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Conceptual Debate
on the Intelligence Cycle

The author provides a systematisation on the theoretical approaches and views of applied intelligence cycle from a conceptual approach. The article focuses on systematising of the diverse contemporary concepts and approaches to the framework and stages of the intelligence cycle as a workflow model in the security and defence sphere.

Keywords: *intelligence cycle, contemporary intelligence analysis, intelligence workflow*

Introduction

In the broadest meaning, the intelligence cycle is a systematic process which is used to generate actionable knowledge (intelligence) from raw data and information to support decision-making.[2] The intelligence cycle often referred in the mainstream scientific literature as a workflow, which always played a crucial role in the ancient profession of intelligence. The intelligence cycle is also known as a workflow model that is used to transform the gathered raw data and information into actionable intelligence for the consumers. Nowadays, this concept as a kind of professional language or modus operandi[3] is universally applied across various industrial and professional domains from journalism through business to governmental area. The outstanding relevance of intelligence work in generating valuable insights in supporting decision making is also accepted in the security and defence arena. However, after the decades-long prevalence of the "classical" five-stage concept of the intelligence cycle have been challenged by a few experts initiating an open debate on the conceptual framework questioning the dominance of the traditional approach. What is more, a few analytical experts seriously questioned the reliability and usability of the whole cycle in its current format referring to their practical experiences. Others refute the professional need for a radical change of the concept highlighting its flexible nature,

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which enables the analysts to tailor the stages to any specific organisation or research project needs.

It is not an easy task to exactly determine the starting time of the current debate on intelligence cycle based on the available literature only. This is very likely that professional arguments always existed among the intelligence professionals about the theoretical basis and practical experiences of intelligence work. However, the contemporary debate on the intelligence cycle itself has gained an impetus after publishing the official report of 9-11 Commission in 2004. Although the comprehensive assessment does not even mention the concept of intelligence cycle by its name, the report recommended, among others, the creation of common standards of quality in how intelligence collected, processed, reported, shared, and analysed by the US intelligence community.[4] This list of the report refers to the set of elements of the intelligence cycle, known as the very basic working method of the intelligence profession, catalysing an extensive and global professional debate on the issue with the aim to share experience for the creation of some kind of common standard in the intelligence profession. The manifestation of this intention could be assessed as the kick off moment to the contemporary open debate on the intelligence cycle. This debate could be categorised from numerous aspects from the beginning. The implications for the contemporary intelligence cycle debate indicate that the summarisation of the main results of the conceptual debate is useful time to time. However, defining the aspects of the categorisation is not easy. First, there is not a universally agreed definition about the intelligence as a special technical term and its stages in the intelligence workflow in the intelligence profession. However, the experts widely agree that the technological development impacted mostly the debate of intelligence professionals on the cycle regardless of their expertise. Second, this is a widely accepted view that the steps of the intelligence cycle mean a flexible method, and it should be used as a conceptual framework instead of a dogma. The core elements of the intelligence cycle mainly remained untouched in the contemporary literature. The latest developments in the theoretical and practical approaches of the experts to the intelligence cycle became a catalyst giving a new impetus to the debate on the conceptual framework.

For example, a comprehensive essay that was published in the middle of the last decade, provided a valuable insight into the nature of the discourse grouping the representatives' critics into four main categories. The article distinguished experts who denied the viability of the intelligence cycle from those who partly accepted it but not as a cyclical process, and others who criticised the intelligence steps from the representatives who focused on the gaps of cycle.[5]

There is no doubt that the discourse on the applicability of the intelligence cycle as a workflow method remained more popular topic among the intelligence professionals than the discussion about the elements of the cycle. And therefore, the article concentrates on this less examined lane of the debate, investigating the most recent trends of the conceptual viewpoints pertaining to law enforcement and military-relevant use of the intelligence cycle. The overall aim of this study is to classify and categorise the current

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[4]   9/11Commission 2004: 408–410.
[5]   Vida 2016b: 25.

trends on the modalities of the cycle from a conceptual perspective by reviewing the professional literature with special attention to the stages of the cycle.

