
The Intelligence Dilemma: Proximity and Politicization–Analysis of External Influences

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Abstract

The relationship between policy-making and strategic intelligence is a source of ongoing discourse. Although there is an abundance of literature about the relationship between consumers and producers of intelligence, consensus as to the relationship between policy makers and intelligence producers is lacking. The two concepts—proximity and politicization—represent the intelligence dilemma that leads to claims of *politicization*, a word with many interpretations. Most observers of the democratic policy-making process are familiar with the traditional potential sources of politicization yet those sources are not the only potential sources of politicization and there is a paucity of literature about external influences and the politicization of intelligence. In democracies, governed by the people through their elected representatives, many individuals and groups interact with policymakers to influence decisions. This article provides a framework for understanding sources of politicization external to the intelligence community. It identifies an *outside-in* influence and uses three examples to show how this type of stimulus contributes to the politicization of intelligence.

Introduction

One of the more thought-provoking aspects of politics is the relationship between policy-making and strategic intelligence. There is an abundance of literature and a variety of opinions about the proper relationship between policymakers, who are consumers of intelligence, and producers of intelligence, who turn raw data into reports to inform policy-making.¹ However, there is a paucity of literature exploring sources of politicization from outside the Intelligence Community (IC), which is necessary to round out the discourse. Indeed, recent news headlines warn about intelligence politicization as the executive branch and the United States Intelligence Community spar publicly over analytic conclusions reached by the IC.²

For decades, the center of the discourse about politicization was *proximity*—how close or far apart should consumers and producers operate? The question arose because, as in all relationships, frequent and repeated interactions can be an asset just as much as those interactions can become problematic. Likewise, amongst scholars and practitioners, there was “no consensus as to what the relationship between intelligence and policy should

¹ Uri Bar-Joseph, “The Politicization Of Intelligence: A Comparative Study,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 26:2 (2013): 347-369, doi:10.1080/08850607.2013.758000; Richard K. Betts, “Politicization of Intelligence Costs and Benefits,” in *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel*, eds. Richard K. Betts and Thomas G. Mahnken (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 57-76, available at: <http://people.exeter.ac.uk/mm394/Richard%20Betts%20Paradoxes%20of%20Intelligence%20Essays%20in%20Honor%20of%20Michael%20I.%20Handel%20%202003.pdf>; Richard K. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in American National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Robert M. Gates, “Guarding Against Politicization,” *Studies in Intelligence* 36:1 (1992): 5-13, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/volume-36-number-1/pdf/v36i1a01p.pdf>; Arthur S. Hulnick, “The Intelligence Producer–Policy Consumer Linkage: A Theoretical Approach,” *Intelligence and National Security* 1:2 (1986): 212-233, doi:10.1080/02684528608431850; Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949); Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: CQ Press, 2015); Steven Marrin, “At Arm’s Length or at the Elbow? Explaining the Distance Between Analysts and Decisionmakers,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 20:3 (2007): 401-414, doi:10.1080/08850600701249733; Joshua R. Rovner, “Intelligence-Policy Relations and the Problem of Politicization,” (doctoral dissertation, MIT, 2009), available at: <http://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/46633>; Richard L. Russell, “Achieving All-Source Fusion in the Intelligence Community,” in *Handbook of Intelligence Studies*, ed. Loch K. Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2007), 189-199; Gregory F. Treverton and Wilhelm Agrell, *National Intelligence Systems: Current Research and Future Prospects* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

² Jeet Heer, “The Danger of Politicizing Intelligence,” *The New Republic*, December 12, 2016, available at: <https://newrepublic.com/article/139275/danger-politicizing-intelligence>.

be.”³ In the political area, intelligence connotes *power*; proximity to policymakers implies *influence*; and influence, relative to intelligence, leads to claims of *politicization*—a word with many interpretations.

Most observers of US policy-making processes recognize traditional sources of politicization.⁴ Yet these are not the only *potential* sources.⁵ Individual citizens, organizations that provide policy research and advice (think tanks), the media (both traditional and new), and lobbyists contribute to politicized intelligence. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine how external entities contribute to the politicization of United States domestic intelligence.

This article considers the history and definitions of politicization, distinguishes types of politicization, and analyzes three sources of politicization from outside the IC—think tanks, the media, and lobbyists. The article concludes by illuminating the outside-in aspect of politicization so

³ Stephen Marrin, “Revisiting Intelligence and Policy: Problems with Politicization and Receptivity,” *Intelligence and National Security* 28:1 (2013): 4, doi:10.1080/02684527.2012.749063.

⁴ Betts, “Politicization of Intelligence;” Michael I. Handel, “The Politics of Intelligence,” *Intelligence & National Security* 2:4 (1987): 5-46, doi:10.1080/02684528708431914; Hulnick, “The Intelligence Producer;” Russell, “Achieving All-Source Fusion;” Betts and Mahnken, *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence*; Gates, “Guarding Against Politicization;” Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*; Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*; Stephen Marrin, “Rethinking Analytic Politicization,” *Intelligence and National Security* 28:1 (2013), 32-54, doi:10.1080/02684527.2012.749064; Rovner, “Intelligence-Policy Relations”; Treverton and Agrell, *National Intelligence Systems*.

