

The Stagnation in Terrorism Research

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Despite over a decade of government funding and thousands of newcomers to the field of terrorist research, we are no closer to answering the simple question of “What leads a person to turn to political violence?” The state of stagnation with respect to this issue is partly due to the government strategy of funding research without sharing the necessary primary source information with academia, which has created an unbridgeable gap between academia and the intelligence community. This has led to an explosion of speculations with little empirical grounding in academia, which has the methodological skills but lacks data for a major breakthrough. Most of the advances in the field have come from historical archival research and analysis of a few field interviews. Nor has the intelligence community been able to achieve any breakthrough because of the structure and dynamic of this community and its lack of methodological rigor. This prevents creative analysis of terrorism protected from political concerns. The solution to this stagnation is to make non-sensitive data available to academia and to structure more effective discourse between the academic and intelligence communities in order to benefit from the complementary strengths in these two communities.

Keywords academia, intelligence community, stagnation, terrorism research

What leads a person to turn to political violence? Several journalists asked me this question in the wake of the Boston bombing incident on April 15, 2013. I was emerging from an eight-year involvement in the U.S. intelligence community (IC) and could finally talk with them. However, I was at a loss to provide them with a consensus answer about the turn to political violence, either from academia or the IC. Privileged to have had a foot in each community in the past dozen years, I decided to survey developments in both communities following the massive financial investment in the field by governments and the addition of thousands of researchers for insights that might help provide some answer to this simple question. Therefore, this survey will look at the developments that are relevant to this issue of the turn to political violence and does not deal with more historical and global analyses of political violence, the consequences of terrorism, or even counter-terrorism.

A Brief Survey of Terrorism Research

Research on political violence did not start *de novo* after 9/11; rather, it furthered an academic tradition that peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This peak coincided

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with a spike in airplane hijackings.¹ Many of the old scholars tried to address the question above, beginning their inquiries with the assumption that people turned to political violence because of some personal predisposition. Some reported discoveries of personality pathology, but these claims did not stand up to empirical scrutiny. A consensus among them gradually emerged that terrorists did not suffer from any major mental illness, and the search for a terrorist personality gave way to the pursuit of a process theory of becoming a terrorist.² But, beyond a vague notion that one somehow became a terrorist, however the term was defined, there was no clear delineation of this process.

Approaches to Terrorism Research Post-9/11

The three thousand fatalities on 9/11/2001 brought a new urgency to this question of how a person turns to political violence. The U.S. government tried to stimulate inquiry through a dramatic increase in funding of terrorism research. In any large enterprise, there is an inevitable gap in time between a decision and its implementation, in this case the publication of scholarly research. This gap was filled by some good journalistic accounts. They described who the perpetrators were, focusing mostly on the leaders of al Qaeda, the organization that conducted these attacks. Among these authors were Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, Peter Bergen, Jason Burke, Steve Coll, Rohan Gunaratna, Terry McDermott, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, Sally Neighbour, Michael Scheuer as Anonymous, and Lawrence Wright.³ In general, these narratives, with one exception,⁴ were superb: Steve Coll and Larry Wright deservedly won the Pulitzer Prizes for Non-Fiction in their respective years of publication. However, these narratives were stories about the perpetrators and their organization, and were not designed to be analytical in a way that would further our understanding of these attacks.

Overall, the post-9/11 money surge into terrorism studies and the rush of newcomers into the field had a deleterious effect on research. The field was dominated by laymen, who controlled funding, prioritizing it according to their own questions, and self-proclaimed media experts who conduct their own “research.” These “experts” still fill the airwaves and freely give their opinions to journalists, thereby framing terrorist events for the public. However, they are not truly scholars, are not versed in the scientific method, and often pursue a political agenda. They are not trained to detect or analyze trends, but they certainly like to make sensational statements. They cannot be relied upon to advance the field of terrorism research, as they are more advocates than objective scholars. The press plays a role in echoing the most outrageous and sensationalist claims. Ultimately, “new findings” are not debated in the academy in a collegial way, but on television and the Internet as arguments to advance political agendas. The voice of true scholars is drowned in this hysterical cacophony of political true believers.

The initial federal funding for terrorism research reflected policy makers’ narrow concerns, based on lay assumptions and understandings of the 9/11 “terrorists.” The first emerging question was, “Why do they hate us?”⁵ This led to a tsunami of works focusing on the origin of such hate in the ideology of these terrorists, who claimed to be solely guided by the Quran. Many scholars, intelligence analysts, and online bloggers took the bait and sought the origin of such hate in the Quran. Enyo and Mary Habeck⁶ are examples of such literature. Most self-appointed researchers were totally ignorant about global neo-jihadi groups and let their prejudices fill the considerable

gaps in their knowledge. The noise from these laymen, appointed experts by the sensationalism-seeking media, drowned out the voices of serious scholars of political Islam that might have brought some clarity to these issues.⁷

The key assumption behind this “Blame it on Islam” explanation of terrorism was that there was some mysterious process of indoctrination or brainwashing that transformed “vulnerable” or “at risk” *naïve* young people into fanatic killers or true believers.⁸ Jerrold Post poetically summarized the essence of that argument: “When one has been nursed on the mother’s milk of hatred and bitterness, the need for vengeance is bred in the bone.”⁹ There is no doubt that ideology, including global neo-jihadi ideology, is an important part of any explanation in the turn to political violence, but we still don’t understand how. This did not prevent people in the U.S. government from becoming obsessed with culture and the “narrative,” and how to counter it.

