1 Introduction

What is the quality of intelligence and security agency reports that politicians, corporate business and NGO’s (Non Governmental Organizations) have to work with? This question is largely unanswered. The reason being, for a large part, is that intelligence is a recently developing discipline. This does not mean that nothing is written about it. Especially during the past decades, there has been almost an incredible growth of publications.¹ Both scientists and practitioners have published intelligence articles, or raised sites on the internet. Also within the wider public context, intelligence has been renewed and has received increased attention, because of the events of 9/11 and the current conflict in Iraq. A key development, within the Dutch context, is that intelligence is becoming more integrated into the European intelligence network. This is largely because of the issues at hand and because of the Treaty of Maastricht (1993).² Intelligence is likely to have a more central place in the discussion on security issues. This calls for a further professionalization of intelligence. In this need for professionalization, it is important to consider the quality of intelligence and security agency reports, because of their central place in and influence on the (political) decision making process.

There is a great need of quality assessment in the intelligence branch. We have to look to methodology to inform such an examination. This examination needs to be constructed in such a way that quality can be assessed without waiting to see if reports are accurate. In other words, what is needed is an ex ante instrument to assess the quality of intelligence and security agency reports.

An ex ante instrument differs from the daily practice that usually takes place in the intelligence community. Until now, the issue of the accuracy of reports has been mainly limited to incidents, such as disasters like Pearl Harbor and 9/11. If you look at evaluations of such disasters, the focus of attention is on post mortem analyses. The disadvantage of this approach is that such improvements are more based on learning processes of incidents and the dubious perceptions by post mortem analyses, than on criteria that are more objective.³ In post mortem

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¹ From 1975 onwards, there is also more attention for issues as intelligence analysis (Lowenthal, “The Intelligence Library,” Intelligence and National Security, April 1987, 371)
² The third pillar of the Treaty of Maastricht (1993) encompasses issues such as the maintenance of the public order (Pouw, Naar een ‘Europees binnenlands veiligheidsbeleid’? ’1995, 145-155).

In Dutch publications on intelligence generally two approaches are dominant – the descriptive approach (insiders such as Engelen, Jensen & Platje, and Hengeveld & Rodenburg; and outsiders such as De Graaff, Kluiters, and Wiebes) and the critical approach (Van Meurs and Vleugels – and watchdog comities like the Utrecht-based Amok, the Amsterdam-based Buro Jansen & Janssen, and the Nijmegen-based Onderzoeksburo Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdiensten OBIV/SIP). Some studies are known to beyond describing and try to develop the discipline of intelligence studies, such as the publication on Peacekeeping Intelligence (De Jong, Platje & Steele). Yet, none is on ex ante assessment of quality.
analyses, you look back, knowing the outcome of the danger evaluated. The question, *what is good intelligence* is scarcely answered. Unfortunately, good intelligence is merely understood by a feeling that a warning should have been given in a certain instance, rather than underlying objective criteria that measures the quality of the report. In short, what are lacking are norms that reports have to meet. Such a gap may affect the effectiveness to cope with dangers, threats, and risks.

However, before we can apply an ex ante instrument of intelligence assessment we have to make sure that the evaluations based on this ex ante assessment make sense. To develop such a relevant quality assessment, two fields of literature are of interest. First, it is necessary to pay attention to what is written on this issue by intelligence practitioners – what does the intelligence community discuss concerning the quality of intelligence and security agency reports. Second, attention needs to be paid to the literature on methodology. Together, these two fields can provide norms – or criteria – that intelligence and security agency reports have to meet.

Insights concerning which factors contribute to a high or a low quality of a report. To trace such factors, case studies can serve as a source of information. To contribute to the thinking on producing high quality intelligence and security agency reports, the following research question has been developed.

**Central research question**

The purpose of this study is to support the process of professionalization of intelligence. It is aimed at contributing to the process of moving towards a qualitative framework for analysis. Concerning the quality of intelligence and security agency reports, this need – as indicated – concerns two issues. First, there is a need to develop an instrument for an ex ante quality assessment of intelligence and security agency reports. Second, there is a need to identify factors of influence on the quality of reports. These aims lead then to the following central research question of this study:

*How can the quality of intelligence and security agency reports be measured, what factors influence the quality of a report, and how can high quality reports be achieved?*

The initial impetus of this research began as early as 1993 as a result of studying a BVD-report.\(^4\) The initial aim was to learn how to produce intelligence and security agency reports. During this process, a fundamental nature was shown to be lacking. There was no analytical framework to assess or to evaluate intelligence and security agency reports. Furthermore, there arose also a need to identify factors that

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\(^4\) This resulted in the publication of a pilot study: De Valk, *De BVD en inlichtingenrapportages*, 1996. In this pilot, some insights were given on the quality of a BVD-report. Yet, the lack of a framework meant that it was not possible to test to quality against criteria.
influence the quality of intelligence and security agency reports. During the research process, these two issues gradually became the prime focus of the study.