⁵ Maciej Bartkowski, “The Study of Politicization: The Case of the UN,” *Rubikon* (2001): 1-11, available at:

http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:xQ2ML_VjuA4J:maciejbartkowski.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Maciej-Bartkowski.-The-Study-of-Politicization.-The-Case-of-the-UN.pdf+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us; Jonathan Craft and Michael Howlett, “The Dual Dynamics of Policy Advisory Systems: The Impact of Externalization and Politicization on Policy Advice,” *Policy & Society* 32:3 (2013): 187-197, doi:10.1016/j.polsoc.2013.07.001; Saville R. Davis, “Documentary Study of the Politicization of UNESCO,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 29:3 (1975): 6-20, doi:10.2307/3824003; Cynthia R. Farina et al., “Rulemaking in 140 Characters or Less: Social Networking and Public Participation in Rulemaking,” *Pace Law Review* 31:1 (2011): 382-468, available at: <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/plr/vol31/iss1/8/>; Michael Howlett and Andrea Migone. “Searching for Substance: Externalization, Politicization and the Work of Canadian Policy Consultants 2006-2013,” *Central European Journal of Public Policy* 7:1 (2013): 112-133, available at: <http://www.cejpp.eu/index.php/ojs/article/view/143/110>; Brandon Rottinghaus, “Dear Mr. President: The Institutionalization and Politicization if Public Opinion Mail in the White House,” *Political Science Quarterly* 121:3 (2006): 451-476, doi:10.1002/j.1538-165X.2006.tb00578.x; Peter W. Singer, “Washington’s Think Tanks: Factories to Call Our Own,” *The Brookings Institution*, (August 12, 2010): 1-9, available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2010/08/13-think-tanks-singer>; Jose D. Villalobos and Justin S. Vaughn. “Presidential Staffing and Public Opinion: How Public Opinion Influences Politicization,” *Administration & Society* 41:4 (2009): 449-469, doi:10.1177/0095399709334647.

participants and observers of the policy-making process can address this emerging dynamic.

What is Politicization and from Where Does it Come?

According to scholars, the first use of the word politicization was in 1907 when Karl Lamprecht, a German historian, “spoke of *die Politisierung der Gesellschaft* [the politicizing of society], although in the harmless sense of increasing interest in politics.”⁶ At some point between 1907 and 1919, the Germans began using the word politicization differently, which “rendered it open to alternatives and controversies and contributed to the rethinking of the concept of politics,” and the negative connotations with which politicization is associated today.⁷ The word politicization, a derivation of the word *politicize* dating from 1758, did not enter the English vocabulary until after World War I.⁸

Despite the relatively recent origin of the word, the concept of politicization has been in existence since Roman times. Yakobson asserts, “all the elements of politicization known to us from the late [Roman] Republic feature prominently in the descriptions of the elections during the struggle of the orders.”⁹ In addition, during the second Punic War, according to Futrell,

“Livy [Titus Livius Patavinus, the Roman historian] refers to his [Marcus Aemilius Lepidus’] unsuccessful candidacy for the consulship of 216 [BC]. This is the first known association between the giving of *munera* [gifts] and electioneering for the highest offices would establish a key pattern for the politicization of the gladiatorial combats in the later republic [Roman Republic].”¹⁰

Palonen asserts, “politicization means detecting the political potential of some existing changes, shifts, or processes.”¹¹ Although technically an acceptable definition, it results from studying the word’s changing use over time, absent

⁶ Kari Palonen, “Four Times of Politics: Policy, Polity, Politicking, and Politicization,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 28:2 (2003): 181, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40645073>; See also Roger Chickering, *Karl Lamprecht: A German Academic Life (1856-1915)*, (New Jersey: Humanities Press), 315.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 182; “Politicize,” Online Etymology Dictionary, available at: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=politicize&allowed_in_frame=0.

⁹ Alexander Yakobson, *Elections and Electioneering in Rome: A Study in the Political System of the Late Republic* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1999), 180.

¹⁰ Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena: The Spectacle of Roman Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 23.

¹¹ Palonen, “Four Times of Politics,” 182.

the context of its use in national security and intelligence matters or of the intelligence-policy relationship. In this regard, there is little definitional consensus amongst scholars. With the intelligence-policy context added, a conundrum exists with both “the definition and conceptualization of politicization.”¹²

Depending on how scholars define it, there can be negative connotations as well as the recognition politicization may be a natural component of the intelligence-policy process, and therefore, useful in certain circumstances.¹³ Neither the quest for a standardized definition nor the concept of politicization leads to definitive conclusions. Rather, the discourse revolves around variations upon themes, which for some authors leads to broad all-encompassing attempts to define politicization, while for others it leads to defining different degrees or types of politicization, further complicating the concept for all actors involved. For example, Johnson defines it as “putting a spin on or ‘cooking’ intelligence to serve the political needs or beliefs of an intelligence manager or policy official.”¹⁴ Gannon contends it is “the willful distortion of analysis to satisfy the demands of intelligence bosses and policymakers.”¹⁵ Rovner defines politicization as “the attempt to manipulate intelligence so that it reflects policy preference.”¹⁶

In contrast, Ransom cites multiple meanings including “partisan politicization....a point of contention between organized political parties,” “bipartisan politicization” that “generates public debate over ends and means,” and “intelligence to please,” which occurs when intelligence

¹² Marrin, “Revisiting Intelligence and Policy,” 2.

¹³ Scholars writing about negative connotations include Betts, “Politicization of Intelligence,” Handel, “The Politics of Intelligence,” and Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*. Scholars writing about politicization from the intelligence-policy process perspective include Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*; Glenn Hastedt, “The Politics of Intelligence and the Politicization of Intelligence: The American Experience,” *Intelligence and National Security* 28:1 (2013): 5-31, doi:10.1080/02684527.2012.749062; Marrin, “Rethinking Analytic Politicization;” Joshua R. Rovner, “Is Politicization Ever a Good Thing?” *Intelligence and National Security* 28:1 (2013): 55-67, doi:10.1080/02684527.2012.749065, and Nathan Woodard, “Tasting the Forbidden Fruit: Unlocking the Potential of Positive Politicization,” *Intelligence and National Security* 28:1 (2013): 91-108, doi:10.1080/02684527.2012.749066.

¹⁴ Loch Johnson, “Bricks and mortar for a theory of intelligence,” *Comparative Strategy* 22:1 (2003): 11, doi:10.1080/0149593039013048111.

¹⁵ John C. Gannon, “Managing Analysis in the Information Age,” in *Analyzing intelligence: Origins, Obstacles, and Innovation*, eds. Roger Z. George and James B. Bruce (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 221.