As contracting officers in government funding agencies became more sophisticated, the next set of questions that emerged was “Why and how do people join terrorist organizations?” Unfortunately, these questions were still framed within a top-down paradigm of terrorism, assuming that sophisticated leaders at the top somehow prompted *naïve* subjects to carry out their intentions. This focused the agenda of research on the process of recruitment. The assumption was that sinister al Qaeda agents lurking in the shadows of mosques spotted *naïve* Muslims based on some personal vulnerability (“at risk”) and turned them over to recruiters, who indoctrinated them into joining the terrorist organization. These spotters/recruiters allegedly formed an organized worldwide “network” of terrorists, ready to take advantage of *naïve* Muslims. These al Qaeda agents convinced the vulnerable subjects to go to al Qaeda training camps and finished their brainwashing there.¹⁰ The British government even funded a whole counter-terrorism industry to identify these young Muslims “at risk” and, through untested but enthusiastic interventions, tried to make them more resilient and able to resist the appeal of terrorism. In the United States, there was a ghost chase for these alleged al Qaeda spotters and recruiters, under the guise of material support for terrorism. After over a decade of intense search, there still has been no discovery of any single spotter/recruiter—except for FBI undercover agents.

The media noted the hateful discourse of self-appointed street “preachers of hate” and Internet proselytizers and stressed their importance in the process of “radicalization.” Law enforcement analysts postulated the requirement of a “spiritual sanctioner” to endorse terrorist activities.¹¹ While freedom of expression is still allegedly sacrosanct in the United States, in Britain there have been some efforts to ban these preachers of hate. In contrast to these assumptions, empirical research showed that joining al Qaeda was based on pre-existing friendship and kinship, and that the evolving group of future perpetrators seemed more akin to a “bunch of guys” than a formal “terrorist cell,” with well-defined hierarchy and division of labor.¹²

A large portion of the funding for terrorism research went to the National Laboratories and to computer scientists in an attempt to use our technological advantage, especially in computer technology, to defeat terrorist organizations. Attempts to model terrorist behavior and decision-making proliferated in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The hope was that these “cutting edge tools” would anticipate the tactics of the enemy and help defeat it. I have been personally involved in almost a dozen projects using social network analysis, dynamic network analysis, agent-based modeling, data mining, data farming, and Bayesian network

analysis, among others. So far, it seems that technological approaches have yet to live up to their expectations. Indeed, it is hard to see any insight that came out of this project. It failed for lack of good empirical databases to test the validity of these simplistic models.

By the middle of the decade, after the attacks in Amsterdam, Madrid, and London and the failed plots in London, the vast majority of researchers and government analysts realized that most of the global neo-jihadi terrorist plots in the West were carried out by homegrown perpetrators—young people who had grown up in the West and conducted terrorist operations in their own backyards.¹³ But if such terrorists were not indoctrinated or brainwashed in terrorist camps, how did they become terrorists? This was the main question that the NYPD report tried to answer. It postulated a process of radicalization in the West.¹⁴ Some terrorists had received some training abroad, but many had not. This was the main insight of the NYPD report that focused on the process of radicalization in the West and the subsequent homegrown threat. What was this mysterious process of radicalization? The NYPD postulated four stages of the process, but these were vague, simplistic, and did not stand up to close empirical scrutiny. Wiktorowicz postulated some sort of “cognitive opening” as the core dynamic for this transformation.¹⁵ However, there has been no empirical validation of this concept. It is simply too easy to find some sort of vague cognitive opening in retrospective self-reports, especially when the interview is directed to finding one.

In an earlier work, I suggested four elements to the process of joining a terrorist network: a perceived war on one’s in-group; moral outrage at some salient major injustice; resonance with personal experiences; and mobilization by an already politically active network. This process was being transformed because of state repression, which created a very hostile environment for face-to-face interactions among potential conspirators, driving them to interact via the Internet. I therefore predicted that the terrorist threat was evolving from a more networked system into a “leaderless jihad” consisting of small numbers of militants carrying out terrorist actions on their own (unguided and not controlled by any central terrorist organization) while they were still connected to the virtual extremist community.¹⁶ This raised some skepticism at the time, but the events of the last half decade have supported this argument.¹⁷

McCauley and Moskalenko¹⁸ proposed an intriguing set of mechanisms constituting this process of radicalization, but the mechanisms are ad hoc, based on very schematic biographies of nineteenth-century Russian militants and selective confirmatory evidence from global neo-jihadi terrorism. It remains to be seen whether their concepts will be fruitful enough to generate a research project or be useful in the field.

From a state perspective, there are two major questions among policy makers with respect to political violence. How do we counter it? How do we protect our constituency? As soon as a mysterious process of radicalization was identified as the core dynamic for terrorism, politicians, both in the U.S. and abroad, naturally requested new projects for counter- or de-radicalization. Many researchers were not yet sold on the nature of radicalization, so self-appointed practitioners went ahead of scholars¹⁹ and set up a variety of de-radicalization programs in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Such programs are conspicuously absent in the United States. They are based on flawed lay understanding of radicalization: misinterpretation of Islam and potential terrorist vulnerability to them. The programs therefore combine

attempts to correct misguided interpretations of Islam and social work for “at risk” individuals. But since scientists have not been involved in creating these programs, there has been no built-in control group for comparison in any of them. Comparison of people receiving any intervention (the test group) with people who do not (the control group) is really the only way to estimate the effectiveness of any social intervention. Simply put, in the absence of comparison with any control group, we have no idea whether the counter- or de-radicalization programs work or not.

