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Postprint: Analysis of Current AI Technology Development in the U.S. Intelligence Community

Authors: Huang Mincong

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper analyzes the implementation background and significance of AI technology in the U.S. national intelligence system, and based on the content, direction, and models of AI projects implemented by national intelligence agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), summarizes the development trends of AI technology in the U.S. national intelligence system, thereby proposing insights for the application of AI technology in China's national intelligence system. [Method/Process] Using literature review and comparative analysis methods, the study examines the implementation content of AI projects by agencies such as CIA and DIA, as well as the advantages of AI technology development in the U.S. national intelligence system. [Results/Conclusion] From the perspectives of project quantity, funding support, and development planning, the U.S. national intelligence system is developing AI technology at an unimaginable pace, with the promotion by In-Q-Tel serving as a particularly key factor. China's national intelligence system should learn from the advanced experience of the United States, accelerate the deployment and application of AI technology, particularly by leveraging the strength of China's internet enterprises.

Full Text

Preamble

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Analysis of the Development Status of Artificial Intelligence Technology in the United States Intelligence Community

Huang Mincong

Guangdong Science and Technology Library (Guangdong Institute of Scientific & Technical Information and Development Strategy), Guangzhou 510070

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper analyzes the implementation background and significance of artificial intelligence technology in the U.S. Intelligence Community, and summarizes the development trends of AI in the U.S. national intelligence system based on the implementation content, direction, and models of AI projects by agencies such as the CIA and DIA, thereby proposing implications for AI application in China's national intelligence system. **[Method/Process]** Using literature review and comparative analysis methods, this study examines the AI project implementation content of the CIA and DIA, as well as the advantages of AI technology development in the U.S. Intelligence Community. **[Result/Conclusion]** In terms of project quantity, funding support, and development planning, the U.S. Intelligence Community is developing AI technology at an unimaginable speed, with the promotion of In-Q-Tel serving as a key factor. China's national intelligence system should learn from U.S. advanced experiences and accelerate AI technology deployment and application, particularly by leveraging the strength of China's internet enterprises.

Classification Number: G20

Keywords: United States; National Intelligence System; Artificial Intelligence

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1. Research Background, Current Status, and Methods

1.1 Research Background

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has attracted global attention. Future AI technology may become a disruptive technology that brings profound changes to national security, comparable to nuclear weapons, aircraft, computers, and biotechnology. Each AI technology brings significant transformations to the strategy, organization, priorities, and resource allocation of U.S. national security agencies, with future influence at least comparable to nuclear weapons. In recent years, agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) have launched numerous AI-based intelligence analysis projects, attempting to convert U.S. AI technological advantages into strategic intelligence advantages to maximize national interests. They have also established three goals for AI application in the national intelligence system: (1) maintaining U.S. leadership to provide leverage for military and intelligence superiority; (2) supporting peaceful and commercial AI applications to help civilian and commercial sectors benefit from AI technology; and (3) using AI-generated intelligence to reduce catastrophic risks and prevent or mitigate the serious consequences of accidental or hostile incidents.

1.2 Research Status

The explosive period of AI technology research began in 2015, with the emergence of ALPHAGO software triggering a global research boom on AI tech-

nology and its development trends. In July 2017, the report *Artificial Intelligence and National Security* released by the U.S. Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA) officially initiated research on the integration of national intelligence and AI technology, attracting widespread attention both domestically and internationally, with extensive media coverage and translation of its core content by major internet platforms such as Tencent and NetEase. Investigation reveals that the U.S. began exploring the combination of AI technology and national intelligence around 2000, making large-scale investments in Silicon Valley-related enterprises through the CIA's venture capital firm and providing continuous funding for over a decade. This has enabled U.S. intelligence agencies like the CIA to master the technological high ground in AI-intelligence integration.

From China's research perspective, according to CNKI database searches (as of January 31, 2018), Chinese scholars' research on AI technology combined with national intelligence system construction is almost blank. This is partly because AI technology only began trending around 2015, and partly because China's national intelligence system and related institutional mechanisms have not yet been fully established. In 2015, Chinese intelligence experts Bao Changhuo and Zhang Jianian proposed that China should establish a national intelligence system architecture as early as possible, with the Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of State Security, and Ministry of Public Security as the backbone. This indicates that China's national intelligence system construction currently lags far behind countries like the United States. Therefore, studying how the U.S. Intelligence Community organically integrates AI technology can fill China's research gap in this field, benefit the construction of relevant Chinese intelligence institutions, and provide decision-making support for channeling China's AI industry resources (second only to the U.S. in industrial competitiveness) to serve the national intelligence system.

