The Defence Intelligence Daily 'Intelligence Update': Current Intelligence as Public Service Announcement

Professor Philip H J Davies

Director, Brunel Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies (BCISS)

Brunel University, London

Kingston Lane

E: Philip.davies@brunel.ac.uk

T: +44 (0)1895 266827

M: +44 (0)7790 496 346

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Since the outbreak of the Russo-Ukraine war the UK's defence intelligence organisation, slightly unhelpfully branded simply 'Defence Intelligence' (DI) has been turning out a daily *Intelligence Update*. The *Update* has received considerable press attention and has even become the basis of a nearly daily item in the *Evening Standard* newspaper. Reactions have been varied, from cynical dismissal of yet another information and influence operation by His Majesty's Government through technical dissatisfaction with the analytical quality of the *Update* to breathless enthusiasm for yet another British leap forward in transparency and open government. For the most part, however, the comments and opinions of the *Update* have been based on a misperception of what kind of intelligence the *Update* is supposed to be, and the kinds of intelligence professional conventions on which it draws. While there may be concerns to raise about the *Update*, these are actually of a different order and deal with issues specific to analytic practice in Defence Intelligence. In particularly, there appears to be a problem associated intended refinements and improvements of what Douglas MacEachin as termed 'analytic tradecraft' that were initiated as a result of the furores about intelligence analysis after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.[1]

The *Update's* reception has varied between fulsome enthusiasm and cynical doubt and even dismay. On the fulsome side, Karia Adam of *The Washington Post* captures many of the favourable views that have been expressed. Adam locates the *Update* within a wider programme of disclosure and declassification underpinned by the on-going impact of open government and increased transparency on the public facing role and status of the intelligence community. In this context, the *Update* appears as part and parcel with the strategy of publicly issuing warning appreciations of the imminent Russian invasion that famously employed open source satellite imagery, 'pre-bunking' Russian false flag operations and warnings of planned Russian irregular warfare actions that were not sourced but attributed with evasive vagueness to 'intelligence'. Noting that 'Nowadays officials [in the UK] share declassified secrets in briefings with reporters' she adds that taking such information 'to a mass audience is a novel approach'. But doing so 'is not without risks' because 'Sources or methods used to acquire intelligence could be exposed.' Consequently 'the intelligence tweets are … still on the cautious side, and sanitized.' With such trade-offs in mind, the *Update*s may be 'just the tip of the iceberg and sometimes detail what's available on other open-source outlets' but they offer 'a constant feed of tactical information'.[2]

By contrast, Jeffrey Michaels at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) argues that 'Not only is the intelligence void of useful facts and insightful judgements, the style and detail leave much to be desired as well'. At some points, he adds 'the updates [sic] reflect views that are so obvious one cannot wondering how this constitutes "intelligence"', singling out the 1 March 2022 for stating that 'The use of artillery in densely populated urban areas greatly increases the risk of civilian casualties.' Like Adam, Michaels notes the time lag between the *Update* and information in the public domain on which it reports, but where she treats that as a minor caveat Michaels complains that 'most of what is reported in the DI updates will already have appeared in the mainstream media and social media, sometimes days beforehand.' Where Adam locates the *Update* in the wider context of intelligence disclosure and declassification, Michaels positions it as organisational politics. The *Update*s are not, he argues, a declassified or unclassified[3] product but 'the intelligence equivalent of a media event' which are significant because 'they derive from an intelligence organisation'. Their main purpose is not one of public information, nor even 'promoting a pro-Ukraine narrative' but, rather, 'putting DI and the MoD in the spotlight.'[4]

Above and beyond the weak analysis, poor presentation and institutional self-serving bias of the *Update*, Michaels is unhappy with the substantive focus of the *Update*. Slightly inconsistently with his 'not promoting a pro-Ukraine narrative' comment, he also complains that 'the analysis is too

one-sided, as it looks almost exclusively at Russian actions and avoids any substantive examination of the Ukrainian side.' The failure to assess both sides is a chronic failing of intelligence because 'intelligence organisations have a tendency to focus on Red (enemy forces) rather than Blue (friendly forces)'. 'In other words' he continues 'despite the ostensibly self-evident need for a holistic understanding of the war, there tends to be little desire to analyse the strengths, weaknesses and intentions of one's allies'. The putative motivation, he suggests, is 'fear of embarrassment if negative analyses are leaked'.[5]

The failure to assess friendly forces is, in fact, something of a misrepresentation of the intelligence problem, and is a line of argument worth scotching sooner rather than later in this discussion. There is, of course, an established analytical methodology for assessing the relative weight of two belligerents, commonly referred to as 'correlation of forces', some examples of which are available in the public domain.[6] This is generally easiest when one is not closely invested in one side in the conflict because this shifts problem into a chronically troubled area known as 'net assessment', that is, assessing one's own forces as against an adversary. Net assessment is intrinsically problematic because, in principle, one's own forces are not supposed to be the target of collection and assessment, i.e. of intelligence activity. It is also quite common to extend that proviso to friendly forces, especially those of close allies. The eventual US solution to the net assessment problem was to move net assessment up and out of the intelligence community as such to the National Security Council[7] while in the UK net assessment sits outside and above Defence Intelligence and within the office of the Secretary of State for Defence.[8]

