

Cooking the Intelligence Books on Iran

“Love is whatever you can still betray.” – John Le Carre

There was a time that intelligence estimates were cloaked in secrecy. Peer review, such that it was, was limited to a few analysts with security clearances, analysts that were not necessarily substantive experts. The iconic Intelligence report is the National Intelligence Estimate ([NIE](#)), a document that is supposed to represent an Intelligence Community consensus. In practice, a recurring NIE might be dusted off once a year and circulated to up to 17 agencies for “coordination” where “happy” might be changed to “glad.” With the exception of statistics, estimates were seldom changed substantially before being filed away for another year.

Any agency within the IC that might have a factual or analytical disagreement is allowed to take a “footnote” to an NIE which will contain the specifics of any disagreement.

An NIE footnote is as likely to be read as the body of an NIE itself is read. Recurring intelligence reports are read with the same relish as congressional bills are read by congressmen. As long as estimates contain enough threat data to justify departmental budgets, as with domestic spending bills, few politicians care much about analytical effectiveness or any correspondence with the real world. Spending, not truth, reflection or restraint, is the *sine qua non* of American politics and governance.

The link between Intelligence and defense spending is fairly explicit. The circuit between Intelligence and Intelligence spending is even more direct. With the IC, the folks who define the threat get to write their own meal tickets. Take the Islamist threat since 9/11. Any agency that can work

“terror” into their mission statement is likely to enjoy a funding windfall.

Alas, were funding tied to performance, the IC and the DOD might have to have to raise funds like Public Television or the Girl Scouts.

Nonetheless, the national security business has changed in significant ways since the advent of an Intelligence czar in 2004, the so-called Director of National Intelligence. Heretofore, Intelligence estimates were classified. Now big reports also have a redacted version available to the Press. All the while, the specifics of threat might be obfuscated.

Unlike German Nazis, Japanese Imperialists, and Russian Communists of yore, the Arab/Persian/Muslim threat does not have any official cognates where the shooters, bombers, or throat cutters might be named or tied to race, religion, country, or ideology. Words like Arab, Persian, terrorist, Islam, Islamism, Muhammadanism, Islamofascism or the like are prohibited by fiat.

Unlike previous global threats, contemporary Intelligence reports would have you believe that the last fifty years of terror and small wars are without a common thread, without an ideology. Ninety or more nations might be [sending](#) religiously motivated jihadists to Sunni Arab ISIS, yet that statistic is of little consequence. Terror victim statistics might have reached an [apogee](#) but that fact is of little moment either. You might speak of radicals, militants, extremists, and criminals, but none of these are to be paired with religion, ideology, or Islamic culture.

Thus a national security assessment today is at once officially transparent and functionally opaque at the same time – for the political hustler, the best of both worlds. Alas, transparency, or should we say propaganda, cuts two ways. The 2015 DNI *Worldwide Threat [Assessment](#)* for Congress

compared to the 2014 [edition](#) is an example. The *deus ex machina* has now been added to the DNI's bag of tricks.

Shia *Hezb'allah*, and Shia Iran disappeared from the threat index in 2015. This is the same *Hezb'allah* that is the Shia equivalent of Sunni ISIS. Clearly, the latest DNI unclassified threat assessment was written with Shia readers in mind.



The elevation of Cuba to BFF is negligible because Havana hasn't been a threat to Miami Beach since Khrushchev went shoeless at the United Nations. Any diminution of the *Hezb'allah* (literally, the party of God) and the Nuclear Persian threats is another matter. A nuclear/terrorist Shia theocracy in the Middle East changes every strategic dynamic; with Israel, with Arabia, with the larger Sunni world, and with NATO.

The motives for cooking the Shia threat are a grab bag of possibilities. Foremost is the specter of concessions to Iran designed to prime the pump for team Obama legacy, in short, a nuclear deal with Tehran at any price. A weak and/or failing American President is an easy mark for Shia ayatollahs with unlimited tenure.

Like the Cuba rapprochement, a lame duck American administration would like to put a Persian "peace" paper in the plus column. Never mind that the Persian priests are unlikely to sacrifice their parity ace to the numerically superior Sunni. At the moment, the Islam bomb is a Sunni monopoly. Only a Shia bomb balances the Sunni/Shia sectarian equation. Nuclear parity for apocalyptic Muslim sectarians would be the strategic equivalent of certain Armageddon for Israel.

Then there is the Syria/Iraq conundrum, two pariah regimes, fast friends of Shia Tehran. Sunni ISIS has made a caliphate of Syria and Iran, a budding empire that aspires to devour

what remains of two failing pro-Iranian basket cases. ISIS is also making more than a bit of a splash in Yemen, Tunisia, and Libya.

Washington and Brussels are unwilling to confront Iran or ISIS in the flesh. Such dilemmas make for strange bedfellows. Thus America and Europe now find themselves shagging Syrian [Assad](#), the Iranian ayatollahs, *Hezb'allah*, and a veritable host of unsavory anti-Sunni mercenaries and miscreants. The Levant is starting to look like a necrotic Abbott and Costello routine. Who's on [first](#)?

And last, but not least, there is the possibility that the dangerous liaison with Shia priests is designed to [punish or poke](#) Israel, especially Bibi Netanyahu. In every Arab or Persian political stew, anti-Semitism is sure to be one of the ingredients.

Given the number of times that America has changed sides in the Middle East, only one thing is certain. Neither Sunni nor Shia can trust Washington today, especially an erratic if not incoherent team Obama. Israel especially, with existential skin in the game, has every reason to be wary of motives in Brussels and Washington too, lest Israel become so much collateral damage like the women, children, and Christians of North Africa and the Levant.

Withal, one other conclusion is now possible. The American Intelligence Community just might be another Beltway hooker, similar in many respects to the academic and think tank camp followers that surround Washington. As long as the funding is unlimited, the Intelligence Community seems willing to provide any service or any answer that pays.

Alas, truth is a candid bitch, she can't be bought. The American Intelligence Community, in contrast, has become just another Washington DC streetwalker.

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