



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

To be effective, policymaking and programming in conflict situations must start with an accurate understanding of local context, conflict actors, causes, and the dynamic relationships among them. The report argues that complex conflict situations can be better understood by tapping the potential synergy between two distinct approaches to analyzing conflicts—conflict assessment and intelligence analysis. This report originates from the United States Institute of Peace's Center for Conflict Management, which conducts research, identifies best practices, and develops new tools for conflict prevention, management, and resolution.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*Lawrence Woocher*

# Conflict Assessment and Intelligence Analysis

## Commonality, Convergence, and Complementarity

### Summary

- A wide consensus has emerged in recent years that successful policymaking and programming in conflict situations must start with an accurate understanding of local context, conflict actors, causes, and the dynamic relationships among them.
- This recognition has led to a plethora of new analytic initiatives, but little evident effort to exploit potential synergies between conflict assessment and national security intelligence analysis.
- Conflict assessment and intelligence analysis have different origins, aims, and methods but also a number of important elements of commonality. They both aim to enhance understanding of complicated sociopolitical situations to support better decision making and face many common challenges, including accuracy, precision, timeliness, and relevance.
- Conflict assessment is marked by its action orientation, its flexibility, and its emphasis on collaborative methods to elicit views on the conflict from diverse perspectives. These attributes may lead conflict assessment processes to be especially able to pick up “weak signals” and to promote cooperation and enhance understanding of the “other side’s” perspectives.
- These strengths of conflict assessment may at times come at the cost of analytic rigor, precision, and sensitivity to the possibility that some stakeholders could provide misleading information.
- Intelligence analysis is designed to produce objective assessments for government national security decision makers through rigorous evaluation of “all source” data (including classified information) in a competitive environment. Intelligence analysts’ independence from policymakers and their adherence to explicit standards of analytic tradecraft should help lead to high-quality analytic products.

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- Potential pitfalls of intelligence analysis include being too reliant on data from clandestine and highly technical sources, being subject to political pressure, and being insufficiently collaborative.
- Three important global trends tend to push conflict assessment and intelligence analysis toward convergence: the changing nature of national security, the increasing salience of “open source” information, and the growing recognition of the limitations of lone analysts.
- Deliberate efforts to draw on the methods of both conflict assessment and intelligence analysis will yield fuller and more useful analysis, which should in turn improve the formulation of conflict management, peacebuilding, and national security strategies. Using tools of conflict assessment and intelligence analysis in tandem is one specific step toward fully realizing the complementarity of these two analytic approaches.

## Introduction

One of the axioms of international conflict management and peacebuilding is the importance of developing a deep understanding of a situation before acting. Conflicts emerge and escalate based on an incredible diversity of local contexts and conditions. Without understanding the actors, root causes, and conflict dynamics of the specific case, outside actors risk exacerbating conflicts, even when acting with good intentions. Multilateral organizations, individual governments (including the United States), and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) all appear to have absorbed this message and, accordingly, have begun to commit themselves to conducting systematic conflict assessments more regularly.

The broad consensus about the need to develop an understanding of a conflict situation before seeking to influence it is perhaps best illustrated by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD DAC), a forum including two dozen of the world’s largest aid donors. A decade ago, OECD DAC issued a report titled *The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict*, which concluded, “To create a ‘culture of prevention’ in development co-operation and foreign policy action, the international community needs to better analyse the causes and dynamics of conflict and peace in order to understand how their actions will affect the ‘structural stability’ of a society or country.”<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, in 2007, the OECD DAC issued *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations*, a touchstone guide for donors. “Take context as the starting point” is the first of these ten principles. “It is essential,” the report elaborates, “for international actors to understand the specific context in each country, and develop a shared view of the strategic response that is required.”<sup>2</sup>

Several individual governments—including Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom—have developed frameworks for assessing conflict situations to inform their policy and programming.<sup>3</sup> The U.S. government adopted an Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) in 2008, building on the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Conflict Assessment Framework.<sup>4</sup> The government’s *Principles of the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework* summarized the rationale for conducting systematic conflict assessments: “A first step toward a more effective and coordinated response to help states prevent, mitigate and recover from violent conflict is the development of shared understanding among USG agencies about the sources of violent conflict or civil strife.”<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, NGOs and civil society organizations working in conflict situations have recognized the central role that good analysis should play in designing effective programs. “Conflict analysis is the foundation of conflict sensitivity,” summarized one resource for NGOs. “Without a good understanding of the context in which interventions are situated, organizations that support or directly implement them may unintentionally help to fuel

violent conflict or to exacerbate existing tensions.”<sup>6</sup> NGOs working in conflict areas now hardly question the need to engage in conflict analysis, but they continue to grapple with how they can most effectively go about this task and integrate the results into their programming.