In military terms, the problem is arguably more straightforward and shaped by the division of labour in the so-called 'Continental command staff' model employed by NATO forces.[9] In such a command staff, the division of labour between the intelligence branch or cell, by way of illustration typically designated J2 in a joint force staff, the Planning or J5 cell, and J3 Operations cell is clearly drawn. Planning *axiomatically* intrinsically involves correlating one's own forces and capabilities against the adversary's in order to draw up plans, while operations is responsible for putting those plans into action and adapting in real time to changes in that correlation of forces arising the fortunes of war. Opining by J2 on friendly as well hostile forces (unless invited to do so) is essentially *ultra vires* in where, as Michael Handel has noted, Operations (and presumably also Plans) are acutely protective of their sphere of competence.[10] J5 awareness of own and friendly forces is, in principle, a comparatively transparent exercise in internal stocktaking and self-audit. The principal known unknowns for J5, however, are equally axiomatically enemy capabilities and intentions – the natural sphere of intelligence. Hence net assessment in command staff terms is either the task of the planners in J5, hand in glove with the operations in J3, or potentially a collaborative enterprise involving all of Intelligence, Operations and Plans but on which either Plans or Operations will lead.[11] Net assessment in military terms is, therefore, primarily concern for Plans and not Intelligence, consequently there is no basis for intelligence to conduct net assessment without impinging on the responsibilities of Plans and Operations.

The fundamental problem with both of these commentaries about the *Update* is that they rest upon perceptions and expectations modelled on national intelligence institutions, processes and products rather than an understanding of military and defence intelligence. In an especially peculiar irony, the misunderstanding of the *Update*'s significance, aims and actual quality are a product of the revolution in government transparency about intelligence that has swept the democratic world in the decades since the Church Committee in the 1970s.[12] The political classes in the West in the 21st Century have an unprecedented public awareness and understanding of intelligence national intelligence driven by the successive scandals, failures and post-mortems that have prompted the

creation increasingly systematic and comprehensive architectures of intelligence oversight, accountability and scrutiny. As a result, public expectations of intelligence analysis and assessment, such those expressed by Michaels and Adam, have been shaped by the lustration of national processes and assessments institutions, in the UK most prominently the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and its supporting Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO).[13]

By comparison, defence and military intelligence entities and their work are – again ironically – appreciably less well understood in civil society even though they have always been rather less secretive. To a very real degree, the role and issues of Defence and military intelligence affairs have tended to be drowned out by the level of public attention given to national intelligence functions and organisations and the volume of information about them and their work that has come into the public domain. But it also has to be said that, to a very real degree, 'intelligence' in the civilian and military realms refers to very different things. As I have argued elsewhere, civilians tend to see 'intelligence' in terms of espionage and the exploitation of covertly acquired information in synthesis with less secret and open source information, while the military has long treated 'intelligence' as an all-source, knowledge-management and analytic function resting primarily on open sources such as cartography, hydrology, foreign language publications and what amounts to human geography.[14] Consequently, national intelligence on the one hand and defence and military intelligence on the other exist in two very different worlds and perform two very different tasks for two equally different sorts of purposes.

There are, therefore, two key items of context that need to be understood when trying to evaluate the *Update*. The first is that the *Update* is produced by Defence Intelligence and therefore reflects defence and military intelligence conventions rather than national intelligence practices. These two can differ significantly. The second is that the *Update* is a very specific type of intelligence product: *current intelligence*. Current intelligence is a fundamentally different analytic product from the kind of strategic assessments produced by the JIC or the US National Intelligence Council. These 'high powered reports for high powered people', as Michael Herman once put it[15], and are more likely to be concerned with big picture strategic issues and the sort of long-term forecasts that the US intelligence community refers to as 'estimative intelligence'.[16] Indeed, one of the consequences of a public perceptions based on JIC assessments is precisely the tendency to conflate *analysis* with *assessment*. As Lord Butler observed in 2004, 'analysis' entails examining intelligence information 'in its own right'. This may be because it is necessary to 'convert complex technical evidence into descriptions of real-world objects or events'. Alternatively, the raw intelligence data might be 'scattered' across multiple lines of reporting, in which case analysis 'assembles individual intelligence reports into meaningful strands' to form a coherent picture.[17] Analysis asks, essentially, what does the intelligence *mean*? According to the Cabinet Office Professional Head of Intelligence Analysis, however, assessment is concerned with the 'so what?' of the available intelligence.[18] It seeks to fit the intelligence into bigger patterns, testing the sum total of the available reporting against alternative 'models' (i.e. hypotheses) and 'produce a picture which is more than the simple sum of the parts'.[19] Assessment, therefore, asks what that intelligence *implies*.

Current intelligence is typically more a matter of analysis rather than assessment. As its name suggests, it is concerned with much more mundane affairs of immediate concern and fairly fine detail than assessment. The current UK joint intelligence doctrine defines current intelligence as 'intelligence that reflects the current situation at strategic, operational and/or tactical levels' that 'reflects a moment in time' and therefore 'perishable' in terms accuracy and relevance as events develop.[20] According to US intelligence community guidance, current intelligence seeks 'to apprise consumers of new developments and their background, to assess their significance, to warn of near

term consequences, and to signal potentially dangerous situations in the near future.'[21] Indeed, there is a close, even integral, relationship between current intelligence and warning intelligence, to such a degree that the functions are often either combined or collocated.[22] By way of illustration, it was photographic current intelligence from U2 reconnaissance flights that detected the offensive ballistic missiles in Cuba that a 19 September 1962 National Intelligence Estimate had dismissed as a likelihood.[23] Likewise, it was current intelligence, mainly from communications intercept, that detected the imminent April 1982 Argentine invasion of the Falklands that JIC assessments had concluded was unlikely any time before the autumn.[24] If intelligence is largely about asking 'what's going on?' and 'what's going to happen next?' (and occasionally 'what just happened?'), current intelligence is intended to answer the first of these.

