

New Global Disclosure Release Analyzes Intelligence Failures

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Frank J. Stech, "Political and Military Intervention Estimation: A Taxonomic Analysis," November 1979. Prepared for the Office of Naval Research and Mathtech, Inc.

This analysis was released to the Nautilus Institute under the US Freedom of Information Act.

Read the full text [here](#).

The intelligence community is under attack today for providing inaccurate information and interpretation to the Bush Administration, especially in relation to the decision to attack Iraq. However, problematic intelligence is not new or unique to the Bush Administration. As this report shows, the problems of intelligence analysis and portrayal are deeper than mere inept analysis or collection, or abuse or misuse by decision-making consumers of intelligence reports. Rather, the failures derive from deeper methodological and procedural problems inherent in intelligence analysis, especially in relation to motivations and intentions of adversaries.

Frank Stech's report is an attempt to review the literature on why intelligence analysis has succeeded and failed. The report also contains the frank "peer review" commentary solicited by the commissioning agency, and Stech's response thereto. It makes fascinating reading given today's debates. It is an essential handbook for anyone approaching a documentary record of how intelligence influences foreign policy decisions.

Writes Stech:

"An implicit assumption of hostility conceals the logic underlying the assessment of hostility and creates a second fallacy of "when in doubt, assume the worst," and this worst case reasoning combines with assumption (2) above [wherein observers tend to fallaciously assume the 'intentions to maximize those future capabilities'] to produce overestimates of capabilities and an emphasis on "all-out" or maximum development, production, and deployment of capabilities." [Page 25]

"...because intelligence is supposedly separate from policy it becomes, on the one hand, remote from policy, and, on the other hand, because it is subordinated to policymaking, intelligence is used to

rationalize or justify the policy line." [Page 58]

"While necessary for organizational control, hierarchy facilitates and reinforces concealment and misrepresentation of information. 'Bad' news tends not to flow upward, especially if it reflects upon the evaluations of those who would convey it. Conversely, hierarchy permits low-level information and personnel to be ignored easily by the higher levels. Hierarchies inhibit innovation, narrow the range of communicated ideas, foster defensive cliques, and self-serving coalitions." [Page 132]

"...intelligence agencies ('indians') put a high cost on failure to provide a warning or signal while consumers of intelligence ('chiefs') put a high cost on false alarms or falsely reporting a nonexistent signal. The consequence is that chiefs receive many warning and signals which they treat as nonserious, intelligence agency hedging. But Halperin implies intelligence agencies (among others) deliberately manipulate information to support their stands and defend their stakes in the bureaucratic game. He portrays intelligence players as serving primarily as 'backstoppers,' providing the facts and rationale to support decisions already made." [Page 146-147]

"The egotism and positivity effects would make it very difficult for an observer to attribute the negative behavior of another state to the impact the observer's state may be having on the observed state; instead of noting the negative behavior as a reaction to situational forces (i e., the impact of the observer's state), the observer will tend to make a dispositional explanation." [Page 345-346]

"Given this demand for current intelligence, there are neither the resources nor the support from policy-makers for long-term estimates of intentions. Consequently, crisis and surprises multiply and policy-makers have even less faith in intelligence to provide the necessary warnings and alerts. The policy community becomes even more reliant on itself for intelligence analysis, increasing its demands for current events. In trying to perform thoughtful and careful analyses as well as making decisions under the stresses of crises, policy-makers find themselves even less able to anticipate and foresee events, lowering still more their opinion of the intelligence sources they receives, and increasing their demand for more 'relevant' intelligence, the 'right' facts, and more 'timely' information, etc. Ultimately a failure occurs and the debate begins as to whether it was an intelligence failure or a policy failure. And the cycle starts again." [Page 382]

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