

INTELLIGENCE AS A TRADABLE COMMODITY

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Within the field of intelligence studies, there has been much discussion concerning the intrinsic purpose and nature of intelligence (Kahn, 2008) (Davies, 2009). Whether its aim lies somewhere between informing and advising or whether it has other collateral uses can be considered as a matter of definition. Whichever definition one may choose to use, the weaponization of intelligence is an occurring phenomenon. The term weaponization adds a military context that has been widely discussed within information warfare studies (Denning, 1999) (Arquilla & Borer, 2007). Characteristically, weaponized information could operate as a ‘Trojan Horse’ within influence or propaganda operations. When an intelligence agency allows (through exchange) low-quality intelligence within its databases, its cognitive vulnerabilities are hacked and exposed. Although analyzing the nature of weaponized intelligence – in a context of unconventional warfare - is beyond the scope of this article, interesting insights can be found in other instrumentalized aspects of intelligence. For instance, the exchange value of intelligence could be seen as facilitator of several political (or even commercial) agreements. In such a case, intelligence functions as a commodity or a pledge for other non-informational assets. While such a practice might have been employed sporadically in the past, the potential of it remains rather unknown. Therefore, being aware and understanding the complexities and different usages of intelligence assists in developing a comprehensive and responsible practice of intelligence collection and dissemination. In addition, intelligence sharing even via unconventional ways could enhance cooperation and trust among states. There lies the importance of studying on such a topic and the need to further explore specific gaps around the relatively underexplored side of intelligence as a trade commodity. In this current article I will briefly illustrate on the notion of ownership that renders intelligence as a product, I will then depict its attributed value in relation to its competitive environment and at last, its correlation with specific market mechanisms will be mentioned.

Ownership and narratives

Warner (2009) argues that intelligence is better conceptualized as a process rather than a product. In this respect, intelligence is highlighted as the set of continuous and changing interactions from all implicated parts of the process. Such an argument makes us think of intelligence as something non-tangible, a sophisticated network of several intangible parts composed (methods, practices etc.). Another interesting concept is that intelligence hardly produces a definite result or an objective set of outcomes. It is rarely possible to predetermine how the intelligence will be handled or what effect it will have on different actors (Munton & Fredj, 2013). In this respect, intelligence is rather a highly sophisticated process that generates products, rather a product itself. However, a production process needs a producer. When such a production process commences within a highly secretive environment over a layered and refined product, notions of ownership arise. The collecting agency or bureau has ownership and control of access to the data produced (Maras, 2017) and treats it as valuable that comes at a certain price. The classification ORCON ('originator controlled') on produced documents depicts this specific narrative of ownership. After the advent of terrorism, the intelligence community seems to slowly turn away from ORCON and data ownership to data stewardship and the 'need to share' (Lowenthal, 2003). Nevertheless, the producer and original owner still holds specific control rights over the information related to its attributed classification and worth. The producer has the authority to decide on how and under which status the information will be disseminated and therefore, has the ability to implicitly influence its value. As such, intelligence can be shaped and directed to an extent, by its originator. Several aspects can be manipulated (returning to weaponized intelligence) or simply sold to a buyer. Its malleability thus derives from elements that relate to ORCON and 'need to know' narrative. As a result, the value of intelligence's tradability moves according to the needs and dynamics of the competitive environment.

The competitive environment

Sims (2009) states that "*intelligence is the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information for decision-makers engaged in a competitive enterprise*" (p. 154). Indeed, the environment of intelligence is dictated by the need to gain a comparative advantage over the other or else to ensure information which is critical for the survival of the state. Taking into consideration that agencies and states may have different priorities and information needs, it might be the case that someone possesses what others seek. In competitive markets, the price of a product can be dictated by supply and demand and targeted advertising can increase the likelihood of selling the product. In a parallel manner, the value of information can be dictated by either the demand or the status of the potential buyer (high profile-buyer results to high value). Furthermore, contextual analysis of the information according to the buyer's needs

could achieve high chances of tradability. Similarly, Fägersten (2010) expresses the view that: *'in the world of foreign policy, intelligence is seen more as a way of selling your view on the world and thus influence the policies of other states. In the world of internal security, intelligence is seen more in terms of power, a commodity that can be traded but should always be kept close at hands'* (p. 518). It can be said, therefore, that once intelligence goes international (or else, releases on the market) and gets treated as a bargaining chip, its malleable attributes enable the producer to make amendments and make it more appealing to the consumer.

The different values of intelligence

'Intelligence is a valuable commodity, and states bargain with one another to obtain the best possible return before agreeing to share it' Walsh (2010, p. 4) claims. That aligns with the argument that intelligence has demonstrable value. According to Denning (1999) there are two types of intelligence value: a) exchange value and b) operational value. As mentioned above, exchange value is the value that member(s) of the competitive environment are willing to pay in order to obtain the intelligence, while operational value relates to the immediate and practical benefits it can provide to its holder. Both values are determined by the relevant environment, but it can be easily conceptualized that specific intelligence might have high exchange value and little operational one (or vice versa). Accordingly, a third one could be added, namely a future exchange value, since the above values depend on time. It is noteworthy that commodities are named as futures, exactly because specific trades are being conducted in order to be delivered in the future. On top of that, McGruddy (2013) takes an interesting note by arguing that intelligence suffers from a paradox. Paradoxically, when shared intelligence can be quite valuable, but when it is excessively shared then its value diminishes. While it certainly depends on the context (in the counter-terrorism context its value would still be great), a parallel can be drawn with market commodities and inflation rates. Although in a rudimentary fashion, vast consumption and large circulation of a commodity could diminish its attributed value. Considering the above market mechanisms and the tradability of intelligence, it could be easy to conceptualize intelligence within broader exchange frameworks. Bossong (2008) makes a first portrayal: *'... intelligence is also 'a "currency" to obtain other valuable information or political favors [and therefore] it is not appealing to share it on the basis of general rules with all EU member states'* (cited in Bures, 2016, p.62). Free sharing might prove beneficial to a counter-terrorism or countering organized crime context, but in foreign policy high risks and an absence of incentives to share hinder intelligence cooperation. Those incentives could theoretically be found in the larger political agenda, where sharing intelligence in exchange for political (or commercial) facilitations could enhance cooperation and build segments of trust.

The current short article attempts to think intelligence as a tool with expanding possibilities. As such, the actors and the narratives of ownership circulating around intelligence have presented intelligence as a process that generates malleable products. Following, the competitive environment on which intelligence flows empowers the possibilities for tradability of the product while in the last part of the article, those possibilities have been based on the exchange value of the product. Whether several theorizations apply to intelligence is open for discussion, however further research on instrumentalized aspects of intelligence could prove enlightening. Fundamentally, widening and enriching the field with new debates could vitalize the discipline itself.

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