

Timothy J. Smith

Quantifying the Unquantifiable

[00:00:00] **Mindy:** Welcome to Analyst Talk with Jason Elder. It's like coffee with an analyst, or it could be whiskey with an analyst reading a spreadsheet, linking crime events, identifying a series, and getting the latest scoop on association news and training. So please don't beat that analyst and join us as we define the law enforcement analysis profession.

One episode at time.

[00:00:17] **Jason:** Thank you for joining me. I hope many aspects of your life are progressing. My name is Jason Elder, and today our guest has 20 years of intelligence analysis experience, most of which with the CIA. He has a PhD in Policy Analysis from Pardee RAND Graduate School. He is currently a consultant dealing with analytical training and geopolitical analysis.

Please welcome timothy J. Smith. Timothy, how we doing?

[00:00:46] **Tim:** Very good. Thank you very much. Glad to be here.

[00:00:48] **Jason:** It's great to have you for the listeners, we got a lot to go over. We actually have a CIA analyst and that can actually talk about his career. So lots that is unclassified, so I'm looking forward to hearing his story.

But we're also gonna talk about writing training and get his perspective from all his experience with the CIA. All right, Tim, how did you discover the intel analysis profession?

[00:01:18] **Tim:** Well, let's see. My background is in international relations. So I had studied international relations at UC Davis, and then I had done my master's degree in European studies at Georgetown.

And I always had an interest in kind of foreign policy, security policy those types of topics. But my first job was was actually I had done an ... I was doing an internship my last year of graduate school at USDA Department of Agriculture, and they had an economic research service.

And that allowed me to do a lot of writing. In fact, my writing was good enough that when I graduated they hired me. Y- I was an unpaid intern for about a year or so. And so they brought me on board and that's how I got started doing... It wasn't so much analytical writing.

Well, I guess it was ... I was a trade analyst, so I was writing about topics like, your- the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. And at that time, this is in the mid-'90s, so there w- the EU was going through enlargement, and I was really interested in that topic. And it, that became actually one of the themes, the common threads of my whole career was I was always interested and worked on, international organizations, so European Union and NATO and things like that, later on the UN.

So even though the s- the subject matter of agriculture was not really my interest, my, my tagline was, "Ag is not my bag." Of course, that doesn't really work well on a business card, but So that was that, at least, but the hook was that it was on European Union. I was really interested in European Union issues and particularly EU enlargement and integration.

Regional integration in general always fascinated me, like how, why do countries, how and why do countries basically cede sovereignty to these supranational organizations and things like that. I did that for a couple of years and then that led me to the RAND Corporation where, and that's where I did my doctoral work.

But the main draw there was that I could get experience doing analysis, being a RAND analyst, and of course, RAND is pretty famous for for policy and security analysis. So I did that for a few years. Did, worked a lot on NATO enlargement, which again, is s- similar theme, right? That's when Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia Czech Republic were joining NATO, so worked on some of those issues along with some other topics.

Did m- did some doctoral work. Actually did not finish my PhD. I'm an ABD, so thank you for calling me doctor, but I'm not actually- Oh ... a doctor, so it's okay.

[00:03:55] **Jason:** Oh, I am sorry.

[00:03:57] **Tim:** Yeah. I know. Yeah, it's all right.

[00:03:58] **Jason:** Yeah.

[00:03:59] **Tim:** Yeah, so if there's a lot of us, there's a lot of, a- of ABDs who start down that path and then realize, "Oh, do I really have to do the dissertation?"

And in my case, I didn't really have an interest in going to academia. I wanted to do policy analysis. That was- ... what my focus was there. So then that led me to the agency. So, and I think we d- we discussed this before that how that came about was in the Dec- around Christmas time of 2003, I had I got sick.

I was actually in the hospital with pneumonia and very serious- pneumonia. Like I was in, I was on pure oxygen for three days. I was in the ICU for 10 days, so in pretty bad shape. But I get a phone- I'm sitting in the hospital, I get a phone call, and it was an agency recruiter, and they wanted to meet me for a an in-person interview at some recruiting event.

This is in Los Angeles at the time. And so I was only able to speak for about one sentence at a time bef- with before gasping for air. So I was they asked like, " we'd like to meet you on such and such a date for an interview," and I would pull the oxygen out of my nose like, "Yeah, sure, sure.

That sounds great." Taking, gasping for air. Trying to pretend that everything's cool, right? While I'm... and never mentioning that I'm in the hospital and on oxygen or whatever, so.

[00:05:11] **Jason:** I picture- So

[00:05:12] **Tim:** one thing- ...

[00:05:12] **Jason:** that you sound like Darth Vader. That's what I- Yeah ... picture, like, you sounding like.

[00:05:17] **Tim:** Yeah, exactly. No, I was able to sound... Here's the thing. I was able to sound normal for about five seconds at a time. And so I was very careful to mute mute, mute the phone when I'm gasping for air and, Oh, gosh ... so, so that worked out. Had a good interview. They were impressed with my resume. They were hiring people who were in...

they were looking for analysts w- with, who had background in international organizations, so- ... I fit the bill. And so yeah, I started at the agency in the fall of 2004.

[00:05:44] **Jason:** Man that's wild. 'Cause what you also told me in the prep call yesterday is months later the doctors were letting you know that yeah, it was it was close there for a while.

They were concerned with your condition with the double lung pneumonia.

[00:06:00] **Tim:** Yeah. So I w- I remember sitting in the- ER, this is probably the first night and a doctor comes in. They take... I think my oxygen level in my blood was, like, 48%, it was incredibly low, whatever, and I was thir- I think I was 34 years old.

And the doctor comes in, and he's looking at me, and he's got a clipboard. He looks at me, and he looks at the clipboard, and he's like, "How old are you?" I said, "I'm 30, I'm 34." He's like, "Huh, I thought you were, like, like 68 or something," Based on the, based on what he saw on the chart. So I guess that should've been a clue, right?

Of, of- Yeah ... how bad I was doing, so.

[00:06:33] **Jason:** Yeah. Now, did you ever tell the recruiter that was on, that you were on the phone with that you were in the hospital, like, after the fact or anything?

[00:06:43] **Tim:** Probably a couple years later. Yeah, 'cause she ended up being my my boss's boss, right? She was, like the group chief.

Okay. So I th- I'm sure down the road I told her, "Hey, by the way, do you mem- do you remember when you recruited me?" Like, yeah, so that's a good story. It's going from death's door to the opening of a brand-new career. And then of course I did about 14 years there, so.

[00:07:05] **Jason:** Yeah. So take us then to your first days, weeks, months of- working in the CIA. Is is it just in awe, or are you maybe disappointed with maybe it was gonna be grander than what you thought? What was your take as you were f- experiencing being an analyst with the CIA for the first time?

[00:07:28] **Tim:** So I think the exper- it's simultaneously, like, surreal and mundane-

if that makes any sense. So 'cause you're going in like, wow, okay, this is, y- it's, you're kind of at the, at the center of the intelligence... Well, it is the Central Intelligence Agency, right? We used to say that all... We used to joke, "Central."

intelligence agency, right? And the CIA analysts have the reputation for, I guess, being a little more kinda arrogant and-

The again, in the intel- 'cause there are 15 intelligence agencies, right? But I think in general the CIA, it tends to get the best folks, and we ha- we we, and we poach we would poach good analysts from other agencies, NSA, places like that, things like, So you're in this strange world that you've read about and, and you're do- you're doing this really cool stuff, but at the same time you're in yeah, the first few days you're just in, like, dingy offices and filling out- ... forms and- ... blah, blah, blah. And it's like, oh man, this is, like, just like any other place. You're sitting in a cubicle farm just like any other office.

And so it, on that sense it's kind of, kind of funny 'cause it's, like, it's not nearly as glamorous as it's portrayed-

[00:08:39] **Jason:** Yeah ...

[00:08:39] **Tim:** in TV and movies. It's like y- you still have crappy offices and there's there's bureaucracy and there's unnecessary meetings and all this other stuff, but you're just, the topics are there was an incident on the other side of the world and we need to tell the president what's going on and stuff like that, so.

[00:08:54] **Jason:** Yeah.

So were you assigned a particular area of the world or did you have a particular topic that you were studying?

[00:09:02] **Tim:** Yeah, so I did international organizations. So that was my academic training and that's kinda what I had done. So I focused on multilateral diplomacy dynamics how different countries were approaching negotiations in the UN and UN Security Council dynamics, things like that.