The groundswell of support for more rigorous and regular conflict assessments represents important progress from the period when rigid templates and “essential task” lists held more sway. Yet conflict assessment efforts are but one of multiple approaches that governments and other organizations use to enhance understanding of and to inform their actions relating to conflict situations. Just as these organizations strive to streamline and coordinate their activities in conflict-affected and at-risk states—whether termed a “whole-of-government,” “joined-up,” or “comprehensive” approach—they would benefit from bringing together disparate analytic approaches. Nudging the analytic activities of sprawling institutions toward greater synergy has its own challenges. Maximizing the benefits of different analytic approaches requires going beyond mere coordination to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches, and crafting ways they can complement each other.

In addition to conflict assessment, one analytical approach that is important when considering conflict situations is that typified by national security intelligence organizations. For a variety of reasons, intelligence analysis and conflict assessment have proceeded for the most part on separate tracks. However, as this report will argue, despite their different origins, aims, and methods, they share important commonalities, and global trends tend to push them toward greater convergence. Furthermore, deliberate efforts to draw on both conflict assessment and intelligence methods will yield fuller and more useful analysis, which should in turn improve the formulation of conflict management, peacebuilding, and national security strategies.

*Maximizing the benefits of different analytic approaches requires going beyond mere coordination to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches.*

## The Two Analytic Approaches

For two concepts that are so frequently discussed, it is surprising how little consensus there is on exactly how to define conflict assessment or intelligence analysis. This poses a challenge in assessing their respective strengths and weaknesses and the relationship between them. Nevertheless, various discussions of the concepts by experts and institutions tend to agree on certain essential aspects.

### *Conflict Assessment and Analysis*

“Conflict assessment” and “conflict analysis” tend to be used synonymously. One finds many definitions of conflict assessment and analysis in the scholarly literature and in practitioner guidebooks.<sup>7</sup> These definitions differ in their details, but they agree on several defining characteristics of conflict assessment:

- **It is action oriented.** Conflict assessment is distinguished from academic analysis of a conflict by its supposition that assessment is an activity that precedes and informs work in or on a conflict.<sup>8</sup>
- **It aims to describe actors, causes, and conflict dynamics.** While the numerous conflict assessment frameworks promulgated by governments, multilateral organizations, and others differ in their details and exact terms used, there is broad agreement around the key components for any conflict assessment. These include understanding the main actors in the conflict, including groups as well as individuals; the underlying causes and mitigating factors of the conflict; and the dynamics of the conflict—the interaction of the factors that drive the situation toward conflict or promote peace and stability. While conflict assessments often seek to describe trends and identify “windows of vulnerability” or “windows of

opportunity,” in the words of the ICAF, for the most part they do not try to serve a warning function; their analysis is typically more descriptive and explanatory than predictive.

- **It generally does not prescribe particular analytic methods or tools.** Most frameworks for conflict assessment call on practitioners to engage in a process that can gather insights about the conflict from diverse perspectives—for example, government officials, religious leaders, youth, trade unions, human rights groups, etc. But by and large, conflict assessment frameworks encourage practitioners to choose the most suitable analytic tools from the wide range available and to adapt these tools for use in local contexts. In other words, beyond the emphasis on incorporating multiple perspectives, the specific means of analysis are not a defining feature of conflict assessment.
- **It aims to enhance understanding of inevitable disputes among groups so that these disputes can be managed peacefully.** Rarely if ever are conflict assessment processes totally norm-free. They typically presuppose—implicitly or explicitly—that conflicts can be managed peacefully and that this is preferable to any use of violence.

