

Five Decades of Ignoring Our Own Advice: Why Inertia Trumps Reform

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“NOT INDIGESTION BUT GLUTTONY”

For an entity that is supposed to be engaged in secret activities, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is a remarkably well-studied institution. Michael Warner and J. Kenneth McDonald, in their 2005 study, *US Intelligence Community Reform Studies Since 1947*,¹ discuss fourteen different studies, while a CIA internal report from 1974,² once classified top secret but now declassified, lists seventeen studies, only one of which overlaps with the Warner/McDonald list (in part because that second set only covers the period 1960 to 1974). There is also the ever-lengthening list of books and monographs by academics, policymakers, and CIA analysts (former or active) that address the perceived or argued shortcomings of the intelligence community in general and the CIA in particular. Indeed, even by 1958, when Harry Howe Ransom published *Central Intelligence and National Security*, one of the first informed studies of the CIA, he could with full justice write that the “CIA has been intensely, repeatedly, and adequately investigated by various special commissions.”³

1. Michael Warner and J. Kenneth McDonald, *US Intelligence Community Reform Studies Since 1947* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, April 2005). <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/US%20Intelligence%20Community%20Reform%20Studies%20Since%201947.pdf>.

2. CIA, “An Historical Review of Studies of the Intelligence Community for the Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy” (Langley, VA: December 1974, document TS-206439-74, declassified February 27, 2003). <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB144/document%208.pdf>.

3. Harry Howe Ransom, *Central Intelligence and National Security* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 150.

The contours of diplomatic engagement are changing rapidly, as are the environments in which diplomacy is crafted, honed, and practiced. New media have changed the pace and content of political awareness and provided new tools for diplomacy.

Every global issue now tests the assumptions and practices of traditional diplomacy. Non-state actors—whether benign or malign, constructive or disruptive—now play increasingly important roles in the conduct of international politics and lead us to think differently about global development, conflict, and reconciliation.

These issues, conditions, and actors are helping to refine, and perhaps redefine, what diplomacy means, how it is conducted, and how we examine the new terrain of diplomacy.

Most of these various studies are variations on the theme of “surprise”—event X occurred and came as a surprise to the intelligence community, the policymakers, or both. Looking back through the various histories and commentaries, one finds not only such famous “surprises” as the near-defeat of General Douglas MacArthur in 1950 in Korea or the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis (or, to take a more recent example, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001) but also “surprises,” the dimensions and possible consequences of which are now forgotten—what, for example, was at stake with the 1955 “Austrian peace treaty” (with the Soviet Union), the signing of which “caught just about everyone by surprise” and so was brought forward by Richard Shryock in his 1964 article in *Studies in Intelligence*⁴ as an indictment of the (then) current state of Sovietology? Although even General MacArthur himself had argued in testimony before the Senate that “I don’t see how it would have been humanly possible . . . to predict an attack” such as that which had overrun his positions, “any more than you could predict such an attack as took place at Pearl Harbor,”⁵ the much more common reaction to these surprises was to see them as “intelligence failures.” The remarks made by Senator Mike Mansfield just a few years after MacArthur’s testimony, that the “CIA, the National Security Council, and all our intelligence arms have been delinquent” because “we were caught by surprise in Poland, caught by surprise in Hungary, caught by surprise in the Middle East”⁶ are representative of the criticisms that have been made of the CIA and the intelligence community (IC) over the past sixty-five years.

As noted, most of those “failures” prompted studies and review, followed by recommendations. Although some of the means to prevent future “failures” suggested in those various studies were structural or bureaucratic—ought the CIA to be solely a coordinating body, as the Dulles Report argued

4. Richard Shryock, “For An Eclectic Sovietology,” *Studies in Intelligence* 8: 1 (Winter 1964).

5. As quoted in Ransom, *Central Intelligence*, p. 189.

6. *New York Times*, “Manfield Calls Intelligence Lax,” November 18, 1956.

