

The development of intelligence studies in France

Eric Denécé and Gérald Arboit

Since the mid 1990s, interest in intelligence studies has grown in France, resulting in a surge of publications, seminars and training sessions on the theme. It is tempting to see in this surge the birth of a 'French School of Intelligence Studies'. But such a school of thought, if it even exists, is still in its infancy.

Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness of the importance of intelligence as a subject for study, signalling a major shift in the French mentality. This change comes on the heels of the geopolitical upheavals of the post-Cold War era which have made intelligence an essential instrument for an understanding of the new geopolitical landscape and consequently for scoping future threats. France, like other world powers, cannot afford to overlook such a transformation.

Those seeking to promote this sea change in the French psyche have had to overcome the inherent reticence of the French people and their political leaders towards a profession that is still viewed pejoratively, a phenomenon that explains the longstanding contempt shown towards it. Above all, the academic community has come to the study of this 'missing dimension'¹ in French research in a singularly fragmented fashion.

In the present paper we will endeavour to present a concise overview of the state of academic research on the subject in France and outline the conditions for the 'establishment' of a veritable French school of intelligence studies.

1. Reasons for the late emergence of intelligence studies in France

There are historic and cultural reasons for the relative disinterest in intelligence studies in France. The absence of an intelligence culture in France is stunning given the role the country has played on the world stage for so long.

¹ Christopher M. Andrew and David N. Dilks, eds. *The missing dimension: Governments and intelligence communities in the twentieth century* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

The absence of an intelligence culture in France

Intelligence work is a discipline that has never been held in high regard by politicians, the military, academics or economists.

One only has to visit a British or American library to see that France lags far behind its Anglo-American allies on the subject. When one book on intelligence is published in France, there are at least ten others published in Britain and the United States. By comparison with these two countries, there is a distinct lack of an intelligence culture in France outside a small coterie of professionals and the rare specialists on the subject. Former intelligence professionals, such as Admiral Lacoste, have noted bitterly that:

...the intelligence culture of French leaders and of public opinion in France is famously lacking, a result of the vicissitudes of recent history and a reflection of specific characteristics of French society.

Moreover, the Cartesian heritage has moulded the national psyche forging a tendency towards conceptualisation and abstraction, sometimes leading to a denial of reality, and a tendency to avoid the concrete resolution of problems. As General Mermet, former director of the DGSE (France's foreign intelligence service) has noted:

...we tend to, more than other peoples, overlook the facts and prefer ideas and subjective judgements to indisputable witness reports, whether it be in politics, where for example we were loath to believe in the changes afoot in Eastern Europe, or in military affairs, as shown by the attitude of the French Military High Command before 1939, despite the fact that the military had in its possession hard intelligence.

French culture has always maintained a strict border between knowledge and intelligence; the former is deemed 'noble' and 'legitimate', the latter 'contemptible' and 'illegitimate'. To prove the point, in France, intelligence is absent from the writing of the greatest French military strategists. The conferences, classes and writings of Foch, Castex, Beaufre, Gallois or Poirier hardly mention the subject at all.

We are here faced with a dual problem:

— On the one hand, the manner in which intelligence work has been performed in France is traditionally and also of necessity focused on domestic matters. The fight against the enemy within is one of the

salient features of the French cultural model.

— On the other, since the 'Dreyfus Affair' (1894), French intelligence services have been mistrusted by the political class. No one has forgotten the enduring impact that the Dreyfus Affair and its aftermath had on all of French society. Since that traumatic event, government leaders have consistently shackled the intelligence services instead of asking themselves how the services could be best put to use and how the performance of the services might be improved. This means that in France, more than in any other Western country, the work of the intelligence services is subservient to political fluctuations and electoral demands. When we bring Ben Barka (1965) and the *Rainbow Warrior* (1985) into the picture, it is easy to see how the political class have come to view and manage the intelligence services.

