

Conscious Action and Intelligence Failure

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The most famous intelligence mission in biblical times failed because actors made conscious decisions to deliberately distort the information they passed on to their superiors. The 12 spies that Moses sent to the land of Canaan concluded unanimously that the land was good. But estimates by 10 of them that the enemy was too strong and popular pressure by the Israelites who wanted to avoid the risk of fighting a stronger enemy led the 10 spies to consciously change their assessment, from a land that “floweth with milk and honey” to “a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof.”¹

This biblical precedent has been lost among contemporary intelligence analysts, who have traditionally given insufficient attention to the role of deliberate distortion as a source of intelligence failure. Influenced by Roberta Wohlstetter’s classic study of the American failure to anticipate the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, by the increasing emphasis in political psychology on motivated and unmotivated biases, and by the literature on bureaucratic politics and organizational processes, students of intelligence failure have emphasized some combination of a noisy and uncertain threat environment, unconscious psychological biases deriving from cognitive mindsets and emotional needs, institutional constraints based on bureaucratic politics and organizational processes, and strategic deception by the adversary.²

¹ Num. 13:27–32.

² Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962). The key psychological studies include: Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957); Joseph De Rivera, *The Psychological Dimension of Foreign Policy* (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1968); Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink*. 2nd rev. ed.

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These themes are reflected in the analyses of three classic cases of intelligence failure that dominate the literature. In her Pearl Harbor study, Wohlstetter emphasized the role of an ambiguous informational environment and parochial organizational interests. In his study of Joseph Stalin's failure to anticipate the German invasion of 1941, Barton Whaley added another variable, the role of German strategic deception in blinding Stalin to an impending attack. Most students of the Israeli intelligence failure on the eve of the Yom Kippur War follow the official Agranat Report and emphasize the role of collective cognitive mindsets that filtered out information that ran contrary to the dominant conception of the external threat. These themes have also shaped more-general theoretical accounts of the sources of intelligence failure.³ A substantial literature on the "politicization" of intelligence has emerged, but for the most part, it has focused on the question of the feasibility of separating intelligence from the political process rather than on the causal impact of politicization on the leading cases of intelligence failure culminating in an adversary attack.⁴

The aim of this study is to shed more light on the neglected subject of the role of conscious, politically motivated behavior in the study of intelligence failure—including "intelligence to please," organizational restructuring, and insubordination. We do not deny the role of other sources of incorrect estimates of adversary intentions and/or capabilities, and we do not argue that conscious action is necessarily more important than factors emphasized in conventional accounts. We argue, however, that in a number of cases, this factor has had a significant causal impact, and that its exclusion from theories of intelligence failure is a serious omission that needs to be corrected.

We begin with a brief review of the sources of intelligence failure. We then highlight the role of conscious action in the distortion of intelligence. This involves both individual and organizational-level variables and takes three primary forms: intelligence to please, organizational restructuring, and insubordination. After explaining our case selection criteria, we turn to an examination of the intelligence failures of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and Israel in October 1973. These cases are not necessarily representative of all intelligence

(Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); Irving L. Janis and Leon Mann, *Decision Making: A Psychological Analysis of Conflict, Choice, and Commitment* (New York: Free Press, 1977); and Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky, eds., *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

³ Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor*; Barton Whaley, *Codeword Barbarossa* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973); Agranat Commission, *The Agranat Report* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1974); Avi Shlaim, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Yom Kippur War," *World Politics* 28 (April 1976): 348–380; Michael I. Handel, "The Yom Kippur War and the Inevitability of Surprise," *International Studies Quarterly* 21 (September 1977): 461–502.

⁴ Richard K. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in American National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

failures, and we make no claim that our results can be generalized to other cases. Our aim is not to test a theory, but instead to highlight and illustrate an important path to intelligence failure that has been given little or no attention in the literature. In terms of standard typologies of case study methods, our historical studies fall into the category of hypothesis-generating case studies.⁵ We select these particular cases because they are among the most widely studied intelligence failures, because standard interpretations of these cases neglect the role of politically motivated behavior, and because these cases nicely illustrate our argument. Our findings will serve as hypotheses that should be examined in a larger selection of cases.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE SOURCES OF INTELLIGENCE FAILURE

Scholars have suggested several typologies of the sources of intelligence failure,⁶ but we find it most useful to use a modified levels-of-analysis framework.⁷ The external informational environment includes hypotheses based on a lack of information, too much information in the form of a low signal-to-noise ratio, and strategic deception by the adversary. Other hypotheses focus on internal factors, including individual psychology, small-group dynamics, organizational behavior, and the politicization of intelligence. Let us discuss each in turn.

The External Informational Environment

Lack of information. To the layperson, the obvious source of intelligence failure is the lack of enough information. The counterfactual assumption is that if only governments had had more information, they would have recognized an impending attack. It was this hypothesis that Wohlstetter's classic study of the U.S. intelligence failure at Pearl Harbor did so much to discredit, by demonstrating that the United States had ample information about the impending Japanese attack. The conventional wisdom now holds that the lack of information is rarely a primary source of intelligence failure.⁸

⁵ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Jack S. Levy, "Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25 (Spring 2008): 1–18.

⁶ Handel, "The Yom Kippur War"; Michael I. Handel, *War, Strategy and Intelligence* (London: Frank Cass, 1989); Alex Roberto Hybel, *The Logic of Surprise in International Conflict* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Press, 1986); Ephraim Kam, *Surprise Attack* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁷ Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, chap. 1.

⁸ Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor*; Whaley, *Codeword Barbarossa*; Shlaim, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates"; Richard K. Betts, *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1982); Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*; Kam, *Surprise Attack*; Uri Bar-Joseph, "Intelligence Failure and the Need for Cognitive Closure: The Case of Yom Kippur" in Richard K. Betts and Thomas G. Mahnken, eds., *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 166–189;

“Noisy” environment. Rather than a lack of enough information, the problem may be too much information. As Wohlstetter argued with respect to the Pearl Harbor case, it is often difficult to extract relevant “signals” from a surplus of irrelevant and confusing “noise.” In Ephraim Kam’s words, “The greater the amount of information ... the more confusing and contradictory the noise received ... [and] the more difficult it is to process the data.”⁹

Strategic deception. Whereas Wohlstetter emphasized the difficulty of separating relevant signals from a sea of noise, Whaley argued that the problem is compounded by active efforts by the initiator to engage in strategic deception. He argued that the German deception plan misled Stalin into believing that the invasion would be delayed until after Germany had defeated Britain and that Germany would issue an ultimatum to the Soviet Union prior to the invasion. Whaley basically endogenized aspects of the informational environment by treating them as the product of strategic behavior by the adversary. Michael Handel subsequently identified active and passive deception as one of several key “noise barriers” contributing to intelligence failure.¹⁰

In the face of an ambiguous informational environment that is compounded by strategic deception, even well-designed intelligence systems staffed by capable and dedicated intelligence officers often fail to anticipate an impending attack or other actions that threaten vital interests. The problem is exacerbated by factors internal to the state, including individual, organizational, and group-level factors, which contribute to intelligence failure directly and through their interaction effects with external variables.

Internal Sources of Intelligence Failure

Individual psychology. Many observers believe that intelligence failure ultimately comes down to individual misperception. As Handel argues, “The root of the problem—the weakest link in the intelligence process—is human nature.”¹¹ Although “human nature” is too all-encompassing to serve as a useful analytic concept, we can identify a number of key individual-level variables that contribute to intelligence failure: cognitive heuristics and affective factors that influence information processing, and individual belief systems and personalities that vary across individuals and interact with these more-general tendencies. The basic argument is that intelligence officers, like all people, try to act rationally but fall short because of the unconscious influence

Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and Its Sources* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005).

⁹ Kam, *Surprise Attack*, 222.

¹⁰ Whaley, *Codeword Barbarossa*; Handel, “The Yom Kippur War and the Inevitability of Surprise,” 462–468.

¹¹ Handel, *War, Strategy and Intelligence*, 34.

of pre-existing belief systems and policy preferences, cognitive shortcuts, and emotional needs.

