

The role of American intelligence in shaping foreign policy strategies

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to determine the role of intelligence in shaping the U.S foreign policy by comparing the positions of the government and citizens of the state. The research employed a doctrinal approach, a statistical method, a historical method, and a comparative analysis. The conducted research determined that the priorities of U.S foreign policy are based on achieving and maintaining an advantage over competing countries to ensure national security and a safe, free, and prosperous world. The important role of intelligence in achieving such goals is confirmed through the analysis of the budgets of the U.S. Intelligence Community. The analysis found that the increase in funding correlates with the need to intensify intelligence activities during various critical events, primarily related to the activities of competing states. Comparison of the priorities of the U.S government and citizens regarding foreign policy, in which intelligence plays a leading role, revealed certain differences. These include, in particular, the priorities of citizens who are supporters of different parties. The conducted analysis emphasizes the need to take public opinion into account while developing foreign policy. The practical application of the obtained results lies in the possibility of their advocacy by politicians to adapt communication strategies according to the expectations and requests of voters.

Keywords: *American intelligence, Democrats, foreign policy, Intelligence community, Republicans, the U.S.*

1. Introduction

In view of the current worsening of international relations, deepening geopolitical tensions, and escalation of conflicts, not only national security, but also global order depends on the balanced foreign policy of advanced countries [1, 2]. Antony John Blinken announced US foreign policy priorities for 2024 at a press conference at the end of 2023. First of all, the Secretary of State emphasized that the United States intends to support those who share their vision of a free and safe world. In particular, this concerns the intention to unite the countries to provide support to Ukraine to turn Russia's aggression into a "strategic failure". Antony Blinken noted that Russia is weaker in terms of military power, economic, and diplomatic capabilities. In turn, NATO is currently more united than ever thanks to the accession of Finland and Sweden among other things. The next priority named by the State Secretary was the further interaction with China on the basis of strategic advantages. The third direction of foreign policy was the development of cooperation for the benefit of the citizens and people of the world. The direction includes various components (ensuring food security, artificial intelligence (AI) issues, health care in developing countries, etc.). Furthermore, the conference noted the intention to provide further aid to Israel [3, 4].

Intelligence is one of the main tools for maintaining diplomacy, ensuring national security, and supporting important foreign policy decision-making [5, 6]. It serves as a source of important information, making the basis for decisions on developing foreign policy strategies. In particular, the mentioned priorities and foreign policy directions should be supported by appropriate intelligence. In turn, foreign policy decisions can also influence the determination of priority areas of intelligence. Therefore, it is important to assess how the priorities of the US foreign policy are reflected in the directions covered by the intelligence.

The U.S. The Intelligence Community (IC) consists of 18 organizations — two independent agencies (the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)), nine divisions of the Ministry of Defense, and seven elements of other departments and agencies. The work of these organizations ensures the timely provision of information necessary for making important government decisions in the field of international relations. This makes it possible to develop a balanced foreign policy, as well as to anticipate and respond to global challenges, threats and plans of competing states in advance [7]. The main tasks of intelligence include providing access to important information within the IC, developing and implementing budgets, ensuring coordination of services, etc. [8].

A large number of studies have been dealt with the US intelligence, testifying both to its significant influence on the success of the US in the international arena, and to certain failures [9-11]. A number of studies identify the significant challenges facing intelligence today, especially in view of rapid technological development [12-14]. A separate aspect worthy of attention is the study of the citizens' attitude to intelligence [15, 16]. Government actions and decisions are heavily influenced by citizens, and their concerns about the impact of intelligence on civil liberties cannot simply be ignored [17, 18]. The level of citizens' information literacy, as well as their party preferences are important aspects in this context [19]. The aim of the research is to determine the role of intelligence in the development of US foreign policy by comparing the viewpoints of the government and citizens of the state. Research objectives:

- Determine the main priorities of US foreign policy;
- Analyse the fulfilment of the U.S. Intelligence Community Budget;
- Study the public attitude towards intelligence and the priorities of the US population in the field of foreign policy.

2. Literature Review

The US foreign policy is a relevant object of research, because not only the regional, but also the world order depends on the actions of such a powerful state. Avramenko [20] studies US foreign policy, including the causes of current problems. The researcher paid great attention to the role of China and Russia, as well as to the impact of current trends on the situation in Ukraine. In general, many works deal with the role of the US foreign policy in the war in Ukraine, where it is often criticized. One of the most famous critics of American foreign policy since the end of the Cold War – John Mearsheimer, noted that the United States bears the main responsibility for causing the Ukrainian crisis [21]. This is explained by the US strive to involve Ukraine in NATO, which the Russian ruling elite considers as a threat to existence. The critic believes that this was one of the main reasons for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the aggressor state [22]. Sokolshchik [23] notes that the rivalry between the USA and Russia influenced the restructuring of the international order, including the cause of the catastrophic events in Ukraine. In some works, the opinion of the Americans themselves regarding the goals of foreign policy, which, in their opinion, are priorities, was studied by means of a survey (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1.