¹⁶ Joshua R. Rovner, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 5.

influences policy.¹⁷ Handel describes politicization as one of four definitions of the word politics, claiming it is the “interference in the intelligence process by leaders and their close aides.”¹⁸ However, Treverton suggests that by expanding the definition to include “commitments to perspectives and conclusions, in the process of intelligence analysis or interaction with policy, that suppresses other evidence or views, or blind[s] people to them.”¹⁹ Treverton goes on to suggest his definition resulted in five forms of politicization working simultaneously.²⁰ The five forms are:

- *Direct pressure* from senior policy officials to come to particular intelligence conclusions, usually ones that accord with those officials’ policies or policy preferences.
- A *house line* on a particular subject, which shifts the focus of the bias from policy to intelligence. Here, a particular analytic office has a defined view of an issue, and analysts or analyses that suggest heresy are suppressed or ignored.
- *Cherry picking* (and sometimes growing some cherries), in which senior officials, usually policy officials, pick their favorites out of a range of assessments.
- *Question asking*, where, as in other areas of inquiry, the nature of the question takes the analysis a good way if not to the answer, then to the frame in which the answer will lie. A related version of this form occurs when policymakers ask a reasonable question but continue to ask it repeatedly, which distorts analysis—by depriving it of time and effort to work on other questions—even if it does not directly politicize.
- *A shared mindset*, whereby intelligence and policy share strong presumptions. This is perhaps the limiting case; if it is politicization, it is more self-imposed than policymaker-imposed.

Hastedt concluded, “for those who minimize its occurrence politicization involves the overt manipulation of intelligence and the intelligence process. For those who see it as a more pervasive phenomenon it can also take more subtle forms.”²¹ Finally, Marrin introduced one of the newest phrases based

¹⁷ Harry H. Ransom, “The Politicization of Intelligence,” in *Intelligence and the Intelligence Policy in a Democratic Society*, ed. Stephen J. Cimbala (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Transnational Publishers, Inc., 1987), 26.

¹⁸ Handel, “The Politics of Intelligence,” 6.

¹⁹ Gregory F. Treverton, “Intelligence Analysis: Between ‘Politicization’ and Irrelevance,” in *Analyzing intelligence: Origins, Obstacles, and Innovation*, eds. Roger Z. George and James B. Bruce (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 93.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Hastedt, “The Politics of Intelligence,” 5-6.

on the idea of “‘analytic politicization’ (a new term used to distinguish it from other forms of politicization).”²² Although never defined, Marrin uses the term to dissect various politicization definitions, summing up the definitional debate best by asserting, “the concept of politicization is for the most part analytically useless.”²³ Marrin demonstrated that depending on from whose viewpoint—consumer or producer—one person’s definition of politicization is another person’s standard operating procedure for decision-making in a democratic society.²⁴

Types of Politicization

In addition to seeking a definition of politicization, scholars struggle with “the issue of the relationship between intelligence and policy making,” and the question of what is the appropriate proximity between policymakers and analysts.²⁵ The two theories, or schools of thought, debated in a similar manner to definitions are the Kent School and the Gates School.²⁶

Although Kent did not use the word politicization, he was concerned about the policymaker-intelligence relationship and penned one of the earliest articles.²⁷ Kent contended actors must maintain a certain distance between one another for intelligence to provide proper guidance asserting, “intelligence must be close enough to policy, plans and operations to have the greatest amount of guidance, and must not be so close that it loses all its objectivity and integrity of judgment.”²⁸ In contrast, Betts considered the academic perspective asserting, “objectivity takes precedence over everything,” a perspective that provided the *modus operandi* for the Central Intelligence Agency for over thirty years.²⁹

By 1980, the Gates School of thought began to emerge because of “critiques of ineffective intelligence contributions to policymaking, and the view that utility

²² Marrin, “Rethinking Analytic Politicization,” 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Treverton and Agrell, *National Intelligence Systems*, 201.

²⁶ Betts, “Politicization of Intelligence;” Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*; Jack Davis, “Sherman Kent and the Profession of Intelligence Analysis,” *Kent Center Occasional Papers* 1:5 (2002): 1-16, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/kent-center-occasional-papers/pdf/OPNo5.pdf>; Russell, “Achieving All-Source Fusion;” H. Bradford Westerfield, “Inside Ivory Bunkers: CIA Analysts Resist Managers’ ‘Pandering’—Part II,” *International Journal of Intelligence & Counterintelligence* 10:1 (1997), 19-54, doi:10.1080/08850609708435332

²⁷ Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁹ Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 76.

is the *sine qua non*.³⁰ Gates observed there were some ways in which politicization crept into the intelligence cycle, but said regardless of how it entered the intelligence cycle, both policymakers and intelligence analysts had to work together.³¹ His implication was for intelligence to be useful, and to provide policymakers with information necessary to make decisions concerning national security, sensitivity and context linked analysis and policy. Thus, in contrast to the Kent School, the Gates School was about the business of intelligence versus intelligence as an academic endeavor.

Westerfield studied both schools and concluded the duality of maintaining both schools of thought, and hence multiple analysis perspectives, was perhaps a “workable—and mutually respectful—a solution for our era,” while acknowledging the dual theories might lead to progress but not without difficulty.³² More recently, Russell, who also studied the merits of both schools, concluded the academic perspective perpetuated by the Kent School was more dangerous in terms of intelligence irrelevance than the Gates School. Given the changing national security needs due to the increased complexity from a more globally connected world in which threats come from nation-states and state-sponsored or independent trans-national actors, the job of intelligence to facilitate decision-making in the name of national security is more multi-faceted than perhaps either Kent or Gates realized.³³ Having evaluated the definitions and the theories, a multi-dimensional model of politicization emerges. It considers many angles and consists of top-down, bottom-up, bi-directional, and inside-out facets of politicization as described in Table 1.³⁴

Table 1. Types of Politicization

Type	Description
Top-down	Consumer originated. As Betts contends, it is where “policymakers are seen to dictate intelligence conclusions.” ³⁵

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gates, “Guarding Against Politicization.”