in 1949, rather than “merely another intelligence agency,” or should the director of Central Intelligence (DCI) be given cabinet-level status as director of a renamed Foreign Intelligence Agency, with “direct access to the Oval Office,” as the Murphy Commission argued in 1975?⁷—most of the recommendations for reform made over the years have concerned the collection and exploitation of information. The complaints leveled at the IC might at first seem contradictory—the Kirkpatrick Joint Study Group in 1960 doubted whether the “flow of information is now sufficient to provide the desirable warning and security of command” and, even if it is, whether “it will not suddenly dry up sometime in the future,”⁸ while the CIA’s 1974 “study of studies” quotes the Cunningham Report, delivered in 1966 and apparently not yet declassified, charged the opposite, that “the CIA was collecting too much information and that, failing to get important information, it was flooding the system with secondary material,” thus “degrading production, making recognition of significant information more difficult in the mass of the trivial.”⁹ An even stronger attack on the growing volume of collected information was made in 1971 by James Schlesinger—who at the time was deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget and so was especially concerned with cost efficiency—when he charged that “the growth in raw intelligence . . . has come to serve as a proxy for improved analysis, inference, and estimation.”

The solution to this apparent paradox, hinted at in the 1974 CIA report (“in the absence of consumer guidance as to the most important matters, analysts tend to cover all bets by issuing requirements for much more information than was likely to be needed, or in fact could ever be used”¹⁰), became explicit in the 1976 Church Committee report. This report noted that the “fear of being accused of an ‘intelligence failure’” makes analysts and policymakers alike feel “that they *have* to cover every

7. Warner and McDonald, *US Intelligence Community Reform Studies*, pp. 9, 25.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

9. CIA, “An Historical Review,” p. D2.

10. CIA, “An Historical Review,” p. iii.

possible topic, with little regard for its relevancy to U.S. foreign policy interests.”¹¹ The Schlesinger Report said much the same thing in slightly different words, writing that “it has become commonplace to translate product criticism into demands for enlarged collection efforts”—an approach that was essentially repeated in February 2011, when the then director of the CIA Leon Panetta told Congress that his organization’s response to the charge of failure to “connect the dots” of regime change in Tunisia and Egypt would be to pay “much more attention . . . to how the Internet and social media can spark and affect protest movements . . . [despite] the vast new piles of data that experts must pore over.”¹² As Schlesinger had charged four decades earlier, in a report prepared under his direction at the Office of Management and Budget, whenever there is a perceived intelligence failure the stock response is to collect yet more data; in Schlesinger’s words, there is “a strong presumption . . . that additional data collection rather than improved analysis will provide the answer to particular intelligence problems.”¹³ The point had been made even more succinctly, however, in 1966, when the Cunningham Report noted that “the [intelligence] community’s disease was not indigestion but gluttony.”¹⁴

THE SENTINEL DOING JIGSAWS

This pattern of repeated accusations of failure to “connect the dots” followed by promises to, in effect, collect even more dots is deeply puzzling, given that the inadequacy of the ultra-high-

11. United States Senate, *Foreign and Military Intelligence: Book 1: Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities* (Washington, DC: April 26, 1976, p. 275. Also known as the Church Report.

12. Yahoo News, “After Egypt, top U.S. spies promise to do better,” February 16, 2011. http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20110216/pl_nm/us_usa_intelligence.

13. Office of Management and Budget, “A Review of the Intelligence Community” (Washington, DC: March 10, 1971), p. 11. Later, this report became known as the Schlesinger Report. <http://www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/review1971.pdf>.

14. CIA, “An Historical Review,” p. G-1.

volume collection systems—which Assistant Director of National Intelligence Thomas Fingar characterized as “vacuum cleaners on steroids”¹⁵—had been pointed out repeatedly since at least the time of the Cunningham Report. The Schlesinger Report suggested that the primary reason for this persistent adherence to a failed business model is bureaucratic: “Each organization sees the maintenance and expansion of its collection capabilities as the principal route to survival and strength with the community.”¹⁶ Certainly the classic studies of bureaucratic behavior make this a credible possibility—Morton Halperin argued, for example in 1974, that “[a]n organization favors policies and strategies which its members believe will make the organization as they define it more important,” and “[a]n organization struggles hardest for the capabilities which it views as necessary to the essence of the organization, [seeking] autonomy and funds to pursue the necessary capabilities and missions.” As a result, “An organization will accept new functions only if it believes that to refuse to do so would be to jeopardize its position with senior officials or if it believes that the new function will bring in more funds and give the organizations greatest scope to pursue its ‘own’ activities.”¹⁷ James Schlesinger, who by then had become former director of Central Intelligence, floated another possible explanation for the continued devotion to this failed business model, when he noted that policymakers do not like to accept blame for “their failures or foul-ups,” making “Intelligence and the Intelligence Community . . . the handiest of scapegoats.”¹⁸

Without rejecting the viability of either of those possible explanations, it is also possible to posit an epistemological ex-

15. Thomas Fingar, “Reducing Uncertainty: Intelligence and National Security” (speech given at Stanford University, October 21, 2009). http://iis-db.stanford.edu/evnts/5859/lecture_text.pdf.

