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The University of Kent

**Constructing Cassandra:
The Social Construction of Strategic Surprise at the
Central Intelligence Agency, 1947-2001**

By

Milo Jones

**A Dissertation Submitted to the
Brussels School of International Studies
Of the Department of Politics and International Relations
In the Faculty of Social Science**

**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
For the Award of the Degree of
PhD in International Relations**

**Brussels,
September 11, 2009**

**(Word Count: 114,622 words, excluding abstract,
footnotes, appendices, & bibliography)**

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Abstract

This dissertation takes a post-positivist approach to strategic surprise, and examines the identity and internal culture of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) through the lens of social constructivism. It identifies numerous social mechanisms that created and maintained four key, persistent attributes of the CIA's identity and culture between 1947 and 2001. These features are: 1) homogeneity of personnel; 2) scientism and the reification of a narrow form of 'reason'; 3) an overwhelming preference for 'secrets' over openly-available information; and, 4) a relentless drive for consensus. It then documents the influence of these elements of the CIA's identity and culture in each phase of the intelligence cycle (Tasking, Collection, Analysis, Production and Dissemination), prior to four strategic surprises: the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, the collapse of the USSR, and al-Qa'ida's terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. It concludes that these key aspects of the CIA's identity and culture created the antecedent conditions that allowed these four strategic surprises to occur, and thus prevented the CIA from fulfilling its mandate to 'prevent another Pearl Harbor'. This conclusion is supported by contrasting the majority views at the CIA prior to these events with the views of 'Cassandras' (i.e. individuals inside or outside the Agency who anticipated the approximate course of events based on reasoned threat assessments that differed sharply from the Agency's, but who were ignored or sidelined). In so doing, this work shifts the burden of proof for explaining strategic surprises back to the characteristics and actions of intelligence producers like the CIA, and away from errors by intelligence consumers like politicians and policymakers. This conclusion also allows this work to posit that understanding strategic surprise as a social construction is logically prior to previously proposed, entirely positivist, attempts to explain or to prevent it.

Acknowledgements

Versions of *Constructing Cassandra* were presented to the SGIR's Fifth Pan-European International Relations Conference, *Constructing World Orders*, The Hague, Netherlands, on September 9, 2004 and to the World International Studies Conference, Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey, on 26 August 2005. In addition, the hypothesis and various supporting chapters were presented on seven occasions beginning in September 2003 at BSIS Research Seminars. Thanks to all who listened, questioned and criticised.

Special thanks to: Dr. Jarrod Wiener, my long-suffering advisor; Lisel Hintz for proofreading and numerous theoretical pointers; and Dr. Christopher Daase and Dr. Michael Palo for their early encouragement. Also, thanks to Alan P. Jones, Jr., Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Dr. Mark Teeter, Dr. Kent Grayson, Prof. Richard Portes, A. Edward Gottesman, Daniel Gastel, Bernhard Kerres, Dr. Mitchell Leimon, Dr. Albenaz Azmanova, Alastair Ross and Dr. Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels for their encouragement and suggestions.

From first to last, Ignacio Corrachano has been an ideal colleague, a true friend, and a powerful inspiration.

I would also like to thank Allen Thomson and other CIA employees (past and present) who wish to remain anonymous. I am especially grateful for the guidance of the late Christine Zummer, a dedicated and brave member of the Clandestine Service.

Very belated thanks to both EHS and the Kennan Institute for a good start down this road all those years ago.

Finally, I would like to thank the staffs of the following libraries: The European Commission Library, Cornell University Library, *L'Université Libre de Bruxelles* Library, *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* Library, The University of Kent Library, The Royal Library of Belgium, The London Business School Library, and The *Instituto de Empresa* Library.

Dedication

Constructing Cassandra is dedicated to my first family (Mother, Elizabeth, and Frances); to my new family, (Ewa and Emily); and to my extended family (US Marines, past, present and future: *Semper Fi*).

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Section I: Overture

On 22 September 1947, in response to the rapidly escalating Cold War, US President Truman created the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).¹ In the dry language of the National Security Act of 1947, a core responsibility of the Agency was “to correlate and evaluate the intelligence relating to national security, and to provide for the appropriate dissemination of such intelligence within the government.”² Washington shorthand for the CIA’s mission was “to prevent another Pearl Harbor”³ — obviously a remit to give strategic warning, not to thwart further attacks by the Japanese Imperial Navy. In short, the CIA was charged with preventing strategic surprises to the United States in the realm of foreign affairs. The Agency’s multiple failures to meet that charge – at tremendous cost – are the subject of this dissertation.

In 1962, for example, the CIA’s estimate of the likelihood that the Soviets would place nuclear missiles in Cuba proved completely wrong.⁴ The Agency’s misjudgement was not simply a question of coming down “on the wrong side”⁵ in a single intelligence estimate.⁶ It was a fundamental misreading of the

¹ For background, see: Rhodi Jeffreys-Jones, “Why was the CIA established in 1947?,” Eternal Vigilance?: 50 Years of the CIA, eds. Rhodi Jeffreys-Jones and Christopher Andrew (London: Frank Cass, 1997), page 24-5. Basic documents on the early history of the CIA can be found in Anonymous, “Historical Intelligence Documents: From COI to CIG,” Studies in Intelligence 37.5 (1994), and Anonymous, “Historical Intelligence Documents: CIA’s Earliest Days,” Studies in Intelligence 38.5 (1995).

² National Security Act of 1947, Accessed online on 14 December, 2006 at: http://www.intelligence.gov/0-natsecact_1947.shtml . An excellent overview of the rest of the legislation governing the CIA can be found in L. Britt Snider, The Agency and the Hill: CIA’s Relationship with Congress, 1946–2004 (Washington, DC: The Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 2004), pages 137-57. Zegart also covers some of the thinking behind the CIA’s origins in Amy B. Zegart, Flawed by Design: the Evolution of the CIA, JCS and NSC (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pages 163-222. Her stress is on the fact that the CIA was not originally intended to collect intelligence or to perform covert action, but to collate, analyse and distribute it.

³ Jeffreys-Jones, “Why was the CIA established in 1947?”, pages 25-28. See also Snider, The Agency and the Hill: CIA’s Relationship with Congress, 1946–2004, page 3.

⁴ Richard K. Betts, Enemies of Intelligence (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), page 190.

⁵ Sherman Kent, “A Crucial Estimate Relived,” Studies in Intelligence 8.2 (1964), page 1.

⁶ The critical document usually cited is Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 85-3-62 “The Military Buildup in Cuba” dated 19 September, 1962. The whole estimate has not been declassified, but the summary and conclusions are available in Mary S. McAuliffe, CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962 (Washington, DC: History Staff of the Central Intelligence Agency, 1992), pages 91-93.

intentions and logistical capabilities of the USSR.⁷ It was also a failure to provide facts that, had they been known, could have proved crucial to the risk calculations made by President Kennedy's team following the discovery of the missiles.⁸ They missed, for example, that the USSR had managed to slip both the missiles' nuclear warheads *and* tactical nuclear weapons into Cuba – a facet of the Crisis that put the US and the Soviets closer to a nuclear holocaust than either side recognised at the time.⁹

Agency analysts made these misjudgements despite vigorous warnings about the probability of the USSR positioning missiles in Cuba, warnings provided months before the rockets were discovered. The Cassandra, or the source of these warnings, was not some fringe figure at the CIA: it was Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), John McCone.¹⁰

Sixteen years later, in 1978, Iran was a key US ally. Samuel Huntington was a staff member of President Carter's National Security Council (NSC). In September of that year, after the "Jaleh Square massacre",¹¹ Huntington asked the CIA for an assessment of a post-Shah Iran. In response, he received "a discussion of the Iranian constitution and the chances of creating a regency council for a transition within the Pahlevi dynasty"¹², with no mention of the immensely popular but exiled Ayatollah Khomeini or of any potential revolution. The year before, the CIA's formal 60-page Iran estimate concluded, "the Shah will be an active participant in Iranian political life well into the 1980s",¹³ and that

⁷ Roberta Wohlstetter, "Cuba and Pearl Harbor," Foreign Affairs 43.4 (1965), page 698.

⁸ Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, page 190.

⁹ Richard L. Russell, Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), page 34.

¹⁰ CIA memorandum of 31 October, 1962 by John A. McCone, "Soviet MRBMs in Cuba" and CIA "Memorandum for the Director, "Action Generated by DCI Cables Concerning Cuban Low-Level Photography and Offensive Weapons", n.d. Found in McAuliffe, CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962, pages 13-17 and pages 39-44, respectively.

¹¹ Gary Sick, All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran (New York: Random House, 1985), page 59.

¹² Gregory F. Treverton and James Klocke, "Iran, 1978-1979: Coping with the Unthinkable," Dealing with Dictators: Dilemmas of US Diplomacy and Intelligence Analysis, 1945-1990, eds. Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), page 119.

¹³ Jim Hoagland, "Hill Report on Iran Faults Carter, Top Aides; Hill Panel Faults Carter, Aides on Broad Failure In Assessing Iran Crisis; Reactions to Shah's Crisis Called a Broad Failure," The Washington Post January 25 1979, page A1.

there would “be no radical change in Iranian political behavior in the near future”.¹⁴

For several years before the Islamic Revolution, however, businessmen had noted Iranians were sending record amounts of money out of the country.¹⁵ Private business risk management services also questioned the stability of Iran.¹⁶ In the spring of 1978, the French newspaper *Le Monde* ran a series of articles detailing grave trouble for the Shah.¹⁷ French¹⁸ and Israeli¹⁹ intelligence also detected Iran’s revolutionary rumblings well in advance.

Eleven years later, in 1989, the CIA’s original *raison d’être*, the Soviet empire, started collapsing. According to former DCI Stansfield Turner, the CIA’s corporate view missed this event “by a mile”.²⁰ In large part, this was because for decades the Agency’s understanding of the Soviet economy was seriously flawed.²¹ The CIA, for example, put Soviet military spending at 11-15% of GNP between 1975 and 1980; after the break-up of the USSR, it was clear that this estimate was approximately two times lower than the actual figures.²² In other words, for decades the Agency underestimated the military burden on the economy of the US’s primary global competitor by a factor of 200 percent. The CIA also underrated the fact that its main target was a multi-ethnic empire, that – in the colourful metaphor of a one-time Chief Analyst of the KGB – “the Soviet Union resembled a chocolate bar: it was creased with the furrowed lines of future division, as if the for convenience of its consumers”.²³

¹⁴ Hoagland, "Hill Report on Iran Faults Carter, Top Aides; Hill Panel Faults Carter, Aides on Broad Failure In Assessing Iran Crisis; Reactions to Shah's Crisis Called a Broad Failure," page A1.

¹⁵ Ofira Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), page 69.

¹⁶ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 69.

¹⁷ Walter Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985), page 64 and footnote 38 page 352.

¹⁸ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 84.

¹⁹ Ronen Bergman, The Secret War With Iran, trans. Ronnie Hope (New York, NY: Free Press, 2008), page 16-21.

²⁰ Stansfield Turner, "Intelligence for a New World Order," Foreign Affairs, Fall (1991).

²¹ "United States Policy Toward North Korea: Testimony of Nicholas Eberstadt American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research " House Committee on International Relations (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1998). The thinking behind this claim is fully explored in Chapter 6, "CIA Assessment of the Soviet Economy" of Nicholas Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press 1995).

²² Mikhail A. Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1997), page 193.

²³ Quoted in Stephen Kotkin, Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), page 86.

Instead, for decades Langley²⁴ ignored émigré analysts telling them both that they were seriously over-estimating the size of the USSR's economy,²⁵ and that the centrifugal forces of nationalism in Soviet Republics were increasing.²⁶

Some ten years later, the head of the CIA's "bin Ladin Unit", Michael Scheuer, struggled to raise the alarm within the CIA about the danger posed by al Qa'ida.²⁷ In 1999, in desperation, Scheuer went outside his usual chain of command and sent an email about the group directly to DCI George Tenet.²⁸ Within days, he was relieved of his duties, made a junior Agency librarian, and given no substantive work.²⁹

As the 9/11 Commission revealed, despite producing numerous individual reports dealing with al-Qa'ida and bin Ladin,³⁰ prior to September 11th, 2001 the CIA provided no complete portrayals of the group's strategy or of the extent of its involvement in past terrorist attacks.³¹ The last National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) by the CIA to focus on foreign terrorism was in 1997; it devoted three sentences to bin Ladin, and it did not mention al-Qa'ida at all.³²

²⁴ For the sake of variety, sometimes the term "the Agency" or "Langley" (the Virginia Headquarters of the CIA) will be used here to replace "the CIA": the choice is stylistic, and no distinction or difference implied by this choice.

²⁵ John Howard Wilhelm, "The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55.1 (2003), page 69.

²⁶ Vadim Belotserkovsky, "Letter to the Future Leaders of the Soviet Union," *Partisan Review* 2 (1975), page 269 cited in Wilhelm, "The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession," page 70.

²⁷ As discussed below, the spelling employed here of both al Qa'ida and its leader is that used by the CIA.

²⁸ Philip Shenon, *The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation* (New York, NY: The Hachette Book Group, 2008), page 194.

²⁹ Rob Klug, "Bin Laden Expert Steps Forward," *60 Minutes* (United States: CBS News, 2004), ed. Graham Messick.

³⁰ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2004), page 342 cites "Bin Ladin Threatening to Attack US Aircraft [with anti-aircraft missiles] (June 1998), "Strains Surface Between Taliban and Bin Ladin" (January 1999), "terrorist Threat to US Interests in Caucasus" (June 1999), "Bin Ladin to Exploit Looser Security During Holidays" (December 1999), "Bin Ladin Evading Sanctions" (March 2000), "Bin Ladin's Interest in Biological, Radiological Weapons" (February 2001), "Taliban Holding Firm on Bin Ladin for Now" (March 2001), "terrorist Groups Said to be Cooperating on US Hostage Plot" (May 2001), and "Bin Ladin Determined to Strike in the US" (August, 2001).

³¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, page 342. The general failure of the CIA to provide strategic warning, however, is confirmed in the CIA Inspector General's report on the pre-9/11 failures: "OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks," ed. Central Intelligence Agency Office of the Inspector General (Central Intelligence Agency, 2005, pages xvii).

³² Amy B. Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), page 86.

In short, by September 12th, 2001, fifty-four years and countless billions of dollars³³ after it was founded, it was clear that the CIA had not proven an effective solution to America's 'Pearl Harbor problem'.

To understand how the CIA repeatedly failed to provide effective strategic warning over this period, this dissertation examines the four strategic surprises above, the CIA itself, and Cassandras – those from both inside and outside the Agency whose warnings were ignored.

³³Technically, this sentence should read "*Uncounted* billions of dollars": the budget of the CIA has been classified since 1947; for further information, see www.fas.org. The best easily digestible summary of what information *is* available that the author has found is in Snider, The Agency and the Hill: CIA's Relationship with Congress, 1946-2004, pages 159-190.

Chapter Introduction

This dissertation is a theoretical inquiry into the nature of intelligence analysis and an attempt to understand how strategic surprises occur. More explicitly, it is an attempt to understand the reasons for the strategic surprises experienced by the United States between 1947 and 2001 by looking at the agency charged with preventing such surprises, the CIA (especially the Directorate of Intelligence [DI], which performs intelligence analysis).

The word 'understand' as opposed to 'explain' is carefully chosen in the paragraph above. There is a tradition in the social sciences³⁴ that approaches the human realm as natural scientists treat nature, as 'outsiders.' This positivist approach is usually identified with 'explaining' social phenomena. The alternative approach is used here. It is an 'insider's' view that seeks to comprehend what events mean (as distinct from unearthing any laws of nature). It is known as 'understanding,'³⁵ and is usually identified with post-positivism.

In the same spirit, before proceeding we should define other key terminology used in this thesis. When that task is complete, we look at the research question, thesis, and scope, followed by an outline of the methodology

³⁴ In effect, the methodology used here argues that the term "social sciences" is a false metaphor, as the "facts" social science considers usually depend on the statements by observers that refer to them; assertions along these lines are made by the literature on scientific realism (like that of Bhaskar cited in the next footnote), by most social constructivists, and more broadly by many self-styled "Progressives" (e.g. Immanuel Wallerstein, Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), pages 125-48. Soros also makes this point in George Soros, Alchemy of Finance: Reading the Mind of the Market (New York, NY: Touchstone Books, 1988), pages 317-22.

³⁵ See Alexander Wendt, "On constitution and causation in International Relations," Review of International Studies 24.5 (1998), pages 101-2. See also: Roy Bhaskar, The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of Contemporary Human Sciences, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1998), pages 1-3, and Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, Explaining and Understanding International Relations (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), chapters Three and Four. Another way of saying this is that the approach used here actively engages with the implications of the idea that when people participate on some level in the events that they think about, they must acknowledge both that their knowledge is incomplete, that their imperfect understanding and fallibility becomes part of reality, and that such effects can compound until "corrected" by reality. See George Soros, The Age of Fallibility: the Consequences of the War on Terror (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), page 4. Soros calls this idea "Reflexivity", defining the concept in its simplest terms as follows: "In situations that have thinking participants, there is a two way interaction between the participants' thinking and the situations in which they participate...When we act as outside observers we can make statements that do not correspond to the facts without altering the facts; when we act as participants, our actions alter the situation we seek to understand...We are confronted with a situation that is inherently unknowable in the sense that what needs to be a fact to make knowledge possible is, in fact, contingent on the participant's view of the situation." See Soros, Alchemy of Finance: Reading the Mind of the Market, pages 2-3, and for a full treatment of reflexivity see Chapters 1-3, pages 49-92.

used. We then highlight the original elements in this work, and close Chapter 1 with a systematic outline of the argument presented.

Section II: Topic and Definitions

The term 'intelligence analysis' is used here as shorthand to indicate all the activities related to designating, acquiring, evaluating, and distilling information into a finished intelligence 'product.' This dissertation only incidentally addresses other aspects of intelligence work, such as protecting the integrity of the intelligence process from penetration by adversaries (i.e., 'counterintelligence'), or political intervention (otherwise known - even when overt - as 'covert action').³⁶ The abbreviation DI is often used below to stand in for CIA units performing this analytical activity.³⁷

As the literature review in Chapter 2 explores, 'strategic surprise' is a contested concept, because surprise and warning are always matters of degree. In addition, the definition of strategic surprise used has a profound impact on the scope of analysis and on the lines of reasoning pursued. "Strategic surprise" is defined here as "The sudden realisation that one has been operating on the basis of an erroneous threat assessment that results in a failure to anticipate a grave threat to 'vital' national interests."³⁸

We should draw attention to several features of this definition. First, in keeping with most literature on strategic surprise, this definition emphasises the mistakes made by the victim of surprise³⁹ as opposed to other factors, such as

³⁶ The distillation of intelligence work into these three areas is drawn from Thomas Powers, The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), page vi.

³⁷ The various names by which the analytical activity has called within the CIA (and the fact that the organisation itself has been reorganized several times) is dealt with below. For simplicity's sake, DI is used throughout this manuscript, even when the term is technically ahistorical because of bureaucratic shuffling or re-naming.

³⁸ This definition employs similar language to that used by Levite. See Ariel Levite, Intelligence and Strategic Surprises (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987), pages 1-3. Levite's definition, however, does not link erroneous threat assessment to predictive failures as directly. In addition, by speaking of "threat perception", Levite (intentionally or not) calls to mind Jervis's cerebral processes (see below) rather than intelligence assessments that include far more than mental pictures. Levite also requires that strategic surprise possess seven distinct features, including a deliberately acting perpetrator of actions designed to catch a target by surprise, as in a surprise attack. As a consequence, surprises like the Iranian Revolution or the collapse of the USSR fall outside of his definition.

³⁹ For example, chapters seven and eight in Michael I. Handel, War, Strategy and Intelligence (London: Routledge, 1989); A. Perlmutter and J. Gooch, "Special Issue on Military Deception and Strategic Surprise - Introduction," Journal of Strategic Studies 5.1 (1982); J. G. Stein, "Military Deception, Strategic Surprise, and Conventional Deterrence - a Political-Analysis of Egypt and Israel, 1971-73," Journal of Strategic Studies 5.1 (1982); Ronald G. Sherwin and Barton Whaley, "Understanding Strategic Deception: An

skilful deception by adversaries. Chapter 2's literature review discusses this aspect of strategic surprise at more length; Chapter 6's coverage of the Cuban Missile Crisis also addresses many aspects of deception.

Second, the inclusion of the words "grave threat to 'vital' national interests"⁴⁰ keeps this analysis firmly fixed on 'strategic,' as opposed to 'tactical,' surprise. The CIA makes the distinction between the two adjectives in this way: whereas a *tactical* surprise might involve a specific incident that endangers US interests, a *strategic* surprise involves "important changes in the character or level of security threats" to US vital interests.⁴¹

Most crucially, this definition incorporates "erroneous threat assessment", thus opening the door to consideration of surprises stemming both from the deliberate actions of enemies (e.g. surprise attacks, or 'secrets') *and* from sudden, unanticipated contingent events (e.g. revolutions and other more diffuse phenomenon with no definitive answers, called 'mysteries' in intelligence literature⁴²). This definition would not surprise most laymen, but as Chapter 2's literature review demonstrates, it differs sharply from that employed by the so-called 'orthodox school' of strategic surprise, which focuses exclusively on surprise *attacks*.⁴³ In other words, this definition shifts the theoretical focus away from the culminating event of the surprise (be it an attack or something else), and on to the logically prior antecedent conditions before the surprise: an erroneous threat assessment.

The extension of the definition of strategic surprise beyond surprise attacks flows logically from the remit of the CIA, noted above, to provide general

Analysis of 93 Cases," Strategic Military Deception, eds. Donald C. Daniel and Katherine L. Herbig (New York, NY: Pergamon Press, 1982); Roberta Wohlstetter, "Slow Pearl Harbors and the Pleasures of Deception," Intelligence Policy and National Security, eds. Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Uri Raanan and Warren Milberg (Hamden: Archon Books, 1981).

⁴⁰ The ideas of "national interest" and "vital national interest" are obviously value-laden and are the subject of a vast literature beginning with Realism and beyond. We do not want to open the door to that discussion. We will simply define "vital national interest" as relating to issues so fundamental to the well-being of the United States that they cannot be compromised, and so might result in the use of military force if the US perceived that they had been compromised. For an introduction to the concept of national interest, see Graham Evans and Jeffery Newnham, "The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations," London: The Penguin Group, 1998, pages 344-6.

⁴¹ Jack Davis, "Strategic Warning: If Surprise is Inevitable, What Role for Analysis?," Occasional Papers 2.1 (2003), page 2.

⁴² See for example, Treverton, "Risks and Riddles."

⁴³ That said, this definition is somewhat in keeping with the approach to attacks used by Abraham Ben-Zvi. He examined three surprise attacks and concluded that misunderstanding an enemy's intentions is less important to explaining surprise than a tendency to misunderstand – and to underestimate – an enemy's capabilities. See Abraham Ben-Zvi, "The Dynamics of Surprise: The Defender's Perspective," Intelligence and National Security 12.4 (1997).

strategic warning to US policy-makers. The National Security Act of 1947 does not mention 'attacks'. It simply says the CIA should "correlate and evaluate the *intelligence relating to national security*",⁴⁴ and provide such intelligence to the rest of the government. The CIA, moreover, has always accepted the expansive view that their remit is to prevent strategic surprises of all sorts. Sherman Kent, a pioneer of analysis at the CIA, said in 1949 that intelligence is "the knowledge which our highly placed civilians and military men must have *to safeguard the national welfare*".⁴⁵ Fifty years later, the CIA's Office of Public Affairs *A Consumer's Guide to Intelligence* observed: "Reduced to its simplest terms, intelligence is knowledge and foreknowledge of the world around us – the prelude to decisions and action by US policymakers."⁴⁶ After the September 11th attacks (hereafter, 9/11), an internal CIA publication said, "The central mission of intelligence analysis is to warn US officials about dangers to national security interests and to alert them to perceived openings to advance US policy objectives."⁴⁷ Quite clearly, a definition of strategic surprise that takes in more than merely surprise attacks is appropriate when analysing the CIA's warning performance.

Having linked the operative definition of strategic surprise to threat assessment, we can now define the 'Cassandras'⁴⁸ of this dissertation's title. The term 'Cassandras' refers to individuals inside or outside the Agency who anticipated the approximate course of events that comprised a strategic surprise based on reasoned threat assessments that differed sharply from those of the CIA. Sometimes these Cassandras were outside the Agency (e.g. businessmen, foreign intelligence operatives or émigré economists), and sometimes they were inside the Agency but nevertheless were ignored or sidelined.

A few examples can help clarify and limit the definition of a Cassandra. After any major surprise, some individuals claim to have foreseen it. The fact

⁴⁴ National Security Act of 1947, Accessed online on 14 December, 2006 at: http://www.intelligence.gov/0-natsecact_1947.shtml.

⁴⁵ Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), page vii. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ *A Consumer's Guide to Intelligence*, (Washington DC: Office of Public Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency, 1999), page vii.

⁴⁷ Davis, "Strategic Warning: If Surprise is Inevitable, What Role for Analysis?." page 2.

⁴⁸ The term obviously refers to *The Iliad*, in which Cassandra, the daughter of Hecuba and Priam (King of Troy), was given the gift of prophecy by Apollo in an attempt to win her favours. When he was refused, the god could not withdraw his original gift, so Apollo ensured that though Cassandra would retain her ability to prophesy, she would never be believed. She accurately foretold the fall of Troy, and was duly ignored.

that a Tom Clancy novel prior to 2001 included an airplane suicide attack⁴⁹ does not qualify Clancy as a Cassandra in the 9/11 case. To qualify as a Cassandra here requires that someone anticipate a strategic surprise based on a *reasoned threat assessment*. Therefore, though more specific than Clancy, the stall-keepers in Pakistani bazaars who sold calendars emblazoned “Look Out America, Usama Is Coming”⁵⁰ in 2000 also do not qualify. Consideration of ‘good guessers’, and those who were ‘right, but for the wrong reasons’, is specifically excluded from the cases below (though such anecdotes *do* offer limited clues to the puzzle at hand, and are sometimes used for that purpose).

In contrast, the former head of the CIA’s bin Ladin Station – Michael Scheuer (whom 9/11 Commission staffers nicknamed “the Prophet”⁵¹) – described above does qualify as a Cassandra. Scheuer gave the right warning (he “anticipated the approximate course of events”) for the right reasons (“on the basis of a reasoned threat assessment”).

Note too that not all the Cassandras considered below were ‘hawks’ about threats. As touched on above, Cassandras in the case of the collapse of the USSR highlight erroneous threat perception in the opposite direction: they offered far smaller (i.e. more accurate) estimates of the Soviet Union’s GNP⁵² and forecast societal instability, only to have their assessments repeatedly rebuffed by the CIA. Conversely, people whose works about the USSR were not grounded in conventional scholarship but merely based on observation,⁵³ or whose predictions were ‘one-offs’⁵⁴ – even when roughly correct – are excluded as well: Cassandras need to ‘meet the CIA halfway’ methodologically.

The extant literature on strategic surprise mentions such people only anecdotally. To mix literary metaphors, heretofore Cassandras in intelligence literature have been treated as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were in *Hamlet*, walk-on figures outside the main tragedy. In contrast, this work takes

⁴⁹ Frederick P. Hitz, Why Spy? Espionage in an Age of Uncertainty (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2008), page 83.

⁵⁰ Michael Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, Revised ed. (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), page 307.

⁵¹ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 188.

⁵² For consistency with the economic debate as it was framed at the time, “GNP” or Gross National Product rather than the now-preferred measure “GDP” or Gross Domestic Product is used throughout this dissertation.

⁵³ See for example Andrei Amalrik, Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984? (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1970), *passim*.

⁵⁴ See for example Marian Kamil Dziewanowski, “Death of the Soviet regime: A study in American sovietology by a historian,” Studies in Soviet Thought 12.4 (1972). *passim*.

Cassandras seriously. It does not – Tom Stoppard-like⁵⁵ – make Cassandras the centre of the action, but it does argue that they are valuable foils: Cassandras illustrate how persistent attributes of the CIA's identity and culture shaped the interpretation of evidence, and how such filters removed signals that might have prevented strategic surprises.

Other terms, less specific or central to this work, are defined throughout the text. Chapter 4, for example, contains sections fully explaining both the phases of the intelligence cycle and the distinction made in intelligence analysis between secrets and mysteries. Appendix I also provides a glossary of terms, acronyms, and abbreviations.

Section III: Research Question, Thesis and Scope

This research sets out to understand a puzzle: when it began, the CIA had a clear remit to prevent strategic surprises. Repeatedly, it failed spectacularly. How is this possible? Previous attempts to answer this question have concentrated their analysis – and laid the majority of the 'blame' - on intelligence *consumers* (e.g. political or military leaders) rather than intelligence *producers* like the CIA.⁵⁶ Those scholars who have addressed the contribution of intelligence producers to strategic surprise have created a body of theories that while rarely flatly contradictory of one another, are not fully compatible or complete in themselves (e.g. 'Signal-to-Noise' problems, Bureaucratic Politics and Psychological theories, all discussed below).⁵⁷ Furthermore, many previous explanations for strategic surprises have ignored cultural factors, and the vast majority take the *specific* identity and culture of intelligence organisations and analysts as unproblematic.

In contrast, this dissertation brings culture and identity to the foreground. It views intelligence analysis and strategic surprise as permeated by social facts, and thus firmly in the grip of the identity and culture of the analysing organisation. It presents a social constructivist model of surprise that focuses on the internal make-up of an intelligence producer, the CIA, including the identities of analysts (homogeneity of personnel), and elements of its organisational culture

⁵⁵ Cf. Stoppard's 1966 play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, that tells the story of *Hamlet* from the point of view of these two minor characters.

⁵⁶ Richard K. Betts, "Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy: A Review of Ariel Levite's *Intelligence and Strategic Surprises*," *International Studies Quarterly* 33.3 (1989), page 330.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 2's literature review for coverage of these.

(scientism⁵⁸, a strong predilection for secrets, and a ferocious instinct for consensus). It suggests that by examining these endogenous features of the Agency one can understand how strategic surprises occur. As Chapter 4 discusses, in the language of statistics the cases below show factors of identity and culture enabling both Type I (false negative) and Type II (false positive) errors to accumulate in intelligence analysis until a major surprise occurs. In so doing, it provides a unified understanding of intelligence failure that is not in conflict with prevailing theories of strategic surprise, but which is logically prior to them. *Constructing Cassandra's* theory is logically prior to them because the social mechanisms revealed below create the antecedent conditions at the CIA that enable the theories of strategic surprise proposed by others to operate.