**How to investigate the research question?**

The first issue of the central research question is to develop an ex ante instrument that can assess the quality of an intelligence and security agency report. To develop such an instrument, first notice has to be taken of what is specific about intelligence and security agency reports. Analysis of the main types of intelligence and security agency reports needs to be undertaken to understand what they are, to identify their characteristics, and to conceptualize what demands are expected in each type of intelligence research. This arrangement of types of intelligence and security agency reports is informed by a literature search into the fields of methodology, the practice of research by professionals, and intelligence. Literature on methodology informs the general insights for each type of intelligence research. The literature on the practice of professionals makes clear what specific demands are met by professionals in research and what is specific compared with science. The literature on intelligence will supply insight in the types of intelligence and security agency reports, and the specific problems and demands of intelligence research.

Criteria will be developed concerning the main characteristics and demands of each type of intelligence research. This implies that an ex ante instrument is construed in such a way that the quality of reports can be evaluated, even when crucial intelligence is absent, or if the outcome of a danger is not known. In short, a literature search into the mentioned fields is carried out to develop an ex ante instrument fit for an assessment of the quality of intelligence and security agency reports.

Later in the research – in case studies – the quality of certain reports is assessed by using this ex ante instrument. As the selected reports are mostly from the 1980’s, the quality assessment may be open to criticism that some ex post elements will also be included.\(^5\)

The second issue of the central research question is to identify factors that contribute to a high or a low quality report. Although an implicit assumption of this study is that the quality of reports will be higher when established methods are used better – this assumption is necessary in formulating criteria for an ex ante instrument – this does not exclude that other factors may play a role. To analyze factors that may contribute to a high or a low quality of a report, case studies will be carried out. As this study is written for the Dutch context, Dutch agencies have been chosen for this investigation. To cover a broad scope of reports, two Dutch organizations, that differ as much as possible, have been selected. This may lead to extra insights than if more of the same are investigated. Therefore, the large and

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\(^5\) To check the accuracy of data presented, sometimes information is included that was only made open as late as the 1990’s. This happens, for example, in the SRB-case, when information from South African sources is discussed. Yet, as in this case, it also concerns documents that as such preceded the intelligence and security agency report in question. Concerning interviews, some ex post elements may be included.
public BVD (Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst) and the small, private, and non-profit Shipping Research Bureau (SRB) have been selected for investigation.

This study attempts to identify factors that may lead to a high or a low quality report. To trace such factors, this part of the study will be of an exploratory nature. As there will be many variables present, with only a limited number of cases, the factors cannot be identified through statistical manipulation. Instead, analytical generalizations will be used. Therefore not only causal explanations based on the findings of the cases will be used – including within-case and cross case analysis – but also of hypothetical expectations from the literature on methodology and intelligence.

To identify more precisely factors that are of influence on the quality of reports, hypotheses are developed throughout the first four chapters of this study. These hypotheses are focused issues on which there is insufficient information in the literature, or on which there are ambivalent opinions. The hypotheses are on the relationship between quality and political and diplomatic feedback, quality and the release of reports, and quality and deception by an opponent.

Sources

For the case studies – to serve their different functions – a wide variety of sources are consulted. Interviews are held with (former) staff members and employees of the BVD and the SRB, in addition to people connected to related groups and organizations or those named in reports. Use is made of different types of archives, literature from different fields, and open sources, such as the internet, publications and media broadcasts. For the literature on intelligence, both scientific publications as well as literature from within the agencies themselves are used. The sources consulted are in English, French, German, Dutch, Italian, and Afrikaans. Sources in Russian or Chinese (of relevance for some BVD-reports) are not consulted, by a lack of knowledge of these languages.

There are several limitations in analyzing intelligence and security agency reports. All the selected reports are pre 1990. To avoid juridical complications and to avoid endangering security, reports from before 1990 are a better option than those of a later date. Furthermore, requests under the Dutch Freedom of Information Act are time-consuming. Many BVD-documents quoted in this study took at least a year – and some more than five years – to be released. Concerning the BVD case, thousands of pages can be consulted, but only a very limited number of complete reports are available.

