BREAKING INTO THE INTELLIGENCE FIELD – HOW TO BECOME AN INTELLIGENCE ANALYST

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Introduction

The field of intelligence is a vast and continuously growing entity, comprised of a myriad of government agencies, private firms, and non-profit organizations. The growth and trajectory of this field are directly affected by technological developments, such as advanced satellite technology and weaponry, as well as world events, including terrorist attacks and regional/national conflicts. The field has been glamorized by Hollywood representations of “CIA spies” such as Clancy’s Jack Ryan, as well as the classic James Bond idealization. Beyond this hype, the intelligence field offers some great careers for interested and qualified individuals. The big question is, however, **HOW DO YOU BREAK IN?** Perhaps you have spent countless hours trying to figure out how you fit into an intelligence career, or perhaps you have determined your strengths and you know what career you want to pursue, but are not sure how to best prepare for a career in this field.

The intelligence sector offers many different types of career paths, including careers for engineers and computer scientists, among other specializations. In my previous white paper on career advancement in the strategic security sector, I provided an overview of careers available in the intelligence field. The purpose of this paper, however, is to enlighten you as to how you can best prepare yourself to get a job as an intelligence analyst in this competitive field – whether it is working for a government intelligence agency or a job in the private sector. In the next few pages, I outline the intelligence field along with the types of jobs available to individuals who want to pursue a career as an intelligence analyst. Next, I lay out some important issues to consider when preparing for such a career, including what steps you could take to make yourself more knowledgeable and, thus, more marketable as an intelligence analyst. Finally, you will find a section with profiles and advice from current intelligence analysts. A caveat – this paper deals specifically with those individuals interested in becoming intelligence analysts – those who are interested in analyzing and synthesizing intelligence gathered from other sources.
CAREER PATHS FOR INTELLIGENCE ANALYSTS - MAPPING THE FIELD

**Government and/or Military**
Probably the most well-known intelligence analyst positions are available in the Federal government. The U.S. Intelligence Community consists of many individual agencies (along with the military) that work collectively to provide national political and military leaders with intelligence so that they can effectively create and manage U.S. foreign and military policy.

The Director of National Intelligence (DNI) serves as the head of the 16 member U.S. Intelligence Community. The DNI, through the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), works closely with the Department of Defense intelligence agencies through the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence. These military intelligence agencies include the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), National Security Agency (NSA), National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA) – in addition to the intelligence divisions of the 4 branches of the Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force).

These agencies have many opportunities for those interested in intelligence analyst positions. By logging onto the CIA or NSA website, one can find numerous positions, such as counterintelligence threat analyst, counterterrorism analyst, political analyst, and regional analyst, among many other positions.

**Private Sector - Corporate**
Major corporations also have their own intelligence units that hire former military intelligence officers or civilian intelligence professionals (analysts, collectors, managers, etc.) as research analysts and intelligence specialists. There are a multitude of dynamic corporate intelligence jobs that require a wide-range of intelligence skills and in-depth knowledge.

Additional types of corporations act as ‘intelligence vendors’ and provide open source intelligence analyses and products to government agencies and multinational corporations (MNCs). For example, large companies may supplement in-house research by outsourcing their competitive intelligence (also known as market or business intelligence) needs to third-party entities that typically focus exclusively in intelligence collection and analysis. Positions in companies like STRATFOR (Strategic Forecasting, Inc.), Lexis-Nexis, and Oxford Analytica are highly competitive and quite often call for advanced degrees in fields directly related to the position requirements.

**Private Sector – Non-Governmental Organizations**
There are plenty of intelligence jobs in think-tanks and the non-governmental organization (NGO) sectors. Think-tanks and NGOs employ researchers and analysts with specific intelligence-related skill sets. International NGOs like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) occasionally hire individuals with intelligence backgrounds to work in watch centers where they monitor and analyze major current events that may have an impact on member states around the globe.
Other think-tank and NGO intelligence jobs are available in high-level institutions like the Organization of American States (OAS), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Organization for the Prohibition for Chemical Weapons (OPCW). One of the exciting benefits of think-tank and NGO intelligence jobs is that they are often located in major cosmopolitan cities around the globe like Vienna, Geneva, New York, and Washington, DC.

National NGOs and other quasi-governmental, independent organizations are highly selective and enviable places to work because of their influence on policy and decision makers through their production of high-quality research, and typically only hire those with advanced degrees. Examples include the RAND Corporation, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Brookings Institution, the Council on Foreign Relations, American Enterprise Institute (AEI), Middle East Institute, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and the Hudson Institute. There are many more think tanks out there and, while predominately centered in the Washington, DC metro area and New York City, opportunities can be found in different locations around the United States and even abroad.