³² Westerfield, “Inside Ivory Bunkers,” 52.

³³ Russell, “Achieving All-Source Fusion” Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*; Gates, “Guarding Against Politicization.”

³⁴ Note: Bar-Joseph in “The Politicization of Intelligence” considers the top-down portion of the model; Betts in “Politicization of Intelligence,” contemplates the top-down, bottom-up, and bi-directional positions, and Riste considers the inside out aspect in Olav Riste, “The Intelligence-Policy Maker Relationship and the Politicization of Intelligence,” in *National Intelligence Systems: Current Research and Future Prospects*, eds, Gregory F. Treverton and Wilhelm Agrell, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 179-209.

³⁵ Betts, “Politicization of Intelligence,” 58.

Bottom-up	Producer originated where “coloration of products by the unconscious biases of the working analysts who produce intelligence analyses” ³⁶ occurs, and is the opposite of top-down.
Bi-directional	A type in which IC managers who peer review staff analysts’ intelligence products providing feedback to shape reports into finished intelligence products before disseminating finished intelligence to consumers. ³⁷
Inside-out	Originates from individuals working for the government who are not the traditional consumers and producers of intelligence. For example, the Office of Special Plans that was set up by the Department of Defense at the Pentagon in 2002 “whose purpose was to second guess” the civilian IC’s Iraq Weapons of Mass Destruction intelligence estimate and to search for and find a link between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda. ³⁸

Rovner points out different that facets of politicization are accomplished using direct and indirect means.³⁹ Direct means supply intelligence to please. Indirect means provide a source for actors to receive incentives or disincentives depending on the positions desired.

For most of the discourse—definitions, classification, and categorization—there has been little discussion of sources of politicization from outside the IC. Politicization from these sources affects both producers and consumers of intelligence. Consideration for *outside-in* politicization—the type that originates from outside government and the IC proper—such as from the media, academia, or private sector businesses is necessary for a well-rounded understanding of the effects that politicization has on intelligence.

Analysis of Politicization External to the Intelligence Community

Up until recently, the literature on politicization focused on traditional sources of politicization such as consumers and producers. Perhaps because intelligence producers primarily relied on information collected using

³⁶ Betts, “Enemies of Intelligence,” 77.

³⁷ Betts, “Politicization of Intelligence,” 59.

³⁸ Riste, “The Intelligence-Policy Maker Relationship,” 181.

³⁹ Rovner, “Is Politicization Ever;” Joshua R. Rovner, “Intelligence in the Twitter Age,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 26:2 (2013): 260-271, doi:10.1080/08850607.2013.757996.

classified methods and sources. However, with the rise of the information economy, both intelligence producers and consumers have instant access to world events. Public sentiment is also immediately available through open information sources such as online foreign and domestic newspapers and social media. All actors have easier access to professional and personal social networks via easy communication vehicles such as email, 24-hour news, and the increased use of social media feeds such as Twitter to promote issues to the top of public consciousness. In a democratic society, these outside stimuli expand horizons beyond those that traditionally informed intelligence. Three of the most prominent non-intelligence sources that influence and contribute to the politicization of intelligence are think tanks, the media, and lobbyists.

Think Tank Influences

According to Haass, “think tanks are independent institutions organized to conduct research and produce independent, policy relevant knowledge.”⁴⁰ As of 2015, the number of think tank organizations swelled to over 6,840 worldwide, including over 1,835 in the United States alone.⁴¹ The roots of today’s think tanks date from the 1830s when Great Britain’s Duke of Wellington founded the Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Securities Studies.⁴² In the United States, in 1916, Andrew Carnegie founded the Institute for Government Research, which eventually merged with two other organizations to create the Brookings Institution in 1927.⁴³ The goal of these organizations was to provide dedicated, professionally trained researchers to study public policy and defense issues to educate and inform policy makers, and the public, through a variety of research products and channels, such as the media.

Abelson asserts there are four waves, or generations he defined by time periods in the evolution of think tanks.⁴⁴ First-generation think tanks were those that came into existence in the 1900s with the purpose of providing a forum for intellectual and scholarly debate of world issues. Second-generation

⁴⁰ Richard N. Haass, “Think Tanks and U.S. Foreign Policy: A Policy-Maker’s Perspective,” in *The Role of Think Tanks in U.S. Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael T. Scanlin, *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda* 4:3 (2002): 5.

⁴¹ James G. McGann, *2016 Global Go to Think Tank Index Report* (Philadelphia: Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania, January 26, 2017), 25-26, available at:

http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=think_tanks.

⁴² Donald D. Abelson, “Old World, New World: The Evolution and Influence of Foreign Affairs Think-Tanks,” *International Affairs* 90:1 (2014): 125-142, doi:10.1111/1468-2346.12099.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

think tanks evolved after World War II. Third-generation think tanks took on an *advocacy* character, “combining policy research with aggressive marketing techniques,” effectively becoming a central actor in policy debates while seeking to influence “both the direction and content of foreign policy” garnering the attention of policymakers and the public.⁴⁵ The fourth-generation think tanks are generally new or start-up companies. Abelson considers this generation *legacy-based* because prominent policymakers, influential scholars, and former presidential administration staffers fund think tanks in an effort to leave a lasting legacy in the public policy arena.

As think tanks evolved, so did the underpinning organizational structure of these entities. McGann developed a topology to categorize think tanks to expose the relative independence these organizations purport.⁴⁶ The categories included political party affiliated, government affiliated, autonomous and independent, quasi-governmental, quasi-independent, and university affiliated.⁴⁷ Each category, named based on the affiliation or sources of funding, contains a number of organizations, many of which now have globally recognizable names. For example, The Hoover Institution is hosted by Stanford University, the Center for Defense Information is quasi-independent; and, the Congressional Research Service, dating from 1914, is a government organization.

