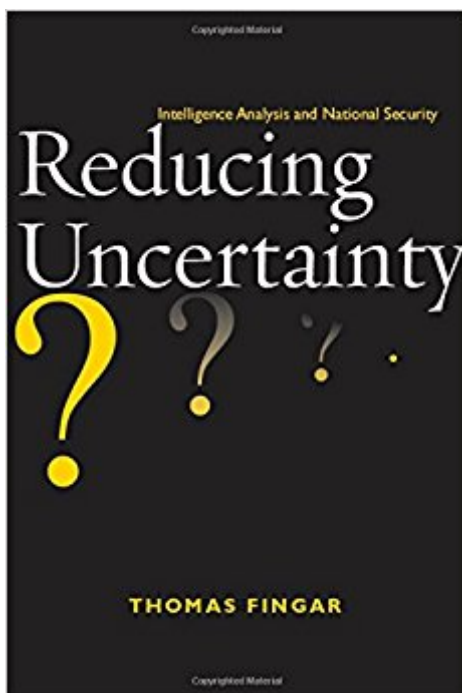


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# Reducing Uncertainty: Intelligence Analysis And National Security



## Synopsis

The US government spends billions of dollars every year to reduce uncertainty: to monitor and forecast everything from the weather to the spread of disease. In other words, we spend a lot of money to anticipate problems, identify opportunities, and avoid mistakes. A substantial portion of what we spend—over \$50 billion a year—goes to the US Intelligence Community. *Reducing Uncertainty* describes what Intelligence Community analysts do, how they do it, and how they are affected by the political context that shapes, uses, and sometimes abuses their output. In particular, it looks at why IC analysts pay more attention to threats than to opportunities, and why they appear to focus more on warning about the possibility of "bad things" happening than on providing the input necessary for increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes. The book is intended to increase public understanding of what IC analysts do, to elicit more relevant and constructive suggestions for improvement from outside the Intelligence Community, to stimulate innovation and collaboration among analysts at all grade levels in all agencies, and to provide a core resource for students of intelligence. The most valuable aspect of this book is the in-depth discussion of National Intelligence Estimates—what they are, what it means to say that they represent the "most authoritative judgments of the Intelligence Community," why and how they are important, and why they have such high political salience and symbolic importance. The final chapter lays out, from an insider's perspective, the story of the flawed Iraq WMD NIE and its impact on the subsequent Iran nuclear NIE—paying particular attention to the heightened political scrutiny the latter received in Congress following the Iraq NIE debacle.

## Book Information

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"Beijing's ambitious plans for 'Silk Road' initiatives strengthening transportation, communications, and trade could transform Eurasia and deeply engage great powers such as Russia and India. Anyone interested in tracking these developments will find this book a godsend, filled with fascinating insights into the interplay of economic, historical, and geopolitical factors that will shape the outcome of this new great game." (J. Stapleton Roy, Founding Director Emeritus Issinger Institute on China and the United States)"Tom Fingar provides a frank, detailed examination of the challenges to and successes of the US Intelligence Community. In doing so, he reveals insights and strategies that directly address our national security needs. High-stakes examples described by Fingar provide an insider-account only he can provide. The result is riveting and informative." (William J. Perry, Secretary of Defense for the United States 1994 to 1997)"This book brings much light and clarity to a subject that is both important and all too often surrounded by erroneous suppositions and myths. There is not likely to be another treatment of intelligence analysis from an individual with such senior access to both the intelligence leadership and senior policy-makers." (David F. Gordon, Head of Research and Director of Global Macro Analysis Eurasia Group)"When I was chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, the only person who spent more time in my office than the secretary was Tom Fingar. His insights, personal and professional, were always trenchant, always valuable. Reducing Uncertainty is jam-packed with such insights." (Lawrence Wilkerson, Visiting Harriman Professor of Government and Public Policy College of William and Mary)"Fingar provides a clear and useful tour of how intelligence analysis is produced." (Robert Jervis Political Science Quarterly)"As an editor and contributor, Dr. Fingar has joined breadth with focus, and parsimony with insight. This fine comparative study importantly suggests that to understand China's ever-changing foreign policy ties, we must understand what Beijing thinks countries can do for it' and do to it.'" (David M. Lampton Johns Hopkins-SAIS and author of Following the Leader: Ruling China from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping)"The New Great Game is a timely and learned contribution to our understanding of an understudied and increasingly important subject: China's relations with its Western neighbors." (Thomas J. Christensen Princeton University and author of The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power)"This is a well-documented, well-written piece by a former high-ranking member of the intelligence community . . . Recommended." (A. C. Tuttle CHOICE)"Tom Fingar's distillation of lessons learned during more

than two decades at the nexus of intelligence analysis and national security decision-making is clear, concise, and brimming with insight. Reducing Uncertainty should be required reading for all who produce, use, or think about intelligence." (Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft National Security Advisor to Presidents Ford and George H.W. Bush)

Thomas Fingar is the Oksenberg/Rohlen Distinguished Fellow in the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. From May 2005 through December 2008 he served as the first Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis and, concurrently, as Chairman of the National Intelligence Council. He served previously as Assistant Secretary of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (2001-2003), Deputy Assistant Secretary for Analysis (1994-2000), Director of the Office of Analysis for East Asia and the Pacific (1989-1994), and Chief of the China Division (1986-1989).