### *Intelligence Analysis*

*Intelligence analysis suffers less from an abundance of different definitions than from a paucity of definitions at all.*

Intelligence analysis suffers less from an abundance of different definitions than from a paucity of definitions at all.<sup>9</sup> Even highly relevant and insightful publications like *The Future of Intelligence Analysis*, *Assessing the Tradecraft of Intelligence Analysis*, and *Analyzing Intelligence* struggle to articulate concise definitions of their subject.<sup>10</sup> This may reflect that intelligence is a field dominated by practitioners, for whom sharply articulated conceptual distinctions are less important than shared, implicit understanding.

Nevertheless, certain key points should be emphasized from definitions and related discussions of intelligence analysis:

- **It seeks to produce objective assessments through rigorous evaluation of data.** Experts debate whether intelligence analysis is distinguished by its use of secret data, by its use of unstructured “all source” data, or by the assumption that some data may be intentionally misleading because of other parties’ desire to deceive. It is agreed, however, that intelligence analysis is designed to ensure that conclusions flow from unbiased evaluation of data. Standards of analytic tradecraft—for example, explicit assumptions, precision in confidence of conclusions, use of “alternative analysis,” and structured analytic tools—have been developed as a means to reinforce these central features of intelligence analysis.
- **It is undertaken to support decision making in a competitive context.** Like conflict assessment, the *raison d’être* of intelligence analysis is to help people make better decisions. In fact, intelligence organizations in governments are given a unique mandate to respond to the analytic needs of national security decision makers—frequently referred to as “customers” or “consumers.” The type of decision support provided by intelligence analysis is further distinguished by the competitive context, in which information advantages or insights into an adversary’s motivations can prove instrumental in achieving decision makers’ objectives.
- **It concerns any issue that affects national security, including but not limited to conflict situations.** The concept of intelligence analysis can apply to other domains, such as business and law enforcement, but this discussion focuses on national security intelligence. Even with this limitation, the specific issues with which intelligence analysis may be concerned range widely and include international conflicts.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1. Summary of Differences between National Security Intelligence Analysis and Conflict Assessment**

	National security intelligence analysis	Conflict assessment and analysis
Subject, process, and outcome of analysis	Threats to national security	Threats to human security
	Clandestine and open sources	Open sources
	Typically distinct from data collection	Typically not distinct from data collection
	No policy recommendations	Frequently includes policy recommendations
	Secretive, private, classified	Collaborative, consultative, public
	Value in product	Value in both product and (participatory) process
Organizational issues	Governments' intelligence organizations	International organizations, NGOs, aid agencies, foreign ministries
	Analyst set off from decision maker	Analyst and decision maker are often one and the same
	Analysis is core function	Analysis is rarely core function
	Relatively significant resources for analysis	Relatively minimal resources for analysis

***Elements of Commonality and Divergence***

There are important commonalities between conflict assessment and intelligence analysis:

- **At their core, they both aim to enhance understanding of complicated sociopolitical situations to support better decision making.** Intelligence analysis and conflict assessment are both “sense-making” activities concerning phenomena that transcend individual domains or disciplines.<sup>12</sup> Both approaches ask questions about the deep roots of crises, the interests and capabilities of individual leaders, the pathway of current trends, and plausible future scenarios, among other things. In essence, they try to make ill-defined and complex situations more understandable to enable leaders to make wiser choices about policy or programs.
- **They face many common challenges—for example, accuracy, precision, timeliness, relevance—and require similar skills from analysts.** Despite differences in data and methodology, the attributes of good conflict assessment and intelligence analysis largely overlap. Conflict analysts tend to talk about ensuring that their conclusions are not “prejudiced,” whereas intelligence analysts tend to worry about “bias,” but these are very similar concerns. James Bruce and Roger George articulate four skills that distinguish intelligence analysts from other specialists and experts. Leaving the skill of understanding intelligence collection methods aside, the other three skills could equally describe the skills of good conflict analysts: “Self-awareness of cognitive biases and other cognitive influences on analysis, Open-mindedness to contrary views or alternative models that fit the data, and Self-confidence to admit and learn from analytic errors.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite these similarities, there are also significant differences between these two concepts (table 1). These can be summarized as falling into two broad categories: (1) the subject, process, and outcome of analysis, and (2) organizational issues.

