Being Intelligent about Secret Intelligence Agencies

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This essay analyzes selected publications since 1974 on U.S. secret intelligence agencies. Published works divide into four categories: memoirs defending the intelligence system, whistle-blowing exposés, scholarly analyses, and reports from executive and congressional studies. What do these materials reveal about the variables determining intelligence system influence in foreign policy decisions? And what do they suggest about criteria for evaluating intelligence performance and product? The finding is that little conceptual progress has been made towards defining the functions of intelligence. But a substantial amount of new illustrative material is now at hand to explore hypotheses such as (1) that intelligence agencies report what they think leaders want to hear, (2) that leaders take decisions without regard to intelligence reports, and (3) that costs often exceed benefits in covert action overseas. We need to understand better the functions of intelligence and to develop theories about the interrelations of information, action, and power within the context of American democratic values. Towards these ends, the article urges the exploitation of the variety of evidence recently published.

Few important subjects have confronted public policy analysts with more formidable obstacles to understanding than the structure and functions of government secret intelligence agencies. Their importance derives both from the theoretically pivotal role of intelligence (information) in decision making and the perhaps unresolvable normative problem of balancing the requirements of American democracy with the presumed need for intelligence agency secrecy.

One major obstacle is the traditional and logical policy that envelops the intelligence activities of government in official secrecy. Not all intelligence work is clandestine. But much of it is and so the entire intelligence apparatus is shielded by official secrecy. This protection sometimes weakens under the onslaught of journalistic or congressional curiosity, yet normally strict controls over the official record are maintained. Usually the public—or the outside scholar—can only know what the government chooses to disclose, Freedom of Information statutes notwithstanding. Consequently, public knowledge is peculiarly subject to manipulation by the intelligence establishment.

A second impediment to understanding is the conceptual confusion, indeed, terminological chaos, surrounding this topic. The term "intelligence" is commonly used interchangeably to refer to a variety of disparate functions, including evaluated information, espionage, counter-intelligence, and covert political action. The most common misuse is to confuse "intelligence" with "spying" and with secret foreign intervention.

These and other obstacles to information and understanding remain. Even so, the number of published works about American secret intelligence agencies in recent years has been enormous and unprecedented. The cloak of secrecy began unraveling in 1960 with the U-2 incident in which President Eisenhower made the unprecedented admission that the United States spies on the Soviet Union by all feasible means. A year later, the Bay of Pigs fiasco trumpeted to all the world that the United States engaged, if ineptly, in covert operations. The secrecy garment was torn again in 1967 when it was disclosed that the CIA was secretly subsidizing dozens of American private organizations. Late 1974, however, became the watershed period, when the New York Times disclosed in detail that the CIA had been engaged in domestic spying in violation of its congressional charter. Coupled with CIA complicity in the Watergate scandal, this disclosure began the new era in U.S. intelligence history, initiating a still-continuing avalanche of disclosures about assassination plots, drug testing, mail opening, etc. and of published materials on the intelligence system. This essay focuses on the period since 1974. Up to that time, there was a modest literature on contemporary intelligence, but much of it lacked authenticated, concrete evidence or examples.

The post-1974 literature can be divided into four major categories. First are the personal memoirs of former intelligence professionals, usually written with the help or encouragement of the intelligence system. Such literature is normally reviewed and "sanitized" by intelligence authorities prior to publication. In a second category are the "whistle-blowing" exposés, written by disgruntled former intelligence professionals, reformist journalists or activists. These works are normally not cleared by government censors and in some cases have
been impeded by litigation or judicial injunction. In the third category are the social scientists attempting to analyze objectively some aspect of intelligence activities, working primarily from non-secret sources. In a fourth category are the large number of congressional and executive branch studies, hearings and reports, which reflect the compromises of facts and values required by the American competitive political process.

