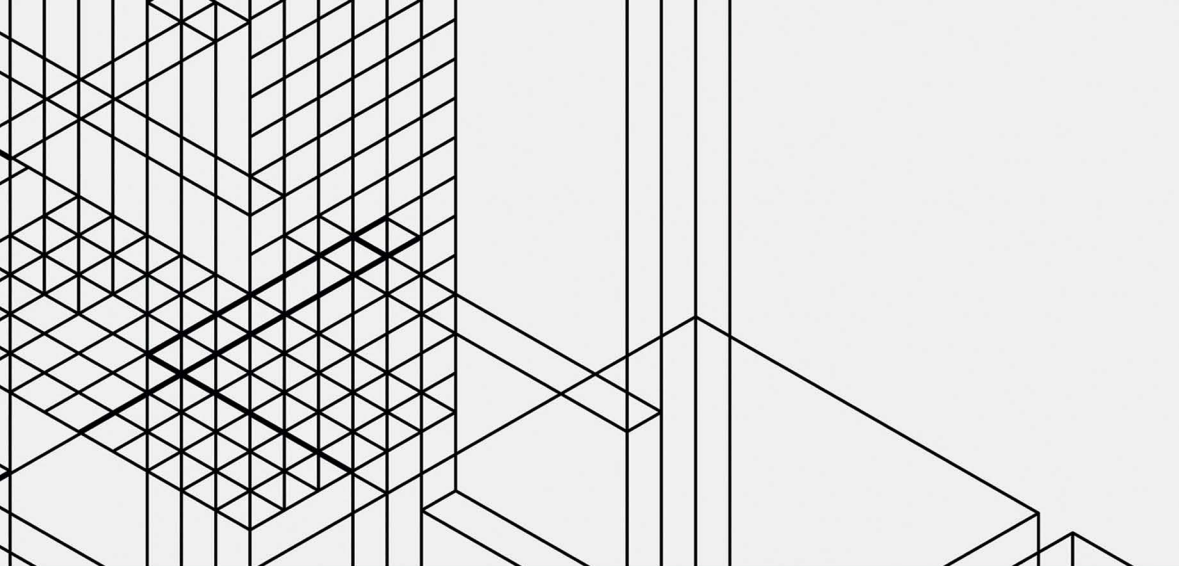




Studies in Intelligence

TIME AND NARRATIVE IN INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR THE
PRODUCTION OF MEANING

Joshua Yaphe



Time and Narrative in Intelligence Analysis

This book offers a new framework and set of standards for intelligence analysis, drawing from a variety of academic disciplines, such as philosophy, historiography, literary theory and semiotics.

The US Intelligence Community is guided by a conviction that its practitioners are engaged in the scientific pursuit of fact-based evidence and its institutions uphold a set of tradecraft skills based on objectivity, timeliness and non-politicization that serve to define professionalism. That approach is counterintuitive to the way analysts actually seek to use language and rhetoric to convince and persuade readers, and counterproductive to the future recruitment and retention of subject matter experts. This book re-examines the assumptions and biases that underlie the intelligence profession in America and its increasing turn toward Artificial Intelligence, with case studies of declassified analytical products on Argentina, China, Iraq, Italy and South Africa.

This book will be of much interest to students of intelligence, national security, philosophy, US politics and foreign policy.

Joshua Yaphe is Senior Fellow at the Center for the National Interest in Washington, DC, and a regular contributor to its journal, *The National Interest*. He has a PhD from American University and served as Senior Analyst for the Arabian Peninsula at the US Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR).

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Production of Meaning

Joshua Yaphe



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Part I

Quality and Standards



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1 Establishing a Framework

Jonah commenced to enter the city, a distance of one day's journey. Then he called out and said: "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overturned." The people of Nineveh believed in the Lord, so they proclaimed a fast and donned sackcloth, from their great to their small.

(Jonah 3: 4–5)

Here we have a story in which the thoughts and feelings of the participants are only partially revealed, the significance of events is open to many different interpretations and the scribes who transmitted the information have superimposed their own understanding on the original events in subtle, almost imperceptible ways. The reader is left to decipher the rest, hopefully with the assistance of an exegete who can parse the many layers of meaning and context. The prophet Jonah had a message to deliver and the information came from a trusted and vetted source. He didn't like the tasker – a strategic warning for the people of Nineveh that they were at imminent risk of total destruction. He thought he understood policymaker priorities better. And he had no confidence that officials in Nineveh would listen and act on the information. Perhaps he disagreed with their politics or felt they deserved their fate.

Regardless, he wanted to maintain a positive working relationship with his supervisor. His first solution was to run far away, pretending he had never received the assignment. Perhaps he thought that by ducking out of work early a colleague would cover for him, but after some wrangling he finally went to give his briefing. Senior officials in Nineveh placed great stock in the credibility of Jonah's source and the result was an intelligence success. The message was both convincing and persuasive, to such an extent that it led the people of Nineveh to change their behavior, thereby saving the lives of thousands. Jonah's supervisor reprimanded him for his negative job attitude. His mission was to deliver a simple and direct message, not influence policy, which meant that his feelings on the matter were irrelevant.

And yet, Jonah should not be judged too harshly. He only had partial information about the circumstances that generated the threat and limited firsthand experience of the Assyrian Kingdom, whose capital was far away from the land

of Israel. Presumably Nineveh had a reputation for depravity, which would have biased Jonah's preconception of the situation. Besides, why should anyone listen to the words of a self-appointed expert, a stranger who had no place in the world of elite Nineveh politics? And why, on that basis, should the Ninevans want to change deeply held and long-established habits and beliefs?

This particular example is not representative. Most intelligence analysts would consider themselves blessed to be in Jonah's position. The message was uncomplicated, its logic was linear and its reasoning clear. The sourcing was good and the threat was specific, the desired outcome was tangible and measurable, and senior officials could intervene effectively if they chose to act in time. Intelligence analysis rarely meets all of those criteria, even if training guides and academic publications often start with the false assumption that any given situation will roughly approximate these ideal circumstances. Postmortems on intelligence failures typically present case studies in which major threats with serious repercussions for the loss of life and property require analysts to identify and convey just the right information in a timely and objective way. But the reality is that moments like Pearl Harbor, the Cuban missile crisis and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 are few and far between. Analytical products are more often concerned with multilateral summits, corruption scandals, technological advances, mass protests, military exercises, economic reforms, national elections, etc.

What is representative in the previous example is the limited access to information, the uncertainty surrounding the intentions and motivations of the actors, the push and pull between analyst and manager, the need for a persuasive argument and the skill of the analyst in communicating the message. Those elements should form the basic building blocks of any understanding of intelligence analysis, regardless of whether the setting is a government agency, a private corporation, an academic department or the inside of a whale.

Intelligence begins with an *aporia*, the irresolvable contradiction between that which is knowable and that which is unknowable. It is a fundamental problem at the core of the discipline that might better be termed 'assumed knowledge.' An individual or an organization claims to know the subject matter, and others assume that they do indeed possess that knowledge. Both statements are correct to the extent that everyone expects an analysis to reflect actual events, not fabricated lies or poetic feeling. And yet, neither one is fully true. Intelligence professionals speak with authority and confidence about the ability to measure and evaluate the impact of events, when in truth most events are only observed secondhand and the inner lives of the people involved are never fully revealed. The ubiquitous citation of facts and sources reassures the policymaker that the organization has access to solid intelligence built upon a concrete foundation of knowledge, while the estimative language and frequent source descriptors belie a guarded skepticism and lingering feeling that no such solid foundation can ever truly exist.¹ The ontological problem of this irreconcilable contradiction was already apparent in the earliest years of the US Intelligence Community, as experts quickly recognized the impossibility of ever knowing everything.²

It is impossible to know all or even most of what occurs in the world. No amount of mass surveillance, keystroke monitoring, ubiquitous telemetry or machine learning can achieve omniscience, because just as technology constantly improves, society constantly changes and adjusts. Predictive analytics forecasting future trends, whether generated by human beings or algorithms, will always depend on an assessment of intentions and motivations that are hidden. Intelligence rarely approaches anything that would resemble absolute truth in the manner of a pure science. Most of the time, it navigates a world of uncertainties in the search for that which is most probable [Ancient Greek: *to eikos*] presenting that which is most persuasive [*to pithanon*], while placing a premium on logical argumentation and proofs [*pisteis*]. That makes analysis a direct descendent of the art of rhetoric as it was understood in the time of Aristotle. Both represent a style of oratory that emphasizes persuasion as a sophisticated verbal art worthy of specialized instruction and both have their origins in defense and security negotiations. It was not only for his poetic style of prose that Gorgias of Leontini came to be known as the great innovator of rhetoric. It was more importantly because of his ability in 427 BC to use those skills to persuade the Athenians to provide financial and military assistance to alleviate a Syracusan blockade of his hometown in Sicily.³

Even the very understanding of what constitutes a fact is in doubt. Facts are merely inert objects. They constitute events only when they become part of a process that unfolds over time, and any meaning attached to them derives from the experience of the observer who seeks to relate them to other phenomena.⁴ For the analyst whose primary knowledge of his portfolio comes from sitting in front of a computer all day reading the reports that appear on his screen, facts are little more than words on a page. Words that only partially describe the incomplete observations of an event that has now passed. Collected, translated and processed by individuals who may have had little or no direct experience of the local environment in which the event took place. Much of their original meaning and significance stripped away in favor of the simplest explanation of their literal sense and transmitted with the goal of contributing to an entirely different policy discourse halfway around the world. The effort of the analyst to transcend these barriers, and the attempt by managers and editors to channel that analytical effort through the imposition of standards and rules, is the dialectic that resides permanently in the background of the discipline.

It is that tension between analytical creativity and institutional tradecraft that generates all the other processes involved in intelligence, the starting point for any description of the formal and structural properties particular to the field, and the justification for any academic discipline of Intelligence Studies. All of the challenges that analysts face are the result of that underlying tension and the processes that emerge out of it. There are rules and norms that arise from that conceptual foundation and they shape intelligence analysis by generating a grammar and syntax, replete with tropes and typologies, related to the different genres of political, military, economic affairs and so forth. These structures are the embodiment of a contradiction that is immanent to the discipline, one that is perpetuated in the form of a dialectic. Accordingly, they must be considered prior to any discussion of

scientific method and separate from any framework borrowed from the sciences.⁵ They represent a set of skills that are intrinsic to the field, not the tradecraft standards and methodologies that are extrinsic and have accrued over time. Every analytical report is a substantive figuration devised by analysts and managers with the aim of resolving this contradiction of assumed knowledge. Each one is an instantiation [French: *parole*] of meaning and significance, operating within systems or codes [*langue*] as endorsed by institutions, pointing toward external phenomena that will always stand at a far distance, all in an effort to achieve purpose and value for policymakers.⁶ This is the claim to truth that intelligence analysis makes, not some false notion that intelligence professionals are the sole purveyors of true facts as they actually happened.

There are different layers of activity taking place at the foundational, structural and surface levels of an analytical product. They shape analytical production, but they do not necessarily determine the choices that analysts make. Rather, what analysts write and brief is a subjective process that involves human beings in all their idiosyncrasies. A person can learn a language, visit a country, study its society, read the intelligence, apply a methodology, examine his biases and collaborate with colleagues, and yet still fail to replicate the way events were understood and experienced by the actors involved. Similarly, a person can establish a thesis, delimit the scope, marshal the facts, connect the dots, draw the conclusions, present the findings and brief the results, and yet still fail to fully control the way in which policymakers may misinterpret, or even ignore, his analysis.

The analyst stands at the center of a two-step process in which symbols and indicators are interpreted and negotiated for their meaning and significance, a process that extends outward in either direction, toward the subject matter or target set on one side and toward the policymaker or intelligence customer on the other. He navigates these worlds of symbolic meaning by recreating them in his mind and representing them on the page, forming them into a narrative that combines events into a larger whole [Grk: *mûthos*] and endowing them with meaning [*mimêsis*]. All of this is separate from analytic tradecraft standards, which play a performative function of their own. The superstructure of tradecraft and methodology that is generated by managers and editors calls attention to the logic of deduction [*sullogismoi*] and induction [*epagôgêi*], even as the content of events and personas selected and arranged by the analyst directs the reader's focus to the *mûthos* and *mimêsis*.

For any analytical judgment to have explanatory or predictive value, the analyst must rely on his imagination. This is in order to find characterizations that substitute for people whose inner thoughts are often unknowable and interpretations that substitute for events that have not yet taken place. Any predictions may come true under certain future circumstances, but in the present moment they are pure supposition.⁷ Even when qualified with degrees of probability, they are inventions or reconstructions that rely on metaphor, analogy and other types of metonymy and synecdoche to fill out a picture that is only partially suggested by the sources. *These imaginative leaps of the mind that bridge the gaps in our knowledge and help us to conceive of new ways to look at familiar problems fundamentally employ language in the service of narrative.* Meaning can only be communicated and negotiated

through the medium of language, analysts can only hope to shape the reception of their work through the subtle use of authorial intervention and policymakers can only be convinced by a narrative that persuades them to suspend their preconceived notions and consider evidence anew.⁸

The speech act itself is no less important than the information it is meant to convey. It is no shame on the intelligence profession to say that analysts reside at one end of a broad spectrum of discourse that includes everyone from social media influencers to tabloid journalists to political pundits. What they all have in common is persuasion. Speech directed at an audience, and therefore imbued with an essential element of intersubjectivity. It is a part of any attempt to synthesize information and present ideas. For Paul Ricoeur (1977, 11), the real question at stake is: “What distinguishes persuasion from flattery, from seduction, from threat – that is to say, from the subtlest forms of violence?” Aristotle would answer that persuasion is distinguished by a reliance on logical argumentation, achieved through a type of ethical and political deliberation that subordinates oratory to the good of the citizen and the city-state. This is what prevents rhetoric from descending into propaganda and disinformation.⁹ Persuasion takes into consideration popular opinions and commonly held attitudes, but it is always grounded in objective and logical argument. It reminds the reader that the events described resemble actual things in the world and the outcomes projected exist within a range of realistic probabilities.

Analysts hone their rhetorical skills on the sly, by watching television, reading newspapers, following social media and attending conferences, in the course of which they absorb and compare thousands of narrative structures while intuitively applying the lessons they learn to their own work. They select data points, arrange them in a sequence, superimpose their own commentary and lead policymakers to a seemingly inevitable conclusion. For as much as the existing literature on Intelligence Studies ignores or denies the existence of an authorial voice, analysts create their own level of discourse in everything from the choice of a simple thumbnail photo to the adoption of an omniscient perspective. Omniscient in the sense of providing information about the target set that the foreign actor cannot access and that could change the outcome should the actor become aware. None of this is captured in any standard operating procedures.

The analyst functions as an author presenting an interpretation of events and personalities half a world away for an audience of readers back home. Expertise is therefore just as much about creativity and imagination as it is about knowledge and tradecraft. The future is unknown, our knowledge of the present moment is patchy and uncertain, and yet the analyst must find a way to bridge the gap and make predictions about the future course of trends and the impact of events. It is a mental leap that takes disparate bits of information about the past, shapes them into a coherent narrative about the present and projects them onto a vision for a future. A foreign actor who is the target of intelligence collection is engaged in a similar process, as is the senior policymaker considering policy options. They too are trying to understand their present moment through a selective reading of their past in order to support their desired outcomes for the future.

Every temporal experience is rooted in this sense of historical consciousness, linking a Space of Experience to a Horizon of Expectation.¹⁰ Individuals recall their past experiences, compare their memories with the accounts of others, seek validation from their peers and form social and cultural identities as part of a collective. They shape their sense of meaning and significance through such intersubjective mediations of the past, negotiated understandings of the present and shared hopes and fears for the future. The analyst's ability to make a successful prognosis and attach degrees of probability to analytical judgments depends on understanding these layered interactions between individuals, communities, institutions and processes, with each layer experiencing a different rate of change over time.

This is the art of intelligence. Not the way some scholar-practitioners would have it, equating art with intuition, in the sense of an unstructured and undisciplined guesswork that rejects the rigors of scientific frameworks and methodologies.¹¹ In other words, a strawman argument to be quickly dismissed in favor of the received wisdom of professional orthodoxy. Rather, this is an art that is of and for intelligence, emerging out of the lived practice of analysts. It has its own processes, techniques, methods and reasoning. It cannot be dismissed as a relic of a bygone age in which superstition and ignorance reigned, long since replaced by a more proper and professional tradecraft, soon to be forgotten in the rush toward Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI/ML), all in the pursuit of a scientific method that banishes human error to the dustbin of history. In this art of intelligence, imagination and empathy play a critical role helping analysts to better understand the mindsets of actors, more accurately predict their behavior and more effectively communicate with policymakers. Scholar-practitioners are not entirely unaware of this approach. Hoover (2013) and Marrin (2011, 2012) in particular have ventured a few pages here and there to suggest that such a perspective is possible and perhaps even desirable. It will be quite a different undertaking in this book to make the case for setting this approach on an equal footing with the scientism that so dominates the field today.

In each section of the book, a chapter presenting a theoretical argument has been paired with a chapter containing a case study that explores the practical implications. Some of these case studies are quite in depth, allowing readers to experience firsthand the reporting, analysis and correspondence of officials in Washington and in the field. Former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Allen Dulles described his own agency's training methods in much the same way:

In the 'case' method, past operations of American intelligence and of the intelligence services of other countries are studied. In order to confront the student with the exact circumstances and chronology of such operations, he is given replicas of files containing all the messages, reports, instructions, traffic between headquarters and outposts, agent materials, results of investigations and of surveillances in chronological order, so that the student can see the day-to-day progress and conduct of the case, see it unfold before him like the rather complicated plot of a very long novel.

(Dulles 1963, 179)

He was quite right. The student should be able to see the analytical line unfolding in real time, as it winds and turns according to the interests and observations of a range of analysts, managers and collectors.

In the first part, *Quality and Standards*, Chapter 1 offers an introduction to the basic concepts and themes, with a look at the philosophical underpinnings of the discipline as it was conceived by the founders of the US Intelligence Community in the 1940s. Following on from that, Chapter 2 is a case study examining a 1952 analysis of apartheid in South Africa that relied purely on expertise and imagination to put forward a remarkably prescient set of predictions for long-term stability. In the second part, *Theory and Practice*, Chapter 3 questions how the industry understands itself, especially given the rapid growth of private intelligence companies and public-private partnerships. It asks whether the guiding principles of objectivity, timeliness and non-politicization accurately capture the experience of analysts and the quality of their work. The case study in Chapter 4 picks up on those themes as it examines an analysis of the Italian elections in 1953, one that prompted a serious debate about what constitutes good analysis. While Washington analysts preferred tangible evidence that could be quantified and measured, diplomats in the field argued in favor of subjective, firsthand experience.

In the third part, *Sense-making and Signification*, Chapter 5 begins with the premise that all analysis takes place within the medium of language, and views the field from the perspective of linguistics and semiology as practiced by Saussure, Peirce, Richards, Morris, Eco and others. The analyst's task is a two-step process of translating and interpreting the signs used by actors abroad into a language that can be understood by policymakers at home. Accordingly, the case study in Chapter 6 takes up a 1992 estimate of Saddam Hussein's grip on power in Iraq, offering a close reading that highlights the structural elements and diagrams their relationships in a manner following Greimas. It shows how analytical products can work within the grammar and typologies of any given analytical genre, while also transcending their norms.

In the fourth part, *Narrative and Storytelling*, Chapter 7 offers a model for understanding the role of the analyst as author and the policymaker as reader, explores the Intelligence Cycle as a heuristic device and enters into a discussion on Aristotle and Ricoeur. Authorial intervention is present at every stage, including intertextuality according to Genette, as the analyst develops a discourse that brings the policymaker into the world of the subject matter and prompts him to reflect on his assumptions. Chapter 8 is a case study that examines the Sino-Soviet Split, noting how some Washington analysts struggled to marshal concrete evidence of the burgeoning divisions, while others used metaphor to develop more convincing narrative structures. In the fifth part, *Time and Historical Consciousness*, Chapter 9 describes the way in which perceptions of past, present and future are inextricably linked, with reference to the works of Husserl, Bergson, Heidegger, Koselleck and others. Human beings build a sense of identity in the present by recollecting memories of the past and attaching hopes and fears to the future, while ideology seeks to shape that identity formation process, especially at key moments of generation change and revolution. The case study in Chapter 10 continues that discussion

while examining British analysis of the Cultural Revolution in China. It shows how a remarkably insightful and far-reaching analytical line could withstand rapid changes on the ground over many years precisely because the analysts appreciated this aspect of historical consciousness.

In the sixth part, *Bias and Empathy*, Chapter 11 explores the concept of intelligence failure, which is commonly used as the impetus for reforms in training, methodology and resource allocation. Most writings on the topic are predicated on a belief that the primary function of analysis is to prevent a catastrophic attack or the outbreak of war, though this is unrepresentative of the work most analysts do. Complex, multilayered problems require the analyst to exercise creativity and imagination, in line with the 9/11 Commission Report recommendations. The case study in Chapter 12 puts those theories of intelligence failure to the test. It covers the 1955 coup in Argentina, in which Washington analysts failed because they were too dependent on tangible, fact-based evidence, while ignoring the more creative and imaginative narratives put forward by diplomats at post. The last section, *Humans and Algorithms*, summarizes the main concepts of the book by way of a conclusion in Chapter 13. It argues that all analysis is ultimately by humans, about humans and for humans, despite the predominant view among intelligence leaders today that Artificial Intelligence is the only way forward.

The material in this book presented three underlying challenges, each one involving the difficulty of writing for an audience of both scholars and practitioners.

- 1) Concepts suffused with a continental philosophy of phenomenology and concerned with subjective experience must be introduced to an American audience that firmly believes the goal of the profession is to describe ontological truths.
- 2) Analysts who have been told to minimize their own personalities in favor of their organization's overall mission have to be reminded that subjectivity and authorship are necessary for attaining those very same organizational goals.
- 3) Terms have to be explained in a simple language for the layman, while at the same time doing justice to the nuances of the intensely complex and hard-fought intellectual debates that surround them.

In order to accomplish these goals, it has been necessary to reach beyond the existing academic discourse on Intelligence Studies to find new approaches, new terms and new case studies. For example, only one major textbook on intelligence analysis makes even a brief mention of storytelling as a valid technique for presenting an analytical argument.¹² That being said, what follows is not intended as a work of philosophy or semiology or literary criticism in its own right. The scope is modest. It should supplement and complement other established views in an effort to achieve a more effective balance in how we look at the intelligence profession.

This book has made a concerted effort to find original case studies that can best exemplify the concepts discussed in each chapter. A key problem of source studies in the field of Intelligence Studies is the scarcity of publicly available source materials, which provide only partial glimpses into a much fuller intelligence record that remains out of the public view. The few sources that are available are poorly

indexed both in the archives and online. One approach is to recreate the context by considering all forms of analytical writing that are affiliated or adjacent to intelligence, including diplomatic cables and think tank reports. Many of the people who drafted such papers demonstrated real expertise, along with access to the same or better sources as their contemporaries in the intelligence world. Another approach is to examine the analyses of multiple governments in order to compare the differences.

Another problem with source studies is the attitude that exists in some corners of the discipline that intelligence experts do not have to show their work. Quite a bit of the academic literature is written in a highly didactic style, with former practitioners sharing their deep insights in bold, confident statements about what intelligence is, or what it should be, while neglecting to provide the kind of evidence they themselves would have demanded from their analysts. Detailed examinations of intelligence reports within their historical context are often lacking, leaving students to simply trust that a former manager with a high-ranking title speaks with authority and has presented a full and accurate account of the topic under examination. This problem is being addressed to some extent by the growth of several outstanding journals committed to opening up the discussion to scholars from more diverse backgrounds, including the *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, *Intelligence and National Security* and the *Journal of Intelligence History*.

The Discourse of the Discipline

This raises the question of whether the field of “Intelligence Studies” really is an academic discipline at all.¹³ Current and former practitioners can reassure themselves they are engaged in an intellectual pursuit, academic departments can provide internships for students and boost their postgraduation employment rates and publishing firms can issue titles creating the impression that serious debate takes place in the field.¹⁴ Good for them. Many of these individuals are former government employees who received government funding to complete their degrees, used their connections among old colleagues to get positions at universities and on editorial boards, and continued to collaborate with their former employers. It matters not. The details of such incestuous relationships are irrelevant as long as the content they provide is credible. But how are we to judge the credibility of Intelligence Studies? It cannot be by appealing to the tradecraft of the profession, since that leads back in a vicious circle through the former intelligence officers who now populate the ranks of academia. Any claim to the status of an academic discipline requires a rigorous examination of the language, concepts and behaviors that are unique to the field. However, such an inquiry cannot be performed using the tools of tradecraft by which the profession already defines itself, because all we find in the end is a very elaborate version of the training these academics received when they were practitioners.¹⁵

There is value in using independent modes of inquiry to scrutinize the processes by which the rules and norms of intelligence analysis are established and enforced,

but here the situation is rather complicated. It is a tautology. There are far too many writings in which the intelligence profession uses the language and methods of scientific inquiry to evaluate the profession's use of the language and methods of scientific inquiry. It is not just any tautology, but rather one in which so much of the profession's actual use of language and scientific inquiry is hidden from public view behind classification banners. A critique of Intelligence Studies in terms of its institutionalized discourse is long overdue, and it must be accomplished for three main reasons: 1) *to better understand the boundaries of the discipline and its relations with other disciplines*; 2) *to better understand how the profession has come to structure itself internally as a community of practice*; and 3) *to appreciate the cognitive processes and ideological debates that will influence the long-term trends and developments of intelligence thinking*.

In the early years of the US Intelligence Community, there were notable examples of key individuals raising questions that challenged the status quo. Allen Dulles could say that "we have created the best possible mechanism to get the unvarnished facts before the policy makers, and to get it there in time," but Roger Hilsman Jr. could respond that an analyst might "spend his lifetime collecting facts . . . and most would be irrelevant . . . a jumble of facts that had no meaning . . . and from which I could draw no conclusions."¹⁶ Washington Platt could reject the notion that a fact, in and of itself, has any sort of intelligence value, caustically remarking that many analysts fail to get beyond a restatement of the known facts, because doing so "entails considerably more work" and "requires considerably more real understanding."¹⁷ *New York Times* journalist Hanson Baldwin, serving as a member of the presidentially appointed Eberstadt Committee assessing the performance of national security agencies in 1948, could write a series of scathing editorials on the intelligence establishment decrying duplication of effort, a lack of collaboration and high levels of incompetence.¹⁸ His claims about the impact of internal reform may have been inaccurate and misleading, due to his very limited understanding of the workings of an internal CIA Survey Group, but many of his general observations were probably correct.

Today, such criticisms are again taking place on the fringes of academia. Some scholars have questioned the premise that intelligence professionals deal with immutable facts that speak for themselves.¹⁹ Others have offered a cautionary warning about the industry's addiction to fact-based evidence:

This deep-rooted positivist tradition, focusing on 'facts,' still prevails in the intelligence field, in the organizational structures, the intelligence cycle, and not least in the professional ethos of dealing with facts (in contrast to journalists), the 'real world' (in contrast to social constructivists in the academia), and having the duty to deliver these facts about the real world to the customers, even if the facts are unwanted and the 'real world' is awful and rejected.
(Agrell and Treverton 2015, 159)

Kriebel (2015) has pointed to a deeply entrenched belief in structural realism borrowed from International Relations theory, and noted that concepts outside that

framework are foreign to intelligence professionals, even if they are rudimentary to students of other disciplines. Even within the seemingly endless and monotonous literature attempting to refine the industry's highly idiosyncratic jargon, there are pieces that stand out. For example, Kerry Patton's work on sociocultural intelligence (SOCINT) poses serious questions about how the industry is structured.²⁰ These individuals are all correct in assessing that the institutionalization of a particular set of norms has become so pervasive that it now shapes the way intelligence professionals think. So familiar that the way in which the discourse is structured is almost invisible. So natural that there is no reason to question the process by which the rules evolved.

And yet, those rules and norms did not materialize out of thin air. They were created and shaped by human beings whose intentions and motivations reflected their own sense of purpose within the Intelligence Community, including their desire to include or exclude others. On the one hand, rules and norms allow people to exchange views and ideas through a shared set of concepts, with clear guidelines for their interpretation. On the other hand, they also limit the types of discourse that are permissible or possible, whether that delimitation is intentional or unintentional. Moreover, the processes by which the field defines itself are not static. They change over time. They coalesce under contingent circumstances or according to habit, leaving residual codes that are in decline, dominant codes that are widely accepted and emerging codes that may later become the preference of the community.²¹

The discipline of Intelligence Studies in the United States today rests upon a highly polished historical narrative of successive intelligence failures spurring on round after round of reform and reorganization, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks motivating the establishment of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI).²² It is a story about caring and committed professionals, patriots who prefer to remain anonymous in their dedication to the mission, who are faced with enormous challenges from malign actors abroad as they tirelessly attempt to overcome their own human limitations, all for the sake of defending and protecting the American people. It accords with a vision for a future in which AI/ML will automate the retrieval of information, test hypotheses and select analytical frameworks, leaving only limited roles for analysts to manage customer expectations.²³ The ideological underpinnings of the profession in America, including the emphasis on timeliness, objectivity and non-politicization, derive from the wisdom and foresight of William Langer, Sherman Kent and other founding members of the Intelligence Community in the late 1940s and 50s. The rest is merely an elaboration and codification of their pioneering vision. It is one long, overarching narrative from the early days of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in WWII to the heroism of intelligence professionals today who valiantly work to thwart foreign election interference, counter the threat of radical extremist ideologies and prevent atrocities and other gross violations of human rights.

In many respects, however, the rules and norms of the US Intelligence Community probably owe more to the philosophy of Pragmatism that dominated the history departments of Ivy League schools in the 1920s and 30s. Traces of early

Pragmatic philosophers, including Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey, are embedded in the writings of Sherman Kent and his peers, even if the influence of those philosophers is invisible to the authors of today's textbooks on Intelligence Studies.²⁴ Kent's advice on how to influence policymakers was to be relevant and credible, to avoid being inaccurate or incomplete and to be mindful of policymaker perceptions of the utility of it all.²⁵ In considering the need for a more rigorous definition of terms and informed debate, Kent's concerns were the practical need for efficiency, avoiding duplication of effort and mitigating the effects of a future war.²⁶ Kent held that intelligence failure most often (though not always) resulted from prejudices, clichés and other mental preconceptions, which presented obstacles to a direct and unmediated experience of the intelligence sources.²⁷

By the same token, Peirce advocated for abandoning abstract metaphysical questions and purely philosophical concepts in favor of lines of inquiry about actual problems that have direct relevance to the present. They should be designed with clearness in their apprehension and familiarity in the way they match lived experience.

It may be acknowledged, therefore, that the books are right in making familiarity with a notion the first step toward clearness of apprehension, and the defining of it the second.

(Peirce 1934, 251 [5.392])

That which any true proposition asserts is real, in the sense of being as it is regardless of what you or I may think about it. Let this proposition be a general conditional proposition as to the future, and it is a real general such as is calculated really to influence human conduct.

(Peirce 1934, 289 [5.432])

William James believed that the ideas and images we have about the world carry meaning and importance in terms of how they help us to fulfill our intentions and cause us to achieve our goals. Our hypotheses will either be confirmed or refuted by observing whether they eventually accord with future events.

To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we only need consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.

(James 2000, 25)

[Pragmatism's] only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted.

(James 2000, 40)

John Dewey taught that every investigation or inquiry contains within it, from the outset, inherent biases that can never be entirely removed. Those cognitive biases should be recognized and minimized, in the pursuit of a more neutral perspective.

Every particular case of thinking is what it is because of some attitude, some bias if you will; and no general theory can be framed which is not based upon what happens in particular cases. This attitude is no immediate part of what is consciously reflected upon, but it determines the selection of this rather than that subject-matter.

(Dewey 1985, 14)

The received wisdom within intelligence circles of the relationship between the policymaker and the analyst is entirely contained within Pragmatism, as almost any random sampling of quotes will demonstrate. For example, Dewey's commentary on James:

The pragmatic procedure here is to set the idea "at work within the stream of experience. It appears less as a solution than as a program for more work, and particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed. Theories, thus, become instruments . . . We don't lie back on them, we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again by their aid" (p. 53). In other words, an idea is a draft drawn upon existing things, an intention to act so as to arrange them in a certain way. From which it follows that if the draft is honored, if existences, following upon the actions rearrange or readjust themselves in the way the idea intends, the idea is true. When, then, it is a question of an idea, it is the idea *itself* which is practical (being an intent) and its *meaning* resides in the existences which, as changed, it intends.

(Dewey 1908, 88)

The purpose of a line of inquiry is not to arrive at universal answers to metaphysical questions, but rather to provide tools with practical benefit that people can use in their lives as they interact with the world. It is an iterative process and its value will only be determined by the end result, so that any meaning or significance is simply a reflection of the fact that the tools provided were indeed ultimately useful to someone. Hence, intelligence analysts must present the facts simply, work within the commonsense frameworks of policymaker debates, present lines of inquiry that are directly tied to national security interests and reach conclusions that will be validated by real-world outcomes. That is the only meaning that counts.²⁸

The critique of intelligence-as-science is also contained within the critique of Pragmatism. Both embody a similar tautology, one in which the scientific method helps align our opinions with fact-based evidence, while those same facts are determined by scientific procedures. This circular logic is transcended in classical Pragmatist thought by an even greater tautology – the scientific method is the approach best adapted to our social needs, and society will reach a consensus on the need

for the scientific method after enough facts have been observed and hypotheses tested.²⁹ As A.J. Ayer put the matter:

We can safely conclude that the scientific method is the only one that gives us a good chance of having our opinions coincide with fact, provided that we have already accepted the scientific point of view, which means, among other things, that we are using scientific method to determine what are the facts with which our opinions have to coincide. . . . Thus, that truth will prevail is a logical necessity; and for this reason truth can be defined as that which will prevail, and reality as its correlate.

(Ayer 1968, 24–5)

Ultimately, what is true is that vast numbers of highly educated intelligence professionals, working for large organizations keen on protecting their reputations in a fiercely competitive marketplace, all of them angling for recognition and promotion in a system that rewards collaboration and teamwork, have an incentive to demonstrate their readiness and enthusiasm for agreeing with one another, and the scientific method with its reliance on fact-based evidence provides a convenient set of norms and rules for achieving that goal. For better or worse, it is all highly pragmatic.

However, in adopting this attitude toward fact-based evidence and the scientific method, the Intelligence Community has assumed: 1) the rational and goal-oriented behavior of foreign actors, 2) relatively transparent and accessible interactions with policymakers and 3) an almost utilitarian role of analysts as instruments for making empirical observations of the world. Some of that is certainly true some of the time, but not to a degree that would justify the direction in which the field has developed. The intelligence professionals of the 1960s and 70s adopted the methodological approach of the WWII generation where it proved relevant for the contemporary challenges they faced. In doing so, they also took onboard the philosophical outlook that accompanied it, though they probably never saw themselves as engaging in precisely the same type of intellectual debate as their forebears in the 1940s and 50s. They wanted to instill a professional ethos that could help sustain and protect their organizations for generations to come, which was also highly pragmatic. However, they misunderstood a great deal of what the founding generation was trying to impart. Sherman Kent would have been highly skeptical and distrustful of the extent to which a scientific paradigm has come to dominate the profession. It is easy to see how the misunderstanding occurred. Kent's descriptions of process and production are full of penetrating insights, while his conclusions about method and meaning are often contradictory and lack any systematic framework. Many scholars have quoted his writings as justification for a scientific approach to the profession, but his own words can just as easily be cited as evidence for quite the opposite, as this book will demonstrate.

Kent was head of the Europe-Africa division at the OSS and later deputy head of the CIA's Office of National Estimates. Before, during and after his years of government service, he was an historian of early nineteenth-century French politics,

having studied and taught at Yale University. His boss in both government positions was William Langer, an historian of late nineteenth-century European diplomacy and French political history, who had studied and taught at Harvard University. In the 1920s and 30s, the period during which they completed their studies, Pragmatism had secured an important place, though not necessarily a dominant one, within the Departments of Philosophy at Harvard and Yale.³⁰ Langer attended philosophy classes at Harvard, and his wife was enrolled in philosophy at Radcliffe College.³¹ The impact of Dewey's writings stretched far beyond the confines of philosophy, becoming particularly influential in history departments of the period. His influence cannot be underestimated for the generation of historians coming of age in the 1930s and 40s, who carried with them a strong civic impulse.

Later, in addition to his immense impact in the social sciences, Dewey influenced the sensibility of those historians creating the American past in the twentieth century: James Harvey Robinson, Charles Beard, Carl Becker, and Merle Curti all contributed to fashioning a "usable past," oriented to an often benign but always reformist vision of America's work in the world.

(Kuklick 2002, 197)

To that list of academic luminaries we might append the pioneers of the US Intelligence Community who were trained as historians in this great American pragmatic tradition and thus were creating the American *present* as well as its past.

Analytical Distance

Early Pragmatists generally supported a notion of radical empiricism that lent scientific respectability to the subjective perception of external phenomena. It was no different among the first generation of American intelligence professionals who had absorbed Pragmatism in their Ivy League graduate school programs in the 1930s. The ability to maintain a detachment, devoid of cognitive biases or affective colorations, was part of an idealized vision of objective science that came to inform tradecraft standards within the US Intelligence Community. The analyst must stand at a remove from both the subject matter and from the policymaker, studying their actions and reactions with the aim of assessing their motivations and intentions, while at the same time remaining aloof.

It is not a matter of security clearances, counterintelligence investigations, source handling and vetting requirements, budget and staffing patterns. Those constraints exist and they do create a restrictive environment, but they are factors over which the analyst has no control. Rather, it is a matter of analytic tradecraft standards, processes associated with production and the expectations that are attached to career promotion. These factors, which are not intrinsic to resource constraints and security imperatives, create barriers that restrict the analyst's ability to have a direct and unmediated experience of the world beyond the computer terminal. Consequently, the unquestioning adherence to the principle of objectivity that accompanies them can seem almost artificial and arbitrary. The rigorous application of

the scientific method today serves to legitimize and reward a work environment in which the analyst is isolated from the outside world and alienated from everything in it, thereby further elevating the authority of institutions over individuals and managers over analysts.

The Intelligence Community's fixation on distance as a positive form of objectivity is yet one more habit inherited from its founders' academic training in the 1930s and 40s, borrowing from the discipline of history the widespread assumption that clarity of thought comes from the passage of time.³² Remoteness and detachment are necessary for the critical reconstruction of another culture or society, and serve as a corrective for the simplistic kind of ideological and moral flattening that accompanies the subjective process of memory. "Thus, the affective and ideological simplicities of a point of view that looks to the past only to find a 'continuing presence' is opposed by a critical historical spirit that might be defined as distance-consciousness."³³ There is an important point related to this concept of analytical distance that has been lost on practitioners today. Namely, that there is a subjective process at work, something more immediate to the senses and vivid in the imagination, and this analytical detachment should only be intended as a corrective measure to focus and clarify that sensation, not to replace it.

Distance is not passive. The political, ideological and emotional detachment that institutions cultivate as a normative standard is actively constructed. An analytical product positions the reader in relation to the subject matter, for example, by using close description to bring the reader into the orbit of people and events, or focusing instead on abstract social forces that limit the reader's feeling of engagement to that of an intellectual exercise. It is reminiscent of the saying that a single death is a tragedy, while a million deaths is a statistic. The point of view or focal lens, the translation of terms and symbols, and the selection of a time frame are all means of controlling the reader's degree of distance/proximity to the issue at hand. And it would be wrong to assume that objectivity in the form of analytical distance is monolithic or canonical, inasmuch as a range of approaches to distance and proximity are surely necessary for responding to the complex, multi-varied tasks that analysts face.³⁴

Aboard the ship in the middle of the sea, on the way from the port of Jaffa to the bustling city of Tarshish, Jonah could feel that his troubles were far behind him. Thinking back over that great distance, he probably felt quite certain that his assessment was correct and the people of Nineveh would never repent, no matter what evidence might be presented to them of impending destruction. He was wrong. His failure was not the result of an inability to separate signals from noise, connect the dots, question assumptions or develop alternative hypotheses, even if each of those factors might have played a role to some extent. Rather, it was first and foremost a failure of imagination and creativity. Jonah could not see beyond Nineveh's reputation as a haven for cruelty and idolatry. He had no feel for the people of Nineveh as three-dimensional human beings, capable of humility and shame, willing to express their repentance in such a way that they might thereby suspend the judgment of heaven. The Lord allowed the kikayon tree to grow and provide shade to Jonah, and just as quickly allowed it to be taken away, teaching the lesson that it is vital to have sympathy for every living creature. By the same token,

the parable demonstrates that our analytical judgments must also be informed by a deeper emotional and psychological engagement with the subject matter. That is the kind of intimate awareness or deep expertise that can only come from an analyst's inner desire to transcend the limitations and surmount the distance that separates him from true knowledge.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Ricoeur (1984, 1:7).
- 2 Ransom (1958, 6–7) cited the Hoover Commission's definition of intelligence in 1955 ("Intelligence deals with all the things which should be known in advance of initiating a course of action") only to then note how impossibly broad and impractical that definition was.
- 3 Sansone (2012, 123–5 and 144–6).
- 4 The definition of 'meaning' in this book will follow Putnam (1975, 2:269), who contends that the ability to validate the absolute truth of a statement is not necessary for understanding its meaning: "the meaning of a word should be a finite sequence, or 'vector', whose components should certainly include the following (it might be desirable to have other types of components as well): (1) the syntactic markers . . . (2) the semantic markers . . . (3) a description of the additional features of the stereotype . . . (4) a description of the extension." This will allow for multilayered chains of signification, while avoiding a rigid empirical tradition that locates meaning strictly in the transmission of ontological facts.
- 5 Cf. Jameson (1981, 77 and 83).
- 6 Jameson (1981, 85).
- 7 Kent (1994, 177): "If NIEs could be confined to statements of indisputable fact the task would be safe and easy. Of course the result could not then be called an estimate. By definition, estimating is an excursion out beyond established fact into the unknown."
- 8 Cf. Greimas (1987, 64–5): "In other words, the generation of meaning does not first take the form of production of utterances and their combination in discourse; it is relayed, in the course of its trajectory, by narrative structures and it is these that produce meaningful discourse articulated in utterances."
- 9 See Gross (2000).
- 10 For a more prosaic rendering of the same ideas, see Lukacs (1994, 251).
- 11 For example, Marrin (2007) and Khalsa (2009). But also note Folker (2000).
- 12 Pherson and Pherson (2017, 166–7): "Narrative engages the entire brain – logic, emotion, and imagination – drawing on memories of past experiences, culture, and learning. . . . Narrative and traditional analysis share many of the same key attributes, suggesting they are left-brain and right-brain variations on ways to communicate complex information."
- 13 Attempts to declare it a discipline go back at least to 1955 (Kent 1994, 14).
- 14 For example, Fisher et al. (2014, 74), and Bruce and George (2015).
- 15 Johnston's survey of the motivations of intelligence professionals is remarkable, yet he returns to a basic definition of analysis (2005, 19): "intelligence analysis can be reconstructed in the context of a scientific method . . . the steps include: observation and description of phenomena; formulation of hypotheses to explain phenomena; testing of hypotheses by independent experts; refutation or confirmation of hypotheses."
- 16 Hilsman Jr. (1952, 4 and 13).
- 17 Platt (1957, 55).
- 18 Baldwin (1948) and CIA Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Reading Room (online), "Subject: Hanson Baldwin's Article," (July 21, 1948), declassified FOIA document number CIA-RDP86B00269R000500050036-2, document release date May 1, 2003, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-RDP86B00269R000500050036-2>.

- 19 Bean (2018), and Räsänen and Nyce (2013).
- 20 Patton (2010).
- 21 Cf. Williams (1977, 121–7).
- 22 That narrative goes back at least as far as the late 1950s. See Ransom (1958, 89–90, 178–82 and 187–92).
- 23 Ish et al. (2021, 68). There are dozens of projects in both public and private sectors seeking to use AI/ML to generate predictive systems replicating the skills of analysts, such as IARPA’s Good Judgment Project. See Hare and Coghill (2016, 858–70).
- 24 As Steury notes in Kent (1994, xix–xx): “Like most historians of his generation, Kent was uncomfortable with theoretical constructs, preferring in their stead empirical judgments that were founded in an ordered methodology. . . . In his contributions to the methodology of intelligence he helped to lay the pragmatic foundation upon which a doctrine and theory of intelligence analysis could be built.”
- 25 Kent (1994, 33–42).
- 26 Kent (1994, 13–19).
- 27 Kent (1994, 178).
- 28 Cf. Peirce (1986, 108): “The intellectual significance of beliefs lies wholly in the conclusions which may be drawn from them, and ultimately in their effects upon our conduct.”
- 29 Cf. Hookway (2000, 80–1): “If we seek to elucidate the normative commitments that are expressed through our practice of scientific assertion, then we should conclude that our goal is to arrive at a body of propositions which are such that any responsible investigator who inquired into the matter long enough would eventually rationally accept these propositions.”
- 30 Kuklick (2004).
- 31 Langer (1977, 57–8 and 124).
- 32 Hollander et al. (2011). Cf. Warner (2017), who acknowledges the importance of narrative, but concludes that analytical writing depends on primary sources, a rigorous chronology, a disinterested point of view, the copious use of original quotations and plentiful citations as proof and not commentary, so that footnotes “should not be (in a serious work of history) mini-essays to advance side arguments.”
- 33 Phillips (2004, 91).
- 34 Cf. Phillips (2004, 95): “it certainly does not follow that there exists a universally privileged distance location. On the contrary, it is essential to recognize that there is no fixed stance, either of detachment or proximity, that is best suited for all contexts, purposes, or genres.”

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2 **Apartheid in South Africa, 1952**

The way the profession has defined itself in teleological terms as an evolving process of crisis and reform on the long march toward scientific respectability is epistemologically questionable, socially constructed and historically contingent. There is perhaps no better example of the negative consequences of the institutionalization of knowledge within the confines of a discipline, as Foucault would have understood the problem. “The disciplinarization of knowledges, and its polymorphous singularity, now leads to the emergence of a phenomenon and a constraint that is now an integral part of our society. We call it ‘science.’”¹ Analysis within the US Intelligence Community has evolved into a strange amalgam of tragedy and farce for which the best literary analogy is Luigi Pirandello’s modernist play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The target sets appear on a computer screen without any reporting to indicate their actions or intentions. The analyst struggles to corral the data points and network diagrams into a format that is acceptable to managers and editors. The situation is saved by the highly formulaic language of US Intelligence Community convention, which conceals the rote learning of a desk-bound bureaucrat.

Moreover, any attempt to evaluate this profession according to its own standards results in a circular argument that struggles to break free from the industry’s own self-image. Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203 is undoubtedly the symbolic achievement of this master narrative of intelligence failures leading to reform and reorganization, each one a step forward on the road to scientific progress and improved security for the American people.² ICD 203 is not just a set of tools for evaluating analytical products, it is more importantly the yardstick for measuring the progress of that master narrative of professionalization. These analytic tradecraft standards, which were codified and promulgated by the ODNI in 2006 and updated in 2015, serve the purpose of sharing best practices across all agencies of the US Intelligence Community. They undoubtedly serve some purpose, perhaps in helping new analysts to orient themselves to the rules and norms of the profession. The question is, are they relevant? And do they contribute to better analysis?

The following case study of apartheid in South Africa will provide the material by which we can judge these tradecraft standards. The analysis is outstanding for its ability to foresee the corrosive long-term political and economic consequences of a particularly nasty and brutal form of racism. If ICD 203 really does hold up as

the universal model for intelligence analysis and the sign for mission accomplished in the industry's efforts to achieve scientific respectability, then all of the positive qualities found in this remarkable product should be reflected in today's tradecraft standards. In other words, we should expect the US Intelligence Community's definition of quality to be a synthesis of the best practices of its leading experts, not a set of abstract rules designed by managers that are then imposed on all employees. And this paper was certainly written by a leading expert.

"Race Relations in South Africa," an assessment produced by the US Department of State's Office of Intelligence Research (OIR) on October 21, 1952, has been declassified in full and made accessible to the public at the US National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland.³ It opened with an analytical judgment that must have been controversial in its day – white authorities would succeed in suppressing racial tensions in the short term, but over the long run "a racial explosion seems inevitable."⁴ The analysis concluded with the assertion that apartheid would eventually put white nationalists in a position of having to make concessions, as it would increasingly leave South Africa politically unstable and economically isolated. It was commendable that the author chose that analytical line, remarkable that his managers approved the topic and admirable that the organization published the analysis. In those days, the stature of the State Department and the respect afforded its analysts were such that this analytical line on apartheid was borrowed for a National Intelligence Estimate that was published concurrently.⁵ As the following discussion will demonstrate, however, such an analysis could not be produced today.

The language was bold and direct. From the outset, it dismissed the racial prejudices that had become pervasive in writings about South Africa. The analyst even delicately suggested that some policymakers reading his report might be themselves susceptible to a rather insidious form of racism arising out of misinformation and propaganda.

Much that is written and said about the situation in South Africa is exaggerated, tendentious, misinformed, or highly speculative. Views of the probable course of race relations range from an imminent blood bath to the Nationalist hope that repression, tempered by encouragement of a certain amount of "separate development" for each group within its own "sphere," will preserve "white civilization." In South Africa, superficial thinking is facilitated by the lack of effective communication between the white and other groups. A large proportion of the white minority are unaware of the non-whites' existence except in their servile capacity and as a factor in urban crime and white politics. The foreign observer, impressed by the rigidity of the white communities' views and by the restiveness of the non-white groups, often arrives at an alarmist interpretation by simplifying a complex sociological situation into loose generalities.⁶

Presumably the vague language ("much that is written") was meant to include both writings by newspaper reporters and cables penned by diplomats in the field, while

the equally vague descriptor (“foreign observer”) was meant to imply both Western publics and officials in Washington. With that, the author has used an aside to speak directly to the reader and address the most sensitive subject of all – the reader’s own biases.

The analysis explained in a confident and insistent tone that: 1) non-whites would be “increasingly unwilling to endure subjection”; 2) the Nationalist Party’s talk of apartheid was mostly a “sham . . . for deceiving the electorate” as it sought to secure votes through fearmongering; 3) the black population might not have had an effective political structure, but an “elaborate organization” by the African National Congress and other non-white groups “might not be necessary” for an uprising to occur in major urban areas; 4) almost all whites would become more extreme as part of “a reaction to the pressure of world opinion”; and 5) “worsening race relations over a long period will have a deterrent effect on [foreign] investment.”⁷ The author was nuanced and thoughtful in his treatment of the material. He considered second- and third-order effects. He noted that the white political groups were at loggerheads about whether to adopt full apartheid or make limited economic and social concessions, that the non-white groups were fractured and too disorganized to mount a coherent front and any action by one side would provoke an opposite reaction on the other side. In other words, a polarization leading to a vicious cycle of violence was inevitable. Infighting among the whites will have the effect of “encouraging the non-white resistance movement,” while a major uprising by non-whites will eventually lead the white parties to unify around a more extremist agenda of repression and exclusion.⁸ The analysis covered an array of domestic, regional and international ramifications, including how white attitudes of racial superiority and their segregation policies in South Africa would “exacerbate white-black relations elsewhere in Africa,” contributing to the “growth of a vague, emotional concept” of a black-dominated pan-Africa.⁹

As we read this assessment today, we find that no matter how wide-ranging the discussion, there is always the sense that the analyst speaks with a deep and passionate concern for the subject matter. Quite possibly derived from his own lived experience, perhaps after having absorbed the issues firsthand over a period of many years. The authorial voice comes through on almost every page (Figure 2.1), with a focal lens for the narrator that is quite distinct from the views of the

	WHITE PARTIES	
	<u>Nationalists</u>	<u>Opposition</u>
<u>Perspective of Protagonists</u>	hardline apartheid	moderate accommodation
<u>Author’s Perspective</u>	fear-mongering populism	meaningless and marginal

Figure 2.1 Two-tiered Focalization in the Assessment

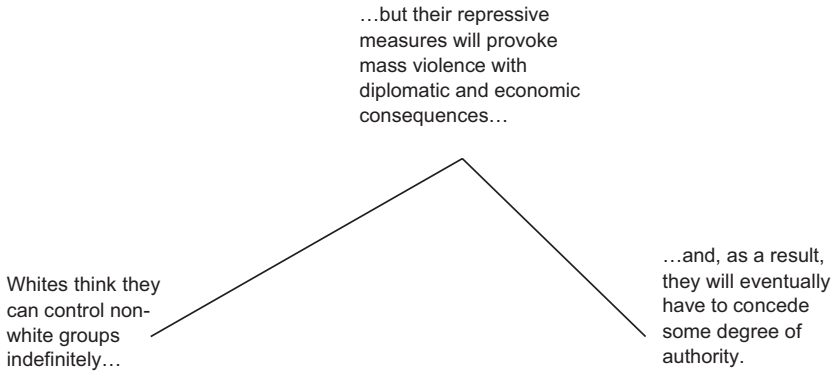


Figure 2.2 Emplotment of the Analyst's Political Predictions

protagonists, and in that regard the analyst's determination to say what he believes is unflinching. There is a definite plot line (Figure 2.2) containing clear elements of Aristotelian tragedy, with a reversal of fortune [Grk: *peripeteia*] for the protagonists that results from a critical character flaw [*hamartia*] and a failure to exercise proper reasoning [*orthos logos*].

The forecasting was incredibly prescient. Common sense would suggest that the report should be judged a success. Certainly it is an achievement if we compare the analytical conclusions with real-world outcomes, but even without that measure of effectiveness we can still see how the writing is both persuasive and convincing. The analysis is compelling.

Testing the Tradecraft Standards

How would the report be judged within the US Intelligence Community today? This analytical product came from a time before there were any tradecraft standards disseminated across agencies, from an era when even the roles and functions of the different organizations were not yet completely fixed. *In no way can this report be judged as timely.* OIR had already published on the current political situation back in July, so this paper was more intended as a general primer covering a broad trend with a very long-term outlook.¹⁰ *The report was certainly not objective.* By today's standards, the analyst should have included a text box with an alternative scenario. In this case, the only proper alternative scenario would be one in which apartheid wins out as a successful strategy for maintaining peace and stability over the long run. This analyst surely had no intention of presenting such an alternative with its implicit attitude of white supremacy, treating apartheid as a serious political philosophy and a viable approach to governance.¹¹ It would have been abhorrent to him. *The report contained clear political insinuations.* It could easily be argued that the pervasive subtext of anti-racism was decidedly partisan in the era of Jim Crow segregation that dominated politics among southern Democrats on Capitol Hill.

Now, let's consider the piece in terms of the ICD 203 Analytic Tradecraft Standards and ICD 206 definitions, with each category graded on a scale of zero to three, the same way that the ODNI's Analytic Integrity and Standards (AIS) Group would review such a product.¹²

- 1) **Sources and Methodology:** The report cites 22 open-source materials, mostly official government statistics and international newspaper clippings, and five diplomatic cables, for a total of 27 unique source citations. Almost all of these citations are related to discussions of the economy, health, education and housing, while the lengthy political discussion has virtually no source citations. There is no source summary statement or methodology discussion. The analyst occasionally offers a brief comment on a lack of sources and then provides his own anecdotal perspective in place of published data. The ranking would be Poor (0), with the qualification that some portions were drafted in the style of a "think piece."
- 2) **Expresses and Explains Uncertainties:** The report very occasionally uses the terms "probably," "might" and "may," as well as the incredibly vague term "perhaps," but it does not link these terms to a more concrete system of percentages of likelihood and it does not provide indicators. It makes absolute statements of certainty, even using the word "inconceivable" at one point. It does occasionally say that some judgments are contingent upon assumptions that certain events might take place. But the analyst at no point backs away from what he envisions as the future course of events. Fair (1).
- 3) **Distinguishes between Intelligence and Judgments:** By and large, the OIR report makes no distinction between the judgment of the analyst and the evidence found in the sources. The analyst takes care to ascribe political and racial attitudes to particular groups, but then he frequently passes judgment on those views without stating any evidentiary basis for his opinion. Poor (0).
- 4) **Incorporates Analysis of Alternatives:** Brief consideration is given to alternative scenarios in which opposition whites, including former military veterans, win an electoral victory or support a coup in response to frustration with hardline apartheid policies. That in itself is a creative approach, but it is not clear whether such a scenario would result in a dramatically different outcome. The report could have considered other possible scenarios. Fair (1).
- 5) **Customer Relevance and Policy Implications:** The implications for the United States are presented at the very end and only deal with the two very limited topics of South African contributions to peacekeeping operations and sales of "strategic materials" to the West (i.e. uranium ore). The piece does not have an obvious or direct connection to contemporary domestic or global events, other than a very brief mention of the elections set to take place in March 1953. Poor (0). If we want to be charitable and assume the analyst was restricted by managers from discussing the implications for domestic US politics, then Fair (1).
- 6) **Clear and Logical Argumentation:** The argumentation is logical and the language is laid out in commonsense terms, though without recourse to any

explicit methodology or theoretical framework. No effort is made to highlight key points or separate them on the page for easy reference. The Abstract does an excellent job of summarizing key analytical judgments. Good (2).

- 7) **Consistency of Analytical Line:** There is a reference to the previous OIR report on South Africa's constitutional crisis published in July, and its main conclusion is incorporated in this analysis. The only mention of other OIR Africa production is that of a report on the British role in Central Africa. Previous OSS papers would surely have been available to readers, in copies that were kept in the OIR library, and they should have been mentioned. Fair (1).
- 8) **Makes Accurate Judgments:** There is an incredible number of judgments, almost all stated clearly and boldly, but lacking if/then statements to demonstrate the logical connections that link them. The judgments for the most part turned out to be accurate, especially in terms of the racial politics of the white minority parties and international community reactions. The grade would have been excellent, but ICD 203 and follow-on guidance state that this category does not receive a numerical rating.
- 9) **Incorporates Visual Information:** The paper is a wall of text for which visuals would have been helpful, even if only a breakdown of the argumentation into ordered lists. Poor (0).

According to today's measures of effectiveness – the ones by which we judge all analytical products and therefore serve as a marker for the health of the profession as a whole – this report should be an abject failure. And yet it is not. Just as the broader categories of timeliness, objectivity and non-politicization seemingly do not apply, so too are the ICD 203 tradecraft standards strangely out of place. Even the eighth category, intended as a catch-all for the substantive content of the analytical arguments, mostly evaluates the analyst's expertise in terms of measurable outcomes rather than the deep expertise that actually characterizes his report. The ICD 203 standards come across as a paper exercise of no substantive value when placed alongside this perceptive, far-reaching analysis of a complex, multilayered problem.

the AIS has not found a way to produce rigorous measures of value. . . . To their credit, AIS personnel recognize the limits of their efforts. They know that agencies can meet AIS standards without fundamentally improving their analytic performance.

(Gentry 2015, 645)

Besides, how could anyone evaluate an analytical conclusion the likes of: "The handling of the housing problem illustrates the whites' responsibility for the plight of the urban Native"?¹³ It was entirely the author's subjective opinion, drawing an analogy with much wider societal issues that had not been discussed, while assuming the reader's emotional sympathy with the basic premise of the argument. And yet the analytical conclusion is nonetheless both persuasive and convincing. The white minority in power had a moral obligation to care for the well-being of the non-white majority population. Even if politicians refused to accept that

responsibility they still had a duty to behave as though they cared, for the sake of their economy, their social stability and the future of their country.

The point of this exercise is to evaluate the US Intelligence Community's master narrative of crisis leading to reform on the path toward scientific progress and professional respectability, using the very tools that the discipline has developed for measuring its own standards of quality. Applying the ICD 203 standards shows how far the Intelligence Community has come since the earliest days in which analysts could simply write off the cuff, as it were. Virtually all of the academic literature on Intelligence Studies would argue that analysts such as this were relying on their intuition and emotion as a poor substitute for what should have been the rigorous application of the scientific method and proper tradecraft standards. However, this case study suggests there are analytical products that do not follow the rules and yet must be judged by any reasonable person as being of the highest quality. The obverse is also probably true. There are undoubtedly analytical products that follow the rules and are thereby deemed a success, even though they have nothing of value to offer a policymaker.