Political psychologists often distinguish between unmotivated and motivated biases.¹² Unmotivated or cognitive biases refer to the influence of an individual's belief system and the simplifying strategies that s/he uses to make sense of a complex and ambiguous world, independent of political interests or emotional influences. One central argument is that perception is a theory-driven process, and that prior beliefs are over-weighted relative to new information in the judgment process. As a result, people have a tendency to see what they expect to see. Other key findings are that people exhibit more confidence in their judgments than is warranted by the data, allow their probability assessments to be disproportionately influenced by vivid images of past events, update their beliefs only slowly, and over-weight the impact of small probabilities.¹³

Motivated biases—which are driven by peoples' fears, guilt, desires, needs, and interests—differ from “cold cognitions.” They are motivated by the need to maintain self-esteem and/or to advance one's interests—diplomatic, political, organizational, or personal. Whereas cognitive biases lead people to see what they expect to see, motivated biases lead people to see what they want to see or need to see, based on their policy preferences or emotional needs.¹⁴

There is often a fine line between unconscious “motivated bias” and conscious, deliberate action to distort intelligence. Motivated biases involve distortions in information processing and an individual's misperceptions of the real world. In conscious distortion, the individual understands the situation correctly but deliberately misrepresents it to others in a strategic attempt to influence others' perceptions and preferences as a means of advancing his/her own policy preferences.

Wohlstetter's account of the U.S. intelligence failure at Pearl Harbor gave primary emphasis to the role of unmotivated cognitive biases. The pre-existing belief that Japan could not win a war with the United States blinded American intelligence officials and policymakers to indicators that Japan was preparing for war. Those who recognized the potential threat from Japan did not imagine

¹² Robert Jervis, “Perceiving and Coping with Threat” in Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), chap. 2; Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Janice Gross Stein, “Building Politics into Psychology: The Misperception of Threat” in N.J. Kressel, ed., *Political Psychology* (New York: Paragon, 1993), 367–392; Jack S. Levy, “Political Psychology and Foreign Policy” in David O. Sears, Leonie Huddy, and Robert Jervis, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 253–284.

¹³ Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky, eds., *Judgment Under Uncertainty*; S.T. Fiske and S.E. Taylor, *Social Cognition*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991); Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*; Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, “Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk,” *Econometrica* 47 (March 1979): 263–291; Jack S. Levy, “The Implications of Framing and Loss Aversion for International Conflict” in Manus I. Midlarsky, ed., *Handbook of War Studies II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 193–221.

¹⁴ Janis and Mann, *Decision Making*; Jervis, “Perceiving and Coping with Threat.”

that it would involve a military attack on Pearl Harbor. The theme of “lack of imagination” is now central in postmortems on the American failure to anticipate the use of hijacked airliners in the September 11 attacks, and in fact, in many studies of intelligence failure. James Wirtz is right to note, however, that what some observers interpret as a “lack of imagination” is sometimes more accurately interpreted as an unwillingness to implement costly policies in peacetime in response to threats that are imaginable but unlikely to materialize.¹⁵

The role of pre-existing mental images is given even greater emphasis in many analyses of the Israeli intelligence failure in 1973. Israeli intelligence officers and political leaders shared the beliefs (later known as “the conception”) that Egypt would not go to war unless it was able to mount air strikes deep into Israel to neutralize Israel’s air force, and that Syria would not go to war without Egypt. Since the first condition was not met, Israeli intelligence concluded that war would not occur in 1973, and this judgment led them to interpret the unprecedented magnitude of Syrian and Egyptian deployments at the front lines as evidence of routine Egyptian military exercises and Syrian defensive moves. Thus, the Agranat Commission traced the intelligence failure to the “persistent adherence to ‘the conception.’”¹⁶

Turning to motivated biases, pre-existing policy preference can be particularly influential in shaping threat perception through the mechanism of wishful thinking. If an actor prefers a particular policy option, s/he may unconsciously exaggerate its likelihood of succeeding. If an actor is convinced that it has only one option for achieving a highly desired goal, there is a tendency to interpret incoming information in a way that suggests that this option will be a successful one. As Jack Snyder argued with respect to German assessments of the merits of the Schlieffen Plan on the eve of World War I, they saw “the ‘necessary’ as possible.” The Schlieffen Plan *had* to work if Germany was to win the war, so German leaders were unconsciously motivated to believe that it *would* work.¹⁷

Motivated and unmotivated biases generate many similar patterns of behavior, and observed distortions in judgment are often consistent with either motivated or unmotivated processes. Thus, it is easier to distinguish the two analytically than empirically. Even that conceptual distinction is beginning to break down, however, with growing evidence, reinforced by new research in neuroscience, that cognition depends on emotional factors and that emotions, once thought to detract from rational decision making, are in fact an essential component of it. For this reason, scholars are now inclined to minimize the former distinction between motivated and unmotivated biases.¹⁸

¹⁵ Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor*; James J. Wirtz, “Responding to Surprise,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 45–65, at 63.

¹⁶ Agranat Commission, *Agranat Report*, 18.

¹⁷ Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), chap. 5.

¹⁸ Antonio. R. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1994); Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby, eds., *The Adapted*

Although these psychological dynamics affect all individuals, differences in worldviews, personalities, emotional states, and other idiosyncratic factors should lead to variations in the impact of cognitive and motivational biases across individuals. People have different policy preferences, different emotional needs, different belief systems based on different political socialization, different degrees of tolerance for ambiguity, and different tendencies toward cognitive closure. The striking thing about so much of the literature on intelligence failure is the emphasis on general pathologies in the warning–response process and the neglect of the role of particular individuals. That is certainly true of nearly all accounts of the Soviet and U.S. intelligence failures in 1941 and of the Israeli failure in 1973. With respect to the latter, even explanations emphasizing pre-existing belief systems in the form of “the conception” treat it as a collective mindset and minimize the role of particular individuals.

In nearly all intelligence failures, however, not everyone got it wrong, just as in nearly all intelligence successes not everyone got it right. Uri Bar-Joseph’s question about the 1973 case applies to other cases as well: “Why did some of the agency’s analysts estimate the situation correctly and regard war’s probability as high or even certain, while others ... erred completely?”¹⁹ Identifying variation in intelligence assessments across individuals and across intelligence units is an important part of explaining intelligence failure and success.

Small-group dynamics. Much of the analysis and interpretation of intelligence, both by analysts and by political decision makers, takes place in small groups, which can exaggerate the pathologies of individual judgment and decision making. Neither individual psychology nor organizational models captures the dynamics of social interaction in small groups. This led Irving Janis to construct a model of small-group behavior. He coined the term “groupthink” to describe the “concurrence-seeking tendency within cohesive groups,” driven not by political pressure but by social pressure in the context of high-stakes decisions and enormous stress within small-group decision-making units. Conformity with group norms and unanimity about policy maintain the integrity of the group and in doing so provide psychological security for the individual, reduce anxiety, and heighten self-esteem.²⁰

Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Daniel Kahneman, “Maps of Bounded Rationality: Psychology for Behavioral Economics,” *American Economic Review* 93 (December 2003): 1449–1475; Stephen Peter Rosen, *War and Human Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Rose McDermott, *Political Psychology and International Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Uri Bar-Joseph, “Intelligence Failure and the Need for Cognitive Closure,” 167.

²⁰ Janis, *Groupthink*, 7–9; Janis and Mann, *Decision Making*. For a more explicitly political model of groupthink, see Paul ‘t Hart, Eric K. Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, eds., *Beyond Groupthink: Political Group Dynamics and Foreign Policy-making* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997). On individual strategic manipulation of small-group interactions, see Zeev Maoz, *National Choices and International Processes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 210, 300, 345–350.

In Janis's model, groupthink leads to illusions of invulnerability, unanimity, and moral superiority. It also leads to tendencies to elevate loyalty to the highest priority goal; to discount information that runs contrary to collective beliefs of the group; to keep the decision within the group and not to go outside the group to acquire additional information from experts; to consider only a limited number of policy alternatives; to fail to reexamine the possible risks of a policy once that policy is preferred by a majority, or to reconsider the possible benefits of alternatives after they have been rejected; to fail to consider what might go wrong and to develop contingency plans; and to take riskier courses of action. These patterns apply to the construction of intelligence estimates of adversary capabilities and intentions as well as to decision making, and most of them serve to exaggerate the pathologies of individual judgment and decision making in a small-group context.²¹

We should emphasize that groupthink explains conformity in small groups, not in more-extensive communities. The common use of the groupthink concept to explain the conformity of views among large numbers of intelligence analysts and government officials leading to the intelligence failures surrounding the September 11 attacks and Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD) involves an incorrect application of the groupthink concept.²²

Organizational behavior. We presume that the reader is generally familiar with theories of bureaucratic politics and organizational processes,²³ so that a general theoretical survey is not necessary here. In terms of the relevance to intelligence failure, one factor is the tendency for different organizations not to share information or to cooperate in other ways. The organizational behavior literature explains this in terms of factored problems, parochial interests, and organizational autonomy. One of the primary factors in Wohlstetter's explanation for the American intelligence failure at Pearl Harbor was the lack of communication between the Army and the Navy. The United States had enough information to arrange the different pieces of evidence into a coherent picture of Japanese plans, but the pieces of the puzzle were held by different military services that chose not to share that information, in part because of inter-service rivalry and competition over the control of intelligence.²⁴

²¹ Janis, *Groupthink*; Janis and Mann, *Decision Making*, 130–131.