Americans' priorities regarding foreign policy goals (Respondents who say each of the following should be a top priority in U.S. long-range foreign policy, %)

Source: [24].

It can be noted that the priorities for the Americans are mainly goals related to the USA itself. This is evidenced by the distribution of answers to the question why President Joe Biden should pay more attention to domestic or foreign policy. A total of 14% of respondents answered that attention should be paid, first of all, to foreign policy, while 83% of respondents believe that the main direction is domestic policy (another 3% refrained from answering this question).

However, the priorities of Americans have recently undergone certain changes. This may indicate an appropriate response of citizens to recent geopolitical events (Figure 2).

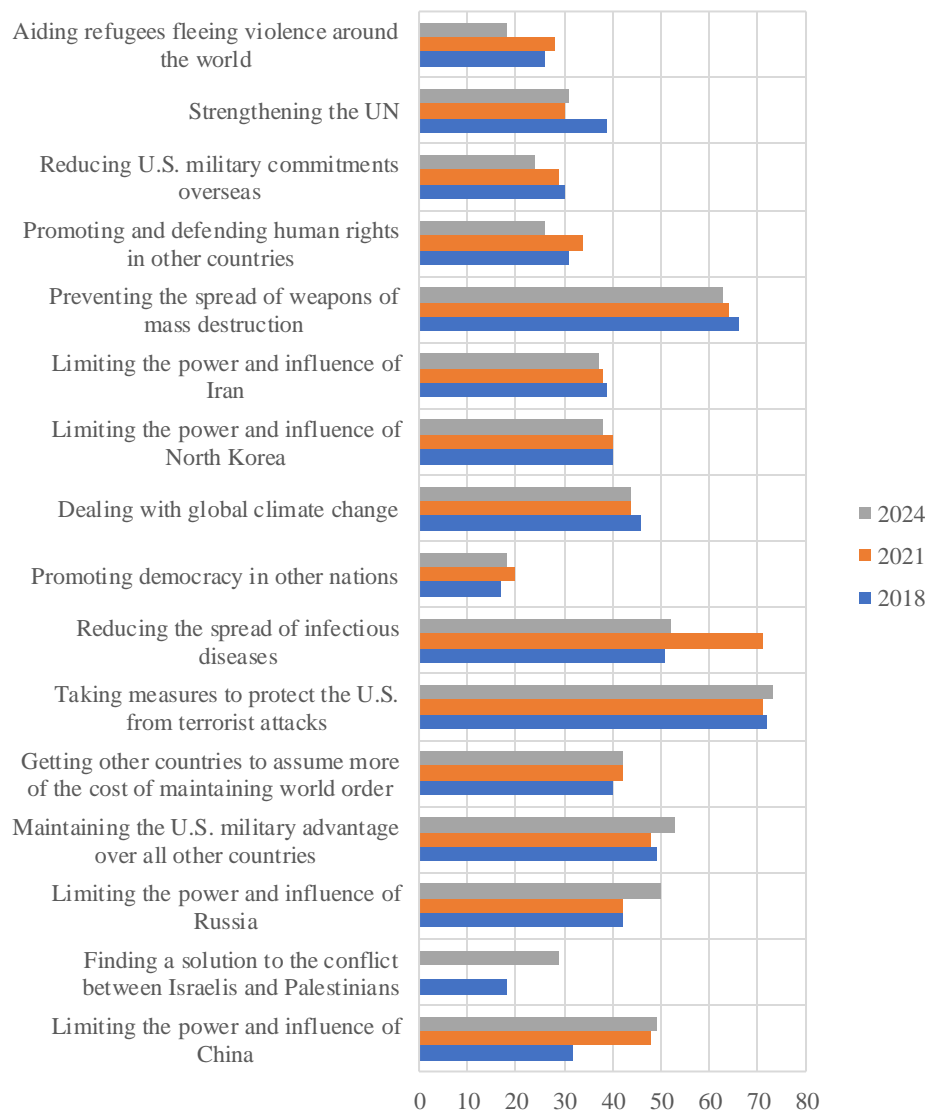


Figure 2.

Changing American foreign policy priorities over time (respondents who say each of the following should be a top priority in U.S. long-range foreign policy, %).

Source: [24].

Judging by Figure 2, especially noticeable changes in 2024 compared to 2018 were experienced by Americans towards the goal Restricting China's Power and Influence. The number of respondents identifying this goal as a priority increased by 17%. The citizens also increased their attention to the problem of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians (+11%). An increasing number of Americans consider it important to limit the power and influence of Russia (+8%). The number of respondents who agree with the need to maintain the US military advantage over other countries has also increased by

4%. It is important to analyse the answers depending on the respondents' party preferences for research purposes (Figure 3).