Scholarly debates about the purpose of think tanks fall across a spectrum. On one end are self-serving, special-interest organizations promoting a political agenda at the expense of the public, while on the other end think tanks are influential and independent forces, advocating policy research by educating both policymakers and the public on foreign and domestic issues.⁴⁸ Those in the middle “sought either to maintain an image of neutrality and distance from policy makers or to finance themselves by producing contract research for the government.”⁴⁹

Some observers consider think tanks *idea factories*. This is because policymakers, presidents, and Congress engage these quasi-academic institutions to develop agendas to guide political campaigns and runs for the White House with thousand-page documents, which become the basis for a

⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁶ McGann, *2016 Global Go to Think Tank Report*, 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Abelson, “Old World, New World.”

⁴⁹ Andrew Rich, “The Politics of Expertise in Congress and the News Media,” *Social Science Quarterly* 82:3 (2001): 585, doi:10.1111/0038-4941.00044.

newly elected president and his administration's agenda.⁵⁰ For example, Carter, Reagan, Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama "relied heavily on scholars from think-tanks both during elections and in the transition period that followed."⁵¹ By way of example, the Heritage Foundation achieved notoriety in 1980 after President Reagan adopted its "Mandate for Change," as a blueprint for governing.⁵² Singer asserted Reagan gave staffers the 1,100-page book that provided "2,000 recommendations, [of which] roughly 60 percent came to fruition—'which is why Mr. Reagan's tenure was 60 percent successful, leading conservative William F. Buckley Jr. later quipped."⁵³ Singer also claimed the Center for American Progress (CAP) published a 700-plus page book called "'Change for America: A Progressive Blueprint for the 44th President' [that] helped the Obama administration to jump-start its agenda as it came to Washington in early 2009, and more than 50 staff members from CAP have since joined the administration."⁵⁴ The Heritage Foundation's release of its "*Blueprint for a New Administration: Priorities for the President*" is a recent example, which illustrates the influence think tanks seek to exert on policy-making.⁵⁵ The report provided recommendations and suggested actions for "15 cabinet-level departments and six key executive agencies" including IC elements such as the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.⁵⁶

During wartime, think tanks concentrated on security policy topics using multiple methods for research and analysis that included consideration of alliances, political factors, and economic factors. Following World War II for example, Brookings Institution was responsible, in part, for "the creation of the Federal government's budget process, civil service system, and Social

⁵⁰ Abelson, "Old World, New World;" Haass, "Think Tanks and U.S. Foreign Policy;" McGann, *2016 Global Go to Think Tank Report*; Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Michael T. Scanlin, ed., "The Role of Think Tanks in U.S. Foreign Policy," *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda* 4:3 (2002).

⁵¹ Abelson, "Old World, New World," 138.

⁵² Haass, "Think Tanks and U.S. Foreign Policy," 7.

⁵³ Singer, "Washington's Think Tanks," 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ The Heritage Foundation, *Blueprint for a New Administration: Priorities for the President* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2016). Available at: http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2016/BlueprintforaNewAdministration.pdf.

⁵⁶ "Blueprint for a New Administration: Priorities for the President," The Heritage Foundation, November 1, 2016, available at: <http://www.heritage.org/conservatism/report/blueprint-new-administration-priorities-the-president>.

Security; [and] the development of the Marshall plan.”⁵⁷ Throughout the years, think tanks also provided guidance and advice to the military. For example, RAND developed many research products for the Army, Air Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the IC.⁵⁸ In fact, a search of several think tanks’ websites revealed research projects and reports on issues including national security, national defense, domestic policy, and intelligence.⁵⁹

The influence think tanks have on foreign and domestic policy issues ranging from intelligence to social security are hard to assess. Metrics are not readily available, funding sources are not always transparent, and measures such as the number of published reports, mentions in the media, or appearances on television are inaccurate at best, because of easy manipulation by marketing. Weidenbaum suggests, “citations in the *Congressional Record* and in congressional hearings and committee reports may be more indicative of policy impact” than page or document counts, and media mentions.⁶⁰ Although consensus on standard measures of think tank influence may not yet exist, the examples previously noted are indicators that think tanks influence the public policy process, including intelligence.⁶¹ In addition, in a study Nicander conducted about the role of think tanks, “the most striking finding was that 94 percent of the respondents thought that think tanks [had] influence and an impact on decisions regarding US security policy.”⁶²

These organizations are “an important source of information to the media, the government, and to a host of private interest groups.”⁶³ As such, academics

⁵⁷ Strobe Talbott, “The Brookings Institution: How a Think Tank Works,” in *The Role of Think Tanks in U.S. Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael T. Scanlin, *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda* 4:3 (2002): 19.

⁵⁸ Haass, “Think Tanks and U.S. Foreign Policy;” Michael D. Rich, “RAND: How Think Tanks Interact with the Military,” in *The Role of Think Tanks in U.S. Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael T. Scanlin, *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda* 4:3 (2002).

⁵⁹ To validate this assertion, the author conducted searches using terms such as national security, national defense, domestic policy, and intelligence on the websites of 10 randomly selected think tanks. These included Center for a New American Security, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Brookings Institution, Cato Institute, Center for American Progress, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Council on Foreign Relations, Hoover Institution, RAND, and The Heritage Foundation.

⁶⁰ Murray Weidenbaum, “Measuring the Influence of Think Tanks,” *Society* 47:2 (2010): 135, doi:10.1007/s12115-009-9292-8.

⁶¹ Abelson, “Old World, New World,” 138; Haass, “Think Tanks and U.S. Foreign Policy;” Singer, “Washington's Think Tanks,” 2.

⁶² Lars Nicander, “The Role of Think Tanks in the U.S. Security Policy Environment,” *International Journal of Intelligence & Counterintelligence* 28:3 (2015): 494 doi:10.1080/08850607.2015.1022462.

