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A Failure of Intelligence

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ABSTRACT *Recent events have made the inadequacies of intelligence services in even the most powerful countries glaringly obvious and various causes for these failures have been canvassed. Many of these problems have arisen from a limited understanding of the complexities of each phase of the intelligence cycle as illustrated by cases drawn from a variety of intelligence contexts.*

Keywords: CIA, information dissemination, intelligence, national security, organizational failure.

Like soup, intelligence comes in many varieties. Although Lord Cherwell famously pronounced in the Encyclopaedia Britannica that 'intelligence is of three kinds, human, animal and military',[1] its applications are considerably broader than in the armed forces. It has been long established in national security contexts, with their overtones of espionage and covert activities, but it is increasingly familiar as business or competitive intelligence, social or developmental intelligence, and as criminal intelligence. 'Intelligence' may be defined as a cyclical process by which information, broadly defined, is acquired, processed, evaluated, stored and used as the basis for action. Standard accounts of the intelligence cycle suggest that it begins with a plan for the acquisition of information, continues through its collection, collation, evaluation, analysis and dissemination as intelligence, and ends with feedback from clients as to its usefulness. When treated as unproblematic each phase carries the seeds of intelligence disaster.

The examples discussed below are drawn from the spheres of military and national security intelligence. They touch on only a few of the sources of potential failure. Comparable examples might easily be found in other spheres of intelligence. The lessons are the same.

Failures of Evaluation

Some failures in intelligence arise from an uncritical acceptance of information or data. Evaluation is crucial in successful intelligence work. It has been defined as 'the considered judgement of the accuracy, completeness and inherent

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meaning of an item of information . . . Items will be evaluated by the analyst in accordance with his/her knowledge of the topic, from his/her experience of the behaviour, by comparison with other relevant data, or by some combination of all these criteria'.[2] If neglected it can lead to the *Failure to look a gift horse in the mouth OR A gift horse is sometimes a Trojan horse* phenomenon. Let one example suffice.

In the first years of the Second World War Sir William Stephenson, at that time station chief of the British Secret Intelligence Service in New York, produced a number of forged documents as a means of inveigling the United States into the war on the Allied side. These included a map that purported to show Nazi ambitions to seize and control South America. The map had allegedly been obtained from a German diplomatic courier in Argentina. Roosevelt accepted it as genuine and in his Navy and Total Defense Day address in October 1941 he claimed:

> I have in my possession a secret map, made in Germany by Hitler's government . . . The geographical experts of Berlin have ruthlessly obliterated all the existing boundary lines; they have divided South America into five vassal states, bringing the whole continent under their domination . . . This map, my friends, makes clear the Nazi design not only against South America but against the United States as well.[3]

It might be argued that the President was guilty of naivety in his ready acceptance of this document. He had, after all, been deceived by the British some 23 years before when, as an Assistant Secretary of the Navy, he had been led to believe that it was British derring-do rather than their tapping of the American transatlantic cable which had yielded such useful propaganda as the Zimmermann telegram. The telegram, which disclosed a German plot to lure Mexico into World War I, contributed to the American decision to enter the war. In a striking parallel, Stephenson's spurious map prepared American public opinion for an engagement in hostilities which were subsequently ensured by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

A more Machiavellian interpretation might be that the President had learned from his earlier error and was not in fact deceived in 1941 but used the false intelligence to prosecute a course of action he himself favoured. Were this the case, the moral might be drawn that Roosevelt did not fail the Gift Horse test, but allowed himself to be properly shocked and appalled by Nazi perfidy to best effect.