1.3 Research Methods

Given AI technology's significant impact on the development of the U.S. Intelligence Community, this study collects, organizes, and analyzes information on investment projects and technical requirements published by major U.S. intelligence agencies such as the CIA and DIA in recent years to summarize the current development characteristics, trends, and directions of AI technology in the U.S. Intelligence Community. Simultaneously, combining publicly available reports, speeches, and commentary, this paper summarizes the current application status of AI technology in China's national intelligence system and proposes implications and recommendations for developing AI technology in China's national intelligence system based on the above analysis.

2. AI Technology Development Trends in U.S. Intelligence Agencies

2.1 Analysis of AI Technology Projects in U.S. Intelligence Agencies

In recent years, U.S. government agencies including the CIA, National Security Agency, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, Office of the Secretary of Defense/Joint Chiefs of Staff, Defense Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Reconnaissance Office, and Department of Homeland Security have successively implemented AI intelligence projects, with the CIA and DIA having the largest number of projects, scale, and funding support.

2.1.1 CIA Since its establishment in 1947, the CIA has controlled the internet as a special project, a situation further strengthened by the advent of computers. However, these seemingly modern methods remain slow for data collection and become obsolete when compared with AI capable of collecting data, as traditional methods can only retrieve small amounts of data. To promote AI application in intelligence collection and analysis, the CIA is simultaneously conducting 137 different AI projects, most of which are screened and funded through In-Q-Tel (hereinafter referred to as IQT). As a non-profit organization, IQT's efficient market-oriented approach has made outstanding contributions to advancing the CIA's AI technology projects. Analysis of some AI projects promoted by IQT in recent years is shown in Table 1 .

Based on sensitivity, IQT does not fully disclose all venture capital enterprises, projects, or funding. Investment information that has been disclosed can be viewed in its corporate technology database (<https://www.iqt.org/portfolio/>). According to this database information, CIA-supported AI technology projects exhibit the following characteristics:

- (1) **Full-chain coverage of the data industry.** CIA-supported AI technology projects are mainly divided into three categories, essentially achieving full-chain coverage of the data industry: (a) Data monitoring and generation (upstream), such as feature extraction from spatial-geographic and economic data to accelerate data production and quality (e.g., Orbital Insight); (b) Intelligent data analysis and processing (midstream), such as developing intelligent data analysis engines and natural language processing platforms (e.g., Primer); and (c) Data application and decision-making (downstream), such as prediction and handling of major national events like infectious disease outbreaks and economic crises (e.g., Metabiota).
- (2) **Emphasis on cloud platform utilization.** Beginning in 2016, the CIA increased support for AI technology projects using cloud platforms, such as intelligent multi-system cloud platforms like FRAME. As an important technology driver of the U.S. Intelligence Community, the CIA shoulders the mission of diffusing technology to other U.S. intelligence agencies. Therefore, the cross-regional, cross-agency, and cross-system characteristics of cloud platforms enable rapid AI technology application

across different intelligence agencies. According to CIA projections, future collaborative systems in the U.S. Intelligence Community will be highly dependent on cloud platforms.

- (3) **Predictive support and priority for AI technology.** Although AI technology only became a hot topic in the past two years, CIA investment in AI technology can be traced back to around 2000. IQT's investment portfolio shows that as early as 2005, it made strategic investments in companies like Orbital Insight and Digital Immunity, which have conducted AI research for over a decade and accumulated solid technical foundations.

2.1.2 DIA The DIA stated in its research report that for decades, the United States has spent defense funds in a slow and cumbersome manner that only allowed cautious development of new projects, such as aircraft carriers designed to last for decades. This model clearly cannot keep pace with Islamic extremists using social media for terrorist activities. Therefore, starting in 2015, DIA launched the "Innovation Implementation Plan" and promoted its implementation through a new Innovation Center office. In this plan, DIA attempts to use AI technology combined with enterprises and external technical projects to drive significant leaps in DIA's AI intelligence projects. Currently, each project supported by the DIA Innovation Plan receives \$250,000 in seed funding for developing projects or conducting technical assessments. In 2016, DIA had already invested over \$2 million in six AI projects, with funding from a dedicated budget in cooperation with the Defense Innovation Unit Experimental (DIUx).

DIA has established regular AI technology requirements on <https://www.fbo.gov> and <https://www.grants.gov>, where various social organizations can submit project proposals for funding at any time. Currently, DIA has 18 major requirement directions for AI technology intelligence projects, with main contents shown in Table 2 .