⁶³ Weidenbaum, “Measuring the Influence of Think Tanks,” 136.

and observers of the policy-making process must be aware of the influence think tanks may have on intelligence issues, and pay attention to the bias and potential for the introduction of politicization into the public policy-making process because of the proximity and access between think tanks and policymakers. The marketing arms of think tanks will undoubtedly exploit proximity and access to policy makers to the media to influence popular opinion.

Media Influences

For actors seeking to politicize intelligence, the press and other news media outlets had been the traditional communication channels used for information dissemination. As far back as World War II, media outlets, such as the BBC, were not only a source of intelligence, but also a vehicle for politicization, spreading the word policymakers desired the public to hear about war progress.⁶⁴ In the United States, prior to 1980, Americans learned of political events and policy through print media or via traditional over-the-air broadcast television networks such as ABC's, CBS's, and NBC's nightly news programs. The stories broadcast by these network stations were tightly controlled and worded such that the content and the message were politically correct. More importantly, the stories were mostly consistent with the sitting presidential administration's public policy.⁶⁵ All this changed when, in 1980, Cable News Network, an all-news channel burst onto the scene, broadcasting news 24 hours a day. Since then, politicized reporting of public policy was thrust onto audiences as pundits and commentators—whether conservative or liberal—opined and changed the course of the American political landscape.

In addition to traditional sources such as print media, broadcast, and cable news, the information technology revolution, beginning in the 1990s, also became an outlet for politicized intelligence. According to Denécé, “about 10 million Web pages are created every day, and the total volume doubles every four years.”⁶⁶ As the frequency and quantity of media reports increase, many sources and channels provide commentary and assessments, which appear more like opinion than the product of credible research or analysis.

⁶⁴ Laura M. Calkins, “Patrolling the Ether: US-UK Open Source Intelligence Cooperation and the BBC's Emergence as an Intelligence Agency, 1939-1948,” *Intelligence and National Security* 26 no. 1 (2011): 1-22, available at: doi:10.1080/02684527.2011.556355.

⁶⁵ Rovner, “Intelligence in the Twitter Age.”

⁶⁶ Eric Denécé, “The Revolution in Intelligence Affairs: 1989–2003,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 27:1 (2014): 34, doi:10.1080/08850607.2014.842796.

Intelligence also faces new challenges from new sources such as social media, an increasingly popular and easily accessible information channel available to anyone with Internet access, including policymakers. With the ability to leverage real-time reports from a variety of social media networks, policymakers have instant access to information. The result has been news media “rais[ing] questions about its [the IC’s] ability to provide policymakers anything useful beyond what the new media provide.”⁶⁷

Further complicating matters, social media companies such as Twitter, Facebook Instagram, Reddit, YouTube, LinkedIn, SnapChat, and Pinterest provide channels where readily accessible information is available to policymakers who are becoming “less dependent on intelligence agencies for updates on current events.”⁶⁸ For the IC, this is a problem because the window of opportunity in which policy makers consume information is shrinking, leaving little time for the IC to perform its value-added analyses and produce judgments. The volume of available information is an opportunity for policymakers to cherry pick information to support or refute a political position, and the information from which the policymaker can select is virtually unlimited. This increases pressure on the IC to add value to the volume of open source information, and the increased pressure may push some IC leaders to manipulate intelligence to appease policymakers to curb skepticism about the value of the IC. According to Rovner, “in addition, they [IC leaders] might also become willing to deliver intelligence to please to stay in the good graces of policymakers. Politicization will be more likely in this scenario.”⁶⁹

Media outlets are a challenge for the IC, which must maintain secrecy while simultaneously educating the public and policymakers about national security threats. With the seemingly unlimited amounts of information available, and the number of professional and armchair journalists, so-called news and information pertaining to national security found on traditional media outlets and social media channels may be misleading, biased, wrong, fake, or intentionally politicized to appeal to the hearts and minds of the public that any actor may strive to influence. For intelligence, “citizens use blogs, journal comments, radio, and TV question and answer (Q&A) sessions to inquire about, comment on, discuss debate, criticize, or favor intelligence issues and

⁶⁷ Rovner, “Intelligence in the Twitter Age,” 261.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁶⁹ Rovner, “Intelligence in the Twitter Age,” 268.

developments.”⁷⁰ This type of communication not only decreases the proximity to policymakers but also influences their thinking. It also leads to “‘opinion journalism,’ whereby journalists provide their personal opinions, sometimes highly biased and speculative, on a specific issue rather than reporting the facts.”⁷¹

Before new media burst onto the scene, the IC had time to vet open source information and fuse it with secret information to differentiate the signals from within the noise, rendering intelligence policymakers used for decision-making. Today, the politicization of intelligence through traditional media outlets and social media sources is as simple as influencing political leaders through blog posts, Twitter feeds, and YouTube videos that broadcast instantly and “have a major impact on political decision-makers and the public sphere.”⁷² The relationship intelligence has with the media is “tense but symbiotic” because “the intelligence sector needs media to tell some of its story, while the media need intelligence to get an exciting story.”⁷³ Although Johnson’s assessment of intelligence failures and scandals was not about the politicization of intelligence, he correlated a relationship between media coverage and intelligence oversight levels.⁷⁴ He explained the influence the media puts on policymakers when he asserted, “extensive media coverage of intelligence seemed to stir interest in a topic amongst executive and legislative officials.”⁷⁵ In addition, other intelligence practitioners, academicians, and government and journalism experts concur, intelligence and the media have a complex bi-directional relationship.⁷⁶ The same holds true for intelligence lobbyists and policymakers.

Lobbyist Influences

According to the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP), an independent, non-partisan, non-profit organization that monitors the money spent on US

⁷⁰ Florina C. Matei, “The Media’s Role in Intelligence Democratization,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 27:1 (2014): 81, doi:10.1080/08850607.2014.842806.

⁷¹ Ibid., 95.

⁷² Felicitas Macgilchrist and Ines Bohmig, “Blogs, Genes and Immigration: Online Media and Minimal Politics,” *Media, Culture & Society* 34:1 (2012): 84, doi:10.1177/0163443711427201.