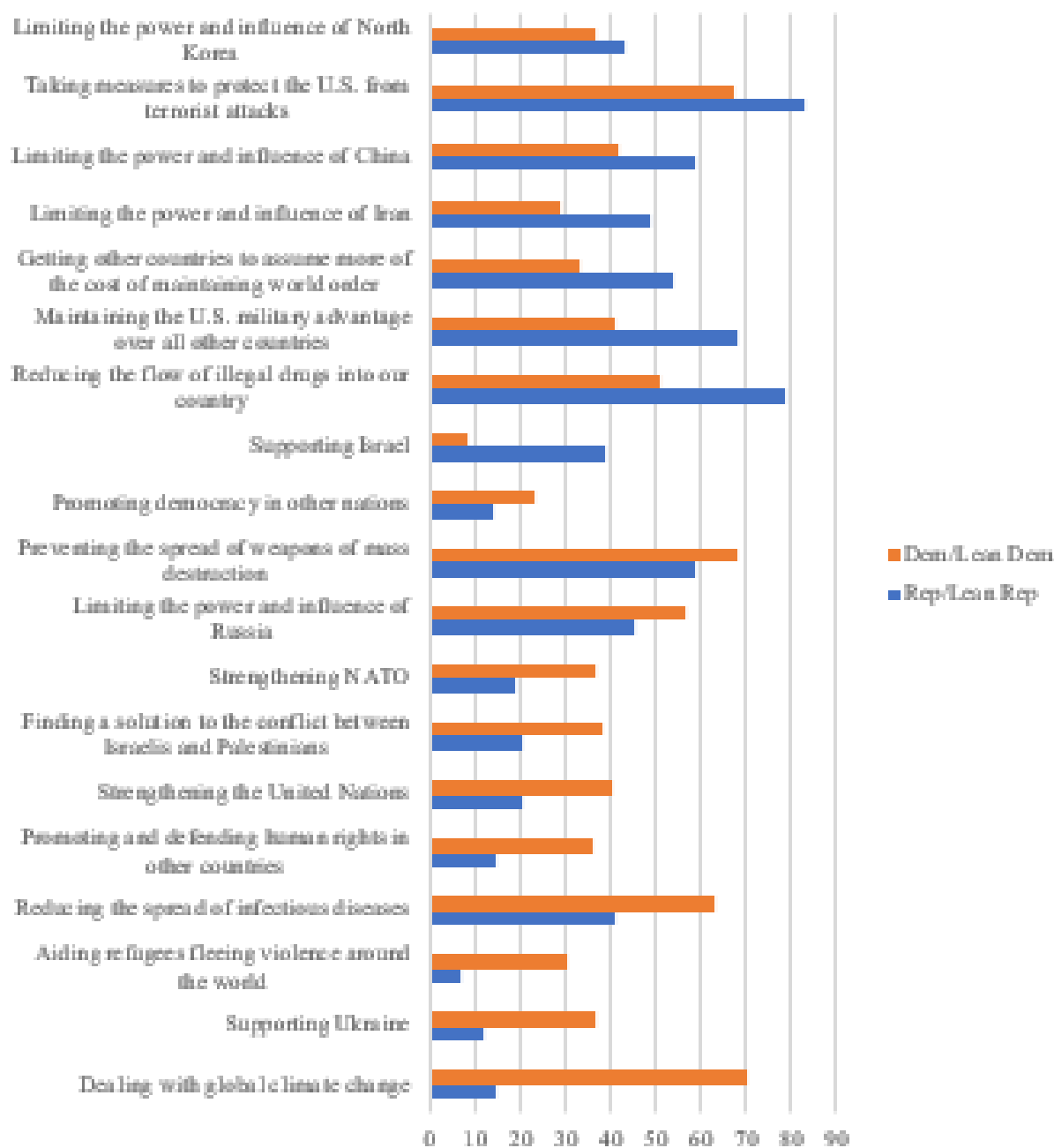


Figure 3.

Gap in foreign policy priorities between supporters of different parties (respondents who say each of the following should be a top priority in U.S. long-range foreign policy, %).

Source: [24]

Figure 3 shows that the priorities regarding foreign policy goals of US citizens differ markedly depending on the party. The greatest disagreement is observed regarding the issue of dealing with

global climate change. A total of 70% of Democrats consider it a top priority, while only 15% of Republicans pay attention to this issue. Noticeable gaps (more than 20%) are also observed in such issues as support for Ukraine, aid to refugees, countering the spread of infectious diseases, strengthening the UN and NATO, and protecting human rights in other countries. All of these issues are more of a concern to Democrats. Republicans consider it a priority to preserve the military superiority of the United States over other countries. It is also important to force other countries to bear most of the costs of maintaining the world order. Support for Israel, countering the flow of illegal drugs, and limiting the influence and power of Iran play not the least role for the Republicans.

The important role of intelligence in the development of US foreign policy is emphasized by [25]. The researchers note that the United States successfully used intelligence to influence the policies and actions of other countries during the Cold War. The authors consider the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as an integral part of the formation and implementation of US foreign policy. The lack of effectiveness of US intelligence has also been noted in some studies. Examining the case of the war in Afghanistan, Duřu [26] noted that US foreign policy at that time was careless. The researcher explains this by the lack of information, not least caused by the ineffectiveness of intelligence.