With the rise of homegrown terrorism and loners, the turn to violence was facilitated by communication via the Internet. How does the Internet contribute to the turn to political violence? The few studies of the Internet in this wave of terrorism are mostly descriptive.²⁰ There is an implicit assumption that mere exposure to material on jihadi websites radicalizes *naïve* Muslims and turns them violent. On the contrary, it appears that there is active participation by these online jihadists and they seek out the website, each for his own reasons. This type of interactivity online was important in the trajectory to political violence.²¹ However, much work remains to be done to understand the influence of the Internet in this turn to violence.

The various forms of this very lethal wave of terrorism also stimulated research to see whether suicide terrorism²² or lone wolf terrorism²³ were new or different from other forms of terrorism. However, no one has shown that either of these forms is very different from other sorts of terrorism, nor offered any significant insights into what leads young people to turn to political violence.

A new research agenda sponsored by the U.S. government again relies on U.S. technological superiority over terrorists. Its goal is to bring insights gleaned from neuro-cognitive science into the study of terrorism. This involves speculation about the generalizability of findings in the laboratory and especially brain-imaging experiments to terrorism research.²⁴

Yet, after all this funding and this flurry of publications, with each new terrorist incident we realize that we are no closer to answering our original question about what leads people to turn to political violence. The same worn-out questions are raised over and over again, and we still have no compelling answers. It seems that terrorism research is in a state of stagnation on the main issues. How did this state of affairs arise?

Terrorism Research in Academia

By its nature, the study of terrorism is multidisciplinary, inviting the insights of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, historians, economists, engineers, and computer scientists. Ideally, a terrorism research program would bring together many great minds from these various fields and structure them to work continuously with a good set of data. Unfortunately, because of the scattershot nature of the funding and lack of reliable data to be discussed below, the field is disorganized and few great researchers are attracted to it full-time.²⁵ Most participate in occasional or part-time projects according to available funding while remaining focused on their previous research interests. Consequently, academia has produced little in the way of research programs that have captured the imagination of gifted scholars or generated fruitful counter-intuitive findings. At best, they might have had a peripheral interest in terrorism, but as federal money poured in, they took notice and developed a rather mercenary interest in the field. They tried to adapt their off-the-shelf disciplinary insights to terrorism, but so far with very limited success.

A serious impediment to scholars, whether fully dedicated to terrorism studies or only occasionally participating in such a study, is the lack of the availability of comprehensive and reliable data. The U.S. government has neither released relevant data about terrorist plots nor funded the methodological accumulation of detailed and comprehensive data that might shed some light on the question of the turn to political violence. A funding contract officer once asked me, “Why should I fund the gathering of publicly available information?” It seems that the government’s strategy has been to fund research, but withhold any detailed evidence, which is still classified. Data available to academics via popular search engines are, at best, secondary sources coming from journalistic investigation or, worse, erroneous claims by self-appointed experts. These are mostly based on politically motivated government leaks and government claims about “terrorists”—often made for political reasons. They tend to justify the government’s actions (providing the prosecutorial case in an upcoming trial), and obfuscate more than they clarify.

Another set of data is the discourse and documents available on “jihadi websites.” However, this is a source of great confusion, as much of this discourse, generally ignorant and sophomoric, is rarely connected to actual violent plots. The U.S., British, and Danish justice departments have played on juries’ ignorance of terrorism and the inflammatory nature of this discourse to hire, as expert witnesses, pseudo scholars who claim that they have generated a terrorist profile from such online discourse. These self-proclaimed “experts” have helped condemn immature young people, whose only crime was boasting and bragging on the Internet, to very long prison terms.²⁶

Government statements and leaks provide fragmentary and biased information to journalists. Unfortunately, since there is so little information, the press amplifies this patchy information to the point of distortion through an echo effect, where repeats of the claims are taken as corroboration for the original leak. One-dimensional and sensational portraits of alleged terrorists, packaged in the five-hundred-words-or-less limit of a newspaper article or a television sound bite, dominate our understanding of this phenomenon. Nor is there any incentive in the press to try to correct erroneous initial information, which is forever memorialized on the Internet, now the repository of all information, good and bad. Self-appointed cyber sleuths who constitute the vast majority of so-called terrorist researchers create far-fetched theories about terrorists and terrorism from these very fragmentary caricatures. Indeed, from such a distorted foundation, anything is possible.

Unfortunately, many scholars also rely on these government officials’ statements, which are political, directed at a given audience for specific reasons, such as advocacy for one’s department or agency, defending it before a Congressional inquiry, self-promotion, or a request to increase its budget. These statements have a definite spin and present only one side of the issue, usually one as favorable as possible to the briefer. They deal in generalities and ignore any inconsistent information. Usually, they are simply misleading, but at times, they are outright lies, such as cabinet officers claiming that the U.S. did not torture terrorist suspects²⁷ or that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction to the United Nations.²⁸ Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz guaranteed to the House Budgetary Committee that the Iraq War would not cost much to the American public.²⁹ Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano declared, “The system worked” when we narrowly escaped an airplane bombing catastrophe due to the ineptitude of the bomber.³⁰ Generally, government cabinet members try to be careful in their messages to the press because they know

that the press will scrutinize them. This same level of care is not present among officials of lesser rank, who originate most erroneous disseminated information, as the provider knows that the press won't be able to check classified information.