⁷³ Matei, “The Media’s Role,” 92.

⁷⁴ Loch K. Johnson, (2014) “Intelligence Shocks, Media Coverage, and Congressional Accountability, 1947–2012,” *Journal of Intelligence History* 13, no.1 (2014), 1-21, doi:10.1080/16161262.2013.811905

⁷⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁶ Robert Dover and Michael Goodman (eds.). *Spinning Intelligence: Why Intelligence Needs the Media, Why the Media Needs Intelligence*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

politics and its effect on public policy, influence is the primary purpose for money flowing through the US political system. The CRP asserts, “corporations and industry groups, labor unions, single-issue organizations—together, they spend billions of dollars each year to gain access to decision-makers in government, all in an attempt to influence their thinking,” and their votes.⁷⁷ Lobbyists influence public policy across a wide spectrum of topics. Section 6 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (LDA), requires lobbyists to register with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives based on certain spending thresholds (set for four-year periods) as determined by the Secretary of Labor. According to the LDA Guidance website, “after January 1, 2013, an organization employing in-house lobbyists is exempt from registration if its total expenses for lobbying activities does not exceed and is not expected to exceed \$12,500 during a quarterly period,” otherwise the lobbyist must register.⁷⁸ In addition, the LDA requires active lobbyists to file quarterly activity reports.⁷⁹

Information from the filed reports is freely available to the public. To make analysis of lobbying efforts more transparent and easier for the public to understand, the CRP compiles the data and makes it available on its website for anyone to search. For example, as of October 28, 2016, 10,882 lobbyists spent \$2.63 billion to influence policymakers’ decisions.⁸⁰

In particular, lobbyists focused most of their efforts on both houses of Congress responsible for yearly budget appropriations amongst other items (see Figure 1). Since intelligence as a policy issue falls under the purview of several IC elements, lobbyists also spent time courting policymakers and staffers in those respective organizations. In addition, lobbyists also rallied around intelligence as an issue and found a number of opportunities in which to exert influence.

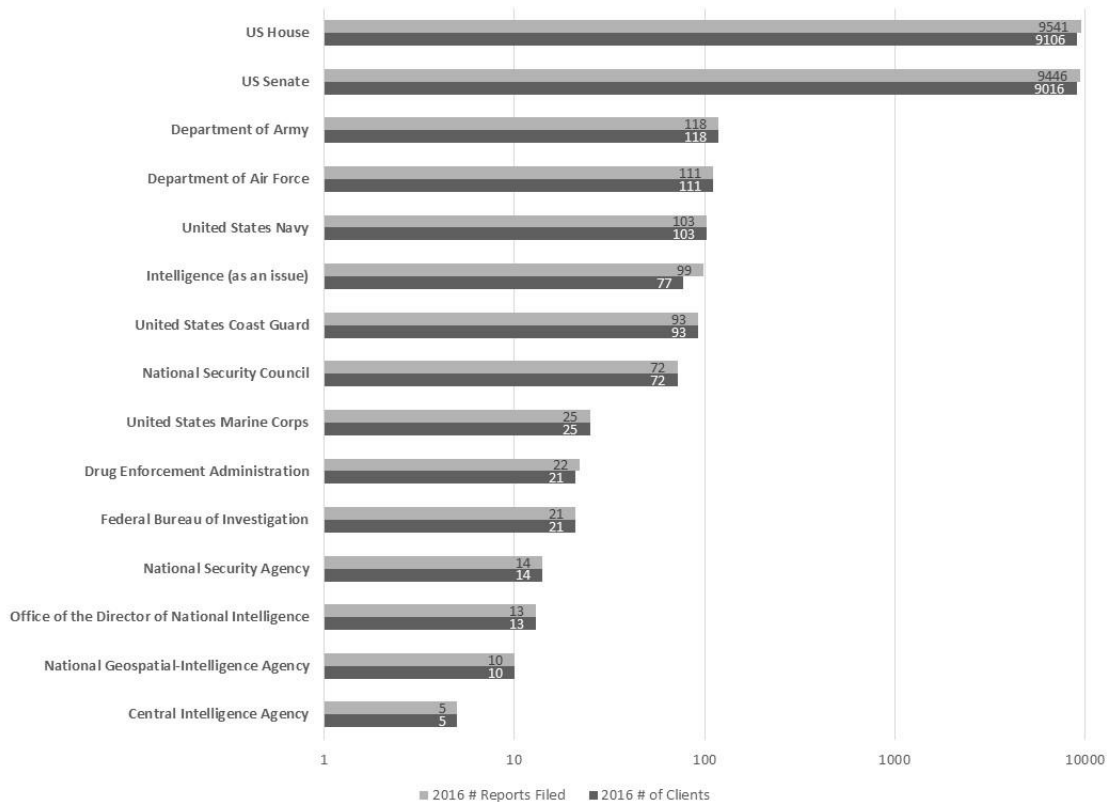
⁷⁷ Influence & Lobbying, The Center for Responsive Politics, accessed January 17, 2017, available at: <https://www.opensecrets.org/influence/>.

⁷⁸ US House of Representatives Lobbying Disclosure Notices and Announcements website accessed January 17, 2017, available at: <http://lobbyingdisclosure.house.gov/>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Lobbying Database, The Center for Responsive Politics, accessed January 18, 2017, available at: <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/>.

Figure 1. Lobbying. Number of clients and reports filed by government agency, department, or issue.



Source: The Center for Responsive Politics, January 18, 2017, available at: <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/search.php>.