Failures of Perception

Other kinds of intelligence failure have resulted from the fixed ideas of commanders-in-chief and their deliberate blindness to uncomfortable facts. Somewhat similar results have been achieved by intelligence chiefs more comfortable with conformity than the contestability of ideas. This is the 'It's *my* department' or 'Comrade Stalin knows best' problem. Wilensky cautions that 'in all complex social systems, hierarchy, specialization, and centralization are major sources of distortion and blockage of intelligence'. In fact, the more rigid the hierarchy, the greater is the likelihood of intelligence failure.[4]

In 1941, Stalin had 'the largest, most efficient and best informed intelligence service in the world'.[5] Yet, on the 22 June of that year, an hour and a half after a train had delivered 1,500 tons of grain to Brest Litovsk as part of the Soviet's obligations under the Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact, the Wehrmacht marched east across the same bridge to launch the German blitzkrieg on its alleged ally.

Stalin *had* expected war. As Hughes Wilson so neatly expresses it:

> In the analysis beloved of Marxist–Leninists, a final clash between communism and capitalism was an historic inevitability. Stalin's problem was he was not yet ready for this particular stage in the unfolding of the Hegelian–Marxist dialectic.[6]

However, he needed to buy time to prepare the military forces whose officer class he himself had ruthlessly purged in the previous decade. In the Great Terror of 1937, 75 of the 80 members of the Military Soviet were executed, every commander of every military district, two-thirds of the divisional commanders, half the brigade commanders, and more than 400 of the 456 staff colonels.[7] The army was so gutted that it lost nearly 250,000 men to the much smaller Finnish army (only 200,000 strong) when it invaded Finland in 1939. How could Stalin have ignored the warnings of clear and present danger? Perhaps the denial or suppression of the excellent intelligence available on Hitler's intentions was necessary to prove that the spilling of so much blood was the price of maintaining in power the only leader capable of defeating Fascism. In the 12 months preceding June 1941, Stalin received no fewer than 90 clear warnings of an impending attack, each analysis delivered by a professional intelligence officer. The US Under-Secretary of State had even briefed the Soviet Ambassador on German plans for the attack after having the leaked documents fully vetted by the FBI. None was disseminated or acted upon. As a consequence the Soviet Union lost 4 million soldiers, 14,000 aircraft, 20,000 guns and 17,000 tanks by December of that year.

The intelligence services had also enjoyed Stalin's attentions during the Great Terror. Many intelligence experts and diplomats had been liquidated or sent to the gulags, leaving few independent advisors in place, and those few understandably discreet. There was no loyal opposition or bureaucratic entity to offer a counter-interpretation of events to those blinded by paranoia, ideology or even by the legacy of two decades of capitalist plots to bring down the Soviet Union. The head of Soviet military intelligence, General Golikov, occupied the chair of seven previous incumbents who had been shot on Stalin's orders. His two immediate successors were also shot. Golikov was prudent enough not to trouble his master with fact contrary to prejudice and treated warnings of the German invasion as English provocations. A disaster for his country was less so for the General. He died in his bed in 1980.

It should be noted that paranoia distorts reality but is not necessarily irrational. Stalin's view that Britain and France were dragging their feet on his proposed triple alliance against Germany was soundly based and the Munich agreement only confirmed his view that the real intention was to collude with the aggressor against Russia. Unfortunately those with the experience to predict the more likely course of events in England were dead or silenced and Stalin drew the wrong conclusions, just as Hitler, lacking an intimate knowledge of English university culture, had drawn the wrong conclusions in the 1930s from the notorious Oxford Union resolution that 'This Union declines to fight for King and Country'.

It would not do for more democratic regimes than Stalin's Russia or Hitler's Germany to assume that they are immune from the temptation to tell politicians what they want to hear. In 1982, Robert M. Gates became head of the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence and ended (in the name of efficiency and to inhibit 'intellectual brawls') a tradition of having analyses produced by internally competing intelligence units. He unified the chain of command to give the same officers who reviewed and processed analysts' draft papers responsibility for judging their performance, recommending promotion or levying sanctions. 'This meant that senior reviewers could enforce their [intelligence] product content preferences through rewards or sanctions via their other roles as managers.'[8] As a consequence, a bizarre mirror image of the Kremlin was created in the heart of the American civil service:

> Office directors [tried] to figure out what Gates wanted, and subordinate managers and analysts [tried] to discern not only what Gates wanted, but what each of their superiors thought their bosses thought [Gates] wanted. On issues about which Gates showed major interest, this became a dominant analytic pursuit.[9]

New and pliable office directors were appointed. Analysts were treated as their research assistants, rather than as autonomous professionals. Their local knowledge was discounted. ('Local knowledge' as its name suggests is the intimate knowledge and understanding of a particular geographical area or topic. It is acquired by experts over time by such means as formal study, visits to the area, developing an acquaintance with fellow experts and engaging local people at all levels in conversation wherever possible.)

They became reluctant to draw unpopular conclusions ('scared rabbits' was one term applied) or counter the Director's views. In a striking similarity to Soviet practice, those deemed 'uncooperative' were subjected to psychiatric assessment or were removed and replaced by 'Gates clones' or 'hired pens'. It is not surprising that the quality of intelligence suffered as independent spirits left the Agency or migrated internally. So serious was the loss of morale that one former analyst has argued that 'bureaucratic alienation' should be added to the list of money, love, ideology and revenge as motive for treason.[10]

However, if attempts to over-control the workings of intelligence lead to problems, so does lack of proper oversight. The obverse of the previous problem is the '*Not* my department' approach to intelligence.

Failure of Organisation

The advantages conferred by the deniability of intelligence embarrassments and by leaving intelligence operations in the hands of the professionals are lost when the professionals, left to their own devices, allow personal prejudices and antipathies to negate the benefits they might otherwise have obtained. An egregious example of effective intelligence operations being impeded by professional jealousies occurred in the interpretations of signals intelligence—Sigint—by the US military in 1941.

The Japanese 'Purple' cipher had been broken in September of that year but this had only exacerbated existing interservice rivalries. To pacify the belligerent

parties in the various services, the practice was adopted, and sanctioned by the President, of having intercepted Japanese traffic decrypted by military cryptanalysts on odd dates and by naval cryptanalysts on even dates of the month. Even more extraordinarily, Roosevelt received decrypted Japanese diplomatic traffic from his naval aide in odd months and from his military aide in even months. However, there was no arrangement in place for supplying him with signals intelligence on weekday evenings or on Sundays.

The division of labour had tragic consequences when, in the early morning of Saturday 6 December 1941, a Navy listening-station picked up part of the Japanese message rejecting the American terms for averting hostilities. The information was forwarded to the Navy Office in Washington but, because the 6th was an even date, the intercepts had to be passed to Army intelligence. However, the civilian staff of the Military Signal Intelligence Service stopped work at midday on Saturdays and consequently military pride had to be swallowed and Navy help sought while a civilian night shift was hastily called together to process the material until midnight when the Navy officially resumed intelligence responsibility. Meanwhile the Japanese were closing in on Pearl Harbor.

Although reforms were put in place after this debacle, the rivalries persisted. In the absence of strong direction from above, US Army and Navy intelligence sections cooperated more closely with the British than with each other, and important signals intelligence was withheld from the analysts of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).[11]

On occasion, positive hostility from above to intelligence operations and agencies can inhibit the effective dissemination of intelligence. Lyndon Johnson is said to have complained:

> Let me tell you about these intelligence guys. When I was growing up in Texas, we had a cow named Bessie. I'd go out early and milk her. I'd get her in the stanchion, seat myself and squeeze out a pail of fresh milk. One day I'd worked hard and gotten a full pail of milk, but I wasn't paying attention, and old Bessie swung her shit-smeared tail through that bucket of milk. Now, you know, that's what these intelligence guys do. You work hard and get a good program or policy going, and they swing a shit-smeared tail through it.[12]

Richard Nixon held a similarly jaundiced view, albeit more conservatively expressed. He told Henry Kissinger that the CIA was a group of Ivy League liberals who had always opposed him politically and had conspired to ensure that John Kennedy defeated him in the 1960 election.[13] (Similarly, Johnson believed that the CIA had cost him the Democratic nomination at that time.)