Thusly, intelligence work has negative connotations in the French psyche, and is unjustly connected with ideas of espionage, privacy violations and dirty tricks campaigns. On the other hand, counter-espionage, that is to say the effort made to protect French military, industrial and economic interests, is seen in a far better light. In France, all endeavours to defend the nation's interests are more easily accepted and implemented than are offensive measures.

The quasi-inexistence of academic research before the mid-1990s

Though perceptions of the profession were marshalled by an absence of a real intelligence culture in France, intelligence has hardly been ignored or derided. A diverse national intelligence production has long existed, and generally falls into two categories: memoirs and accounts written by former intelligence staff and writings by journalists. Before the end of the 1980s, academic research on the subject was virtually nonexistent.

The history of intelligence as a science in its own right was long the prerogative of foreign researchers. At university level, the Americans were the first to consider intelligence as an academic subject, before going on to establish 'Intelligence Studies' courses in the 1980s. The British followed their lead in the 1990s, with several university chairs in intelligence established.

The recognition of intelligence as a subject of study in its own right is a recent phenomenon in contemporary French historiography. Until very recently, historians and political scientists had not considered intelligence as a significant parameter of statecraft, nor did they consider the intelligence services as significant stakeholders in state policy. It cannot be said that the subject was totally ignored, but it is fair to say that its importance was largely

underestimated and hardly appears in social and human sciences, with even military historians giving it short shrift.

It must be admitted that the secret nature of intelligence work did not facilitate the work of researchers and the issue of access to documents was for a long time a brake on historic research. When the rare academics sought to understand the contribution of intelligence to history, their lack of knowledge about the intelligence profession, and their incapability in identifying the characteristic signs of clandestine operations led them to declare that there was no source material on the subject. Before the 1990s, few university writers, compared to their Anglo-American counterparts, worked on the subject of intelligence.

2. The emergence of academic intelligence studies in the 1990s

The emergence of intelligence studies in the world of French academia is firstly a result of the emergence of the society of information and the growing awareness of the reality of global competition, obliging economic stakeholders to integrate intelligence into their management processes. In order to respond to their new demand for specialists, business universities and schools at the beginning of the 1990s began to provide degree courses or other specialised post-graduate courses on 'business intelligence', to instruct economic players on the management of information and disinformation. In parallel, research and publications increased on the subject.

The work performed by the Martre Commission on "Competitiveness and economic security" (Martre Report, 1994) led to a growing awareness of new market entry strategies and the new realities of global competition.

In France, a dynamic and conflictual approach to international commerce and trade has emerged only recently. Elsewhere, the major international powers all understood that to guarantee peace, scope out emerging threats and emerge victorious from global economic rivalries, effective services, drawing from a culture of intelligence disseminated throughout the administration, business and civil society, were key. Though such awareness was slow to arrive in France, at least a demand for corporate information processing specialists had begun.

The second factor that explains the new interest in intelligence is terrorism, in particular the attacks of September 11, 2001. These attacks made French politicians and the general public in France more aware of the role that intelligence plays in national security. Intelligence was rediscovered as an essential information and decision-making instrument for political leaders with regard to foreign policy, defence and domestic security, and as a means of action.

The emergence of education and courses dedicated to intelligence

At the beginning of the 1990s, in response to the demand for specialists, universities and business schools established degree courses and specialised post-graduate courses on business intelligence, to initiate students and employees into the practices of intelligence as applied to the business world.

In 1995, upon the initiative of Admiral Pierre Lacoste, former director of the DGSE, the CESD (Centre d'études scientifiques de la Défense) of the University of Marne-la-Vallée was established. The aim of the CESD is to teach, promote study and research and act as a factory for ideas, with research covering the newly-widened scope of defence and security issues in contemporary society.

In parallel, the University of Marne-la-Vallée established a Masters Degree course in information and security that covers the work of the intelligence services and intelligence culture in general. Two Masters Courses in business intelligence and security engineering were also set up to cover a comprehensive range of intelligence issues.