Several basic questions constitute starting points towards an understanding of intelligence policy. These include: what was the CIA supposed to be when it was created by Congress in 1947? What did it become, and why? What has been the nature and quality of its performance? And what ought to be the future structure and functions of a national intelligence system within the American democratic framework? From studying these questions one would hope to see political science served by the development of understanding of the variables that determine how intelligence systems work and of clearly defined criteria for objectively evaluating performance and product. Let us examine publications in the various categories to determine what light they shed on these questions.

Accounts from Inside the Establishment

In the first category are several notable memoirs. Of the recent books by former high-level insiders, William Colby's *Honorable Men* is the most valuable. Only in America could a former intelligence director write a book that candidly discusses his recent experience. Not since Allen Dulles, whose *The Craft of Intelligence* appeared in 1963, has a former CIA Director published a book. Colby's work, written with Peter Forbath, is an important contribution because of his extensive experience from World War II to detente in the wide range of intelligence activities, and the constitutional issues raised. He was deeply involved in the Cold War, the Vietnam War, "Third-World" covert operations, and in managing the CIA "scandal" and response to congressional investigations. The book is more useful than the Dulles book, which was uncritical about, and insensitive to, the problem of a secret establishment in a democracy. As might be expected, Colby defends the intelligence system and its record, playing down its failures and its foibles, but his book is no whitewash and he understands the dilemmas posed by secret operations. Colby defines the problem as "threading the thin line between responding to the Congress' constitutional right to know and protecting legitimate intelligence secrets" (p. 13). As an autobiographical account of 30 years in intelligence, Colby's book supplies interesting detail. Among its disclosures is that the White House entourage, including Vice-President Rockefeller and Henry Kissinger, opposed Colby's general policy of disclosing the CIA's past record to Congress and the public. Another category of revealing details concerns America's covert politics in Italy, the CIA's largest covert-action program ever undertaken, which Colby operated between 1953 and 1958, with the objective of supporting "the center democratic political parties" (p. 115), as well as non-Communist trade unions, competitive democratic cooperatives and cultural and civic groups. This was done through the dispensing of tens of millions of American dollars to various Italian recipients in a patently illegal operation. Though illegal, this was done for the purpose of containing communism in Western Europe and countering similar efforts by the Soviet Union which was subsidizing Communist party activities in Italy. Colby claims success for the program in one of those arguments that can be accepted only on faith. A third among many relevations is the startling admission of the enormous power that had been sequestered in the hands of the counter-intelligence division within the CIA, under the leadership of James Angleton, whose organization at one stage was producing, in Colby's view, no "tangible results" but who at the same time could not easily be dislodged from his position of secret power (which included his control of the liaison with Israeli intelligence). Colby found that he simply could not fire Angleton, whom he saw as a liability, because Colby feared that "Angleton's professional integrity and personal intensity might have led him to take dire measures if I forced the issue of either his Israeli relationship or his continued employment" (p. 365).

*Honorable Men* is filled with additional details about the internal operations of the CIA in its three "subcultures" of the covert information gatherers, the covert political activists and the analysts. Also supplied are details about Vietnam operations in which Colby was deeply involved, the various interventions in Chile, Colby's tenure as CIA director in the stormy period of congressional investigations, and finally his dismissal by President Ford.

Colby expresses faith that secret intelligence agencies can be brought within the controls of the American constitutional framework. On the other hand, the symbolism of his title *Honorable Men* seems to be based upon the unacceptable idea that one must ultimately have
faith in honorable men rather than laws. Colby's position on this is at least ambiguous. One other missing element in this otherwise impressive book is any detailed account of the significant successes of the intelligence system.