²² Robert Jervis, "Reports, Politics, and Intelligence Failure: The Case of Iraq," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 29 (February 2006): 3–52.

²³ Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 1999); Morton H. Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1974).

²⁴ Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor*. Edwin T. Layton with Roger Pineau and John Costello, "*And I was there*": *Pearl Harbor and Midway—Breaking the Secrets* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006); Gordon W. Prange with Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, *Pearl Harbor: The Verdict of History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986).

While the dispersion of information can be a problem, so can the excessive concentration of information. One of the factors in Israel's intelligence failure in 1973 was the fact that the directorate of military intelligence (AMAN) held a monopoly on the Israeli intelligence estimate. As a result, warnings that were provided by the Mossad did not receive the attention they deserved. Israel acknowledged the problem after the war, restructured its intelligence system, and distributed responsibility to the Mossad, the Foreign Office, and to the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) local commands.²⁵

Organizational culture is also important. Among other things, it shapes the extent of the free flow of information, which provides an atmosphere in which intelligence officers are encouraged to question pre-existing assumptions and to "think outside the box." The managerial style of the leader of the organization also plays an important role in shaping the acquisition and dissemination of intelligence, and can interact with organizational culture. Bar-Joseph and Arie Kruglanski argue that both Lieutenant Colonel Yona Bandman, AMAN's leading estimator for Egyptian affairs, and Major General Eli Zeira, director of military intelligence (DMI), had authoritarian styles. Their emphasis on decisiveness over debate and lack of tolerance for open and extended discussions contributed to premature cognitive closure and to the intelligence failure. Similar traits were exhibited by U.S. Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, the chief of war plans division in the naval department, whom some regard as "the man mainly responsible" for the failure in Pearl Harbor.²⁶

A key theme in the literature on bureaucratic politics and organizational processes is the gap between decision and implementation, between the policy decided at the top and how it is implemented by specific organizations. In terms of intelligence, one potentially relevant factor here is deliberate insubordination by a key intelligence official, the refusal to follow the policies or procedures set up by political leaders. The literature on intelligence failure has neglected this factor, despite the fact that it played an important role in major intelligence fiascos. For example, before launching operation "Zapata" in 1961, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers consciously underestimated the power of the Castro regime and overestimated the likelihood that the Bay of Pigs invasion would trigger a popular uprising in Cuba. They acted so in order to obtain the political authorization for an operation to which they had become psychologically committed and which they believed would serve their organizational interests.²⁷ We will argue that this factor played a critical role in the Israeli intelligence failure of 1973.

²⁵ Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*; Samuel M. Katz, *Soldier Spies: Israel's Military Intelligence* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1992), 257–258.

²⁶ Uri Bar-Joseph and Arie W. Kruglanski, "Intelligence Failure and the Need for Cognitive Closure: On the Psychology of the Yom Kippur Surprise," *Political Psychology* 24 (March 2003): 75–99; Prange, Goldstein, and Dillon, *Pearl Harbor*, 294–295.

²⁷ Peter Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs Declassified: The Secret CIA Report on the Invasion of Cuba* (New York: The New Press, 1999); Trumbull Higgins, *The Perfect Failure: Kennedy, Eisenhower, and the*

A good example of unauthorized action by intelligence officers leading to serious national embarrassment is the 1954 action by the Israeli director of military intelligence, Colonel Benyamin Givli. Without authorization, he initiated a sabotage campaign in Egypt in order to prevent the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian accord on the evacuation of the British forces from the Suez Canal Zone. The failure of this “unfortunate business” brought about Israel’s most severe political crisis, which lasted until the mid-1960s.²⁸

The politicization of intelligence. Ideally, intelligence should serve policy by providing political decision makers with the information and analysis they need to make informed judgments and decisions, but it should be driven by the evidence and not by the policy preferences of political leaders. As Paul Pillar argues, policymakers should determine the general questions that intelligence professionals investigate but not the conclusions they reach. At times, however, political leaders go beyond specifying the questions and try to influence the answers. As Robert Jervis argues, “Policy often drives intelligence as much as intelligence drives policy.”²⁹

Although the influence of policy and politics on intelligence is an age-old phenomenon, the politicization of intelligence is neglected in most treatments of the classic cases of intelligence failures leading to surprise attacks (Pearl Harbor, Barbarossa, and Yom Kippur). It is now attracting more attention among American analysts in the aftermath of the U.S. intelligence failure regarding Iraqi WMD in 2002–03. Despite extensive debates on the role of politicization in that case, most theoretical discussions focus more on the feasibility of separating intelligence from the political process than on the causal impact of politicization on intelligence failure.

It is important to distinguish the question of whether the politicization of intelligence occurs from the question of its impact on policy. Inferences about causal impact depend in part on the counterfactual of how decision makers would have responded to intelligence that undercut their preferred policy. If they would have ignored the bad news, then cooking the books did not have a causal impact. The validation of the counterfactual often raises some difficult methodological issues.³⁰

CIA at the Bay of Pigs (New York: Norton, 1987); David A. Phillips, *The Night Watch* (New York: Ballantine, 1982).

²⁸ Uri Bar-Joseph, *Intelligence Intervention in the Politics of Democratic States: The United States, Israel, and Britain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 1995), chap. 7; Shabtai Teveth, *Ben Gurion's Spy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

²⁹ Paul R. Pillar, “Intelligence, Politics, and the War in Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs* 85 (March–April 2006): 17–25 at 16; Robert Jervis, “Intelligence and Foreign Policy,” *International Security* 11 (Winter 1986–87): 141–161 at 154.

³⁰ Jack S. Levy, “Counterfactuals and Case Studies” in Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady, and David Collier, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 627–644.

The conventional wisdom holds that policy and politics interfere more with intelligence in authoritarian regimes than in democratic regimes—because there are fewer channels for dissenting views in autocracies and because the personal costs of providing news the leader does not want to hear can be severe. Common examples include Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Saddam Hussein.³¹ As M. Kevin Woods, Michael R. Pease, Mark E. Stout, Williamson Murray, and James G. Lacey write about Saddam, “In the years before Operation Iraqi Freedom, everyone around Saddam understood that his need to hear only good news was constantly growing and that it was in their best interest to feed that hunger.”³²

All dictators, however, do not react in a similar manner. Hitler, who was as ruthless and intolerant as Stalin and Saddam, did not execute or arrest intelligence and military officers who presented him with estimates and advice that contradicted his own. In most cases, he crudely fired them. Such was his policy before war started and even in 1944, when the eastern front collapsed. Hitler ordered executions in the *Wehrmacht* and the *Abwehr* (as well as other German organizations) only after the failed assassination attempt in July 1944.³³

The pervasiveness of politically induced distortion of intelligence in authoritarian politics should not blind us to the fact that political pressure on the intelligence process arises in democratic regimes as well. Intelligence officers might consciously adjust their estimate because they believe that the failure to provide “intelligence to please” might result in their loss of a job, the denial of a future promotion opportunity, or the loss of influence on future policy decisions. It is also possible that these factors might subconsciously distort their assessments, which would fit the category of “motivated biases.”

A good example of conscious distortion is American intelligence about the possibility of Chinese intervention in the Korean War. Despite numerous indications of a massive Chinese military deployment in Korea in autumn 1950, including the capture of Chinese soldiers south of the Yalu River, General Douglas MacArthur’s intelligence chief, Major General Charles Willoughby, estimated that there was no threat of a Chinese intervention. This was not merely a mistake. A senior staff officer of the X Corps who fought in Korea and was familiar with the situation testified years later: “MacArthur did not *want* the Chinese to enter the war in Korea. Anything MacArthur wanted,

³¹ Zachary Shore, *What Hitler Knew: The Battle for Information in Nazi Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); David E. Murphy, *What Stalin Knew: The Enigma of Barbarossa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); M. Kevin Woods, Michael R. Pease, Mark E. Stout, Williamson Murray, and James G. Lacey, *Iraqi Perspectives Project: A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom From Saddam’s Senior Leadership* (Norfolk, VA: Joint Center for Operational Analysis, 2006).

³² M. Kevin Woods, James G. Lacey, and Williamson Murray, “Saddam’s Delusions: The View From The Inside,” *Foreign Affairs* 85 (May/June 2006): 2–26 at 6.

³³ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936–1945: Nemesis* (New York: Norton, 2001), 101–102, 646–649, 685–690.

