



U.S. intelligence tests crowd-sourcing against its experts

August 21, 2012

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Los AngelesTimes

WASHINGTON — Nine years ago, Congress blocked a Pentagon agency from setting up a website that would have allowed anyone with a credit card to bet on the likelihood of foreign assassinations, coups and terrorist attacks.

The idea was to take advantage of the "wisdom of crowds," a social science maxim that contends the average of a group of forecasters, under certain circumstances, tends to be more accurate than even the most knowledgeable single forecaster.

But lawmakers worried the proposed predictions market could allow terrorists to profit from their own misdeeds. Congress forced the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency — the military's cutting-edge research arm, known as DARPA — to scuttle the program.

Now terrorism futures are back.

DARPA's sister agency — the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity, which funds experimental projects for the U.S. intelligence community — is running a four-year, \$50-million program that pays people willing to predict major world events, including wars and terrorist strikes.

Now in its second year, the so-called crowd-sourcing project involves competing corporate and university teams, including UC Irvine. Each team includes more than a dozen social scientists and as many as 2,000 participants, who can answer hundreds of questions each if they want.

The study, known as Aggregative Contingent Estimation, is designed to see whether the 17 agencies in the U.S. intelligence community can aggregate the judgment of its thousands of analysts — rather than rely on the expertise of just a few — to issue more accurate warnings to policy makers before and during major global events.

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For more information on the Aggregative Contingent Estimation (ACE) project visit [IARPA.gov](#).