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A Framework for Understanding Intelligence

Not surprisingly, many argue that intelligence is an integral element of decisionmaking. Yet, an equally convincing case can be made that not only does intelligence only rarely assure success on the battlefield and in policy decisionmaking, but it can very well be of no use whatsoever, even counterproductive. The discrepancy between these two positions will be explored while formulating a framework for understanding intelligence.

ENLIGHTENED SOVEREIGNS

The basic importance of intelligence can be found in Biblical times. The Prophet Ezekiel recounts that:

... if when the watchman sees a sword come upon the land he blasts the horn and warns the people. Then whoever hears the sound of the horn and takes no warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head ... but if the watchman sees the sword, and does not blast the horn and the people are not warned, if the sword comes, and takes any person ...¹

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God holds the watchman responsible in the second case. Medieval Jewish Biblical commentators explain the watchman's subsequent guilt in the fact that the people "have appointed him and trusted him."²

The ancient Chinese military authority Sun Tzu gave intelligence prominence in *The Art of War*. Never using the word intelligence per se, Sun Tzu opens his chapter thirteen with "Estimates," and closes with "Employment of Secret Agents."

Sun Tzu begins "Estimates" as follows: "War is a matter of vital importance to the state; the province of life or death ... therefore, appraise it in terms of the five fundamental factors. ..." ³ These five factors are moral influence, weather, terrain, command, and doctrine.

In "Employment of Secret Agents," Sun Tzu argues that: "What is called 'foreknowledge' cannot be elicited from spirits, nor from gods, nor by analogy with past events, nor from calculations. It must be obtained from men who know the enemy situation."⁴ He thereupon analyzes five categories of spies, thus emphasizing the importance of the information these men can provide.*

While Sun Tzu does not relate his analysis of secret agents with the importance of "foreknowledge" regarding his five factors, clearly information about terrain, and the enemy's moral influence, command, and doctrine can be acquired through the use of spies. Hence, an understanding of Sun Tzu's writings will lead to the conclusion that good intelligence is essential. Sun Tzu himself ends *The Art of War* by saying:

And therefore only the enlightened sovereign and the worthy general who are able to use the most intelligent people as agents are certain to achieve great things. Secret operations are essential in war; upon them the army relies to make its every move.⁵

A contrary approach is espoused by an equally authoritative source. According to David Kahn, "Carl von Clausewitz disdained intelligence,"⁶ citing the following selection from *On War* to support his claim: "Many intelligence reports in war are contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain. ... In short, most intelligence is false."⁷ While acknowledging that Clausewitz does not dismiss the importance of good information, Kahn presents a well-developed analysis of *On War*, showing that Clausewitz believed several significant factors — chance, imponderables, limitations of observation and of analysis, and preconceptions — preclude the efficacy of good intelligence.⁸ Indeed, Kahn points out that of the battles covered in Edward S. Creasy's *Fifteen Decisive*

*The five categories of agents are: (1) natives — the enemy's citizens; (2) inside agents — officials of the enemy; (3) double agents — enemy spies; (4) expendable agents — your own spies given fabricated information in the hope that they will be captured and confess; (5) living agents — those who return with information.

Battles of the World: From Marathon to Waterloo, only in the battle of Metaurus, a Roman victory over the Carthaginians, did victory depend on intelligence.⁹

Kahn does indicate however, that the introduction of aerial photography, codebreaking, and satellite reconnaissance, for example, makes intelligence quite different than that of Clausewitz's day. Quoting several prominent modern military authorities, Kahn asserts that modern day intelligence is indeed a much needed capability. Nevertheless, he notes that Clausewitz's five factors limiting the usefulness of intelligence are the same ones that cause modern day intelligence failures.¹⁰

Clausewitz's negative perception of intelligence, however, does not contradict the usefulness and successes of modern day intelligence capabilities. Clausewitz understood the need for information. Sun Tzu portrayed the notion of "foreknowledge" in a more encouraging and functional light, but Clausewitz would agree that if accurate intelligence could be acquired, it would surely be important.

Those drawbacks of intelligence that Clausewitz viewed as characteristic do point to an inherent problem in the nature of trying to comprehend an opponent and foretell his actions. The two main elements of intelligence, acquiring and understanding information, are replete with systemic and intrinsic difficulties. Nations invest a great deal in the discipline of keeping secrets, and information can easily be misunderstood. Improvements in collection and analysis techniques do not ensure a better overall intelligence capability. The gap between the need to know and the problematics in knowing is significant; despite much research and reorganization of intelligence organizations, bridging the gap may prove to be an impossibility. The difficulty is inherent, and is found in interpersonal relationships as well as in international; it can well be argued that as long as misunderstandings continue between individuals, understanding and tranquillity will not characterize international behavior.