Reliance on the text of federal warrants or indictments should be the beginning of an objective investigation, not its end. Such documents set forth the prosecution's claim, giving its best argument in our adversarial legal system. It is one-sided and biased. Its claims must be corroborated through independent investigation or through a trial, which gives a defendant a chance to defend himself and challenge the claims of the prosecution. In much of terrorism research, this attempt at objectivity is abandoned and analysts behave as if alleged terrorists are guilty until proven innocent.³¹

To appreciate the pitfalls of academic analysis based on poor information, imagine academics during World War II trying to study the German Wehrmacht, and having to rely only on what was known to them at the time—the claims of allied propaganda about Nazis, politically motivated intelligence leaks, and Nazi propaganda. The study would necessarily, and probably unintentionally, have become a piece of allied propaganda, despite the scholar's intentions of neutrality and objectivity. Half a century later, after the opening of East European archives, new studies of the Wehrmacht rely on primary source documents from German soldiers themselves. The difference between the hypothetical contemporaneous study and current studies would show a dramatic difference in their quality and validity. The richness and sophistication of the later studies would contrast sharply with those carried out during the war, which were mostly exercises in caricatures and prejudices against the enemy.

In contemporary terrorism studies, the only data sets collected in academia are incidents-based databases, like the Global Terrorism Database (GTD)³² collected at the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. Such a database can very crudely describe a terrorist incident but gives no details on the plots. From such data, one can make statements about the frequency and distribution of terrorist attacks, but little about how people turn to political violence, which requires far more detailed, comprehensive, and reliable data.

Without relevant and comprehensive data, academics are condemned to be arm-chair investigators, extrapolating from robust studies in other fields onto terrorism research. In history, for example, there are excellent studies of previous cases of terrorism based on archival investigations, but these insights cannot be compared to present cases for lack of similar information in the present cases. There are also some chronicles of terrorist movements, but they are often too superficial to offer insights that really matter.

Another method of extrapolation from other fields is to generalize insights from other disciplines to terrorism research. Some view terrorists as psychopaths (lacking empathy), criminals, gang or cult members, or participants in social movements, and uncritically apply various findings from their respective fields to terrorism. Most of these studies are necessarily superficial because they lack the rich data to check on the validity of their findings to terrorism. All too often, they search only for confirmatory evidence and completely ignore any data that might refute the validity or usefulness of their comparison.

A fruitful strategy is to apply the developing insights of social psychology and social movement studies to terrorism, since the findings about how we think, feel,

and behave are supposed to be universal. However, the application of such insights requires a very detailed database to validate some of these insights for terrorism, what anthropologists call “thick description.”³³ Without such detailed accounts, the academic community, which has the skills and the time to analyze complex data, is condemned to simple speculations based on analogies rather than solid evidence. Overall, the few bright spots in academia are case studies that used such thick descriptions,³⁴ collected essays around a research topic,³⁵ and research based on extensive field studies.³⁶

Unfortunately, more ambitious attempts³⁷ to set a research agenda have not been compelling enough to either consolidate findings into some scholarly consensus or to generate a large research project about the process of turning to political violence. So far, academia has failed to provide deep insights into the turn to political violence. In summary, it is hard to escape the judgment that academic terrorism research has stagnated for the past dozen years because of a lack of both primary sources and vigorous efforts to police the quality of research, thus preventing the establishment of standards of academic excellence and flooding the field with charlatans, spouting some of the vilest prejudices under the cloak of national security.

Terrorism Research in the Government

Terrorism research is now mostly and secretly conducted within governments, specifically within the IC, which has not shared much information about terrorist plots with the academic community. One might reasonably ask whether the intelligence community has developed insights into the turn to political violence of which the academic community is unaware. During the past eight years, I was privileged to be a member of the IC, with daily access to highly classified information streams on terrorist threats, and able to observe the developments in the IC’s understanding of this turn to violence.

Shortly after 9/11, the government expanded its capability in terrorism collection and analysis. Thousands of patriotic young college graduates, who could pass a background security investigation and a polygraph, were hired by the Defense Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of Homeland Security, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the State Department, and newly created agencies such as the National Counter-Terrorism Center and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. At the same time, the government decided to educate and train these young hires in-house rather than build large university centers, like the Russian Studies Centers created at prestigious universities at the beginning of the Cold War. So the young recruits learned about terrorism on the job³⁸ or at the FBI Academy in Quantico, the CIA’s Sherman Kent School, the Military Academy’s Combating Terrorism Center at West Point or at various seminars and conferences sponsored by various government organizations. The exceptions are the two university-based social science Centers of Excellence on terrorism funded by the Department of Homeland Security—the previously mentioned START at the University of Maryland, and the University of Southern California’s National Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorist Events.³⁹

This fateful decision to bifurcate academic and government research on terrorism resulted in the stagnation of the field. During the Cold War, there was a very active interchange and communication between the academic and intelligence communities

on Soviet studies. Many academics took sabbaticals or leaves of absence from their universities to work in the government in either analytical or policy positions. This is not the case in terrorism studies as the present structure of the funding and exaggerated security concerns ensure that the gap between these two communities and their respective cultures is unbridgeable without any possibility of fruitful interchange.

