions.

Terrorism has also forced intelligence agencies to increase their level of international cooperation — both in terms of the raw data and finished product shared between agencies, and in the range of agencies drawn into liaison arrangements. 'It takes a network to fight a network' (Dumaine & Germani, 2004). Traditional alliance structures remain — and indeed have been greatly strengthened by shared perceptions of the global terrorist threat. However, the notion of a 'global borderless intelligence space' is still not accepted without concerns (Williams, 2004). One result of the expansion of intelligence contacts has been a fear, born of some real and costly indiscretions, that sensitive sources and methods will be revealed and long term counter-intelligence capabilities compromised.

Another challenge for strategic analysts is posed by the place terrorism has been given in national political priorities. Terrorism does not pose an existential threat to a state that is determined to resist such pressures. However, in democracies strong counter-terrorist measures need to be justified to an often sceptical public, particularly if they involve a loss of traditional liberties. Even more than before, governments are using sensitive intelligence publicly to build support for domestic security measures and foreign policies. It has also been cited to justify past decisions or to claim credit for particular successes. Not only does this increased publicity threaten the secrecy of sources and methods, it also increases the public's expectations of the omniscience of their intelligence services.

As the US intelligence guru Mark Lowenthal (2000) has written, 'in some respects intelligence is expected to operate perfectly when dealing with terrorism.' The public's tolerance for intelligence failure on terrorism is very low. This places even greater pressure on agencies. They become fearful of missing some vital piece of intelligence, or of being accused in the inevitable post-incident investigation of having failed to report some key development. There is a consequent tendency to report everything, regardless of value. The onus of evaluating and reacting to threat intelligence is pushed even higher up the chain of command, challenging the very reason for being of the intelligence agencies.

Strategic Analysts and Terrorism

So, to return to our initial questions, what particular qualities and characteristics should we be looking for in our strategic analysts to make sense of this very complex and dynamic issue, and to help manage the increasing demands being made on them, and the intelligence community? Are the traditional selection criteria enough?

The baseline requirement must remain those broad attributes and skills that we listed at the beginning of this presentation. Their timelessness derives from their proven and almost universal applicability across a wide range of analytical functions. And clearly most weapons in this analytical armoury can be used against other intelligence targets. Given its peculiar nature, however, the following additional qualifications strike us as being particularly useful for a strategic analyst whose job is to study international terrorism today.

1. If we are better to answer the challenge of modern terrorism, we need to understand it better. The adage 'know thine enemy' is as relevant today as it was when first coined by the Chinese strategist Sun Tzu (1981) 2500 years ago. This requires a much greater knowledge and understanding of the target, in all its forms.
2. In this regard, academic qualifications in the relevant languages, history, religions, cultures and so on are a good start, but we also need people with first-hand experience and a deeper level of understanding, derived if possible from lengthy study and/or residence in the affected countries or regions — whether they be the villages of Afghanistan, the jungles of Mindanao, the slums of Baghdad or the Muslim enclaves of suburban Paris.
3. At the same time, strategic analysts need to combine specific geographical and subject expertise with global vision. They cannot allow the depth of their knowledge in one particular area to prevent them from drawing insights and information from other areas, or from seeing the big picture. While it has local or national manifestations, international terrorism is by definition a global phenomenon.
4. Terrorism analysts also need to be multi-skilled, or at least flexible and intellectually agile enough to be able to draw upon and exploit a range of different disciplines, at different levels. They need to be able to understand how elements of history, politics, strategy, religion, psychology, demographics and other factors can all combine and interact under certain circumstances to produce and sustain violent extremism.
5. They need to be able to grasp the finite as well as conceptualise the infinite — or, put more simply, to build on hard data, where it is available, and to project the problem beyond what is known — or knowable — to come up with sensible conclusions. Terrorists are not always rational actors — at least judged against our frames of reference — and analysts need to be able to think out of the box. To use Joseph Nye's (1994) helpful formulation, terrorism analysts need to be comfortable in a culture of mysteries, as in the past they have been in a culture of secrets.