In further contrast to previous approaches to strategic surprise, this dissertation examines side-by-side case studies of surprises traceable to what are often referred to in intelligence literature as 'mysteries' and 'secrets'⁵⁹. The term 'mysteries' refers to events that are unknown – *but not necessarily impossible to foresee* - because the answer is contingent.⁶⁰ Examples of mysteries include the Iranian Revolution and the collapse of the USSR. These events were mysteries because they could not be foretold through any covert – or overt – operation, they could only be “framed by identifying the critical factors and applying some sense of how they have interacted in the past and might interact in the future.”⁶¹ 'Secrets', on the other hand, are epistemologically distinct, because they are “facts that actually exist, but which the opponent is trying to hide”.⁶² Examples of secrets include the USSR's secret plans to base missiles in Cuba and al-Qa'ida's 9/11 conspiracy.

The distinction between mysteries and secrets is a key organisational element of *Constructing Cassandra* because the 'orthodox' approaches to strategic surprise view surprises that stem from secrets as of such a different character from those rooted in mysteries that they exclude them from their analysis completely. In contrast, the argument here is that because all strategic surprises have their origins in erroneous threat assessments, one can find in the identity and culture of the CIA common attributes that link surprises considered both secrets and mysteries by the intelligence community. In other words, the

⁵⁸ i.e. the form and language of rationality over its substance.

⁵⁹ See for example, J. S. Nye, "Peering into the Future," Foreign Affairs 77 (1994), pages 86-8.

⁶⁰ Treverton, "Risks and Riddles."

⁶¹ Treverton, "Risks and Riddles."

⁶² Berkowitz and Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age, pages 74-5. Emphasis added.

research question is built around the CIA repeated failures to prevent *strategic surprises as a complete phenomenon*, not simply the CIA's failure to predict surprise attacks. This is why the argument to follow is divided as it is: Chapter Five discusses the two mysteries – contingent events - cited above, and chapter Six explores the two examples of secrets – surprise attacks. Such an approach also allows this dissertation to cut through some of the rhetorical devices employed following strategic surprises to mask errors in threat assessment. Following the collapse of the USSR, for example, one veteran intelligence official disingenuously asked, "Gorbachev himself and even his KGB didn't know, so how could the CIA?"⁶³ The answer, of course, is that the collapse, while not a certainty, was at least foreseeable as a possibility but not foreseen by the CIA for reasons *Constructing Cassandra* explores. Both the distinction between secrets and mysteries and the selection criteria for cases used are examined at greater length in Chapter Four.

This summary of the research question and thesis raises the issue of the scope of this research. That scope is limited to the CIA from the period of its creation in 1947 until September 10, 2001. It looks mostly at the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence and related bodies that perform intelligence analysis. The CIA's Directorate of Operations (hereafter, 'DO', which gathers 'Human Intelligence' and conducts covert action), the CIA's other departments,⁶⁴ and other agencies of the US Intelligence Community⁶⁵ are discussed when they have an impact on the type, volume and quality of information passed on to the DI.

As Chapter 2 explores, there is a large body of literature on strategic surprise that addresses the so-called 'warning-response problem'⁶⁶: the idea

⁶³ "Difference between a secret and a mystery when it comes to intelligence failures," All Things Considered (8:00 PM ET) USA: National Public Radio, 2002. Emphasis added. It is interesting to discover that one 'secret' that was probably actually a mystery is the burden of Soviet Defense spending on the USSR. While certainly much greater than CIA estimates (see below), the true burden was probably not known to anyone, including Gorbachev. See Noel E. Firth and James H. Noren, Soviet Defense Spending: A History of CIA Estimates 1950-1990 (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, 1998), pages 188 to 191.

⁶⁴ Currently, the CIA is divided into the Directorate of Intelligence, the Directorate of Science & Technology, the National Clandestine Service (called in this dissertation its traditional named, the Directorate of Operations) and the Directorate of Support. See www.cia.gov or Jeffrey T. Richelson, The US Intelligence Community (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008), pages 15 to 29 for more detail.

⁶⁵ Richelson, The US Intelligence Community, *passim* catalogues this ever-shifting mosaic.

⁶⁶ This literature comes in many "shapes and sizes", and is huge: see for example, Steve Chan, "The Intelligence of Stupidity: Understanding Failures in Strategic Warning," The American Political Science Review 73.1 (1979), Jack Davis, "Improving

that strategic surprises occur even in the presence of high-quality warning offered by intelligence producers because intelligence consumers (e.g. politicians and military leaders) do not heed the warnings given.⁶⁷ *Constructing Cassandra* concentrates only on the CIA, and therefore most issues raised by the warning-response problems are outside its scope. After all, if the case is made successfully that the CIA itself is surprised, the 'warning-response problem' is moot (for the puzzle at hand, if not as a practical matter).

In a few places below, in order to provide evidence that the CIA was surprised (contra some of its defenders), the quality of warning issued by the CIA prior to a strategic surprise is addressed. In particular, this issue is discussed with respect to the CIA's warnings about the collapse of the USSR. These claims and their significance are addressed both in Chapter 4 and in Appendix II (which contains excerpts from the Congressional Record in which Robert Gates, during his second nomination to become DCI, offers Langley's best case that they were *not* taken by surprise by this event).

This research cannot dispose of allegations (more often hinted at than stated) that the CIA knew more than it was willing to say to intelligence consumers about the strategic surprises below. *Constructing Cassandra* takes the common sense approach that if either the Agency admits it was surprised by an event (e.g. the Iranian Revolution) or documentation exists to back claims by high-level intelligence consumers that the CIA did not warn them, then the CIA itself was surprised. The Agency's responsibility is not to 'Know but don't tell' – it is to provide strategic warning, and each case study below provides substantial evidence that the CIA was surprised before exploring how that surprise occurred.

Similarly, a moment's thought generates the observation that the same qualities of identity and culture that offer an understanding of the intelligence failures outlined below also offer an understanding of many of the CIA's intelligence successes. These successes – 'prevented surprises' – constitute the 'dark matter' of any work on intelligence failure. Here, though we

CIA Analytic Performance: Strategic Warning," *Occasional Papers* 1.5 (2002), G. W. Hopple, "Intelligence and warning: Implications and lessons of the Falkland Island's war," *World Politics* 36 (1984). A. K. Mansur, "The crisis in Iran: Why the U.S. ignored a quarter century of warning," *Armed Forces Journal International*. January (1979), or Richard K. Betts, "Surprise Despite Warning: Why Sudden Attacks Succeed," *Political Science Quarterly* 95.4 (1980-1).

⁶⁷ This research, covered in the literature review, focuses on issues like the attitudes and behaviour developed by leaders during their careers, their capacity for cooperation, their willingness to consider ideas besides their own, and their ability to admit mistakes or to change course.

acknowledge that intelligence successes are the logical flipside of failures, the CIA's many successes stay in the background. They stay in the background because any 'sample' of successes is tainted by the practical fact that an unknown number of successes are secret, became 'non-events' in the public record⁶⁸, and because of the logical problem that successful prevention frequently leads to a self-altering prediction.⁶⁹

Section IV: Methodology

The methodology employed here is social constructivism. It is social constructivism used in a manner, however, with which some International Relations (IR) scholars may be unfamiliar. In mainstream IR, the unit of analysis is usually nation states. In answer to the question 'What is produced by the interaction between agents and structures?' the standard answer is that social norms⁷⁰ are produced (and re-produced) by actors internalising them and then acting to reproduce them.⁷¹

In contrast, this thesis operates at the level of a single organisation created by a state, the CIA. Furthermore, it argues that behavioural outcomes rather than social norms are produced (though social norms also arise as unspoken 'rules' to the espionage 'game'). Simply put, *Constructing Cassandra* begins with the fairly commonplace observation that the culture and identity of an organization shapes its members' perceptions, affects what they notice, and changes how they interact their environment, screening from view some parts of

⁶⁸ Either because they are classified or because the "non-event" was not "newsworthy".

⁶⁹ Avi Shlaim sums this argument up nicely in the context of surprise attacks, but his argument applies more generally: "Successes may be indistinguishable from failures" because successful prediction may lead an attacker to alter his plans because surprise has been lost. As Betts observes, in that case, successful analysis effectively discredits analysis. See Avi Shlaim, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Yom Kippur War," *World Politics* 28.3 (1976), page 378 and Richard Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable," *World Politics* 31.1 (1978), fn 2, page 62. The issue of self-altering prediction and its ties to counterfactual history is also addressed in Chapter 5.

⁷⁰ Norms are defined here as collective expectations about what behaviour is expected for a given entity. They are constitutive because they specify actions that "will cause others to recognize and validate a particular identity and respond to it appropriately." See Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security," *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), page 54.

⁷¹ See the oft-cited Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics," *International Organization* 41.3 (1992), *passim*, and the more complete argument made in Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, ed. Steve Smith (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

'reality' and magnifying others.⁷² It argues that this process inevitably frames and constrains the CIA's threat perception, and thus is an underlying cause of strategic surprises.

This approach is similar to that used by Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore in "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations"⁷³. That article, like this dissertation, asks a standard constructivist question: as John Ruggie puts it, "How are things in the world put together so that they have the properties they do?"⁷⁴ Specifically, Barnett and Finnemore ask "Do international organizations really do what their creators intend them to do?" To answer that question, they develop a constructivist approach rooted in sociological institutionalism to explain both the power of International Organisations and (more important here) their "propensity for dysfunctional, even pathological, behavior".⁷⁵ Here, the "dysfunction" of the CIA is erroneous threat assessment and the resultant periodic strategic surprises.

We should also acknowledge here that there are both logical and methodological difficulties determining the causal priority of bureaucratic (endogenous) or social (externally-produced) culture. Of course, the answer is 'both.' However, when and how is it either? Some of the characteristics of the CIA's identity and culture discussed below are shared within the wider framework of US political culture generally, or are features of intelligence agencies around the world.⁷⁶ Such dilemmas cannot be resolved in a definitive manner.

⁷² After Elizabeth Kier, "Culture and French Military Doctrine Before World War II," The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996). page 202.

⁷³ Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, "The Power, Politics and Pathologies of International Organizations," International Organization 53.4 (1999).

⁷⁴ See John Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together," International Organization 52.3 (1998). and Wendt, "On constitution and causation in International Relations." quoted in Barnett and Finnemore, "The Power, Politics and Pathologies of International Organizations", page 701.

⁷⁵ Barnett and Finnemore, "The Power, Politics and Pathologies of International Organizations", page 699.

⁷⁶ A scholar who has wrestled with this question in the sphere of corporate (literally) versus national culture is Geert Hofstede. Hofstede developed what is known as the "Hofstede Cultural Orientation Model" by studying IBM 1967 and 1973. By looking at the behaviour of IBM employees in 40 different countries, and defining culture along five different dimensions, Hofstede was able to make cross-country comparisons and consider the impact of IBM's culture versus national culture. He asked "When is the corporate IBM culture dominant, and when is the national culture dominant?" His subsequent studies have included commercial airline pilots and aviation students in 23 countries, civil service managers in 14 countries, "up-market" consumers in 15 countries and "elites" in 19 countries. Hofstede's work has been used extensively by managers of multinational corporations trying to understand the differences between workforces in different national environments. See Hofstede's own site, along with

The approach used here, however, is defensible because the understanding of the CIA and strategic surprise that results from it goes well beyond 'mere description.' As Barnett and Finnemore point out "Understanding the constitution of things does essential work in explaining how those things behave and what causes outcomes."⁷⁷ To the undoubted disappointment of those looking for a quick fix to strategic surprise, they go on to caution "this type of constitutive explanation does not allow us to offer law-like statements such as 'if X happens, then Y must follow.'" Nevertheless, "By providing a more complete understanding of what bureaucracy is, we can provide explanations of how certain kinds of bureaucratic behavior are possible, or even probable, and why."⁷⁸ Here, a more complete understanding of the CIA allows us to see that it is frequently acting from an endogenous culture that misses cues from the exogenous environment, and the result is strategic surprise.

In sum, the main argument here is a constructivist one (the identity and culture of the CIA is reproduced by socialisation and internal social control mechanisms), but *contra* Wendt *et al* endogenous features here take priority, and 'filter' the meanings of actors, events, and symbols from the social environment in manner that produces dysfunctional outcomes.

Section V: Originality

The claim to originality for *Constructing Cassandra* rests on three pillars: the unique the combination of its subject matter, the different method used to analyse that subject matter, and the original conclusions and theory that result from that analysis.

The combination of subject matter considered here is unique for two reasons. First, the broad definition of strategic surprise employed (encompassing a revolution, the sudden demise of an empire, a surprise maneuver, and a surprise attack)⁷⁹, allows a distinctive systematic comparison of four diverse surprises, two rooted in 'secrets' and two 'mysteries'. Previous

www.economist.com, November 28, 2008; Hofstede most accessible works are Geert Hofstede, Culture's Consequences, Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), and Geert Hofstede, Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2005).

⁷⁷ Barnett and Finnemore, "The Power, Politics and Pathologies of International Organizations," page 701.

⁷⁸ Wendt, "On constitution and causation in International Relations." quoted in Barnett and Finnemore, "The Power, Politics and Pathologies of International Organizations", page 701.

⁷⁹ The Iranian Revolution, the demise of the USSR, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and 9/11, respectively.

comparisons of such varied surprises have been anecdotal and partial, lumping them with other cases into categories like ‘intelligence blunders’⁸⁰ or simply ‘intelligence failures’.⁸¹ This dissertation is much the most detailed comparison of the CIA’s record concerning these four events. Second, there has never been a methodical look at Cassandras’ role in these surprises (or any others), nor at how Cassandras might illuminate the general phenomenon of strategic surprise.

Furthermore, the method of analysing both the CIA and strategic surprise is original because there has never been a social constructivist look at either topic.⁸² This methodology allows *Constructing Cassandra* to weigh in with new perspectives on each case study and on strategic surprise as a whole. Uniquely, it takes as its starting point a post-positivist look at the social practice, or observable ‘properties of identity and culture’ of the CIA. The perspective on strategic surprise that results is different from that generated by previous (without exception, positivist) works on either the CIA or strategic surprise.

Finally, the conclusions and the theory of strategic surprise generated by this analysis are original. *Constructing Cassandra* concludes that the roots of diverse strategic surprises are found in the identity and internal culture of the CIA, not – as is frequently asserted – solely outside Langley in the inherent unpredictability of events (as discussed below, outcomes that cannot be predicted, after all, can still be *foreseen* as possibilities⁸³) nor necessarily by obtuse, indifferent, or over-worked intelligence consumers. The Agency’s identity and internal culture is found repeatedly to create the antecedent conditions that allow the proximate mechanisms posited by previous

⁸⁰ See for example Willard C. Matthias, *America's Strategic Blunders* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), and PT Coogan, "America's strategic blunders: Intelligence analysis and national security policy, 1936-1991," *Journal of Military History* 66.1 (2002).

⁸¹ See for example Michael A. Turner, *Why Secret Intelligence Fails* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2005).

⁸² The work that comes closest – an anthropological, highly positivist look at the identity and culture of the CIA - will be reviewed in Chapter two; see Rob Johnston, *Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 2005).

⁸³ This distinction is more than linguistic hair-splitting, and is not a counsel of perfection: international events will always be to some extent “unpredictable” in a strict sense. Paul Saffo, however, is frequently cited below making the distinction between ‘accurate’ versus ‘effective’ forecasts: effective forecasts may not be completely accurate, but they effectively “*delineate the possibilities that extend from a particular moment or event,*” and “*tell you what you need to know to take meaningful action in the present*”. This standard of forecast – effective forecasts - is entirely reasonable, within the CIA’s remit, and is illuminated below by comparing the CIA’s forecasts with those of Cassandras. See Saffo, “Six Rules for Effective Forecasting”, page 1.

understandings of intelligence failure to operate. This insight in turn offers several new perspectives on how strategic surprises arise.

Section VI: Outline of the Argument

So far, this chapter has defined the topic and terms used in this research, summarised the research problem, sketched its thesis, and delineated its scope. It has also briefly discussed this research's methodology, and what makes it original. To close this chapter, we now summarise the argument to come.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on intelligence, the CIA, and strategic surprise. First, it places the study of intelligence in the context of the discipline of IR. Next, it reviews the two different types of primary sources that this research draws upon, and then it provides a review of the secondary literature on strategic surprise. That review highlights the difference between this work and previous works about strategic surprise, and concludes with a summary of how and why the theory proposed in *Constructing Cassandra's* differs from those of other scholars and intelligence practitioners.

Chapter 3 performs three tasks. First, it offers evidence that intelligence work generally and intelligence analysis at the CIA specifically is a social process, and thus a suitable subject for a constructivist analysis. In so doing, this section increases further the distance between the approach to surprise taken here and that used by others.

Next, Chapter 3 employs a constructivist methodology to describe four social mechanisms (and their component parts) that create the characteristics of identity and culture of the CIA on which the rest of this work builds. These social mechanisms are grouped into four categories: Self-selection, Active selection, Socialization, and Mirror-imaging. The social mechanisms in this section underpin this thesis: without them, the attributes of culture and identity employed to understand strategic surprise at the CIA become merely arbitrary – and easily debatable – descriptive features. Here, though these attributes are shown to result from contingent choices, their durability and much of their force is explained. This explanation also reveals why the bureaucratic reorganisations of the CIA (positivistic attempts to perfect its 'intelligence machinery') are unimportant for the puzzle addressed here. In short, this section establishes why the features of identity and culture described in the section that follows it can bear the weight of understanding that later chapters place upon them.

The final section of Chapter 3 introduces the four aspects of the CIA's identity and culture that these social mechanisms produce: 1) homogeneity of

personnel; 2) scientism and/or a propensity to reify reason; 3) the privileging of secret over openly obtained information; and 4) a strong impulse towards consensus. In the cases to follow, these four components become the filters that shape the CIA's flawed threat assessments and that enable strategic surprises.

Figure 1 summarises the relationship between the social mechanisms of section two, and the features of the Agency's culture and identity in section three that they create and maintain. The Y-axis lists the social mechanisms described in section two, and the X-axis summarises the resulting constants of the CIA's identity and culture described in section three. The vertical axis below includes the sub-parts of two of the social mechanisms discussed, Socialisation and Mirror-imaging. Where a block is filled, a contribution by that social mechanism to that attribute of the CIA's identity and culture should be inferred.

Figure 1: Perennial Features of the CIA's Analytical Identity & Culture and Their Related Social Mechanisms

		Perennial Features of the CIA's Identity and Culture			
		Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
Social Mechanism					
1	Self-Selection				
2	Active Selection				
3	Socialization, including:				
	A. Induction and Training				
	B. Definition of "Analytical" Activity				
	C. A Vocabulary of false precision				
	D. "Collegiality": marginalizing dissent				
	E. "Wisdom Literature"				
	F. Isolation, Compartmentalisation & Secrecy				
4	Mirror-imaging				
	A. Mirroring the Consumer				
	B. Mirroring the Community				
	C. Mirroring the Target				

Chapter 4 introduces the frameworks and ideas required to organise and to understand the case studies. It first presents the criteria used to select the four case studies. It discusses such factors as the importance of each surprise for America, its fit with the scope of this analysis, and whether enough unclassified and declassified material⁸⁴ is available for analysis.

Chapter 4 explicitly notes that although an inconsistent amount of *direct* primary source material is available for each case (with the Iran Revolution at the low end of the spectrum, and the Cuban Missile Crisis at the high end), this unevenness is compensated for in *Constructing Cassandra* through the abundance of *indirect* primary sources (such as articles from *Studies in Intelligence* and other internal Agency documents). These internal documents

⁸⁴ Unclassified information has always been available, even if obscure; declassified information was at some point designated classified by the US government, and then later released to the public.

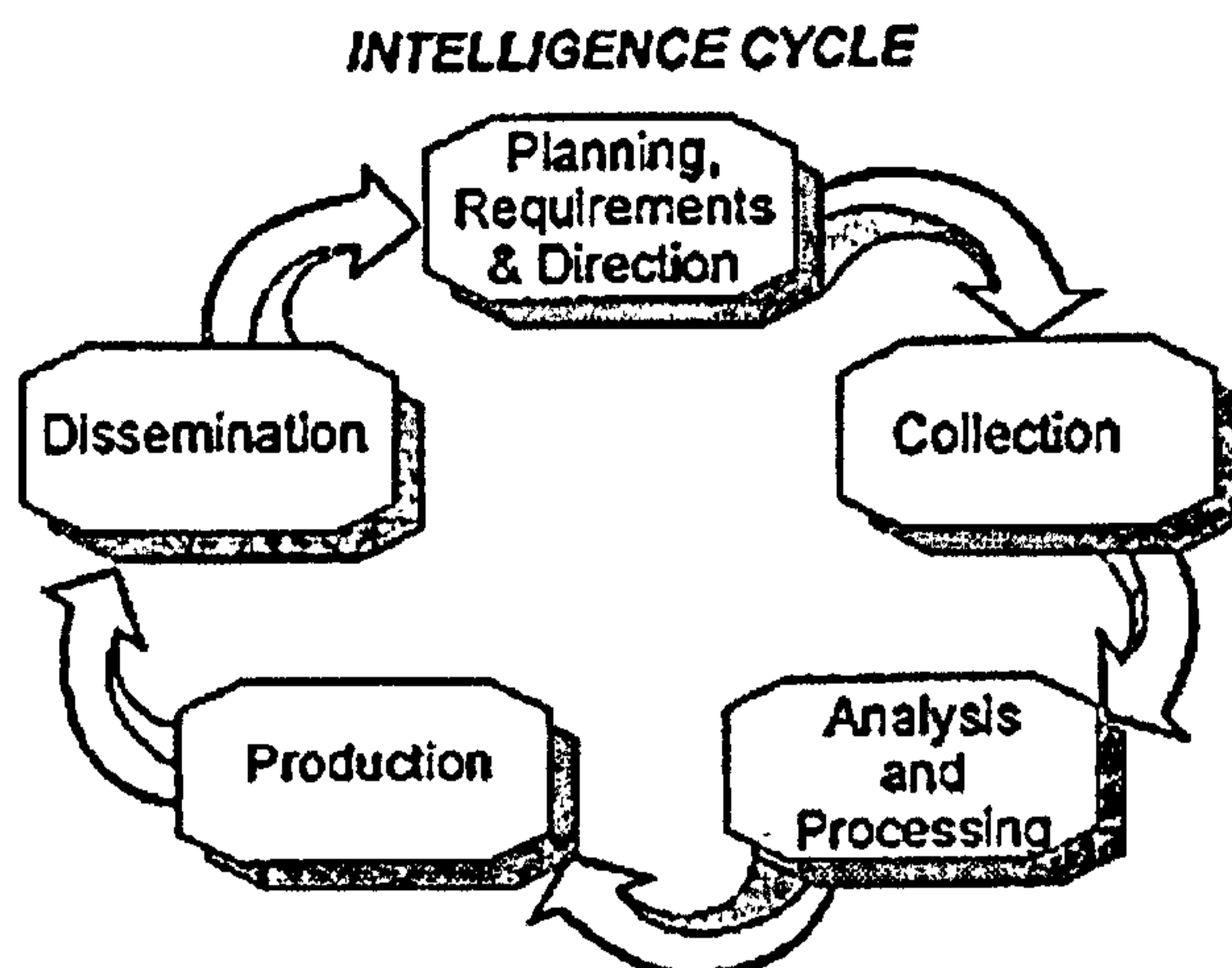
illuminate the culture and identity of the CIA throughout the scope of each surprise and this work as a whole. The section on the Iranian Revolution, for example, draws upon twelve *Studies* articles from the preceding decade and the CIA guide, “Warnings of Revolution”, published in 1980,⁸⁵ and numerous accounts of CIA analyses of Iran by high level intelligence consumers. Though the Cuban Case demonstrates that declassified analyses provide illuminating detail to the hypothesis, the overall approach here is to contrast the nature of the surprising events in each case with features of the internal culture and identity of the CIA. These attributes are exposed by indirect primary sources, and thus the thesis as a whole is not constrained by the gaps in the analytical record in the Iran case. The key documents to sustain *Constructing Cassandra’s* argument, Agency material that provides evidence of persistent features of CIA culture and identity, have no gaps.

Next, Chapter 4 elucidates a key epistemological distinction used in intelligence analysis: the difference between a ‘mystery’ and a ‘secret.’ This distinction – between something ‘unknowable but perhaps foreseeable’ (a mystery), and something ‘knowable but unknown’ (a secret), is central to any discussion of strategic surprise as we have defined it. Every surprise is a complex admixture of both, but the distinction is important to draw because apologists for the Agency following surprises frequently seek either to disown the ‘mysteries business’ entirely or to muddle the logical distinction between the two. Examples of those phenomena and of the appropriate use of both terms are provided.

Third, Chapter 4 introduces a framework widely used by the Intelligence Community, the ‘intelligence cycle’. It explains each part of that cycle: Tasking, Collection, Analysis, Production, and Dissemination. A graphic representation⁸⁶ of the cycle (that occurs as Figure 3 in the text) is offered below.

⁸⁵ Excerpted in Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 261.

⁸⁶ Graphic taken from: <http://www.fas.org/irp/eprint/ic2000/ic2000.htm>



The cycle is not a straightjacket for the four cases, but simply organises the presentation of information within them to ensure a complete and consistent analysis.

Each case study follows the intelligence cycle's convention, and begins at the 'top' with 'Tasking' (Called "Planning, Requirements & Direction" in the graphic above). Note, however, that the cycle is understood to be iterative. This iterative nature is important to emphasise for the light it shed on the self-reinforcing nature of an initially skewed threat assessment – intelligence targets with a low Tasking priority get less Collected about them; this leads to flawed Analysis...and ultimately returns to a continuing low Tasking priority. One can envision inflation of a threat operating through a similar dynamic, so the cycle helps illustrate how the "problem of the wrong puzzle"⁸⁷ in intelligence work can grow into a strategic surprise, allowing both Type I and Type II errors to accumulate. In *Constructing Cassandra*, therefore, the intelligence cycle is used to: 1) organise each case internally, 2) emphasise the ongoing relationship between exogenous and endogenous factors within each case, and 3) underline aspects of cumulative causation in each strategic surprise.

Chapter 5 presents the first case, "The Fall of the Shah of Iran". The Iranian Revolution is shown to be both an important event for the United States, and a 'mystery-based' surprise to the CIA. First, clear evidence of an intelligence failure is presented, and historically singular aspects of the surprise are examined. Next, the four unique characteristics of the CIA's identity and culture are shown to remove, change, magnify, or distort information flows

⁸⁷ Jeffery R. Cooper, Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis (Langley, VA: Central Intelligence Agency, Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005), page 26.

throughout the intelligence cycle prior to the overthrow of the Shah. External Cassandras (found in academia, business, the media, and foreign intelligence agencies) detected numerous signals that the CIA missed, and thereby offer contrast to the CIA's internal assessments. As intended, such Cassandras call into question the claim that this 'mystery' was inherently impossible to foresee. In comparison to the cases that follow, this case is relatively simple: there is little debate about the CIA's failure to assess properly the probability of revolution in Iran. It is also the shortest case, largely because the least amount of direct primary source material about the Iranian Revolution has been declassified.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, by drawing upon indirect primary sources (such as twelve articles from *Studies in Intelligence* from the decade before the Revolution, and other contemporary CIA documents) the telltale signs of the CIA's persistent identity and culture can be mapped onto this failure.

Chapter 5's second case, the demise of the USSR, is another mystery-based surprise, but is more complex. First, we see how the CIA was not alone in its failure to anticipate this surprise. Second, we look in detail at claims that the CIA was not surprised by (or even created) the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ultimately, however, we argue that the CIA's assessments of the USSR were fundamentally erroneous (especially regarding its crucial evaluations of the size of the USSR's economy, and of the regime's perceived legitimacy), and that these assessments are tied to our four key, persistent characteristics of Langley's identity and culture. Investigation of Cassandras from among the émigré community aids this conclusion.

A summary of the influence of each attribute of culture and identity, and its relative importance to erroneous threat assessment in the first two cases, is below (it occurs as Figure 5 in the main text). The Y-axis lists each phase of the intelligence cycle, and the X-axis lists the constants of the CIA's identity and culture; where their intersection is filled, that phase of the cycle is shown to be influenced by the corresponding characteristic of identity and culture in surprises stemming from mysteries.

⁸⁸ In contrast to every other case for example, not even redacted executive summaries of the CIA's internal assessments of their mistakes prior to this surprise have been declassified.

Figure 5: Mysteries - Features of Identity & Culture vs. Key Distortions of the Intel Cycle

Intelligence Cycle Phase	Feature of the CIA's Identity & Culture			
	Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
<i>Tasking</i>				
<i>Collection</i>				
<i>Analysis</i>				
<i>Production</i>				
<i>Dissemination</i>				

Chapter 6 changes gears to consider two surprises rooted in secrets. These cases consider not contingent events, but the definite plans of US adversaries. It opens with the Cuban Missile Crisis, an event frequently considered a triumph for the CIA. The Crisis is revealed instead as a near-disastrous strategic surprise. First, a timeline of events prior to the missiles' discovery provides context for this discussion (most works on the Crisis concentrate on events *after* the missiles were found). We see how far from being a failure in a solitary intelligence estimate as is sometimes alleged⁸⁹, the Crisis stemmed from several fundamental misjudgements about the Agency's most important adversary. By looking at DCI John McCone's role as a Cassandra prior to the Crisis, we again see how the CIA's mistaken assessments have their origin in Langley's identity and culture. We pause while going through this case to review other aspects of intelligence work that further complicates any analysis of strategic surprise: security, deception and the details of various collection sources and methods. As a result, and because the primary and secondary material available on the Crisis is extensive, the Cuban case is the longest presented.

Chapter 6 concludes with the final case study, the terrorist attacks in America of September 11th, 2001. First, 9/11 is verified as 'secrets-based' surprise. As before the Cuba Missile Crisis (but for even longer), an internal Cassandra – Michael Scheuer – is proved to have given warning, and is used as a reference point to highlight how the Agency's identity and cultural prevented a critical mass of people at Langley from recognizing the threat posed by al Qa'ida.

A summary of the influence of each attribute of culture and identity, and its influence on erroneous threat assessment in the third and fourth cases is below (it occurs as Figure 8 in the main text). As before, the Y-axis lists each phase of the intelligence cycle, and the X-axis lists the constants of the CIA's

⁸⁹ See for example Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived" *passim*.

identity and culture; where their intersection is filled, one should infer that that phase of the cycle is influenced in surprises stemming from secrets.

Figure 8: Secrets - Features of Identity & Culture vs. Key Distortions of the Intel Cycle

Intelligence Cycle Phase	Feature of the CIA's Identity & Culture			
	Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
<i>Tasking</i>				
<i>Collection</i>				
<i>Analysis</i>				
<i>Production</i>				
<i>Dissemination</i>				

In the Seventh and final Chapter we first summarise the argument so far, and then answer the question 'What does a constructivist approach reveal about strategic surprise?' To answer this question, we recall that one of the primary strengths of a constructivist approach is that it allows the theoretical breadth to investigate both types of 'common sense' intelligence failures: failures prior to mystery-dependent surprises and prior to the secrets-based attacks addressed by the orthodox school of strategic surprise. Doing so sets up the first value-added aspect of this dissertation's approach: it underlines the enormous commonalities between all four strategic surprises. They share common roots in erroneous threat assessments that flow from enduring endogenous features of identity and culture.

