Stupider Intelligence: The IC in a Post-Truth World

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Articles and commentaries abound about how we live in a "post-truth" world, where alternative facts, fake news, and anti-intellectualism freely compete with recognized authoritative sources and peer-reviewed research in the battle for control over public opinion. Substantive topical engagement has been set aside by a reliance on talking points and buzz words, while factual rebuttals are easily dismissed as irrelevant and non-consequential. While most of these analytical commentaries are motivated to get to conclusions about the darker consequences of a hyper-technologized society or criticisms of the current political environment in America, this paper looks at an angle of the debate that has gone wholly unnoticed and unanalyzed: how does intelligence operate in a world no longer uncomfortable with the manipulation and corruption of information? The assumptions that intelligence professionals should feel adept in an environment overwhelmed by informational subterfuge are missing a crucial element for practitioners: dealing with subterfuge while acquiring information from targets is normal; dealing with it from the people you are meant to provide intelligence product to is highly detrimental. Analyzing how the IC attempts to overcome this problem fundamentally addresses the current state of Intelligence in American politics today and likely for the foreseeable future.

Keywords: IC, Post-Truth World, fake news, intelligence

Introduction

Articles and commentaries abound about how we live in a "post-truth" world, where alternative facts, fake news, and anti-intellectualism freely compete with recognized authoritative sources and peer-reviewed research in the battle for control over public opinion. Substantive topical engagement is set aside by a reliance on talking points and buzzwords, while factual rebuttals are dismissed as irrelevant and non-consequential. Most analyses of post-truth society are motivated to get to conclusions about the darker consequences of a hyper-technologized society or criticize the current political environment in America. This paper looks at an angle of the debate that has gone wholly unnoticed and unanalyzed: how does intelligence deal with a world not just fully comfortable with the manipulation and corruption of information but perhaps surrounded by a society that de facto embraces the post-truth era? The assumptions that intelligence professionals should feel adept in an environment overwhelmed by informational subterfuge are missing a crucial element. Dealing with subterfuge from adversaries while acquiring information is normal. Figuring out how to provide intelligence product within a post-truth society, arguably to a post-truth president, is still undetermined. Analyzing whether the IC can overcome this problem, while examining how other disciplines have attempted to address it as well, reveals just how much the current state of intelligence in America today and likely for the foreseeable future

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could be undermined.

Just about any analysis of post-truth society regardless of end objective is required to start with how the Oxford dictionaries named "post-truth" as their word of the year in November 2016. The immediate context was not only the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States but also the Brexit decision in the UK, where the electorate decided to voluntarily remove itself from the European Union. Most educational institutions and mainstream media organizations portrayed these two events as "proof" that a post-truth world had been depressingly concretized. Formally defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief", the term post-truth has actually been in existence since the early 1990s. But it only became Oxford's word of the year because of the organization documenting a 2000% increase in its overall usage across all media and other communication channels during the 2016 calendar year (Yalçinkaya B., Dönmez A., Aydin F., & Kayali N., 2018, pp. 53–64).

Donald Trump being elected in and of itself would not necessarily carry post-truth consequences to the American Intelligence Community (IC). Even subsequent studies that have shown the President to, on average, make at least 5.5 misleading or outright false claims per day do not automatically prove a direct consequential impact on the IC (Kristiansen L., & Kaussler B., 2018, pp. 13–52). But having the President of the United States appear at times to be engaged in open public relations warfare with his own IC does demand a new analysis be added to the growing list of disciplines trying to understand how post-truth impacts their work and what can be done about it. No matter what, it is a strange new information world indeed. The low point for intelligence was arguably not the President patronizingly questioning the IC's professionalism, competence, and patriotism. Rather, it was his Tweet comparing the IC's supposed leaking behavior with Nazi Germany[1]. Taken in sum, any analysis is more than just an attempt to repair damage done to the relationship between the chief executive and the IC. It is also not a jingoistic attempt to protect the reputation of the American Intelligence Community. Rather, the effects of post-truth (when it is represented by bogus attacks on core political institutions and fundamental principles of the democratic system) when aimed at the Intelligence Community can signal an erosion of critical norms in liberal democracy. When the connection between power and truth become less than solid, then the damage can be very real and far deeper than esoteric debates over philosophy (Kristiansen L., & Kaussler B., 2018, pp. 13–52).