In 1949, Sherman Kent deliberated in depth on the need for, and consequent nature of, current intelligence. Kent argued current intelligence captures the target at a moment in time, 'stopping the clock' on entities and events are actually in motion and evolving.[25] The basic role of current intelligence is to update the intelligence picture and report on change and the direction of change, noting that 'For example, it is as important to know that the standing military establishment of a potential enemy power is being demobilized as it is to know that it is being built up or merely reoriented around a new weapon or a new tactical concept.'[26] Change can follow many different alternative directions, and current intelligence needs to be alert to that. The question, Kent acknowledges, quickly becomes one of selecting what areas of activity and change need to be monitored and updated. There is, he notes, 'no categorical answer', but emphasis should be on matters 'positively germane' to policy and rank ordered by relative importance.[27] Tasking, requirements and priorities are, therefore, at the heart of current intelligence.[28]

Current intelligence has, however, some crucial and often noted limitations. Stephen Marrin has warned that, compared with estimative, warning and in-depth 'research' intelligence, 'Current intelligence production is the least analytical'. The immediate significance and limited shelf-life of current intelligence means that 'time constraints do not permit analytic tradecraft to be applied' with 'tight deadlines' that often compel analysts to 'use shortcuts' and rely 'more on informed intuition than structured or rigorous methods.'[29] Furthermore:

> When the CIA emphasizes intelligence 'on demand' analysts meet the much shorter deadlines by reducing the scale and scope of their research as well as sidestepping the more laborious procedures by not rigorously scrutinizing assumptions or comparing working hypotheses to competing explanations. Many times current intelligence analysis consists of a single hypothesis – derived within the first hour of tasking – that the analyst intuitively believes is the best explanation for the data.[30]

The resulting 'frenetic pace' can result in analytical 'drinking from a firehose' of information that may have 'eroded analysts' ability to acquire expertise'.[31] And this erosion inevitably means that any such analysis rests on a less developed and less well-informed understanding of the context and significance of the breaking intelligence news being reported.

A little like Adam and Michaels, Marrin's concerns about analytic rigour also apply national intelligence concerns and criteria of *assessment* to an *analytical* function that is largely, as Kent termed it, 'reportorial' and therefore minimally analytical and mainly factual in interest and content. However, one can also see in Marrin's description how the risks attendant on current intelligence are inherent limitations arising from the nature and timelines of currently intelligence and its requirements. In this sense, those limitations are not so much foibles or failings as they rationally calculated trade-offs by current intelligence analysts and their managers.

Despite the analytical and assessment constraints of current intelligence, it also has the ability to capture intelligence consumer attention in ways that more substantial analytical products struggle to emulate. It always easier for intelligence organisations to make the case for their relevance and ability to inform policy with current intelligence than with long- or short-term forecasts that ultimately comes down to educated and sophisticated guesswork or in-depth studies that may contribute to the institutional knowledge base and understanding but which can appear remote and detached from policymaker priorities and urgencies so often dominated by news cycles and crisis response. The result is what Marrin refers to as a 'pendulum swing' in institutional priorities between prioritizing current intelligence against more analytical products.[32] For example, a 1993 US intelligence community briefing to intelligence consumers listed more than three times as many intelligence community current intelligence products as either estimative or warning (21 current intelligence products from across the US intelligence community compared with 6 each for estimative and warning intelligence).[33]

Colloquially known as the 'tyranny of current intelligence', this pendulum swing has proven problematic on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1982 GCHQ Deputy Director Doug Nicoll produced a review of past UK strategic warning intelligence failures that was tabled in the JIC almost exactly a month before Argentine troops landed at Port Stanley. While Nicoll identified a number of analytic pathologies in prior JIC warning assessments, one significant problem was the JIC's emphasis on current intelligence dominated by the weekly reporting cycle of the *Weekly Survey of Intelligence* (aka the 'JIC Red Book'). Of this Nicoll remarked 'the weekly system is not designed to allow of that highly detailed collation, and cumulative collation, of evidence which I believe to be the only way in which a country's aggressive intent can be discovered other than very late in the day'.[34] Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, during the 1968 reforms to the JIC (often seen as a badly needed and highly successful modernization), Joint Intelligence Staff that undertook in-depth and long-term appreciations was abolished. What was essentially the JIC current intelligence organization – centred on regional and functional JIC subcommittees explicitly designated 'Current Intelligence Groups' – took on responsibility for all intelligence assessment, whether current or oriented to forecasting or the longer term. Consequently the JIC's assessment process fell prey to the 'tyranny of current intelligence'[35] – a characteristic that arguably continues to pertain today. Current intelligence priorities and techniques do not merely stand in contrast but potentially in conflict with those of strategic intelligence.

In military practice, current intelligence leans even more towards Kent's notion of 'reportorial' analysis and further from the standards and criteria of strategic assessment. The contribution of current intelligence is chiefly directed towards situational awareness, with timelines and deadlines largely driven by the prevailing tempo of operations. It is typically captured in an assortment of standardised products such as intelligence reports (INTREPs) that are issued 'whenever information or intelligence is urgent and contains any deductions that can be made in the time available', 'concise, periodic' Intelligence Summaries, or INTSUM, that 'update the current intelligence picture' and 'highlight important developments', reinforced as needed by Supplementary Intelligence Reports or SUPINTREPs that 'highlight important developments within the reporting cycle.'[36] Military doctrine acknowledges that current intelligence should rest on a well-informed and thorough underlying background understanding in the form of 'basic intelligence'.[37] But this is treated as a prescriptive guide rather than, après Marrin, a note of concern.