Dominance of the "classical" intelligence cycle

The literature on intelligence in the very first publications often cited the concept of intelligence cycle as the "classical" or "traditional" five-step model of the intelligence work. One of the very first description of such model is dated back to the late 1940s, when the US Congress issued the pivotal law on the National Security Act of 1947 under the administration of President Harry S. Truman. The Sec.102A 7(B/2) article of the law mentioned the following five stages of the intelligence workflow: "collection, processing, analysis, exploitation and dissemination of intelligence information."[6] The modern intelligence cycle model framework was born by this description. The US intelligence community (that consists of 17 government intelligence agencies and subordinate organisations in these days), from the years of the 1950s and 1960s exceptionally used this modality to describe their cyclical workflow during the Cold War period. This approach became prevalent, and did not go through any fundamental changes despite the dense scandals around the US intelligence community's performance even in the 1980s until the post-Cold War era.[7] The five-step intelligence cycle model remained dominant without major changes worldwide in the theory and practice for decades.
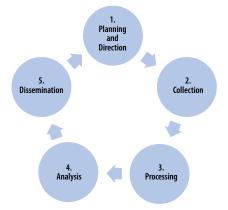

Figure 1: The Five-Step "classical" Intelligence Cycle
Source: compiled by the author

In the early 1990s, the termination of the bipolar world system enormously impacted the intelligence profession indicating the end of the previous era. The governments launched a plenty of profound changes in all segments of the intelligence work in both sides of the former world order. The main changes included but were not limited to the reform of

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6   The National Security Act of 1947. See: www.dni.gov/index.php/ic-legal-reference-book/national-security-act-of-1947
7   Brown–Rudman 1995: 16.

the structure, finance, and legislative framework of the intelligence agencies. The practical use of the intelligence cycle and some concerns about the real need for the intelligence services especially in the US was also formulated. In the fundamentally changed global geopolitical environment, the intelligence agencies also wanted to respond to the emerging needs of more sophisticated intelligence. The situation finally led to an intensive develop-ment of the whole intelligence profession including rethinking the role and characteristics of the "classic" intelligence cycle mainly from a functional perspective. In the mid-1990s, the decades-long hegemony of the five-step conceptual model framework of the intelli-gence cycle seemed to be on the decline. The intelligence profession launched a discourse on several aspects of the intelligence work in parallel with the institutional developments focusing on the viability of the intelligence cycle in the late 1990s. However, that debate remained sporadic and involved mainly the intelligence practitioners until the first decade after the millennium year, when the 9-11 attack suddenly put the intelligence work in the centre of gravity in the security-related concerns all over the world.

At the beginning of the new millennium (from 2000 to 2010), entering a new stage of global terrorism, the US intelligence community was reached by another wave of modernisation. The changes of the new era have also affected other countries' intelligence, security and defence architecture. These changes generated much more institutional, technical, and technological than theoretical-related developments in the workflow models similarly to the previous decades. However, quite a few intelligence agencies and organisations have initiated some prudent changes on their applied intelligence cycle introducing four or even six-step models replacing the "classical" one. It is not obvious what the main catalyser behind the modifications was in the workflow of a few intelligence bodies, but it is very likely that the intense professional debate on the applicability of the "classical" intelligence cycle contributed to the initiatives.

Novel approaches of the debate on the intelligence cycle

The earlier professional discourse on the security and defence-related intelligence cycle that was almost exclusively dominated by the military, law enforcement, and sometimes governmental intelligence experts, gained an impetus with the involvement of the academic sphere from the second decade of the 21st century. During that period, several scientific articles published on the subject and the first systematisation of the main views of the debate on the cycle is also linked to the representatives of the scientific sphere. From that time on, two fundamental trends can be distinguished in the debate.

Some intelligence professional continued to concentrate on the functional aspects of the intelligence cycle applying an institutional approach to investigate the professional applicability of the theory. This trend has the longest history in the debate. The practitioners both military and law enforcement were primarily interested in the practical viability of the intelligence cycle theory regardless of how many stages involved in the workflow, for example. They investigated the relevance of the intelligence cycle basically from the operational point of view from the very beginning of the debate. Meanwhile, the experts of the conceptual approach, mainly intelligence analysts from the military or the law enforcement and the scientists, focused more on the theoretical issues and the modalities of the intelligence cycle

itself. This second trend that is the subject of this article too, added a firm scientific character to the formerly launched intelligence expert discussion creating a parallel scholarly debate. Nowadays, the discussions are not only about the practical usability of the intelligence cycle or the most appropriate conceptual framework of that. This dispute is also about extensive sharing of the best practices online in this domain. This science-based debate on the intelligence cycle related issues recently became a platform of exchange of expertise due to the leverage of the real-time social media, online expert forums, analytical tools, and multinational research projects for example.