In the CIA's case, these commonalities are summarised in the chart below (it appears as Figure 9 elsewhere in the text). As before, the Y-axis lists the stage of the intelligence cycle; the X-axis here captures both the feature of identity and culture and the respective strategic surprise in which it played a role.

Figure 9: Summary of Identity and Culture's Influence on Surprises

Intelligence Cycle Phase	Features of the CIA's Identity & Culture															
	Homogeneity of Personnel				Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"				A Preference for "Secret" Information				Consensus-Driven			
	IR	FSU	CMC	911	IR	FSU	CMC	911	IR	FSU	CMC	911	IR	FSU	CMC	911
<i>Case</i>																
<i>Tasking</i>																
<i>Collection</i>																
<i>Analysis</i>																
<i>Prod & Diss</i>																

IR = The Iranian Revolution
 FSU = Fall of the Soviet Union
 CMC = Cuban Missile Crisis
 911 = September 11th, 2001

Note that the only unbroken line of filled blocks in the chart above is Tasking. That fact introduces the second conclusion of *Constructing Cassandra*: that the iterative nature of the intelligence cycle reinforces initial errors in Tasking. In other words, the information filters imposed by identity and culture both distort Tasking and then impede 'course correction' of threat assessment in the rest of the cycle (corrections further hindered by the effects of the same characteristics on the other stages of the intelligence cycle that held sway during Tasking).

In other words, we conclude that a social constructivist approach to strategic surprise brings centre-stage what Cooper calls, "The problem of the wrong puzzle"⁹⁰ in intelligence analysis. He quotes a classic intelligence aphorism: "You rarely find what you're not looking for, and you usually do find what you are looking for."⁹¹ This turns the spotlight firmly back on to intelligence Tasking, because an identity and culture-based analysis allows an understanding of the origins of the 'problem of the wrong puzzle', i.e. flawed Tasking. The chart above highlights that if the wrong puzzles are pondered, all the other parts of the intelligence cycle are useless (or worse: the irrelevant information that they provide wastes resources, and results in false confidence). The intelligence cycle is iterative, and an identity and culture-based theory of strategic surprise shows how the problem of the wrong puzzle is compounded and reinforced each time the cycle runs.

Chapter 7 then argues that this model of an identity and culture-induced negative 'feedback loop' (i.e. the return of part of a system's output to change its input in a manner in which initial errors gain in magnitude⁹²) in threat assessment leads to another conclusion. This conclusion is that an understanding of strategic surprise in light of identity and culture is logically prior to the orthodox school of strategic surprise's proximate, partial and overlapping explanations (i.e. it offers an understanding of how the antecedent conditions arise on which Chapter 2's explanations⁹³ of strategic rely). In so doing, *Constructing Cassandra* makes strategic surprises informative again, as it

⁹⁰ Cooper, Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis page 26.

⁹¹ Cooper, Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis page 26.

⁹² Stafford Beer, "feedback," The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, eds. Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley (London: HarperCollins, 1999, pages 312-3.

⁹³ These include Signal-to-noise (e.g. Wohlstetter), Bureaucratic Politics or Organisational Behaviour (e.g. Allison's Models II & III), and Misperception or Psychological theories (e.g. Janis, Jervis and Heuer); see Chapter 2, below.

opens the door to a better understanding of the relationship between culture, identity and intelligence failures.

Finally (*contra* the 'orthodox school' of strategic surprise), understanding strategic surprises as a unified phenomenon embedded in intelligence producers' erroneous threat assessment shifts the burden of proof back to producers like the CIA. Before blaming surprises on intelligence consumers, intelligence producers must demonstrate that it is not their identity and culture that is responsible for the poor-quality warning that in turn results in strategic surprise. After all, in this work Cassandras at odds with that identity and culture have been shown to offer high-quality warning, but to be marginalized in the intelligence production process. Because the theory advanced here highlights how this marginalization occurs, the orthodox school's assertion that most strategic surprises have their origins in failures among intelligence consumers becomes problematic.

Chapter 2 – The Literature of Intelligence and Strategic Surprise

This chapter serves four purposes. First, it situates the study of intelligence within the discipline of IR. Next, it provides a brief overview of the study of intelligence and the CIA generally. Third, this chapter discusses the primary sources on strategic surprise and the CIA used here, including a discussion of how these sources were selected, along with general issues raised by using intelligence documents as primary sources. Section four then closes the chapter with a survey of the secondary literature on strategic surprise. This survey is divided into five time periods; where appropriate, as major works are reviewed, the differences between the approach used in those work versus the approach used here is highlighted. The chapter concludes by summarising the originality of the approach used in *Constructing Cassandra* in light of the literature on surprise as a whole.

Section I: Situating Intelligence Studies in International Relations

The concept of rulers employing intelligence assets to achieve foreknowledge of future events, i.e. to avoid strategic surprise, is probably as old as human society itself,¹ as it is rooted in our species' instinct for survival.² The so-called Old Testament, for example, repeatedly refers to spies and recounts numerous intelligence operations.³ The title of this dissertation draws attention to another ancient document that ponders the issue of strategic foreknowledge: Homer's *Iliad* (probably composed in roughly the eight century BCE, though referring to events about four hundred years earlier).

Herodotus – arguably the first ancient 'historian' in a sense we might now recognise – mentions the Greeks sending spies to Persia prior to Xerxes' invasion of 480 BCE.⁴ Similarly, Thucydides (460-400 BCE) – one of the honorary 'Founding Fathers' of the discipline of IR⁵ – makes multiple references

¹ Thomas Quiggin, Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2007). page 64, and Allen W. Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence (Guilford, Connecticut: The Lyons Press, 2006), page 1.

² Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence, page 1.

³ Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence, pages 2-3.

⁴ Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence, page 5-6.

⁵ Evans and Newnham, "The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations", page 534-5; see also Robert Gilpin: "Everything – well, almost everything – that the new realists find

to intelligence collection efforts in *The Peloponnesian War*. Unfortunately, he does not offer a picture of how this information was analysed.⁶ In *The Landmark Thucydides - A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, Strassler notes thirty-two occasions when various leaders are provided intelligence in the form of raw data,⁷ but Thucydides never mentions specific groups or individuals being responsible for collating and analysing the information, and offers no examples of condensed intelligence assessments.⁸ In other words, Thucydides provides no evidence for organised intelligence analysis among the Greeks of his time. For actual foreknowledge, the various combatants in the Peloponnesian War apparently relied on oracles,⁹ which Thucydides dismisses.¹⁰

Thucydides' combatants were not alone in this approach, however: as Shlomo Gazit says in "Estimates and Fortune-Telling in Intelligence Work", consulting astrologists, oracles, and fortune-tellers was a customary way for kings and generals to solve an age-old problem: decision-making under conditions of uncertainty.¹¹

intriguing...can be found in the *History of the Peloponnesian War*"; Robert Gilpin, "The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism," *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert Keohane (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), page 308. Der Derian explores Gilpin's idea critically in James Der Derian, "A Reinterpretation of Realism: Genealogy, Semiology, Dromology," *International Theory: Critical Investigations*, ed. James Der Derian (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1995), pages 382-5. One might not need to go such extremes, however, and simply agree with Alexseev that a "minor squabble between Greek city states" exercises undue influence on Western Political Science, especially in light of his point that the Mongol Empire (the largest in the history of the world) and the rise of Genghis Khan challenge many fundamental Western assumptions about power and rationality. See Alexseev, *Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle*, pages 123-151; on Mongol decision-making using intelligence, see especially pages 146-8, and also the account of Genghis Khan's campaigns in Jack Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2004), pages 81-191.

⁶ Quiggin, *Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age*, page 66.

⁷ Robert B. Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides - A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996), page 672.

⁸ Quiggin, *Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age*, page 66.

⁹ Quiggin, *Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age*, page 66.

¹⁰ Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides - A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, page xx.

¹¹ S. Gazit, "Estimates and fortune telling in intelligence work," *International Security* 4 (1980), page 36. Gazit's phrase "decision-making under conditions of uncertainty" is here used in a general sense: it is *not* intended to open the door to the ideas of Game Theory, Nash Equilibria, etc. Without doubt, the phrase "decision-making under uncertainty" was first applied in Game Theory (following its development by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern) and involved in nuclear strategy. The physicists and mathematicians Edward Teller, Hans Bethe, and Albert Wohlstetter (husband of Roberta Wohlstetter, discussed below; she is a very important figure in the literature on

This also raises Laqueur's point: as long as humans have been collecting information about the intentions and power of neighbouring tribes, there the usefulness and effectiveness of intelligence has been criticized.¹²

The Roman Republic and Empire certainly used occult methods similar to those of their Greek predecessors, and they also gathered what is today called tactical intelligence. A surprising amount of Roman strategic understanding of enemies, however, both 'barbarians' and rival empires like the Parthians was rooted in traditional – what today might even be called literary – sources.¹³ The Roman approach to intelligence continued in the Byzantine period, though Luttwak recently pointed out that the truth can never be known entirely, as intelligence operations are usually undocumented and unknown even to contemporary observers.¹⁴

strategic surprise), and of course Herman Kahn, author of *On Thermonuclear War*, all thought strategy and in that context and sometimes wrote about surprise attacks. Their work, however, did not deal with *intelligence analysis* except in the most general sense. In fact, essentially the doctrine of Mutually assured destruction assumes the probability of surprise, and is predicated on being able to prevail against it through a "second strike" capability. Therefore, through organisations such as the RAND Corporation and the Hudson Institute, these theorists were addressing the same policy-makers (i.e. the "Warnees") as the CIA, but they were doing so from a very different angle. No evidence was found that their writings directly influence intelligence analysis at the CIA for any of the cases considered. Therefore, their work (and Game Theory generally) is extremely interesting but was deemed out of scope for this dissertation. As an aside, mainly for those interested in the history of ideas, some footnotes in the Cuban Missile Crisis case below deal briefly with the relationship among Game Theory, intelligence analysis when dealing with secrets, games of "perfect information" like chess, and games of "imperfect information" like poker and *Kriegsspiel* (a nineteenth-century German version of chess in which neither player can see the other's pieces, that requires a third party to act as a referee).

¹² Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 3.

¹³ Susan P. Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), pages 66-7. See also N. J. E. Austin and N. Rankov, *Exploratio: Military and Political Intelligence in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 1995), Francis Dvornik, *Origins of Intelligence Services: The Ancient Near East, Persia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, the Arab Muslim Empires, the Mongol Empire, China, Muscovy* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974), and the definitive Rose Mary Sheldon, *Espionage in the Ancient World: An Annotated Bibliography of Books and Articles in Western Languages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008). Mattern is especially useful for making oneself aware of problematic the projection of modern strategic concepts onto ancient cultures is. As wonderful to read and apparently illuminating as books such as Edward M. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) are, Mattern makes the point that to see the Romans or other ancients as expert military or diplomatic strategists in the modern sense is illusory.

¹⁴ The different types of intelligence activities that can be found or deduced from Byzantine documents is well covered in Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pages 62-7. There is also, of course, extensive coverage in Rose Mary Sheldon, *Espionage in the Ancient World: An Annotated Bibliography of Books and Articles in Western Languages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008).

Credit for being the first nation in the ancient world to develop empirical theories of strategic intelligence must go to China.¹⁵ The first written set of recommendations for the organisation of an intelligence service belongs to the Sun Tzu,¹⁶ who lived circa 400-320 BCE. Along with the scholar and general Wu Ch'i (430-381 BCE),¹⁷ Sun Tzu provided the Chinese with a systematic set of theories of intelligence and political forecasting so that one generation could build on the experience of another.

Before continuing, we must situate the study of intelligence firmly in the field of IR. To do so, consider a common complaint among US intelligence consumers during the Cold War: in many CIA assessments of Soviet objectives, consumers "could substitute the name of any other great power in history – Imperial Rome, 16th century Spain, Napoleonic France – and [the assessments would] sound equally valid."¹⁸ Clearly, if one accepts the idea that IR as a discipline has traditionally been defined as "the study of the diplomatic, military, and strategic relations between states"¹⁹ (however much one may – as Brown does – critique that definition), then the study of intelligence is a logical sub-field within that discipline.²⁰ Note too that in addition to intelligence, surprise has also been examined in IR in both a military and diplomatic context.²¹

¹⁵ Ralph D. Sawyer, The Tao of Spycraft: Intelligence Theory and Practice in Traditional China (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), page xiii. For a discussion of this theory as opposed to covert action and espionage, see Part Four: *Theories of Evaluating and Intelligence*, pages 289-520.

¹⁶ Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence, page 5.

¹⁷ Quiggin, Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age, page 65. Wu Ch'i is also discussed extensively in Sawyer, above.

¹⁸ Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable", page 71.

¹⁹ Chris Brown, Understanding International Relations (London: Palgrave, 2001), page 3. He then proceeds to outline the problems with this definition between pages 3 to 19. What is important for our purposes, however, is simply to point out that the study of intelligence is a logical and legitimate sub-field of the discipline of IR.

²⁰ Indeed, Andrew argues that if anything IR underestimates the relevance of intelligence to the discipline. See Christopher Andrew, "Intelligence, International Relations and 'Under-theorisation' " Intelligence and National Security 19.4 (2004), *passim*.

²¹ Military surprise is dealt with at length below. The literature on diplomatic surprise is less covered in what follows, though several scholars have worked on both, especially Michael Handel; see his works on military surprise *passim* below and on diplomatic surprise see Michael. I. Handel, "Surprise and change in international politics," International Security 4 (1980) and Michael. I. Handel, The Diplomacy of Surprise: Hitler, Nixon, Sadat (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Center for International Affairs, 1981). For an interesting discussion of the ambiguous position of the study of intelligence between the disciplines of History and International Relations, see: R. Gerald Hughes, "Of Revelatory Histories and Hatchet Jobs: Propaganda and Method in Intelligence History " 23.6 (2008).

Section II: The Study of US Intelligence and the CIA

Histories of intelligence in the English-speaking world²² frequently begin in the early modern period with such figures as Sir Francis Walsingham (Secretary of State and spymaster for Queen Elizabeth I), or John Thurloe (Cromwell's intelligence chief, who ran the first department called a 'Department of Intelligence').²³ These histories of early modern intelligence, however, usually deal with espionage and tradecraft, and almost never address intelligence *analysis*,²⁴ which as a separate and formal activity is a modern phenomenon.²⁵

In a specifically American context, it is possible to see much of the history of US foreign policy as a reaction to an early strategic surprise: the occupation and burning of Washington by British forces in the war of 1812.²⁶ The distinguished historian John Lewis Gaddis maintains that this event – which is even commemorated in the little-sung third verse of the *Star-Spangled Banner*²⁷ – led to an American quest for security that has never stopped, and explains much of the pattern of US foreign policy since then.²⁸

Despite this quest for security, however, the US was the last major power in the world to acquire a professional foreign intelligence agency,²⁹ and many surveys of US intelligence – apart from relating isolated instances of derring-do or covert action from earlier periods – start with the first permanent

²² The literature coming out of China has already been noted; some pointers towards the rich history of intelligence in Russian is offered in the footnotes of the collapse of the USSR case, below.

²³ Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence, page 11.

²⁴ A partial exception to this generalization is arguably work discussing cryptography and traffic analysis through the ages.

²⁵ Michael Herman, Intelligence Power in Peace and War (Cambridge: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996), page 2.

²⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, Surprise, Security and the American Experience (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pages 10-46. For a good survey of US intelligence from George Washington to the 20th Century, see Christopher Andrew, M, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1995), pages 6-30.

²⁷ As Gaddis mentions, the British failure to take Fort McHenry in Baltimore harbour upon leaving Washington runs as follows:

*And where is that band who so hauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a country, shall leave us no more?
Their blood has washed out their foul foot step's pollution
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave.*

²⁸ Gaddis, Surprise, Security and the American Experience, pages 10-46.

²⁹ Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 1.

US foreign intelligence agency, the CIA, or its immediate predecessor, the WWII Office of Strategic Services (OSS).³⁰

A quick survey of the secondary literature (and common sense) reveals that the CIA has never been a 'neutral' subject. Intelligence services may be, as Powers writes as "inevitable a part of modern states as armies, telephone and postal services, or a system of collecting taxes",³¹ but especially since the late 1960s the CIA has aroused strong emotions in popular discourse and academia.³² It has also generated an immense body of fiction³³ and downright myth (some of which is encouraged by disinformation campaigns³⁴). Perhaps for that reason, as Yale historian Robin Winks observes, there is comparatively little careful, solid research on the US Intelligence Community even though intelligence history is "an essential component of our times".³⁵

On the other hand, most of what arouses controversy about the CIA – 'covert action' – generates a lot of secondary material that does nothing little to advance theoretical insights.³⁶ Rather than attention-grabbing espionage and direct political action activities of the CIA, *Constructing Cassandra* largely focuses on the seemingly mundane office-bound tasks of the CIA, making much so-called 'intelligence literature' irrelevant.

³⁰ For a discussion of the often overlooked UK role in establishing the CIA (and the rarely discussed possible "fruit of a poison tree" question with respect to penetration by Soviet intelligence that this genealogy may raises for the CIA) see footnotes on this topic in Chapter 4, below.

³¹ Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA*, page 308.

³² One scholar characterizes her efforts to pursue intelligence scholarship as "like being in a dog-eat-dog world and wearing milk-bone underwear". See Rose Mary Sheldon, *Espionage in the Ancient World: An Annotated Bibliography of Books and Articles in Western Languages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), page 7.

³³ An accessible and well-informed survey that attempts to put this literature in some realistic perspective is Frederick P. Hitz, *The Great Game: The Myths and Reality of Espionage* (New York: Random House, 2004).

³⁴ This phenomenon was common during the Cold War, and infects even some of the "primary" literature on intelligence, such as H. A. R. ("Kim") Philby, *My Silent War* (New York, NY: Modern Library Classics, 2002) or all the books (allegedly) by Philip Agee in the 1970s (actually written by Cuban and Soviet intelligence; see Oleg Kalugin and Fen Montaigne, *The First Directorate* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994) page 192). It also happens in the post-Cold War world: concrete examples of such active disinformation measures are repeatedly described in Peter Earley, *Comrade J* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons 2007).

³⁵ Robin W. Winks, *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1987), page 476.

³⁶ Quiggin, *Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age*, page 69.

Section III: Strategic Surprise and the CIA: Primary Sources

The primary sources that this dissertation draws upon are of two types: direct primary sources (the CIA's intelligence 'products' themselves), and indirect primary sources (other CIA or US Government documents directly addressing intelligence-related topics).

Direct Primary Sources

The direct primary sources used below consist mainly of actual declassified CIA documents: the Agency's intelligence estimates and internal reports about the four case studies, as well as reports on other intelligence issues. These include numerous NIEs and Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIEs), which are "considered the analytical profession's most prestigious products".³⁷ These have been supplemented by declassified reports of various other internal and external official bodies or government panels (e.g., the CIA's Office of the Inspector General's *Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks*³⁸ or the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence's *An Evaluation of CIA's Analysis of Soviet Economic Performance 1970-1990*).³⁹ The direct content of these documents is examined for the light they shed on individual surprises; at least one prominent scholar feels that particularly when examining strategic surprises, the use of primary sources is vital as a corrective to the "fragmentary and distorted"⁴⁰ information which secondary sources offer⁴¹. Here, the cultural indicators embedded within such sources are exposed (e.g., the "game of footnotes",⁴² explained below).

³⁷ Thomas W. Shreeve, "The Intelligence Community Case Method Program: A National Intelligence Estimate on Yugoslavia," Intelligence and the National Security Strategist: Enduring Issues and Challenges, eds. Roger Z. George and Robert D. Kline (Lanham, MD Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006). On the origins of NIEs see Ludwell Lee Montague, "The Origins of National Intelligence Estimating," Studies in Intelligence 16.2 (1972). For how Congress views NIEs recently, see Richard A. Best, Intelligence Estimates: How Useful to Congress? (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2006).

³⁸ "OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,"

³⁹ "An Evaluation of CIA's Analysis of Soviet Economic Performance 1970 -1990," House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence-Review Committee Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1991.

⁴⁰ Levite, Intelligence and Strategic Surprises, page 174.

⁴¹ Due to factors like hindsight bias.

⁴² Bruce D. Berkowitz and Allen E. Goodman, Strategic Intelligence for American National Security (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pages 132-3.

There is another noteworthy aspect to the primary sources used below. None of the documents drawn upon was “leaked”,⁴³ i.e. all have been through the CIA’s declassification process and, in many cases, partly redacted. They were obtained either through published anthologies (e.g. *The Soviet Estimate: US Analysis of the Soviet Union*⁴⁴; *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962*⁴⁵; *At Cold War’s End: US Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*⁴⁶) or via online collections. Such a collection is maintained by the CIA itself, and by several NGOs such as The Federation of American Scientists.⁴⁷ Where redactions seemed pertinent, these redactions have been noted in the text. As the case selection criteria section in Chapter 4 discusses, the availability of sufficient declassified primary sources was a key screen for the case studies ultimately chosen. In a few instances below, the CIA’s refusal to declassify documents (e.g. the entirety of its post-mortem on the Iranian Revolution, and most documents about Iran leading up to those events; all but the Executive Summary of the Agency’s OIG’s post-mortem on 9/11) is specifically noted. The possibility of “spinning” analysis of a case by selective declassification of NIEs while withholding others is also considered in the case of the Agency’s record on the USSR. The final case investigates the significance of the *absence* of an NIE during a key period. Thus, primary documents like NIEs are looked at below as individual sources, but the possible significance of redactions, declassifications, and the existence (or lack thereof) of estimates is also considered.

Another category of direct primary sources used here is the unclassified items published by the CIA for other branches of government; examples include items such as the CIA Office of Public Affairs’ *A Consumer’s Guide to Intelligence*.⁴⁸ The CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence has also made available several declassified CIA analytical guides such as *A Compendium of*

⁴³ This is only because no “leaked” document found was found that was both useful to this argument and indubitably original.

⁴⁴ Thomas S. Blanton and Byrne Blanton, eds., *The Soviet Estimate: US Analysis of the Soviet Union* (Washington DC: National Security Archives, 1995).

⁴⁵ McAuliffe, *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962*.

⁴⁶ Benjamin B Fischer, *At Cold War’s End: US Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Washington, DC: History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999).

⁴⁷ See www.fas.org.

⁴⁸ *A Consumer’s Guide to Intelligence*, (Washington DC: Office of Public Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency, 1994).

*Analytic Tradecraft Notes, Volume I,*⁴⁹ or *Sherman Kent's Final Thoughts on Analyst-Policymaker Relations.*⁵⁰

The final type of direct primary sources used in *Constructing Cassandra* includes emails and conversations between the author and former CIA employees and other US government employees. These sources have been quoted with permission, and their accompanying footnotes provide complete context to their judgements and remarks.

Indirect Primary Sources

As a reminder, the term ‘indirect primary sources’ is used here to indicate CIA or other US government documents apart from actual intelligence estimates and analytical products. The most important of these indirect primary sources consists of articles from the CIA’s internal journal, *Studies in Intelligence*. This journal was for many years classified (though known to “knowledgeable outsiders”).⁵¹ Individual articles remain unavailable, but a vast number of *Studies* articles have been declassified since the end of the Cold War,⁵² and these articles are for purposes of this dissertation a primary source. The chapters that follow draw upon over fifty *Studies* articles, spanning the years 1955 to 2007. Some of these articles deal directly with questions of intelligence gathering and analysis. Others are employed to open a window on the CIA’s internal culture, and thus function as a primary source for our examination of the Agency’s identity and internal culture.

A second indirect type of primary source is memoirs or intelligence handbooks published by former CIA employees. This category includes biographies such as Robert Gates’ *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*,⁵³ Theodore Shackley’s *Spymaster: My Life in the CIA*⁵⁴, and also collections of

⁴⁹ Anonymous, “A Compendium of Analytic Tradecraft Notes, Volume I,” ed. Product Evaluation Staff of the Directorate of Intelligence (Central Intelligence Agency, 1995).

⁵⁰ Jack Davis, “Sherman Kent’s Final Thoughts on Analyst-Policymaker Relations,” *Occasional Papers* 2.3 (2003).

⁵¹ H. Bradford Westerfield, ed., *Inside CIA’s Private World: Declassified Articles from the Agency’s Internal Journal 1955-1992* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), page xiv.

⁵² First in Westerfield, ed., *Inside CIA’s Private World: Declassified Articles from the Agency’s Internal Journal 1955-1992*, and then via the CIA’s website through The Center for the Study of Intelligence.

⁵³ Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

⁵⁴ Theodore Shackley, *Spymaster: My Life in the CIA* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, Inc., 2006).

reminiscences such as *CIA Briefings of the Presidential Candidates, 1952-1992*.⁵⁵ They also encompass actual intelligence handbooks by CIA authors or other US intelligence officials that have been published in the private sector such as *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*⁵⁶ or *Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach*.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, some CIA biographies that might shed further light on Cassandras – such as David Robarge's *John McCone as Director of Central Intelligence* – remain classified.⁵⁸

The reader is reminded that secondary CIA material has a special feature: Agency employees are obliged by law to submit their manuscripts to the Agency's Publication Review Board prior to publication even after they have left the CIA; both a certain degree of self-censorship and actual censorship can be therefore inferred. The purpose of the review, however, is simply to eliminate classified material: authors usually note that clearance by CIA's Publication Review Board "should not be construed as an official release of information, confirmation of its accuracy, or an endorsement of the author's views".⁵⁹ For that reason, it is frequently relevant to the central argument made here.

Reminiscences by foreign sources such as General Gribkov's vivid memories in *Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis*⁶⁰ or Markus Wolf's *Man Without a Face: the Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster*⁶¹ are approached here the same way, i.e. under the assumption that they were released under similar strictures.⁶²

⁵⁵ John L. Helgerson, *CIA Briefings of the Presidential Candidates, 1952-1992* (Laguna Hills, CA: Aegean Park Press, 2000).

⁵⁶ Cynthia M. Grabo, *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004).

⁵⁷ Robert M Clark, *Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2004).

⁵⁸ See reference to this classified biography in Snider, *The Agency and the Hill: CIA's Relationship with Congress, 1946-2004*, fn 80, page 25.

⁵⁹ Shackley, *Spymaster: My Life in the CIA*, page vii.

⁶⁰ Anatoli I. Gribkov and William Y. Smith, *Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Chicago, IL: Edition Q, inc., 1994).

⁶¹ Markus Wolf and Anne McElvoy, *Man Without a Face: the Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1997).

⁶² The problem of foreign sources also being infected by intentional disinformation, like Philby's *My Silent War*, is noted in a footnote above.

Section IV: Strategic Surprise and the CIA: Secondary Sources

The secondary literature on strategic surprise falls naturally into five time periods.⁶³ These are the literature up to World War Two (WWII), post-WWII to 1969, the literature of the 1970s, the literature from 1980 through 2001, and the literature since 2001.

Pre-WWII Secondary Literature⁶⁴

As noted above, for our purposes pre-WWII secondary literature begins with Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. The main contribution of *The Art of War* to modern thinking about strategic surprise is simply that deception and surprise form the basis of most successful warfare and other forms of conflict between states. The CIA's counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton, for example, when asked what the use of KGB deception could be in a world armed with nuclear weapons, simply referred the questioner *The Art of War*.⁶⁵

Besides Sun Tzu, the dominant author still drawn upon by theorists of strategic surprise from this period is Carl von Clausewitz. Specifically, contemporary scholars still draw upon his unfinished study of 1832, *On War*.⁶⁶ As we see below, there is a large body of literature on strategic surprise that, for differing reasons, considers the problem of surprise to be 'intractable' or 'inevitable'. Such authors frequently use, consciously or not, the idea of the inherent unpredictability of conflict subsumed under the Clausewitzian notion of

⁶³ Earlier versions of this chapter attempted an ideas-based approach that still tried to be "Mutually Exclusive, Collectively Exhaustive" ("MECE"): "Anecdotal theories, Information Theory-based theories, Bureaucratically/Organisationally-based theories, Psychologically-based theories, and Politically-based theories." The problem with that approach is that it did not allow for the fact that scholars addressing strategic surprise, even when propounding an over-arching theories, rarely commit to a uni-casual explanation for surprise (thus "mutually exclusive" categories could not be sustained without severe injury to the subtlety of some works). There are also levels of analysis problems attempting to shoehorn the literature to such a theoretically narrow approach, so it has been abandoned in favour of a chronological method.

⁶⁴ Before beginning this survey, a note about the approach to citing secondary works in this dissertation is appropriate. The alert reader will notice that footnotes are used throughout both to document facts and to credit the assertions, quotations, and ideas of others. Special effort is also made, however, to offer in the footnotes a more expansive guide to the literature and ideas touched upon than is strictly required. Though much subordinate to the central aim of this work, the author's aim in these notes is to aid others interested in the world of intelligence, strategic surprise, and related issues.

⁶⁵ Thomas Powers, "The Riddle Inside the Enigma," *New York Review of Books* August 17 1989, page 18. On the other hand, translators of Chinese texts tend not to be intelligence experts and vice versa. For the problems the text presents to intelligence scholars see Michael Warner, "The divine skein: Sun Tzu on intelligence " *Intelligence and National Security* 21.4 (2006).

⁶⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

'Friction' (*Gesamtbegriff einer allgemeinen Friktion*).⁶⁷ Sometimes Clausewitz is even openly repositioned as a sort of early Chaos Theorist as in Beyerchen's "Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War". (Colin Gray, however, has recently argued convincingly that approaches applying Chaos Theory to war and diplomacy too literally and uncritically are flawed. Rather, a somewhat chaotic unpredictability about the consequences of strategic behaviour is a defining characteristic of – but not a fatal impediment – to strategy⁶⁸ and therefore to anticipating some strategic surprises). Other authors, notably Handel, note that Clausewitz's theories can accommodate change, and highlight that in the context of modern strategic surprises, Clausewitz's ideas require modification (especially as a result of technological innovations that grant adversaries the ability to deliver a major strategic defeat in minutes).⁶⁹

Secondary Literature from WWII to 1969

The second period in the literature on strategic surprise begins at the end of the WWII and runs until 1969. These years encompass the early years of the CIA, and there are notable contributions from authors intimately associated with the Agency. This literature largely tried to digest intelligence lessons of the War (especially the strategic surprise of Pearl Harbor), and contemporary shocks such as the Chinese intervention in North Korea (1950), the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968).

For our purposes, this period opens with the seminal *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, published in 1949.⁷⁰ Though not billed as such, it was essentially a textbook on strategic intelligence⁷¹ written by the US intelligence veteran and CIA employee Sherman Kent. Prior to WWII, Kent was a History professor at Yale. During the War, he became head of the research and analysis branch of the OSS, and after a brief stint back at Yale he was appointed Deputy Director of the CIA's Office of National Estimates in 1950; Kent was chair of that body from 1957 to 1967.⁷² *Strategic Intelligence for*

⁶⁷ Chapter 6 in Barry D. Watts, "Clausewitzian Friction and the Future of War," McNair Paper 52 Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 1996.