On the other hand, overconfidence in an intelligence agency can lead to disaster by disarming the necessary client scepticism. Partly because Kennedy was so impressed by the intelligence support given by the CIA and the imagery intelligence (Imint) of the National Photographic Interpretation Centre during the Eisenhower years he sanctioned the doomed Bay of Pigs invasion. As Robert Gates, then Director of Central Intelligence, argued:

> Presidents expect that, for what they spend on intelligence, the product should be able to predict coups, upheavals, riots, intentions, military moves and the like with accuracy.[14]

Thus, agencies may become victims of their own success and succumb to the temptation to claim a certainty about their conclusions that cannot be justified.

Uncertainty is greatest in the area of the target's intentions. How can one know what information is required when one does not know of what one is ignorant? Are existing assumptions sufficiently well founded, or is there a danger of a closed perspective blinding one to new features of the state or group under examination? In such cases, one could suffer from the worst kind of ignorance, that of not knowing that one *is* ignorant. This problem has been largely unaddressed in the intelligence literature, and has resulted in the misallocation of personal and organisational resources as a consequence of over-investment in an espoused diplomatic position.

An ongoing problem in intelligence work, therefore, is that of knowing of the existence of all relevant information and managing it effectively. Locating and identifying relevant information from the universe of potentially useful information external to the organisation and attempting to fit it in a meaningful pattern is not easy.[15] Some sources, indeed, may be not so much unknown as purposely ignored. McDowell has described the 'official data only syndrome', which manifests itself in those intelligence units where unofficial sources are regarded with varying degrees of doubt, disquiet and suspicion.[16] This problem arises not only from the limitations of an analyst's own worldview, but from the routines and norms of the intelligence agency itself and from standard civil service procedures.

Moreover, what of data that is not purposely collected? In Allee's words, 'most data seeps in under the doors, slips around through the phone wires, whispers through the hallways, or is picked up like a virus around convention halls and conferences. This kind of data receives very little attention, yet it comprises the bulk of the sensing, scanning and perceiving activities of [an] enterprise'.[17] It may have little immediate applicability to decision making, but it is nevertheless acquired, in circumstances where its relevance to future situations cannot be exactly identified.[18] Although he was referring specifically to the operations of the British Scientific Intelligence Service during the Second World War, R. V. Jones's catalogue of the various ways in which information can 'leak' from a source is also applicable to national security intelligence.[19] He lists:

- accidental indiscretions;
- indiscretions encouraged by alcohol and/or mistresses. (Jones comments somewhat ambiguously 'The results obtained by these methods are all that can be expected'[20]);
- information from the disaffected;
- information that cannot be kept secret because it is a consequence of contact with the enemy.

Jones has described the consequences of such flows of miscellaneous information into an intelligence unit.[21] The more diverse and specialised the nature of the data, the more sophisticated and specialised the analysis, and the analyst. He describes this as 'input-by-source and output-by-subject'. It requires organisational structures which facilitate the flow of data from those who first acquire it to those who will analyse it, and a reverse process of guidance from analysts to collectors. It is not to be expected that the Gates regime facilitated such a flow. Nor are the assumptions of information sharing and the use of the innocent term 'guidance' always expressive of the actual power relationship between analyst and client. An analyst

may exert influence, particularly when analyst and client have known each other for some time and the analyst's competence has, in the past, proved helpful to the client, but the analyst cannot hope to implement policy. This is an interesting instance of knowledge not being synonymous with power.