Based on the secondly mentioned main trend of the debate, the contemporary viewpoints can be grouped into three basic categories according to their most preferred conceptual models in the practice of intelligence work. The representatives of the first group believe that some moderate adjustment on the five-step model of the intelligence cycle is enough to apply according to the special intelligence needs but the cycle should be kept as simply as possible. This standpoint can be assessed as a conservative view of the intelligence cycle. In contrast to them, another large group of experts assert that the "classical" form of the intelligence cycle is too simple and therefore it is unable to properly refer to the complexity of the intelligence work in the digital age. They believe that the creation of a rather complex, multistep or even a linear workflow model is also acceptable according to the needs of an intelligence body or project. This trend was influenced mainly by spreading the all-source intelligence collection approach.[8] The third camp of the representatives of the conceptual debate holds the most radical viewpoint by questioning or even rejecting to use any kind of formal intelligence cycle emphasising the obsolete and unnecessary nature of such theoretical concepts. These experiments of the reinterpretation of the "classic" intelligence cycle have their own representatives and arguments in the contemporary professional and scientific debate on intelligence, and often showing overlaps in the viewpoints.

Followers of the intelligence cycle model up to 7 steps

Although, the operational environment including the ever changing and increased demands towards the practical intelligence work have considerably changed in a few times, the intelligence cycle as a conceptual guideline survived the last seven decades somehow. The most striking feature of this evolution is that the bodies of the intelligence community in the military and law enforcement sphere always used some kind of formal intelligence cycle to describe and communicate their very basic working methodology. The early practice confirmed that the establishment of some type of intelligence cycle as a reliable workflow method was definitely needed at the intelligence agencies. The popularity of use of the "classical" five-step intelligence cycle dated back to the late 1940s and the intelligence bodies carefully approached this early model when tailored it to their modern organisations' needs. This conservative approach acknowledged the five-step model as a stable starting point for the creation of their own versions, but the various organisations' adopted cycles comprised more or even less stages than five.

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[8]   The use of the term of "all-source" that refers to the involvement of all available sources into the intelligence production is also a matter of discourse in these days. Treverton–Gabbard 2008: 43.

The review of the contemporary practice of the intelligence agencies worldwide proves that the most typical versions of the intelligence cycle today is a six-step model consisting of the following stages: planning and direction, collection, processing, analysis, dissemination and evaluation or feedback. This working method is the most widely used approach of generating intelligence from raw data and information in the military, law enforcement and other security and defence-oriented activities. Such model is used, among others, by the whole US Intelligence Community (IC) formed in 1981.[9] The similar concept is used by the US Marine Corps according to the Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication since 1997.[10]

Meanwhile, the five-step model also used by several intelligence agencies globally mainly in the law enforcement community. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission is a perfect example in these days. The launch of the classical five stages intelligence cycle rooted in their "Practical Approach Strategy 2017–2020" program integrated into a criminal intelligence model to produce strategic, tactical and operational intelligence analysis products at 18 Australian intelligence agencies nationwide. This kind of intelligence cycle covers the following five steps: plan, prioritise and direct, collect and collate, analyse and produce, report and disseminate and finally evaluate and review.[11] The intelligence cycle model of the United Nations developed for peacekeeping operations is also a five-step concept, but it consists of the tasking, acquisition, examination and collation, analysis and dissemination phases. The stage of acquisition is a unique name to describe the process of obtaining data and information. This stage is mentioned by other intelligence bodies as collection.[12]

One typical example of a simpler intelligence workflow model than the five-step one was introduced by the UK Military Intelligence Doctrine in 2011. This British intelligence community approach to the applied intelligence cycle uses only a four-stage model of the core functions such as direction, collection, processing and dissemination.[13] The tasks in this simple and easy to understand concept often conducted concurrently rather than sequentially as the relevant document highlights it. The same four-step recursive process introduced by the Israeli intelligence community and used since the late 1990s,[14] when the concept of Web 2.0 revolutionised the use of the internet enabling users to interact each other by user-generated contents creating a worldwide virtual community by real-time social media platforms. Their cycle consisted of the so-called essential elements of information (EEI) as the starting stage of the process followed by collection, analysis, and distribution phases. In other words, from the side of a few intelligence agencies, creation of a holistic but simplified internal working procedure was the clear answer for the challenge of the more complicated operational environment. But not all the intelligence agencies shifted their working models towards the simplification when experienced the complexity of the operational environment.