16. Office of Management and Budget, “A Review of the Intelligence Community,” p. 11.

17. Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1974), pp. 39–40.

18. James Schlesinger, Remarks, in Gerald K. Haines and Robert E. Leggett, *Watching the Bear: Essays on CIA's Analysis of the Soviet Union* (Washington, DC: CIA, Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2003), p. 254.

planation for the stubborn persistence with which the CIA and the IC have continued to believe that (in Schlesinger's words) "additional data collection rather than improved analysis" is the proper response to accusations of intelligence failure. The expectation that the CIA should be equally good at both "collecting dots" and "connecting dots" was hard baked into the organization from the beginning. As Harry Ransom wrote in his 1959 study, the provision of "strategic intelligence" was one of the CIA's three main tasks, which meant telling policymakers "the capabilities, vulnerabilities, and intentions of foreign nations."¹⁹ The CIA's public webpage uses virtually the same words today, asserting that the organization carries out its mission by "collecting information that reveals the plans, intentions and capabilities of our adversaries."²⁰ The expectation that the CIA should do so is fair enough, given that the organization has allowed itself to be regarded as "the nation's first line of defense,"²¹ or what H.L. Stimson called "a sentinel on duty at all times."²²

The problem that has persistently arisen, however, is that describing the "capabilities" of a foreign actor is essentially a data problem, requiring the study of the present, while describing the "intentions" of such an actor requires extrapolating those capabilities into the future. With the possible exception of the 1960 Kirkpatrick Report, mentioned above, none of the critical reports point to a lack of data, of "insufficient dots," as the cause of an intelligence surprise. Rather, the criticisms overwhelmingly are of the way in which those various "dots" have—or more precisely, have *not*—been "connected." Even in 1966, the Cunningham Report had cited as a fundamental weakness that the first response to any intelligence question was to increase collection, in the hopes that "that one little scrap might be the missing piece," the logic driving what it

19. Ransom, *Central Intelligence*, p. 12.

20. <https://www.cia.gov/about-cia/cia-vision-mission-values/index.html>.

21. *Ibid.*

22. As quoted in Ransom, *Central Intelligence*, p. 57.

called “the jigsaw theory of intelligence.”²³

The jigsaw metaphor for the way in which data accumulation is supposed to become transformed into understanding is an important indicator of the assumptions that analysts and policymakers alike appear to have made about the nature of reality. A jigsaw puzzle has one—and only one—correct solution, which is derived from the proper arrangement of the puzzle bits that make up that puzzle. For all that the Cunningham Report was critical of the jigsaw approach to intelligence, the authors’ assertion that there is some quality inherent in the data itself that would make it possible for collectors to gather *only* the bits necessary to solve a given puzzle, and so disregard all the “secondary material” with which, the report charged, “[the] CIA was flooding the system, degrading production, making the recognition of significant material more difficult in the mass of the trivial” suggests a fundamentally Platonic view of reality.

Probably the most straightforward statement of intellectual faith in such an understanding of reality is that made by Sherman Kent in his book, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, which in many ways is the “foundation document” of the present IC. What intelligence analysts are to describe for policymakers, Kent wrote, is the “objective situation.” What he meant by this, he explained in a footnote, was “the situation as it exists in the understanding of some hypothetical omniscient Being . . . the situation stripped of the subjective characteristics with which a prejudiced human observer is almost certain to endow it.”²⁴ There can be little doubt that Kent had a Platonic conception of “real reality” in mind as he wrote, given that the only work by another author that Kent quoted at any length was Walter Lippmann’s work of 1922, *Public Opinion*. What Kent chose to quote was Lippmann’s argument for “intelligence officials,” a self-policing group of faculty-like researchers who, Lippmann proposed, should be attached permanently

23. As quoted in United States Senate, *Foreign and Military Intelligence*, pp. 274–275.

24. Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 41–42.

to each of the U.S. cabinet offices as repositories of knowledge and guardians against misconceptions that might arise from the incorrect “pictures in their minds” that less educated policy-makers might have formed about the world. Lippmann’s own belief in the Platonic universe is signaled unambiguously when he prefaces his book with the Allegory of the Cave passage from Plato’s *Republic*.

