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Unit 3
The History of Intelligence – Ancient to Early Modern Periods

Fundamentals of Intelligence: History and Theory

MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSE (MOOC)

Project N. 2023-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000161770
ANALYST - A New Advanced Level for Your Specialised Training

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The great evolution of Military Intelligence

- Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield
- Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace
- Urban Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace
- Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment

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Intelligence in Antiquity

Intelligence is not a modern invention. Ancient civilizations extensively used espionage, reconnaissance, and secret communications. For example, Sun Tzu, in ancient China (~5th century BCE), wrote about the importance of knowing the enemy through spies in The Art of War – indicating a formal understanding of intelligence thousands of years ago. The Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans all practiced forms of intelligence-gathering; Egyptian pharaohs had informants, and the Old Testament even recounts Moses sending spies into Canaan. In short, as soon as there were organized states and armies, there was a need for intelligence to gain advantage

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Intelligence in Antiquity

Roman Empire's Intelligence Practices: The Roman Empire had one of the earliest known organized intelligence systems. The Frumentarii, originally grain supply officers, evolved into an imperial spy network during the Roman Empire (around the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE). They carried messages and also gathered information on potential threats to the Emperor. Roman generals relied on scouts and local informants to track enemy tribes and armies. Additionally, Rome's extensive road network and communication system (messengers on horseback) acted like a "nervous system" to quickly transmit information across the empire. This allowed Roman authorities to respond to rebellions or invasions swiftly.

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Medieval and Middle Eastern Contexts

Through the medieval period, intelligence work continued in various forms. For instance, during the Crusades, both Christian and Muslim forces used spies and emissaries to gather intelligence about each other's plans. In the Middle East, the Hashashin (Assassins) in the 12th–13th centuries gathered intelligence as well as carried out targeted killings. Mongol rulers (13th century) like Genghis Khan placed huge value on intelligence; they employed scouts and spies far ahead of their armies. This Mongol intelligence apparatus collected detailed information on enemy fortifications and troop strengths, enabling the Mongols to conquer vast territories with effective strategy. The Mongols' success was not just due to brute force, but also their superior knowledge of the lands and enemies they faced.

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Renassaince and early modern contexts

By the Renaissance (14th–17th centuries), we see more formalized spy networks, especially in Europe. City-states and kingdoms employed spies for both internal security and foreign intelligence. For example, Queen Elizabeth I of England (16th century) had a famous spymaster, Sir Francis Walsingham. Walsingham ran a network of agents and famously used cryptanalysis (code-breaking) to uncover plots – such as the Babington Plot to overthrow Elizabeth. The cracking of Mary, Queen of Scots' encrypted letters in 1587 (leading to her execution) is an early case of intelligence success through code-breaking. In Italy, the wealthy Medici family and the Vatican engaged in espionage and cryptography to stay ahead in the complex politics of the time. This era also saw secret societies and intelligence-like groups; for instance, factions would use covert communications and secret codes in their political intrigues.

Early Military and Diplomatic Affairs

Many historical turning points hinged on intelligence. In 13th-century Europe, during the rise of nation-states, diplomatic envoys were not just negotiators but also information gatherers (a diplomat might double as a spy). By the 18th century, during conflicts like the Napoleonic Wars, both Napoleon and his adversaries ran networks of informants and had dedicated staff to process intelligence (Napoleon's Bureau of Secret Intelligence, for example). These developments show a gradual shift: intelligence activities became more systematic and respected as a crucial element of statecraft and warfare.

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From AD HOC to ORGANIZED

A key theme from ancient to early modern intelligence is the shift from ad hoc, personality-driven spying to more organized, state-run systems. Early on, success depended on a clever king or a skillful spymaster. By the early modern era, many governments had at least a rudimentary intelligence budget and staff. This set the stage for the institutionalization of intelligence in the 19th and 20th centuries, where permanent agencies and official training for intelligence officers became the norm.

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Unit 4
The Evolution of Modern Intelligence – 19th to 20th Century

Fundamentals of Intelligence: History and Theory

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Intel Revolution

The 19th century saw the first formal, institutional steps toward modern intelligence agencies. Many countries started to establish dedicated intelligence units, especially as great power rivalries grew. For example, the British created the Intelligence Branch of the War Office in 1873 and the Naval Intelligence Department in 1887. By 1909, the UK founded the Secret Service Bureau, which soon split into the domestic security service MI5 and the foreign intelligence service MI6. These were among the first permanent peacetime intelligence organizations. Similarly, other empires had their versions: Czarist Russia's Okhrana (secret police/intelligence) was active in the late 1800s, mainly to counter revolutionaries. Intelligence work professionalized as nations recognized the need to gather information on rivals (e.g., the intense espionage between European powers, sometimes referred to as "The Great Game" in Central Asia between Britain and Russia).

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World War I

WORLD WAR I (1914–1918) was a catalyst for modern intelligence techniques. Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) made a major impact – a famous example is the British interception and decryption of the Zimmermann Telegram in 1917, where Germany tried to entice Mexico into war against the U.S. The successful code-breaking of this telegram influenced the United States to join WWI. Intelligence bureaus expanded: each major army had intelligence staffs for trench warfare (to interpret enemy trench raids, POW interrogations, etc.), and new technologies like aerial reconnaissance were used to scout enemy positions from the sky (proto-IMINT). By the end of WWI, countries saw the value of permanent codebreaking units, leading to organizations like Britain's GC&CS (Government Code and Cypher School) established post-war (which would later become the famed Bletchley Park codebreaking center in WWII).