Willoughby produced intelligence for.... In this case Willoughby falsified the intelligence reports.... He should have gone to jail.”³⁴

There are some systematic differences among democratic states worth noting. A good example is the relationship between intelligence makers and consumers in the United States and in Israel. Israeli intelligence officers have almost always felt free to express, without reservations, estimates that contradicted their consumers’ perceptions or political preferences.³⁵ This sharp line between policy and intelligence in Israel is much less well defined in the United States, reflecting a different culture of interaction between intelligence officers and their political consumers. One can identify numerous instances of political pressure on the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency to fit its estimates to the policy preferences of political leaders. In fact, a CIA task force set up in the early 1990s by incoming director Robert Gates found that over half of the analysts questioned believed that shaping an intelligence assessment to conform to a view that the analyst believed was held by a manager “occurs often enough to be of concern.”³⁶

This happened in the 1950s with the debate about the “bomber” and the “missile gap,” in the 1960s with the controversy over the Viet Cong Order of Battle,³⁷ in the 1970s with the establishment in 1976 of Team B in order to challenge the CIA’s estimates of strategic Soviet capabilities and intentions,³⁸ and in the 1980s with pressure by Director of Central Intelligence William Casey on the agency’s analysts to produce estimates of a strong and threatening Soviet Union.³⁹ There is also an ongoing debate about the extent to which intelligence assessments of Iraqi WMD in 2002–03 reflected political pressure

³⁴ David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), 378.

³⁵ Uri Bar-Joseph, “State-Intelligence Relations in Israel: 1948-1997,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 17 (Fall 1997): 133–157.

³⁶ Robert Gates, “Guarding against Politicization,” *Studies in Intelligence: Journal of the American Intelligence Professional* 36 (Spring 1992): 5–13 at 6.

³⁷ Harry Howe Ransom, “The Politicization of Intelligence” in Stephen J. Cimbala, ed., *Intelligence and Intelligence Policy in a Democratic Society* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Transnational Publishers, 1987), 25–46 at 34–36; James J. Wirtz, “Intelligence to Please? The Order of Battle Controversy During the Vietnam War,” *Political Science Quarterly* 106 (Summer 1991): 239–263; Michael C. Hiam, *Who the Hell Are We Fighting? The Story of Sam Adams and the Vietnam Intelligence Wars* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth, 2006); Christopher Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996), 327–332; Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 82–85.

³⁸ John Prados, *The Soviet Estimate: US Intelligence Analysis and Russian Military Strength* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 38–45; John Prados, “Team B: The Trillion Dollar Experiment,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 49 (April 1993): 23, 27–31; Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 85–88.

³⁹ Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981, 1987* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 341–346; Mel Goodman, *Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and the Fall of the CIA* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

from the administration of George W. Bush, so that “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.”⁴⁰

This difference in the frequency of the politicization of intelligence in the United States and in Israel is reflected in the debate within the American intelligence community between two different conceptions of the proper relationship between policymaking and intelligence. The first, which is shared by most Israelis and by the British as well, argues that the primary goal of intelligence is objectivity and advocates the strict separation between policy and intelligence.⁴¹ The second conception privileges utility over objectivity and argues that too strict a separation of intelligence and policy leaves intelligence irrelevant to policy. In this view, intelligence is inherently a political process, and analysts should involve themselves in policy by trying to understand the needs of their customers—including the policy context and the range of policy options available to decision makers—and to frame or package their assessments in ways that serve those needs. Otherwise, political decision makers will simply ignore the intelligence community. As Richard Betts argues, if intelligence products are “untainted by the hurly-burly of policy debate, they may preserve purity at the price of irrelevance.”⁴²

Betts characterizes this debate as between the “Kent” model, after Sherman Kent, who directed the Office of National Estimates and who emphasized the importance of analysts maintaining their objectivity, and the “Gates” model, after Robert Gates, who served as director of central intelligence. The Gates model (characterized by H. Bradford Westerfield as involving “actionable” as opposed to the “objective” analysis of the Kent school and by Bar-Joseph as advocated by “realists” or “activists,” as opposed to “professionals” or

⁴⁰ Maria Ryan, “Inventing the ‘Axis of Evil’: The Myth and Reality of US Intelligence and Policy-Making after 9/11,” *Intelligence and National Security* 17 (December 2002): 55–76; Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq*, 109th Congress, 2nd session, 7 July 2004; Pillar, “Intelligence, Politics, and the War in Iraq”; Jervis, “Reports, Politics, and Intelligence Failure”; Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 114–123; Frank Rich, *The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006). The quote reflects a statement of Sir Richard Dearlove (“C,” head of M16), in a meeting with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, 23 July 2002, as reported by Mark Danner, *The Secret Way to War: The Downing Street Memo and the Iraq War’s Buried History* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006), 89.

⁴¹ Yehoshafat Harkabi, “The Intelligence-Policymaker Tangle,” *The Jerusalem Quarterly* (Winter 1984): 125–131; Handel, *War, Strategy and Intelligence*, chap. 4; R.V. Jones, *Reflections on Intelligence* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 294.

⁴² Richard K. Betts, “Intelligence for Policymaking,” *The Washington Quarterly* 3 (Summer 1980): 118–129 at 119. See also Robert M. Gates, “The CIA and Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 66 (Winter 1987/88): 215–230; Robert Gates, “An Opportunity Unfulfilled: The Use of Perceptions of Intelligence at the White House,” *The Washington Quarterly* 12 (Winter 1989): 35–44; Gates, “Guarding against Politicization”; Richard K. Betts, “Policy-makers and Intelligence Analysts: Love, Hate, or Indifference?” *Intelligence and National Security* 3 (January 1988): 118–129; Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, chap. 4; Arthur Hulnick, “Controlling Intelligence Estimates” in G.P. Hastedt, ed., *Controlling Intelligence* (London: Cass, 1991).

“traditionalists”) emerged in the United States in the 1980s and dominated until 2003.⁴³

It is often a fine line, however, for intelligence analysts to engage policymakers without running the risk of allowing policymakers' preferences to distort intelligence assessments. The prescriptive debate about the proper role of intelligence is exacerbated by differences in conceptions of what politicization is and what it is not, something that also confounds the scholarly analysis of politicization. Political leaders can influence the intelligence process in many ways, some of them quite explicit and blatant, others quite subtle or even inadvertent.

Scholars generally agree, for example, that pressure from above to adjust intelligence products to conform to the policy preferences of political leaders, irrespective of the evidence, constitutes politicization. Other actions are more difficult to classify. Pillar classifies the “sugarcoating” of an unpalatable message as politicization, while Betts notes analysts' temptations to give in on an unwinnable issue in the hope of retaining influence for the next issue, which James Thomson describes as the “effectiveness trap.”⁴⁴ Similarly, Jervis and others have argued that U.S. intelligence on Iraq failed to emphasize the uncertainty surrounding its estimate that Iraq probably had WMD. Is that necessarily politicization, or does it reflect a bureaucratic practice to maximize influence? As Betts argues, “Analysts who complicate and equivocated do not compete as effectively for the limited attention of consumers as those who simplify and advocate....”⁴⁵

If political leaders select intelligence directors who either share their own policy preferences or who are known for their loyalty, and the result is the screening out of dissenting viewpoints, is that politicization? Richard Immerman, noting that U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson replaced George Kennan with Paul Nitze because the latter's worldview was more similar to his own, argues that a “failure to surround himself with dissenters and skeptics is misguided but not politicized policymaking.”⁴⁶ We might add that the critical question is not the policy preferences of a decision maker's advisers, but whether those advisers dissent if the evidence calls for it and how the decision maker responds when they do. A dissenting view from an adviser who generally shares the leader's beliefs can be quite informative.⁴⁷

⁴³ Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 76–77; Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949); H. Bradford Westerfield, “Inside Ivory Bunkers: CIA Analysts Resist Managers' ‘Pandering,’ Part I,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 9 (Winter 1996/97): 407–424 at 408–409; Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 22–35.

⁴⁴ Pillar, “Intelligence, Politics, and the War in Iraq,” 22; Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 79; James C. Thomson, “How Could Vietnam Happen: An Autopsy,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 221 (April 1968): 47–53.

⁴⁵ Jervis, “Reports, Politics, and Intelligence Failure”; Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, 79.

⁴⁶ Richard H. Immerman, “Intelligence and Strategy: Historicizing Psychology, Policy, and Politics,” *Diplomatic History* 32 (January 2008): 1–23 at 12.

⁴⁷ Randall Calvert, “The Value of Biased Information: A Rational Choice Model of Political Advice,” *Journal of Politics* 47 (May 1985): 530–555.