Sun Tze, of course, famously observed that 'All warfare is based on war is based on deception.'[38] Consequently, as Lord Butler has explained, 'Intelligence may not differ in type or,

often, reliability from other forms of information used by governments' but it 'operates in a field of particular difficulty' because '[b]y definition the data it is trying to provide have been deliberately concealed.' As a consequence 'the danger of deception must be considered' for all sources, technical or human.[39] The process by which intelligence reporting is examined to establish its reliability and possible adversary denial and deception (D&D) is referred to as 'validation' in British intelligence practice, or 'evaluation' in NATO and US parlance.[40] Consequently, while *assessment* may not be essential to current intelligence *validation* is.

It is important to appreciate the significance of validation in OSINT to appreciate some of the issues in the timeliness and content that both Adam and Michaels identify. The availability of increasingly diverse, detailed real- and near-real-time sources of information conveyed by contemporary information and communication technologies has also entailed an equivalent expansion of the use of those technologies to misinform, malinform and disinform. Not only is the Russo-Ukraine War probably the most comprehensively and globally observed conflict, it is also equally arguably the conflict most comprehensively suffused with disinformation. The public is confronted with an unprecedented range and volume of detailed information matched in previous decades only the resources of major national governments, with capabilities previously limited to resources like highly capable reconnaissance satellites and globally deployed signals intelligence resources. At the same time, they are confronted with miasma of systematic and technically highly sophisticated deception and manipulation. There are, of course, long-standing counter-deception principles and techniques developed in the intelligence community and as suitable to open source exploitation as to national security capabilities.[41] But most citizens will have little access to or familiarity with these techniques, and even less time in their lives to acquire and apply them with the necessary rigour and consistency. There is, therefore, a very real premium on having some organization or entity in a position to capture and validate the available open source information, systematically collate it into a coherent appreciation, and winnow away the white noise and adversary disinformation. This, of course, is what organizations like Defence Intelligence's analytic components exist in large part to do.

Viewed in terms of the conventions, requirements and interest that drive and shape military intelligence, one therefore has to view the DI *Intelligence Update* in rather different and perhaps analytically less ambitious terms than have prevailed. If we approach the *Update* as (mainly) a current intelligence product we would not be asking what analytic depth and insight it offers so much as questions like:

1. How is it intended to update the existing picture and situational awareness?
2. On what kinds of change or lines of development is it reporting?
3. How effectively is it validating, collating and interpreting information to deliver (1) and (2)?
4. How effectively is it conveying that validated information?
5. Insofar as it does make inferences and analytical judgements, how accurate do those appreciations appear to have been?

This is not to say that current intelligence cannot offer analytic insight or touch on assessment, merely that this is not its principal *raison d'etre.* In many respects, item (3), the interpretation and validation of information is essential to forming a clear judgement regarding the other criteria.

Rather than locating the *Update* within the narrative of declassification and disclosure, it is actually more useful to see it as part of an on-going campaign to improve DI's – and the wider intelligence community's – exploitation of open-source intelligence (OSINT). Despite the enthusiasm for OSINT in recent decades, however, open source has some very real

limitations. Almost by definition it is confined in its ability to penetrate a target's denial and deception measures and, at least in Britain, there is a strong case for arguing that the UK's national agencies were established specifically to provide what open sources could not.[42] The open domain is also the principal, large-scale and wide coverage medium for propaganda, deception and disinformation. In the realm of the internet, it is also largely unregulated in terms of both volume and content. As a result, the search costs of OSINT are comparatively high (and increasing) because of the sheer volume of information that needs to be captured and sifted to identify relevant and reliable information, and to identify erroneous or deceptive materials. Because OSINT is not what intelligence doctrine calls a 'controlled source'[43], where the intelligence function can vouch for or has detailed insight into the origin and handling of the information, the validation task is especially demanding. To be sure, there is always the risk that a controlled source an agent has been doubled or that an image is one a decoy. But there will have been a vetting process in the recruitment of the human source and on-going validation of their reporting, and imagery sensors are constantly evolving to find means to penetrate concealment or detect false signatures and decoys. But the web page, Telegram channel, or social media identity are often far more opaque in provenance while also embodying the same risks of hostile control, whether direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious.

The consequence of this is that OSINT validation *takes time*. Intelligence cannot simply take up and relay information in the open space the moment it appears and because it appears. The risks of hostile control, mischievous malice and sincere error have to be taken into account. Sources need to have their *bona fides* evaluated, their provenance attributed, their content tested for corroboration, qualification or falsification. *Of course* open source material will be discussed by the *Update* days after it initially appears because of the validation process. Even as a purely OSINT product, without drawing on national security sources and capabilities, the *Update* would need processing time to validate and collate. It should be no surprise, therefore, that when the *Update* did finally detail the successful Ukrainian shoot down of a Russian Beriev A50 MAINSTAY air surveillance and early warning aircraft and damage of its attendant Ilyushin IL 22M COOT B airborne command post it was almost three days after the initial 'unconfirmed' reports appeared in the public domain.[44] Battle damage reports are notoriously prone to error, premature confidence and exaggeration of success and significance. As a result, validation and confirmation are always a necessity as is the time required to undertake them.