The two concepts diverge first in the focus of their analysis. In short, intelligence analysis focuses on threats and opportunities related to a state’s national security, whereas conflict assessment seeks to understand the conflict and its effects on all parties without applying a national security prism. Intelligence analysis, furthermore, relies to varying degrees on classified information, whereas conflict assessment is nearly always based exclusively on open sources. The difference in data sources extends also to what might be called the

***Intelligence analysis focuses on threats and opportunities related to a state’s national security, whereas conflict assessment seeks to understand the conflict and its effects on all parties without applying a national security prism.***

culture of the analytic process, which tends to be secretive and private for intelligence analysis versus open and collaborative for conflict assessment. The collaborative nature of conflict assessment has led peacebuilding specialists to use the assessment process itself, when conducted with a group that represents diverse parties to a conflict, as a tool of conflict transformation. According to Peter Woodrow of the Reflecting on Peace Practice project, “The [analysis] exercise itself helps to build relationships and understanding among those trying to make a difference in the peace process.”<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the value of intelligence analysis is overwhelmingly found in the product—that is, the analytic insights generated by the process.<sup>15</sup>

The way in which conflict assessment and intelligence analysis are organized also tends to be quite different. Large national security intelligence organizations exist for the purpose of collecting and analyzing threats to a state’s national security. (For example, in 2009 the U.S. director of national intelligence described the intelligence community as a “200,000-person, \$75 billion national enterprise.”) Intelligence organizations have a unique place in governments’ bureaucracies, set off from policymakers in an advisory role with analysis as a core function and significant resources (at least relatively) dedicated to the analytic enterprise. Conflict assessment is rarely associated with any dedicated institutions; rather, it is undertaken as is seen fit by development agencies, international organizations such as the United Nations, foreign ministries, and NGOs. The assessment process is accordingly seen as one piece—and typically a small piece—of these organizations’ core functions of engaging in diplomacy, development, and peacebuilding. Rarely do organizations dedicate substantial staff and resources to conflict assessment. This means that it is common for the individuals or groups conducting the assessment to be also those developing the policy or programming ideas, a stark contrast to intelligence analysts, who in most settings are proscribed from even offering policy recommendations.

The extent to which the commonalities or the differences between these two approaches predominate depends largely on the specific context or subject of analysis. When the subject of analysis is a highly militarized state-to-state conflict, a highly centralized authority, or highly technical/scientific issues (e.g., nuclear weapons development), the differences will tend to dominate. Likewise, conflict assessment and intelligence analysis tend to diverge in manner and content when there is a lack of open source information or major “denial and deception” issues—that is, parties to the conflict have strong incentive and ability to hide or mislead their true capabilities and intentions. Examples of subjects of analysis in this domain might include conflict on the Korean Peninsula, between the United States and Iran, and between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Nevertheless, to say that the differences between conflict assessment and intelligence analysis are marked in these situations is not to say that they cannot complement one another.

## **Strengths and Pitfalls of the Two Approaches**

The differences in archetypal conflict assessment and intelligence analysis approaches lead them to have distinct strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of conflict assessments, in general, include their being based on loose frameworks that can be adapted to the specifics of a unique context, their openness to different perspectives, their emphasis on dynamic communication with diverse stakeholders, and their action orientation. The flexibility and openness of conflict assessment processes may lead assessors to be especially able to pick up “weak signals” about emerging changes in complex environments and quickly refine the questions being asked. In addition, as noted, beyond the analytic value per se, collaborative conflict assessment processes have the ability to bring people together around a common endeavor, promoting cooperation and enhancing understanding of the “other side’s” perspectives.

These strengths—particularly the emphasis on eliciting information from parties to conflict and building a shared understanding—may at times come at a cost of lack of analytic rigor, precision, or sensitivity to the possibility that some stakeholders could provide misleading information, deliberately or not. For example, conflict assessment processes often rely on inviting groups of people living in the situation of interest to identify conflict causes or drivers. If all voices are affirmed equally, this type of process can lead to long lists of factors with little sense of priority or interaction among them, or a collection of individual perceptions that fails to add up to a coherent picture. If, however, there is a strong preference for consensus, there is a risk that the “most popular” ideas will emerge rather than the ones best supported by all available evidence.

