

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

Assignment: Johnson and Wirtz parts 4, 7 and 8

1. [carry-over from the readings of last week] Consider that Betts (chapter 8) thinks make “intelligence failures inevitable” and Riley (chapter 4) thinks that the system is thoroughly screwed up, consequently should US policy be based on the assumption that we *don't* have good intelligence?
2. Why is intelligence reform so difficult?—why do the various problems identified in the articles persist across decades? Is there something special about intelligence, possibly the fact that information is the life-blood of organizations and intelligence deals purely in information?
3. Take question [1] and apply it to the problem of counter-intelligence: that is, given that during the Cold War, both the US and USSR seemed to have fairly thoroughly compromised each other's intelligence services [see in particular the discussion by Bagley], should US policy be based on the assumption that we *don't* have good intelligence? Is this an argument for depending more on technical intelligence despite all of the pressures for greater human intelligence? Is this problem likely to affect contemporary intelligence operations, particularly those directed against militarized non-state actors, as much as it was relevant during the Cold War?
4. What does an elected/appointed policy-maker need to know about how an analyst works? What does an analyst need to know about how policy-makers work?
5. 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)
6. Evaluate the role of *ideology* (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”
7. 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?

8. Are democracies at an advantage or disadvantage in terms of operating intelligence agencies? Again, don't jump to what seems like the obvious answer—democracies constrain intelligence— but consider the downsides of unconstrained intelligence/secretcy as well. Consider specifically the constraints imposed on US intelligence by the combination of Congressional and judicial oversight, as well as the sources of some of the past abuses.
9. [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.