The IC has not been able to advance terrorism studies because of inherent limitations in the process of collecting, disseminating, analyzing, and generating its products for policy makers. Even more than the academic community, it functions largely at the whims of politicians and their concerns, which set the frame and tone of its research. The potential perversion of this system was illustrated by the requirements to find justifications for the invasion of Iraq and the widespread belief in the IC that Saddam Hussein did possess weapons of mass destruction, when the UN inspection teams on the ground were casting strong doubts about this belief.

The processing of intelligence is also faulty. All source analysts are supposed to have access to all information, but generally, they rely on disseminated intelligence reports. These reports are already products crafted by a collector or an analyst and contain inherent biases. For instance, raw information such as intercepted communications or even interviews/interrogations of suspects are transcribed into relatively short intelligence reports that decontextualize statements worthy of intelligence. I have compared such raw information and its derived intelligence report, and observed that much is lost in the transcription. Not infrequently, the reports read like a prosecutor's brief, with the worst interpretation given full attention and potentially disconfirming evidence casting doubt on the gist of the report is neglected. The bias is toward an alarmist (and therefore worthy of attention and personal promotion) interpretation.⁴⁰ On topics of interest, several of these reports are then collected and summarized in a "finished product" warning consumers of new trends. These finished products of course further abstract from the raw data and again accentuate what may be new and sensational, which is often more alarmist than necessary. Drowning in this ocean of potential threats and false alarms, analysts have trouble identifying truly unusual occurrences indicative of an actual threat. For instance, while wives in custody disputes occasionally accuse their husbands of being terrorists, it is very rare for parents to go out of their way to report their children to the IC. Ideally, intelligence analysts should dedicate more resources to satisfactorily resolving the allegations in the second scenario than those in the first one. However, as was the case with the underwear bomber, this won't get done because they are under pressure to process huge numbers of mostly false leads, which were erroneously generated by the IC in the first place. Throwing more analysts at the problem compounds the issue as it creates more false leads for analysts who err on the side of security.

Finally, a topic may acquire such importance that it becomes the subject of a larger think piece for policy makers. This involves an even higher level of abstraction with its built-in biases. The methodology is usually primitive and consists of searching only for confirmatory evidence, ignoring inconsistent evidence and completely neglecting the usually very low base rate of the phenomenon under study. Worse, the tyranny of coordination of the final product among more than a dozen intelligence agencies results in the publication of the lowest common denominator acceptable to all, leading to a watered down and dumbed down intelligence estimate, colored with a bias for alarming interpretations.⁴¹

This alarmist bias generated by the IC is fed through leaks to journalists who disseminate them, fueling a peculiar American hysteria on terrorism, which forces politicians to be responsive and show that they are tough on terrorism, continuing a vicious spiral of continuous terror. The alarmist bias is self-protective. Usually IC products follow the rule that the recent past⁴² is the best predictor of the future, and their estimate is often that, with a caution that negative events can happen. If nothing bad happens, then their authors can celebrate being right for the most part. If things improve, they won't be blamed for a conservative estimate. However, if bad things happen, they can always point out that their caution anticipated such outcomes. In truth, people are more likely to get blamed for not anticipating bad things than for not foreseeing good things. The result is that most intelligence estimates play it safe and, with rare and courageous exceptions, build in a negative and alarmist bias. This bias is then also directly communicated to policy makers, who, in turn, perpetuate the politics of fear, which is amplified by the press and government friendly experts. Rather than calming the public, politicians are generally alarmists, both as a need to respond to their constituents' fears and as a result of the bias of their advisers.

To be fair, this alarmist bias helped detect several serious terrorist attempts in the West over the past dozen years. Had they succeeded, they would certainly have caused at least hundreds of casualties. But generally such plots are much fewer than government officials like to claim and this exaggeration has prevented a serious societal discussion about the choice between security and civil rights.

Intelligence analysts often do not have the methodological concepts (as opposed to computers and software tools) to investigate all the information to which they are privy. Very few have a graduate degree in the social sciences with solid methodological training to deal with the evidence they have. From my observations, they commonly look only for confirmatory evidence and do not bother searching for disconfirmation—the essence of the scientific method. They have little understanding of probability and suffer from low base rate neglect for very rare events. Much of their time is spent in investigating obvious false alarms, sometimes losing track of important developments. Furthermore, they have very little leisure time to synthesize new insights. Unlike that of their counterparts in academia, their time is not protected and they are under constant pressure to produce timely short pieces for the rest of the IC or policy makers. Indeed, IC analysts generally do not have time to read books or long articles.⁴³ They confine themselves to short summaries of the arguments and typically do not acquire the level of sophistication required to understand their complicated subject.⁴⁴ The system forces them to jump from topic to topic, like children with Attention Deficit Disorder. The whole is enmeshed in turf wars among competing agencies and rivalry for promotion within each division.