THE INTEL CYCLE—BORN IN NINETEENTH CENTURY GERMANY

Neither *Public Opinion* nor *Strategic Intelligence* explains, though, how data might be transformed into insight. For Kent, at least, that explanation had already been offered in his book *Writing History*, published as a how-to guide for university students in 1941.²⁵ Although most of the book is concerned with such mechanics as writing style and note-taking, Kent begins his volume with an explanation of what history is and why it is important. In Kent’s view, the primary value of history lies precisely in the guidance it provides for coping with the future. As he wrote, “Knowledge of things said and done—notice the past tense [Kent’s interpolation]—is a knowledge which not merely sees us through the trivial decisions of the moment, but also stands by in the far more important times of personal or public crisis.” The purpose of writing history, Kent implies, is to search for constant laws or principles underlying recurrent situations or events; a student who “makes no effort to relate [his chosen subject] to his own larger world” is not writing history but rather is engaged in “mere antiquarianism.”

The key to doing history properly is to do it “systematically”—the process for which Kent explains by citing the German historian Ernst Bernheim, whose works have apparently never been translated into English.²⁶ By the accounts of others

25. Sherman Kent, *Writing History* (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co, 1941).

26. The book Kent cites, *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode und der Geschichtsphilosophie*, was first published in 1889 and was subsequently republished in five further editions, the last of which appeared in 1908—the one to which Kent refers.

who have written about him, Bernheim was a firm adherent of the view that history is a true science—“the science which investigates and exhibits the temporally and spatially delimited facts of the development of mankind in their (singular as well as typical and collective) activities as social beings, in the correlation of psycho-physical causality,” according to a quotation attributed to him.²⁷ That “psycho-physical causality” is derived from a process that Kent cites as the model that anyone wishing to write history should follow. Bernheim argues that understanding history has four steps, all of which Kent quotes in the original German before explaining in English afterwards:²⁸

1. Heuristik, the gathering of historical evidence;
2. Kritik, the evaluating of this evidence;
3. Auffassung, the moment of comprehending the true meaning of the evaluated evidence; and
4. Darstellung, the presentation of the new idea in terms of the evaluated evidence.

What Bernheim is describing is startlingly similar to what we today would call “the intelligence cycle.” The “collection” portion of the cycle corresponds precisely to the *Heuristik*, while the “processing” portion fits well with Bernheim’s *Kritik*—people have written, for example, of Bernheim’s attempts to identify the *falschung*²⁹ in history in a way that sounds very like an attempt to separate “signal and noise.” Bernheim was a strong believer in a difference between “remains,” by which he meant physical objects that “testify to the factuality of the occurrence,” and “tradition,” meaning “the occurrence as it was

27. Patrick Kelly, “The Methodology of Ernst Bernheim and Legal History.” <http://www.scribd.com/doc/20021802/The-Methodology-of-Ernst-Bernheim-and-Legal-History-Patrick-Kelly>. I have no German and so cannot say whether this barely comprehensible style belongs to Bernheim or to the translator.

28. Taken from Kent, *Writing History*, p. 6.

29. Timothy Barnes, “Falschung and Forgery,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 44: 4 (4th Qtr., 1995): pp. 497–500. See also Susan Grigg, “Archival Practice and the Foundations of Historical Method,” *The Journal of American History* 78: 1 (June, 1991): 228–239.

interpreted by someone,” which was limited both by the interpreter’s ability to understand the occurrence and also the desire or willingness to report it.³⁰ The duty of the historian, according to Bernheim, is to rely upon the physical evidence to clarify the accumulated errors and omissions that may have accrued, in order to achieve that moment of “*Auffassung*,” or comprehension of “true meaning.” *Darstellung*, of course, corresponds to the dissemination portion of the cycle, which is the point at which the intelligence process results in (in the words of the CIA’s mission statement) “timely analysis that provides insight, warning and opportunity to the President and decision-makers.”