The other edge of the simplification is the more detailed process description. Examples for the use of even a seven-step model of the intelligence cycle can be mentioned both the

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9   The U.S. Intelligence Community is composed of 18 governmental intelligence organizations. For the members of the IC of the USA see: www.dni.gov/index.php/what-we-do/members-of-the-ic
10   Publications of US Marines available online: www.marines.mil/News/Publications/
11   The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission 2017.
12   UN Department of Peace Operations 2022.
13   The UK Ministry of Defence 2011.
14   Siman-Tov–Ofer 2013: 33.

contemporary military and the law enforcement practice. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime approach to the criminal intelligence analysis practice describes a seven-step intelligence cycle model incorporates the tasking, collection, evaluation, collation, analysis, inference and development, and finally dissemination phases in a cyclical model.[15]

Such concepts that essentially apply the core elements of the "classical" five-step intelligence cycle and changing only very moderately developed in the 1940s by plus-minus one or two steps, can be aggregated into the same group representing a kind of conservative style of the cycle compared to other approaches. According to the intelligence bodies and practitioners, who insist on following this practice accept a stable and tested conceptual model framework for their intelligence work. They inherited the core concept of the early workflow model but tailored it to the peculiarities of their intelligence organisations. This conservative stream influences most of the debate on the cycle nowadays, stated that no more change than necessary is acceptable to define the cycle. Representatives of this approach asserts that adding number of stages to the "classical" five-step intelligence cycle could create chaos because such a model should integrate countless possible elements generating a vicious circle. Therefore, the intelligence cycle concept should be kept as simple as possible. Unnecessary enlargement of a conceptual framework leads to a theoretical dead end, and has also no benefit from practical perspective. However, not everyone thinks the same way and their viewpoints brought to life the group of opponents of the conservative approach of the "classical" intelligence cycle.

The representatives of the fully-fledged change

According to a few intelligence experts represented in the current generation of practitioners, shaping the intelligence cycle can be considered as workflow modelling experiments. This professional group that obsessed with sustained interpretation of the cycle come mainly from the military and law enforcement analytical domain of the intelligence profession. Among them the analysts who deal with the Open-Source Intelligence analysis (OSINT) seems to be the most innovative, experimenter and critical minds in creating new approaches to the intelligence cycle. They were not convinced by the existence of the "classical" workflow model. Consequently, the most of them deny the applicability of any simple intelligence cycle. This kind of revisionist trend overseeing the "classical" model of the intelligence cycle pointed out its deficiencies and limited ability to describe a proper workflow in the field of intelligence work. The root of their scepticism derived from the often-cited imperfect nature of the "classical" intelligence cycle that is also linked to its very limited ability to describe such a complicated and interconnected workflow like intelligence work in the late 20th century. The representatives of these views did not question the need of the intelligence cycle but rethought its structure and elements since the 1990s. This listed the followers of these views in the same set. Appearance of this kind of discourse added several new aspects to the versatile debate by generating a sort of interesting conceptual experiments with the overall aim to define more and more perfect concepts of the intelligence cycle from an analytical perspective. In the spirit of perfection, the revolutionary ideas for reforming the

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[15]   UNODC 2011.

intelligence cycle were moving from initially simpler models to the complicated-looking, compound process descriptions. The common, minimum feature of these experiments is that even if some elements are used from the classical model, the cyclical character, or the number of phases of the cycle have been significantly transformed. According to such experts, the number of the stages is less significant than identifying the real relations among them. At that time, the basics of intelligence work were increasingly being interpreted as a science that focuses on the knowledge creation.[16]

The earliest examples of such experiments focused on precise explanation of the various connections among the stages of the cycle. The efforts for revealing the hidden interconnections between the stages manifested in the often-referred "Real Intelligence Cycle"[17] or the dimension based "i-System"[18] as the earliest models, for instance. In these cases, the stages of the intelligence cycle are connected to each other by formulating a network-style linkage instead of a simple cyclical process. The emphasis was not on the sequence of the elements anymore but on the interactive connection between them. According to the reformers, one of the chronic problems of the classic intelligence cycle formula was the vague limits of the various stages that resulted overlaps among them. This latent connection established a whole network of links in the background of the classic five-stage model as the next layer, so it was no longer possible to express the relationship between the steps of the cycle by only five links. From this point, the publication of the so-called "latent intelligence cycle model" has opened a new horizon of the discourse on the intelligence cycle.