Excellent analysis with a very concise writing style. This book doesn't create suspense it gets to the heart of the issues quickly. His sources and references make it a must read. Very factual in his approach.

Tom Fingar offers readers an inside look into the role of intelligence analysts and how he used his experience, the shortfalls of the Iraq WMD NIE, and his new position to improve analytical performance across the intelligence community. Fingar argues that analysts are needed to provide context, assess implications, and anticipate how events will unfold in order to reduce uncertainty and enable policymakers to avoid mistakes. He believes analysts should spend more time than they do on opportunity analysis so decisionmakers can change or reinforce the trajectory of events. As DDNI/A, his number one priority was to restore confidence in the intelligence community, starting with national estimates and the president's daily briefing. This led to the development of common analytic tradecraft standards for the entire intelligence community which were codified into intelligence community directives and incorporated into training and education efforts. The author believes the intelligence community must overcome several challenges, including increased expectations and data overload.

Fingar does an excellent job of outlining the work and mission of intelligence analysts. He also gives the reader a much better understanding of the flawed intelligence assessments that facilitated the launch of the U.S.-led Iraq War in 2003. That being said, I do quite strongly disagree with Fingar's

assertion that the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran's Nuclear Program "got it right," especially when compared to the 2002 NIE on Iraq's WMD program. While I do believe that the tradecraft from the 2002 to the 2007 NIE significantly improved, I still believe that the intelligence authors of the 2007 NIE were similarly vulnerable and perhaps impaired by the same pressures of the political "atmosphere" and sensitivity to past intelligence failures that plagued the 2002 NIE. Fingar completely fails to address these issues, but it seems apparent to me that these same vulnerabilities existed both in 2002 and 2007, but from essentially diametrically opposed directions. Whereas in 2002 Fingar argues that the intelligence community (IC) may have been affected by the "war fervor" in Washington, it is reasonable to conclude in 2007 that the IC was affected by war weariness, especially as the U.S. was in the bloody depths of insurgency in Iraq. The U.S. Congress, the American public and even the White House were in no mood for an intelligence estimate that could be viewed as supporting U.S. (or perhaps even Israeli) military action against Iran's nuclear program. Furthermore, in 2002 the IC was operating in the shadow of the catastrophic September 11 attacks and the failure to detect the scope of Iraq's WMD program before 1991. This not surprisingly led to a tendency to overhype the WMD threat in Iraq. In 2007, in comparison, the IC was seeking to overcome the debacle of the 2002 Iraq WMD intelligence, and in my view, the IC not surprisingly downplayed the intentions and capabilities of the Iranian regime acquiring a nuclear weapon. Could the IC really have dug itself "out of the very deep hole created by the Iraq WMD estimate" if it had come to a more alarmist conclusion on Iran's nuclear weapons program?

Last year the CIA (and the rest of the intelligence community) failed to anticipate the collapse of the Iraqi Army in the face of ISIS. The Agency didn't understand Iraq even though Iraq had been a top target for at least 25 years and hundreds of CIA collectors and analysts had cycled through Iraq during the U.S. occupation. This flop followed earlier failures to foresee the collapse of the USSR, to stop 9/11, to know that Saddam Hussein had no WMDs, to foresee the Arab Spring, etc, etc. The author of "Reduced Uncertainty" was a veteran State/INR analyst who rose to the top ranks of the intelligence world. He's a thoughtful interpreter (and critic) of the analytical methods and work product of the IC, and he understands the political environment in which the IC operates. In the end, however, he may have loved the profession too much, for he glosses over the reality that much intelligence analysis goes unread (except by other analysts) and has little or no impact on policy. Instead, he takes refuge in the claim that most analysts get the analysis right most of the time. To be sure, they do. But so do journalists, diplomats, academics, financial analysts, and other

traffickers in political and economic insight. We pay the IC more than \$50 billion per year to deliver something special. We don't get it. The author's central conceit is that efforts to tinker with and reform analytic tradecraft after the Iraqi WMD debacle led to big improvements in the quality of analysis received by policymakers. In reality, the IC still pours out a daily tidal wave of trivial current intelligence. These reports are produced by analysts who need to publish things in order to advance their careers. The reports are consumed (when read at all) by officials eager not to be blindsided or to look "out of the loop" when they interact with journalists, politicians, or colleagues. Meanwhile, too many analysts change portfolios too often to develop genuine expertise, and truly valuable strategic intelligence is in short supply. The upshot is an IC that can know, for example, the location of every unit in the Iraqi Army -- but not know that they'll fall apart when ISIS appears on the horizon. Intelligence is inherently hard to do. We surely expect too much of it. But we could probably do it better. These criticisms of the IC can be found between the lines in "Reducing Uncertainty," but the author was too diplomatic and collegial to spell them out clearly. Too bad.

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