Ateř [27] identifies the main contemporary challenges in intelligence in various fields, classifying them into several groups: political, financial, organizational, and technological. The researcher pays the most attention to the last group of challenges, because, in his opinion, all other challenges are either related or result from these challenges. The researcher defines technological challenges as the use of metadata, the spread of social media, and cyber security issues. Prabhu [28] notes that the effects of social media influence create a number of important ethical and legal issues. The advent of social media has fundamentally changed intelligence warfare, and the scale of the problem poses challenges to democracy and diplomatic relations. Pylypiuk [29], noted that it is impossible to completely protect the country from harmful informational influence in view of rapid development of technologies. The researcher noted that the influence of foreign players on events such as presidential elections has become the norm. However, US intelligence is able to anticipate possible interventions and monitor possible harmful effects. Shedd [30] notes that current intelligence challenges (especially those originating from China and Russia) can be solved through the use of data analysis, AI, and other technologies. Moran et al. [31] reveal the ways in which US intelligence uses AI for national security purposes.

The review shows that most of the studies focus on the means by which the state can improve approaches to intelligence. However, there is a lack of research that examines foreign policy priorities and the place of intelligence in it from the citizens' perspective. In fact, the government and government decisions largely depend on the citizens in such a democratic country as the USA. This study complements the identified gap by comparing the state goals of foreign policy and the priority areas of US intelligence with the citizens' viewpoints on these aspects.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The first stage of the study provided for identifying the main priorities of the US in the field of foreign policy. This determined the areas of government activity should be primarily supported by the intelligence service. The second stage involved the analysis of two IC budget programmes (National Intelligence Program and Military Intelligence Program). Funding trends for IC activities were analysed, including changes in funding depending on current geopolitical events. This made it possible to link the increase or decrease in the funding of the intelligence service with certain critical events of a particular period (financial crises, the beginning of military operations, etc.). The third stage reveals the viewpoints of US citizens on the state's foreign policy priorities, as well as the role of intelligence in achieving state goals. Comparison of the citizens' views depending on their party preferences revealed certain differences. These differences may affect future US foreign policy and the importance of intelligence, especially in the context of the upcoming US presidential election.

3.2. Sample

The study is based on information contained in two US regulations and one agency report, including the National Security Strategy 2022, National Intelligence Strategy 2023, Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community. More than 20 regulatory documents and reports were considered for the study, but the selected documents were the most relevant to the research objectives. The main criterion for the selection of documents was their relation to the US foreign policy for the purpose of outlining its directions and priorities. The study also uses secondary data from citizen surveys 'What Are Americans' Top Foreign Policy Priorities?' and 2022 Public Attitudes on US Intelligence conducted among Americans [24, 32, 33]. The first survey was conducted by the Pew Research Center among 3,600 American adults in April 2024. The respondents are members of the Center's American Trends Panel (ATP), an online citizen survey panel generated by a national random sample. The second survey is the result of general national surveys of public attitudes toward US intelligence conducted by the University of Texas at Austin in 2021 and 2022. Both surveys contain the distribution of respondents by party affiliation, which became a flawed aspect of the author's research.

3.3. Methods

The research employed the doctrinal approach, which was used to analyse the content of 20 US regulatory documents and reports. This method helped to select two regulatory documents (National Security Strategy 2022, National Intelligence Strategy 2023) and one agency report (Annual threat assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community) for the study [34-36]. The main attention during the analysis was focused on the sections that determined the priorities and directions of the US foreign policy, as well as the key sources of risk. This made it possible to identify the priorities of US foreign policy and the main threats to national security. The statistical analysis combined with the historical method were applied to study the IC budget funding trends for its main programmes — the National Intelligence Program and the Military Intelligence Program. This made it possible to link changes in financing with key geopolitical events of the relevant period. Accordingly, the key indicator for the analysis was the amount of the Intelligence Community Budget in terms of the observed programmes in billions of US dollars. The historical method was applied to assume which geopolitical events could have influenced the change in funding in the corresponding year during the period from 2006 to 2025. The analysis of the survey results made it possible to reveal the priorities of US citizens in the field of foreign policy, as well as the place of intelligence in it depending on party preferences among other things. This analysis included the following indicators: Americans' priorities for foreign policy goals, changes in Americans' foreign policy priorities over time, the gap in foreign policy priorities between supporters of different parties, the role of the U.S. Intelligence Community, the effectiveness of the U.S. Intelligence Community, the effectiveness of the U.S. Intelligence Community in helping the President in conducting balanced foreign policy. Comparative analysis made it possible to identify differences in government and civil priorities in the field of foreign policy. Government priorities were determined through the study of the above-mentioned regulatory acts, civil priorities were identified through the analysis of survey results. In addition, comparative analysis was applied to compare respondents' answers depending on their party affiliation. Analytical conclusions were drawn on the basis of the identified differences, which made it possible to determine inconsistencies between the views of various interested parties.