Intelligence is an important aspect of international politics; countries that feel they have a better understanding of their neighbors, a potential partner in conflict, or an enemy, may very well feel more assured of their own security. Good intelligence could provide a warning of the other's intentions, permit a surprise to be foiled, and avoid a conflict, or conversely, to develop one earlier, for example, in the form of a pre-emptive strike.

DEFINING THE TERRITORY

The field of intelligence can be clearly outlined. The "intelligence process" was depicted in a very concise manner twenty years ago by a Senate committee formed to study United States intelligence. After presenting the major

organizations that comprise the U.S. intelligence community, the Church Committee Report outlined the process as follows:

- Those who use intelligence, the ‘consumers,’ indicate the kind of information needed.
- These needs are translated into concrete ‘requirements’ by senior intelligence managers.
- The requirements are used to allocate resources to ‘collectors’ and serve to guide their efforts.
- The collectors obtain the required information or ‘raw intelligence.’
- The ‘raw intelligence’ is collated and turned into ‘finished intelligence’ by the ‘analysts.’
- The finished intelligence is distributed to the consumer and the intelligence managers who state new needs, define new requirements, and make necessary adjustments in the intelligence programs to improve effectiveness and efficiency.^{11*}

An understanding of the “collectors,” or an intelligence agency’s sources, is essential to an appraisal of the effectiveness and limitations of intelligence.

The two main categories of intelligence courses, human and signal, can deeply penetrate the decisionmaking apparatus of a country and offer a general sense of the state of affairs. The following examples suggest the types of information intelligence sources are capable of supplying a country.

(1) Arkady Shevchenko, a leading Soviet diplomat at the United Nations and U.N. Undersecretary General for Political and Security Council Affairs, defected to the United States in 1975. In his autobiography, Shevchenko, who had in the past worked directly for Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, reveals his high level of access and the type of information he routinely transferred to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA):

I read the code cables and other secret information arriving from Moscow via the diplomatic pouch ... I kept [CIA handler] Johnson up to date on what was going on in the Kremlin, particularly regarding the Brezhnev-Kosygin frictions over the future course of Soviet-American relations, about Moscow’s instructions to Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in Washington, details of Soviet policy, and the political rationale for many plans and events in various parts of the world. I told him about the Soviet positions on arms-control negotiations — SALT and others — including fallback provisions

*This mechanism does not always function flawlessly in practice. A Pentagon report in 1995 concluded that while the American military had intelligence that enemy radar was tracking Captain Scott O’Grady’s F-16 over Bosnia, the communications link between those officials and the NATO Awac that could have relayed the message to O’Grady could not transmit classified information. The message was therefore not relayed and O’Grady was shot down, (“Downing of U.S. Fighter Over Bosnia Is Tied to Shortcoming of NATO Plane,” *The New York Times*, 8 July 1995).

contained in the instructions. I told him of specific Soviet plans for continuing the fight with movements in Angola that did not accept Moscow's role there. From officials in Moscow involved in economic matters, I passed on the information that the original oil fields in the Volga-Ural region on the Ob River would soon decline and that in several years the Soviet Union would have difficulty expanding oil production in the smaller, less accessible fields. Of course, I briefed Johnson regularly on the goings-on in the mission.¹²

This is quite an array of useful and highly guarded information.

(2) Journalist James Adams writes that the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) had intercepted a communication from the Libyan People's Bureau in East Germany to Colonel Muammar Qaddafi in Libya stating that "It will happen soon. The bomb will blow. American soldiers must be hit." Several hours later, a bomb exploded in a West German discotheque frequented by American soldiers. Immediately after the explosion, GCHQ intercepted another Libyan message: "Action carried out. No trail left."¹³

On the basis of this information, according to Adams, President Ronald Reagan ordered the U.S. retaliatory bombing of Libya in 1985.

(3) Reporter Bob Woodward relates that during the *Achille Lauro* hijacking incident in 1985, the National Security Agency had intercepted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's phone conversations, including those with his foreign minister.

Contrary to his public statements that the four Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) terrorists who attempted to hijack the *Achille Lauro* had left Egypt, President Mubarak in his phone conversations revealed that he knew that the four were still in Egypt, yelled that U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz was "crazy" to think that Egypt could turn its back on its PLO brethren and extradite the four to the United States, and planned to allow them to leave Egypt by plane. The plane number, location of the runway, and time of take-off were discussed.