A more blatant form of politicization is the establishment of a new institution or the major modification of an existing institution as a means of bypassing normal intelligence channels and of getting intelligence that supports one's preferred policy. This factor is ignored in the literature on past intelligence failures, though the establishment of the Office of Special Plans (OSP) in the Pentagon after the September 11 attacks has highlighted the potential consequences of this form of organizational restructuring. There is substantial evidence that the OSP was designed to circumvent the CIA and produce intelligence that demonstrated both the existence of Iraqi WMD and a link between Iraq and al Qaeda in order to provide a rationalization for a war against Iraq. It is significant that OSP was staffed with analysts who were selected for their job precisely because they believed from the start in these hypotheses, and that some of those analysts had previously served as Donald Rumsfeld's agents in the military team that prepared for the war.⁴⁸

Given the ambiguity surrounding the concept of politicization, the fact that subtle forms of political influence in intelligence are unavoidable, and the utilitarian conception of the proper role of intelligence, it is useful to distinguish between "normal politicization" and "hyper-politicization."⁴⁹ Admittedly, the difference between them is a matter of degree, but we suggest the following criteria to distinguish them. An estimation of the likelihood of an event can be classified as certain ("slam dunk"), probable, even, improbable, or impossible. "Normal" politicization of the intelligence estimate is when, with the lack of additional information to support it, the estimate changes in one degree, e.g., from probable to "slam dunk." "Hyper-politicization" is when the estimation changes in two degrees or more, usually from probable to improbable and vice versa. As we noted earlier in our Korean War example, hyper-politicization can be found in democratic as well as autocratic regimes. Our first case study describes in detail how this type of "hyper-politicization" played a role in the Soviet intelligence failure in 1941.

Most of our discussion has focused on "intelligence to please," the shaping of intelligence assessments by the policy preferences of political leaders, or perhaps of higher-level managers in the intelligence system. It is also possible that an intelligence analyst might allow his/her own policy preferences to shape the intelligence product he/she passes forward. Such behavior might be driven by the goal of enhancing organizational resources, influence, or autonomy, or by the analyst's sincere belief that the policies that might follow from his/her assessments would best serve the national interest. We refer to the latter as the "we know best" syndrome. Although we prefer not to classify this as a form of

⁴⁸ Seymour M. Hersh, "Selective Intelligence: Donald Rumsfeld has his own special sources. Are they reliable?" *The New Yorker*, 12 May 2003; Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), 45.

⁴⁹ We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this distinction and the term "hyper-politicization."

the politicization of intelligence, it represents the deliberate distortion of intelligence that fits the broader category of politically motivated behavior, and it can contribute in significant ways to intelligence failure. Our second case study will show how such behavior significantly contributed to Israel's intelligence failure in 1973.

Although we have identified several analytically distinct sources of intelligence failure at different levels of analysis, we should emphasize that most intelligence failures are the product of the interaction of multiple factors at different levels. In an unambiguous informational environment, psychological biases have a much weaker impact and there are fewer opportunities for the deliberate distortion of intelligence assessments. In an inherently ambiguous informational environment, psychological biases and other variables play a much greater role. Efforts at strategic deception are most effective if they are informed by psychological proclivities of the target and designed to exploit them. Organizational cultures that are conducive to the free flow of information can be compromised by a key intelligence official who has an authoritarian management style and intolerance for dissent. These relationships are complex and context dependent, and as a result, there is no single path to intelligence failure, but instead multiple paths.

We now turn to our two historical case studies. We summarize the leading interpretations of each of these cases in the literature, highlight their neglect of the conscious and deliberate distortion of intelligence information, and demonstrate the impact of this factor by specifying the causal paths through which it contributed to the intelligence failure.

BARBAROSSA: THE SOVIET INTELLIGENCE FAILURE OF 1941

Most analysts of Barbarossa (the code name for the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941) argue that ample information was available to the Soviet Union in 1941 about the looming German threat. There are, however, exceptions to the rule. One is Viktor Surovov, who argued that Stalin planned to attack Germany in the summer of 1941 and that the offensive deployment of the Red Army was the main cause for its defeats. Suvorov failed to provide compelling evidence, however, as Gabriel Gorodetsky and others have demonstrated.⁵⁰ In any case, these studies are less relevant for our own analysis because they say little about the intelligence provided to Stalin prior to Barbarossa and how he used it.

⁵⁰ Viktor Suvorov, *Icebreaker: Who Started the Second World War?* (New York: Viking, 1990); Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999). A similar argument, but one that draws on new archival sources, is Mikhail Ivanovich Meltyukhov, *Upushchennyi shans Stalina: Sovetskii Soiuz i Borb'ba za Evropu, 1939–41* [Stalin's Lost Chance: The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Europe, 1939–41] (Moscow: Veche, 2000), available at <http://militera.lib.ru/research/meltyukhov/index.html>.

The dominant school of the study of Barbarossa provides convincing evidence for the claim that insufficient information was not the cause for the Soviet failure. Barton Whaley counted 84 warnings that were available to the Soviets prior to the invasion. Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky (the KGB station chief in London prior to his 1985 defection) stated in 1990 that an updated study would have yielded more than a hundred warnings.⁵¹ Vasili Mitrokhin, the KGB archivist who defected to England with parts of this archive, revealed that the KGB alone provided Stalin with “over a hundred” warnings of the incoming attack since the beginning of 1941. The implications of this claim become clearer if we take into account that the larger share of the reports about the incoming attack came from Military Intelligence (GRU, which in 1940–41 was initialed RU) and not the KGB. Gorodetsky, who presented many of the warnings that Stalin received from the NKGB, the GRU, and the foreign office, agrees that lack of information was not the source of the failure. He nevertheless noted that there “was sufficient ambiguity in the vast intelligence offered to Stalin for him to be convinced that the attack might be deferred, or at best be unleashed at a time of his own choosing.” David Murphy, who composed the most detailed study of this episode, revealed additional warnings, some from sources unknown before, such as eavesdropping on conversations of German and other foreign diplomats in Moscow.⁵²

Most students of this episode share the view that the main cause for the Soviet lack of military preparedness was Stalin’s belief that Hitler would not initiate war in the east before the war in the west had ended. They also agree that Stalin, convinced that his army was unready yet to confront the *Wehrmacht*, attempted to avoid a war in 1941 through a policy of appeasement vis-à-vis Nazi Germany. Moreover, since Stalin feared that raising the Red Army’s state of alert might trigger a conflict spiral and lead to a war for which the U.S.S.R. was unprepared, he avoided that action despite incoming warnings of the looming invasion.

There is no agreement, however, as to why Stalin persisted with this strategy despite growing evidence of a German invasion. Whaley regarded the German deception plan as the key explanation for Stalin’s mistake. Richard Overy traced Stalin’s blindness to a lack of imagination and his belief that Hitler would act rationally and would not initiate a war in June, when only a few weeks of weather convenient for war were left. Pavel Sadoplatov, who in 1941 was a senior NKGB officer, maintained that while the main mistake was Stalin’s, both the GRU and the NKGB failed to raise the possibility that the German war goal would be the destruction of the Red Army in *blitzkrieg*

⁵¹ Whaley, *Codeword Barbarossa*; Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of Its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (New York: Harpercollins, 1992), 260.

⁵² Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 92; Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, 130–136, 321; Murphy, *What Stalin Knew*, 108–116.

tactics rather than the occupation of the Ukraine. Murphy attributed importance to the German deception. He also emphasized Stalin's aim of exploiting the war in the west to advance Soviet domination in Europe, and the impact that Stalin's suspicious mind had on the quality of the intelligence he received. Gorodetsky acknowledged the role of German deception, but criticized Murphy for ascribing Stalin's behavior to offensive intentions.⁵³

One factor missing in these explanations is the role that fear of Stalin played in shaping the kinds of information and analysis that the Soviet intelligence establishment was willing to pass on to the Soviet leader. The fact that Stalin was an obsessively suspicious tyrant, who executed or sent to the Gulags anyone whom he suspected might challenge or undermine him, is well documented. It has become clear in recent years that fear of Stalin's response to challenges to his persistent conviction that Germany would avoid attacking in 1941 played a major role in shaping the intelligence reports and assessments that were submitted to him.