DIA-supported AI technology projects are more sensitive than CIA's and generally do not disclose project investment enterprises, funding, or content to the public. However, based on the above project directions and public information, they mainly exhibit the following characteristics:

- (1) **Natural language processing recognition as an important AI application direction.** Among the 18 directions, four involve NLP applications, which have received high priority from U.S. military intelligence departments. This is partly because DIA increasingly focuses on data collection from social media and other sources, and partly because it is closely related to the global deployment of U.S. military forces. AI technology in NLP strengthens DIA's intelligence collection and analysis capabilities across different regions, ethnic groups, and organizations.
- (2) **Organic integration of AI with military equipment.** Intelligent military equipment has long been a development direction pursued by the U.S. military. From a technical requirements perspective, the combination

of AI analysis capabilities with various equipment sensor data has become a key tool. In addition to enhancing equipment performance, AI can provide real-time intelligence support including danger warnings, strategic analysis, and military strategy selection for war zones. This support can even extend to basic combat units such as individual soldiers.

- (3) **Rapid theater intelligence generation, analysis, and processing capabilities.** A major difference between DIA and CIA in AI technology requirements is that DIA places greater emphasis on obtaining AI analysis results within short timeframes, compressing the time required for intelligence data extraction, analysis, and application. Among the 18 directions, most require technology with rapid analysis capabilities, particularly the second major direction, which uses AI technology to compress military intelligence generation and processing time to meet the needs of rapidly changing battlefields.

2.2 Analysis of AI Technology Development Trends in U.S. Intelligence Agencies

2.2.1 AI Technology Will Gradually Replace Large Amounts of Manual Intelligence Work With the advancement of satellite development and intelligence collection technology, collectable data is growing exponentially. Taking satellite data as an example, the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency Director Robert Cardillo stated that if commercial satellite imagery intelligence analysis work in the coming 20 years were to be done by humans, it would require nearly 8 million image analysts. The CIA's Kent School Dean of Intelligence Analysis Joseph Gartin indicated that the introduction of AI technology will greatly increase the scale and speed of CIA's social media data collection. The U.S. *Artificial Intelligence and National Security* report states that for social media data monitoring, analysis, and screening—an important guarantee for U.S. national security—AI technology introduction will become key to addressing massive social media data. It is predicted that 75% of intelligence analysis tasks will be automated in the future, thereby improving efficiency.

2.2.2 Social Media Big Data Intelligence Analysis Receives High Priority From the AI technology projects supported by the CIA in the past two years, a considerable portion involves processing and analyzing social media big data, including natural language processing recognition technology, image and emotion recognition technology, etc. The introduction of AI technology will significantly enhance the CIA's ability to collect social media data in terms of scale and speed.

2.2.3 In-Q-Tel's Corporate Operation Model Is Gradually Gaining Recognition In-Q-Tel was created in 1999 with the mission to identify and invest in cutting-edge technology companies that protect U.S. homeland secu-

rity interests, delivering superior capabilities to the CIA, DIA, NGA, and the broader intelligence community. Currently, approximately 75% of IQT's investment transactions serve multiple agencies within the U.S. Intelligence Community, including the CIA. While most U.S. venture capital funds and firms are private, IQT's establishment broke this pattern. As a government agency, the CIA provides IQT with at least \$35 million annually, while IQT cultivates and transfers advanced, usable information technology to the CIA in the form of venture capital. In recent years, IQT has heavily invested in AI technology projects, with its proportion increasing annually. Most of the 137 AI technology intelligence projects currently supported by the CIA are screened and supported through IQT. As a non-profit organization, IQT primarily relies on donations from various U.S. social entities in addition to CIA funding. This corporate market-oriented operation model has greatly accelerated the development speed and efficiency of small U.S. AI technology intelligence enterprises.

2.2.4 Massive Funding Support According to statistics, the CIA, DIA, and other U.S. Intelligence Community agencies invest over \$50 million annually to support AI technology intelligence projects (including the CIA's \$35 million support to IQT, which does not disclose investment amounts per enterprise). Funding from U.S. enterprises, universities, and other research institutions for AI technology intelligence projects is even more substantial. The U.S. *Artificial Intelligence and National Security* report also states that "DARPA, IARPA, the Office of Naval Research, and the National Science Foundation should increase funding for AI-related intelligence technology basic research, providing more resources to IQT to promote cooperation between national security agencies and AI commercial companies." This indicates that future U.S. investment in AI technology projects for the Intelligence Community will continue to increase.