Adam and Michaels are almost certainly not wrong when they speculate that the *Update* draws on classified sources in making its judgements, however. Using open source information to convey knowledge gleaned from national security intelligence sources is a well-established practice often referred to as 'source masking'. Nearly two decades before the invasion of the Ukraine imagery analysts were using source masking to assist disaster relief efforts, locating survivors with national reconnaissance systems then locating them in commercial imagery that could be provided to non-governmental organisations and relief agencies.[45] But insofar as the *Update* entails 'source masking' and DI analysts can refer to classified sources to parse which open sources to trust and which not that process of correlation and evaluation will take time, and there will need to be a review and approval process. And this will not happen in absolute real time. In fact, validating and reporting OSINT-based appreciations in the current disinformation environment in a day or three is impressively fast, even when there are classified sources to draw on to steer and confirm OSINT

collation, validation, integration and exploitation, internal review and authorisation for release and publication.

In purely technocratic terms of analytic tradecraft, perhaps the most striking aspect of the *Update*, however, has been its use, and often *ab*use, of what the UK intelligence community refers to as 'conditional language'. Conditional language is terminology used to express levels of confidence in analytical judgements and likelihood of those judgements being accurate. The issue of conditional language was first explicitly identified by Sherman Kent in terms of what he called 'words of estimative probability' (WEPs) in 1964.[46] Examining different sorts of uncertainty and consequent estimation in intelligence assessments, Kent observed that certain propositions in intelligence appreciations were factual statements while others were inferences, and that all inferences in intelligence carry with them a measure of uncertainty. He further asserted that the intelligence community 'should be able to choose a word or a phrase which quite accurately describes the degree of its certainty; and ideally, exactly this message should get through to the reader'[47] The issue of conditional language and WEPs acquired a very specific significance in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq when politicians in both the UK and USA criticised their respective intelligence communities for failing adequately made their levels of uncertainty regarding appreciations of Iraqi non-conventional weapons capabilities sufficiently clear. In fact, intelligence professionals had gone to some lengths to articulate their uncertainty *but in terms that made sense to other intelligence professionals.* They employed conventions and terminology that were liable to misinterpretation and misrepresentation by politicians with very different professional backgrounds and whose careers are defined by skills of persuasion rather than analysis.[48]

One of the key responses in Britain was an internal review of analytical methods by Defence Intelligence led by Stuart Jack. This resulted *inter alia* in the articulation of a body of formally prescribed language to express uncertainty, encapsulated in what was originally termed the 'Uncertainty Yardstick'.[49] Now into its second, revised version and rebranded the 'Probability Yardstick (see figure 1), the Yardstick prescribes very specific forms of language to express the probable accuracy of analytic judgements and eschews the use of 'modal' ordinary language 'such as "can", "could", "might" and "may"' and even 'possible' as the 'probabilistic equivalent of "weasel words"'.[50] Instead, analysts are to employ recommended phrases such as 'highly likely' and 'realistic possibility' to express specific measures of probability (75-85% and 25-50% respectively) (see Figure 1).
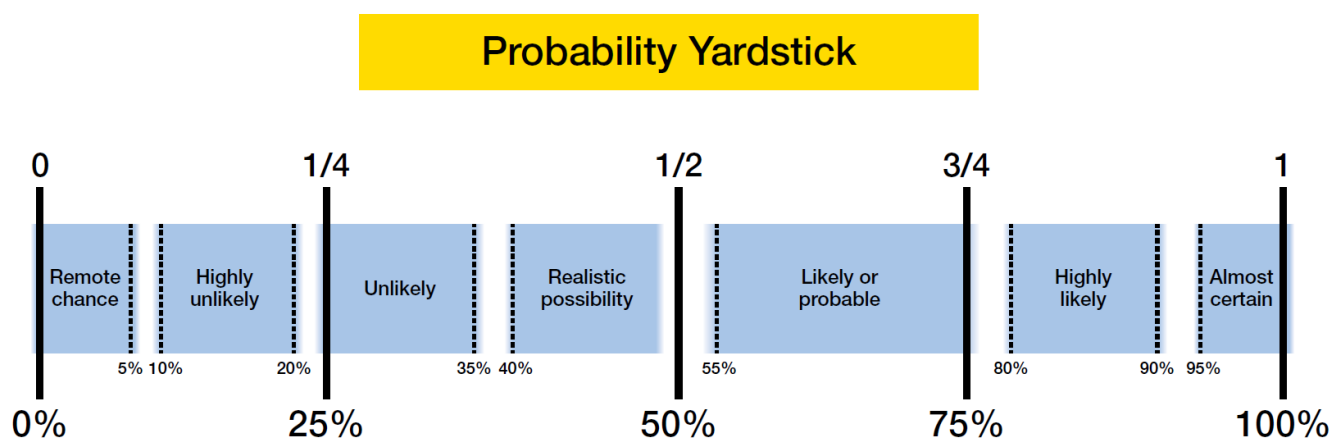