This exercise points to the fact that something is wrong. Either the industry standards, institutional norms, training manuals and academic writings are true in their absolute adherence to a rigorous, scientific approach along the lines described previously, or there is something fundamentally wrong with the discipline as a whole. None of this is a reflection of problems in the ICD 203 tradecraft standards. They serve a purpose in their own way. It is rather a reflection of a much larger problem in the way the field is defined, the way analysts are trained and managed, and the relentless drive toward a singular vision of professionalism. The normal standards of the profession cannot be used to evaluate the health of the discipline because they are themselves the product of that system. They cannot serve as an independent arbiter as long as they operate according to the logic of the prevailing scientific paradigm that designed them.¹⁴ The profession must be examined from outside the discourse that pervades it, with the goal of clearly identifying the fundamental principles and core processes that make intelligence different from other disciplines.

Institutions can establish standards for analytical craftsmanship, methodologists and theorists can devise scorecards for measuring performance and academics can compare the results with other areas of social endeavor. However, what they are ultimately measuring is only that which can be measured, and what they are evaluating are only the ways their own standards are being applied. For better or worse, such tools are an accurate reflection of the state of the profession today. They may not tell us much about the narrative structures that serve as the basic vehicles for delivering content and meaning, but they can function as a mirror for gazing into the soul of the discipline. Unfortunately, by today's standards this piece could not be published. At least, not without removing the subjective opinions of the author, offering alternative scenarios that are deeply racially offensive, eliminating most of the in-depth discussion to shorten the page length while at the same time adding loads of fact-based data points, heavily qualifying and hedging judgments to reflect confidence levels, acknowledging the lack of adequate sourcing, reframing

the time horizon for predictions so that the outlook is only one to two years and not untold decades into the future and so forth. The ICD 203 standards are a reflection of Community-wide expectations for judging the quality of production, and those expectations demand a certain attitude and approach to analysis for which this report and its author would have been unsuitable.

Yet the OIR report was an outstanding product, thoughtful and insightful, eloquent and articulate, powerful and lucid, even venturing out to use emotional language in order to establish a meaningful connection with the reader. It took real risks in its projections and timelines, never holding back and rarely hedging its bets. The author of this report had something important to say. He was attempting to persuade his readers to see the world differently and to convince them that his ideas were right. None of that is accounted for in any tradecraft standard or measure of professional excellence today. Instead, the capacity to convince and persuade has been subsumed into the tradecraft and made subservient to a bureaucratic process, in the unspoken belief that a standardized approach will maintain the reputation of the institution and convey an air of credibility and legitimacy above and beyond any strengths or weaknesses of individual analysts.

This book instead argues that intelligence analysis is not a mechanical procedure of collating facts and assembling them on a page, but rather a deep reflection on the interpretation and communication of meaning. By the same token, the discipline of Intelligence Studies must aim to be more than an employment scheme for former intelligence officials. It should seek to foster real intellectual debate. It should be a framework for understanding the very subjective and all-too-human interactions that take place within governments, and indeed all of society. It might seem radical to suggest that the analyst is an author, and the unique features of his or her background and personality are vitally important for the creation of successful analyses, present at every stage of the intelligence cycle and on every page of the finished product. But intelligence analysis has come as close as possible to achieving the ideal of High Modernism, in a way that resembles Foucault's comments on the role of the author in his day.

Thus, the essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears. (Foucault 1977, 116)

It seeks to achieve what Ernst Cassirer was only grudgingly willing to acknowledge, and in a qualified manner at that (1953, 285–6): “In the objective content of science, these individual features [of subjectivity, individuality and personal style] are forgotten and effaced, for one of the principal aims of scientific thought is the elimination of all personal and anthropomorphic elements.” The intelligence profession today would have the analyst disappear, integrated seamlessly into the purely functional role of assisting computers in information synthesis. But the analyst is a human being. One whose unique experiences, personal goals and creative impulses are essential to the quality of output and worthy of recognition, even if

the specific personal details and characteristics of any particular analyst are later removed from the final, finished product.

The OIR Branch Chief for Africa, William Oscar Brown (1899–1969), was almost certainly the author of the aforementioned report.¹⁵ He was from a family of tenant farmers who grew cotton and other crops in a dusty little town in central Texas, not big enough to be on a map.¹⁶ In 1930, he earned a PhD in Sociology from the University of Chicago with a thesis on “Race Prejudice: A Sociological Study,” in which he compared writings about race from the United States and South Africa to demonstrate how racism does not emerge from biological differences but rather from the construction of collective identity among privileged groups in society.¹⁷ He taught at the University of Cincinnati and Howard University, and held a fellowship with the Julius Rosenwald Fund, a prominent philanthropy providing grants to African-American artists and intellectuals. He was an analyst in the Africa Division of OSS at the end of the war, alongside Dr. Ralph Bunche, before coming to the State Department. Not long after drafting this report, he would leave government service to establish the Africa Studies Center at Boston University and become president of the Africa Studies Association.

As early as 1935, Brown had assessed that South Africa was experiencing a gradual decline of white prestige that would hinder their ability to coerce and control, and a rising racial consciousness among blacks that would inevitably facilitate their political organization and mobilization.¹⁸ This was a man who spent a lifetime trying to understand the corrosive and toxic effects of racism in America, trying to appreciate the situation of blacks in the United States and across the African continent, and trying to challenge the ways that government and academia viewed these issues. His care and concern for the subject comes through on every page. Presumably, his willingness to tackle these difficult subjects in such penetrating ways created a space in which other analysts and policymakers could express themselves along similar lines. Of all the habits that have accrued to intelligence analysis today, Brown probably would have found the unwritten stricture of maintaining an analytical distance the most objectionable. It would have denied his personal lifelong connection to the material, his passion for his chosen field of expertise and the inner conviction that guided his analytical conclusions. That type of expertise only emerges from a personal commitment, an inner drive to dedicate a lifetime to the pursuit of knowledge, which is something that no institution can inculcate or train.¹⁹ It comes with sacrifices and hardships.

It is one of the great ironies of intelligence culture in America that government agencies, which are so reliant on the specialized knowledge and skills of subject matter experts, are often staffed by managers who believe themselves better suited to shape and present analytical conclusions. Jonathan House (2022) finds this trend present throughout the history of the US Intelligence Community, but reading through the records at the National Archives in College Park would suggest that this was not always the situation. At one point, it was the weight and authority of the subjective opinions of true experts that sustained the reputations of the organizations in which they were employed and not the other way around. As this example shows, the US Intelligence Community once defined itself in terms of

that kind of expertise, allowing its analysts to take creative risks and make leaps of the imagination in the pursuit of something much more meaningful and impactful.

Notes

- 1 Foucault (2003, 182).
- 2 Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), "Intelligence Community Directive 203: Analytic Standards" (January 2, 2015), <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICD/ICD%20203%20Analytic%20Standards.pdf>. See also Immerman (2011).
- 3 U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 59, Entry A1-449, Box 292, "Race Relations in South Africa," U.S. Department of State (State), Office of Intelligence Research (OIR), Intelligence Report No. 6009 (October 21, 1952), declassification #NND989071. Henceforth, OIR 6009.
- 4 U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 59, Entry A1-449, Box 292, "Race Relations in South Africa," U.S. Department of State (State), Office of Intelligence Research (OIR), Intelligence Report No. 6009 (October 21, 1952), declassification #NND989071. Henceforth, OIR 6009, i.
- 5 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-1373, Box 4, "National Intelligence Estimate: Probable Developments in the Union of South Africa," NIE-72 (October 20, 1952), declassification #NND 959285. Henceforth, NIE-72.
- 6 (OIR 6009, 1).
- 7 NIE-72, i, 11, 16, 17 and 20.
- 8 NIE-72, 17.
- 9 NIE-72, 19.
- 10 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 290A, "The South African Constitutional Crisis," State/OIR, Intelligence Report No. 5926 (July 2, 1952), Declassification #NND 989071.
- 11 The report briefly considers the arguments for and against apartheid from the perspective of the white political groups as part of an exercise in evaluating their platforms and agendas, but it is only for the sake of judging the political divergences (OIR 6009, 11).
- 12 ODNI, "Rating Scale for Evaluating Analytic Tradecraft Standards with Amplified Guidance for Evaluators" (revised November 6, 2015), Unclassified; and "Intelligence Community Directive 206: Sourcing Requirements for Disseminated Analytic Products" (January 22, 2015), Unclassified. See also Marcoci et al. (2019).
- 13 OIR 6009, 6.
- 14 Cf. Kuhn (1996, 94).
- 15 U.S. Department of State (1951, 58).
- 16 McCall (1969). See also Moge (1969).
- 17 Brown (1930).
- 18 Brown (1935).
- 19 In describing staffing patterns of the CIA in the 1950s, Dulles (1963, 175) put voice to the commonly held perspective that institutions can make experts: "With this motivation, an alert, inquisitive and patriotic individual with an adequate education can be molded into a good intelligence officer."

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Part II

Theory and Practice



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3 Definitions of Intelligence Analysis

Most scholarship attempts to distinguish and differentiate intelligence from mere information by defining intelligence in terms of: 1) the element of secrecy by which it is collected and transmitted; and 2) its ability to respond directly to policymaker priorities.¹ Those essential elements serve to describe a universal concept of intelligence, broad enough to encompass all aspects of the field and characteristic enough to define intelligence as a unique professional and academic discipline.² Taken to the extreme, some scholars posit a biological imperative in all life forms down to the smallest protozoan, an impulse for survival that drives organisms to gather targeted information on potential threats.³ The problem with reducing the subject to such a basic level, however, is that it leads down the path toward a very rigid realism, defining the field entirely in terms of threat reporting and strategic warning, which is a trend that periodically grips the profession.⁴ Some advocate for a fully quantifiable and measurable definition, relying on statistical comparisons of the language used in a range of definitions, in the belief that a single, correct and authoritative definition is both possible and desirable.⁵ Perhaps it is. Others have argued for a more flexible definition that can take in the ever-expanding activities of intelligence officers, from running prisons to managing soccer teams.⁶ Of course, that runs the risk of normalizing the habit that intelligence services typically adopt of abrogating authority from interagency colleagues, in ways that should outrage most liberal societies. Even the widespread practice of intelligence services conducting diplomatic activities has corrosive effects over extended periods of time, as it creates expectations that the intelligence chief is the only policymaker who matters, placing other senior officials at the mercy of the intelligence chief for updates on critical information and access to channels of communication.

For every universal definition or quantifiable approach that rests upon secrecy and decision advantage, it should be remembered that intelligence agencies often engage in the collection and analysis of useless, expensive and ineffective information for the purpose of maintaining the appearance of competence and resourcefulness.⁷ This obsessive and compulsive desire for the collection and analysis of information arises out of a perception that intelligence has value as social capital.⁸ There is a danger to that attitude, as Martin Gurri has noted. We live in an era in which the public's ability to access information and instantaneously share it fundamentally

undermines the authority and credibility of any set of elites who would otherwise hide their ignorance behind institutional codes and societal hierarchies.⁹

As a corollary to these theoretical definitions, the field has more or less settled on a functional definition of how professionals perform their duties, focusing on what is commonly termed the Intelligence Cycle: 1) planning and direction; 2) collection; 3) processing and exploitation; 4) analysis and production; and 5) dissemination.¹⁰ Sometimes a sixth element is separated out, called *consumption* if it is placed at the end of the cycle or *requirements* if it is placed at the beginning, allowing for theorists to make explicit reference in the model for a feedback loop in which policymaker responses are incorporated into an iterative process.¹¹ There are other ways of defining intelligence, for example, as a form of state power in its own right, as a corrective to institutional biases in the decision-making process, or as a facet of daily life in terms of public safety (e.g. police surveillance). However, those definitions are more often concerned with particular subsets of issues rather than a holistic understanding of the field.¹²

That brief review of definitions should be sufficient for this book, since we are only interested here in describing the analysis of intelligence, not the government agencies that manage it, not the uses to which it is put and certainly not the sources and methods that generate it.¹³ The rest of what follows requires nothing more than publicly available open-source materials drawn from widely published academic literature and declassified archival documents. There will be no need to discuss technical procedures, no interviews with current officials and no mention of operations. And yet, a few more general words about how we define intelligence might be appropriate, if only because the profession is changing and scholarly definitions need to keep pace.

Today, there are hundreds of Private Intelligence Companies and consultancies providing services that aim to replicate the activities of leading Western government intelligence agencies, including on the operational side with corporate espionage. They are often staffed by former government employees who seek to retain connections with their old colleagues.¹⁴ The definition of intelligence needs to expand to include these providers, especially as governments increasingly seek to harness private sector resources and talent in a safe and secure manner.¹⁵ They are located everywhere from Paris to Dubai to Hong Kong, often providing services to host governments, sometimes in ways that allow governments to skirt their own laws.¹⁶ Some are focused primarily on analysis, though they may occasionally consult outside experts or purchase databases of raw data to mine them for insights. Others actively engage in collection, for example by scraping social media and combing the dark web, or paying individuals in far-flung places and tasking them with gathering information. If we were to say that Human Intelligence (HUMINT) and Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) are exclusively the methods of governments, or that intelligence reporting is solely directed at informing policymakers, then our definition of intelligence would be sorely out of date. Government agencies turned to contractors a long time ago to fill core functions and they now look to start-up companies for innovation and creativity, to such an extent that it is impossible to say where the public sector ends and the private sector begins.¹⁷

The two separate yet intertwined activities of collection and analysis have spread far beyond the public sector.¹⁸ Today, a typical report by *The Economist* is perfectly likely to mention call records obtained by investigative journalists (SIGINT), ship tracking from organizations that crowdsource imagery (GEOINT), sanctions evasion tip-offs from inside sources (HUMINT) and quotes from international experts (OSINT), all of which is collected and processed by correspondents who manage to maintain a degree of anonymity.¹⁹ How is this any different from the all-source analysis of a government agency? Many private companies vet their sources, admit their confidence levels and acknowledge their information gaps, which are hallmarks of good intelligence tradecraft standards, even if those standards are not always spelled out in a systematic way. Such companies are just as concerned about avoiding intelligence failure as governments are. In fact, at some private enterprises the analysts are required to make future projections a part of all products they draft, they are expected to attach probabilities to alternate scenarios, and they are graded on the accuracy of their predictions at the end of the year.²⁰

That last point is in stark contrast to the public sector, where there is no penalty for an analyst who routinely fails to make accurate predictions, or any predictions for that matter. Some would even argue that it is nearly impossible for government agencies to judge the accuracy of analysis, for the following reasons: 1) any single product might have dozens of subsidiary conclusions; 2) qualifiers of probability allow for analytical hedging against future outcomes; and 3) the objective is often merely to warn the reader about broad trends rather than outcomes.²¹ And yet, in the private sector, where there is a very concrete bottom line, many companies do feel that accountability is not only possible but necessary.²² Some analysts are at risk of losing their jobs if their predications turn out wrong often enough over time.

Private companies and government agencies all want to deliver analysis to the customer in a timely manner, with branding and marketing that make their products stand out from the crowd and call attention to other services on offer. That means a distinctive masthead, logo, layout, etc., to create an instantly recognizable visual design.²³ They all want to solicit feedback from the client, which can help guide the production of more analysis and grow the relationship. They all want to track what others are writing and do their best to demonstrate value added over rivals who are competing for the client's attention. There are quick-turnaround products, intended to monitor fast-breaking situations with daily updates on issues of interest for the client.²⁴ Although summaries of press clippings and other open-source materials with light commentary do not attract substantial profits from subscribers, it is necessary to distribute them in order to steer potential clients toward more high-end and bespoke services. Such quick-turnaround products are the bread and butter of many public and private sector organizations, who maintain 24-hour crisis cells or watch centers to answer client questions in real time. Geostrategic analytical products are less likely to stand out in the marketplace and it is hard to develop a loyal clientele on such products alone, unless the agency or firm has special insider access to high-level officials and widely recognized expertise.

Private companies also differ from their public sector counterparts in a number of ways. Their mainline products involve reports examining travel security

and threat monitoring, new market entry for overseas expansion, executive and event protection, and due diligence background checks on partners and clients.²⁵ This is all separate from the more traditional fields of business analytics and corporate espionage, which have older pedigrees and require more technical skill sets. Organizations often try to link geostrategic insights to short-term products of immediate reader interest or offers for additional services, like arranging meetings with senior officials and conducting market research surveys. There are start-ups seeking to disrupt the industry, providing services that are inspired by ethical and moral causes as much as (or more than) pure profit.²⁶ Ultimately, all analysis is rooted in human beings, public and private sectors alike. There are true experts everywhere who must reconstruct the intentions and motivations of actors, using narrative structures to lend meaning and coherence to disparate events, for readers who will interpret the analysis according to their own policy challenges.

All of these market fundamentals are just as true today as they were eight decades ago, when the institutions of the US Intelligence Community were new and the private sector for intelligence was in its infancy. The passage of the 1947 National Security Act created the Director of Central Intelligence, the first three National Security Council Intelligence Directives detailed the roles of the various agencies and the Hoover Commission proposed reforms intended to encourage Community-wide standards and integration.²⁷ We often think today that the impetus for reform emerged from the failures associated with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, including the creation of the ODNI with its mandate to encourage collaboration among agencies.²⁸ But reform goes back to the beginning.²⁹ The problems of stove-piping, competition and information-hoarding were present almost from the outset, a natural outgrowth of the free market approach to production and dissemination that pervaded the intelligence enterprise, despite the best intentions of legislators.³⁰ Durbin has studied multiple rounds of reforms and concluded that it is rare for all circumstances to line up perfectly to accomplish meaningful change in terms of political will, public attention and policy innovation.³¹ No doubt the same problems exist among other governments.³² And in the private sector, too, where entities typically avoid collaboration for fear of violating nondisclosure agreements or losing clients to competitors, and institutional memory is lost when contracts end and experts move on.

All of this is to say that there may still be value in defining intelligence in terms of a culture of secrecy and policymaker needs. But maintaining secrecy is no longer just a matter of security clearances, document control and counterintelligence investigations. And the tally of intelligence customers must be expanded beyond the ranks of government officials. Adjusting our conception of intelligence for the twenty-first century also requires an examination of the bias inherent in the discipline of Intelligence Studies itself.

Scholarship and practice are intimately intertwined in Intelligence Studies. Former CIA officers increasingly publish memoirs and studies that effectively preempt outsiders from attempting their own independent research, or color the academic debate with personal perspectives that are hard to prove or disprove in the absence of declassified source materials.³³ Intelligence officers leave government service to

enter the ranks of academia while still maintaining their relationships with former colleagues. They often bring with them a vision for the field that is an extension of the training they received, even as they hope to influence and collaborate with the institutions that once employed them.³⁴ This type of 'public-private partnership' is not a unique phenomenon inasmuch as there are other academic fields that similarly seek to collaborate closely with the government. Political scientists generally hope their work will inform policymaking as well. Firsthand experience in government and the ongoing ties it generates can be incredibly valuable for informing academic research.³⁵ But it also creates a cognitive bias in the way the intelligence profession defines itself.³⁶

In their natural desire to bring respectability to the field and distinguish it as a discipline, these scholar-practitioners have supported a broad consensus in favor of measurable, scientific standards. Such standards reflect a particular set of values that are already endorsed by the target readership of government officials to which those scholar-practitioners formerly belonged. These values explicitly and implicitly define the way that employees, potential recruits, legislative appropriators and the public at large are meant to view the industry. Professionalism and progress are characterized by common tropes about the protection of state secrets, the responsiveness to policymaker needs, the imperatives of collaboration and transparency, etc. It is a tale of dedicated intelligence officers ensuring that critical intelligence failures like Pearl Harbor, the Cuban Missile Crisis and 9/11 never happen again.³⁷ America loves a champ who stumbles and falls, buckles down and works hard, and comes back from behind for the big win. In this case, the story is recast in terms of scientific progress, an analogy that resonates with an increasingly secular, liberal class of Washington insiders who live in and around the Beltway.

Intelligence professionals train in an environment that inculcates this set of tropes and then move into academia where they theorize about the application of this worldview, helping to refine the master narrative of government agencies striving for the benefit of society as a whole. Some of this scholarship may seem repetitive, monotonous, insular, pedantic and even sycophantic, but there is nothing inherently wrong with it, as long as we recognize that Intelligence Studies in America come with an institutionalized agenda. Moreover, we have to recognize that the intelligence profession, in its quest to achieve scientific respectability, has borrowed from the natural sciences a self-righteous attitude of near mythological status for the discipline as its own epistemology.

Scientific knowledge is therefore fundamentally social knowledge. As a social activity, science is clearly a product of a history and of processes which occurred in time and in place and involved human actors. These actors had lives not only in science, but in the wider societies of which they were members.

(Mendelsohn 1977, 4)

It is only when public officials come face to face with the defamiliarizing similarities and dissimilarities of the private sector that they are forced to confront their own institutional biases. The private sector overlaps somewhat in terms of

tradecraft, but it operates under very different measures of effectiveness. Private companies are motivated by profit and market share, in ways the public sector does not experience and cannot conceive. An immediate problem therefore arises when we consider the future of the profession in terms of private sector innovation, because it is in the private sector that most of the real transformational change is now occurring. It would be shortsighted and arrogant of the public sector to believe it will continue to lead by example, while at the same time monopolizing the relationship with policymakers under a veil of secrecy and choosing when/how to engage with the private sector. The test might come when a Private Intelligence Company on a very sensitive contract insists on briefing a senior policymaker directly without the contracting intelligence agency in the room, for fear of revealing sources and methods to the government's own intelligence officers.

Basic market fundamentals impact the way companies see their work and the manner in which they apply their tradecraft, the amount of risk they are willing to assume and the level of accountability they are willing to bear, all of which should eventually reverberate in their interactions with government agencies and, in turn, have a shaping effect on how the public sector defines its own mission statement. The US Intelligence Community may have to abandon the dual concepts of *progress through science* and *failure leading to reform* that underpin its master narrative, because they only really describe the history and mission of the public sector, not the private sector. Indeed, a master narrative of that sort in the private sector would require corporate leaders to reassure an understandably nervous and wary set of investors that success will eventually come after fits and starts by investing enormous amounts of capital into untested, next-generation technologies. Perhaps it would be better to cast that narrative aside and instead ask some new questions. How much longer will these epistemologies serve as an effective means for understanding intelligence? How do we incorporate private sector innovation into our view of the profession? And, if doing so requires a paradigm shift, then what new categories of knowledge will replace the old ones?

Timely, Objective and Independent

Some would argue for a universal definition of intelligence that could serve to organize the discipline, while others would rather define intelligence through a taxonomy of the many different ways it is manifested in the real world. There is a master narrative of the US Intelligence Community that defines the profession according to an enlightenment ideal of progress, though it is questionable whether that historical approach is applicable to other governments, the private sector or the future of the industry. But there is also a normative approach that would define the intelligence enterprise in terms of the way intelligence is practiced in an everyday setting.³⁸ One of the reforms that came in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks was the creation of a set of basic standards intended to guide the production of all analysis. Publicly issued in 2006 as ICD 203 and updated in 2015, it offered some general principles that should be universally applicable to all work within the

US Intelligence Community – timeliness, objectivity, independence from political considerations and based on all available sources of information.³⁹ Those principles are not new. They were codified in US Law at the time of the National Security Act of 1947, which stated in Section 103(a)(2): “Such national intelligence should be timely, objective, independent of political considerations, and based upon all sources available to the intelligence community.”

Here we have an essential point of reference for the way the US Intelligence Community is constituted. There was an understanding among senior policymakers from the outset that these categories should be invested with critical significance for the national intelligence establishment, in whatever form the institutions would take. In turn, they have been enshrined in policy. However, for as much as these concepts are typically portrayed as unequivocal and self-evident, it is important to note they are not as straightforward and obvious as they might seem at first glance. Despite a confident tone by officials and consistent messaging over the decades in press releases, commission reports and Congressional testimony, even these core principles have been open to debate from the very beginning until today.⁴⁰

Timely

Intelligence is information that can be acted upon by officials in a timely manner, meaning that timeliness fits under the broader category of relevance. Of course, only a policymaker can determine what is relevant, and therefore what is timely, which means that intelligence providers require proximity to the consumers. During the debates in late 1945 about forming a centralized intelligence component, the Secretary of State’s Staff Committee argued that intelligence estimates were “useless if produced in a vacuum,” that such reports must “assist directly in the formulation of foreign policy” and any intelligence agency “must therefore be a part of some body performing those functions.”⁴¹ Naturally, the Secretary and his staff almost certainly had the State Department in mind as the body that would house an intelligence component.

The importance of timeliness is most evident when managers task out quick-turnaround products, such as situation reports (sitreps), leadership profiles (bios) or charts of progress markers (indicators).⁴² Daily, weekly or monthly iterations are often justified by managers wanting to use the high volume of production to argue for more resources, and by customers wanting to know if the intelligence can confirm or deny what has already appeared in the press. Unfortunately, there is a paradox here. It is precisely with such products that timeliness runs the risk of becoming an end unto itself, thereby losing all relevance. Think of a daily sitrep of a situation moving so fast that collection cannot keep up and the analysts must rely on information from newspapers and social media. Yet such products are ubiquitous, they comprise the majority of output within any organization and there is a general expectation that analysts will produce them.⁴³ They can take on a life of their own, especially when they require frequent updating, resulting in wasted time and effort.⁴⁴

Objective

All analysts should strive to convey the basic facts in an accurate and transparent manner, evaluating and minimizing their cognitive biases, and considering alternative viewpoints. As Heuer Jr. (1999, 4) put it: “to illuminate the role of the observer in determining what is observed and how it is interpreted.” If a source is one-sided or misleading, with the intention of influencing as well as informing, then that suspicion needs to be voiced as a warning to the reader. If there are gaps in our knowledge of an issue, then those uncertainties need to be expressed. There are any number of places where the analyst can comment on the sources and our interpretation of them, both in terms of their quality and our confidence levels. That being said, Davies reminds us that source citations, formal dissents and similar devices, which are today justified in terms of the transparency and credibility they offer, evolved for entirely different historical reasons.⁴⁵ The components of the US Intelligence Community after World War II refused to submit their budget and responsibilities to a centralized intelligence authority, so these best practices of transparency helped to deconflict problems that arose as agencies competed for policymaker attention.

Objectivity typically concerns how information is processed and presented, but it can also relate to uncertainties, which is where the concept begins to fray at the seams. Methodologists refine the percentages of likelihood that they attach to particular descriptors, such as ‘probably’ or ‘unlikely,’ with incredible numerical specificity, but ultimately it is the feeling of the analyst that decides what value to assign. Nobody is applying the formulas of Carnap for logical probability.⁴⁶ Objectivity also relates to the absence of data. An analyst loses credibility if she tries to answer a question for which she does not have an answer and in the process compensates by offering personal opinions that masquerade as analytical conclusions. This is readily apparent on cable news networks and Sunday political talk shows when a commentator avoids a direct question by saying that the question itself is ‘very important,’ and the outcome ‘will have a big impact,’ because the issue is ‘really so critical.’ Indeed, all questions are important, all outcomes could potentially have impact and every decision point is critical. Some people make entire careers out of concluding their assessments with ‘the situation could result in violence’ or ‘we’ll continue to watch this space.’ Empty, meaningless catchphrases, equivalent to a nervous tick for an analyst caught off guard, which reveal nothing more than the person’s lack of imagination and expertise.

By contrast, an analyst gains enormous respect and trust if he is willing to humbly and openly admit the limits of his knowledge, thereby reinforcing the perception that the rest of his briefing presented as complete and accurate a picture as possible. Indeed, policymakers may not always want or need total objectivity.⁴⁷ When the analyst is in the room presenting her conclusions to a senior official, she will know she has done a good job if the policymaker turns to her and asks for her personal thoughts on how the situation might impact policy or vice versa. As paradoxical as it may seem, that intersubjective exchange is a key performance

indicator of job success. In that moment, the senior official has clearly absorbed the analysis and the briefer has earned trust in her work.

Independent

The problem of how to define politicization in intelligence is complicated, as is the question of whether it is necessarily a bad thing.⁴⁸ The US Intelligence Community has always placed high stock in its nonpartisanship. Understand that analysts are often studying less democratic governments abroad, where foreign intelligence services may be tools in the hands of political parties. This leaves a taste of *schadenfreude*, something akin to a black mirror. For example, in discussions from November 1945, Assistant Secretary of War Robert Lovett noted how the British had successfully been able to “divorce the factual aspects of their findings from political creed,” while the failure of the German intelligence services derived from their being “afraid to interpret facts which might be contrary to Nazi policy.”⁴⁹

Almost all experts would agree that the key judgments should be protected from external political pressures, leaving the analysts free to challenge policymaker assumptions, even if the results might be viewed by some in partisan terms.⁵⁰

For issues of high import and controversy, any relevant analysis will perforce be politically charged because it will point at least implicitly to a conclusion about policy – whether it will work, whether it addresses the right issue, whether it will have negative side effects, and so on.

(Betts 2007, 75)⁵¹

However, several people have made arguments for a ‘soft’ or ‘positive’ politicization, in which intelligence officials allow politics to shape their assessments in return for greater access and trust.⁵² It is important to note that many intelligence customers are political appointees, and if an analyst is to be most effective at her job, she needs to understand and appreciate the political concerns of her audience.⁵³ That raises a question about whether close daily interactions with political appointees and elected officials impact the attitudes and motivations of analysts, a debate as old as the US Intelligence Community itself.⁵⁴

There are other, more insidious forms of politicization. Intelligence professionals who are paid employees of the US Government are charged with a duty to uphold the Constitution and a commitment to the American people. Nonetheless, they are also entitled to their personal political views, and sometimes their career ambitions include politics. If it is the intention of the analyst that matters when determining whether intelligence has been negatively distorted, then who can say whether a particular piece has been politicized?⁵⁵ There is also the question of whether all analysis must be nonpartisan, i.e. whether politicized analysis lacks credibility. Once again, it is the private sector that prompts the question. A number of Political Action Committees and Public Relations firms maintain their own in-house analysts, some of whom are former or future government employees.

This is not unique to the United States. In capitals around the world, there are former intelligence officers whose work advances partisan causes, and these companies serve as proving grounds for training future intelligence officers.

Rationalizing the Policy Debate

In addition to timeliness, objectivity and independence from politicization, ICD 203 lays out nine subsidiary categories of Analytic Tradecraft Standards meant to inculcate best practices across all agencies. 1) Evaluate the quality and credibility of underlying sources; 2) express confidence levels in the analytical judgments; 3) distinguish between the intelligence information and the analytical assumptions and judgments; 4) include alternative hypotheses and possible futures in the analysis; 5) provide insights of direct relevance to policymakers; 6) present a clear and logical argument; 7) explain any change or continuity with previous assessments; 8) use expertise to make accurate judgments; 9) incorporate visuals and interactive displays where appropriate. Each one is reasonable as a goal worth achieving, at least on the surface of it, and together they create a common framework that practitioners can use to understand what is expected of them.

In a sense, we are all products of ICD 203. At this point, almost a quarter century after 9/11, everyone involved in analytical production has been trained in these standards, whether or not they have ever actually read ICD 203. Even a graduate student completing an internship at a private company helping clients with due diligence on sanctions compliance is probably learning the tools of the trade in an office run by a former intelligence officer previously employed by a government that used these or similar standards. Every practitioner understands such things as descriptors that convey degrees of probability, statements expressing confidence levels, etc. Each organization may have its own version of formatting and layout. For example, one might only include citations during the coordination process and drop them in the final publication that goes to customers. Some of that variance has to do with different approaches to marketing and branding that help an institution distinguish its flagship product line from other institutions. Regardless, ICD 203 has become imbued in everything we do, to such an extent that analysts today often judge their peers and competitors (whether consciously or unconsciously) according to those tradecraft standards.

When the analyst is asked to comply with ICD 203 in every sentence of every report she produces, it quickly becomes a habit to see the world in terms of ICD 203. Sentences that have no mention of the type of sources used, verbs that fail to add qualifiers of likelihood and alternative scenarios that make no reference to Structured Analytical Techniques are less credible. They may not even be products worth reading. They lack the type of analytical rigor that everyone has come to expect. This scientism now pervades the field, both in academia and among practitioners, to the point where some commentators will dismiss anything they deem unscientific as superstition or fortune-telling.⁵⁶

Nobody would argue in favor of analytical products written off the cuff without sources or methods, but for some that means analysis must involve constructing a

research hypothesis, measuring the variables and testing a theory through experimentation.⁵⁷ The profession is once again trending toward the kinds of quantifiable methodologies that were popular in the 1960s, when analysts sought to devise models for strategic warning that could reduce an intelligence estimate down to a set of generalizable algorithms.⁵⁸ Or the kinds of social science methodologies that were popular in the 1970s, when analysts were encouraged to use Delphi technique, Bayesian inference and computer-assisted methods of applying statistical models to probabilities.⁵⁹ The scientific method has become essential to saving the profession and preparing the way for Artificial Intelligence.⁶⁰

It can just as easily be argued that from a sociological perspective intelligence is part of a cultural superstructure of Washington. It is an intersubjective form of reality, achieved by consensus on a tacit agreement on the need for a common language of national security. Its features and characteristics are determined by the social interactions of the government officials who produce and consume it.⁶¹ Analysis exists for the sake of rationalizing any given policy discussion, while also serving as a litmus test for what constitutes rational discourse in Washington. Tradecraft standards, probability language, source summary statements, etc., create a sense of inclusion among officials with access, while at the same time excluding competing sources of information and commentary that originate outside official circles. The situation is an even more refined version of what Dallmayr (1984, 4–5) described:

In an overt or subterranean fashion, the politics of language always accompanies or is associated with a given language of politics . . . language itself at this point seems to be the bone of contention, as a centerpiece in public discourse and in the quest for a meaningful way of life.

Policy discussions in political circles are often parsed by the language of intelligence, and the language used in intelligence circles is subject to political conflicts, so that the worlds of intelligence and politics are thereby interpenetrated. Intelligence professionals function as arbiters of truth and knowledge within policy circles when they fulfill their duties as dispassionate and unemotional facilitators of rational discussion.

It is important to note, however, that intelligence is a secondary process of socialization. Its systems of knowledge are not the type of data that analysts must learn as a fundamental requisite for doing their jobs, comparable to military platforms, macroeconomic indicators or political parties. Nor are they the kind of social structures that analysts must master to be successful at their work, such as organizational charts, bureaucratic routines and workplace behaviors. They are rather a specialized set of procedures that are secondarily applied or overlaid to other forms of knowledge, and that impart a stamp or imprimatur of authority.⁶²

The distinction afforded to the tradecraft of intelligence comes not from any inherent value that these tools possess that might make them the actual point of discussion in any particular policy debate. Rather, their importance derives from their ubiquitous presence on the margins of every conversation. The secondary quality of analytical tradecraft, attempting to shape policy debates but rarely serving as

the center of one, bears the hallmark of a sociological phenomenon described by Berger and Luckmann. Namely, a certain anxiety associated with discourse and self-identity. “In order to maintain subjective reality effectively, the conversational apparatus must be continual and consistent.”⁶³ Hundreds of products are issued every day in a cacophony of analytical noise, many of them replicating a small handful of analytical lines with tiny incremental judgments that echo commentaries already posted in open-source media. They are nonetheless necessary for sustaining the edifice of the system. The secondary nature of most of this activity gives it “a brittle and unreliable subjective reality compared to the internalizations of primary socialization.”⁶⁴ The only way for intelligence to have a seat at the policy table is for products to highlight the tradecraft at every turn, hoping to demonstrate the value added by intelligence professionals, even if the policymakers have experts on staff who can brief the details of the issue better and firsthand. The definition of intelligence mentioned previously, that agencies often engage in the collection and analysis of useless, expensive and ineffective information for the purpose of maintaining the appearance of competence and resourcefulness, no longer appears so far-fetched in this context.

This discussion therefore brings us back to the definitions provided at the outset of this chapter, though with a richer understanding of the interests and perspectives of the institutions, practitioners and academics that have determined and promoted them. Definitions of intelligence inform the norms and rules that become codified in standards and guidelines, and as the profession has become institutionalized those standards and guidelines have had the reverberating effect of establishing habits and expectations. In an effort to uphold an elusive ideal of objectivity, managers will routinely edit analytical judgments to remove emotive content, taking words that hint at subjective feeling and replacing them with clinical and sterile language that is thoroughly hedged and qualified.⁶⁵ An analytical judgment may start life as:

But it points to a future in which [Xi Jinping’s] hegemonic ambitions are frustrated as the more stable and dynamic countries on his borders either resist his initiatives or hedge their bets, while the most volatile ones, with the dimmest prospects, become increasingly reliant on China’s support.

*(The Economist 2023)*⁶⁶

After several rounds of edits, the sentence could end up as: “China probably will boost ties with weak neighbors while struggling to build closer relations with more stable countries in the region.” The sense of Xi’s personal ambition, his eventual frustration, the despondency and desperation of the smaller neighboring states and even the author’s tone of confidence are all washed out in favor of a supposed clarity and brevity.

However, the quest for total objectivity runs the risk of producing little more than soundbites and snapshots, facile mental images and throwaway lines that mimic or reference other catchphrases in the popular media, but which are divorced from the kinds of deeper meaning that have resonance for human beings. Landon-Murray

(2013) has described this phenomenon of increasingly fragmented and frenetic types of thought patterns that disrupt sustained concentration, and concluded they are partly a consequence of a younger generation becoming reliant on the internet. The same argument could be made that a younger generation now has difficulty in extending analytical lines, sustaining their logical argumentation and projecting outcomes forward in time because they have been trained so thoroughly in a very rigid writing style that does not lend itself to that kind of creative expression.⁶⁷ For analysts and managers today, tradecraft standards and scientific methodologies are attractive as tools for measuring analytical production because they carry the impression of being quantifiable and therefore being open to dispassionate debate among people from diverse backgrounds. They accord with the prevailing vision of Intelligence Studies as a branch of the social sciences.

The ICD 203 guidelines help show the analyst how to present data for a range of policymakers who have busy schedules and want the bottom line up front. They encourage the analyst to state his biases, acknowledge information gaps, summarize the quality of sources, weigh his level of confidence and consider alternative scenarios. Everything comes together in a product with key judgments at the top, an update of the current situation in the middle and bullet points of known facts at the bottom. It can all contribute to a good delivery of the analytical product and a positive reception by the targeted audience. But little of it is analysis in the sense of what we might refer to as actual analytical thought, i.e. a logical process that reaches a substantive conclusion about the meaning of events or the future direction of a trend. With so much space taken up on the page by this critical apparatus, so much pressure to produce quickly on the latest topic and so much competition for policymaker attention, it is only natural that many analysts abandon creativity altogether and resort to chasing after the news media cycle.⁶⁸ Or create a parallel cycle of their own based on few meager bits of sensitive information.

Standards and guidelines are useful for establishing best practices, while setting expectations for analysts and customers alike, but they are no substitute for good analysis. An analytical product can exemplify the highest standards of tradecraft without ever achieving a substantive analytical conclusion beyond a simple statement of the obvious. ICD 203 Analytic Tradecraft Standards 4, 6 and 8 all point to the need for a type of expertise capable of producing a logical argument while also considering alternative scenarios, but they are not intended to regulate how analysts should accomplish those goals. Only that such elements should exist. Accordingly, there is a distinction between tradecraft and what we might better term actual analytical content. In order to see that analytical line at work, we have to strip away all the layers of tradecraft, removing the logo and banner, the sourcing statement, the summary paragraph, the bullet points of factual evidence, the feedback instructions, the legal disclaimers and so forth. What remains might not be much, perhaps nothing more than a couple sentences in some cases. It is the actual analytical content, and even if it does not always conform to an idealized notion of objectivity, timeliness and non-politicization, it is that substance of real analysis that should concern us most.

Notes

- 1 Breakspear (2013).
- 2 Warner (2002). For an alternative, more open-ended approach, see Gaspard (2017).
- 3 For example, Kahn (2009, 10): “These three principles of intelligence – it optimizes resources, it is an auxiliary function in war, and it is essential to the defense but not to the offense.”
- 4 See Grabo (2004).
- 5 Macpherson and Hastedt (2023).
- 6 Stout and Warner (2018).
- 7 Pohlig (2022).
- 8 Iordanou (2022).
- 9 Gurri (2018, 79).
- 10 See Warner (2013).
- 11 Lowenthal (2006, 66–7), and Clark (2016, 31).
- 12 For example, Scott and Jackson (2004).
- 13 By the same token, this book will not discriminate between the terms ‘community,’ ‘establishment’ or ‘enterprise,’ for describing the intelligence profession. Readers can refer to Miller (2023).
- 14 Brown (2011, 215).
- 15 See Lowenthal (2018, 56–7), and Gainor and Bouthillier (2014).
- 16 Kahaner (1997, 159–200).
- 17 Shorrock (2008), Steele (1995) and Sigurdson and Tagerud (1992).
- 18 Elements of outsourcing and even competition between public and private sectors existed even in the 1970s (Abella 2008, 241–5).
- 19 For example, *The Economist* (2022a).
- 20 Every year, *The Economist* features predications by a global network of ‘superforecasters,’ and grades them for accuracy (*The Economist* 2022b).
- 21 Marrin (2012).
- 22 There is now a separate industry just for geopolitical forecasting, including betting markets, consultancies and hybrid organizations like Good Judgment Inc., with some outfits that operate in British circles preferring the moniker of *knowledge prospection*.
- 23 According to Tromblay and Podulka (2021), the CIA even attempted to develop an entire workplace aesthetic with an environment that could benefit employee productivity and project a sense of seriousness to the outside world.
- 24 Strachan-Morris (2013).
- 25 Crump (2015, 231–55).
- 26 For example, *Malcontent News* (2024).
- 27 U.S. Department of State (1996, 1107, 1109 and 1119).
- 28 Commission Report (2005).
- 29 Warner (2001).
- 30 See Moseman (2020).
- 31 Durbin (2017, 32).
- 32 For example, Hijzen (2021), Kahana (2002), Beres (2015) and Libel (2015).
- 33 See Jeffreys-Jones and Hughes (2023).
- 34 For example, Beebe and Pherson (2015, xli): “About the Authors. Sarah Miller Beebe began thinking about a book of cases during her career as an analyst and manager at the Central Intelligence Agency. A variety of broadening experiences, including an assignment as director for Russia on the National Security Council staff and a position as a national counterintelligence officer at the Office of the National Counterintelligence Executive, drove home the need for rigorous and effective approaches to intelligence analysis. . . . Now, as owner of Ascendant Analytics, she helps organizations apply such techniques against their specific analytic problems.”

- 35 It is important to note that I, too, served in the US Government, having authored 150 Intelligence Assessments and 25 Presidential Daily Briefs, and that background undoubtedly has had an impact on my perspectives as well.
- 36 See Glees (2013).
- 37 Glees (2013, 1): "For the past two decades, a quiet movement has been gathering momentum to transform the ways in which intelligence analysis is practiced. Prior to this movement, analysts generally approached their tradecraft as a somewhat mysterious exercise that used their expert judgment and inherent critical thinking skills. Although some analysts produced solid reports, this traditional approach was vulnerable to a large number of common cognitive pitfalls, including unexamined assumptions, confirmation bias, and deeply ingrained mindsets that increased the chances of missed calls and mistaken forecasts."
- 38 For example, Hastedt and Shelley (2009), and Zegart (2006).
- 39 ODNI, "Intelligence Community Directive 203: Analytic Standards" (January 2, 2015), Unclassified.
- 40 Kendall (1949).
- 41 U.S. Department of State (1996, 115).
- 42 See Grabo (2004, 25–32).
- 43 N.B. Trevorton and Gabbard (2008, 1): "The overarching generality about the U.S. intelligence analytical community today is that most of it is engaged in work that is tactical, operational, or current. . . . In other words, most analytic resources and activities are dedicated to intelligence reporting instead of attempting to attain the 'deep understanding' of our adversaries that constitutes analysis."
- 44 In other words, "unnecessary competition and redundant products" (Barry et al. 1993, 1).
- 45 Davies (2008, 192).
- 46 Carnap (1963).
- 47 According to Fredholm (2021), a former senior intelligence officer for Sweden: "And I learned that a briefing is not only about facts and assessments, but something more similar to showmanship, a theatrical performance." See also Levine (2021, 6): "Word choice, intonation, pace, pauses, volume, gestures, facial expressions, and any number of other non-substantive aspects can ensure success or doom it."
- 48 Agrell and Trevorton (2015, 163).
- 49 U.S. Department of State (1996, 109).
- 50 For example, Gates (1992).
- 51 See also Betts (2003, 74).
- 52 Rovner (2013), and Woodard (2013).
- 53 Levine (2021, 2): "Analysts must be attuned to the opportunities for action as well as the broader picture of where action might be prioritized (or shunted aside)."
- 54 Davis (1992).
- 55 Marrin (2013).
- 56 Prunckun (2010, 2): "Intelligence is, therefore, not a form of clairvoyance used to predict the future but an exact science based on sound quantitative and qualitative research methods." Davis (1995, 27): "One goal is to reduce avoidable error by relying more on evidence and logic and less on rhetoric and authority. As the former DDI put his bid for adding greater rigor, and thus greater modesty, to analysts' judgments, 'We are not in the prophesy business.'"
- 57 For example, Prunckun (2010, 43–53).
- 58 Ramsey and Boerner (1963) offer examples of the 123 indicators developed by the National Indications Center, which they apply to seven hypotheses for attack on the United States, each one having seven or more component features, all of them evaluated on a five-point scale, resulting in algebraic formulas like "Pearl Harbor: S_1 on V_2 by A_6 employing $F_{2,3}$ and using W_3 against $T_{1,2,4}$ (after or accompanied by D8)" that can be statistically plotted on a graph.

- 59 See Marchio (2021).
- 60 Cf. Phythian (2009, 54).
- 61 The parallel with historical writing should be evident. See White (1987, 100–1): “If, as most would agree, history is not a science, then it must be seen as part and parcel of the cultural superstructure of the age, as an activity that is more determined by than determinative of social praxis.”
- 62 There may be a distinction here between analysts and operators (Dulles 1963, 178).
- 63 Berger and Luckmann (1967, 154).
- 64 Berger and Luckmann (1967, 144).
- 65 Cf. Kreuter (2015).
- 66 *The Economist* (2023).
- 67 For example, McGlynn and Garner (2019, 73–90).
- 68 Agrell and Treventon (2015, 197) view this is a natural and positive future trend for the profession in terms of media narrative validation, though it is questionable whether there is value in having the attention of hundreds or thousands of analysts directed toward fact-checking.

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4 Elections in Italy, 1953

Even the simplest of situational reports is capable of communicating meaning, though the actual analytical content may be no more than a sentence or a single phrase after all of the tradecraft has been wiped off the page. In order to see what an analytical line truly looks like, we would do better to go back to a time before there were tradecraft standards. Back when analysts had more space on the page and more leeway from editors. We are fortunate to have just such an assessment in the forthcoming case study, one that is almost pure analysis. The storyline in it presents a logical argument, an expression of confidence levels and other suggestions that the authors were at least aware of tradecraft. Yet it provoked a fierce debate with policymakers about what makes good analysis. In that debate, it quickly became clear that policymakers were also aware of tradecraft, but they nevertheless considered such standards to be largely irrelevant for judging the quality of the work. It is a case study that suggests there is an entirely different way of looking at intelligence analysis, one that sets aside objectivity, timeliness and non-politicization, and instead puts subjectivity at the center.

On September 22, 1952, the State Department's Office of Intelligence and Research (OIR) distributed a comprehensive study on the "Probable Outlook for Italy," incorporating research from a series of previous background papers.¹ It was drafted under the direction of Richard Scammon, who had served as chief of the Division for Research in Europe since 1948 and was a vocal advocate for his team's work.² In those days, the OIR offices were parceled out among the regional bureaus at State, so that intelligence analysts were sitting alongside and closely collaborating with their policy counterparts. This particular report was planned as a contribution to an interagency assessment that would later be published by the CIA on March 31, 1953, as National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) 71, "Probable Developments in Italy," in preparation for the general election scheduled for June 7 of that year.³

We can consider both the OIR and interagency products together because the CIA team under the leadership of Sherman Kent, the Assistant Director of National Estimates, was closely collaborating with State from the outset, over a period of nine months in advance of the NIE's publication.⁴ In the early years of the US Intelligence Community, it was common practice for various agencies to provide their own contributions covering their respective expertise and the CIA would

incorporate those papers into a final NIE product. There are indications in declassified correspondence now available at the National Archives in College Park that the reality was increasingly one of the CIA using the basic information provided by the agencies while diverging “sharply from [their] tone and conclusions.”⁵ In those instances when the CIA adopted a cavalier attitude, the State Department and the military service branches were left with few options for having their voices heard, other than carefully documenting the breakdown in consultation.⁶ But in this instance, OIR appears to have been in complete agreement with the CIA throughout the process and the State Department analysts only offered small word-smithing suggestions on the final NIE coordination.⁷

The authors set the stage with the basic premise that the Italian economy was stagnating and there were no likely prospects for improvement. They portrayed a number of divided political parties on the left that would benefit from public discontent over the economic situation and a fraying centrist coalition currently in power that would barely eke out a win in the elections. They envisioned a postelection scenario in which the centrist government would fail to accomplish meaningful economic reforms. With popular anger mounting and disputes among ruling coalition partners, the result would be the rapid turnover of successive cabinets. The authors went beyond the six-month horizon, as might be expected in a long-term futures product like an NIE, projecting outward over the next one to two years with implications for the next five years. They predicted that the ruling Christian Democrats (CD) led by Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi would push their coalition partners further toward the right, which “might lead a moderate rightist government to become more authoritarian and less parliamentary in its methods.”⁸ The Catholic Church would play a key role in supporting this shift, and the promonarchist party would join the coalition, but “we believe that the memory of the disasters which overwhelmed Italy under Mussolini will prevent the emergence of another fascist regime.”⁹

There is an implication here, which the authors might not have wanted to state explicitly because it was contingent on so many other events taking place. Namely, *if* the Communists and Socialists on the left could remain united over the long run, and *if* the government was unwilling to ban the Communist Party outright, and *if* the economic crisis worsened, *then* the centrist coalition that was drifting toward authoritarianism and accommodation of the hard right would be doomed. The parties on the right would alienate voters with their heavy-handed tactics, contributing to a widespread surge of support for the united left. In other words, the centrist coalition would win the elections and continue a close partnership with the United States and NATO, but the coalition’s subsequent rightward drift would ultimately erode democracy in Italy and undermine their position. This authoritarian center-right coalition would barely cling to power, while a frustrated Communist party with stockpiles of weapons will grow its base of support under cover of an alliance with the Socialists, thereby presenting an opening for the Soviets to exploit.

It would have been fair enough to reproach the authors for political partisanship, though it should be said from the outset that any such partisanship does not appear to have detracted from what was a good analysis. There was a subtext throughout,

hinting that US and European foreign assistance and political support would provide top cover for the centrist coalition's unwillingness to enact economic reforms and its subsequent rightward drift. "The government will continue to look for an escape from its economic difficulties primarily through continued US aid, increased emigration [to the United States, among other places], and European economic integration."¹⁰ Presumably the policy dilemma here was how to avoid a situation in which US assistance might defend against a Communist takeover and yet stop short of inadvertently undermining Italian democracy. This report hints at a solution of encouraging a CD coalition with Socialist Party leader Pietro Nenni, peeling him away from the Communists and marginalizing both the radical Left and the radical Right in the process. The analysis was logical and rational, if we accept the premise of Cold War fears of the global spread of Communism, if we reduce the interests of the various political actors and their parties to their simplest form and if we view Italian politics through the lens of game theory. Such an approach would certainly have been warranted, even if the analysts were subtly suggesting that the United States should facilitate an accommodation with the Socialists. The analysts should have been commended for constructing a coherent and insightful narrative of Italy's long-term future.

Post disagreed. After reading the preliminary OIR assessment, Embassy Rome sent back a fifteen-page front channel cable quoting significant portions of the original text, annotated with comments by various embassy officers seeking to correct the facts.¹¹ Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) Elbridge Durbrow then sent the OIR Front Office an Official-Informal letter, directing Washington's attention to the cable and offering additional thoughts on tradecraft problems, like the failure to question assumptions and the interchangeable use of the terms *probable* and *possible*. "The chief problem, however, is not so much in the inaccuracy of some of what is represented as factual material in this report as in its interpretation."¹² Post had previously written a series of cables laying out a very different future for Italy, and was concerned the OIR report and subsequent NIE would become "the basis for future policy actions by a great many agencies of the U.S. Government."¹³

The first point of attack for Embassy Rome was to cast doubt on the language Washington analysts used to describe Italian Government actions (e.g. "slow moving," "occasional malevolence," "cautious" and "ineffectual"). Not to criticize the use of emotive language per se, but rather to reject the characterizations that these particular descriptors implied.¹⁴ The second target was the OIR prediction that Italy might have to manage its own economic decline, inasmuch as Embassy Rome believed with high confidence that the United States and Europe would intervene to support the Italian economy. The third difference of opinion came with post's sense that Washington had minimized the malign role of Italian Communism, leading Durbrow to suggest that the OIR author was politicizing the analysis in favor of outreach to the Socialists. In each case, the DCM had a valid point. According to Embassy Rome: 1) the economy had shown signs of growth and the government had a plan for encouraging more; 2) the United States and other European partners

would come to Italy's aid; and 3) the Vatican was not a purely self-interested political actor, but rather an ecumenical institution concerned with saving all Christian souls and not just those on the right. In conclusion, "with a relatively stable government for five more years, Italy will be well on the way to the consolidation of democracy and to the alleviation if not the solution, of her most pressing economic and social problems."¹⁵

What did it mean to have this difference in interpretation? The report was certainly timely and relevant with elections looming. It was possibly a bit partisan, but in a way that could hardly be faulted at the time, since American experts in both Washington and Rome agreed the Communists were a threat and it was critical to preserve a stable and democratic Italy. The difference was not a matter of special access to classified sources or sensitive information. Neither side of the debate required intelligence sources to make its case. Diplomats at post highlighted what they felt to be a significant confirmation bias in the way that Washington based its negative outlook on a series of false assumptions, which were never fully examined or contrasted with alternative scenarios. In other words, Rome felt that Washington had cherry-picked data points to prove an analytical point. But that was not the fundamental disagreement either. If pressed, Rome probably would have admitted that it too was cherry-picking data points to fill out a rosy picture of economic progress and government achievement. The two sides could quibble over the mechanics of tradecraft, the quality of the source materials and the need to examine underlying assumptions, but none of that was the real issue. There was something bigger at stake.

Subjectivity and Expertise

The issue for Rome was a question of what it means to be "objective." Not out of a desire for more objectivity, but rather for less of it. Post felt the analysis lacked subjectivity. DCM Durbrow noted how embassy reporting was "the result of continuous and innumerable first-hand contacts with the local scene by a succession of highly trained observers."¹⁶ The DCM's language is worth quoting in full:

One of the difficulties with a country such as Italy under current conditions is that there is so much "intelligence" available, that the main problem lies in its selection, correlation and evaluation. We appreciate fully the greater difficulty of doing this in Washington than on the spot where it is possible, against a background of knowledge of the Italian language, history, psychology and personalities, to check all sides of a problem, evaluate the motivations of partisan individuals or groups, and come up with a considered judgment or analysis. OIR doubtless has access to more raw intelligence on Italy than we do, but, even at that, while greater in quantity, we doubt if it can be substantially different in quality.¹⁷

The tone of condescension is important, and it would have been justified by the DCM's goal of supporting his staff and defending their work. From the perspective

of the diplomats in the field who lived and worked the issues, the OIR analysts had gotten the story wrong. Even more telling is what follows in the letter from Rome:

The report itself admits that emphasis is given in it to the “disturbing” elements of the situation and explains this as due to the fact that they are “more readily identifiable and evaluable”. The hopeful factors for the future, described merely as “conserving forces of inertia, of city and village routine, of family responsibilities and countless other social and psychological stabilities” are not, the report says, given consideration because they are “unmeasurable”. No explanation is given as why they are not measurable, but they are essential to an understanding of the Italian scene and they are taken into account and included in forming our judgments.¹⁸

Embassy Rome believed what was missing from the analysis in Washington was a feel for the realities on the ground, the cultural and psychological factors that drove individuals and society. In other words, the intangibles. Post believed these factors were missing because Washington analysts were held captive by their dependency on classified reports, their hesitancy to work outside the bounds of concrete data and their inability to fully appreciate the mentalities and deeper motivations of the human beings they were studying.

For Rome, Washington demonstrated a lack of true *expertise*. That word is hard to define. We can tally the number of years analysts have spent on their portfolios, test them for language skills, and allow them to conduct annual site visits and attend conferences, but ultimately the moniker of *expert* is conferred on a person by his peers out of respect for such qualities as insight, vision, perseverance, commitment and passion. It is those qualities that enable experienced analysts to see beyond the raw data and use their imaginations to reconstruct the meaning contained in the subject matter that they study.¹⁹ This is not *meaning* in the sense of logical patterns that serve a secondary purpose of processing and recombining mental abstractions of symbols and their significance. Embassy Rome recognized that the analysts in Washington had a great deal of skill in that regard. Rather, it is *meaning* in the sense of a feeling for a lived experience that is precognitive and primary in its relationship to the way symbols are generated and evaluated.²⁰ It is the primary nature of that felt experience – an opening out to the world or receptivity to phenomena, made possible by perseverance and commitment – that allows for the selection of new significations and their evaluation or arbitration.²¹

The analysts in Washington were playing with signs, while the diplomats in the field were creating them, and the latter allows for much greater freedom of expression and innovation than the former. What came across in the OIR product was an examination of how political coalitions form and dissolve, a warning about the threat to democracy in Western Europe and a consideration of US interests. All very logical, but for the folks at Embassy Rome it was lacking a connection to reality. It was not a story about Italy on the cusp of elections in 1953. Or, at least, it was not a compelling story. It may have been intelligence analysis, but it was not particularly good intelligence analysis.

These analytical products can be evaluated based on the criteria of real-world outcomes, though the results are equivocal. Washington analysts made the right call at times. The parties on the left failed to combine forces and defeat the centrist coalition, which won a plurality but fell short of a supermajority. PM De Gasperi left office and the government proved ineffective and fragile, as one cabinet after another turned over in rapid succession. In other respects, it was Embassy Rome that made the right call. Parts of the country, especially the northwest, witnessed an economic boom lasting through the decade, and the parties at the extremes (Communists, neofascists) were consistently shunned as coalition partners. The CD under Amintore Fanfani flirted with the Socialists, while maintaining independence from the Vatican. Ultimately, the centrist parties kept a hold on power by decentralizing decision-making across numerous parliamentary institutions. That allowed the Communists to influence legislation while keeping them out of the coalition, drawing on Communist votes at times when their own backbenchers wanted to revolt. They avoided a serious political debate about platforms and legislative agendas, while continuing to build patronage networks.²²

For Washington analysts at that time, unable yet to evaluate outcomes that still lay in the future, their best indicators for the ruling coalition's impending hard rightward turn were as follows:

- 1) In the face of local election losses in 1951 and 1952, the Vatican and the Catholic Action Society were pressing the CD to form a hard right coalition with the National Monarchist Party and the neofascist Italian Social Movement.
- 2) The centrist government had just pushed through a controversial election law giving the simple majority vote-winner an automatic supermajority of two-thirds seats in Parliament, able to pass legislation and block the opposition at will.
- 3) Outrage over that law had led some CD members to abandon their party, while also giving the Communists and Socialists common cause.²³

Perhaps the best indicator, though a bit dated, was that Pope Pius XII had excommunicated all Marxists in 1949 and encouraged voters to support the right wing of the CD party.²⁴ The OIR and CIA authors also bolstered their case with a commonsense appeal to policymakers' understanding of politics and electioneering. In other words, when political parties fail to claim the center, they often drift toward the extremes in an attempt to mobilize a more committed and loyal base.

What would have been the alternative, subjective methodological approach favored by post? First of all, the attempt to present an objective view of the known facts had placed the human element in the background, leaving only passing reference to the mindsets of leading politicians like de Gasperi and Nenni, the aspirations of the Italian people and the self-image of the Church as spiritual caretaker of all Christian souls. In the absence of vetted, corroborated, processed and disseminated intelligence sources, the only way analysts could have made such assertions would have been by inference and intuition, which they were reluctant to do. Second, a closer examination of one key intangible tied to mentalities – the nostalgia for the

pre-war years – might have suggested to analysts a slower but steadier revival of the far right, independent of any recognition from the other parties or participation in their coalitions. One of the appeals of fascism in general, and Mussolini in particular, was the notion that a great leader empowered with total authority would have the will to achieve a real transformation in society. Consequently, a myth survived among many Italians after the war that fascism was relatively benign and enlightened, with a focus on economic improvement and public works.²⁵ Again, analysts would have had to piece this together from disparate data points using their imagination in the absence of polling data that explicitly asked the question: “Do you miss fascism?” Third, the analysts modeled their predictions of political party behavior on a kind of left–right polarization familiar to Americans, but that was not necessarily the nature of Italian politics, where a two-party system was unthinkable. Rather, as many academics have noted since, a small group of Italian elites across the political spectrum sought to maintain stability and control through moderation and maneuvering, and the majority of voters were unconcerned with the political theorizing that preoccupied the platforms of the national parties.²⁶ Any analysis along those lines would have been highly speculative, as there could be no set of data points sufficient for depicting those societal trends. The analyst could have made a mental leap, referencing an unexpected concession from a major party leader, and used it as a metaphor for broader political elite behavior, but that is not the same as *evidence supporting facts*.