Hierarchies, the structure of all IC agencies, rarely make optimal use of their members' insight, knowledge, and expertise. Usually, they rely on shared information common to all and not on the totality held by all its members. IC managers frequently do not recognize true expertise. Members' contributions to an IC product all too often depend on demographic characteristics (gender, age, or ethnicity), rank, or talkativeness and verbal dominance. This reliance on commonly shared information and flawed weighing of true expertise is exacerbated by time pressure and competition for promotion. This discourages innovations that might provide bold new insights and instead encourages playing it safe by continuing to adhere to the internal conventional wisdom. Furthermore, the old complaint that various agencies

do not share information with each other in a meaningful way is unfortunately still valid, especially for ongoing operations. Much information from the field, especially important contextual information, does not trickle up to the various headquarters in Washington.⁴⁵

The IC suffers from an additional and inevitable bias. Its constant focus on potential terrorist plots and its exposure to a deluge of threats daily, the overwhelming majority being false alarms, create a sense of complacency among old analysts or, worse, a sense of imminent threat, extraordinarily out of proportion to the real threat.⁴⁶ Neo-jihadi terrorist attacks are extremely rare on their own—without sting operations—and law enforcement agencies complain that they are drowned by an ocean of false alarms, which overwhelm their resources. The major request from the field is help to distinguish the very few true positives that will turn to violence from the vast majority of false positives—young people who brag and pretend that they are tough and dangerous, but, in fact, just talk, talk, talk, and do nothing. The study of the disparity between the great numbers of wannabes and the rarity of actual violent acts has generated a consensus in the IC around a two-step model of the turn to violence. This insight has been one of the few advances in the field. The first step in this process is to join a political protest community, which the IC calls radicalization; and the second is the actual turn to violence, which the IC calls mobilization (to action). This label creates confusion with academia, which calls mobilization the act of joining a political protest community. The hope of this IC frame is that true positives give off signature words and behaviors that indicate this turn to violence, which can therefore be detected. So far, to my knowledge, the IC has neither reached a consensus about these indicators nor tested their rate of specificity.

This is very important because lack of specificity for very low base rate events generates an enormous number of false positives. This has real-life implications. Aggressive FBI field offices, via sting operations, set up many people targeted on non-specific indicators and arrest them. According to Bayesian probability, the odds are that these men would never have turned to violence on their own, without FBI intervention: they were simply false alarms. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to teach special agents, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, and juries about Bayesian probability, base rate neglect, and the insights of social psychology. While performing their critical duty, special agents and juries cannot fully appreciate the ramifications of introducing older and authoritative FBI *agents provocateurs* that influence impressionable young men to do things such as detonating bombs that they would never have done on their own. The result is that these young men are invariably convicted in the present atmosphere of terrorism hysteria and the Department of Justice points to these convictions as justification for their sting operations and validation of their indicators. Academics would easily point out the flaws in such circular and self-serving reasoning that sends young men to prison for life.

For the purpose of these trials, governments lift the veil of secrecy for the discovery material in order to convict the defendant. Even then, the government insists that retained experts at such trials sign a non-disclosure agreement for all the information that is not presented at trial. Of course, in the United States (but not in other countries) whatever is presented at trial becomes public record when it is published after the proceedings. However, through the negotiation of pre-trial motions, judges only allow a portion of all the discovery material as admissible evidence to juries, which do not realize that they are presented carefully crafted stories rather than all the available evidence.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this information is by far the most complete,

detailed, and reliable one on terrorist plots and even surpasses what is available to IC analysts. Theoretically, it is available to academic scholars, but I have not yet seen academics collect trial transcripts and use them systematically in their investigation of terrorism.

This short and somber appraisal of the functioning of the IC and its too mundane products should not be taken as a personal critique of members of the IC, law enforcement departments, and the military that keep a country safe. My appreciation for their dedication and devotion to public service and safety cannot be overstated. I have been privileged to witness their commitment, perseverance, and fairness as a private consultant to several of them, helping them investigate and try to prevent potential cases of political violence. The flaws are in the way the system is set up.

To draw my point to its extreme: we have a system of terrorism research in which intelligence analysts know everything but understand nothing, while academics understand everything but know nothing. This critique is but the last of a long jeremiad going back almost forty years about the poor quality of the research in the field.⁴⁸ At this point, the government funding strategy and its refusal to share accumulated data with academia has created the architecture of the IC/academic divide preventing us from developing useful and perhaps counter-intuitive insights into the factors leading people to turn to political violence. The solution is obvious: we need more productive interactions between the two communities.⁴⁹ But this would require political courage and will. Meanwhile, we still don't know what leads people to turn to political violence.

Notes

1. Alex Schmid, *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases and Literature* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1983).

2. Maxwell Taylor, *The Terrorist* (London: Brassey's Defense Publishers, 1988); Walter Reich, *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1990); Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in Context* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); Andrew Silke, ed., *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and its Consequences* (Chichester, England: John Wiley, 2003); John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2005), 47–106; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 83–91. These works offer a summary and critique of the terrorist personality approach. However, some mental health professionals and amateur psychologists still believe that terrorists suffer from some sort of mental disorder based on very selective anecdotal evidence. As the latest example, see: Adam Lankford, *The Myth of Martyrdom: What Really Drives Suicide Bombers, Rampage Shooters, and Other Self-Destructive Killers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

3. Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon Benjamin, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002); Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York: The Free Press, 2001); Peter Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader* (New York: The Free Press, 2006); Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: Casting a Shadow of Terror* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003); Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004); Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Terry McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005); National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report, Authorized Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004); Sally Neighbour, *In the Shadow of Swords: On the Trail of Terrorism from Afghanistan to Australia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005); Anonymous (Michael Scheuer), *Through Our Enemy's Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Washington,

DC: Brassey's, 2002); and Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

4. The exception is of course Gunaratna's popular but misleading account, which was obviously rushed to publication, became a source of confusion, and may well have delayed good scholarly research because it provided the field with a faulty frame and database.