Figure 1: The Uncertainty Yardstick

The most striking aspect of the *Update*'s use of conditional language is how poorly it is incorporated into the drafting. Prescribed WEPs are often wedged into sentences with a complete absence of grammatical care and attention. We are informed, for example, that 'Since September 2023, Russia has highly likely committed elements of its 25th Combined Arms Army (CAA 25) to action for the very first time'[51] or that 'Russia will highly likely need to reallocate SAMs [surface to air missiles] which are routinely protecting distant parts of Russia'.[52] In the first instance, such writing jars with one's sense of rhetorical nicety. 'Likely', of course, is an adjective and not a mid-position adverb, and specifically one that ought to take a conjunction – it likely *that* something is the case, or that that something is *as* likely *as* something else. 'It is highly likely that….' would be stylistically preferable, no less clear and make no real difference in time and effort during the writing. While the Yardstick might offer 'Likely' and 'Probably' as estimative equivalents, they are not really directly substitutable in grammatical terms. And 'probably' has the syntactical virtue of actually being a mid-position adverb. But the *Update*'s authors scrupulously avoid its use. It is open to speculation why such an informal taboo seems to affect analytic drafting at DI, but a plausible reason is that confusion between 'possibly' and 'probably' was a recurrent theme in the post-Iraq postmortems that prompted the creation of the DI Yardstick.

Were it simply a problem of awkward prose it would hardly warrant significant concern but in some cases the perfunctory use of conditional language actually obscures the intended analytical message. On 17 January 2023, discussing Russian use of long range missiles against civilian infrastructure during the winter, the *Update* asserted that 'An AS-4 KITCHEN large anti-ship missile, launched from a TU-22M3 BACKFIRE medium bomber, highly likely struck a block flats in Dnipro City which resulted in the death of at least 40 people.'[53] This leaves the reader puzzling as to whether it was highly likely (85%) that the block of flats was struck, and so leaving some possibility, however 'Improbable or Unlikely' (15-10%) that the building had not been hit at all. Or whether it was highly likely that it was this strike that caused the tragic loss of life rather than some other cause. Or if it was highly likely that it was an AS-4 that hit as opposed to some other type of missile. A reader might even ask why the *Update*'s authors were so certain that the missile in question was launched from a BACKFIRE rather than some other class of aircraft. A clearer form of writing would really have been 'It is highly likely that the missile which struck a block of flats in Dnipro city resulting in the deaths of 40 people was an AS-4 KITCHEN large anti-ship missile launched from a TU23M3 BACKFIRE medium bomber.' Four more words seems a small enough increased word length so exchange for significantly clearer writing.

In fairness, there are instances of tidier forms of words do appear. On 13 October 2023, for example, noted of a hiatus in Russian long range aviation (LRA) airstrikes between 9 March and 28 April 'it was likely that the LRA had almost depleted its stocks' of AS-23 KODIAK air to surface missiles.[54] However, there are also times where conditional language is used a sort of default phrasing or filler. When the *Update* reported on 1 November 2023 that 'Russia's Lancet small one-way-attack uncrewed aerial systems (OWA UAVs) have likely been one of the most effective new capabilities Russia has fielded … over the last 12 months'[55] one really has to ask where the analytic uncertainty lies in this judgement. One might as easily say that the Lancet is 'amongst the most effective' without losing accuracy or rigour.

The point in all this is not simply to play the role of authoritarian grammarian, but to make two significant, linked points about what the *Update* may be telling us about more pervasive issues in the conduct of intelligence analysis in DI. The most important of these is that what we see in the use of conditional language in the *Update* is not the scrupulous use and articulation of carefully

evaluated levels of uncertainty. In 1964 Kent warned of WEPs that analysts should 'try to use them sparingly and in places where they are least likely to obscure the thrust of our key estimative passages'.[56] Instead in the *Update* prescribed expressions are frequently parachuted into sentences in a perfunctory fashion. What we see in the *Update* is not WEPs as instruments of analytic rigour but exercises in formal compliance and professional standards box-ticking. The second point follows from the argument above that the *Update* is written in terms of, and employs, the standards and conventions of military intelligence drafting the general, and current intelligence reporting practice in particular. From this it follows that it is – pardon the phrase – *highly likely* that the analytic drafting style and practice we see in the *Update* is indicative of the style and practice in common use throughout DI analytic production. In other words, there is a *high probability* that the use of conditional language detached from analytic process and employed as a perfunctory formal compliance is a wider, even pervasive practice amongst DI analysts. This, of course, would defeat the purpose for which prescribed conditional language and the DI Yardstick were intended. And if this is so, it would be a source of very serious concern regarding the possible quality of classified DI analytic processes and products.

In due course, many other questions will need to be asked of the *Update*, particularly around the accuracy of its analytical judgements, it's 'batting average' as American commentators have put it.[57] There will inevitably have been miscalls as well as accurate appreciations over the course of the conflict as there are in intelligence in any crisis. And these will need to be examined in closer detail once the conflict has reached a close and we are in a better position to piece together what exactly was happening and when thickest the thickest residual fog of war has dispersed. In the meantime, the *Update* will be of best use to its intended audience if approached on its own terms rather than expectations drawn from entirely different levels and forms of analytic product. But even accepted on those terms, it is possible to detect indications of systemic issues of professional practice affecting it. To be sure, the *Update* is, as many have noted, a somewhat unprecedented experiment and undoubtedly its drafters are learning as they go. But clear analytic drafting and the use of post-Iraq, post-Butler refinements in analytic tradecraft are neither new nor experimental. Both the public and governmental consumers of DI products should be able to expect analytic standards to be more than formal observation and what organizational sociologists John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan have referred to as bureaucratic 'myth and ceremony'.[58]

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[1] Douglas J. MacEachin 'The Tradecraft of Analysis' in Roy Godson, Ernest R. May and Gary Schmitt ed. *US Intelligence at the Crossroads: Agendas for Reform* (Washington DC: Brassey's, 1995) pp.63-74.