Now we are beginning to get a glimpse of the fundamental problem that the diplomats at Embassy Rome saw in the analysis. Elements of stability were built into the Italian political system, and they could never be captured in facts and figures, let alone translated into indicators and outputs. It required the ability of the analyst to envision the intangible and non-measurable aspects of human consciousness, the mentalities of political leaders and the expectations of the electorate.

Influential policymakers in Washington sided with the Embassy against OIR. Outerbridge Horsey, a key Policy Planning staffer who had previously served at Embassy Rome, told OIR Deputy Special Assistant Fisher Howe that he found fault with ninety-five percent of the report, that the OIR analysts had exhibited “venomous hostility” to the Vatican and that the Italian Government could handily defeat the Communists if the situation ever got out of hand.²⁷ In turn, OIR Special Assistant W. Park Armstrong felt obligated to respond directly to the criticisms, but wanted to do so in a way that would maintain a positive working relationship with State Department colleagues. Accordingly, Armstrong sent a letter stating that post could very well be right with respect to the short-term situation and OIR’s assessment could prove correct for the longer-term outlook.²⁸ The same issue – for example, land reform or infrastructure investment – might be handled adequately by the Italian Government in the coming weeks and months, yet still fail to achieve a sufficient impact over the coming years. That was certainly a proper bureaucratic response, signaling that there could be experts on all sides. But even with that, Armstrong was admitting there was a much bigger difference of opinion at stake that could not be resolved. Post was optimistic about the Italian Government’s stability, the successful consolidation of democracy and significant

economic improvement, while OIR believed that the country's problems were intractable.

Washington's Perspective

The debate was never resolved. At times, there was a lot of finger-pointing, with Washington implying that the Embassy was pandering to the host government (as a form of clientitis) and the Embassy implying that Washington was harboring a hidden political agenda (as Communist sympathizers). The more fundamental question remaining on a deeper level was: How do we decide whether analysis is good or bad, and who is qualified to judge that? The answer from the intelligence customers was that quality resides in creating a narrative that reflects the lived experience of the participants on the ground and the concerns of policymakers back home. The answer from the intelligence professionals in Washington was that quality resides with the selection and presentation of tangible facts that can be evaluated and measured, thereby revealing patterns and trends that are indicated by the sources.

Both would almost certainly agree that any analysis must abide by some sort of tradecraft standards, demonstrate logical rigor in its judgments and consider all available sources that are verifiable. The difference was in the way the Embassy viewed the analysis through a very subjective lens, concerned with intangible and even irrational human emotions, and with outcomes that were fluid depending on how policymakers might choose to act, while Washington considered it an exercise in testing hypotheses and measuring analytical judgments against real-world results. Washington argued that a good analysis is one that is proven right by later events, while Embassy effectively argued that a good analysis is one that spurs policymakers to actively intervene in the course of events. If the fundamental basis of intelligence as a discipline is the insurmountable reality that analysts are expected to know that which is unknowable, and the only way to overcome that obstacle is through a dialectic of subjective experience constrained by objective standards, then in this instance Embassy Rome voted for the former and Washington for the latter.

In the 70 years since then, it is Washington's perspective that has won out. The profession has come to define itself by the analyst's ability to achieve a crystal clear, almost clinically sterile, presentation of the available facts. The discussion among scholars and practitioners today is broadly one of how best to apply a scientific method pursued through the rigorous application of methodologies borrowed from the social sciences. If managers and editors wish to adopt a regimented framework for the design and presentation of analytical products, then there is a clear justification to be found in the need to maintain a corporate brand and a commanding share of the marketplace. If, however, they wish to legitimize their procedures with a claim to objectivity that effectively severs the analyst's ability to meaningfully engage with the world, then they have upset the delicate balance that exists at the core of the discipline. They have abrogated the role of the analyst in favor of reasserting their own authority over the process, all in the name of a

science of intelligence that cannot withstand close scrutiny under even the mildest of examinations. By contrast, this case study has attempted to step back in time and retrieve what was lost, in order to recover an alternative way of looking at intelligence analysis, one that might help us to lay the groundwork for a different conception of the field.

Notes

- 1 The original long report is now missing, but it was comprised of a number of shorter papers on focused issues that still exist today:
 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 59, Entry A1-449, Box 289A, "Background Information on Italy: The Italian Constitution and Government," U.S. Department of State (State), Office of Intelligence Research (OIR), Intelligence Report no. 5839.1 (June 4, 1952), declassification #NND 989071.
 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 289A, "Background Information on Italy: The Italian Government: Composition and Leading Personalities," no. 5839.2 (June 4, 1952), declassification #NND 989071.
 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 289A, "Background Information on Italy: Italian Political Parties," no. 5839.3 (June 5, 1952), declassification #NND 989071.
 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 289A, "Background Information on Italy: Italian Elections Past and Future," no. 5839.4 (July 9, 1952), declassification #NND 989071.
 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 289A, "Regional, Provincial and Local Government in Italy," no. 5839.5 (June 3, 1952), declassification #NND 989071.
 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 289A, "Background Information on Italy: Political Activity of the Church in Italy," no. 5839.6 (July 8, 1952), declassification #NND 989071.
 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 289A, "Background Information on Italy: Objectives of Italian Foreign Policy," no. 5839.7 (July 8, 1952), declassification #NND 989071.
 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 289A, "Background Information on Italy: The Conduct of Italian Foreign Relations," no. 5839.8 (June 6, 1952), declassification #NND 989071.
- 2 U.S. Department of State (1951, 388).
- 3 CIA FOIA Reading Room, "National Intelligence Estimate: Probable Developments in Italy," NIE-71 (March 31, 1953), declassified FOIA document number CIA-RDP79R01012A002400020001-4, document release date September 12, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79r01012a002400020001-4>. Henceforth, NIE-71. Also available as NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-1373, Box 4, declassification #NND 959285.
- 4 CIA FOIA Reading Room, "Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence, Subject: The Italian Political Outlook through the National Elections" (June 28, 1952), declassified FOIA document number CIA-RDP79R00904A000100030044-2, document release date June 17, 2005, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79r00904a000100030044-2>.
- 5 NARA, RG 59, Entry 1494, Box 66, "Memorandum from Henry Owen to OIR, Subject: NIE Work" (March 9, 1951), declassification #NND 959010 and #NND 47552.
- 6 NARA, RG 59, Entry 1494, Box 66, "Memorandum from Henry Owen to OIR, Subject: NIE Work" (March 9, 1951), declassification #NND 959010 and #NND 47552.
- 7 "Memorandum for the Director . . .," cover memo: "The OIR corrections were practically all editorial nit-picks, as _____ agrees. We mutually agreed to accept about half of them and to leave out the rest. The paper is not changed in any material respect."
- 8 NIE-71, 4.
- 9 NIE-71.
- 10 NIE-71, 6.

- 11 NARA, RG 59, Entry 1561, Box 19, "Embassy [Rome] Comments on OIR Contribution to NIE-71," Despatch no. 977 (November 12, 1952), declassification #NND 941285 and #NND 46519.
- 12 NARA, RG 59, Entry 1561, Box 19, "Official-Informal, American Embassy Rome [Elbridge Durbrow] to Special Assistant for Intelligence [W. Park Armstrong]" (December 28, 1952): 2, declassification #NND 941285 and NND 46519. Henceforth, Official-Informal.
- 13 Official-Informal: 2.
- 14 Official-Informal: 3.
- 15 Official-Informal: 5.
- 16 Official-Informal: 2 (words underlined as in the original document).
- 17 Official-Informal: 1.
- 18 Official-Informal: 2.
- 19 The close connections between creativity, imagination, innovation, initiative and professional respect are evident in the comments of analysts who were surveyed as part of a series of CIA seminars on creativity and ethics in the late 1970s (Marchio 2021).
- 20 Gendlin (1962, 103 and 144–5).
- 21 Gendlin (1962, 123).
- 22 Newell (2011).
- 23 Cf. Kogan (1983, 63–4).
- 24 Wiskemann (1971, 37).
- 25 Corner (2022). Opposition to this myth of Italy's ineluctable progress under Mussolini did exist, even during the war, as exemplified in Elio Vittorini's 1941 novel *Conversazione in Sicilia*.
- 26 Kogan (1983, 66). This view of national politics matched the provincial situation in many places outside Rome (Allum 1973, 334–5).
- 27 NARA, RG 59, Entry 1561, Box 19, "Memorandum for P[ark] A[rmstrong], Subject: Italy: DRW vs. Embassy, [from Fisher Howe]" (February 19, 1953), declassification #NND 941285 and NND 46519.
- 28 NARA, RG 59, Entry 1561, Box 19, "W. Park Armstrong, Jr., to The Honorable Elbridge Durbrow" (February 19, 1953): 2, declassification #NND 941285 and NND 46519.

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Part III

**Sense-making and
Signification**



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5 Allowing for Subjective Experience

It has been almost 80 years since the establishment of the basic structure of the US Intelligence Community, and in that time academics and practitioners alike have come to define intelligence analysis in terms of scientific method, to such an extent that today it is almost unthinkable to conceive of the field in any other terms. Students are instructed to use deductive or inductive reasoning to develop a hypothesis involving a set of measurable variables that will be tested in an experiment with a clear plan for data collection and evaluation.¹ Young professionals are instructed to provide two or more data points with source descriptions as evidence for any analytical judgment, an overall source summary statement, confidence levels associated with percentages of probability and some remarks about methodology where appropriate.² Structured Analytic Techniques (SATs), meant to encourage transparency and collaboration by delving into the assumptions underlying any given hypothesis, proliferate in manuals and have even taken hold in some parts of the private sector where former intelligence officials have brought their training to the corporate workplace.³ All of this lends Intelligence Studies a certain prestige, intended to legitimize the creation of academic departments, the reputation of the former intelligence officers who teach in them and the private consultancies they operate providing advice and training to their former colleagues.⁴ However, none of this fully constitutes a ‘science of intelligence.’ It is rather a set of scientific procedures and methodologies that are applied to intelligence, with none of them emanating from intelligence, and that distinction matters.

The gradual move toward a more explicitly scientific approach was evident in the mid-1970s with the establishment of a team at the CIA especially devoted to applying new quantitative methods. Heuer Jr. (1978, 7) described its mission as follows: “Our task is not to try to replace the subjective wisdom of these specialists with so-called objective data, but to use rigorous methodological procedures to explicate and exploit more fully the insights and judgment of these analysts.” In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the tone had shifted from applying scientific methods as experimental aids to employing them as tools for evaluating human performance: “The need for such science arises from the inevitable fallibility of human judgment and organizations.”⁵ The discussion today about the role of Artificial Intelligence goes a step further and envisions automating many of the routine tasks of human analysts: “If AI could take on much of the prep work in assembling

sources, creating graphics, or even drafting reports, human analysts could focus on the needs of the decision-maker and the implications of the situation.”⁶ These quotes and many more like them should serve the purpose of demonstrating how experts have not been attempting to develop a scientific method *of* intelligence analysis, in the sense of an epistemology that arises within and emerges out of the discipline. Rather, they have been engaged in the pursuit of a scientific method that can be applied *to* intelligence analysis, in ever more intrusive ways.

The logical positivism of Auguste Comte and Émile Durkheim would dictate that any science of intelligence should make observations about the connections between variables, in order to test hypotheses and confirm the results, thereby revealing laws and the theories that explain them. That vision for the social sciences took hold in the United States during the 1930s, alongside the American tradition of Pragmatism, and both intellectual trends subsequently came to shape the field of political psychology.⁷ Should Intelligence Studies really be defined by such a rigid empiricism? It seems a bit old-fashioned. Perhaps the science of intelligence analysis should be more in line with a post-positivist view that takes into account the idea that the scientific method is rarely value neutral. It has been commonplace within the field of social science for decades now that the scientific method is conditioned by the cultural construction of language and therefore subject to politicization, so that many social processes “are beyond the limits of theories that assume freedom or rational choice.”⁸

Familiarity with the scientific method can certainly encourage more analytic rigor in terms of logical reasoning and precision in the use of terms. However, all of this logical positivism and empiricism borrowed from the social sciences (and derived, in turn, from the natural sciences) prompts the question as to what intelligence analysis is on its own, in the absence of any epistemology borrowed from another field. It is like asking if a tree falls in the forest. Looking at the question in a slightly different way, if someone records an event but nobody can find a reason why it should be of policymaker interest, is it really intelligence?

Our understanding of the profession is so overly determined by the scientific principles and methodologies imposed by managers, editors and so-called tradecraft experts that it is difficult to even conceive of what the fundamental experience of intelligence is in its precognitive stage, before any methodology or tradecraft has been applied and the results processed by the consciousness. Ideally any description of intelligence analysis should have a direct resemblance to the lived reality of the analyst. But how do we move from a phenomenology of analysis – one in which the analyst is confronted by an immeasurable quantity of data, ubiquitous gaps in knowledge and the burden of having to make sense of it all – toward the actual production of analytical products, without getting diverted into a borrowed and antiquated discourse of scientific method?

In order to recover the lived experience of analysts as they encounter their subject matter and transform it into analytical products, it is first necessary to strip away the discourse of objectivity and science, not only from the methods but also from the sources. That approach cuts against the grain. There is a reductionist viewpoint that says facts should speak for themselves, with analysts intervening

only when a lack of sufficient sources leaves critical gaps in our knowledge. Recent calls for a greater focus on epistemology purport to allow a constructive approach to understanding subjectivity, but they typically refer more to a general process of introspection, empiricism, rigorous testing and SATs that point back toward eliminating cognitive bias, while lacking any reference to a specific tradition of philosophical thought.⁹ In a similar manner, some academics have opened the door for analysts to make use of political psychology, but only to apply those tools on a very limited basis.¹⁰

The discussion that follows will take as its point of departure the notion that intelligence analysis is not a study of objective facts in the sense of inner truths that can be revealed through experimentation. It is not a scientific pursuit that should be admitted to the social sciences on the basis that almost all subjective experience be treated as a form of cognitive bias.¹¹ The information that will eventually be collected and processed into intelligence reports is data that does physically exist somewhere and in many cases it can be verified, but the rest is a matter of subjective experience. The intelligence profession is a socially constituted process in which institutions and norms, from an agency's banner and logo to the use of well-defined probability language, all make explicit and implicit claims to truth that reference one another. The science of intelligence is part of a communicative act of cultural production that is intended to confer legitimacy on analytical products as they become part of a policy debate. It is governed by rules for how meaning is communicated and preserved, which can be processed and transferred, allowing a set of ideas and concepts from one society or culture to become accessible to people in another.¹²

An intelligence analysis is not intrinsically true or false in its relation to a set of verifiable objects or events. That correspondence to truth must be evaluated by managers, editors and policymakers, with each person exercising their judgment according to an understanding of a deeper rules-based order as they read the report and validate its claims. It is redolent of Habermas's theory of communicative action.

First, it must be grounded in experience; that is, the statement may not conflict with dissonant experience. Second, it must be discursively redeemable; that is, the statement must be able to hold up against all counterarguments and command the assent of all potential participants in a discourse.

(Habermas 2001, 89)

The truth claim as asserted in a report might be one of low probability/high impact, or it might be a low-confidence judgment, or it might be a Red Cell hypothetical exercise, and consequently it may well be that not all policymakers agree on the conclusions of the analysis or even the need for such an analysis. Yet they can at least agree that within the established norms of the intelligence profession there is a utility for that type of report, the methodological premise does indeed match the stated aims of the originating agency, and if the agency has reached such conclusions then at least they have been vetted and approved by multiple layers of

competent managers. In that regard, on at least a rudimentary level, they have participated in a social process for which reason is mediated by speech acts.

Intelligence analysis involves the study of raw data that can be construed as facts, but only to the extent that those facts directly or indirectly concern human beings, because their validity is in many ways contingent upon the perceptions of human beings. Information becomes intelligence when collectors choose to gather and process it, analysts have determined that individuals and populations could be impacted by it, politicians and policymakers are concerned with it and so forth. At every stage, it is humans who perceive the need for that information and thereby validate its status as intelligence, separate from the process of assuring its accuracy. All facts that comprise events were at one point instantiated or influenced by humans, organized and structured into narratives by humans, and interpreted for their meaning by humans. The goal should be to understand how meaning and significance are assigned, communicated and negotiated by human perceptions and attitudes within the interpretative framework of intelligence analysis.

There is a two-step process of interpretation that takes place in any analysis. The first step involves taking signs imbued with meaning and using the imagination to reconstruct the ordered set of relationships that lent them significance within their local context. In that regard, thought as both feeling and action gives the subjective self a grounding in historical time and the natural world that is comparable to any object or event.¹³ Those signs could be indices that refer to things in the world, icons that directly reproduce some element of the original thing to which they refer, or symbols that rely on convention or habit to stand in for a thing. This characterization of the process is not a figure of speech. Intelligence agencies and private companies quite literally spend millions of dollars every year on platforms designed by Palantir, C3AI and other systems providers, which are specifically intended to link data from across multiple streams into a seamless network of searchable references.¹⁴ The second step involves the analyst taking that mental or digital map of relationships and transposing them into the new setting of a finished analytical product, with all of the institutional conventions and policymaker expectations that come with the genre. Each of these two steps requires an act of translation: in the first instance, a translation from the languages, customs and manners of the original locale of the target set into terms with which the analyst is more familiar; and in the second instance, a translation from the analyst's understanding of those terms into terms with which the policymaker is familiar.

Any attempt to construct an abstract model of that two-step process of interpretation and communication opens up an almost endless array of theoretical perspectives that delve into hermeneutics, sociology and psychology. That is because the process of signification is a basic aspect of social behavior. Ogden and Richards would have described the aforementioned first step in terms of a chain of significations in which a sign is reconstructed by the mind in all of its sense or inner logic, and they would have described the second step in terms of the emotions, motivations and intentions that lend context to the sign and therefore imbue it with meaning.¹⁵ This is a description of the analyst's task viewed from the inside of the process, as it is experienced by the person who is interpreting and communicating,

or perhaps for a close observer. Roland Barthes has described the same process from the outside, as it is experienced by society as a whole, among a larger community of individuals who participate in and derive benefit from the process. In that view, the first step takes any meaning that accrues to a sign and standardizes/generalizes it in the manner of a commodity, which can then in the second step be reused, exchanged or manipulated for its value as a status symbol.¹⁶ Neither theoretical approach envisions the two steps as necessarily occurring in a particular order, neither one would deny the importance of the other and neither one considers the process to be a closed system operating in a vacuum. Both can exist simultaneously. Intelligence analysis is similarly a social process that involves the presence of multiple actors as generators of content, interpreters of meaning and consumers of products, all operating on many different levels of societal interaction.

The analyst may be intimately familiar with the actors and the society under examination, or he may be entirely reliant on intelligence sources transmitted to the safety and comfort of his computer screen. Either way, he brings many different experiences and expectations with him that consciously or unconsciously shift and alter the original meaning and significance of the target set. Similarly, the policymaker will have her own appreciation of the meaning and significance of the issues, based on her understanding of how they impact her domestic political situation. The policymaker may only have 30 seconds to read the headline and ask the urgent question of whether a terrorist will attack, or how a country will vote on a United Nations resolution or whether a military invasion will occur. In such a moment, all that matters is a clear and transparent rendering of the mental projection of the topic at hand (the *signified*) by way of a coordinated and published analytical judgment (the *signifier*).

Entire units of regime protection forces refusing to obey orders to pick up arms and fire on tens of thousands of civilians engaged in a mass protest in a capital city probably signals a critical turning point in regime stability. The types of units and numbers of protesters serve as an index of the fault lines emerging in society, which suggest images of revolt and political crisis that exist as abstractions in the mind of the policymaker. The analyst may have researched beyond the newspaper headlines, going on social media to see videos posted of soldiers exiting their tanks and shaking hands with protesters. However, these too are merely images that substitute for actual experiences of which the analyst cannot physically be acquainted and at the same time they refer to other abstract concepts, such as military discipline, regime loyalty, popular discontent, economic decline, democracy deficit and so on. Consequently, there are tangible and intangible differences between the way signs are treated in steps one and two.

The practicalities of intelligence dissemination, especially in an era of mass media and instant communications, sometimes create an impression that the indices and symbols that inform the policy debate are rather arbitrary. This is because the nuances and ambiguities of reality on the ground are often lost in the course of policy discussions, with a chain of mental associations substituting and assuming center stage in the debate. For example, the decision of whether or not to bolster a failing state or encourage regime collapse may not hinge on a cost-benefit analysis

of the actual suffering of the local residents. Rather, the decision may come down to fears of regional spillover or political blowback or the rise of an even greater threat emerging out of the chaos. Those fears may have nothing to do with the situation at hand. They might have been brought to mind by past experiences in different circumstances linked to possible futures that have not yet occurred. In other words, step one of the analytical process may involve many more nodes of data and produce a multidimensional interaction between analyst and subject matter that is far more complex than the policymaker's understanding of the signifier (the analytical product) and the signified (the topic of analysis) in step two. Regardless, there is always something to which the sign refers, and that thing-in-itself matters, if not for the busy policymaker then certainly for the analyst.

Semiotic Theory for Intelligence Analysis

Semiotics would teach that all thought is in some way contingent upon signs and their interpretation.¹⁷ A token or sign serves as an abstract representation of something (the *referent*), whether it be an object, person, idea, emotion or another sign. The relationship between the sign and the referent is established by way of a mental abstraction, the *interpretant*, which helps people to share ideas, make generalizations, draw comparisons and apply lessons. For example, a newspaper headline may mention a cabinet shuffle (the denotation) and this may conjure up the implication of a political scandal or the declining popularity of a prime minister (the connotation). The headline is the sign and the mental image of political controversy is the interpretant. The event that actually occurred, which both the denotation and connotation reference (albeit in different modes), might have involved two ministers resigning over a policy dispute that they did not care to make public.

There are certain theoretical debates in semiotics for which this book need not engage, and certain terms that for the simple purposes of this discussion can be employed without the need to articulate their intellectual tradition. For example, there is no need here to consider whether the Stoic categories of *signans* and *signatum* are sufficient and complete in describing the concept of a sign, or whether *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* are coterminous with denotation and connotation. That is because intelligence analysis presupposes the existence of a referent, and it has a set of fixed expectations for how analytical judgments should be demarcated on the page. It is a format that comes with much greater rigidity in how its rules and norms, its codes of interpretation, are structured and applied – greater than most literary genres. Even if events are many steps removed from the observer and only partially knowable, there is a general belief upon which all intelligence is predicated that no analysis should be fabricating information wholesale in the manner of fiction or referencing its own language in the manner of lyric poetry.

By way of a purely hypothetical example, let's consider a single event that exists as a symbolic construct with one particular set of meanings for participants in one foreign capital, and at the same time as an entirely different symbolic construction with another set of meanings for policymakers in another capital. Civilians may believe that a short television clip of their president reviewing the troops is proof

of his control of the armed forces and a symbol of the country's stability, while officials in Washington may see the same clip and believe it to be a weak attempt at reassuring the public the president is not in a coma facing an imminent coup. Both sets of observers can appreciate that something of importance is happening on the ground in real time and that it relates to a question of regime stability. There may be overlap between two symbols and even some agreement on the form, content and meaning they convey. But there are nonetheless two very different conversations taking place in two separate parts of the globe about two slightly different sets of facts, and those understandings of events will never be congruent with one another. The different responses of the interpreters may be based in part on acquired habits or subconscious reactions, as Morris identifies in his behavioral psychology of semiotics:

It is because of the fact that similar interpretants are aroused in the informer and the driver that we can say that the sounds uttered have the same signification to both of them. And this does not require that their actual behavior be the same in the situation, for an interpretant is a disposition to respond in a certain way under certain circumstances, and since the motivational and environmental circumstances are different for the informer and the driver the responses actually performed are different.

(Morris 1946, 41)

As we consider analytical production from a policy-centric viewpoint, it is tempting to view the terms of our own policy debates as signs, to view the foreign actors and events as referents, and to view the analytical products as the interpretants that mediate between the two (Figure 5.1).¹⁸ If we adopt that perspective, the analyst's role is to engage with the semiotic worlds of both the policymaker and the target set, seeking to understand and rationalize the different types of language and discourse used by each, while employing any tools available that might help bridge the gap.

The three facets of a sign are dense constellations of data points, full of nuances that intersect in complicated and unpredictable ways. There are even occasions when two worlds collide in a direct interaction between a senior official and a

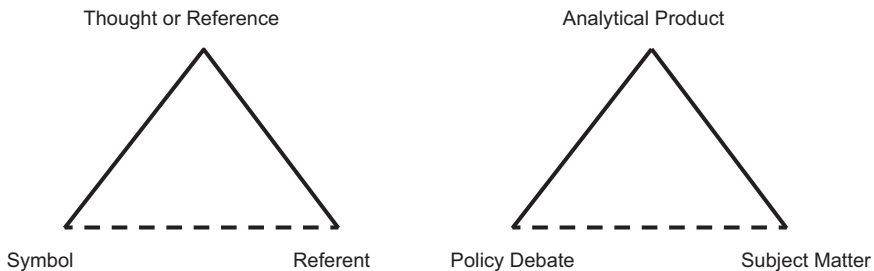


Figure 5.1 Ogden and Richards' Concept of the Triangle of Reference

foreign leader that is memorialized in an intelligence report. The symbol and the referent come in direct contact, and the analyst becomes an observer rather than a participant in the process.

Overall, however, the idea of a two-step process for describing the way in which an analyst negotiates these markedly different yet interconnected symbolic exchanges provides a model that corresponds in some degree to lived practice. It is what scholars and practitioners in Intelligence Studies often term “sense-making.”¹⁹ A shorthand definition of sense-making would probably refer to the general practice of analysts placing intelligence reporting within a context and delivering a judgment about the significance of events.²⁰ A more precise definition would probably lead us to a semiotic theory of sign-function (the rules or conventions of signification) and sign-production (the processes and acts of communication), in which the task of the analyst is to reconstruct the almost endless networks of referential meaning that exist in the world. Or, as Umberto Eco defined it: “Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie.”²¹

Semiotics was quite explicitly a branch of linguistics from the outset, and many of its foremost thinkers from Jakobson to Kristeva were engaged in literary theory or the study of mythology. Eco himself was a novelist. Scholarship ever since the posthumous publication of Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* in 1916 has been rooted in verbal language, with key contributions from Barthes and others on how sounds and images convey connotations and denotations that resemble a nonverbal form of rhetoric.²² Most semioticians have advocated for a wider application of their theories, and many have subordinated linguistics to a broader science of signs. There is even an entire literature devoted to the zoological and biological processes of signification, building upon the writings of Sebeok, who advocated that nonverbal systems are primary in all forms of life, above any other verbal or cultural systems. But it is always with language serving as “the semiotic system *par excellence*.”²³

On the one hand, Eco accepted the closed concept of a sign as a binary correlation between signifier and signified – a concept at the center of Saussure’s *langue*, defined as a system of socially accepted rules governing how language is employed in discourse. On the other, Eco famously stressed this should be merely the starting point for an open-ended process of *semiosis*, in which communication is the result of a continuous chain of inferences and interpretations. Both implicitly and explicitly, Eco allowed for expanding the semiotics of linguistic syntax and grammar in a rigorous, scientific manner to the field of political analysis.²⁴ That, too, was a concept traceable back to Saussure (1983, 24):

A language has connexions with institutions of every sort: church, school, etc. These institutions in turn are intimately bound up with the literary development of a language. This is a phenomenon of general importance, since it is inseparable from political history.²⁵

It is precisely within this definition of sign-production, part of an infinite process of interpretation and communication, that we can expand the boundaries of semiotics to encompass other aspects of social life, including intelligence analysis.

Society is interpreted by language, not the other way around.²⁶ Selg and Ventsel have made a convincing argument that the relational nature of the power dynamic that produces hegemony and (by extension) political order, comprises a semiotic universe of its own.²⁷ The terms, values, feelings or orientations that a community uses to designate the terms of its political debate, its 'political culture,' all constitute social relations and identities. Similarly, it is undeniable that intelligence analysis is primarily grounded in verbal language, and secondarily in audio and visual media. And it is the language of analytical discourse that opens up a window into the otherwise opaque sociological and psychological world of political action and decision-making.²⁸ By the same token, policymakers primarily interact with the world through the medium of language as they design and debate policies and policy implementation.

The goal here is not to dismiss the utility of frameworks borrowed from the social sciences. Semiotics cannot examine the ontology of the things to which signs refer, only the way in which those signs are processed in the minds of people and employed in acts of communication.²⁹ Any study of objects, people, emotions and ideas therefore requires other disciplines, such as history, political science or what David Belt and others have termed *strategic culture*.³⁰ These are all fields of human endeavor that color and shape the way intelligence professionals process signs and interpret data. Most important of all is the study of bureaucratic culture within and among intelligence agencies and governments, a line of inquiry that Philip Davies and others have explored.³¹ Assigning and negotiating meaning occurs within an interactive social environment, one in which the codes and norms that guide the interpretation of events are formed and reformed by individuals who operate in different fields of knowledge in their jobs and in their daily lives.

Sign-function and Sign-production

People are a product of signs. The way humans conceive of their own identity is structured by the mental processes of abstraction, deduction and interpretation, all of which require the use of symbols, sounds and images as substitutes or placeholders for the meanings assigned to them. This is true to such an extent that it would be nearly impossible to function without signs.³² At the level of phonetics in language, the smallest unit is typically paired with its opposite term, and the two are so interconnected in people's minds that the mention of one recalls the other.³³ They can thereby be used to disambiguate or clarify the sense of a larger concept. A similar process occurs at the semantic level, though with the smallest units that are used to convey meaning being connected in chains of associations.³⁴ The problem in any complex semantic system is segmentation, knowing how the grammar is parceled out into sentences and paragraphs.

The situation is no different with politics. Regime stability as an objective fact may depend upon a leader's ability to successfully order his troops to fire on crowds gathered on a hot afternoon in the central square to protest a sharp rise in food prices. The action may entail a public ceremony the next day honoring the soldiers for their valor, mass arrests of protest organizers, the forced closure of an

opposition party's headquarters, condemnation from regional neighbors and sanctions imposed by the West. The United Nations Security Council may meet to vote on a statement and policymakers in Washington may announce sanctions or conditionalities on future foreign assistance. Each event or process can be broken down into constituent parts that exist as images or signs in the mind, and the concepts associated with them can motivate actions and reactions, to such an extent that language shapes personalities and social organization. It is a foundational principle of modern linguistics:

It is difficult to see adequately the functions of language, because it is so deeply rooted in the whole of human behavior that it may be suspected that there is little in the functional side of our conscious behavior in which language does not play its part. . . . In spite of the fact that language acts as a socializing and uniformizing force it is at the same time the most potent single known factor for the growth of individuality.

(Sapir 2008, 507–8)

The smallest units that divide into oppositional pairs at the semantic level (freedom vs. repression, people vs. state, order vs. chaos) retain a degree of ambiguity in their connotations, which may change for different individuals depending on any number of factors.

Objective facts certainly exist in the world, but it is not those facts that are transmitted in intelligence reports. It is rather the representation of their component parts in the form of linguistic devices and mental images that matters. And that comes with chains of associations based on ambiguous or shifting connotations of meaning. Consider a hypothetical example of popular protest and regime stability. A rise in food prices becomes a rallying cry because it has some sort of larger political significance, security forces receive orders to fire because they have some sort of regime protection function, commanders respond to orders because they feel some sort of assurance their loyalty will be rewarded, an opposition party's offices are raided because they pose some sort of threat to the regime and the international community reacts with punitive measures because they feel some sort of obligation for upholding acceptable norms. The analyst is piecing together the web of connotations and associations, not conducting an experiment, testing hypotheses and correlating variables like a scientist in a lab.

There is a basic grammar at work, and everyone involved in the process has a commonsense understanding of the fundamental concepts involved, which allows them to function in society and perform their roles. Considering this hypothetical example again, senior government officials all understand the importance of maintaining public order and safety, even if they disagree on the modalities of how to achieve it. The UN Security Council debates human rights violations because that is its mission, and that mission confers legitimacy on participating states who want to be seen as responsible caretakers of a just international system. Security forces follow presidential orders because if they do not, the situation could quickly unravel with mobs of angry citizens enacting revenge for real and perceived grievances.

These functions are all mutually reinforcing, constitutive of the self-identity of the actors and organizations involved, and to some extent independent of any consideration of one or another specific crisis, though changes in circumstances and the complex interaction of events may lead one side or another to re-evaluate its interests at any specific moment in time. The science of semiotics contains a substantial element of structuralism, though that does not necessarily mean it is constrained by constructivist determinism.³⁵

The signs that comprise the grammar or rhetoric of regime stability contribute to a common language for all participants involved. The actors can debate and challenge the application of the terms to any given set of circumstances, but that does not mean that any one actor can completely control the way a given sign is used or interpreted. Several regime insiders can arrive at the same decision to suppress a peaceful protest based on their different political and personal goals, e.g. the defense of a sectarian minority's access to jobs and resources, the ability to tarnish the ruler's reputation only to sponsor a later coup attempt, the inability or unwillingness to make any alternative political compromise that would address public grievances. Several youth activists might lead demonstrations for very different reasons, e.g. the expectation of occupying high political office under a transitional government, reprisal for injuries inflicted by government forces on a family member, a genuine belief that the international community will somehow support protester demands and intervene on their side. The meaning and significance assigned by these various actors to the symbols of power that are being contested can also be revised and modified over time, perhaps in response to a rising number of civilian casualties, the indecisiveness of the leader or the inability of the crowds to gain a broader public sympathy outside the capital. Moreover, there is an interplay between the synchronic and the diachronic.³⁶ The seemingly static system of internally defined relationships that distinguishes regime stability from other elements of economic, political or regional stability develops and changes as a result of the reiterative process by which humans make decisions, implement policies and learn from those experiences. What we consider to be a Gross Violation of Human Rights today might only be an inconvenient fact of working with an authoritarian ally tomorrow.

The system of sign-functions contains unspoken or only partially referenced rules and norms, which exert a guiding influence over the decisions that actors have to make and the way in which they make them. Each element is defined in terms of the other elements rather than some concrete object or Platonic ideal. And the meanings and values assigned by the actors to each of those decisions are always shifting, pointing in their meaning to other factors and events that in turn have their own significance. Faced with this "fuzzy logic," the analyst may therefore have to ask which characteristics of a system are strong and stable, able to be understood by all participants based on denotations of meaning that help determine relatively clear outlines for the intentions and motivations of the actors, and which elements are weak and transient, based on vague connotations that are peripheral to the main issue at hand.³⁷ To treat analysis as a matter of selecting a set of given facts, evaluating them for their veracity and relevance, and applying a theory borrowed from

political science or International Relations theory, all in the pursuit of an elusive ideal of transparency and objectivity, is to ignore the much more complex and subjective process that occurs in spite of the best intentions of any line editor. Again, that process takes place in two steps, the first as an interpretive leap from the outside world to the analyst, and the second as an interpretive leap from the analyst to the policymaker. And the construction and interpretation of those signs as they exist in their original setting abroad may or may not have a close correspondence to the way policymakers understand them at home.

Meaning is established through the use of narrative structures, not the particular sets of details contained in any single analytical report, and therefore the most basic approach to a specific semiotics of intelligence analysis would seek to categorize and reduce the number of narratives down to their common typologies.³⁸ An analysis of regime stability could examine the interests of the regime's inner circle, the cohesion of regime protection forces, the role of public opinion, the views of regional neighbors, etc., with each of these structural units bearing standard features, correspondences or isomorphisms that are common to all analyses of similar topics.³⁹ The purpose would be to understand how analysts consciously or unconsciously shape their narratives in reference to other stories and analyses that they have read and absorbed about this particular political crisis, other similar crises or regime stability in general. In any profession responding to a media cycle – whereby numerous writers are competing to publish their take on the same storyline – there will inevitably be a base aspect of intertextuality, with any one finished product referencing a host of others on a conscious or subconscious level.⁴⁰ Similarly, there would be value in examining the ways that political actors understand and deploy the same or similar tropes based on their own understanding of the concepts and other historical precedents. In either case, these tropes function to a certain degree as mental models, subject to verification and validation, as successive analysts periodically revisit them to determine if they are still useful heuristic tools for communicating meaning. One potential line of inquiry would therefore be an examination of model fidelity, accuracy and granularity, which is perfectly compatible with even some of the most quantitative methods proposed for intelligence analysis.⁴¹ Criteria such as comprehensibility, explainability and uncertainty would address both the internal validity of how such tropes are deployed within the context of narrative structures and the external validity of how they represent events and trends.

Much more valuable would be a semiotics of intelligence analysis that seeks to understand the cognitive processes that generate particular reactions and responses to signs and significations. Even if this is part of a general semiotics that can only exist on a philosophical level and might be impossible to achieve in its totality, it should not deter scholars and practitioners from posing these kinds of questions.⁴² The question here is one of why a sign is (re)produced and received, which goes far beyond linguistics and into considerations of factors that may be psychological or intangible in other ways. This line of inquiry pushes us to examine the social construction of the semiotic codes that guide sign-function and sign-production, and ask to what extent the sign is open to many interpretations and to what extent

it is already determined in its meaning. In other words, is the sign not yet coded, vaguely coded or in the process of being coded, and what does that mean for policymakers who want to define the terms of a debate and develop a range of policy options?⁴³ Charles Morris posits four categories of sign usage that correspond to whether a sign is convincing (so that the reader agrees that the analysis reflects the conditions on the ground), effective (so that the reader demonstrates a preference for one particular analysis above others), persuasive (so that the reader is moved to act and not just simply reflect) and corrective (so that the reader looks at other analyses and policy discussions differently in light of a particular analysis).⁴⁴

Accordingly, the intelligence analyst is involved in the process of coding a sign, by fixing or challenging its denotations and connotations in the minds of policymakers. This happens every time an analyst draws a comparison between experiences recalled from the past, current situations in the present and expectations for future developments. Since no two events in time are ever exactly the same, the analyst has to draw the comparisons from one to another by eliminating certain details and focusing attention on others, in the process coloring the way the issue is framed and therefore how it is received by an audience. The logical continuation of an ongoing trend is demonstrated, for example, by appeal to a basic principle of political theory, history, psychology, etc., one that is broad and abstract enough to be able to encompass different events taking place under very different circumstances at different points in time. These mechanisms can best be described as analogies, metaphors and tropes of varying shapes and sizes, and they are tools at the analyst's disposal for shaping the discourse around a topic. Foreign actors engage in the same patterns of using established frameworks of meaning to assimilate data, shaping them to their needs and deploying them for political purposes. To take these linguistic tools at face value as though they are to be understood intuitively (for better or worse) is to ignore the complexities of how metaphors, analogies and other tropes come to influence political, economic and social discourse.⁴⁵ To adopt a clinical approach and demand that the language of analysis be clear, unambiguous and literal, capable of being empirically tested by comparison with the facts, is to turn a blind eye to the crucial role that metaphors play in all human activity.

Notes

- 1 There is no better textbook example than that of Dr. Henry "Hank" Prunckun (2010), which is modeled after social science textbooks like Hoover and Donovan (2011). A close second is McDowell (2009), especially the charts on 20, 143, 155, 163 and 172. See also Clark (2017), McGlynn and Garner (2019), Tecuci et al. (2016), and any of the essays in George and Bruce (2014, esp. 66–7, 147–8, 343).
- 2 For a comparison of how analysts in different agencies, countries and time periods have been taught different ways to quantify probabilities, see Mandel and Irwin (2021).
- 3 For example, Heuer Jr. and Pherson (2015), and Beebe and Pherson (2015).
- 4 See Glees (2013).
- 5 National Research Council (2011, 12). The sentence that precedes this quote is also indicative of the change: "The behavioral and social sciences provide a disciplined way of evaluating such assessments, complementing the intuition and personal experience that inform them, as well as empirically evaluating their actual performance."

- 6 Mitchell et al. (2019).
- 7 Nesbitt-Larking and Kinnvall (2012).
- 8 For example, Diesing (1991, 305). For more approaches that move beyond Rational Choice theory and its reliance on cost-benefit analysis, see Elster (2007, 214–45), and Manjikian (2013, 563–82).
- 9 For example, Bruce (2014), Marrin (2017) and Herbert (2006).
- 10 For advocates of qualitative research methods who are nevertheless working within a scientific paradigm, see Dahl (2017), Margolis (2012) and Zegart (2013).
- 11 Cf. Muller Jr. (2008).
- 12 Eco (1984, 167–8).
- 13 Peirce (1991, 8–9).
- 14 For example, Weinberger (2020), and Ward and Sottile (2019).
- 15 Ogden and Richards (1945, 223): “Thus, in speaking a sentence we are giving rise to, as in hearing it we are confronted by, at least two sign-situations. One is interpreted from symbols to reference and so to referent; the other is interpreted from verbal signs to the attitude, mood, interest, purpose, desire, and so forth of the speaker, and thence to the situation, circumstances and conditions in which the utterance is made.”
- 16 Cf. Barthes (1973, 41–2): “The sign-function bears witness to a double movement, which must be taken apart. In a first stage (this analysis is purely operative and does not imply real temporality) the function becomes pervaded with meaning. . . . Since our society produces only standardized, normalized objects, these objects are unavoidably realizations of a model, the speech of a language, the substances of a significant form. . . . But once the sign is constituted, society can very well re-functionalize it, and speak about it as if it were an object made for use.”
- 17 Peirce (1991, 49): “If we seek the light of external facts, the only cases of thought which we can find are of thought in signs. Plainly, no other thought can be evidenced by external facts.”
- 18 Ogden and Richards (1945, 11).
- 19 Moore et al. (2021).
- 20 Pherson and Pherson (2017, 354): “Sensemaking: The simultaneous automatic process by which the brain fits data into a frame or mental model and fits a frame around that data” National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2019, 67): “In the context of the IC, sensemaking is a process of creating situational awareness and understanding in highly complex, emergent, or uncertain circumstances” Moore (2011, xxxvi): “the processes by which specialized knowledge about ambiguous, complex, and uncertain issues is created.”
- 21 Eco (1979, 7).
- 22 The semiology of sounds and images should resonate with any geospatial intelligence analyst who has been subject to the limitations of cloud cover and narrow apertures. Barthes (1977, 49): “Thus the rhetoric of the image (that is to say, the classification of its connotators) is specific to the extent that it is subject to the physical constraints of vision (different, for example, from phonatory constraints) but general to the extent that the ‘figures’ are never more than formal relations of elements.”
- 23 Lévi-Strauss (1963, 48).
- 24 An argument could be made that intelligence analysis falls under Eco’s category of phenomena that “unquestionably have a semiotic relevance even though the various semiotic approaches have not yet completely succeeded in giving them a satisfactory theoretical definition” (Eco 1979, 6). Later on, he would describe a “hardly definable ‘twilight zone’ of semiotically oriented practices, such as the application of semiotic notions to literary criticism, the analysis of political discourses” (Eco 1984, 6).
- 25 Most scholars have read Saussure’s semiotics as a science of language, despite his vision for a larger project on the life of signs in social life. Thibault (1997) rather examines Saussure’s views on how the rules and practices of signification in language are intimately and inextricably bound up with social relations in historical time.

- 26 Benveniste (1985, 236): "The signs of society can be interpreted integrally by those of language, but the reverse is not so. Language is therefore the interpreting system of society. . . . We can already infer from this that the semiotic subsystems internal to society are logically interpreted by language, since society contains them, and society is interpreted by language."
- 27 Selg and Ventsel (2020, 110–14).
- 28 As Allen Dulles told a group of reporting officers in his 1925 lectures for the Foreign Service School: "you cannot be good political reporters unless you can write clear and expressive English" (Langbart 2020, 22).
- 29 Eco (1979, 316–17).
- 30 Belt (2015), Johnston (1995) and Gray (1999).
- 31 Davies (2004), and Duyvesteyn (2013).
- 32 Benveniste (1985, 234): "In short and without going beyond empiric verification, it is clear that our whole life is caught up in networks of signs that condition us to the point where we do not know how to omit a single one without endangering the equilibrium between society and individual."
- 33 Jakobson (1978, 76): "The opposed terms are two in number and they are interrelated in a quite specific way: if one of them is present the mind educes the other. In an oppositional duality, if one of the terms is given then the other, though not present, is evoked in thought."
- 34 This is what later semioticians prized in the writings of Peirce. Eco (1979, 75). "Modern linguistics had already discovered that a given term can trigger off a series of associations."
- 35 No one is suggesting that Intelligence Studies must be defined within a constructivist framework (Lilibacka 2013). Similarly, this book is not advocating for "postmodern intelligence," whatever that means (Rathmell 2002).
- 36 Lévi-Strauss (1963, 89): "But, above all, we know since Jakobson's article that the opposition between synchronic and diachronic is to a large extent illusory and useful only in the preliminary stages of research."
- 37 Eco (1979, 71, 82 and 125).
- 38 Greimas (1987, 64–5): "In other words, the generation of meaning does not first take the form of production of utterances and their combination in discourse; it is relayed, in the course of its trajectory, by narrative structures and it is these that produce meaningful discourse articulated in utterances."
- 39 Lévi-Strauss (1963, 209–11, 233–6, and 279–84).
- 40 Kristeva (1986, 111): "If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its 'place' of enunciation and its denoted 'object' are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated."
- 41 Waltz (2014, 146–51).
- 42 Eco (1979, 5).
- 43 Eco (1984, 38–9).
- 44 Morris (1946, 95–106).
- 45 Cf. Fludernik (1993, 463).

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6 Saddam Hussein's Survival, 1992

Even in the natural sciences, linguistic tools derived from metaphor serve a valuable role. They function as a means of acquainting a new generation with a set of older scientific principles, adjusting scientific theories to accommodate new observations, assigning language to describe newly observed processes and creating the categories of knowledge by which scientists can group phenomena.¹ Moreover, it is precisely in the use of literary tools derived from synecdoche and metonymy that we can see the analyst attempting to bridge the gap between the mostly known past, the partially knowable present and the unknowable future. We can also see the processes of translation and transposition that take place between the analyst and the subject matter, and between the analyst and the policymaker, as the terms of the debate are defined and redefined from one setting to the next. The following case study will demonstrate that it is the mark of a good analyst to be able to work within the established grammar and syntax of analytical tropes while at the same time shaping the way such typologies are understood and how the rules are applied.

NIE 92–7 from June 1992 assessed that Saddam Hussein would likely survive in power for the next year, by successfully stifling dissent, withstanding international sanctions and rewarding his core support group.² Since August 2010, this NIE has been declassified and made available to the public online, allowing us to see an outstanding example of analytical tradecraft. It offered an alternative analysis up front, saying that there would always be the possibility that Saddam's core supporters among the Sunni base and the military might support a coup launched by members of his inner circle and the Republican Guard. A second alternative scenario in the form of a popular revolt was mentioned and dismissed, before the key judgments resumed their discussion of Saddam's resilience. The purpose of the NIE was not to make a grand gesture or embark on a new line of analytical thought. The challenge was to push back against the assumptions held by some members of the Bush Administration that Saddam would inevitably fall and the United States could encourage that outcome. Accomplishing that intelligence task required a series of analytical reports that covered all the bases and hit home repeatedly on the same points, relying on eloquence, persuasiveness and articulateness to convince a skeptical audience.³

The NIE presents a clear set of interrelated concepts that form a scaffolding or architectural structure in which the author can organize and group the intelligence

sources, the reader can understand the bits of information within a larger context and a storyline can follow a logical path toward a seemingly inevitable conclusion. The text posits a series of conditions under which one or another outcome can be determined, and pushes the reader toward one outcome as being more likely than the rest through a series of overlapping and converging subsidiary arguments, e.g. Saddam's ability to evade sanctions and provide his loyalists with goods and services will maintain their continued support. The logical flow of the analysis generates a series of conditional premises that are *intensional*, focused inward, in the sense of allowing certain combinations of elements while excluding others, such as the way that economic pressures are treated in terms of their relevance for stability overall and not as indicators of unrelated macroeconomic trends.⁴ At the same time, each element is *extensional*, contingent on facts and situations that are verifiable to a greater or lesser degree, based on a range of sources that can be evaluated for their veracity. Clarity of thought is achieved through the denotation of meaning that disambiguates terms by pointing in each instance from a logical premise to an equally logical inference.

There are certain tropes that should be included in any account of regime stability, and that are present here as well, including the attitude of regime insiders, the cohesion of the armed forces, the role of regional and international actors, and the economic resources at the leader's disposal. Those building blocks of leadership analysis are socially constructed and inculcated across generations of analysts, to the extent that any omission would be notable. The author could have drawn a chart of all the different factors and assigned a color (green, yellow, red) to each, as indicators or indices, in a flurry of signs intended to lend more precision to the discussion. However, that would have been misleading. Each indicator opens up a multiplicity of relationships: each is based on a range of events for which the details are buried in footnotes; each refers to processes that have knock-on effects impacting other processes; and each stands in for the concept of stability as a whole (metonymy), though in what proportion or to what degree would be difficult to say.⁵ Perhaps in a hypothetical case of uranium enrichment and reprocessing, a color coded chart of the different steps involved would make sense, as the conventions for the production of weapons-grade fissile material are well established through scientific experiments. However, such an approach in this context of regime stability would only raise more questions about how the categories of knowledge are related to the observations of phenomena, how those phenomena are delineated from one another and who determines their rank of importance overall.

Negotiating the Grammatical Rules

The grammar of this type of analysis contains codes or rules for constructing the conceptual scaffolding of the piece. It is not an open-ended affair in which the analyst decides to parade about with an endless set of indicators that each seem to exist in a world of signification all their own. Such analytical products do exist. The analyst could have chosen to present a cross-hatched graphic or even just a text block covering the different sub-components, each one treated separately with its

own key judgment linked only by implication in the mind of the reader. An effort like that might still have served a purpose, though it would have been something of a mechanical exercise in rote learning. For example, a section on public opinion might have considered the attitudes of different ethno-sectarian communities in Iraq toward the regime and assessed whether they were capable of mobilizing an effective resistance. Or perhaps the topic of regime stability could have been broken down a different way into sub-components and each of them compared with the others in a chart. For example, Saddam's ability to maintain power would be handled separately from (but related to) the question of whether the government and the Ba'ath Party could continue to function, and the economy's potential collapse under pressure of sanctions would be handled separately from (but related to) the question of whether the defense and security forces could continue to cohere. In the former approach, each section would consider actors and circumstances in their own right and with their own agency, while in the latter approach, the entire nexus of relationships in society could have been mapped out. Either way, there would be no single center of gravity and therefore no single point of view established by the author that would serve to unify the theme and provide a direct answer to a real or assumed policymaker concern. It would have been a demonstration of the rules of the game, devoid of any authorial voice, not an opening gambit in an attempt to engage the policymaker on the central issue at stake. Such approaches are the closest that intelligence analysis comes to the idea of an open text, one in which the reader must actively engage in interpretation in order to delimit and circumscribe the many possible ways that the data points reference other problem sets, analytical products or policy debates.⁶

The author of this NIE has presented a number of avenues for analytical exploration, but then proceeded to direct the interpretation of each in a way that is closed, leaving the reader with almost no options for generating alternative policy responses. In this NIE, the analyst presented the elements of regime stability in the following order, moving outward from the persona of Saddam Hussein in concentric circles with the ordering dependent on their immediacy and importance to his regime: 1) the inner circle; 2) the defense and security forces; 3) opposition in the North and the South; 4) economic pressures; 5) regional neighbors; and 6) international actors. Even the ordering was a conscious attempt by the analyst to guide the structural intensionality. We can visualize the analyst's train of thought by mapping out the various arguments in a diagram, in this case a semiotic square (Figure 6.1), in order to evaluate the veridictory status of regime stability through homology (Figure 6.2).⁷

Applied semiotics of this sort can be a useful heuristic aid for understanding the synchronic features of the grammar of regime stability in an analytical context.⁸ Of course, the intelligence professional could just as easily perform a Structured Analytic Technique, such as a Morphological Analysis, and arrive at the same place by breaking down each dimension of a problem set and considering their connections with one another.⁹ There is a remarkable overlap between SATs as they are mapped out on a whiteboard and the types of models commonly in use among semioticians. Adopting such an SAT approach would probably come with the implicit

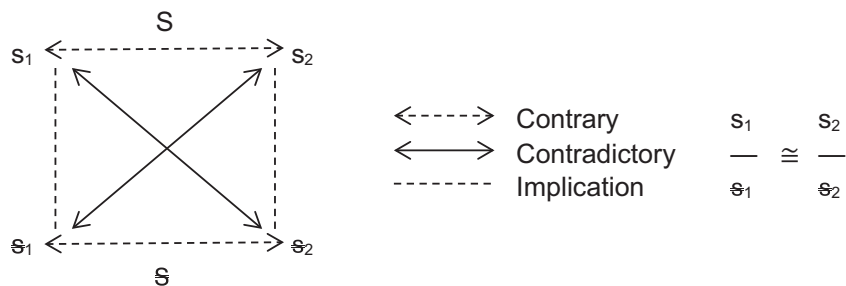


Figure 6.1 Simplified Version of Greimas' Semiotic Square

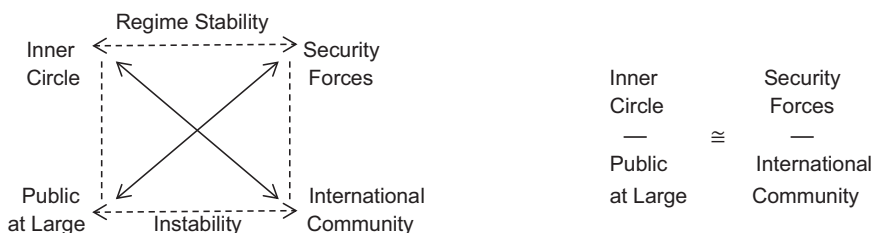


Figure 6.2 Application to Regime Stability Example

value judgment that the analyst of this NIE failed to consider all possible scenarios and their implications. However, it is important to note that the author of this NIE had no interest in testing a hypothesis through deductive reasoning as part of some scientific exercise intended to demonstrate her credentials as an intelligence professional. Any tradecraft that she employed in the drafting of this assessment was purely as a matter of course, an ingrained habit more than a conscious effort and, crucially, all in the service of a much higher purpose. She was engaged in a dialogue with policymakers, trying to convince them that their hopes of overthrowing Saddam Hussein through a combination of international sanctions, no-fly zones, diplomatic isolation, etc., were unlikely to have the desired effect and might even entrench him further. The goal was to communicate with senior officials through the medium of intelligence analysis, to tell a story that would persuade them more through the conviction of her words and the confident tone of her rhetoric than through the scientific rigor of her methodology. It was intelligence analysis as literary device, not scientific experiment. The message that she wanted to communicate would have been unintelligible without the context of policymaker interests, thereby moving the analysis out of the realm of the text as sign (i.e. an exercise in data transmission and tradecraft) and into a realm of text as human interaction (i.e. the negotiation of meaning and significance).

The analyst subordinated a rather formulaic structure of regime stability, as defined by the conventions of the genre, to an overarching narrative centered on the perspective of one man, Saddam Hussein. Each of the factors presented by the

tropes of regime stability are reconfigured and personified in the form of human beings who represent domestic constituencies and foreign powers with real interests at stake and decisions to make – all with regard to Saddam. It is the character of Saddam and his actions on the figurative or surface level of the narrative, not the deeper structures or tropes of regime stability, that lend this analysis meaning and significance. Or it might be more appropriate to say that meaning and significance are derived from the way in which the depiction of Saddam's attitude and behavior on the decorative surface of the narrative subverts the deeper structure of tropes related to regime stability and pushes them into the background. Greimas would have described it in terms of the way that the "narrative level of an anthropomorphic nature posits relations between subject and object," while Paul Ricoeur would have noted how it is "the surface of the text that provides the element of contingency and the series of unpredictable decisions which keep the story moving."¹⁰

The metaphors contained in the subsection headings tell the story in quite physical terms that connote Saddam's brutality: "Saddam Holding On"; "Tightening His Grip"; and "Extending His Reach in the South." Even the next two subheadings, "Pressure on the Kurds" and "Coping With Economic Pressures," imply that Saddam is the subject (or, for Greimas, the *actant*), which is confirmed by the fact that the first sentences in both sections start with the word "Saddam."¹¹ The analyst is playing on the expectations of the policymaker, redefining the mental image of Saddam's isolation that a preferred reading at the time would normally have understood in terms of the positive effects of international sanctions. She is instead deploying the same image to illustrate how Saddam actively seeks isolation and is using it to his own benefit. He will "continue to isolate himself from all but his most trusted colleagues and family members" for his personal security, he wants to "limit access of international observers and relief workers" to enable more military operations in the south and he will continue his internal economic embargo and military blockade of the north "to try to divide the Kurdish political leadership." The author's choices force a very different homologation (Figure 6.3).

The dominant reading among policymakers after the Gulf War would have been a simple equation of the cohesion of the regime's inner circle and security forces

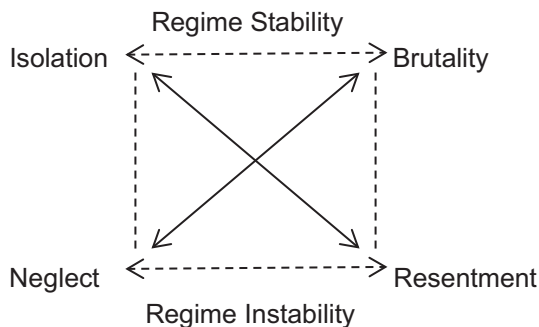


Figure 6.3 Homologation of 1992 Iraq NIE

slowly being undermined by popular revolt and international sanctions, so that the denominators in the equation would gradually become greater than the numerators and Saddam would eventually fall. However, the author has adopted a style that inverts the equation, consistently using literary tools of metonymy (i.e. the physicality of Saddam to stand in for his personal control) and synecdoche (i.e. the use of air power to stand in for a broader intimidation of the public) to create a context in which seemingly literal readings of trends are reinterpreted in a figurative sense, thereby allowing the author to point to a different analytical outcome than the reporting might suggest on the face of it.¹² In that sense, an analyst's style does not have to be viewed pejoratively and dismissively as some sort of romanticized expressivity reflective merely of the analyst's ego, but rather as a set of strategies at the formal, linguistic or figurative levels designed to exemplify the immanent properties of the discourse in a perceptible manner.

Similarly, factors that could have impacted the situation but that lay outside the scope of Saddam's interests, intentions, motivations and perceptions were minimized. Indeed, in 64 out of 94 full sentences, Saddam in one way or another is a key topic of conversation, not the broader regime of political insiders or the economy as a whole or Iraqi society writ large.¹³ Turkey's willingness to intervene against the Kurds is considered, as is the increasing Kurdish drift toward greater autonomy, public dissatisfaction with international sanctions and the lack of unity among political exiles abroad, though each gets only a passing mention. The one exception in which an actor or set of actors other than Saddam receives extended treatment is notably in a separate text box insert that appears toward the end on the topic of regional neighbors' attitudes, and even then it is their attitude toward Saddam that matters.¹⁴ The narrator's point of view is repeatedly redirected back to Saddam, even when it passes through the eyes of other actors and observers, and even when the actions to be undertaken involve line ministries of the Iraqi Government. In that regard, Iraqi air force operations are "taken by Iraqi citizens as an indication that the coalition is easing its opposition to Saddam," and in the absence of traditional oil exports, "His other sources of revenue are likely to remain gold sales."¹⁵ The unnamed members of the inner circle are defined first and foremost in terms of how Saddam can coerce or incentivize their cooperation, not in terms of their own unique perspectives and interests, and the recent military operations are mostly important for the way Saddam has used them to test the resolve of the international community and intimidate his populace.