5. George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, Washington, DC, September 20, 2001, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>

6. Enyo, *Anatomie d'un Désastre: L'Occident, l'Islam et la Guerre au XXIe Siècle* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 2009) and Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

7. Some of these true scholars of Islam, whose voices were drowned in the post-9/11 hysteria, are Khaled Abou el Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam From the Extremists* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005); Raymond Baker, *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Richard Bonney, *Jihad: From Qur'an to bin Laden* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); François Burgat, *L'Islamisme à l'Heure d'Al-Qaïda* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2005); Jocelyne Cesari, *L'Islam à l'Épreuve de l'Occident* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2004); Michael Cooke, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); John Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Mohammed Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003); Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Gilles Kepel, *Fitna: Guerre au Coeur de l'Islam* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2004); Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L'Islam des Jeunes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997); Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Les Nouveaux Martyrs d'Allah* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002); Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

8. The expression "true believer" was popularized by Eric Hoffer in the early 1950s in an attempt to explain Nazism and Communism and other mass movements. See Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Time Inc., Time Reading Program Special Edition, 1963).

9. Jerrold Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to al-Qaeda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 37. Although Post used the expression to describe secular Palestinian terrorists in the 1970s, in his conversations with me, he generalized it to al Qaeda terrorists as well. Later, in his book on the mind of the terrorist, he acknowledged that al Qaeda members were different from his Palestinian sample, but described them as "true believers," who "had subordinated their individuality to the group. They had uncritically accepted the directions of the destructive charismatic leader of the organization, Osama bin Laden, and what he declared to be moral was moral and indeed was a sacred obligation" (Ibid., 193). However, he does not describe how these members became "true believers."

10. This is the view promoted by Gunaratna, *Inside al Qaeda* (see note 3 above), but see also Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist* (see note 9 above), 204–205. This was also the view from law enforcement; see Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Home-grown Threat* (New York: The New York Police Department Intelligence Division), http://www.nypdshield.org/public/SiteFiles/documents/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf, 2007.

11. Ibid., 38.

12. Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (see note 2 above), 99–135.

13. There were some exceptions. For example, see Bruce Hoffman, "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 3 (May/June, 2008): 133–138.

14. Silber and Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West* (see note 10 above).

15. Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 85–98.

16. Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 71–88, 125–146.

17. I never implied that al Qaeda central directed plots were over, as some critics claimed after reading the title of the book instead of the book itself. See Hoffman, 2008. Rather, I argued that these homegrown disconnected plots would become predominant in the future over the centrally directed plots.

18. Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

19. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan, eds., *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (London: Routledge, 2009) and John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (London: Routledge, 2009) are pioneering attempts to understand the process of “disengagement.”

20. Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006); Deborah Wheeler, *The Internet in the Middle East: Global Expectations and Local Imaginations in Kuwait* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006); and Homeland Security Policy Institute & Critical Incident Analysis Group, *NETworked Radicalization: A Counter-Strategy*, 2007, <http://www.gwumc.edu/hspi/policy/NETworkedRadicalization.pdf>

21. See Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad* (see note 16 above), 109–123.

22. See Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2007); Ariel Merari, *Driven to Death: Psychological and Social Aspects of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005); and Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2005).

23. George Michael, *Lone Wolf Terror and the Rise of Leaderless Resistance* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012); Petter Nesser, “Individual Jihadist Operations in Europe: Patterns and Challenges,” *CTC Sentinel* 5, no 1 (January 2012): 15–18; Raffaello Pantucci, *A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists* (London: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, King’s College London, 2011); and Jeffrey Simon, *Lone Wolf Terrorism: Understanding the Growing Threat* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2013).

24. The Strategic Multilayer Assessment Project at the Joint Staff/Deputy Director for Global Operations at the Pentagon is an example of this great faith in using unrelated new technological discoveries to combat terrorism.

25. Mia Bloom and John Horgan from the University of Massachusetts and Gary LaFree from the University of Maryland are the exceptions in this country.

26. Evan Kohlmann comes to mind. He is knowledgeable about Internet Islamist extremist websites, but is not a scholar versed in social science methodology. See Magnus Ranstorp, “Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11: An Academic Field of Old Problems and New Prospects,” in Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning, eds., *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda* (London: Routledge, 2009), 27–28.

27. Condoleezza Rice in 2005; see Glenn Kessler, “Rice Defends Tactics Used Against Suspects,” *Washington Post*, December 6, 2005.

28. Colin Powell, *U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell Addresses the U.N. Security Council*, February 5, 2003, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030205-1.html>

29. See Paul Wolfowitz, *Hearing before the Committee on the Budget, House of Representatives* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 27, 2003), <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-108hhrg85421/pdf/CHRG-108hhrg85421.pdf>, 18–19. In this testimony before the House Budget Committee on February 27, 2003 Wolfowitz says that the published estimates of the costs of the war and rebuilding of the upper range of \$95 billion was too high because it ignored the fact that Iraq was a wealthy country with annual oil exports of \$15 to 20 billion and the assumption that the U.S. was going to pay for it all

was wrong. Joseph Stigler, a Nobel Prize winner and former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, later put the price tag of the war at three trillion dollars.

30. See Janet Napolitano, Interview with *CNN*, Dec. 27, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6V_Godcyq-s&feature=related

31. This is especially true for expert witnesses at terrorist trials, such as Evan Kohlmann, who presents only evidence supporting the prosecution case and conveniently ignores any contradictory evidence.