⁶⁸ Colin S. Gray, Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pages 101-10.

⁶⁹ Handel, War, Strategy and Intelligence, pages 55-89.

⁷⁰ Kent, Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy.

⁷¹ Quiggin, Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age, page 72.

⁷² Michael A. Turner, "Kent, Sherman (1903-1986)," Historical Dictionary of United States Intelligence (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006), page 110.

American World Policy is widely considered a foundational document for American intelligence analysts. One CIA author called Kent “the godfather of the vital National Intelligence Estimates and the man for whom the CIA's school of analysis is named”,⁷³ and his “Principles of Intelligence Analysis” is still used in Agency analysts’ training.⁷⁴ He also founded the CIA’s in-house journal *Studies in Intelligence*, mentioned above. Because of Kent’s central role in shaping the culture and identity of the Agency, his writings are discussed at length in the chapters that follow.⁷⁵ Here, however, we should mention that Kent’s book does not explicitly discuss strategic surprise (in fact, surprise does not feature in the book’s extensive index, nor do individual strategic surprises such as Pearl Harbor or Operation Barbarossa). The closest Kent comes is his discussion of what he calls “positive intelligence”, saying that it “is not merely an intelligence for the commander on the offensive (the man who has taken or plans to take the initiative), it is also intelligence which protects this commander against the surprise moves of his opponent. In this aspect it has an important defensive and protective flavor”.⁷⁶ In short, Kent’s work does much to establish a basic US literature on intelligence, but skirts the explicit issue of strategic surprise.

As we see below, however, Kent’s *oeuvre* as a whole had other effects relevant to *Constructing Cassandra’s* argument. It did much to advance the especially ‘American’ view that “intelligence could be treated as a science”.⁷⁷ As the title indicates, Kent was specifically writing about intelligence for *American*

⁷³ Michael Schrage, “What Percent Is ‘Slam Dunk’?,” The Washington Post Sunday, February 20 2005.

⁷⁴ Stephen Marrin, “CIA’s Kent School: A Step In the Right Direction,” International Studies Association Conference New Orleans, LA: ISA Archive Online, 2002.

⁷⁵ Portions of Sherman Kent’s legacy are subjected to detailed and at times severe analysis below. None of this is meant as an attack upon him or upon the CIA as a whole: the author stands in awe of Kent’s monumental achievements, and hopes that in a small way this work improves upon Kent’s true legacy: the relentless search for better intelligence analysis. The same may be said the discussion of the vast majority of other CIA employees discussed below – the criticism is there, but the task is not underestimated and the intent of all criticism here is ultimately constructive. As Nietzsche says in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “If, however, thou hast a suffering friend, then be a resting-place for his suffering; like a hard bed, however, a camp-bed: thus wilt thou serve him best.”

⁷⁶ Kent, Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy, pages 210-1. He then distinguishes “positive intelligence” from “security intelligence” through a household analogy: policemen use security intelligence to protect your house against burglars or catch them after you have been robbed; positive intelligence tells you “when there is going to be a boost in the price of beef” or “when your bank is going to fail”: in other words, strategic warning.

⁷⁷ Quiggin, Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age, page 72.

world policy;⁷⁸ his definition of intelligence given in the previous chapter was likewise couched in terms of what information the *American* government requires.⁷⁹ This ‘scientific’ approach is central to the analysis contained in this dissertation and Chapters Three, Five, and Six discuss it at length.

Another important intelligence work from this period is DCI Allen Dulles’ *The Craft of Intelligence*,⁸⁰ first published in 1963. As Quiggin says, this somewhat eccentric work – part memoir, part string of anecdotes, and part meditation on the problems of intelligence work – never makes “an effort to examine a theory of intelligence or to explore the bounds and limits of the subject”.⁸¹ Dulles’ book is also more overtly anti-Communist than Kent’s: Dulles baldly discusses the USSR, China, and other Communist nations as opponents, whereas Kent – perhaps in keeping with a ‘scientific’ outlook – couches his discussions in terms of a hypothetical nation called “Great Frusina”.⁸² Dulles nowhere addresses the issue of surprise, but because he was the fifth DCI (1953-1961),⁸³ his work became an influential primer on intelligence, and it is a useful source for some of the cultural analysis of the CIA that follows.

In the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, some scholars recognized the void in theory regarding intelligence and strategic surprise. In his 1964 article “Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles”, the third important scholar of strategic surprise who emerged in this period, Klaus Knorr,⁸⁴ issued a call for “systematic attempts at theorizing on intelligence”,⁸⁵ characterising the current state of affairs as “informal rather than

⁷⁸ Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence, page 169.

⁷⁹ Kent defines intelligence as “the knowledge which *our* highly placed civilians and military men must have to safeguard the national welfare.” Emphasis added. See Kent, Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy, page vii.

⁸⁰ Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence.

⁸¹ Quiggin, Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age, page 75.

⁸² Kent, Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy, *passim*.

⁸³ Michael A. Turner, “Dulles, Allen Welsh (1893-1969),” Historical Dictionary of United States Intelligence Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006, page 61.

⁸⁴ For his later work on such related issues as threat perception see among others: Klaus Knorr, “Strategic Surprise in Four European Wars,” Strategic Military Surprise: Incentives and Opportunities, eds. Klaus Knorr and Patrick Morgan (New York, NY: National Strategy Information Center, 1983), and Klaus Knorr, “Threat Perception,” Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems, ed. Klaus Knorr (Lawrence, KN: University Press of Kansas, 1976).

⁸⁵ Klaus Knorr, “Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles,” World Politics 16 (1964), page 466.

formal, apt to be fragmentary rather than integrated, the cumulative sediment of experience rather than the product of self-conscious endeavor".⁸⁶

The fourth important writer on intelligence and strategic surprise in this period did not work for the CIA, but advanced a thesis that was precisely such a self-conscious endeavour. Roberta Wohlstetter worked with the RAND Corporation, and between 1951 and 1957 she wrote a study of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. When she finished, the Air Force immediately classified the document 'Top Secret', and Wohlstetter herself (with a lower clearance), could legally neither read nor possess a copy.⁸⁷ After five years of effort, however, she managed to have the report declassified⁸⁸ and in 1962, it was published as *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*.⁸⁹ It promptly won the prestigious Bancroft History Prize,⁹⁰ establishing Wohlstetter as a pre-eminent interpreter of the surprise. Though since criticised,⁹¹ *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* has maintained its credibility⁹² and remains hugely influential: Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, for example, cited it during his first appearance before Congress following 9/11.⁹³ Wohlstetter also wrote about the Cuban Missile Crisis soon after the event in *Foreign Affairs*,⁹⁴ and continued

⁸⁶ Knorr, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles." page 466.

⁸⁷ Alex Abella, *Soldiers of Reason: The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Inc., 2008), page 82. After a few years of working on a PhD, one finds anecdotes like this highly amusing. In the 1930s, a student doing a PhD on bat navigation and communication was mystified to find himself in a similar position, until he was invited to join the effort to develop radar. These days, I suspect that biochemists keep a weather eye.

⁸⁸ Conspiracy theories about strategic surprises are touched on in the 9/11 case. Here simply observe that apart from her other motives, Wohlstetter apparently wished to publish her study to debunk conspiracy theories about Roosevelt's foreknowledge of the Pearl Harbor. See Betts, "Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy: A Review of Ariel Levite's Intelligence and Strategic Surprises." page 331.

⁸⁹ Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962). It was reviewed in *Studies* soon after: Lyman A. Kirkpatrick, "Book review of Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision by Roberta Wohlstetter," *Studies in Intelligence* 7.3 (1963).

⁹⁰ Abella, *Soldiers of Reason: The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire*, page 82.

⁹¹ See, for example, Levite, *Intelligence and Strategic Surprises*, pages 43-6.

⁹² Quiggin, *Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age*, page 74. See also for example Handel, *War, Strategy and Intelligence*, pages 236-7, Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11*, Chapter 5, or *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, Chapter 11.

⁹³ Abella, *Soldiers of Reason: The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire*, in page 82. As Abella notes, however, Wolfowitz would have been familiar with the work in any case as a student of Roberta's husband, RAND mathematician Albert Wohlstetter, and an "intimate of the family."

⁹⁴ Wohlstetter, "Cuba and Pearl Harbor.". The very end of this period also saw the beginning of Graham Allison's work on the Cuban Missile Crisis: Graham Allison,

to write on intelligence matters through the 1980s.⁹⁵ In 1985, Ronald Reagan awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom.⁹⁶

In *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* and in her later writings, Wohlstetter puts forth the notion that the Japanese attack succeeded not because of a lack of information: "At the time of Pearl Harbor the circumstances of collection in the sense of access to a huge variety of data were, at least in Washington, close to ideal".⁹⁷ Instead, Wohlstetter says that that pertinent information about the Japanese plans (the 'signal') was not sorted from irrelevant information (the background 'noise'). Instead of a problem of threat awareness or collection, in her view strategic surprise occurred due to failures in analysis. These analytical problems arose not from too little information, but from the inability to glean 'information' from mere 'data'. She concludes, "We failed to anticipate Pearl Harbor not for want of the relevant materials, but because of the plethora of irrelevant ones".⁹⁸ She thereby positions intelligence analysis effectively to prevent strategic surprise as a sorting process, writing that "perception is an activity",⁹⁹ and that the "job of lifting signals out of a confusion of noise is an activity that is very much aided by hypotheses".¹⁰⁰ She also cautions that "it is much easier *after* the event to sort the relevant from the irrelevant signals".¹⁰¹

The reader may already note that this approach is in harmony with the thesis advanced here. *Constructing Cassandra* simply works towards understanding how the particular culture and identity of the CIA predisposed it generate certain hypotheses and ignore or reject others (i.e. those of Cassandras). Instead of being used as a *deus ex machina* to understand intelligence failures, the hypotheses of intelligence producers and their origin become part of the research puzzle.

Secondary Literature of the 1970s

The next period in secondary literature of intelligence and strategic surprise roughly corresponds to the decade of the 1970s. Several factors drove

"Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," American Political Science Review 63.3 (1969). This work is dealt with below in the context of his later writings.

⁹⁵ Wohlstetter, "Slow Pearl Harbors and the Pleasures of Deception."

⁹⁶ Abella, Soldiers of Reason: The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire, pages 249-51.

⁹⁷ Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, page 70.

⁹⁸ Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, page 387.

⁹⁹ Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, page 70.

¹⁰⁰ Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, page 70.

¹⁰¹ Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, page 387. Emphasis original.

a flowering of intelligence literature in this period. First, the 1970s was a tumultuous period on the US domestic scene, and the radical politics of the day prompted both journalistic exposés and public debate about intelligence activities;¹⁰² it also marked the beginning of more widespread serious academic study of intelligence.¹⁰³

In fact, prior to the 1970s, teaching and research about intelligence had not been considered a distinct academic subject.¹⁰⁴ The public interest of this period led to the National Strategy Information Center – which had been trying to institutionalize national security studies at US universities since the late 1950s¹⁰⁵ – to form a Consortium for the Study of Intelligence by the end of the decade, which began publishing monographs on the subject.¹⁰⁶ Other public-interest bodies like the US Foreign Policy Association also began explicitly addressing intelligence topics beginning in the 1970s.¹⁰⁷

Another factor in this new focus on intelligence was the CIA's famous 1976 'Team A - Team B Experiment', in which outsiders were given access to intelligence about the USSR and asked to perform their own analysis of Soviet

¹⁰² NB: neither the so-called "Pike Committee" nor the "Church Committee" US Congressional inquiries into CIA activities in the 1970s dealt with intelligence analysis in any depth whatsoever (in fact, the Church Committee barely acknowledge that the function existed). Whether this absence of inquiry was because the activity of intelligence analysis did not suit the populist nature of these inquiries (the intelligence cycle as a whole is poorly-suited to a morality play), or because their instigators and investigators were led astray by a Hollywood view of intelligence is for others to judge. For a quick overview of these investigations see Snider, The Agency and the Hill: CIA's Relationship with Congress, 1946–2004, pages 35-9.

¹⁰³ As Quiggin records, the UNI list of Dissertation Abstracts (covering mainly US universities, but also some UK and Canadian institutions) does not have a single entry for a PhD thesis dealing primarily with "strategic intelligence", "military intelligence", or "strategic surprise" in its database that covers the 1861 to 1974. Quiggin, Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age, page 76.

¹⁰⁴ Roy Godson, Comparing Foreign Intelligence: the US, the USSR and the Third World (McLean, VA: Pergamon-Brassey, 1988), page x.

¹⁰⁵ Godson, Comparing Foreign Intelligence: the US, the USSR and the Third World, page x.

¹⁰⁶ Roy Godson, Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's: Elements of Intelligence (Washington DC: National Strategy Information Center, Inc., 1979), page 4; for a statement of the Consortium's complete purposes, see page 85. It was followed by the British Study Group on Intelligence and the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies, both started in 1984. By 1988, the International Studies Association also had an Intelligence Studies Section. See Godson, Comparing Foreign Intelligence: the US, the USSR and the Third World, page ix. A brief look at the historiography of intelligence studies from an international perspective is provided by D. Cameron Watt, "The Historiography of Intelligence in International Review," Intelligence in the Cold War: Organisation, Role and International Cooperation, eds. Lars Christian Jenssen and Olav Riste (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Thomas L. Hughes, The Fate of Facts in a World of Men: Foreign Policy and Intelligence-Making, Headline Series (New York, NY: The Foreign Policy Association, 1976).

strategic doctrine,¹⁰⁸ which was then compared to that of the CIA. This exercise sparked lasting academic interest in¹⁰⁹ and controversy about¹¹⁰ intelligence analysis.

A third driver for a flowering of intelligence literature in the 1970s, especially pertinent here, was the immensely shocking strategic surprise that Israel suffered in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. This led *World Politics* to address the issue as early as 1976 (in an article highlighting the need to integrate the strategic assumptions of the observing state into Wohlstetter's basic framework,¹¹¹ and to another that offered a mixed psychological-institutional explanation of surprise¹¹²), and to a raft of studies by Israeli and American scholars in the 1980s, discussed below.¹¹³ The Yom Kippur War remains a prominent benchmark for many recent studies of surprise.¹¹⁴

Many of the intelligence issues raised in the scholarship in the 1970s continue to spark debate (e.g. the policy-intelligence divide or the 'politicisation' of intelligence,¹¹⁵ the efficacy of covert action,¹¹⁶ and approaches to reforming the Intelligence Community¹¹⁷). Central for our purposes, however, is the fact

¹⁰⁸ To be exact, the three groups looked at Soviet air defences, missile accuracies, and strategic objectives.

¹⁰⁹ Quiggin, Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age, page 76-7.

¹¹⁰ See, for example Richard Pipes, Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), pages 134-43 and Richard Pipes, "Team B: The reality behind the myth," Commentary (1986), *passim*.

¹¹¹ Abraham Ben-Zvi, "Hindsight and Foresight: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Surprise Attacks," World Politics 28.3 (1976).

¹¹² Shlaim, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Yom Kippur War."

¹¹³ There is one slight chronological exception: Michael Handel, discussed below, published an article on this topic before the decade was out as well: Michael I. Handel, "The Yom Kippur War and the Inevitability of Surprise," International Studies Quarterly 21.1 (1977).

¹¹⁴ See for example Ephraim Kahana, "Early warning versus concept: the case of the Yom Kippur War 1973," Intelligence and National Security 17.2 (2002), and Uri Bar-Joseph, The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and Its Sources (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005).

¹¹⁵ For example Daniel O. Graham, "Analysis and Estimates," Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's: Elements of Intelligence, ed. Roy Godson (Washington DC: National Strategy Information Center, Inc., 1979), page 26. For an overview of reform efforts, see Michael Warner and Kenneth J. McDonald, US Intelligence Reform Studies Since 1947 (Washington DC: Strategic Management Issues Office and the Center for the Study of Intelligence of the CIA, 2005), and Richard A. Best, Proposals for Intelligence Reorganization (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2004).

¹¹⁶ For example Hugh Tovar, "Covert Action," Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's: Elements of Intelligence, ed. Roy Godson (Washington DC: National Strategy Information Center, Inc., 1979), pages 74-9.

¹¹⁷ See for example Michael M. Uhlmann, "Approaches to Reform of the Intelligence Community," Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's: Elements of Intelligence, ed.

that the issue of strategic surprise was first explicitly addressed at this time, and that some of the explanatory approaches developed in the 1970s are still used.

Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision*¹¹⁸ was not explicitly advancing a theory of strategic surprise, but since it was first published in 1971¹¹⁹ it has had a substantial impact on thinking about the topic.¹²⁰ (As a recent example, note that Allison's collaborator in the revised edition of *Essence* is Philip Zelikow, Executive Director of the 9/11 Commission). In particular, Allison's Models Two and Three, "Organisational Process" (expanded in the 1999 edition to "Organisational Behavior") and "Governmental Politics", have encouraged scholars of surprise to ask many questions about the assumptions of Model One, "Rational Actor": that governments are unitary actors, that process information according to rules of optimizing rational action, based on complete information.

Allison's Model One, of course, is (like all rational choice models) vulnerable to the fundamental point that constructivists make about the difficulty of identifying and measuring actor preferences and interests. If Analysts rely on what actors say their preferences and interests are, they run the risk of being taken in by intentional deception. If Analysts rely on what actors *do* to reveal their preferences and interests, they run the risk of circularity in their argument, because every action taken by an adversary, by definition, is in an actor's interests if interests are defined through actions.¹²¹ As we shall see below, this element of the potential for either deception or circularity (or both) in the apparently 'common sense' application of rational choice models does not appear to have been addressed at the CIA.

Allison's Model Two is especially pertinent to the argument made in this dissertation because it evolved to account for the role of organisational culture, and explored how culture can affect intelligence analysis. In the first edition of

Roy Godson (Washington DC: National Strategy Information Center, Inc., 1979), *passim*.

¹¹⁸ Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999).

¹¹⁹ The book grew out of the "May Group" at Harvard that began in the spring of 1966, in which several Harvard faculty members met to discuss the impact of "bureaucracy" on policy, or "the gap between the intentions of actors and the results of government action". The Group included an almost unbelievable number of luminaries of US Political Science, including its Chairman Earnest R. May, and participants Morton H. Halpern, Fred C. Iklé, William W. Kaufmann, Andrew W. Marshall, Richard E. Neustadt, Don K. Price, Harry S. Rowen, and Graham Allison himself as *rapporteur*. See Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page xiii.

¹²⁰ It was reviewed along with Janis's work in Studies in Fritz W. Ermarth, "Book reviews of *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* by Graham T. Allison and *Victims of Group Think* by Irving L. Janis," Studies in Intelligence 18.1 (1974).

¹²¹ After Kowert and Legro, "Norms, Identity and Their Limits, A Theoretical Reprise." page 484.

Essence, Allison's Model Two dealt largely with organisational routines, so-called "Standard Operating Procedures".¹²² He addressed the constraints that such routines place on rational choice, and their sometimes-perverse effects on outcomes. He spent little space questioning the origin or maintenance of such routines (though that was not his purpose). In contrast, in the 1999 edition of *Essence*, Allison called Model Two "Organisational Behavior". This revised Model Two acknowledged the role of organisational culture more broadly, and Allison opened (though did not fully explore) the question of where organisations derive their preferences, and how organisations relate to their environment.¹²³ He certainly did not propound a theory of strategic surprise or intelligence analysis through Model Two, but as we see in the Cuban case, anecdotes from the new edition of *Essence* provide rich fodder for such an approach (with the caveat, made below, that *Essence* also deals with actions taken *after* the discovery of Soviet missiles, while this dissertation deals exclusively with events *before* their discovery).

Allison's Model Three, "Governmental" or "Bureaucratic" Politics, has also contributed richly to the literature on strategic surprise, though usually from the perspective of failures among competing agencies to cooperate,¹²⁴ share information,¹²⁵ or acting as impediments to warning transmission and reception. Discussions of the 'politicisation' of intelligence are variations on this theme,¹²⁶ and some scholars advance variants on 'politicisation' as an 'Institutional' explanation for surprise.¹²⁷ As we explain in detail below, the process of intelligence is frequently portrayed as a cycle of Tasking, Collection, Analysis,

¹²² The role of SOPs in 9/11, at least after the attack occurred, are discussed in The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States page 17-8 and page 246.

¹²³ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 155-7.

¹²⁴ See, for example, Ephram Kam, Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). page 180, or The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States page 267, or Daniel Byman, "Strategic Surprise and the September 11th Attacks," Annual Review of Political Science 8 (2005). pages 148-9. Zelikow's role in the Commission has already been noted, so this is not entirely surprising.

¹²⁵ See, for example Russell, Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right, pages 132-8.

¹²⁶ Charles F. Parker and Eric K. Stern, "Bolt From the Blue or Avoidable Failure? Revisiting September 11 and the Origins of Strategic Surprise," Foreign Policy Analysis 1.3 (2005), page 317. For examples of this approach, see Robert M. Gates, "Guarding Against Politicization (Transcript of remarks to analysts made on 16 March, 1992 in the CIA auditorium)," Studies in Intelligence 36.5 (1992), or Richard K. Betts, "Politicization of Intelligence: Costs and Benefits," Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence, eds. Richard K. Betts and Thomas G. Mahnken (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

¹²⁷ See, for example, Shlaim, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Yom Kippur War." pages 365-76.

Production, and Dissemination. Bureaucratic Politics approaches to the problem of surprise tend to focus on politics among competing intelligence bodies (including the CIA),¹²⁸ and not on information processing *within* the CIA, as this analysis does. As a result, many of these approaches are out of the scope of this analysis.¹²⁹

If one wished to broaden the scope of this analysis, there is no logical reason why such approaches could not be a sub-set of the identity- and culture-based explanation of strategic surprise advanced in this thesis. Weldes, however, is correct in pointing out that “Bureaucratic Politics models generally make positivist assumptions about the production of knowledge and the world of policy-makers”¹³⁰ (e.g. Interests, Power or Rationality; the same observation could be made about Allison’s other two models), whereas as the constructivist approach used here calls many of these assumptions into question. As Weldes points out, too, the value added of constructivism is partly in asking questions that are logically prior to these models.¹³¹ Allison’s Model Three also fails to explore the point made by Berger in the *Culture of National Security* that “Politics is not merely a question of who gets what, but of who persuades whom in an ongoing negotiation with reality,”¹³² i.e. Allison does not plumb the questions raised by the fact that the Model Three’s actors are dealing in and shaping social, not natural, facts.

On a practical level, Bureaucratic Politics models break down as an explanation because attempts to reform intelligence structures exactly address such problems, and have repeatedly been found wanting. Following Israel’s 1973 intelligence failure before the Yom Kippur War, for example, the Argranat Commission produced proposals for institutional reform that amounted to copying the US institutional arrangement at the same time – which had failed in

¹²⁸ See, for example, Berkowitz and Goodman, Strategic Intelligence for American National Security, chapter five.

¹²⁹ The recent exception to this generalization is an article by Stafford Thomas. His work, “the CIA’s Bureaucratic Dimensions” used a conventional, positivist framework to distinguish among such “types” inside the CIA as “Self-Interested Bureaucrats”, “Altruistic Bureaucrats”, “Zealots,” and “Advocates”. See Stafford C. Thomas, “The CIA’s Bureaucratic Dimensions” International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence 12.4 (1999), *passim*.

¹³⁰ Jutta Weldes, “Bureaucratic Politics: A Critical Constructivist Assessment,” Mershon International Studies Review 42.2 (1998), page 216.

¹³¹ See Jutta Weldes, “Bureaucratic Politics: A Critical Constructivist Assessment,” Mershon International Studies Review 42.2 (1998), pages 216-24.

¹³² Berger, “Norms, Identity and National Security in Germany and Japan”, page 327.

precisely the same way.¹³³ After decades of repeated reorganisation¹³⁴ (at times, perhaps re-disorganisation is a more accurate term), it is hard to believe that the root causes of strategic surprise lie solely (or even mainly) in Bureaucratic Politics; institutional innovation surely would have diminished it either in the US or elsewhere otherwise. More and “better” positivist approaches to improving intelligence organisations through bureaucratic reengineering have repeatedly failed to prevent strategic surprise; this dissertation helps one understand how this is possible. Unlike purely ‘rationalist’ structural approaches, what matters to in *Constructing Cassandra* is not merely the ‘objective’ facts under analysis, but also how analysts understand these conditions.¹³⁵

To continue with the literature review, however: a 1949 review of Kent’s *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* in *Public Opinion Quarterly* observed that Kent “does not take up in detail the theoretical or operating problems of obtaining the *psychological* intelligence that is urgently needed in peace or war”.¹³⁶ The same reviewer might also have observed that Kent did not address in detail the psychological factors that bear on intelligence analysis. Beginning in the 1970s, however, scholars began to apply psychological perspectives to intelligence analysis.

The decade began with the work of Irving Janis and *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-policy Decisions and Fiascos*¹³⁷. The expression “Groupthink” has entered the popular discourse, and Janis’s central notion (based studies of small group dynamics) was that the structure, internal psychological processes, and dynamics of small groups of decision-

¹³³ Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable.” page 73. As Betts says in the footnote, for the Israeli proposals see Shlaim, “Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Yom Kippur War.” pages 375-7, fn 2; for the US failure at the same time, see US Congress, “Hearings, US Intelligence Agencies and Activities: the Performance of the Intelligence Community,” House Select Committee on Intelligence, 1st ed. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976. Disturbingly, many of the changes made to the Intelligence Community made or proposed after 9/11 resemble the changes made by President Carter in the 1970s. See Stansfield Turner, Burn Before Reading: Presidents, CIA Directors, and Secret Intelligence (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2005), fn on page 157.

¹³⁴ For an overview, see: Best, Proposals for Intelligence Reorganization.

¹³⁵ After Herman, “Identity, Norms and National Security: the Soviet Foreign Policy Revolution and the End of the Cold War.” page 285 fn. 42.

¹³⁶ Bruce Lannes Smith, “Review of Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy,” The Public Opinion Quarterly 13.3 (1949), page 526. Emphasis original. This may have been a deliberate omission on Kent’s part due to active CIA funding of such activity (“Communications Research”) at the time. See Christopher Simpson, Science of Coercion: Communications Research & Psychological Warfare 1945 - 1960 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pages 79-93.

¹³⁷ Irving L. Janis, Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-policy Decisions and Fiascos (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

makers can lead to their failure to heed some information (e.g., strategic warning).¹³⁸ Thus, Janis was not addressing intelligence analysis *per se*, but rather the reception of intelligence analysis by policymakers. In its essence, Janis' approach is a subset of the 'warning-response problem' and therefore out of scope of this work. His approach is noted here, however, because the CIA acknowledges the phenomenon as possibly affecting intelligence analysis.¹³⁹ Like the more general term "Mindset",¹⁴⁰ Groupthink sometimes offer a partial, proximate explanation for individual decisions by groups of intelligence analysts, one not in conflict with the identity- and culture-based hypothesis advanced here.

Janis' work is less known today than the work of another prolific scholar who began addressing strategic surprise in the 1970s, Robert Jervis. His seminal 1976 *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* remains influential in the field. While Jervis did not outline a unified theory of strategic surprise, he offered several psychologically-based partial explanations for how such surprises occur. These explanations included the need for cognitive consistency by intelligence evaluators and consumers;¹⁴¹ the problems of how decision-makers "learn lessons" from history;¹⁴² and the influence of desires and fears on intelligence evaluators and consumers.¹⁴³ Many of these insights were applied specifically to CIA analysis through the effort of Richard Heuer, who assembled various articles he had written while working at the CIA into the widely available volume *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*.¹⁴⁴ Jervis, too, has continued to publish on the topic.¹⁴⁵

It is crucial here to distinguish a psychological approach to strategic surprise from the arguments to follow. Jervis, Heuer and others who advance

¹³⁸ It was reviewed in *Studies* along with *Essence of Decision* in Ermarth, "Book reviews of *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* by Graham T. Allison and *Victims of Group Think* by Irving L. Janis."

¹³⁹ For example in Richard J. Heuer, *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (Langley, VA: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 1999), pages 180-2 or Jack Davis, "Combating Mind-Set," *Studies in Intelligence* 36.5 (1992).

¹⁴⁰ Used for example in Roger Z. George, "Fixing the Problem of Analytical Mindsets: Alternative Analysis," *Intelligence and the National Security Strategist: Enduring Issues and Challenges*, eds. Roger Z. George and Robert D. Kline (Lanham, MD Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), *passim*.

¹⁴¹ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), page 117-201.

¹⁴² Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, pages 217-87.

¹⁴³ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, pages 356-81.

¹⁴⁴ Heuer, *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*. Published in 1999, but drawing upon older *Studies* articles.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, R. Jervis, "What's wrong with the intelligence process," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 1 (1986) and Robert Jervis, "The Drunkard's Search," *Explorations in Political Psychology*, eds. Shanto Iyengar and William James McGuire (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

the importance of psychological factors in strategic surprise¹⁴⁶ stressed the role of 'heuristic' shortcuts in 'cold'– or cognitive – processing of information: how humans introduce biases into their analysis of information because of beliefs, prior experiences, existing expectations and the individual's current cognitive 'set' or agenda.¹⁴⁷ Jervis also explored 'hot'– or affective – mental processes: how humans' needs and emotional states alter how they process information through motivational biases.¹⁴⁸ Janis' work, stressing the emotional dynamics and pressures of small groups, also largely dealt with 'hot' mental processes. Overall, their focus was on *the moment of information processing* by either analysts or decision-makers. As a result, psychological approaches are necessary and illuminating for understanding isolated elements of strategic surprises, but they are not sufficient to explain the phenomenon as a whole. Why?

First, in the cycle of intelligence Tasking, Collection, Analysis, Production, and Dissemination, psychological theories focus largely either on the analysis or the dissemination phase of intelligence (i.e. the reception of intelligence by decision-makers). In contrast, the effort below demonstrates the power of an identity and culture-based argument to highlight crucial pathologies earlier in the intelligence cycle, in Tasking and Collection, and their key role in strategic surprise. As Wohlstetter said, the "job of lifting signals out of a confusion of noise is an activity that is very much aided by *hypotheses*"¹⁴⁹ – these hypotheses focus Tasking and Collection before they ever affect Analysis, and psychological approaches only superficially account for *where these hypotheses*

¹⁴⁶ This has been a rich seam: see, for example, Ole R Holsti, "Foreign Policy Decision-makers Viewed Psychologically: "Cognitive Process" Approaches," Thought and Action in Foreign Policy, eds. Matthew G. Bonham and Michael J. Shapiro (Stamford: Centre for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences, 1977); J. G. Stein, "Building Politics into Psychology - the Misperception of Threat," Political Psychology 9.2 (1988); S. A. Renshon, "The Psychology of Good Judgment - a Preliminary Model with Some Applications to the Gulf War," Political Psychology 13.3 (1992); Valerie M. Hudson, "Cultural Expectations of One's Own and Other Nation's Foreign Policy Action Templates," Political Psychology 20.4 (1999); C. F. Parker and E. K. Stern, "Blindsided? - September 11 and the origins of strategic surprise," Political Psychology 23.3 (2002); U. Bar-Joseph and A. W. Kruglanski, "Intelligence failure and need for cognitive closure: On the psychology of the Yom Kippur surprise," Political Psychology 24.1 (2003); Robert Alan Goldberg, "Who Profited from the Crime?; Intelligence Failure, Conspiracy Theories and the Case of September 11," Intelligence and National Security 19.2 (2004); Abraham Ben-Zvi, "Perception, Misperception and Surprise in the Yom Kippur War: A Look at the New Evidence," Journal of Conflict Studies 15.2 (1995), all *passim*. See also Byman, "Strategic Surprise and the September 11th Attacks.", pages 147-8.