In Secrets, Spies and Scholars (1976), Ray S. Cline, who spent 30 years as an intelligence professional, offers an autobiographical account of the development of U.S. intelligence. His is somewhat less revealing than Colby's book on some of the major policy issues, yet it offers considerable detail from an insider's view—being essentially an apology for the intelligence system. Cline served in high intelligence positions in both the CIA and the State Department. Cline offers his book as a "contribution to political science" (p. xii), yet other than his detailed proposals for reforming the structure of the intelligence system, he offers few generalizations or conceptual progress. Perhaps the problem is that he became imbued with the netherworld of secrecy and was unable to step into the role of objective critic of the system for which he worked so long. As he puts it: "The rarified atmosphere of clandestine work intrigued me" (p. 171). Because he was action-oriented, Cline became a clandestine operator, serving as CIA Chief of Station in Taiwan from 1958 to 1962.

Although Cline is generally defensive about, and an apologist for, most of the CIA's activities over the past 30 years, he nonetheless concludes his memoir by proposing a radical structural change that essentially would separate intelligence analysis from clandestine activities. Cline's book is not a systematic survey of intelligence in the political process; it is chiefly valuable as a personal memoir adding some significant insight into the mind-set of an educated intelligence officer and some important details as to the intelligence organization's historical evolution, particularly under Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson.

William R. Corson's The Armies of Ignorance (1977) is one of the most useful secondary sources yet published. It is not exactly a memoir, although the author had a long career as a military intelligence professional with a wide variety of assignments in politico-military intelligence work that gave him good insights into secret intelligence. Nor is it entirely a secondary source, for the author has included all-too-numerous verbatim reprints of important official documents. Many of these are fascinating but they tend to clutter up the analysis. Throughout the long book, important "pre-theory" questions are raised. Un fortunately, Corson did not deal with the topic systematically and the book has the quality of a rough draft of what might have been one of the modern intelligence classics. It falls short of that distinction by its discursiveness and loose organization. Perhaps the book's most suggestive section is its first chapter in which the author interprets how a growing intelligence empire has responded to each successive presidency, starting with Truman. The author's general proposition is that "each of the new presidents has come to his role [as first intelligence officer] unprepared to take it over" (p. 4). More often than not, the intelligence system has, in Corson's view, managed to co-opt the presidency. This is an exceptionally insightful inside view of the bureaucratic maneuverings underlying the growth of the American intelligence "empire." Anyone with a serious interest in the organizational growth of the U.S. intelligence system and the interplay of intelligence agency politics cannot ignore this book. It is a valuable resource and reference, although it will be hard going for the general reader, for whom a book half its length would have been more useful.

David Atlee Phillips resigned from the CIA in 1975 to organize former U.S. intelligence officers into the Association of Retired Intelligence Officers and to write The Night Watch (1977). Like his efforts to organize an intelligence lobby, his book is a personal memoir designed to spread the CIA gospel—and presumably to counter Philip Agee's Inside the Company: CIA Diary (1975) (discussed below). Phillips guides the reader through his career, from the time he was recruited by the CIA in Chile, to his assignment as station chief in Brazil and Venezuela and ultimately as chief of the Western Hemisphere Division of the clandestine services. He was deeply involved in covert actions in Guatemala, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Phillips has less new to reveal for the historical record of events involving these various notions than he does about the character and personality of intelligence professionals and their world outlook. Essentially, life and secret operations appear to them a game to be approached sometimes gleefully, sometimes cynically. With this book as basis, one finds it difficult to take seriously the clandestine "tradecraft." Essentially, the book takes for granted that the U.S. must conduct covert operations. Phillips does not offer an adequate rationale for such activities; excitement and adventure appear to be the motivating forces for covert operators. Another message that comes through is that the CIA tends to be a personal instrument of the president. This book adds savory spice but too little of substance to the intelligence pudding.
Peer De Silva’s *Sub-Rosa: The C.I.A. and the Uses of Intelligence* (1978) is another book that combines the personal memoir with a defense of the intelligence system against its critics. De Silva became a CIA officer in 1953 and served as operations chief for Soviet Russian activities for three years; later he served in the Far East, first in Korea in 1960, and in Saigon as Chief of Station. He offers some insight into the bureaucratic politics and maneuvering in the field among CIA, the armed services and State Department. But readers are not offered sufficient information to form an evaluation of the quality of CIA’s work. And the book compounds the conceptual confusions that abound regarding intelligence work, failing to distinguish among “intelligence,” “counter-intelligence,” “espionage,” and “covert action.”