Admiral John Poindexter and Lt. Colonel Oliver North, who received the cables at the National Security Council in Washington, then recommended on the basis of this information that the United States send jets to intercept the Egyptian plane. Woodward comments that the two understood that "such precise intelligence was a rarity," and for them "it was as good as being in the Egyptian President's office."^{14*}

These three cases — a spy, a cable interception, and a phone interception — are examples of "raw intelligence" and illustrate to what extent a country is able

*Robert McFarlane, National Security Advisor before Poindexter, writes that the source regarding the whereabouts of the *Achille Lauro* terrorists was an agent in President Mubarak's office and does not mention the interception of Mubarak's phone conversations (Robert McFarlane, *Special Trust*, (New York: Cadell & Davies, 1994, p. 130).

to acquire information about another.* When added to these methods photo and satellite reconnaissance, underwater surveillance, and other highly technical means, the extent to which one country can penetrate another is astonishing.** Indeed, a country's intelligence sources may very well be one of its best kept secrets.***

Despite this capability, it has become a truism that the actual information at hand is rarely the root of intelligence failures. According to Richard Betts, "[I]f intelligence can be developed to assure detection of enemy preparations, the problem [of surprise] should be solved." Betts cautions, however, that "in most

*These activities are not limited to governments and national security. The Manhattan District Attorney's Office in 1995 charged a Spanish journalist and two Miami private investigators with eavesdropping on the telephone conversations of a New York woman. The investigators attached a UHF transmitter to the telephone switching panel located in the basement of her building and were arrested while listening to the transmissions on a radio scanner in a car parked nearby. They were to be paid \$25,000 for their efforts by the journalist. (*The People of the State of New York against Luis Jiminez, Carlos Fernandez, and Carlos Arriazu Sanchez*, filed in the Criminal Court of the City of New York, County of New York, by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office on 20 June 1995). The journalist reportedly wanted to ascertain whether the woman was dating the Crown Prince of Spain ("Gossip Reporter Arrested in Wiretapping for a Royal Scoop," *The New York Times*, 21 June 1995).

**The scope of these methods is emphasized by two articles in the 23 April 1995 edition of *The New York Times*. The first, entitled "War Decoding Helped U.S. To Shape U.N.," reviewed a paper published in the July 1995 edition of *Cryptologia* revealing that about 635 pages of diplomatic messages were intercepted and decoded during the final months of World War II by U.S. Army intelligence. The intercepts gave U.S. officials an understanding of the negotiating positions of the nations involved in establishing the United Nations and "played a major role in enabling America to fashion the United Nations into the organization it wished."

The second article, "Sheik's Tapped Calls Entered in Terrorism Trial," discussed the eleven wiretapped conversations resulting from FBI efforts that demonstrate Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman's leadership role in the World Trade Center bombing.

***British author David Yallop displayed a peculiar view of the concerns a country has regarding the security of its intelligence sources. In his book *Tracking The Jackal: The Search For Carlos, The World's Most Wanted Man* (New York: Random House, 1993, pp. 567-571), Yallop included correspondence he initiated with the Israeli government. Yallop requested of then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir information "that supports and sustains allegations" made by Israel's representative to the United Nations regarding Libya's involvement with international terrorism, and gave Shamir his "firm understanding that all such evidence will be utilized and quoted" in his book. The Israeli Foreign Ministry responded by sending Yallop public information which included British and German newspaper articles and a Fact Sheet prepared by the U.S. Department of State.

Dissatisfied and undaunted, Yallop again wrote to Shamir, this time expressing his "astonishment that a representative of Israel should get to his feet ... [at the UN and make statements] based on such truly pathetic source material. [T]he evidence that your government has sent me would not justify hanging a dog, let alone a head of state." To which an advisor to Shamir replied, "You may rest assured that the appropriate Israeli authorities base their assessments on a great deal more information than press information ... [W]e are not in the habit of sharing such information with private individuals."

important cases, intelligence failures in collecting indicators were only secondary elements in the cause of surprise.”¹⁵

INTELLIGENCE: USED AND IGNORED

The mechanics of intelligence collection can supply a country with the raw intelligence needed for proper understanding of the enemy and good decisionmaking. Raw intelligence is acquired through many various sources, and often contains numerous contradictory elements and assertions. The raw intelligence undergoes a process of analysis in order to produce a finished product, intended to be the most rational and sensible conclusion which can be drawn based on the information acquired.

Ephraim Kam portrays the analysis process as follows:

A typical intelligence production consists of all or part of three main elements: description of the situation or event with an eye to identifying its essential characteristics; explanation of the causes of a development as well as its significance and implications; and the prediction of future developments. Each element contains one or both of these components: data, provided by available knowledge and incoming information, and assessment, or judgment, which attempts to fill the gaps in the data.¹⁶

The finished intelligence product, once presented to the decisionmaker, will be used at his discretion. How a decisionmaker uses intelligence is a question in and of itself. A country's leader or cabinet may want to pursue interests that are not supported by the view of an intelligence report; the intelligence report may represent the "truth" as objectively as possible, but political decisionmakers often have concerns beyond the realm of intelligence. The function of the top political leadership is to protect and advance a country's interests, and in its view, deciding against certain "truths" may be a necessary step in so doing. Also, a decisionmaker's preconceptions may be of more significance to his decisionmaking than the intelligence he receives. Such preconceptions are not limited to the target of intelligence but to the capabilities of intelligence itself. Christopher Andrew, in his recently published *For The President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush*, maintains that "the intelligence community has had its fair share of failures. Presidents' recurring disappointment with the intelligence they receive however, has derived, at least in part, from their own exaggerated expectations."¹⁷