There is a grammar for this type of analysis in the sense that regime stability has its own tropes, with factors such as the degree of military loyalty and the organizational capability of the political opposition functioning as indices. But that grammar has been subordinated to a singular focus on the persona of the ruler himself, Saddam. The resulting portrait verges on the psychological, in the sense that the reader is subsumed into the worldview of the Iraqi leader. There is really only one key judgment, it is written in direct opposition to the expectations of the policymakers, and it is all quite intentional.¹⁶ Perspective, voice, discourse and style are all present, but above all, the success of the analysis comes in the way the analyst establishes a framework on multiple levels that is inflexible and

closed to interpretation. The author here reaches beyond the norms of the genre and engages the reader on a single question of very real policy interest that would have major consequences for the lives of everyone involved – the question being, is there anything short of Western armed intervention that will result in the fall of Saddam? Many senior officials reading it could have concluded that the answer was no, and that the only means by which to remove Saddam from power might be through direct US military intervention.¹⁷ That may not have been the analyst's intention, but once the author had published the assessment, control over the interpretation of her text would have passed out of her hands and into those of the readers.

The author of this assessment was my mother, Judith Yaphe, a woman who spent over 40 years as an analyst and academic, researching, writing and teaching primarily about Iraq and Iran. She studied under Ernie Dawn at Champaign-Urbana in the late 1960s and early 70s, earning a PhD with a dissertation on the 1920 Revolution in Iraq that was unique for its use of the many firsthand Iraqi accounts of the uprising. As she would recall it, in those days the CIA needed people with deep expertise on obscure parts of the world and the Agency was better at hiring women than some other organizations, even if few women ever reached the level of the senior intelligence service. She did a year of Lebanon at the start of the Civil War and joined the surge team on Iran after the fall of the Shah. She was passed over for promotion, so she went to the newly founded Counter-Terrorism Center to work on hostage issues, which was of key importance for the Reagan Administration. Only after that did she become the senior analyst for Iraq, saying about it later on that “sometimes you have to walk away in order to come back with your head held high.” She trained a number of junior analysts, helping them to understand the portfolio and working late nights while raising two small children of her own, only to watch her younger colleagues leapfrog above her in the ranks. Even now, I can remember her anger and frustration. When Saddam invaded Kuwait, it was her moment.

I showed this declassified NIE to my mother shortly before her death in May 2023 and told her that the CIA had publicly released one of her old pieces with only minor redactions. After reading it carefully, she gave a frown and grumbled: “Doesn't really say much, does it.” I replied: “But you had such good tradecraft.” We both laughed, because for her the tradecraft was never the point, it was only a base requirement for a job that was about so much more. And the point of this particular assessment was not to reinvent the wheel with a radical new look at Iraqi regime stability. Her real accomplishment in this piece was her ability to challenge a set of deep-rooted assumptions in Washington. Not with an ‘opportunity analysis’ pretending to know more about policy than the policymakers, but rather by operating within the confines of her job and using the tools at her disposal to transcend the limitations of the format. It was purely an act of storytelling, and, even reading it today, it is persuasive. She may have adopted a slightly outmoded version of Great Man theory, but she felt that offered an effective set of tropes for holding her reader's attention, and it is precisely that same framework that she chose to use in her later career as a university professor.

Returning now to the problem that opened this section of the book, we still have to define what a ‘science of intelligence’ is supposed to mean. If we choose to view it as a human science, rooted in verbal language and structured by multiple levels of meaning and signification, then a relatively clear description follows. There is a grammar or rhetoric tropes, many of them borrowed from other disciplines, operating within a system of socially constructed rules that help the analyst to lend significance and meaning to disparate and partial bits of data. The particular subject matter and the details of specific intelligence reports decorate the surface of this multilayered structure of typologies, occasionally referencing, subverting or redefining the symbolic values associated with them. It is all reminiscent of Frederic Jameson’s description.

The literary or aesthetic act therefore always entertains some active relationship with the Real; yet in order to do so, it cannot simply allow ‘reality’ to persevere inertly in its own being, outside the text and at distance. It must rather draw the Real into its own texture . . . [so that] language manages to carry the Real within itself as its own intrinsic or immanent subtext.

(Jameson 1981, 81)

In the case of this NIE, it is the reality of Saddam’s steely control over Iraq that is drawn into the text through the use of metaphor and analogy.

Tropes within various genres have evolved as part of an attempt by analysts to comprehend the world of human behavior and activity, explain it to their audiences at home and collaborate across a broad community of other experts and technicians. They are a response to the inherent contradiction that resides at a deep structural level almost unique to intelligence, namely, that analysts are expected to predict the trajectory of future events with only partial or inaccurate knowledge. Tradecraft standards, methodologies and expectations for professional conduct emerge out of the same inherent problem of analysts being tasked with knowing the unknowable. The critical apparatus that encompasses both tradecraft and methodology is generated by the desire of institutions to establish boundaries for the sake of defending their reputations and promoting their brands in a very competitive marketplace for knowledge. If managers and editors did not dress up their products with all of the external signifiers of tradecraft and methodology, then they would leave their institutions exposed to the suspicions and fears of their clients that the analysis has no real basis in reality. They too are engaged in an essential part of the process of signification.

It is all part of a dialectic of creativity and constraint. The literary modes of understanding events in the world help authors and readers to engage with the subject matter in spite of the many gaps in their collective knowledge, while the tradecraft standards represent an attempt by managers and editors to organize the production and dissemination of analytical products into an ordered, rational and consistent process. Both sides of the equation have a legitimate reason for wanting to assert the primacy of their efforts, and both are engaged in a performative aspect of their

work. The structures of intelligence analysis that were described previously are the medium through which everyone involved in the production process has to navigate. The tropes and typologies of any particular analytical genre comprise the conductive fluid through which the charged particles of meaning can be communicated. The case study has shown how a sophisticated and experienced analyst can shape and bend the parameters of the genre in order to more effectively communicate a message. The next chapter will take up the larger task of exploring how meaning is negotiated and contested in intelligence analysis. It will look at the relationship between the analyst as author and the policymaker as reader, seeking to understand the way that narrative serves as a crucial link between them.

Notes

- 1 Kuhn (1993).
- 2 CIA FOIA Reading Room, "National Intelligence Estimate: Saddam Husayn Likely to Hang On," NIE 92-7 (June 1, 1992), declassified FOIA document number 0005389147, document release date August 26, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/0005389147>. Henceforth, NIE 92-7.
- 3 NIE 92-7 is part of a declassified document series that can be accessed at the George Washington University's National Security Archive: "Saddam's Iron Grip: Intelligence Reports on Saddam Hussein's Reign," *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 167*, edited by Jeffrey Richelson, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB167/index.htm>.
- 4 Eco (1979b, 59 and 62).
- 5 Eco (1979b, 210).
- 6 Eco (1979a, 63).
- 7 There are many different formulations of a semiotic square. Each presents a slight variation on Greimas' original diagram for homologation, including the versions developed by his student and translator Paul Perron. In terms of the version used here, Greimas described it as a simplified form that would allow for easier comparisons with the diagrams of others (Greimas 1987, 49).
- 8 See Hébert (2020, 40-62).
- 9 Heuer Jr. and Pherson (2015, 119-21).
- 10 Greimas and Ricoeur (1989, 554).
- 11 NIE 92-7.
- 12 Cf. Genette (1993, 121): "This does not exactly mean that every element of discourse is figurative, but rather that any element of discourse may be taken, according to the contexts and types of its reception, as either literal or figurative."
- 13 The exact count is fungible. It is hard to say, for example, whether a reference to "Saddam's intelligence services" means that the author was trying to make a particular point about Saddam's personal agency, so I have erred on the side of caution by not including such mentions.
- 14 NIE 92-7, 4.
- 15 NIE 92-7, 1 and 4.
- 16 Cf. Eco (1979a, 33): "there are texts aiming at giving the Model Reader the solutions he does not expect, challenging every overcoded intertextual frame as well as the reader's predictive indolence."
- 17 For a similar set of conclusions, see Clawson (1993, 77-8): "It is not easy to identify how sanctions will lead to the overthrow of dictatorial governments. . . . In fact, sanctions have made only a limited contribution toward U.S. goals vis-à-vis Saddam."

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Part IV

Narrative and Storytelling



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7 Reconceiving the Intelligence Cycle

The position of those who would advocate for intelligence as a science is quite clear. For them, the value added by the analyst comes from the use of unique intelligence sources, the timeliness of the production, the ability to tailor products to policymaker needs and the objectivity of the presentation.¹ Their approach dominates training seminars and academic journals so thoroughly that it needs no further justification. The Intelligence Cycle is their roadmap for the production and dissemination of timely and relevant information in an orderly and transparent fashion, with a feedback loop that facilitates a scientific method of hypothesis testing and abductive reasoning.² It is a rough substitute or loose reminder of the scientific method (Figure 7.1).

The position of those who would advocate for intelligence as an art is not so certain.³ If that art resides somewhere within the analytical line itself – the logical train of thought that leads from antecedent causes to consequent effects to key judgments – and not the tradecraft surrounding it, then the Intelligence Cycle would have to be reconceived. Production would be recast in terms of *narrativity* or *narratology*. The relationship between the events being represented and the representation of those events, the tension that derives from the depiction of a story and the discourse surrounding it, the way an author constructs and shapes a series of occurrences in order to lend them greater meaning and significance.⁴ At issue here are less the semiotic codes and structures of signification that generate the tropes and typologies at the grammatical and syntactical level, and more the style and presentation at the surface level of a text that make each analytical product distinct and memorable.

How does the Intelligence Cycle serve as a roadmap for what we choose to narrate, why we choose to narrate and how we impart meaning through narration? In the first step of the Intelligence Cycle (Planning and Direction), policymaker priorities or other specific customer requirements are identified and assigned, either by direct tasking or individual initiative. Dozens or hundreds of such taskings could be issued every day within a large organization. On a basic level, there is a general expectation that fast-moving events in faraway places could have a major impact on national or corporate interests, and such events need to be understood in their larger context and placed in perspective for senior officials. This desire for meaning and order is what motivates senior officials to commit resources and

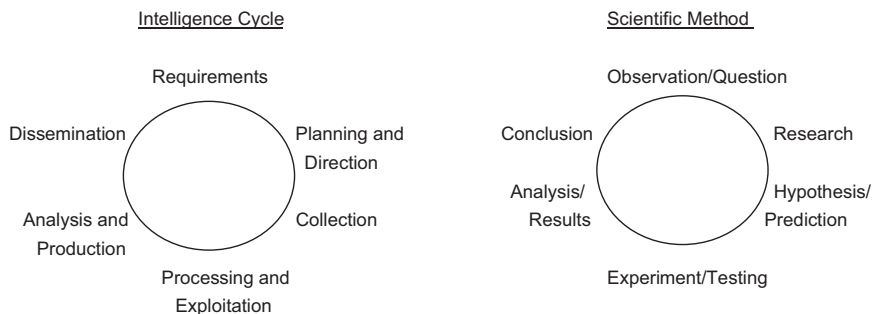


Figure 7.1 The Intelligence Cycle as a Reworking of the Scientific Method

attention to intelligence organizations. It provides the existential justification for retaining analysts on a payroll who otherwise would contribute very little of tangible and immediate benefit to the profitability of a company or the success of a particular government initiative. It is a daily construction of meaning, in the sense of a routine processing of events within a larger context, accompanied by the expectation that analysis will lend intelligibility and coherence to a chaotic universe. Just as with the semiotic structures of language discussed in Chapter 5, here is another resemblance between analysis and literature in terms of the roles they play in society.

In the second step of the Intelligence Cycle (Collection), information has to be gathered to provide reference points around which a story can be anchored. The third step (Processing or Exploitation) involves establishing relationships among the data points, understanding the interconnections between targets and recreating those networks in a digestible form. Taken together, these second and third steps might seem far removed from the work of analysis as authorship, yet in many ways they are essential to understanding the audience. Gathering information and processing the raw data are tasks that may be given out to collection managers, but the input of analysts is necessary to ensure that collection is directed toward policymaker interests or operator requirements.

The careful selection of data can lend a sense of realism and truthfulness to a storyline. As we will discuss later, the analyst's finished product involves a degree of creative discourse in which elements are placed in a particular order and setting, related to one another according to an overall plan. Yet everything is fundamentally based on a story that reflects actual events, which occurred in their own temporal sequence and within a localized setting. The placement of events in a temporal order helps the author to establish guideposts that mark out the beginning, middle and end of an event or trend, signaling to the reader the origins of a problem, the trajectory of an issue and the possible scenarios that might result from it.⁵ If incorporated skillfully into the narrative, they help the reader to enter into the world of the target set, encouraging the policymaker to set aside any preconceptions he might have about how the world works or what policy should be. All of that leads us to step four (Analysis and Production), where the analyst has to connect these

data points in a logical sequence of events and concepts. In the process, the analyst adopts an authorial voice, providing verbal clues to indicate cause and effect, guiding the reader along a path that leads inexorably to a firm analytical conclusion.

In terms of the fifth step of the Intelligence Cycle (Dissemination), if we view it simply as a matter of delivering the analytical product, then we have missed the point. It is dissemination of the content and the ideas associated with it, not just handing off a physical document. For the reader to absorb the substantive meaning, he has to experience the analyst's train of thought in real time, with its logical progression of events and concepts, to arrive at the analytical conclusion that the author intends to serve as a summary of the whole. It is that experience of the whole as an accumulation and combination of the various parts that is so crucial, and it requires the act of absorbing the narrative in its totality. Anything else would simply be the conveyance of raw data or the delivery of a single bottom-line judgment. Such situations do happen. Quite often, in fact. Senior officials are presented with more information than they have the time or bandwidth to process, and the only solution is to show the policymaker the title of an article, skipping the rest of the text. When those moments occur, they effectively remove the analyst and her work from the equation altogether, which begs the question as to whether AI/ML could better accomplish the job.

However, such moments do not need to define the entire profession. There is a common drive among many senior officials, especially in their first few months on the job, to be kept informed of all matters all of the time, leading them to ingest impossibly large quantities of data. There are also intelligence managers who choose to prioritize quick-turnaround products and a public display of responsiveness over depth of coverage and impact of message for the sake of their own corridor reputation and promotion potential. Such impulses exist and they can be hard to avoid. By contrast, a carefully crafted analytical line prepared by an expert and delivered to an intelligence consumer who is mentally processing and recreating the subject matter in his mind by closely reading or listening will accomplish something that an algorithm could never do. Dissemination is therefore the human interaction between analyst and policymaker, which has the potential to open up for the senior official a new window onto a foreign concept or environment, contributing to a new understanding of the issue and possibly even a new direction for the policy debate.⁶

The previous discussion suggests that the analyst has a relationship with the intelligence customer that goes far beyond the mere conveyance of information. It resembles the process of *mimēsis*. The best translation of the word would be *refiguration*, which captures the element of creative reworking found in Aristotle, unlike *representation*, which more closely matches Plato's sense of a direct imitation of characters and actions. However, *refiguration* is an uncommon word in the English language, so many scholars continue to use the word *representation* despite its limitations. Paul Ricoeur describes it as a three-part process.⁷

- Mimesis₁ – in which people ascribe meaning to the behavior of others and place otherwise random occurrences into a logical order that lends them a greater significance than their individual components.

- Mimesis₂ – in which an author takes aspects of the real world and embeds them in a plot, using a chain of causal relationships to move the reader toward a predetermined conclusion whose inevitability becomes apparent in a moment of recognition.
- Mimesis₃ – in which the reader absorbs and incorporates the message communicated by the author into a new understanding of society and the reality of the world all around.

Frederic Jameson argues that this approach – taking Aristotle’s rules for Ancient Greek tragedy and applying them to all narrative structures – results in few real insights beyond a rather simple humanism, while failing to do justice to the nuanced idea of catharsis, the synchronicity or multiplicity of time in postmodern literature and the inability of language to replicate the effect of lived temporal experience.⁸ All of that may be true, but none of it can detract from the remarkable ability of Ricoeur’s model to synthesize the structuralism of semiotics and the relativism of phenomenology while capturing the complex interactions between authors and readers. In fact, while Ricoeur attempts to take Aristotle’s lessons from tragic theater and expand them outward into the complex worlds of the modern novel and historical writings, his approach works just as well in reverse, as we scale down this same approach to the smallest literary genre of intelligence analysis.

Ricoeur’s understanding of *mimêsis* shares with the Intelligence Cycle the idea that there is a human inclination to gather and sort relevant data from our environment in the pursuit of order and meaning in our lives. And just as the previous discussion considered the Intelligence Cycle in terms of narrativity, so too will the following discussion examine Ricoeur’s three stages of Mimesis in terms of intelligence production. In this way, the many close connections between these two conceptual models will be evident and the similarities between them can be demonstrated on a reciprocal basis.⁹ The goal is not to describe Ricoeur’s entire body of work, but rather simply to appreciate his approach to the phenomenology of narrative as it relates to intelligence analysis.

MIMESIS1: PREFIGURATION

Knowledge of the world beyond that which can be experienced by the immediate senses involves an imaginative leap in order to interpret occurrences in nature and the actions of others. But there are rules and norms that provide guidelines, preventing an interpretation from descending into confusion. By the same token, any analytical effort to understand intentions and motivations is carried out through a process of abstraction and inference that is guided by traditions and paradigms, theory and practice, rules and norms. It is part of a semantics of action in which all elements are synchronic and interrelated, and it takes place both in everyday routines and in more structured settings. The telling of a story inherently presupposes that both author and reader have a shared concept of the structure, the symbolism and the temporal nature of action. In other words, a storyline assumes an understanding of the concept of human action. Not only as a single discrete event, but also as a network of contingent relationships and consequences that develop from

it, in terms of the goal of an action, the motive for performing it, the circumstances in which an action takes place, the outcome of the action and the responsibility for undertaking it.¹⁰

This aspect of mimesis takes place constantly in everyday life, even in the smallest of interactions with the outside world, before we are even conscious of having performed these mental leaps. A shared, almost intuitive, understanding of the world derives from the way that human actions in our everyday lives are typically articulated and mediated by signs that carry values within societies and cultures. Such devices help people to process the phenomena they experience and communicate knowledge of those experiences to others, in much the same way that analysts operate within conventions as they assign degrees of probability to their assumptions and conclusions. Without such rules and norms, there would be no terms of reference to allow different people of different backgrounds – whether they are readers and authors or teams of analysts and managers – to carry on a conversation about a shared point of concern.

In the same way, an analyst attempts to ascertain the meaning of events by ascribing reasons for the behavior of others, and those reasons carry different degrees of probability based on an understanding of the context in which those events occur. It is a routine process that takes place intuitively and almost subconsciously, with the end result being a cumulative sense of causality, one in which occurrences that might otherwise appear random and chaotic are reconceived as a logical succession of moments in time or even a pattern that could serve as the basis of an analytical line. Disparate elements are thereby viewed within a larger conceptual framework and perceived as a coherent whole. Consequently, an intelligence report is not a mirror of the world it seeks to describe in terms of an exact imitation of the people, places and things, but rather an approximation. Even the ideas and concepts that the analysis contains are abstractions. They are filtered through, and conditioned by, the lens of the original sources, the translation of their words into English and the recombination of those words in the finished report.

Actions are judged and evaluated according to the rules and norms of their cultural setting, e.g. good or bad, effective or ineffective, appropriate or inappropriate. That hierarchy of values, with its implications for ethical behavior, is consequently embedded in narrative, particularly in the portrayal of characters. Similarly, actions are experienced within their temporal flow according to their cultural or social setting, e.g. waiting or anticipating, retaining or reminiscing, fulfilling or enacting. That sense of preoccupation with the symbolic significance of an event helps situate an action within the plot of a narrative.¹¹ A narrative draws upon these understandings and processes as they naturally occur in culture and society, in order to arrange a series of actions into a plot that integrates all of the elements into a larger whole. It is a whole that is endowed with a meaning that realizes the potential significance that was latent in each separate action. Narrative understanding is diachronic, dependent in part on a sequential order and the deployment of actions within it, with a syntax or grammar of rules for the composition of a plot, drawing upon the cultural and social environment from which those actions derive their symbolic value.¹²

MIMESIS₂: CONFIGURATION

The next stage of mimesis is more intentional, with the individual or collective consciously employing a narrative structure to lend meaning to events, drawing upon the types of rudimentary narrative structures that are constantly observed and processed in the aforementioned first stage. The composition of a plot as an ordered series of actions ties together individual events into a larger whole with a concomitant meaning that is greater than the sum of its parts. This process of emplotment serves as an intermediary step, mediating between discrete actions, characters, circumstances and goals on the one hand, and a fully articulated narrative structure on the other.¹³ Throughout this compositional process, causal connections identified by the narrator that link disparate moments in time prevail over sequential connections as they are found in the events that comprise the storyline. For example, in terms of the storyline, political leaders face decision points that will have consequences for stability, infrastructure projects must be completed to attract foreign direct investment and offensives are launched to achieve strategic effects on the battlefield. In terms of the discourse, the analyst has already considered the various scenarios and determined that events will lead to one probable outcome over others, with those analytical conclusions stated up front and shaping the selection of facts and the language in the text that follows. Creativity and invention are often the hallmarks of composition in narrative, but innovation only occurs within the norms and rules that define the tradition of a genre such as Athenian tragedy, Romantic novel or political history. By the same token, there are norms and rules that typically govern how innovation takes place, and those rules can also be challenged and renegotiated under a new paradigm, as long as the genre itself is not fundamentally overturned.

For Ricoeur, one of the most important facets of this stage is the temporal nature of the narrative structure, which moves in two opposite directions. The characters or participants experience events with only a partial understanding of what the consequences of their actions will be, or perhaps no understanding at all, while the narrator has already reached a conclusion about the meaning of events and can signal their eventual outcomes as the story progresses.¹⁴ Similarly, an analyst will commonly strive to make sure that the connections to her key judgments are readily apparent at each stage of the analysis, often telescoping the narrative by juxtaposing relevant historical information with descriptions of contemporary events. In that way, an analyst can convey the sense of time passing, with actors making choices and people suffering the consequences. Think of an army operating under outmoded rules of engagement, a government ignoring growing popular resentment or an economic vision plan no more likely to succeed than the one that came before. The denouement or conclusion of the plot is the fulfillment of the premise from which the story began, and it is only acceptable as a summation of events if its meaning is congruent with the episodes that came before and of which it is comprised. There is a theme or message conveyed in the conclusion that appears to stand on its own, existing outside of time as a lesson learned or a universal truth, but that message can only be realized and appreciated by a reader through

the repetition of the episodes in linear sequence.¹⁵ Hence, it is a dual temporality, and the awareness and recognition that the reader experiences derive in part from the tension between the two sensations of time – one moving forward in a succession of events (storyline) and one moving backward through the realization of a predicted outcome gradually revealed (discourse).

Of all the elements of mimesis outlined by Ricoeur, this last one may seem like the most unlikely aspect with relevance for intelligence analysis. Conventional wisdom would have it that everything necessary for conveying an analytical judgment should be contained in the lead sentence or two, with any secondary chapeau paragraph carrying an argument that is clearly subsidiary to the first. And yet, that is insufficient, because such a writing style allows for no narrative structure – only a succession of quickly forgotten headlines standing almost independently of one another. They demand the reader's attention, but fail to make a compelling case for why they deserve to be read. An almost imperceptible feeling of contingency is essential. There must be a sense that the policymaker is reading the report or receiving the briefing, and in so doing experiences an event whose repercussions continue to reverberate into the present moment, with implications for an open-ended future. As Arthur Danto noted, the logic of a narrative derives in large part from its gradual unfolding in time in a process that reminds the reader of his ability to act. "The cognitive openness of the future is required if we are to believe that the shape of the future is in any way a matter of what we choose to do."¹⁶ In much the same way, it is the act of participating in a process of understanding that reinforces the perception of the policymaker that she has the ability to act on the information.

On this point, Sherman Kent agreed wholeheartedly. In *Writing History*, he stated quite plainly that "writing is expression, and that successful expression is dependent upon the continuity and clarity of the thought. . . . That the prose should be esthetically satisfactory to the reader is very important."¹⁷ This was not a minor aside. His meaning becomes quite clear in the discussion of how to write an introduction to an essay: "Its essential purpose is to draw the reader gradually and smoothly from his own separate existence into the realm of the essay . . . to guarantee the reader a continuity of intellectual experience."¹⁸ What follows is remarkable for the way Kent's advice diverges from the attitude of many intelligence managers today. It is common enough among some managers in the US Intelligence Community to dumb down both the language used and the concepts contained in an analysis, on the nominal basis that policymakers are far too preoccupied with high-level policy to care for nuance or detail. Kent acknowledges that a writer cannot assume a reader has any direct experience with the subject matter, but he nonetheless assumes a basic level of competence in his readership. At no point does Kent call for watering down the content or talking down to his audience. His remarks on the matter are unequivocal:

The reader is no fool. If led by the hand through a slow and orderly introduction, if told about the general nature of the topic, if cajoled and humored, and told things he knew and has forgotten, he may gradually be pulled into the most complicated sort of explanation and follow it with ease and pleasure. . . .

The reading of the essay will be an interesting part of the continuousness of his mental life.

(Kent 1941, 58)

With that, Kent has positioned himself and his students in a world of phenomenology and intersubjective experience, where the text functions as a shared space allowing for a relationship between author and reader. His remarks lead us directly into Ricoeur's understanding of Mimesis₃.

MIMESIS₃: REFIGURATION

The narrative structure described in Mimesis₂ exists within a space that the author has composed and shaped. It uses elements drawn from human experience, but at the same time forms a world of its own that attempts to suspend the reader's disbelief as it aims at a plausible and convincing representation. Most literature has posited an enclosed world where the conclusion is prefigured in the narrative structure and a certain sense of order in the universe is revealed, restored or refashioned. This is the world inside the text. Concurrently, there is a world outside the text, of prejudices and preconceived notions about a genre and the rules that govern it. This static division between the inside and the outside is broken down with the act of reading or listening, as the reader (in a sense) completes the work.¹⁹ It is no different than the divide between analysts and policymakers. That divide might possibly be bridged by increased personal contact of briefers and pre-briefers, etc., but really a truly quality product should not need a publicist.

Ricoeur asserts that any reaction on the part of the reader – a new realization, recognition or understanding of society, culture or the human condition – can only be actualized when the message contained in the narrative is carried back into the real world. It is only when that new understanding enters into the realm of communication that the elements of the story, now endowed with a new meaning, can once again become part of a network of references to lived feelings and experiences. By the same token, intelligence analysis is merely an intellectual exercise until a policymaker reads it, steps into the world that the analyst has recreated on the page, considers a different perspective and acts on his new understanding of the issue.

While there are recurring literary tropes or paradigms (apocalypse, revolution, utopia, zombies) in which the temporal solution is to undermine or overthrow the expectations familiar to the reader, and in more recent years they have come to form genres of their own, those are not common strategies of emplotment. The situation is no different in intelligence analysis, where studies of political continuity or stability are ubiquitous, and incremental change or minor disturbances are sometimes posited, but revolution or state failure are usually dystopian outliers. And in the end, these outliers with their startling and disconcerting radical conclusions more often serve as low-probability scenarios that reinforce the prevailing wisdom of continuity, albeit with minor variation. This is because both the act of reading and the written text operate within a field of common expectations and beliefs about how the world is structured, how human interactions are structured and how

literature is structured. Human beings usually seek out stories that are familiar in their general outline – a theme that runs from mimesis₁ to mimesis₂ to mimesis₃. We want to view episodes in our lives as untold stories, to believe that our lives are deserving of stories and to view the present in relation to the past as a continuation of our stories. Such expectations help guide the interaction between authors and readers, defining and delimiting genres, informing the way ordinary people view their world, the way authors structure their narratives and the way readers approach their understanding of a text.²⁰ In other words, the text works within a tradition while at the same time playing at innovation, as the author attempts to communicate a message and the reader attempts to absorb and process the meaning, all within certain boundaries defined by genre.

Texts thus become part of a larger consciousness that may not reflect any one single narrative but rather a combination of narratives or different understandings of a narrative, in much the same way that an analyst hopes his work will contribute to a much larger policy discussion that ultimately takes in information and opinions from many different sources. Similarly, the publication of a series of analytical reports on a given subject, the elaboration and development of an analytical line over an extended period of time and the repeated telling of stories about a particular topic all create a set of conventions. They focus policymaker attention on a particular way of knowing an issue while also projecting forward a set of trends that create expectations for the policymaker about what future analytical products will hold. All of this imagines a community of readers, which might be very small in terms of those policymakers who are directly focused on a single issue. Yet, it assumes that through their influence and actions, a broader policy community will absorb the analytical line and thereby the policies of an entire government or corporation can be shaped.

Plausibility and Persuasion

Ricoeur's definition of *mimēsis* offers a dialectic that transposes rather well onto the Intelligence Cycle, especially in terms of the last stage with its inclusion of a virtuous circle or feedback loop. New narratives contribute to new perspectives on life and new perceptions of the world, which in turn call for the production of new narratives, etc. Of course, the Intelligence Cycle is a theoretical abstract, a generalized roadmap for analytical production and dissemination, and at a certain level of abstraction almost any model can find similarities with any other. Yet even at closer examination the comparison still holds, particularly in terms of the moral and ethical consequences that entail from the interaction between reader and author. For example, Plato would caution us that any author who imitates or impersonates a character or event in the world is deceiving his audience, fooling the reader into believing that the author actually has firsthand knowledge of the inner workings of the subject, when in fact the details of any recounting of real events are to some extent supposition.²¹ That cautionary warning helps provide useful boundaries for the kind of stories found within intelligence products, in the sense that analysts are never present at the moment a key political decision is made, a bribe exchanged or a unit deployed to a battlefield.

For as much as Plato's injunction is often swept aside by literary theorists who would rather seek to understand the mimetic function of tragedy in an Aristotelian sense, Plato's words are surprisingly relevant to intelligence analysis. The analyst might travel to a country, meet a source firsthand and use that interaction as the basis for justifying an analytical conclusion, all of which is within the realm of possibility. However, such experiences are only common among the most dedicated professionals. For others, their knowledge of people and events usually comes two or three steps removed, by reading newspapers, social media and other reporting on a screen. At no point does their knowledge constitute truth in any absolute sense, nor can they claim expertise from a distance. There are other lessons that can be drawn out by recasting intelligence analysis as a form of literary endeavor. They will require a closer look at Aristotle's conception of poetics and rhetoric in order to determine what makes an analytical line convincing and persuasive.

Aristotle's definition of *mimêsis* reconceives Plato's relationship between viewer and content to allow for the distortion and artifice inherent in the medium of the text. Some degree of authorial intervention is assumed from the outset by both reader and author, and that is both necessary and advantageous in overcoming the limitations of the medium and focusing the attention of the audience on the message that the author wishes to convey. If a series of reporting officers, collection managers, analysts and even the intelligence sources themselves are all processing events through their own mind's eye, then it creates multiple layers of abstraction that will inevitably strip away potentially valuable detail, nuance, accuracy and context. The policymaker accepts that state of affairs when he agrees to an intelligence briefing. He does not have the time or inclination to wade through a morass of detail for the purpose of deriving his own interpretation of events. He relies on the expertise of the analyst and the resources of the agency that the analyst represents as a guide to that which is most important. Authorial intervention and a certain degree of artifice is assumed by both reader and author from the outset.

Therefore, the question is not whether an intelligence analysis is the most complete and authoritative in terms of the presentation of data, but whether it is convincing, effective, persuasive and corrective. These categories for measuring the effectiveness of sign-formation have been well studied in the field of marketing and advertising, but they have natural applications for intelligence analysis as well.²² A product can present a wealth of facts, properly qualified with confidence levels and referenced with the latest reporting, but it will fail to convince the policymaker if it cannot capture the intangible experience of those who are participating in events and the atmosphere on the ground. It is an echo of the argument that US Embassy Rome made in the case study on Italy in Chapter 4. A direct experience of reality is obscured and colored by the many layers of intermediaries who collect, translate and process any given event into the format of an intelligence report, but that does not mean the final product must necessarily abandon any hope of verisimilitude. Not all key insights are lost to the relentless editing down of nuance and atmospherics into a dull gray list of data points, and some insights can even be recovered with the skill of the expert analyst.

Charles Morris's categories of semiotic exchange offer a simple approach to understanding the impact of a text on the reader, but to appreciate the nuances of how a text can both inform and influence, it is necessary to turn back to the *Poetics* of Aristotle and consider each of the concepts within an intelligence context. The relationship between author and reader that they imply depends on the audience's acknowledgement that the recreation of events on stage is both symbolic representation and stylized performance. By the same token, policymakers fully expect intelligence analysis to highlight that which is important for policymaking, in a way that addresses a policy concern, all of which is an encoded representation of events and trends. Aristotle contends that not only is the artifice of tragedy taken for granted by both author and audience, the contemplation of the subject matter is even enhanced by the subtle awareness of the relationship between the artifact and what it represents. The policymaker's experience of intelligence can also occasionally involve an element of this "dual-aspect" theory of *mimêsis*, as Stephen Halliwell describes the multilayered awareness of both the medium and the content of an artwork.²³ The intelligence customer is generally aware that coverage of many targets is often haphazard and patchy, so that when the reporting is particularly detailed and juicy, the challenge of having obtained it can enhance its allure.

Here we encounter the limitations of our comparison. There is little need to appreciate the workmanship of intelligence production in terms of Aristotle's concept of artistic technique [Grk: *apergasia*].²⁴ The policymaker is not usually absorbed in an appreciation of the medium of intelligence analysis in the same way that we would take account of the texture of the paint on a canvas or the vocal inflection of an actor on a stage. Here we encounter the limits of the comparison between intelligence and literature. It is perhaps only relevant in terms of how specialized accesses help lend an added degree of exclusive authority to an analytical product, or the way in which a map is intricately overlaid with multiple layers of visual data. Even then, the reader's absorption in a map or graphic can be a distraction from the intelligence briefing. Similarly, the Ancient Greek concept of an aesthetic sensation [*aisthetikos*] of pleasure, pain, pity or fear has only minimal bearing, perhaps on some subconscious level as recognition of the human potential inherent in the actions and sufferings being represented.²⁵ That is true even if we adopt a minimalist interpretation of emotion, and conceive of the aesthetic response to the author's depiction of pity and fear as an impulse or a "motion in the psyche" that accompanies an insight gained by the reader.²⁶ The exception to the rule, of course, is a situation in which a policymaker actually served in the country now undergoing a natural disaster, civil war or epidemic spread of disease, and the analyst is tasked with describing specific people and places that the policymaker knows personally.

Yet we can set aside the concepts of artistic skill and aesthetic emotion, and still draw a comparison between poetics and analysis, if we consider the craftsmanship, technique and artifice of intelligence in terms of the discourse and critical apparatus that the analyst applies to the storyline. Take, for example, the Aristotelian concept of universals [*katholou*]. If they are to be treated not as a set of Platonic ideals nor as explicit moral judgments, but rather as general categories that help

structure our world, then a comparison between intelligence and literature is quite possible.²⁷ The appeal to such universals bears a resemblance to the way analysts rely on principles of International Relations theory or Political Science in order to build a foundation upon which they can assess actors' intentions and make predictions about future behavior.

To speak of how 'the contemplation of the subject matter is enhanced by the subtle awareness of the relationship between the artifact and what it represents' is therefore more appropriately to speak of the relationship between the analytical discourse of a very structured and polished intelligence product and the ground-truth reality that its storyline is meant to depict. Again, the narrative representation of an event is both story and discourse. Aristotle does not conceive of representation as the literal depiction of people and events as they actually occur in nature, but rather as the approximation of situations that contain a degree of probability [*eikos*]: "From what we have said it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary."²⁸ This is squarely the task of intelligence analysis, attempting to assess hidden intentions and foresee events that are within the realm of the probable, even if they are shrouded in secrecy or have not yet occurred.

In addition, the development of a plot [*mûthos*] that arranges incidents or actions [*praxis*] in an order must not only be probable but it must also be credible or believable [*pithanon*]. *Mûthos* is often interpreted as the entire emplotment of events, though Aristotle had a more limited notion that only involved those events contributing to the advancement of the overall theme, in much the same way that a film director sets up a storyboard.²⁹ Accordingly, *mûthos* does not refer to any one specific moment in the plot, but rather the overall thrust of the plot in a broad and general sense that is not dependent on any one particular fact being verifiable or falsifiable.³⁰ It is no different for the analyst who seeks to project forward and assess the future trajectory of an issue. Any prediction that hopes to be credible or believable is a combination of the general and the particular, building on a foundation of particular details in the present and keeping the projection of a future trend at a broader level.

The ability to recreate a scene or imagine a scenario that is both plausible and probable, and even more importantly to do so in a persuasive or convincing manner, rests on the capacity of the text not just to inform but to facilitate understanding and reason. Ricoeur lends greater precision to Aristotle's terms by noting that narrative must be probable based on a comparison with objective reality and persuasive based on the reader's subjective feeling.³¹ That can only be achieved by an author with a talent for registering the existence of similarities and discerning a pattern of likenesses that carry significance, "something that not everyone can do, or not equally well."³² Nowhere is it more evident than in the depiction of motivations and intentions. For Aristotle, a character is defined by ethics – their capacity for good or bad, and their ability to improve or to be harmed by the events around them. And in many ways, the personas portrayed by analysts are also typically defined by their capacity for good governance, informed decision-making, repressive tendencies,

populist pandering, etc. The ability of the analyst to shift tack and redefine a brutal dictator as both a reliable force for stability and a potential ally of the West depends upon the analyst's skill in demonstrating how circumstances have changed the ruler's outlook and potentially softened his attitude. This ethical dimension is not necessary for explaining the known facts, yet the ability to demonstrate a connection between actions and ethics is essential for persuading the policymaker that the analyst's assessment of intentions and motivations is true to life.

A critical character flaw or mistake [*hamartia*] may have explanatory value as to why a senior official went down a particular path. For example, ignorance [*akrasia*] or the failure to exercise proper reasoning [*orthos logos*] may allow an analyst to assess an impending (or even an inevitable) reversal of fortune [*peripeteia*]. Such literary devices do make for good narratives, but they are not essential in analysis, because intelligence products are not attempting to arouse the emotions of the reader in quite the same way as tragedy. That is not to say there is no place for emotion in intelligence analysis. Indeed, emotive words are necessary for holding the attention of the reader. It is merely to say that the analyst does not seek the same quality of emotional response in the policymaker as the author seeks in Aristotelian tragedy. Again, we encounter the limitations of a comparison between analysis and literature.

There is a certain pleasure in learning or understanding [*manthanein*] that is important here, though it needs to be qualified from the outset. The analyst seeks to contribute to a rational policy debate that is informed, but not determined, by emotion. It can help to have a trendy subject, an arresting image, perhaps even a catchy title, though not the type of reportage that leads with an interview of a single person who is disproportionately impacted by events. A product might feature a war game or a red cell exercise that can help policymakers to map out possible future scenarios and reduce the potential for risk and miscalculation, but only rarely a worst-case scenario that describes the dire and immediate consequences of policy inaction. For Aristotle, the idea that an emotional appeal is aimed primarily and directly at persuasion is a concept reserved more for rhetoric than poetics.

And yet, intelligence analysis is associated with rhetoric. Aristotle finds a societal benefit to the release of emotions, both in terms of improving a person's character and his ability to make good decisions. This notion of *catharsis* should not be seen as a purging of the emotions for the sole sake of moral improvement or cleansing of the soul, but rather as a reminder of our human fallibility and a call to action to apply the lessons we have learned.³³ The distinction is subtle but important. Intelligence analysts may not consciously be aware of structuring their narratives with this performative goal in mind, of making the reader pause and reflect before choosing a wise and well-informed course of action. Yet they often do so in ways that probably seem so obvious they are hardly worth commenting on. When analysts highlight issues such as a regime's slide toward authoritarianism and the manipulation of election results, pervasive corruption and the lack of development, gross violations of human rights and transnational repression, atrocity prevention and so forth, they tacitly remind readers about their own personal freedoms and support for the principles of democracy. Characterizations of authoritarianism

abroad often resonate with the reader's conception of politics at home, whether in terms of the contrast with constitutional principles of a liberal society or in terms of a possible warning that any government left unchecked can slide into repression.

An intellectual and emotional awareness of the relationship between the storyline as a depiction of real-world events and the analytic line as discourse draws upon a commonsense understanding of the world and at the same time transforms that understanding. If the cathartic pleasure the reader experiences within a literary context is a matter of finding order in the universe, structure in our lives and meaning in interactions with others, then that same satisfaction in an intelligence context comes from discovering an order, structure or meaning that reflects how decision-makers see themselves and how they want to be seen by others. It makes the task of policymakers easier and more comforting to know there is (or there should be) an order to the world and that the exercise of power and influence is a virtuous attempt to uphold and maintain that order. There is an echo of this in the commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* by the Arab philosopher Averroes, who repeatedly invokes the Qu'ranic phrase *al-amr bil-ma'rūf wa al-nahī 'an al-munkar* (to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil) to describe the ultimate aim of poetry. The poet must depict plausible and believable actions and emotions, with language so persuasive and convincing that the reader's soul is driven to react.³⁴ In Averroes' view, only the best of Arab poetry follows this Qu'ranic injunction, which provides a yardstick for measuring the moral quality of any author's work.³⁵ It is a message made all the more relevant when considering the deep political subtext of much Arab poetry and the way poems were often directed as criticism or advice to individuals in positions of authority.

Authorial Intervention

Throughout this chapter, from the discussion of the Intelligence Cycle to Aristotle and Averroes, the conversation has circled around the relationship between analyst and policymaker, repeatedly attempting to define it as one of author and reader. Of course, most public and private intelligence organizations seek to minimize the analyst's personality as much as possible, presenting a uniform style that is representative of the institution as a whole. That may be feasible in quick-turnaround products, such as a situation report comprised of a place mat with map and graphics. However, the individuality of the author and the reader are inescapable. They exist even in terms of the expertise unique to each analyst and the policy interests particular to each senior official. This is not to suggest that a postmodern framework is desirable. Any approach that declares the Death of the Author in favor of an open-ended universe of interpretation is no more appropriate in this context than a rigid constructivist approach insisting on a fully determinative role for social conventions.³⁶ There is a middle ground here.

On the one hand, any reading of intelligence analysis requires a theory that can account for the formal constraints imposed by managers and editors as part of their roles as representatives of the institutions that organize production. On the other hand, a theory must also take in the analyst's ability to transcend the limitations

that constrain access to total knowledge. There is a push and a pull between them, as would be natural in any setting where institutions establish rules and processes intended to guide and channel innovative and imaginative thought. These two contradictory components that make up the irresolvable contradiction of assumed knowledge that was discussed in Chapter 1 are fundamental defining properties of the discipline. Neither one can be ignored or dismissed. The dialectic that emerges from the interplay between these two opposite poles generates a contradiction at a higher level between the objective transmission of data and the subjective interpretation of its meaning. That, too, is a dialectic of a different magnitude that cannot be fully resolved, though it can at least be elucidated in a way that the discipline of Intelligence Studies to date has been generally unwilling to acknowledge.

Language, particularly its instantiation in analysis, is the privileged place where a surplus of meaning is located and its value negotiated. However, as Ricoeur would note, a structural framework of semiotic meaning does not consider the role of human agency in the production and communication of meaning. Not just human agency, but also human nature with its limited ability to perceive all sides of an object or aspects of a phenomenon. "It is the limited character of self-knowledge which imposes the indirect strategy of interpretation."³⁷ Any text can present multiple ways of construing an argument, multiple perspectives on the subject matter, so that even a single intelligence report can lead to the production of five very different analytical products by separate analysts or agencies. Comprehension, the active process of trying to understand meaning, is not a linear motion from object to subject – a raw intelligence report dressed up with analytical context that does little more than point back toward the reported facts. That kind of process involves the acquisition of information and the accumulation of knowledge, a function that intelligence services often perform as an end unto itself in their pursuit of information as a commodity, a marker of status within the larger social setting of a government bureaucracy. But it does not constitute interpretation and the analyst who only accomplishes that much has not demonstrated understanding. Rather, comprehension is a mode of being that ultimately seeks to improve and transcend the limits of knowledge.³⁸ By communicating a particular understanding of meaning, the analytical product "goes beyond the mere function of pointing out and showing what already exists," in order to provide "a new way of looking at things, as an injunction to think in a certain manner."³⁹ This effort to transform the way a reader looks at a set of issues is the true measure of an analyst's ability to understand and communicate meaning.

A proper theoretical framework for intelligence must be capable of leading from an examination of the structures of language, in terms of the grammar and syntax of analysis that we saw in Chapter 5, toward the lived experience of the analyst and policymaker, in terms of the interaction between author and reader. It is a movement from semiotics to heuristics, from language and reflection to action and intentionality, which we will navigate by way of the idiosyncratic terminology of the literary theorist Gérard Genette. According to Genette, Aristotle's *Poetics* established a simple categorization of genres (tragedy, comedy, epic [and parody]) that have been misunderstood and misapplied by generations

of critics and academics superimposing their own thematic and stylistic features on Aristotle's original framework.⁴⁰ The many successive transformations of the categories of mode, theme and style can potentially exist within a single overarching theory of genre, and they can be mapped out in their historical progression, but the number would be endless and any hierarchy would probably be impossible to determine. The instability of the morphological structures that underpin literature results in part from the routine manner in which authors adopt and rearrange elements from other works, other genres and other types of social interaction.

Authors may not be fully aware of the conventions within which they are operating, or they may be intentionally trying to obscure their borrowing, or they may be responding to the constraints of publishers and editors.⁴¹ Regardless, readers are usually cognizant on some level of the interchange. The force and impact of a literary work, i.e. its ability to shape the consciousness of its readers, comes from the way authors reconceive and comment on conventions and expectations. As Genette put the matter:

Let me say that the art of 'making new things out of old' [*bricolage* or tinkering] has the merit, at least, of generating more complex and more savory objects than those that are 'made on purpose'; a new function is superimposed upon and interwoven with an older structure, and the dissonance between these two concurrent elements imparts its flavor to the resulting whole.

(Genette 1997a, 398)

By the same token, the most interesting and memorable intelligence analysis is typically not the one that presents a new topic for its own sake, but rather the one that counters readers' expectations on an established issue or disrupts another person's long-running analytical line. It is in this manner of reader reception that individual texts can transform or subvert the way that categories of genre, mode or theme are understood.⁴²

Readers will attach significance to the different elements of a work according to their own experiences and interests. The people involved in the production of a text (author, editor, publisher, et al.) are sensitive to that, and will usually attempt to guide and direct the reader's understanding by signaling their intentions for how they want a work to be interpreted. They intervene in both the content and the form of the text in subtle ways, through the modification of a genre, addition of commentary, juxtaposition of disparate elements, supposition of psychological factors, inference of causality and even the presentation of text on the page. Consider the dissemination of a summary paragraph of an intelligence product, which is entirely similar to the publisher's summary [Fr: *le prière d'insérer*] for a novel. It allows managers and editors to intervene directly in the reception of a work.⁴³ It focuses attention on what the manager perceives to be the relevance and significance of the piece, encourages other organizations to include the summary in their own reviews/compilations of recent products, and thereby spreads the word about a new publication to a broader audience that may not have the time, inclination or

accesses to read the full report. These types of referencing comprise a network of overlapping mechanisms for conveying authorial or editorial intention (transtextuality), attempting to channel the reception of the work for the reader. One text can quote, plagiarize or allude to another text (intertextuality); it can explicitly or implicitly serve as commentary on another text (metatextuality); it can play on the reader's expectations for the conventions of genre, mode or theme (architextuality); it can use pastiche or parody to rewrite a prior text (hypertextuality); it can use notes, headings or other materials that are marginal or peripheral to the text (paratextuality).⁴⁴

One of the key ways in which authorial intervention can be identified is through the use of multiple levels of narration [*diegesis*], i.e. stories within stories or perspectives telescoped through the eyes of others. Strictly speaking, there should be no intelligence equivalent to *One Thousand and One Nights*, in which a narrator at one level of narration (extradiegetic) introduces a story about the protagonist Scheherezade at a second level of narration (intradiegetic), who must in turn tell a story about a character at a third level of narration (metadiegetic), etc.⁴⁵ Genette's tripartite classification of narrative situations would also seem, at first glance, to be far removed from the hard realities of analysis: 1) secondary narratives that fulfill an explanatory function by evoking the causes or antecedents of the primary narrative; 2) secondary narratives that are intimately linked to the events of the primary narrative and may impact its future direction; and 3) secondary narratives that have no immediate relevance for the primary narrative and only exist by virtue of their act of narration.⁴⁶ And yet, an example of the first category would be an analytical product with a main text that opens with a brief situation report to get the reader caught up on the latest action before moving on to the main storyline. An example of the second would be a piece that considers bilateral relations with a rival or adversary before turning to look at how a close ally's involvement in the situation will impact US relations with either of the two. An example of the third would be a text box insert that provides a leadership profile of a head of state, but contributes no specific information to propel the analysis of the larger piece forward.

These types of authorial or editorial intervention exist throughout, even at a rudimentary level of emplotment and even if the analyst has no further intent to signify a larger meaning through their inclusion. Furthermore, the author can play with the reader's perception of time and space within a work simply by adjusting the extent to which the narrative relies on a portrayal of actions and events versus a description of people and objects.

The narration links itself to actions or events considered as pure processes, and by this it puts emphasis on the temporal and dramatic aspects of narrative. On the other hand, description, because it lingers over objects and beings considered in their simultaneity and because it envisages the actions themselves as scenes, seems to suspend the flow of time and to contribute to spreading out the narrative in space.

(Genette 1976, 7)

Moreover, the author's voice exists whether he directly assumes responsibility for the ideas and beliefs he wishes to convey, or whether he indirectly puts them into the speeches and thoughts of another narrator or a character. Whoever the narrator is, he has the focal lens – i.e. the perspective through which actions and descriptions are selected, filtered, arranged and interpreted. It is this focal lens through which all aspects of the story gain their logical coherence and significance as a whole.

An intelligence manager or editor may claim that the focalization is strictly that of the institution or the government writ large, with a field of view so broad and so complete that any such focal lens is negligible. Genette would argue that zero focalization is possible:

That obviously means that the analysis of a 'non-focalized' narrative must always be reducible to a mosaic of variously focalized segments and, therefore, that '*zero focalization*' = *variable focalization*. That formula would not bother me in the least, but it seems to me that classical narrative sometimes places its 'focus' at a point so indefinite, or so remote, with so panoramic a field (the well-known 'viewpoint of God,' or of Sirius, about which people periodically wonder whether it is indeed a point of view) that it cannot coincide with any character and that the term nonfocalization, or zero focalization, is rather more appropriate for it.

(Genette 1988, 73)

However, an intelligence analysis is not the Encyclopedia Britannica, it is a product of limited scope that is targeted to answer a particular policymaker need, and therefore at least in scoping the question and targeting the need there is some minimal degree of focalization already present. Even the raw intelligence reporting comes with the focal lens of the sources. From the minute the analyst selects particular aspects of an event or specific factors underlying a trend, he has already shaped the outcome of the analytic judgments with his decision about what data to include or exclude.

It is clear that aspect and point of view are as closely linked as the front and back of a sheet of paper. The aspect determines or reveals the point of view, while the point of view selects and illuminates the aspect. Comprehension and connotation are thus two sides of a single phenomenon.

(Genette 1993, 93)

The author's voice cannot be completely removed from the text, nor should it be.

Authorial intervention plays a critical role at every stage of intelligence production, even in the transcription of direct speech. After all, no transcription can ever recreate verbatim the original context and meaning in which the conversation took place.⁴⁷ Even more than that, there will always be one focal lens or point of view for the observer of direct discourse, and another for the analyst who summarizes the discourse indirectly.

Direct discourse most clearly distinguishes between the utterances of the reporter and those of the reported speaker, and it nevertheless gives the

reporter ample opportunity for manipulation in the framing, selecting and interpreting of the supposedly 'verbatim' utterances; indirect discourse (and, even more clearly, speech report), on the other hand, serves the needs of summary and condensation, and it is therefore specifically designed to disregard, mute or warp propositional meaning.

(Fludernik 1993, 435)

Consequently, each person who reports information is wittingly or unwittingly attempting to have her voice heard, her perspective affirmed or her opinion respected. If not her opinion, then at least that of her institution or her government. It is that persistence of an authorial voice, even if only as a ghost in the machine, which pushes the narrative forward and sets the tone, style or mode of discourse. There is always a narrator deciding which facts to communicate, how to link them together and what significance should be attached to them. That narrative voice exists within a dense web of analysts and collectors, foreign actors and target sets, layers of management, concentric circles of policy-makers and politicians and media personalities, all engaged in a social process that presupposes the ability of each of its members to speak and be heard as part of a conversation better known as 'policy-making.' It persists in the background as a social fabric of shared perception or intersubjective experience, occasionally punctuated by the occurrence of events that demand a policy response.

Thus, we must rediscover the social world, after the natural world, not as an object or a sum of objects, but as the permanent field or dimension of existence: I can certainly turn away from the social world, but I cannot cease to be situated in relation to it. Our relation to the social, like our relation to the world, is deeper than every explicit perception and deeper than every judgment.

(Merleau-Ponty 2012, 379)

It would be absurd to claim that any analysis is an entirely impartial and objective account of the facts, hermetically sealed off from the outside world, with only the probability language and confidence levels serving as a faint reminder that human beings were at one point somehow involved in the production of the report. As if the key judgments appeared from on high, dictated by the voice of the angel Gabriel. Any claim to absolute objectivity that presumes to forego the rights and responsibilities of the author does not avoid the subjective element of narrative but rather displaces it onto others.⁴⁸ However, it is not the responsibility of the sources to present a fair and balanced account of their intentions and motivations, nor is it the responsibility of the policymaker to intuit an accurate interpretation of events. It is the duty of the analyst to use his best judgment as he prepares and presents the material for his audience.

Notes

- 1 Lowenthal (2006, 109–10). In many ways, this standard textbook has served for many years as an iconic rendering of how the US Intelligence Community views the analytic function.

- 2 The comparison is entirely apt. The literature on Intelligence Studies is dominated by a supreme conviction in the absolute necessity of applying the scientific method, as demonstrated in the many examples cited in this book. Nevertheless, see also Marrin (2011, 38): "As an examination of the intelligence studies literature indicates . . ."
- 3 Typical are the rather confusing definitions in Richards (2010, 97): "In this chapter, we focus on the cognitive activities surrounding analysis itself, with a view to raising awareness about these activities (which can be called *heuristics*), and considering how to mitigate their negative aspects. This, in a sense, is the 'art' part of the picture." Just as confusing are the many essays in Lahneman and Arcos (2014), in which (for example) Agrell and Petterson (224) address the "art of intelligence" as such: "Intelligence is traditionally defined as a decision support within the domains of foreign policy and national security, with the main focus on monitoring and assessing threats."
- 4 The distinction between story and discourse is basic in narrative theory and important here. Other distinctions (e.g. between fable, plot and element) lie outside the scope of this study. See Puckett (2016, 4–12), Bal (2017, 3–5) and Fludernik (2009, 2–4).
- 5 Bal (2017, 69): "Playing with sequential ordering is not just an artistic convention; it is also a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects, to produce suspense, to show various interpretations of an event, to indicate the subtle difference between expectation and realization, and much else besides."
- 6 House (2022, 11): "In the case of intelligence, however, the analyst may well be trying to convince the decision maker that the reality of the situation differs from what the politician believes it to be, which implies that the desired policy outcome is inappropriate or impractical. Thus intelligence leaders not only begin the discussion with less credibility than their military counterparts, but also must seek to persuade the decision maker to change his or her perceptions of reality."
- 7 Ricoeur (1984, 1:45).
- 8 Jameson (2009, 484–98).
- 9 While Ricoeur is concerned with a two-fold division of the field into literary narrative and historical narrative, for the purpose of this discussion, intelligence analysis will be treated as a version of the latter.
- 10 Ricoeur (1984, 1:55).
- 11 Ricoeur (1984, 1:56–7).
- 12 Ricoeur often takes his definition of semiotics from Ernst Cassirer and Clifford Geertz, primarily for the way the two make a connection to culture, but Ricoeur was also in close dialogue with Algirdas Greimas and other semioticians of his generation.
- 13 Ricoeur (1984, 1:65).
- 14 For a succinct explanation of this crucial aspect of Ricoeur's thought, see Dowling (2011, 88): "His analysis in each case explores what we have called the double temporality of narrative structure: a *telos* that carries characters forward in a state of imperfect knowledge about the consequences of their actions, with a narrator who, gazing backward on events from a fixed or *totum simul* perspective, has arrived at certain conclusions about their meaning or significance."
- 15 Ricoeur (1984, 1:67).
- 16 Danto (1985, 353).
- 17 Kent (1941, 51 and 54). N.B. Kent (1941, 55–6) was strangely ambivalent about language, cautioning against slang except "when the situation is made to order," and warning against metaphor unless "the thing is done quickly."
- 18 Kent (1941, 57).
- 19 Ricoeur (1984, 1:71 and 79).
- 20 Ricoeur (1984, 3:178–9).
- 21 Woodruff (1992).

- 22 Morris, *Signs, Language*, 95–106. Note the stark difference between semioticians like Eco and Greimas who were working to systematize the field in the late 1970s and 80s, and others who were trying to expand the audience by taking on topics of consumer culture (Berger 1984, 148–54).
- 23 Halliwell (2002, 181–5).
- 24 Halliwell (1992, 243).
- 25 *Poetics*, 1453b12 (Aristotle 1984, 2:2326): “The tragic pleasure is that of pity and fear, and the poet has to produce it by a work of imitation.” Some scholars have proposed other categories of emotion based on readings of the *Rhetoric*, ones that Aristotle might have viewed as a response to pity and fear (indignation, confidence) or ones that are embedded within other genres like comedy (malice, envy).
- 26 Konstan (2020, 62).
- 27 Halliwell (2002, 199–200).
- 28 *Poetics*, 1451a37–9 (Aristotle 1984, 2:2322–3). The continuation of the passage (1451a39–1451b5) is also relevant: “The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse – you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be.”
- 29 Marsh (2021, 39–40).
- 30 Wilkinson (2009, 31–2 and 35).
- 31 Ricoeur (1984, 1:47).
- 32 Halliwell (2002, 189).
- 33 Lear (1992, 327 and 334).
- 34 Averroes, *Middle Commentary*, para. 39, referring to Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451b15 (Averroes 1986, 84).
- 35 Averroes, *Middle Commentary*, para. 70 (Averroes 1986, 108).
- 36 See Barthes (1977, 142): “Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.”
- 37 Ricoeur in Ihde (1971, xvi). With that, Ricoeur has reasserted Heidegger, albeit in a qualified fashion.
- 38 Ihde (1971, 170–4).
- 39 Ricoeur (1976, 88).
- 40 Genette (1992, 60): “I have tried to show how and why theorists reached the point of devising, and then (as a supplementary consideration) of attributing to Plato and Aristotle, a division of the ‘literary genres’ that the whole ‘unconscious poetics’ of both philosophers rejects.”
- 41 See also Bloom (1997).
- 42 Cf. Genette (1982, 19).
- 43 Genette (1997b, 105–6): “And at that time *please-insert* was a completely clear and literal expression, indicating to newspaper editors that the book’s publisher was asking them to insert this little text, in whole or in part, into their columns to inform the public of the work’s appearance.”
- 44 Genette (1997b, xviii–xix).
- 45 Bal (2017, 52–3).
- 46 Genette (1988, 92).
- 47 Cf. Lotman (1990, 12–13): “For a fairly complex message to be received with absolute identity, conditions are required which in naturally occurring situations are practically unobtainable: addressee and addresser have to have wholly identical codes, i.e. to be in fact semiotically speaking a bifurcation of one and the same personality.”
- 48 Bal (2017, 132): “Storytelling is inevitably slanted or subjective in nature, and to deny this constitutes a dubious political act, for it means denying narrative responsibility.”

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8 Sino-Soviet Split, 1949

While the reader of the intelligence product is experiencing the unfolding of events in a temporal sequence, the author has already foreseen the most plausible scenarios and used the narrative voice to guide the reader to the most likely outcome, from the opening sentence of the summary paragraph to the marginal text box with the alternative analysis. Throughout, the intelligence analyst maintains a presence, deriving a meaning from events that runs counter to the stated intentions of the participants and pointing to different outcomes than those envisioned by the actors themselves. In so doing, the analyst comments on the actions and behaviors of the actors in ways that implicitly or even explicitly enter into moral judgment. After all, analysis has the express purpose of attempting to inform and influence the policymaker. The following case study on the Sino-Soviet split exemplifies all of these crucial elements of storytelling.