So, but I covered other organizations as well throughout my career and really kind of developed expertise on, like, how these organizations work and which is most policy makers have very little understanding of how international organizations function. They just assume that the US as the biggest- country can go in and kinda dictate their will, and that's clearly not the case, that countries have different...

They also, the, a lot of US policymakers tend to think of international organizations like the E- the EU and NATO and the UN as autonomous actors,

and they aren't really a- they are, they're not really actors so much as they are forums, and they're, they are venues where negotiations are hashed out.

Countries come in. The UN has 190-some members, and the Security Council has 15, and with five permanent members. And so there's always the negotiations in progress, and it's kind of misleading to think of them as unitary autonomous actors because they really are more forum, for- fora for negotiations where thing, different decisions and policies are hashed out.

So a lot of the job was explaining to folks in in the Pentagon and the State Department "No, this isn't how it works. It's s- this c- such and such country has the presidency of the Security Council this month, and they have certain goals and objectives, and these countries are more amenable to our position, but these other countries are not."

So, that, that was a big part of the job, was just explaining those dynamics.

[00:10:55] **Jason:** So the data that you're studying for this, is it mostly written reports, or are you dealing with open source video? Are you interviewing folks? Like, what's kinda the breakdown there of the types of data that you were studying?

[00:11:14] **Tim:** Well, so in that phase of my career, it was mostly qualitative analysis. And it was all sor- it was all source analysis. Yeah. There was- ... there there would be open source stuff, but there were a lot of, like, your classified materials that would go in, that would go into the analysis.

But then one thing that I did develop was s- we always got questions about how countries would vote, right, on certain issues. And so one of the earliest things that I did there was to develop a tool using open source data on, UN General Assembly voting. And then, and that r- that resulted in a tool called Votester, which was basically an app that we created where you could go in and you could assess voting trends in the General Assembly and figure out on what issues countries had more affinity with the US on...

it was helpful for kind of identifying voting blocks and things like that.

And that became hugely- Popular because it was easy to understand. It was a tool that would digest, like a large number of data points. It was historical data. It went all the way back to 1946, I think.

So you could see long-term trends. You could see how countries would shift their voting over time reflecting changes in governments. Like the collapse of communism was a big shift, and then suddenly you had countries like Poland and Bulgaria, like, shifting their voting allegiance from the former communist block to voting more with Europe and things like that.

So, that- so that's really what got me into the more data and more q- heavily quantitative analysis, which was then the focus of, I guess, the second half of my career there.

[00:12:47] **Jason:** With the UN voting, I'm thinking in a way that you probably have these alliances on certain measures that these countries always vote alike or- these countries always vote this way.

But then you have the, always the aspect of how does, whatever the particular vote is, how does that impact that particular country? And they- ... might not vote with their allegiances because that would really be detrimental to that particular country. So I guess it sounds, though, the way you describe it, that this app was sophisticated enough to really get into different indexes in terms of what the actual vote was.

Like, what the particulars-

[00:13:41] **Tim:** Right ...

[00:13:41] **Jason:** of the vote.

[00:13:42] **Tim:** Yeah, that's true, and I think one of the main concepts that US policymakers sometimes had trouble grappling with was the difference between, what could... The meaning of consensus in international organizations, right?

It's c- kind of a difficult concept for Americans to grapple, 'cause we vote on everything, right? We have votes in the House, we have votes in the Senate, and we're always thinking about, "Okay, what's the majority? How many votes do we need to get for this to pass?"

And the majority wins, blah, blah, blah. And in international organizations, they function by consensus, so what that means is that in most cases they're, they don't vote on issues. B- they will... Even if some countries may not disagree with something the idea of consensus is, like maintaining, if you, if let's say there's a block of- Five or 10 countries that don't necessarily agree with something, if they don't feel that strongly about it, they just let it go because

they know that the majority of the membership is in favor of it. So th- that's what consensus is about, and a lot of countries, especially smaller countries, are very reluctant to stick their neck- necks out and say "We oppose this," and they don't wanna be voted down 100 nothing 'Cause if they call for a vote and it's 190 to four-

and then they become a pariah, and if you're a a tiny developing country that maybe is reliant on f- on foreign aid and trade from the bigger countries you're more likely to go along with things. So that was one thing that was... And that and that's true not even of small countries, even larger countries are, the idea of negotiating something, hashing out differences until you have a consensus, meaning the broad, the v- the broad view of the membership is in favor of something.

That's basically- ... what consensus is about without having to force a vote. Now, there were a lot of issues that would, that if it was a very serious issue that a country was very adamant about, then it, then it w- it would come to a vote. So a lot of votes on things about the Middle East or and often the US was the country that was like, "No, we don't..."

There was a, there was... A- and a lot of these resolutions would come up year after year, and like, what, ex- for example, there's one of them is called the right to food, which sounds like, what do you mean the right to food? That sounds like a kind of a str- a strange thing.

And that always, the US always voted against that for for whatever, some ideological reasons. The US also had, took a very legalistic approach to these things and w- would approach these things from a, from an international law perspective. Whereas a lot of countries would see them more as, not as legalistic, but more, I don't know, just aspirational or because they are UN General Assembly resolutions aren't, they're not legally binding. So they're just they're just expressing the the opinion of the majority of member states. So, so we would be outvoted 190, 193 to three- ... on the right to food or something like that.

And it and the three would be the US and a couple of, like, small Pacific Island states that you've never heard of, right? Yeah. So, so yeah. Huh.

[00:16:38] **Jason:** Since it's an app, you have the aspect of you have the data, you have the, what you wanna see, and the results of the data, but then there's the technical piece.

Is that something you as well got experience in with more of the technical- No ... side?

[00:16:53] **Tim:** No. I partnered with basically a software developer, Yeah ... who built the actual wrote the actual code for the software. But I was involved in I, the, I have some graphic designers in my extended family.

So I kind of have a knack for data visualizations- ... and you know what, and what, especially, like, what not to do when you're displaying data and stuff like that. So I was able to leverage some of that, and then just think from the consumer's perspective, like what do they need to...

these are non- non-technical, non-quantitative folks, so what's the best way to present the information in ways that they can most easily digest? So I was very involved in the design and the layout and the functions and, like, where the buttons should go, what the options should be, what it should look like, and then partnered with some very good software developers to build the tool.

[00:17:41] **Jason:** That's cool. Then you go on to update a 40-year-old tool in the Global Power Index.

[00:17:50] **Tim:** Yes. Yeah, so that led me to the second phase of my career, I moved from doing international international organization dynamics to a more quantitative shop- and it was there where I started ended up, yeah, as you mentioned, my experience doing Votester, I'm not even sure how it happened. I had come back from an assignment and I landed in this new office and was just kind of, didn't really have a portfolio yet, but started playing around with tools to measure, that measure national power.

And it, it kind of just took off where I developed this tool and started showing it around and people said, "Wow, this is useful." It's it was similar to Steve Jobs. He said that like, like the A- Apple c- would create things that, that people didn't realize that they needed until they had it, right?

I think that's what he said about the iPhone or whatever. It was similar to that where we created this tool that measured national power, and all of a sudden there were a bunch of folks who found it very useful and started using it in their to help them with decision-making as an input to other things.

So, yeah, so basically what I did is I found I was just looking around and looking at in the in academia what had been done before and what was being

used in the policy world. And f- for the most part, it was this tool that had been designed in the '60s and was it's sorely in need of being updated.

So, that, that's- That's what I did then. I kind of gathered some data and kind of created a more updated version of a tool that measured bas- the power of countries, essentially.

[00:19:24] **Jason:** So it was you that initiated this endeavor?

[00:19:28] **Tim:** Yeah. Yes. And again, it just started as kind of like sitting at my desk and playing around with gathering data sets and thinking, read- reading up on reading up on some of the academic work that had been done on how to measure military power and political power and economic power, and things like that.

And thinking critically of the, kind of the interactions between countries. And then working with others and kind of, doing surveys and fine-tuning this, looking for other data sets, kind of cr- sometimes often creating new data sets from scratch where we needed them. Incorporating some...

There were some some classified inputs that went into it, but we tried to keep it unclassified for the most part so that to make it more, more broadly useful so more folks could use it and that we could brief it more broadly.