In 1997, the former director of the EIREL (Inter-service School for Intelligence and Linguistic Skills) in Strasbourg, General Jean Pichot-Duclos, and the former leader of NAPAP (French Maoists), Christian Harbulot, set up the *École de guerre économique* (School of Economic Warfare — EGE). This unique post-graduate academy is supported by the Paris-based ESLSCA School of Business, and aims to fill in the gap in skills training for French business managers, namely the fact that the notion of information warfare is absent from the strategic planning of corporations, administrations and local authorities.

In addition, intelligence has been gradually introduced into the programs of ENA (French National School of Administration), allowing future senior civil servants to learn about the field. One of the missions of the IHEDN (French Institute of National Higher Defence Studies) is to provide in-depth information on the major issues connected with defence, and gives a course on the threats posed by foreign intelligence services, as well as a course on business intelligence. Finally, in 2006, the CID (French National Defence College) inaugurated a seminar on intelligence. Before this date, apart from some one-off conferences, there was no specialised seminar on the subject in the training of senior French military officers.

Also in 2006, the Masters program in “International Affairs” at Sciences Po Paris set up a seminar entitled “Clandestine worlds: Intelligence in the face of terrorism”, led by Stephen Duso-Bauduin, Professor in Sociology of International Relations and Jean-Pierre Pochon, a former top-level officer of the French secret services having worked at the DCRG (Direction centrale des renseignements généraux), the DST (Direction de la

surveillance du territoire), and the DGSE (Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure). The seminar studies the role of intelligence in the campaign against terrorism in different countries, with a primary focus on the United States and the French services, while also covering other major services worldwide.

The following year, the same institute established a new course called 'Intelligence Policies', helmed by Philippe Hayez, former deputy director of intelligence at the DGSE. The seminar aims to enable students to better understand this 'special' form of public policy, its ties with other instruments of state (*corps diplomatique*, military, police, and judiciary) and administrative decision-making.

There are now more than forty Masters Courses specialised in competitive intelligence in French universities or business schools.

The multiplication of publications

Two factors emerge from an analysis of French and foreign publications in France since 1975. The first factor to be considered is the slow beginnings of intelligence studies as of 1991, followed by a surge as of 1998, with a peak reached in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. From a publishing point of view, it is clear that French production on the subject has grown considerably since 1995.

The second aspect illustrated by the statistics is a fall in the number of foreign books published to the benefit of French-authored books. French publications have been amplified by the surge in interest from publishers on intelligence since the attacks of 9/11. Several publishers launched collections on the subject, with L'Harmattan establishing the collection *Culture du renseignement* (Intelligence culture) in 1999, followed in 2001 by the collection *Renseignement et guerre secrète* (Intelligence and secret warfare) by Lavauzelle, replaced three years later by *Renseignement, histoire et géopolitique* (Intelligence, history and geopolitics). In 2003, Ellipses also published a range of books on the subject.

The rise of academic research

Ten years after Great Britain, French academics began to conduct research on intelligence studies. There have been a high number of doctorates, degree papers, and Masters Dissertations and IEP diplomas on the subject. Analysis of that academic production reveals the areas of research explored and the progress of the ongoing 'establishment' of a specifically French intelligence school. On account of its multidisciplinary nature, intelligence studies encompass history, political science, law, economic science, and information and communications sciences. Its areas of application cover all sectors of

national security and economic/corporate security.

Be it a passing fad, or the focus of legitimate attention, the dissertations and official accreditations granted for thesis research since 1996 illustrate a diversity of research not seen in the publishing business. Above all, it shows the primacy of subjects connected to business intelligence (49%), to the detriment of international relations and warfare (20%). It means that the university system is adapting to a dual demand, one from the state and the other arising from purely professional requirements.