The most illuminating similarity, however, is the correlation between *Auffassung* and analysis. Bernheim broke the process of *Auffassung* into a hierarchy of tasks: “interpretation”; “combination”; “reproduction and imagination”; and “comprehension of the general factors,” which further broke down into understanding “the physical factors,” the “individual-psychological factors,” the “social-psychological factors,” and the “cultural factors.” Although both complex and mechanical, the process that Bernheim envisioned had as its goal the linking of discrete pieces of information into patterns. As Bernheim wrote, this means “to restore from separate incoherently given data as from scattered points the connecting line, creating something previously not directly given.” This ability to plot a line from disparate points is close to “*Phantasie*” (not translated, but by context apparently used in a way that approximates “imagination”), but “it differs significantly from the *Phantasie* thus, that it wants to create nothing new, but seeks merely to restore to some extent the extinguished connecting lines.” It does this by being “strictly bound to the actual given data of the historical tradition as well as the actual empirical analogies of the human events in general and of historical events in the particular case.” Importantly, it is precisely the *quantity* of data that protects the process of *Auffassung* from error and subjectivity. Bernheim wrote that “for true certainty” about a “combination,”

30. Kelly, “The Methodology of Ernst Bernheim.”

“the available data must be so abundant and dense that it only allows room for a single connection.” When data are insufficient, then “several combinations will be probable in the same degree,” allowing the historian to make only “a hypothesis”—a condition that the historian should attempt to remedy by making every effort to get more data.³¹

“Free and systematic inquiry are as typical of the American way as succotash and ham and eggs.”

A review of the other book that Kent cites approvingly in *Writing History*, Allan Nevins’s *The Gateway to History*, derides Bernheim and those who followed his “historical method” as being “curiously like the ritual of a secret society,” the outcome of which is that “when they have told [the reader], at very great length, how to take his subject completely apart, they tell him very little about how it can be put together.”³² This captures another important aspect of the assumptions that underpinned Kent’s approach to intelligence—that the process of “taking the subject completely apart,” known in the intelligence community by its Greek name, “analysis,” will lay bare the true laws that govern the world.³³

In *Strategic Intelligence*, Kent wrote only of scientific method and reason as enlarging “the horizon of knowledge,” but in *Writing History* he was much more open about what he viewed as the purpose of history. It was the historical work of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Kent wrote, that became “the reference book of Lloyd George’s Liberal government” and “the pillar of fire out in front of the movement to recast England’s manner of living in a more decent form.” The reason this was so was that good history required one to be a “rationalist”—by which, Kent wrote, he meant “the people who hold that the mind, when

31. Kelly, *The Methodology of Ernst Bernheim*.

32. Walton E. Bean, “History as Public Domain,” *Sewanee Review* 47: 2 (1939): 310.

33. For a greater elaboration of this argument, see Josh Kerbel and Anthony Olcott, “Synthesizing With Clients, Not Analyzing for Customers,” *Studies in Intelligence* 54: 4.

playing in the channels of right logic, can solve any problem it can set itself,” including “how to do away with poverty, disease, and war; how to promote happiness, health, and peace.”³⁴ Moreover, Kent wrote, “The intellectual milieu of our society is heavily laden with a respect for reason and an optimistic faith in social conscience if it be led by the dictates of the mind. Our bill of rights and our liberal democratic tradition make free and systematic inquiry as typical of the American way as succotash and ham and eggs.”

Although perhaps difficult to perceive today, Kent’s language is grounded in a debate that, while largely settled by the time he wrote, had raged among American intellectuals since World War I. That war, and the parallel rise of mass media, mass political movements, and powerful new means of propaganda all had a profoundly unsettling effect, for many intellectuals overturning their prewar beliefs in rational discourse, the power of logical persuasion and, ultimately, the ability of people to govern themselves. Lippmann’s *Public Opinion* and the sequel volume, *The Phantom Public* (1925) laid down an argument that “the public” in its mass is fundamentally passive, irrational, and far too easily led into error. As one scholar of the era has written, the only antidote to the “dangers of the ‘crowd psychology,’ the rising tide of ‘barbarism’ attendant to mass democracy, the fallacy of human intellectualism, and ‘the instincts of the herd’” was to remove “the idea of a competent public” from the center of traditional democratic theory, “replacing it with technocratic experts.”³⁵ Lippmann had made that point entirely unambiguously in *Public Opinion* when he wrote: “Every democrat feels in his bones that dangerous crises are incompatible with democracy, because the inertia of the masses is such that a very few must act quickly.”³⁶

In other words, the problem inherent in a Platonic view of reality is what to make of those who disagree with you. Since

34. Kent, *Writing History*, Chapter 1.

35. Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 3.

36. Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1922), p. 22.

Kent, Lippmann, and the other “scientific liberals” all believed fundamentally that the “instruments of reason and scientific method” could only lead to the same conclusions as they themselves had reached, the only two possible explanations for different conclusions or different outcomes were error or ignorance. In the case of Kent, that conviction nearly led to global conflagration, when he and his team asserted unequivocally in a National Intelligence Estimate issued in mid-September 1962 that the Soviets would not try to put “offensive strategic weapons”—meaning nuclear warheads—in Cuba. In the post-mortem conducted after that assertion had been proven to be so dramatically wrong, Kent concluded that the biggest error he and his analysts had made had been to assume that Khrushchev understood the rules of “rational leadership behavior” as well as they did. As Kent wrote, “We were not brought up to underestimate our enemies. We missed the Soviet decision to put the missiles into Cuba because we could not believe that Nikita Khrushchev could make a mistake.”³⁷

Though Kent links his belief in this argument back only as far as Lippmann, the roots of this faith in “scientific liberal elitism” run back through Lippmann’s professor at Harvard, Graham Wallas, to the French writer Gustave Le Bon. Le Bon’s book of 1895, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, is credited by professor Stuart Ewen³⁸ with establishing the notion of “the crowd” or “the masses” as a “lower life form . . . driven by dark, irrational forces . . . [and also] driven by impulsiveness, irritability, an incapacity to reason, [and] the absence of judgment.” Le Bon rejected John Locke and the other Enlightenment philosophers who based their arguments on the premise that all men are rational beings. Rather, Le Bon argued, “It must not be supposed that merely because the justness of an idea has been proved it can be productive of effective action even on cultivated minds. This fact may be quickly appreciated by noting how slight is the influence of the clearest demon-

37. Sherman Kent, “A Crucial Estimate Relived,” *Studies in Intelligence* 8: 2.

38. Stuart Ewen, “Reflections on Visual Persuasion,” *New York Law School Law Review* 43 (1999–2000).

stration on the majority of men. Evidence, if it be very plain, may be accepted by an educated person, but the convert will be quickly brought back by his unconscious self to his original conceptions.”³⁹ Swayed by emotion, led by gross oversimplifications and powerful symbols, the crowd resembles more an animal or primitive organism than it does a person. Although Le Bon’s work is shot through with contempt for people of the lower classes, he sees the behavior of crowds as largely independent of their constituent parts. As he wrote:⁴⁰

“In the collective mind the intellectual aptitudes of the individuals, and in consequence their individuality, are weakened. The heterogeneous is swamped by the homogeneous, and the unconscious qualities obtain the upper hand. This very fact that crowds possess in common ordinary qualities explains why they can never accomplish acts demanding a high degree of intelligence. The decisions affecting matters of general interest come to by an assembly of men of distinction, but specialists in different walks of life, are not sensibly superior to the decisions that would be adopted by a gathering of imbeciles. The truth is, they can only bring to bear in common on the work in hand those mediocre qualities which are the birthright of every average individual. In crowds it is stupidity and not mother-wit that is accumulated.”

Le Bon’s confidence that even “an assembly of men of distinction” who are “specialists in different walks of life” are not likely to make decisions any better or any wiser than might be made by “a gathering of imbeciles” captures well the disdain that both Lippmann and Kent shared for policymakers. These could best be served, as Kent wrote, by analysts whose job it is

39. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Electronic Text Center), p. 52. <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=BonCrow.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=3&division=div2>.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

“to see that the doers are generally well-informed . . . to stand behind them with the book opened at the right page, to call their attention to the stubborn fact they may be neglecting, and—at their request—to analyze alternative courses without indicating choice.”⁴¹

“In a world of perfect information, there would be no doubt about . . . future intentions”