[00:20:17] **Jason:** So did it take much to get this off the ground? Did you have to put in, put together a big pitch to get time and energy spent to go towards this?

[00:20:27] **Tim:** I wanna say that it was a year, a years long process, I think- ... of creating the tool and vetting it and getting buy-in from folks. And- ... there were a lot of partners involved in terms of coming up with the weights of each component of the index and things like that. And then once we had it we briefed it around and it kind of took off and was adopted by a lot of policy shops in DOD and State Department and various organs of the US government.

[00:20:53] **Jason:** , That's a big success story, right?

Going from an idea to multi-agency implementation.

[00:21:01] **Tim:** Yeah. And then it... And then it took off from there because once we had this measure of power, which is just kind of a static measure, it had measures of, it said military power, economic power diplomatic power.

We, developed new data sets to measure the diplomatic power of countries, , which- ... had never been done before really. And incorporating things like, Well, for example, in the old measures- None of them accounted for nuclear weapons. So the fact that countries spend billions and billions of dollars to develop nuclear capabilities, you think of India and Pakistan, for example.

And if you have a measure that's supposedly measuring national power and you're not accounting for nukes, it seems ludicrous to us. So, so we came up with some tools for doing that. But also rather than just counting the pure number of nuclear warheads which would be heavily skewed towards obviously the U.S.

and Russia that was one where we took a logarithmic measure. So we figured, okay, having that first nuclear weapon is extremely critical in terms of joining the nuclear club. So that's way more important than say adding the 1001st nuclear warhead if you're an established nuclear power.

So we we did some what do you call it? Transformations of the data to make the numbers more accurately reflect the kind of geopolitical significance of the data.

[00:22:20] **Jason:** As I mentioned, this is a 40-year-old update it was originated in the 1960s.

Maybe back in the 1960s, there wasn't really that many people with nuclear power, but it does seem curious that was left off the list of defining a country's power.

[00:22:40] **Tim:** Yeah. Well, one of the things we realized digging into the history of this it was developed by an academic named David Singer at the University of Michigan.

And it was called Comprehensive Index of National Capabilities, the CINC or the CINC. And at the time think about 1965 and the capacity of computers at the time. You're talking about like punch cards and big data at that time was maybe like two kilobyte. I forget what the data capacity was of like memory at the time.

It was so tiny that they didn't even have data for every year because of the constraints of memory and computers at the time. They only had data for every five years. So it was a five-year thing. So it's one of the first things we did is like, okay, why is this every five years?

It should be annual data. So a lot of these decisions that you look at like, well, why the hell would you do that? That doesn't make any sense. If you go back and you look at the, Technical constraints at the time- Yeah ... and also just the availability of information, right? It was a... You can't just go to the World Bank and web- website and download- 70 years of GDP data like you can today. So, I think that's more... That was part of it, was getting a broader understanding, okay, this is why things the way they were. It these weren't stupid people that were-

...

[00:23:56] **Tim:** Creating these tools. They just had limited access to data and very limiting constraints in terms of the memory of the computers that they were working with.

So, but at the same time when I was starting the project and I realized that this tool was being widely used both in academia and in the and in the policy world it was mainly because there was nothing else had come along. Right? People were using it because their predecessors had used it.

It was the only thing. It was only tool on the shelf. So that's why it was so widely used, and I think that explains the success of the tool that we made. It was like, oh, wow this actually makes a lot more sense. 'Cause in our briefings we would just show them side by side, and it's like, okay, this obviously makes more sense to add more data and make it annual and add some visualization tools and things like that.

[00:24:43] **Jason:** But with that, it seems like you were taking on a lot, at least in the beginning, to get it up to speed. 'Cause it seems like there was probably a lot of things that you had to add for the, for lack of better term, version 2.0.

And it... All that data was... I guess talk a little bit about- Taking the data, 'cause you have all these different data sources, and trying to build this index of it where you're trying to establish these thresholds

it sounds like you're trying to put a number on all these different aspects of a country's power. And then ob- obviously you're summing them all up to then come up with one final number, if you will- yes ... for lack of a better description. And so it seems to me that it c- it obviously had to have the precision there and the intelligence analysis portion of it, of how to assign value to different aspects of those indexes.

[00:25:53] **Tim:** Yeah, and I think that was the... I think that was the skill set or the expertise that I developed over a decade or so of doing this, was developing and in- innovating ways of quantifying things that are hard to quantify, right? Yeah. So that kind of became my tagline, is like quantifying qualitative information.

So I'll just give you an example. In most traditional national power indices, they, most of them will use some measure of population, right? So they'll, And the easiest thing to do is just count how many people there are, right? So that's what the, that's what the CINC did, that's what a lot of other indices do.

And then if you think more critically about that, rather than counting just the number of people, if you think of it in broader as how do, how does demography contribute to the power of a country? If you step back and you think more critically of it, then it's more about just the quantity of human beings you have in the coun- in the country.

But the human capital is more you need to think about the say maybe the broader the health outcomes of a country, the education level, so instead of just c- calling it population, we changed that category of the index to human capital.

And we accounted for things like education, and life expectancy, and health outcomes. The UN has a thing called the Human Development Index which is a combination of kind of the health and education outcomes. So, so we used that to, to modify... So you think about, Countries like Bangladesh, for example, not sure exactly what the population of Bangladesh is, but it's probably in the top five or seven in the world, and has a larger population than Germany.

But obviously Germany has m- if you're measuring human capital rather than the number of human beings, then obviously Germany would rate higher because of their education outcomes and the and health and longevity and things like that. So that's an example of k- one of, one of the, one of the kind of innovations that we made.

And you present this to policymakers and they're like, "Well, yeah, of course it... Of course that makes sense." We got very little pushback I would say- ... in terms of when we presented this. We would have people, like, quibbling over, like the weights of things or, "Did you think of that?"

Or, "Are you including that?" Yeah. But when it came to presenting this compared to what was done before, I think that explains the success of it. It was like it was it was... Yeah, it wasn't perfect, and there were some shortcomings.

Yeah. There were things that we left out. But I think overall it was much better than anything that had been used before.

So I think that accounts for its kind of bro- broad wide adoption.

[00:28:26] **Jason:** D- Now, did you have any particular process for assigning the weights?

[00:28:31] **Tim:** Yeah. So this is where we brought in I worked with a team , we did a lot of surveys, ... within the intelligence community. So we figured we opened up, we tried to get as a broad input as possible in terms of variety of,

Types of analysts, military analysts, economic analysts, political analysts and whatnot. And used those, So u- using surveys not only to come up with the weights of the measures, but we also did surveys of, we asked people to rank. We would give people, like, 30 countries and ask them, "Okay, how would you rank these in terms of power?"

Right? So, trying to come up with some... 'Cause there, there's no right answer. It's not like w- we're trying to build an estimate of something.

And there was no definitive. It's not like a hard science where there's a, where there is a definitive final answer for these things.

[00:29:15] **Jason:** Yeah.

[00:29:15] **Tim:** So, so yeah, we d- we used a lot of we li- r- relied a lot o- on surveys to kinda come up with the weighting of thing. And u- understanding that's already introducing some biases because the surveys were done by intelligence analysts, right? Their view of the world might be different from others.

And some of the survey results were, were- kind of hilarious, and we had to exclude some of the responses. We 'cause we're asking people w- who are, have very defined jobs, sitting in their cubicle focusing on a s- single issue, and then we're asking them to step out of your world and the cubicle and think about the world as a whole and come up with ratings for things.

But I remember one survey response was it was a military analyst. Anyway, we're asking people to assign weights to a whole range of things, and the response was short-range missiles 20%, long-range- ... missiles eight- 80%, and that was his index. So obviously we excluded responses like that, but.

[00:30:11] **Jason:** Oh, man.

[00:30:12] **Robert:** This is Robert Aboumitri, a retired analyst with the RCMP. If I have an advice for analyst, one advice, , tell the story of the data. Do not tell the story of somebody who wants a story to be told, even if it's your boss, even if it's the chief of police and they tell you to show something and as a result of your analysis.

Do not. Stay true to what's in front of you. Let the data, , speak to you, and you be the voice of that data.

[00:30:49] **Megan:** My name is Megan Cruz. , I'm the crime analysis supervisor at Richmond Police, and my public service announcement is knowing how much, , the data and in- the information that crime analysts touch, , applies to everything a department does.

