

Consensus or Pluralism in Intelligence Assessment?

A Methodological Response

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Abstract

High-level decision makers need concise, explicit, timely, and accurate assessment of threats and opportunities. However, the world is complex, changing, and fraught with deep uncertainty. Consequently, intelligence assessment has repeatedly failed to meet decision makers' demands, especially in warning intelligence (Cuban missile crisis, Iranian revolution, collapse of the Soviet Union, 9/11 terror attacks, and more). One response to these failures has been to encourage diversity of opinion in intelligence products. Pluralism, however, does not meet decision makers' needs for explicit and accurate assessment. We present a methodological resolution of this conflict. We propose to nurture plurality of assessment, and to embed those diverse assessments in the analysis of robustness to uncertainty. Specifically, for any proposed policy, we evaluate the robustness (of that policy) to uncertainty (plurality) of assessment. A more robust policy is preferred over a less robust policy. What the analyst provides to the decision maker is a concise, explicit, timely, and accurate prioritization of proposed policies based on their robustness to the diversity of assessments. This paper describes and illustrates the methodology, which is based on info-gap decision theory, and explains how to maintain policy neutrality of the intelligence analyst.