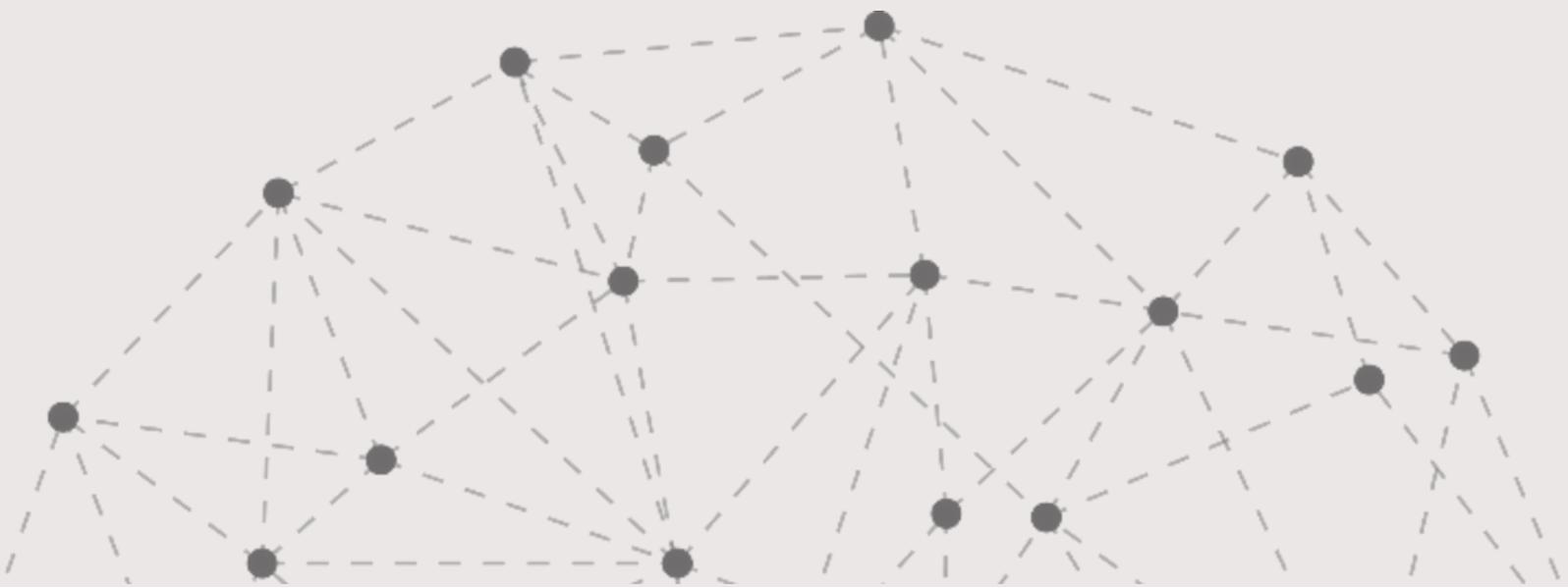# Modernization of Brazilian Intelligence: the strategic role of SISBIN Colleges in transforming the capabilities of the State

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Summary

Intelligence has become one of the main tools supporting strategic decision-making in contexts marked by complexity, uncertainty, rapid technological change, information flows, and misinformation. In Brazil, the modernization of the Brazilian Intelligence System (SISBIN) has become a necessary condition for the State to remain capable of anticipating risks, responding to multidimensional threats, and protecting its strategic interests. This policy brief analyzes the central role of SISBIN Colleges—with emphasis on the Brazilian Defense College (ESD) and the Higher Strategic Intelligence Course (CSIE)—as structural pillars of this intelligence modernization process, capable of bringing an internationalized academic debate with geopolitical, historical, and economic connections at the regional and global levels.

The document starts from the diagnosis that the main contemporary challenge for intelligence does not lie in the scarcity of data, but in the institutional capacity to convert it into qualified strategic understanding. This means the ability of analysts to use sophisticated and integrated methodologies to compile, interpret, and diagnose situations capable of generating short-, medium-, and long-term scenarios. The emergence of hybrid threats, transnational organized crime, cyberattacks, disinformation operations, and environmental risks to critical infrastructure requires coordinated, evidence-based responses supported by highly skilled personnel.

The policy brief argues that systematic investment in training, capacity building, doctrinal standardization, innovation, and interagency integration, promoted by SISBIN Schools, is a strategic vector for strengthening national intelligence governance. Finally, recommendations are presented for public decision-makers, SISBIN managers, and policymakers, with the aim of consolidating future-oriented, integrated, ethical intelligence that is aligned with the strategic needs of the Brazilian state.