Like most others in this category, Harry Rositzke, in *The C.I.A. Secret Operations: Espionage, Counterespionage and Covert Action* (1977) seeks to counterbalance the widespread public criticism of the CIA. His book is not a timid response, but an astute narrative and analytic account of CIA espionage, counter-espionage and covert action. It focuses on Rositzke’s main professional interest since 1946: operations against the Soviet Union. His detailed accounts do not constitute a whitewash, for Rositzke concludes that much of CIA’s clandestine activity over the past 30 years has been counter-productive, time- and resource-wasting, or just foolish. But he believes it crucially important to maintain an intelligence and covert action capability in order to protect America’s major world-wide interests from predatory adversaries. Even so, he is aware that secret operations are but instruments of foreign policy. Rositzke offers little in the way of analyses of intelligence failures. The failures in covert action, however, he attributes to policy failures. He proposes a modest agenda of unexceptionable reforms.

In sum, the books in this category offer an aggregate of personal experience, attitudes, and world views. Together they supply a significant number of jigsaw pieces to the composite picture of an intelligence system created with the deliberate intention of concealing some of the crucial pieces in the picture. Answers to the basic questions posed at the outset are not frontally addressed by these works.

**Polemics, Raw and Refined**

In a second category of recent literature are the polemical works of axe-grinders, whistle-blowers and activists. Some of these works are by former intelligence professionals, defying secrecy regulations. Others are by journalists and activists aiming to expose what they consider intelligence agency inefficiencies, corruptions or violations of constitutional principles.

Perhaps the most notorious of this category is Philip Agee’s *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*. Agee’s book is not a true diary, but a reconstructed account of his 12 years in the CIA, during which time he served as a covert operator primarily in Ecuador, Uruguay and Mexico, where he was engaged in bribing politicians, forging documents and other forms of hokery-pokery. Agee came to be disaffected not only from his employer, but also from capitalism. A newly self-styled “revolutionary,” he decided to expose all names of secret agents and cover organizations that he could remember—an action that made him a virtual exile. His book supplies some detail about various covert actions in Latin America, how the CIA recruits and trains its own personnel, and how foreign agents are manipulated. While Agee’s book has the ring of authenticity, it inadvertently reveals how little was accomplished and how CIA capers resemble the scripts of Marx Brothers movies. This book leaves one wondering whether most covert operators are to be taken seriously.

The Lawless State: The Crimes of the U.S. Intelligence Agencies is, as the title suggests, more of an analytical indictment than an objective analysis. It is a team effort, assembled by a group from the Center for National Security Studies headed by Morton H. Halperin (1976). If one seeks a digest of the vast number of pages of congressional hearings and reports, government commission studies, and journalistic essays and opinion, this book serves that purpose. As the title suggests, the book emphasizes abuses and makes little effort to place the behavior of intelligence agencies within the historical context. The first section of the book deals with the CIA overseas and the FBI at home, with case studies of CIA operations against Allende in Chile and FBI’s vendetta against Martin Luther King, Jr. The second section focuses heavily upon the activities of various major U.S. intelligence agencies against the Vietnam War and civil rights protest movements of the 1960s and the book concludes with reform proposals. Its chief value is as a polemical compendium of information on the intelligence investigations, disclosures and “scandals” of the 1960s and 1970s.

Covering much of the same ground but in greater depth is David Wise’s *The American Police State* (1977). The hyperbolic title sug-
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suggests the author's stance, which derives from his concern with the "misuse of the police power of the state against individuals who dissent from established policy" (p. 413). This is the work of a sophisticated journalist who has gone well beyond the published material and official sources. He has interviewed more than 200 intelligence officials and former officials and many of their targets. The book focuses on internal spying by U.S. intelligence agencies, including the CIA, FBI and Internal Revenue Service. Wise may exaggerate in some ways the degree to which the United States had become a "police state" by the late 1960s, but his book should be considered an essential item in any collection of literature on the functioning of government intelligence agencies during the years of the Nixon administration. It contains important details about the all-too-quickly forgotten intrusion by police and intelligence agencies into the lives of Americans and warns of the tendency of agencies designed for national security to injure some things they are trying to protect.

