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When Military Intelligence Reconsiders the Nature of War: Elements for an Archeology of “National Security” (United States, 1919–1941)

Alexandre Rios-Bordes

Abstract

Where does the notion of “national security” come from? The genesis of this extraordinarily ambiguous concept is largely unknown, besides what a few historical works have long established, i.e., that national security is an offspring of the early Cold War inspired by the experience of the Second World War, dictated by the confrontation with the Soviet Union, and accompanying the integration of what was to be called the “National Security State.” While not denying the importance of this turning point, this paper offers a new perspective by focusing on what was discreetly happening a quarter of a century earlier within two modest military intelligence services, the Military Intelligence Division (MID), and the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI). Based on lessons drawn from the experience of modern warfare, a theoretical and practical break took place in relation to the four distinctions that had been traditionally central to military thinking, namely war and peace, military and civilian, front and rear, and friend and foe. Our hypothesis is that this silent but concrete and definite break paved the way for the formation of governmental rationality that came to be referred to as “national security.”

It seems that the concept of national security has finally crossed the Atlantic. Not that Europeans have up to now been unaware of its existence. The use of the expression has long been widespread in Europe and has given rise to numerous analyses and debates. Yet, supported by a particularly favorable context, it is only recently that it finally conquered European shores and especially national legal systems, in the process burying its conceptual opponents, beginning with “national defense.”¹ This “silent revolution” is clearly significant, and there is much to be written on the subject. However, we will limit ourselves here to saying, following Barry Buzan’s insightful term, that we are dealing with the most “powerful” concept,² which, once enshrined in national law, bureaucratic use, and public debate, considerably extends the areas, situations, and spaces where governments can exercise power in a structurally extraordinary³ way, thereby modifying the scope for exercising fundamental freedoms and rights, the relations and balance between the branches of government, the organization and operation of the state apparatus, and periodically, the development of political debate and competition, that is, everything that is constitutive in various ways of the democratic nature of political systems.

While national security has been the focus of a very large number of publications over the past fifty years, the concept is characterized by its persistent ambiguity, something

¹ On the British case, see in particular Julian Richards, *A Guide to National Security: Threats, Responses, Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). On the French case, see Fabio Liberti and Camille Blain, “France’s National Security Strategy” (Working Paper, Real Instituto Elcano, March 2011); Bertrand Warusfel, “La sécurité nationale: Nouveau concept du droit français,” in *Les différentes facettes du concept juridique de sécurité: Mélanges en l’honneur de Pierre-André Lecocq* (Lille: Université de Lille 2, 2011). The expression “silent revolution” was taken from this paper.

² Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Brighton, England: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983), 4. However, Buzan only focuses on political power, whereas we are using the term in a much broader sense here.

³ We use this term to establish a clear distinction from the notion of an ongoing “state of exception” put forward in Giorgio Agamben’s work, particularly in *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005). The idea here is that the institutionalization of “national security” results in the normalization of a zone of substantive and procedural exception (constitutional, bureaucratic, legal, and to a certain extent, political), and not to a continuing overall state of exception established for the long term.

that most authors who have studied it recognize.⁴ However, the concept suffers less from an absence of definitions than from the confusion caused by a proliferation of these, particularly academic definitions that during the last twenty-five years have become almost as numerous as the didactic or theoretical works in the strategic and security studies subfield of international relations, as this concept broadly crystallizes the paradigmatic and theoretical oppositions that crisscross it.⁵ However, presenting the winners and losers of this normative battle far exceeds the scope of this paper. At most, we would like to suggest that the forcefulness of the debate can perhaps be partly explained by the weakness of the available historical knowledge, and that by setting aside theoretical speculation for a moment, an investigation of its roots might contribute to clarifying the entire issue.

We know astonishingly little about the history of the concept, except for what several authors established long ago and a host of others undertook to make common knowledge. The expression originated in the United States in the immediate post-war period, where it took the place of “national defense.” The new expression thereby conveyed the extension of strategic horizons dictated by the confrontation with the Soviet Union and inspired by the immediate experience of world war. It signaled the development of defense as a continuous global problem, accompanying the profound institutional changes undertaken to coordinate and integrate the various components of the “mosaic” of organizations set up to respond to the new challenge (the Department of

⁴ Critics have emphasized the rhetorical effectiveness of the concept and its usefulness for decision makers, as suggested by Arnold Wolfers in “National Security as an Ambiguous Symbol,” *Political Science Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (1952). More recently, the notion has been extended by representatives of the “Copenhagen school” (see Charles-Philippe David, *La guerre et la paix: Approches et enjeux de la sécurité* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 2013), 59).

⁵ This is so to the point where an essentially contested concept is often discussed. See David A. Baldwin, “The Concept of Security,” *Review of International Studies* 23, no. 1 (1997); Thierry Balzacq, “Qu’est-ce que la sécurité nationale?” *Revue Internationale et Stratégique* 52 (2003–2004); Steve Smith, “The Contested Concept of Security,” in *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, ed. Ken Booth (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005). For a synthesis of these debates, see David, *La guerre et la paix*, 40–45. On the emergence of security studies, see in particular Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8–20.

Defense, the National Security Council, and the Central Intelligence Agency).⁶ In this perspective, “national security” is a product of the first few months of the Cold War, which were very directly shaped by immediate and entirely new concerns, especially the emergence of the nuclear age. We would hence be confronted with a certainly novel occurrence in the contemporary history of ideas: a concept developed and precipitated even as it was being institutionalized with disconcerting ease to become in just a few months the dominant paradigm of the US defense apparatus and even a part of the US state apparatus.⁷

It is immediately apparent how this narrative of the concept’s origin is unsatisfactory. However decisive the immediate context and however competitive the new term, something tells us that preliminary maneuvering was necessary for this stunning intellectual and institutional triumph to occur. Specialists themselves often seem to hesitate between reaffirming the clear rupture resulting from the beginning of the Cold War and tracing often clumsy genealogies that end up minimizing the conceptual innovation (when they do not substitute a semantic-philosophical or semantic-historical examination of each of the two opportunely distinct elements in the common lexical item).⁸ The main historical work on which these specialists rely even points out several

⁶ The term “mosaic” is used by one of the main architects of this reform, Ferdinand Eberstadt, cited by Jeffrey M. Dorwart, *Eberstadt and Forrestal: A National Security Partnership* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 8. Among the important references on the question, see Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 12–13 and 193–201; Norman A. Graebner, “The Sources of Postwar Insecurity,” in *The National Security: Its Theory and Practice, 1945–1960*, ed. Norman A. Graebner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3–36; Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 10–15. See also Amy Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 12–53.

⁷ Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945–1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–22; Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: American Anti-Statism and its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3–8.

⁸ Among the standard works offering this type of genealogy, one of the most frequently cited is: Ernest R. May, “National Security in American History,” in *Rethinking America’s Security: Beyond Cold War to New World Order*, ed. Graham Allison and Gregory F. Treverton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 94–114. For a recent

avenues to explore.⁹ A number publications have begun to do just that, shifting the focus to the second half of the 1930s and to universities, where a few pioneers of international relations and strategic and geopolitical studies promoted a broader understanding of problems linked to conflicts and the integration of their non-military aspects. However, this work fails to establish in any convincing way how these intellectual innovations conquered the state apparatus so quickly and so effectively. Attempts have been made to go even further back and see in the propaganda agitation of the National Security League during the First World War the essential premises of the homonymous concept but without offering any other link between the two periods than the obvious similarity in concerns – “national security” simply disappearing for a quarter of a century, before returning to the forefront after this dormant period to occupy the center of the “political order of the Cold War.”¹⁰

A history—or more exactly, a prehistory—remains to be written, a process to which we intend to contribute by exploring another avenue. We do not claim to establish a genealogy, which is impossible to reconstruct at this stage. At most, we aim to undertake what could be viewed as an initial report of archival excavation, the results of which lead us to formulate a hypothesis, namely that a large part of the history—or the immediate prehistory—of the concept of “national security” takes place in a lower historical stratum, in the modest and highly unobtrusive spaces of the US military apparatus. This stratum is the period following the First World War, a period supposedly almost apathetic about strategic analysis, and the spaces are the two military intelligence

and particularly lucid example of what often takes the place of conceptual investigation, see Prabhakaran Paleri, *National Security: Imperatives and Challenges* (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, 2008), 3–41.