The strengths of intelligence analysis include its independence, adherence to standards of analytic tradecraft, and provision for evaluation and oversight. For example, the U.S. director of national intelligence has promulgated a set of analytic standards to which all analytic products should follow. Dedicated units exist to audit analytic reports on their adherence to these agreed standards. The unique role of intelligence analysts—set off from policymakers and free of responsibility from decisions about policy or programming—has distinct advantages. Most commonly cited is the freedom to explore hypotheses about trends and effects unencumbered by pressure from political bosses or from the biases that plague the evaluation of ideas in which one is already invested. In addition, the interplay with “customers” and congressional oversight, when they work well, push intelligence analysts toward deeper, sharper, and more policy-relevant analysis.

Reviews of recent intelligence failures have underscored some of the corresponding pitfalls.<sup>16</sup> For example, intelligence analysis is often too reliant on data from clandestine and highly technical sources. Since these data are so difficult and costly to acquire and are the most tangible feature that distinguishes intelligence from other kinds of analysis, it can be tempting to assign them undue influence in the analytic process. One notorious example is the weight that was reportedly given to testimony of a single Iraqi defector—code-named Curveball—about alleged Iraqi weapons programs. A similar bias can exist regarding analysis based on highly technical means or methods, including various visualization techniques, whose vividness tends to make people see these results as more likely than may be merited. In addition, when analyst-policymaker relations go awry, intelligence analysis can be subject to severe political pressures—ironically, precisely because intelligence organizations are designed to operate outside the political fray. Because of reliance on classified data, the analytic culture in intelligence organizations tends toward individual experts working independently or in small groups of analysts with similar sets of expertise and background. This risks producing overly insular or insufficiently collaborative analysis, especially when important knowledge exists outside the intelligence community. All of these issues are being tackled by intelligence organizations, but they remain thorny challenges.

## **Forces Promoting Convergence of the Approaches**

This review of the strengths and potential pitfalls of conflict assessment and intelligence analysis alone is sufficient to recommend greater interaction between these approaches. Three important global trends combine to make this task all the more critical.

### ***Increasing Primacy of Open Source Information***

Whereas intelligence analysis has traditionally been based largely on classified information, it is now widely recognized that changes in both information and security environments make open source information central to virtually any analytic enterprise. “The need for

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exploiting open source material is greater now than ever before,” concluded the 2005 WMD commission report, adding that “the Intelligence Community’s open source programs have not expanded commensurate with either the increase in available information or with the growing importance of open source data to today’s problems.”<sup>17</sup> As the Internet and social media platforms continue their explosive growth, one can expect that the future information environment will place open source information more and more at the heart of any analytic enterprise. This means, in turn, that differences in the data being analyzed by conflict assessment and intelligence analysis processes will shrink considerably.

### ***Changing Nature of National Security Threats***

In past decades, the most significant threats to national security originated in powerful hierarchically organized states. This is less true today. As former senior U.S. intelligence official John C. Gannon summarized, “Threats are becoming more complicated and more distributed at home and across the globe.”<sup>18</sup> In this more complicated security environment, many of the most significant threats—for example, violent extremism, pandemics, and nuclear proliferation—emanate from societies at risk of or currently experiencing violent conflict, even outside zones of obvious geopolitical concern. This has led many observers to identify instability and conflict themselves, wherever they occur, as major threats to U.S. national security. This is evidenced in the attention to several ongoing and potential violent conflicts in recent public threat assessments presented by the U.S. intelligence community.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the ascendance of nonstate actors means that national security threats are more frequently associated with networked organizations like al Qaeda, which draw strength from popular grievances and ideological appeal as much as material capacities. As governments like the United States increasingly find that violent conflict itself threatens its security, with networks more than hierarchical bureaucracies being key actors, the type of assessment required to support national security action will become less and less distinct from that needed to support peacebuilding.

### ***Growing Insufficiency of the “Lone Analyst”***

Knowledge about matters relevant to conflict situations is increasingly dispersed across individuals and organizations, meaning analysts must tap into pockets of outside expertise to generate accurate findings. When topics of interest range from missile technology to infectious disease vectors—let alone tomorrow’s emerging issues—it is impossible to house all relevant subject matter expertise in a single organization. Moreover, current analytic challenges are less highly structured than in the past, frequently spanning multiple disciplines or topic areas, and less amenable to being broken down into individual components. For example, understanding the drug war in Mexico requires not only experts in political, economic, security, and organizational analysis but also methods designed to develop an appreciation for how these various dynamics together form an adaptive system, where no separate component can be understood fully without recognizing its many linkages. In addition, collaborative analytic techniques (e.g., prediction markets, wikis) have proved useful in aggregating knowledge as well as picking up “weak signals.” In sum, as Carmen A. Medina, a senior U.S. intelligence official, wrote, “The ‘lone expert’ model will suffice for fewer analytic problems.”<sup>20</sup> This means that intelligence analysis should increasingly engage outside expertise and embrace collaborative methods, thereby bringing it closer to practices associated with conflict assessment.