We are fortunate to have an unclassified, firsthand account of the Intelligence Community's early efforts to identify divergences between the Soviet Union and China. Harold Ford, one of the individuals closely involved in those analytical debates, left the public at large with a detailed review of the perspectives and arguments that were put forth in the 1950s and early 60s by experts who sought to challenge the prevailing wisdom that the USSR and the PRC were part of a monolithic Red bloc acting in concert to spread Communism around the world.¹ In Ford's account, the very first suggestion that there might be cracks in the façade of the Sino-Soviet alliance was put forward by the CIA's Foreign Documents Division (FDD) and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) at the height of the Korean War in April 1952. In a series of papers, analysts at those organizations, who were primarily concerned with open-source materials, focused their attention on the following: 1) the Chinese assertion that Mao's teachings were a major advancement of Marxism–Leninism; 2) the Chinese contention that Mao's theories were applicable to revolutionary movements throughout the colonial world; and 3) the lack of any substantive Soviet validation of these claims. In September of that same year, an NIE was published on the topic, which has since been declassified and publicly released. It concluded that the PRC was unlike other Soviet satellites, more able to pursue "independent action and a capability to exert an influence upon the shaping of Communist policy in the Far East."²

In a sense, Harold Ford's account of Sino-Soviet analysis in this period seeks to understand the success and failure of Washington analysts in terms of each stage of the Intelligence Cycle. As for the first stage, Planning and Direction, the impetus for analyzing a Sino-Soviet split initially came from a small group of experts who were viewed as heretics by a broader community of analysts and policymakers. Acceptance of their work only arrived in the early 1960s, as acknowledged by none other than Sherman Kent himself, but by that point the escalation of the Vietnam War had come to overshadow their efforts. In terms of both Collection and Processing, a central problem was the paucity of intelligence sources, as Ford noted that "it was not until firmer evidence surfaced in the early 1960s that some impact began to be made," especially "a flood of Soviet and Chinese documents" that were acquired in 1960.³ In terms of Analysis and Production, Ford was intent on showing that what began in 1952 as open-source analysis, concluding that Sino-Soviet policy divergences were creating the potential for conflict, would develop by 1960 into a conviction among the leading experts that such divergences would eventually result in an unresolvable break. Most importantly, Ford cared about Dissemination, because for him this case study was an exercise in understanding the relationship between analysts and policymakers. He went to great lengths to quote numerous senior officials to show how attitudes slowly changed over time due to the constant drumbeat of the work of these dedicated analysts, despite the fact that: "it was the proclivity of many senior policymakers to brush off intelligence analyses of growing estrangement as being too theoretical, too inferential, and, for some years, too contrary to continuing outward signs of cooperative Soviet and Chinese policies."⁴ In that regard, Ford's writings are merely one more case study in a long line of academic publications on intelligence failure, and the real takeaway is that successful analysis requires solid evidence, a receptive audience and the persistent repetition of a simple message.

Ford was certainly right about one thing – most of the analytical products he cited were indeed too theoretical and inferential. They were tethered to Soviet and Chinese official pronouncements and press commentaries that they sought to reinterpret through an exegesis of Communist phraseology and hidden subtext. The argument of these analysts, particularly those who would become involved in the CIA's Sino-Soviet Studies Group (SSSG) launched in 1956, was that Chinese attempts to assert an independent role within the Communist bloc were emblematic of a larger competition with the Soviets, most evident in Sino-Soviet policy disputes over how to support Communist movements in East Asia. For example, the CCP wanted to industrialize and collectivize the economy at a faster rate than the Soviets deemed feasible, a process that had the potential to place China at the forefront of the transition from socialism to communism.⁵

The crowning achievement of this partial intelligence success was the publication of Donald Zagoria's book *The Sino-Soviet Conflict* by Princeton University Press in 1962, which drew upon everything that author had learned while working as an analyst at the SSSG.⁶ In it, Zagoria tried to establish a series of flash-points arranged in a timeline of escalating ideological conflict: China's rejection of the revisionism of Stalin's legacy at the Twentieth Soviet Party Congress in

1956; China's rush to collectivize into communes in late 1957; the Soviet adoption of a more cautious approach toward confrontation with the West in 1958; and Krushchev's assertion that détente was both possible and desirable in 1959. Zagoria's analytical conclusions reflected the caution of his former CIA colleagues. He believed there were limits to the burgeoning Sino-Soviet conflict, neither party could abandon their shared commitment to Communism by allying with the United States and "a war between Russia and China . . . is, in my opinion, premature."⁷

These approaches were all driven by a belief in the forward movement of time as a progression of moments comprising a well-defined trajectory, with each new event ratcheting up the tensions between the USSR and the PRC. Analysts were seeking to identify indicators that might reveal how increasing tensions would lead to the type of break that would eventually occur with the border clashes along the Ussuri River and Xinjiang in 1969. It was a pious devotion to all that which is concrete and measurable, responding to practical and immediate policy questions, while developing clear and effective lines of inquiry. The role of the analyst was to present events as they happened in a logical sequence according to a clear argument, see how the presentation was received by policymakers, compare predictions against the latest developments and then repeat the process until he could derive a formula or methodology that would guide future research. It was pragmatic and scientific.

However, there were other approaches to this issue. Approaches that sought to demonstrate that the root causes of Sino-Soviet tensions were inherent from the beginning, embedded in the personalities of the leaders and their domestic political agendas, so that later events were merely manifestations of what had existed all along. One thing they had in common was an implicit understanding that the task of the author was to make the inner world of the subject matter accessible and familiar to readers. It is interesting that Ford overlooked these analysts and academics in his article, because in some respects their approach was both more expansive and more prescient.

As early as 1957, the Council on Foreign Relations published a collection of essays on Sino-Soviet ties, highlighting China's economic dependence as a captive market for Soviet goods and China's struggle to incorporate the border populations from Xinjiang to Manchuria.⁸ In the lead chapter considering the possible areas of USSR-PRC divergence, Boorman started his narrative not in 1956 with the Chinese denunciation of Soviet revisionism, nor in 1952 at the height of the Korean War. Rather, he began in 1949, focusing on the first meeting of Mao and Stalin, taking careful note of how the bilateral relationship was shaped by these two colossal personalities:

Ruler of the most populous Communist nation, [Mao Tse-tung] had never visited Russia, spoke no Russian, and had had relatively little contact with the Russians. His journey to negotiate with Stalin at the end of 1949, when the Soviet dictator was already seventy, was Mao's first venture outside his native China and, to date, his only pilgrimage to the Mecca of world Communism. . . . It is probable that Stalin, increasingly rigid in his later years,

viewed Mao Tse-tung as an Asian and an inferior. Mao, for his part, knew very well that Stalin's failure, two decades earlier, to understand the realities of the Chinese political situation had led Moscow in 1927 to issue unrealistic directives to the Chinese Communists and had resulted in staggering Communist losses at the hands of the Kuomintang.

(Boorman et al. 1957, 6)

This was an approach that attempted to reconstruct the thinking of key actors and their perceptions of one another, giving agency to the individuals at the center of a plotline. There was an element of the tradecraft of Kremlinology as Zagoria understood it. In other words, to describe and interpret the rhetoric of the two sides for the purpose of piercing the veil of propaganda, seeking insights into policy disputes among the two Communist parties in the absence of verifiable, detailed, firsthand accounts of the private conversations of leaders.⁹ But that was not the primary goal. The primary goal was to tell a story. Both approaches required quite a bit of inference, but the difference was in the attitude toward analysis as a mode of communication. The first approach was all about testing a hypothesis and validating assumptions, while the second approach was about positioning the reader within the mindset of the actors.

There is a pragmatic aspect to Ford's conclusions that successful analysis requires solid evidence, a receptive audience and the persistent repetition of a simple message. But there is also creative insight to be had in the attempt to establish a narrative structure that operates beyond the limitations of the available sources and sets aside the presentation of concrete evidence in a strictly ordered timeline. Since the early 1990s, experts have benefitted from a wealth of documentary sources drawn from state archives in Moscow and Beijing, and those documents have helped to illuminate the policy debates and private thoughts of leaders with the kinds of evidence that Zagoria, Ford and their contemporaries in Washington lacked.¹⁰ With that wealth of new evidence, scholars have expanded and enriched our understanding of the structural issues that contributed to the fissure between the two countries, such as China's overdependence on Soviet assistance and trade in the face of a prolonged US embargo. The common theme running through many of these recent studies is the very personalized nature of the dispute, and they make explicit what was only speculation in the earlier analysis of Boorman and others.¹¹

Mingjiang Li shows the origins of the Sino-Soviet Split in the desire of leaders on both sides to demonstrate their legitimacy and enhance their influence by proving to domestic audiences and international allies that their ideological programs were correct. Any time the leadership of one country sought "to defend its ideological and political position," the move was "perceived by the other as a threat to the legitimacy of its own domestic political line," so that political factions were "strongly tempted to use the ideological differences . . . for their own domestic political purposes."¹² Domestic politics shaped the foreign relations of these two countries, and their foreign relations had an influence on their domestic politics. Mao's cold reception for Khrushchev's military proposals in 1958, his headlong rush into the Great Leap Forward and his lack of consultation over the second Taiwan Strait Crisis were

born out of a personal drive to put pressure on colleagues within the CCP while projecting the image of his ability to maintain an equal partnership with Moscow. Even the ideological rivalry over influence in East Asia – the issue that so excited Washington analysts at the height of the Korean War in 1952 – was partly the result of a very tangible bitterness and humiliation that Mao and other CCP leaders felt in their interactions with Moscow.

In that regard, anything Mao interpreted as undermining his domestic and international standing in terms of his prestige and status within the CCP and the world Communist movement had a direct impact on Beijing's threat perceptions of Moscow.¹³ This included: Kao Kang's overtures to Stalin in 1949 and the fears of his CCP colleagues that he was willing to hand over control of Manchuria to the Soviets; Stalin's attempts to use the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance in 1950 to establish a Soviet sphere of influence over buffer zones within Chinese territory; and Stalin's encouragement of Chinese support for Kim Il-Sung's plans to advance across the 38th Parallel while failing to consult Beijing on the ultimate attack.¹⁴

Again, it is one thing to say that an inherent ideological rivalry lay beneath the public pronouncements of cooperation, and this trend could predictably lead to conflict, even in the absence of direct evidence confirming the mounting tensions between Beijing and Moscow. It is quite another to say that a series of attempts by leaders on one side to assert influence and project strength as part of a domestic power struggle had the adverse effect of creating threat perceptions among leaders on the other side, leading both sides to believe that such moves could potentially undermine their own political authority and legitimacy. The difference is in the way that the first approach treats states, ideologies and national interests as abstract signs of competition within a generalized framework of International Relations theory, while the second approach treats the rivalries, animosities and fears of individual human beings as determinative factors in shaping a particular course of events. That difference is also reflected in the analyst's attitude toward hermeneutics. The former places a stress on the exegesis of texts by taking the sources and methods as a starting point for evaluating the accuracy of an analytical line, while the latter judges its analytical integrity in terms of the heuristics of approximating intentions and motivations within their complex cultural and social settings. It is the latter approach that seeks to ground the discussion within its local context, in a way that reflects the lived experience of the participants, even in discussions of foreign relations on the international stage.¹⁵

Earlier Analytical Efforts

Ford does not explore the analytical products that preceded 1952, but had he done so he might have found examples of Washington analysts pursuing that second approach, even in the absence of direct intelligence sources for Soviet and Chinese senior leadership motivations and intentions.¹⁶ Among the declassified papers available at the National Archives in College Park, there is Report No. 5101, "The Status of Mao Tse-Tung as Theoretician and Leader," published by State/OIR on

December 22, 1949.¹⁷ Communist forces had only just recently succeeded in taking the rest of the mainland, with Mao announcing on October 1 the establishment of the People's Republic. The OIR analyst wanted to explore the implications. He began by characterizing Mao's own self-image in terms of three categories: "Chinese Communist leader, Communist theoretician for East Asia, and protagonist of 'peasant liberation.'"¹⁸ In a sense, this was an opening gambit that asked the reader to assume the mindset of the main character in the story. In other words, to see the world through Mao's eyes.

The author then contrasted the man and the myth, calling into question this image-making by comparing it with recent events on the ground:

Within the past two years Mao has lost much of his former appearance of independence of the USSR, his teachings have been the subject of some controversy among Communists in East Asia, and Communist advocacy of the peasant, in which Mao had originally taken the lead, has given way to a more orthodox championing of labor and the 'proletariat.'¹⁹

The author considered the possibility that such developments might be transitory or simply the result of a misunderstanding, but he concluded that Mao's status was undergoing a transformation regardless, and that the process of revising Mao's image could have a big impact on the trajectory of Sino-Soviet relations. There is a clear marking out of the focus lens that distinguishes between the viewpoint of the protagonist (or his inner circle), the perceptions of regional observers and the judgments of the analyst as narrator.

Having established the characters, setting and theme of Mao's transition from folk hero revolutionary to head of state, the author then set those elements in motion. Two countervailing trends pushed the action forward in the report with the analyst highlighting the tension between them. On the one hand, Mao would be increasingly constrained by Soviet efforts to intervene in Chinese affairs, as the USSR sought to prevent another situation like Marshall Tito's semi-independent behavior in Yugoslavia. On the other hand, Mao would be empowered by Moscow's dependence on Beijing, as the Soviets sought to use the Chinese to extend Communist influence in East Asia. The author concluded that Mao would lose some of his international prestige and devolve into a role "nearly approximating that of other [Soviet] satellite leaders," a conclusion that was proven false by later events; he did correctly assess that Mao would remain the "unchallenged leader of Chinese Communism," a conclusion that was by no means obvious in 1949.²⁰

Mao had to struggle to assert his unquestioned authority within the CCP and ensure the loyalty of the senior ranks of the party during the 1950s. As for the eventual Sino-Soviet split, it was not the task of this analyst to predict the many changes in Soviet politics that would occur after Stalin's death, but it is remarkable to see the fundamental divisions between Moscow and Beijing forecast at such an early date and to note how they were centered on the persona of Mao.²¹ More importantly, this paper was perhaps the most eloquent account of a narrative that was surprisingly prevalent in analytical writing on the topic at the time.

Authorial intervention took the form of a commentary on Mao's efforts to shape his image and elevate his status, which required the author to separate out two very different perspectives for the CCP and the Soviets. The author drew his characters into sharp relief for the reader through colorful analogies and emotive language, which may have been anachronistic and facile, but which served the purpose of conveying the message to policymakers in relatable terms. "In the mid-1930's Mao was still regarded as the tribal chieftan, the patriarchal Moses who had just brought his weary communist flock through many hardships to the promised land of North-west China."²² This is metaphor, and the paper repeatedly returns to the theme of Mao being promoted to the popular status of a prophet, drawing on the irony of that metaphor's religious overtones.

Analysis from this early period of CCP rule in northern China appears to have oscillated wildly between incredibly broad statements about ideological and doctrinal disputes on the one hand, and efforts to guess at the threat perceptions and internal rivalries of key leaders on the other. The only way for Sinologists of the time to overcome the absence of sources was to use another literary and rhetorical device, synecdoche, in which the part stands in for the whole or vice versa.²³ For example, a second OIR report from 1949 stated that the defensive tone of a March announcement about a shift in agricultural production signaled a more orthodox Communist turn from a peasant to a proletarian base of support for the CCP and therefore the subordination of rural populations to the urban centers. The report concluded that this indicated a serious factional dispute directed at Mao.²⁴ In terms of the synecdoche, the agricultural shift stood in for a broader doctrinal debate and the language of the public announcement stood in for the personal defensiveness of Mao, allowing the author to use them as an analogy whereby an imagined policy feud represented a presumed factional dispute. A third OIR report from that year surveyed the many economic advantages and military vulnerabilities that Manchuria presented to the CCP, asserting that the "possibility of a break between the Chinese Communist Party and the USSR . . . most likely . . . would center around the issue of Manchuria."²⁵ In this case, Manchuria was both a potential flashpoint and an exemplar of broader Sino-Soviet distrust and rivalry, with the analyst admitting that there was almost no information available about the critical issue of what CCP leadership in Manchuria really looked like.

Not all of the analytical products in this period were making a concerted effort to get past the barriers to information about inner CCP workings by using metaphor, analogy and other exercises in creative thinking. Some products were simply falling back on clear and articulate, but ultimately unhelpful, political science theories, trying to make a case for a scenario that policymakers in Washington could act upon. There was a 1949 NIE on the same topic, now declassified, which echoed the analytical ambivalence of OIR 5101 about the long-term consequences of Sino-Soviet rivalry. It avoided any discussion of individual personalities and put forward the rather meaningless assertion that any future Sino-Soviet tensions would be dependent either on the ability of unspecified "dissident groups" to "wrest the control apparatus from the pro-Moscow leadership, or that leadership must change its policy toward Moscow."²⁶ It is easy enough for an analysis to posit the existence

of hardline versus moderate factions, and thereby open up the possibility of external intervention shifting the balance between the two. The hard part is proving that such factions exist, explaining their cohesion and demonstrating that they have different interests beyond their competition for power. Without being able to demonstrate the latter, this discussion was all just empty theorizing.

There was an NIE in 1952 that picked up where the OIR reports left off, adding new layers of depth regarding the characters in charge of the CCP and their perceptions of Moscow:

The Chinese Communist claims of independent achievement which allow the USSR credit only for ideological and moral support until the formation of the Peiping regime in October 1949, have some basis in fact although they underestimate the assistance given by the USSR during the period from 1945 to 1949. The high command of most Communist parties in the world has undergone frequent and violent changes, which are believed to have been dictated from Moscow. In contrast, the CCP has exhibited unique stability and continuity in its leadership. This leadership undoubtedly takes pride in its independent rise to power and recognizes that it possesses a capacity for independent action.²⁷

What is it that makes such an approach so attractive? According to Harold Ford, it should be the presentation of detailed intelligence sources in a clear and articulate language with a very tangible and concrete analytical framework of immediate relevance to policymakers that lends an analysis the ability to convince. Many analysts in this period of 1949 to 1952 readily admitted to a lack of good sources, but they proceeded anyway to build an intricate analytical line describing increasing Sino-Soviet tensions, and they concluded that no amount of US intervention could sway the situation one way or another.²⁸ They drew a more detailed portrait of senior leader intentions and motivations than the available sources would allow, while also including the theoretical arguments about ideology and doctrine that would come to dominate the later analytical products that Ford highlights. The noted historian Franz Borkenau was undoubtedly influential in shaping that analytical line. All of the elements contributing to an inevitable Sino-Soviet Split, including the personal animus between leaders on both sides, can be found in a paper dated February 1, 1952, which Borkenau produced at the request of State/OIR.²⁹ Borkenau traced the bitter origins of the rivalry back to 1927, blaming Soviet complacency for the Chinese Communists' calamitous defeat, and concluding: "This, incidentally, must have been one of the most telling and affirmative experiences for Mao."³⁰

If those analyses failed to have an impact in their day, then perhaps everything is as Ford has said. Perhaps all that matters is whether a policymaker acts. And yet, there is something deeply convincing and persuasive in these early pieces. It is the way they present a coherent narrative structure involving different layers of interpretive meaning, with a perceptive author carefully navigating the reader on the path to understanding this complex world of Eurasian politics. The previous

passage from NIE 58–52 even approaches the kind of well-rounded, three-dimensional character portrayals that we see hinted at in Boorman and more explicitly detailed in the scholarship of post-Cold War academics. The NIE predicted that:

A Chinese Communist effort unilaterally to revise the relationship or to leave the Bloc would result in the cessation of Soviet economic and military aid and support and in serious dissension within the Chinese Communist Party and the armed forces. It might lead to armed conflict with the USSR. Similarly, a Kremlin effort to reduce Communist China to the status of the European Satellites might lead to armed conflict with Communist China and would divide and confuse the international Communist movement.³¹

That was a prescient remark about the future course of events. It was not tied to any current development that might elicit an immediate policymaker response, nor was it based on any observable facts that could be marshaled as concrete evidence for its analytical conclusion. It derived from the personification of the CCP in terms of its independence and pride, just as the earlier OIR reports relied on analogy to draw inferences about internal political dynamics. One lesson learned from all of this is that the value of intelligence analysis might derive from its scientific precision and timely relevance, but it might just as well derive from the quality of the narrative, especially if the goal is to persuade and convince policymakers. Indeed, both statements could be true. It is quite possible that while a good narrative structure was present before the mid-1950s, it came to be replaced by a certain precision and relevance thereafter, and either approach might have benefitted from the addition of the other.

Metaphorical Truth

Metaphors and other linguistic devices are not just wordplay that occur in our everyday speech; they are systematic modes of organizing concepts and language that can contribute to shaping our perceptions of the world. To think metaphorically requires a special talent for being able to show the similarities that exist in things that are seemingly dissimilar. It can involve either hiding certain comparisons that are inconvenient or highlighting other connections that are more desirable for communicating a particular point.³² There are ontological metaphors derived from the physical environment that help structure social interactions based on concepts like up/down, high/low and forward/backward. These are so pervasive in terms of describing human emotions like happy/sad, good/bad and progress/decline that we hardly notice them. A metaphor can isolate a particular aspect of an amorphous or ambiguous concept, and thereby help to delimit, measure, quantify, categorize and control it.³³ Analysts can adopt metaphors from the vernacular of everyday speech in which, for example, governments *pursue interests*, *seek influence* and *leverage resources*, though they should never pretend that such words carry the same objective precision and accuracy by which those properties appear in nature.³⁴ Linguistic devices such as metaphor and metonymy lie on a spectrum from literal to figurative

language, and the dividing lines between such linguistic devices are not always clear cut.³⁵

The use of metaphor and metonymy is necessary for conveying meaning and significance, opening up windows onto the world that would not be accessible through literal renderings of data alone, and allowing the reader to experience the perspective of the protagonist if only for a brief moment. Imaginative thinking reaches toward a metaphorical truth that transcends the literal repetition of facts on the page. That being said, rhetoric must still be grounded in logical argumentation in order to achieve persuasiveness, and metaphor must demonstrate resemblance in order to be coherent (even if it is not always consistent). By the same token, *mûthos*, in the sense of a broad narrative or a sweeping analytical line, must be structured and ordered with an awareness of *mimesis*, in the sense of representing a real state of being in the world.³⁶ Again, intelligence analysis bears a close affinity to the art of rhetoric. Managers who edit in the name of clarity and brevity do so out of an extraordinary self-confidence in their own writing skills, but they miss the point that their readers view the world through metaphor and their analysts are trying to work with those customer expectations. According to Ricoeur (1977, 33), "one can say that 'the chief merit of rhetorical discourse' is to give discourse an 'unfamiliar' air, while not doing so in an obvious manner. Thus, rhetorical style combines clarity, embellishment, and the unusual, all in due proportion." Metaphors tap into common opinion and popular wisdom, spilling over into rhetoric and rushing beyond the literal meaning on the page, channeling proof and evidence into eloquence and persuasion. Such linguistic devices are essential within the policymaking context: "metonymy serves the needs of rapid, efficient communication in shared physical settings where interlocutors are under time pressure, and where language plays an ancillary role to extra-linguistic activities."³⁷

The analysts covering the issue of Sino-Soviet Relations in the earliest period after the establishment of Communist rule in northern China used their powers of imagination and creative thinking to build out a discourse of Chinese intentions and motivations, even in the absence of adequate sources of information. They did so by thinking metaphorically. In a larger sense, the Intelligence Community also relies on the metaphors contained in the Intelligence Cycle, using it as a heuristic device for modeling the social interactions within the profession. The intension is to reveal a connection between intelligence work and the scientific method, creating the appearance of a process that exhibits scientific rigor and precision in the pursuit of quality standards and professional success. What those metaphors hide, in turn, is the lived experience of analysts and policymakers engaged in a symbiotic process of shaping language and perceptions of any given issue.

For an analyst whose primary experience of the job is limited to his computer terminal, a language teacher, the occasional site visit and a few academic roundtables, the target set is little more than a random collection of names, dates and places, and policymaker priorities are little more than headlines in the newspapers. The concepts and the language that supposedly represent intentions and motivations are merely signifiers lacking the most important property of the objects they are supposed to signify – the property of being human. It is the same complaint that

we saw from Embassy Rome in Chapter 4. The portfolio takes on a living, vibrant presence in the life of the analyst only through direct engagement.

In the experience of dialogue, a common ground is constituted between me and another; my thought and his form a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion and are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. . . . And even the objection raised by my interlocutor draws from me thoughts I did not know I possessed such that if I lend him thoughts, he makes me think in return. Only *après coup* – when I have withdrawn from the dialogue and I am remembering it – can I reintegrate it into my life, turn it into an episode of my private history.
(Merleau-Ponty 2012, 370–1)

The job requires a certain degree of empathy, produced through direct engagement with the material, and that kind of insight pays dividends in the way it generates metaphorical thought. This, in turn, serves as the inspiration for authorial intervention at every stage of the process, from the selection of information, to the ordering of events, to the addition of context, to the framing of the scope of inquiry, to the assessment of key judgments, to the presentation for policymakers. It implies an undercurrent of subjective experience throughout, tugging against the institutional flow of objective process and method, as the analyst seeks to put a human face on events in order to make the analytical line both persuasive and convincing. Indeed, any group or faction within society carefully cultivates images and symbols that serve as metaphors for their values and distinguishing marks of their identity, any analyst draws mental connections and relationships that metaphorically reconstruct the networks of meaning that existed within the target set and any policymaker interprets an analysis according to the political metaphors with which he is most familiar. None of them can accomplish their mission if they are restricted in their use of metaphorical thought.

Here, we arrive at an insurmountable problem within the intelligence profession. Managers, who were promoted through the ranks based not on their readiness to take risks and think imaginatively but rather for their ability to diffuse conflict and avoid controversy, are expected to oversee and edit the work of analysts, who must use their creativity to revise perceptions and challenge established wisdom if they are to achieve real success. Aristotle noted this contradiction. On the one hand,

the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.

Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1459a5–8 (Aristotle 1984, 2:2334–5)

On the other hand,

it is not quite appropriate that fine language should be used by a slave or a very young man. . . . Naturalness is persuasive, artificiality is the contrary;

for our hearers are prejudiced and think we have some design against them, as if we were mixing their wines for them.

Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1404b14–20 (Aristotle 1984, 2:2239)

The quality of discourse is defined by the use of metaphor, and yet that kind of poetic language is inappropriate within the context of a hierarchical institutional setting. Organizations have to maintain a linguistic order in which boundaries are maintained between managers and analysts, permitting certain types of accepted terminology and containing other types of speech.³⁸

Metaphorical thought, this “intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars,” may be critically important in using expertise to overcome gaps in our knowledge, but within the hierarchical structure of power relations that governs the chain of command of any intelligence enterprise, it is typically deemed inappropriate. This institutional anxiety about the ability to maintain control over language is probably also a leading reason why the term ‘intuition’ has become the *bête noire* of Intelligence Studies. Every time a manager edits down a thoughtful metaphor into clinical, sterile language, he reaffirms an institutional perspective that insists on a singular paradigm of science serving as the organizing structure for analytical thought. Every time an analyst tries to use metaphor to bridge the gap between the different concepts and understandings of the target set and the policymaker, he calls into question the adequacy of the system that promoted his supervisors and through which they owe their own credibility as professionals.

Notes

- 1 Ford (1998).
- 2 Ford (1998, 61). CIA FOIA Reading Room, “National Intelligence Estimate: Relations between the Chinese Communist Regime and the USSR: Their Present Character and Probable Future Courses,” NIE 58 (September 10, 1952), declassified FOIA document number 0001086032, approved for release May 2004, <https://www.cia.gov/reading-room/document/0001086032>. Henceforth, NIE 58–52. Also available as NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–1373, Box 3, declassification #NND 959285.
- 3 Ford (1998, 60 and 67).
- 4 Ford (1998, 65).
- 5 Ford (1998, 58–9).
- 6 Ford (1998, 60). See also Kochavi (2000).
- 7 Zagoria (1962, 22).
- 8 Boorman et al. (1957).
- 9 See Zagoria’s own discussion on methodology (1962, 24–35).
- 10 For example, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/topics/sino-soviet-alliance-1950-1959>.
- 11 For example, Klochko (1971).
- 12 Li (2012, 1–2).
- 13 See also Sheng (2008), Shen and Xia (2011), and Yang and Mao (2016).
- 14 Goncharov et al. (1993, 68–9, 122–3, 134–5, 141–2 and 154).
- 15 For example, the “guerilla policy style” discussed in Heilmann and Perry (2011, 12–13).
- 16 In a later account, Ford (1993, 92–4) was even more limited in his scope and more fixated on evaluating the analytical product in terms of a single key judgment.

- 17 NARA, RG59, Entry A1-449, Box 267, "The Status of Mao Tse-Tung as Theoretician and Leader," State/OIR, Intelligence Report No. 5101 (December 22, 1949), declassification #NND 989071. Henceforth, OIR 5101.
- 18 OIR 5101, i.
- 19 OIR 5101.
- 20 OIR 5101, ii.
- 21 OIR would tackle the subject of Stalin's death and its impact on Sino-Soviet relations in 1953, concluding that "no organizational schism between the two countries is in prospect." NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 295A, "Points of Stress in Current Sino-Soviet Relations," State/OIR, Intelligence Report 6225 (April 1, 1953), declassification #NND 989071.
- 22 OIR 5101, 1.
- 23 One of the most comprehensive attempts to catalogue the full range of Sino-Soviet tensions can be found as early as 1949 in NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 264A, "Possible Chinese Charges, and Soviet Countercharges, Concerning Violations of the Sino-Soviet Treaty and Agreements of August 14, 1945," OIR Report 5053 (September 23, 1949), declassification #NND 989071.
- 24 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 261, "Implications of Chinese communist Plans to Shift from a Rural to an Urban Base," OIR Report 494 (April 1949), declassification #NND 989071, 6.
- 25 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 264, "Recent Political Developments in Manchuria," OIR Report 5019 (August 25, 1949), declassification #NND 989071, 10-11.
- 26 CIAFOIARReadingRoom, "Prospects for Soviet Control of a Communist China," ORE29-49 (April 15, 1949), declassified FOIA document number CIA-RDP78-01617a00350004 0004-5, approved for release March 1, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp78-01617a003500040004-5>.
- 27 NIE 58-52.
- 28 NIE 58-52, 1-2: "we do not believe that the existing Sino-Soviet solidarity can be weakened by non-Communist concessions to Communist China. . . . We believe that Western pressures against Communist China, while weakening her, would not disrupt Sino-Soviet solidarity during the period of this estimate."
- 29 Tashjean (1983, 342).
- 30 Tashjean (1983, 350).
- 31 (NIE 58-52, 2).
- 32 Lakoff and Johnson (2003, 10-13).
- 33 Lakoff and Johnson (2003, 61).
- 34 Lakoff and Johnson (2003, 186-8).
- 35 Littlemore (2015, 13-14).
- 36 Ricoeur (1977, 43): "All *mimêsis*, even creative – nay, *especially* creative – *mimêsis*, takes place within the horizons of a being-in-the-world which it makes present to the precise extent that the *mimêsis* raises it to the level of *mûthos*. The truth of imagination, poetry's power to make contact with being as such – this is what I personally see in Aristotle's *mimêsis*."
- 37 Littlemore (2015, 146).
- 38 Fiumara (1995, 3).

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Part V

**Time and Historical
Consciousness**



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9 Objective and Subjective Time

For the most part, intelligence analysis should not be concerned with physical or objective time. Physical time according to Aristotle, in the sense of a continuum, a line at rest that can be divided into instants, a succession of moments occurring either before or after in relation to a given point, measured by the comparison of one to another in much the same way that the planets revolve and the days pass.¹ Objective time according to Kant, in the sense of an infinite magnitude, invisible yet immediate in the form of our intuitive sensation of the world, with simultaneities and successions of events that are only indirectly observable when the human mind tries to imagine how changes occur to spatial objects.² There are occasions when the analyst must know the number of days needed for an army to mobilize reserves, or the number of months until centrifuges process sufficient levels of highly enriched uranium. In those cases, it is critical to measure the ticking of a clock, the setting of the sun or the entries in a diary, in what might accordingly be called calendrical, cosmological or chronicle time. And as remote as the possibility might seem, it is conceivable that an analyst trying to estimate the advanced technological capabilities of an adversary might need to understand space-time according to Einstein, in the sense of the warping or dilation that occurs relative to gravity. In a few years from now, some analysts may even need to understand time on a quantum level.³

There are also occasions in which analysts must take note of the way subjective experience is embedded within objective time, such as a ruler's decision to commemorate the anniversary of his country's uprising against colonial rule, or a terrorist attack that is scheduled to take place on Christmas Day. There are even occasions in which the intelligence analyst is required to take stock of a person's conscious awareness of objective time, or a situation in which objective time is directly impinging upon subjective experience. One example might be a provincial governor facing a filing deadline by which she must decide whether or not to announce her candidacy for national office. For certain topics, there is a need to preserve a thorough timeline of exactly what happened, day by day and week by week, either to facilitate the rapid production of situation reports or to conduct an after-action study that assigns responsibility for an event to one party or another. In the earliest years of the US Intelligence Community, long before computers and

the internet, analysts would maintain their own detailed timelines for their portfolios, and if a crisis emerged, the timelines might even be published as standalone pieces.⁴

This obsession with objective time extends to all sorts of features that have only minor significance as markers of tradecraft, such as the display of time stamps on the front of a product to show that it is indeed the most current information available. A time stamp comes with an implicit promise the report will be updated at six- or twelve-hour intervals. This preference for hard dates and fixed times in intelligence production also contains an implicit bias or positivist belief in the ability to measure, calculate and compare events according to whatever changes can be observed in a given situation. Time is parceled out into one or more instants that then become the focus of study, reduced to their position in a sequence of similar or dissimilar moments, in much the same way that a particular insurgency or civil war can be reduced to the generalizable features of a conflict and then compared with other similar or dissimilar conflicts.

Is there value in such knowledge? Sometimes. A military commander has to track an uptick in the frequency of attacks on coalition forces in an occupied zone to judge whether there is a significant change in the threat level of the operating environment. But even then, the significance of a timeline is usually in the relationships that inhere among the events themselves, the pattern that emerges from a sequence of related phenomena, the cause and effect conveyed by a succession of related occurrences. The significance does not derive from the timeline itself, but rather from the underlying connections, the trends they indicate and the future courses of action they imply, for which the timeline is merely a token or sign. Even the relational concepts of before and after, earlier and later, first and last, for as much as they exist in the world and are apparent in nature, are insufficient for the derivation of the kinds of meaning and sense-making that constitute an interpretation of events.

Intelligence analysis should be far more concerned with subjective time. It is a curiosity to know the year of birth of a foreign head of state. It is more useful to note how that individual's advanced age might signify possible mental decline or how his youthful vigor might betray policy inexperience. It is far more valuable to consider how a person's timespan indicates certain milestones he would have lived through and how they might have shaped his career and worldview. Above all, it is crucial to understand how that foreign leader reflects upon his experiences or perhaps even the experiences of his predecessors, using them as reference points for putting forward a political vision, crafting a legacy, attacking opponents, and so forth. Here it is a matter of the way that human beings perceive and experience the relationship between one temporal moment and another. This allows individuals to construct their inner sense of self, attach themselves to a culture and identity, and project their hopes and fears upon the world around them.

The way in which we experience the present moment is not reducible to an instant on the continuum of time that can be isolated and measured. Rather, the idea of the present is just a point of reference. It is distinct from all other moments in time, but only in the way that it reorients the past and the future, making them

interdependent. It is that interdependence that creates a whole larger than its parts, with a significance as a unity that cannot be divided into an ordered regularity of dates on a calendar or entries in a chronicle. This might be variously termed psychological time, phenomenological time or the time of the soul. Phenomenological time according to Husserl, in the sense of a duration, in which each new impression slips away into the past, losing its clarity as it is modified by feelings and associations in the mind, yet still retaining a direct connection with the original experience.⁵ In this way, lived experiences in the present that endure in the mind are seamlessly connected to past, present and future by a common identity. They are primal impressions that generate streams of content flowing in either direction toward memories situated in the past and potentialities situated in the future.

Every impression retained in the past or projected into the future can thereby “possess a temporal halo . . . that will make it in each case the center of perspective for its own retentions and protentions.”⁶ For example, I sit in my rocking chair with my son, who is seven months old as I write these words, and I sing him a slow nigun, the *Rostover Rebbe*. As I do so, I can remember my mother’s large, dark brown, wooden rocking chair with its red seat cushion and white knitted blanket draped on top. I cannot remember in any detailed way what it was like to be rocked in the chair when I was the same age as my son is now. But I can remember being four years old and wishing I could still be rocked in the chair with my mother singing to me. I only retain a glimpse of that earlier experience, which is refracted through a later memory, which is recalled in relation to a current event. In this example, we have a memory retained, a memory archived and a memory lost – all fragments of an experience that has persisted into the present and continues to shape the way I interact with my son.

There are also impressions that have been forgotten or discarded, and they can be recalled despite the loss of their privileged status among the many thoughts retained in the mind. Recollection of this sort serves to further highlight the fundamental importance of how a fading past is tethered to a vital present and bound to an elusive future.⁷ It matters how that moment of “now” is chosen and who does the choosing, because a moment in time only acquires these properties when it is recognized as significant by a subject. This is linguistic time, according to Émile Benveniste, in the sense of a speaking subject who establishes a temporal reference point every time a present tense is uttered or implied, an act that is entirely internal to discourse and constitutive of being.⁸ Entire political agendas, institutional reputations and advertising campaigns hinge on the ability of an individual or a collective to articulate the vital importance of the present moment in time and to establish a convincing and accurate correspondence with the past and the future. “To put it another way: *time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.*”⁹

Narrative borrows from time just as time borrows from narrative. It is all predicated on the ability of the author to construct a past, present and future that reflect a beginning, middle and end, and in which the elements of character,

setting and plot are able to link all three temporal phases so closely together that the reader feels the events being depicted truly mirror his own experience of the world. If not his own experience, then at least the events credibly mirror someone else's. In the children's book *Where the Wild Things Are*, Maurice Sendak crafts a storyline in which Max is able to sail "through night and day and in and out of weeks and almost over a year," cavorting with wild things in deepest forests of a faraway land, and still return home to find his dinner waiting for him, nice and hot.¹⁰ It is a dream, an imaginary voyage of a small boy who doesn't like being punished for his bad behavior, and within that dream Max is able to encounter a whole other world where time stretches on to infinity. It has no basis in physical or temporal reality, and yet the movement from reality to imagination is seamless, achieved by the subtle use of symbols to link the real world of Max's home to the imaginary world of his dream. Max takes his real-world experiences of hanging a stuffed animal from a line, chasing the dog, being called a wild thing by his mother, and standing in his wolf suit with the moon shining over the plant by his window, and projects them as mental images. The symbols are all carefully reused and reconfigured, so that no matter how far afield the story may go, it has never really left the confines of the original premise and setting, just as Max has never really left his home. It is that quality of seamlessness throughout the episode that finds its corollary in memory and the way memories shape identity.

This is all quite different from a conception of physical time that resembles "an imperious force that surrounds us, envelops us, dominates us, without the soul having the power to produce it," almost as though growth, sustenance and decay were the outward manifestations of an invisible, material force that is unalterable and irreversible.¹¹ The human experience of temporality must extend beyond that impersonal notion, since we are capable of revising our judgments of the past and forming alternative visions of the future. There may be aspects of physical time that do impinge on our existence, but time is also present within our consciousness and our perception of it constitutes a form of self-knowledge in its own right. This is the time of the soul according to St. Augustine, in the sense of an interior reflection or introspection, in which the past is no longer, the present is fleeting and the future does not yet exist, but all three are nevertheless accessible to the mind through the actions of memory, attention and expectation.¹²

Suppose that I am going to recite a psalm that I know. . . . As the process continues, the province of memory is extended in proportion as that of expectation is reduced, until the whole of my expectation is absorbed. This happens when I have finished my recitation and it has all passed into the province of memory. What is true of the whole psalm is also true of all its parts and of each syllable. It is true of any longer action in which I may be engaged and of which the recitation of the psalm may only be a small part. It is true of a man's whole life, of which all his actions are parts. It is true of the whole history of mankind, of which each man's life is a part.

(Augustine, *Confessions*, 11:28 [Augustine 1961, 278])

There is a thread that runs through the past, present and future as they are perceived by any single individual or group in society at any particular moment in time. However, it is rather intangible and unquantifiable, and therefore absent in most of the literature on Intelligence Studies, with the notable exception of David Moore's work on sense-making.¹³

The extension of the present moment through the accrual of memory and the projection of anticipation results in a tension between the passive sensation of receiving impressions and the active intentionality of remembering and imagining. The problem is that analysts often short-circuit their natural tendency by applying an impersonal and dehumanized construct of objective time to what are fundamentally subjective experiences, and they do so in a way that purports to ascribe meaning to what is really little more than a sequential ordering of events. The careful selection and arrangement of data into a series of bullet points on the page can create the vague impression of correlation or even causality, but it is certainly not equivalent to interpretation or meaning. Similarly, a title or key judgment containing culturally loaded terms carrying associations with a commonly recognizable set of tropes about a topic (authoritarian tendencies, succession crises, economic reforms, etc.) does not serve as a substitute for interpretation.

Every trope carries with it the expectation of a standard progression of change over time, such as the pattern of an election cycle moving from the primary to the nominating convention, or the rhythm of a multilateral summit from the invitation to the final communiqué. More often than not, a key judgment stated abstractly and supported by a chronology of related data points advances a false sense of likelihood, or even certitude, that the sequence of events will broadly continue in the direction indicated. This is keeping in line with the generic associations that are linked to the narrative tropes rather than according to any specific conditions that arise out of the actual situation on the ground. The only thing left of the signs and significations that once informed the perspectives and decisions of the original participants with regard to how the events should be interpreted is a faint residue of meaning buried in the quotes derived from the sources. In this circumstance, even the analyst's own perspective or critical discourse is limited to a summation of the trends that were already identified in the reporting. The fact that a candidate has won a nomination, or that various parties have agreed upon final communiqué language, is copied wholesale into an analytical line stating that the election campaigning will proceed or the summit will issue a press conference. The conclusion of the analysis is essentially more of the same, reassuring the reader that everything fits into a simple replicable pattern. A three-dimensional experience with real consequences for the people involved thereby becomes flattened out into a two-dimensional exercise of arranging timelines and stating the obvious.

This points to a parallel between intelligence analysis and historical writing, of which the founders of the profession in the 1940s must have been acutely aware, precisely because so many of them were highly accomplished historians in their own right.¹⁴ Indeed, Sherman Kent's history of early to mid-nineteenth century French politics often reads like an intelligence assessment, as the author repeatedly takes the smallest of passages from source materials and spins out entire

paragraphs of interpretation trying to lend them significance.¹⁵ Various asides in which he refers to the correlation of evidence and the testing of hypotheses feel more appropriate for Washington than New Haven. It is not a narrative in which the source materials serve to highlight key points of analysis, but rather a collection of source materials arranged like a lattice through which the narrative can be seen darting in and out. The founders of the US Intelligence Community may have prized language skills, military service and technological expertise, many of them had obtained law degrees, but the heads of research and analysis wanted to read reports that reflected their own training as historians.

The historian usually deals with his subject matter as though it were hermetically sealed from the present and the future, even if he acknowledges in passing that the topic does have relevance for him personally, for his contemporaries and for future generations. The historian's task is to provide a critical dimension by consolidating and articulating the material contained in the original sources, sometimes even correcting or contradicting them, for which the construction of a narrative is necessary in order to convey that critical voice.¹⁶ The discourse, standing above the source materials and judging them from on high, is typically achieved by distancing the author from the subject matter – distancing, almost to the point of obscuring, the dialectic that takes places between human experiences and expectations.

To the degree that historians build their disciplinary claims on prescriptive understandings of distance, they make it difficult to conceptualize distance as anything less than a natural feature of our relation to time – the historical equivalent of visual perspective. Indeed, as the term is generally used, “historical distance” assumes a strong analogy between time and space, both of which are conceived as open to objective measurement. Such thinking is doubly reductive, since it simplifies the ways we experience time while focusing on temporality to the exclusion of other engagements that mediate our relations with the past.

(Phillips 2013, 4)

It is counterintuitive, inasmuch as people's hopes and fears for the future, and their pride and regret over the past, demand empathy from the observer if they are to be fully appreciated. The problem is even more acute for intelligence analysts, who must maintain that critical distance with the target set while at the same time fulfilling the demands placed on them to demonstrate the relevance and urgency of events. *In that sense, the emphasis on chronological time and discrete data points in intelligence writing helps preserve a critical distance, though at the risk of parceling out events into separate units that lose their organic flow, their inter-connectivity and, as a consequence, their psychological depth.*

Experience and Expectation

The intelligence profession as a collective enterprise locates meaning in a relatively rigid form of scientific time, creating the impression of a universal standard

that is replicable in the work of all analysts and responsive to the tradecraft imperative of timeliness. This approach is inauthentic and disingenuous. All political leaders, military commanders, economic planners, public intellectuals and members of civil society operate within complex webs of interconnected significations that sustain their social environments and from which they derive meaning. Any attempt to understand their intentions and motivations must take as a premise the notion that they interpret their own lives and the actions of others through a subjective lens, understanding the passage of time within a very human framework, not as some objective reality that exists outside of (and entirely apart from) their own perception. As John Lukacs put the matter:

There is no human being who has not experienced the relativity of time (though he may not have recognized its meaning); that there is a sense of time that resides within ourselves, whose dimensions may on occasion stretch to impossible lengths or contract within an instant to the standing stillness of death, and that this personal sense of time does not always correspond to the mechanical and mathematically progressing – and therefore man-made – categories of clock and calendar.

(Lukacs 1994, 250)

At the very least, the retention of memories from the past and the projection of possibilities into the future are ways of coping with the enormity of the present, especially in terms of the weight of decisions that must be made immediately and could have major consequences later. There is a sense of being within an historical moment, a feeling of historicity. It serves as a focal point of meaning and understanding, reorienting the past and future toward a point of reference in the present and thereby connecting all three together in a common identity that carries a larger significance than the mere sum of its temporal parts.

Setting aside training manuals and scholarly literature, in actual practice analysts drift unwittingly and almost imperceptibly from the sense of personal time as experienced by their targets of interest to a universal time that obscures or even erases any trace of that same lived experience. Personal time according to Heidegger, in the sense of our ability as human beings to invest our care [German: *Sorge*] and concern in the present moment, based on an understanding of our own limitations and the choices we must make as we face those limitations, foremost among them being the eventuality of death.¹⁷ It is not solely a preoccupation with the finitude of life itself that must define people's perceptions of decision points in terms of costs and benefits, risks and rewards, success and failure. But the concept of being-unto-death does serve as a useful heuristic for clarifying this notion that individuals have a very personal association with the passing of time that makes the events they witness almost inseparable from the meaning and significance they attach to them. And it is largely through social interaction and the need to engage with a larger community that this sense of personal time becomes a shared understanding of time within the public sphere. Clocks, calendars, agendas, schedules and deadlines are necessary for the coordination and collaboration of actors across

social strata. But, at the same time, they further drive the homogenization of temporal experience into an even more impersonal version of scientific time, which is mapped onto a routinized set of processes and procedures. These, in turn, strip away or leave only a trace of the original individual's temporal experience, in what would now be more properly considered universal time.

When the well-trained analyst frames the narrative according to these standards and routines of universal time, he detaches himself and his narrative from the value that his target subjects had originally assigned to events. No doubt a trace of that original significance, in terms of the preoccupation and intentionality of the participants, remains. Perhaps it is in the form of a recurrent political slogan or a retro trend now back in fashion, which carry forward some remnant of past nostalgia along with an associated desire for a once-possible future. But it is now incumbent upon the analyst to extricate that substantive meaning from underneath a mass of tradecraft standards and practices imposed by managers who insist that the known facts be arranged in chronological order in the shape of a timeline, accompanied by maps and graphics that amplify a singular analytical conclusion meant to answer a policymaker concern. As Henri Bergson put the matter:

In short, whether we study Cartesian physics, Spinozistic metaphysics, or the scientific theories of our own time, we shall find everywhere the same anxiety to establish a relation of logical necessity between cause and effect, and we shall see that this anxiety shows itself in a tendency to transform relations of succession into relations of inherence, to do away with active duration, and to substitute for apparent causality a fundamental identity.

(Bergson 1913, 208–9)

This is the false impression of logic and reason, certainty and stability, which intelligence writing borrows from universal time and the consequent homogenization of lived human experience. Analysts, when placed in an institutional setting with structured rules and best practices designed to codify and standardize production across an organization, write and brief according to those codes and standards. The consequence is that the justifications they use for interpreting data are derived from factors that are external to the target set.¹⁸ It cannot be assumed that the fundamental and irreducible experience of time, as it is lived and perceived by the actors who participate in events, is somehow residually retained in the course of the transmission of intelligence information and the dissemination of analysis. And retaining that sense of lived experience or subjective time is vital to any interpretation of events that seeks to reconstruct the true intentions and motivations of the actors.

Historical consciousness is the intuitive sensation or pre-understanding of historicity or historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*] – that feeling of belonging to a past and anticipating a future. It exists before any mode of inquiry or system of explanation is applied, and it leaves an indelible imprint on the decisions that actors make in the present.¹⁹ We can feel that some part of ourselves, our identity, our culture or our society, is dependent on the past and contingent on the future, even though neither the past nor the future is physically present. Any sensation of them or meaning we

attach to it is a mental projection onto things that are no longer (or not yet) tangible – except in the form of artifacts or traces that require interpretation. As David Carr notes, that feeling of connection and being is more tangible for Heidegger, who begins his phenomenology from the standpoint of active engagement with the world, than for Husserl, who considers the consciousness of time to be taken up with perception and cognition.²⁰

Reconstructing the meaning and significance of events by examining the emergence, persistence and transformation of these mental projections of past and future is a matter of reception history [*Receptionsgeschichte*] as defined by literary theorist Hans Robert Jauss. An event can be understood according to the intentions of the individual who instantiated it, but it must also be understood according to each successive audience that encountered it, interpreted it and was impacted by it.

The relationship of work to work must now be brought into this interaction between work and mankind, and the historical coherence of works among themselves must be seen in the interrelations of production and reception. Put another way: literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject – through the interaction of author and public.

(Jauss 1982, 15)

We cannot consider each individual event in the world as an object of study on its own or only in relation to other events, but rather in terms of the ripple effects it has on society. Different experiences of the past and anticipations of the future accumulate in layers or strata [*Schichten*] that can be viewed in relation to each other or in relation to a common point of reference, in something resembling an archaeology of memory.

Mental projections of past and future can be broadly categorized as a Space of Experience and a Horizon of Expectations. These two categories of temporal perception undergo constant change and adjustment, they exist prior to any cognitive processing and they have a direct impact on how meaning is determined and communicated.²¹ For Koselleck these concepts have a direct relevance for political action, social thought, decision-making and predictive analytics. The Space of Experience includes actual memories and remembrances, collective knowledge and skills, habits and behaviors, which are passed down through generations or conveyed by institutions, as well as traces of events retained within unconscious modes of conduct. The Horizon of Expectations includes hopes and fears for the future, rational and irrational desires for eventual outcomes, and feelings of receptivity or hostility to that which is new and different.

Despite their respective present-centeredness these are not symmetrical complimentary concepts which might, for instance, as in a mirror image, mutually relate past and future. Experience and expectation, rather, are of different orders. Past and future never coincide, or just as little as an expectation in its

entirety can be deduced from experience. Experience once made is as complete as its occasions are past; that which is to be done in the future, which is anticipated in terms of an expectation, is scattered among an infinity of temporal extensions. (Koselleck 2004, 259–60)

Meaning and significance are derived from the tension between experience and expectation, the interplay between the two categories of historical consciousness. Together, they form a description of subjective time that can be applied either to the individual or to society as a whole. The gap between experience and expectation may be almost unnoticeable, dormant in the background. This is the case in an orderly transition of power away from a highly unpopular government at a time of economic stagnation, in which political leaders and the public are all well aware that a change in leadership is both necessary and inevitable. Or the strain between experience and expectation may be active in the foreground. This is the case in a disorderly failure to transition power, in which a highly unpopular government refuses to take responsibility for its actions by acknowledging the economic realities and the inevitable need to hand over power, and public expectations can only be voiced in the form of violent protest.

Memory, Identity, Ideology

Understanding the intentions and motivations of an actor requires an appreciation for how that individual assigns meaning and significance to the world around him, the way in which he attaches emotional and psychological value to his experiences and expectations. The recollection of a memory is not an automated function of the mind's storage capacity, it is an active process in which the individual perceives a resemblance or coincidence between a representation of the past and an impression of the present.²² In doing so, the distance between past and present is shortened and the past becomes intertwined with the present, allowing the subject to identify in an immediate sense with the memory of what came before.²³ Not as a practiced routine with the intent of mastering a persona, but rather as an internal reflection that is largely subconscious or unconscious in nature.

Identity is built on memories of the past that are recollected in the present [Grk: *anamnesis*] and projected onto the future in an active process of selection. The surface features that differentiate one temporal moment from another are minimized in favor of those commonalities that resonate with the person's current state of mind. This is how we can form an image of ourselves in the past that we retain in the present moment, in which there is a logical and rational connection between past and present Self. This process helps bolster a more stable sense of identity through a seemingly continuous connection with past images of the Self, while also providing a stronger differentiation with that which is Other. The desire to shape and promote this identity prompts us to take actions that will have ramifications for the future, so that the mental projection of Self and differentiation from Other works in both temporal directions. People construct narratives about the world and their role in it, using their imaginations to envision alternate futures and selectively

drawing upon particular memories as justification for projecting the image of who they want to be.²⁴

There is an inherent fragility in this chain of identity extending from past to present to future, a fragility that is a consequence of the intensely personal way that people take possession of their memories. There is a push and pull that ensues among different actors who each want to define the past on their own terms.

What we celebrate under the heading of founding events are, essentially, violent acts legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right, acts legitimated, at the limit, by their very antiquity, by their age. The same events are thus found to signify glory for some, humiliation for others. To their celebration, on the one hand, corresponds their execration, on the other. It is in this way that real and symbolic wounds are stored in the archives of collective memory.

(Ricoeur 2004, 82)

Hence, there is a drive to cultivate memories and express them as a projection of a person's identity, but also to recoil from the way that others cling to their own similar or overlapping memories and thereby project a competing identity. One of the goals of anthropologists is then to understand how societies confer authority on members who are more competent at adjusting their own expectations and those of others with regard to how cultural identity is defined.²⁵ Seen from this perspective, ideology is an attempt to intervene in the process of identity formation by posing as the guardian of identity, ready to help define and lend meaning to memories from a position of sociocultural authority. In the process, ideology distorts the perception of reality, resulting in the legitimation of power and the appropriation of symbolic systems of everyday life. From its inception during the French Revolution, the term was directed at establishing a normative system of ideas intended to lay a foundation for human needs and desires, with its practitioners [Fr: *ideologues*] aspiring to a leveling of society and a regulation of civic virtue.²⁶ The word had its origins in the *Institut de France* and Antoine Destutt de Tracy, author of a survey on how thoughts are formed (*Eléments d'Idéologie*). Their efforts to propagate a new set of freedoms both elevated Napoleon's attempts to promote himself as guardian of the Revolution and undermined his efforts to exert absolutist authoritarian control.

Ideology thus closes the gap between the claims to legitimacy that are asserted by those wishing to govern, and the belief in that same legitimacy held by those who would be governed. It does so by shaping the contours of a narrative, the selection of facts and the features of the protagonists. The ideologue as narrator decides what to remember and what to forget, and whether to use words that seduce or intimidate, all while focusing the audience's mind on a common history with a shared identity to the exclusion of alternative narratives. It is a temporal process of remembrance (past), memorization (present) and commemoration (future).²⁷

Again, memories are inherently private. When individuals draw upon their memories to structure their self-identity and assign their self-worth, they take possession of those experiences and carry them into the present as a token of who they

are. It is part of a tradition of inwardness, introspection and reflection that goes back to Augustine, in which impressions are safeguarded and consciousness of them contributes to a sense of continuity and stability that must be protected and defended. And yet, in order to appreciate the ways in which entire social groups coalesce and mobilize, or how actors seek to shape and direct that group formation, it is also necessary to understand how individual experiences become a part of collective memory and how individual hopes and fears become a part of shared expectations.

The human mind is able to project a memory of the past or a vision for the future onto others, through analogy and empathy, or what might be termed affective imagination [Ger: *Einfühlung*]. Individuals are even capable of recollecting events and shaping their memories of the past by taking cues from how others engage in such activity. Participation in a group and having a sense of belonging in that collective involves shifting viewpoints and adopting shared perspectives on the significance of the past. The social framework is embedded in the process of recollection, from our earliest childhood memories onward, even when the social setting that gave rise to the memory has long since been abandoned and forgotten.

We shall better understand the nature of this reshaping operation as it applies to the past, and perhaps also to dreamlike states, if we do not forget that even at the moment of reproducing the past our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu.

(Halbwachs 1992, 49)

This is not to say that all memories are socially constructed, but it is to say that the act of recollection is ours alone and our viewpoint shifts according to changes in our social position.

That sense of communal belonging, in which we feel that others share our personal experience of the past and our private feelings about the future, varies by degree as we move outward through concentric circles of social interaction. A shared identity based on the confident recollection of memories is strongest within the environment of a person's immediate family, then extended family, then friends and local neighborhood and so forth, corresponding to decreasing degrees of direct face-to-face interaction. Proximity in age and kinship creates bonds of trust that help encourage strong identity formation, in the sense that close relations are presumably more likely to care about our birth and death, they are more likely to approve of our mode of existence and they are more likely to reaffirm our choices. They have a special status halfway between the Self and Other, and between individual and collective memory. As Alfred Schutz noted, the world of contemporaries who are not family, friends or associates can only be accessed indirectly and with modifications, by imagining a generalized type of experience based on a broad characterization of an ideal type of individual who is only loosely comparable to a family member, a friend or an associate.²⁸

To speak of this process in broad cultural terms and with regard to large groupings in society is to speak of generations. Our trust is extended to contemporaries

on the assumption that peers within our own age group have gone through some of the same transformative events at around the same key junctures in their lives. They can therefore be reasonably expected to appreciate our emotional and psychological attachment to those events. Contemporaries within the same generation embody an assumed shared experience of a lived present, predecessors in previous generations have access to a more remote archive of past events that are less accessible to people today and successors in coming generations will have an untold potential to experience events that are as yet unknowable. In comparing generational experience to class consciousness, Mannheim noted that:

The fact of belonging to the same class, and that of belonging to the same generation or age group, have this in common, that both endow the individuals sharing in them with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action.

(Mannheim 1952, 291)

Just as the members of a generation undergo contemporary experiences that point them toward certain modes of behavior, so too do those shared experiences limit and restrain the members of a generation from engaging in other types of self-expression. And thus, the tension between experience and expectation, as it passes from one generation unto another, helps generate the concepts of tradition and innovation.

Identity and culture are dependent on the past and contingent on the future. What purpose do clocks, calendars and the cosmos have in this understanding of time as an intersubjective mental projection of intentions and motivations? They help to establish a shared understanding of events and a vocabulary by which individuals can debate the issues that concern them as they form communities around a set of mutual interests, even if some members disagree over the selection of data and the exact meaning attached to it. Groups in society and even entire cultures come to see their own identity in terms of collective experiences and expectations, in ways that can be collaborative or confrontational, with the remembrance of certain events and the forgetting of others contributing to a sense of communal belonging or factional strife.²⁹ Dates or events seen as watershed moments in the collective memory can serve as pivot points for competing attempts to define cultural identities and promote political agendas. It is then a matter of political psychology to determine how and why certain moments in time galvanize public attention and generate new expectations for the future, and how particular societal actors are capable of capitalizing on them.

Consider two examples of how generational conflict and the shared interpretation of memory come to inform communal identity. In the first, Levi Eshkol, Yigal Allon and Moshe Dayan, despite their policy differences, shared an emotional connection to the idea of settlements in the territories that Israel newly occupied in June 1967. This was born out of a feeling that they could now carry forward the

vision of those pioneers whose mission had been interrupted by the 1948 war. What they failed to understand was how a younger generation of settlers would seek to create their own facts on the ground.³⁰ In the second, young Algerians turned out in October 1988 to riot and loot in the capital, angry about widespread unemployment and economic mismanagement. Above all, they were sick and tired of hearing the regime narrative of heroic rebellion against colonial French rule and so they turned that rhetoric against their parents as they re-envisioned the *pouvoir* of the government as the oppressor. That regime narrative of anti-colonialism had come to be seen as a justification for allowing the discredited elites of their parents' generation to maintain their grip on power amidst the gradual economic decline.³¹

Modernity, Utopia, Revolution

When ideology serves as the basis for tethering the present moment to a set of collective experiences of the past and shared expectations of the future, the resulting sense of shared social or cultural identity creates a moral framework for evaluating proper and improper courses of action. "The sense-creating procedures of historical consciousness are necessary for moral values and for moral reasoning . . . in the sense that values must have an acceptable relationship to reality."³² People not only attach feelings of regret and pride to the past, hope and fear to the future, they also make moral and ethical value judgments about themselves and others in the process. For example, a theocratic regime might build its legitimacy on a messianic vision for the future, one in which good governance is defined by the ability of political leaders to prepare the conditions for a scripturally preordained salvation. A Green Party can build its political platform on claims of a long-term global warming trend, and mobilize voters with an agenda that seeks to avoid the catastrophic effects of climate change in a distant future.