Frank Snepp's Decent Interval (1977) gives rare insight into how well the CIA performed operationally overseas. It is an account, based upon the author's personal diaries as well as government documents and interviews, of the final days of the U.S. presence in Vietnam and a striking indictment of the CIA's performance. Snepp's account argues that official myopia, lack of planning and ignoring hard information endangered the lives of CIA operatives and informants and resulted in a hasty American withdrawal in 1975 which left behind thousands of Vietnamese whose loyalty to the U.S. cost them their freedom, or in many cases, their lives. Snepp accuses the government of covering up massive bungling, waste and deception. He published this book in the face of CIA's efforts to prevent its publication and to punish its author. Snepp's purpose was to expose dramatically what he considered to be a poor operational performance. Whatever the merits of his judgments, we are supplied with a datum useful for an overall intelligence agency performance evaluation.

John Stockwell's In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story (1978), a personal memoir, focuses on another example of CIA performance, the intervention in the civil war in Angola in 1975–76. Like Snepp and others, Stockwell has published this book in defiance of CIA regulations. After 12 years of service in the clandestine service, Stockwell became disillusioned, pessimistic about internal reform or effective congressional control and decided to argue in print that the clandestine services of the CIA should be abolished. He reached this decision after heading a CIA task force in 1975–76 that ran the CIA's secret para-military intervention in Angola. The CIA's Angola program is the vehicle for his efforts in this book to characterize the clandestine mind and to show the functioning of the secret bureaucracy for covert action. It has become increasingly rare to have such a view from the inside about the clandestine service, but Stockwell's angry testimony cannot be ignored by those who would understand how the system works.

Also worth mentioning in this category is Joseph B. Smith's Portrait of a Cold Warrior (1976). This work is not so much an anti-CIA polemic, but a low-key personal account of a 25-year career in the CIA's clandestine services. Smith's book was presumably cleared for publication by the CIA and it appears to reveal no state secrets other than that the CIA "emperor has no clothes." This book received relatively little attention, for it offers no dramatic exposé, but it contains convincing detail about the moral decay that can characterize an organization based upon deception and the principle that the ends justify any means. Even more arresting is his argument that the clandestine service often created a false intelligence base to justify some of its covert interventions. Smith believes in the crucial importance of an intelligence service and he does not write in hyperbole, but as a sensitive observer he became disillusioned as a CIA professional and deeply concerned about CIA "drift toward Gestapo status" (p. 434). His book deserves a place on the intelligence bookshelf.

Three other books need mentioning here: Dirty Work, edited by Philip Agee and Louis Wolf (1978); Uncloaking the CIA, edited by Howard Frazier (1978); and The CIA File, edited by Robert L. Borosage and John Marks (1976). All are collections of essays and comments generally critical of the intelligence system. The last, The CIA File, is the most substantial and least strident of these books. The former two books represent a variety of "New-Left" criticism and many of the writers represent the view that the CIA be abolished.

Another book that may belong peripherally in this category is The Search for the Manchurian Candidate by John Marks (1979). Writing as a civil libertarian, Marks makes a serious effort to reconstruct carefully the details of intelligence agency experiments with "mind-control" and behavior modification techniques. This highly secret activity designed to inform the government on how to control human behavior would have remained in the shadows without the efforts of Marks and his associates, armed
with the Freedom of Information Act. He details a wide range of intelligence agency experimentation with drugs, hypnosis and a variety of behavior modification techniques and demonstrated that many of these programs went forward in the absence of political accountability.