Paradoxically, practitioners of business intelligence research are loath to recognize its relationship with intelligence work. Business intelligence is considered more as a new form of business management, the result of a cross between open source management and the rigorous and scientific approach employed in marketing and consultancy, despite the fact that, internationally, the relationship between business intelligence and intelligence work in general is taken for granted. Consequently, many academics believe themselves to have 'invented' a new discipline. Accordingly, the information and communications sciences, whose scope is the widest due perhaps to its lack of definite contours, have quickly gained prominence in the field. Since 1996, information and communications sciences account for one third of thesis papers submitted on the subject of "intelligence" and two thirds of theses presented on "business intelligence". This trend creates a misunderstanding about the reality of economic intelligence and has resulted in the fact that 49% of thesis papers presented were dedicated to "open source monitoring", *i.e.* electronic information management processes.

This reductionist approach has since extended beyond the field of information and communications sciences and has been imported to all academic disciplines that deal with economic intelligence. In this way, in business management, 49% of business intelligence thesis papers presented were on the theme of open source monitoring; as were 13% of economics thesis papers. The interest in business intelligence has also extended beyond the sciences and has spread to the humanities, including law (22% of thesis papers), political science (15% of theses) and even history (4%).

For the last thirteen years, sixteen different disciplines have participated in intelligence studies in French universities. Contrary to what occurred in Great Britain, the history of intelligence (16% of thesis papers) is not the guiding force. Just as with information and communications sciences, the study of the history of intelligence can be said to deform the reality of its object of study. Military intelligence is overrepresented (60% of historical thesis papers), benefitting from the progress made in military history research over the last twenty years. And though international relations are well represented (28%), it should be noted that 80% of the subjects treat modern history only. Unlike military history, disinterest among students for the history of foreign relations has grown, especially in relation to contemporary

history. There are no professors working on the history of intelligence who are also foreign relations experts, despite the fact that foreign relations constitute the traditional theatre of operations for the intelligence services.

Bizarrely, political science thesis papers on intelligence (8%) are not comparable in quality to the efforts of foreign students working in the same field. With 47% of theses on spy literature and only 38% on the intelligence agencies and their structures, we can hardly talk about any knock-on effect. The same goes for thesis papers in law (15%), this despite the fact that law constitutes the third reservoir of intelligence studies in France.

The structure of official academic research on the subject of intelligence is still in the development stage, but it is in the area of business intelligence that the most important initiatives are taking place, with, in particular, the establishment in 2003 of the *Laboratoire de recherche en guerre économique* (LAREGE — The Economic Warfare Research Laboratory), by the School of Economic Warfare. Under the direction of professor Philippe Baumard from the University of Aix-Marseille III, his aim is to make up for the time lost in France concerning the field of business intelligence.

Other centres of research are also studying and working on intelligence questions: the *Centre d'études d'histoire de la Défense* (CEHD — Centre for Historical Study on Defence), established in 1995, set up a History of Intelligence Commission in 2000 chaired by jurist Bertrand Warusfel. The objective of the Commission is to promote research and debate, and to allow the military to contribute to university research in this potentially rich field of historiographic study. However, after eight years work, and one publication presenting the conferences held over its first five years of existence, the Commission was disbanded. The *Centre de recherche des écoles de Coëtquidan* (Coëtquidan Military Schools Research Centre), where Olivier Forcade ran a seminar on intelligence from 1997 to 2002, met a similar fate; the program was ended when its founder left having co-supervised fifty-eight dissertations by junior grade lieutenants on the subject of intelligence.

In parallel, the *Agence nationale de la recherche* (ANR — National Research Agency) supports a four-year program (2006-2009) for 'young researchers', entitled *Information ouverte, Information fermée* (IOIF — Open and closed source information), set up by Sébastien Laurent, Associate Professor at Bordeaux III and Science Po Paris. The program gathers twenty-two researchers and its objective is to be the first multidisciplinary intelligence approach in France (history, political science, law), composed mostly of young academics who work closely with their international counterparts. This interesting initiative is however more of a gathering of researchers interested in intelligence than a centre for intelligence experts. Their grasp of intelligence is somewhat limited even though the work produced is of a high quality and the meetings organised do enable many young historians to

familiarise themselves with the subject.