For the intelligence analyst, this might mean studying an event for its significance in the life of a particular individual, but it might also mean studying the same event in terms of its broader significance for a generation or an entire society. The different meanings attached to the same event might interact in important ways at different levels of analysis. Individuals participate in activities that give them a shared sense of identity and culture, binding them to common experiences of time and space, but they do not necessarily participate in exactly the same way, at exactly the same moment or with exactly the same awareness or level of concern.

On a very grand scale, there is a collective experience of time that binds societies all across the industrialized world and which contains its own narrative of growth and decline acting as a centripetal force pulling in other narratives within its orbit. This is Modernity. The German term *Neuzeit* better conveys the sense of novelty as a value or commodity in its own right. In a colloquial sense, modernity simply means a period in which a static sense of time is displaced by a feeling of development and forward motion.³³ For chroniclers and scholastics in the late Middle Ages, the idea that there was significance in recording new events as they progressed from the present into the past certainly existed, as did the millenarian notion of perfection to be achieved at the end of history. But these concepts only existed within

a worldview that minimized the importance of earthly affairs, human agency and mundane authority, in favor of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Final Judgment and the World to Come.³⁴ It is implicitly in the sixteenth century and more explicitly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that written works refer to a contemporary period that is qualitatively and substantively different from what came before, inasmuch as the advancement of science, the discovery of the New World and the end of the Wars of Religion made possible an outlook toward the future that was not circumscribed by eschatology. The idea of a Modern epoch comprised of a level of advancement that could surpass even that which the previous generation experienced, a *neueste Zeit*, only came into play in the later Enlightenment.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, society had passed a threshold in which historical events and future prognostications were no longer simply accumulated. Temporal experience has since been marked by the perception of acceleration, a concept that is embedded in such processes as progress, crisis and revolution. Political movements such as Socialism, Marxism and Communism have sought to situate society within this historical consciousness of Modernity, each with a particular vision for how human beings should use their agency to effect change on the path toward a better future on this earth.³⁵ The notion of Utopia that was once grounded in an idealized return to the moral and political superiority of a classical antiquity, free from the constraints of original sin, has been replaced with an ideological pursuit of scientism as part of a “relentlessly future-directed activism.”³⁶ According to Koselleck (2018, 98): “Clearly, the acceleration claimed and invoked for the entirety of world history is less a controlled concept of experience and more a utopian concept of expectation.”

Popular revolt styled as a necessary break with the status quo, coups portrayed as managed transitions to more responsible governance, modernization theory promoting transformational change to link globalized societies. All of it leading to dislocations, resentments and trends of “national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories,” as Svetlana Boym (2001, 41) has characterized it. In this acceleration of progress, successive generations have overlapping experiences of the same transformational events, with different social groups viewing change through alternately positive or negative moral frameworks. Aleida Assmann (2020, 172) has noted how people increasingly “appropriate the past as a way of coping with existence,” compensating for political visions of utopia that have turned to dystopia. The effect is one of attempting to reverse time, with individuals fleeing the future and finding refuge in the past, or redressing grievances and seeking equity to such an extent that “we can no longer clearly distinguish between the temporal registers of past, present, and future.”³⁷

The notion of progress contained within the experience of Modernity has given rise to teleologies that are embedded in the master narratives of historians, politicians and other actors in society, shaping the way they conceive of identity, culture and community. In turn, the pressure this places on individuals in terms of their private narratives produces feelings of emptiness, loneliness and inauthenticity. It

creates anxiety and doubt about the future, for which the natural impulse is to shift responsibility onto others and retreat into a protected space of memory.³⁸ The desire for individuality and free expression is not abandoned, but it is displaced, from a future that is now perceived as more of the same onto a past that can be reimagined in a golden haze of nostalgia.

The alternative would be a kind of Freudian “working through.” It is exemplified in Jacob Burckhardt’s metanarrative of Modernity in which the suffering, misery and despair that are pervasive throughout history corrode the accumulated heritage of cultural forms and dissolve them into value-free instrumental rationality.³⁹ In such a reckoning, the past is no longer a constructive force for framing identity in the present and thereby providing a positive basis for action in the future, neither forward toward an agenda of progress nor backward in the hopes of better times restored. Rather, the process of historical change is condemned and abandoned in favor of studying the past for the sake of consolation about an unvarnished vision of the present and its inevitable future, “which deprives it of the very gravity of real life by transforming it into a matter of art.”⁴⁰

All of this is reflected in the belief that the intelligence profession must be laser-focused on the present, with a flurry of disposable analytic products constantly overtaking one another, as each new development threatens a potentially catastrophic intelligence failure. This is the tyranny of the clock as George Woodcock understood it, with its invisible hands dictating the thoughts and actions of all those who work within the industry.⁴¹ The analyst can retreat into a long-format product of deep research on a topic of personal interest that will revive her feeling of intellectual excitement, receive no policymaker attention and attract a great deal of managerial criticism. Or, she can seek a career track in management by redirecting her efforts toward public displays of cheerful excellence in collaboration and mentoring. Either way, the most common analytical response to the vicissitudes of mass production is avoidance and retreat or plagiarism and fraud. Overall analytical output thereby devolves into a kind of theater spectacle. The analysis of topics that should inspire thought and care, such as humanitarian disasters, gross violations of human rights, civil war and genocide, instead degenerate into updating indicators, comparing them with other conflicts and appending a timeline. The only thing prompting real concern is the discussion of confidence levels. For such intelligence professionals, analytical production is an exercise in demonstrating an ability to work within the confines of tradecraft standards for their own sake. Not for the sake of the policymakers who must make decisions, nor for the sake of the people whose lives will be impacted by those decisions.

Modernity and Progress are ideological constructions readily open to critique, whether from a historiographical perspective like that of Walter Benjamin or from a purely intelligence standpoint of cognitive bias like that of Richards Heuer Jr.⁴² The underlying teleology of progress nevertheless has meaning for many of those who are wrapped up in such narratives and analysts have to take that into account. For example, a political party mobilizing voters with fears that a high turnout for the opposing side will result in the election of an authoritarian demagogue and the end of long-standing democratic values and institutions. What is important is not

the type of master narrative, but rather the way in which human agency is posited within it. In other words, if a narrative involves a preordained course of events projected into the future by a political actor, then who has the ability to control the pace and direction of those long-term trends? And why should people commit themselves to a belief in that particular vision of the future?

Those questions become most urgent when we consider the concept of revolution, a tectonic shift in society that ideological actors attempt to commandeer through a wholesale revision of identity politics. It is in the course of revolution that the relationship between collective experience of the past and shared expectation for the future becomes untethered. A society's understanding of its past is fundamentally reinterpreted and a new vision for the future threatens to overwhelm the present order. Revolution upends established norms and subverts the rules that once governed social interactions. The state temporarily loses its capacity for repression and control, just at the time when it needs to channel public sentiment the most. The competition among new elites as they seek to capture institutions hinges on their ability to garner public support. This leads to a brutal contest between state and society over how to define the new rules of political discourse, with the public taking a direct role in interpreting symbols of power and authority. The groups that win out are small, disciplined, single-minded, ruthless and often highly centralized – qualities that once helped them survive persecution under the old regime and that are now turned against their new rivals for power and the public at large.⁴³ Such groups are self-conscious of their minority status and their outsized devotion to a cause. As Crane Brinton (1965, 148–51) pointed out, in their anxiety they seek to impose on others an “unmistakably puritanical or ascetic” state of social conformity and “eschatologies, [with] their notions of final ends like heaven and hell.”⁴⁴

Communal identity and collective solidarity coalesce around the revolutionary experience, with the revolution itself serving as Year One, the pivot point for which all history is now defined. Kamrava (1992, 108) has written that: “Under such circumstances, the identity of the group supplants and replaces the identity of the individual.” In other words, there is a strong impulse by citizens who have lived through a revolution to form a new communal identity around that radical experience. There is also a strong compulsion by the new elites to redirect that identity towards activities that will reinforce loyalty to the emerging state. The Horizon of Expectation has become so impossibly large, endowed with the collective hopes and fears of the masses and amplified by the rhetoric of self-interested elites, that it now subsumes the Space of Experience. People are living on the cusp of an imagined future, just at the edge of what they believe to be its event horizon. They “tend to have a romanticized image” of their accomplishments, they “idealize the quality of social relationships in their movement,” they want to “maintain their newly-found sense of self worth” and they seek to memorialize their sacrifices in the name of their hard-fought liberties.⁴⁵ The euphoria of nationalism thereby creates a false sense of belonging, intimately and instantly tied to an imagined community that extends far beyond the traditional confines of family, friends and associates.

All of this points to a key distinction that Thomas Kuhn made about the way in which communities establish their paradigms or the mental models under which

they operate.⁴⁶ Even if people believe there are rules or theories underlying the way in which society functions, in truth people usually operate without rules in the strict sense, instead basing their theories on practical applied experience, never questioning their assumptions. “Indeed, the existence of a paradigm need not even imply that any full set of rules exists.”⁴⁷ It is part of the reason why transitions at a time of revolutionary upheaval are so chaotic. Individuals were invested in the old institutions and social norms on a personal level, passively allowing them to shape their interpretation of past events and their expectations for future trends. It is not the removal of a rules-based order that suddenly throws society into disarray *per se*, it is the manner in which people’s identities become untethered from the moorings of their familiar and well-worn understanding of the past, present and future. This is why the post-revolution landscape is as much a contest of public persuasion (between rival factions vying for power) as it is a competition for actual control (over institutions and processes).

As in political revolutions, so in paradigm choice – there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community. To discover how scientific revolutions are effected, we shall therefore have to examine not only the impact of nature and of logic, but also the techniques of persuasive argumentation effective within the quite special groups that constitute the community of scientists.

(Kuhn 1996, 94)

The English, American, French, Russian and Iranian revolutions have typically served as classic examples of the myths and realities surrounding such radical transformation in society. They clearly illustrate how ideology can intervene in the formation of collective identity and crystalize popular demands for progress into a program for reorganizing society. However, those case studies are also suffused with propaganda that survived long into the postrevolutionary phase, thereby obscuring for later generations some of the mechanics that were outlined previously in this chapter. A quick glance at a different kind of revolution, the 1848 revolution in France, might offer a better opportunity to see some of these temporal elements at play, allowing us to understand how experience and expectation fold in upon one another, as utopian hope turns into revolutionary farce. Over three days in February, riots in Paris prompted the abdication of King Louis Philippe and the abolishment of the monarchy, inspiring a wave of mass protests, political reforms and conservative retrenchment all across Europe. The Provisional Government that came into effect under the ensuing Second Republic was beset on all sides, devoid of confident leadership and highly unpopular following its suppression of the June Days uprising. This set the stage for Louis Napoleon’s rise to national prominence and his eventual assumption of the presidency in December, which later fell into dictatorship. This is the narrative arc of a bourgeois revolution guided by Socialist ideals that emerged out of the ranks of the working classes, which would eventually descend into repression and a police state before ending in an authoritarian coup.⁴⁸

What makes this period remarkable for our purposes is how three generations of revolutionaries were living side by side, so that numerous participants manning the barricades and throwing cobblestones during the 1848 events could reasonably claim to have done the same in 1832, 1830, 1827 and before.⁴⁹ Louis Philippe's plan for putting down the insurgency had been devised by Marshall Gérard, a man who fought in the wars of the 1790s, while the Provisional Government trotted out Jacques Charles Dupont de l'Eure as nominal head, a man in his 80s who had served as a deputy from the time of the Directorate in 1798 up through the July Monarchy in 1830.⁵⁰ Episodes from previous revolutions were not distant echoes of the past, long since retired to the archives of the cultural collective. Rather, they were living memories in the lives of countless individuals from multiple generations who were now all contemporaries engaging in the same endeavor of reliving their past. Even Karl Marx, who took up residence in Paris for a month at the invitation of a member of the Provisional Government, noted how the participants were more intent on dredging up the past and parading around in old revolutionary clothes rather than pursuing genuine reforms.⁵¹ In the popular imagination, those individuals who had profited from the expulsion of landed elites and the plundering of religious institutions during the first revolution were now viewed as the rough equivalent of the same aristocrats that those individuals had evicted from the castles.⁵² Alexis de Tocqueville summed up the mood as one of nostalgia for a glossy version of revolutions past, which served as an escape for the public's general malaise and a political lethargy that could not envision a sufficiently radical future.

M. Thiers's *Histoire de la Révolution*, M. de Lamartine's *Les Girondins*, and other less celebrated but quite well known books and, to an even greater extent, plays had rehabilitated the Terror and in a sense made it fashionable. Thus the tepid passions of the day were made to speak with the inflamed rhetoric of 1793, and the names and deeds of illustrious criminals were constantly on the lips of people who had neither the energy nor the sincere desire to emulate them.

(Tocqueville 2016, 53)

Alphonse de Lamartine, the poet-turned-minister who proclaimed the Republic on February 24 at the Hôtel de Ville, epitomized this glossy version of the past made present in the introduction to his history of events:

The revolution of 1848 is merely the continuance of the former [1789], with fewer elements of disorder, and more elements of progress. . . . This idea is the people; the people who, in 1789, freed themselves from the servitude, ignorance, privileges and prejudices of absolute monarchy; the people who, in 1848, freed themselves from the oligarchy of a small number, and a monarchy representing in too limited a manner the development of right, and the interest of the masses in the government.

(Lamartine 1849, 1:2)

In Lamartine's mind, this was revolution in the *longue durée*, in the sense of a slow-moving undercurrent of collective will that had taken a lifetime to become fully manifest in the consciousness of the masses, culminating in universal male suffrage and an enormous National Assembly of 900 representatives. It could be seen as revolution for its own sake, with an expectation for radical change having become ingrained in the collective imagination, and the new political classes reverting to the past for reassurance out of a fear for anarchy and disorder.⁵³ It could also be viewed as the movement from Modernity to Postmodernity, encapsulated in a series of events that bore all the hallmarks of historical consciousness in the guise of generation change, identity formation and ideological demagoguery.

Notes

- 1 *Physics*, Book IV, 220a25–26 (Aristotle 1984, 1:373): “It is clear, then, that time is number of movement in respect of the before and after, and is continuous since it is an attribute of what is continuous.”
- 2 *Pure Reason*, A33 and B50 (Kant 1998, 163): “Time is nothing other than the form of inner sense, i.e., of the intuition of our self and our inner state. For time cannot be a determination of outer appearances; it belongs neither to a shape or a position, etc., but on the contrary determines the relation of representations in our inner state. And just because this inner intuition yields no shape we also attempt to remedy this lack through analogies, and represent the temporal sequence through a line progressing to infinity, in which the manifold constitutes a series that is of only one dimension, and infer from the properties of this line to all the properties of time.”
- 3 Some scientists have suggested that while one object can experience time through quantum entanglement with another, an unentangled system does not experience time at all (Coppo et al. 2024).
- 4 For example: NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–449, Box 306, “A Tabular Presentation of Military Activity in the Taiwan Straits, 1949–1955,” State/OIR, Intelligence Report No. 6949 (July 1, 1955), declassification #NND 989071; NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–449, Box 306, “A Tabular Presentation of Military Activity in the Taiwan Straits, 1949–1955,” State/OIR, Intelligence Report No. 6949 (July 1, 1955), “Military Activity in the Taiwan Strait, May 10 to September 22, 1955,” No. 6949.1 (September 26, 1955), declassification #NND 989071; NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–449, Box 306, “A Tabular Presentation of Military Activity in the Taiwan Straits, 1949–1955,” State/OIR, Intelligence Report No. 6949 (July 1, 1955), “Military Activity in the Taiwan Strait, September 23 to November 14, 1955,” No. 6949.2 (November 18, 1955), declassification #NND 989071; etc.
- 5 Husserl (1964, 51): “Going along the flux or with it, we have a continuous series of retentions pertaining to the beginning point. Moreover, every earlier point of this series shades off [*sich abschattet*] again as a now in the sense of retention. Thus, in each of these retentions is included a continuity of retentional modifications, and this continuity is itself again a point of actuality which retentionality shades off. . . . Each subsequent retention, rather, is not merely a continuous modification arising from the primal impression but a continuous modification of the same beginning point.”
- 6 Ricoeur (1984, 3:32).
- 7 Similarly, in clinical observations of the hippocampal network in mice, researchers have found that memories are stored in different groups of neurons, each operating on different scales of time. The ways in which memories are retrieved and their properties modulated depends on the activation of different types of neurons following memory encoding, and that interlocking process allows for the reinforcement of associations and inferences (Kveim et al. 2024).

- 8 Benveniste (1971, 226–7): “No matter what the type of language, there is everywhere to be observed a certain linguistic organization of the notion of time. . . . But let us beware of this; there is no other criterion and no other expression by which to indicate ‘the time at which one *is*’ except to take it as ‘the time at which one *is speaking*.’ This is the eternally ‘present’ moment.” Or, as Kristeva (1975, 231–2) would later characterize it, Benveniste’s speaking subject is capable of positing a referent through an assertion of existence, so that the copula (“to be”) puts forward both a subject and a referent at one and the same time.
- 9 Ricoeur (1984, 1:52). Emphasis in the original.
- 10 Sendak (1963).
- 11 Ricoeur (1984, 3:12).
- 12 Ricoeur (1984, 1:18–20).
- 13 Moore (2011, 81–4).
- 14 Harvard-trained historians who were recruited to the OSS included Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Crane Brinton, H. Stuart Hughes and Carl Schorske, among others (Pinck 2011).
- 15 See Kent (1975, 7, 24, 49, 82, 99, etc.).
- 16 Ricoeur (2006).
- 17 Heidegger (1996, 180–1): “The phenomenon of care in its totality is essentially something that cannot be split up; thus any attempts to derive it from special acts or drives such as willing and wishing or urge and predilection, or of constructing it out of them, will be unsuccessful.”
- 18 See Bergson (1913, 170).
- 19 Cf. Greimas and Ricoeur (1989).
- 20 Carr (1986, 104).
- 21 Ricoeur (1984, 3:208).
- 22 Ricoeur (1984, 3:34–5).
- 23 Ricoeur (1984, 3:144–5).
- 24 Bruner (1990, 114–15).
- 25 Goodenough (1981, 104–5).
- 26 Lichtheim (1967, 7–8).
- 27 Lichtheim (1967, 85).
- 28 Schutz (1967, 188–9): “Ideal-typical understanding, then, characteristically deduces the in-order-to and because-motives of a manifest act by identifying the constantly achieved goal of that act. . . . The next step is to postulate an agent behind the action, a person who, with a typical modification of attention, typically intends this typical act – in short, a personal ideal type.”
- 29 Carr (2014, 53–5).
- 30 Gorenberg (2006).
- 31 Evans and Phillips (2007, 102–42).
- 32 Rüsen (1993, 67).
- 33 Koselleck (2004, 229–30).
- 34 Kumar (1991, 36) notes the importance of the way in which these concepts were bounded: “But the millennium is not utopia. Its ideal order is predetermined. It is brought in by divine intervention. Human agency remains questionably relevant.”
- 35 Kumar (1991, 248–9).
- 36 Shklar (1965).
- 37 Shklar (1965, 192).
- 38 Bauman (2017, 125–7).
- 39 Rüsen (2005, 151).
- 40 Rüsen (2005, 156).
- 41 Woodcock (1944).
- 42 Cf. Davies (2010, 41–2): “modernity, being a historical category resulting from historical consciousness, assimilates the progression of history to the revelation of religious truth.”

- 43 Brinton (1965, 148–51).
- 44 Brinton (1965, 180 and 194).
- 45 Brinton (1965, 109).
- 46 N.B. Kuhn (2000, 136) cautioned about the application of his theory to other disciplines: “My methodological prescription is, however, directed exclusively to the sciences and, among them, to those fields which display the special developmental pattern known as progress.” For a counterargument, see Wolin (1980).
- 47 Kuhn (1996, 44).
- 48 Merriman (1978, 215–22). Most historians have pilloried the Second Republic for political pandering and incompetence, but a more sympathetic reading is also possible (Heywood and Heywood 1994). Its unpopularity may have been more the result of an inability to read public sentiment and anticipate how policies designed for one segment of society would impact others (Fasel 1974).
- 49 Duveau (1967, 165). N.B. Not many of the older generation were actively participating in politics circa 1848. Amann (1975, 37): “By the middle of the nineteenth century, only one Parisian in twenty-five was old enough – fifty-five years separated 1793 and 1848 – to have lived through the storm of the 1790’s as a young adult. Among club leaders, the proportion was the same.”
- 50 Duveau (1967, 183–4).
- 51 Beecher (2021, 345–51).
- 52 Duveau (1848, 210).
- 53 Guyver (2016, 93): “Left-wing representatives self-consciously called themselves *montagnards* and sat together on the upper banks of the chamber, called the Mountain, as had their predecessors during the first Revolution.”

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10 Cultural Revolution in China, 1966

Experiences of the past and expectations for the future are the formative elements of identity and culture. Memories are refracted through the ideas and opinions of family, friends and acquaintances and projected onto a historical consciousness that slowly transforms from one generation to another. Regarding the question of whether these concepts of temporality are comparable across different cultures and societies, Rüsen makes the following observations about Chinese historical writings:

As to history, it is expressed in concepts of time and temporal change that define the relationship between past, present and future. These time concepts put the human world into an order which enables people to handle the experience of contingency by which their lives are permanently threatened. They also define their social life forms by structuring basic views of identity, of togetherness, and of otherness. In Chinese one could speak of the “Tao” of history, which can be compared with the “logos” of history or its “sense” in the West. The related principles and modes of thought draw a line between sense and senselessness in respect to the temporal dimension of human life.
(Rüsen 2005, 112)

The following case study of the Cultural Revolution in China presents a similar pattern of generation change, identity formation and ideological demagoguery. It also contains a utopian vision for the future based on an unsustainable memory of the past that quickly collapses into a dystopia of societal breakdown and government brutality. The analysts took full advantage of the opportunity that revolution afforded to explore the many cross-cutting issues at hand and second-order effects. It was precisely through their consideration of historical consciousness that these analysts were able to partially reconstruct the intentions and motivations of senior officials in Beijing.

Then, as now, the Cultural Revolution presented a particularly thorny topic, involving almost all aspects of life in China for nearly a decade in rolling scenes of “bewildering complexity and almost unfathomable brutality.”¹ Confrontation between Mao and his perceived rivals within the upper echelons of the CCP had been playing out since at least 1961, with Mao openly criticizing a number of

policies as a way of pushing back against the encroachment of revisionist tendencies. These early moves were handled in “vague and ambiguous language” that would have been hard to interpret for even the most ardent China watcher, and Mao’s thinking had not yet coalesced into what would later become a systematic theory justifying a Cultural Revolution.² Between February and May of 1966, the battle lines were drawn, with: 1) different centers of power within the CCP engaging in attacks on writers that effectively served as tests of ideological purity, 2) the meeting of the CCP’s Central Committee at the Ninth National Congress in April, and 3) the issuance of the May 16 Circular indicating that a purge of revisionism throughout China was imminent.³ Throughout the summer and fall of 1966, newspapers denounced counterrevolutionary artists and intellectuals, colleges and universities were shut down in preparation for educational reforms promoting Mao Thought, vigilante youth were organized into Red Guard units with support from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the economy felt the first setbacks as revolutionary zeal spread throughout the countryside.

From the very beginning, analysts in London could see that changes were underway. In February 1966, the UK Foreign Office’s (FO) Information Research Department (IRD) published a briefing paper entitled “After Mao – Candidates for Power.”⁴ The analysts were working from the basic premise that Mao and his inner circle were advanced in age and would soon have to hand off power to a younger generation. Mao was reportedly in poor health. The illness or incapacitation of a leader usually calls for a piece on political succession; indeed, any transition of power in an authoritarian regime justifies analytical production.⁵ Analysts at the IRD had been evaluating political succession in China since at least 1958, stating that Mao’s decision to step down as Chairman of the People’s Republic “inevitably raises the question of his successor.”⁶ In 1966, they took note of Mao’s age (72), but refrained from getting bogged down in a description of health issues. In retrospect that was probably for the best, considering that Mao had another ten years to go and his image as a strong, confident leader would endure. That image of unquestionable and indisputable authority that Mao so ardently sought to project would eventually come into doubt, but only after his death in October 1976 and the subsequent arrest of the chief ideologues of the Cultural Revolution. It would take the CCP under Deng Xiaopeng five more years to find a way forward for modernizing the country, while maintaining a firm grip on power and avoiding any revision of Mao’s legacy.

The analysts at the FO were armed with little more than historical knowledge of Mao’s cult of personality, the concept of an inevitable transition of power to a younger generation and some evidence of halting efforts to revise the educational curriculum. From that scant basis, their paper would remarkably conclude the following:

- The government’s campaign is directed at instilling the correct revolutionary ideology in the next generation, in the belief that modernization will only be achieved through the kind of “selfless” struggle and “unrelenting” sacrifice that the founders of the CCP had experienced.
- After the older generation passes, Chinese society will be more complex – “increasingly a consumer society” with higher living standards, more in touch

with the outside world, and more prone to rebellion against the “tight controls which have become so much a part of their lives.”

- China will be “nearer to being a great Power,” with nationalism and a “distrust of foreigners” persisting well into the future, long after the “revolutionary fire dims” and the wisdom of Mao is brought into question.
- Leaders of the next generation, “starved of authority in their earlier years” and unprepared to deal with these challenges, will maintain an overriding concern for preserving national unity as they “tolerate no threat to the central Government’s absolute power.”⁷

This is a sweeping narrative making predictions at least fifteen to twenty-five years out, some of which would turn out to be rather accurate. The paper admits there are numerous information gaps about the inner circle of the CCP in Beijing, yet proceeds to steadily and confidently present its analytic line, always stressing those points of divergence where the narrator’s perspective contrasts with that of the main characters. There is no quarter given to analytic tradecraft, such as methodologies, source summary statements or probabilistic language. Instead, the author has a point to make about the intentions and motivations of Chinese leaders, as well as the unintended consequences of their actions, and he has little to no interest in hedging his bets. And it is incredible to think about how much analysis is contained within such a short space, after allowing for the 56 lines of text devoted to biographical sketches of possible successors to Mao. The editors could have imposed tradecraft standards on the piece. But that would only have detracted from the analysis as a whole and the vivid impression it leaves on the imagination, forcing the text to double back on itself in an implicit acknowledgement of self-doubt, while filling up valuable space on the page with critical apparatus that would have done little to change the overall thrust of the argument.

Deeply embedded within this narrative is a sense of temporality, or rather two different temporalities. The first is situated in the desire of an older generation of leaders to project a shared universal experience of their own glorious past as they remembered it, along with a collective expectation for a courageous leap into the future that perpetuates those ideals. The second is located in the younger generation’s very personal and inchoate sense of disillusionment derived from ongoing hardships, with a receding and diminishing expectation for change in the future. The paper works its way out of the initial research question (“What will happen when Mao dies?”) and through the biographical sketches (members of the CCP Political Bureau and others), before turning to a short discussion of issues that will remain even after the transition of power (discipline within the CCP, a focus on Taiwan). It concludes with a look at the mindset of an older generation of CCP leaders. In terms of their fears: “They fear that with the passage of time, self-seeking and the profit motive will replace selfless devotion to the revolutionary cause.”⁸ And in terms of their hopes:

They intend that [China] should develop her economic and military (including nuclear) capacity to fit her for what they consider her predestined role of

a great Power, and to bring her fully into the 20th century as an industrialised nation.⁹

These were the twin goals of socialist commitment and economic progress that had motivated the CCP since long before the Great Leap Forward.

In this IRD paper, the older generation is so consumed with memorializing their experience of hard-fought struggle and sacrifice that they are allowing their fears to overwhelm their ambitions, blinding them to the obstacles this will create for their successors. Senior officials are constrained by their understanding of the past and can conceive of only one policy option for their country's future – perpetual revolution.

“Therefore, according to Mao and his associates, modernisation is, in effect, impossible without ensuring a firm ideological basis. There must be no thought of pausing to enjoy such limited material progress or prestige gained since 1949 at the expense of more solid benefits due at some unspecified future date.”¹⁰

Societal gain is deferred into the distant future, pushed so far onto the horizon that the Chinese people cannot and should not attempt to approach it. Meanwhile, the physical and mental struggle of the past is brought into the present by way of a government re-education campaign to inculcate Mao Thought in a younger generation and make them “heirs to the revolution.” And hence, a utopian vision for the future based on hope and progress is abrogated by a dystopian vision of fear and worry, resulting in the retrenchment of Mao and the principles that have sustained his regime.

Past and future collide. It is analysis in which experiences of time form the bedrock of a multilayered and complex analytical problem, requiring a careful consideration of intentions and motivations in ways that cut across categories of politics, economics, etc. It is important to note that the analysts in London were not the only ones to view the problem through this lens and arrive at these conclusions. Arthur Doak Barnett, then-Professor of Government at Columbia University and Chairman of the National Committee on United States-China Relations, delivered a series of lectures at Princeton University in October 1966, which he published as a book the following year.¹¹ He asserted that the “generation of Chinese revolutionary leaders will soon pass from the scene,” and these “aging leaders have been engaged for some time in a process of intense soul-searching, groping for effective strategies to ensure the continuation of uninterrupted revolution at home and abroad.”¹² Barnett described the older generation's fear that their hard-earned victories would be cast aside and their legacy revised, making Maoism obsolete. In Barnett's view, generational conflict was a result of the CCP's inability to meet public expectations, with older values and patterns of behavior that had been suppressed now returning. It was causing defensive political elites who had become distant from the masses to retrench, now feeling the “temptation . . . to apply old solutions to new problems.”¹³ Barnett posited the

same struggle for succession as the analysts at the FO, and he too acknowledged the lack of available sources.

The most plausible explanation – or at least hypothesis – is that a grouping of opposition elements began to take shape within the Party Politburo and Secretariat, challenging the power of the currently dominant leaders, but Mao, Lin, and their supporters acted decisively to suppress them. . . . In striking back, Mao relied heavily on the army, the Shanghai Party Committee, the new special group established under the Central Committee to lead the cultural revolution, and the mobilized youth of the country. . . . What do these developments portend for the succession, once Mao dies? . . . Perhaps the most important thing to note is that in a basic sense no one can really replace Mao.

(Barnett 1967, 111–13)

Barnett concluded that after Mao there would be a fierce competition for power, a younger successor would have to collaborate with key individuals of the older generation while purging other officials and policies would become fluid as the government pursued more moderate goals. From the very outset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the FO analysts and Barnett reached similar conclusions for their long-term predictions, even while admitting a lack of information.

Extending the Analytic Line

The analytic record on the Cultural Revolution that is available to the public at The National Archives (TNA) in Kew Gardens comes from two separate yet closely related entities. The first of them was the IRD and the second was the Foreign Office Research Department (FORD), a select group of experts, contemporaneous and similar in function to the Research and Analysis (R&A) Division of the OSS, which would later become the State Department's Office of Intelligence Research (OIR) after WWII. Much like OSS/R&A under Langer and Kent, FORD's establishment and growth was overseen by the eminent historian Sir Arnold Toynbee, then serving as Director of Studies at Chatham House. He had initially sought in 1938–39 to convene a small group of noted experts at his alma mater of Balliol College (Oxford) in 1939 to provide the government with news updates and analytic reports on special topics.¹⁴ As for the IRD, its mission was to collect and analyze open-source and grey materials, producing propaganda intended to counter Communist messaging against the West.¹⁵ Much of IRD's work was of an academic or analytical nature, sometimes resulting in the public distribution of white-label articles and books that mirrored the analytical line of FORD's government-restricted, limited-distribution products. These were jobs that demanded a high degree of expertise. FORD and the IRD valued quality, much like State/OIR in its early years, and they used the resources of the Foreign Office to cultivate experts. For example, Joe Ford was an experienced East Asia hand who had served at the embassies in Saigon and Hanoi, done a stint as head of the China Section at FORD in the 1950s and later

on became Director of FORD at the height of the Cultural Revolution from March 1967 until his retirement in 1970.¹⁶

Following the initial IRD report of February 1966, the next five years of analyses elaborated upon that initial narrative, though nothing would supplant the original analysis in terms of the quality of writing or the explanatory value of the ideas. A situation report published in June that year focused on the accusations leveled against seven prominent intellectuals, another in August focused on the status of the military and the courts, and a third in December focused on the Revolution's impact on Chinese media outlets.¹⁷ In a separate series of papers, analysts took a more strategic approach by expanding the focal lens, considering the narrative from different angles and taking deep dives into some of the second- and third-order effects. The first paper retained started with the same idea of Mao's determination to provide a more "sufficiently revolutionary education" for the younger generation.¹⁸ Analysts in London were clearly aware that they were witnessing a momentous and historic event unfolding rapidly and chaotically, so they chose to draw out the origins of the Cultural Revolution, slow down the pace of events on the page through more detailed description and bring in more actors and related issues. The CCP's efforts to exert central authority through social indoctrination were having the contradictory effect of unleashing violent centripetal forces in society. The one point of stability analysts could identify was the People's Liberation Army, "the main support of the Party in China," essential at a time when "[the CCP] has, by its extremism, alienated supporters among the population at large," yet perhaps facing pressures of its own as it was being called upon to purge the ranks of "bourgeois military."¹⁹

Some analysts shy away from discussing historical events on the assumption that readers have little time or interest, dismissing older sources of information as 'legacy reporting.' In this instance, the FO experts intentionally sought out historical comparisons that might shed light on the intentions and motivations of the regime. This included the Great Leap Forward of 1958, the suppression of Kao Kang's separatist ambitions in 1953 and the rejection of Soviet-style revisionism in 1956. In January, FORD published a study of the Red Guards that placed the attitudes of the younger generation in the foreground. The paper continued the theme of trying to explore a range of past experiences, both lived and imagined, that were now being symbolically reenacted in a process that was consuming society.²⁰ It also picked up where the February 1966 piece left off, noting how the older generation had doubts about the "worthiness and suitability" of the youth to be heirs to the revolution. It also added an element of depth to the characterization of the youth themselves in terms of their "disillusionment." In turn, Mao's motivations were put into relief with a glance at his experiences as a youth, highlighting his "antagonism" toward education and scholarship, his impoverished youth, his inability to enroll at Peking University and his poorly paid job at the University Library. The report went on to discuss the many professors, lecturers and teachers who had been removed, humiliated, relegated to menial work or committed suicide under pressure of the youth, thereby delaying the reopening of the school system. It noted the recruitment of children from poor backgrounds and their indoctrination into

a program of loyalty to Mao, with the government diverting their energy into the “emotional stimulus . . . of ‘continuous revolution’ . . . [helping them to] understand the meaning of austerity, daring and sacrifice.”²¹

Generational change is usually accompanied by efforts to transform the educational system to defend the political agenda of the new ruling classes and disseminate their revolutionary values. The goal is to inculcate loyalty, delineate proper versus improper behavior and bolster elite claims to legitimacy in the face of competing narratives. These are precisely the reasons why institutions of public education were first established in Western countries in the late nineteenth century.²² What was the historical moment in time that Mao and his associates wanted the youth to experience for themselves as a symbol of this austerity, daring and sacrifice? According to the UK analysts: “The lessons and hardships of the Long March and the years of struggle before the establishment of the Republic in 1949 had to be re-learned.”²³

These papers spelled out what was nascent or implicit in the first report of February 1966. The willingness of the Red Guards to bypass the Communist Party’s authority, their attacks on the industrial and agricultural sectors and the burden they placed on transportation and communications, all of which would create a more intellectually and economically impoverished society.

The younger generation will therefore grow up in ignorance of anything, past or present, outside China. . . . If there is difficulty now in restraining the excesses of this children’s army, what chance have the authorities of keeping the same youngsters in check as they get nearer adulthood?²⁴

According to the FO analysts, the two very different sets of experiences and expectations of the older and younger generations were only temporarily reconciled through the government’s attempts at manipulation and coercion, methods that were incommensurate with the long-term goals of economic growth and international prestige. The past, revived and imposed on the present, would rapidly crowd out any desirable future.

Similarly, a paper from March 1967 discussed possible factional rivalries within the CCP and the PLA in more depth, picking up on the theme of long-term economic problems and extending the theme to cover the Revolution’s damage to the CCP’s own credibility.²⁵ A report from the following August surveyed the government’s inability to control the Red Guards, concluding:

After a year of upheaval, during which more than 20 million young people, freed from the discipline of the classroom, have roamed the country fighting with workers and peasants, party cadres, the army, and against each other, Mao seems to have made a thorough job of ‘destroying the old.’ But he has signally failed to offer any constructive plan for ‘promoting the new’, or to keep a rein on the force he has unleashed.²⁶

The Red Guards were now encouraged to trek on foot across the country rather than take public transportation, in emulation of the 6,000 miles that Mao and the

veterans of the Long March traversed in 1934. By this point, analysts in London had grown comfortable with their overall analytic line. They were now extending the narrative to encompass a wider lens of activity, exploring the implications of their original conclusions. They were watching a generational conflict play out in real time, and their ability to appreciate the historical consciousness on both sides allowed them to take their analysis in almost any direction.

One continuous analytic line, stretched out over a period of almost a decade, containing within it a remarkable ability to project the narrative both backwards and forwards, allowing for broad brushstroke conclusions and sharp focused second-order effects. It is all gathered together in a 49-page memorandum from 1972 produced by the analysts at FORD.²⁷ The original elements from 1966 and before are there, as the work traverses the familiar ground of Mao's mistrust of his colleagues, his fear of the younger generation going soft, and the rebuilding of the Communist Party. It reaches the same conclusion that the IRD had reached in their first paper in 1966: "Future leaders will still face the same problems – the disparity between China's size and economic underdevelopment and the relationship between political dogma and expediency."²⁸ It projects forward a future scenario in which the younger generation finally comes of age and has to make hard decisions about how to preserve CCP cohesion and whether to carry on Mao's legacy in the face of overwhelming economic challenges. By 1972, the analysts in London were able to go one step further:

It seems reasonable to assume that the vast majority of military officers and officials who have emerged from this movement in positions of influence would have no wish to experience another of the same kind; on the other hand, some future leader, if he should lose confidence in his immediate colleagues and the operation of the political machinery, might see advantage in following the pattern set by Mao to conduct a wide-ranging political campaign.²⁹

This is a thumbnail sketch of the CCP after Mao. An organization similar in name but different in spirit, led by a generation that experienced the worst of the Cultural Revolution firsthand and had their lives turned upside down by the chaos. You might expect a different policy response in the twenty-first century, but these British analysts were saying that if faced with the same types of issues – factional disputes within the Party and anxiety about the commitment of the younger generation – Mao's successors could resort once again to the same type of widespread purge that both overturns and renews the political order at one and the same time. After so many sacrificed so much to preserve their status and promote their vision of a single nation that moves forward together with a united purpose, it would only be natural for a leader like Xi Jinping to do whatever possible to protect and preserve the system from an uncertain future. The solution now, as it was then, would be to stage a revolt from within. This would give the victors the advantage of being able to control the pace and style of revolutionary change, thereby building a legacy that sets the standard by which the next generation must be judged. The analysts

in 1972 could just as well have been writing in 2025, such was the extent of their insight and foresight.³⁰

Predictive Analytics

If it is true that considerations of time and narrative contribute to a deeper and fuller approach to analysis, and this approach can have practical benefits for the intelligence profession as a whole, then the positive impact should be observable in the most important area of analytical performance, i.e. forecasting. Predictive analytics require some sort of structure that can lead the reader from the present by way of the past into a possible future. The analyst must be able to impart confidence and reassurance in any prognostication about events that have yet to occur and are inherently unknowable. That can only be accomplished on the basis of a narrative in which the succession of events is grounded in reality, even if the reconstruction of actors' intentions and motivations requires thinking in nonlinear terms. Some data points for the future may exist. Analysts can be relatively certain of the date of an upcoming multilateral summit, the arrival of winter conditions on a battlefield or the inevitable death of an elderly ruler. Others are speculative or contingent, like the aspirations of a politician who intends to restrict immigration or limit carbon emissions. But the reality is that we have no access to sources from the future. Probabilistic language with varying degrees of confidence is assigned to predictions not on the basis of objective facts, as helpful as these might be in supporting an argument, but rather on the basis of subjective perceptions. That is true even for crowdsourced expert opinions using the Delphi technique, probabilities of hypotheses adjusted according to Bayes's theorem and geopolitical subjects mapped out in a morphological matrix.³¹

The analyst has to imagine any scenario as a multilayered affair, both in terms of interactions among actors as they unfold over time, and in terms of the institutions and processes that operate according to their own temporal pace. There are structural conditions in society and nature that endure and persist, even as everyday events exhibit unexpected changes and unintended effects. For example, political propaganda can shape public attitudes and the behaviors that emerge can outlast the political movements that gave rise to them. On every level, the analyst can demonstrate how events from the past have shaped the present with implications for the future, with varying degrees of fidelity and probability for each. They are not measurable or quantifiable, but the experiences and expectations that form the historical consciousness of the different actors and groups in society do operate according to a logic. "The ability to judge the prospects of success for a given prediction thus depends on the temporal multi-layeredness of historical experience out of which predictions are composed."³² The more layers of experience correlated, the more processes taken into account, and the more individuals granted human agency, the more likely the success of the prediction.

Any half-decent analyst should be able to project a narrative forward, at least in outline, with judgments about the likelihood of events transpiring tomorrow as a result of decisions taken today building on trends that emerged yesterday. As

Harold Ford (1993, 22) put it: “There is always a marked hesitance among analysts to go beyond empirical evidence. Such caution is admirable, but what Estimators are paid for is to discern probable trends and contingent outcomes.”

If NIEs could be confined to statements of indisputable fact the task would be safe and easy. Of course the result could not then be called an estimate. By definition, estimating is an excursion out beyond established fact into the unknown – a venture in which the estimator gets such aid and comfort as he can from analogy, extrapolation, logic, and judgment.

(Kent 1994, 177)

If this is the role of National Intelligence Estimates, then surely the principle extends to other analytical products. It is precisely what the political actor abroad and the policymaker at home must accomplish in order to succeed in their respective jobs, so there should be no reason to hold the intelligence analyst to a different standard. It might even be said that prognostication is an essential function of all intelligence work, in accordance with the definition of biological imperatives mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 3.

Notes

- 1 Phillips (2016).
- 2 Harding (1991, 114–15).
- 3 Harding (1991, 127–34).
- 4 The National Archives (TNA), FO 1110/2281, B(L)141, “After Mao – Candidates for Power” (February 1966), Unclassified. Henceforth, B(L)141.
- 5 For a fuller discussion of analytical approaches to leadership incapacitation, see Robins and Post (1993).
- 6 TNA, FO 1110/2293, B.540(R), “Mao Tse-Tung: The Choice of Succession” (December 1958), Unclassified. Henceforth, B.540(R).
- 7 B(L)141.
- 8 B.540(R), 3.
- 9 B.540(R), 3.
- 10 B.540(R), 4.
- 11 Barnett was born in Shanghai to American missionaries in 1921, studied at Yale University and travelled around China after WWII as a journalist covering the Chinese civil war (Oksenberg 1999).
- 12 Barnett (1967, 3).
- 13 Barnett (1967, 6–7).
- 14 Longmire and Walker (1995, 12–13).
- 15 Historians in the Library and Records Department (1995).
- 16 Longmire and Walker (1995, 27).
- 17 TNA, FO 1110/2300, B 777, “Rivalry for Power in China” (June 1966), Unclassified; TNA, FO 1110/2300, B 783, “No Change in China’s Power Structure” (August 1966), Unclassified; and TNA, FO 1110/2300, B 796, “Chinese Press Disrupted by ‘Cultural Revolution’” (December 1966), Unclassified.
- 18 TNA, FO 1110/2281, B(L)149, “China’s ‘Cultural Revolution’” (September 1966), Unclassified. Henceforth, B(L)149.
- 19 B(L)149, 5–6.

- 20 TNA, FO 1110/2281, B(L)151, "China's Red Guards" (January 1967), Unclassified. Henceforth, B(L)151.
- 21 B(L)151, 3.
- 22 Ansell and Lindvall (2013), and Paglayan (2021).
- 23 B(L)151, 4.
- 24 B(L)151, 7.
- 25 TNA, FO 1110/2281, B(L)154, "The Struggle for Power in China" (March 1967), Unclassified.
- 26 TNA, FO 1110/2281, B(L)160, "One Year of the Red Guards" (August 1967), Unclassified.
- 27 TNA, FCO 51/214, "China's Cultural Revolution: An Interpretative Description," Departmental Series No. 19 (January 12, 1972), Unclassified. Henceforth, FCO 51/214. In order to see just how far the analytic line had expanded, compare this 1972 FORD paper with the IRD's first 1967 attempt at a long-format summation of its conclusions for a public audience: TNA, FO 1110/2228, "Mao's Cultural Revolution" (December 1967), Unclassified.
- 28 FCO 51/214, 5.
- 29 FCO 51/214, 34.
- 30 For example, *The Economist* 2024: "Now in his speeches Mr. Xi [Jinping] frets about how officials' vigilance has been weakened by years of prosperity, raising the dangers of Soviet-style decay. Even after a dozen years in power, during which he has carried out purges of potential rivals from the party's senior ranks and waged relentless ideological campaigns to ensure the absolute loyalty of its nearly 100m members, Mr. Xi appears far from satisfied."
- 31 Cf. Clauser (2008, 168–88).
- 32 Koselleck (2002, 141).

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Part VI

Bias and Empathy



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11 Understanding Intelligence Failures

Intelligence failure is a *sine qua non* for scholarship on analytical methods and tradecraft skills. No book can avoid the topic altogether. The most common case studies are Pearl Harbor, Operation Barbarossa, the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Tet Offensive, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, India's nuclear test, Al Qaida's terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the case for WMD in Iraq.¹ The lessons drawn from them are usually focused on the causes of failure rather than the effects, for the simple reason that the effects are self-evident. Intelligence failures in each of these examples resulted in mass casualties or the potential for a nuclear exchange. The 1973 Arab-Israeli War is so thoroughly debated in the literature (in multiple languages) that an enterprising student could use it to write a dissertation about how the topic of intelligence failure has evolved over time.²

Such case studies can be easily explained to legislators and the public in terms of vital national security interests, thereby providing broad legitimation for the intelligence profession and clear justification for manpower and resources.³ They have the advantage of well-defined variables, measurable outcomes and linear progressions of events. They involve concrete policy objectives, material interests and a realist perspective of the balance of power within the international system. The lessons learned point to the inability of analysts to 'separate the signals from the noise,' connect the dots, question assumptions or develop alternative hypotheses. Recommendations include better communication with policymakers, greater attention to warning and increased transparency and collaboration. They convey the impression that national security should be defined very narrowly in terms of direct threats to lives and property. As Jervis (2010, 179) said: "while all surprises are embarrassing, only those that harm the country and could have been mitigated by actions that would have been taken had there been warning are instances in which the intelligence failure mattered."

On the one hand, a case study such as the hunt for Osama bin Laden makes for a great read, resonates with a generation of readers and teaches a lesson about mitigating cognitive bias.⁴ On the other hand, many analysts will never deal with a situation that resembles the decade-long task of tracking down the location of the world's most wanted man. A cogent, articulate and comprehensive argument can be made that all analysts should be focused on countering immediate and tangible threats to peace and security, as Hall and Citrenbaum have done. However,

they do so within the context of analytical support to warfighters in theater who are engaged in counterinsurgency and special operations. And even then, Hall and Citrenbaum conclude that analysts must be able to deal with complex, multilayered problems involving foreign cultures, perceptions and behaviors.⁵

Analysts are routinely asked to examine questions that have little or no connection to kinetic threats. Many of these issues have no fixed end date, no clear outcome and no opportunity for policymaker intervention. There is no amount of ‘opportunity analysis’ (a type of policy prescription posing as analytical commentary) that can help. Nobody, for example, can demonstrate the critical importance to US national security interests of domestic politics in Lichtenstein. Yet, Lichtenstein had elections in February 2025 and almost certainly there was someone in the US Intelligence Community who had to forecast the results. The majority of problems that analysts face are complex and multilayered, with overlapping and interdependent factors that cannot be converted to charts and graphs of indicators without reducing them to abstract symbols drained of their original meaning. As David Moore points out, each one is unique and hard to fit into categories, any attempt to model them can actually change the problem set and the way they are perceived predetermines the methods used to understand them.⁶ Consequently, the standard definitions of intelligence failure may not be as self-evident or comprehensive as they appear.

The key feature of intelligence failure as it is commonly depicted in the academic literature is the element of surprise. It is a moment in which one side capitalizes on an asymmetric advantage, an ambitious initiative or a bit of fortuitous timing, while the other side experiences a loss of deterrence and a shift in the status quo. Past experience becomes insufficient for predicting the present course of events and any previous expectations for the future are shattered. The late 1970s through the 80s witnessed an explosion of interest in ‘strategic surprise,’ a concept Michael Handel borrowed from Clausewitz and applied to the modern era of technological innovation and professional intelligence services.⁷ Accordingly, any postmortem of a surprise attack is a matter of documenting the event, assessing the nature of the threat, understanding the vulnerabilities that provided one side with an advantage and identifying the mental, organizational or political hurdles that prevented analysts or policymakers from calculating the risks and foreseeing the possible outcomes.⁸

The corresponding term in Intelligence Studies is ‘strategic warning,’ and advocates who see it as the *raison d’être* for the intelligence profession would have all analysts trained and prepared to include an element of threat reporting in everything they write. Under this paradigm, a person who concludes every paper with the phrase “this could result in violence” would be held up as an inspirational role model rather than a comical farce.

States and intelligence services typically believe that strategic warning – traditionally defined as the process of alerting national leaders to the emergence of grave dangers and convincing them that unpleasant and costly measures may need to be taken in response – is the premier task of intelligence.

(Gentry and Gordon 2019, 11)

A great deal of careful thought was put into the concept of strategic warning in the early years of the Intelligence Community, generating an elaborate organizational structure. The US Intelligence Board delegated authority to a Watch Committee of senior intelligence officers from different agencies, supported by a National Indications Center of 25 intelligence officers, who were all engaged in preparing meetings and agendas for reviewing and briefing the latest threat reporting.⁹

As long as our concept of intelligence failure is tethered to the threat of surprise attack – by a foreign military rival, terrorist group or cyber-hacking entity – then no further explanation is needed. The answer is simple. The response should be more scientific rigor, greater attention to tradecraft, a concern for cognitive limitations, an effort to integrate intelligence more closely with policy and a renewed commitment to professionalism. One of the clearest and simplest definitions of intelligence failure to emerge from this line of reasoning comes from Wirtz, who argues that any understanding of intelligence failure must first establish a theory of surprise. “At the heart of the problem are the limits to human cognition that constrain our ability to anticipate the unexpected or novel, especially if the future fails to match our existing analytical concepts, beliefs or assumptions.”¹⁰ Intelligence failure is thus *an inability to accurately foresee events due to cognitive limitations*. Institutional responses have at their core a belief that cognitive limitations arise from unquestioned mental models, pathologies and biases, and a conviction that greater transparency and collaboration can reduce the severity and frequency of analytic error.¹¹

Pherson has outlined the history of that methodological turn within the Intelligence Community, from efforts in the late 1970s and 80s encouraging alternative hypotheses to the Structured Analytic Techniques (SATs) of today.¹² SATs now come in hundreds of variations on a theme, which can be summarized as a collaborative effort to map out competing hypotheses and underlying assumptions. Several prominent scholar-practitioners who advocate the use of these techniques have developed and sold software programs that nominally assist users with complex issue sets, though it is still up to the analytical team to do data entry and coding. These are designed less as techniques for crafting new ideas and storylines and more as tools for uncovering deeply held attitudes and mindsets that might hinder critical thinking, i.e. unconscious bias. Such recommendations go back as far as the foundations of the discipline, as Roger Hilsman Jr. noted in 1952:

By a painful process akin to self-analysis, both the operators and the researchers must dredge out and make explicit their hidden but nonetheless powerful attitudes and predispositions. These must then be coldly scrutinized to see which are unfit as a base for understanding reality, and therefore useless in the tasks that lie ahead. Both operators and researchers must overcome their tendencies to make off-the-cuff decisions in terms of these unexamined and only partly conscious assumptions, and train themselves for systematic, rational thought. They must rid themselves of attitudes which form mental blocks to a conscious use of knowledge, and then set to work to build a

well-stocked kit of carefully inspected intellectual tools and to acquire a professional skill and facility in their use.

(Hilsman Jr. 1952, 43)

Richards Heuer Jr., a former intelligence officer who wrote the canonical guide to these analytical pathologies, believed the goal is not for analysts to engage in an endless cycle of self-examination for its own sake. Rather, the aim is to leave behind the impulse of intuition in favor of adopting a more scientific approach as a matter of routine:

Scientific method is based on the principle of rejecting hypotheses, while tentatively accepting only those hypotheses that cannot be refuted. Intuitive analysis, by comparison, generally concentrates on confirming a hypothesis and commonly accords more weight to evidence supporting a hypothesis than to evidence that weakens it. Ideally, the reverse would be true. While analysts usually cannot apply the statistical procedures of scientific methodology to test their hypotheses, they can and should adopt the conceptual strategy of seeking to refute rather than confirm hypotheses.

(Heuer Jr. 1999, 46)

It is an approach that takes this first definition of intelligence failure to its logical conclusion, revealing the potential for cognitive biases in every aspect of analytical thought. Taking it one step further, Jack Davis assigns blame for intelligence failures to those who bear the most responsibility for neglecting to practice, prioritize, employ and design these tradecraft standards.¹³ Even expertise itself is viewed as a cognitive bias and is therefore unreliable, with experts who claim to have an exceptional understanding of the subject matter viewed as pied pipers leading entire teams of analysts down the wrong path. We have to admire the confidence of any theoretician who would cast doubt on all forms of expertise in the name of cognitive bias and ask whether perhaps it is not part of a larger historical tradition of anti-intellectualism in American thought.¹⁴ Of course, anti-intellectualism is strangely out of place in a discipline that prides itself on scientific respectability, but it does exist and it may result from a fear and distrust of people and ideas that cannot be controlled and managed by bureaucrats from within the insular world of secretive government agencies.¹⁵ Richard Betts (2007, 53) offers a less categorical, though no less critical, version: “Paradoxically, sometimes the more one knows about a subject, the worse one’s judgment of it. Knowledge can become an innocent enemy of intelligence.”

Although most scholar-practitioners start from a theory of surprise and extrapolate back toward cognitive bias as the key element of intelligence failure, there is another approach that is even more directly linked to the concept of strategic warning. This second definition of intelligence failure might be summarized as *an inability to alert officials to critical threats so that they can take preventative action*. It is not mutually exclusive of the first definition. In either case, analysts are expected to provide the most relevant and timely information in the most objective manner.

It simply puts at the forefront a consideration of how intelligence is received by policymakers, and how it is either acted upon or not acted upon, hence the term 'actionable intelligence.' Erik Dahl is the leading advocate of this second definition, arguing that a cognitive bias constraining analytical thinking is rarely the primary cause of intelligence failure. Rather, if the case studies all involve kinetic threats that require actionable intelligence, then the difference between intelligence success and failure comes down to precision and receptivity.

In order for intelligence to be actionable and usable in preventing surprise attacks, it must provide precise, tactical-level warning, and it must be combined with a high level of receptivity toward that warning on the part of policymakers who will decide how and whether to use it.¹⁶

(Dahl 2013, 23)

Again, that is *precision* in terms of the objective presentation of facts, and *receptivity* in terms of policymaker appreciation for the timeliness and relevance of the threat warning. Dahl's approach is not a refutation of how intelligence professionals typically apply their understanding of the field to the concepts of intelligence failure and strategic warning, but rather a refinement.¹⁷ Regardless, it is one that leaves little to no room for creativity and imagination:

this study indicates that it is mistaken to believe that future attacks are likely to be prevented through imaginative analysis alone. The history of intelligence successes and failures strongly suggests that analytical assessments and estimates are not enough to convince decision makers to take seriously the warnings from intelligence. . . . This book suggests that for a scenario to be sufficiently believable, it needs to be based not on imagination but on solid, tactical-level intelligence.

(Dahl 2013, 180)

Policymakers should be convinced through the timely presentation of relevant facts that are believable in terms of the detail and accuracy of the underlying information. Accordingly, a third definition of intelligence failure might also be *an inability by policymakers to properly make use of the intelligence*. This could be the result of officials failing to appreciate the relevance of the analysis, or preferring their own interpretation to that of intelligence professionals, or perhaps even working so closely with analysts that together they come to share a common feedback loop.¹⁸

This raises the question of the manner in which critical issues are presented to policymakers and whether format and venue play a role in intelligence failure. Surprisingly, the format that would seem best suited for alerting policymakers to a critical development – the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) – is actually the one that many scholar-practitioners say is least suited to the task.¹⁹ According to Tomingar, former Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis and Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, the process of estimative analysis is not intended to make any theoretical breakthroughs. It is meant to pull together

the evidence already available, characterize the current situation “as accurately as possible,” describe the broad trends and factors affecting trajectories, and outline alternative futures.

Something would be very wrong if officials responsible for working an issue learned about new information germane to the issue or new interpretations of that information by reading an NIE. If their intelligence support team were doing its job, and the process were working as it should, new information and insights would have been factored into the decision-making process long before an NIE had been approved and published.

(Fingar 2011, 68)

This line of thought dovetails with Marrin’s critique of the way in which strategic analysis is presented to policymakers. Both Marrin and Fingar envision a closer integration of policy and intelligence, intended as a corrective for situations in which decision-makers ignore intelligence findings in favor of their own assessments.²⁰

Estimates should give [decision-makers] a clearer picture of the possibility space within which events are likely to play out, what is likely to drive or deflect developments from the trajectories they seem to be on, and what might signal that change is occurring with respect to one or more drivers or trajectories. Estimates should also provide insight that will help decision makers to determine what they can do about projected developments and how long they have to work the problem.

(Fingar 2011, 72)

This is a description of the NIE process that at least recognizes there are broad trends that cannot be easily bounded by quantifiable facts and figures. Moreover, Fingar holds that estimative judgments should help fill the gaps that arise in our knowledge of any given issue and clearly articulate what is assumed to be true with regard to factors that are only partially known or totally unknown. But it is still a perspective that is thoroughly grounded in linear thinking with examples mostly drawn from military and terrorism threats. It can only suggest the desirability of moving beyond a clinical description of facts into the interpretation and elaboration of trends and trajectories.²¹ Fingar’s account does not get very far beyond the definitions and case studies mentioned previously and it contains little that would shed light on what exactly analysts should be doing to think more creatively.

There is also a fourth definition that might be phrased as *an inability to overcome institutional constraints*, including such things as bureaucratic procedures that prevent agencies from sharing information and chains of command in which information is stove-piped.²² Philip Davies characterizes this type of systems failure a matter of intelligence culture. He points to the “relative strength of collegial, consensus-oriented norms and values” that distinguish British Government institutions from their American counterparts.²³ Indeed, it is absolutely necessary to

compare cultural norms across different societies to determine which kinds of systemic failure are intrinsic to the locality and which are inherent to the intelligence profession as a whole, but so much of the evidence is anecdotal and obscured by the efforts of individuals and institutions to maintain their reputations.

There are ways to write about intelligence culture that draw upon tangible factors as measurable variables. The predominant approach is to consider the Anglo-American sphere in terms of processes and priorities, intellectual debates and institutional reforms, and then compare and contrast the same factors as they are manifested in other societies. The parameters of the issue are laid out quite clearly and succinctly in the outstanding work of Aldrich and Kasuku (2012), and this book follows in their footsteps in terms of the way it situates the scientific paradigm of the US Intelligence Community within an American intelligence culture. There are other ways to understand intelligence culture that might be more germane to the local context of Washington. For instance, taking Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* as a starting point for understanding the incentive structures for promotion at intelligence agencies whose reputations are nominally predicated on subject matter expertise.