The new configuration of intelligence in the 21st century

Contemporary intelligence is no longer understood exclusively as the secret collection of information. In the current context, it is a continuous process of analysis, integration of multiple sources, intensive use of emerging technologies, and production of knowledge applied to strategic decision-making. This transformation reflects profound changes in the international and domestic environment, characterized by the overlap of traditional and non-traditional threats. Nevertheless, a state's intelligence capacity lies in its ability to seek strategic information, in some cases secret or confidential, that directly impacts the political and strategic directions and processes regarding the survival of that state. However, the new dynamics and contemporary context have brought into debate any isolation of intelligence in order to make room for cooperation in the area, reserving actions that could compromise the state that this intelligence protects. Currently, the way of cooperating and integrated responses to threats have shaped a new model of relationship between intelligence agencies around the world.

The actions of states through hybrid strategies, the expansion of non-state actors with high operational capacity, the advance of transnational organized crime, and the intensification of cyber threats challenge traditional models of security and defense. At the same time, the technological revolution—marked by the use of big data, artificial intelligence, geointelligence, and advanced open sources (OSINT)—has exponentially increased the volume of available data, requiring new analytical and methodological skills.

In this scenario, intelligence plays a strategic role not only in responding to crises, but also in anticipating risks, constructing prospective scenarios, and supporting the formulation of public policies. The state's ability to understand the strategic environment thus becomes a central element of its sovereignty and national security. In the meantime, combining theory and practice allows intelligence to adapt, improve, and modernize in the face of challenges.

Peter Gill, in his article Theory of Intelligence (2010), argues that the discipline of intelligence studies has historically developed with a strong empirical and operational emphasis, presenting a relative scarcity of systematic theoretical formulations. However, the consolidation of intelligence theories is fundamental to qualifying institutional practice, insofar as it provides analytical frameworks capable of guiding the production, interpretation, and use of knowledge in complex decision-making

contexts.

To complement Gill's ideas, we can reinforce that theories allow accumulated experience to be transformed into practical applications consistent with the core mission of intelligence agencies, namely the protection of national security. Furthermore, by clarifying the assumptions, limits, and responsibilities of intelligence activities, the theoretical framework helps to align the actions of these agencies with the principles of the democratic rule of law, promoting institutional transparency, accountability, and a balance between security and civil liberties.

The development of intelligence theories, whether based on writing or research, descriptive, explanatory, or predictive, plays an important role in the formulation of public policies, in the observation of processes and contexts that impact states and their actions in the face of challenges. There is a need to establish a theoretical analysis in a cycle of revalidation that comes from the practical experiences of intelligence agencies and that replenishes the cycle of modernization in the areas of operation, training, and application of intelligence. According to Stephen Marrin (2018), Intelligence theorizing is the effort to understand and explain different aspects of intelligence as a function of government. The purpose of theory is to construct simple but powerful explanations for why things are the way they are.

There are different kinds of intelligence theories which can be created, corresponding to the various purposes of social science research, including description, explanation, and prediction. Descriptive theories of intelligence describe what it is that intelligence as a function of government does. Explanatory theories explain why intelligence does what it does, to include why it is organized as it is and the processes associated with it. Predictive theories provide predictions or—if less formalized—forecasts as to what intelligence as a function of government will be involved with in the future. Finally, normative theories provide assessments of what intelligence should—and more importantly, should not—do as a function of government. (Marrin, 2018)

Scott and Jackson (2004) argue that intelligence studies constitute a pluralistic field, marked by the coexistence of different methodological and epistemological approaches, which reflects the very complexity of intelligence activity within the state. For the authors, understanding intelligence solely as a technical process of information gathering and analysis is insufficient; it is essential to situate it in its political, institutional, and decision-making context. This theoretical perspective allows us to understand how intelligence is produced, interpreted, and used by decision-makers, as well as the limits, constraints, and disputes that permeate this process. By emphasizing the centrality of theory, Scott and Jackson demonstrate that the articulation between academic reflection and professional practice is indispensable for intelligence to contribute effectively and responsibly to the

formulation and implementation of public policies.

<div style="background-color:#4a9b9b;color:white;padding:10px;">Findings</div>

Challenges and the Importance of Intelligence Modernization in Brazil

In Brazil's case, the intelligence system was designed to integrate the efforts of different agencies and bodies, coordinating aspects of defense, public security, foreign policy, the environment, and critical infrastructure protection. However, the effectiveness of this system depends directly on its governance, organizational culture, and the level of interoperability between the actors involved. This requires not only joint and integrated practices among agencies, but also an interconnected modernization model that is consistent with SISBIN principles. In this context, intelligence schools should adopt an approach based on intelligence culture, integrated training, and modernized dialogue among the various thematic intelligence areas (public security, criminal, financial, at the strategic or operational level).

Historically, institutional fragmentation, the existence of organizational silos, and the absence of a common doctrinal language have limited SISBIN's full potential. In a context of multidimensional threats, such limitations become even more evident, reinforcing the need for structured mechanisms for training, integration, and standardization.