Notes: Client is the organization that paid for the lobbying. Graphic created by author using data from The Center for Responsive Politics, current as of October 28, 2016.⁸¹

In 2016, businesses lobbied Congress for intelligence spending so those businesses could compete for services contracts such as for computer system implementation and integration or advocate agendas related to intelligence

⁸¹ The author created this graphic using the data as coded and categorized by the CRP. According to the CRP, lobbyists report activities on the LD-2 Disclosure forms under one of 80 issue areas. The author relied on the CPR to code issues properly. The CRP also makes individual reports filed available to the public via its website. To confirm coding for intelligence issues, the author inspected a random sample of reports from the elements in Figure 1, searching through disclosure forms looking specifically at the category Intelligence (as an issue) and the code “INT” to validate lobbying for intelligence related topics. Random samples of disclosure forms for other categories also revealed the “INT” coding. While it is difficult to ascertain the topic of discussions lobbyists conducted with respective parties without having been present at the meetings, the number of clients and the number of files noted serve as proxy measures indicating proximity and influence analogous to methods suggested by Weidenbaum, McKay, and Nicander.

issues such as freedom of speech, surveillance, cybersecurity, encryption, and sharing of cybersecurity information. For example, according to the CRP, companies lobbying for intelligence specific issues included Microsoft Corporation, Facebook Inc., Intel Corp, SoftBank Corp., Citigroup Inc., Consumer Technology Association, Twitter, Verizon Communications, Yahoo! Inc., and Zebra Technologies, amongst others.⁸² In addition, the CRP data show lobbyists reaching out to policymakers on intelligence issues such as the FY 17 Intelligence Authorization Act, Congressional bills such as H.R. 1037, Global Free Internet Act of 2015, H.R. 1466, The Surveillance State Repeal Act, S. 754, Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act, cybersecurity and encryption technology, and reform issues pertaining to the Electronic Computer Privacy Act.⁸³

McKay conducted a study and tested common assumptions about spending related to policymaking by combining new and existing information from a prior survey of lobbyists, which according to her, was “the largest sample of lobbyists ever interviewed by scholars—the Washington Representatives study by Heinz et al. (1990, 1993).”⁸⁴ Although McKay’s analysis was not specific to intelligence, “the data suggest[ed] that money alone does not buy success, but how it is spent may matter.”⁸⁵ Whether lobbyists are successful in their endeavors specific to intelligence related matters is an outstanding question worthy of further research. The United States IC, administration officials, and observers of the policy-making process should not only be aware of the vast market related to intelligence lobbying, but also how these lobbyists are proactively guarding against possible politicization attempts or actively pursuing one side of an issue.

Conclusion

Ransom observed politicization is tied to behaviors such that when “consensus wars” existed, politicization is absent because of “policy neutrality.”⁸⁶ Yet, when political actors’ opinions differ, “the intelligence system tends to become politicized.”⁸⁷ Handel’s first paradox states, “on the

⁸² The Center for Responsive Politics, Intelligence Issue Profile, January 18, 2017, available at: <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/issuesum.php?id=INT&year=2016>.

⁸³ Ibid., available at:

https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/issue_spec.php?id=INT&year=2016. For more information on these legislative matters, see <https://www.congress.gov/>.

⁸⁴ Amy McKay, “Buying policy? The Effects of Lobbyists’ Resources on Their Policy Success,” *Political Research Quarterly* 65:4 (2012): 910, doi:10.1177/1065912911424285.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 908.

⁸⁶ Ransom, “The Politicization of Intelligence,” 44.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 44.

one hand, it is the democracy and the struggle for influence over public opinion that increases politicization of intelligence, but on the other hand it is democratic pressure that contains and limits that politicization.”⁸⁸ In addition, Handel recognized controlling and opposing political parties might become so embroiled in debates that one way to force resolution was to “market intelligence conclusions...[by taking] them to the media, seeking public opinion in support of policy.”⁸⁹ Handel was also one of the first scholars to point out “yet another intelligence paradox; namely, that the best professionals are the amateurs.”⁹⁰ Perhaps he recognized the potential of politicization by non-intelligence actors.

Politicization is as old as the intelligence business.⁹¹ It is a continuum and, depending on its use, can have many definitions. Definitions create subtleties and nuances that in certain cases may render politicization a normal part of the political process. Betts concluded “to some degree [politicization is] inevitable, and, in some forms, necessary” and asserted the “paradox...is that the real world of policy makes politicization in one form the worst thing that can happen to intelligence, but, in another form, the best.”⁹² Politicization is similar to the saying about terrorism, where one man’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter. It “exists in the eye of the beholder, and more specifically, the beholder whose political frame of reference differs from the implications of the analysis beheld.”⁹³

Think tanks are a necessary part of the policy-making process because these organizations augment the capabilities of both the producers and consumers of intelligence. At the same time, all parties must recognize the potential influence and biases these organizations can introduce into the intelligence process. Traditional media had a carefully curated and influential effect on the policy-making process. That changed with the proliferation of communication sources in the Internet age. Instant access to information that is always flowing may influence policy-makers’ thinking without the benefit of the value-added and synthesized analyses producers provide to the intelligence process. Lobbyists influence public policy across a wide spectrum of topics. Both producers and consumers of intelligence should become more familiar with the intelligence-related topics and the vast sums of money spent to guard against politicization. Each of these outside-in aspects of

⁸⁸ Handel, “The Politics of Intelligence,” 13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹¹ Gates, “Guarding Against Politicization.”

⁹² Betts, “Politicization of Intelligence,” 59.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

politicization has the potential to affect policy-making and the strategic intelligence process.

Intelligence will never be completely free from politics or from the effects of politicization. Both the IC and policymakers must realize in the Information Age, debates will naturally occur in the public's view and are increasingly likely to include a more engaged, but possibly more divided, public due to increased virtual proximity afforded by social media. The secrecy that intelligence once enjoyed has transformed into a more open dialogue about national security. The proximity of the public to policymakers and intelligence leaders is closer than before, if only virtually, enabled by technology. The knowledge that was once difficult to obtain is now more accessible, causing the IC to work harder to add value and compete for policymakers' attention. Unfortunately, debate that is more public will increase opportunities for politicization. Hence, all parties must be aware of the outside-in aspect of politicization and its effects on policy-making and the strategic intelligence process.