⁹ Among several sources of inspiration from his two partners, Jeffery Dorwart briefly notes the writings of the specialist in public policies W. F. Willoughby on government in time of war (Dorwart, *Eberstadt and Forrestal*, 10 and 18–23). Daniel Yergin refers to Edward Mead Earle and the famous seminars of the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton University (Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, 194–195). Melvyn Leffler points to the popularity and influence of the geopolitical approach (Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 10–11).

¹⁰ Douglas T. Stuart, *Creating the National Security State: A History of the Law that Transformed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 26–31; David Ekbladh, “Present at the Creation: Edward Mead Earle and the Depression-Era Origins of Security Studies,” *International Security* 36, no. 3 (2011–2012); Mark R. Shulman, “The Progressive Origins of National Security,” *Dickinson Law Review* 104 (2000).

agencies, the Military Intelligence Division (MID) and the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI). In those spaces, the understanding of the nature of armed conflicts and of their stakes and implications was profoundly altered by the very experience of conflict. In that context and based on specific experiences, an interpretation was arrived at and adopted that considerably extended the list of imperatives linked to the defense of territory and to external interests. It is there and then that a break was made with the classical conception of war by subverting, both theoretically and practically, four traditionally essential distinctions: war and peace, military and civilian, front and rear, and friend and foe. Our hypothesis is that by subverting these four distinctions, the intelligence services silently but concretely opened the way to a form of governmental rationality that was soon to be identified through the concept of “national security.”

War and Peace: A Perpetual Interval

Due to their functions, the first intelligence specialists started to live in “the shadow of war” earlier than their contemporaries, more directly than most political leaders and even more concretely than a large part of the military apparatus.¹¹ Like almost all military officers, they were long convinced of the profoundly conflictual nature of international relations. This conviction, which appeared in various forms, combining a jaded anthropology, a discourse on history marked by Darwinism, and a realist geopolitics, was part of military common sense: confrontation is an inherent part of the human condition, clashes punctuate the history of civilizations, power relations decide the fate of peoples, competition between nations is part of the nature of things, war is always a possible—if not probable—outcome, and only states prepared to go to war can hope to survive and prosper. For intelligence officers, as well as for the vast majority of military professionals, this horizon could not be transcended. Rather, it was a primary, eternal, and incontestable reality that recent events had confirmed on a previously unimaginable scale: whatever its causes, armed conflict is a “phase of international relations,” and the interests, security, indeed the existence of nations depend on states’

¹¹This is in reference to Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 15–44.

capacity for self-defense.¹²

However, intelligence officers distinguished themselves by a surplus of realism. As a consequence of their familiarity with international issues and their experience with clandestine activities, they were particularly well-placed at the conclusion of the First World War and in the immediately subsequent years to observe the persistence of international rivalries, the constancy of efforts underway to prepare for future clashes, and the continuation of clandestine machinations. There is nothing surprising, in this context, about the fact that intelligence officers did not indulge in post-war enthusiasm, nor did they allow themselves to be deceived by “the moral law,’ ‘the new understanding,’ ‘the conscience of mankind,’ ‘the new state of mind’, and all the many other new things heralded as having come about since the end of the World War (...).” In concrete terms, in the corridors of the MID and the ONI, no one believed in the establishment of any sort of collective security system or in the supposed stability guaranteed by the different treaties, and most were open about it. According to Lieutenant-Colonel Walter C. Sweeney, an already experienced intelligence officer, the idea that diplomacy and international law could eliminate or even simply thwart the logic of conflict rested on an erroneous premise. In his words, “because of the absence of a superpower, able to punish nations for their disregard of the rights of other nations or to protect nations against the encroachments of others, each nation is compelled to hold itself ready to fight for its rights and necessities if it expects to survive.”¹³ As for the supposed perpetual peace established and guaranteed by the international agreements concluded under the auspices of the major powers, these did not stand up to a clear examination, and other large-scale explosions of violence, whose causes are already at work, should not be excluded and should even be expected.¹⁴

¹²Walter Campbell Sweeney, *Military Intelligence: A New Weapon in War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1924), 59–62 and 80.

¹³Sweeney, *Military Intelligence*, 60–61. When W. C. Sweeney published this work, he had just spent most of the seven preceding years working for military intelligence, first in the Intelligence Division of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), then as head of the Censorship Section of MID, and finally as intelligence officer for the First Corps Area Headquarters (Boston) from 1921 to 1924.

¹⁴See Albert Parker Niblack, *Why Wars Come, or Forms of Government and Foreign Policies in Relation to the Cause of Wars* (Boston, MA: The Stratford Co., 1922), 21–22 and 165.

To the observation of irreversible instability was added one that underlay and motivated all analyses conducted in the military services, namely the view that the involvement of the United States in large-scale conflicts was from that point on always plausible and even likely in the medium to long term. This had long been known in military circles, particularly in naval circles influenced by Mahan's theses, and the possibility had been considered by planners for nearly two decades. Yet the First World War ended the debate for good. Given its international status, the scope and spread of its economic and commercial interests, and the strategic contraction caused by steady technological improvements, the United States could no longer reasonably expect to remove itself from the arena by withdrawing back to its continental territory and to a hemisphere formerly protected by wide oceans.¹⁵ Even the sole pursuit of its traditional—and justifiable—objectives of promoting open trade and self-determination was likely to cause tensions. In future, the United States would inevitably be forced to deal with other nations with the ambition to extend their control over territory, resources, and markets. These rivalries would inevitably degenerate into antagonisms, antagonisms into quarrels, and quarrels into conflicts, some of which would be settled by the use of force. Not only could the United States be led to decide to use arms to defend distant vital interests, but they were likely to be forced at any moment into a major conflict as a result of the calculations and decisions of belligerent powers.¹⁶ From this perspective, the United States was no longer the master of its destiny: there would be other wars, and direct threats against its national territory could not be ruled out. In other words, for America, insecurity was from then on a potentially permanent state of affairs.