***Collaborative analytic techniques have proved useful in aggregating knowledge as well as picking up “weak signals.”***

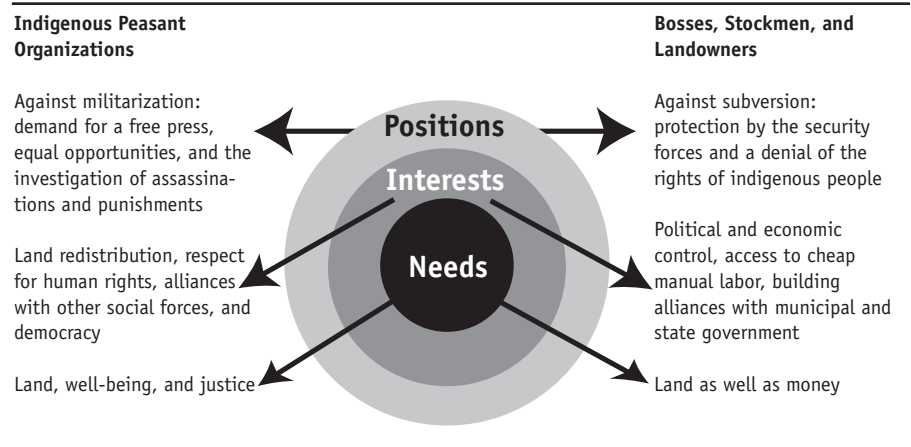


## Recommendations for Promoting Complementarity of the Approaches

These forces promoting convergence highlight the increasing importance of and potential for synergy between conflict assessment and intelligence analysis. But they by no means guarantee that this potential will be realized, particularly when the connections across the respective professional communities remain quite weak. The foregoing analysis leads to recommendations about how to draw on the strengths of conflict assessment and intelligence analysis in ways that can benefit both peacebuilding and national security decision making:

- **Recognize that there are no one-size-fits-all analytic approaches.**<sup>21</sup> The methodologies chosen to address any issue should be driven by the contours of the analytic challenge, not by the traditions and practices of any organization or professional community. For most conflict situations, multiple analytic perspectives will be necessary.
- **Remember that the analytic value of information is only loosely associated with the method by which it was obtained.** This is an admonition both to intelligence analysts, who tend to overvalue clandestine reporting, and to conflict assessment specialists, who tend to overvalue the outcomes of inclusive group processes. The source of information should, of course, affect one's assessment of the information's credibility. Yet, particularly in complex conflict situations, even highly credible information—for example, satellite imagery of artillery movements or the shared perception of civil society leaders about the root causes of a conflict—may not help much in choosing among multiple plausible explanations. The ultimate question is the extent to which information provides purchase on a relevant analytic question, and this is not necessarily a product of the method used to obtain the information.
- **Embrace collaborative methods, but beware of lowest-common-denominator analysis.** While intelligence organizations have begun to take strides toward fostering collaborative analysis, there remains a long way to go. To reap the rewards of collaboration, all assessment processes need to safeguard against the possibility that critical points of differing judgment or uncertainties may be papered over by an emphasis on what can be agreed on by all.
- **Be explicit about the precision and degree of confidence in analytic conclusions.** This hallmark of analytic tradecraft is too commonly absent in the results of conflict assessment processes, leading to overconfidence and different understandings of a single analytic conclusion. Moreover, as analytic problems become increasingly complex, it will be important for all analysts to be equally open and direct about what they do not know as about what they do know.
- **Be open to counterintuitive, nonlinear, nonrational explanations.** Conflict situations frequently surprise and even confuse the methodical analyst. Analysts should adopt explanations wherever the evidence points them, even if they fail to match implicit assumptions of linear relationships or even minimally rational behavior. Matching systematic and rigorous analysis with this kind of openness can be a major challenge.
- **Try using tools of conflict analysis and intelligence analysis in tandem.** This is the most specific implication of this report's conclusions. Selecting analytic tools from both traditions that can work well together can help operationalize the more general recommendations above. The appendix presents an illustration of how the "onion model" of positions, interests, and needs—a classic from conflict resolution theory that is used in many conflict assessment exercises—could be used in combination with the analysis of competing hypotheses, a technique developed for intelligence analysts. Further discussion among analysts should uncover additional pairs or groups of analytic tools that are well suited to complementary use.