The Venn diagram of functional overlaps was one possible answer to the challenge of the multiple connections of the intelligence cycle' steps and the overlaps between them, that was followed a series of more and more complex if not complicated models after the first decade of the 2000s.[19]
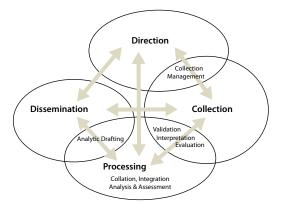

Figure 2: The Venn diagram of the core functions of the intelligence cycle
Source: Davies–Gustafson–Rigden 2013: 22.

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[16]   Aydin-Ozleblebici 2015: 93–99.
[17]   Treverton 2001: 8.
[18]   Nakamori 2003: 49–72.
[19]   Davies–Gustafson–Rigden 2013: 79.

The next obvious example of the more complex way of thinking on the cycle-related approaches was the "Nested Intelligence Cycle" that represented another experiment for depicting complex relationships in a clear way. This model described the same concept as the Venn diagram did but from another view. According to this model, the single stages of the cycle incorporated and repeated the same steps as the model it was built on.
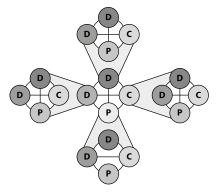

Figure 3: The Nested Intelligence Cycle Model
Source: Davies–Gustafson–Rigden 2013: 22.

Although the construction of steps and the existing interactive relationship between them with overlap are today's popular topics to create new models of the cycle, the efforts of the reformers, mainly from intelligence analysis perspective, remain at the heart of the proper depiction of a more detailed and complete workflow. The "Propeller Intelligence Cycle" that was developed in 2012 was a perfect example of such experiments based on real analytical experiences. This cycle consisted of three interconnected sub-cycles (preparation, reporting and intelligence production) focusing on customer needs.[20]
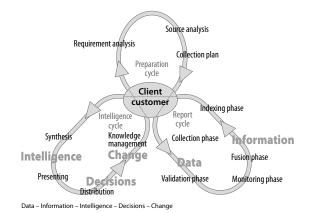

Data – Information – Intelligence – Decisions – Change

Figure 4: The RIS Propeller Intelligence Cycle
Source: Reuser 2017: 38.

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[20] Reuser 2017: 29–43.

It was the essence of this path search that the functional relationships between the elements of the cycle were described more precisely. Ultimately, as alternatives to the classic model, a series of complex and only expert-interpreted cycle models were created and published. These hybrid models tried to solve the issues of functionality and conceptuality at the same time, which brought the five-step classic model to futuristically complex ones sometimes. This experimental approach is going on. The increasingly complex models have not yet led to a uniformly accepted concept. On the contrary, the views became even more polarised. Perhaps, this was the reason why intelligence experts began to argue with the complete rejection of the formal cycle, and this view is still popular.

The no-need of formal intelligence cycle camp

Hardly surprisingly, the group of the most critical opponents of the use of any formal intelligence cycle traditionally comes from the intelligence practitioners' group consists of primarily law enforcement and military professionals. These views that refuse the relevance of intelligence cycle in the applied intelligence work are rather different from all the other standpoints. Representatives of this category, representing the most "radical" view, questioning the relevance of the cycle and need of attempts were made to create suitable definitions and question or even reject the existence of the intelligence cycle in practice. They proclaimed a complete flexibility to form a counter camp against both previous categories.