The following analysis will first investigate the state of the current literature on post-truth as a general phenomenon across several disciplines. While most lament its evolution and pervasiveness across society overall, there is divergence in terms of understanding how deep the problem is and even how best to define its reach and scope. Other disciplines, like conservation, education, and globalization have done an excellent job examining how post-truth impacts their specific worlds and have even made attempts to offer remedies and solutions. Interestingly, it will be shown how those solutions overall tend to be wildly divergent. Thus, it is unlikely such analyses offer direct insight for the IC. A detailed examination of the tension between President Trump and the Intelligence Community will then follow, not just to document how badly things currently stand but to reveal how post-truth attacks do not so much impact job efficiency and procedural etiquette as they do undermine societal faith in the industry as a whole. The analysis also emphasizes how scholars, analysts, and media commentators alike might need to think twice before simply suggesting that the real solution to the IC

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[1] Available online at: http://search.proquest.com/docview/1868529097.

post-truth problem is to just patiently wait for the exit of Trump from the White House. After all, while it might be true that President Trump could very well be the epitome of the post-truth phenomenon currently, it can also be argued that he is but a symptom of a larger societal evolution, not its cause. As such, his ultimate fade from the political scene does not guarantee the removal of the post-truth problem for the IC. It is understandable, the desire to see this problem wrapped up conveniently in the embodiment of a single person. Unfortunately, this analysis reveals that society-wide problems are best resolved societally and not wholly focused through the lens of one controversial individual, no matter how lofty their title or power. This is shown at the end by briefly examining how British and Russian intelligence have been impacted by the phenomenon regardless of Trump as figurehead.

Ultimately, this analysis asks some difficult and pointed questions that are necessary if society-at-large wishes to progress beyond the post-truth era. Even that end goal, ultimately, might be under question: what is society's endgame when it comes to post-truth? Are citizens unknowing dupes in the process or willful participants pushing the phenomenon forward?

Understanding what is to become of terms such as critical reasoning, analytical thinking, conceptual analysis, and falsifiability will go a long way in shedding light on how damaging post-truth will be, not just for intelligence professionals but for Americans overall. Affirming what one believes is not the same as confirming what one thinks. It is easy to recognize the distinction between affirm and confirm. What tends to be missed, however, is the significance of difference between *believe* and *think*. Affirming belief is a largely subjective process, given to emotions and rarely analytical. Confirming a thought is a mostly objective process, absent emotions and supported through analysis. Post-truth will find victory or defeat upon this intellectual battlefield and the consequences for many different disciplines and professions could be stark. After all, some consider post-truth thinking to be a de facto departure from Enlightenment ideas: that a victory for post-truth is in reality the death of experience and expertise, the centrality of fact, humility in the face of complexity, and the need for further study and respect for divergent ideas (Hayden Michael, 2018). A post-truth world may put intelligence together with some strange bedfellows: journalism, academia, the courts, and science. May this necessity lend itself to new opportunity, where citizens building the future understand how important it is to base society on best judgment, objective reality, and truth-telling (Hayden Michael, 2018).

The Post-Truth Phenomenon: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?

The flurry of analysis that has focused on the concept of post-truth began in earnest when the Oxford dictionaries made it their word of the year in 2016. Thus, it can be somewhat forgiven that few people go back to its true beginning, all the way back to 1992, when a little known Serbian-American playwright coined the term (Picciotto R., 2019, pp. 88–96). At the time, Tesich was attempting to ascertain the true long-term political and societal consequences on America emergent during the generation that had passed since the Watergate scandal of President Nixon. He decided that American citizens didn't want bad news anymore, no matter how true or vital to our health as a nation and that in a fundamental way we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world ((Picciotto R., 2019, pp. 88–96). Ultimately, his point was that the pursuit of truth seemed to always be accompanied by the presence of bitter disappointment and bad news so pervasively that it would in fact be best to just be lied to. This came with a special caveat, however: this lying had to be done in the interests of the people, according to their worldviews and still aligned with national security (Picciotto R., 2019, pp. 88–96).