¹⁴⁷ Parker and Stern, "Bolt From the Blue or Avoidable Failure? Revisiting September 11 and the Origins of Strategic Surprise." page 304.

¹⁴⁸ Parker and Stern, "Bolt From the Blue or Avoidable Failure? Revisiting September 11 and the Origins of Strategic Surprise." page 305.

¹⁴⁹ Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, page 70. Emphasis added

come from and how they are maintained. Part of what *Constructing Cassandra* does is to show features of the CIA's identity and culture operating in a manner that contributes to these underlying hypotheses, and the social processes that create and maintain features that sustain them.

Second, much of the psychologically oriented literature is built around *individual* analysis and decisions. As we shall see in Chapter 3 below, however, intelligence is a *group* process. It is hard, moreover, to understand strategic surprise as merely the accumulation of individual mental ticks, most of which are common to humans in general (even to the Cassandras we discuss below). Therefore, psychological approaches to strategic surprise do not address effectively what has been called “the natural selection of accidents”¹⁵⁰ over extended periods in particular organisational environments like the CIA.

Third, the limited literature on group psychological biases in intelligence work concentrates on the ‘hot’ biases introduced by the power dynamics of small groups, and thus do not effectively bring to the fore long-term processes of cumulative causation in a structured manner; as we shall see, culture and identity pinpoint ‘cold’ biases in information processing that often last for years or decades. The Cassandras discussed were not bullied out of the intelligence dialogue in ‘the heat of the moment’, and thus psychological approaches to intelligence failures focused on ‘hot’ biases offer partial, proximate explanations that while not always in conflict with an identity- and culture-based approach, do not have its reach.

Four and perhaps most importantly, Heuer *et al* survey the role of universal human cognitive traps and flaws in intelligence analysis: the role of specific identities and analytical cultures in producing blind spots is unproblematic. The role that one particular, historically grounded and continually reinforced identity or culture plays in patterns and failures in analysis is left unaddressed in this literature.

The final important work of secondary literature on strategic surprise in the 1970s is Richard Betts' landmark 1978 article “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable”. In it, Betts maintains that intelligence failures are inevitable for three reasons. To illustrate the first of these reasons, “Failure in perspective”, Betts employs a classic metaphor: after a strategic surprise, observers always see the warning “glass” as “half empty” rather than

¹⁵⁰ Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), page 494-5.

“half full”. As a human activity, intelligence and warning is never perfect.¹⁵¹ Betts’ second reason is also a variation on the warning-response problem, “Pathologies of communication”. He says, “Sources of breakdowns in intelligence lie in the process of amassing timely data, communicating them to decision makers, and impressing the latter with the validity or relevance of the information”.¹⁵² This dissertation only addresses “amassing timely data”, and the analysis of that data (though before each case, it demonstrates a surprise occurred, so one might argue that it also speaks to questions of communicating findings to relevant decision-makers). The third reason Betts maintains surprise is inevitable he calls “Paradoxes of perception”. These paradoxes consist of the irresolvable trade-offs and dilemmas inherent in attempts to improve strategic warning:

Curing some pathologies with organizational reforms often creates new pathologies or resurrects old ones; perfecting intelligence production does not necessarily lead to perfecting intelligence consumption, making warnings systems more sensitive reduces the risk of surprise, but increases the number of false alarms, which in turn reduces sensitivity; the principles of optimal analytic procedure are in many respects incompatible with the imperatives of the decision process; avoiding intelligence failure requires the elimination of strategic preconceptions, but leaders cannot operate purposefully without some preconceptions.¹⁵³

It is hard to disagree with the logic of the fundamental trade-offs that Betts highlights here. This dissertation, however, aims to discuss only a narrow slice of these pathologies, because its focus is intelligence production rather than consumption: it underlines the *insensitivities* of the agency responsible for strategic alarms, the CIA; it also brings to the fore the process of the formation and persistence of the strategic preconceptions of the Agency. The approach here does not take issue with Betts’ basic assertion that strategic surprise is inevitable; instead, it seeks to shed light on how the CIA’s identity and culture shaped what strategic surprises actually occurred, and how.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable.” page 62.

¹⁵² Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable.” page 62-3.

¹⁵³ Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable.” page 63.

¹⁵⁴ Though policy recommendation for analytical improvement are specifically out of scope, and *Constructing Cassandra* offers no ‘silver bullet’ for preventing surprises, its approach certainly suggests that an understanding of how these surprises occurred is pertinent for improving analytical performance at the margins.

Secondary Literature from the 1980s to 2001

The period from the 1980s through 2001 saw a maturing of the academic study of intelligence analysis. This maturation had several notable features. First, intelligence studies continued to be characterised by an inter-disciplinary character and openness to different conceptual approaches.¹⁵⁵ Second, this period witnessed the return of academic work by current and former CIA professionals, like *Strategic Intelligence for American National Security*¹⁵⁶, and works by scholars that had spent considerable time in various other parts of the Intelligence Community, such as *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*,¹⁵⁷ *Informing Statecraft: Intelligence for a New Century*,¹⁵⁸ or *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*.¹⁵⁹ Third, like so many other parts of American society, in the 1990s the Intelligence Community tried to come to grips with the implications for intelligence of the pervasiveness of information technology.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, Mikhail Alexseev made a notable attempt to look at intelligence analyses spanning different centuries and cultures in *Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle*.¹⁶¹ In addition to continuing coverage of intelligence issues by mainstream IR journals, this period saw the founding of two US academic journals solely devoted to the topic: *Intelligence and National Security* and *The International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*. Finally, in addition to the CIA declassification effort that following the end of the Cold War, this period substantially contributed to what has grown into a large crop of memoirs by intelligence professionals from many nations,¹⁶² and saw a flow of formerly classified information (now stopped) from

¹⁵⁵ The fact that this constitutes a strength of the field is argued here Len Scott and Peter Jackson, "The Study of Intelligence in Theory and Practice" *Intelligence and National Security* 19.2 (2004), *passim*.

¹⁵⁶ Berkowitz and Goodman, *Strategic Intelligence for American National Security*.

¹⁵⁷ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*.

¹⁵⁸ Angelo M. Codevilla, *Informing Statecraft: Intelligence for a New Century* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1992).

¹⁵⁹ Shulsky and Schmitt, *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*.

¹⁶⁰ See for example: Bruce D. Berkowitz and Allen E. Goodman, *Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), or Gregory F. Treverton, *Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁶¹ Alexseev, *Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle*. This work draws upon his work on the KGB and the CIA in the period 1975-85; Alexseev also covers Chinese perceptions of the Mongols in the 13th Century, and the British-French rivalry of 1792-1815.

¹⁶² Notable here is Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, but see also Kalugin and Montaigne, *The First Directorate*; Wolf and McElvoy, *Man Without a Face: the Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster*; and Milt Bearden and James Risen, *The Main*

the former USSR.¹⁶³ This dissertation draws heavily on the latter for the Cuban Missile Crisis case.

In terms of strategic surprise, the secondary literature from the 1980s through 2001 continued to debate the ideas of Wohlstetter, Knorr, Allison, Jervis, and Betts. Michael Handel joined in that debate, and materially added to it by working on the phenomenon of surprise in other spheres such as technology¹⁶⁴ and further work on the warning-response problem.¹⁶⁵

Collectively, the work of these scholars gelled into what is called the 'orthodox school'¹⁶⁶ of strategic surprise. While considerable work was done on the role of deception in strategic surprise,¹⁶⁷ the orthodox approach continued to emphasise the victim's mistakes, usually concentrating on mistakes of intelligence consumers.¹⁶⁸ In 1978, Betts claimed: "Fewer fiascos have occurred in the stages of acquisition and presentation of facts than in the stages

Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown with the KGB (New York, NY: Random House, 2003).

¹⁶³ Most spectacularly two volumes of KGB documents from the so-call "Mitrokhin Archive": Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB (New York, NY: Basic Book, 1999) and Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World (New York, NY: Basic Book, 2005), but also true scholarly collaborations like Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964 (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1997), Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, or Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁶⁴ Michael. I. Handel, "Avoiding political and technological surprises in the 1980's," Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's: Analysis and Estimates, ed. Roy Godson (Washington, DC: National Strategy Information Center, 1980), or Handel, War, Strategy and Intelligence chapters one, two, three.

¹⁶⁵ For example: Michael. I. Handel, "Leaders and Intelligence," Intelligence and National Security 3 (1988).

¹⁶⁶ This interpretation of the literature was first presented in a dissertation here: Ariel Levite, "Intelligence and Strategic Surprises," Cornell, 1983., then in a book here: Levite, Intelligence and Strategic Surprises, then by Betts here in a review of Levite: Betts, "Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy: A Review of Ariel Levite's Intelligence and Strategic Surprises.", and finally by Levite again here: Ariel Levite, "Intelligence and Strategic Surprises Revisited: A Response to Richard K. Betts's "Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy", International Studies Quarterly 33.3 (1989).

¹⁶⁷ For example, Handel, War, Strategy and Intelligence chapters seven and eight; Perlmutter and Gooch, "Special Issue on Military Deception and Strategic Surprise - Introduction"; Stein, "Military Deception, Strategic Surprise, and Conventional Deterrence - a Political-Analysis of Egypt and Israel, 1971-73"; Sherwin and Whaley, "Understanding Strategic Deception: An Analysis of 93 Cases"; Wohlstetter, "Slow Pearl Harbors and the Pleasures of Deception."

¹⁶⁸ Betts, "Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy: A Review of Ariel Levite's Intelligence and Strategic Surprises." page 330. For a recent example, see John A. Gentry, "Intelligence Failure Reframed," Political Science Quarterly 123.2 (2008).

of interpretation and response.”¹⁶⁹ By “interpretation”, however, Betts makes it clear that he means interpretation *by intelligence consumers, not intelligence analysts*, for the next sentence reads: “Producers of intelligence have been culprits less often than consumers”.¹⁷⁰ Later in the article, he reasserts that “most notable intelligence failures occur more often at the consuming than the producing end”.¹⁷¹ In large measure, this remains the consensus of the orthodox literature on strategic surprise. Kam, for example, openly took this approach in *Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective*,¹⁷² which treated surprise largely from a psychological perspective.

In general, this dissertation seeks to expand, deepen and synthesize rather than flatly contradict the orthodox school’s work on surprise. However, it does take issue with the primacy that the orthodox approach gives to the warning-response problem. In the four strategic surprises analysed here (arguably four of the most significant surprises in US foreign policy since WWII), we demonstrate that there was more than a ‘failure in perspective’ by ex-post judges of intelligence producer’s performance. This dissertation establishes that surprises originated in *warning* failure by the CIA, and not necessarily in the response of consumers. Whether consumers’ responses to partial and deeply flawed warning exacerbated surprises is a separate issue, and out of scope here.

The 1980s included at least one work that also took issue with the orthodox school’s emphasis on the faults of intelligence consumers: Levite took issue with the primacy given to the ‘consuming end’ in his 1987 book *Intelligence and Strategic Surprises*. In the main, Levite emphasised failures in collection rather than analysis.¹⁷³ *Contra* Wohlstetter and others, he pushed the notion that signals cannot be sorted from noise if an inadequate volume of signals is collected.¹⁷⁴ Levite also stressed that the *quality of warning*¹⁷⁵ across

¹⁶⁹ Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable.” page 67.

¹⁷⁰ Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable.” page 67.

¹⁷¹ Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable.” page 84.

¹⁷² First published as a dissertation: Ephraim Kam, “Failing to Anticipate War: the Why of Surprise Attack,” Harvard University, 1983, and then a book: Kam, Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective.

¹⁷³ Levite, Intelligence and Strategic Surprises, page 185-6.

¹⁷⁴ Levite, Intelligence and Strategic Surprises, pages 44-6 and pages 59-61.

¹⁷⁵ NB. Betts does address the “Relativity of surprise” in Betts, “Surprise Despite Warning: Why Sudden Attacks Succeed.” pages 551-5, but this is not entirely the point, and returns more to his “Failures in perspective” approach.

all dimensions of “who, why, what, where, and when?” matters when apportioning blame.¹⁷⁶ While Betts and others have conceded that quality of warning matters,¹⁷⁷ overall, the orthodox view has not shifted from the idea that problems of intelligence consumption by politicians rather than intelligence production by intelligence agencies should bear the majority of explanatory weight.

In contrast, *Constructing Cassandra* addresses how the CIA's identity and culture enabled four important strategic surprises; in doing so, the burden of proof of adequate warning shifts back to intelligence *producers*, i.e. the CIA. The Agency claimed in some cases examined here that the ‘glass’ of warning was ‘half full’, but evidence against such generous readings is offered. More importantly, a theory of *how* warning failures arise at the CIA is advanced.

Levite also reminded scholars working on this topic of the importance of striving for explanations of surprise that are falsifiable.¹⁷⁸ This work avoids such a baldly positivist approach, but by contrasting CIA failures to warn with the views of Cassandras, it seeks to undermine some of the intellectual fatalism about intelligence failures that sometimes arises from the orthodox school's discussion of ‘inevitable’ strategic surprise.¹⁷⁹

Another attribute of the literature of intelligence and strategic surprise produced in the early 1980s is that scholars began to consider surprise outside the context merely of surprise *attacks*. Strategic warning (or rather, lack thereof) about contingent contemporary events like revolutions and rapid political disintegration had rarely been addressed by the orthodox school, except by Handel in the sphere of surprise diplomatic initiatives.¹⁸⁰ Why? Betts argues somewhat acidly in response to Levite: “‘Surprise’ interests strategists as an adjective that modifies the subject, which is *attack*. Attack is the subject

¹⁷⁶ Levite, *Intelligence and Strategic Surprises*, page 174.

¹⁷⁷ Betts, “Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy: A Review of Ariel Levite's *Intelligence and Strategic Surprises*.” pages 331-3.

¹⁷⁸ Levite, *Intelligence and Strategic Surprises*. pages 36-8; Betts acknowledges this here: Betts, “Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy: A Review of Ariel Levite's *Intelligence and Strategic Surprises*.” page 339.

¹⁷⁹ NB this fatalism is not usually present in the orthodox school's literature, which since Knorr (Knorr, “Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles.” fn 1, page 460) has stressed the value of marginal improvement in intelligence agencies' “batting averages”. Given the difficulties, at least one scholar advances the idea that “perhaps it is the successes that should be the surprise, not the failures”: see Christopher Brady, “Intelligence Failures: Plus Ça Change,” *Intelligence and National Security* 8.4 (1993). Fatalism can be found more extensively both in journalistic discussions of strategic surprise, and also in the discussion of failures to give adequate warning regarding surprises rooted in ‘mysteries’. See discussion in Chapter 4, below.

¹⁸⁰ Handel, *The Diplomacy of Surprise: Hitler, Nixon, Sadat*, Handel, “Surprise and change in international politics.” or Handel, *War, Strategy and Intelligence*, chapter six.

because it imposes disaster, and surprise is a significant modifier because it makes the disaster worse...what matters is not the mental jolt to politicians and commanders, but the effects on the defense."¹⁸¹ Perhaps for this reason, as Ofri notes¹⁸², there is considerably less material on opportunity as opposed to crisis forecasting. Both Handel¹⁸³ and Lacqueur¹⁸⁴ also observed in the 1980s that though more common than military surprise, political strategic surprise had been much less studied.

Such a narrow approach could not last. Beginning with the fall of the Shah in 1979, and growing far more volubly after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, the literature on intelligence and strategic surprise was forced broaden its scope to include events that – while not amenable to precise predictions – clearly warranted strategic warning. After both events, specific explanations for intelligence failures at the CIA (or absolute denials of failure) were proposed to explain the Iran revolution and the USSR's implosion. A few limited explanations grounded in bureaucratic politics among competing parts of the Intelligence and Foreign Policy Community were proposed.¹⁸⁵ There were also attempts to explain these failures that appealed to the contingent, unknowable nature of the future: warnings about 'Mysteries' should not even be expected (effectively setting up a straw-man of perfect prediction to obscure Betts' point that warning "Need not be conclusive to be credible...its function is to alert leaders to danger even if the evidence does not warrant firm prediction".¹⁸⁶) The case studies in Chapter 5 address these limited explanations and evasions.

In this period, security studies began to focus on the "effects that culture and identity have on national security",¹⁸⁷ notably in Peter Katzenstein's edited volume *The Culture of National Security*. While the essays in that volume feature norms, culture and identities in causal arguments about national security policy, but the unit of analysis is national governments or 'the state' as a whole. Thus, they use national identities as the links between norms and interests that

¹⁸¹ Betts, "Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy: A Review of Ariel Levite's Intelligence and Strategic Surprises." page 333. Emphasis original.

¹⁸² Arie Ofri, "Crisis and opportunity forecasting," *Orbis* 26 (1983), page 817.

¹⁸³ Handel, "Avoiding political and technological surprises in the 1980's." *passim*.

¹⁸⁴ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 256.

¹⁸⁵ For example: Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran*, page 104-8.

¹⁸⁶ Betts, "Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy: A Review of Ariel Levite's Intelligence and Strategic Surprises." page 331.

¹⁸⁷ Peter Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), page 17.

motivate behaviour¹⁸⁸ at a very high level. Perhaps for that reason, this focus on culture and identity did not translate into new theories of strategic surprise, except in one instance. Beginning in 2000 with *Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran*, Seliktar argued such failures can best be understood in terms of Thomas Kuhn's ideas of the role of paradigms in revolutionary changes in knowledge.¹⁸⁹ She showed how Kuhn's idea that dominant paradigms determine what questions arise, what forms of explanations are explored, and what interpretations were excepted as legitimate help understand the US foreign policy establishment's failure to comprehend events in Iran.¹⁹⁰ In 2004, in *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union*¹⁹¹ she applied the same approach to the US foreign policy establishment's surprise at the demise of the USSR.

Seliktar's thesis is compelling, and the two case studies on mysteries and strategic surprise in Chapter 5 owe much to her scholarship. Indeed, as with several other approaches to strategic surprise, the theory presented here is in some ways a refinement to, or extension of, Seliktar's work. There are, however, important points of difference as well.

First, is the obvious point that Seliktar addressed only two cases of surprise – both mysteries – and did not attempt to link paradigm failures to a more generalised theory of strategic surprise that encompassed surprises rooted in secrets, i.e. the type of surprise heretofore addressed by the 'orthodox school' (and discussed in Chapter 6, below).

Second, while Seliktar addressed the role of the CIA in these two surprises, her thesis encompassed the entire US foreign establishment and

¹⁸⁸ Robert G. Herman, "Identity, Norms and National Security: the Soviet Foreign Policy Revolution and the End of the Cold War," *The Culture of National Security*, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). page 283.

¹⁸⁹ Kuhn's idea was also used (though with nothing like Seliktar's depth and thoroughness; mainly as an introductory metaphor), by Michael Handel to look at discrete diplomatic surprises (versus "normal diplomacy"), such as the American-Chinese rapprochement of 1971 or Hitler's various diplomatic *fait accomplis*. See Handel, "Surprise and change in international politics." pages 58-64, and Handel, *The Diplomacy of Surprise: Hitler, Nixon, Sadat* page 1. For an introduction to the ideas of Kuhn as they apply to the social sciences more generally see: David A. Hollinger, "T.S. Kuhn's Theory of Science and Its Implications for History " *American Historical Review* 78.2 (1973).

¹⁹⁰ Seliktar, *Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran*, pages xvi-xvii.

¹⁹¹ Ofira Seliktar, *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2004).

political culture: she also looked at the role of numerous agencies of government, the press, think tanks, and academia.

Third, Seliktar did not, as this thesis does, employ social constructivism to examine the creation and maintenance of the specific features of identity and culture that contributed to the ‘paradigm failure’ (though her work extensively documents the CIA’s penchant for quantification and neglect of ‘human’ factors, and gave this factor a prominent role in these two surprises). Kuhn’s paradigm approach and its critiques were developed to address the discovery of and theorizing about *natural* facts, an uncritical, wholesale application of a Kuhnian approach to an activity mostly concerned with *social* facts is problematic, an issue that this dissertation directly addresses.

Before closing this discussion of the literature on strategic surprises prior to 2001, it is also important to draw attention to Jutta Weldes’ *Constructing National Interests: the United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis*.¹⁹² In it, Weldes used a constructivist approach to ask “Why did the presence of Soviet Missiles in Cuba constitute a crisis for the US?” In answer, she tied the Crisis into what she called the Cold war “security imaginary”¹⁹³ of the US.

Weldes’ work is interesting, but it does not impact the originality claim of this dissertation. While she employed constructivism, she did so in a manner more in keeping with mainstream IR (i.e. employing the state as the unit of analysis; she does not look specifically at the CIA or intelligence analysis), and like most scholars of the Crisis, Weldes spends far more time on events following the discovery of Soviet missiles than before their discovery.

Post-2001 Secondary Literature

The terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, and the resultant wars in Afghanistan and Iraq resulted in a new wave of interest in intelligence failures and strategic surprise. The secondary literature on 9/11 itself (and the problems that it presents) are dealt with in Chapter 6. Here, four developments warrant treatment.

¹⁹² Jutta Weldes, Constructing National Interests: the United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

¹⁹³ Weldes, Constructing National Interests: the United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 121-63.

First, the 'orthodox school' of strategic surprise – expressly addressed to surprise attacks – has remained intact since September 11th, 2001. To the author's knowledge, there were no sustained, scholarly theory proposed that took issue with the approaches outlined above. Most aggregated them. Explanations for intelligence failures prior to the attack were found in Wohlstetter's signal-to-noise problem,¹⁹⁴ in bureaucratic politics,¹⁹⁵ in psychological factors,¹⁹⁶ and in singular historical factors such as the decline in US human intelligence capability since the end of the Cold War.¹⁹⁷

A partial exception to the generalisation above was a notable work by Neumann and Smith, *Missing the Plot? Intelligence and Discourse Failure*,¹⁹⁸ which highlighted how dominant debates about terrorism and Islam in the years preceding 9/11 contributed to the intelligence failure.¹⁹⁹

Naturally, the post-9/11 body of work did not focus solely on the CIA, and many works attempted a mix of explanations without isolating any single variable as decisive.²⁰⁰ Betts' notion of the inevitability of strategic surprise remained intact in his own work²⁰¹ and in that of others;²⁰² this shifted some of the focus to a "risk management" approach to surprise.²⁰³

¹⁹⁴ For example: Bruce Berkowitz, "Spying in the Post-September 11 World," Hoover Digest 4 (2003).

¹⁹⁵ For example: Amy B. Zegart, "September 11 and the Adaptation Failure of U.S. Intelligence Agencies," International Security 29.4 (2005), and Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11.

¹⁹⁶ For example: Parker and Stern, "Blindsided? - September 11 and the origins of strategic surprise." and Parker and Stern, "Bolt From the Blue or Avoidable Failure? Revisiting September 11 and the Origins of Strategic Surprise."

¹⁹⁷ For example: John Diamond, The CIA and the Culture of Failure: US Intelligence from the End of the Cold War to the Invasion of Iraq (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), or Ishmael Jones, The Human Factor: Inside the CIA's Dysfunctional Intelligence Culture (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2008).

¹⁹⁸ Peter R. Neumann and M. L. R. Smith, "Missing the Plot? Intelligence and Discourse Failure," Orbis (2005).

¹⁹⁹ Another partial exception that does not address surprise specifically but that edges towards some of the issues discussed here is Andrew Rathmell, "Towards postmodern intelligence " Intelligence and National Security 17.3 (2002). Rathmell says that the post-Cold War Intelligence environment can be productively approached using post-modern social theory as a conceptual framework.

²⁰⁰ For example: Turner, Why Secret Intelligence Fails.

²⁰¹ Richard K. Betts, "Intelligence Test: The Limits of Prevention," How Did This Happen, eds. James F. Hoge and Gideon Rose (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2001), *passim*, Richard K. Betts, "Fixing Intelligence," Foreign Affairs 81.1 (2002), pages 43-4 and Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, chapter Two.

²⁰² For example: Russell, Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right, page 18; Quiggin, Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age, pages 53-8.

²⁰³ For example: Paul Bracken, Ian Bremmer and David Gordon, eds., Managing Strategic Surprise: Lessons from Risk Management and Risk Assessment (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Second, the attacks generated considerable secondary literature about intelligence analysis broadly defined (i.e. the whole intelligence cycle, but as distinct from other CIA activities such as covert action). This included works and collections intended largely for the policy-making community and interested outsiders,²⁰⁴ a flood of volumes aimed mainly at practitioners,²⁰⁵ and several new histories of the CIA.²⁰⁶

A few of these works either included superficial looks at the analytical culture of the CIA,²⁰⁷ or focused in an anecdotal way on the culture of the DO.²⁰⁸

A more sophisticated look at culture and intelligence was taken by Philip H.J. Davies. In 2002, he called for a *cross-national* look at intelligence culture²⁰⁹. In 2004, Davies followed this call up by examining intelligence failures in the US Intelligence Community versus Britain's intelligence establishment, but in the US

²⁰⁴ For example: Francis Fukuyama, ed., Blindside: How to Anticipate Forcing Events and Wild Cards in Global Politics (Baltimore, MD: Brookings Institution Press, 2007); Matthias, America's Strategic Blunders; Richelson, The US Intelligence Community.

²⁰⁵ For example: Clark, Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach; Jan Goldman, ed., The Ethics of Spying: a Reader for the Intelligence Professional (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006); Roger Z. George and Robert D. Kline, eds., Intelligence and the National Security Strategist: Enduring issues and Challenges (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006); Roger Z. George and James B. Bruce, eds., Analyzing Intelligence: Origins, Obstacles and Innovations (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008); Jerome Clauser and Jan Goldman, ed., Intelligence Research and Analysis (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008); Don McDowell, Strategic Intelligence: A Handbook for Practitioners, Managers and Users (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009); James S. Major, Communicating With Intelligence: Writing and Briefing in the Intelligence and National Security Communities (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008); James S. Major, Writing Classified and Unclassified Papers for National Security: A Scarecrow Professional Intelligence Educational Series Manual (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009); and Christopher Andrew, Richard J. Aldrich and Wesley K. Wark, eds., Secret Intelligence: A Reader (London: Routledge, 2009).

²⁰⁶ For example: Turner, Burn Before Reading: Presidents, CIA Directors, and Secret Intelligence; Rhodi Jeffreys-Jones and Christopher Andrew, eds., Eternal Vigilance?: 50 Years of the CIA (London: Frank Cass, 1997); Tim Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

²⁰⁷ See for example: Garrett Jones, "It's a cultural thing: thoughts on a troubled CIA," Secret Intelligence: A Reader, eds. Christopher Andrew, Richard J. Aldrich and Wesley K. Wark (London: Routledge, 2009) pages 26-30; or Michael Turner, "A Distinctive US Intelligence Identity," International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence 17.1 (2004) *passim*.

²⁰⁸ For example: Diamond, The CIA and the Culture of Failure: US Intelligence from the End of the Cold War to the Invasion of Iraq or Jones, The Human Factor: Inside the CIA's Dysfunctional Intelligence Culture.

²⁰⁹ Philip H.J. Davies, "Ideas of Intelligence: Divergent National Ideas and Institutions," Harvard International Review 24.3 (2002). Though not a cultural approach, Godson also did some comparison in Godson, Comparing Foreign Intelligence: the US, the USSR and the Third World. There are also national comparisons in Michael Herman, "Assessment machinery: British and American models," Intelligence and National Security 10.4 (1995), A. D. McLennan, "National intelligence assessment: Australia's experience," Intelligence and National Security 10.4 (1995), and Harald Nielsen, "The German analysis and assessment system," Intelligence and National Security 10.4 (1995).

case, he assigned a causal role to broad cultural factors that created “acute institutional balkanisation and weak inter-agency collaboration”²¹⁰. As a result, Davies analysis ended up a subset of the “Bureaucratic Politics” school of intelligence failure.

A work from this period that took an approach akin to a cultural one, and that included a great deal of raw material about the CIA’s internal culture, is drawn upon extensively below. *Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study*,²¹¹ by Dr Robert Johnston, was the result of an anthropological study of the DI that he conducted under the auspices of the CIA’s Postdoctoral Fellowship Program.²¹² Johnston did not directly address the issue of strategic surprise, but his findings provide considerable raw material for the analysis of the CIA’s culture and identity in Chapter 3, below. His work almost amounted to a primary source; as Johnston was working in-house, his access was extensive (he was cleared to conduct over 489 interviews²¹³) and his findings appeared in *Studies in Intelligence*. While the present work differs sharply with many of Johnston’s conclusions, overall his work was a strong contribution to understanding the internal culture of the CIA.

Another recent article to note was Michael Turner’s 2004 effort to describe “A Distinctive U.S. Intelligence Identity” in the *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*.²¹⁴ Turner posited fourteen norms²¹⁵ that composed this “distinctive” US Intelligence Community’s identity (not simply the CIA’s). Presumably, he derived these norms from personal experience, but he also credited the work of Donald Snow on American strategic culture.²¹⁶ Turner did not posit any specific social mechanisms that produced these norms, nor do the majority of his traits seem distinctively American (e.g. “Institutional survival;

²¹⁰ Philip H.J. Davies, “Intelligence Culture and Intelligence Failure in Britain and the United States,” Cambridge Review of International Affairs 17.3 (2004) page 503.

²¹¹ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study.

²¹² Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page v.

²¹³ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 125.

²¹⁴ Turner, “A Distinctive US Intelligence Identity.”

²¹⁵ Turner’s fourteen “distinctive” traits are 1) Institutional survival; 2) Secrecy; 3) Intelligence Exceptionalism; 4) Ambiguous Mandate; 5) Confederal Structure; 6) Flexible Accountability; 7) Separation of Intelligence from law Enforcement; 8) Competitive Intelligence; 9) Separation of Intelligence from Policy; 10) Policy Support; 11) “Can Do” Attitude; 12) primacy of Intelligence Analysis; 13) Emphasis on Current Intelligence; 14) Provision of Accurate, Timely, and Relevant intelligence. See also Turner, Why Secret Intelligence Fails, Chapter, 2, pages 16-40.