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Inter-War Period

In the 1920s and 1930s, intelligence continued to develop through peacetime – though often on a shoestring. The British formed the Joint Intelligence Committee in the 1930s to coordinate intel assessments. The Soviet Union, emerging from revolution, created the OGPU and later NKVD, which combined secret police and intelligence functions (spying abroad and enforcing security at home). Nazi Germany built an intelligence service (Abwehr) and the notorious Gestapo for internal security. Japan and other powers also invested in espionage. Notably, the U.S. was relatively behind in peacetime intelligence – it didn't have a centralized civilian agency yet, though the military had small intel divisions and the FBI handled domestic security. This partly explains why early in WWII, U.S. intelligence efforts had catching up to do.

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World War II

- The Second World War (1939–1945) is often seen as the period when modern intelligence truly came of age. Major developments:

Signals Intelligence & Codebreaking: The Allies' Ultra program at Bletchley Park (UK) cracked the German Enigma cipher and other codes, providing a flood of high-level intelligence. This SIGINT shortened the war by helping Allies win key battles (e.g., knowing U-boat positions in the Atlantic). The U.S. similarly broke Japanese codes (Magic program), which notably helped at the Battle of Midway in 1942 by revealing Japanese plans – a turning point in the Pacific War. These successes made it clear how vital codebreaking and cryptanalysis were to intelligence.

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Human Intelligence & Counterintelligence: WWII had extensive HUMINT networks – from resistance fighters in occupied Europe feeding information to the Allies, to spies like the famous "Cambridge Five" who infiltrated British intelligence for the Soviets. The British MI6 and the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS, created in 1942 under William Donovan) coordinated espionage and partisan support across Europe and Asia. Counterintelligence (catching enemy spies) was also critical – e.g., Britain's Double-Cross System turned German agents in Britain into double agents, deceiving the Nazis (notably in the run-up to D-Day, feeding false information about where the invasion would land).

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Intelligence Analysis & Offices: Many countries set up dedicated analytical units to process all the info. The OSS in the U.S. had R&A (Research & Analysis) branch with academics piecing together reports on enemy economies, troop movements, etc. This era also saw more systematic use of deception operations (which rely on good intelligence and counterintelligence). For instance, Operation Bodyguard was an Allied deception plan that misled Germany about the D-Day invasion plans.

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Intelligence Failures – Pearl Harbor: A pivotal event often studied is the Pearl Harbor attack (1941). U.S. intelligence had intercepted some Japanese communications and observed indicators of Japan's aggressive intent, but misinterpretation and poor coordination led to a complete surprise on December 7, 1941. This failure spurred post-war changes and soul-searching. Importantly, it led to studies like Roberta Wohlstetter's famous analysis years later. (On the flip side, the same war had intelligence successes, like Midway, showing the two sides of the coin.)

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Cold War and the Intel Community

After WWII, global politics split into East vs. West, and intelligence agencies grew dramatically in size, capability, and number. In the United States, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was established in 1947, succeeding the wartime OSS, to coordinate peacetime espionage and analysis on a global scale. The National Security Agency (NSA) was created in 1952 to handle signals intelligence (monitoring communications worldwide). The Soviet Union's KGB was formed in 1954 (from earlier Soviet security agencies) and became one of the world's most formidable intelligence organizations, responsible for both external espionage and internal security. Allies of the US (like Britain's MI6/MI5, and new agencies like West Germany's BND, Israel's Mossad, etc.) and allies of the USSR (like East Germany's Stasi, Cuba's DGI) all expanded their intelligence efforts. The Cold War was fought as much in the shadows as openly – spies, defectors, surveillance, and covert operations were everyday tools of competition.

Intel&Technology

The mid-20th century brought a technological revolution to intelligence. Imagery Intelligence (IMINT) took off with high-flying aircraft and, later, satellites (the first spy satellites, like America's Corona program, started in the 1960s). Suddenly, one could get photographic evidence of adversaries' military bases and missile sites from space. Signals intelligence capabilities grew with the advent of worldwide electronic communications – agencies built huge listening stations to intercept radio, microwave, and eventually satellite communications. Computers started to be used to break codes and sift data (early computing was actually driven significantly by codebreaking needs). By the late 20th century, intelligence agencies were using supercomputers and establishing databases of information – a far cry from index cards and paper files of earlier days.

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Post Cold War

As the Cold War wound down in the 1980s, intelligence agencies had to adapt. The fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) were events that surprised many analysts in terms of their timing. Suddenly, the familiar bipolar world was gone. Agencies like the CIA faced an identity crisis: what is our main mission now? In the 1990s, new focuses emerged – regional conflicts (e.g., the Gulf War 1991 showcased the use of intelligence in high-tech conventional war), proliferation of weapons (tracking nuclear programs in countries like North Korea and Iran), terrorism (e.g., rising focus on groups like al-Qaeda), and economic intelligence (understanding global financial threats, economic competition). The period also saw intelligence used in humanitarian and peacekeeping contexts, like the Balkans conflicts, where intel helped reveal atrocities and guide military interventions.

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New Institutions

The end of the 20th century and early 21st brought reforms and new institutions. Many countries introduced more oversight for intelligence (to prevent abuses that had come to light, like in the 1970s the U.S. Church Committee investigated CIA wrongdoing). International intelligence sharing became more important in dealing with transnational issues (for instance, countries sharing counter-terrorism intelligence). The concept of the "intelligence community" (all the various agencies working together) was solidified in places like the U.S., which created the position of a Director of National Intelligence after 2001 to better coordinate agencies. Intelligence also expanded beyond government: private-sector intelligence and risk firms started handling corporate and cybersecurity intelligence needs. By the start of the 21st century, the field of intelligence was broader and more complex than ever – a mix of old-fashioned spying and cutting-edge technology.