This would be more scientifically confirmed by 2016, when no less than a Nobel Prize-winning psychologist tied this to the concept of "cognitive ease", in which humans often have a tendency to avoid facts that would be challenging to their brains and force them to think in ways that are uncomfortable compared to previously held facts[2]. A decade before this, it was brought to the forefront of the public imagination in America when the late night host and popular comedian coined the term "truthiness", in which people seemed to be opting more for "facts" that would just "feel true", regardless of whether they were actually true or not. No less impressive, Colbert's whimsical term would not only become a formally recognized word, it was selected by Merriam-Webster as its "word of the year" in 2006. The ten years between these two notable observations can be seen as the true laboratory in which the worst of Tesich's original fears in the 90s came true. Post-truth found its ultimate calling in a public sphere where there was a near derisive loss of trust in governmental institutions and the infrastructure in which people began to obtain their information underwent massive and fundamental changes[3]. This perfect storm, where President Bush's Global War on Terror met face-to-face with Zuckerberg's Facebook algorithms, created a semi-conscious trap that some intellectual circles awkwardly call "homophilious sorting": the natural tendency of like-minded individuals to form clusters[4].

This negative zeitgeist was perfectly captured by the famous Kremlin propagandist-cum-journalist, Dmitrii Kiselyov, who declared that "the age of neutral journalism had passed…because what you select from the huge sea of information is already subjective".[5] And if people are uncomfortable with taking analytical conclusions from such biased sources, there are plenty of other studies that seem to back up Kiselyov's derision. A large survey conducted on Turkish university students not only proved that today's college-age people are aware of the existence of post-truth fake information online, its overall pervasiveness, they still tend to select information sources that trend in the direction of their preconceived and predetermined ideas (Yalçinkaya B., Dönmez A., Aydin F., & Kayali N., 2018, pp. 53–64). Studies with these types of depressing observations might help explain the trend that emerged under Tesich. The existence of discriminating filters, automatic fact-checkers, and other technology-driven platforms that could help people discern post-truth sources from ones with veracity depend on the willingness of the users to employ them. And study after study in the 21st century seem to indicate such willingness is not in ample supply when it comes to people's patience[6]. Thus, most resolutions for battling post-truth seem to work around the consumers of information as *part of the problem and not potentially as part of the solution.*

Ultimately, where Tesich and his colleagues truly went unknowingly awry was in proposing resolutions disconnected from the true source of the problem: the people themselves. Perhaps worse, this would become a tendency in the literature that continues to this very day (as will be seen upcoming when the disciplines of conservation, education, and globalization are viewed through the prism of post-truth). Thus, the true loss was in so perfectly describing the scourge of what post-truth was to become but feel the best scenario for fighting its advance was *to elevate a bureaucratic profession with more prestige, status, and reputation* (Picciotto R., 2019, pp. 88–96). Tesich believed if the process of "evaluation" could achieve true professional status, with guiding principles, ethical guidelines, competencies, and control over the formal designation, then post-truth would finally have a legitimate rival with which to compete. It was a de facto elitist resolution to what was fast

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[2] Available online at: http://search.proquest.com/docview/1817953241.
[3] Available online at: http://search.proquest.com/docview/1817953241.
[4] Available online at: http://search.proquest.com/docview/1817953241.
[5] Available online at: http://search.proquest.com/docview/1817953241.
[6] Available online at: http://search.proquest.com/docview/1817953241.

emerging as a populist problem. This proposal would become the standard habit of modern post-truth analyses: policy over people, elitism over populism, and bureaucratic expertise over street-level grassroots approaches. Tesich perhaps did not know he was creating a legacy that would impinge the very fight he wanted to engage. But create it he did.

Studies like the Turkish university one above are the true descendants of Tesich's societal pessimism. Instead of thinking of ways to instill popular motivation to utilize readily-available technology and inculcate higher standards of personal judgment, analyses seek ways to front-end install platforms that do the judgment ahead of time. Indeed, as the world moves deeper into an automated, technologized age, the resolutions seem to only become more impersonal and less independent. As the age of post-truth seems to be de facto creating a political world of rampant disinformation, this has stark consequences. Instead of developing more discerning human beings, they are being bypassed entirely in favor of hard-wired programs that can evaluate criteria for them, without their knowledge. Automated quantitative programs that can perform conceptual analysis to root out disinformation before it reaches a potential consumer is being regarded as a *safer and more reliable* solution than working with actual people (Fallis D., 2015, pp. 401–426). Indeed, intellectual pessimism needs to be overcome for it limits what are likely the most direct and efficient potential resolutions for combating post-truth disinformation. Sometimes the pessimism comes across as so much benign condescension, patronizing consumers of modern information as helpless victims (Bremner J., 2018, pp. 11–12). These arguments should basically be listed under the "educators" white knight brigade, as they inevitably seek to address the problem by proclaiming their need to be a vanguard to help people understand how to properly vet valid information from disinformation, how to create an activated public and stop them from being so passive. Sometimes, the elitism that subtly informs such arguments is not so subtle:

> First, there is a need to engage with the kind of "post-truth" politics that has emerged as a significant, anti-democratic and anti-progressive trend (see, e.g., Stokes, 2016; Viner, 2016). Second, progressive post-positivist academics are uniquely equipped to engage with post-truth politics, and we have a particular responsibility to do so — beyond as well as within academia. Third, progressive, postpositivist academics need to go beyond the safe, postmodern haven of critique and instead do more to inform and propose positive (although not positivist) and positional, rather than merely oppositional, alternatives. Fourth, in fashioning such new positive perspectives for the post-truth world, post-positivists can draw inspiration from modernist as well as postmodernist sources, notably from the avantgardes of the 20th Century (Tallis B., 2016, pp. 7–18).

Aside from the fact that the above quote is barely intelligible for a mass, non-specialist audience, it symbolizes how poorly the elites have not just communicated to but directly involved everyday people in creating solutions to the problems of post-truth. Instead of trying to attempt whatever the above quote is angling for, might it not be more efficient to craft proposals built on encouraging everyday people to take pride of responsibility in the quality of their information consumption?

While Tesich should be applauded for coming to his rather unique societal observation so early, it is clear he had no idea he was merely tapping into what was the front-edge of the coming post-truth wave. In fact, he should not have been looking back a generation to Watergate and reflecting on where society had come. He should have been looking forward a generation, through the "adulting" years of Generation X, and try to ascertain where society was going to go. For this shift in viewing position would have allowed people to know that while the phenomenon that would come to epitomize post-truth (emotionality, subjectivity, willing falsehood, manufactured facts, and alternative realities) has always in one way or another been evident in

politics for eons, it has arguably never been so pervasive and multi-layered as it is in the 21st century. Little-known scholars writing for little-read journals about little-propagated theories that undermine science in favor of arbitrary societal constructs have minimal impact. But press forward into a highly-technologized world where the scholars, peer-reviewed journals, and understanding of theory are now basically bypassed for instantaneous communication across a legitimately global non-elite audience and you have the ideal foundation for the explosion of "populist post-truth". Just consider how Tesich and his colleagues in the early 90s were fearing these new developments:

> In the post-truth world, civil debate vanishes as reactionary rhetoric flourishes. Arguments specifically designed to hinder principled dialogue combine the perversity thesis (whereby any action proposed by a political adversary is portrayed as likely to generate the exact opposite of what was intended); the futility thesis (according to which political adversaries' attempts at social transformation will produce no effects); and the jeopardy thesis (which holds that proposed reforms are bound to endanger previous hard-won accomplishments)...There is something qualitatively different about its current incarnation. It is the symptom of deep policy dysfunctions grounded in a unique historical context. It reveals significant threats to the public welfare. It reflects deep dissatisfaction with the status quo and it is opening the door to populist leaders (Picciotto R., 2019, pp. 88–96).

This quote perfectly reflects the fears of the global environment currently, fully 38 years ahead of its time. In fact, it seems fair to argue this quote better describes life in 2019 than it did the fears of what may have happening in 1991. Principled dialogue is now, apparently, a mere formal exercise in which at least two parties engage in a series of monologues, each one patiently or impatiently as the case may be waiting for the other to finally stop talking, never having listened in the meantime, so that they would have the floor in which to begin their ongoing soliloquy. Post-truth, disinformation, and elitist anti-populism work now in tandem to produce the full culmination of Tesich's fears across far too many disciplines.

Post-Truth and Conservation

Any discussion about the impact of a post-truth society on intellectual disciplines has to include conservation. One of the primary topics of conversation, from high-level think tanks to late night comedy show hosts, is the battle over the narrative of climate change. Indeed, scientists themselves in this area have often thrown up their intellectual hands lamenting their overall lack of ability for dealing with the *public relations* aspect of the issue in today's politicized world.

Thus, some of the best analysis of how disciplines are truly impacted by post-truth come from the world of conservation analysis. The innate humility of climate scientists means they have always been quick to emphasize the conjecture aspect of their predictive models. Since their analytical conclusions carry significant societal intervention impact, conservationists have laudably admitted that simply communicating the science as facts is not going to be enough (Rose D., 2018, pp. 518–524).