At the societal level, as of July 2017, U.S. AI startup financing had reached 97.8 billion RMB, accounting for 50.1% of the global total (China: 63.5 billion RMB, accounting for 33.18%, see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). Such massive social capital investment provides excellent financial support for AI startups, from which the U.S. Intelligence Community also benefits, driving the development of AI technology application in the U.S. Intelligence Community.

2.2.5 Silicon Valley Is Becoming an Important Innovation Source for U.S. Intelligence Community AI Technology Based on projects supported by IQT and information released by other intelligence agencies, over 80% of AI technology intelligence project enterprises are concentrated in Silicon Valley. This is partly because Silicon Valley has gathered a large reserve of AI technology talent, and partly because of its developed venture capital funds. This agglomeration effect promotes collaborative innovation in AI technology intelligence projects and has spawned numerous innovative applications. IQT and other U.S. Intelligence Community agencies have successively established branch offices in Silicon Valley to rapidly identify enterprises and projects. In summary, Silicon Valley is becoming an important innovation source for U.S.

Intelligence Community AI technology.

2.2.6 “Anti-AI” Technology Offensive and Defensive Capabilities

The U.S. *Artificial Intelligence and National Security* report states that with the in-depth development of AI technology, the U.S. Intelligence Community should vigorously invest in “anti-AI” offensive and defensive capabilities. Current research shows that some AI technologies can be exploited for intelligence camouflage, such as using AI to spread rumors on social media to incite social movements, or using AI to create false social and commercial data, thereby causing errors in AI intelligence analysis results. This type of AI application can even influence national decision-making. Therefore, “anti-AI” technology has become an important focus for the future U.S. Intelligence Community.

2.2.7 Cloud Applications Are Gradually Becoming an Important Carrier for AI Intelligence Projects

From 2016 to 2017, the CIA has supported three innovative projects to deploy AI technology intelligence projects on cloud platforms like Amazon. Using cloud platform characteristics further accelerates the breadth, depth, and interconnectivity of data collection for AI technology intelligence projects. Additionally, to address security issues arising from cloud platform applications, the CIA also supports projects on threat detection capabilities for AI technology intelligence projects to ensure the security of the national intelligence system.

2.2.8 U.S. Government’s Cautious Approach to AI Intelligence Analysis Results

Currently, the U.S. government’s attitude toward AI technology intelligence analysis results appears somewhat conservative. CIA and other agencies state that before AI technology intelligence analysis results are submitted to national decision-makers, it must first be ensured that humans themselves can understand the deduction process. Persuading senior government officials (including the U.S. President) to trust intelligence reports generated by “robots” is a major challenge facing AI technology intelligence project developers in the future.

3. Current Status of AI Technology Development in the U.S. Intelligence Community and Its Implications for China

3.1 Current Status of AI Technology Application in China’s National Intelligence System

At the national level, the term “artificial intelligence” was written into China’s 13th Five-Year Plan in March 2016. In July 2017, the State Council issued the “Notice on the New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan,” systematically laying out AI at the national level with implementation led by the Ministry of Science and Technology. Experts such as Bao Changhuo believe that China’s national intelligence system has not yet been fully established, with main drivers concentrated in the Ministry of National Defense, Ministry

of State Security, and Ministry of Public Security. Based on publicly available information and literature research, China's national intelligence system's large-scale research, development, and application of AI technology began in 2014, such as the China Ordnance Industry Group and Chinese Association for Artificial Intelligence jointly establishing the "China Unmanned Systems Academician Expert Workstation," and CloudWalk Technology cooperating with the Ministry of Public Security on the "Face Recognition Industrialization and Application Project." Although Chinese intelligence agencies have successively explored AI technology applications in recent years, compared with U.S. intelligence agencies, the following deficiencies exist:

3.1.1 Incomplete Guidance of China's Enterprise AI Technology Resources to Serve the National Intelligence System

From the U.S. experience, relying on In-Q-Tel, U.S. intelligence agencies have established close ties with the business community, particularly Silicon Valley enterprises, enabling rapid fulfillment of intelligence agency needs while providing substantial funding to numerous AI startups. As the world's second-largest AI industry after the U.S., China is rich in AI technology resources (enterprises, technology, talent, equipment, platforms), but currently lacks a complete institutional mechanism and platform to fully guide these AI technology resources to serve China's intelligence agencies. This is partly due to institutional constraints and partly due to traditional confidentiality concepts, with many intelligence agencies preferring to assign technology requirement projects to subordinate research institutes.