**HOW TO “BREAK IN”**

Recruiters at government intelligence agencies as well as employers of intelligence analysts in the private sector are both looking for educated, intelligent individuals who are able to solve problems quickly, are self-motivated, and have an interest in serving their country. Below I discuss some important points to consider when applying for intelligence positions within the government, as well as ways to standout to recruiters so that you are positioned to become marketable to the private sector.

**Education**

Perhaps the most important component to preparing for a career as an intelligence analyst is your education. A solid education is a building block to developing relevant skill-sets and knowledge necessary for you to perform your job. While many government agencies do not have a strict rule about the level or type of education you must attain, it is important that you invest wisely in your education as that will make you stand out from other applicants.

Unless an applicant has significant work/military experience, most agencies require that their employees have a bachelor’s degree at the very least. Some agencies have internship or co-op programs for undergraduate students as well. These agencies, furthermore, prefer advanced degrees (master’s degree level or above) and some often require it. For example, the CIA’s job announcements for counterterrorism analysts, counterintelligence threat analysts, political analysts, and regional analysts note that a master’s degree is required. Specifically related to intelligence analyst positions, government agencies are looking for individuals with advanced degrees in many security-related areas, such as international affairs, intelligence, national security, terrorism studies, international business, foreign area studies, and political science, among other areas. Other intelligence analyst positions for more specific departments such as economics, psychology, etc. require degrees specific to their area of expertise.
Intelligence analysts employed in the private sector are held to the same educational standards as those in the public sector. Often however, private sector intelligence positions in NGOs or non-profits weight more heavily one’s work and life experiences, as many of these positions require one to travel and/or live within particular countries.

Specific Skill-Sets
What is most important about the acquisition of a related degree or an advanced degree, however, is what that degree teaches you to do. By taking classes in strategic security-related areas, students are developing subject matter expertise, as well as learning how to think and reason analytically. Bottom line – a targeted education helps you develop thinking and reasoning skills critical to becoming a good intelligence analyst. Below I’ve listed a number of skills that intelligence agencies and private sector employers look for when interviewing job candidates for intelligence analyst positions.

Analytical/Critical-Thinking Skills: Most job descriptions for intelligence analyst positions mention that applicants MUST possess analytical, critical thinking, or problem-solving skills. You might be wondering, however, what exactly these “skills” are and how you can acquire them. One popular dictionary defines analytical skills as the ability to visualize, articulate, and solve complex problems and concepts, and make decisions that make sense based on available information. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, critical thinking is a series of mental processes including discernment, analysis, and evaluation in order to form a sound judgment that reconciles scientific evidence with common sense. Critical thinking skills, therefore, enable analysts to remove personal bias and analytically or methodically evaluate a particular situation. Intelligence analysts sift through and analyze a large amount of unfiltered information in order to make sense of a particular situation and advise policy-makers. Without these skills, intelligence analysts would fail to accurately ascertain the often nuanced situations surrounding threats. As mentioned above, advanced education provides a perfect opportunity for you to develop these critical thinking skills.

Language: Many intelligence analysis positions require or strongly suggest applicants have some type of language training. This training varies from basic to fluency. The language requirement obviously depends upon what type of position for which you are applying.

Subject matter expertise: Government agencies, as well as corporate and non-profit groups hire intelligence analysts to work within a specific office or department. These include regional offices, such as the Middle East, Europe, or South Asia, for instance. In addition to regional offices, many agencies have offices devoted to specific subject matter, such as Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) terrorism, or other, more technical subjects. Applicants to these departments obviously must be able to demonstrate their expertise on the particular subject through previous work experience and/or education.

Work Experience
Government agencies and, more particularly, non-profit organizations are also interested in hiring intelligence analysts that have some previous work or internship experience in a related field. While work experience is not necessarily required, it will make you stand out among other applicants and will enhance your profile, especially if you do not have a relevant educational background. Furthermore, while working you are more likely to develop a strong network of
contacts with which you can use in the future. Work experience is important because it demonstrates to prospective employers that you are dependable and, furthermore, provides you with significant on-the-job training. Military experience is also a plus, as you will have undoubtedly learned a great deal about security-related concerns.