To be sure, at times raw intelligence alone is what a decisionmaker may need, and not an analyst's view based on many different sources. Commenting on the Soviets' use of the intelligence afforded them by Kim Philby and his colleagues, Robert Jervis observes that it is "surprising how little Stalin was able to take advantage of what presumably was the steady flow of high-grade information

about top level political thinking and plans ... [W]hat seems most striking is how little difference this excellent intelligence seems to have made."¹⁸

Decisionmakers may choose to ignore, or may misunderstand, the intelligence they receive. This, however, does not account for the many situations of intelligence failures where the intelligence itself was faulty and not, for example, the cognitive decision to decide contrary to the intelligence. An inherent part of the domain of intelligence, such failures have played a major role in most of the eight cases of surprise attack reviewed by Betts in *Surprise Attack*, and in the twelve cases reviewed by Kam in a book bearing the same title.¹⁹ To misunderstand or misjudge a situation is not necessarily a sign of poor professionalism but an inescapable imperfection in the nature of the human condition. The human mind does not function without shortcomings and at times people cannot control or determine human destiny. The future therefore cannot always be predicted nor can the intentions or thinking of another person or group of people always be determined, regardless of collection capabilities or analytical acumen.

CAUGHT IN A BIND

The game theory model of "prisoner's dilemma" illustrates how one's actions can be inexorably intertwined with another's, yet foreknowledge of the other's actions, though exceedingly important, is not necessarily helpful. "Prisoner's dilemma" places two actors in a situation where, in trying to pursue their best interests, an unavoidable dilemma is confronted and no solution is at hand. The prisoner's dilemma matrix clearly shows how rational actors will choose not the option which will best serve his interests, but the one that will only minimize the damage, taking into consideration that one actor's future is intertwined with the other. In the words of Kenneth Oye, "individually rational actions produce a collectively suboptimal outcomes."²⁰

Prisoner's dilemma is an appropriate model to use when analyzing international behavior. Its extensive use in international political literature testifies to its widespread application. To bring just two examples, in *The Nature of Politics*, a discussion of the relationship between politics and biology, Roger Masters affords prisoner's dilemma much prominence in a section on "Cost-Benefit Theories of Cooperation."²¹ In *Unguided Missiles: How America Buys Its Weapons*, Fen Hampson makes use of prisoner's dilemma in an Appendix entitled "Competitive-Cooperative Behavior in the Defense Budget."²² Of note, the 1994 Nobel Prize in Economic Science went to three professors who made contributions to the field of game theory "as the foundation for understanding

complex economic issues,” with implications ranging from biology to industrial organization.^{23*}

Strategies have been suggested for increasing the likelihood of action that best serves the interests of all involved in a prisoner’s dilemma situation. Oye discusses conventions and collective enforcement as good strategies,²⁴ and maintains that “a reputation for reliability, for resisting temptation, reduces the likelihood of defection” (defection being that which each side is fearful the other side would do and hence opts to do first).²⁵ In *Strategy and Conscience*, Anatol Rapoport also discusses “enforceable agreement” as an aid in overcoming the obstacles presented by the dilemma. But the continuation of his reasoning illustrates an inherent problem of intelligence:

[I]f we assume that the two players of prisoner’s dilemma can make a pact ... to effect the mutually advantageous outcome ... the prospective partners must have a common language. They must also either profess allegiance or render obedience to a common authority, either coercive, like a police force, or internalized like conscience. That is to say, pacts must be enforceable ... the assumption that agreements are enforceable is therefore vital if coalitions and collusions are to be included as factors in rational decisions.²⁶

Rapoport understands that relying on common language or the other’s sense of obedience is dangerous. The section that suggests these arrangements is entitled “The Dilemma Has Not Been Resolved.”^{27**}

Steve Brams also recognizes that communication between the two actors is crucial: “To escape the dilemma, therefore, one must assume that there is some communication between the players ... [T]he only clean escape from the dilemma ... occurs when the two players can communicate.”²⁸

*In *Prisoner’s Dilemma* (Anchor Books, 1992), William Poundstone further underscores the universal applicability of prisoner’s dilemma by tracing its elements in the writings of, for example, Confucius, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, Edgar Allen Poe, Giacomo Puccini (pp. 123-124) and in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (pp. 59-60). See also *Biblical Games: A Strategic Analysis of Stories in the Old Testament*, by Steven Brams (MIT Press, 1980).