It seems that to evaluate cultural norms, it is also important to get down to ground level and understand the way that intelligence professionals actually live and work from day to day. Their beliefs, assumptions and modes of behavior as individuals are no less important for establishing an intelligence culture than the high-flown ideals and principles described in the mission statements of the organizations for which they work. Their behavior may even be more revealing of how they truly perceive their community and its values. In that regard, the members of the US Intelligence Community are probably no different than their counterparts in any other government. They are human beings, trying their best to get by in life and, wherever possible, to get ahead. Most move from one job to another, angling for promotion in step and grade, hoping for the moment when entrée into the ranks of management will bring with it a title that translates into executive pay. Beyond that, it is hard to make any generalizations.

There are analysts hanging out by their boss's desk talking sports all day long and quietly ducking out around midafternoon, skipping important policy discussions and hoping no one will notice. There are team chiefs making analysts redo pieces over and over again, documenting the frustrated responses as evidence of insubordination and then telling senior leadership how they are upholding the standards of the institution. There are people running slightly reworked versions of newspaper articles or copying entire sections of papers from other agencies, shifting around the sentence order and replacing a few words with synonyms. There are older analysts persuading younger analysts to give them co-authorship credit for high-profile products to which they contributed nothing. There are managers double- and triple-tasking the same simple topics for the sake of boosting their production numbers (i.e. juking the stats) and analysts dragging their feet in endless research in the hopes their supervisor will find someone else to task. In some offices, half the personnel are spending all their time on the three H's of management consulting (hearing, hugging, helping) in the expectation that the interns they

supervise will give them high marks for their Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in exit interviews with the bosses. There are even analysts who privately admit they are out of their depth, unmotivated by the subject matter and fearful of getting stuck in a dead-end job. But in front of their managers, they make a big show of their meager effort, fume about the lack of attention they receive and complain about how more productive colleagues are holding them back.

Plagiarism exists and it is corrosive. I once asked a group of over twenty mid-career professionals, in an unclassified setting and without requesting any details, how many of them had been plagiarized in their career. Almost two-thirds raised their hands. Some volunteered stories of having taken initiative on assignments only to be bullied by colleagues, as if analysis were some sort of competition. The workplace bullying they described should be familiar to everyone. For example, one analyst accuses another of having “undermined” him citing a comment taken out of context, finds sympathy from managers who are highly sensitive for their own corridor reputations and thereby distracts attention from his own shortcomings, all while successfully ostracizing his colleague. Surprisingly, there is no major study of the phenomenon in the intelligence profession, despite the enormous amount of scholarly research that has shown consistent patterns across a wide spectrum of professions in America.²⁴ Academics in the fields of sociology, psychology and social work have identified fixed stages of the process with crystal clarity:

Bullies tend to be narcissistic, lacking in job expertise, and adept at taking credit for the efforts of others . . . seeking control through manipulation, gossip, sabotage, gaslighting, and isolation . . . often [feeling] threatened by targets’ competence, creativity, and social capital.

(Suskind 2020)

The bully “often begins by ingratiating himself, pretending to be a friend and ally,” etc. It goes on until the target employee is transferred, terminated or otherwise discharged, so that “most targets are left unemployed, financially strapped, and without health insurance . . . [while] the bully may continue the character assassination, hampering the target’s efforts to secure new employment.”²⁵

How much of this is unique to America or common to all intelligence cultures? As I write these words, I have just spent the day with two extremely capable analysts who live half a world away from Washington. They have never worked for the US Intelligence Community or received training from the US Government, and yet they described all of the same situations that were just mentioned. Such deep-rooted problems probably exist within the very fabric of the profession, to varying degrees across a wide range of societies, and they most likely contribute to intelligence failure on some level. But they are not captured in the literature on Intelligence Studies, where intelligence cultures are often described in drab tones, e.g. an institutional drive to collect data and liaise with foreign partners (Stout 2017), a collective sense of threat perceptions and national interests (Munier 2021) or the practicalities of regime support and organizational decentralization (de Graaff 2020).

That being said, there are significant parts of the US Intelligence Community where a culture of respect and dignity thrives. New analysts on an account make a concerted effort to meet their predecessors on the portfolio to understand previous analytical lines. They track down businessmen or academics with deep knowledge of the issues. They seriously consider the opinions of their peers, not for the sake of stroking an ego and demonstrating managerial skills to their bosses, but rather for the sake of genuine learning. This is even true in parts of the largest institutions, where one might rather expect heavy bureaucratic inertia. Accordingly, there are analysts in any organization who are serious about their work. Their job is more than a vocation, it is a calling. At the same time, there are analysts who are avoiding risk, dodging responsibility and making a mockery of expertise by turning the job into a cheap popularity contest. Both types are in the minority and they lie on the extreme ends of the spectrum, while the majority of analysts are somewhere in between, just trying to do their jobs and get through the day.

Surely there are other definitions of intelligence failure that could be added to the list, and none are mutually exclusive of the others. Any given intelligence failure could exhibit several breakdowns in communication and cognition simultaneously. These definitions all have certain features in common: 1) their importance can be clearly demonstrated through case studies involving direct threats to public safety; and 2) they offer relatively clear solutions that fit in with the overall scientific paradigm of objectivity, timeliness and non-politicization. However, none of them address a central problem of intelligence failure, one that should be at the forefront of all writings on intelligence but tends to only receive passing mention. It is found in the definition put forward by the 9/11 Commission of intelligence failure as *an inability to encourage creative thinking and institutionalize the use of the imagination*.²⁶

Discussions of intelligence failure that conclude with recommendations for structured methods and scientific precision do occasionally mention creativity and imagination. However, it is usually only in terms of this elusive concept of 'intuition,' and even then, only in the negative sense of analysts relying on gut feelings while overlooking their cognitive biases.²⁷ A parallel is often drawn with medicine, in what can only be described as a rather tortured and convoluted way of acknowledging the unavoidable persistence of imagination in analytical writing, despite the best attempts to minimize or dismiss it.²⁸ As the comparison goes, medicine is a profession similarly defined by its scientific rigor, one in which the concept of threat warning finds a direct corollary in medical diagnostics. Doctors have to interpret ambiguous signs and symptoms, evaluate phenomena that cannot be directly observed, develop hypotheses and challenge their own cognitive biases through structured analytical methods (i.e. differentials).²⁹ The comparison exists. But even if we are to grant a certain degree of artistic license in how those procedures are conducted, it is certainly not by way of this ill-defined 'art' that institutions want to build their reputation. Someone needs to explain what precisely that art is (separate and distinct from the science), how it is intrinsic to the field and why it would not better be performed by Artificial Intelligence. Then the comparison with intelligence can be made.

There are other conceivable reasons why intelligence officers might want to compare their profession with medicine, including a desire to be treated with respect, both in academia and among the broader citizenry, in the hope that intelligence will be viewed as a public good.³⁰ They might feel they are under the same pressure to be accurate and timely, believing that in intelligence as in medicine real lives are on the line. They too are involved in a constant learning process. They too have pursued a higher calling, graciously accepting the long hours and grueling assignments that come with it. Such comparisons may be perfectly valid. But it must be admitted that they hold intelligence up to the mirror of medicine for any number of reasons, none of which have anything to do with an art of intelligence. Most of them have to do instead with people casting about for ways to refashion a reputation as spies into something more dignified and reputable. Regardless, these comparisons with medicine might contain some element of creativity, but according to the scholarly literature, that creativity can only be defined within the context of the scientific method and it must be subordinated to scientific rigor.

Multilayered Problem Sets

As long as the discussion remains in the realm of those defense and security threats that have a direct and immediate potential for violence, everything mentioned previously holds true. However, as soon as we step outside those parameters, we encounter a vast ocean of analytical topics that include political and economic trends, social attitudes and behaviors, leadership intentions and governance styles, science and technology innovations, etc. Many have no single outcome to be achieved by a specific actor on a specified date, pose no imminent threat to lives and property, and offer no clear options for policymaker intervention. They too are important for national security in a broader sense, and they are just as subject to intelligence failure and success in ways that could have significant consequences for national interests, but they do not fit neatly into the previous definitions. It may well be as Jervis, Handel and others have noted – that failure is unavoidable and probably more common than the public knows: “it is clear that [intelligence failures] are not rare events . . . even if particular instances could have been avoided, the general phenomenon cannot.”³¹ It may also be that the previous definitions, the issues of cognitive bias and strategic warning and the pursuit of improved collaboration are necessary but not sufficient for understanding intelligence failure. The science of intelligence might improve the tradecraft, precision and presentation of analytical products, but it might not substantively change the analytical line itself except in rare cases, and that has implications for preventing or mitigating intelligence failures. As Jervis concluded:

My summary view, however, is that while there were errors and analysis could and should have been better, the result would have been to make the intelligence judgments less certain rather than to reach fundamentally different conclusions. . . . More careful, disciplined, and explicit reasoning will not automatically yield the right answers but will produce better analysis, do a

better job of revealing where the key differences of opinion lie, and increase the chances of being correct.

(Jervis 2010, 3)

His look at the Iranian Revolution is a case study in regime stability, a topic that is an order of magnitude more complex than predicting a terrorist attack.

Security threats pose challenges for collection and the evaluation of sources, and they sometimes have important strategic implications, but the prospect of an attack does not pose a very complicated question for analysts to answer. By contrast, country stability poses a wide range of political, economic and social issues for analysts in understanding the very nature of the variables themselves, not to mention distinguishing their limits and judging their relationships. Most analytical work deals with such multilayered, interconnected problems:

Quite simply, complex issues tend to defy the behavioral conclusions that these rules [of linear thinking] promote. They are not repeatable (rule two), they defy the clear identification of simple cause-and-effect dynamics (rule three) and they are highly sensitive to unique conditions at unique moments (rule four). But most importantly, complex challenges are not additive (rule one). . . . And in order to discern those interconnections, to see those relationships, to perceive those interdependencies, and to understand what they might mean for emerging circumstances, it is fundamentally necessary to think creatively.

(Kerbel 2014)

Dahl and Kerbel can both be correct, to a certain extent. Almost any problem that an intelligence analyst faces can be treated either in a tactical manner relying on a small number of tangible inputs and measurable outputs, or in a strategic manner depending on a large number of intangible factors and overlapping trends.

Security threats are ideally suited to linear thinking, with identifiable causes and effects, antecedents and consequents and chains of contingencies that result from the interaction of relatively concrete variables. For example, cloud cover on a rainy day might obstruct the line of sight for aerial reconnaissance and force the postponement of a crucial offensive. They commonly involve factors that have quantifiable inputs and measurable outputs, such as force sizes, technical specifications, chains of command, plans and doctrine. And yet, there are still factors for the analyst to explore that are intangible and impossible to measure, such as troop discipline, officer loyalty and ideological indoctrination. They present ambiguities similar to those that a political analyst faces when dealing with the vague concepts of prestige and influence in international relations.

It is the choice of the analyst and her managers whether or not to interpret a question strictly within the confines of her assigned responsibilities or whether to expand the scope. For a military analyst, a single topic such as command and control could be treated simply in terms of an organizational chart for a regime protection unit deployed to secure mass protests, or complexly in terms of an analysis of

whether those units would follow orders and fire on incoming crowds. The former requires some basic knowledge of the unit commanders and force structure, while the latter requires some inference of how the officers and troops see themselves in relation to their fellow citizens. Policymakers might need an organizational chart for the purpose of vetting a unit involved in suppressing demonstrators for its eligibility for military training assistance, but they will probably never interact with that regime protection force. They are more likely to find value in understanding officer and troop sentiments, since they may have to deal with the humanitarian, political, social and regional fallout of a rapidly collapsing regime that has no clear successor.

In the event of a popular uprising, both approaches would be necessary and both would be time sensitive. The latter approach is the one that usually garners policymaker interest, by addressing the second- and third-order effects that ripple outward from the tactical question of military units into the broader strategic implications for regime stability. But an analyst will often opt for something that more closely approximates the former, taking no risks on evaluating a unit's future effectiveness, so that what she loses in comprehensiveness she gains in retaining control over her narrative and a quick production schedule. It is important to note that every effort at collaboration and coordination increases the risk of forcing edits and major alterations to a narrative, opening up the analyst to criticism and debate that may or may not be justified. As the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine noted in their publicly released *Research Agenda for Advancing Intelligence Analysis*:

The layers of the process typically include, but are not limited to, the analyst's immediate supervisor; the leader of the analytic office; a chief editor with duties not unlike those of a newspaper or journal editor; and in the case of the President's Daily Brief, a senior reviewer representing the leadership of the IC. The analyst's job is to defend the analysis itself from editorial "fixes" that would alter the message while at the same time welcoming changes that improve clarity and readability. The analyst must also be sensitive to editorial changes that would require further coordination with colleagues. It is important to note that this editorial process is not merely or even primarily stylistic; it often identifies errors in thinking or perspective that need to be fixed.

(National Academy 2019, 76)

It can easily be forgotten in abstract discussions of the Intelligence Cycle that there is also a complex coordination process occurring alongside it, with people on all sides seeking to insert their own expert opinions in ways that can shape, constrain or redirect the substance of the analysis.

Military, economic, political and leadership issues comprise genres in the sense that each has its own established tradition, with well-recognized storylines and a dedicated set of readers with policy interests in the topics. A greater challenge comes with cross-cutting topics, such as emigration, that do not fit into any single genre. There are times when it is necessary to address topics such as brain drain,

capital flight and foreign influence operations. An analyst can stay within the confines of her assigned duties and write, for example, about the radicalization of Muslim refugees in Western Europe or the response of right-wing extremist groups to an influx of Muslim asylum seekers. She will have the advantage of accessible open-source materials, including social media postings and intercepts of extremist chatter, which require only minimal interpretation to decode any attempts at denial and deception. Alternatively, she can examine the complicated political, economic and social relationships among the Muslim émigrés themselves, including their fragmented political agendas, their efforts to lobby host governments, their ties to populations back home and their willingness to someday return. She will have enormous challenges trying to gather information on third-country nationals in multiple countries, finding other analysts who understand these multilayered political and economic agendas, and explaining how the product meets thresholds for publication in terms of policymaker interests.

Such cross-cutting topics test the limits of the intelligence profession. They sometimes require changes in the way career paths are incentivized or the way staffing patterns are organized, but they rarely call into question the assumptions and premises upon which analytic production is based. The real problem comes with an issue like stability. A policymaker request for a stability assessment is a major undertaking, arguably the most important tasker a country analyst can receive, and certainly not a fringe issue for which managers can surge personnel. When approached as an opportunity to flex the analytical muscles and not merely a rote exercise in updating indicators, it is the best reason to get up in the morning and go to work. It is a genre of genres that must, by necessity, adopt a large focal lens encompassing a wide range of interdependent issues that are connected in both tangible and intangible ways. The second-order effects are occasionally observable, but are more often only intimations or feelings in the minds of the participants. Any attempt at mapping out the different relationships among variables, hypotheses and probabilities in the form of a Toulmin diagram or a 'hypothesis-level synthesis' chart would be incredibly intricate and complicated, with no easy way to prioritize and assign values to the lines that represent necessary or sufficient conditions. At least, not without reducing them to abstract catchphrases.

Academics have spent decades developing mathematical formulas for correlating every conceivable variable with various political outcomes, which can only be processed as a collective whole by sophisticated algorithms.³² There are any number of nongovernmental organizations that provide indicators measuring instability, with the aim of assisting governments and multilateral organizations with political forecasting, crisis mitigation and contingency planning.³³ Efforts to calculate and codify instability are sometimes broken down by regions of the world, in the belief there are certain factors that are more relevant in particular areas than others.³⁴ Many of these indices have proven to be quite successful at prediction, they provide a benchmark for comparisons and they allow for tracking over time. However, such predictions are so generic that they are of little to no value for estimating the specific causes and consequences of any particular scenario, and the rankings are usually obvious to the most casual viewer.³⁵ Some intelligence

scholar-practitioner-consultants advertise the sale of their own computer software to assist with quantitative modeling and simulations, suggesting that such tools are efficient, effective and universally applicable, though most require the user to enter the data and thus grapple with the thorniest problems of how to parse or code it.³⁶

A regime might be highly unstable, at risk of a coup or factional infighting that could remove a leader from power, and yet the government and society continue to function as normal. An economy might be teetering under the weight of international sanctions and runaway inflation, with the currency rapidly devaluing and bread lines forming, yet the regime retains power for decades. It is highly complex. When regime collapse finally arrives, it may come as a surprise to some, but the conditions that led to it probably developed over a period of years and were known to many. Accurate forecasting might seem possible, but over the mid to long term, any number of unforeseeable events could intervene. Moreover, estimates of stability and instability are rarely actionable. External powers usually have little ability to influence the domestic politics of another country, at least not to such an extent that their actions determine the rise or fall of a regime absent military intervention or targeted assassination. And yet, such estimates are central to intelligence analysis and they compel analysts to think differently about the nature of their job.

It is instructive to see how analysts in the early years of the US Intelligence Community viewed the complexity and critical importance of such an undertaking. Fortunately, the experts at State/OIR in 1955 were able to articulate a clear and insightful accounting of the challenges they faced, which is publicly accessible today as a declassified record at the National Archives in College Park:

The series as a whole seeks to explore and illustrate certain basic propositions concerning the problems which face countries undergoing a profound social, economic, intellectual, and political transformation. Each country paper attempts to estimate whether, in the next decade, local institutions are likely to show sufficient resilience to adjust to new patterns of forces and functions or instead are likely to be weakened by serious and prolonged crises. . . . Such a process of change cannot be analyzed by following convention and focusing merely on the character and actions of individual leaders and political parties, or on the structure and operation of constitutions, laws, cabinets, and parliaments. In the midst of a process of fundamental readjustment these constitute, at most, symptoms of change in the structure and functioning of society. This report therefore focuses on the shifting interaction of all major social, political, and economic institutions, cultural values and aspirations, and intellectual trends.³⁷

That definition sets a high bar for any analysis of stability, and it is justified in doing so. Estimates of stability are just as important as assessments of adversary military capabilities and terrorist attack planning, and they are just as subject to analytical errors and intelligence failure, but it is doubtful that they can be improved by a greater adherence to objectivity and the application of the scientific method.

A Failure of Imagination

This chapter began by questioning the premise that intelligence failure must be defined in terms of kinetic threats, observing that such definitions assume the rigorous application of the scientific method while minimizing or excluding the role of creativity and imagination. It proposed that much, if not most, analytic work exists outside of that framework, focusing instead on complex, multilayered issues for which creativity and imagination might mean the difference between intelligence failure and success. To speak of creativity and imagination in intelligence analysis is to speak of subject matter expertise in a way that goes beyond mere knowledge and comprehension. Analysts can do a site visit to a country, a short rotation in a policy office or an intensive language training program, but it is questionable whether any of those activities really create a direct connection with the account. Site visits are subject to the rules and procedures imposed by the country team, rotations are often used as resume builders for employees seeking career advancement and language training only pays off if the analyst is committed to using those skills over the long term. All of them build knowledge and comprehension, but it would be hard to argue that they promote empathy and understanding, let alone expertise.

What is expertise? For many analysts today, expertise is conferred on them by virtue of their affiliation with an institution that has resources and authority. Prestige is achieved by association with a portfolio of interest to decision-makers. That is obviously an inadequate answer. It bears no resemblance to anyone's common-sense understanding of expertise. And in the future, an institution's reputation will be based on its algorithms. But to disabuse people of the notion that status is tied to institutional affiliation would be to take away their self-image as professionals and open up the question itself to attack on the grounds of elitism, i.e. 'an expert is someone who thinks too highly of himself.' Managers would sooner tally up the number of years each analyst has served on a portfolio and their level of language proficiency, using such statistics as measurable and quantifiable proxy indicators of expertise. They would prefer not to ask the harder question of how anyone sets about acquiring such an intangible quality as expertise in the first place. When they mistakenly treat these administratively determined and institutionally defined categories as signs of a deep and abiding concern for an issue set, intelligence organizations confuse the effect for the cause. It is a symptom of a larger problem whereby institutions prize management skills over analytical insight, teamwork and deliverables over risk-taking and vision, systematization and regimentation over creativity and imagination, and promotion of the corporate brand over individual achievement.

Empathy and understanding are much better indicators of expertise, but they are intangible. They are human qualities with a psychological dimension. For Sherman Kent, empathy was a crucial element of analysis:

If there is a first rule in estimating the probable behavior of the other man, it is the rule to try to cast yourself in his image and see the world through his

eyes. It is in pursuit of this goal that intelligence services put the highest premium on country-by-country expertise, that they seek out and hire men who have deeply studied and experienced a given nation's way of life. . . . To the extent that objectivity of judgment about the other man's probable behavior is the crux of the intelligence business, to that extent is the importance of living the other man's life recognized and revered.

(Kent 1994, 184)

Almost all analytical work directly or indirectly relates to human behavior – even descriptions of defense systems, which are operated by humans and directed at humans. Therefore, by the transitive property, almost all analytical products have the potential for an element of psychological insight. This is especially true the closer the analytical line verges into political and leadership topics, where analysts must grapple with rational choice models in which actors have an ordered set of values and goals that accord with their vision of a desired end-state.

Foreign actors exhibit a range of behaviors with varying degrees of rationality and irrationality. Klaus Knorr noted five types of behavior the analyst might observe, including: 1) the means–end calculation of a rational act that seeks to maximize values; 2) an emotional act with no instrumental calculus that is neither strictly rational nor irrational; 3) a mistaken act based on a rational calculus that is impacted by misinterpretation or faulty information; 4) an irrational act based on unrealistic conceptions and relationships; and 5) a seemingly irrational act that is actually quite rational when considered within a different cultural or social context. Even within that range of behaviors, “the pure types of action we have distinguished are rare in real life. Real behavior usually represents a mixture of the pure types and falls somewhere on the continuum between rational and irrational or between rational and emotional.”³⁸

As a consequence, analysts who must study their subject from afar and rarely have the time and opportunity to immerse themselves in another culture usually compensate by developing a set of expectations for how actors behave. This is based on intensive and prolonged observations, which are tested by encounters with crises and modified in the course of successive estimates.

And [this kind of abstraction] is indispensable because the set is a most valuable tool in performing timely, coherent, articulate and, on a probability basis, accurate intelligence. Without it, the current stream of information would be unmanageable and often paralyzingly ambiguous.

(Knorr 1964, 462)

Such concepts borrowed from the field of political psychology can be treated with empirical and mathematical rigor or they can be handled with creative and imaginative interpretation, and sometimes it is hard to distinguish between the two approaches.³⁹

That account of the analyst's cognitive process is accurate in describing the practicalities of the intelligence profession, but it is not sufficient for explaining a

successful forecast of human behavior, which depends on more than a set of broad and generalized expectations about an actor's intentions and motivations. As Herbert Simon noted, accurate prediction requires a consideration of a foreign actor's assumptions, his perceptions, his instincts and his ability to draw inferences from the information available – all of which may or may not exist in ways that can be determined by an outside observer.⁴⁰ It brings us back to the original premise of this book, that intelligence analysis is fundamentally rooted in assumed knowledge, and the primary task of the analyst is to reconstruct or reimagine the unknown. Such assumptions, perceptions, instincts and inferences of foreign actors may not be tangible, measurable, quantifiable or even directly observable, but they usually leave traces in the world that make certain actions or choices stand out from the background.

The role of psychology within intelligence analysis goes deeper than that, and it is not limited to the concept of cognitive bias. Psychological analysis has ebbed and flowed in popularity since the founding of the US Intelligence Community, making at least a token appearance in any given textbook.⁴¹ It was particularly prominent in the early years of the Cold War, when State/OIR produced a monthly review, the *Psychological Intelligence Digest*, which is now declassified and publicly accessible at the National Archives in College Park.⁴² This publication was intended for an interagency group, the Psychological Review Board, which was tasked with exploring opportunities for operations behind the Iron Curtain and defending against communist efforts to undermine Western allies. In the earlier volumes there was clearly an effort made to distinguish this psychological approach with thoughtful public opinion surveys and probing leadership profiles, though in the later volumes it appears the reports devolved into more routine types of political and economic analysis dressed up as psychological insight.⁴³

What then is empathy? Jervis defines empathy within the context of intelligence analysis as a deep appreciation and sensitivity to the way foreign actors are affected by their own unique “domestic and bureaucratic politics or political history.”⁴⁴ It is a lesson that could just as easily be extended to other social, cultural and psychological features. Even Robert Clark, with his absolute insistence on scientific objectivity, still finds a place for empathy. “Instead, [analysts] must practice empathy, or the concept of putting themselves in the shoes of the target. Empathy is a tool of objectivity in that it allows analysts to check their biases.”⁴⁵ The successful construction of a storyline from disparate traces of human behavior implies the analyst's ability to identify with the subject matter, finding elements of a story that match his own experience or understanding of the world.⁴⁶ Here we have a concept of intelligence analysis that covers very tangible and rational problem sets, but that also encompasses more amorphous and complex situations requiring a subjective approach, with imagination and creativity.⁴⁷

Returning to the 9/11 Commission Report and taking into consideration everything discussed up to this point, the fifth definition of intelligence failure might accordingly be rephrased as *an inability to imagine the cognitive, cultural and societal norms and attitudes that shape the behavior of human beings*. Nothing in this definition excludes or competes with the others. They can all coexist and overlap

with other definitions of intelligence failure concerned with politicization or ‘conscious action,’ a type of institutional conformity involving organizational culture and individual insubordination.⁴⁸ It is simply important to note the difference between this definition here and the very first definition mentioned previously – a difference that is subtle yet significant. It is the difference between an analyst looking inward and seeking to mitigate cognitive bias in the pursuit of a more objective assessment of the information available, and an analyst looking outward and seeking to understand the perspectives of others in the pursuit of a more subjective appreciation of the target set.

It is therefore a thin, almost imperceptible line that separates cognitive bias from empathy, tradecraft from expertise and science from art.⁴⁹ Even Marrin, a staunch advocate for comparing the art of intelligence to clinical diagnosis in medicine, acknowledges a role for empathy:

As a result, use of empathy does not mean setting aside substantive expertise about the adversary but rather layering on top of that substantive expertise a more intuitive or empathetic assessment of how that adversary might behave in different situations. In this way, it can provide a good corrective to mirror-imaging or presumptions of rationality.

(Marrin 2011, 51)

In that sense, these separate approaches to managing cognitive bias and building empathy are two sides of the same coin, the one trying to control for subjectivity and the other attempting to take advantage of it.

Notes

- 1 For example, Wohlstetter (1962), Shlaim (1976) and Zegart (2007).
- 2 For a literature review, see Shapira (2023).
- 3 Pillar (2008).
- 4 Zegart (2022, 102–3).
- 5 Hall and Citrenbaum (2010, 25–7).
- 6 Moore (2011, 18–29).
- 7 Handel (1984).
- 8 Gentry (2008).
- 9 Patton (1959).
- 10 Wirtz (2017, 9).
- 11 For a typical case study along these lines, see Brand (2019).
- 12 Pherson (2013).
- 13 Davis (2014, 123).
- 14 Dewey (1910).
- 15 Wolff (1963) and White (1962).
- 16 Dahl is right in saying (179): “Commentators today place too much importance on a few key strategic-level intelligence products such as National Intelligence Estimates and the *President’s Daily Brief*. Many experts seem to believe that future surprises and attacks can be prevented if all the available information is assembled into such an intelligence product.”
- 17 Dahl’s argument derives from Betts (1978).

- 18 See Agrell and Treverton (2015, 47): “Most of what get labeled ‘intelligence failures’ result in fact from the interaction of intelligence and policy. When the two come to share a common mindset around a common story or ‘concept,’ then the interaction becomes a feedback loop in which questions that cut against the concept are not likely to be asked and disconfirming evidence is not likely to be offered as an answer.”
- 19 Notably, Ford did not hold this view, though he did acknowledge (1993, 174–86) that other authors had experienced problems using NIEs to challenge policymaker assumptions.
- 20 Marrin (2017).
- 21 Fingar (2011, 80). The primary case studies in that chapter are Iran’s nuclear program, Saudi missiles from China and WMDs in Iraq.
- 22 The overlap between the third and fourth definitions can make them almost indistinguishable. See Aid (2011).
- 23 Davies (2004, 497).
- 24 Duffy and Yamada (2018), Namie and Namie (2009) and Carbo (2017).
- 25 Suskind (2020).
- 26 National Commission (2004, 339–48). N.B. Stephen Marrin (2007a): “Improving the imaginative abilities of the intelligence analysts should enable them to provide decision-makers with more useful scenarios.”
- 27 Marrin (2011, 42): “an analyst would read a lot, come up with some analytic judgment, and send that judgment up the line without much focus on either the process involved in coming to that judgment, or making that process transparent to others.”
- 28 For example, Marrin and Clemente (2005), and Bruce and George (2015).
- 29 See Marrin (2007b), and Treverton (2007).
- 30 Part of that respectability undoubtedly derives from the existence of a medical code of ethics, something that does not have a direct corollary in intelligence (Andregg 2010).
- 31 Jervis (2010, 5).
- 32 For example, Tsurutani (1968), Hurwitz (1973), Lineham (1976), Sanjian (1999), Gates et al. (2006) and Tusalem (2015).
- 33 The Fragile States Index supported by the Fund for Peace (<https://fragilestatesindex.org>) and the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators (<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators>) are among the most popular examples.
- 34 For Latin America, see Johnson (1964), Bwy (1968), Paldam (1987) and Bickel and Mia (2022).
- 35 Margolis (2012).
- 36 Tecuci et al. (2016, 84–90), and Heuer Jr. and Pherson (2011, 271–7).
- 37 NARA, RG 59, Entry 1494, Box 65, “Forces Affecting the Stability of an Independent Sudan,” State/OIR, Intelligence Estimate No. 71 (February 11, 1955), i, declassification #NND 959010 and #NND 47552.
- 38 Knorr (1964, 459).
- 39 For example, Riker (1995).
- 40 Simon (1985), and Simon (1995).
- 41 Gentry and Gordon (2019, 49): “Individual psychological factors are important. . . . Leaders’ points-of-view matter.”
- 42 OIR’s External Research Staff also commissioned and collected reports from nongovernmental experts related to psychological warfare. NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–1498, Box 1, “News and Notes: State’s External Research Staff,” State/OIR, *Psychological Intelligence Digest* 2, no. 7 (April 1, 1954), 29, declassification #NND 951046.
- 43 For example, NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–1498, Box 1, “Iraq: Prospects for Political Stability,” State/OIR, *Psychological Intelligence Digest* 2, no. 8 (April 15, 1954), 9–10, declassification #NND 951046.
- 44 Jervis (2010, 195).
- 45 Clark (2017, 329). Nevertheless, as Clark also notes (328): “It may seem obvious that to remain objective is the first commandment of credible analysts.”

- 46 This message is found even in the earliest issues of the CIA's own journal for Intelligence Studies. Peake (1959): "The intelligence estimator, in utilizing the findings of the social and political scientist, needs to superimpose on them his own imagination, insight, and understanding."
- 47 White (1986).
- 48 Bar-Joseph and Levy (2009).
- 49 Hart and Simon (2006), and Phythian (2009).

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12 Juan Perón's Argentina, 1955

The difference between cognitive bias and empathy, tradecraft and expertise, science and art, will be evident in the case study that follows. It is one in which the analysts expressed complete confidence in their estimate of a regime's stability, only to watch the regime unravel and collapse. It is not a case study that fits the mold of surprise attack and strategic warning. Greater precision and policy-maker receptivity would probably not have improved it. Even if the analysts were impacted by cognitive limitations, it is doubtful that any collaborative exercise in mitigating bias would have changed their basic analytical line. They were committed to an objective, fact-based, linear approach, when the issue at hand was instead rooted in the subjective feelings and attitudes of a large and complex society. It is a typical example of regime stability as a topic of analysis, far more representative of the work that analysts do than tracking the world's most wanted terrorist or preventing a massive attack on the homeland. And it demonstrates the value and utility of the fifth and last definition of intelligence failure mentioned in the preceding chapter: *an inability to imagine the cognitive, cultural and societal norms and attitudes that shape the behavior of human beings.*

We are fortunate to have numerous intelligence assessments of Argentina in the 1940s and 50s that have been fully declassified and made available to the public on websites and at the National Archives in College Park. The sheer number of analyses provides a fascinating glimpse into the development of analytical thought in the early years of the US Intelligence Community. They begin just before the 1943 revolution, the basic categories of analysis remained roughly the same throughout the next twelve years and Washington recognized that the final call on regime stability in 1954 was clearly an intelligence failure. All of the concepts discussed so far in this book can be found in this case study, which covers a complex, multilayered topic that is rather typical of the work that analysts do.

NIE 91, published on March 9, 1954, assessed that Argentine President Juan Domingo Perón had total control over the armed forces with no remaining opposition to the regime, and in the unexpected event of "his death by accident or assassination," an Army-backed caretaker government and its successor would continue his policies.¹ The Intelligence Estimate prepared by the State Department's Office of Intelligence Research (OIR) on January 14 of that year similarly concluded that: 1) the political opposition was internally divided and lacked "a vital issue to use

against Perón"; 2) the military was increasingly indoctrinated and rewarded for its loyalty, with the Army unwilling or unable to overthrow the regime; and 3) the various regime protection forces were prepared to "safeguard against either a civilian uprising or a military coup."² The analysts were wrong. This was not an intelligence failure in the same sense as Pearl Harbor, one of those exceedingly rare moments in which a surprise attack on the American homeland might result in mass casualties and the outbreak of war. However, their analysis was nonetheless an intelligence failure, one that was far more exemplary of the routine kinds of problems that an analyst should expect to encounter from day to day.

On June 16, 1955, the Argentine Navy launched a long-planned revolt, and with the help of the Air Force conducted an aerial bombardment of the central square (Plaza de Mayo) where the presidential palace (Casa Rosada) was located. The revolt quickly failed due to poor weather, leaks of the coup plot, opposition from the workers of the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT) labor union, loyalty of the personnel of the security cordon around Buenos Aires and indecision among Army leaders split between those supporting radical change and those favoring a managed transition.³ Under pressure from Army leaders, Perón shuffled the cabinet, abandoned his assault on the Catholic Church and offered to dialogue with the political opposition. In the ensuing weeks, Perón panicked, vacillated, reneged and retrenched. He held public trials for the military conspirators. He called for the underprivileged working classes (*descamisados* or shirtless ones) to come out into the streets with cries of "Our lives for Perón," in a move reminiscent of the mass protests of October 17, 1945 that had first created the legend of Perón's overwhelming popular appeal.

Perón styled himself a man of the people, with close ties to the unions and an inclusive image of Argentine national identity that could encompass all walks of society, but he was also a practical man who understood that regime stability was predicated on maintaining military support. He now asked the Minister of War to arm and organize the labor unions into militias, an idea that his late wife Eva Perón had proposed several years before. He did this in the mistaken belief that these two pillars of regime support (labor and military) had some sort of mutual interest other than the preservation of the patronage system – a system that looked increasingly unsustainable in the face of rising inflation and unemployment. Perón could only have been fooling himself. As a career military man, he should have recognized that the officer corps was predominantly middle class and often from immigrant heritage, confident in its ability to manage politics and the economy since at least 1930, unified around a myth of the military as liberator, founder and guardian of the nation.⁴ The military was therefore predisposed to fear a political mobilization of an armed, indigenous proletariat. The military trials with their accusations of treason and the prospect of the working classes controlling security in the capital, among other factors, led a group of Army commanders to plot another military revolt for September 16. The coup succeeded four days later with the active participation of the Navy and the passive acquiescence of the gendarmerie, as Perón fled to exile in Paraguay and the military began the long process of trying to dismantle Peronismo.⁵

That being said, how do we define this intelligence failure and what could have been done to avoid it? An Intelligence Advisory Committee would later commission a Validity Study, in recognition of the fact that “NIE 91–54 did not anticipate the revolution which drove Peron from power in 1955.”⁶ To its credit, the study does not blindly attribute the missed call to information gaps or an unwillingness to consider alternative scenarios. It would be reasonable in the aftermath of any intelligence failure to assign blame to poor collection, in the belief that if it had only been possible to collect more quantifiable data of just the right kind – an officer willing to confess coup plans to a foreign agent or a public opinion survey revealing high levels of popular discontent – the failure could have been avoided.⁷ Analysts could have explored any number of high-impact/low-probability scenarios, but it is unclear how that would have changed their overall analytical line that Perón was indispensable. Washington analysts were convinced at the time that Perón had everything under control. Even in the immediate aftermath of the June 1955 revolt, OIR published an assessment concluding the Army needed Perón and the two were dependent on each other.⁸ Instead, Perón would be gone in a matter of weeks.

There is a fundamental problem at stake here about how anyone can predict regime failure. There are plenty of regimes that persist for years or decades despite scheming military commanders, disillusioned publics, stagnating economies and meddling foreign powers. Everything comes crashing down when a leader is removed by force, but how a country gets to that point involves so many variables playing out over such a long period of time. The Validity Study attempts to survey the variables and assess where the analysts over/underestimated the importance of certain factors, such as how Perón’s attacks on the Catholic Church and his outreach to the United States would have a polarizing effect on the public and energize the opposition. Mostly, however, the Validity Study is taken up with the role of the armed forces and the differing attitudes among the service branches, essentially looking at the actual outcome of events (a military coup) and tracing backwards to find tangible and direct antecedents that could have led to that specific outcome. “The likelihood of army disunity, which is a necessary condition of the navy’s current political significance, and the existence of navy leaders able and willing to assume political power were not sufficiently considered.”⁹

This Validity Study is an after-action review that deals in broad brushstrokes, much like OIR 6989 and NIE 91–54. For the most part, the language is expansive and impersonal, i.e. there are large institutions that collaborate or oppose one another, there is a regime that is united or fractured, and there are actors who play a major or a minor role. In tackling the central question of what went wrong, the Study determines that the complex interactions among variables need to be simplified by isolating the variable that mattered most (the armed forces) based on the eventual outcome (a military coup) and recalibrate the equation ($\frac{2}{3}$ Army < Navy + $\frac{1}{3}$ Army). Presumably the analysts could then have run the experiment again with a new product. Under this scientific paradigm, individuals are representative of institutions that function as variables, pieces to be moved around a chessboard, and evaluated according to effects rather than causes.

Where was that key indicator that would have alerted Washington analysts to the reality that the Argentine Government was unstable and at significant risk of a coup? It was lying in plain sight. The opening paragraph of NIE 91–54 should have made the analysts stop and reflect:

Peron now dominates Argentina more completely than ever before. He has the active political support of a substantial majority of the population, including especially urban and rural labor, the numerous bureaucracy, and many industrialists. He has also secure control of the armed forces, the police, the principal labor organizations, the Peronist Party machine, the national Congress, and the provincial governments. Extensive decree and police powers enable him to interfere in any aspect of national life. He has in effect a monopoly of all media of public information. There exists no effective opposition to his regime.¹⁰

That was a remarkable statement, positing a near totalitarian level of control in what was nominally a democracy. In this narrative, Perón commands the support of the people, Perón controls the security forces, Perón dominates bureaucratic and political life in the capital and the provinces. It is Perón and Perón alone who exercises a monopoly on all public information. And he rules “virtually unchallenged,” with the “support of large segments of the population.”¹¹ Such language mirrored the rhetoric of the regime itself, rhetoric that was designed by Perón to project an image of stability in his rule, confidence in his judgment and strength in his control over key institutions, even as his tactics changed to fit the circumstances. The opposition was weak and political repression was severe, but the economy was strong and the lines of patronage were effective. Besides, what difference did any of it make when Perón was adored by the masses?

Clearly there was something wrong with that paragraph, though what exactly it was and how it resulted in an intelligence failure would be hard to say at first glance. When all of the elements contributing to the stability or instability of a country are laid out on a single page, they often appear as a jumble of societal indicators with no rhyme or reason. It is easy to see how analysts might minimize the complexity and reduce them to a single unifying theme of Perón in control (NIE 91–54), or single out one solitary determining factor like the loyalty of the armed forces (Validity Study) as if it were the only one that mattered. But there is rarely an easy answer for assessing stability. It is an analytical genre that requires a long view of disparate trends that converge and diverge over a period of years or decades. Even firsthand observers, who should have had their fingers on the pulse of the nation (Perón, his closest advisors, the US Embassy) were caught unaware by the initial revolt and subsequent coup. And yet such pivotal events should have been predictable on some level, as the historian Robert Crassweller (1987, 289) carefully noted:

The power of the regime, impressive enough to the eye, had faded in its core. Some inner essence had gone out of it, perhaps because it was no longer

sustained by the spontaneity and the freshness of hope that had brought it to life.

He reached that conclusion after pouring over the same US diplomatic cables that Washington analysts in the early 1950s had at their disposal.

We can take the factors of Argentine stability mentioned in NIE 91–54 and group them into three categories: 1) those that lay entirely within the regime's control for which it could mobilize popular support; 2) those that were not entirely within the regime's control for which it had to work to neutralize or disincentivize the opposition; 3) those that were almost entirely out of the regime's control for which it could only hope to mitigate the damage. The Peronista Party, the labor unions, the armed forces, the police, the gendarmerie and the media were factors that all seem to have fallen into the first category, while civil society and the political opposition (including wealthy property holders) appear to have fallen into the second. The Catholic Church was somewhere in between the second and third categories, while the economy and the international community tended more toward the third. Those themes could be traced back over a decade in the written products of Washington analysts, from the military revolution in 1943 to the fall of Perón in 1955.

Some qualifications are in order. First of all, analysts at the time were not always using these exact words to describe these conceptual categories, though they were referencing these typologies of regime stability both implicitly and explicitly with some consistency over the years. Second, at the time of the military revolution in 1943, analysts assessed that the new government of General Pedro Ramirez represented the interests of the same landholding elites, often termed an oligarchy, who had backed the previous civilian government of Ramón Castillo. However, by the end of Perón's tenure in office, the definition of regime loyalists had shifted to members of the Peronista Party, in accordance with a series of economic, legal and social changes that had slightly altered the landscape of class structures and wealth creation in the country. Third, some stability factors (e.g. the Catholic Church) only seemed to arise in direct relation to recent events, while others (e.g. foreign policy) made frequent appearances but were tied to no specific event, making them hard to pin down in terms of significance.

Throughout the reports, there was a gradual shift toward an interpretation that favored stability. Table 12.1 compares the language of three analytic products that have been declassified and made publicly available. It is a selection of just a few categories of analysis that can serve as a representative sample of the many possible typologies of regime stability. In the first report, published by the OSS in 1945, Perón is a rising star within the military regime.¹² In the second report from OIR in 1951, Perón has survived major challenges to his rule, but he has not yet consolidated power.¹³ The third report is NIE 91–54, in which Perón reigns supreme.

The OSS assessed that the military regime seizing power in 1943 would fail to address the core problems that had brought down the previous civilian government.¹⁴ Unable to alleviate Argentina's regional and international isolation, and unwilling to revise economic and foreign policies that benefited the landed aristocracy, the new Ramirez government would increasingly resort to repression

Table 12.1 The Evolution of Language on Argentina, 1945–54

- Regime Can Only Mitigate Damage
- ▒ Regime Can Neutralize or Disincentivize Opposition
- Regime Can Mobilize Support

	OSS 2830.1	OIR 5454	NIE 91–54
Armed Forces	▒ “[The regime] had to contend with constant dissension among its own supporters, including the military, on the issue of tactics. One wing of the regime advocated the fullest development of an aggressive pro-Nazi totalitarian policy . . . while another wing of ‘moderates’ argued for . . . a manner calculated to conciliate official United States opinion. . . . Since the Campo de Mayo garrison . . . was deeply involved in intrigues based on these issues, the security of the regime remained threatened.”	--- “The growth of mass participation in government has more and more interposed a barrier to an Army move to take power as in 1943. The attitude of the Army is still of great importance to the regime, but it no longer can count on making an easy transition to military rule.”	--- “[Perón] has purged those suspected of disloyalty and appointed personal followers to positions of command. He has also opened the officer ranks to enlisted men, who are largely pro-Peron. In addition, he has improved morale by bettering the living conditions of service personnel.”
Labor Unions	▒ “The Labor Secretariat acted to subordinate unions which had previously been autonomous. Numerous leaders were jailed and government agents put in control of important unions. . . . The labor program was successful to the extent that . . . all officially tolerated union leadership came under the control of the government while labor difficulties at no time seriously impaired the government arms program.”	▒ “Especially difficult has been the problem of installing labor leaders who can command worker loyalty and who are at the same time willing to obey orders from headquarters run with an iron hand by Mrs. Perón. The harmonizing of workers’ demands with economic necessities in an era of inflation and full employment likewise perplexes administration leaders.” --- “Organized labor as it existed in 1943 has been shorn of independent leadership and swamped with the addition of several million forgotten workers. . . . Labor is overwhelmingly Peronista, having been turned away by official blandishments and controls from the Socialist, Anarchist, and Communist leadership which they followed when the government was an upper class affair.”	--- “Through [CGT leaders], Peron exercises considerable control over the laboring masses and can, when necessary, quickly organize mass demonstrations in support of his policies.”

(Continued)

Table 12.1 (Continued)

	<i>OSS 2830.1</i>	<i>OIR 5454</i>	<i>NIE 91-54</i>
Civil Liberties	--- "A decree regulating rural societies . . . met such strong opposition that it had to be suspended. The elections in the Sociedad Rural Argentina, in which the anti-government slate was re-elected, were generally considered a defeat for government policy. . . . However, the principal factor which made difficult the government campaign to bring the nation under control was the democratic sentiment of the majority of Argentines."	--- "The Perón regime is generally credited with somewhat more absolute control over the society than it has attained or perhaps even sought. . . . Perón has apparently been taking special precautions in preparation for election year against the growth of effective opposition by maintaining or further perfecting the machinery of control . . . suspension of habeas corpus."	--- "The new Five-Year Plan gives Peron . . . the power to dissolve any political party . . . impose martial law, curtail civil liberties, and apply severe punishments against any who criticize government officials."
Public Information		--- "Measures against metropolitan opposition newspapers, dating mostly from late 1947, and against provincial newspapers in the past year have eliminated significant press opposition except for La Prensa and La Nacion. Against these newspapers the regime has waged a persistent campaign. . . . Government control over radio broadcasting is apparently more complete than control of the press. . . . In addition the Perón administration finds censorship and propaganda essential to conceal or rationalize official failures and deviations in order to protect its stability and assure its perpetuation in power."	--- "The government supervises, and in some cases owns and operates, the press, radio, television, and other public information media."

and intimidation. It would remove symbols of democracy, promote ultranationalist sentiment, and launch a massive campaign to militarize society in a trend toward totalitarianism along fascist lines. Those analytical judgments were retained and incorporated into later assessments, even in some instances carrying through to the 1950s all the way to NIE 91–54. However, the key terms in earlier analytical products that once indicated significant problems for the regime were later reworked into more neutral or even positive language in the later analyses. For example, NIE 91–54 makes a passing nod to the prevalent view of the 1940s that “Peronism has borrowed from foreign ideologies, including Fascism,” and yet that quote comes within the context of a much larger section in which Perón comes across as merely a passive actor in the regime’s repressive tactics and an almost unintended beneficiary of authoritarian powers.

We would expect the use of terms loaded with meaning from a previous era to create moments of ambiguity and cognitive dissonance for the readers of these later NIEs, but such mentions could have been easily overlooked by readers distracted by the wash of numbers, statistics and raw facts that now proliferated.

Although the UCR [*Unión Cívica Radical*] polled one-third of the total vote cast in 1951, this vote undoubtedly included a considerable number of protest votes against Perón’s authoritarian controls and Senora de Peron rather than against other aspects of the Peronist Revolution.¹⁵

The author’s intention was merely to cite a polling number as an indicator of how an opposition party lacked grassroots support. But what does it mean to say “a considerable number of protest votes,” and how could anyone protest the Peróns without also criticizing the movement they led? In that regard, NIE 91–54 is a palimpsest. It was not an original analysis full of novel thinking about a complex problem set. It was rather a bureaucratic exercise, full of rhetorical gestures whose semantic meanings were partially erased and written over by successive authors, all nominally dealing with the same topic but not in dialogue with one another.

These different analytic products adopt the same basic categories and very similar typologies of regime stability, even as they reach slightly different conclusions about how to interpret the overall impact of those factors. Additionally, some of the descriptors and phrases conveying meaning were carried over from year to year, but they were increasingly detached from their original context and occasionally inserted at odd moments in a new discourse. These two trends in analytic writing might be viewed as improvements or refinements in an ongoing process of assessing the same target set over a period of many years, in which successive analysts reconsidered the received wisdom of their predecessors and did their best to update the situation in light of new information. That would be a charitable reading, and it is the conclusion we reach under an intelligence-as-science paradigm. These products would accordingly serve as indicators of progress, were it not for the eventual intelligence failure in 1955. Even then, a scientific paradigm would probably account for that failure by describing it as an anomaly or a failure of the analysts to properly calibrate the tools they were using for measurement. In other

words, the role of the different military service branches needed to be weighted differently in proportion to one another and to society as a whole. Certainly not a systemic failure.

However, there is another trend in these analyses that is both noticeable and worrying, especially when considered in combination with the first two. It is a trend that went unremarked in the Validity Study, perhaps because the intelligence profession had become so enamored with a scientific paradigm that it would simply have been unthinkable to question it. Consider the following comparison of language regarding civil liberties (Table 12.2). The OSS report from 1944 presents a blunt and scathing critique of a thuggish regime, the OIR report from 1951 offers a nuanced consideration of an authoritarian system run by a calculating and self-interested politician, while the NIE from 1954 depicts a head of state who has accrued enough legitimate power to control all of society should he so choose.

Table 12.2 A Comparison of the Language on Civil Liberties in Argentina

<i>OSS 2830.1</i>	<i>OIR 5454</i>	<i>NIE 91–54</i>
“The regime continued to consolidate its position. It created major new administrative agencies, restaffed key positions with persons indoctrinated in the aims and principles of the regime, and otherwise tightened control over the state. The Ramirez government began the new year with publication of a decree outlawing all political parties and the small nationalist groups. This move left the traditional parties confused and unable to act, except in conspiracy, and at the same time left a free field to the flourishing of major nationalist organizations. During the year such outstanding Conservative leaders as Antonio Santamarina, José Aguirre Cámara and Rodolfo Moreno were either arrested or driven into exile.” (4)	“Perón himself has the astute politician’s wariness of becoming overly associated with repressive measures in the public mind. When employing them, he usually goes to some pains to justify action in terms of the national interest. Perón also manages to avoid responsibility in many cases. Thus the police, CGT officials, cabinet members, and Peronista politicians, while performing such services as closing newspapers, dealing with union dissidents, and so forth, leave Perón himself as the arbiter, able to disavow or compromise action taken, especially when, as is often the case, Peronista agents go beyond the requirements of a given situation.” (18)	“A docile Congress has granted Peron extensive decree and police powers with which he can effectively interfere in almost every phase of national life. The government supervises, and in some cases owns and operates, the press, radio, television, and other public information media. The new Five-Year Plan gives Peron extensive powers over the economy, including strict regulation of imports, exports, credits, wages, and prices, as well as the power to dissolve any political party which opposes the principles of Peronism. Peron also has the power to impose martial law, curtail civil liberties, and apply severe penalties against any who criticize government officials.” (3–4)

In OSS 2830.1, there is a preference for depicting the lives of real people, using emotive language and appealing to common sense. This becomes a more formal description of intentions and motivations that verges on the psychological in OIR 5454. It is all replaced by a clinical and sterile treatment in NIE 91–54. The OSS account sarcastically depicts the government as celebrating the New Year by closing down the opposition, then vouches for the character of opposition leaders in exile. The OIR paper reconstructs the thought process of Perón in terms of what motivates his behavior and how he views his own place in society, even if it does not explicitly pass judgment on him. The NIE does not venture beyond a list of the tools at Perón's disposal, refusing to explicitly or even implicitly assess his character, let alone discuss the impact of these repressive measures on the public at large.

It is not just a matter of intelligence assessments increasingly leaning on numbers, statistics and other data points in place of analytical conclusions. It is not simply about high-confidence statements of fact replacing more risky judgments and intuitions. Rather, something important has been lost along the way. Human faces and emotions, their triumphs and failures, their hopes and dreams, have been left behind in favor of faceless and nameless organizations and institutions and their "instrumentalities." The typologies or tropes of regime stability remain, as do some of the key words and phrases, to an extent. But the spark of life that once illuminated these actors and events, connecting the words on the page with the reality they purported to represent, illustrating how there are human consequences for all-too-human choices, has gone. A world of three-dimensional depth that struck the imagination of the reader has been replaced with a page full of cardboard cut-outs, including (and especially) that of Juan Perón. Even in NIE 66–52 there is still a glimmer of human emotion that comes through at key moments, especially concerning Evita.

Senora de Peron has not only functioned as party manager of labor, but has also assumed the role of inspirational leader of the labor movement, appealing especially to the depressed masses, the *descamisados*. Her incapacitation . . . would also tend to dissipate the effectiveness of the *descamisados* as a political force. No alternative leader in sight could sustain the fervor which she has been able to arouse.¹⁶

The argument could easily have been made, and probably should have been made, that not even her husband could sustain that fervor. However, NIE 91–54, which hardly gave a passing thought to the consequences of Evita's death, presented a Perón who was calm, collected and in control. Even worse, the OIR analysts who prepared IE-61 as a contribution to NIE 91–54 went so far as to dismiss her role entirely, stating that: "The death of Señora de Perón removed an extremist and disruptive influence . . . Perón has assumed the control his wife exercised . . . and has thereby strengthened his personal hold upon the Peronista movement."¹⁷ This may have reflected an objective reading of the known facts, inasmuch as Perón had appointed new CGT leaders, taken over control of the Social Aid Foundation and removed Evita's brother Juan Duarte from office. However, an alternative analysis

adopting a more subjective viewpoint might have viewed the situation differently. All the same evidence could have been used to depict Perón as a shell of a man, an aging politician running out of tricks, soon to face the competing demands of contradictory forces in society that he had so delicately kept in balance with the help of his late wife and a fragile patronage network.

The Intersection of Intelligence and Diplomacy

For twelve years, Washington analysts had written a steady stream of reports on regime stability in Argentina, and during that time something had been lost and something gained.¹⁸ A certain degree of tangible and measurable precision had been achieved, with a clarity of language and thought that lent the analytical line a feeling of concreteness, surety and professionalism. However, it had come at the cost of a deeper insight into the character and nature of the people involved. And these different styles of analytical writing were so incommensurate that it probably would have been unthinkable for the author of NIE 91–54 to write about the depressed masses and their loss of fervor, let alone an astute politician’s wariness or avoidance of responsibility. Certainly not in the format of a National Intelligence Estimate. Besides, what was it that defined Perón’s survival? Perón’s claim to legitimacy was, in part, his assertion that Perónism was the embodiment of social justice, despite the hypocrisy evident in the more repressive measures undertaken by his government. What Washington analyst would want to wade into the intangibles of social justice as a category of regime stability? That would mean devising a set of indicators for evaluating the social contract, which would be entirely contingent on local societal norms for which the analysts probably had little firsthand experience anyway. How could anyone quantify or measure the political impact of a failing social contract or measure its importance relative to other factors of regime stability? Perhaps that was why social justice, such an important part of the rhetoric of the Perónistas, only received the briefest mention in NIE 91–54.

What of the notion that self-reflection, possibly with the help of a Structured Analytic Technique, could have exposed a cognitive bias contributing to this intelligence failure? A team exercise listing key assumptions in a cross-hatched chart would hardly have been necessary. The bias should have been readily evident to everyone involved. The analysts were clearly taking their cue from the policymakers, shifting gradually over the years in response to a slow change in US policy. What started as economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation, imposed because of the fascist leanings of the military regime and its association with former Nazis, ended up as commercial and military engagement with an erstwhile democracy nominally willing to side with America in the emerging Cold War. The attitude of successive US Ambassadors had developed from Spruille Braden’s personal insistence on the publication of the “Blue Book” in 1946, detailing Perón’s suppression of civil liberties and manipulation of the labor unions, to Albert Nufer’s tireless advocacy for a diplomatic reset in relations with Washington.¹⁹

The attitude of the US Embassy around the time of NIE 91–54 is expressed most succinctly and clearly in a declassified cable (54 Buenos Aires 1077) in which the direct connection is made between analysis and policy, i.e. between Perón’s regime

stability as evidenced by his widespread popularity and the need for the United States to cultivate a long-term security partner:

With the outcome of the recent Argentine elections we have reached an important stage in the development of our relations with Argentina. The achievement of a solid two-thirds popular vote by the Peron government in a substantially free and honest election confirms the existence of wise and voluntary support for Peron and his program. The Peron forces rolled up a solid majority in every part of the country and in many, if not most, of the interior provinces overwhelmed their opponents. This factor must be carefully weighed in calculating future steps in relation to Argentina, particularly in view of the critical stage in our position in Asia and Europe, which emphasizes the importance of our security position in this Hemisphere.²⁰

The extent to which Ambassador Nufer, his staff and the US Government as a whole had become an ally and apologist for the regime was a serious topic of conversation in Buenos Aires in the summer of 1955, and it became something of a minor scandal following Perón's ouster in 1955. In order to defend his reputation, Nufer prepared a document summarizing "the many malicious rumors that were being spread about [his] alleged objectionable activities," and he held up that document to associates of the new military regime with the assurance that such gossip was "obviously spread in bad faith."²¹ Three weeks before the final coup, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Henry Holland had delicately pointed out to Nufer that his "conservative" tone in reporting cables was rather at odds with what Washington was hearing from newspaper correspondents and what they were reading in raw intelligence reports.²²

Ambassador Nufer was in an awkward situation, well aware since at least August 1953 that politicians and journalists in Buenos Aires were rumoring that he was too close to Perón, while at the same time hearing from policymakers in Washington that he alone was responsible for promoting a narrative of confidence in regime stability.²³ As Perón fled into exile, Nufer began documenting his phone calls to Assistant Secretary Holland, opting for the format of a Memorandum of Conversation that was traditionally used for discussions with foreign interlocutors, and using it instead to record his updates to Washington.²⁴ He could just as easily have filed the contents in a front-channel cable for routine distribution or deferred to Holland's own summaries for the Seventh Floor. But Nufer apparently wanted a copy for the record with an exclusive distribution to the Secretary of State and his senior staff.²⁵

The narrative of regime stability that Ambassador Nufer and some of his staff had promoted throughout his tenure derived first and foremost from his meetings with Perón and regime insiders. Almost to the end, Nufer was channeling regime rhetoric, even when that propaganda was inconsistent and contradicted the very dynamics on the ground that his staff was dutifully reporting in other cables.

- The morning of the June 16 revolt, Nufer met with Perón, who was "very sure of himself and exuberated confidence," as he explained that he would continue

the campaign against the Catholic Church at the ballot box, because “an even greater majority than heretofore [would turn out] in favor of the Peronista Party.”²⁶ The US Embassy was thus at pains to explain how Perón should not be blamed for the hoodlums (possibly Communists) who had set fire to the Church’s Curia office that evening. They commented that it could not possibly have been a staged attack by the Peronista Party, since surely Perón himself had asked “all workers to remain in their homes and not attempt to take matters in their own hands.”²⁷

- Later during the summer of unrest that followed, Nufer noted that post “agrees with Perón’s publicly stated view that the opposition Parties as such were not involved in the June 16 revolt and that they are not as Parties sponsoring and supporting the continued demonstrations against the government.”²⁸ However, once Perón shifted tack from conciliation to confrontation with the opposition, the Embassy castigated them, saying that Perón’s efforts at national reconciliation had failed because “the opposition never gave it a chance,” and their “conditions, if met, would require almost a complete reversal of the Peronist program.”²⁹
- The Embassy noted that Perón would henceforth embark on an even more repressive crackdown on civil liberties in the name of law and order. But in a bit of twisted logic, post took pains to explain how this would stabilize the situation, leading Perón to a “new period of strength in which he can pose as the apostle of pacification,” so that this move “may well have had enough plausibility . . . to persuade the Army that Perón is the best agent for the restoration and continuation of law and order.”³⁰

The gap between regime rhetoric and reality on the ground was clearly creating friction, as some embassy staff started raising difficult questions about the Ambassador’s interpretation of events. Francis W. Herron, a Foreign Service Officer who had previously been in San Salvador and Montevideo, served as assistant press officer in Buenos Aires from 1946–47, and studied at the University of Córdoba in Argentina during the war, took an informal survey of his servants and sent a write-up to Nufer.³¹ He wanted the Ambassador to appreciate the comments of his chauffeur, who said the working classes are nostalgic for the early years of social reform and are “reluctant to think that era is ending.”³² The chauffeur further noted that people felt they had to choose between Perón and the Church, inflation was eating away at purchasing power and the government was indulging in personal privilege and corruption at their expense. Following a particularly sharp debate in a staff meeting, Garret Ackerson expressed his opinion in a formal memo for Nufer: “I think that Perón is perfectly capable of giving an order to burn churches; whether he did or not in this instance.”³³

I know that you have no illusions about Perón, but we must face the fact that a great many people – Argentines, Americans in the Argentine, and Americans in the United States – suspect otherwise. In particular, they think that the United States Government, in the past two years, has become unnecessarily

friendly toward Perón and even supports him. . . . I am not at all certain that the long-term interests of the United States and of U.S. business are best served by his continuation.³⁴

Nevertheless, Nufer would conclude in an Official-Informal note to Assistant Secretary Holland on August 10, 1955:

It is increasingly evident to me, at least, that Perón is becoming more firmly entrenched as each day goes by. . . . Now that the sound and the fury seem to be gradually dying down, I often wonder how we were able successfully to withstand the pressure of the hundreds of rumors without being stampeded into an inaccurate appraisal of the situation.³⁵

The Ambassador was dug into his interpretation and had reached a conclusion that would prove wrong: "it seems fairly obvious that [Army leaders'] primary concern is with their own position which is linked with that of Perón to whom practically all of them owe their present elevated ranks."³⁶ By seeking to control the policy debate in Washington, he was indirectly influencing the analytical line. His own analytical judgments, which mirrored those of the regime, were making their way directly into intelligence products – i.e. the Army depended on Perón and the only real threat was one of assassination.