This study will not give an overall picture of the state of affairs of Dutch intelligence and security agency reports. This is not the purpose of this study. The aim is not a descriptive generalization of the quality of SRB- or BVD-reports. As noted before, the aim is to identify, through analysis, which factors influence the quality of intelligence and security agency reports. Knowledge of these factors will be very useful, if we want to improve our intelligence performance in the near future.
The success of this study depends on the findings in three fields. First, the criteria must have a discriminating capacity concerning the quality of reports. Second, if a causal argument is made on factors of influence on the quality of a report, it must also indicate the degree of probability this causal connection is. Third, this study has to lead to recommendations (the third part of the central research question).

**Composition of the study**

To answer the central research question, this study is composed of three parts. In the first part, the concepts of intelligence and analysis are discussed and an ex ante instrument is developed to assess the quality of intelligence and security agency reports. In the second part, two cases are presented – one on the SRB and one on the BVD. In the third part, factors of influence on the quality of reports are discussed and recommendations are presented.

The first part of the study is composed of chapter 2, 3, 4, and 5. In chapter 2, an introduction to intelligence is presented. It outlines what the main characteristics of intelligence are, and provides an overview of the field – in particular on aspects that are relevant to producing reports.

In chapter 3, three main types of intelligence and security agency reports are discussed – descriptive, explanatory, and prognostic intelligence research. For each type, its characteristics are presented, the particular demands each has for research are explored and the main methods and techniques that each makes use of in research. Chapter 3 mainly focuses on literature, methodology and research practice by professionals.

Chapter 4 focuses on insights on what the intelligence community sees as main pitfalls and biases in producing intelligence and security agency reports.

Finally, in chapter 5, criteria are identified for developing an instrument that is capable of making an ex ante assessment on the quality of intelligence and security agency reports. In 5.3, the criteria and their specific indicators are presented (table 5.1).

In the second part, two case studies are presented – the first one focuses on the SRB and the second one on the BVD. The first case – chapters 6, 7, and 8 – focuses on the SRB, a private non-profit organization that monitored oil shipments to the apartheid regime of South Africa. The SRB, which had a powerful lobby in Dutch parliament, reported directly to the United Nations.

In chapter 6, background information is presented on the SRB and the selected SRB-reports. In chapter 7, the quality of the selected reports is assessed with the help of the criteria from chapter 5 – the ex ante instrument. In chapter 8, an investigation on complementary elements that can be identified as influencing the quality of a SRB-report is undertaken.

The second case – chapters 9, 10, and 11 – focuses on the BVD, the Dutch public agency on domestic security. This agency had the most media coverage in
the Netherlands, making it more easy to investigate than the other main public agency – the military agency.  

In chapter 9, background information is presented on the BVD and the selected reports. In chapter 10, the quality of the selected reports is assessed with the help of the criteria from chapter 5. In chapter 11, complementary elements that can be identified as influencing the quality of a BVD-report are investigated.

The third part deals with factors that influence on the quality of intelligence and security agency reports, conclusions, and recommendations. In chapters 12 and 13, the factors that influence the quality reports are discussed. Use is made of both within case and cross case outcomes. Attention is paid to hypotheses that are developed to assess more precisely the influence of a factor.

In chapter 14, the intelligence processes of the two case studies are compared. In what respect does the quality of the intelligence and security agency reports investigated differ? Did the ex ante test lead to plausible assessments? Following this different explanations of quality are compared – also with a reference to the presented literature. Finally, recommendations bring this study to conclusion.

As intelligence studies is a relatively new – and partly still developing – scientific discipline, a caution has to be made. This caution concerns that in such a relatively new discipline normative elements (ex ante instrument) and causal connections (factors that influence the quality of a report) may be partly intertwined. Therefore, these two issues are separated as much as possible in the composition of this study. In the case studies, the normative issue of the quality of a given report is dealt with in chapters 7, 8, 10, and 11. The analytical issue of factors of influence on the quality is dealt with in chapters 12 and 13.

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6 During the 1980’s, there was a large reorganization in which the three separate military agencies were merged into one organization. This complicates research, because four organizations will have to be object of investigation – the military agency and its three predecessors. This reorganization was preceded by the so-called Fatima-affair. This was an infiltration – not authorized by the responsible ministers – into the unions of the army. This infiltration became public after the anti-militarist activist group Onkruit unveiled documents that it had obtained after a theft at the 450 Counter Intelligence Detachment in November 1984.