“The practical lesson from this conception as applied to the external relations of the United States is: that the United States in times of peace must be prepared to transform

¹⁵On planning for major conflicts, see Steven T. Ross, *American War Plans, 1890–1939* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002) 23–88 and 98–101; on public debates, see John W. Chambers, “The American Debate over Modern War, 1870–1974,” in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871–1914*, ed. Manfred Boemeke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute/ New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁶Sweeney, *Military Intelligence*, 63–68 and 74–75.

itself at any time into a state of war.” This is a paradigm shift that implied two different things. First, it sounded the death knell for “free security.”¹⁷ From then on, it was essential to maintain and develop the country’s military means even in the absence of any immediate threat. The intelligence officers not surprisingly shared this conviction with their fellow staff members. The stormy debates that took place within the armed forces in the beginning of the 1920s over broad strategic, tactical, and organizational orientations never reached an underlying consensus on necessary investments in defense. Not only was this effort considered essential to the country’s defense, but it was also seen as the best way to deter possible enemies from risking direct confrontation. Consequently, any policy that did not take into account the possibility of a major conflict demonstrated disconcerting naivety, and any sustained reduction in defense capabilities bordered on culpable negligence. Every time they had the opportunity, military intelligence chiefs argued in favor of maintaining, then increasing the capabilities of the army and navy, and they continued to do so without respite during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁸

However, in the eyes of these officers, the contribution of military intelligence was much more direct and decisive than a mere demand for budgetary increases. To be constantly ready for war does not imply only the indefinite and indifferent accumulation of human and material means of defense, it was argued. Rather, it is necessary to be able to identify possible enemies, evaluate their forces, determine their strategy, and predict their actions, in other words, there is a need to anticipate, not only in the short term in order to be spared the disastrous consequences of a surprise attack but also in the long term to carry out sound organizational, strategic, or industrial change, and even in the middle term to estimate the appropriate level of mobilization in case of mounting tensions or the outbreak of hostilities. Any “modern army” must therefore have its own “information-gathering system,” i.e., an intelligence service that continually collects data for military purposes on “foreign nations which might become its enemies” and

¹⁷ The term “free security” originated with the historian C. Vann Woodward, cited in David F. Trask, “Military Imagination in the United States, 1815–1917,” in Boemeke, Chickering, and Förster, *Anticipating Total War*, 329.

¹⁸ Sweeney, *Military Intelligence*, 62, 72–73, and 81–82.

“that could be useful in times of war.” This is the usefulness of such organization: to be the eyes and ears of the armed forces, to accumulate and digest data in order to produce prospective analyses that will provide civilian and military decision-makers with relevant information.¹⁹ Two things therefore follow: first, since “potential enemies are legion and war is always possible, not to say inevitable,” this task should not be interrupted, all the more so, added the Director of Naval Intelligence, A. Niblack, in a letter to the Secretary of the Navy in January 1922, since personnel and equipment have been cut. It was thus even more crucial to be kept up to date on the technical and tactical developments of foreign powers and on actions undertaken against the country; secondly, since conflicts of all kinds can break out almost anywhere that could involve the United States or at least make a strategic evaluation of the situation necessary, the effort should have no limits as the “entire world is an operational theater.”²⁰

This is the root cause of this new institutionalized way of thinking, the first of the conceptual breaks called for by the intelligence services. The world is irreversibly unstable, an adversarial logic dominates international relations, and war is a possible, if not probable, outcome of rivalries and disagreements. The United States, which has become a first-order power, participates in this arena whether it wishes it or not, which means that peace is inevitably transitory, a major conflict is always possible, and military insecurity will henceforth be permanent. The armed forces must therefore

¹⁹The terms here cited are drawn from: Sweeney, *Military Intelligence*, 2–3, 62, and 84–85; Colonel Charles H. Mason, “The Doctrine and Practice of General Staff Intelligence” (lecture delivered at the General Staff College, Washington, DC, October 23, 1919). Military Historical Institute, LeRoy W. Yarborough Papers, Box 2 (hereafter the “Yarborough Papers”). To secure attention, intelligence service officials used and abused metaphors of blindness and deafness. See, for example: Marlborough Churchill, “MID and How it Works,” no date (ca. 1921), Yarborough Papers, Box 2; Commander Claude B. Mayo, US Navy, “Naval Intelligence,” lecture delivered at the Army War College, September 25, 1924, Military Historical Institute, Army War College Lectures, U413 Q7 (hereafter the “AWC Lectures”).

²⁰Niblack to SecNav via DNI, January 5, 1922, 996/3409, RG 38 E 78, ONI, Confidential “Suspect” Files, 1913–1924, Box 8; Lecture by Brigadier General M. Churchill, G.S., September 4, 1919, Military Intelligence Division, War Department, General Staff; C. H. Mason, “Doctrine and Practice,” Yarborough Papers; Lecture by Colonel Stanley H. Ford, Military Intelligence Division, War Department General Staff, January 6, 1928, AWC Lectures.

constantly anticipate these potential conflicts and be adequately prepared, and, for that reason, continually collect, accumulate, and interpret data to allow an informed analysis of situations with which the country may be—or will likely soon be—confronted. Eyes must remain open and ears alert. In military intelligence, the clear separation between *war and peace* is largely abolished, and the intelligence services are—or at least claim to be—functionally settled into a state of perpetual (inter)war.

Military and Civilian and Modern Warfare

In the meantime, the great lesson of the First World War is that future wars would no longer look like past conflicts. “Modern warfare,” writes Lieutenant-Colonel Walter Sweeney, “has developed [the concept of] the ‘*nation in arms*’ in every sense of the term.”

Heretofore war has been fought by armies rather than by nations. . . . Even in a comparatively recent time, armies have been off in the theater of operations, fighting and carrying on their campaigns, while the mass of their people were at home, pursuing their ordinary vocations, frequently being only casually interested in the military operations. . . . Modern war has changed all that. . . , because of the great development in means of transportation and the scientific improvements in the methods of communication. These factors make it possible to utilize the entire military resources of the nation for the prosecution of the war, and, because it is possible, it becomes necessary if success is to be gained.²¹

The idea was not new. It had even been the subject of public debates before the war.²² And even if the influence of the strategic literature was more limited and belated among American officers than among their European peers, the most erudite among them, those who had received a theoretical military education (such as Walter C. Sweeney), were aware of much of what a number of works, particularly German ones that followed Clausewitz, had long taught on the subject.²³ However, what the passage from book

²¹Sweeney, *Military Intelligence*, 61 and 68–69 (my emphasis).

²²Chambers, “American Debate over Modern War.”

²³Walter C. Sweeney is in some way a product of the military education that rapidly developed during the First

knowledge to concrete; direct, prolonged experience of the various facets of a major conflict can change should not be neglected, particularly in the case of officers who had up to this point been involved in short interventions against minor opponents only. For the first time, the US armed forces had experienced a large-scale confrontation that mobilized, beyond the professionals in uniform, the whole of society, a “total war” that, it was well understood, was in part fought far from the front, in the factories, in local communities, and in people’s minds.²⁴ Without doubt, understanding the nature and implications of conflicts had profoundly changed.

As officers working in the intelligence services understood it, there was a before and an after, and it was during these few months that a real awareness was achieved of what the term “modern warfare” meant, particularly in its non-military aspects. “Before the world war,” confided the head of naval intelligence, Captain Luke McNamee, “we knew in a vague way what Clausewitz taught, that war was no longer a contest between armies and navies, but a conflict between nations in arms where every national resource was mobilized in one of the four great arms of service, namely, military, economic, political, and psychologic.” Yet the concept was not fully understood, and it was fortunate, he noted, that the United States had benefited from a little time and had only entered the

World War, being a graduate of the Army School of the Line (1912), the Army Staff College (1913), and the Army War College (1920). On these questions, see Trask, “Military Imagination in the United States, 1815–1917; Richard D. Challener, *Admirals, Generals, and American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 12–45; Russell F. Weigley, *History of the US Army* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 272–298 and 314–341. On the influence of Clausewitz, see Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), particularly 50–55, 116–121, and 152–176. Already before 1914, army planners knew how to take into account mobilization capabilities and material and logistical constraints and hence questions of production, access to resources, and transportation. See Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The US Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897–1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 27–28.