What this means is that conservation scientists in real terms have always accepted that the best way to communicate important information that has real-world influence is to include aspects like values, justice, pragmatics, and stakeholder interests (Rose D., 2018, pp. 518–524). Simply "doing good science" means nothing if you don't have scientists talented in communicating that science onward to non-scientists. Therefore, the discipline of conservation has notably been focused on how they have by and large lacked that ability, which has negatively affected their reach and influence. While this is both practical and admirable overall, it is more interesting to note how the discipline seems to accept the existence of a post-truth world not only in terms

of not being able to reverse it, but in terms of how to better educate and train their own scientists to cope with sucha world far into the future. In other words, conservation is literally trying to build a better mouse scientist, not a mousetrap, by inculcating new understanding about how scientific evidence has tobe considered as only one of several factors affecting even a purely scientific issue (Rose D., 2018, pp. 518–524).

This pragmatism hints at a rather fundamental philosophical question that seems to lie underneath almost all post-truth arguments, regardless of the field being impacted: whose reality counts? (Rose D., 2018, pp. 518–524). In this aspect at least, conservation has done far better than most fields by admitting that greater progress and significance are achieved when you are able to connect with people andmake them believe they are either fully invested in the outcome or have a genuine participatory stake in the process overall. Ultimately, success comes when people are made to feel the end outcomes are being achieved by them or with them, but not when the outcomes are being done *to* them. This battlefield formulation is quite common in the post-truth world, where collaboration and open facilitation are rejected and adversarial lines in the sand are drawn instead.

Conservation is ahead of many other disciplines to have this level of introspection and pragmaticreflection when it comes to the post-truth fighting world, even if at the moment it feels it is still losing the overall fight.

Post-Truth and Education

Education considers itself as damaged and endangered by the emergence of the post-truth world as conservation science. Given that it considers itself to be a beacon for developing global citizenship, critical thinking, and analysis, it is perhaps no surprise that the discipline's reaction to post-truth has been less introspective and more angered. Thus it is not difficult to find lamentations about how "facts are now futile", "bubble worlds" reign supreme, and the capacity for moral thinking has been denigrated and compromised (Peters M., 2017, pp. 563–567). The dual body blow of Trump's election and the Brexit referendum is seen as an unholy coincidental alliance where older neoconservative values are infiltrating white working-class post-industrialized areas of poverty and despair. For many in education, post-truth is seen as a de facto rejection and/or refutation ofa liberal internationalist order, something that is most certainly *not* a step for progressive thinking and societal advancement (Peters M., 2017, pp. 563–567). To a large extent, the discipline of education has dug its collective heels in and thrown down a gauntlet quite separate from the reaction seen in the worldof conservation:

> If education is equated almost solely with job training rather than a broader critical citizenship agenda for participatory democracy, we can expect the further decline of social democracy and the rise of populist demagogue politicians and alt-right racist parties. In the era of post-truth it is not enough to revisit notions or theories of truth, accounts of "evidence", and forms of epistemic justification as a guide to truth, but we need to understand the broader epistemological and Orwellian implications of post-truth politics, science and education. More importantly, we need an operational strategy to combat 'government by lying' and a global society prepared to accept cognitive dissonance and the subordination of truth to Twittered emotional appeals and irrationalpersonal beliefs (Peters M., 2017, pp. 563–567).

Unlike conservation, which sought to find a navigable path through a morass of obstacles, education sees post-truth as a fundamental threat to its overall existence. Or at least an enemy with the capability of changing how its educators do their business to a dire extent. In this way,post-truth is not simply a societal progression for the worse. It is a turning of society upside down and rendering the true importance of education, its core values, into insignificance.

Interesting to note, this is why the emphasis is much more on political activism, on physical intervention in the political process, rather than on "doing better research" or communicating at conferences in a more compelling way. Education has decided that the prevalence of post-truth as a societal descriptor is so dominant that subtle strategies connected to revisiting theories or better epistemic justifications amounts to nothing more than just so much elitist nonsense that would be ultimately ignored.

Ironically, these latter strategies are being shunted aside in an effort to get education back on a more solid footing where just such strategies can once more be engaged. In short, education yearns to get back to the world where theoretical arguments and epistemological debates can be its bread-and-butter. But right now that is impossible given that education has formed the post- truth debate to not be one of waging war with education but to be about the very survival of liberal democratic principles and free-learning society. It is about striving to stop the inexorable march to demagogic, false populist, anti-intellectual de facto gang warfare.