²¹⁶ Donald Snow, National Security (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

Policy support; an ambiguous mandate; a ‘Can Do’ Attitude”²¹⁷). Most fortunately for this author, Turner made no effort to link these attributes to specific intelligence outcomes, such as strategic surprise. In short, Turner’s effort was intellectually flabby and inconclusive (as at least one scholar witheringly concluded Turner’s traits consisted of “elements that vary from the trivial...to self-flattering platitudes of the Vincent Peal variety”).²¹⁸

The third factor to note in the post-911 literature on strategic surprise was that the issue of major surprise received additional attention in the wider world, especially the business community. Nicholas Nassim Taleb’s contributions²¹⁹ are probably the best known of these – and for good reason: they were original, wide-ranging, and well argued – but others exist.²²⁰

The final piece of secondary literature published since 2001 that is worthy of mention is Fred Charles Iklé’s *Annihilation From Within: The Ultimate Threat to Nations*.²²¹ While his book did not propose a new theory of strategic surprise *per se*, Iklé offered an original, historically informed, and ultimately thought-provoking look at the likely sources of strategic surprise in the future. Equally important, he examined the possible political consequences of such surprises.

Conclusion – This Work’s Claim of Originality in Light of Previous Literature

Before drawing a conclusion about the originality of this work, we should sum up the literature review presented above. First, the study of intelligence in general and strategic surprise in particular has always been a part of IR, and has grown in scope and maturity since WWII. Since the 1970s, both the CIA

²¹⁷ Say what you will about the KGB or even the Shah of Iran’s secret service, SAVAK: the one thing that they possessed was a “can do” attitude!

²¹⁸ Davies, “Intelligence Culture and Intelligence Failure in Britain and the United States.” page 496.

²¹⁹ See Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Foiled by Randomness: the Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets* (New York, NY: Texere, 2004), and Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York, NY: Random House, 2007). The author of this work, by email correspondence with Taleb, contributed a minor correction to a draft chapter in the latter (involving not an issue of surprise, but the number of volumes of Giacomo Casanova’s memoirs).

²²⁰ See for example: Peter Schwartz, *Inevitable Surprises: A Survival Guide for the 21st Century* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), and Paul Saffo, “Six Rules for Effective Forecasting,” *Harvard Business Review*. July-August (2007).

²²¹ Fred Charles Iklé, *Annihilation From Within: The Ultimate Threat to Nations* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006).

and strategic surprise have received sustained (if at times, narrow) academic attention.

Second, since the 1980s, an 'orthodox' school of strategic surprise has arisen. This orthodox approach is fragmented among various mutually exclusive modes of explaining surprise (e.g. 'Signal-to-Noise' problems; Organisational Behavior; Bureaucratic Politics; Psychological issues), though very few authors commit entirely to a single approach as 'the' complete explanation for a given surprise. This orthodoxy, however, stresses the mistakes of the victim of surprise in collecting or processing intelligence, in effectively communicating intelligence to political leaders, or (most usually) in the mistake of political leaders in evaluating and using the warning transmitted. This has been modified somewhat by questioning the quality of warning offered before some surprises, but it has not been overturned. There is also consensus about the inevitability of strategic surprise, grounded most solidly in Betts' "Paradoxes of perception", the irresolvable trade-offs inherent in attempts to improve strategic warning.

Third, the notable new theoretical approaches that have been added to the orthodox school of strategic surprise since it solidified are Seliktar's idea of the role of Kuhnian paradigms in strategic surprises stemming from contingent events like the collapse of the USSR, and Neumann and Smith's somewhat related identification of societal "discourse failures" prior to 9/11.

Several conclusions in support of the claim of originality for this work can be drawn from the literature review above. First, no systematic studies try to understand strategic surprises in a theoretically unified manner. There is a body of theory about surprise attacks ('secrets'), and another, overlapping approach to surprising contingent events ('mysteries'), even though both are – on a common-sense level – intelligence failures. Psychological approaches to intelligence failure certainly span both, as can other relatively narrow methodologies such as organisational theory, bureaucratic politics, or signal-to-noise approaches. That said, no single, unified 'theory of strategic surprise' drawing on case studies from both categories of surprise has been formulated. This dissertation does so, with a narrow focus only on the internal culture of a single intelligence agency, the CIA. *Constructing Cassandra* is the first attempt to understand in a detailed, methodologically consistent manner how all types of surprises within an intelligence agency's remit are possible. It is certainly the only work to examine four case studies mixing surprise attacks and contingent events side-by-side and in such detail.

Second, the author was unable to find any cross-comparison of the Cassandras identified following strategic surprises, or attempts to draw conclusions about strategic surprises by specifically including Cassandras in *post hoc* examination of surprises. This dissertation uses Cassandras as a foil to cast doubt on the 'inevitability' or 'unpredictability' of each surprise, as least insofar as the CIA's analysis is concerned. It makes, however, no claims about what might have happened in each case had the CIA issued a Levite-style 'high-quality' warning to its 'customers'; it specifically excludes from its scope the warning-response problem.

Third, the author is unaware of any approach that either explicitly or implicitly employs a social constructivist methodology to look at the CIA, intelligence analysis, or strategic surprise.

Why this methodologically original approach to these important topics is both appropriate and useful, and what sort of picture of the CIA's culture results from it, comprise the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Constructivism and the CIA

Chapter 3 is the core “theory chapter” of this dissertation. As such, it offers a conspectus of the social processes that create and maintain the identity and culture of the CIA, and it describes the resultant features of that identity and culture that are constant within the scope of this work. Chapters Five and Six employ cases as examples to trace specific erroneous threat assessments and strategic surprises back to the misperceptions, analytical distortions, and ‘blind spots’ that result from these key elements of the CIA’s identity and culture. These qualities are also the critical to the general understanding of strategic surprise advanced in Chapter 7. Thus, the theoretical crux of this dissertation lies within the social processes explored in this chapter, and the resultant identity and culture.

To perform this foundational role, Chapter 3 has three sections. Section One introduces the theoretical viewpoint, social constructivism, and explains why it is well suited to investigate the CIA’s work. In sum, this is because intelligence work happens not merely in the minds of individual analysts, but in a distinctive community, the CIA. This section also spends time illuminating the details of exactly what is meant by ‘intelligence work’, especially ‘intelligence analysis’ to demonstrate its essentially social nature.

Section two then answers the question ‘What are the main inter-subjective social processes and practices (i.e. social mechanisms) that shape the identity and culture within the CIA?’

Section Three concludes by answering the question, ‘Given those social mechanisms, what have been the persistent features of the CIA’s identity and culture?’ i.e. what characteristics of the Agency’s identity and culture persist over the temporal scope of this dissertation?

Following chapters then establish these traits of identity and culture as the important constants for understanding the recurrence of the CIA’s erroneous threat assessments and the resultant strategic surprises.

Section I: Constructivism and the CIA – Well Matched?

As Chapter 2 mentioned, no scholar has looked at strategic surprise using social constructivism. This section begins by addressing why social constructivism provides productive theoretical leverage for this topic. It conveys the analytical depth offered by constructivism, and helps understand why

competing (and at times complementary) approaches to intelligence failure benefit from this effort at synthesis.

Next, this section confirms that social constructivism and the day-to-day business of intelligence are well matched, i.e. that the social features of the intelligence work at the CIA make it well suited to this approach. Historically the Intelligence Community has been slow to admit or to analyse the social aspects of intelligence work, especially intelligence analysis. This section is essential, therefore, to confirm that though scholars have not used social constructivism to understand the CIA before, they make an ideal theory-subject combination.

Why is constructivism a useful approach for understanding intelligence work?

Social facts¹ are constructivism's² point of departure. As a result, its ontology is post-positivist.³ As their name implies, social facts have no grounding in the 'natural' world,⁴ and therefore there can be no clear subject/object or agent/structure distinction.⁵ This is another way of saying that constructivism has a 'Relational' rather than 'Essentialist' ontology.

An important consequence of this relational ontology is that there can be no objective structures: as Gould says, "Structure is in the mind's eye. Structures exist because agents see patterns to which they *impute* structure."⁶ On this basis, it should be obvious that constructivism is not merely a modish way of making old-fashioned structural arguments. This is an important point to make because of the numerous structural accounts of strategic surprise described in Chapter 2. Graham Allison's three models of explanation provide a nice example of these and of the problem: his models are not flatly in contradiction with each other, but neither are they fully compatible; this suggests

¹ The original term appears to appear first in Emile Durkheim, The Rules of the Sociological Method, trans. Sarah A. Solovay and John D. Mueller, ed. George E. G. Catlin (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1938), page 1061-2.

² Throughout the text, the reader should draw no conclusions from the use of the single word "constructivism" as opposed to "social constructivism" – it is for variety and brevity's sake only.

³ Wendt, Social Theory, pages 90-1.

⁴ Bhaskar, The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of Contemporary Human Sciences, pages 1-9.

⁵ Wendt, "On constitution and causation in International Relations." pages 165-78.

⁶ Harry D. Gould, "What is at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?," International Relations in a Constructed World, eds. V. Kubalkova, Nicholas Onuf and Paul Kowert (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998) page 83.

that facts and interpretations are extremely difficult to separate⁷ when examining a classic intelligence problem: What were the Soviets up to in Cuba in 1962?

Social constructivism's epistemology flows naturally from its ontology – it takes as its starting point social practice, or observable 'properties of identity' and culture. As a result, the questions that arise from it have a different emphasis from those generated by Positivist structural approaches. Instead of Positivism's standard questions of 'Why?' and 'In what manner?' social constructivism usually probes more deeply into 'How possible?' and 'What are the probable behaviours given a set of observed social facts?' This post-positivist approach (that Wendt calls "an 'insider's' view of social phenomena"⁸), seeks to comprehend what events mean (as distinct from unearthing any laws of nature). What justifies this approach? Bhaskar points out that the conceptual categories that we use to identify and understand events are socially and historically – rather than exogenously – determined, and that this is the difference between "causal laws" and "patterns of events"⁹. Such an approach actively engages with the implications of the idea that when people participate on some level in the events that they think about, not only is their knowledge incomplete, but their imperfect understandings and subjective viewpoints becomes part of the 'reality' being examined.¹⁰ In so doing, constructivism is extremely effective at highlighting the specific ways in which "history is encoded into institutions."¹¹

Moreover, as Koslowski and Kratochwil point out, before one dismisses the constructivist approach to questions as pure idealism, one needs to remember that both rational choice theory and economic reasoning start precisely with a conception of an autonomous actor and his or her conceptions and preferences,¹² and then explore the effects of these preferences aggregated over time (i.e. that "Agency has an inherently relational dimension"¹³). In short,

⁷ Hollis and Smith, Explaining and Understanding International Relations, page 54-5.

⁸ Wendt, "On constitution and causation in International Relations." pages 101-2.

⁹ Bhaskar, The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of Contemporary Human Sciences, pages 1-9.

¹⁰ See Soros, The Age of Fallibility: the Consequences of the War on Terror, page 4.

¹¹ James March and Johan Olsen, Rediscovering Institutions (New York, NY: Free Press, 1989), page 56.

¹² Rey Koslowski and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, "Understanding change in international politics: the Soviet empire's demise and the international system " International Organization 48.2 (1994), page 225.

¹³ Wendt, Social Theory, page 171.

the approach here is grounded in the idea that social environments and actors penetrate one another.¹⁴

Given that brief introduction, how does constructivism work? As an operational methodology, constructivism explores a group's rules (explicit statements telling people what they *should* do), norms (informal, unwritten rules), practices (actual behavior in light of rules and norms), institutions (stable – but not fixed - patterns of rules and practices), and structures (consistent patterns of the rules, practices, institutions, and norms, and the intended and unintended consequences of all of them).¹⁵ Taken together, these elements ultimately constitute a society or community with a distinct identity and culture.

A note is in order here to explain that constructivism as it is sometimes employed in IR makes a level of analysis distinction between identity (which is agent-level when considering nations) and culture (which is structure-level when considering nations). Here (as the social mechanism described below makes clear), identity and culture are *not* separable, but instead are 'mutually constitutive'. Such a binding of identity and culture is common in the work on national security culture (e.g. Peter Katzenstein¹⁶ or Robert Herman,¹⁷) and explorations pathologies in international organisations (e.g. Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore).¹⁸

How, then, is constructivism different from traditional cultural analysis? The distinction most significant for this thesis lies in constructivism's clear focus on the dynamic interaction between agent and structure. According to Valerie Hudson, "Culture shapes practice in both the long and the short term. At the moment of action, culture provides the elements of grammar that define the situation, that reveal motives, and that set forth a strategy for success." However – crucially – viewed through constructivism, the CIA's culture not only becomes a generator of preferences, but also "a vehicle for the perpetuation of values and preferences"¹⁹. The identity and culture at Langley not only create a set of behavioural dispositions and fix meanings, but they perpetuate and

¹⁴ Peter Katzenstein, The Culture of National Security (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), page 25.

¹⁵ Nicholas Onuf, "Review of The New Culture of Security Studies," Merrshon International Studies Review 42.1 (1998).

¹⁶ Katzenstein, The Culture of National Security.

¹⁷ Robert G. Herman, "Identity, Norms and National Security: the Soviet Foreign Policy Revolution and the End of the Cold War," The Culture of National Security, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Barnett and Finnemore, "The Power, Politics and Pathologies of International Organizations."

¹⁹ Jeffery S. Lantis, "Strategic Culture and National Security Strategy," International Studies Review 4.3 (2002).

participate in constant re-creation of those meanings and dispositions.²⁰ The significance of this distinction becomes clear in section two, which outlines the many social mechanisms that both create and maintain the CIA's culture and identity over several decades.

Constructivism's emphasis on the social interaction between agent and structure is not the only reason for selecting it as the theoretical viewpoint from which to scrutinize the CIA. There are at least five further advantages of a social constructivist approach.

The first source of constructivism's theoretical leverage is its holistic quality, its ability to make it "feasible to theorize about matters that seem unrelated because the concepts and propositions normally used to talk about such matters are also unrelated".²¹ Constructivism's recognition of multiple pathways and directions of interdependence means one can advance an approach to strategic surprise that encompasses a wide variety of proximate and distal factors and processes within the CIA, and then link the resulting identity and culture to a pattern of outcomes formed by a series of historically unique events: intelligence failures leading to strategic surprises. When trying to generate a theory covering complex, discrete events over a period of fifty-four years, this is a methodological strength.

The second theoretical advantage that constructivism provides is its emphasis on the reproduction of existing social structures, and on how structures transform agents. Because of this, constructivism can account for continuity *and* (or in the midst of) change. Its rejection of exogenously determined static structures provides constructivism with a distinct advantage when investigating an entity that, while always a recognisable whole, was in constant organisational flux since it began. Since an act of Congress created the CIA in 1947, there have been countless reforms and changes to its structure and bureaucracy.²² Purely bureaucratic, organisational, or other structural methodologies cannot easily account for continuity in such an entity. Their relative inflexibility leaves the theories of surprise that these approaches generate open to attack for ahistorical neglect of detail concerning the constantly

²⁰ Barnett and Finnemore, "The Power, Politics and Pathologies of International Organizations." pages 706 and 711.

²¹ Nicolas Onuf, "Constructivism: A Users Manual," International Relations in a Constructed World, eds. V. Kubalkova, Nicholas Onuf and Paul Kowert (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), page 61.

²² An agonisingly complete account of these is provided by Warner and McDonald, US Intelligence Reform Studies Since 1947.

shifting boxes and lines of authority in the organisational chart of the entity always called “the CIA”.

Similarly, because the composition of America’s foreign policy analysis agencies, governmental actors, intelligence targets, intellectual climate, and external political circumstances have varied considerably between 1947 and 2001 (i.e. numerous factors exogenous to the CIA, but influencing it), a ‘pure’ strategic culture approach is also an imperfect way to examine strategic surprise. In contrast to such a purely cultural approach, constructivism “views culture as an *evolving* system of shared meaning that governs perceptions, communications and actions...Culture shapes practice in both the long and the short term”²³. Constructivism labels the generally stable but never final patterns shaped by inter-subjective processes ‘institutions’, and acknowledges that these both *suit and shape* agent’s actions over time: with constructivism, change (intentional and unintentional, even unconscious, change) is *expected*. Because one of the social mechanisms discussed in section two involves the CIA’s interactions with the ‘consumers’ of its analysis and with other parts of the Intelligence Community, a methodological provision for some development of the *Weltanschauung* of both CIA employees and their ‘customers’ is extremely important. It allows the analysis here to address an extremely varied set of phenomena: pre-existing categories used by the Intelligence Community (secrets and mysteries), and examples of surprise that the CIA itself takes as paradigmatic of each category (attacks and social upheaval).

This iterative aspect of the relationship between a culture and its environment that constructivism captures so well is especially useful because intelligence work often involves the *interaction* of an analytical community with the ‘threat’ over time: it is rarely a one-time assessment of one ‘side’ or another.²⁴ Katzenstein says it best: with constructivism, culture “refers both to a set of evaluative standards, such as norms and values, and to cognitive standards, such as rules or models defining what entities and actors exist in a system *and how they operate and interrelate.*”²⁵

The third reason that constructivism is ideally suited to analyse this topic is that the origin of the ‘puzzle’ that this dissertation addresses is partly the

²³ Valerie M. Hudson, ed., Culture & Foreign Policy (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 1997). emphasis added.

²⁴ Stephen Peter Rosen, “Net Assessment as an Analytic Concept,” On Not Fooling Ourselves, eds. Andrew W. Marshall and Henry S. Rowen (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991). Rosen, “Net Assessment as an Analytic Concept.”

²⁵ Katzenstein, The Culture of National Security. Emphasis added.

presence after each US strategic surprise of Cassandras (i.e. individuals inside or outside the Agency who anticipated the approximate course of events that comprised a strategic surprise based on reasoned threat assessments that differed sharply from those of the CIA). Constructivism, while not always employing Gramscian notions of intellectual hegemony, at least opens the door to exploring the idea that “rules yield rule”.²⁶ As such, it offers tools to investigate the puzzle of why some analytical voices are left crying in the intelligence wilderness, and how the “epistemic community”²⁷ of the CIA systematically excludes certain people and ideas. The next section describes several coercive elements (both overt and subtle) within the social mechanisms that create and maintain the identity and culture of the CIA.

The fourth reason that constructivism is an apt methodology for this topic is that it embraces unintended consequences: the lynchpin of this hypothesis is that strategic surprise is an unintended consequence of four key characteristics of the CIA’s identity and culture. A critical constructivist approach allows a structural analysis of practices that highlights “possibility conditions”²⁸ rather than the discrete choices emphasised by positivist structural models. As Onuf writes: “Agents often make choices that have consequences, for themselves and others, that they had not anticipated...Unintended consequences frequently form stable patterns with respect to their effect on agents”.²⁹ Strategic surprises are such a pattern: this dissertation argues that the inter-subjective social processes and the CIA agents’ (no pun intended) choices within them produce assessments of the outside world that sometimes result in strategic surprises. These choices about identity and culture create what Barnett and Finnemore have called in other organisations “pathologies”³⁰ that become the wellspring of strategic surprises.

Take ‘mindset’, for example. Using the prevailing CIA mindset, many strategic questions are defined and analysed efficiently. However, as one CIA post-surprise review puts it – without questioning the deeper origins of the

²⁶ Onuf, “Constructivism: A Users Manual.”

²⁷ In keeping with Haas (who quotes Burkhart Holzner and John H. Marx, Knowledge Application (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1979), by this phrase I mean “those knowledge-oriented work communities in which cultural standards and social arrangements interpenetrate around a primary commitment to epistemic criteria in knowledge production and application”. See Ernst B. Haas, When Knowledge is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

²⁸ Weldes, “Bureaucratic Politics: A Critical Constructivist Assessment.” page 224.

²⁹ Onuf, “Constructivism: A Users Manual.” page 61.

³⁰ Barnett and Finnemore, “The Power, Politics and Pathologies of International Organizations.” *passim*.

problem – “the basic trade-off for mind-set [in intelligence analysis] is much like that for nuclear power plants: it works wonders to get production out – in between disasters.”³¹ Constructivism allows the investigation of this relationship fully by tracing the CIA’s mindset back to the inter-subjective social processes that create it: as Chapter 2 discussed, it allows one to sustain Seliktar’s ‘Kuhnian paradigm model’ of mystery-based failure (at least as a metaphor: the aforementioned distinction between natural and social facts must be remembered), with the ‘orthodox’ theories of secrets-based intelligence surprises.

This raises the final strength of constructivism applied to this topic. It offers the ability to explore with exactitude the social mechanisms that generate the CIA’s identity and culture, see the resulting attributes of identity and culture at work in the cases creating erroneous threat assessments and ‘constructing the Cassandras’, and also allows a theoretical reach across previous attempts to explain or understand strategic surprise – it allows one to create a ‘unified theory’ of strategic surprise (i.e., one that encompasses many levels of analysis and types of explanation). It achieves this theoretical reach in part because it frequently asks questions that are ‘distal’ (here used to indicate logically prior) to those asked by other approaches.³² This combination of theoretical depth and breadth allows it to generate a way of understanding that both endorses and transcends existing explanations of strategic surprise. It allows one, for example, to acknowledge the strengths of Jervis’s and other’s work on misperception³³ and Seliktar’s paradigm model, while at the same time extending and relating this mode of understanding to others.

The Social Foundations of Intelligence Analysis

Explicit recognition of the social nature of intelligence analysis has emerged only in the last few years. Below, however, we examine the actual process of intelligence analysis in detail, and expose it as an almost entirely social process, and therefore one well suited to a social constructivist

³¹ Davis, “Combating Mind-Set.” The idea that strategic surprises are a species of normal accidents like those in nuclear plants as described by Perrow is addressed below. (see Charles Perrow, “Normal Accident at Three Mile Island,” Transactions 18 (1981) and Charles Perrow, Normal Accidents: Living with High Risk Technologies (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

³² Weldes, “Bureaucratic Politics: A Critical Constructivist Assessment.” page 224.

³³ See for example: Robert Jervis, “Minimizing Misperception,” Thought and Action in Foreign Policy, eds. Matthew G. Bonham and Michael J. Shapiro (Stamford: Centre for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences, 1973) and Jervis, Perception and Misperception and Jervis, “What’s wrong with the intelligence process.”

examination. Time spent labouring over the social nature of intelligence analysis in this section illuminates an activity that those outside the world of intelligence have difficulty picturing precisely. A close look at the actual processes of analysis here also introduces documentary material that the next section of this Chapter draws upon to elucidate the social mechanisms that create and maintain the Agency's identity.

Anecdotal accounts of both intelligence analysis and of specific strategic surprises have always contained accounts of social interactions, but as noted above scholars and practitioners have only explicitly recognized the essentially social nature of intelligence analysis in the last few years.³⁴ The literature targeting improved analysis has usually consisted either of collections of practical analytic techniques for the individual analyst (essentially, what an individual 'should do'³⁵), or descriptions of the various psychological traps to which individual analysts are prone (essentially, what an individual should 'not do'³⁶). One can observe this social void in both CIA publications about intelligence analysis, and in external sources.

Recognition of the Social Nature of Analysis

The slighting of the essentially social basis of US intelligence analysis began at its birth. Sherman Kent, in *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (as noted in Chapter 2, a foundation document for American intelligence analysts, published in 1949), describes a seven-step process of intelligence analysis. None of Kent's analytical steps overtly recognises the social nature of analysis. Quite the contrary: Step One of Kent's process of analysis reads "1. The appearance of a problem requiring the attention of a strategic intelligence

³⁴ For the CIA, see for example Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study; for the Intelligence Community as a whole see: Cooper, Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis. Even so, "Taylorist" studies of the analytical process are depressingly persistent, using 21st century technology to capture data in pursuit of early 20th century "scientific management" methodologies (See, for example Tom Hewett, Emile Morse and Jean Scholtz, "In Depth Observational Studies of Professional Intelligence Analysts," (The US National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2004.), or technologically-driven attempts to apply data-mining techniques and other "more-is-better" techniques to intelligence analysis (See, for example John Hollywood, Diane Snyder, Kenneth McKay and John Jr. Boon, Out of the Ordinary: Finding Hidden Threats by Analyzing Unusual Behavior (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2004) and numerous other works published by RAND and the MITRE Corporation.) These studies only offer further evidence of the persistence of scientism at the CIA, discussed below.

³⁵ For example: Frank Watanabe, "Fifteen Axioms for Intelligence Analysis," Studies in Intelligence Semi-annual Edition.1 (1997).

³⁶ For example, much of Heuer, The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis.

staff”.³⁷ Note a peculiar thing about this step: the problem to be analysed simply “appears” - the analyst and the Agency as a whole are un-problematically presented by the exogenous environment with this problem, they do not participate in its definition or creation. This uncritical, *deus ex machina* introduction of a discrete intelligence problem is even more peculiar considering Step Two of Kent’s process: “2. Analysis of this problem to discover which facets of it are of actual importance to the U.S., and which of several lines of approach are most likely to be useful to its governmental consumers”. Clearly, Kent is describing an essentially social process as un-problematically as if intelligence issues were atomic particles.

For the readers of his book, Kent’s positivistic approach is not a surprise. In the preceding paragraphs (by the man, one may note, called “the godfather of National Intelligence Estimates”, for whom the CIA’s school for analysts is named”,³⁸ and whose “Principles of Intelligence Analysis” analysts still use in training³⁹), Kent says:

A medieval philosopher would have been content to get his truth by extrapolating from Holy Writ, an African chieftain by consultation with his witch doctor, or a mystic like Hitler from communion with his intuitive self. But we insist, and have insisted for generations, that truth is to be approached, if not attained, through research guided by a systematic method. *In the social sciences which largely constitute the subject matter of strategic intelligence, there is such a method. It is much like the method of the physical sciences.* It is not the same method but it is a method none the less.⁴⁰

Kent then elucidates in a footnote the qualification to this naked positivism made in the final sentence quoted above. Namely, that the in the social science there is “enormous difficulty” in “running controlled and repetitive experiments”.⁴¹ This idea, while true, does not reveal any appreciation by Kent for the distinction between natural and social facts or any insight into the social nature of analysis.

One might object that Kent’s book is a 1950’s relic. As far as its attitudes to social facts are concerned, it is not. To offer but one example, *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*, a 1991 book still widely respected among analysts and used in many courses on intelligence, says: “Analysis

³⁷ Kent, Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy page 157.

³⁸ Schrage, “What Percent Is ‘Slam Dunk’?”

³⁹ Marrin, “CIA’s Kent School: A Step In the Right Direction,”

⁴⁰ Kent, Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy pages 155-6.

⁴¹ Kent, Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy page 156, fn 4.

refers to the process of transforming bits and pieces of information that are collected in whatever fashion into something that is usable by policy makers and military commanders. The result, or ‘intelligence product’, can take the form of short memorandums, elaborate formal reports, briefings, or any other means of presenting information.”⁴² *Silent Warfare* then goes on to describe cryptanalysis, telemetry analysis, photo interpretation, and the production of scientific and technical intelligence military intelligence, political intelligence, and economic and (even) “Social” intelligence (sic) without addressing the social aspects of the analytical process.⁴³ The closest that the authors come to acknowledging that the analytical process *is* a social process is through asides like “In some cases, such as the production of economic and political intelligence, the techniques [of analysis] are not distinguishable from those of the corresponding social sciences”.⁴⁴ Such asides hardly go to the heart of the epistemological problems raised by the approach described above.

In the same way, one of the CIA’s attempts to improve analysis, the oft-cited volume - *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* pulls together articles written in the Directorate of Intelligence’s in-house journal written between 1978 and 1986.⁴⁵ Here, too, the focus is almost entirely on the internal cognitive challenges to the individual analyst, at one point comparing the analyst to a “Chess master”⁴⁶. The analyst exists in splendid, endogenous isolation, handed discrete, exogenous ‘problems’ from on high.

⁴² Shulsky and Schmitt, *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*, page 41.

⁴³ Shulsky and Schmitt, *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*, pages 41-56.

⁴⁴ Shulsky and Schmitt, *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*, page 52.

⁴⁵ Heuer, *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, page vii.

⁴⁶ Heuer, *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, page 30. It is also worthy of note that the emblem of the Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) is a Chess Board. The CSI was “founded in 1974 in response to Director of Central Intelligence James Schlesinger’s desire to create within CIA an organisation that could ‘think through the functions of intelligence and bring the best intellects available to bear on intelligence problems.’ The Center, comprising both professional historians and experienced practitioners, attempts to document lessons learned from past operations, explore the needs and expectations of intelligence consumers, and stimulate serious debate on current and future intelligence challenges.” From its emblem, however, it appears to consider these questions “one piece at a time”. Citation from Front Matter in Warner and McDonald, *US Intelligence Reform Studies Since 1947*. On the other hand, for how chess was used by one Soviet dissident as a tool to resist KGB interrogation and Soviet repression generally, see Natan Sharansky, *Fear No Evil* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs 1998).

The single partial exception to that generalization is in itself revealing. In the final section, “Improving Intelligence Analysis”, Heuer acknowledges the need for CIA personnel to have “Exposure to Alternative Mind-sets”. He says:

The realities of bureaucratic life produce strong pressures for conformity. Management needs to make a conscious effort to ensure that well-reasoned competing views have the opportunity to surface within the Intelligence Community. Analysts need to enjoy a sense of security, so that partially developed new ideas may be expressed and bounced off others as sounding boards with minimal fear of criticism for deviating from established orthodoxy... [Management should promote] the kinds of activities that confront analysts with alternative perspectives – consultation with outside experts, analytical debates, competitive analysis, devil’s advocates, gaming, and interdisciplinary brainstorming.⁴⁷

These measures seem like an implicit acknowledgement that intelligence analysis is a social activity. One must realise, however, that Heuer’s remarks aim to aid *individual* analysts keep an ‘open mind’. Observe in this passage that *management* needs to make this effort, and that only “well-reasoned” competing views should have the opportunity to surface to challenge “orthodoxy”. Observe too that it is the “sense of security” of the *individual* analyst that needs nurturing, and that *individual* analysts who need “confronting” with “alternative viewpoints”. One can conclude, therefore, that the essentially the dynamic, social aspects of analysis are ignored, and recommendations are made in order to improve the analytical performance of individual CIA ‘chess players’⁴⁸ who are conceived in isolation from the chess board, pieces, or rules.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Heuer, The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis, pages 180-1.