In 1937 and 1938, Stalin purged the Soviet intelligence services. The prime targets of this purge were the NKVD Fifth Department residents abroad, and most of them were liquidated by 1938.⁵⁴ As a result, "the whole system of intelligence assessment was dominated by the fearful sycophancy encapsulated in the formula 'sniff out, suck up, survive.'"⁵⁵ Andrew and Gordievsky, who also emphasize the role of this formula in shaping Soviet estimates prior to the war, conclude that "more than at any previous moment in KGB history, INO [the foreign intelligence department] was under pressure to provide intelligence that supported the leadership's conspiracy theories." A typical example of the impact of this pressure was the information that was provided by the KGB resident in Helsinki, who reported to Stalin "what he wanted to hear: that in the event of war the Finns would collapse as quickly as the Poles and that the Finnish working class would support a new Communist regime."⁵⁶

In the case of Barbarossa, Stalin's two main intelligence providers—his minister of interior (in charge also of the NKGB), Lavrenty Beria, and the chief of military intelligence (RU, later GRU), General Filipp Golikov—were badly affected by the political pressure. Consequently, the need to please Stalin took a very high toll in the intelligence-making process prior to the German invasion. Beria became the head of the NKVD in November 1938, replacing Nikolai Yezhov, who was arrested and executed in 1940. Beria was "fawningly sycophantic ... [with] a genius for cultivating patrons," and he

⁵³ Richard Overy, *Russia's War* [Hebrew] (Ganei Aviv: Dvir, 2001), 91; Anatoli Sudoplatov and Pavel Sudoplatov, with Jerrold L. Schecter and Leona P. Schecter, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness – A Soviet Spymaster* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1994), 117; Murphy, *What Stalin Knew*; Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*.

⁵⁴ Murphy, *What Stalin Knew*, 90.

⁵⁵ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 94.

⁵⁶ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 242–244, 250; Murphy, *What Stalin Knew*, 90.

became Stalin's right-hand man.⁵⁷ As the head of the NKVD, he was in charge of the foreign intelligence department (INO) in the NKVD. The head of this department since February 1941 was Pavel Fitin, who, despite lack of experience (he had joined the agency only three years earlier, following the 1938 purge), proved to be an excellent manager who was, unlike most of his colleagues, appreciated by his subordinates. Fitin, moreover, estimated that the German preparations were designed for offensive operations, and he was brave enough to express his opinion to Stalin. Perhaps this was the reason why Stalin preferred to receive his intelligence from Beria and hardly saw Fitin in the months before the war.⁵⁸

For Beria, protecting his position was more important than providing Stalin with true intelligence information and estimates. The results were quite obvious. In October 1940, when the Soviet residency in Berlin reported that Germany was likely to start the war in early 1941, Beria told Stalin: "I will drag this *Korsikanets* [the source] to Moscow and jail him for disinformation." Three days before war started, a Gestapo officer who was one of the best Soviet sources and was highly regarded by Beria himself, reported that his unit was informed that war would start on 22 June at 03:00. But since the interior minister refused to confront Stalin on this report, he considered it "false and provocation."⁵⁹ Two days later, Beria gave an even more vivid expression to his order of priorities. After ordering that four officers who persisted in sending warnings about the German attack be "ground into labor camp dust," he wrote Stalin:

I again insist on recalling and punishing our ambassador in Berlin, Dekanozov, who keeps bombarding me with "reports" on Hitler's alleged preparations to attack the USSR. He has reported that this attack will start tomorrow.... But I and my people, Iosif Visarionovich, have firmly embedded in our memory your wise conclusion: Hitler is not going to attack us in 1941.⁶⁰

Golikov, the director of military intelligence, who spent a large part of his military career in political positions, was nominated for this post in July 1940. He replaced General Ivan Proskurov, a distinguished Air Force general who was fired (and later executed) because he expressed his professional opinion quite freely (his opposition to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, for example) and because Stalin sensed that he could not control him.⁶¹ Golikov played an important role for two reasons: First, he was "the intelligence chief with whom Stalin most frequently discussed [the] warnings."⁶² Second, he was in charge of

⁵⁷ Simon S. Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 79.

⁵⁸ Murphy, *What Stalin Knew*, 93–94, 241; Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 241, 259.

⁵⁹ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 94; Murphy, *What Stalin Knew*, 102, 208.

⁶⁰ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 94.

⁶¹ Murphy, *What Stalin Knew*, 141; Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, 79, offers a different explanation for the firing of Proskurov.

⁶² Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 257.

the Information Department, the only analytical section within the Soviet intelligence community in 1941.

Gorodetsky, who tends to portray events in Stalin's court in less dark colors, described Golikov as highly aware of the German threat and maintained that he "kept Stalin abreast of it." Nevertheless, even Gorodetsky admitted that Golikov tailored his estimates to Stalin's view. According to Vasily Novobranets, the head of the Information Department for Eastern Countries in 1941, Golikov often called him after meeting with Stalin in order to instruct him what the "boss" thought. Golikov, by this account, was very afraid that RU information would not coincide with Stalin's perception.⁶³ Numerous pieces of evidence confirm this pattern of behavior. In February 1941, for example, Golikov wrote, in a highly reliable report that warned of a German attack at the end of May, that this was probably disinformation and that the source should be notified about it. Murphy concluded that given that similar reports reaffirmed this warning, it is obvious that Golikov nullified its value in line with Stalin's conception. In other instances, Golikov authorized the distribution of reports on German troop movements but prevented the distribution of information about German intentions to launch war soon. Selective distribution of intelligence reports was pervasive.⁶⁴ In May, Golikov authorized the distribution of a report that ruled out a possible German attack on the USSR, but forbade the distribution of a report from the RU resident in Tokyo, Richard Sorge, who reported that "German generals evaluate the combat readiness of the Red Army so low that they estimate the Red Army will be destroyed in the course of a few weeks."⁶⁵

In other instances, Golikov combined authentic warnings with a calming assessment. On 20 March, he distributed to his top consumers a document that included a number of reports about German preparations for war but gave more weight to reports that confirmed Stalin's view. He framed the estimation section by emphasizing in the document's first sentence that reports about German offensive intentions were the product of a Western disinformation campaign aimed at worsening Soviet–German relations. In the report's summary, he assessed that "the most likely date for the beginning of actions against the USSR will be the moment of victory over England or the conclusion of an honorable peace for Germany." He then repeated his warning that all information about war in the spring "must be rated as disinformation." During the last week of May, Golikov distributed additional intelligence documents that stressed the possibility of a German invasion of England and underestimated the German threat to the Soviet Union. One of them described German troop movement to Norway. Despite evidence that this was part of a German–Finnish

⁶³ Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, 80–81; Igor A. Damaskin, *Stalin and Intelligence* [Russian] (Moscow: Vetcha Publishing House, 2004), 255.

⁶⁴ Murphy, *What Stalin Knew*, 69, 80; Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 260.

⁶⁵ Murphy, *What Stalin Knew*, 180.

cooperation for war against the USSR, Golikov explained that it was carried out in connection with an operation against the British Isles.⁶⁶

To summarize, the fact that the intelligence officers who met with Stalin refused to challenge his conception and took all measures to support it certainly had an effect on the Soviet decision-making process prior to Barbarossa, though how much of an effect is hard to say. A comparison with the interaction between Stalin and his generals at the same period of time provides one indicator of how a firmer stand could make a difference. On 11 June, the chief of the Red Army general staff, Georgy Zhukov, and Defense Commissar Semyon Timoshenko conferred with Stalin in order to convince him to authorize an increase in the state of military readiness. After Stalin rejected their requests, they made another bold attempt a week later. Stalin again rejected their demands and threatened that they would have to pay personally for unauthorized action. Despite these threats, in the weeks that preceded the attack, Zhukov and Timoshenko authorized the army to take, very cautiously, certain defensive measures. On 21 June, they met again with Stalin and suggested immediately deploying the army for defense. This time Stalin was more forthcoming. Although he rejected their demand, he agreed to issue the army a more general warning order. Zhukov used this authorization to take wider measures.⁶⁷ Twenty-one June was also the date when Beria told Stalin how certain he and his people were that no war would break out. If Stalin had been surrounded by intelligence officers with the personal integrity of Zhukov and Timoshenko, his estimate of German intentions might have been more realistic. But since his intelligence suppliers provided him with supportive information that did not reflect the true information they had and with confirmative assessment that was not based on a professional analysis of the available information, the result was just the opposite.

It is reasonable to ask, however, whether Beria's and Golikov's actions were conscious and deliberate. As far as is known, there is no positive evidence that Beria acted so in fixing intelligence to Stalin's needs. Hence, it is possible, although highly unlikely, that Beria truly believed what he reported to Stalin. No such doubt surrounds Golikov. In 1965, he told a Soviet writer: "I admit I distorted intelligence to please Stalin because I feared him."⁶⁸ He was not alone. And the widespread fear of Stalin's reaction in the intelligence community had certainly led many intelligence officers to act similarly, thus facilitating the way to the surprise of 22 June.

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

The fear of political or personal consequences, which was the main cause for the distortion of assessments by Soviet intelligence officers on the eve of

⁶⁶ Ibid., 156–161.

⁶⁷ Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*, 278–279, 298–299, 310–311.

⁶⁸ Murphy, *What Stalin Knew*, 249.