²⁴What interests us here of course is the perception of the actors. Thus, we will not go into the debate over the use of the concept of “total war” in the historical literature. On this point, see: Roger Chickering, “Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept,” in Boemeke, Chickering, and Förster, *Anticipating Total War*. On the changes in perspective at the highest level, see: Russell F. Weigley, “Strategy and Total War in the United States,” in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

conflict once the strategic situation had been stabilized by the allies. There were similar sentiments at MID: the U.S. would no longer be caught off guard; wars were no longer a matter of campaigns and battles, strategies and tactics, and personnel and equipment, but had as much to do with systems of government and political choices, economic and productive capacities, and the mobilization of the masses; and the inevitable conflicts will no longer occur only at armed fronts but at least as much—if not more—in the rear, on “home fronts.”²⁵

It is clear that this set of four factors—military, political, economic, and psychological—is an almost obligatory step, a kind of inevitable analytical repertoire of any analysis of modern warfare by military and naval intelligence officers. They began by recalling that “military resources,” i.e., the number of men, their training, their organization, and the quantity and quality of their equipment, continued to play a crucial role since, in cases of direct confrontation, the outcome would still ultimately be decided at the front. However, this military factor was correlated with—and to a certain extent subordinated to—a group of non-military elements themselves closely linked to one another. Clearly, the military capacity of a state was determined by the economy in a broad sense, since a country could prepare for war and sustain the necessary effort of a modern conflict only to the extent it was capable of procuring and delivering essential military supplies and hence of having appropriate production capacities, an available labor force, essential raw materials, sufficient agricultural production, and adequate transportation and communication infrastructures—and it was able to dedicate all of this at least in part to its armed forces without causing major instability. These natural, material, and human resources, provided they are “converted into a form immediately usable for war,” were the foundation of military power—or at least the “maximum strength” of the armed forces. The “effective strength” however, was constrained by two sets of additional factors. First, it was necessary to take into account a number of “political elements”, external—geographic position, relations with allied, neighboring, and neutral nations—and above all internal:

²⁵“Naval Intelligence: A Consideration of Some Special Features,” lecture by Captain Luke McNamee, Naval War College, September 7, 1922, 429 RG 80, GB, Subject File, 1900–1947, Box 150–151. See also similar remarks by Churchill, “MID and How it Works.”

In the former days, when only a part of the military resources of a nation was necessary for the prosecution of military operations, a war could be carried on by the rulers regardless whether or not it was supported by the whole nation. Today, since it is requisite that a nation give up everything else and devote all its energies to winning the war, the war must be one for which the people will fight.

The degree of popular support for the conflict but also, among other things, the type of government, its legitimacy, and its ability to maintain internal stability hence clearly affected its effective power of military and economic mobilization. It was therefore necessary to correctly assess the “psychological” components likely to affect the actions and reactions of the population (hence that all of the preceding elements), which include, among other things, the population’s “temperament,” the existence of racial conflicts, or the persistence of traditional friendships and enmities.²⁶

Next step: the integration of these factors inevitably modified the scope of the strategic analysis, and it was therefore imperative that past habits be jettisoned in favor of taking into account a wider and necessarily more complex reality around factors that “are so interlocked,” argued Captain Luke McNamee, “that no sound war plan can be devised without careful estimate of all information bearing on each [of them].”²⁷ In the mind of an “intellectual in uniform” such as Colonel Charles H. Mason, the analysis must become more systematic. In August 1919, he argues that four dimensions “control international affairs through peaceful competition or armed conflict, namely military, economic, political, and psychological actions.” The problem is simple: war is won or lost on these four dimensions. When we get down to determining a given strategic situation, it is thus necessary to be able to evaluate the situation of various actors in these different areas. Once these evaluations are completed, it is possible to produce a proper strategic analysis, that is, to consider them in light of four parameters: 1) the combination of these factors; 2) the determination of the United States to act; 3) the determination of the foreign power to do the same; and 4) the “hypothesis of life on

²⁶Sweeney, *Military Intelligence*, 69–74.

²⁷Luke McNamee, “Naval Intelligence,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (1924), 1448.

which individuals and nations predicate action, such as fate, providence, chance, destiny, or the like.” Finally, “the application of these variables to the four factors enumerated produces the solution of the strategic equation at each moment”, and it is on this comprehensive analysis, this formalized “equation,” that decision-makers will be able to base their diplomatic and military decisions²⁸.

From this observation, intelligence professionals drew the logical consequence: to “know, understand, and predict the capacities and intentions of potential belligerents,” it is necessary to assemble a maximum of relevant data beyond the strict military domain.²⁹ To put it simply, counting divisions and ships, assessing the range of canons and the tonnage of the enemy’s fleet is no longer enough; it is important, but not sufficient. “Recognizing these truths,” wrote Marlborough Churchill, “the Military Intelligence Division has adopted the maxim that the situation in any given country is not comprehensively understood unless all four factors—military, political, economic, and psychological—are understood.”³⁰

This was not only a statement of principle. Within MID in particular, the foreign intelligence section (MI-2) was organized with this in mind from the beginning: its personnel was divided into three, then soon after into four sub-sections, each devoted to one of the above-mentioned strategic factors, and subdivided in turn into large geographical areas. At the end of the war, despite the many problems caused by this thematic division, the organizational and intellectual influence of the model was reinforced. Not only did the head of the agency, Colonel C. H. Mason, confirm this division of labor in the summer of 1919, reiterating that each entity was called upon to contribute to the design and daily updating of the unit’s main outputs based on its specialty, but he also required the entire military intelligence organization to use a

²⁸ C. H. Mason, “Doctrine and Practice,” Yarborough Papers; Memorandum no. 137, “Strategic Index,” August 14, 1919, 10560, RG 165 E 65, MID, Security-Classified Correspondence (hereafter “MID, Security-Classified Correspondence”), Box 3515.

²⁹ Ford, “The Military Intelligence Division.” See also: McNamee, “Naval Intelligence,” RG 80, Subject Files.

³⁰ Churchill, “MID and How It Works.”

“strategic index” constructed around the same conception and the same vocabulary.³¹

This index deserves a closer look. It classifies the data collected—or to be collected—around the four central strategic factors, each further broken down into a tree diagram consisting of successive sub-topics leading to no fewer than one hundred and twenty-one numbered items (or four hundred and eighty-four in total):

1. The treatment of the *combat factor* is the most standard: three sub-topics—military strength, naval strength, and geographic location—make it possible to evaluate the strictly military potential of the country in question, i.e., the structure, equipment, and effectiveness of its armed forces as well as the advantages and disadvantages of its spatial situation, topography, and even its climate.
2. The *economic* area is considered in great detail: resources, including raw, animal, and energy material, industrial production capacities, and food products; distribution, i.e., transportation equipment, communication infrastructures, and financing possibilities (gold reserves, the credit situation, even the structure of the banking system); human data (“humanity”) studied in quantitative terms—combat, productive, and non-productive personnel—as well as in qualitative terms—health, physical abilities, and the effectiveness of labor.
3. As regards *political* information, there are three distinct areas. “Interests” (1), which include the individual interests of those in power, their entourage, and eminent personalities; the interests of the main political groups, parties, and organizations; that of “castes” (civil, military, and religious) and “classes” (social, commercial, and labor); and constituted

³¹Memorandum no. 142, August 22, 1919, MID, Security-Classified Correspondence, Box 3515. On the organization of MI-2 during the war, see: Bruce Bidwell, *History of the Military Intelligence Division, Department of the Army General Staff, 1775–1941* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1986), 150–159.

interests such as business circles. The “sociological” element (2) is a more ambiguous term that refers to the influence of important ideological trends broken down into “individualist” orientations (anarchism, egotism, and moralism) and “collectivist” orientations (sovereignism, liberalism, and socialism). Lastly, the “ethnic” parameter (3), which encompasses racial aspects—represented racial types, their histories, intellectual qualities, physical characteristics, and morals—and cultural aspects—language(s), custom(s), and religion(s)—as well as political aspirations, the nature of distribution (in society, the labor force, and the armed forces), and the formation of political or labor organizations for the various segments.