Post-Truth and Globalization

If conservation is striving to find its way reluctantly in a here-to-stay post-truth world and education is fighting — tooth, claw, and nail — to prevent post-truth from remaining relevant in the world, then globalization is still for now navigating a middle course that largely remains aloof but intellectually engaged and curious about how post-truth will proceed. Part of this may of course be because globalization somewhat proudly thinks post-truth is largely a consequence of its own doing. It feels post-truth is merely a response to global socio-economic uncertainty, most of which is brought on or intensified by the increasing primacy of globalization (Chacón R., 2018, pp. 7–27). In short, modern-day populism, neo-nationalism, and post-truth functioning are nothing but negative symptoms, compensations, to the victory of globalization as a systemic world order of economic activity and advancement. Thus, not wanting to be a victim of having the baby (globalization) thrown out with the bath water (post-truth), there is a fascinating hedging of intellectual bets within the discipline when discussing it:

> On one hand, we have transformed our planet to such an extent that some of its fundamental realities can only be understood from the supra-human standpoint of a science that "sees" what no individual can see or even conceive. On the other hand, our survival as a species may depend on acknowledging such inconceivable truths. But for such a work of acknowledgment to be effective, there must be political spaces and sovereign authorities (Chacón, R., 2018, pp. 7–27).

When wading through the nuance, what one finds is a discipline not seeing post-truth as a threat or as an immutable object impervious to change. Globalization simply sees it as a consequence of multiple modern realities. As such, it is just as malleable as any other political phenomenon. The key is figuring out the right approach in which to address it. The inevitable flow of all things good — capital, information, technologies, images — must also have an inverse reactive flow of some things bad — global warming, pandemics, terrorism, criminality (Chacón R., 2018, pp. 7–27). That structural yin-yang of life cannot be altered. Post-truth, therefore, is more about the collective response of self-actualization in the face of this onslaught, good and bad (Chacón R., 2018, pp. 7–27). In formal terms, globalization is treating post-truth as its dependent variable, while so many other disciplines are treating it as the independent. It is not for this study to determine which approach is ultimately correct. But it is important to note how this methodological divergence does absolutely change the manner and attitude with which this discipline sees the "problem" compared to others.

Post-Truth and Intelligence

As a phenomenon, post-truth is interesting because it manifests its impact value far beyond pure intellectual exercises. As seen in the previous three disciplines, while each has had formal scholarly concerns about the dangers of post-truth, its more profound damage has been seen to exist in the real world, impacting not just the pursuit of truth but actual employment and legitimacy. This perfectly encapsulates how the Intelligence Community, and intelligence as an intellectual discipline, has bumped up against post-truth. Arguably, intelligence is potentially more harmed in real terms than many other fields/disciplines, exactly because its uniqueness value is based on the ability to not just produce hard-to-obtain and hard-to-access information, but to produce knowledge product that literally can only come from its specialists. As two famous "celebrity scientists" (Neil deGrasse Tyson and Cara Santa Maria) have said publicly, thebiggest problem is not that people have lost the ability to judge what is true and what is not, but that the "very idea of evidence and logic is being threatened by individuals and interests with thepower to do real harm." (Sartwell C., 2017, May 6, p. A.13). This is indeed the area where intelligence as a field and discipline sticks out far more than all the others: the holder of the most powerful office in the world, the President of the United States, is basically the primary object for intelligence product. If post-truth reaches all the way up to the President and impacts his thinking, then there is little else thatcould be more damaging to the IC. As hinted at earlier, the list of post-truth moments against theIC continues to grow today at an alarming rate:

- Trump called the IC "extremely passive and naïve" when it comes to its ownassessment of Iran
- Trump dismissed the IC's assessment of the threat still represented by North Korea
- Toward the end of the Obama administration, when an American intelligence report was produced first purporting the possible interference of Russia in the 2016 election,Trump's first reaction was to question the "credibility of its spies"[7].
- The White House accused the IC of "illegally leaking" information and de facto creating the "fake news" environment that breeds nothing but distrust and hatred. Trump called the IC "un-American" for its continued leaking to the press[8].
- Trump demanded an investigation into the FBI and DOJ for supposedly illegally infiltrating and surveilling the Trump campaign for purely political purposes (Megerian Chris, 2018).
- Trump ended the long-established practice of the President's Daily Brief (PDB), in which chief intelligence officials started the President's day off with a summary ofglobal concerns and threats.

