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TITLE: A Definition Of Intelligence

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# STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



A collection of articles on the historical, operational, doctrinal, and theoretical aspects of intelligence.

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*A recent article in STUDIES provokes here a second attempt to sort out a tangled concept.*

## A DEFINITION OF INTELLIGENCE

Martin T. Bimfort

Formulating a brief definition of so broad a term as intelligence is like making a microscopic portrait of a continent, and the product of this effort is likely to have less value than the process of arriving at it, the reexamination of our own thinking as we seek to pinpoint the essentials of the concept. Yet misunderstandings within and without the intelligence community often result from incompatible understandings of the meaning of the word *intelligence*. Moreover, the assignment and coordination of functions, responsibilities, and relationships among the members of the community must rest upon an agreed interpretation of this word in the laws and directives which govern our work.

Definitions carefully formulated by intelligence experts do exist, but all seem deficient in one respect or another; the concept remains as sprawling and thorny as a briar patch. Each expert tends to view the term through the spectacles of his specialty. Military intelligence officers speak of enemies and areas of operation, defining *operation* as a military action or the carrying out of a military mission. The collectors of information are inclined to regard its further processing as a kind of frosting, a matter of arrangement and decoration. The agent handlers tend to lose sight of the end in the wildwood of the means. The producers of finished intelligence, cutting their cloth far from the smell of sheep dip, are likely to disregard both the raw materials and the methods by which they are obtained. Like the services within the intelligence community, these specialists within services need common definitions as bridges toward unanimity.

A definition recently proposed by R. A. Random<sup>1</sup> is here compared with three others. After discussing them we shall, with human temerity, propose yet another.

<sup>1</sup> Intelligence as a Science," *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 1958), page 76.

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1. Webster's *Unabridged* (1956)

"Intelligence. 5. The obtaining or dispensing of information, particularly secret information; also, the persons engaged in obtaining information; secret service."

2. *Dictionary of United States Military Terms for Joint Usage*  
(Revision of February 1957)

"Intelligence — the product resulting from the collection, evaluation, analysis, integration, and interpretation of all available information which concerns one or more aspects of foreign nations or of areas of operation and which is immediately or potentially significant to planning."

3. *A Training Handbook*

"Intelligence—The product resulting from the collection, evaluation, collation, interpretation, [and] analysis of all available information concerning the intentions, capabilities and objectives of other countries which are significant to a government's development and execution of plans, policies, decisions, and courses of action."

4. *Mr. Random*

"Intelligence is the official, secret collection and processing of information on foreign countries to aid in formulating and implementing foreign policy, and the conduct of covert activities abroad to facilitate the implementation of foreign policy."

Definitions 2 and 3 consider intelligence solely a product. Definitions 1 and 4 recognize that intelligence is also a process, but they contain other inadequacies. All four omit counterintelligence, a deficiency which is like that entailed in explaining an automobile in terms of its motor without reference to its bumpers or brakes.

Webster's definition is clearly not exclusive enough for our purposes. There is much obtaining and dispensing of information, even secret information, which has nothing to do with intelligence as we use the term. The second and third definitions list whole series of overlapping concepts in an effort to include everything, yet exclude the essential concept of process. With Webster, they likewise ignore not only counterintelligence but also political action and covert propaganda, although

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these activities are conducted by intelligence organizations in accordance with directives based on law.

Mr. Random's definition avoids all but one of these pitfalls, but has weaknesses of its own. First, in the phrase "the official, secret collection and processing of information on foreign countries," the adjective *official* is proper to the processing of intelligence but not always applicable to its collection. The acquisition of intelligence is normally performed for a government, but the act of acquisition is sometimes highly unofficial. Secondly, although secrecy is critical to intelligence, it is not a universal attribute. There is overt reporting by representatives abroad, overt processing of overt materials, overt disclosure of finished intelligence. Thirdly, intelligence is not confined to information on foreign countries; witness FBI reports on the CPUSA. This last difficulty can be solved, if the term *agent* is understood to mean any person or group who serves the interests of a foreign state, by adding the words "and their agents" after "foreign countries."

Mr. Random states the purpose of intelligence as "to aid in formulating and implementing foreign policy." But intelligence may aid in determining domestic policies for national security as well: the inauguration of a program for civil defense, for example, or stepping up the national development of space satellites.

The final element in the fourth definition, "the conduct of covert activities abroad to facilitate the implementation of foreign policy," comes close to the mark. It should be made clear, however, that "covert" as here used does not mean "secret," in the sense that the activities are hidden, but rather "non-attributable," in that the government's responsibility for these activities is not disclosed.

The omission of counterintelligence from the fourth definition, as from the others, is the more surprising in that counterintelligence is a part of intelligence not in an architectural but in an organic sense. The counterintelligence elements of the intelligence bloodstream are the white corpuscles and antibodies. It is true that our emerging definition has taken some informational aspects of counterintelligence into account by including "information on foreign countries *and their agents*," but we must also cover the aggressive and defensive measures

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which intelligence takes to protect its activities and products. Adding this element to our definition, we rest our case on a triad (positive intelligence, political action, counterintelligence) with threefold application (to process, to product, to agency).

Intelligence is the collecting and processing of that information about foreign countries and their agents which is needed by a government for its foreign policy and for national security, the conduct of non-attributable activities abroad to facilitate the implementation of foreign policy, and the protection of both process and product, as well as persons and organizations concerned with these, against unauthorized disclosure.