Political Science 972: International Conflict
Discussion Questions for Week 10
Strategic Intelligence: Analysis

Assignment: Johnson and Wirtz parts 2, 3 and 5

1. What are some of the major intelligence failures in the post-WWII period—you should be able to list at least a dozen or two. Is it possible to create a typology as to why these have occurred? To what extent are these due to correctable (or at least identifiable) bureaucratic problems and to what extent are they due to the fact that "Prediction is difficult, particularly concerning the future?"

2. Evaluate the relative merits of open-source vs. classified information for the use in strategic analysis (that is, predictions about political behavior with a lead time greater than 6 months). How (if at all) has this situation changed during the post-WWII period. Where does it stand today? Also consider the various arguments that have been made as to why open-source information (and analysis) is not more widely used.

3. Evaluation the role of theory (generally defined, not just formal academic theories) in intelligence analysis. In particular, look at the role of theory with respect to:

   a. Filtering of relevant information
   b. Identification of likely outcomes
   c. "Abduction" of missing information
   d. Figuring out possible causal linkages or "process tracing"

   Compare and contrast the ways in which theory assists and impedes analysis.

4. Without getting into excessive technical detail, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of technical intelligence versus human intelligence. As with everything else, how has this situation changed during the post-WWII period ('not at all" is not an option), and how does it seem to be changing at the moment? To what extent is the emphasis in the US on technical means a product of the peculiarities of the US and to what extent is it due to the technical climate of the late 20th century?

5. How do the problems of analysis change when one moves from the problem of "what is" to "what will be"? Are the information and information-processing requirements of the two sufficiently different that one might have separate groups doing these, or are they better combined.

6. We will get into this more next week, but since the readings deal with the issue, evaluate the potential problems of the interface between the decision-maker and the intelligence analyst. In particular, how does one get the decision-maker to recognize the limitations of intelligence.

7. Evaluate the problems of false positives versus false negatives, from the perspective of both the analyst and the policy-maker. To what extent are discussions of political forecasting even explicitly aware of these problems?

8. Consider the factors that Betts (chapter 8) thinks make "intelligence failures inevitable": which are these would be most easy (if that is the correct word…) to correct and which are most difficult? In particular look at the advantages/disadvantages of "Team A/B" and "devil's advocate" exercises.

9. Compare and contrast the problems of military intelligence and political intelligence. Again, have these changed significantly in the post-WWII world, specifically the effect of

   a. "globalization" [define this…]
   b. militarized non-state actors
   c. democratization
   d. end of the Cold War

10. Andrew Lo, an MIT economist, provided a candid definition of "physics envy" in *The Economist:*

    > "We would love to have 3 laws that explain 99% of economic behavior. Instead we have 99 laws that explain maybe 3% of economic behavior."[1]

    This assessment is probably unduly pessimistic—at the micro-economic level at least, I would guess that simple laws such as supply-and-demand explain far more than 3% of behavior—but nonetheless instructive. Where does political behavior fit in this framework?

11. What are the qualitative methods that are typically used in political forecasting? To what extent are these used systematically? Are we doing anything Aristotle would not have recognized? Do contemporary political science methods have anything intelligent to add here?

12. Evaluate the information and analytical requirements of the following types of forecasting problems

- **Structural**:
  predict the cases (countries or regions) most likely to experience conflict
- **Dynamic**:
  predict a probability of conflict breaking out at a known point in the future
- **Counter-factual**:
  predict how the change in some policy (e.g introduction of aid or peacekeepers) will affect the likelihood or magnitude of conflict

[1] *Economist,* 363, 8273 (18 May 2002) "Survey of International Finance" pg. 17