⁴⁸ These collective elements are also ignored in Shulsky, who writes in the section “Intelligence Failure and Surprise”: “speaking of intelligence failure is similar to speaking of ‘chess failure’, defined as failure to win chess games. Obviously, to improve our chess-playing abilities, it makes sense to critique styles of play, as well as individual moves, as thoroughly as we can. *The result should be better individual chess play and if we share the insights we have gained, better play by others as well.*” Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence, page 70. Emphasis added. The chess metaphor is worse than useless when – as this work does – one is considering the “macro” factors lying behind strategic surprise; in fact, its repeated use highlights problem – intelligence analysis is a social activity engaged in not by individual chess masters but by groups of individuals. George Elliot makes another important point about the limitations this metaphor – especially given the scientism of CIA culture: “Fancy what a game of chess would be if all the chessmen had passions and intellects, more or less small and cunning; if you were not only uncertain about your adversary’s men, but a little uncertain about your own; if your knight could shuffle himself on to a new square on the sly; if your bishop in disgust at your castling, could wheedle your pawns out of their places; and if your pawns hating you because they are pawns, could make away from their appointed posts that you might get checkmate on a sudden. You might be the longest-headed of all deductive reasoners, and yet you might be beaten by your own pawns. *You would be especially likely to be beaten, if you depend arrogantly on your mathematical imagination, and regard your passionate pieces with contempt.*”

In the same manner, in *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*, a 1970s manual for training analysts at the CIA (called “mandatory reading for intelligence analysts whose job it was to forecast threats to the United States” during the Cold War)⁵⁰ also largely ignores the social nature of intelligence analysis. In it, the social nature of the analytical process gets a nod but little more, and the focus remains on individual judgements made (seemingly) in a social void.⁵¹

A change comes in *Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach*, published in 2004. This work is mostly a toolbox of analytical techniques written by a veteran CIA analyst and executive in the Directorate of Intelligence. It does not raise larger issues of problem formation and definition in analysis, but at least it dwells on the activity’s social aspects: three sections clearly address the ‘ideal’ analyst’s social attributes, or “Interpersonal Skills”. These are: the “Analyst as Team Player”, the “Analyst as Advocate” and the “Analyst as Communicator”. The description offered of the ideal individual analyst, for example, states that:

They are persuasive. They enjoy interacting with people and teaching others how the analytical game is played. They choose their words with care, and when they speak, customers listen and respect their opinions. They are highly regarded by their peers and can organize and work with a team on analyses. But they have the courage to stand alone in their judgements. They are good, and they know it. Their self-confidence, like that of the Israeli intelligence analyst who spotted the oncoming Yom Kippur attack, tends to perturb their superiors.⁵²

See George Eliot, *Felix Holt, The Radical* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1866) page 111. Emphasis added. The chess metaphor in international relations is, of course, loosely employed in Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1998). For an interesting exposition on the general applicability of chess to human affairs more generally, see Garry Kasparov, *How Life Imitates Chess: Making the Right Moves, from the Board to the Boardroom* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2007).

⁴⁹ Technically, pawns and pieces. For a fascinating discussion of the social construction of the rules of chess (and society) centred upon how the Queen evolved in Medieval Europe from being the moderately strong piece representing a male vizier of the previous five centuries into the most powerful – and female – piece that figures in today’s game, see Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004).

⁵⁰ Grabo, *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*, page vii.

⁵¹ Grabo, *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*, pages 133-4. She says “The collector in the field who elects to forward, or not forward, some fragment of information to his home office is making a judgement. The current analyst who decides to write up a given piece of information, or not do so, is making a judgement about it. The manner in which he writes it up, the emphasis he gives to this or that aspect of it, constitutes another judgement. The items that his immediate superior selects to include in a briefing for the senior officials of his agency or department are the result of another judgement... [Individual judgements are] an integral part of the process at all times.”

⁵² Clark, *Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach*, page 3.

Note that this description ends with these *social* traits in an analyst underscored as a factor in preventing a strategic surprise! The author goes on to state: “The process of getting an answer, especially on complex intelligence problems, is fundamentally a *social* one”⁵³. Fortunately for the originality claim of this dissertation, however, the hypothesis is not pursued further, but its appearance is interesting: it is another indicator that intelligence analysis *is* a social process.

The following year (2005), in the beginning of his path breaking anthropological study of intelligence analysis, Dr. Rob Johnston (a Director of Central Intelligence Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence), finally defined intelligence analysis in a social manner: “Intelligence analysis is the application of individual and collective cognitive methods to weigh data and test hypotheses within a secret *socio-cultural context*”.⁵⁴ He did so while introducing the results of a two year study to “investigate analytic culture, methodology, error and failure within the Intelligence Community”, in the course of which he conducted 489 interviews, “direct participant observations” and focus groups.⁵⁵ Johnston concludes his introduction to the analysis process thus: “My work during this study convinced me of the importance of making explicit something that is *not well described in the literature, namely, the very interactive, dynamic, and social nature of intelligence analysis*”⁵⁶.

This volume offers abundant evidence to confirm the essentially social nature not just of intelligence work generally, but of intelligence analysis at the CIA. In fact, Johnston says, “Despite the seemingly private and psychological nature of analysis as defined in the literature, what I found was a great deal of *informal, yet purposeful collaboration* during which individuals began to make sense of raw data *by negotiating meaning among the historical record, their peers, and their supervisors*.”⁵⁷ He then offers even more detail by quoting from his interviews with CIA analysts. Below is a “typical description of the analytic process” by a CIA analyst:

⁵³ Clark, Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach, page 7. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁴ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 4.

⁵⁵ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page xiii.

⁵⁶ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 4-5. Emphasis added.

⁵⁷ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 5.

When a request comes in from a consumer to answer some question, the first thing I do is read up on the analytic line. [I] check the previous publications and the data. Then, I read through the question again and find where there are links to previous products. When I think I have an answer, *I get together with my group and ask them what they think. We talk about it for a while and come to some consensus on its meaning and the best way to answer the consumer's questions. I write it up, pass it around here, and send it out for review.*⁵⁸

This description neatly brings us to further evidence that intelligence analysis is essential social: the “review process”. The review process – so key to the CIA’s analytical work - is clearly social, not merely individual and cerebral. Both for that reason and because of its centrality to the CIA’s work as a whole, the review process is worth understanding in detail.

Process Evidence of the Social Nature of Analysis: Review

Martin Petersen opens his 2005 *Studies in Intelligence* article “Making the Analytic Review Process Work”, with the words “If there is a first principle in producing written intelligence, it is that finished intelligence is a *corporate product*, not a personal one.”⁵⁹ This article provides rich fodder for a social constructivist analysis of strategic surprise, because it further exposes the social nature of the CIA’s analytical work.

Petersen begins by reminding his CIA audience that the review process in intelligence analysis is not mere bureaucratic pettifogging, and it is more than editing: “Editing is NOT review. Editing is a mechanical task that should be accomplished by the first-level reviewer or by a staff. Review is about thinking, about questioning evidence and judgements. It focuses on the soundness of the analytic points that are being made and the quality of the supporting evidence.”⁶⁰ In this view, “Review” in intelligence might resemble review of a Physics problem by a more experienced physicist. After an analysis is finished, for example, “The drafter's supervisor is almost always the first-level reviewer”; this supervisor “bears the greatest responsibility—after the author—for the substantive accuracy of the piece”.⁶¹ Use of the words “supervisor” and “responsibility” implies a culture recognizes that hierarchy, but so far, it remains at least debatable whether Review is purely social.

⁵⁸ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 5.

⁵⁹ Martin Petersen, “Making the Analytic Review Process Work,” Studies in Intelligence 49.1 (2005), Emphasis added.

⁶⁰ Petersen, “Making the Analytic Review Process Work.” Emphasis added.

⁶¹ Petersen, “Making the Analytic Review Process Work.”

A second level of review of the analysis then occurs, and this level of review is more clearly social:⁶² we not only have further mentions of responsibility, but a relationship – closeness to the policymaker – is cited as a virtue (the greater significance of which is explored in section two of this chapter).

In addition, Petersen continues, one of the key questions that the second level reviewer must ask is about *consistency*: “Is this piece consistent *not only with previous work on this topic but also with other analysis being done in the issue group?*” Such a question foregrounds the social nature of intelligence analysis, as it strongly implies that consistency with other, past analysis is a screen through which an analytical piece must pass to get to the next level. Natural sciences, however, recognizes neither “arguments from authority” nor on a majority consensus to settle disputes – those are usually used to settle social, not scientific questions.

Next, Petersen explains the third level of review:

The third-level review should be done by the office director or the staff of a senior officer in the organisation. *On a particularly sensitive piece, both may weigh in ...* Like earlier reviews, the third level needs to ponder core tradecraft questions: is it clear what is known and not known and what the level of confidence is? What assumptions underpin the analysis? *And does the piece address policymaker concerns?... is it consistent with other work being done in the organisation?... The third-level reviewer should focus most on whether the right questions have been asked and what the key variables are.*⁶³

From this passage, there can be little doubt that at the CIA analysis is not an individual but an intensely social activity. The focus is on consistency and the policy-makers concerns overwhelming point to a subjective process.

The culture of a hierarchical attitude to Review of intelligence analysis finds an echo in the earlier, ‘Tasking’ phase of the intelligence cycle – what ‘facts’ should get collected for analysis. Former DCI Dulles says:

The matters that interest an intelligence service are so numerous and diverse that some order must be established in the process of collecting information. This is logically the responsibility of the intelligence headquarters. *It alone has the world picture and knows what the requirements of our government are from day to day and*

⁶² Petersen, “Making the Analytic Review Process Work.” He says “The second-level reviewer is usually the issue manager, who is well steeped in the subject matter but not as expert as the analyst or the firstline supervisor. As a rule, this individual is closer to the policymaker...Whereas the firstline supervisor bears the principal responsibility for the substantive accuracy of the piece, subsequent reviewers, by virtue of their greater perspective, bear responsibility for the clarity of the message for the audience, ensuring that the points the piece is attempting to make are apparent and that the supporting evidence is compelling (at best) or supportive (at a minimum).”

⁶³ Petersen, “Making the Analytic Review Process Work.” Emphasis added.

month to month...It also establishes priorities among these objectives according to their relative urgency. Soviet ICBMs will take priority over their steel production. Whether or not Communist China would go to war over Laos will take priority over the political shading of a new regime in the Middle East."⁶⁴

Dulles is clearly (but largely unconsciously) talking about a social process of problem formulation here, and he is miles away from Kent's ideal of the exogenous "appearance"⁶⁵ of an intelligence problem.

Perhaps this passage explains why the Petersen article enjoins his CIA audience that: "Reviewers must be open to discussing substantive differences raised by analysts. Although the final say goes to the reviewers, the process should be a dialogue not a decree."⁶⁶ Analysts, on the other hand, should not dissimulate but instead "Respect the experience, perspective, and expertise of the reviewers, and accept that the final say belongs to them."⁶⁷ In sum, "Review" is obviously both a key part of intelligence analysis, *and* a demonstrably social process.

Further evidence of the social nature of intelligence analysis appears in another recent work sponsored by the CIA, Jeffrey Cooper's *Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis*. Here, Cooper suggests that intelligence failures like that surrounding 9/11 and misjudgements regarding weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq "resulted from deep-seated, closely-linked, interrelated 'systemic pathologies'."⁶⁸ While he does not take an explicitly constructivist or even cultural approach, Cooper does compare the Intelligence Community as a whole (as opposed to the CIA alone) to a "Complex Adaptive System"⁶⁹, and dissects the failings of this system on the

⁶⁴ Dulles, *The Craft of Intelligence*, page 75. Emphasis added.

⁶⁵ Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, page 157.

⁶⁶ Petersen, "Making the Analytic Review Process Work." He goes on to say "Reviewers, moreover, have an obligation to put analysts at ease and to draw out their views. They should be specific about their concerns or issues. If a reviewer cannot explain what the problem is, the problem may be the reviewer. Reviewers should complete their work quickly. If the piece is a priority for the analyst, it has to be a priority for the reviewer. Finally, reviewers must be prepared to stand behind the analysts and their analysis at the conclusion of the review process."

⁶⁷ Petersen, "Making the Analytic Review Process Work." He goes on to say: "An analyst can and should seek clarification if he or she does not understand what a reviewer is saying or wanting, raising any concerns about what the reviewer is suggesting by using data, history, alternate theories, or intelligence reporting. If analysts are unhappy with what reviewers have done, they should be ready to offer other language or suggest another approach to the issue at hand."

⁶⁸ Cooper, *Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis*, page 4.

⁶⁹ Cooper, *Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis*, page 9.

level of the Intelligence Community as a whole, the individual analysts and analytic units and organisations.⁷⁰

Cultural Evidence of the Social Nature of Analysis

In addition to this process-driven evidence for the social nature of intelligence, there is cultural evidence. As early as 1955, there is clear evidence of a sense of community and shared customs within the CIA: the rules, norms, and practices of a culture. Here, for example, is Sherman Kent writing that year, in the inaugural issue of *Studies in Intelligence* (which itself is evidence of and a contributor to that culture). In a missive to his colleagues entitled “The Need for an Intelligence Literature”, Kent wrote:

*We have orderly and standardized ways of doing things. We do most things the right way almost automatically...Most important of all, we have within us a feeling of common enterprise and a good sense of mission... Intelligence...has developed a recognized methodology; it has developed a vocabulary; it has developed a body of theory and doctrine; it has elaborate and refined techniques.*⁷¹

This passage is a pellucid depiction of a community with a common operating culture. Such a characterization make sense (as early as Max Weber, it was recognized that bureaucracies not only embody certain modern values and have distinct agenda, but they also have behavioural dispositions and distinctive cultures⁷²), and is easily supported⁷³ by further evidence. There is even, for example, a collection of articles from *Studies in Intelligence* whose title recognizes these mores: “Law and Custom of the National Intelligence Estimate: An Examination of the Theory and Some Recollections Concerning the Practice of the Art”.⁷³

Items like these also offer proof that the CIA was a distinct “epistemic community” in the period under review. (Haas defines an epistemic community as “a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue area”⁷⁴). In such communities, “cultural standards and

⁷⁰ Cooper, Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis, pages 9-11.

⁷¹ Sherman Kent, “The Need for an Intelligence Literature,” Studies in Intelligence 1.1 (1955). Emphasis added.

⁷² Barnett and Finnemore, “The Power, Politics and Pathologies of International Organizations.” page 706.

⁷³ Accessed online on 22 May, 2005 at <https://www.cia.gov/csi/books/shermankent/5law.html>

⁷⁴ Peter M. Haas, “Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination,” International Organization 46.1 (1992). page 3. In fn 4, Haas notes that

social arrangements interpenetrate around a primary commitment to epistemic criteria in knowledge production and application"⁷⁵, which further strengthens the case for a social constructivist analysis (though here, only at a level analysis⁷⁶ in keeping with the scope of the rest of this work).

While examining actual strategic surprises, Chapters Five and Six offer a look at the dominant paradigms shared in this epistemic community, and offers further evidence for this characterization of the CIA.

Section One Summary

Section one of this Chapter has demonstrated that despite the apparent lack of self-awareness by many inside the CIA, intelligence work is essentially a social process, and the CIA is a separate "epistemic community" (though this is dealt with far more fully below). This section has therefore established that the activities of the CIA from its inception in 1947 until 2001 comprise an appropriate topic of inquiry in which to employ a social constructivist approach. This approach is ultimately used to unravel one of the unintended outputs of the CIA's identity and culture: strategic surprises.

Section II: Creating and Maintaining the CIA's Identity and Culture

The second part of Chapter 3 explores the primary social processes, norms, rules, and practices that create and maintain the identity and culture of the CIA between 1947 and 2001.

This thesis argues that at least four social mechanisms⁷⁷ are involved in constructing the identity and culture of the analytical arm of the CIA, an identity and culture that has four features (discussed in section three of this chapter) that

his definition is looser than that used for communities made up of natural scientists, which makes its use especially appropriate here! One could also use – ironically – the definition of Burkhardt Holzner and John H. Marx, that Haas mentions in the same note: they use the term to refer to communities with "a shared faith in the scientific method as a way of generating truth".

⁷⁵ Haas, When Knowledge is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations, page 40.

⁷⁶ Epistemic Communities are frequently employed at the transnational level, among state administrators and among international institutions. See Haas, "Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination." table 1, page 6.

⁷⁷ Throughout this chapter, references are made to social mechanisms. This approach draws mainly on the work of Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg, "Social Mechanisms: An Introductory Essay," Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory, eds. Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); these mechanisms form the operational "toolbox", or shorthand, to capture the rules, norms, institutions, etc. with which the most fine-grained social constructivist approach deals.

contribute in varying degrees to the strategic surprises that characterise the cases explored below. These four social mechanisms are not entirely separable, but the working of each is identifiable over time, and in concert, they create the attributes of the CIA explored in section three (to which I link the strategic surprises of the cases in Chapters Five and Six). These four social mechanisms are: 1) the Self-selection of personnel working in Intelligence; 2) the active selection of personnel by the CIA; 3) various Socialization processes that follow selection (i.e., aspects of the internal operating environment, what Kowert and Legro refer to as “social diffusion”⁷⁸ mechanism for creating norms in a culture); and, 4) various “Mirror-imaging” processes by the Agency of its ‘customers’, the Intelligence Community as a whole (i.e. other agencies such as the NSA, FBI, and the Armed Services), and its assigned “targets” or adversaries.

Figure 1, below, summarises the four social mechanisms discussed, and links them to the four perennial qualities of the CIA that enable strategic surprise.

Figure 1: Perennial Features of the CIA's Analytical Identity & Culture and Their Related Social Mechanisms

Social Mechanism	Perennial Features of the CIA's Identity and Culture			
	Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
1 Self-Selection				
2 Active Selection				
3 Socialization, including:				
A. Induction and Training				
B. Definition of "Analytical" Activity				
C. A Vocabulary of false precision				
D. "Collegiality": marginalizing dissent				
E. "Wisdom Literature"				
F. Isolation, Compartmentalisation & Secrecy				
4 Mirror-imaging				
A. Mirroring the Consumer				
B. Mirroring the Community				
C. Mirroring the Target				

The vertical axis above includes the sub-parts of two of the social mechanisms discussed, Socialisation and Mirror-imaging.

It should be noted that this section represents another point of difference between *Constructing Cassandra* and previous efforts to incorporate identity and culture into security studies. As Kowert and Legro say in their critique of Katzenstein’s *The Culture of National Security*, for example, the essays that make up that volume tend to acknowledge (often at some length) that actor identity and behavioural norms are socially constructed, “but this is generally a *starting point*, from which the essays proceed to focus on the impact of these

⁷⁸ Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, "Norms, Identity and Their Limits, A Theoretical Reprise," *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996). page 475.

social constructions...about the *process* of identity construction, the authors have relatively little to say.”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, "Norms, Identity and Their Limits, A Theoretical Reprise," The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), page 469 emphasis original.

1. Self-selection of personnel

The first social mechanism plays its role outside of the formal organisational boundaries of the CIA: the self-selection by candidates to work there. Some scholars refer to this self-selection of people for certain roles (along with the mechanism of "Active Selection", below) as "Anticipatory Socialization"¹, or "pre-arrival".² In any case, no one enters the CIA involuntarily, or (given the security checks and other procedures described below), without knowing it. The identification of the role of this mechanism in the creation and perpetuation of the Agency's identity and culture is entirely in keeping with Kowert and Legro's idea that the first question determining group belongingness is not 'do I like these other individuals?' but 'Who am I?'"³ Everyone working at the CIA has sought it out, just as others have actively avoided it.⁴

This assertion is easy to document. In his memoir *The Craft of Intelligence*, for example, Alan Dulles describes self-selection in his outline of the character traits of the average CIA volunteer in the early 1960s:

What motivates a man to devote himself to the craft of intelligence? One way to answer the question is to look at some of the people who make up the ranks of American intelligence today and see how they got there... [one man] wanted to be closer to some front where he could feel he was "engaged", where he was dealing with the things he felt counted most....[Another man] wasn't really sure what he wanted to do but what interested him from the small glimpse he had of it in his college studies, and what stirred him every time he read the headlines, were the commitments and problems of the United States abroad and the Soviet challenge to our way of life...[A third man was drafted into the Army, trained in electronics, and witnessed the Communist attack on Quemoy. Once he was discharged, he could have] perhaps opened a television repair shop. Instead, he turned up one day at CIA offering his

¹ Daniel C. Feldman, "The Multiple Socialization of Organization Members," Academy of Management Review 6.2 (1981). cited in Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 97-8.

² Lyman W. Porter, Edward E. Lawler and J. Richard Hackman, Behaviour in Organizations (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1975). cited in Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 98-9.

³ Kowert and Legro, "Norms, Identity and Their Limits, A Theoretical Reprise." page 479

⁴ The author is aware of at least two highly competent historians/area experts and several immensely talented linguists who have been approached to work at the CIA and who refused for ideological reasons to have any association whatsoever with the organisation. As in so many areas, there is also speculation that there may be a genetic component to self-selection for some kinds of work, or at least general "sociability" and willingness to work in groups. See Lisa M Newbern, "Press Release, 9 June: Yerkes and CBN Researchers Find Minor Variations in Genetic Code Affect Social Behavior " (Atlanta, GA: Woodruff Health Sciences Center of Emory University, 2005).

services...What all these men had in common was an awareness of the conflict that exists in the world today, a conviction that the United States is involved in this conflict, that the peace and well-being of the world are endangered, and that it is worth trying to do something about these things.⁵

Clearly, all of these men consciously 'self-selected'. Similarly, in 1999 Thomas said that "commitment to national loyalty"⁶, "public service", and "self-sacrifice",⁷ motivate the CIA's applicants, and that these traits were reflected in CIA application forms.

While consistent with US government practice, a self-selecting, openly conducted⁸ recruitment of personnel to work at the CIA is not the only logical or practical possibility.⁹ Indeed, it is in sharp contrast to the Soviet/Russian intelligence agencies' methods throughout the period in question. Vladimir Putin, for example, recounts that when he originally approached the KGB¹⁰ about

⁵ Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence, pages 170-1.

⁶ Thomas, "The CIA's Bureaucratic Dimensions", page 405.

⁷ Thomas, "The CIA's Bureaucratic Dimensions", page 406.

⁸ At various times the Agency CIA has even placed classified – no pun intended – advertisements in US newspapers for analysts. See Berkowitz and Goodman, Strategic Intelligence for American National Security, page 157. Similarly, perhaps for reasons outlined below, the author was bemused to observe in the late 1990s that the CIA was openly recruiting MBA students from the University of Chicago and other business schools in the US, but did not bother to recruit at the best European business schools (e.g. London Business School, Instituto de Empresa, or INSEAD) despite the large number of US students at EU schools who: 1) tend to speak foreign languages far better than their US MBA counterparts; and, 2) are obviously attracted to the idea of working outside the United States. Paranoia, incompetence or parochialism? Probably a combination.

⁹ For the Directorate of Operations, there has also been in some periods less utterly transparent methods of recruitment, such as placing "blind ads", or newspaper advertisements listing the skills wanted (e.g. willingness to travel, foreign languages, etc.) without specifying the future employer, though at some point fairly quickly in the evaluation process, the future potential employer, the CIA, is unveiled. See Jones, The Human Factor: Inside the CIA's Dysfunctional Intelligence Culture, page 23.

¹⁰ For simplicity's sake, this acronym will be used throughout this dissertation to refer to the Soviet and then Russian Federation intelligence organisation headquartered at Lubyanka Square in Moscow and later (in the case of the First Chief Directorate, which dealt with foreign intelligence) in the suburb of Yasenovo, southwest of Moscow. The acronym KGB, however, and the organisation that it represents, requires an excursus for the sake of accuracy: it is a transliteration of the Russian "КГБ", which is the abbreviation for The Committee for State Security: Комитет Государственной Безопасности. The KGB was the premier Soviet Intelligence agency from 1954 to 1991, and in British terms was roughly the equivalent of both MI5 and MI6, or a combination of the American CIA and FBI (though far more pervasive than these analogues). Within the temporal scope of this dissertation it was preceded by very briefly by the KI (Komitet Informatsii) and then, the subsumed by MGB (The Ministry of State Security: МГБ: Министерство государственной безопасности) in existence from 1946-53. It was then supplanted by the FSB (The Federal Security Service ФСБ: Федеральная служба безопасности) and the SVR (the Foreign Intelligence Service: СВР: Служба внешней разведки) in 1991 (after senior KGB figures participated in the attempted coup against General Secretary Gorbachev). Much of this complex recent history of the KGB during

working for them, he was told “We don’t take people who come to us on their own initiative”.¹¹ Only after seven years did the KGB then approach *him* about working there.¹² The apogee (nadir?) of this approach was taken by Soviet

the Soviet break-up is well covered in Jeremy R. Azrael and Alexander G. Rahr, The Formation and Development of the Russian KGB, 1991-1994 (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1993). This history (and more) is also well covered in the admirable Robert W. Pringle, Historical Dictionary of Russian & Soviet Intelligence, ed. Jon Woronoff (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006), especially the Chronology (page xiii-xxii) the Introduction (pages xxiii-xxxv) and Appendices A-F (pages 305 to 316). To delve into the deep past of Russia and its intelligence services, Dvornik, a specialist in Byzantine history, explores the Muscovite princes’ adaptation of the Mongol’s elaborate intelligence and post system; see Dvornik, Origins of Intelligence Services: The Ancient Near East, Persia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, the Arab Muslim Empires, the Mongol Empire, China, Muscovy. In Russian, see also A. I. Kokurin, Lubianka: Organy VChK-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB, 1917-1991: Spravochnik (Moskva Demokratia. Mezhdunarodnyi fond (Fond A.N. Iakovleva), 2003), and the KGB’s own 1977 history of itself is available at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~hpcws/documents.htm>. Interestingly, this 639-page history by Viktor Chebrikov (who went on to head the institution) is still classified “Top Secret” in Russia, but was obtained in Riga in July 1997 by Indulis Zalite, a Latvian archival researcher. In contrast to Moscow, the Latvian government has declassified all documents from the Soviet era, and they are now freely available to researchers.

¹¹ Vladimir Putin, Nataliya Gevorkyan, Natalya Timakova and Andrei Kolesnikov, First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President Vladimir Putin, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000) page 23. For more on rigorous but passive KGB screening and recruitment methods, see Pete Earley, Confessions of a Spy: The Real Story of Aldrich Ames (New York, NY: Putnam Adult 1997), page 36-7. In contrast, Felix relates an incident in which “a young Harvard graduate, about to be employed in a covert operation in the Mediterranean area, was told that his cover would be that of a minor clerk in a shipping firm. “When this had been explained to him, he responded, in tones of shocked protest, “But you’ve got to give a man a cover he can be proud of!” As he observes “The American Dream can be a serious handicap to the American agent.” See Christopher Felix, A Short Course in the Secret War, Fourth ed. (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1963), pages 86-7. NB Felix technically did not work for the CIA the whole time; see: Mark Stout, “The Pond: Running Agents for State, War, and the CIA,” Studies in Intelligence 48.3 (2004), pages 1-2.

¹² Putin, Gevorkyan, Timakova and Kolesnikov, First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President Vladimir Putin, page 40-1. For a fascinating exploration of the degree to which the early conspiratorial tradition of underground communist movements shaped both intelligence tradecraft and the Cold War as a whole, see David McKnight, Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War: The Conspiratorial Heritage (New York, NY: Frank Cass, 2002), *passim*. One of the few explicit comparisons of the intellectual discourse about such matters is Godson, Comparing Foreign Intelligence: the US, the USSR and the Third World. Even differences in vocabulary are revealing: according to Richard Helms and William Hood, A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency (New York: Ballantine, 2003), page 115, in place of both “analysis” and “tradecraft”, the Russians use the word “conspiracy”. Kent makes a similar observation in a footnote of Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy, and expands on it: “the Communists – most notably the Soviets – use the word [i.e. “intelligence”] in a more restricted and quite different sense. To begin with, the expression ‘overt intelligence’ is to them pretty much a contradiction in terms. All intelligence work and intelligence (the resulting knowledge) is to them highly secret. It is almost wholly espionage, counterespionage, and the fruits thereof... If in fact the Soviets engage in what we in the West call ‘intelligence research and analysis’ they have another name for it and a name bereft of the cachet of ‘intelligence’. It is seemingly inconceivable to them that large numbers of people will be quite overtly engaged in something known as intelligence work, able to inform all and

Military Intelligence, the GRU¹³, in which the defector Vladimir Rezun¹⁴ recounted in 1985 “any volunteer would be arrested at once and subjected to a long and very painful interrogation”.¹⁵

This contrast throws into relief another form of self-selection that the Soviet Union and the CIA’s other adversaries also did not contend against: most talents useful in intelligence work command a higher premium elsewhere in American society. The result is that though some people self-select for intelligence work, others do the opposite for reasons transcending simple ideology. This competition has qualitative effects. As Berkowitz and Goodman point out, “George Soros has earned billions of dollars through his ability to analyse exchange rates a half step head of the rest of the world. Do we really expect a civil servant in the bowels of the intelligence bureaucracy to do better, and if so, why is he or she working for the government? Can the US government attract the calibre of analyst that one finds at Goldman Sachs, Credit Suisse/First Boston, Merrill Lynch, or any other investment firms?”¹⁶ Especially after the Cold War ended, it took a certain type of person to choose to labour as a “civil servant in the bowels of the intelligence bureaucracy”¹⁷ as an intelligence analyst rather than in a well-paid private sector job.¹⁸

sundry that this is in fact their calling, and obliged to guard with secrecy only those matters having to do with sources, methods and foci of their attention, and the content of their findings.” See Kent, Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy, page xiii fn.

¹³The acronym GRU is a transliteration of the Russian “ГРУ” which is the abbreviation for the Main Intelligence Directorate of the (Soviet and now Russian Army’s) General Staff : Главное Разведывательное Управление. It operates residencies and signals intelligence stations throughout the world.

¹⁴ a.k.a. “Viktor Suvorov”.

¹⁵ Viktor Suvorov, Aquarium (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), page 6. He precedes this assertion with its basis: “The GRU is entirely secret. Since nobody knows about it, nobody can enter it on his own initiative. Even supposing that some volunteer were to come along, how would he set about finding the right door to knock at, to request admission? Would he be accepted? Not likely. Volunteers are not needed.”

¹⁶ Berkowitz and Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age, page 109-10. The same point might be made for other types of analysts (not purely financial), when offered careers at McKinsey, Accenture, or even private security firms like Kroll.

¹⁷ Berkowitz and Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age, page 109-10

¹⁸ As will be discussed in the final case, a great example of this was the CIA’s Counterterrorist Center prior to 9/11. A small minority of CTC analysts had PhDs Russell, Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right, page 124. One former senior manager had a master’s degree in English; and a former Chief at the CTC had a bachelor’s degree in forestry. Russell, Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right, page 124-5. The same charge is made of the DI as a whole in the current era by Russell: he recalls “I remember sharing the news with my Middle East division chief that distinguished Harvard professor and political scientist Joseph Nye was named the chairman of the National Intelligence Council. My division chief looked at me curiously and asked ‘Who is Joseph Nye?’ To which I had to reply, ‘Oh, he’s just one of

The self-selection, both positive and negative that occurred in the talent pool from which American Intelligence draws very much mirrors US society (as did the reverse approach taken by Soviet Intelligence agencies). It also ensured, however, that people with a certain *Weltanschauung* and not others were the raw material from which the culture and identity of the Directorate of Intelligence was constructed. Clearly, this powerful social mechanism shaped the identity and culture of the CIA from in 1947 to 2001.