[2] Karia Adam 'How U.K. Intelligence Came to Tweet the Lowdown on the War in Ukraine' *The Washington Post* 22 April 2022 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/22/how-uk-intelligence-came-tweet-lowdown-war-ukraine/ [accessed 15 November 2023].

[3] 'Declassified' refers to material that some point was classified but has its caveat rescinded been released, while 'unclassified' refers to something originally issued without any protective security marking.

[4] Jeffery Michaels 'Ukraine: the Daily Intelligence Event' *RUSI Commentary* 18 May 2022 https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/ukraine-daily-intelligence-event [accessed 14 November 2023].

[5] Michaels 'Ukraine: The Daily Intelligence Event' *infra.*

[6] See, e.g. John Prados ed. *The White House Tapes: Eavesdropping on the President* (New York: the New Press, 2003) pp.92-97. *Contra* Michaels' assertion about the US intelligence community assessing a corrupt South Vietnamese regime, see e.g. Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) and United States Intelligence Board (USIB) *National Intelligence Estimate 53-63 Prospects in South Vietnam* 17 April 1963 (Declassified January 2005), https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001166413.pdf.

[7] On net assessment, see Philip H j Davies *Intelligence and Government in Britain and the United States volume 1: Evolution of the US Intelligence Community* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2012) pp.180-181; 256.

[8] On the Secretary of State's Office of Net Assessment and Challenge (SONAC) see e.g. Ministry of Defence 'Press Release: Announcement of new Director Appointed to the Secretary of State's Office of Net Assessment and Challenge' 6 May 2022 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/announcement-of-new-director-appointed-to-the-secretary-of-states-office-for-net-assessment-and-challenge-sonac [accessed 18 December 2023]; Gabriel Elefteriu 'The MoD's new "Net Assessment" Capability Can Make a Huge Difference' *Policy Exchange* 18 January 2022 https://policyexchange.org.uk/blogs/the-mods-newly-independent-net-assessment-capability-can-make-a-huge-difference/ [accessed 18 December 2023].

[9] Eugene O. Porter, 'The Evolution of the General Staff' *The Historian* Vol.8 No.1 (1945).

[10] Michael I Handel 'Intelligence and Military Operations' in Michael I Handel editor *Intelligence and Military Operations* (London: Frank Cass, 1990) pp.21-32.

[11] For the role of the J2 cell in a command staff, and joint planning models in a command staff such as joint targeting committees, see Philip H J Davies 'ISR Versus ISTAR: A Conceptual Crisis in British Military Intelligence' *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* Vol.35 No.1 (2022) pp.76-78, 84-85 and 97 n.77.

[12] Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities. *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities United States Senate Together with Additional, Supplemental and Separate Views.* 7 volumes. Report No.94-753, 94th Congress. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1976).

[13] See, variously Lord Franks *Falkland Islands Review: Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors* (London: HMSO, 1983), Percy Cradock *Know Your Enemy: How the Joint Intelligence Committee Saw the World* (London: John Murray (Publishers) Ltd. 2002), Lord Butler *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* (London: The Stationery Office, 2004), Michael S. Goodman *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee Volume 1: From the Approach of the Second World War to Suez Crisis* (London: Routledge, 2016) and the report and proceedings of Sir John Chilcot's Iraq Inquiry at https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20171123123237/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk// [accessed 20 December 2023].

[14] Davies *Intelligence and Government in Britain and the United States Volume 1* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2012) p.64.

[15] Quoted in Philip H J Davies 'Organizational Politics and the Development of Britain's Intelligence Producer/Consumer Interface' *Intelligence and National Security* Vol.10 No.4 (October 1995) p.113

[16] For a concise description of estimative intelligence, see e.g. Office of the Director of Central Intelligence (ODCI) *A Consumer's Guide to Intelligence* OPAI 93-00092 (Washington DC: ODCI, 1993). More detailed discussions of estimative intelligence can be found in e.g. Harold P Ford *Estimative Intelligence: The Purposes and Problems of National Intelligence Estimating* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1993) or Sherman Kent 'Estimates and Influence' *Studies in Intelligence* Vol.12 No.3 (Summer 1968) pp.11-21.

[17] Lord Butler *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* p.10.

[18] Professional Head of Intelligence Assessment *Professional Development Framework for All-Source Intelligence Assessment* (London: Cabinet Office, 2019) p.6.

[19] Lord Butler *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* pp.10-11.

[20] Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC) *Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00: Intelligence, Counterintelligence and Security Support to Joint Operations* 4th Edition (Shrivenham, UK: DCDC, 2023) p.30.

[21] ODCI *A Consumer's Guide to Intelligence* p.4.

[22] Practical examples of this may be found in the JIC Watch Manuals that have been released to The National Archive, i.e. "JIC Watch Manual," JIC(62)29 (Final), April 20, 1957, and "JIC Watch Manual," JIC(62)29 (Final) both in CAB 158/45, and "JIC Watch Manual," INT 42(74)1 (Working Draft), January 31, 1974, CAB 190/71.

[23] See, e.g. Sherman Kent 'A Crucial Estimate Relived' *Studies in Intelligence* Vol.36 No.5 (Spring 1964) pp.111-119.