Everything from media responses to patrol allocation to solving crimes to, , overtime allocation, that commanders really should be tapping their crime analysts before they make any kind of decisions. Everything should be evidence-based and data-driven.

[00:31:25] **Greg:** Hello, my name is Greg Thomas. One phrase that annoys me that analysts say is that they say that...

When they introduce themselves, they say, "I am just an analyst." You should be proud of your profession and the field , and the job that you do, and don't say you're just an analyst.

[00:31:47] **Jason:** In terms of the Global Power Index, was there anything in terms of a country's maybe i- illicit economy? Like, if there wa- if th- there was a major drug export or import, or organized crime, or a- that, that type of aspect where it that's not necessarily maybe well-known, that's just maybe something that, but that is still part of a, the dynamic or the makeup, I should say, of the country.

[00:32:21] **Tim:** Yeah. So, I might be confusing this 'cause the, after the Global Power Index I developed several other tools, one, one that measured the strategic importance of countries. But I believe in the Global Power Index we had a political capacity category. So this came up a lot 'cause we would have people say, "Well if you're measuring the economy and-

The country has a huge illicit economy, how does that-

...

[00:32:45] **Tim:** How does that fit in?" , One way that we did that for social political capacity we looked at government revenues. So, how much revenue was this, is the central government able to collect? And if you look at the the academic research on this, that becomes a, it's clear that's a very powerful tool for accounting, accounting for things like illicit economy or trust in the government and things like that 'cause the ability of a country...

Y- you think about the legitimac- how do you measure the legitimacy- of a country's national government. That's a s- ... super qualitative thing that's very squishy, and there's... it's really hard to come up with ways to measure, say, the le- the legitimacy of a government. But if you look at government revenues, that, that becomes a very powerful proxy because if citizens are willingly paying their taxes you look at tax collection rates around the world, and, like, Scandinavia is, like, the top of the rankings in terms of ability to gather revenues from a population.

And then you look at, like, countries like Zimbabwe or Nigeria, and it's much lower, right?

...

[00:33:53] **Tim:** And then, and that's... So that's kind of an indirect way. So I would say that we ended up coming up with measures like that where, that were finding good data sets of things that were proxies for things that we couldn't directly measure.

[00:34:05] **Jason:** Okay. So then, yeah I guess, 'cause that was where my head was going, too. How would you have gathered that type of information if it wasn't readily available? But- Right ... I can see b- doing it by proxy was th- was the path to go. That makes sense.

[00:34:19] **Tim:** Yeah.

[00:34:20] **Jason:** All right. And

[00:34:20] **Tim:** then that led to the next tool that I created was it measured...

Okay, so this is just measuring... i, i- in IR theory there's, y- the the realist model of the world is nation states are billiard balls, right? They're kind of like things. And we're measuring the weight of... if you think of it in, like, like

scientific terms or th- we're just measuring the weight of countries how powerful they are.

But one of the next tools that I developed was, okay it's, it was measuring national strategic importance. So this is how important are countries to the strategic interests of the United States. So, and these are two different things, right? Because- ... just because a country is powerful doesn't mean that it, it has a high strategic importance to us.

So, so, so that led to a tool of, and this then became another thing that was pretty well-received because it, it fed directly into kind of resource allocation decisions, right? So, by allowing policymakers and decision-makers to have another input into their decision proc- processes based on how important the countries were to the US.

[00:35:25] **Jason:** But that sounds like it would be more difficult and maybe even more subjective depending on who you're talking to, right? That could- Yes ... that seems like that was, in terms, could be way more political than- Yes ... the first one, right? Yeah.

[00:35:40] **Tim:** Yeah. Yes. No, it was definitely more difficult and, And it required more...

Like you, yeah, like you said, it's like, well, why are you counting this and not that and blah, blah, blah. But this is one where we... Recognizing that different policymakers and different agencies might have different different worldviews, let's say- Yeah. ... On what is or what is not important.

So we kind of built that flexibility into the tool. So we allowed users... Let's say we're we're briefing this to someone at the Commerce Department, for example.

And they have... And their view of strategic importance is probably gonna be more heavily weighted on economic factors than, say, someone at DOD.

So we allowed users to come up with their own weights, ... and maybe they can turn off certain components of the index and kind of create their own custom in- index. So, bec- that, that was our way of dealing with that. We did have a our overall measure.

But then if specific users wanted to tweak that, then they could go in and basically have toggle, toggle o- on and off different factors. And that was also

an interesting way to kind of look at the kind of multifaceted nature of strategic importance.

[00:36:52] **Jason:** So was there a key or was there a particular process that really allowed the system to be concise, yet complex, right?

That didn't like- Yeah ... it was, it didn't allow it to get bogged down, but was still helpful- ... and useful.

[00:37:11] **Tim:** Yeah, exactly. 'Cause there... So, this is where I was in an analytics unit- this is in their early teens when big data was just becoming the buzzword at the time.

And I always said that I worked in small data. I was using Excel spreadsheets, right? I wasn't using high-powered data analytics-

[00:37:32] **Jason:** No LLMs.

[00:37:32] **Tim:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah. That was not a thing at the time. And there were folks who were doing that kind of thing.

And for me, 'cause I was always... Again, my background was not... i'm not a math PhD. I worked with a lot of folks who had heavily quantitative backgrounds. I came from the international relations field and I'm looking for ways to... So I feel like I had more, maybe a greater understanding of how policy c- how consumers would use these and how they think about these issues.

So, so the challenge was, okay, that how do you incorporate, like you said you wanna you wanna m- measure as many things as you can, but you wanna be able to explain it to a policymaker who, who maybe doesn't have a strong quantitative background. So, so yeah, we focused very much on, like, I think the National Strategic Importance, I'm looking at it now, it had maybe 13 or 15 indicators in f- in four different dimensions, and each of them you were...

It was easy to explain to a policy consumer like, "Okay, this is why we're including it, and this is how we're measuring it." And being very open throughout the process of, like, where the shortcomings are. These aren't perfect, but we're trying to... The, some of these are proxy measures of concepts or facets of strategic importance that we know are important.

We know that military partnerships, for example is a, is an important facet of what, of how country, of strategic importance of countries. So how do you measure military partners? Well, there's joint military exercises military assistance how much milit- financial military assistance, military training and things like intelligence partnerships.

So there's yeah, for, so for each kind of subcategory we call them, there's dimensions and then clusters and then indicators. So the indicators are the actual data that we're using, and there were, like, 25 of those, and they would fit into, like, a dozen clusters, which then fit into four dimensions. So, So

[00:39:28] **Jason:** , When you're developing this index, are you essentially creating that from scratch, or is that something that's already established, all those nodes you just described is all of those indicators already established, or that was part of the process that you were doing in developing this strategic index?

[00:39:52] **Tim:** I think it's fair to say that we did it from scratch, because we did- Wow ... we did an extensive... we worked with with some contracting partners and had them... We commissioned some lit reviews and said, "Okay, can you go out and find all the work that's been done in academia on measuring measuring strategic importance?"

And it came, they came back with, like, well, kind of funny, they came back with, like, the CINC that I mentioned earlier. It was like, "Oh, there's this thing from the '60s c- called the Comprehensive Index." I'm like yeah, we know that. We've already kind of upgraded that." So, so that was the first start, 'cause you know you never wanna completely reinvent the wheel if there's, if there's-

Work that, that has been done. And it to be fair, we built on the CINC. That was kind of our starting point. So in, in thinking of the national strategic importance of how to measure that, it really started with the with the power indices that we had built, 'cause we had some good data from that.

And then just kind of instead of... But then measuring it in terms of bilateral connections, right? So, it's one thing to measure how much trade a country has, but how much trade a country has with the US is is more significant for the importance of that country.

So yeah and a- and again, having gone through the process of creating the first one you kinda come up with best practices. You're like, "Okay, this is what

we've done before, and it was successful," so using, again, using a lot of surveys doing a decent amount of, Research in, into the academic research.

'Cause again, each piece of this ha- has, had been looked at, I think, in terms of academic work. How ch- academic studies on like trade and investment ties and things like that, and how that how that increases the the leverage between countries and things like that.