4. The fourth and final group organizes types of information into a significantly more vague classification that makes possible an approach to the *psychological* characteristics of nations. This includes the degree of intelligence (individual, racial, and national), the impact of the environment and level of education, the spiritual, sensual, and scientific reference points affecting the relation to truth, superstition, and error, and the religious and emotional dimensions of the dominant modes of perceiving phenomena and events.

This, according to C. H. Mason, is the “ideal [of knowledge] which perhaps can never be realized, but toward which the service should always strive.”³²

This document, which, we repeat, is not a speculative exercise but a working tool to be used by the entire Division in standardizing the collection, treatment, and classification of information and facilitating their synthesis, shows the profound influence of this multi-factor conception and the degree of refinement the army intelligence service thought it necessary to develop. Above all, it shows the intention to break with a strictly military approach and raise civilian factors, at least formally, to an equivalent status in the intelligence service’s concerns. In terms of intelligence, this approach is the result of

³²Memorandum no. 137, “Strategic Index,” MID, Security-Classified Correspondence.

the analysis then undertaken on the implications of modern warfare: if war is total in the sense that it mobilizes all of the resources, means, and energies of nations, then intelligence must be conceptualized as a program of *total knowledge* of potential enemies. A thorough investigation of nations, societies, and peoples must therefore be carried out to determine the potential—and, in case of war, the possibilities of mobilization and resistance—of enemy governments, economies, and populations.

In practice, these ambitions were quickly scaled down and, lacking means, MID gave up using this index. Yet the main point remains in that this expanded conception of intelligence took root in the services, which continued to be inspired by it. For MID, during the next two decades, intelligence remained “the resultant product of a scientific and systematic collection and evaluation of information on Geographic, Political, Economic, Psychological, and Military factors of any given country for the purpose of arriving at a definite conception of its military capacity and intentions.”³³ As for the Office of Naval Intelligence, whereas there was no trace of such an advanced formalization of the intelligence problem, it adopted and retained a similar definition: the Navy Department Intelligence, states the ONI manual of 1933, is “the product of a scientific and systematic collection and evaluation of information on the Political, Economic, Social, and Psychological, Military, Air, and Naval Forces; and the geographic situation of a specified nation, for the purpose of arriving at a definite conception of its naval strength and efforts, and an estimate of the initial intentions of its naval forces in case of war.”³⁴

In sum, future armed confrontations—which are possible, if not probable, indeed inevitable in the more or less long term—will take the form of modern warfare, that is, not only a confrontation between armed forces on battlefields but more broadly a clash between nations, peoples, and societies by means of military and non-military instruments. Anticipation and preparation can therefore be based only on overall

³³Definition by Ford, “The Military Intelligence Division.” A comment on the tasks of the intelligence branch on the eve of Pearl Harbor: Bidwell, *History of the Military Intelligence Division*, 263.

³⁴ONI–19, ONI Intelligence Manual, 1933, § 2004–2005 (cited in Wyman H. Packard, *A Century of Naval Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1996), 144).

intelligence of international issues, and particularly of the situation, capacities, and intentions of possible enemies, taking into account beyond the strictly military aspects a host of political, economic, social, and psychological factors that determine the conduct and capabilities of nations. The inquisitiveness of the military must therefore be practiced beyond its initial boundaries, the objective being to accumulate the maximum amount of military and non-military data in order to be in a position to gauge potential enemies, predict their initiatives, and plan appropriate responses. Thus, within the intelligence services, a second traditional conceptual wall dividing *military and civilian* was knocked down.

Internal and External: Self-Knowledge

“The gathering of military intelligence requires investigation in practically every field,” argues Stanley H. Ford in 1928, adding immediately “and in every country.”³⁵ Every country in the world? Yes, and we can take the head of military intelligence at his word. All countries must be covered, including his own, because it is possible to evaluate the capacities and intentions of potential enemies only in a relative manner by relating the enemy’s situation to one’s own. Diplomatic and strategic orientations, preparations, logistical, and industrial decisions, and later, tactical choices in the conduct of military operations depend as much on the correct assessment of one’s own strengths and weaknesses as on knowledge of those of rivals. The change, which is inevitable if we follow this reasoning, is fundamental in that it is one’s own country that must now be systematically and strategically evaluated. That is, its armed forces, government, resources, productive apparatus, and population should be understood as elements of its equation, the ultimate objective being always the possibility of involvement in a modern war and, in the meantime, the need to prepare for it. Although it cannot be said that the idea is truly new, what changes is the systematic character of the focus, its importance in the line of reasoning pursued and promoted by the services, and the conclusions drawn concerning intelligence.

³⁵Ford, “The Military Intelligence Division.”

Take, for example, the table devoted to the strategic situation of the United States published in the classified *Monthly Information Bulletin* of the Office of Naval Intelligence in December 1923³⁶. The analyst is highly confident about US fundamentals. From a strictly military point of view, the situation is more than satisfactory. With a population of one hundred and eleven million (including nearly one hundred million whites, eleven million blacks, and six hundred and seventy-five thousand “others”), the country displays a demographic profile that puts it in an undeniably favorable position. That is, it can count on a mobilizable mass of an estimated eight million individuals, a figure that could even be raised to more than sixteen million in a short period of time. The army and the navy are in a sound situation, even if trained personnel is clearly insufficient and the limits imposed by international naval agreements are unfavorable to the United States in the medium term.

From the economic point of view, the situation is close to excellent. In most cases, strategic raw material resources are enough to ensuring self-sufficiency: the country contains plenty of minerals; petroleum reserves cover needs especially as almost exclusive access to Mexican fields can be guaranteed if needed; rubber, wool, and leather are plentiful; and there is a surplus of agricultural products except for sugar, coffee, and tea. The level and status of the infrastructure is adequate. Transport systems are efficient, in particular the rail network, and the telegraph, telephone, and radio communication systems are sound. In case of a large-scale conflict, the merchant marine can maintain the continuity of trade and if necessary participate in the transportation of troops and actively support the Navy. The overall industrial capacity of the United States is also satisfactory, even if ammunition stocks are too low in the short term and twelve to eighteen months will be necessary to put industry effectively at the service of war production. As for the financial situation, it is sound since the United States is a creditor nation and the budget is balanced. As a result, “finance will not be a limiting factor in war effort.”

One issue is of particular concern for the author though: the fact that the productive

³⁶ “Estimate of the Economic Situation, October 1923,” *Monthly Information Bulletin*, Office of Naval Intelligence, December 1923 (RG 38 E 141, ONI, Security-Classified Publications of ONI, 1882–1954, Box 12–18)

capacity of the nation also depends on the civilian population, which therefore is an essential element of the economic factor.

A modern warfare is not simply a conflict between armies and navies; it is rather a titanic struggle between rival economic organizations in which the mobilization of a nation's industries is of equal importance with the mobilization of its fighting forces. The basis of the industrial structure of a country begins with man power in the production of raw materials and ends with man power in the manufacture of finished products. Because of its relation to industry, therefore, is one of the fundamental sinews of war.