3.1.2 Lack of a Primary Driver for AI Technology Application

The application and promotion of AI technology in U.S. intelligence agencies is primarily led by the CIA, which greatly reduces redundant investment and facilitates data unification, coordination, and processing across agencies. Currently, the CIA is already using cloud platforms to establish AI technology cloud application platforms among U.S. intelligence agencies. In China, no single independent agency has yet assumed responsibility for AI technology application and promotion, resulting in redundant investment in most AI technology projects. For example, both the Ministry of National Defense and Ministry of Public Security are developing similar AI intelligent face recognition systems. This phenomenon also hinders the establishment of collaborative mechanisms among various national intelligence agencies.

3.2 Implications of U.S. Intelligence Community AI Technology Development for China

3.2.1 Open National Intelligence System AI Technology Application Projects to Enterprises Across Society

The U.S. experience shows that In-Q-Tel's market-oriented operation model is an important catalyst for the rapid development of AI technology application in the U.S. Intelligence Community, with numerous U.S. AI startups receiving government project support. These enterprises achieve higher opera-

tional efficiency and technology iteration than traditional research institutes or government-affiliated research institutions. In China's national intelligence system construction, there is often a conservative approach that believes assigning national intelligence system projects to private small and medium-sized startups is unreliable—partly due to concerns about their capabilities and partly due to confidentiality risks. Public information shows that most similar projects by Chinese intelligence agencies still rely on subordinate research institutes, universities, or large information enterprises. This conservative attitude not only hinders rapid technology application and upgrading in the national intelligence system but also impedes the cultivation of the AI technology market. Therefore, China should follow the In-Q-Tel model and establish a government-funded national technology intelligence market cultivation company to provide reliable, market-oriented AI technology solutions for intelligence agencies by supporting Chinese AI technology startups.

3.2.2 Focus on Cultivating “Anti-AI” Technology Offensive and Defensive Capabilities

While most countries worldwide are just beginning to focus on AI technology application, U.S. intelligence agencies have already started cultivating “anti-AI” technology offensive and defensive capabilities. The *Artificial Intelligence and National Security* report lists this capability as a key foundational capability for the U.S. to lead the world in future national intelligence system construction. Cultivating “anti-AI” technology offensive and defensive capabilities can play an increasingly important role not only in traditional national intelligence fields but also at the military level. Currently, U.S. DIA has already launched projects at the battlefield level simulating regional war AI technology application scenarios (see Table 2). Therefore, China should accelerate the cultivation of “anti-AI” technology offensive and defensive capabilities.

3.2.3 Increase Cultivation of AI Technology Talent and Research Institutions for the National Intelligence System

As shown in Table 3, among the top 20 schools in AI technology, only Peking University (ranked 12), Tsinghua University (ranked 16), and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (ranked 17) from China have entered the rankings. The U.S. holds an absolute leading position in terms of university quantity, top scholar numbers, and important paper counts. A large number of internationally competitive research institutions and scholars are key to U.S. AI technology's global leadership and fundamental support for AI technology innovation in the U.S. Intelligence Community. In addition to general research institutions, the CIA has recently launched AI technology talent training and related courses at its Kent School training institution. Leveraging abundant U.S. AI innovation resources, Kent School's AI technology talent cultivation has achieved excellent results. Currently, China's internet enterprises are highly developed, with Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent also exploring AI technology. Therefore, China should leverage internet enterprises' AI innovation resources and, through government and research institution cooperation, establish AI technology talent cultivation mechanisms for its national intelligence system.

3.2.4 Emphasize the Application and Protection of AI Technology Projects on Cloud Platforms

From the CIA's 137 AI intelligence projects, the CIA has already planned to gradually deploy the U.S. Intelligence Community on cloud platforms, including Amazon and Microsoft cloud platforms. Simultaneously, the CIA and other agencies have launched synchronized efforts on network threats and protection for AI intelligence projects. The CIA anticipates that with the exponential growth of intelligence data volume, traditional information platforms can no longer meet intelligence requirements, particularly regarding the breadth and depth of data collection for AI intelligence projects—only cloud platforms can satisfy future AI technology needs. Moreover, relying on cloud platforms, anyone with government authorization can access powerful U.S. Intelligence Community AI resources anytime, anywhere. For example, the U.S. military has planned to implement theater danger warning intelligence projects, allowing soldiers to quickly access cloud platforms via mobile devices to understand real-time threats in their current theater and quickly assess threat levels of individuals through facial recognition. Similar cloud-based AI intelligence projects support U.S. participation in global international affairs. Based on this, China's national intelligence system AI intelligence projects should accelerate their application practice on cloud platforms and explore using Chinese internet enterprises' powerful cloud support capabilities to improve project efficiency and protection.

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Keywords: US; United States Intelligence Community; AI

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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