Barbarossa, is not a valid explanation for the Israeli fiasco of October 1973. As we noted earlier, relations between intelligence producers and consumers in Israel have always been rather free of political pressures, and throughout the country's history, intelligence officers have expressed, without reservations, estimates that contradicted their consumers' perceptions or political preferences.

The two leading interpretations of Israel's intelligence failure on the eve of the Yom Kippur War focus on the collective belief systems of Israeli intelligence analysts and on strategic deception by Egypt.⁶⁹ Our argument is that while each of these factors played some role, they do not suffice to explain the Israeli fiasco. We shift the focus to the individual level of analysis and emphasize the role of a particular individual, DMI Major General Eli Zeira. We argue that Zeira's conscious and deliberate actions served as a vital link in a chain of events that led Israeli policymakers to underestimate the level of threat. If Zeira had acted differently, we argue, Israeli leaders would probably have anticipated a high probability of an attack and taken substantial measures to deal with it.

Let us first consider the strategic deception hypothesis, which a number of scholars have identified (with some variations in emphasis) as the primary source of the 1973 intelligence failure. Alex Hybel, who compared the cases of Pearl Harbor and Yom Kippur, maintained that as a result of Arab deception, Israel failed to gain the critical information necessary for a reexamination of the thesis that war was unlikely. Aharon Zeevi (later AMAN's director) and John Amos each concluded that the Egyptian deception—which aimed at creating the impression that the concentration of forces along the Suez Canal took place in connection with a routine exercise—played a major role primarily in hiding from the Israelis and the Americans Egypt's intention to go to war.⁷⁰

AMAN's director in 1973, Zeira, attributed an even more critical role to Egyptian deception. He argued that Israel's most valuable human source in Egypt, Dr. Ashraf Marwan, who was Gamal Abdel Nasser's son-in-law and a close aide of Anwar Sadat, was in fact a double agent and the jewel in the crown of the Egyptian deception campaign. According to Zeira, Marwan was the source of the information that validated the Israeli conception regarding Egypt's necessary conditions to launch war and of a number of false warnings that were intended to decrease Israel's war awareness. In the summer of 1973, Marwan informed the Israelis that war would start, if at all, at the end of the

⁶⁹ Agranat Commission, *The Agranat Report*; Michael Handel, *Perception, Deception, and Surprise: The Case of the Yom Kippur War* (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Leonardo Davis Institute for International Relations, Jerusalem Papers on Peace Problems, 1976); Shlaim, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates."

⁷⁰ Hybel, *The Logic of Surprise*, 100; Aharon Zeevi, "The Egyptian Deception Plan" in Zvi Offer and Avi Kober, eds., *Intelligence and National Security* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 1987), 432–438 at 431; John Amos, "Deception and the 1973 Middle East War" in Donald C. Daniel and Katherine L. Herbig, eds., *Strategic Military Deception* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981), 317–334 at 326.

year. Consequently, Zeira regarded Egyptian deception as the most important cause for the Israeli debacle.⁷¹

In light of what is known today about the information that was available to Israel prior to the war, it is clear that these assessments exaggerated the role of deception in the Israeli intelligence failure on the eve of Yom Kippur. AMAN's collection agencies were aware of the fact that radio traffic prior to the war was different from such traffic prior to regular exercises. They also collected information about the advancement of bridging equipment to the water line, removal of minefields, and preparation of descents to the Canal, that had never been observed in earlier exercises. The agency's signals intelligence experts concluded three days before the war that no exercise took place. Moreover, in the weeks prior to the war, Israel received a number of warnings, mostly from Mossad human intelligence sources, that Egypt and Syria intended to launch war soon. Zeira's thesis about Marwan's role is also problematic. Marwan provided Israel with accurate information throughout the period that preceded the war, including Egypt's true war plan, which was known to only a few in Egypt. His last-minute warning saved Israel a complete surprise.⁷²

The second element of conventional interpretations of the 1973 intelligence failure focuses on the collective mindset of Israel's top political, military, and intelligence echelons and their failure to adjust their beliefs in response to incoming information about the looming threat. This hypothesis was central to the report of the Agranat Commission, the only official investigation of the Yom Kippur War. The report focused on the dogmatic beliefs of DMI Eli Zeira, those of the head of AMAN's research department, Brig. Gen. Arie Shalev, those of the head of the Egyptian branch in the research department, Lt. Col. Yona Bandman, and those of the intelligence officer of the southern command, Lt. Col. David Gdalia. Individually and collectively, they believed that Egypt would avoid war with Israel as long as it did not have the capability to hit Israeli air force bases, and that Syria would not launch war without Egypt.⁷³

With a few exceptions, all scholarly students of this event accepted this interpretation, though some elaborated on it in different ways. Some concluded that the source of the problem in 1973 was the Israeli inclination to give more importance to strategic assumptions than to information at the tactical level that indicated that war was under preparation.⁷⁴ Others saw a major source

⁷¹ Eli Zeira, *Myth versus Reality, The October 73 War: Failures and Lessons* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronot, 2004), 109–122, 151–163.

⁷² Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 50–51, 185–186; Bar-Joseph, “The Intelligence Chief Who Went Fishing in the Cold: How Maj. Gen. (res.) Eli Zeira Exposed the Identity of Israel's Best Source Ever,” *Intelligence and National Security* 23 (April 2008): 226–248 at 231–235.

⁷³ Agranat Commission. *The Agranat Report*.

⁷⁴ Abraham Ben-Zvi, “Hindsight and Foresight: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Surprise Attacks,” *World Politics* 28 (April 1976): 381–395; Abraham Ben-Zvi, “Threat Perception and Surprise: In Search of the Intervening Variable” in Frank P. Harvey and Ben D. Mor, eds., *Conflict in World Politics: Advances in the Study of Crisis, War and Peace* (New York: St. Martin's Press,

of the problem in a number of organizational and psychological obstacles in Israeli intelligence, military, and political environments, crude violation of norms of behavior between intelligence producers and consumers, and symptoms of groupthink in Israel's decision-making and intelligence-making processes.⁷⁵ Veteran AMAN officers emphasized the psychological milieu in which the estimation process took place. One, who focused on the distinction between "fundamental" and "situational" surprise, concluded that "the shock on Yom Kippur was primarily caused by the Israelis' discovery that they misconceived themselves, their military, social, and to some degree their moral, image."⁷⁶ Another, who served as a senior officer during the war, maintained that pretension and arrogance on the part of intelligence officers, who believed that they could correctly grasp the complex strategic calculus of leaders such as Anwar Sadat and Hafez Asad, contributed significantly to the 1973 fiasco.⁷⁷ Finally, some students of the subject pointed to another cause for the failure: an over-reliance on a single human source (Marwan) who disappointed his handlers at the most critical time, thus contributing to AMAN's adherence to the mistaken preconception until the very last moment.⁷⁸

In contrast to popular descriptions,⁷⁹ Israeli policymakers were aware of the possibility that Egypt might initiate a war and that Syria would join. This was the conclusion reached by Prime Minister Golda Meir, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, and the Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. David Elazar, in a secret discussion they held in mid-April 1973. On the basis of this discussion, Dayan directed the IDF to prepare for war by the end of the summer. Although Dayan changed his mind and had estimated since July that war was not likely in the foreseeable future, Meir and Elazar remained concerned about this issue. On the morning of 5 October, when the dimensions of the Egyptian deployment along the front became clear, the Chief of Staff raised the state of alert of the regular forces to the highest level since 1967. He avoided two additional steps: ordering a full deployment of the regular forces for war, and demanding the mobilization of the reserve army, which, in the Israeli case, constituted about 80 percent of the IDF ground forces. The authorization to mobilize the reserve army rested

1998), 241–271; Betts, *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning*, 68–69; Stein, "Building Politics into Psychology."

⁷⁵ Shlaim, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates"; Alouph Hareven, "Disturbed Hierarchies: Israeli Intelligence in 1954 and 1973," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 9 (Fall 1978): 3–19; Janice Gross Stein, "The 1973 Intelligence Failure: A Reconsideration," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 24 (Summer 1982): 41–54.

⁷⁶ Zvi Lanir, *Fundamental Surprise: The National Intelligence Crisis* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1983), 54–57.

⁷⁷ Yoel Ben-Porat, *Neila, Locked-on* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Idanim, 1991).

⁷⁸ Ahron Levran, "Surprise and Warning—Considerations of Fundamental Questions," [Hebrew] *Maarachot* 276–277 (October–November 1980): 17–21; Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 126–127).