This is all the more true since the mission of the nation is not limited to providing for the needs of the armed forces. The adequate production of military equipment within the time limit imposed by the enemy is the key factor, the author argues, but the stability of the rear and the general situation of the economy are of equally high importance. It is also crucial to produce the essentials in order to support that part of the nation that is not serving under the flag and maintain the economic balance in order to permit reconstruction after the war. In the case of the United States, the author reassures us, the quantity of "raw man power is not a limiting factor in any foreseeable defensive war." However, recent experience has shown numerous difficulties resulting from a lack of organization in the initial period, the lack of coordination between the various contributing institutions, and the redundancy of their dispersed efforts. In the future, the government will have to be more clearly interventionist.³⁷

This type of analysis is neither isolated nor surprising, which reflects—or rather extends—the analyses being undertaken at the time of economic and industrial mobilization, a subject that occupied a very important place in debates over preparing for a new conflict at the beginning of the 1920s. Numerous civilian and military officials were convinced that modern warfare makes industrial production—and the economy in general—a key element of the success of nations, and that it makes the planned, managed, and controlled mobilization of resources the inescapable solution. Within the

³⁷"Estimate of the Economic Situation, October 1923".

armed forces, the question became a problem in itself and was the subject of studies by various subdivisions of the General Staff, notably by the Army War College, which even devoted courses to it. The National Defense Act of 1920 especially entrusted the planning of the supply of military equipment and, more ambiguously, the planning of economic and industrial mobilization as a whole to a civilian official, namely the Assistant Secretary of Defense. Despite resistance and slow implementation, this initiative led at the beginning of the 1930s to the drafting of Industrial Mobilization Plans that pushed the logic of centralization and control much further. However, some questions, including those related to the civilian labor force, were addressed, albeit with great caution, a consequence of the public character of documents that might support the critiques of isolationist, pacifist, and radical currents, and provoke a stronger stance by labor unions.³⁸

While the economic question was dominant, another issue concerned the General Staff, the Department's planners, and in particular the intelligence services almost as much: the morale of the population. This "psychological factor", to use the term presented earlier, was considered of great importance. The smooth, effective, and sustained mobilization of the other key factors depended on the support of the population to the principle of war, the consent to the collective and individual effort it presupposed, and the acceptance of the difficulties and hardships that would result. Conversely, discontent, dissent, and opposition at all levels would hinder, slow down, or even block the mobilization of the human and material means of the nation. The author of the document published by the *Bulletin* of the ONI in December 1923 did not neglect this

³⁸On questions of mobilization during and after the First World War, we refer to the work of Paul A.C. Koistinen, including "The 'Military-Industrial Complex' in Historical Perspective: World War I," *The Business History Review* 41, no. 4 (1967); "The 'Military-Industrial Complex' in Historical Perspective: The Interwar Years," *The Journal of American History* 56, no. 4 (1970); *Mobilizing for Modern War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1865–1919* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 288–298; *Planning War, Pursuing Peace: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1920–1939* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 1–71. See also: Elisabeth Glaser, "Better Late than Never: The American Economic War Effort, 1917–1918," in Chickering and Förster, *Great War, Total War*; Harry B. Yoshpe, "Economic Mobilization Planning Between the Two World Wars, Part I," *Military Affairs* 15 (1951); Harry B. Yoshpe, "Economic Mobilization Planning Between the Two World Wars, Part II," *Military Affairs* 16 (1952).

question any more than would the Department's planners seven years later when they initiated their first industrial mobilization plan by emphasizing the importance of public support for such plans. However, the latter remained evasive concerning what measures to adopt and emphasized their preference for initiatives that would favor voluntary cooperation while referring to the need to shape public opinion by presenting appropriate information." Clearly, they sought to avoid polemics that would trigger any suspicion that this was simply a state propaganda effort. Yet the "psychological factor" was a discreet concern of the military throughout the decade, before suddenly gaining visibility on the eve of the Second World War.³⁹

What is important here is that the intelligence services shared concerns linked to the mobilization, management, and control of the internal front during a hypothetical future conflict. In fact, they had long drawn the necessary conclusions and, under the veil of secrecy, expressed them far less cautiously. From the late 1910s, their position was clear: the role of the authorities was to ensure the proper mobilization of the four dimensions discussed above, if need be by force, and more specifically to coordinate strictly military considerations with the three key non-military strategic factors, namely the effective management of internal affairs, the proper functioning of the economy, and the maintenance of the population's morale. It was understood that the military, and especially the intelligence services, were probably—and unsurprisingly—best placed to determine the internal requirements that might arise from an open conflict and then serve as the interface between the various participants.⁴⁰ As a superior officer of the MID summarized the position in October 1919,

³⁹"Estimate of the Economic Situation, October 1923." On public sensitivity to the question of state propaganda, see: J. Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22–52; J. Michael Sproule, "Social Responses to Twentieth-Century Propaganda," in *Propaganda: A Pluralistic Perspective*, ed. Ted J. Smith (New York: Praeger, 1989). On the question of civilian population morale, see: Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 48–81.

⁴⁰C. H. Mason, "Doctrine and Practice," Yarborough Papers. See also: Colonel Oliver Edwards, "The Military Intelligence Division," lecture delivered at the General Staff College, September 2, 1920; "Intelligence Course no. 1," Military History Institute, UB 253, E 26 (1920) 70231.

The combat weapon is applied by the army directly; the economic, political, and psychologic weapons being applied by the civil departments of the government concerned in liaison with the Intelligence Division, which is the portion of the General Staff charged with coordinating of these civilian agencies with the military objective so that their objectives will synchronize with the combat objective and vice-versa.⁴¹

While waiting for the moment of open confrontation to arise and of effective mobilization of the productive system and the population, the eyes and ears of the armed forces could not remain blind and deaf to the situation in their own country. There again, the conclusion is almost self-evident: if the defense of the United States and of its international interests depends on a series of internal elements—both military and non-military—, then the armed forces must monitor them. It is therefore rational—indeed essential—to be informed and to collect and constantly update the maximum amount of data so as to ascertain the relative strategic situation of the United States, and thus to consider one’s own country in the same way that one considers other nations, to approach the relative strategic situation of the United States in the same way, posing the same questions, even using the interpretative framework established for foreign powers. This is exactly what it was proposed MID do in the still favorable context of the immediate post-war period. In the memorandum that announced the generalized use of the strategic index mentioned above, Colonel C.H. Mason took pains to note that the index “is also useful in reporting on conditions in our own country, indicating as it does the nature and scope of the “positive” information of the United States desired by the Military Intelligence Division.”⁴² We know what became of this index. But even if its general use never came to fruition, its very existence signaled the establishment of a logical continuum that, in the eyes of intelligence service officials, would justify the interference of the two intelligence services in the country’s internal affairs throughout the inter-war period.

⁴¹C. H. Mason, “Doctrine and Practice,” Yarborough Papers.

⁴²In the list of targeted countries, the United States appears between Ukraine and Uruguay. Memorandum no. 137, “Strategic Index.”

Let us now summarize this step: because it is necessary to be aware of the relative strategic situation at any moment and because analysis, anticipation, planning, and mobilization can only be based on detailed and continually updated knowledge of all four dimensions discussed above, it is necessary to be closely interested in all of the military and non-military factors that constitute the “effective strength” of the country. Investigation and monitoring of the internal situation are the natural continuation, the essential corollary of external intelligence, its necessary reciprocal or, alternatively and to deliberately use the terminology of the intelligence services, its photographic “negative”. In fact, “negative intelligence”—as it was still called in the first months of the post-war period before this far from inspired name prompted a change of terminology—and “positive intelligence,” that is, external intelligence, are the two sides of the same project for truly total knowledge, including of one’s own territory and population. This led to the third conceptual break: within the intelligence services, the traditional demarcation between front and rear and more fundamentally between *internal and external* lost most of its meaning.

Friend and Foe: The Hostile Element

Everything that could affect in one way or another the American political, economic, social, or psychological situation—and thus undermine the strength of the domestic front in case of a major conflict—was from now on of possible military interest. Among the factors that could affect these strategic dimensions, there was one in particular to which the personnel of the intelligence services were particularly sensitive, that occupied an important place in their thinking about modern warfare, and that they considered more directly and more exclusively relevant to their domain of competence: internal threats. This was the last great lesson of the First World War, but obviously one of the most important for intelligence service officials. The “maximum strength” of the United States rested on the fundamental characteristics of the American nation; and its “effective strength” was certainly a function of the quality of the preparatory measures and the most immediate decisions of the public authorities. However, the four military and non-military dimensions were and could be—tomorrow just as they undoubtedly

already were—affected by the actions of individuals, of more or less organized groups, and of more or less extensive networks likely to work more or less directly, willingly, and concretely in the interest of potential or avowed enemies of the nation. Any serious evaluation of the defense capacities of the country had to take these domestic risks into account, and no planning effort for future conflicts should ignore the presence in the country, within the population, of these “hostile elements.”