The birth of a specialised research centre

Though French universities did not allow for the establishment of a specific research centre on intelligence studies, one striking project has been developed at the margins of university life, around the *Centre Français de Recherche sur le Renseignement* (CF2R — French Centre for Intelligence Studies), founded in 1999. University researchers and former intelligence officers, overcoming ingrained reticence from the academic world, decided to create an independent think tank to foster the development of intelligence studies. With a dual entrepreneurial and academic approach, professionals with backgrounds in the services and a team of researchers, both young and more experienced, have for the last ten years produced more than twelve thousand pages of books, documents, and multidisciplinary articles. They have worked on numerous private university and military academy degree programs, and have addressed conferences in France and abroad. CF2R has established exchanges with international research institutes and with foreign researchers and has set up a university prize that awards the work of students on the subject. In addition, researchers at CF2R have taught a variety of audiences (general public, children and adolescents) and have given orientation sessions and consultancy work to MPs, the media, filmmakers, etc.

Though there existed no specific diploma dedicated exclusively to intelligence studies, CF2R and the *Centre d'analyse politique comparée, de géostratégie et de relations internationales* (CAPCGRI — Centre for Comparative Political Analysis, Geostrategy and International Relations) of University Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV, established a Masters degree in *Intelligence studies* in September 2006.

With this diploma program, CF2R and CAPCGRI sought to deepen and disseminate a veritable intelligence culture in France. With this end in mind, the course aimed to teach students the principles governing the actions undertaken by intelligence operatives, enabling students to recognize the traces of such actions in their research. This project is in the process of being relaunched within the framework of the *Groupe de recherche Sécurité et gouvernance* (GRSG — Study Group on Security and Governance) at the University of Social Sciences Toulouse I.

In addition, despite the fact that the government's *Livre Blanc sur la Défense et la Sécurité* (French government White Paper on Defence and Security, 2008) pilloried the need for an intelligence academy in France, at the beginning of 2009 CF2R launched a unique diploma for professionals in the French-speaking world, entitled "Management des agences de renseignement et de sécurité" (Intelligence and security agencies management). This course is aimed at high-ranking civil servants and military

officers, as well as deputies who work in or with intelligence and security services and who wish to become proficient in this environment. The objective is to allow participants direct access, manage or supervise intelligence services, to integrate such services with success, or to work effectively with them.

3. The limits and challenges facing academic intelligence studies in France

The main reason for the late emergence of scientific study of intelligence arises from two difficulties.

The first difficulty is simply the secret nature of intelligence work. There is nothing more difficult than an analysis of a field of activity whose main characteristic is the elimination of all trace of its existence or activity. Nevertheless, this difficulty also applies to many other fields of human endeavour and cannot be accepted as a reason for failure. Over time archives have been declassified and former intelligence officials have agreed to talk openly about their work.

Secondly, the work and professional practices of the intelligence services are wholly misunderstood; it is only with the acquisition of such knowledge that it becomes possible to identify the many traces of intelligence work throughout history and behind current events. Very few university teachers are able to comprehend the range of professional practices employed by intelligence operatives. Such practices are extremely rigorous and codified and have been perfected over centuries. Few researchers are aware of this gap in their knowledge when dealing with the work of the services. This is why academic courses must be developed on the subject.