**Figure 1. The onion model: an example from Chiapas, Mexico**



Source: Simon Fisher, ed. *Working with Conflict* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 28

## Appendix: Pairing Analytic Tools

Conflict analysts frequently use the “onion model” described by Simon Fisher and colleagues, as a tool for eliciting from parties to a conflict not only their stated positions but also their underlying interests and needs (figure 1). This is a critical step toward understanding the roots of a conflict and whether there is a “win-win” solution that meets both parties’ interests and needs. What is sometimes overlooked is that ideas generated by using the onion model are just hypotheses that should be subject to subsequent analysis and testing.

Analysis of competing hypotheses (ACH) is a technique developed by Richards Heuer for intelligence analysts to avoid cognitive traps and to ensure that hypotheses are accepted only when the evidence merits.<sup>22</sup> ACH guides analysts by having them array multiple hypotheses in columns against evidence in rows. Each cell is coded based on how consistent the hypothesis is with the piece of evidence. The analyst can then reject hypotheses by looking across the matrix at the degree of correspondence between data and hypotheses (tables A.1 and A.2).

It is important to recognize that the ACH method itself relies on starting with an appropriate range of plausible hypotheses. Using the onion model and ACH in tandem, thus, could help ensure that an appropriate set of hypotheses are generated and that these are evaluated systematically based on available evidence (table A.2).

**Table A.1. Analysis of competing hypotheses: an example from the Wen Ho Lee case**

	Classic spy who passed classified info 6	Archived data for LANL as instructed 3	Stashed intellectual property for his next job 1	Talked to Chinese but passed no classified info 1
WHL's wife was FBI/CIA informant	Inconsistent	N/A	N/A	Neutral
WHL had a record of cooperating with the FBI and CIA	Inconsistent	Consistent	N/A	Consistent
Massive amounts of material were transferred to UNCLAS disc drives	Very Consistent	Consistent	Very Consistent	Very Consistent
WHL admitted he had disclosed sensitive info to a foreign govt	Inconsistent	N/A	Consistent	Consistent
WHL did not report all his meetings	Very Consistent	N/A	N/A	Consistent
PRC's W-88 sketch had revisions made after WHL lost access	Inconsistent	N/A	N/A	Consistent
99% of W-88 info on the Internet	Neutral	Consistent	Inconsistent	Consistent
No proof any classified documents were passed to the PRC	Inconsistent	Neutral	Neutral	Consistent
WHL was in regular contact with senior Chinese nuclear scientists	Consistent	Consistent	Consistent	Consistent
Entered lab at 0330 Christmas Eve	Very Consistent	Inconsistent	Consistent	Inconsistent
Did not download user manuals	Inconsistent	Inconsistent	Consistent	Neutral
Took computer files home	Very Consistent	Inconsistent	Very Consistent	Very Consistent
Moved files to UNCLAS computer	Very Consistent	Very Consistent	Very Consistent	Very Consistent

Source: Adapted from [http://competinghypotheses.org/docs/Sample\\_Projects](http://competinghypotheses.org/docs/Sample_Projects)

**Table A.2. Illustration of an ACH matrix based on hypotheses generated using the onion model**

	Landowners' interest in cheap labor drives their treatment of indigenous people	Landowners' ideology and prejudice drive their treatment of indigenous people	Landowners' desire for political control drives their treatment of indigenous people
Evidence 1	Very consistent	Neutral	Neutral
Evidence 2	Inconsistent	Consistent	Neutral
Evidence 3	Consistent	Neutral	Inconsistent
Evidence 4	Consistent	Very consistent	Inconsistent
Evidence 5	Neutral	N/A	Consistent

An online edition of this and related reports can be found on our Web site ([www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)), together with additional information on the subject.