In the immediate post-war period, the idea of the internal front took on a much less metaphorical meaning than usual in the thinking, speaking, and writing of intelligence officers. For them, the national territory should in a sense be considered a real theater of operations, a space where the enemy is actually faced, where real battles occur, and where the war is decided, or at least a type of battle and a part of the war. This internal front was their great concern during the several months of hostilities. Before the return to normality and a number of events prompted them to be more prudent, these officials as well as their supervisors did not hesitate to place in the forefront, next to the “informational” and “operational” aspects, the “negative or protective” side of intelligence service activity. Thus, the influential head of the Intelligence Branch, C. H. Mason, asserted that:

During the war, the immediate and imperative need was for the last mentioned of the three activities of intelligence, i.e., negative intelligence. This was due to the fact that the enemy hoped for much from the use of the three non-military weapons: the political, the economic, and the psychologic. They had good grounds for such hope. And it was within the borders of our own country that we had to meet it, alone, unassisted by our Allies as we were in the field of positive intelligence work. So the great need was for the immediate creation and functioning of a competent service to combat the enemy’s war within our borders. So it was done, and effectively done.⁴³

In substance, intelligence officials argued that many, including especially some professionals in uniform, neglected this facet of the conflict. It was hidden by the din of

⁴³Mason, “Doctrine and Practice.”

the classic confrontation because it did not occur in broad daylight, and could not be brought up without causing a degree of discomfort since it was difficult to reconcile with ethical canons and military honor. Yet it is this stubborn, bitter fight that the intelligence services first of all and above all undertook, which not only involved legitimate defense but also an important, vital, and decisive mission, namely the direct continuation of the external confrontation, when the enemy threatened to cause the country to falter from the inside, a mission that was carried out successfully, as confirmed over ten years later by a Director of military intelligence:

The war was not fought by the armed forces alone; there were political, economic, and psychological forces also engaged. In order to defeat the enemy, it was essential to understand fully the strength of each of these forces in enemy, allied, and neutral countries. On the other hand, it was equally necessary that we through every possible safeguard about our own preparations for war, and [that we] thwart and forestall enemy activities which tended in any way to lower our morale, damage our industries, or debauch our soldiers. We had to frustrate the foe within as well as to defeat the enemy without.⁴⁴

A double extension of the description of these internal threats was thus carried out. The first extension is obviously diachronic: it should not be assumed that the armistice put an end to this underground confrontation, when the secret war was precisely characterized by its pursuit in times of peace as a clandestine means of international competition by the great powers and, if required, as a preparatory maneuver to a future open conflict. As C. H. Mason comments:

In all things we do [. . .], in collecting information and in applying the economic, political, psychologic, and combat weapons to foreign countries, both in peace and war, just so are those countries acting against us in greater or less degree. As it is incumbent upon the fencer to guard and parry, so it is incumbent upon our government to parry the thrusts of the enemy, these thrusts being delivered in time of peace by its Intelligence Service, who in turn is parrying the thrusts of our Intelligence Service. To nullify his efforts, Intelligence must provide the

⁴⁴Ford, "The Military Intelligence Division."

mechanism for protecting us against his activities. This is in time of peace. In time of war, is added the military factor of actual combat, and it then becomes incumbent upon the Negative Branch to protect the nation not only against the enemy's normal peace time propaganda, economic competition, and political aggressions, but also from its war efforts of creating dissension and revolution, of overthrowing our political government, of attacking our industries and transportation systems by sabotage, and our military forces through propaganda, political unrest, limitation of armament and equipment, etc.⁴⁵

If a conflict breaks out, it will be necessary to control, apprehend, and repress. In the meantime, the main precaution consists in maintaining an active vigilance capable of thwarting enemy maneuvers, what is called in the broad sense "counter-espionage," to which can be added perhaps the planning of measures that need to be taken in case of an international crisis or declaration of war.

Yet aside from actual enemy agents—that is, official functionaries or mercenaries under contract, who are the most dangerous incarnations of the domestic threat and the most acceptable faces of the internal enemy—, sheltered by the opaque veil that covers their activities, in documents duly and prudently classified, before a restricted and selected public, intelligence specialists pointed the finger above all at other sources of threats, somewhat less obvious, certainly less legitimate, and incomparably more numerous. The argument here is the simplest and based on recent experience. During the First World War, the intelligence services were not content to track hypothetical spies. Almost from the beginning, they extended their curiosity to a whole range of individuals, groups, and segments of the population they considered worked in the interest of the enemy, perhaps not directly and willingly but at least actively. From the hunt for foreign agents, followed by the search for "enemy sympathizers," the next step was the surveillance of hostile—or potentially hostile—elements, namely citizens or foreigners without any connection to the belligerents but who, because of their activities, behavior, or expression of their opinions, interfere—or could interfere—with the smooth operation of the armed forces, the execution of military contracts (and more generally, the maintenance of strategic production), and the population's support for the war effort. As

⁴⁵Mason, "Doctrine and Practice."

a result, tens of thousands of union members and radical activists, pacifists, blacks, and others found themselves at one moment or another in the crosshairs of the two services.⁴⁶

What is important here is that the armistice changed nothing: “In this matter,” a local military intelligence official laconically summarized, “there is no fundamental distinction between war and peace.”⁴⁷ The analysis is clear: these same individuals, groups, and segments of the population are always likely to weaken—and even, in a crisis situation, threaten—the integrity of the armed forces, a sound economy, stability, social order, and even the existence of the government, in other words: the military and non-military foundations of national defense. Consequently, in the event of a potential conflict, these “hostile or potentially hostile elements” must be subject to military surveillance, which includes:

[The] individuals and organizations who advocate the overthrow by violence of the government of the United States; those engaged in activities which may lead to the intervention of military forces; those who may in time of war become allies within of our borders of enemies of the United States; and those who seek to subvert the loyalty of the military establishment are potential hostiles of the United States government. Such individuals and organizations are subjects for the observation of Military Intelligence.⁴⁸

From the beginning of the 1920s, the essential elements of a rationale justifying the substantive extension of the definition of internal threat were set out. Despite the scandals and restrictive directives, the decline in the number of staff, budgetary

⁴⁶On this aspect, consult: Joan M. Jensen, *Army Surveillance in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); Roy Talbert, *Negative Intelligence and the American Left, 1917–1941* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1991).

⁴⁷Commandant T. K. Spencer (1st region, Boston) ACos, G2 (Boston) to DMI, October 29, 1920, 271-A-9 (6), MID, Security-Classified Correspondence, Box 356. On opinions within the ONI, see, for example, “Memorandum on the Mobilization of ONI in the Event of National Emergency,” 21036-2344(A), s. d. (ca. spring 1919), RG 38 E78 ONI, Confidential “Suspect” Files, Box 11.