**Poundstone quotes several authorities who maintain “the prisoner’s dilemma will never be solved ... (it is) a demonstration of what’s wrong with theory, and indeed, the world.” (pp. 123, 277)

Brams cites the problems that Rapoport only alludes to: “[W]hat is to prevent the leader from lying about his announced intentions to cooperate unconditionally?”^{29*} Brams’s solution is, of course, verification:

[N]ational technical means of verification, which each side now possesses and can utilize without dependence on the other side, can make cooperation ... rational in Prisoner’s Dilemma ... [I]n a world of uncertainty, no precautions that either side takes will ever be foolproof ... [A] player’s trust will not be misplaced if it is undergirded by monitoring capabilities that make the success of a double-cross strategy bleak.³⁰

Verification is indeed an operational device used to monitor compliance. The United States and Russia, for example, have recently embarked upon an experimental program that could theoretically lead to the monitoring of each other’s weapons grade plutonium sites. Plutonium storage vaults at a laboratory in each country will be equipped with remote control sensors and video cameras that will be triggered when someone enters the vault. The filmed images can be retrieved on demand by both countries via telephone lines.³¹

The solution of verification makes theoretical sense, and in practice is responsible for much of the success that intelligence has to offer. Why, however, no precaution will be foolproof despite the theoretical validity and practical confirmation of its usefulness is one of the inherent flaws of intelligence.

*The 1932 correspondence between Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud on international security and the human condition can perhaps shed light on why the inescapably harmful and rationally illogical result in prisoner’s dilemma cannot be avoided based on the goodwill of man. Einstein was concerned that “with the advance of modern science, [the issue of war] has come to mean a matter of life and death for civilization as we know it; nevertheless, for all the zeal displayed, every attempt at its solution has ended in a lamentable breakdown.” His suggestion: that every country “would undertake to abide by” and “accept judgments unreservedly” of a “supranational organization competent to render verdicts of incontestable authority and enforce absolute submission to the execution of its verdicts.” Recognizing that this would involve “unconditional surrender by every nation, in certain measure, of ... its sovereignty,” Einstein asked of Freud: “Is it possible to control man’s mental evolution so as to make him proof against the psychoses of hate and destructiveness?”

Freud responded, that “a glance at the history of the human race reveals an endless series of conflicts ... [W]ars will only be prevented with certainty if mankind unites in setting up a central authority to which the right of giving judgment upon all conflicts of interest shall be handed over.” Freud continued, that “there is very little prospect of ... endowing a supreme agency with the necessary power,” and “that there is no use in trying to get rid of men’s aggressive inclinations ... [War] seems to be quite a natural thing, to have a good biological basis and in practice to be scarcely avoidable ... I trust you will forgive me if what I have said has disappointed you ...” (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 22, pp. 197-215, Published by The Hogart Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964).

MISSED SIGNALS

An opportunity to see how information can be misunderstood between nations by comparing misunderstandings between individuals can be found in selections from the book *Love is Never Enough*, reviewed in *Newsweek* in 1989.³²

The review presents three examples of short and simple conversations between two people that were greatly misunderstood. Interestingly, the titles given to summarize these examples are “Clashing Views,” “Withheld Information,” and “Missed Signals,” terms that can be similarly applied to international relations.

The following are the examples of such conversations:

A. *MISSED SIGNALS: Max calls Sybil from a medical convention:*

Max: (Sybil will be glad I’m getting on so well) I’m having a great time. How are you?

Sybil: (He’s having a great time while I have two sick kids on my hands.) Joan and Freddie are sick.

Max: (Oh no, she’s going to lay something on me.) What’s the matter with them?

Sybil: (Will he show a sense of responsibility?) They have the chicken pox. They’re running a fever.

Max: (Chicken pox is not serious. She’s exaggerating.) You don’t have to worry. They’ll be all right.

Sybil: (Why doesn’t he offer to come home?) All right.

Max: I’ll call tomorrow.

Sybil: (He’s never around when I need him.) You do that.

B. *CLASHING VIEWS: Laura tests the devotion of her fiancée:*

Laura: Will you stay home tonight? I think I have the flu.

Fred: I’m already committed to see Joe (a colleague).

Laura: (If he won’t do this small favor for me, how can I count on him when I have a major problem?) You never want to stay home. I very rarely ask you to do anything.

Fred: (If she insists on keeping me home for such a small thing, what will happen when something big happens — like when we have kids?) I’m sorry, but I really have to go.

Laura: (I should get out of the relationship while I can find somebody I can depend on.) Go ahead if you want to. I’ll find somebody else to stay with me.

C. *WITHHELD INFORMATION: Sally and Tom, who live together, have been invited to visit friends:*

Sally: The Scotts said something about dropping over on Thursday.

Tom: (Jumping to the wrong conclusion) They invited you?

Sally: I just told you (He's challenging my veracity.)

Tom: (Hurt) How come they invited you?

Sally: Obviously they like me (He doesn't think I'm likable enough on my own.)

Tom: Well, go. I'm sure you'll have a wonderful time (I hope she has a terrible time.)

Sally: (Bitter) I'm sure I will.

An observer listening to these conversations would not necessarily realize a mistake is being made, and could conceivably arrive at the same error as one of the participants.