And then it was, it w- it was political because some of it was we looked at things like human rights. And this is a time when I don't know, I don't wanna get too political on this, but there was bipartisan understanding that the human rights of a country, like cou- countries that were major violators of,

Of political rights and civil liberties were important to the US because that's, those were things that US administrations were interested in, right? That would put a country on... Let's just put it, l- let's just make it a kind of a stark example. You have two countries that are exactly the same size, have exactly the same trade relationships with the US.

Yeah. And one of them i- is committing massive political rights abuses. , We would tend to focus more on, on that country and trying to curb those abuses than we would- ... the other country., Yeah, it was mostly from, built from scratch, but picking up pieces here and there of things that had been done before.

And then of course briefing it and getting input from our customers and like, "Oh, have you thought about this?" And like, oh yeah, sometimes there would be things that we had completely missed that we would incorporate into it.

[00:42:48] **Jason:** Yeah. You mentioned that from that point it was going to be updated once a year, or maybe- that was just the power index. How many versions did you work on with these indexes?

[00:43:01] **Tim:** Yeah. We tried to update it we tried... Most of the data s- underlying data sets were annual in nature. So, and a lot of it was coming from like UN data sets.

The UN has high quality data sets across the board on a whole bunch of things, so we would use that a lot as a, as an input. And some of this we had to create our own data sets from scratch. So that w- that was another piece. And it just became the, it became a whole program of analysis where we were cr- creating-

Brand new data sets combined- merging them with existing data sets tweaking things that already existed.

And again, with the broader goal, the whole mindset of the whole thing is like, what's the best way to quantify concepts that are inherently difficult to quantify?

[00:43:47] **Jason:** Yeah. Now you need to... I- it makes me want to get you on, like, a crime index endeavor-

...

[00:43:55] **Jason:** And come up with various ways of evaluating crime and even evaluating police departments.

I often ask analysts who've been around for 20-plus years, what are some things that you're surprised we haven't figured out yet? And that's one for me that it seems like we're still been counting crime, and I would've just thought- Yeah

that we would've come up with some more complex way of evaluating efficiency, in not only police departments, but in, in like even, intelligence analysis agencies.

So

[00:44:32] **Tim:** I think the tool the methods that I've developed over the years are pretty broadly adaptable to a variety of fields, right?

It's coming up with thinking it, it all started... I w- let's back up, 'cause it all started with thinking about not using thinking of numbers at all. Thinking about like, okay, when you think about, when you think about the power of a country-

...

[00:44:54] **Tim:** What are the main dimensions of national power, right?

And so most people would say, well, there's military power, there's economic power and political power, and then if you wanna add the human capital thing. So that's how it usually started from the big picture, the huge top level view. Then you come up with dimensions, right?

So then you've got three or four dimensions of this thing that you wanna measure. And then, okay, let's zero in on economic power, right? So what are, what contributes to economic power? Well, there's the size of the economy, there's how much trade you do. There's a technological component. 'Cause if you're building supercomputers, that probably should count more than if you're- if you're exporting soybeans or something. So, then you start thinking of breaking it down dimension by dimension, and then that gets you to clusters and kind of sub-components. So yeah, I think there's definitely a scope for this if there's anyone out there who wants to- ... develop a tool.

And again, what we found is like this does, a lot of this stuff is, it's just never been done before. So that's what- ... makes it so powerful and useful. It's not that it's perfect and that it's measuring everything- ... but it just gives you another... and we n- when we briefed this, we never said, "This is the be all, end all."

Like, "This is what you should do." Like, "Do what- ... this tool tells you." It's just another, a- another input into decision processes that folks have. But it gives, it lends it it, it's not purely quantitative because you're measuring qualitative aspects. So, so it's just, again, I think that's the power in it, is that it's combining qualitative and quantitative at the same time, and you're capturing subject matter e- expertise, and that's the key factor here, is that you're relying on folks who have- done this in their, they made a career of this, and they understand-

The world in w- in which they're dealing and the concepts. And just kind of putting some numbers to that and helping folks think about it maybe more, ... more analytically or more critically.

[00:46:48] **Jason:** It kind of reminds me, though I'm curious the Deep Dive series Before You Leap with Randy Stickley.

The last episode that just aired talked about the confidence accuracy gap, I envision with that concept, if what you're talking about, you have subject matter experts, but their evaluation of their contribution to the index, did you experience anything like that where they the information that you got was, had high confidence but it didn't turn out to be very accurate?

[00:47:28] **Tim:** Yeah, I mean, that's difficult 'cause again, there's no established factual benchmark against- ... which we're measuring things, right? We're kind of grasping- ... in the dark in terms of what the reality is. You're measuring again, we're coming up with proxy measures for things.

But I will give... Well, no I won't go into that example. C- what... Can you tell me what do you mean by the confidence accuracy gap, just for my background?

[00:47:52] **Jason:** Sure. Well, it's, I think it's the idea of having maybe too much confidence in a particular data set or particular bit of intelligence, and you're putting too much weight on it, and then-

[00:48:09] **Tim:** Right

[00:48:10] **Jason:** you, the action that then it was the wrong, it was the wrong action because it wasn't necessarily accurate information. In your case, when you're dealing with the index and you're dealing with a subject matter expert if the, maybe if the old wisdom was something where everybody was putting a lot of weight on one particular dimension, but times have changed, for instance, and now those old adages are maybe no longer true.

Yeah. And so the accuracy of those perceptions. That's just one example. I'm just it just when you, as you were describing this- ... and you're gathering a lot of information from different people, and you mentioned the one that was basically just had a two-prong approach that you threw out.

It got me thinking if it in terms of how confident or the people were versus actually applying the information in the tool.

[00:49:08] **Tim:** Yeah, I mean, there's, It's one thing you learn when you start diving into this is-

...

[00:49:13] **Tim:** Even something as- as broadly accepted as GDP, right?

Which everyone knows what, most people know what GDP is, and it's accepted of, like, the size of an economy, right? But-

...

[00:49:25] **Tim:** But then there's but are you measuring it purchasing power parity or market exchange rates, right? So there's different- ... ways to approach how it's even measured.

And then if you dive into how GDP is actually calculated, it's not a perfect measure of- ... the size of a country. The broader lesson here, I think, in terms of just doing analysis in general is that we always have we use is intelligence gaps, right?

, Where we know that we're missing information- ... that, that could be critical or important. So I think it, that's one thing that we always preach when we're, when we teach intelligence analysis is to acknowledge when you're presenting your analysis to a customer it's it's incumbent upon you to point out those intelligence gaps that, okay, this is the information that we have.

Here's what we know. Like Colin Powell used to say, your job as an intelligence analysis is to say, "This is what we know, and this is what we don't know, and this is our best assessment of what we think is going to happen." So, so yeah, and that goes for data when you're using data as well because there are f- some folks who think, "Well, if it's quantified it's therefore, it's more legitimate than if something..."

Just because you put numbers to something doesn't mean that it's more rigorous or more has more credibility than something that doesn't have numbers attached to it, 'cause you have to look at the quality of those numbers as well.

There's a quote. There's a great...

I would throw this in here. I think it was Albert Einstein who said... And this is one of the little quotes that I would keep up in my in my desk. "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts." Right? So that's a... If you think about that's pretty powerful.

So it what that's saying is like, just again, just 'cause you have numbers for something doesn't mean that it's measuring something important to what you're trying to do.

[00:51:09] **Jason:** All right. I do wanna move on to talking about your exit from the CIA and getting- ... into consulting.

But before we do, I do want to give you an opportunity to share the story of being invited to the White House for a debriefing.

[00:51:27] **Tim:** Yeah, there was I think this was the- Power index where I guess word had got out that we had built this tool, and I was invited to brief someone who was focusing on US strategic strategic policy.

And so yeah, that was a cool opportunity to get to go, to get to go to the White House and actually sat in the Situation Room, which was kinda cool- Wow ... and and gave the briefing. Now, I don't know what this what the senior policy maker ever did with the tool, but they were very interested in they geeked out on the process.

They were very interested in how we developed it and and things like that. So that was neat. Wait a

[00:52:03] **Jason:** minute. Are you saying you didn't go on a Jack Ryan adventure from there? Like, the, it wasn't a movie to where you were called from the White House as an intel analyst and then go on this grand adventure to save the world?

No, but- You have no idea what they did with the information you gave them?

[00:52:22] **Tim:** No, but I think- ... we were downtown, so I think we did go... We did do Potbelly's afterwards, so that was kinda- ... that was good.

[00:52:30] **Jason:** Yeah, Potbelly's.