Applying the Tools of Scholarship

In the category of scholarly works, the number of items remains small. Even with all of the disclosures of recent years, obstacles to research are formidable.

Lawrence Freedman’s *U.S. Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat* (1977) is an example of a rare effort to study the prime intelligence function of informing decision makers of events and prospects abroad, and to evaluate how successfully the intelligence system has performed that function. Freedman also explores the process of producing intelligence estimates and how the structure affects the product and its influence. His analysis is based not only on the published record but also on interviews with some of the principal actors. The substance of the analysis centers on six case studies, including the “missile gap,” the debate over antiballistic missiles, and the search for an invulnerable deterrent. The author’s analysis suffers from the lack of access to actual intelligence estimates and more fundamentally the absence of a theory of intelligence. This absence makes it difficult to categorize intelligence “failures” or “successes.” Freedman’s principal finding is that the perception of external threats is a political process in which prevailing strategic doctrine and U.S. policy makers’ attitudes towards defense spending and arms control are as crucial in determining policy as are the intelligence estimates. The book helpfully explores the myth that perfect intelligence would resolve all policy disputes.

Another book focusing on the internal activities of the intelligence agencies is *Spying on Americans: Political Surveillance from Hoover to the Huston Plan* (1978) by Athan Theoharis. This heavily documented history analyzes the relationship between the presidency and the intelligence system, particularly the questions of accountability and control by responsible political authority. Primary emphasis is on the FBI although the National Security Agency and CIA come under scrutiny. Writing from the vantage point of a civil libertarian, the author finds that all administrations since Franklin Roosevelt’s have permitted intelligence agencies too much license, to the detriment of the constitutional rights of citizens. The book has a reference book quality, summarizing a vast amount of published documentation, informed more by a civil libertarian ideology than a conceptual yardstick.

Also notable is *The Reform of FBI Intelligence Operations* (1979) by John T. Elliff, the leading academic specialist on the Federal Bureau of Investigation. His book explores the risks versus benefits of giving the FBI wide authority to gather intelligence about terrorists and spies, or, in effect, the dangers of maintaining an American political police force. He argues that detailed restrictions must be placed upon the FBI and he believes that with such reforms, the bureau can operate within the bounds of the U.S. Constitution. From this book one can gain an understanding of the policy debates, the evolution of the Attorney General’s “guidelines” for the FBI, and the dimensions of professional and political responsibility with regard to this aspect of the intelligence function.

*American Espionage: From Secret Service to CIA* (1977) by Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones emphasizes the half-century of experience with intelligence in the United States from 1898 to 1947. This study, bearing the marks of a doctoral dissertation, explores some new ground with the purpose of putting the contemporary U.S. intelligence system in a historical context. The author’s investigation has ranged widely into archival, unpublished, and official documents and memoirs. He is more successful in his research on the period through World War II than in his efforts to analyze the postwar period, which is dealt with in sketchy and discursive fashion. This work has value in demonstrating that many of the issues related to intelligence agencies in America are not new.

Proliferation of Government Reports

Spurred on by *New York Times* reports of late 1974 that the CIA had seriously violated its charter and engaged in domestic spying, a number of important government studies of the intelligence system were initiated. In early 1975 the president appointed the (Rockefeller) Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States, the U.S. Senate created the (Church) Select Committee on Intelligence Activities and the House established the (Pike) Select Committee on Intelligence. At the same time, the (Murphy) Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy, a joint legislative-executive undertaking, devoted a segment of its wide-ranging study to
intelligence. In aggregate, millions of dollars were allocated and hundreds of staff persons undertook to study the U.S. intelligence system during this 1975–77 period. These efforts left in their wake a vast array of published hearings, reports and special studies on what formally was a highly secret function of the federal government. A complete list of congressional hearings and reports on this subject in the 1970s would number more than 100 separate items. Many of these, such as the Church Committee Report (1976), the Village Voice (1976) version of the “Pike Papers,” and Appendix U of the Murphy Commission Report (1975) will serve as important sources for analysts of intelligence and covert operations for many future years. These documents represent considerably more than the “tip of the iceberg” on the subject, although more disclosures are likely to be forthcoming. A valuable reference work including 1000 pages of excerpts from the most significant of the government publications is The Intelligence Community (1977), compiled and edited by Tyrus G. Fain and others. Also useful is the bibliography by Blackstock and Schaf (1978).