While it is true Trump is by no means the first Commander-in-Chief to have tense relations at various times with the Intelligence Community, the manner in which this tension is being playedout publicly and is covering issues of impropriety, professionalism, legitimacy, relevance, and need is unique. First, viewing the IC as just another tool to manipulate and utilize for political convenience and partisan interests is *not* the norm and does fundamentally undermine one of American democracy's little-emphasized but crucially-important aspects: keeping intelligence professional, non-partisan, and apolitical. Second, the IC needs this structural relationship intact and honored because it is often responsible to deliver news to the President that is not aligned with his direct policy wishes and political agenda. Fracturing that atmosphere or rendering the ICunable to deliver such information impartially undermines American national security, the raisond'etre of the IC. Third, moves like

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[7] "Trump tells US spy chiefs to go back to school", *BBC Report*, January 30th, 2019.
[8] Available online at: http://search.proquest.com/docview/1868529097.

ending the PDB without formal articulation and logical reasoning but hinting at being able to get the same information elsewhere and more quickly (i.e., Fox News) calls into question the very legitimacy of the IC as an organization and decreases its value publicly before the entire nation. Perhaps unlike any other discipline, post-truth has not hurt intelligence in an abstract or unintentional way. Rather, post-truth has been wielded more like a weapon in the very hands of person intelligence has to answer to directly, thus impugning their motives, character, and abilities and making them less-than-viable in terms of public confidence[9].

Even Nixon, who had every right to despise his own Intelligence Community at the end of his Presidency, did not come close to calling into question his agencies' professionalism or hinting at their own in-house political partisan agenda-mongering. More importantly, today's political environment has social media tools like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to intensify the practical reach and impact of post-truth statements. Trump has utilized these tools to maximum detriment of his own IC. It is not just about having the President's ear or getting him to value intelligence product. The manner in which post-truth statements are blasted across Twitter have undeniably produced an effect on the morale of agents already within the IC and on the effectiveness of the IC to recruit new talent to the job of national security. In addition, when the President of the United States denigrates his own IC through the use of post-truth posturing, it is not a far leap to imagine foreign intelligence agencies from questioning the value and veracity of partnering with the American IC, of trusting its information, and of de-valuing its influence.

Ultimately, a post-truth world for the IC is one that simply rejects the value of data, exults in emotionality, dismisses expertise, and arrogantly waves off objective intellectualism as elitist propaganda. While it is obvious why these trends would be anathema to every academic discipline and intellectual profession, they are especially damning to the Intelligence Community. The principles of evidentiary data, non-subjectivity, apolitical evidence collection, highly developed expertise, and rational intellectualism are the core bedrock upon which the intelligence profession is not just built but upon which it has always staked its relevance and reputation. A world run amok with post-truth would be difficult enough to deal with. But to have the High Priest of such a world literally the chief executive you must report into, this might simply be untenable for the future of classical intelligence as a profession and discipline. After all, when one of the most famous proponents of an intelligence career publicly retells how he found it necessary to mentor one talented young individual away from pursuing employment with the IC, explaining, "Don't put yourself at risk for the future. You have a lot to offer." (Hayden Michael, 2018).

Someday, then it may no longer be in a post-truth world. It may be a post-truth TwilightZone.

Conclusion

Some might argue that there is a legitimate place for post-truth in the modern world, especially in the contemporary world of politics. After all, perhaps the derision with which post-truth is held is a deflection by opponents unable to carry their own beliefs to full popularity and power. Making fun of others or dismissing their ideas as illegitimate based on emotionality has always been a preferred method of elites to ignore the masses. Justified anger has always been a driver of social change for decades, if not centuries (Fox C., 2016). Perhaps post-truth is just the newest manifestation of such anger and therefore deserving of more serious consideration as legitimate expression? Those not wanting to see post-truth written off so easily further

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[9] Available online at: http://search.proquest.com/docview/1858208995.

emphasize the danger of reducing "facts" down to only what is measurable (Fox C., 2016). Number crunchers outsourced by politicians unable to make compelling arguments to reach the people should not be automatically granted victory over people who lack three letters after their last names but still feel as adamantabout their own positions and arguments.