4. Results

4.1. Analysis of the Regulatory Framework

Analysis of the US regulatory framework allows us to testify that ensuring freedom and prosperity in the world, declared as the main priority of the state's foreign policy, is intended to be achieved from a position of strength, in particular, military power. This is proven by the study of US national strategies,

where the noted goal is to be achieved through the need to develop up strength to maintain competitive advantages. The National Security Strategy notes that the use of US diplomatic power should be aimed at creating a powerful coalition to ensure a safe, free, and prosperous world. It is possible to strengthen the international order through the modernization and strengthening of the national army. Accordingly, the document defines the main directions of efforts to ensure national security: combating international challenges originating from strategic competitors; overcoming global challenges; development of rules in the field of technology, economy, trade, and cyber security [34].

These tasks are also reflected in the National Intelligence Strategy, where the first goal is to determine the position of the Intelligence Community to strengthen strategic competitiveness. The explanation to the goal states that the main challenge to a free and safe world is the strategic competition of states with authoritarian rule and revisionist foreign policy. China is defined as the “only competitor of the United States”, and Russia, although it is a constant regional threat in Europe and Eurasia and causes instability in the world, lacks the capabilities of China [35].

The Threat Assessment Report of the U.S. The Intelligence Community indicates that China, Russia, certain regional states, such as Iran, as well as some non-state actors “challenge the long-standing rules of the international system, as well as the supremacy of the United States in it.” Therefore, such challenges require constant and high attention from the United States [36].

4.2. U.S. Intelligence Community Budget

The analysis of the US intelligence budget shows the activities and priorities of the U.S. Intelligence Community reports. The budget consists of the national intelligence programme (**Figure 4**) and the military intelligence programme (**Figure 5**).

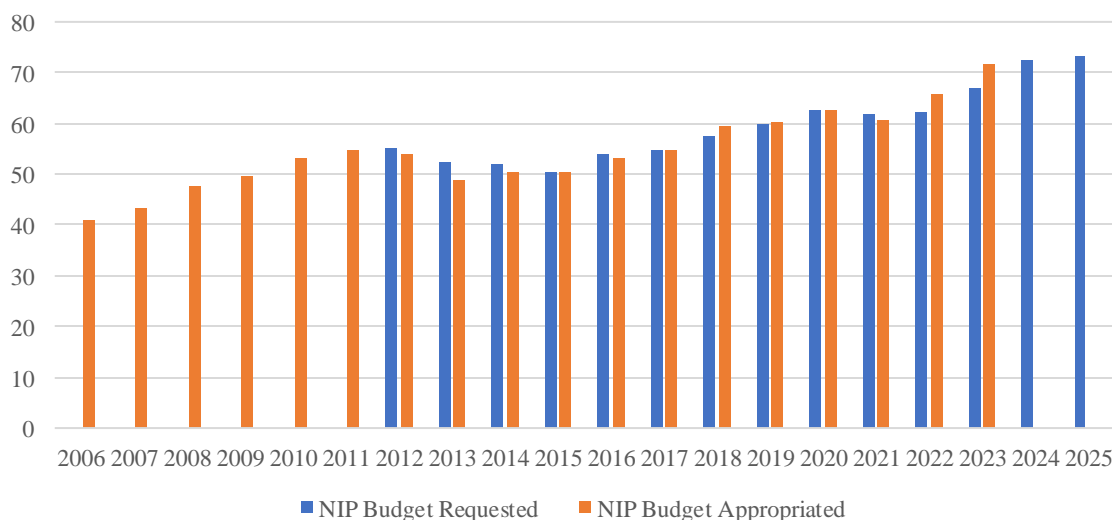


Figure 4.
U.S. Intelligence Community Budget (National Intelligence Program), \$ billions
Source: [8].