6. Often, the job will demand that analysts go beyond broad descriptions of the strategic environment and the nature of the terrorist problem, to much more immediate issues. Their analyses will help set threat levels and prompt specific official responses, such as travel warnings. At times, they may even be called upon for direct advice on operational matters. Despite the lack of firm intelligence, these demands may require them to go beyond their analytical comfort zone and take certain risks.
7. There is a need for 'trans-territorial professionals with trans-national competencies' — terrorism analysts who can set aside institutional loyalties and work cooperatively with others to reach common goals — whether it be within agencies, between agencies, or between countries. Only by approaching the problem in this way can all the pieces of the terrorist jigsaw puzzle be brought together, and used most effectively.
8. This will require a greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities (and limitations) of other parts of the intelligence community (such as the operational side of the house), the law enforcement agencies and other parts of the official machinery of government, such as Customs, Immigration, Treasury, Transport — even Health. Traditionally, intelligence agencies dealt only with agencies like themselves, and relished their exclusiveness. Those times are past.
9. As the CIA's Richard Heuer (1999) has pointed out, minds are like parachutes — they only work when they are open. Analysts need to have open and questioning minds, so that they can be aware of their own prejudices and in-built assumptions, can accept new interpretations of the available data and are prepared to challenge orthodox views. They also need to be receptive to ideas and information from outside the secret world — from academia, business, journalism, science and other parts of society.
10. Terrorism analysts need well developed interpersonal and communication skills — and perhaps a fair share of diplomatic expertise — to help break down institutional stove pipes and as far as possible encourage the sharing of intelligence data and ideas. They now function in a multi-agency environment, and need to be able to reach beyond their normal range of contacts and productively engage others who have a contribution to make.
11. In this regard, while much strategic analysis is performed alone, at a desk or in front of a computer, these days teamwork is vital, and the ability to work with others is essential. No one person can hope to master all aspects of modern terrorism, yet it needs to be considered as an integrated problem.
12. This will not be easy. Surveys have shown that intelligence analysts tend to be more comfortable working alone or in small groups, focussed on highly specific problems. They prefer to come to conclusions themselves and then resist different views — they are classic INTJs on the Myers Briggs personality matrix (see, for example, Johnston, 2005). These characteristics tend to be encouraged by the secretive nature of intelligence work, with its specialised compartments and 'need to know' principles.
13. The intelligence available on international terrorism is usually fragmentary, incomplete and confusing. It is also highly complex and constantly shifting. Even more than with other subjects, analysts need to be able to manage uncertainty and ambiguity in a political and operational environment that demands certainty, particularly with regard to specific terrorist threats.
14. Given the nature of the subject matter, terrorism analysts must be able to accept that, despite their best efforts, at some stage they will probably make mistakes, miss vital clues, or draw the wrong conclusions from incomplete data. They must have the resilience to accept these risks, learn from their mistakes and move on, despite the inevitable — and often unjustified — criticisms levelled against them.
15. Also, terrorism analysts need to be intellectually and emotionally robust enough to be able, over a lengthy period, to study closely the most vicious people and the most dreadful events, without losing their sense of values, their own objectivity and their determination to do the best job possible within the bounds that have been set around them.
16. Above all, strategic intelligence analysts need to have enthusiasm and energy — in short, the kind of dedication that acknowledges the importance of their chosen profession and willingly embraces its heavy intellectual, physical and emotional demands.

We need here to add a couple of footnotes.

Firstly, many of these qualities and attributes would also suit strategic analysts to the management of other intelligence accounts— and indeed to a range of other professions. Without them, however, their ability to analyse international terrorism would be greatly diminished.

Secondly, it would be unrealistic to expect to find many (if any) individual analysts with all these characteristics. Yet, if agencies can recruit people who, working as a team, together display these qualities, then they should still be able to achieve the total result we are hoping for. Indeed, despite the problems of mixing different personalities, professional skills and academic backgrounds, such teams have already proven to be a very effective way of harnessing diverse skills and coming up with new ideas and useful results.

Lastly, we should not expect to find recruits with these qualities fully developed. Provided that the raw material is there, good training programs, sensible mentoring

arrangements, enlightened and sympathetic management, and experience on the job can greatly assist in creating these attributes, or developing them to the desired level.

Conclusion

To adapt an expression from an earlier time, when intelligence agencies were grappling with a different kind of asymmetric threat, international terrorists are like predatory fish in a global sea, constantly moving and adapting in a highly dynamic and complex strategic environment.

Strategic intelligence agencies need analysts who can find these predators, identify them and their capabilities, describe their habitats, learn how they breed and survive, discern their patterns of behaviour, discover their intentions and help catch them. That will be a very challenging process, and one that will require a special kind of person, with particular skills, working cooperatively with others over a very long time. A most basic realisation must be that not all the information terrorism analysis needs will be gathered covertly. In the age of the internet and the mobile phone, many of the clues and contexts for understanding and tracking predators is openly available. Good terrorism analysts must also be comfortable with interacting with academic specialists, who often can shed real light on the specific problems the intelligence analyst is concerned with.

Izaak Walton (1635, 1935) may have been the first person to hang a sign on his front door saying ‘I have laid aside business, and gone afishing.’ To the compleat intelligence analyst of the future, however, fishing will be their business, so we had better recruit and train the right people.

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