Kent’s inclusion of that last intelligence activity—to, in effect, predict the outcome of proposed future courses of action (only if asked, and without indicating which course is better or worse, and so, by implication, leaving the policymaker responsible for the outcome)—returns us to the recurrent criticism of the IC, that, as former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski put it during a postmortem conference on the CIA’s analysis of the Soviet Union, “PDBs [Presidential Daily Bulletins] were informative specifically but not enlightening generally,” because “the Agency was superb on ‘factology,’ [but] not very good in ‘politology.’”⁴² This was pretty much the same charge that Schlesinger had made thirty years before, when he wrote that the greatly expanded collection efforts had not “brought about a similar reduction in our uncertainty about the intentions, doctrines, and political processes of foreign powers.” Kent’s conviction, traceable back to Bernheim, that sufficient quantities of data would eventually allow an analyst to perceive “the objective situation,” was called out in a review of *Strategic Intelligence* by Kent’s Office of Strategic Services’ colleague Willmoore Kendall, who charged that, to Kent, “the course of [future] events . . . is a tape, all printed up inside a machine; and the job of intelligence is to tell the planners how it reads.”⁴³ Although the American public and policymakers may want this kind of what Kendall called “absolute prediction”—what early DCI General Walter Bedell Smith called “being on a commun-

41. Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*, p. 12.

42. Haines and Leggett, *Watching the Bear*, pp. 263, 275.

43. Willmoore Kendall, “The Function of Intelligence,” *World Politics* 1: 4 (July 1949).

ing level with God and Joe Stalin” so as to be able “to say that a war will start next Tuesday at 5:32 PM”⁴⁴—it is only in the world of Kent’s “tape printed up inside a machine” that such prediction could be possible. Kendall argued that the only thing possible is what he called “contingent prediction”—which he characterized as the ability to say: “The following factors, which can be influenced in such a fashion by action from the outside, will determine whether and if so when, General DeGaulle will come to power.”

Kendall made another complaint about Kent’s book that also touches on the problem of prediction, or of discerning both capabilities and intentions. Kent, he observed, saw intelligence needs to be the same in wartime as they are in peace. Kendall disagreed strenuously, arguing that in wartime the intelligence requirements are overwhelmingly tactical. The overall *strategic* goal is simple and unambiguous—defeat the adversary—while the *means* for doing so require enormous amounts of what we would now call “current intelligence” or “mission support intelligence.” The task in peacetime, Kendall argued, was precisely strategic—which meant, among other things, understanding the full complexity of what he called “the big job—the carving out of United States destiny in the world as a whole.” Historian David Kahn has made the even stronger argument that “[w]hile intelligence is necessary to the defense, it is only contingent to the offense.” What he means is that, while the likelihood of an offensive success may be increased with intelligence, the goal of the offense is clear, as are the direction in which it will be launched and the resources that can be deployed to achieve it, and so are not intelligence dependent. Defense, by contrast, consists in (Kahn here quotes Carl von Clausewitz) “the parrying of a blow. What is its characteristic feature? Awaiting the blow.”⁴⁵ As that metaphor suggests, the only way that the defender can be absolutely certain that the attacker is actually going to attempt to land that blow is for the attempt to be made. To be sure, a well-prepared defender may

44. As quoted in Ransom, *Central Intelligence*, p. 41.

45. David Kahn, “An Historical Theory of Intelligence,” *Intelligence and National Security* 16 (Autumn 2001).

well parry the blow, but the fact remains that the task of the attacker is simpler and more straightforward than that of the defender—which means, no matter how good the intelligence, there is always the possibility that a blow will nevertheless land. Kahn quotes Clausewitz again to illustrate that “Bonaparte was quite right when he said that Newton himself would quail before the algebraic problems it would pose” to “evaluate another state’s capabilities and intentions.”

Although in *Strategic Intelligence* Kent wrote only of the “two instruments by which Western man has, since Aristotle, steadily enlarged his horizon of knowledge—the instruments of reason and scientific method”⁴⁶—in *Writing History* he argued almost openly that solving the “algebraic problem” of the future might be possible. Well-done history, Kent asserted, “contributes to society’s formal store of useful memory” and can mean that “an important part of the world’s business is conducted in a new and better way.” Kent was not the only one, however, to believe that accumulation of information would translate into understanding of the future. As James Schlesinger put it in his 1971 report, “In a world of perfect information, there would be no doubt about the present and future intentions, capabilities, and activities of foreign powers.”⁴⁷ Since the world of information is not perfect, the only possible course remains to continue to collect as much data as it is physically possible to do, and hope that the jigsaw puzzle that is the future will eventually somehow reveal itself.

46. Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*, p. 206.

47. Office of Management and Budget, “A Review of the Intelligence Community,” p. 10.

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