**Clean Background**
While education, specific skill sets, and previous work experience are all vital to your application package for intelligence analyst positions, they become irrelevant if you cannot pass a background check or security clearance. Various agencies and employers have different background requirements, but if you are interested in a career as an intelligence analyst, you should be aware of the fact that in most cases your background and personal history will be scrutinized. Government agencies provide an outline of what they will and will not accept concerning illegal drug use, crimes, and credit problems, among other concerns. These requirements are easily accessible at agency recruiting websites. You should also be careful about your foreign contacts and where you have travelled. While traveling to Cuba, for example, might not prevent you from gaining a security clearance, it will definitely hamper the process. Furthermore, while interviewing a member of a rogue political party in Lebanon might be a great idea for an academic research paper, this activity will make passing a security clearance much more difficult for you.

I also spoke with a current intelligence analyst to get her advice about passing the security clearance, and she mentioned the importance of maintaining a low and clean online presence. While your blog, Facebook, or MySpace account might be a great way for you to keep in touch and network with all of your friends, any content you post on these sites can easily be accessed by future employers to determine whether you could represent a threat to national security (i.e.: by being blackmailed), should you be hired as an intelligence analyst.

**INTELLIGENCE ANALYST PROFILES**
I recently interviewed a few individuals who are employed as intelligence analysts for government agencies or private or non-profit groups. I asked them to share how they were able to “break into” the intelligence field with the hope that this would provide you with some good illustrations of the importance of specific education, work experience, and networking.

**Work Experience**
One intelligence analyst I spoke with comes from a military background. After graduating from a military academy and serving her time afterwards, she was honorably discharged and decided to pursue a career in the intelligence field. With her background and specific technical skill set that she acquired while in the military, she found a niche for herself as a civilian intelligence analyst. She suggested that interested applicants should apply to those jobs in which they have a demonstrable level of understanding and expertise. For instance, if you are interested in being a political analyst following North African countries, you should demonstrate that you have an interest in the subject by taking relevant courses and pursuing language training. If you are interested in working as a counterterrorism analyst, become an expert on a specific group or ideology. Make sure you are passionate about what you want to do and demonstrate that to the recruiter.
**Advanced Education**

Another recently-hired intelligence analyst at a government agency landed his job after obtaining a master’s degree in a national-security related discipline. Rather than relevant work experience, the key to his employment was his targeted education. This analyst worked in the financial sector for a number of years but decided that he would prefer to serve his country as an intelligence analyst. He realized he would not make the initial cut unless he had some relevant advanced education, so he quit his finance job and enrolled in a master’s degree program in a national-security related discipline. While working towards his master’s degree, he spent time traveling and also took independent language courses to support his regional interests. During his final semester of graduate school he applied to a few government agencies and is now happily working in his new career field.

**Networking/Internships**

Another analyst I spoke with works for a private risk assessment firm on corporate security-related issues for U.S. companies that do business in East Asia. Previously she had worked in marketing for a large international corporation but was interested in pursuing a career in a strategic-security related capacity. She began networking with individuals working in corporate security and risk assessment. She landed an unpaid internship at a risk assessment firm and spent one summer learning the ropes. She made an effort to learn about what the firm does and what role she could play in such an organization. Similar to the other analysts I interviewed, she determined that a master’s degree in a security-related field would provide her with the credibility and knowledge to pursue a career as an intelligence analyst working for a private company. After obtaining her master’s degree, she used the networks she had previously developed through her unpaid internship and was offered a job at the same firm where she had previously interned.
How Henley-Putnam Can Help

A career as an intelligence analyst is one of many career opportunities within the security sector. Intelligence analysis, however, is driven by the need for strategic security, which is a multidisciplinary, global view of security issues that requires the timely accumulation of accurate and objective knowledge to deter threats. Practitioners in the field of strategic security, including intelligence analysts must have highly developed analytical skills, which can be developed through targeted education and professional training.

Henley-Putnam University recognizes this need and thus offers focused degrees in strategic security related areas, including bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Intelligence Management, Terrorism and Counterterrorism Studies, and the Management of Personal Protection. Furthermore, Henley-Putnam is one of the only online universities to offer a doctoral degree program in Strategic Security. By enrolling in Henley-Putnam’s bachelor’s or master’s degree programs in Intelligence Management, you will receive a one-of-a-kind education that focuses exclusively on intelligence studies. Henley-Putnam University offers you a targeted educational experience that will deepen your knowledge and understanding of critical intelligence, as well as help you develop subject matter expertise. Henley-Putnam courses will also require you to hone your critical thinking and analytical skills. By furthering your education, refining your critical thinking skills, and developing subject matter expertise, you will be preparing yourself for a career as an intelligence analyst. Furthermore, by joining the elite team at Henley-Putnam, you will become part of a life-long network of security professionals. Make the choice today to become a leader in the intelligence profession while building a long-term relationship with us based on trust and confidence.