32. Available at <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

33. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6.

34. For instance Vivien Bouhey, *Les Anarchistes Contre la République: Contribution à l'histoire des Réseaux sous la Troisième République (1880–1914)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008); Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). Please note the dominance of foreign scholars in this field.

35. Bjørge and Horgan, eds., *Leaving Terrorism Behind* (see note 19 above); Rik Coolsaet, ed., *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge: European and American Experiences*, 2nd Ed. (Farham, England: Ashgate, 2011); Jackson, Smyth, and Gunning, eds., *Critical Terrorism Studies* (see note 26 above); Magnus Ranstorp, ed., *Understanding Violent Radicalisation: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2010); and Silke, ed., *Terrorists, Victims and Society* (see note 2 above).

36. Bloom, *Dying to Kill* (see note 22 above); Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism* (see note 19 above); and Merari, *Driven to Death* (see note 22 above).

37. See for instance Martha Crenshaw, *Explaining Terrorism: Causes, Processes and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2011) and della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (see note 36 above).

38. See Philip Mudd, *Takedown: Inside the Hunt for al Qaeda* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 38. In essence, this shows that the government does not appreciate the value of social science training at a Ph.D. level. It would never think of hiring young people with just a B.A. and an ability to pass the security scrutiny to build nuclear weapons or break down cyphers. For these “serious” tasks, it hires top grade physicists, engineers, and mathematicians. I wonder where the state of nuclear weapon development would be if the government had just hired recent graduates from any fields to develop them.

39. See <http://create.usc.edu/>. There is another center in the United States, John Horgan’s International Center for the Study of Terrorism (ICST), which was funded by both smaller government grants and university funds. Such a center is dependent on the support of a university, and when it dries up, the center must close or move, as was the case for the ICST. It has now become the Center for Terrorism and Security Studies at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. There are also several university centers for the study of terrorism abroad, namely the Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews, Scotland; the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization at King’s College, London; the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore; the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel. There are also government funded research institutes on terrorism, such as West Point’s Counter-Terrorism Center and the RAND Corporation in this country; the Forsvarets forskningsinstitutt in Norway or the Royal United Services Institute in England. But all these institutes and centers suffer from the lack of access to detailed intelligence information and share the same obstacles to generation of new insights as academic centers.

40. Of course, sometimes these disseminated intelligence reports are downright misleading because the writer has completely misinterpreted the true meaning of the utterances under scrutiny. For instance, a simple joke between friends is viewed as a “desire to become a suicide bomber” by one of them. Such claims later frame any interpretation of future utterances from the now suspected subject.

41. The IC is not homogeneous and there are some major differences in interpretation of the same data among various IC agencies. In general, State’s INR and US Army Intelligence are generally more dovish while DIA and CIA are more hawkish. The FBI varies according to the case.

42. That is, within the past few years because, to my surprise, IC analysts are abysmally ignorant of history.

43. A good example of being too busy to actually read an article or a book came from one of the most thoughtful IC analysts, who deservedly became the government's senior analyst on terrorism. In an article, I had made the same analogy about present-day academics' inability to study terrorism like World War II analysts' similar inability to study the Wehrmacht because of the lack of good data. See Sageman, "The Stagnation in Terrorism Research," *Chronicles of Higher Education*, April 30, 2013, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2013/04/30/the-stagnation-of-research-on-terrorism/>. She completely misunderstood the article and emailed me: "well, candidly, comparing us [the IC] to the German Wehrmacht during World War II is offensive and not conducive to dialogue." I suspect time pressure prevented her from actually reading the article. IC analysts simply gloss over articles for recognizable terms and then connect the dots according to their own perspective. This erroneous association is then treated as fact!

44. I have found several short summaries of my 2008 book on IC shared sites. On the basis of reading these very superficial summaries, others went on to express very firm opinions about the work! I suspect that in academia too, many people just read a book review rather than the book, and think they understand the author.

45. I've been personally involved in some of these field investigations and can attest to the continuing truth of this phenomenon.

46. See Mudd, *Takedown* (see note 33 above), 33, 41–44.

47. Unfortunately, judges who decide what is going to be presented at trial are lay people and often suffer from the terrorism hysteria, despite the fact that they have learned to smell out government prejudice in other cases, such as racism or unpopular political views. Judges seem to side with the prosecution and do not allow the defense the time or latitude to present an adequate defense on how young people can be influenced by authority figures to do things they would never have done in the first place.

48. See Schmid, *Political Terrorism* (see note 1 above); John Horgan and Michael Boyle, "A Case against 'Critical Terrorism Studies,'" *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 1 (April 2008): 51–64; and Jackson, Smyth, and Gunning, eds., *Critical Terrorism Studies* (see note 26 above).

49. Of course, there have been many conferences sponsored by the intelligence community, where the maximum number of academics is invited to share their views. But these conferences never lead to a dialogue. Most of the time, the academics are limited to about a 15-minute presentation before others take their turn. There is rarely any conversation between the academics, even if they are on the same panel. The IC is of course in the audience, but says nothing for fear of giving away any hints of a secret. The result is unsatisfactory for both communities. The big winner is of course the private contractors, who organize the conference and cash in on their contract. They point out that so many academics have participated—the more the better and hence the lesser likelihood for any real communications because of lack of time—and so many members of the IC have attended. The fact that no understanding or insights have been reached in these conferences does not seem to bother anyone.