Failure in Selection of Sources

Furthermore, there are hidden influences on the kinds of sources selected for intelligence analysis. One's choice of sources is shaped by one's pre-existing knowledge base, particularly by one's level of formal education and position within organisational communication structures.[22] As Hayek has maintained, knowledge within a social system is dispersed, not simply because all knowledge cannot be contained within a single mind, but because the individual mind cannot identify in advance what kind of practical knowledge will be relevant.[23] Even supposing it were possible to identify likely sources, at what stage would it be cost effective to stop searching? ('The problem is often not in deciding to seek information, but on deciding when to stop.'[24]) Is it not likely that the information most immediately available is that held in formal information systems which offer at best a subset of the universe of relevant information, namely that which is highly codified, and which is not necessarily the most significant in a particular investigation? Does the combination of a need for speed, and the expense in terms of time and effort of seeking out and processing non-codified information, mean that less costly information transfer rather than information transactions will be preferred? In other words, a first attempt is likely to be made to satisfy the need with data, rather than engage in the messier process of exchanging information with other people. Is one likely to take a chance on unconventional data when the reward systems canonise a narrow range of interpretative activities and schemas?

In the trade-off between exploitation of existing knowledge (that is, the 'refinement and extension of existing competences, technologies and paradigms') and exploration for new and possibly confronting information, the 'positive, proximate and predictable' returns of the former will nearly always be more attractive than the 'uncertain, distant, and often negative' returns of the latter.[25] Organisations, like individuals, are a collection of skills and accumulated information. Like individuals, they may find it cheaper to pursue those information channels that are already connected to these skills and knowledge.[26] Johnson's cynical—or realistic—observation that, even if managers base decisions on inadequate information, they can control both the outcome of the decision (by directing enough resources to *make* the solution work) and the way that outcome is interpreted, seems particularly applicable to the Gates era CIA.

Failure to Identify the Right Target for Intelligence Operations

Major intelligence failures can occur when the target—or some aspect of the target's behaviour—is totally novel and outside the normal frame of reference of the intelligence unit.[27] The origins of this difficulty lie, at least partly, in the fact that the process of target identification cannot be completely codified. It involves as much art as science in the exercise of sensitivity to novelty and imminent change in the environment.[28] Even the process of developing a data/information collection plan is inherently political; that is to say, there are questions to be resolved as to who has authority to define the topic; whether any aspects of the

topic are sensitive or 'out of bounds'; what resources are made available; what authority the intelligence professional has to compel disclosure of relevant information; and whether some conclusions are unacceptable *a priori*. In a bureaucratic and authoritarian milieu, any challenges to the received truths of policy which emerge from disinterested analysis are unlikely to be encouraged; challenges to the mental models of the environment held by management will almost certainly engender resistance.[29] Indeed, the whole enterprise may be a symbolic, rather than actual quest for enlightenment. In a questioning environment, there is the opportunity to challenge the proposed plan. In a different environment, existing biases and errors may be reinforced by those who have bought into the particular interpretation of the intelligence problem embodied in the collection plan. In the latter case the danger is amplified by the fact that those aspects of the environment which are the objects of the search for information are shaped by cultural models, defined by D'Andrade as 'a cognitive schema that is intersubjectively shared by a social group'.[30] Because the cultural model is shared, its assumptions go unquestioned because they are never made explicit.

The US intelligence community failed to predict the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk in Cambodia in 1970—'What the hell do those clowns do out there in Langley?' Nixon is reported to have asked[31]—as well as the possible consequences of the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1978 and the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Perhaps the greatest blow to the credibility of the intelligence agencies was the failure to foresee the collapse of the Soviet Union. President Reagan's Secretary of State, George Schulz, complained:

> The CIA . . . had been unable to perceive that change was coming in the Soviet Union. When Gorbachev first appeared at the helm, the CIA said he was 'just talk', just another Soviet attempt to deceive us. As that line became increasingly untenable, the CIA changed its tune: Gorbachev was serious about change, but the Soviet Union had a powerfully entrenched and largely successful system that was incapable of being changed: so Gorbachev would fail in his attempt to change it. When it became evident that the Soviet Union was, in fact, changing the CIA line was that the change wouldn't really make a difference.[32]