While there is no doubt some legitimacy underlying these arguments — elitism in and of itself is no guarantor of rightness just as emotion-based argument built on volume alone is not — it is important not to be swept away by the misdirection. In the end, too many of these supposed justifications for post-truth boil down instead to feel-good justifications by the misinformed so asto not feel it necessary to become better informed. The important scholarly principle of "falsifiability" comes into play here. Any scholar worth his/her salt has to construct research and ask questions that do *not* in fact have self-evident or predetermined answers. To do so would be to nullify the legitimacy and purpose of the research before it even began. Falsifiability, therefore, is embracing the notion that we can be *wrong* rather than doing everything possible to ensure we end up right. This is an equally important concept taken for granted within the intelligence profession, where research and analysis are governed by the holy principles of collect the data, follow the evidence, let it speak for itself. Post-truth is the literal antithesis of falsifiability. It can serve no positive purpose engaging the IC or intelligence as an intellectual discipline.

When governments get involved in the post-truth phenomenon, actively working with it rather than being a stalwart enemy against it, the results can be more than stark. Russia's use of post-truth in the form of misinformation, disinformation, control of facts, alternative narratives, and the like, has a direct and strategic domestic purpose. It creates a destabilizing effect within society that does not threaten the functioning of the country as a whole but certainly undermines the ability of oppositional organizations from gaining any real foothold and momentum against the regime in power (Surowiec P., 2017, pp. 21–27). In the end, Russia fulfills its own power system where the state dominates, suffers no fools, and accepts no challengers. Post-truth, therefore, is not something the Russian state feels burdened by but is effectively utilized by the state as a sort of manipulative soft power over society as a whole (Surowiec P., 2017, pp. 21–27). Others have even more eloquently explained the dangerous consequences when such domestic post-truth practices are allowed freedom on theglobal stage:

> We submit that the widespread publicity surrounding Russia's hacking activities in international politics…conceals the origins and daily practices of the trolling culture in Russia and its subsequent spillover into the international realm. In the contextual analysis that follows, we argue that empirical manifestations of a trolling frame…represent a wider practice of what we call *neutrollization* — a type of localized desecuritization-by-trolling…Kremlin trolls generate meaninglessness, neutralizing civil society attempts to cast the regime as a societal securitythreat (Kurowska X., & Reshetnikov A., 2018, pp. 345–363).

Ultimately, this is the battle that intelligence wages when the executive branch thinks it can getjust as good information from a post-truth world and thereby completely bypass the entire industry of the IC: formally accepted and governmentally-utilized post-truth denudes the publicof power, reduces its ability to participate, and renders its influence factor to near impotence.

Post-truth works best in at least a quasi-authoritarian political space, as its ultimate role undermines an informed and activated public. While other disciplines certainly suffer, intelligence is arguably hurt worse because of the nature of its role in the democratic space and the responsibilities it is meant to uphold. As is seen currently in the White House, post-truth runamok within the government does not just undermine how informed

the public is. It basically removes all of the IC's viable functions.

In order to avoid accusations of cherry-picking Russia as the worst possible case of post-truth/governmental collusion (pun intended), studies on British intelligence show a similar destabilizing effect that pushes the community toward failure (Keenan J., 2017, pp. 190–213). When trying to ascertain why British intelligence performed so poorly post-2004 during the buildup of its alliance with the United States for the Global War on Terror, it was found that the British had a tendency to rely on "proxy intelligence" (Keenan J., 2017, pp. 190–213). What this meant in a nutshell was that an overreliance on their American diplomatic counterparts to provide data proved disastrous for British intelligence because it was not entirely aware at the time that the US government was caught operating in an entirely "post-truth political environment" (Keenan J., 2017, pp. 190–213). Thus, when controlling for political regime type and international adversarial status, post-truth still operates within the intelligence environment like an infection and not just an obstacle: the end product is compromised, leading to poor organizational performance.

A last word of warning must be issued to those who feel the potential failure of Trump to gain reelection in 2020 is the answer to solve all of society's post-truth problems. While it seems highly doubtful that a new President would try to mimic the animosity currently between the White House and the IC, Trump has shown, for better or worse, that it is possible to conduct affairs without having a close and positive relationship with the IC, to the detriment of intelligence overall. Perhaps more importantly, his exit from the White House would unlikely create a sudden cathartic societal epiphany where the population as a whole no longer would fall victim to post-truth thinking or manipulation. The trend pre-dated Trump. It will inevitably post-date him as well. Living in a post-truth world matters for intelligence because it creates a society, a populace, and a working environment detrimental to its purpose and function. A post-truth world creates a world of "stupider" intelligence not by choice but by de facto force. And that world is not only more ignorant and misinformed. It is more dangerous as well.

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