[24] Lawrence Freedman *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign: Revised and Updated Edition Volume 1 The Origins of the Falklands War* (London: Routledge, 2005) especially pp.162, 204, 207; John Ferris *Behind the Enigma: The Authorised History of GCHQ, Britain's Cyber Intelligence Agency* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020) pp.615-624.

[25] Sherman Kent *Strategic Intelligence for US World Policy* 2nd Edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1965 [1949]) p.29.

[26] Sherman Kent *Strategic Intelligence for US World Policy* p.30.

[27] Sherman Kent *Strategic Intelligence for US World Policy* p.38.

[28] For a closer examination of the central but underacknowledged significance of tasking and priorities, see Neveen S Abdalla and Philip H J Davies 'Intelligence and the Mandate: A Third Form of Strategic Failure' *International Journal of Intelligence, Security and Public Affairs* Vol.23 No.2 (2021) pp.105-124.

[29] Stephen Marrin *Improving Intelligence Analysis: Bridging the Gap Between Scholarship and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2011) p.17.

[30] Marrin *Improving Intelligence Analysis* p.64.

[31] Marrin *Improving Intelligence Analysis* p.85.

[32] Marrin *Improving Intelligence Analysis* pp.62-67.

[33] ODCI *A Consumer's Guide to Intelligence* pp.21-26. The *Guide* describes 21 current intelligence products, occupying 4 out of 6 pages, from across the community compared with 6 each for estimative and warning intelligence.

[34] Douglas Nicoll 'The Nicoll Report: the JIC and Warning of Aggression [Redacted Version May 2007' p.12 reproduced in Michael S. Goodman 'The Dog That Didn't Bark in the Night: The Joint Intelligence Committee and Warning of Aggression' *Cold War History* Vol.7 No.4 (2007) p.544.

[35] Philip H.J. Davies *Intelligence and Government in Britain and the United States Volume 2* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2012) pp.190-193, 219-220.

[36] DCDC *Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00: Intelligence, Counterintelligence and Security Support to Joint Operations* p.71.

[37] DCDC *Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00: Intelligence, Counterintelligence and Security Support to Joint Operations* p.30.

[38] Sun Tzu *The Art of War*, Samual B. Griffiths trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971 [1963]) p.66.

[39] Lord Butler *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* p.9.

[40] Lord Butler *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* pp.9-10; DCDC *Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00: Intelligence, Counterintelligence and Security Support to Joint Operations* 4th Edition pp.58-59.

[41] See, e.g. James B Bruce and Michael Bennett 'Foreign Denial and Deception: Analytical Imperatives' in James B. Bruce and Roger Z. George *Analyzing Intelligence: Origins, Obstacles, and Innovations* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008) pp.122-137.; Richards J. Heuer Jr. and Randolph H. Pherson *Structured Analytics for Intelligence Analysis* (Washington DC: CQ Press, 2011 p.173-175.

[42] Philip H.J. Davies *Intelligence and Government in Britain and the United States Volume 1* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2012) pp.44-69.

[43] DCDC *Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00: Intelligence, Counterintelligence and Security Support to Joint Operations* p.47.

[44] Defence Intelligence *Update on Ukraine 17 January: Intelligence Update* https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1747544627257745426 [accessed 17 January 2024]; Oliver Slow 'Ukraine Says it Shot Down a Russian A50 Spy Plane' *BBC News* 16 January 2024 Ukraine says it shot down Russian A-50 spy plane - BBC News [accessed 18 January 2024].

[45] See, e.g. Committee on the Future US Workforce for Geospatial Intelligence *Future US Workforce for Geospatial Reference* (Washington DC: National Academies Press 2013) p.14.

[46] Sherman Kent 'Words of Estimative Probability' *Studies in Intelligence* Vol.8 No.4 (Fall 1964) pp.49-65.

[47] Sherman Kent 'Words of Estimative Probability' *Studies in Intelligence* p.64.

[48] Philip H.J. Davies *Intelligence and Government in Britain and the United States Volume 1* pp.388-395; pp. *Intelligence and Government in Britain and the United States Volume 2* 76-279

[49] For the first edition see, e.g. DCDC *Understanding and Intelligence Support to Joint Operations* 3rd Edition (Shrivenham, UK: DCDC 2011) p.2-23, revised in the 4th edition, *op cit,* p.65. See also Professional Head of Defence Intelligence Analysis (PHDIA) *Quick Wins for Busy Analysts* (London: Defence Intelligence, 2016) pp.55, 58-59.

[50] PHDIA *Quick Wins for Busy Analysts* p.58.

[51] Defence Intelligence *Update on Ukraine 27 September 2023: Intelligence Update* https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1706903544190689630 [accessed 10 January 2023].

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[54] Defence Intelligence *Update on Ukraine 13 October 2023: Intelligence Update* https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1712702484446158861 [accessed 13 January 2024]

[55] Defence Intelligence *Update on Ukraine 01 November 2023: Intelligence Update* https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1719621502121775113 [accessed 10 January 2023].

[56] Sherman Kent 'Words of Estimative Probability' *Studies in Intelligence* p.64 *infra*

[57] See, *inter alia,* Steven Marrin 'Evaluating the Quality of Intelligence Analysis: By What (Mis)Measure?' *Intelligence and National Security* Vol.27 No.6 (December 2012) and Jim Marchio '"How Good is Your Batting Average?" Early IC Efforts to Assess the Accuracy of Estimates' *Studies in Intelligence* Vol.60 No.4 (December 2016).

[58] John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan 'Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony' *American Journal of Sociology* Vol.83 No.2 (September 1977).