The review of the mainstream intelligence literature proved that the strongly critical approaches to formalisation or uniformisation of the intelligence cycle were not communicated by intelligence field professionals right after the appearance of the very first "classical" cycle. Even if the intelligence experts have expressed their deep concerns in terms of the applicability of the classical intelligence cycle at the agencies, they have not published them for quite a long time, and this fact prevented any meaningful dialog on the issue.[21] Just as the criticisms of the elements of the intelligence cycle, the views that discuss the need for the whole cycle were gradually at the heart of scientific interest only after the Cold War. The post-Cold War situation quickly accumulated all the previous concerns about the intelligence cycle due to the dramatically changed requirements of the policy makers towards intelligence and revealed the eroded bureaucratic boundaries between the intelligence professionals and their clients.[22] All the preceding doubts about the applicability of the intelligence cycle including the reform and the denial views became public. The need of the formal intelligence cycle itself, regardless of their integrated stages, appeared in the contemporary scientific literature first in the first decade of 2000s and remained the core element of the debate.[23] This time can be assessed as the formation of the two basic approach determined the view on the cycle namely the proceduralist and the conceptualist ones. Such experts, who formulated the arguments to support the ignorant

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[21]   CLARK 2009: 11.
[22]   DUPONT 2003: 34–35.
[23]   WHEATON 2011a.

views come from the first group and stressed the importance of maximum flexibility in the intelligence work that may allow to move beyond the use of formal intelligence cycle.[24]

The opponents of the use of the intelligence cycle never formed a homogenous group, their views ranged from the strong criticism targeted the basis of the concept to the total denial. A common point of their views was their critical reasoning, that often linked to the published intelligence failures took place during the practical implementation of the cycle. A wide range of historical examples proved solid evidence on the serious problems of producing high-quality intelligence that raised the necessity of the in-depth reform of the whole intelligence profession, and sometimes led to ignoring the use of the formal intelligence cycle by following a target-centric approach.[25] This kind of approach put two different but interlinked subjects into the centre of the opponents' debate, namely the intelligence profession itself and the intelligence cycle as its theoretical working procedure. According to the less strong criticism of the intelligence cycle, the cycle is needed but the cyclical nature of the process was never suitable to write down the complex intelligence work accurately, and therefore it should be replaced by a flat model.[26] A more critical approach was supported by similar observation like it happened in the case of the fully-fledged reform approaches. This opponent view asserted that the intelligence cycle become an obsolete model in the age of the technical revolution, which has created the system of 'pull–push architecture' where users can pull down intelligence from a networked database in contrast to the past where the intelligence services pushed their products on clients.[27] In other words, the intelligence cycle should not be used anymore because of this model overwhelmingly based on the needs for intelligence formulated by the clients in advance. However, in the age of the cyber intelligence the flow of information influences the need for intelligence, and the intelligence profession proactively feeds the cycle and orients the clients' needs. This situation is completely opposite with the former one. Another comprehensive study on intelligence cycle also assumed that the cycle became outdated from analytical perspective, and it may impede the efforts to improving the intelligence discipline, so it should be replaced with something more valid.[28] It means that the intelligence cycle should be replaced with something different. The representatives of this also point out that, although the intelligence cycle is used to describe a process, it always remained a model and not a full description of a real workflow or work process, so the relevance of re-defining of the conceptual elements should not be overestimated.

An online professional discourse, with a little before this view, also argued that the cycle should be "killed" from the intelligence profession because it is "fatally flawed" and the continued adherence to use of the cycle became counterproductive.[29] This view represents the perspective of the total denial approach that encourages experts to completely ignore the cycle. While this opinion can be considered as the most radical criticism of all previous views of the cycle, this also has its own critics. Some experts correctly pointed out that the cycle as a model is necessarily not perfect, but it is not a reason to completely

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[24]   Hulnick 2006: 959–979.
[25]   Clark 2009:18.
[26]   Lowenthal 2012a: 57–70.
[27]   Omand 2013: 97.
[28]   Holmström–Riipinen 2014: 94.
[29]   Wheaton 2011b.

refuse it and this professional standpoint was shared by the intelligence organisations as well. Others call the attention to the informal applications of the elements of the cycle.[30] The representatives, who denied the need of any formal intelligence cycle often referred to the relevant scientific discussions as the flow of endless arguments and some eternal debate over the subject that resulted only vague, experimental cycle models, for instance. This kind of disillusionment feeling was fed by the decades-long, scientists and analysts dominated and prolonged debate on the various conceptual models. The sceptical approach to any debate on the intelligence cycle remained quite popular among the intelligence practitioners. A few experts underlined the limits of the importance of the discourse from a military intelligence perspective, too.[31] However, it is not proven that ignoring the cycle is more effective in practice than applying it with some mistakes.