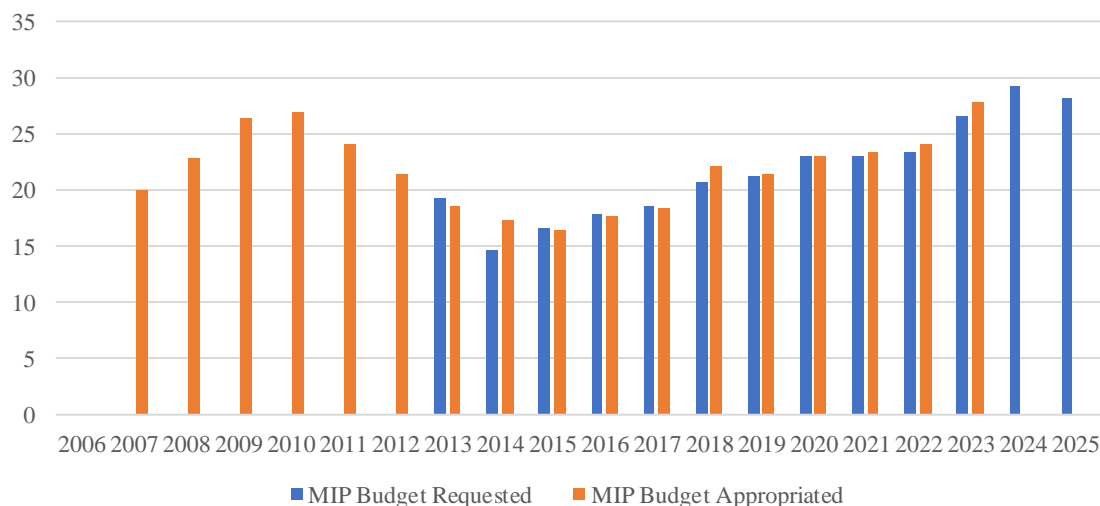


Figure 5.
U.S. Intelligence community budget (Military intelligence program), \$ billions.
Source [8].

The overall increase in budgets indicates the significant role of intelligence in ensuring US national security. The gap between the requested and appropriated amounts of funds is mostly not significant, which may indicate the adequacy of the requests and the proper fulfilment of the assigned tasks. The budget increase at the beginning of the study period can be related to the measures necessary to strengthen anti-terrorist security in response to the events of September 11, 2001, as well as military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some reduction of budgets was observed in the period from 2010 to 2013–2014 followed by a gradual increase. This trend may be related to the complication of the geopolitical situation, in particular, due to the growing influence of China, the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, and the worsening of relations with Iran and North Korea. These events required some intelligence and counter-intelligence actions in response. Further growth of budgets is most likely determined by further aggravation of global threats. This is especially noticeable after 2022, when a full-scale invasion began in Ukraine, which necessitated current information about the military and political plans of the aggressor country.

4.3. Analysis of Public Opinion

The conducted analysis of the regulatory framework and intelligence budgets briefly reveals the main foreign policy goals of the US and testifies to the important place of intelligence in the development of foreign policy via the connection between goals and corresponding actions. However, an important task for such a democratic state as the USA is also the evaluation of the investigated aspects from the perspective of citizens' perception. All public institutions, their decisions and policies ultimately depend on public support for the need for resource provision, policy influence and institutional sustainability. Therefore, gaining and maintaining the trust of citizens is an important task for the state.

At the same time, most Americans believe that intelligence is a vital priority for national security. This is evidenced by the survey data of Americans (Figure 6).

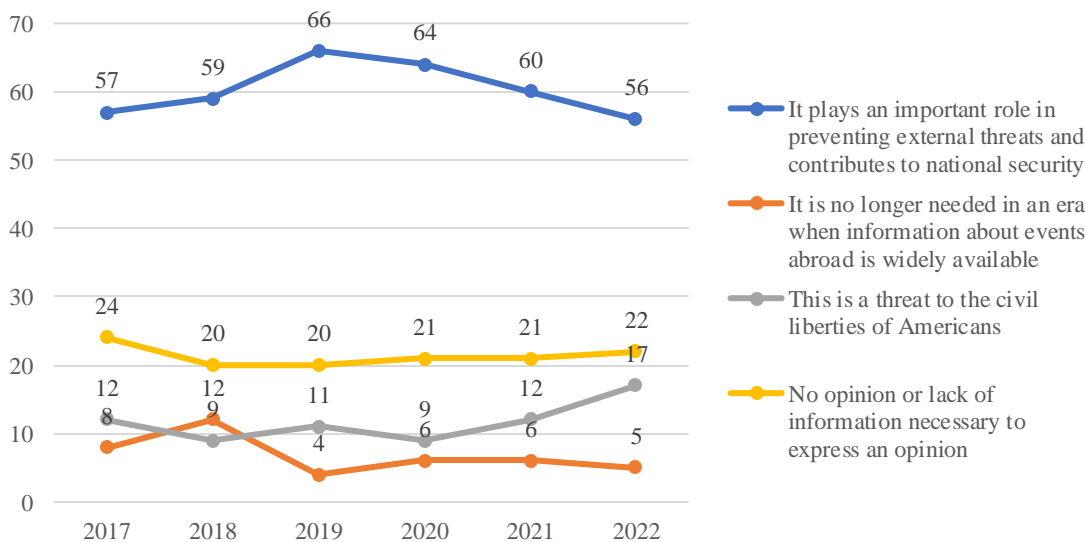


Figure 6.
The role of U.S. intelligence community.
Source: [32].

Therefore, the vast majority of respondents believe that intelligence plays an important role in preventing external threats. At the same time, the proportion of respondents who share this opinion decreases during the studied period. Instead, the share of those who believe that intelligence threatens civil liberties is growing. Americans' viewpoints on the effectiveness of the U.S. Intelligence Community is presented in Figure 7.