All right.

[00:52:32] **Robert:** This is Robert Aboumitri, a retired analyst with the RCMP. If I have an advice for analyst, one advice, , tell the story of the data. Do not tell the story of somebody who wants a story to be told, even if it's your boss, even if it's the chief of police and they tell you to show something and as a result of your analysis.

Do not. Stay true to what's in front of you. Let the data, , speak to you, and you be the voice of that data.

[00:53:10] **Megan:** My name is Megan Cruz. , I'm the crime analysis supervisor at Richmond Police, and my public service announcement is knowing how much, , the data and in- the information that crime analysts touch, , applies to everything a department does.

Everything from media responses to patrol allocation to solving crimes to, , overtime allocation, that commanders really should be tapping their crime analysts before they make any kind of decisions. Everything should be evidence-based and data-driven.

[00:53:46] **Greg:** Hello, my name is Greg Thomas. One phrase that annoys me that analysts say is that they say that...

When they introduce themselves, they say, "I am just an analyst." You should be proud of your profession and the field, and the job that you do, and don't say you're just an analyst.

[00:54:08] **Jason:** Let's talk about your decision to leave the CIA and get into consulting work.

[00:54:13] **Tim:** Yeah, so I left in 2018, and mainly for family reasons, to get out of the DC area. And, Okay ... I grew up in Colorado and had always planned to retire here. So, and it, the decision boiled down to like, do I wanna spend another 11 years in DC to get a- ... quote, unquote full retirement, or to- leave early and have more flexibility and be able to do continue to do interesting work. So, one of the... So there's always when... There's always push factors and pull factors right, when you're leaving a job or making a career change. So for me, the push factors were just the level of bureaucracy and meetings and things was becoming weighing more heavily on me and the amount of time spent doing interesting, intellectually challenging, and impactful work was declining.

So it was like, all right, now is the time. I'd done a lot. I'd done a lot of work there. I be- became a senior analyst and it was like, okay, there's... I think this is a good time to leave. So yeah, then I started consulting and in... Basically what I ended up doing was was analytic training.

I did consult on some things doing kinda strategic analysis helping different organizations think about risk analysis and strategic planning, And did some geopolitical advisory work for a while with in private sector and public sector and some think tanks and things like that. But mostly what I've been doing is analytic training.

And a lot of that, again, is focusing on on writing, like teaching folks how to think critically and and put their analysis on the written page.

[00:55:49] **Jason:** Yeah. , Did you consider yourself always- A good writer? I think you mentioned in the beginning that you thought your writing was good enough to get into the CIA do you think you always were a good writer, or do you think you were taught to be a good writer?

[00:56:06] **Tim:** I think a bit of both. I think there is some people just have more natural inherent ability, I guess, to use word- i, to, w- let's just say

wordcraft, right? The ability to use words v- vocabulary, like how to characterize things. So I think I was a, maybe a decent writer, but I would say... most of what I, my, I would call my writing skill right now, I would say the majority of it is from training is from- learning, learning the craft of doing analytic writing. And yeah, I should mention, like, throughout my career, I was always involved in various tradecraft cells, and I loved editing papers. That was not necessarily even q- quantitative stuff, but ed- w- working with colleagues and helping them edit pieces and working in tradecraft cells and editing things before they went up the chain.

So that, I had, I already had some background in that, and then I, it b- it really became a passion. Like, editing is, like, one of my things that I really enjoy to the f- to the point that I even enjoy editing my own work, right? I'll write something, I'll let it set for a day. I come back to it the next day and there would be review sessions where I'd be sitting with my managers and going over a piece, and as they're giving feedback, I would interject and like, "Oh, we should change this too.

We need to change this." Let's fix this. Let's fix that." So joining in the process, and I think that's one of the... I would say that's one of the important takeaways that I would say as anyone who's in the field of doing any kind of analysis, is that in most situations, what you're writing is is a corporate product, right?

It's like it might have your name on it, it might not have your name on it. It might have the name of your office or your agency or whatever. But approaching it, approaching the process as a collaborative effort and kind of stepping back and disassociating yourself, taking your ego out of the process and realizing that this is a, it's a product that we're all working on together.

Yes, you might have sole authorship or primary authorship, but . the process of making any written product better is u- usually a collaborative effort, and the end product will come out better if you kind of step away from it and think of the product separately from your own,

Your own self

[00:58:16] **Jason:** Yeah.

Yeah, I mean, and wr- writing is one of my soapboxes on this show because any job announcement for a analyst job is going to have something about writing in it and oral and written communication. And yet there isn't a lot of training out there on the particular topic.

A lot of conferences don't cover it. A lot of initial training in analysis does not cover writing. ... I think they do, I think they do a little bit better with oral presentations tips and tricks, but in terms of writing, I really don't see a lot of it out there. , What are the big things that you're seeing maybe analysts do, or do you have, like, maybe a certain set of principles when it comes to intelligence analysis writing ?

[00:59:13] **Tim:** Yeah. Yeah, so let's back up. So I... When I started in 2020- ... with the group that I'm working with now, that... Analytic Advantage is the name of consulting group, and they do... They provide analytic training a whole range of different things. And when I was first brought on, I was a co-teacher and sometimes, like, a guest editor and things like that.

I was briefing slide decks that had been created by others, and lot- lots of great material, , it wasn't my own material, let's say. Let's put it that way. ... And then I started working with I started working with the RCMP, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

This is actually my first exposure to I guess, like crime analysis or law enforcement analysis, was working with the Mounties. And they have... So for those who don't... are familiar, the RCMP is, Their analog in the US is more than... they're kind of a national police force, but they also are in charge of counterterrorism and counterintelligence, so they have much broader, their portfolio of responsibilities is much larger than, say, the FBI in the United States. They kind of overlap with several other Of US agencies. So, and I started working with them in 2021, I believe, and that led to me creating my own course on, on analytic trade... I call it analytic tradecraft because it's more than just writing.

It's the focus is on writing, but there's-

...

[01:00:34] **Tim:** We use the word tradecraft to, to capture the whole process of thinking about con- conceptualizing and producing analysis. And so for me it always starts with impact. Like your job is to... You think if you boil it down to like your job as an analyst, like why are you doing the analysis?

It's really to inform policy decisions so that the policymakers, the decision-makers that you're writing for are able to make better decisions and have better outcomes. So, I always start with impact, like what's the most, what's the best

way, how can you improve your out- your impact? And and for most of us that translates to job satisfaction, right?

Like, if you're actually doing something that is having a impact in the world, even if it's just a small thing of, like, preventing your boss from making a mistake by giving them better information, right? That's always where I start is impact. And then, okay, so well, how do you produce impact?

And that comes down to writing very clearly, getting your key assessment, your key judgments conveyed clearly and concisely in a way that are easily absorbed. And then everything goes from there. Like, how do you get to that endpoint?

[01:01:49] **Jason:** So I- I think one of the struggles that I've had with writing is how much information to give.

H- what to talk about, h- how the precision over, over impact. But I also know that I had a tendency to be more informing my audience, the decision-makers, as opposed- ... to maybe influencing. Talk a little bit about that, the analyst's role in terms of the mindset of influencing over, informing.

[01:02:23] **Tim:** Well, I think that starts with knowing your audience and knowing- ... , who you're writing for. Because, yeah, there are many situations where you have to explain something that your readers might not understand-

...

[01:02:34] **Tim:** In o- in order to craft the the argument that y- that you're making.

But I would argue that informing is influencing, right? If you're telling your readers something that they don't know that they probably should know- ... then that's a, that alone is impact, right? Even- ... if it's just saying, "Oh here's how the UN General Assembly works," right?

Or for example, just something from my background.

Or if you're writing something that's more technical analysis, like we work with we, we do some work with nuclear physicists. So a lot of their back- their background are, like, these are PhDs in in molecular physics and things like that.

So they, they have very detailed technical information, so a lot of the challenge is how do you write this in a way that is understand- understandable? So- ... but that all, it all boils down to your, knowing your audience and knowing their level of sophistication. How much do they know?

How much do they not know? If you're writing for someone who's brand new in their job, then you might have to include more more background materials. Now, whether you include that in the piece that you're writing or if you put it in footnotes or an appendix or just point to it as further reading, then that, yeah, that's obviously a main ch- One of the key challenges in writing an analysis is calibrating that level of detail and expertise- to your audience in a way that isn't condescending but it, but also helps build your argument or helps you convey your message.