These misunderstandings can serve as a model for the following theoretical example. Through a general understanding of *A*'s behavior, an observer is convinced that *A* would not do *X*; *X* not being in *A*'s interests, according to the observer's analysis. It has come to the observer's attention that *A* told *B* he will do *X*. There is no question as to the accuracy of the information; the conversation was recorded, for example. *A* indeed told *B* that he will do *X*. The most obvious conclusion to draw is that the observer was mistaken in thinking that *A* would *not* do *B*. *A* revealed his true intentions to *B*, indicating that the observer miscalculated *A*'s intentions. This seems to be clear cut. The observer, on the other hand, convinced that *A* realizes that *X* is not in his interest, may very well remain convinced, and conclude that the new information brought to his attention is indicative of a worsening of relations between *A* and *B*; otherwise, *A* would not tell *B* that he will do something that he clearly would not do.*

If the function of intelligence is to know the enemy, and, in the process, an attempt is made to acquire information that the enemy would not want to be had, achieving the goal of intelligence can now be seen as a difficult, if not at times impossible task. Yet, the problem of acquiring information very often can be

*The hearsay rule, an aspect of the laws of evidence, recognizes this predicament. Hearsay is an out-of-court statement made by a person not testifying offered to prove the truth of the matter asserted. It is inadmissible as evidence in court because that person is not available for cross-examination. Professor Lawrence Tribe analyzed the hearsay problem in terms of ambiguity, insincerity, erroneous memory, and perception of the person making the statement.

As an illustration, Tribe relates that in 1971, James Schlesinger, then Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, took his wife and daughters to visit the site of a nuclear test blast in Alaska. The conclusion one might draw is that Schlesinger thought the site was safe despite the blast. When analyzing this act in terms of ambiguity and insincerity, Schlesinger might have sought "to dispel fears of danger, so that his act may not bespeak an actual belief in the test's safety." In terms of memory and perception, Schlesinger may not have recalled or correctly understood all the relevant data "so that his belief in the data ... may not correspond to the facts sought to be demonstrated." "Triangulating Hearsay," *Harvard Law Review*, 1974, Vol. 87, pp. 958-961).

overcome. Ephraim Kam states that “strategic decisions constitute the most closely guarded of national secrets. Often they exist in the mind of one man alone ... or else they are shared by only a few top officials.”³³ In contrast, Betts maintains that failure in collecting information is often only a secondary element in the cause of surprise (see reference 15). Nonetheless, the theoretical problem of being convinced that A will not do X, viewed along with the examples of misunderstandings, gives credence to the argument that even precise information can sorely be misunderstood.*

That “precise information” can be interchanged for raw intelligence. The “prisoner’s dilemma” analysis demonstrates that even with regard to a particular piece of information, or raw intelligence, intrinsic analytical difficulties exist which may prove to be impossible to overcome. An overall intelligence analysis, however, is based on many pieces of intelligence, and a clear picture must be developed from myriad reports. Gary Sick describes this reality as follows:

In the aftermath of virtually any sudden policy shock, it is possible to sift back through the record and find evidence that the event was clearly signaled in advanced and should have come as no surprise. However, for each item of ‘significant’ evidence as perceived in hindsight, there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of items that were contradictory, ambivalent, or merely competing for policy attention. The problem is always to sort the wheat from the chaff.

Recent events continue to demonstrate the validity of Sick’s analysis. ABC News’ “Day One” reported that an FBI undercover agent who infiltrated the Arizona Patriots recorded a group member saying that the federal courthouse building in Phoenix could be taken out “with one ... Winnebago properly parked,” and that in 1993 undercover police detectives met with Timothy McVeigh after he placed an advertisement in a right-wing publication offering to sell anti-tank weapons, and he spoke to them about shooting federal agents.³⁵ Unsealed government affidavits relate how James Nichols, brother of the accused accomplice Terry Nichols, told an informer in 1988 that the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City could be blown up by a megabomb,³⁶ and discussed McVeigh’s various purchases (totaling eighty 50-pound bags) of ammonium nitrate fertilizer and gallons of diesel fuel during the months prior to its

*In *The Source*, by James A. Michener, an archeologist reporting on a find from 9000 B. C. E. wrote “he wore skins,” only to reflect on the sociological, technological, anthropological, philosophical, and psychological aspects of what he had just written. This quite extensive analysis of a three-word sentence highlights the potential complexity of even the simplest of communications (pp. 109-113, *The Source*, Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1965).

bombing.^{37*} McVeigh himself wrote to a local newspaper in 1992, and after complaining about the ills of American society, said “[D]o we have to shed blood to reform the current system? I hope it doesn’t come to that! But it might.”^{38**}

Similarly, information that might have led to the discovery of the World Trade Center bombing plot was available but not seen. Steven Emerson, producer of “Jihad in America,” the television documentary on domestic Islamic terrorist activity, reported that government investigators found notes in the home of El Sayyid Nosair, who assassinated Rabbi Meir Kahane in 1990, which contained the following passage:

We have to thoroughly demolish the enemies of God. This is to be done by means of destroying and blowing up the towers that constitute the pillars of their civilization such as the tourist attractions they’re so proud of and the high buildings they’re so proud of.