⁴⁸Instructions approved by chief of staff C. Peyton, “March 18, 1921. Provisional Instructions for the Operations of the MIS in Corps Area and Departments,” March 18, 1921, 271-A-9 (7), MID, Security-Classified Correspondence, Box 356. However, these instructions were canceled a few weeks later by his successor.

constraints, official denials, and internal resistance, the intelligence services continued to be interested in the internal sphere, first and above all because they never abandoned the idea that surveillance of the population is a response to a military problem and is therefore entirely legitimate. Ten years after the end of the war, when the serious economic crisis created favorable conditions, exactly the same rationale was the leading argument in the effort to persuade the authorities to authorize the resumption of systematic surveillance of radical elements:

This is a purely normal military function, the exercise of which by the Department of War would in no way conflict with the civil functions properly performed by other executive departments [. . .]. Because in the preparation of a war plan all information concerning a potential enemy is essential to the proper estimate of his war-making powers, it is submitted that potential enemy sympathizers are a factor requiring consideration in this connection. It is for this purpose that the Department of War should keep advised of the general radical situation in the United States in order that it may at all times be in a position to determine with a fair degree of accuracy the potential value or menace to our plans occasioned by the individuals and groups engaged in radical activities.⁴⁹

This argument supported the secret remobilization of military means for internal surveillance at the beginning of the 1930s⁵⁰, as well as their internal activities throughout the following decade, and was considered worth taking to the highest level. This domestic mission of the intelligence services even seems to be implicitly confirmed when, on the eve of a new world conflict, Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the establishment of an internal security triumvirate consisting of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Military Intelligence Division, and the Office of Naval Intelligence.⁵¹

The fourth and final conceptual break introduced by the intelligence services in

⁴⁹“Memo for the ACoS,” G2, December 22, 1930, 271-A-9 (136), MID, Security-Classified Correspondence, Box 356.

⁵⁰See, for example: “Estimate of the General Subversive Situation within the United States,” June 2, 1931, 271-A-9a-9 (138), MID 1, Box 356. See also the remarks of the Secretary of War in “Memorandum for the Adjutant General,” September 10, 1937, 271-A-9 (211), MID, Security-Classified Correspondence, Box 357.

⁵¹Bidwell, *History of the Military Intelligence Division*, 396.

apprehending the issue of national defense can be summarized as follows: because the ability of the country to defend itself depends on the mobilization, effectiveness, and resistance of military and non-military factors that in turn depend on the entire population; because potential enemies can seek—undoubtedly are already seeking and inevitably will seek—to weaken these strategic foundations from the inside, especially because they could—undoubtedly already can and inevitably will be able to—benefit from the behavior of elements actively promoting their interest; and because in view of a possible conflict all of this should be anticipated; it is imperative that the means for counter-espionage and above all for targeted surveillance of possibly subversive segments of the civilian population be maintained. In other words, to control the uncertainty of modern warfare and to be able to ensure the country's defense, it is necessary to have specific knowledge of the population that will make it possible to identify, gauge, and track these hostile elements. Thus one last boundary, that between *friend and foe*, perhaps more fundamental even than the preceding ones, became blurred, or rather became reconfigured, threatening to divide the national community along primarily political and, secondarily, social and ethnic fault lines.

In the Fall of 1945, the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, testified before the Senate Military Affairs Committee as follows:

It has been a fetish of mine that the question of *national security* is not merely a question of the Army and Navy. We have to take into account our whole potential for war, our mines, industry, manpower, research, and all the activities that go into normal civilian life. I don't think you can deal with this only by the War and Navy Departments. This has to be a truly global effort [. . .].

Several weeks earlier, in mid-September, his friend and Wall Street colleague, Ferdinand Eberstadt, had sent him a report on the defense apparatus that concluded, as expected, that the unification project advocated by the Department of War was ineffective, and recommended a “more drastic and far-reaching” reform, “a complete realignment of our governmental organizations to serve our *national security* (...),” thereby ensuring the continual mobilization of political, military, and economic means

and, the document added, ensuring the perception of the critical nature of the situation by public opinion. Let there be no mistake: shifting the concept of “national security” suddenly to the forefront and knowingly and systematically substituting it for that of “national defense” meant that the Navy had to involve others in the debate in order to put an end to the confrontation with a powerful rival that threatened to engulf it. At the same time, this conceptual innovation also expressed a real intellectual revision that, regardless of the politico-bureaucratic battle of the following weeks, was going to become essential for all participants: in a few months, “national security” became the “fundamental defense theory” of the American government.⁵²

Our hypothesis is that such a swift, smooth, and radical revision cannot be explained unless it is seen in the context of a re-evaluation of the implications of warfare long undertaken within the armed forces, and particularly within the secretive and modest military intelligence services. There, a series of breaks have been analyzed, developed, advocated, and formalized for a quarter of a century, when the concept suddenly rose to the surface in a favorable context. This does not mean that it is not necessary to look elsewhere for other roots and origins, in other places and views, and in other challenges and types of statement, establishing or privileging other relations. How could it be otherwise with a concept so uniquely syncretic? Nor does it mean that the importance of this decisive moment in the early months of the Cold War should be neglected: it was at that moment that the revision came about in the form of a conceptual vehicle, the question was raised to the rank of a major concern, and the paradigm shift was taken to an infinitely higher level and culminated in visible and lasting expressions in the legislative, regulatory, institutional, and bureaucratic domains; and probably at this moment that dialogues, meetings, and hybridizations took place between the various discourses—academic, political, military—that participated in the conceptual innovation. But it is no less important to recognize that some key members of the military had long lived in the “shadow of war,” a war no longer far away, involving everyone, thus concerning everyone, at any moment, inside as well as outside, to the point of transforming society into a potential battlefield and fellow citizens into

⁵²Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, 194, 204, 214 (my emphasis). “Fundamental defense theory” are the words of Secretary Stimson, cited in Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, 220.

potential enemies.

Many aspects—the essentials, in fact—remain to be established.⁵³ However, it seems that we have a way forward here. In this regard, it is significant that one of the very first occurrences of the well-considered substitution of “national security” for “national defense” that can be identified comes out of the intelligence services. In 1932, an officer in ONI’s security section (in charge of questions of confidentiality) suggested the adoption of the phrase “national security” to justify the classification “secret,” which would make it possible to extend this protection to material that do not belong to “national defense” in the strict sense of the term.⁵⁴ Four years later, Army regulations took the leap and introduced the decisive phrase in the article dealing with the classification of information. Two years later, ONI had it adopted in the corresponding article in the Naval regulations.⁵⁵ Though it is impossible to establish with certainty what the expression meant exactly in the minds of the writers, the intellectual rupture that occurred at the end of the war was nonetheless formally manifested; and, perhaps for the first time in an official document, this rupture was expressed in the concept that would soon come to synthesize it.

Why is it important for an understanding of the concept of “national security” that its roots are found in part in an earlier historical stratum and in places that are different from those generally indicated up to now? Quite simply because it—and with it the change it conceals—belongs to another context and thus to another network of causes, which can only be outlined here. “National security” is no longer an exclusive outcome of the early months of the Cold War, but in large part a result of a world war, that is, of *total war*. It is no longer an argument imposed to a threatened country by the circumstances, but by the rationality of a nation that had acquired the status of a *great*

⁵³This is especially true of the possible links maintained with members of those university circles that changed the approach to conflicts. David Ekbladh mentions in passing the links the “pioneer” Edward Mead Earle had with the navy intelligence service. See: David Ekbladh, “Present at the Creation.”

⁵⁴ “Memorandum for the DNI,” July 12, 1932; “Memorandum for the Director,” July 13, 1932, RG 38 E 166, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Division of Naval Intelligence, Day Copies of Letters Sent, 1929–1940, Box D8.

⁵⁵ *United States Navy Regulations*, 1938, Article 751/2§ 1(b).

power. It is no longer primarily an academic or political outcome, but also—and perhaps above all—a *bureaucratic* and military one. Finally, the military ancestry of “national security” is confirmed: it may be an element to consider for those who would prefer to separate the concept from the problem of defense entirely and who, as a result, assert that its warlike orientation results from the contingencies of the Cold War alone.