

Political Science 972: International Conflict
Discussion Questions for Week 11
Forecasting: Policy Interface

[Note: some of these questions come out of Heuer, who is primarily cognitive in orientation, while others address the organizational aspects of forecasting, which we haven't really covered in the readings but which are still relevant]

1. To what extent does Heuer actually succeed in developing a consistent epistemology—a method determining what is true—as distinct from discussing the perceptual and psychological aspects of intelligence analysis? To the extent that he has an epistemology, where does this coincide and where does it differ from various academic political science approaches?
2. Compare and contrast Heuer's use of induction (making theoretical generalizations from specific cases) to that encountered in various political science approaches. In making that comparison, distinguish between how political science is supposedly done (that is, the dominant deductive paradigm) with how it is actually done (that is, take some widely influential works in political science and ascertain the extent to which they are deductive and inductive). [Note: Chapter 4 is particularly relevant on this]
3. To what extent does Heuer distinguish between problems encountered in determining circumstances (*what is*) and forecasting (*what will be*). To what extent do these involve distinct cognitive processes?
4. Heuer is considerably more open than most academic analysts to the utility of “unconscious” or “intuitive” processing—that is, getting the correct answer without necessarily knowing how you got it, or what information you used. This is not unique to intelligence analysis; the same phenomenon is found in a number of problem solving domains, for example medical diagnosis. To what extent does Heuer (or anything) provide a means by which one could formalize those sorts of judgments?
5. Since he is primarily coming out of a cognitive framework, Heuer is continually emphasizing the limitations of working memory. To what extent do these limitations become more or less important as one moves from the individual level to the organizational level?
6. Are cognitive biases ever a good thing?—that is, do they persist simply because we are stupid/lazy/badly-programmed or do they have positive utility in sufficient circumstances that they are reinforced?
7. As a general observation, I've found the comparisons between intelligence analysis and medical diagnosis quite useful: note that a lot of Heuer's anecdotal examples and a fair amount of literature that he cites comes from the field of medicine. But then I've spent more time than I'd like observing medical personnel in action and might be biased. Consider some of the similarities and differences between the two domains.

8. 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) cognitive and bureaucratic problems and to what extent are they due to the fact that “Prediction is difficult, particularly concerning the future?”
9. [carry-over from the readings of last week] Consider that Betts thinks make “intelligence failures inevitable” and Heuer thinks that the problem of doing good analysis is really, really hard, consequently should US policy be based on the assumption that we *don't* have good intelligence? Conversely (again going back to last week), is also policy based on feed-forward projections and therefore you simply need to go with whatever you can manage. But how does that, in turn, affect predictability? [yes, this is turning back in on itself...]
10. What does a [responsible] elected/appointed policy-maker need to know about how an analyst works? What does an analyst need to know about how policy-makers work?
11. Analysts I've talked with complain [endlessly...] about competing for attention with Fox and CNN (and losing...)—a 60-second report from the scene by someone with a \$200 haircut will trump their 60-slide briefing or 60-page report. Assess the relative strengths of these two approaches (note: this question is more subtle than it first appears)
12. Evaluate the role of *ideology* (generally defined, not just formal academic theories) in intelligence analysis. In particular, look at the role of ideology 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”More generally, is ideology simply another word for Heuer's cluster of cognitive biases, or is there more to it?
13. A paradigm that may have been popularized by former Clinton domestic advisor Bruce Reed (see <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0403.reed.html>) (or may have been around far, far longer) suggests that the fundamental divide in Washington is between “political hacks and policy wonks.” Hacks know how to get their bosses elected and stay popular; wonks actually know something (or everything) about policy. To what extent is the analyst/policy-maker divide simple a wonk-hack divide, and to what extent does it go beyond that?
14. [not addressed specifically in the readings but I think we know enough to discuss it]: To what extent were the intelligence failures surrounding the 2003 invasion of Iraq a “perfect storm”—everything that could make the situation go wrong was present—and to what extent was this “business as usual.” In other words, was the Iraq situation so unusual that there was little to be learned from it, or does it point to correctable flaws? Same question (though the issues are quite different) on pre-9/11 intelligence.