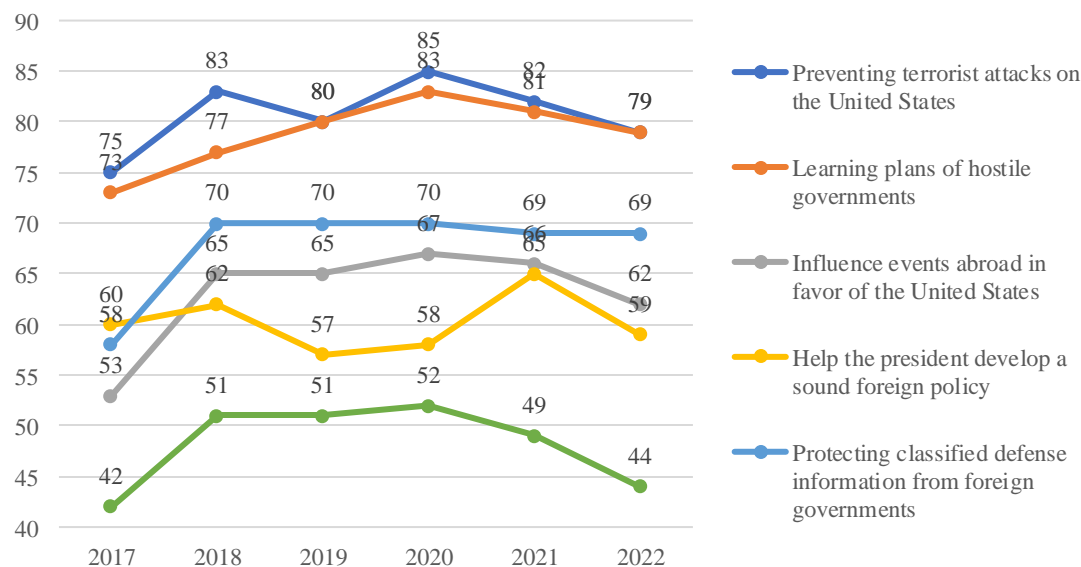


Figure 7.
Effectiveness of U.S. intelligence community.
Source: [32].

So, the majority of respondents believe that the main role of intelligence is to prevent terrorist attacks on the United States, to reveal the plans of the governments of competing countries, and also to protect classified information. Intelligence is least effective in terms of ensuring respect for Americans' privacy and civil liberties. Figure 8 shows Americans' viewpoints on the effectiveness of intelligence in helping the President form a balanced foreign policy, divided by party. This becomes especially important in the context of the upcoming presidential elections in the USA, where the main candidates are J. Biden (Democratic Party) and D. Trump (Republican Party).

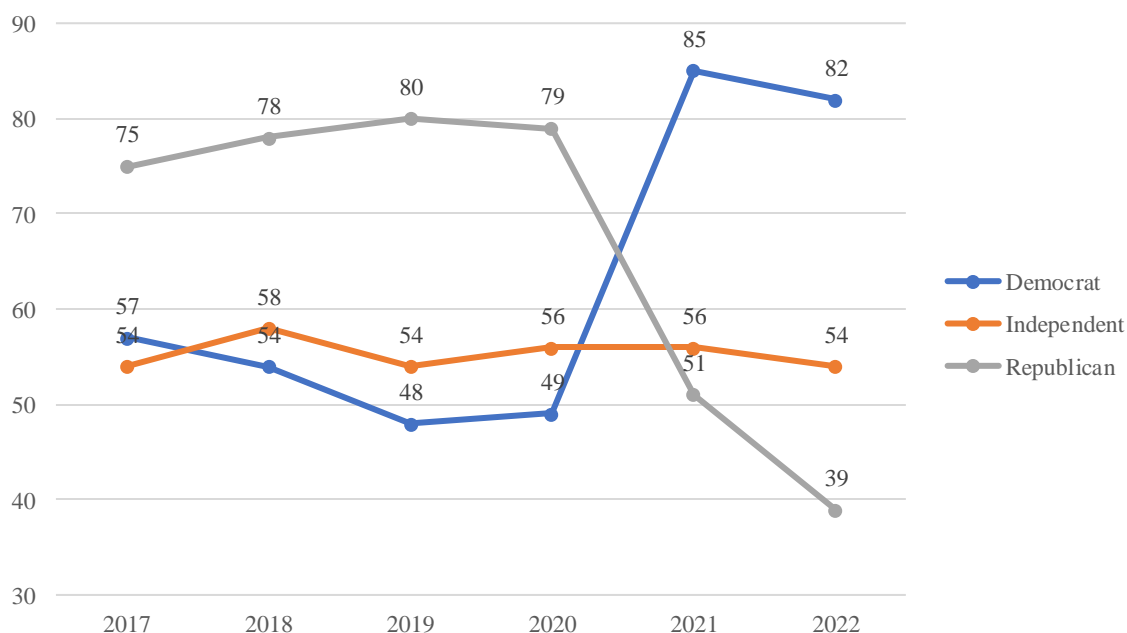


Figure 8.