This is where SISBIN schools play a strategic role. They not only train human resources, but also build conceptual, methodological, and ethical frameworks that support the integrated operation of the system, use and discuss theory and practice, and can place qualified professionals in the field of intelligence. The Brazilian Intelligence Agency's Intelligence School has played a central role in creating the Intelligence Schools Forum, with the aim of establishing a common focus for the development of the field.

An analysis of the modernization process of Brazilian intelligence shows that staff training is SISBIN's main strategic asset. In the face of complex and dynamic threats, initial training is insufficient. A model of continuous training is essential, capable of updating knowledge, incorporating new technologies, and developing advanced analytical skills, applying sophisticated methodologies, and incorporating the culture of intelligence into strategic activities.

The role of SISBIN Schools is to fulfill this function by training analysts and managers capable of dealing with multidimensional issues such as cybersecurity, the

environment, critical infrastructure, and information operations. This training expands the State's capacity to produce actionable, decision-oriented, evidence-based intelligence. At the Ministry of Defense, the Advanced Course in Strategic Intelligence (CSIE), currently offered by the Higher School of Defense, plays an important role with a broad curriculum that engages with several institutions important to national security. The course curriculum is constantly being updated, encourages academic publications by students, uses active classroom participation methodologies based on the Chatham House model, and works with simulations of complex situations to improve decision-making processes and create scenarios for agency action.

The relevance of schools becomes essential in this process, as they are responsible for expanding the creative environment and testing theoretical, technical, and operational capabilities by offering learning opportunities. At CSIE, the curriculum cuts across thematic areas and is divided into areas such as Intelligence Theory and Studies, Intelligence Policies and Doctrines, Geopolitical Studies, International Relations, National Security and Defense; Strategic Studies, Intelligence Practices and Methodologies, and Scenario Studies. With a broad view of the curriculum, the course seeks to expand critical and analytical thinking, challenging students to develop an integrated view of the complex actions that affect the (in)security of the state.

The convergence of academia and intelligence agencies strengthens the ecosystem of continuous learning and methodological updating, associated with the ability to incorporate innovation and applied research into the analytical routine. The intensive use of artificial intelligence, automation, big data analysis, and decision support tools redefines traditional intelligence processes.

However, this movement requires consistent investment in the training and professionalization of analysts, as well as in the construction of theoretical and normative frameworks that guide the use of these technologies in a critical, ethical, and integrated manner. (Sandes Monfredo Mendes, C., & da Costa Mendes, R. L., 2024). The modernization of intelligence processes is not limited to the adoption of new tools, but involves the revision of doctrines, analytical methods, and organizational practices in order to ensure greater epistemological rigor, technical capacity, and adaptation to increasingly complex strategic environments, structured logic, and systemic thinking. In this context, the integration of academic knowledge, technological innovation, and practical experience contributes to improving the quality of intelligence estimates and reinforcing the role of these activities in protecting national security and the interests of the state.

Conclusions

The modernization of Brazilian intelligence is a strategic imperative in an increasingly complex, interconnected, and volatile security environment. This policy brief has demonstrated that the success of this process depends not only on technological investments, but above all on strengthening human, institutional, and doctrinal capabilities.

The SISBIN Schools emerge as central pillars of this transformation. They articulate training, standardization, innovation, and integration, laying the foundations for future-oriented, ethical intelligence aligned with the strategic needs of the Brazilian state. The experience of the Brazilian Defense College and the CSIE shows that strategic education is a decisive factor in the professionalization of intelligence and the consolidation of an interagency culture applied to the intelligence environment. Ignoring the role of these institutions would compromise Brazil's ability to understand its strategic environment, anticipate risks, and guide state decisions. On the contrary, strengthening them represents a direct investment in national security, sovereignty, and democratic governance.

Recommendations

1. Institutionalize continuous investment in SISBIN Colleges: Ensure stable, long-term resources for training, capacity building, and applied research in intelligence.

2. Strengthen SISBIN doctrinal standardization: Use colleges as central instances for conceptual, methodological, and ethical harmonization of intelligence activities.

3.   Deepen integration between academia and intelligence agencies: Encourage partnerships for applied research, methodological innovation, and the development of analytical research.

4.   Expand interagency culture: Encourage training programs that bring together civilians, military personnel, and public managers, reducing institutional silos and increasing mutual trust.

5.   Prioritize emerging strategic competencies: Update curricula with a focus on artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, disinformation, environmental analysis, the Amazon, borders, and critical infrastructure.

6.   Protect sensitive knowledge and strengthen academic counterintelligence: Develop specific information security protocols in the SISBIN educational environment.

7.   Encourage the creation of networks of experts: academics, and professionals who can engage in dialogue and expand intelligence studies in a multidisciplinary manner.

8.   Consolidate intelligence as state policy: Formally recognize intelligence education and training as structural elements of national security and development.

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