⁷⁹ John Hughes-Wilson, *Military Intelligence Blunders and Cover-Ups* (London: Robinson, 2004), 234–235.

with the government. In light of the already tense situation, an emergency cabinet meeting that took place at noon empowered Golda Meir and Dayan to authorize such a move.⁸⁰

At the morning meeting, as well as in the meetings at the defense minister, prime minister, cabinet, and IDF general headquarters forums that convened in its aftermath, the Chief of Staff made it clear that if he were to receive another indication for war, he would demand the mobilization of the reserve army. He also explained that he had avoided demanding it so far since he did not believe that the Arabs could launch an attack without AMAN knowing it.⁸¹ As is known today, much of this confidence rested on Elazar's familiarity with certain intelligence assets—known as the “the special means of collection” or, euphemistically, as “Israel's national security policy”—in the form of “eavesdropping devices planted in strategic military locations” in Egypt that AMAN had built prior to the war in order to obtain clear-cut indications that Egypt intended to launch an attack.⁸² The sole person who had the mandate to authorize their activation was DMI Zeira. A few days earlier, the chief of staff had asked him if these means had been activated and had received a positive answer. At a meeting with the Defense Minister on that Friday at about 9:00 am, Dayan asked if they brought any information, and Zeira said that “all was quiet.” The Chief of Staff, who participated in this meeting, heard his intelligence chief's answer as well.⁸³

What the Chief of Staff and the Defense Minister did not know was that DMI Zeira had lied to them. Since 1 October, a number of senior intelligence officers, including the commander of the agency's collection department, the commander of the signals intelligence unit (848, later 8200), and the head of the research department, had requested Zeira to activate the means, but he had refused to do so. On 5 October, the activation of these means was raised once more in a meeting he held in the early hours of the morning. Zeira refused again.⁸⁴ When he had told Elazar a few days earlier that these means were operational, and when he had let Dayan and Elazar think so a few hours later, he had simply lied to them. On the same day, Zeira acted similarly again. He sat next to the chief of staff in all the meetings that took place on 5 October, and he heard Elazar saying that he was waiting for another piece of information to demand the mobilization of the reserve army. Nevertheless, he did not inform Elazar about a high-quality warning that AMAN collected at about 4:00 pm, which explained the Soviet emergency evacuation from Syria and

⁸⁰ Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 69–73, 162.

⁸¹ Ibid., 160–161, 173–174.

⁸² Or Honig, “Surprise Attacks—Are They Inevitable? Moving Beyond the Orthodox–Revisionist Dichotomy,” *Security Studies* 17 (January 2008): 72–106.

⁸³ Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 116–117, 148.

⁸⁴ Aviezer Yaari, *The Road from Merhavia* [Hebrew] (Or Yehuda: Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2003), 176–177.

Egypt that had been initiated about 24 hours earlier by the Kremlin's knowledge that the Arabs planned to attack soon.⁸⁵

Zeira undoubtedly was quite confident that war was unlikely. He deceived his superiors not because he wanted Israel to fall victim to the Arab surprise, but because his very high level of self-assurance led him to believe that he knew better than his superiors what the Arabs planned to do (i.e., abstain from attacking) and, in addition, how Israel should react. A thorough analysis of certain features of his personality provides a more comprehensive explanation for his unique behavior.⁸⁶ In any event, there can be no doubt that his acts were conscious and had a major impact on the level of the IDF's state of readiness for war when the Arabs attacked on 6 October at 2:00 pm.

The Chief of Staff, who learned only after the war that he was misled by Zeira with regard to the operational status of the special means of collection, said that this "confused me more, since I knew [the special means] capability and if there was no war information from them, it was a sign that all was in order."⁸⁷ The Agranat Commission concluded that Dayan's confidence that the concept was valid and war was unlikely was strengthened after he heard from DMI Zeira on the morning of 5 October that AMAN was using all its means of collection.⁸⁸ In addition to juridical considerations, this was the main reason for the Commission's decision to exempt Dayan from responsibility for the blunder. Upon hearing about the warning AMAN received on 5 October in the afternoon, the chief of staff said that had he received this information in time, he would have demanded an immediate mobilization of the reserve army and would have taken further measures to deploy the regular army for war. If these measures had been taken twenty rather than eight hours before war started, the Syrian army would not have broken the defense line in the Golan and the course of the war would have been entirely different.⁸⁹

In sum, explanations of the 1973 fiasco tended to focus, until recently, on various unintentional obstacles in the Israeli intelligence, military, and political systems that prevented a proper transformation of the available warning indicators into a strategic warning. We have argued here that a major and perhaps the most critical obstacle was actions taken by the director of military intelligence, who consciously fitted the intelligence picture his costumers received to his own beliefs regarding the probability of war. By doing so, he unnecessarily delayed the implementation of emergency measures—primarily the full deployment of the IDF regular forces—and the mobilization of the reserve army.

⁸⁵ Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 179–183.

⁸⁶ Bar-Joseph and Kruglanski, "Intelligence Failure and the Need for Cognitive Closure."

⁸⁷ Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 249.

⁸⁸ Agranat Commission, *The Agranat Report*, 46.

⁸⁹ Ben-Porat, *Neila, Locked-on*, 103; Hanoach Bartov, *Daddo – 48 Years and 20 More Days* [Hebrew] (Or Yehuda: Dvir, 2002), 340.

This delay was the main cause for Israel's military setback in the war's first days.

CONCLUSIONS

The literature generally traces major intelligence failures to an ambiguous threat environment compounded by the adversary's strategic deception, to collective mindsets and individual cognitive biases, and to familiar organizational pathologies. This study aimed to shed more light on the neglected subject of the role of conscious action in the study of intelligence failure, with a primary emphasis on "intelligence to please," organizational restructuring, and insubordination motivated by a we-know-best attitude. By using two major cases of such failure, the paper has shown how conscious action had an impact on the final intelligence product, how it was motivated by various sources, and how the distorted intelligence product contributed to the making of major national disasters.

Deliberate deception played a critical role in both the Soviet failure to anticipate a German invasion in 1941 and the Israeli failure to anticipate an Arab attack in 1973, but the motivations for the deception were different. In the case of Barbarossa, Stalin's advisers feared the political and personal consequences of giving bad news to a tyrannical leader. In the case of Yom Kippur, an intelligence officer's conviction that his own assessment was correct led him to conceal information about recent actions by the adversary and its allies and, more critically, about the failure to carry out orders to implement critical intelligence procedures. The 1941 Soviet case fits the "intelligence to please" pattern, while the 1973 Israeli case fits the "we know best" insubordination pattern.

Our analyses take the form of hypothesis-generating case studies, and our hypotheses require further testing in other cases to validate the role of conscious action in other intelligence failures. At this stage, however, we emphasize three important implications of our study.

First, at the professional level, intelligence officers should recognize that fear of political and personal reprisals and the need to conform to the leader's opinion can play a decisive role in shaping the decision-making process in an adversary's regime. Consequently, when estimating the opposing leader's possible course of action, they should consider the option that the information and advice that the leader receives may encourage him to take what outside observers might deem an irrational action. Stalin's decision to avoid taking the necessary measures despite a high likelihood of a coming German attack is one example. Another example is Saddam's decision, in January 1991, to stand firm against U.S. pressure despite mounting evidence that the United States intended to implement its threat to drive Iraqi forces out of Kuwait with military force, or his belief, even after Operation Iraqi Freedom had started in March 2003, that Baghdad was safe despite U.S. military superiority.

Second, at the policy level, more attention to the damage to the national interest as a result of a conscious action that distorts the intelligence picture

may lead to less tolerance toward such behavior. This relates mainly to the United States, where politicians have rarely or never paid for attempting to influence the intelligence estimate and intelligence officers have tended, sometimes, to yield to such pressures and fix their product according to the consumers' needs. There are sufficient objective obstacles on the road to building up a high-quality intelligence picture, and there is no need to add political obstacles as well.

Third, in terms of scholarly analysis, students of the subject should bear in mind that official investigations tend to mitigate the role of conscious action as a cause for intelligence failure. This was reflected in the Israeli Agranat Report, which avoided reporting on Zeira's action that had intentionally mitigated the value of information indicating a high likelihood of war. In addition, the official American investigations of Iraq's WMD capabilities prior to the war in 2003 concluded that there was no evidence of political pressure on intelligence analysts, while senior analysts admitted after the publication of the official reports that such pressure took place and had an impact.⁹⁰ For obvious reasons, evidence for such behavior is unlikely to be found in official protocols as well. Hence, students of the subject who look for such behavior should use in-depth interviews with the persons involved. Such interviews do not provide a fool-proof way of uncovering underlying motivations, but they nevertheless provide a critical tool for exploring this subject.*

⁹⁰ Pillar, "Intelligence, Politics, and the War in Iraq."

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