The effectiveness U.S. intelligence community in helping the President to conduct balanced foreign policy.

Source: [32].

There are significant party differences in views on the effectiveness of intelligence. Between 2020 and 2021, including the transition between the administrations of the two presidents, the support of the U.S. Intelligence Community on the side of the Democrats increased, and on the side of the Republicans - decreased. So, citizens tend to evaluate the work of intelligence depending on their allegiance to the president who leads the country in the relevant period. In particular, surveyed citizens who did not support of J. Biden's administration were more inclined to evaluate intelligence activities as a threat to civil liberties.

5. Discussion

This study determined that maintaining primacy among countries is one of the main priorities of the USA. Studying US foreign policy, Avramenko [20] concludes that the US somewhat lost its leadership position on the international arena at the beginning of the 21st century. The researcher considers the difficulty of holding positions and the incompetence of the ruling elites as the underlying reason. The confrontation between the USA and China is expected to intensify in the near future. The author also referenced to the US legal framework that the state does not consider Russia as a significant threat as China. At the same time, some studies noted that this could be the cause of the crisis in Ukraine [20, 22]. The observed trends in a certain sense testify to the partial failure of the state's foreign policy and

the need to increase its effectiveness. The study proved that intelligence plays a significant role in this aspect.

The role of intelligence in the development of foreign policy is growing in view of aggravation of global threats and relations between foreign players [25]. The importance of intelligence is eloquently demonstrated by the war in Afghanistan, which demonstrated that insufficient and incomplete information from intelligence can only lead to significant material losses without sufficiently significant geopolitical consequences [26]. Another example is the war in Iraq, when the US relied in vain on data about the weapons of mass destruction in the country [37]. At the same time, modern conditions create new challenges for intelligence. Ateş [27] classifies them into four groups: political, financial, organizational, and technological. Technological ones are the most significant due to the modern development of information technologies, and require appropriate adaptation on the part of intelligence, for example, the creation of cyber intelligence departments. Shedd [30] notes that “cyber-centric” intelligence capabilities must be the norm to succeed in the confrontation between the US and its adversaries. Prabhu [28] argues that it is necessary to impose content standards on social media companies to combat disinformation and counter US intelligence targeting by foreign actors. Moran et al. [31] note that the AI use can contribute to intelligence activities for ensuring national security. Pylypiuk [29] emphasizes the role of intelligence in the digital sphere. The researcher notes that the US is aware of the possible negative impact of the use of new technologies by foreign players on democratic processes in the country, and therefore can take countermeasures. According to the researcher, the goal of interference by such players as Russia is to undermine the authority of the Democrats and support the Republican presidential candidate — D. Trump. Despite the fact that the author’s work is more focused on the study of goals, and the mentioned studies — on the intelligence means, the researchers agree that intelligence plays a key role in the development of US foreign policy. The mentioned works emphasize the need to use new technologies in intelligence to ensure the superiority of the United States in the confrontation with other states, in particular, Russia. As indicated in the last of these works, outside influence, including disinformation, can even be directed to the election results - for example, Russian intervention to support D. Trump. In this regard, the author’s work noted that the views of Democrats (current President J. Biden) and Republicans (presidential candidate in the upcoming elections D. Trump) on US foreign policy, as well as on the role of intelligence in it, differ significantly. Therefore, the future redistribution of the world order may depend on the upcoming elections.

6. Conclusions

Intelligence plays an extremely important role in shaping US foreign policy strategies, providing the board with timely and necessary information to make important decisions in the international arena. The analysis carried out in the study testifies that the main priority of US foreign policy is to achieve and maintain an advantage over competing countries in order to ensure national security and a safe, free and prosperous world. The role of intelligence in achieving foreign policy goals is important, as evidenced by the appropriate funding of intelligence in response to global and regional threats. The Americans themselves mostly believe that domestic policy in the country is a priority, and the role of intelligence is important for ensuring national security. It was found that Americans’ priorities regarding US foreign policy vary significantly depending on party affiliation. The Democrats turned out to be more concerned about global issues, such as climate change and ensuring democracy in other countries. The Republicans’ views are directed mostly to the interior of the state, and they primarily insist on the need to ensure the superiority of the United States over other countries. Based on the results of the analysis, it is possible to offer several recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of intelligence activities, taking into account state and civil priorities:

- Increase attention to civil and social aspects in the process of developing intelligence strategies;

- Ensure proper observance of civil liberties and ethics in the course of intelligence activities by increasing transparency during the collection of personal information;
- Improve citizens' awareness of the rules for using information within the scope of current legislation;
- Ensure due attention to the issue of combating disinformation - both in intelligence activities and among the population;
- Conduct campaigns to improve information literacy of citizens.

The obtained results can be used by statesmen to take into account public opinion while implementing foreign policy. This will make it possible to develop policies taking into account the citizens' views, which will increase their loyalty to the government. Further research could examine the role of intelligence in countering the spread of disinformation by US global competitors.

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