The long debate on intelligence cycle models has not yet brought about a widely accepted revolutionary change on the classic model, so some kind of quiet rejection of the formalised procedure in the intelligence work might be possible. However, all the national intelligence agencies and plenty of international institutions still insist on applying their intelligence cycles to formally describe their working method and regulate the workflow. This suggests that the intelligence profession has recognised the importance of applying the cycle. It is very likely that the complete denial of intelligence cycle could result chaos in the professional work and therefore it should be avoided. In other words, even an imperfect intelligence cycle would be much better than a non-existent intelligence cycle to manage the workflow in the intelligence profession.

Summary

Over four decades of scientific knowledge has been gathered through the debate on the intelligence cycle from various perspectives. However, the scientific and expert debate on the intelligence cycle has not yet brought a breakthrough to reach a widely accepted concept. On the contrary, the views have become even more diverse over the past decade, which has been promoted by such an emerging field of expertise like the OSINT and the CYBINT. During that period, these new professional domains were introduced everywhere at the modern intelligence agencies that influenced how the quality in the intelligence profession was perceived. The appearance of the world-wide corporate intelligence expanded the intelligence arena, and the discussion on the cycle remained open to continue. The global intelligence community experienced three main waves of structural changes or in-depth reforms in the field of intelligence production in the last decades since the end of the World War II with the overall aim to improve all segments of the professional intelligence work. That's where the various theories of the intelligence cycle as the basic concept of the applied intelligence analysis come in.

The "classical" five-step model of the intelligence cycle preserved its hegemony from the late 1940s until the first wave of the comprehensive reforms at the intelligence agencies after collapsing of the bipolar word order in the 1990s. That first period of the debate was

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[30]   Phythian 2013: 17–22.
[31]   Siman–Ofer 2013: 31–51.

overwhelmingly dominated by the intelligence experts, who focused on institutional approaches of the intelligence cycle that hardly affected its conceptual framework. In the second wave of the intelligence community's reform after the 9-11 attack in 2001, the scientists were also involved in the unfolding debate and the intelligence analysts' perspectives added value for the discussions challenging and shaping the cycle especially from a conceptual point of view due to the increasing role of all-source intelligence and OSINT method in the intelligence cycle. The third wave of the intelligence reform as well as the further development of the conceptual debate on the intelligence cycle has recently come to light. The rapidly emerging phenomena of the CYBINT and the cyber threat intelligence represent the most recent challenge for the intelligence work by opening a new global battlefield led by IT experts and cyber threat analysts in today's world ensuring that the debate on the intelligence cycle remains alive.

The debate on the elements of the cycle is not intended to develop a uniformly accepted concept or standardised cycle. The shared views suggested that the debate on the elements of the cycle led to a holistic categorisation. The intelligence cycle remained a subject of institutional diversity in interpretation and innovation highlighting the heuristic (learning by doing) nature of the intelligence profession. Although, the opinions of experts and scientists who participated in the discursion have always been predominantly in the scientific literature, the views on intelligence cycle were mostly reflected in the published positions of the intelligence agencies. And this still is the situation today.

In the most recent wave of the transformation in the basic working methodologies of the intelligence profession also opens new horizon not only for the debates but for the cooperation of the intelligence experts, too. It should also give a fresh impetus to the professional discussions on the intelligence cycle. The conceptual debate on the intelligence cycle proved that this working methodology is essential part of the intelligence profession, where the scientific and practitioner views can be shared or even categorised in various ways without the intention to create a universal concept of the cycle. The interaction between the practitioners and scientists of various domains of the intelligence profession is more important now than ever before. For example, the EU project for developing the European Intelligence Community is one of the most significant initiatives in the field of intelligence profession to ensure a holistic response to the multifaceted threats in the age of uncertainty. The NOTIONES Programme of the European Union as one of the latest scientific cooperation and innovative platforms in this area is a perfect example. This framework program runs 15 EU supported projects between 2021 and 2026. This network of intelligence and security experts from 21 different countries intends to create a pan-European ecosystem for monitoring and analysing the leading technological advancements and best practices. It brings together 30 partners, practitioners from military, civil, financial, judiciary, local, national and international security, and intelligence services from 9 EU Member States and 6 Associated Countries. They also monitor the results of academic research and industrial innovation to suggest actions. Hopefully, such international efforts will contribute to the methodological development of the intelligence area including the heterogeneous approaches to the intelligence cycle in the future.

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