A subject of research that is ill-defined

When we talk about intelligence, what is referred to exactly? There is much confusion about what constitutes a piece of intelligence, intelligence work in general and indeed the function of the intelligence services. Such confusion usually stems from problems of vocabulary. Indeed the term 'intelligence' refers to the intelligence services, their operations and the results of their work:

— *special services* provide state information to various Departments, (Ministries of the Interior, Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Economy);

— professional *practices* enable the penetration of the secrets of adversaries using different means. The means employed to penetrate

enemy secrets do not consist solely in illegal actions. Such practices are conducted to lend meaning to a mass of different data, both secret and non-secret, and to make such data understandable and actionable for a decision-maker;

— *finished product*, drafted to respond to a given demand. The finished intelligence product arrives directly on the desk of the authorities providing them with information; such information does not originate only from the special services.

When intelligence is studied, a researcher may be led to focus on several areas of expertise:

— the *administrative bodies* in charge of intelligence missions; the position and importance of such bodies within the state defence and security apparatus;

— the *professional clandestine skill-sets* developed to conduct intelligence missions. Such skill-sets are the only parameter by which one can judge the professionalism of an organisation; however, this is an area where archival material is very rare and academics are insufficiently trained;

— *intelligence product*, i.e. the intelligence gathered the quality of that intelligence and the manner by which such a product is taken into account or not by government authorities;

— *the manner by which a power (State) informs itself* about the world around it with a view to safeguarding control over its destiny and for the realisation of political and/or military projects; and

— *intelligence culture*, i.e. the relationship between the national community and intelligence work in general.

It is very important to give a detailed explanation of what is commonly referred to as a 'culture of intelligence'. The term not only covers intelligence work proper. In fact it covers all aspects of 'secret warfare', be that intelligence, action or influence: intelligence and counterintelligence, clandestine operations and special operations, interceptions and decoding, psychological warfare and deception. These activities cannot be separated one from another. Only a holistic, global approach allows for an understanding of the impact of such actions and their combined interaction.

An object of research that requires a well-defined discipline

Intelligence study is by its very nature multidisciplinary and unites political science, law, history, geopolitics, management sciences, the organisation of information and communications. Intelligence applies to all areas of national security, and economic security via business intelligence.

In an appendix to the compendium of papers presented at the seminar “French Intelligence Culture” at Marne-la-Vallée, Admiral Lacoste provided eleven themes of research essential to intelligence study. He drew from his experience as director of the DGSE as well as from the advances made in Anglo-American research, as published in British journal *Intelligence and National Security*:

- documentation;
- elaboration and decision-making;
- methodological approach to intelligence;
- internal workings of secret services;
- business intelligence;
- information processing and information warfare;
- criminality and public order;
- ethics and deontology;
- civil liberties;
- investigative journalism; and
- culture.

This indicative list constitutes an initial, largely multidisciplinary, ‘road map’. The former director of the DGSE suggested “a multiplication of complementary approaches from a range of disciplines”. A non-exhaustive list of specialist subjects indicated could be gleaned by looking at the speakers invited by Admiral Lacoste to the seminar: they included historians, economists, political scientists, sociologists and jurists.



In less than two decades, French intelligence studies have undergone a major transformation, benefiting from the favourable environment born of the information revolution and the attacks of September 11, 2001. The different government reports on business intelligence have also largely influenced the integration of the subject into university curricula. This has led to the establishment of diploma and degree courses, the first thesis papers and research programs as well as the creation of a specialised research centre (CF2R). In addition, closer correspondence between the academic world and the pu-

blishing business has led to a popularisation of a specifically 'French intelligence culture', that differs from the traditional journalistic approach and has resulted in the publication of numerous books that can be qualified as 'scientific' in their treatment of the subject.

Accordingly, and despite the traditional disinterest of political leaders in the subject, intelligence has achieved a level of recognition that it hitherto lacked. The existence of university courses on this subject seemed quite unrealistic only a decade ago. Such progress still requires comprehensive harmonisation by the universities in France.

We believe that it is still too early to talk of the emergence of a 'French School' of intelligence. As a subject of research, it is still too early to say whether the renewed interest in intelligence is but a passing fad. Research projects, save for CF2R and LAREGE, remain too fragile to constitute a real trend.

Centre français de recherche sur le renseignement