[01:03:53] **Jason:** What are the struggles in writing that your students, have? Is there common themes there?

[01:03:59] **Tim:** It's similar to what you just said about, like, putting too much, maybe p- putting too much information in.

Like-

...

[01:04:04] **Tim:** As most... A- all of us are writing with some level of expertise, and we all have a tendency to want to demonstrate our expertise or how much we know in our writing. So that's where you're throwing "I know this," ... but not everything that you know is something that your reader needs to know, right?

So-

And that's one of the biggest challenges, is figuring out, okay here's some, a set of facts that are really cool that maybe you're the only one who knows it or one of the few people who knows it, and you wanna- Demonstrate that you know that, but maybe your reader doesn't care. Like- it's a totally it's off topic or whatever. So that's one of the, one of the main challenges is figuring out the relevance of the information. Another one that comes up time and time again is just learning how to write concisely, how to make it short and sweet and impactful.

So that's a lot of what we spend time on is figuring out how to how to write, be both concise and precise and adequately sourced and conveying your level of

confidence in the information and what information that you're missing. And it it's it's hard. It's difficult, and it takes years of practice to get r- really good at it.

... But in, in the courses that I do, that's why in the courses that I run I tend to include a lot more exercises where you we'll present a topic or concept, and then we give the students an opportunity to practice it, like, right away. And then work with each other in small groups and ch- chew on an idea and a concept and try to...

I think that's a good way of learning is by actually practicing and doing it. .

[01:05:37] **Jason:** . I guess any particular tips that you wanna share with the audience?

[01:05:41] **Tim:** Yeah. So, a couple of notes here. So I, for me, one of the things that really helped when I first started at the agency was, 'cause , it's a brand new type of writing, right?

So, I'm sure probably most of us have been in situations where if you do any kind of writing, if you switch offices or you switch organizations or you switch careers the type of writing that you're expected to do can be totally different. So one of the things that I was told that was very helpful was to copy exemplars.

Ask your boss, find out, what are the best examples of the type of the, of writing that you're doing, the genre, let's say, of a writing- ... the ty- type of report that you're writing. If it's a situation report or a s- it, some kind of summaries, find out, go out and seek out the best examples of it and then copy it.

There's no that's not plagiarism- ... to copy the style of- ... of the best work. And sometimes there'll be catchphra- there's phrases or the or there's a sentence that is like, "Oh, this is a great sentence. Like, I can use this as a model of how to improve my writing." So that's what I would say. Figure out what are some of the best practices of the office that you're in. Another one, I think I've already mentioned this already, is kinda check your ego at the door. Try to, as much as you can, separate your work. This goes for more than just writing.

Try to separate your work from your own ego, and then I think that's a healthy approach to especially if you're doing any collaborative endeavor. Like some there's always be things where you're gonna be passionate, and you're gonna argue for your position or your point of view.

But but I think especially in written products, most of us are writing in-, collaborative environments, and things just go more smoothly if you kinda detach yourself and say, "Okay, this is a piece that we're working on. Yes, I wrote it, I'm the primary author, but it's still a collaborative piece."

Which is not to say to roll over if someone comes in with a, it five edits and you say, "Okay, we'll just take all of your edits." You need to stick up for yourself when you feel strongly about if they're changing I, we were always told if the reviewer is changing the nature of your message, then you need to be prepared to push back and say, "No, this you can't change the meaning.

This is our analysis. This is our conclusion." But if if it's word changes or punctuation or whatever, then that's-

[01:07:52] **Jason:** Yeah ...

[01:07:53] **Tim:** those are things that you don't wanna-

[01:07:54] **Jason:** Yeah, it- ...

[01:07:54] **Tim:** quibble, qui- quibble too much over.

[01:07:56] **Jason:** Yeah. And always, I was always annoyed by the two extremes. Either when I got a review back of the writing and it, I felt like the editor totally rewrote everything that I did, or there was too little there.

They just told me that it was fine. I was like- Right ... both of- Yes ... both of them were annoying in d- in different ways, but, . it is difficult sometimes to take certain edits, but yeah.

[01:08:22] **Tim:** No, that's an important point, 'cause I think editors pe- folks who are in managerial positions who are in charge of editing analysis, I think , they benefit from this training as much, if not more, because learning how to be a good editor and how to pro- and how to give feedback and how to calibrate that feedback, right, from- ... completely rewriting it and saying, "Yeah, this looks okay." Obviously you wanna have as an editor, you wanna provide- useful feedback that is let's just say as impactful as possible, right? So-

So that's- Yeah

definitely part of the process, and that's in the courses I do as well, is how to edit strategies for reviewing written products. And if a product, if a written

product doesn't have a clear message or clear bottom line finding or an actionable piece of analytic an actionable piece of intelligence that is clearly conveyed- then that needs to be fixed first rather than the misspellings or the bad grammar or the run-on sentence in the fourth paragraph, right?

[01:09:26] **Jason:** . So are your courses like week-long courses, or do they, is this one of those where you meet maybe once a week for 15 weeks?

[01:09:36] **Tim:** They vary. Most of them are over five days, like five half days. Or if it's in person it will be three day, three full days. So whatever that comes to, like 15 to 20 hours total. And I've done a lot of these in person with the RCMP.

I've gone to Ottawa a couple of times, Winnipeg Fredericton, New Brunswick. So, a fair amount of travel in Canada to deliver these in person, but I've also worked with other elements of the Canadian government both in person- ... and online. And a lot of the, a lot of the US-based work is online.

So, yeah, a range of different formats, I'd say.

[01:10:14] **Jason:** Okay. Yeah, 'cause I would think this would be something that I think I, I would do better if it was like once a week for like 15 weeks- ... and really allowed me to take the time have a little bit more analysis time, like reflecting time- Yeah ... right? Right. Right In terms of what trying to help me learn all the different concepts.

[01:10:37] **Tim:** Yes. We have done courses like that where we met- Yeah ... once a week for, I think, five weeks or something like that. So- Yeah ... yeah, I mean, everyone has their different learning styles and, like, some people, like when they're, they can't really step away from their desk job full t- for three full days without the world collapsing around them.

So, so it's some- the, I think the half day thing works. It gives folks time to think about things, and also it's a lot to absorb. So, doing 20 hours like straight through in three days, it's... I do the in-person- Courses, I think, tend to be more impactful 'cause you get to know the students better and the and you can deliver more, say, tailored advice and instruction.

Then it's just more fun it's just more fun to meet with small groups and work with them for a few days.

[01:11:22] **Jason:** . We've already touched on it a little bit, but I do like to always have an advice section to these interviews. So I know you've already given some advice just informally as we've talked here today, but what other advice do you have for our listeners?

[01:11:37] **Tim:** So a couple more points that I would say, point out are we've already talked about biases a little bit, and I think that- ... I think that kind of ties into the confidence accuracy gap that you mentioned before. We all come into our work with with our own experiences and a lot of...

A- and some biases. A little some biases are well-known and others are un in the eight, in the intelligence community we talked a lot about unconscious bias. So these are biases that we are these are mindsets or perspectives that we bring to our work that we're not maybe aware of.

The reason they're important is that they can lead to intelligence failures- ... because it's you're introducing blind spots or the way we interpret information is kind of, tainted in certain ways that we're not always aware of. So I would say if your organization offers any training in, like, being aware of unconscious bias and tools for, the intelligence community has a whole set of tools and methods to kind of, identify and correct unconscious bias, and I think that's something that you could look into that would- generally improves your analysis by making it more objective and th- and therefore less prone to intelligence failures or just incorrect analysis in general.

And then another piece of advice I always give is And this also relates to the confidence accuracy, in the intelligence community we refer this as intelligence gaps, and this is, like, things that you don't... When you're presenting your analysis, obviously you're crafting your argument based on information that you have, but you should always acknowledge the in- information that you don't have, or the key pieces of- data or evidence that you're missing. And acknowledge that upfront, and also you should be honest about how much that missing information could impact your analysis or your key findings. If, like, if you knew X, Y, and Z how would that impact your final your final assessment? And in some cases it could change things dramatically, so you need to be upfront about, like, we don't...

There are certain key pieces of information that we don't know. And also it's always helpful to give tips on, okay, how could you close that intelligence gap? Like, what are some steps that you could take? What are some resources that you could employ or partners that you could leverage to, to fill those gaps?