Prison records revealed that Nosair, acquitted of the killing in a New York State court but convicted on gun charges by that court, held phone conversations while in prison with some of the defendants convicted of the World Trade Center bombing. Investigators had in their possession Nosair’s notes but did not translate them until after the bombing.³⁹ Nosair was, however, convicted in October 1995 in federal court of the Kahane killing, which was portrayed by prosecutors during the World Trade Center bombing trial as the “first blow in a four-year terrorist agenda.”⁴⁰

THINKING, NOT KNOWING

Preconceptions play a significant role in intelligence analysis as well. A review of the bibliography to Robert Jervis’ *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* points to the extensive literature on this topic.^{41***} As

*This document does not imply that the government was in possession of evidence that McVeigh was purchasing bomb components before the explosion on 19 April 1995. However, had a reasonable suspicion arose about McVeigh based on other evidence, his bomb preparations may not have gone unnoticed.

**In an incident unrelated to the 1995 bombing, a federal prosecutor recalled that evidence gathered in the late 1980s revealed that the Federal Building in Oklahoma had been the target of a similar bombing plot (“Oklahoma City Building Was Target Of Plot as Early as ‘83, Official Says,” *The New York Times*, 20 May 1995).

***Preconceptions play a role in the hard sciences as well. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (MIT Press, 1962), Thomas Kuhn analyzed the role of paradigms (“a set of recurrent quasi-standard illustrations of various theories in their conceptual, observational, and instrumental applications”) and “previously assimilated experience in the process of perception.” Based on the role of these factors in analysis, Kuhn relates how a physicist and chemist differed as to whether or not a single atom of helium is in fact a molecule (pp. 50-51).

Alexander George states, "An incorrect image of the opponent can distort the appraisal of even good factual information on what he may do."⁴²

Preconception will greatly determine how a situation will be viewed. Again, to quote Gary Sick:

Vision is influenced by expectations, and perceptions — especially in politics — are colored by the models and analogies all of us carry in our heads. Unfortunately, there were no relevant models in Western political tradition to explain what we were seeing in Iran during the revolution. This contradiction between expectations and reality was so profound and so persistent that it interfered fundamentally with the normal process of observation and analysis on which all of us instinctively rely.^{43*}

The following report that Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain gave to the British cabinet on his impressions of Benito Mussolini after a trip to Italy in 1939 shows how wrong one's appraisal of another can be:

I am convinced that Signor Mussolini and Herr Hitler cannot be very sympathetic to each other, and that although they have some interests in common their interests are not identical. ... Accordingly I, on several occasions, gave Mussolini a chance to express his real feelings of Herr Hitler. He never took the opportunity offered to him, but remained throughout absolutely loyal to Herr Hitler. At the time I was somewhat disappointed at this attitude, but on reflection think that it reflects credit on Signor Mussolini's character.⁴⁴

Paul Johnson offers another example of, in his words, "the truly amazing extent to which intelligence, well-informed and resolute men, in the pursuit of economy or in an altruistic passion for disarmament, will delude themselves about reality."⁴⁵ Johnson summarized a letter written by Winston Churchill in 1924 to the then British Prime Minister about the possibility of war with Japan:

I do not believe there is the slightest chance of it in our lifetime. The Japanese are our allies. ... Japan is at the other end of the world. She cannot menace our vital national security in any way. ... She has no reason whatsoever to

*This assessment is evident in Ross Perot's 1979 rescue operation of two of his employees wrongfully imprisoned in a Tehran jail. To lead the rescue operation Perot retained a retired U.S. army colonel who "wanted to know all about Tehran: the weather, the traffic, what the buildings were made of, the people in the streets, the number of policemen and how they were armed." The employees, who were ultimately freed when rioters overturned the prison, were taken by the rescue team through northern Iran and across the border with Turkey. The team brought along a trustworthy local Iranian who, before crossing the border, insisted on haggling with a gas station attendant over the one dollar cost of filling the tank. "He would have got [sic] suspicious if I didn't argue," explained the Iranian to the carload of Americans, horrified at the idea of arguing over the price of gasoline during the final stages of a rescue operation. (Ken Follett, *On Wings Of Eagles*, New York: Penguin, 1983, pp. 117 and 356.)

come into collision with us. ... War with Japan is not a possibility which any reasonable government need take into account.⁴⁶

That the intelligence collected could be part of a deception plan further complicates its analysis. Deception can be accomplished by utilizing open sources as well as specific intelligence techniques. The following examples will demonstrate how complex this matter could be.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig maintains that during the Falkland Islands crisis of 1982, he assisted Britain by deceiving Argentina:

Although the British told us nothing of their military plans, the Argentines plainly believed we knew everything the British did. Possibly this misconception could be useful. I called Bill Clark [President Reagan's National Security Adviser] at the White House on an open line, knowing that the Argentinians would monitor the call, and told him that in a tone of confidentiality that British military action was imminent. The Argentines produced a new peace proposal shortly thereafter.⁴⁷

The Israeli military used information collected through signals intelligence for purposes of psychological warfare against the Syrians in the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

On 20 October Israel Radio, broadcasting in Arabic, reported that the Syrian government had executed one of its brigade commanders "who was a member of the Druze community" for neglect of duty. According to Nikolaos van Dam, the officer was killed in battle; the information about his death was transmitted along regular military lines of communication and intercepted by routine Israeli surveillance. The Israeli military had concocted the story hoping that the incident would spark dissension among the Druze minority in Syria, and would subsequently require the Syrian military to divert part of its resources from the war in order to deal with this artificially created internal problem.

The effects of the rumors generated from the broadcast were real; the Syrian Army Command issued notice requesting that anyone repeating these rumors be reported, with warning of heavy punishments to those involved.⁴⁸

The Israelis themselves were deceived in 1973 by an Egyptian plan so well executed that, according to Stewart Steven, "most experts believe that it was run by the Russians who have long proved themselves to be masters of misinformation techniques."⁴⁹ The Egyptian military invited foreign military attachés to observe a ground attack exercise. The maneuvers were deliberately executed in a poor manner and the numerous reports in the foreign press about Egyptian military incompetence were viewed by Israel as further proof to strengthen their conception that the Egyptians were incapable of winning a war against Israel and would therefore never attack.

Even if preconceptions and deception did not play a role in a decision, the judgment needed to overcome the intrinsic problems of analysis is subjective and intangible. Immanuel Kant best described the intricacies of judgment when he wrote in 1793:

An act of judgment must be added to the rational concept which contains a rule and it is by this act of judgment that the practitioner can decide whether something is to be subsumed under the rule or not. Since there cannot again be rules for judgment on how a subsumption is to be achieved, for this would go into the infinite, there will be theoreticians who, in their whole lives, can never become practical because they lack judgment.^{50*}

Information can be acquired, preconceptions may not interfere, and one's judgment could be sound. Yet, there are instances where foreknowledge is impossible. In his book on the Iranian revolution, Ryszard Kapuscinski wrote, regarding the outbreak of revolutions in general, that "the choice of that moment is the greatest riddle known to history. Why did it happen on that day and not another? Why did this event and not some other bring it about?"⁵¹

Two strikingly different perspectives from two equally perceptive observers might thus be reconciled. The noted military historian, Liddell Hart, observed:

When, in the course of studying a long series of military campaigns, I first came to perceive the superiority of the indirect over the direct approach, I was looking merely for light upon strategy. With deepened reflection, however, I began to realize that the indirect approach had a much wider application — that it was a law of life in all spheres: a truth of philosophy. ... This idea of the indirect approach is closely related to all problems of the influence of mind upon mind — the most influential factor in human history.⁵²

Yet another prominent historian, Barbara Tuchman, comments on the strange state of government affairs:

A phenomenon noticeable throughout history regardless of place or period is the pursuit by governments of policies contrary to their own interests. Mankind, it seems, makes a poorer performance of government than of almost any other human activity. In this sphere, wisdom, which may be defined as the exercise of judgment acting on common sense and available information, is less operative and more frustrated than it should be. Why do holders of high office so often act contrary to the way reason points and

*A recently published book echoes Kant's sentiment. Author Philip Howard argues that the current regulatory system "goes too far" and "does too little," this, due to "the absence of the one indispensable ingredient of any successful human endeavor: use of judgment ... [H]uman activity can't be regulated without judgment by humans." (Philip K. Howard, *The Death of Common Sense*, Random House, 1994, pp. 11-12).

enlightened self-interest suggests? Why do intelligent mental processes seem so often not to function?^{53*}

In light of Hart's keen strategic insight, how can Tuchman perceive such a poor record of applicability?

Clearly not all things can be predetermined, leaving decisionmakers without a critical component of decisionmaking. Often the decisionmakers themselves do not know how they will decide. At times, events and not the proclivities of the decisionmakers determine the decisions. Former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin wrote about the "historico-philosophical argument between the 'idealists and the materialists': Which is the cause and which the effect? Do men make events or do unavoidable events make the men?"⁵⁴

That not all events are determined by man makes predetermining them more difficult. Even if they were determinable, the human mind is not capable of always freeing itself from misperceptions, bad judgment, and the possibility of misunderstanding. Intelligence will remain a necessary element of decisionmaking, limited by the realities of the human condition.

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*For a humorous yet serious analysis of a related issue, see *The Natural History of Stupidity* by Paul Tabori (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993).

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²Commentary on *The Book of Ezekiel* by Radak and Abarbanel.

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⁴Sun Tzu, p. 145.

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