## Endnotes

1. OECD, *The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* (Paris: OECD, 2001), 31, [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/54/1886146.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/54/1886146.pdf).
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5. *Principles of the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework* (Washington, DC: United States Department of State, 2008), 1, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PCAAB943.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB943.pdf).
6. "Chapter 2: Conflict Analysis," in *Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding: A Resource Pack* (London: APFO, CECORE, CHA, FEWER, International Alert, and Saferworld, 2004), 1, [www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/chapter\\_2\\_\\_266.pdf](http://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/chapter_2__266.pdf).
7. For representative definitions of conflict assessment or analysis, see GTZ, *Conflict Analysis for Project Planning and Management*, 8; *Conducting a Conflict Assessment*, 8; Simon Fisher, ed., *Working with Conflict* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 17; "Chapter 2: Conflict Analysis," in *Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development*, 1.
8. For example, International Alert, a leading NGO in the peacebuilding arena, describes the role of analysis in its Programming Framework as follows: "The purpose of the analysis is to determine what actions Alert can take—if any—to improve the prospects for peace, with respect to a specific conflict context or a specific issue or theme which is relevant to peace and conflict—often one of the peace factors." *Programming Framework for International Alert: Design, Monitoring and Evaluation* (London: International Alert, January 2010), [www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/library/012010ProgrammingFrameworkForAlert.pdf](http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/library/012010ProgrammingFrameworkForAlert.pdf).
9. Notable exceptions include definitions of intelligence analysis in Rob Johnston, *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2005), 4; and Bruce D. Berkowitz and Allan E. Goodman, *Strategic Intelligence for American National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 85.
10. William J. Lahnenman, *The Future of Intelligence Analysis: Volume 1, Final Report* (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 2006), [www.cissm.umd.edu/papers/files/future\\_intel\\_analysis\\_final\\_report1.pdf](http://www.cissm.umd.edu/papers/files/future_intel_analysis_final_report1.pdf); Gregory F. Treverton and C. Bryan Gabbard, *Assessing the Tradecraft of Intelligence Analysis* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), [www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/2008/RAND\\_TR293.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2008/RAND_TR293.pdf); and Roger Z. George and James B. Bruce, eds., *Analyzing Intelligence: Origins, Obstacles, and Innovations* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008).
11. See, for example, Randolph H. Pherson, *Rethinking National Security in a Globalizing World: A New Ecology* (Reston, VA: Pherson Associates, 2009); Thomas Fingar, "Analysis in the U.S. Intelligence Community: Missions, Masters, and Methods," in *Intelligence Analysis: Behavioral and Social Scientific Foundations*, ed. B. Fischhoff and C. Chauvin (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2011).
12. Gary Klein, Brian Moon, and Robert R. Hoffman, "Making Sense of Sensemaking 1: Alternative Perspectives," *IEEE Intelligent Systems* 21, no. 4 (2006): 70–73.
13. George and Bruce, *Analyzing Intelligence*, 3.
14. Peter Woodrow, *Advancing Practice in Conflict Analysis and Strategy Development: Interim Progress Report* (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2006), 18, [www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/article/RPP%20Article%20Conflict%20Analysis%2020060101.pdf](http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/article/RPP%20Article%20Conflict%20Analysis%2020060101.pdf).
15. "Intelligence liaison" activities may be an exception. These collaborative efforts between different parts of a single government or among multiple governments can themselves help build relationships and trust, which can prove useful beyond the particular analytic endeavor.
16. See, for example, *The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction: Report to the President of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 31, 2005) and *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 22, 2004).
17. *The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 378.
18. John C. Gannon, "Managing Analysis in the Information Age," in George and Bruce, *Analyzing Intelligence*, 215.
19. See, for example, James R. Clapper, "Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community for the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, February 10, 2011; Dennis C. Blair, "Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, February 2, 2010.
20. Carmen A. Medina, "The New Analysis," in George and Bruce, *Analyzing Intelligence*, 242.
21. National Research Council, *Intelligence Analysis for Tomorrow: Advances from the Behavioral and Social Sciences* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2011), 33.
22. Richards J. Heuer, Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1999), 95–100.



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