Much of the material which might have indicated the true state of Soviet affairs, and the state of the Soviet economy in particular, had been in the public domain for years, but this open source information had been largely neglected as being slow to process, yielding less certainty of interpretation and lacking the glamour of the fruits of covert operations and high technology:

> Those officers who have patiently absorbed reams of unclassified materials have often been far ahead of the curve in discerning new trends because their immersion in such evidence has given them a sophisticated feel for the subject at hand. It is no surprise that over the years some of the analysts with the most acute sense of feel have been historians—one of the best [has] been an expert on Byzantium, not at all irrelevant for our times.[33]

In this connection, it is worth noting that the growth of militant Islam and its implications for the balance of power have been an object of concern for at least the past 20 years, even if such fears have routinely been discounted by assumptions

about Arab disunity and Arab capacities that may owe more to unacknowledged racism than to analysis. Attention might have been paid to the articles on 'Islamic warriors' and 'A new strain of terrorism' which appeared in the *Washington Post* on 3 August 1993, but if such articles were noticed by analysts, they appear not to have affected policy.

Failure of Dissemination

The qualified conclusions of such analysts may be unwelcome to policy makers and to politicians seeking evidence to validate an espoused position. 'All kinds of forces go into the making of policy, not excluding timidity, ambition, hubris, misunderstandings, budgetary ploys, and regard for how this or that policy will play in Peoria.'[34] Intelligence is therefore sought to sanction, not inform, policy. Even fair-minded clients may resent having their own expert knowledge challenged by unknown analysts and hence reject their conclusions. Moreover, such conclusions drawing on open sources and human interpretation lack the technological halo of signals and imaging intelligence, and can be more easily contested and discounted. The bias towards technology may be expected to continue, given the enthusiasm for intelligent agent software which will mine databases of facts for warning or estimative intelligence available for the policymaker to read at will.[35] This is an extraordinary misunderstanding of the intelligence function which is intended to save the decision maker from negotiating a morass of unprocessed data. Moreover, it would deny the decision maker access to the tacit knowledge implicit in the analytical products available on the database.

One of the most intractable problems in intelligence is that of persuading the members of a hierarchical organisation—an organisation likely to both attract and mould conventional and conformist people—to accept intelligence which suggests an unconventional approach to a case or a different perspective on the evidence. Furthermore, intelligence products such as the analysts' reports must compete for the attention of their presumed consumers. As Simon has noted, information consumes the attention of its recipients.[36] In the information-rich and complex environment of a department of state, intelligence products have to compete with other pressing demands for time and consideration. They demand that the client *engage* with them, yet most impersonal information (that is, delivered via print or online) is encountered at the lowest level of the engagement hierarchy of information, where it may be passively viewed rather than discussed or acted upon.[37] Although intelligence staff may try to counter this detachment or disinterest by enlivening their reports with sophisticated graphics, or by sparkling oral presentations which capitalise on their perceived objectivity and expertise, the fact remains that they are competing for limited attention. Moreover, they themselves may have neither the time nor the resources to format or present intelligence in these novel ways. Indeed, it has been estimated that it can take three or four times as long to design these kinds of presentation.[38]

More to the point, the special kind of information that is intelligence is costly to the recipient, not just in terms of attention but also in terms of the threat it poses to the status quo, the existing mental model of how things are. There is a paradox here, for an intelligence unit is potentially a mechanism for *conserving* the attention of its clients. The functions of an intelligence unit are to index and store information on receipt from the external environment and to analyse, draw

inferences from and summarise this information, then to index and store its analytical products for use by its clients:

> The purpose of the [intelligence unit] . . . is not to supply [the client unit] with information but to *buffer* it from the over rich environment of information in which it swims. Information does not have to be attended to (*now*) just because it exists in the environment. Designing an intelligence system means deciding: when to gather information (much of it will be preserved indefinitely in the environment if we do not want to harvest it now); where and in what form to store it; how to rework and condense it; how to index and give access to it; and *when and on whose initiative to communicate it to others* (emphasis not in original).[39]