So, yep, some little tips.

[01:14:02] **Jason:** Yeah. All right. Well, very good. Well, let's finish up with personal interests, and it is baseball season's . But you are a part of a baseball league that where it doesn't really depend on what's going on this year. Explain to the listeners baseball that you are interested

[01:14:23] **Tim:** in.

Okay. Well, I've always, since I was a, in- a teenager, I've always enjoyed like tabletop sports games. Like cards and dice type games. And then that developed into computer games- Computer sports games, and I was always drawn to baseball. Again, that's part of the, my underlying fascination with numbers, right?

As so the most statistical of the sports. But yeah, I started an online baseball league in 2003, and it's been... It restarted in 1951 with kind of a draft. So the thumbnail s- version of it is it's a simulation a long-term simulation that uses historical players, but then imports them into this game engine, and the players may or may not do what they did in real life.

So we're up to 1990. We're up to our 47th season, 19- '97, so. It's fun. It's been a fun kinda side hobby. About half of the folks in my league are like f- personal friends and others. The other half are folks who have joined the league throughout the years who then have just become online friends.

[01:15:31] **Jason:** , Are you managing a team that you have, or is it more like fantasy baseball? I get the concept of- Yep ... , the machine is creating results- Right ... of games. But then- Yeah ... I guess, what are, what is your role i- in that? S-

[01:15:48] **Tim:** so we're really, we're general managers, right?

Okay. So the game engine we use is called Out of the Park Baseball. Like, so we're, you're general managers. You're drafting players. You're setting your lineups. , You're making trades and things like that. So for example, like, my team, I drafted Greg Maddux, when I don't know what year it was, 1988.

He was the number one pick. In real life, probably with Pedro Martinez, one of the best pitchers of the '90s, right?

[01:16:13] **Jason:** Like,

[01:16:13] **Tim:** one of the greatest pitchers of all time. In our game, he com- I think he had an injury his second year. He was- Yeah ... he's completely washed out. I think he had a decent first year, and now he's, like, in the minor leagues.

So, so that, yeah, that happens. And then the the opposite happens, where, like, one of the greatest players in our league's history is a guy named Craig Robinson. He won the MVP, like, five years in a row. , If you look at his actual career, , he was, , a utility infielder who played three years with the Braves and, like, never did anything.

[01:16:43] **Jason:** And it's cumulative, right? So what happens, it's not a reset every year, so what- Yes, that's right ... happened in previous seasons still holds true.

[01:16:52] **Tim:** Yes. Yes.

[01:16:54] **Jason:** Huh.

[01:16:54] **Tim:** Yeah. Once the players are imported into this universe, this game engine, and there's- a whole player development model, and then the, so there, there's it varies from there.

[01:17:02] **Jason:** How long does it take to get through a season?

[01:17:05] **Tim:** We do a s- we do about three seasons a year.

[01:17:07] **Jason:** Okay.

[01:17:08] **Tim:** So, yeah.

[01:17:09] **Jason:** Wow.

[01:17:09] **Tim:** We tend to run this, we simulate about, we simulate a half a month at a time,

[01:17:12] **Jason:** Oh ...

[01:17:13] **Tim:** about twice a week.

[01:17:14] **Jason:** That's really cool. That's really interesting. I thought I've heard of all different ways to appreciate baseball, but you gave me a new one today.

[01:17:22] **Tim:** Yeah.

[01:17:24] **Jason:** All right, very good. Hey, , I'm gonna I'm actually gonna throw you a curve ball. How about that one for this last one?

Sure. , I know you're a big reader- Oof ... so I'm gonna put you on the spot and ask you what is one book that every analyst should read?

[01:17:41] **Tim:** Oof. One book. I'm gonna go with I think one of the classics. Let's go with Thinking Fast and Slow- Yeah ... by Kahneman and Tversky, I think it is.

So this is a classic book about... It's really like cognitive psychology, but it explains how the brain works and how the brain processes information, and that our brain- ... we have two different systems. We have like a knee-jerk, instant reaction thinking, and then there's this, the slow thinking that where we absorb information and craft complex ideas over time.

[01:18:14] **Jason:** . I'm glad you gave me a real answer and didn't give me a wishy-washy one, so that's, that's- yeah

I appreciate that. I was... As you were saying that, I forgot to mention, I probably should have done that in the intro, but we got introduced to one another, through David Cariens.

Yes. And so David Cariens has been on the show, he's also former CIA analyst and has written a bunch of books, I will put to, some links to his episodes in the show notes.

So I just David was the one that has introduced us, and that's how we've gotten to know each other over the years.

[01:18:49] **Tim:** I have a cool story if about how I met Dave Cariens in person.

If you want, I can tell it now. Oh, great. Go ahead. We can go ahead. So, Dave Cariens is how I got involved with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police work, and I basically... He was retiring, the company needed someone to take over the training courses that he was doing. So we overlapped.

His last course was in, in Fredericton, New Brunswick, and I... So I went, and my role was to kinda, like, take notes, and it was kind of like the handoff of the course. We had communicated or whatever remotely. The first time we met in person was at, we had breakfast at his hotel, and then we took a taxi over.

And on the taxi ride from the hotel to the training facility, the RCMP building we started sharing stories about our history a- at the agency, and we realized one thing you find is there's... We always say we have the same DNA 'cause we we did the same work. We were, we did the same type of intelligence analysis, only there's a f- 45-year age gap, right?

So, and it turns out that he had done a bunch of work on Yugoslavia, like, during the Tito years in the '70s, and I was like, "Well, I had studied Yugoslavia in grad school," so we hit it off immediately. We bonded over, , the types of topics that we had done, and so that was a really cool it was really cool to meet someone from your profession who had done basically the exact same type of work, like, four decades earlier.

[01:20:12] **Jason:** Very cool. Very cool. Yeah. D- David's an interesting character. Yeah. So, he's really great.

Yeah

[01:20:18] **Jason:** Timothy, this has been great perspective. Very interesting talking w- with you and your power indexing and your writing tips.

I, I really appreciate all your time and advice today.

Also for the listeners we'll put links for more information on all the topics that we covered and on Timothy's courses if you're interested with them.

Timothy, how, what's the best way to contact you, through LinkedIn?

[01:20:46] **Tim:** Yeah, I would say through LinkedIn.

[01:20:47] **Jason:** Okay. And so we'll put the link to his LinkedIn page in the show notes as well.

. Well, our last segment to the show is Words to the World, and this is where you can promote any idea that you wish. Timothy, what are your words to the world?

[01:21:02] **Tim:** Okay. So I had, when I was at the agency, as you can imagine, there were some very stressful moments at times.

And some less stressful moments at other times. So I used to have this little this kind of clear plastic photo frame, and it had two postcards that I made myself- ... to keep... you'll hear, like, NBA coaches say this, like, "Don't get too high or d- don't get too low or whatever to maintain an even keel."

. So here's what it was. I had I have an interest in science as well, like, s- so I would have... One of them was an image of, like, a cell in a human body, and it said something like, "The human body contains a trillion atoms."

And that, that would, And then in big letters underneath, "Stop screwing around." And the other side was like a Hubble telescope image, and it said "There are trillions of stars in the known universe." And underneath that in big letters, "None of this shit matters."

So, so that was one, and I need to make this again 'cause I I didn't, I don't have it anymore. But it was a great reminder of, like, y- you need to like, everything you do is important in your life, and at the same time, none of it really matters, right? They'll sound very contradictory, but I think it's a good way to, like, keep yourself grounded, let's say- and on, on an even keel, and remembering that everything that we do fits somewhere between complete insignificance and being very important. So I don't know if that's helpful. It was helpful to me, and it it generated some laughs in the office, so.

[01:22:33] **Jason:** Very good. Well, I leave every guest with you've given me just enough to talk bad about you later.

,

[01:22:40] **Tim:** Okay. Yeah, yep.

[01:22:42] **Jason:** But I do appreciate- That's all right ... you being on the show, Tim. Thank you so much, and you be safe.

[01:22:47] **Tim:** All right.

Thanks, Jason. It was a pleasure to be on.

[01:22:49] **Mindy:** Thank you for making it to the end of another episode of Analyst Talk with Jason Elder. You can show your support by sharing this and other episodes found on our website@www.podcasts.com.

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