Conclusions

In sum, the executive purpose and the legislative intent in creating the CIA remain somewhat obscure. Nonetheless, for two decades in the context of cold war consensus, the CIA became the multi-functional agency that operated world-wide in intelligence analysis, espionage, counter-intelligence and covert political action. Now that the consensus has evaporated, evaluating CIA’s multi-faceted performance is the challenge, and a necessity. Available but incomplete evidence seems to support the proposition that intelligence has too often seriously failed to forewarn policy makers and that in covert political action costs have exceeded benefits. As of this writing, after five years of executive commissions, congressional hearings and reports and an unending volume of literature of the type described, the executive-congressional decision-making structure has been unable to reach a new consensus on a redesigned intelligence system, legitimized by a “charter” that precisely defines functions and sets limits. I believe this to be a fundamental policy requirement.

Even if answers to certain historical questions remain elusive, what aggregate theoretical knowledge is derivable from the recent literature? Systematic research requires that events and relationships be observable. With respect to secret intelligence, not only are concepts poorly defined, but also many events and relationships are obscured from scholarly observation by secrecy. Even those who have been intelligence professionals normally have worked in tight compartments, and have themselves had access to very limited views of systems and behaviors. Empirical evidence needed for a systemic overview consequently has been in short supply. The above-cited expansion of the bibliographical foundation since 1974, however, offers a wealth of new evidence, suggesting new research frontiers. Perhaps the time is at hand for conceptual progress, inviting the first few steps down the long road to theories of intelligence.

From years of reading and reflection on strategic intelligence, I am convinced that the functions of intelligence constitute the largest gap in our understanding of how foreign policy decisions are made. Discussions of intelligence “failure” abound, but we lack an acceptable theory of intelligence that permits systematic evaluations of performance by clearly defined criteria. The elaborate intelligence process includes a number of steps, from the setting of information requirements to the use of processed information in decisional choice. An understanding of how this process works has been severely hampered by secrecy. If knowledge is power, then political science badly needs better knowledge of the intelligence structure and process. Without it, the descriptive, let alone the explanatory or predictive, power of the discipline remains seriously deficient.

Until disproved, the following hypotheses, partly intuitive, appear to represent reality: intelligence systems tend to report what they think the political leadership wants to hear, and whatever is reported, leaders often take actions without regard for the intelligence reports. If it is true, intelligence makes little difference in policy formation. The unwise decisions after 1947 to combine the disparate functions of foreign intelligence, counter-intelligence and covert political action under the CIA roof have compounded the problem of structuring a proper relationship among secret information, policy making and action in foreign affairs. Intelligence may be less a policy determinant and more an ingredient to be manipulated by policy makers. Once in power, leaders seem compelled to support the maintenance of secrecy. Probably this is because leaders discover that control of secret information provides the leverage for political power. Concerns about the information-power relationship are perhaps the hidden agenda in the current politics of restruc-
turing the intelligence system. Predictably, the politics of reestablishing the intelligence system has become a partisan issue. Note that the Republican National Committee in August, 1979, issued a broadside, condemning the Carter administration's plan for reorganizing the intelligence community, and proposing alternatives. And so efforts over recent years to rearrange the system of intelligence secrecy, to include Congress and the judiciary, and to define precise limits for the activities of intelligence agencies, have met with enormous difficulty. Basic elements of power are at stake. Political science needs to know more about knowledge and power, information and action. We can be encouraged that substantial evidence now is being disclosed, such as that contained in the literature described above, to aid our important search for this knowledge.

References