The frequently unspoken rationale for communicating intelligence is that it gives decision-makers a more accurate picture of the world so that they can determine the most appropriate courses to pursue. The rationale rests on the questionable assumption that decision-making is solely a matter of reason. However, decision-making is of different kinds. Will the consumers of intelligence use it to make a choice of action based on alternative outcomes, or will they follow an organisational pattern of response to particular stimuli (that is, a recipe)? Do decision-makers look for clarity and consistency in their decisions or seek to benefit from ambiguity and equivocality? Is their decision-making *instrumental* in solving a problem, or *interpretive* in attempting to understand it, that is, is decision-making not so much an 'action factory' as a 'meaning factory'?[40] If the latter case is true, then the role of intelligence in political decision-making is really one of helping their clients to create a shared picture or story about a situation and how it might be resolved—that is, to operate almost as a collective mind.[41] Finally, is the decision to be an outcome of a choice by autonomous actors, or will it result from the interplay between those actors and the organisational and social environment?[42]

It would serve intelligence professionals well to know the nature of the decision-making their products serve, if, indeed, it is a decision-making process they do serve. (After all, intelligence can also comprise straightforward factual data which describes a situation or event or confirms other data, or it can serve to motivate or develop personal relationships.) It has been asserted that decision-makers want information that is concrete and specific; that is couched in terms of certainties rather than probabilities, and they prefer to seek confirmatory information rather than that which challenges an accepted position.[43] What are the chances for acceptance of an intelligence product which is none of these things? Yet decision-makers also have some basis for scepticism:

> Mindsets are not the monopoly of decision makers; the latter can justly hold those intelligence inputs at arms length that seem to reflect long held, dug-in lines of analytic argument.[44]

Even the quality and potential usefulness of intelligence products do not guarantee their acceptance. The location of the intelligence unit within an organisation, a successful track record and the presence of powerful patrons can be crucial in determining how much attention is paid to its products and how justifiable its conclusions are deemed to be. If it is organisational policy to promote the most effective staff out of the intelligence unit, or they have removed

themselves out of disillusion, those remaining may be viewed as less competent or may believe their careers to have stalled. These beliefs have consequences for the perceived or actual quality of intelligence products. Particularly in organisations where the promotion ladder can be scaled by only a few employees, those of middle rank—the 'non-mobile'—may form defensive cliques the members of which have an interest in restricting information in order to prevent change or thwart more successful colleagues, or in passing on only that information which furthers their ambitions.[45] Thus the legitimacy accorded to an intelligence product may rest on the perceived professional expertise of the intelligence professionals who created it, but it is equally possible that their political skills in 'selling' it are just as important in gaining its acceptance.

To the degree that politics and perceived self-interest inhibit the effective diffusion of intelligence, they limit two of the characteristics of the 'competence endowment' of the organisation, namely efficiency in identifying mistakes and effectiveness in correcting mistakes. This presumes a willingness to admit mistakes, of course, and a forgiving organisational culture in which the acknowledgement of error incurs no major penalties. In intelligence environments such as those described above it is unlikely that knowledge gained during the intelligence process will be transferred so as to enable organisational learning.

Finally, the reader may have noted that all these examples of intelligence inadequacy and outright incompetence are safely in the past. For very good reason.

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43. March, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 20. In this connection one must note the extraordinary episode in late 2000, in which the Office of National Assessments presented to the Australian Government (then fighting an election on the issue of illegal immigrants) an intelligence product which supported the Government's claim that a boatload of such persons had thrown their children overboard in order to force their rescue by Australian defence personnel. This 'analysis' was subsequently found to have been based on the statements of government ministers themselves. One may surmise the motivation of those involved.
44. Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
45. Wilensky, *op. cit.*, p. 45.