So much for objectivity. The idea that Perón might be living in a bubble, rehashing the exploits of his earliest years long after the charm and charisma of his regime had faded in a haze of inflation, repression and arrogance, should have been just as apparent to analysts in Washington as it was to Mr. Herron's chauffeur in Buenos Aires. And yet, the authors of NIE 91–54 were willing to stake their reputation on an opening paragraph of total confidence in Perón's absolute control over all aspects of society. No alternative analysis or Structured Analytic Technique could have helped them. It was no secret that the US Ambassador had been soft-pedaling the threat to regime stability and toning down the narrative for Washington. And it was not as if Nufer was presenting new evidence of regime stability that analysts had never considered before, just his own interpretation. But the analysts felt they had sufficient reason for presenting positive indicators in most major categories of regime stability according to what they saw as verifiable facts and the most tangible evidence available.

A Structured Analytic Technique might have led them to question some key assumptions of interpretation and suggest the need for an alternative analysis. Such an exercise could have challenged the main analytical line, but it would not have replaced it, because their level of confidence in regime stability suggests that any alternative future would have been little more than a low-probability/high-impact scenario. No amount of inner reflection would have led them to throw out everything they thought they knew in favor of the casual musings of an Argentine chauffeur. Even an opinion survey would have been unlikely to help. How would a pollster have framed a survey questionnaire to inquire whether Argentines still held genuine love for their leader or just misplaced nostalgia? And how would a pollster

get accurate results about whether people were willing to turn out in the streets and risk their lives to defend their President from a military coup?

The analysts of NIE 91–54 had facts from published sources and disseminated reporting, the authoritative remarks of the US Ambassador and the conventional wisdom that Perón was a survivor who had always pulled through. They had loads of epistemology. Above all, they had a rational belief that their job was to compile the most relevant information, summarize the evidence and inform policy-makers based on their objective reading of events. They may very well have had their own opinions, their own creative musings, or what some people might call ‘intuition,’ but such things did not belong in a National Intelligence Estimate. These were intelligence professionals, not litterateurs, and an NIE was not a place for poets and prose. The idea that they might base their analytical judgments on their own subjective opinions, or that they might try to reconstruct the inner thoughts and feelings of the key actors, or that they might use minor anecdotes and atmospherics as metaphors for much larger processes in society, was simply not a part of their job.

And yet, others did see it as part of their job. To his enormous credit, Nufer allowed his staff to send their own cables back to Washington with the content they thought relevant, written in a style they felt appropriate. He was interested in shaping the policy debate in Washington, not censoring his country team, which is a narrow but important distinction. In the case of one Political Officer, Ernest Siracusa, that freedom of thought did not lead to any radical revision of the embassy’s basic analytical line. He had served in Mexico, Guatemala and on the desk for Central American and Panama Affairs in Washington before coming to Buenos Aires in 1952.³⁷ His cables reported the known facts as they appeared in the newspapers, transcriptions of speeches and minutes of official meetings.³⁸ His commentary was almost uniformly a couple paragraphs, at the end of which he posed a few broad questions about what events might mean for larger trends. He usually offered both sides of any given argument and concluded that only time would tell. His cable from August 20, 1953, discussing how some opposition parties were cautiously willing to cooperate with the government on the condition of restored civil liberties, was typical:

Taken at face value, their attitude and statements do not constitute an appeasement of Perón but rather one view of how the long-run interests of their parties and the nation may best be served. This view, of course, is not universal and those opposed to conciliation have read appeasement and resignation into the statements of those who favor it. Whichever view proves to be correct will probably depend more upon future developments and Perón’s reaction than upon the present intentions of those who advocate co-existence.³⁹

It was always very proper writing, and Siracusa at least recognized the delicate and somewhat unstable balance of forces in Perón’s government, but he took no risks and rarely ventured an opinion of his own.⁴⁰

By contrast, Hugh Reichard recognized the importance of highlighting human emotions like dignity and pride in assessing the nostalgia the workers felt for Perón. “Intangibles may be at least as important as tangibles in accounting for Perón’s

labor support. Even opposition sources have acknowledged that before Perón, a worker had 'nobody to listen to him' or champion his cause."⁴¹ As Labor Attaché, he wrote a number of cables from 1952 to 1955 trying to map out the rivalries he perceived within the labor movement. He felt that Perón, by manipulating the labor and trade unions, was increasingly losing control of them, which was a far-reaching conclusion with major consequences for regime stability.⁴² The evidence was mostly circumstantial, often derived from unverified rumors, and with a great deal of inference based on simple common sense. He would meet with labor leaders, listening to their talking points about worker solidarity and international engagement, and report their remarks in precise detail. He would then add his own discourse by questioning their motivations and intentions. He drafted a cable in October 1953 attempting to assess the role of CGT Secretary-General Eduardo Vuletich, a man who Reichard had not yet met in person.⁴³ He wrote that Vuletich was rumored to have "exerted common pressure with the Army upon Peron" to clean up regime corruption, that he "feels irritated or disgraced" by Perón's plan to organize a new union for professional workers outside the auspices of the CGT and that he fears he is losing influence to rival union leader and Interior Minister Angel Borlenghi.⁴⁴ Reichard accordingly asked why Perón should want "widespread organization of practically all groups," noting that "the most common explanation offered . . . is that through organization [Perón] can exercise more effective control." But Reichard concluded the opposite, that Perón's machinations and the fragmentation of union leadership could get out of control, noting that a recent incident "suggests an unhealthy, perhaps unstable, state of affairs."

Reichard's instincts would be proven right after the revolt of June 16, 1955. He met with Cesar Mazzetti, Director of the CGT's International Relations Department, who said the government at first encouraged the CGT to call the workers out into the streets to defend the regime against a military coup, which the CGT understood to mean impeding traffic, setting fires and buying time, much as they did in the attempted revolt of September 1951. Mazzetti commented: "The call was, this time, inappropriate and has been resented by numerous workers."⁴⁵ Reichard further cited rumors that some workers had been summoned to the Plaza de Mayo ("in some cases being told why, in others not"), where hundreds of civilians would lose their lives in the Naval bombardment. Reichard thought the anecdotal evidence to be a sign of a much bigger problem in worker morale: "At one packinghouse, police offered arms to those willing to 'fight for Perón,' only eight accepting." He carefully recorded how, in the presence of both Reichard and a reporter, Mazzetti implied that it may have been Perónistas who set fire to the Church's Curia office that evening. Based on these intangible feelings, rumors and impressions, as well as his own three years of experience in the country, Reichard concluded:

First, it seems demonstrated that labor did not and perhaps cannot prove to be an effective physical defense for the Government where it does not have a superiority of arms and training. Second, that the vast majority of workers was not prepared to die for Perón. Third, that this does not mean lack of political support, although the religious issue may have confused, disappointed,

and to some extent alienated some workers. Fourth, the post-revolt regime, whose true character and composition remains obscure . . . has not seen fit to give credit to the workers for their efforts, heroism, or sacrifices.⁴⁶

Here we have uninspired workers, hesitant union leaders, and a regime that was seen as high-handed and arrogant. They were warning signs of instability within the central pillar of regime support, which must have been developing for some time. But they were not based on any sort of quantifiable, comprehensive or objective criteria, so they were ignored.

Even more impressive was the reporting of Robert Martindale, head of the Political Section from 1951 to 1954, who had studied at Paris, Oxford, Grenoble and Columbia universities, worked as a freelance journalist for seven years and served in military intelligence during the war.⁴⁷ He supported his Ambassador's approach on policy, but had no illusions about Perón, and seemed to encounter evidence everywhere for mounting opposition to the regime. He remarked in a note to the State Department desk officer for River Plate Affairs: "As a matter of fact, my wife and I have been surprised, and sometimes even a little embarrassed, over the way people we meet discuss and criticize Peron, his government and, especially, his late wife."⁴⁸ A good example of his writing style is a cable with the deceptively simple title, "Some Recent Developments in Argentina."⁴⁹ It is pure analysis. He opens by establishing a baseline for assessing Perón's state of mind, saying that Perón has increasingly consolidated power since the death of his wife and exhibited "greater self-security," as evidenced by increased outreach to the United States, less erratic behavior and more focus on long-term vision. However, since the bombings at an April 15 rally and the subsequent campaign against the oligarchs, Perón has been "thrown back upon the defenses of his old insecurity." Martindale observed that the uncovering of a terrorist plot had not brought the Army out into the streets, and he inferred "that [since] this has not occurred [it] appears to show how real the Army's weakness is." The police had been rounding up oligarchs, but also shopkeepers, some of whom were guilty of no more than keeping antique weapons and sporting rifles. Without mentioning sources, Martindale said that "great disquiet is arising among those who anticipate that the government may use this means toward eventual confiscation of their properties."

All of that was merely set-up for a much more trenchant analysis of the long-term implications of Perón's "erratic behavior" and "indecisiveness," his overconfidence in his abilities, and his penchant for picking fights without foreseeing the consequences.⁵⁰ Martindale assessed the impact of the recent arrests on capital flight, noting that the landed classes faced a situation in which their only options were collaboration with Perón (who vocally supported their elimination), or moving their money abroad and fleeing the country. Their friends, relatives and business acquaintances were being interrogated, forced into confessions and accused of treason. Martindale drew a parallel with the Army, whose leadership had been decimated following a failed coup attempt in 1951. He then considered the second- and third-order effects:

The oligarchs whom Peron has thus put on notice may have their most effective means of attack on Peron through connections abroad. . . . Peron is

hyper-sensitive to press opinion. This weakness is known. From oligarchs to communists, those who think a better understanding with the United States might strengthen his position have in his sensitiveness an effective weapon to hinder such rapprochement. Thus, the Argentine oligarchy has strange allies who share at least a part of their objective.

Martindale went beyond Siracusa's situation reports, beyond Reichard's strategic warnings, and beyond Nufer's opportunity analyses. He used his imagination to recreate the mental states of different constituencies in society, not just their intentions and motivations but also their hopes and fears, their competing and overlapping interests, both with regard to Perón and to one another.

Martindale's cables speak of institutions containing a wide range of personalities, human beings in all of their emotional complexity, with a nuanced depiction of relationships evolving between social groups. He reported in October 1953 that Perón's successful replacement of the Papal Nuncio had cowed senior Church officials into submission, but in the process Perón had only further antagonized lay leaders and the civic organizations.⁵¹ He noted similarities in the editorial lines of Communist and Ultranationalist dailies, assessing that these erstwhile rivals might find a shared interest in attacking Perón by way of his outreach to the United States.⁵² In his cable on Perón's personal motivations, Martindale remarked that: 1) Perón's seemingly unpredictable policy pivots were a consequence of one man having sole decision-making authority; 2) his overriding ambition, above and beyond any consideration of Argentine national interests, was to remain in power; and 3) he was constantly trying to gauge whether his actions had increased his domestic popularity.⁵³ Consequently, Perón's vision was shortsighted, with major policy moves subject to his partial and biased conception of his personal prestige. Martindale concluded with an incredibly perceptive insight that should have seriously called into question the long-term stability of the regime, particularly at a time when NIE 91-54 was almost certainly in the drafting phase: "In forecasting his own position, Peron has no great advantage over other observers." It is only in Martindale's analysis that Perón emerges as a three-dimensional human being and we can begin to appreciate his real intentions and motivations.

In his pursuit of an unvarnished view of Argentine politics, Martindale was tapping into a narrative that had been prominent in earlier analytical products from the late 1940s, and in doing so, Martindale was entering into a genuine dialogue with his predecessors on the portfolio.⁵⁴ Namely, that a number of wealthy elites, political opponents and military leaders were increasingly coming to view Perón's erratic and aggressive behavior as an existential threat. And even if they may not have had the capacity to combine forces and mount a challenge to the regime, their individual actions could undermine the economy and Perón's prestige, thereby in aggregate having seriously destabilizing effects. Martindale chose to highlight US-Argentine ties as the thread that would unravel the delicately knitted fabric of Argentine politics, viewing the burgeoning bilateral relations in terms of their complex reverberations within Argentine society and their impact on Perón's

self-image.⁵⁵ In this analysis of Perón's motivations, there is no cult of personality, only an impulsive man obsessed with his image and desperate for attention:

Even if he were not highly-sensitive as he is, this overture to us would place Peron in a vulnerable position. At home and abroad, rebuff by United States opinion would hurt his pride; at home he has exposed himself to loss of prestige among his own people. His unconcealed enthusiasm is that of sentiment released by the prospect of fulfillment of long-suppressed desire for recognition. His emotion in this situation is stronger than his political judgment.⁵⁶

Here we have an analytical line that relied on the author's creativity and imagination to draw out the second-order destabilizing effects of Perón's behavior.

Deciding Among Competing Narratives

This discussion should bring to the foreground an important facet of the lives of these diplomats. They were effectively functioning as both analysts and collectors, gathering and processing information on the ground in real time and communicating their interpretation of events to a broad readership in Washington. We are fortunate to have a large body of their work preserved, declassified and made available to the public at College Park, covering a broad swathe of topics from a range of years. Moreover, we have the names of the authors preserved on the cables, allowing us to compare their approaches and consider how their narratives differed and developed over time. It should also be kept in mind that all of these reports stretching back to the mid-1940s were available to the country team at post in 1954 and the authors of NIE 91–54. Embassy Buenos Aires kept well-organized folders of reporting cables and other correspondence through the 1960s, while the State Department maintained a central library for OSS and OIR reports that could be checked out on loan. These different narratives, with their competing visions for the past, present and future stability of the regime, all co-existed in the files of analysts and diplomats alike.

For Washington analysts in 1954, the evidence for Perón's eventual ouster was all around them. However, to see it clearly required a certain empathy with the subject matter. An ability to appreciate how the facts as they knew them were not concrete objects, but rather bits of carefully constructed narratives that had meaning and significance for living human beings.⁵⁷ To piece through the rhetoric of the regime and come to the realization that Perón was a politician at best, an entertainer at worst, but certainly not a visionary capable of single-handedly transforming the nation, would not have been difficult.⁵⁸ In a single speech on May Day in 1953, Perón called upon the workers of the world to unite, declared that "the Perónist movement had the force to last a hundred years" even as the "dignity of our own fatherland" was at stake, and criticized both capitalism and communism for their treatment of workers.⁵⁹ At post, Siracusa dutifully transcribed the details in a cable that carefully noted Perón's confused mix of Marxist and Fascist slogans.⁶⁰ Martindale assessed that Perón's opponents had taken advantage of his vain obsession

with his media image to provoke him into the diatribe and risk his relationship with the United States.⁶¹ But the Washington analysts who drafted NIE 91–54 could only see as far as: “Peronism has borrowed from foreign ideologies, including Fascism and Marxism, and it emphasizes ultranationalism, industrialization, the political and social importance of labor, and state-supported welfare measures.”⁶² How very matter-of-fact.

To arrive at a key judgment of instability, Washington analysts would have had to think more critically about one narrative in particular – the Perón of October 1945, hero of the workers and man of the people, true representative of a military revolution that promised social justice for all, with an image frozen in time of the *descamisados* crying out in the streets of Buenos Aires: “Our lives for Perón!” Such a narrative should not have been taken at face value, nor should it have been discarded entirely. Rather, it should have provided material for a deeper sociological or psychological portrait of those who were propagating that tale and those for whom it was intended. That is because it had come to serve as an anchoring point for the interpretation of so many other supposedly epistemologically sound and objectively verified “facts,” all encapsulated in the larger concept of Perón’s cult of personality that formed the backbone of analytical thinking in Washington in 1954.⁶³

At the height of her influence and popularity in October 1951, just a couple weeks before her hysterectomy for cervical cancer, and with the seriousness of her condition plainly evident, Evita was lifted to the microphone. While embracing her husband, she called upon everyone in a barely audible voice to pledge their loyalty with: “Our lives for Perón.”⁶⁴ That was the high watermark for the regime. Washington analysts in 1954 should have written an estimate of a regime past its prime, with Perón no longer able to hold the centripetal forces in society together, absent the role that his late wife played as trusted enforcer and glamour symbol.⁶⁵ It would have been an alternative narrative in which Evita was an essential link, now lost. She had sustained the public’s memory of Perón in 1945 as a man catapulted into power by the workers, a man who lifted up the dreams of the masses, shifting attention away from the Perón of 1951, the head of a corrupt bureaucracy pretending to represent all Argentines.⁶⁶ Maybe October 1945 was the start of an inviolable social compact between Perón and the *descamisados* destined to overcome all adversity, or perhaps October 1951 was the end of a grand illusion in which all that remained for Perón and his followers was a memory of fading hopes and dreams. The dates themselves are only symbolic, though useful as signs for encapsulating the popular sentiments that accrued to events and their reverberations in society over time. Either way, Washington analysts in 1954 chose to remove what few remarks about Evita had remained in NIE 66–52, perhaps because she was no longer considered timely and relevant since her death. It is ironic that the analysts of NIE 91–54 could have struck such a tone of confidence in their objective presentation of facts about a regime whose claim to legitimacy was so rooted in the subjective and ambiguous feelings of the masses.

The question of regime stability operates outside the paradigm of intelligence-as-science. There will never be one single narrative that explains with mathematical

precision the eventual outcome, but rather a number of competing narratives that fall on a spectrum of better or worse in terms of their explanatory value. The topic should compel analysts to reconsider their basic assumptions about their portfolio and their job, as they are forced to confront complex puzzles that cannot be answered with simple equations. In terms of a “theory of surprise,” where in our example of Argentine stability is there an adversary capitalizing on an asymmetric advantage, an ambitious initiative or a bit of fortuitous timing? Perón had benefitted from three years since the previous attempted coup. He had time to make adjustments, yet it was his own handpicked military officers who ousted him, and the coup leaders made no great innovation over previous juntas.⁶⁷ Even after the June 16 revolt, Perón had three months to change tack and find a solution. However, he had already lost the confidence of a significant part of the armed forces, he could not mobilize sufficient support from the workers’ unions and he did not have enough political capital to strike a deal with the opposition to buy time until the next election cycle. Those trends and trajectories had been determined months or years in advance, and any surprise that Perón and his inner circle may have experienced on September 16, or even June 16 for that matter, was a result of their own failure to accurately assess the situation, not any remarkable achievement on the part of their opponents.

In terms of what caused this intelligence failure, how should analysts have made the mental leap from political instability to military coup? The question of why the Army lost confidence in Perón is not *sui generis* and any attempt to answer it quickly expands outward into a wide range of factors and relationships in society that are only tangentially linked to the military.⁶⁸ A failed coup in 1951 had altered the defense and security landscape with the incorporation of the gendarmerie and maritime police into the Interior Ministry, and the transfer of major units from the capital into the provinces. It left hundreds of forcibly retired officers hostile to the regime and their replacements resentful of the new oath of loyalty.⁶⁹ The discomfort of the senior military ranks can be traced even farther back to repeated demands that successive commanders had made for Perón to remove his wife from any role in political and security affairs. Most of the nationalists on the right who had supported the coup in 1943 and Perón’s election in 1946 lent their active support after 1951 to various military efforts to overthrow the regime.⁷⁰ They opposed Perón’s negotiation of loans from the United States and concessions to American oil companies, his carousing with teenage girls and his appropriation of their rhetoric without adopting the substance of their cause. Similarly, even those elements among the bourgeois classes that were willing to work with Perón during his Second Five-Year Plan rejected his political movement, because of his reliance on the trade unions and his contradictory economic policies.⁷¹ The Peróns championed the traditions of the *mestizos* or *criollos* from the interior as a model for an authentic Argentine culture, which was at odds with a long-held vision of white Argentina so prevalent among the urban middle classes.⁷² Even divisions between union leaders and labor ranks, which weakened the regime’s ability to mobilize effectively at the end, had been simmering since the mid-1940s.⁷³ Martindale was quite right to assess that none of these constituencies on their own had the potential to challenge

Perón, but Perón himself might commit an unforced error that could galvanize the opposition. The unauthorized Corpus Christi demonstration protesting the regime on June 11, 1955 was just such an event. It tapped into a narrative of Perón breaking a sacred promise to the Church and to the nation, pushed the military to move forward with the revolt and allowed others to cast off the nostalgia they still felt for the regime.⁷⁴

Ultimately, Perón's regime was unstable, his governance style unsustainable and his judgment unsound. That is not to take away anything from the many accomplishments of the early years of his tenure in office, but it was certainly true by the time NIE 91-54 was drafted. To reach that conclusion, however, would have required the analysts to adopt a subjective approach to analysis, relying on atmospherics, anecdotes, assumptions and perceptions, both their own interpretations and those of others, to such an extent that no manager would have allowed its publication beyond a red cell exercise or an alternative scenario buried at the back of a text box inset. There is no formula for predicting regime failure, no calculation that can measure instability with accuracy and precision. Intelligence failures may be a consequence of *an inability to accurately foresee events due to cognitive limitations*, but as this case study demonstrates, the tendency to equate subjective experience with analytic error may be its own form of cognitive bias, hindering the flow of creativity and insight. In that regard, intelligence failures can just as often be the result of *an inability to imagine the cognitive, cultural and societal norms and attitudes that shape the behavior of human beings*.

Notes

- 1 CIA FOIA Reading Room, "National Intelligence Estimate: Probable Developments in Argentina," NIE-91 (March 9, 1954), declassified FOIA document number CIA-RDP79R01012A004600040001-8, document release date January 9, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79r01012a004600040001-8>. Henceforth, NIE 91-54. Also available as NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-1373, Box 4, declassification #NND 959285.
- 2 NARA, RG 59, Entry 1494, Box 65, "Probable Developments in Argentina Through 1955," State/OIR, Intelligence Estimate No. 61 (January 14, 1954), 4, declassification #NND 989010 and #NND 47552. Henceforth, OIR IE-61.
- 3 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "The Abortive Revolt of June 16," Despatch No. 1167 (June 22, 1955), declassification #NND 913592. See also Potash (1980, 182-91).
- 4 Whitaker (1975), and Norden (1996, 158-60).
- 5 For a summary of events that takes in the role of class consciousness, see Goldwert (1972, 129-38).
- 6 CIA FOIA Reading Room, "Intelligence Advisory Committee: Validity Study of NIE 91-54," IAC-D-100/18 (July 20, 1956), declassified FOIA document number CIA-RDP61-00549R000300010004-8, document release date January 5, 2000, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp61-00549r000300010004-8>.
- 7 Both the OSS during the war and OIR after the war made use of public opinion surveys conducted by private outfits, though only for special projects and not with any great frequency.
- 8 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1-449, Box 306A, "Probable Course of Peron Regime," State/OIR, Intelligence Report no. 6989 (July 21, 1955), declassification #NND 989071.

- Henceforth, OIR 6989. It is unclear why the OIR analysts adopted this analytical line, when just that December they had correctly assessed that “an open clash appears probable” with the Church, setting off “the most serious struggle in Perón’s turbulent career . . . a struggle that could end in Perón’s downfall.” The OIR assessment itself is now lost and we only have excerpts quoted secondhand in NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 164, “Official-Informal: Ernest V. Siracusa to James F. O’Connor, Jr., Esquire” (December 27, 1954), declassification #NND 959075.
- 9 “Validity Study of NIE 91–54.”
 - 10 NIE 91–54, 1.
 - 11 NIE 91–54, 2.
 - 12 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–449, Box 185, “Growth of Argentine Power in 1944,” OSS Research and Analysis (R&A), Intelligence Report No. 2830.1 (June 1, 1945), declassification #NND 978015. Henceforth, OSS 2830.1.
 - 13 NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–449, Box 275, “Argentina: Current Political Trends,” State/OIR, Intelligence Report No. 5454 (March 12, 1951), declassification #NND 978015. Henceforth, OIR 5454.
 - 14 NARA, RG 59, Entry M-1221 (microfiche), “Three Months of the Ramirez Government in Argentina,” OSS R&A, Report No. 1169 (September 4, 1943), declassification #NND 978015, 1.
 - 15 CIA FOIA Reading Room, “Probable Developments in Argentina,” NIE-66 (June 4, 1952), declassified FOIA document number CIA-RDP79R00904A000100030053-2, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79r00904a000100030053-2>. Henceforth, NIE 66–52.
 - 16 NIE 66–52, 5.
 - 17 OIR IE-61, 3.
 - 18 In addition to the reports already mentioned, the following analyses have also been declassified: NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–449, Box 10, “Argentine Neutrality and Trade with the Axis,” OSS Latin America Division Situation Report No. 4 (March 26, 1942), declassification #NND 978015; NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–449, Box 184, “An Analysis of Current Domestic Opposition to the Argentine Regime,” OSS/R&A no. 2800 (December 28, 1944), declassification #NND 978015; NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–449, Box 185, “New Tactics in the Government’s Campaign to Eradicate Democratic Names and Symbols from Argentina,” OSS/R&A no. 2822 (January 10, 1945), declassification #NND 978015; NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–449, Box 185, “Colonel Perón and the Argentine Industrial Union,” OSS/R&A no. 2842 (March 16, 1945), declassification #NND 978015; NARA, RG 59, Entry A1–449, Box 186, “Militarization of Argentina on Fascist-Totalitarian Lines,” OSS/R&A no. 2850 Part III (February 15, 1945), declassification #NND 978015; NARA, RG 59, Entry 1494, Box 64, “Probable Developments in Argentina Through Mid-1953,” State/OIR, Intelligence Estimate No. 43 (September 22, 1952), declassification #NND 959010 and #NND 47552.
 - 19 *Blue Book* 1946. Many of the categories that contemporary analysts used for defining regime stability in Argentina were given their definitive form in the *Blue Book*.
 - 20 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 150, Amembassy Buenos Aires, “Security Significance of Improved U.S.-Argentine Relations,” Despatch No. 1077 (May 19, 1954), declassification #NND 959075.
 - 21 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, “Ambassador Nufer Memorandum of Conversation with Admiral Anibal Osvaldo Olivieri” (September 30, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
 - 22 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, “Henry F. Holland to Albert F. Nufer,” (August 22, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
 - 23 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 155, “Official-Informal: James F. O’Connor, Jr., to Ambassador Albert F. Nufer” (August 21, 1953), declassification #NND 913592: “The criticism of your retention in Buenos Aires as an alleged sop to Peron contained in yesterday’s [New York Times] editorial”; NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 150, “Official-Informal: Robert C. Martindale to Henry Dearborn, Esquire,” (December 1, 1953),

- declassification #NND 959075: "I think we must anticipate that the technique of trying to undermine Al's authority by insinuating that he is "pro-Peron" will be exploited to the limit of our various opponents' ability."
- 24 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Ambassador Nufer Memorandum of (Telephone) Conversation with Assistant Secretary Henry F. Holland," (9:45 a.m., September 17, 1955), declassification #NND 913592. These memos continued once or twice a day throughout the week following the coup.
- 25 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Mr. Holland to the Acting Secretary: Situation in Argentina" (September 16, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 26 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Memorandum," Buenos Aires 1165 (June 21, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 27 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Amembassy Buenos Aires: The Abortive Revolt of June 16," Despatch No. 1167 (June 22, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 28 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Amembassy Buenos Aires: Comments of Gomez Morales in Political Situation," Despatch No. 144 (August 24, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 29 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Amembassy Buenos Aires: Pacification is Dead! Long Live Pacification!" Despatch No. 160 (August 26, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 30 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Amembassy Buenos Aires: Pacification is Dead! Long Live Pacification!" Despatch No. 160 (August 26, 1955), declassification #NND 913592. Within the Defense Attaché Office, the Air Force component reached the same conclusion: "At present there is no indication the military will turn." NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Air Attache Buenos Aires: Continued Unrest in Argentina," IR-168-55 (August 18, 1955), declassification #NND 913592. The Naval component was more cautious: "90% of non-flag officers in all three services were against Peron . . . [but] the element lacking, or at least not known to exist, is any effective leadership for such opposition." NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "U.S. Naval Attache, Buenos Aires: Argentina - Armed forces - Attitudes Toward Government," 77-55 (August 10, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 31 U.S. Department of State (1954, 229).
- 32 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Mr. Herron to Ambassador Nufer: Causes of June 16 Revolution" (June 18, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 33 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Mr. Ackerson to the Ambassador, Ref.: Your Memorandum of July 23 [*sic* 13], 1955" (July 15, 1955), declassification #NND 913592. An official investigation after Perón's ouster would eventually lay full blame on the former President for personally issuing the order to burn the churches. NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 164, "National Investigation Commission's Report on Burning of the Churches," Despatch No. 711 (March 13, 1956), declassification #NND 959075.
- 34 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Mr. Ackerson to the Ambassador, Ref.: Your Memorandum of July 23 [*sic* 13], 1955" (July 15, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 35 NARA, RG 59, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Official-Informal, Albert F. Nufer to Henry F. Holland" (August 10, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 36 NARA, RG 59, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Official-Informal, Albert F. Nufer to Henry F. Holland" (August 10, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 37 U.S. Department of State (1961, 650).
- 38 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 155, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Peron Demonstrates Confidence at Santiago Del Estero," Despatch No. 197 (August 31, 1953), declassification #NND 913592.
- 39 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 155, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Summary of Opposition Gestures for Conciliation and 'Co-existence'," Despatch No. 164 (August 20, 1953), declassification #NND 913592.
- 40 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 164, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Borlenghi and the Church Problem," Despatch No. 458 (November 19, 1954), declassification #NND 959075.

- 41 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 150, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "The Labor Aspect of U.S.-Argentine Relations," Despatch No. 270 (September 27, 1954), declassification #NND 959075.
- 42 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 163, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "The 'Confederacion General de Profesionales' (CGP)," Despatch No. 771 (February 11, 1954), declassification #NND 959075.
- 43 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 163, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Stresses and Strains in the CGT," Despatch No. 363 (October 8, 1953), declassification #NND 959075. Reichard would later meet Vuletich in February 1954 and judge that contrary to newspaper reports, the man was "human and likeable." NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 163, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Interview with Vuletich, Secretary-General, CGT," Despatch No. 763 (February 9, 1954), declassification #NND 959075.
- 44 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 163, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Stresses and Strains in the CGT," Despatch No. 363 (October 8, 1953), declassification #NND 959075.
- 45 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Private CGT Version of Naval Revolt and its Aftermath," Despatch No. 1178 (June 24, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 46 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 163, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Labor Possible Key to Future Regime," Despatch No. 1172 (June 22, 1955), declassification #NND 959075.
- 47 U.S. Department of State (1961, 455).
- 48 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 150, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Official-Informal: Robert C. Martindale to Henry Dearborn, Esquire" (February 10, 1953), declassification #NND 959075.
- 49 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 155, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Some Recent Developments in Argentina," Despatch No. 1466 (May 18, 1953), declassification #NND 913592.
- 50 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 155, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Some Recent Developments in Argentina," Despatch No. 1466 (May 18, 1953), declassification #NND 913592.
- 51 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 164, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Current Relations Between the Catholic Church and Peron," Despatch no. 340 (October 5, 1953), declassification #NND 959075.
- 52 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 150, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Halt of US Attacks May Unite Some Right and Left Argentine Groups," Despatch No. 1242 (March 27, 1953), declassification #NND 959075.
- 53 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 150, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Can We Trust Peron? – A Misleading Question," Despatch No. 570 (December 4, 1953), declassification #NND 959075.
- 54 Analytical writing in the 1940s focused on the regime's sympathies with fascism, which dovetailed with public perceptions that Perón and others had actually harbored Nazis. Martindale predicted quite accurately that political opposition members in the mid-1950s would use the international media to attack Perón by reviving claims of his Nazi ties. NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 155, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "'Tecnica de Una Traicion' and 'Peron's Blandishments'—No Comment Here So Far," Despatch No. 184 (August 26, 1953), declassification #NND 913592. Cf. Santander (1955).
- 55 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 150, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Peron's Profit in Better United States Relations," Despatch No. 451 (November 4, 1953), declassification #NND 959075.
- 56 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 150, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Danger of Peron's New Attitudes," Despatch No. 103 (July 31, 1953), declassification #NND 959075.

- 57 A perfect example of such a political stability narrative would be a regime's ability to maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate (Lipset 1959).
- 58 For example, Craig (1976), and Lee (1969).
- 59 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 155, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Peron's Labor Day Rally Speech in Plaza de Mayo," Despatch No. 1415 (May 6, 1953), declassification #NND 913592. Following the speeches, the CGT held its annual beauty pageant and variety show.
- 60 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 155, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Peron's Labor Day Rally Speech in Plaza de Mayo," Despatch No. 1415 (May 6, 1953), declassification #NND 913592.
- 61 NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 150, Amembassy Buenos Aires, "Peron's May 1st Message to Congress: Motivations?" Despatch No. 1408 (May 4, 1953), declassification #NND 959075.
- 62 NIE 91-54: 3.
- 63 For example, NARA, RG 84, Entry UD-2024, Box 154, "Telegram to Department, No. 123" (3 p.m., August 4, 1955), declassification #NND 913592.
- 64 Crassweller (1987, 244).
- 65 See Patroni (1999) and Deiner (1973/1974).
- 66 See Navarro (1980), and Navarro (1983).
- 67 Goldwert (1972, 116-19).
- 68 See Fossum (1967).
- 69 Potash (1980, 134-7), and Loveman (1999, 122-3).
- 70 With the notable exception of the Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista (Walter 1993).
- 71 Brennan and Rougier (2009, 61, 84 and 105-6), and Wynia (1978, 74-80).
- 72 Chamosa (2010, 113-42).
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- 74 Donini (1983), Potash (1980, 185-6) and Skidmore and Smith (1989, 90). For a contrasting view of regime support outside the provinces, see Wellhofer (1977).

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Part VII

Humans and Algorithms



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13 Conclusion

Information exists everywhere. Organizations collect and process whatever data they can acquire, in the hopes that policymakers will find something new and valuable in it, and the intelligence arrives on a desk at headquarters as words on a computer screen. These words suggest people, places and things in the world, but they are far removed from the context that gave life to them and their intended meaning. The analyst reconstructs their original environment, breathes life back into them and communicates their meaning to policymakers. It is not the data points that open up a window onto the world, but rather the analytic interpretation of them, in terms of human behaviors and attitudes, intentions and motivations, experiences and expectations. It is creativity and imagination that bridge the gap between events occurring abroad and the policy debate back home, with the analyst's empathy and understanding closing the distance between the target set and the policymaker. Experience, intuition and judgment are the tools of that tradecraft, yet they rarely appear in the literature on Intelligence Studies and, when they do, the terms are often glossed over or treated with suspicion.

In the words of David Brooks (2004), there is a “false scientism” within the US Intelligence Community, a “cold, formal, depersonalized” approach that “has factored out all those insights that may be the product of an individual’s intuition and imagination, and emphasized instead the sort of data that can be processed by an organization.” Late in his life, Sherman Kent said much the same thing. In his preface to the 1966 edition of *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, he considered the increasing dependence on technology with vast new streams of data then becoming available and the inclination by spooks to think the shortest route toward knowledge is espionage. He concluded:

But whatever the new wrinkles, the eternal verities remain. These are the verities which I tried to stress in this book: there is no substitute for the intellectually competent human – the person who was born with the makings of a critical sense and who has developed them to their full potential; who through firsthand experience and study has accumulated an orderly store of knowledge; and who has a feeling for going about the search for further enlightenment in a systematic way.

(Kent 1966, xxi)

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Kent goes on to praise the scientific method, and he was right that there is a time and place for a science of intelligence. However, over the last eight decades a set of expectations has emerged for standards and performance that would appear to leave only a very limited role for human creativity. A role that is exposed to intense peer pressure for conformity and can leave the practitioner ostracized from the community for taking any sort of risk or initiative. Again, Kent understood the tendency of large institutions, driven by systematization and uniformity, to trample the very talent upon which their existence depends:

Whatever the complexities of the puzzles we strive to solve, and whatever the sophisticated techniques we may use to collect the pieces and store them, there can never be a time when the thoughtful man can be supplanted as the intelligence device supreme. Even the seemingly most valuable document cannot be unquestioningly accepted as the basis for action until it has been evaluated in terms of *something other than* authenticity of source. If we agree on this principle, I do not see how we can disagree much about that “something other than.” It is, in last analysis, a judgment as to the plausibility of content – a judgment which a disciplined mind will construct on the basis of knowledge, wisdom, and plain horse-sense.

(Kent 1966, xxiv)

There is clearly a central place for experience and subjectivity in Kent’s vision for analysis, even if he does not go as far as to use the words ‘creativity’ and ‘imagination’ in this passage. The underlying echoes of Dewey’s approach to Pragmatism are evident throughout:

Moreover, something is necessary to determine a case of valid knowledge besides the bare presence of the valid object. . . . And, alack and alas, that this something else required to secure and to guarantee the presence of an object as a valid object should be experience – which is subjective.

(Dewey 1910, 171)

Neither Dewey nor Kent wanted to admit subjectivity as a means of validating knowledge if it were to draw criticism that their methods were merely based on intuition or opinion.¹ They would rather have admitted subjectivity as unavoidably present in all empirical observation and left it lingering uncomfortably in the background.²

Despite this recognition by one of the founders of the discipline that there is an irreducibly human element at the core of all analytical work, such an approach to understanding intelligence through the subjective perspective of the analyst cuts against the grain. That is partly because, in America at least, the profession is often defined by people who spent their careers in management, helping to build and maintain institutions in which they themselves had a vested interest. Even Kent ultimately envisioned the analyst’s role as part of a larger process in which the credibility of the institution and the discipline took precedence. The analyst’s

personality has to be subordinated to a spirit of collaboration for the good of the institution and the mission of the government as a whole, even if management has to make some allowances for the proclivities of experts in order to retain and motivate them.³ Remember that Kent's formative experiences in management, during the transition from the OSS to the State Department's Interim Research and Intelligence Service, were concerned with the bureaucratic challenge of holding an institution together in the face of a rapid departure of most of his experienced analysts.

It would be a struggle for anyone trying to preserve the credibility and relevance of a large institution to ensure that analytical creativity and imagination, so necessary for innovation, do not fall prey to mass production and standardization. And yet, they did. The writing style emergent in the 1960s that now dominates the field, designed for neatness of presentation and ease of handling, has come to crowd out other forms of writing that might sometimes have more explanatory value.⁴ It relegates the analyst to being a mere conduit for the conveyance of data, with analytical products that are manufactured and mass-produced, serving as disposable vessels with little intrinsic value of their own.⁵ If an individual or a team or even an entire institution can have cognitive bias, then so too can the field of Intelligence Studies, and that bias is towards a paradigm of science. It comes at the expense of a poorly defined and commonly misunderstood concept of intuition, which is surprising given the fact that Sherman Kent himself envisioned a central role for intuition. He stated quite plainly that while an NIE must be prepared "in rough accordance with the procedures of the scientific method," the analytical thoughts contained therein "grow best in a medium of knowledge, experience and intuitive understanding."⁶ That is not what computer scientists will build into the parameters of AI models for intelligence analysis. Those models will be overfitted to direct them toward the scientific method, so that testing hypotheses and weighing variables will be permanently fixed like concrete at every level of programming.

Experience, intuition and judgment exist within the core substratum of the 'radical empiricism' that characterizes both early Pragmatism and Intelligence Studies alike, but it is only in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and his students that these concepts become comprehensible within the larger context of human activity. For Husserl, logical argumentation lends definition to a set of laws or rules that provide the negative conditions by which judgments must abide, and judgments can never be true if they do not fulfill these criteria. However, it is misleading to think that logic therefore reveals an internal structure that underpins all cognition and knowledge of the world. It can only describe structural forms, not material content.⁷ And even if all judgments are predicated on a universal belief in objective reality and the use of structural forms, their material content is contained within the mind and the senses.

Before any logical argumentation can take place, there is an experience of the world – a sensation, apprehension or feeling – which sparks an interest that can only be satisfied through perception or contemplation.⁸ Such an experience has an immediacy to it that captures the attention and draws in other phenomena (objects or activities, memories or anticipations, etc.) into a continuous chain of explications with a horizon of possibilities. It projects a mode of inference outward, assigning

new meaning to past events or future trends in light of a present understanding, while at the same time referring meaning and significance back to the original experience.⁹ Knowledge is more than a conscious awareness of the world. It is the ability to evaluate the degree to which an anticipatory belief about something is in accordance with an actual firsthand experience of it, and judgments are true when they validate that correspondence.¹⁰

There is a moment of insight in which intuition takes over and carries a person across the divide that separates a generalized impression of symbolic value from the fullness of a lived experience.¹¹ Intuition allows the subject to internalize and grasp some sense of an external object or idea that would otherwise stand at an inseparable distance, transforming experience into evidence and arriving at substantive meaning.¹² A notion of how the world works, a thought about how societies behave, an assumption about what motivates actors, now comes face to face with the actual object of study in that instant of intuition or insight, in which the truth of the matter is either realized or disappointed.¹³ Intuition is a rational process, one that involves a positive action of the mind and contains the qualities of breadth, depth and intensity.¹⁴

It would be impossible for analysts to examine every aspect of each new problem set (including their own biases) with a logical thought process. Intuition has the advantage of parcelling out routine tasks to the subconscious and freeing up mental space for more complicated lines of inquiry. It can be trained through constant practice like any other skill, as long as the feedback is unambiguous and there are real penalties for making mistakes.¹⁵ It can more easily process and evaluate intangible factors and better reflect the lived experience of the actors who are participating in events, without the mental barriers that people so often erect as defensive mechanisms in their more consciously structured modes of cognition. It is ultimately the basis for making any judgment on the simplest and most basic level.¹⁶

Art and Science at the Extremes

Let's start over from the beginning and traverse the same ground one more time. It can be surprising how different everything appears when the mind has had a chance to rest, absorb and reflect on what came before. There are general definitions that are broadly accepted within the industry that relate to the intelligence profession as a whole, the role of analysis as a subset of it and the tradecraft standards that are used to measure the quality of production. There is the Intelligence Cycle, various methodologies, stylistic guidelines and a number of tools that effectively serve as a critical apparatus, including scope notes, confidence levels, source summary statements, estimative language, etc. All of this comprises the science of intelligence.

The analyst fills up the page with a profusion of bullet points stating the facts and summarizing the sources, so that it is clear how the key judgments are derived from the evidence. This is a performative demonstration of objectivity and professionalism in the pursuit of transmitting valuable information to the policymaker. Does the policymaker have the time to get beyond the summary paragraph? Does

she have an interest in knowing there are significant information gaps? Maybe. Maybe not. Either way, this is what the analyst does, because this is what it means to do intelligence in the twenty-first century. Without that critical apparatus to qualify and comment on the analysis, without the formalized writing style to telescope arguments by placing the bottom line up front, without the Intelligence Cycle to provide a continuous feedback loop, the profession might cease to be. It would lose its status as a branch of the sciences, leaving it open to accusations of being arbitrary or indiscriminate or (heaven forbid) irrelevant. In Washington, irrelevance is a fate worse than death.

This set of rules and norms, tools and procedures, beliefs and expectations, is linked to a paradigm of intelligence-as-science, which is the result of more than 80 years of progress. It is the fulfillment of a vision laid out in the 1940s by Kent and his peers, the evolution of an ancillary function of government into a discipline respected by leading academics, senior officials and the public at large. The critical importance placed on timeliness and relevance arose out of a pragmatic belief by the founders of the discipline that the only questions worth answering were the ones that could contribute to concrete and immediate policy outcomes. Those principles were self-reinforcing, hermetically sealed, applicable to all intelligence work and entirely self-evident, *sui generis*.

Over the decades, an analytic ideal emerged out of this scientific pursuit. It was the notion that every analyst should be constantly on guard to pick out the one piece of intelligence reporting that might reveal a secret so critical and so little recognized that the transmission of that information alone should be enough to convince senior officials to write a policy impacting millions of people's lives. How realistic is that scenario that we should elevate it to a performance standard by which we judge the success or failure of the entire enterprise? The answer matters not. This scientific approach exists within an echo chamber of training manuals/academic guides, practitioners/scholars, in which that question does not exist. In that bubble, the key debates revolve around whether it is feasible to teach policymakers about tradecraft and whether the definitions of the profession are sufficiently comprehensive. This paradigm will sustain and preserve with confidence and reassurance the reputation of the profession and its practitioners until Artificial Intelligence can finally close the gaps in our knowledge and eliminate our subjective biases.

Now let's wipe away all of this and leave only the three words that always crop up in the literature and that often appear to be lost, adrift, amidst the sea of scientific paradigm: *context*, *meaning* and *sense*. These words somehow define the job of the intelligence analyst, even within the paradigm of intelligence-as-science, though they are only ever used in the abstract. We might even add the word *prediction*, or substitute for it the more colloquial term *forecasting*. If we were to eliminate everything else but these four terms, how would we begin to describe the role of an analyst? It would be incredibly hard, considering how everyone working in intelligence today is so inculcated in the scientific approach, to the point where it is almost impossible to conceive of the profession without falling back on terms like *hypothesis*, *testing* and *variables*. But let's try anyway. Set an analytical report before you and redact all of the factoids and citations, cross out the source

summary statement, cut out the banner logo at the top and the scope note at the bottom, skip over any mention of the word ‘probably’ or ‘likely.’

What’s the first thing you see? Perhaps it’s a name like Yevgeny Prigozhin.¹⁷ There could be a mention of the Kremlin, literally referencing the institution but also figuratively representing the inner circle of actors who move in Putin’s orbit. Maybe there’s a predicate phrase referring to Prigozhin’s death and that phrase is part of a sentence comparing his loss to Putin’s gain. Already we have character, setting and plot. We might take note of emotive words or phrases that imply mental and psychological states, such as *determined*, *revenge*, *prestige*, *weakness*, etc. They represent subjective opinions and they are chosen by the analyst to convey an approximation of the intentions and motivations of the people involved. The very selection of terms for the title and lead sentence is no less subjective. There is no reason why an article on current affairs must open with the name of a man who is dead and gone, when it could open with a mention of a private military company still in existence, or a war in Ukraine that continues to stymie Moscow.¹⁸ Unless, perhaps, the article opens with Prigozhin because he has name recognition, because every other article in the media is doing the same, and because the analyst is hoping for better readership by playing into expectations generated by the media cycle.

If this is a storyline, how does it end? Analysts are paid to assess the impact and future course of events, so presumably this product reached some sort of conclusion. That conclusion could not have been based primarily on fact-based evidence, since we have no access to the future. The future is unknown. Perhaps this analysis relies on historical precedent to reach its analytical conclusion, or it refers to a general theory of politics or international relations, or it makes an emotional appeal to common sense. Those strategies for forecasting are all tools that enable creative and imaginative thinking, provide ways of bridging the divide between past and future, and build a logical basis for projecting outward and communicating with the reader. Even then, it is the experience and insight of the analyst that guides his decision-making on which tools to use.

Every step of the creative process involves a degree of empathy in assessing the intentions and motivations of the actors.¹⁹ Does the policymaker have time to absorb the nuance? Does she care to understand the perspective of a foreign leader? Maybe. Maybe not. Either way, this is what a good analyst should be doing, because it is what will motivate him to wake up every day and go to work, despite all of the other mundane tasks he is assigned. Without a writing style that allows for authorial intervention, without the opportunity to appeal to the emotions of the reader, without the two-step process of interpreting societies at home and abroad, analysis might cease to be an art. It would lose its ability to persuade and convince, leaving it open to accusations of being mechanical or duplicative or (heaven forbid) boring. In Washington, you have to always think in terms of what you would say if you had 30 seconds to brief the President.

These are two sides of the same coin. Under a paradigm of intelligence-as-science, tradecraft standards provide the analyst with scaffolding for hanging theories and methodologies derived from the social sciences or other disciplines that can help package and transmit the information to the policymaker. Under a paradigm

of intelligence-as-art, narratives provide the author with a spinal column that aligns disparate events into the central nervous system of a single interpretation that convinces and persuades the reader. They are not mutually exclusive.

Taken to its logical conclusion, the pursuit of intelligence-as-science ends in an almost infinite point of objectivity. All judgments have to be supported by evidence, hedged with qualifying language and alternative scenarios, coordinated among a range of colleagues, limited in scope to that which can be safely deduced, etc. It becomes impossible to make a categorical statement, no matter how certain the outcome. At the extreme end of objectivity, cognitive biases can be found everywhere, from confirmation bias (confirming a predetermined hypothesis), to recency bias (a recent crisis colors the interpretation of new data), to anchoring bias (everything is pinned to the first assumption) and hundreds more. They cannot be eliminated, only minimized. Yet it is incumbent upon every analyst to examine and expose such mindsets, because so often it is cognitive bias at the heart of intelligence failures. Even expertise itself is relative, and therefore suspect, because a person's many years of experience can lead the individual to have a false sense of confidence in his or her knowledge. At the point of complete and total objectivity, analysis is no longer possible. The only way forward is a list or chronicle of the known facts with a map that shows the geographical setting. At that point, it might just be better to turn over all analysis to machines, because of the intrinsic and irredeemable fallibility of human beings.

Taken to its logical conclusion, the pursuit of intelligence-as-art moves in the opposite direction toward subjectivity. All storylines must convey a message, with a meaning and a purpose that speak to the reader, which can only take place through authorial intervention. Subjectivity pervades every level, from the selection of a topic and supporting evidence, to the interpretation of events, to the choice of language and conceptual frameworks. Without that subjective element, analytical writing is dull and dry, quickly forgotten or ignored, easily copied or imitated until it becomes parody, rote learning, pastiche, plagiarism. As difficult as it might seem to come up with something original to say about every new topic, it is incumbent upon subject matter experts to have a message worth imparting, because falling into a malaise of mechanical production saps people of their will to strive for something better and sends a signal to colleagues that innovation and creativity are unwelcome or (even worse) unimportant. At the point of total subjectivity, no amount of data is sufficient. The only way forward is a reconstruction in the mind of the analyst of the innermost intentions and motivations of actors, including emotional and psychological states that lie hidden from all surveillance methods. At a certain point, it might simply be better to have the policymaker meet his foreign counterpart and walk away with his own firsthand impression. At these extremes, the objective and subjective approaches surprisingly converge as the analyst disappears.

Expertise in the Digital Age

Both of these approaches are necessary, and neither has to be taken to an extreme, yet the way they are treated in the professional and academic worlds would make

them appear to be mutually exclusive, to the advantage of the former over the latter. Most scholar–practitioners acknowledge the importance of analysis, but have a difficult time envisioning a future for the analysts themselves in a world of Big Data and Artificial Intelligence. Lowenthal (2013) once proposed that: “The core function of intelligence analysis is the ability to think interesting thoughts, to see beyond the apparent facts, to bring to bear expertise, and to write the results in a clear and compelling fashion.” By the year 2028, many people will question whether a human is necessary to accomplish those tasks. As Carmen Medina has written:

The intelligence community is entering a new era of analysis, during which it will be discovered that much of what used to be called intelligence analysis was primitive and incomplete. In this new era of analysis, prose prepared by so-called subject matter experts, which today still accounts for the overwhelming majority of analytic product, increasingly will be viewed not as analysis at all but just a form of commentary. . . . These types of expert commentary certainly have a role in informing national decision making, but commentary should not be considered the same thing as analysis and certainly cannot take its place.

(Medina 2008, 239)

The passage is right in cautioning that not all of what passes for analysis is analysis, and not all of it serves a purpose in promoting national security.²⁰ Fair enough. But it also hints at what other advocates for automation make much more explicit. They can only envision a future role for analysts of management oversight, policymaker interface and the validation of computer results. McChrystal and Roy (2023) say some analysts will be needed as “checks and guardrails on technology-driven decisions.” Mitchell and his colleagues (2019, 6) note that “humans are better at tasks that change dramatically with context or those that involve high levels of interpersonal interaction.” Katz (2020, 6) asserts that the use of AI will be limited by the customer’s desire for transparency, clarity and “ensuring data and intelligence authenticity.” None of them make much of a case for the centrality of humans.

These nods to the analytical tradition are admirable, but they are silent on a coherent theory for intelligence analysis and they lack a plan for the integration of humans and computer-generated systems. Frankly, none of the current and former senior officials who write about the benefits of AI will be around to see its full implementation, so it’s not really incumbent upon them to devise that theory and plan. So, the intelligence profession is likely to succumb to its worst impulses. It is not enough to hope that intelligence managers will see the virtue in the qualities of human expertise that Bruce Pease (2020, 194–5) enumerates: 1) identifying problems and tools; 2) exercising analytical doubt; 3) anomaly detection; and 4) explaining the ‘why’ of causality. Pease has accomplished a remarkable feat offering a practitioner’s view of the profession from the perspective of the analyst, while acknowledging the reality of how machines are an inseparable part of the industry. But his solution for coexistence has already been overtaken by events.

Even as he wrote those words, there were private sector start-ups working on fully automating analysis and they can now achieve results with AI that many of his former colleagues would consider to be indistinguishable from government reports. And therein lies the problem. For too many managers deciding the future of the profession, they cannot distinguish between products generated by computers and products generated by humans. They do not understand or appreciate the human element that was required to make a product truly great, and so they will not miss it when it's gone.

The US Intelligence Community will be faced with a choice. Either invest in subject matter expertise, which involves years of building language skills and cultural knowledge for individuals who ultimately may not want to devote their careers to working on a single topic (let alone government service), or invest in coding skills. After all, the only way to evaluate the effectiveness of AI/ML and its suitability to any given task will probably be to hire teams of consultants capable of regularly updating metrics, adjusting for changing priorities and calibrating the way systems are employed, as RAND did in their 2021 study.²¹ Methodology teams of statisticians and programmers will evaluate the utility of glass box models versus black box models for achieving interpretability and accuracy, and the coordination process will require interagency colleagues to comment on the use of gradient boosting and bootstrap aggregating. If subject matter experts are unprepared to weigh in on that level, they will be irrelevant.

The indicators for trends within the intelligence profession would all seem to point to a future in which the definition of intelligence will be *to collect secrets and accumulate bulk data for computers to process and synthesize in an attempt to obtain comprehensive knowledge*. Intelligence failure will be characterized by *an inability to understand the internal processes of algorithms or adequately maintain recognizable hyperparameters*. These trends are not new. They have been apparent for at least a decade now, with some European experts cautioning against this growing American tendency to abandon human expertise in favor of machines.²²

What is expertise? For many analysts today, expertise is conferred on them by virtue of their affiliation with an institution that has resources and authority. By the same token, prestige is achieved by association with a portfolio of interest to decision-makers. That is obviously an inadequate answer. It bears no resemblance to anyone's commonsense understanding of expertise. And in the future, an institution's reputation will be based on its algorithms. But to disabuse people of the notion that status is tied to institutional affiliation would be to take away their self-image as professionals and open up the question to attack on the grounds of elitism, i.e. 'an expert is someone who thinks too highly of himself.'

Managers would sooner tally up the number of years each analyst has served on a portfolio and their level of language proficiency, using such statistics as measurable and quantifiable indicators of expertise. They would prefer to avoid the harder question of how anyone goes about acquiring such an intangible quality as expertise in the first place. When they mistakenly treat these administratively determined and institutionally defined categories as signs of a deep and abiding concern for an issue set, intelligence organizations confuse the effect for the cause. It is a symptom

of a larger problem whereby institutions prize management skills over analytical insight, teamwork and deliverables over risk-taking and vision, systematization and regimentation over creativity and innovation, and promotion of the corporate brand over individual achievement.

A person cannot declare his status as an expert, nor can an institution simply confer it. Expertise is a trait that is recognized by others, and it can only be fostered in an environment where there is a culture of respect. I do not mean likeability or affability, which so often pass for respect in Washington today. Likeability does fine for people who see their current job as little more than a stepping stone to higher office and who worry that even the slightest damage to their corridor reputation is the kiss of death. For them, it is better to adopt the mannerisms of an absent-minded fool or a secretarial factotum than to attract negative attention from others. It wasn't always this way. There was a time in Washington that even I can remember when regional experts who didn't like each other nevertheless respected one another. And that is what allowed for an environment in which polite debate and discussion could take place. At least, that is how I remember those days.

Proposals for the automation of analysis through AI/ML assume a degree of causality and determination in human action that can be mapped out spatially in terms of decision points, contingent factors and necessary relationships. That is fundamentally misleading. In almost any capital, a well-regulated approach of administrative procedure is separate from the more important, inchoate and messy process by which attitudes and opinions are formulated and negotiated. Computer-generated analysis leaves little room for the nonlinear, imaginative thinking that is needed for so much of what the intelligence organizations do, precisely because that computer programming has been designed under the paradigm of intelligence-as-science. As far back as 1993, William Burris wrote:

In huge bureaucracies, beset by all the sins of such institutions, a rigid devotion to set lines of authority, use of computers, established hierarchies, systemic thinking, scientific certainty, and the pretentious claims of social scientists can lead analysts and managers to play down or ignore the importance of affections – that fertile ground of humanness where the greed, irrationality, passion and lust for power that threaten our national security are often rooted.

(Burris 1993, 301)

Such an opinion is decidedly in the minority, receiving little theoretical elaboration in the secondary literature.²³ This, despite the fact there have been numerous conference reports and lessons-learned exercises since the 1970s, each one emphasizing how creativity can only be sustained through the encouragement of an entire ecosystem that protects and nourishes initiative, debate, flexibility and autonomy.²⁴

There is a bright future for the scientific and technological enhancement of intelligence, but analysis is fundamentally written by humans, about humans, for humans. As the case studies in this book have shown, there were clearly times when analysts wrote with incredible imagination, using their creative faculties and expertise to forecast accurately about complex scenarios over extended-time horizons.

Those examples should not be the exceptions but rather the rule. They point to a difference between analysis at its best, which is a persuasive interpretation of the inner motivations and intentions of actors reflecting lived experience and substantive meaning, and analysis at its worst, which is a rote transmission of information that has been overprocessed by multiple layers of bureaucracy, institutionalized formats and tradecraft standards.

Notes

- 1 Indeed, Dewey often preferred the terms ‘affective thought’ and ‘aesthetic experience’ (Stankiewicz 2011).
- 2 Dewey (1905, 656): “The empiricist (of the immediate type) will prefer to use the term knowledge-experience, or cognitional experience.” Cf. Kent (1994, 134–5): “There is a point the poets can make with telling effect . . . I realize the truth in the above; I am not reconciled; I deplore it.”
- 3 Kent (1966, 127).
- 4 Cf. Scholes et al. (2006, 213).
- 5 Cf. Lotman (1990, 11): “the text is treated as something that is valuable, not in itself, but merely as a kind of packaging from which the topic of interest is extracted.”
- 6 Kent (1994, 175).
- 7 Husserl (1973, 16–17).
- 8 Husserl (1973, 64–5).
- 9 Husserl (1973, 31–2).
- 10 Husserl (1973, 283).
- 11 Husserl (1931, 197 and 382).
- 12 Levinas (1995, 78 and 89–90).
- 13 Levinas (1995, 74–5).
- 14 Levinas (1995, 69–71).
- 15 See Hogarth (2001).
- 16 Cf. Moore (2011, 69–73).
- 17 Khvostunova et al. (2023).
- 18 Herbst et al. (2023).
- 19 There are even SATs for putting the analyst into the shoes of the subject (Heuer Jr. and Pherson 2015, 197–200), though the notion of a formal tool designed to impose a systematic approach to analysis being used to teach empathy is deeply ironic.
- 20 See also Lim (2016).
- 21 Ish et al. (2021, 68).
- 22 Denécé (2014, 39), and Stenslie (2022, 37).
- 23 Kerbel (2014).
- 24 Marchio (2021), Ish et al. (2021).

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