2. Active Selection of Personnel

The next social mechanism that operates to form the identity and culture of the CIA is the active selection process, and it too exerts powerful pressures; it is a variation on fairly standard “in-group/out-group differentiation”¹⁹ mechanisms for creating norms, cultures, and group identities.

To understand this mechanism, one must picture the distinctive aspects of CIA recruitment. Johnston describes “Potential CIA analysts must submit to a thorough background investigation, a polygraph examination, and financial and credit reviews. Further, a battery of psychological and medical exams must be passed prior to a formal employment offer. The timeframe for the background check eliminates the possibility of a rapid hiring decision.”²⁰ Johnston then writes, “*Even more important are the nonverbal messages sent to the recruit that this is a position of secrecy and high importance.*”²¹ CIA acculturation begins immediately, even before a final offer is made.

The distinctive aspects of the CIA selection process are a significant contributor to Langley’s identity and culture, many other agencies in the US Intelligence Community share them. Two other distinctive factors shape Active Selection at the CIA, however. Both of these features have dramatically affected the Agency over time: the class composition of the CIA’s early members, and the CIA’s peculiar approach to émigrés.

The CIA’s ‘social tone’ (and thus one input in its selection process) was set early on: from 1940s to at least the late 1960s it disproportionately favoured

the most highly regarded political scientists of his generation.” See: Russell, Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right, page 126.

¹⁹ Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, “Norms, Identity and Their Limits, A Theoretical Reprise,” The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996). page 475.

²⁰ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 100.

²¹ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 100. Emphasis added.

White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) East Coast 'establishment types' (given the immense - but still largely unacknowledged – covert role of British Intelligence in establishing several of the CIA's predecessors,²² this is hardly surprising).

CIA employees who worked in counterintelligence at the FBI in the 1960s, for example, found the general atmosphere of the former was 'tonier.' The man who unmasked KGB agent 'Kim' Philby found that in comparison to the FBI, by joining the CIA he was stepping into "an organisation of academics and Wall Street attorneys. Many of the men he met were heirs to considerable

²² Mahl makes the point that the CIA's institutional lineage can be traced back to the OSS, but then beyond that to the Coordinator of Information, which in turn was begotten in the "image and likeness" of an entity known as the British Security Coordination, which was both very effective in dampening isolationist sentiments in the US, and very tied into the WASP elite; see Thomas E. Mahl, Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939-44 (London: Brassey's Inc., 1999), pages 9 to 45 and Thomas F. Troy, "The Coordinator of Information and British Intelligence," Studies in Intelligence 18.1-S (1974), *passim* (Troy wrote a large number of *Studies* articles and other works on this relationship, of which this is only the most directly relevant). The upper class, Ivy League nature of the CIA is also well-covered for the period up to 1968 in Stewart Alsop, The Center (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1968), Chapter 8. For more on the Coordinator of Information and British Security Coordination, and another entity known as "the Rockefeller Office" see also H. Montgomery Hyde, Room 3606 (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, 1962), *passim* (which is to be preferred to the less complete US edition of the "same" book, H. Montgomery Hyde, The Quiet Canadian (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962)). For the British influence on the US Intelligence Community more broadly, including the FBI, see Douglas M. Charles, "Before the Colonel Arrived: Hoover, Donovan, Roosevelt, and the Origins of American Central Intelligence, 1940-41," Intelligence and National Security 20.2 (2005). Early internal histories of the CIA like Lyman B Kirkpatrick, "Origins, Mission and Structure of CIA," Studies in Intelligence 2.1 (1958), or Arthur B. Darling, "Origins of Central Intelligence," Studies in Intelligence 8.3 (1964), are missing any mention of a British role in its genealogy. The early mixed institutional history of US intelligence (albeit also entirely missing any mention of British involvement), is also recounted in Stout, "The Pond: Running Agents for State, War, and the CIA.". This approach is technically accurate, but also somewhat disingenuous, as there was a large British role in US intelligence efforts during WWII, and one can both assume and detect continuities. There were also US forerunners besides the OSS that were folded into the CIA. As the CIA itself says "This is a sketchy history of a semi-private US intelligence organisation, known as "the Pond," which was created and run for 13 years (1942-1954) by a mysterious figure named John Grombach. Originally begun as a secret intelligence collection organisation within the Army G-2 as a counterweight to the OSS, Grombach managed to find sponsorship for the Pond from State Department and, ultimately, CIA until it was finally disbanded in 1954." For more on "The Pond", see also John V. Grombach, The Great Liquidator (New York, NY: Zebra Books, 1980). Another fact rarely mentioned in admiring CIA histories is that the OSS lineage – however slight on paper, and absent Donovan - actually presented the CIA with a serious handicap because the OSS had been heavily penetrated by the Soviets; see Nigel West, "Office of Strategic Services," Historical Dictionary of Cold War Counterintelligence, ed. Nigel West (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007).

family fortunes... [the FBI man felt that he] was crossing the tracks, joining the establishment."²³

Robert Gates recounts how he perceived this aspect of the Agency's culture and identity when he joined the CIA in 1969.²⁴ Gates, aware of the caricature of the CIA as a "conservative" institution, stresses in his memoir that the CIA that he joined in the 1970s was not a conservative, Cold War monolith.²⁵ During the Vietnam War, for example, he remembers that "not only was antiwar sentiment strong at the Agency, we were also influenced by the counterculture... Antiwar and anti-Nixon posters and bumper stickers festooned CIA office walls".²⁶ Tellingly, Gates goes on to say that during Director Casey's tenure in the Reagan Administration:

More and more, the recruitment process for the clandestine service had led to new officers who looked very much like the people who recruited them-white, mostly Anglo-Saxon; middle and upper class; liberal arts college graduates; mostly entering in their mid to late twenties; engaging hale fellows well-met. Few non-Caucasians, Few women. Few ethnics, even of recent European background. In other words, not even as much diversity as there was among those who had helped create the CIA...in the late 1940s...By 1981, the [DO] had become a closed circle, and a bureaucratic one at that. No one who failed to fit the mold could get in."²⁷

Gates is clearly discussing a social process resulting in homogeneity, at least among CIA collectors of human intelligence. Moreover (as discussed in section three of this chapter's look at the cultural features that result from these mechanisms), according to one recent article, at the CIA in 2001 one still found a: "*systematic distrust of people who do not fit preconceived notions of patriotic*

²³ David C. Martin, Wilderness of Mirrors (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2003), page 37. The author of one privately-printed memoir even referred to himself somewhat bitterly as a "plebe" compared to many of his counterparts. See Thomas Bell Smith, The Essential CIA (Privately printed, 1975), page 9, cited in Powers, The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA, page 318 footnote 9.

²⁴ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, pages 31-2. He says "The late 1960s and early 1970s represented the last hurrah of those who had helped build the organisation and still ran it...Some, like Angleton, were mysterious, even weird - sitting in a darkened office with a single desk light, chain-smoking, a figure from another world. Others were very Ivy League, very establishment, very well connected. The people who ran the rest of the government at the highest levels were their personal friends and often their tennis partners."

²⁵ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, page 28.

²⁶ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, page 28.

²⁷ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, page 209-10.

Americans. From its inception, the Intelligence Community [has been] staffed by the white male Protestant elite, not only because that was the class in power, but because that elite saw itself as the guarantor and protector of American values and ethics."²⁸

Too much can be made of the 'tonier' aspects of the CIA. According to Brugioni, for example, under DCI McCone (in charge of the Agency during the Cuban Missile Crisis), the Eastern establishment feel of the Agency was salted with technocrats who fell outside this profile. He says, "New men, with family names unfamiliar to the Eastern establishment, began to move into positions of prominence in the Agency. They were experts in such disciplines as optics, electronics, chemistry, physics, engineering and photography."²⁹ What is noteworthy about his comment, however, is that very clear that the "new men" represented a change great enough to be noticed and commented upon, and also that the technocrats described would reinforce other cultural tendencies that we find below.

Still, the phrase a "systematic distrust of people who do not fit preconceived notions of patriotic Americans"³⁰ leads directly to yet another social mechanism shaping the CIA's analytical community: the systematic exclusion of émigrés. The overt reasons given for their exclusion from the Community were security concerns,³¹ and this approach to émigrés continued at full tilt least through the controversial tenure of James Jesus Angleton as chief of counter-intelligence (i.e. from 1954 to 1974). As one sympathetic scholar

²⁸ Robert Callum, "The Case for Cultural Diversity in the Intelligence Community," International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence 14.1 (2001), page 29. Emphasis added. "Protestant" here is an umbrella term encompassing such self-proclaimed Christian sects as Mormonism, which many observers outside of Mormonism have difficulty accepting as "Christian" or "Protestant". Because of their tradition of missionary work in out-of-the-way places, however, there has been a connection between Mormons and the US intelligence community. Berkowitz and Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age, page 161 is in agreement with this point. It is documented for the CIA's early years (from the founding through the Bay of Pigs) in Burton Hersh, The Old Boys: The American Elite and the Origins of the CIA (New York, NY: Scribner's, 1992), though the author's conclusions on most other fronts stray into paranoid fantasy (and his prose is execrable).

²⁹ Dino A. Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball (New York, NY: Random House, 1991), page 65.

³⁰ Robert Callum, "The Case for Cultural Diversity in the Intelligence Community," International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence 14.1 (2001), page 29.

³¹ According to Dulles: "Security investigations are a purely negative part of the [screening and selection] process. They are rigorous, as they must be, but ninety-nine out of a hundred young Americans could pass a security investigation without difficulty. It is not hard to understand why an intelligence organisation in these times [1963] cannot employ persons with close relatives behind the iron curtain, or persons who were at one time associated with Communist or other anti-American movements, or who in the past have displayed weaknesses in personal behavior or moral judgement." Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence, page 168-9.

observes, “Angleton recognised that the KGB had vast resources to devote to the narrow task of penetration, and the opportunities for gaining that advantage were limited and easily countered: avoid employing personnel with a Russian background or those vulnerable to an appeal to patriotism; never underestimate the call of Mother Russia.”³² We will see, however, that this fine-meshed counter-intelligence filter on recruitment has immeasurably contributed to the homogeneity of personnel – a trait of the Agency’s identity and culture that is bound up with the erroneous threat assessments that result in strategic surprises (and – importantly - not only with respect to the USSR).

A second, more subtle, reason for the exclusion of émigrés, particularly after the shift in the national mood with respect to communist infiltrators in government after the mid-1960s, was that many émigrés were bitter about aspects of the system that they had fled. Their attitude is understandable, but because the CIA was always striving to forge a ‘scientific’ approach to analysis (documented below), émigrés were considered “too ideological/not objective enough”³³ to be suited to the “dispassionate”³⁴ business of the CIA analyst.

We see, then, that processes of Active Selection at CIA can be described collectively as a mechanism in which the various apparatuses of security (security checks, polygraphs, etc.) are paramount, but which also included some class elements that had their genesis in the CIA’s social origins in US society. Some elements of these processes were independent of security concerns. Others, particularly the exclusion of émigrés, reinforced them. Like the other social mechanisms discussed in this section, Active Selection reveals how the CIA’s identity and culture was created and maintained. This finding is entirely in keeping with the well-documented “in-group/out-group differentiation”³⁵ mechanism for creating norms, cultures, and group identities.

³² Rupert (writing as West Allison, Nigel), Historical Dictionary of Cold War Counterintelligence (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007), page xxiv. The job of chief of counterintelligence is always, in the famous phrase that Angleton drew from TS Eliot’s poem *Gerontion*, a “wilderness of mirrors”, but poor Angleton’s equilibrium may have been clouded by his long-time friendship with Kim Philby. The long mole hunt at the end of his career damaged many genuine agents and loyal employees, and produced nothing but “sawdust”. The ultimate damage done was so great that there have even been suggestions that his paranoia had a more insidious purpose: that Angleton was himself the mole.

³³ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 204.

³⁴ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 204.

³⁵ Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, “Norms, Identity and Their Limits, A Theoretical Reprise,” The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996). page 475.



3. Socialization

The third of the four social mechanisms responsible for key perennial features of the CIA's identity and culture is that cluster of processes (norms, rules, etc.) which ensues once analysts and others have formally joined the Agency.

While grouped here under a single heading, "Socialization", this social mechanism contains six distinct (yet mutually reinforcing) components. Combined, these components have played a large role in forming those aspects of the CIA's identity and culture, and these elements link to periodic strategic surprises. The heading "Socialization" in Figure 1 above lists each of these traits, and each is further discussed below.

3A Socialization – Induction and Training

Just as are workers in any other trade, once the Directorate of Intelligence recruits analysts into the CIA, they are socialised into their work place, thus beginning the process of the "social diffusion"³⁶ of norm creation.

One might expect the first aspect of this socialisation process would be formal training – certainly, there is an extensive training programme for officers in the DO.³⁷ It is also clear that "intelligence analysts think of themselves as professionals".³⁸ The social mechanism meant by "Induction and Training," however, does not reflect this ideal.

Contrary to commonly held beliefs of how one becomes a "professional", for over sixty years there was no systematic new analysts' training programme at the CIA. Former analyst Stephen Marrin quotes Jeffrey Cooper about this "unprofessional" phenomenon as follows:

Intelligence remains a 'craft culture' operating within a guild and apprenticeship system—in fact, self-consciously referring to 'tradecraft' for example. Such a culture builds pragmatically on accreted practices that were successful in the past, lacks the strong formal epistemology of a true discipline, and is reliant on implicit transmission of often-tacit expertise and domain knowledge to novices.³⁹

³⁶ Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, "Norms, Identity and Their Limits, A Theoretical Reprise," The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996). page 475.

³⁷ See among scores of accounts in Chapter 4 and 5 in Robert Baer, See No Evil (London: Arrow Books, 2002). or the numerous asides in Bearden and Risen, The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown with the KGB.

³⁸ Stephen Marrin, "Intelligence Analysis: Turning a Craft Into a Profession," 2005 International Conference of Intelligence Analysis (McLean, VA: Mitre Corporation, 2005., page 1.

³⁹ Marrin, "Intelligence Analysis: Turning a Craft Into a Profession," page 2.

Speaking of the 1970s – but bemoaning the same problem in the present – Agrell makes a similar point, saying intelligence analysis then was “a kind of semi-profession, resembling an early form of organized skills like a medieval guild. Here the secrets of the craft were transferred from master to apprentice through a process of initiation and sharing of silent knowledge. The craft was not developed but reproduced; its knowledge was static and the process cyclic.”⁴⁰ Cooper concurs, calling training at the Directorate of Intelligence a “guild system” (and adding that as of 2005, the system for producing apprentices was “broken”).⁴¹ In support of these broad assertions, documentary evidence confirms that until the year 2000,⁴² there was no formal, comprehensive ‘beginner’s’ analytical training course at the CIA.

Tying back to the previous social mechanism described – Active Selection – a uniform Human Resources process for hiring analysts has also never existed: “Most analysts were hired by the individual Directorate of Intelligence offices, assigned to ‘groups’ which cover specific geographic areas, and then assigned a functional speciality...such as political, military, economic, leadership, scientific, technical and weapons intelligence.”⁴³ As an author with personal experience noted in a 2002 paper, “In fact, CIA analysts have been hired and assigned a desk at CIA headquarters without any analytic training whatsoever, with two or four weeks of analytic training coming six months or so later”.⁴⁴ Another Community insider, former staff director of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Mark Lowenthal, put it this way [the CIA does not] “do a lot of training...They say, ‘Congratulations, you’re the Mali analyst, have a nice day.’”⁴⁵ In fact:

The training process usually relied upon the analyst’s prior formal education combined with an initial period of sink-or-swim adaptation to the DI. The sink-or-swim analogy is used frequently inside the CIA to describe its junior analyst acculturation. In May 2001, the Kent School’s former dean likened previous DI training to being thrown

⁴⁰ Wilhelm Agrell, “When everything is intelligence - nothing is intelligence,” The Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis Occasional Papers 1.4 (2002).

⁴¹ Cooper, Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis, pages 6 and 28.

⁴² See CIA press release TENET DEDICATES NEW SCHOOL FOR INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS, 4 May, 2000; accessed online at https://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/press_release/2000/pr050400.html

⁴³ Stephen Marrin, “CIA’s Kent School: Improving Training for New Analysts,” International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence 16.4 (2003), page 613.

⁴⁴ Marrin, “CIA’s Kent School: A Step In the Right Direction”.

⁴⁵ Tim Weiner, “Naiveté at the CIA: Every Nation’s Just Another U.S.,” The New York Times 7 June 1998.

into the deep end of a pool, and added that if the training or mentoring 'missed,' the analyst 'floundered.'⁴⁶

This passage raises an important point: *informal induction and training is no less powerful an influence shaping the culture and identity at CIA than a formal training programme would be.* As the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu famously summarised, when it comes to culture, "What goes without saying, comes without saying",⁴⁷ and purely on-the-job training for analysts – no matter how good their starting qualifications - by their CIA colleagues and superiors is likely to usher in and sustain a large number of unexamined social practices, analytical methodologies and cultural norms. As we see in Chapter 5's exploration of the strategic surprise of the collapse of the Shah of Iran's regime, at least one eminent scholar has concluded that a "conscious epistemology would have helped analysts and their consumers understand the implications of developmentalism and dependency on forecasting political change."⁴⁸ Such epistemological awareness certainly does not form in the informal approach to 'training' described.

The 'craft culture' operating within a 'guild and apprenticeship system'⁴⁹ continued throughout analysts' careers throughout most of the period in question: only in 2000 was an analysts' training school established⁵⁰, and a career track for a "Senior Analytic Service to promote in-depth work on multifaceted issues" implemented.⁵¹

Some piecemeal formal training – some undoubtedly of high quality – also took place at the Agency. From 1986 to 2002, for example, senior members of the Intelligence Community (from both the CIA and other agencies) attended an executive programme run by Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of

⁴⁶ Bax, Frans. Presentation at an Association of Former Intelligence Officer (AFIO) Luncheon. Fort Myer, Virginia. 22 May 2001, cited in Marrin, "CIA's Kent School: A Step In the Right Direction,"

⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁴⁸ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 192.

⁴⁹ Marrin, "Intelligence Analysis: Turning a Craft Into a Profession," page 2.

⁵⁰ See Vernon Loeb, "CIA Goes Deep Into Analysis," The Washington Post May 4 2000.

⁵¹ Steven R. Ward, "Evolution Beats Revolution in Analysis: Counterpoint to "The Coming Revolution in Intelligence Analysis," Studies in Intelligence 46.3 (2002). page 31. In 2005, there was a call in *Studies* for the "Creation of a National Institute for Analytic Methods" for the Intelligence Community as a whole). Steven Rieber and Neil Thomason, "Creation of a National Institute for Analytic Methods," Studies in Intelligence 49.4 (2005). These calls were in response to perceived weaknesses of the intelligence community in the preceding years.

Government, which ran “once or twice a year for one to three weeks”.⁵² However, because these courses were ‘in-house’ (i.e. closed to Community ‘outsiders’), and because the average attendee “typically had twelve to twenty years experience” before attending,⁵³ it seems unlikely that such training would be a ‘transformative experience’ for analytical methods employed by, not to mention the identity and culture of, the CIA.

3B Socialization - The definition of Intelligence activity: reduce and simplify

Having dealt with two basic, even prosaic, aspects of identity formation among intelligence analysts (Self and Active Selection), and the initial phases of Socialization (induction and training), it is time to dig deeper and unearth a factor at the CIA that initially seems esoteric: the term intelligence ‘analyst’ itself, and some of the accompanying vocabulary that analysts encounter from their first days at Langley.

The very name of the role – ‘analyst’ – and the word used to describe their core activity – ‘Analysis’ – must obviously lie at the core of the identity of CIA intelligence worker. ‘Analysis’ is also a separate step in the intelligence cycle (described fully in Chapter 4).

Unfortunately, the term also provides evidence for a privileging of reductionist thinking: both words have their root in the Greek *Analyein* “to break up”.⁵⁴ As a current CIA Asia affairs analyst says in a 2004 journal article “Although reductionism is usually associated with Newton, who, in effect, codified it in his laws of motion, the term is rooted in Greek philosophy and Aristotle, who emphasised ‘illumination through disaggregation.’”⁵⁵ As the same article points out, however, while such an approach works well for ‘linear’ problems (in which a system’s behaviour is the sum of its discrete parts; e.g. the motion of a planet), it does *not* work well for systems that are not ‘genuinely

⁵² Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, eds., Dealing with Dictators: Dilemmas of US Diplomacy and Intelligence Analysis, 1945-1990 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), page 1.

⁵³ Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, eds., Dealing with Dictators: Dilemmas of US Diplomacy and Intelligence Analysis, 1945-1990 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), page 1.

⁵⁴ Josh Kerbel, “Thinking Straight: Cognitive Bias in the US Debate about China,” Studies in Intelligence 48.3 (2004), page 1.

⁵⁵ Kerbel, “Thinking Straight: Cognitive Bias in the US Debate about China.”, fn 5.

reducible', systems that do not change or adapt their fundamental behaviour as interaction occurs between their component parts (e.g. human societies).⁵⁶

As with the problem of self-selection, however, other approaches are possible. The author continues:

It is worth noting that Chinese thought—at least that thought freed of Marxist-Leninist ideology—appears significantly less inclined toward reductionism than most Western intellectual approaches. This, in turn, points to contrasting US and Chinese approaches to foreign policy. Henry Kissinger has written that "Americans think in terms of concrete solutions to specific problems. The Chinese think in terms of a process that has no precise culmination."⁵⁷

The article concludes that for studying the real world (which, as a non-linear system is "not rocket science; it's more complex"⁵⁸) the CIA needs intelligence "Synthesists" in addition to Analysts, and suggests that "A good symbolic starting point for CIA might be modification of the Kent School's name to read: The Sherman Kent School for Intelligence Analysis and Synthesis."⁵⁹ Indeed, Chapter 5 argues that particularly when the strategic surprise in question is a 'mystery' (i.e. a contingent event like the fall of the Shah of Iran or the implosion of the Soviet Union), it is exactly this lack of synthesis – and the underlying scientism that the term 'analyst' implies - that is partly to blame for a fundamental misapprehension of some 'analytical' problems.

Thus, the very name of a core part of the intelligence cycle – Analysis – and title Analysts constitute both a symptom and a cause among many of the key attributes of the Agency's identity and culture.

3C Socialization – The vocabulary of false precision

As Katzenstein notes in *the Culture of National Security*, norms can emerge in a culture from the process of communication itself: norms can simply evolve through communication, and they can also emerge because certain

⁵⁶ Kerbel, "Thinking Straight: Cognitive Bias in the US Debate about China.", page 2.

⁵⁷ Kerbel, "Thinking Straight: Cognitive Bias in the US Debate about China.", fn 5 Henry Kissinger echoed this point in 2004, musing of the diplomatic significance of Western chess versus the Chinese game go: "Chess has only two outcomes: draw and checkmate. The objective of the game is absolute advantage—that is to say, its outcome is total victory or defeat—and the battle is conducted head-on, in the center of the board. The aim of go is relative advantage; the game is played all over the board, and the objective is to increase one's options and reduce those of the adversary. The goal is less victory than persistent strategic progress." See Kissinger, Henry A., "America's Assignment", *Newsweek*, November 8, 2004.

⁵⁸ Kerbel, "Thinking Straight: Cognitive Bias in the US Debate about China." page 1.

⁵⁹ Kerbel, "Thinking Straight: Cognitive Bias in the US Debate about China." page 6.

communication practices are consciously promoted;⁶⁰ Kowert and Legro also highlight the linguistic path to internal norm construction.⁶¹ At the CIA, an excellent example of this phenomenon is the special vocabulary that the Directorate of Intelligence employ in the course of their ‘tradecraft’ (a term coined by Dulles⁶²). It is a set of promoted norms that further reinforces a mindset constantly driving for Newtonian certainty and reducibility.

Sherman Kent again set this norm in motion at the CIA. In his essay, “Words of estimative probability” (originally published in the Fall 1964 issue of *Studies*), Kent admits a number of tries at making the language of CIA assessments more ‘scientific and exact’:

We began to think in terms of a chart that would show the mathematical odds equivalent to words and phrases of probability. Our starter was a pretty complicated affair. We approached its construction from the wrong end. Namely, we began with 11 words or phrases that seemed to convey a feeling of 11 different orders of probability and then attached numerical odds to them.⁶³

Admitting failure with this complex ‘Swiss watch’ approach, Kent then describes a revised chart “set down in its classical simplicity thus”:

Percentage Likelihood	Words to Employ	
100%	Certainty	
<i>The General Area of Possibility</i>		
93%	give or take about 6%	Almost certain
75%	give or take about 12%	Probable
50%	give or take about 10%	Chances about even
30%	give or take about 10%	Probably not
7%	give or take about 5%	Almost certainly not
0%	An Impossibility	

While Kent admits in this article that “I [later] dropped all thought of getting an agreed airtight vocabulary of estimative expressions, let alone reproducing the chart in the rear of every NIE”, nevertheless, “I did continue harassing actions

⁶⁰ Peter Katzenstein, The Culture of National Security (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), page 21.

⁶¹ See Kowert and Legro, “Norms, Identity and Their Limits, A Theoretical Reprise.” page 479. Kowert says in fn 64 on page 480 Kratochwil and Onuf also assign language a role in norm construction. See Freidrich V. Kratochwil, Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). and Nicolas Onuf, World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory in International Relations (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

⁶² Indeed, this is among the reasons his book was titled *The Craft of Intelligence*.

⁶³ Sherman Kent, “Words of Estimative Probability,” Studies in Intelligence. Fall (1964).

and in the course of making a nuisance of myself to associates and colleagues did pick up some useful converts.” The problem of gaining acceptance for such linguistic laws? “What slowed me up in the first instance was the firm and reasoned resistance of some of my colleagues. Quite figuratively I am going to call them the ‘poets’--as opposed to the ‘mathematicians’--in my circle of associates”. Kent then adds “If the term conveys a modicum of disapprobation on my part, that is what I want it to do.”⁶⁴ (Without running too far ahead of the overall argument of this dissertation, we can wryly note here that Osama bin Ladin frequently addressed his threats to the US quite literally in poetic verse:⁶⁵ it is not too much of a stretch to conclude that the intellectual DNA of the CIA might make it more likely to puzzle over – or ignore – such a figure).

It is clear below that Kent’s ‘physics envy’ and drive for ‘precision’ in language – in which one can detect a strong denial of the distinction between social and natural facts - left a powerful legacy in the CIA’s analytical community, the consequences of which are found among the key persistent features of identity and culture.

3D Socialization: ‘collegiality’, “coordination” and the marginalization of dissent

Any discussion of high-level policy-making should address the question of the degree and role of ‘collegiality’ in day-to-day operations. In the late 1920s, Max Weber introduced the idea that “rationally specialised functional collegiality”⁶⁶ was a necessary counterweight to 19th century hierarchal bureaucracies when “well-considered decisions”⁶⁷ were more important than “quick and consistent”⁶⁸ decisions.

Given the CIA’s mission to coordinate ‘all source intelligence’ (i.e. HUMINT, SIGINT, MASINT, IMINT)⁶⁹ gathered by the myriad agencies that make up the

⁶⁴ Kent, “Words of Estimative Probability.”

⁶⁵ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 215.

⁶⁶ Max Weber, Economy and Society (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), page 273-8.

⁶⁷ Weber, Economy and Society, page 273-8.

⁶⁸ Weber, Economy and Society, page 273-8.

⁶⁹ These abbreviations are standard in intelligence literature: HUMINT = Human Intelligence, SIGINT = Signal Intelligence, MASINT = Measurement and Signature Intelligence, IMINT = Image Intelligence. For a complete list, see Appendix I.

Community,⁷⁰ a certain degree of collegiality with respect to other agencies is indeed indispensable. For that reason, the CIA has always sought to foster and to project collegiality as a part of its culture and identity. Robert Gates, for example, describes a 1980s “cadre of analysts accustomed to ‘gentlemanly discourse’”⁷¹ that DCI Casey’s blunt Wall-Street-style questions sometimes transgressed.

Further evidence of a outward atmosphere of collegiality and an ostensive openness to ‘polite dissent’ is evident from the earliest period of the CIA’s existence in a Kent article describing the purpose of the Agency’s in-house journal, *Studies in Intelligence*. This literature’s role as a socializing mechanism is dealt with below, but here the reader should note that in 1955, in the inaugural essay describing the intent of the journal, the ‘Father of Analysis’ wrote:

The literature I have in mind will, among other things, be an *elevated debate*. For example, I see a Major X write an essay on the theory of indicators and print it and have it circulated. I see a Mr. B brood over this essay and write a review of it. I see a Commander C reading both the preceding documents and reviewing them both. I then see a revitalized discussion among the people of the indicator business.⁷²

Kent seems here to be recalling his (somewhat idealized?) past in the History department at Yale. There is powerful evidence, though, to conclude that this ‘elevated debate,’ has always been more an aspiration than a reality at the Agency. It is certainly specious to say that dissent is encouraged at the CIA in the way it is in academia.⁷³

Evidence to support this conclusion is easy to discover. Collegiality is defined, after all, as “characterized by or having power and authority vested *equally* among colleagues.”⁷⁴ In Petersen’s description of the CIA review process noted above, equality is not in evidence. He writes:

⁷⁰ Though there are sixteen in 2007, this number has never been below ten in the CIA’s existence.

⁷¹ Robert M. Gates, “Remarks to DDI Analysts and Managers on 7 January, 1982,” Cited in “Intelligence Analyst/Manager Relations at the CIA” in *Intelligence Analysis and Assessment*, 1996, ed. John A. Gentry (London: Frank Cass, 1982, page 207.

⁷² Kent, “The Need for an Intelligence Literature.” Emphasis added.

⁷³ Or even other intelligence organisations. One scholar, for example, unfavourably compares US attempts at collegiality with that of British intelligence agencies, and claims, “the history of US intelligence is littered with the remains of failed collegial bodies.” He attributes this failure to “a traditional [US] emphasis on rugged individualism and standing by one’s judgements and rights against all odds” and to structural/organisational features of the US Intelligence Community’s organisation. He sums up the US Intelligence Community as having “minimal collegiality.” See Davies, “Intelligence Culture and Intelligence Failure in Britain and the United States”, pages 498-503.

⁷⁴ Houghton-Mifflin online dictionary, emphasis added; accessed online on 22 May, 2005, at www.Houghton-Mifflin.com

The third-level review should be done by the *office director or the staff of a senior officer* in the organisation. *On a particularly sensitive piece, both may weigh in ... does the piece address policymaker concerns?... is it consistent with other work being done in the organisation?... The third-level reviewer should focus most on whether the right questions have been asked and what the key variables are.*⁷⁵

Here, the review process could easily be used as a socialization mechanism for the censorship of ideas, despite a veneer of collegiality. The phrase 'the right questions' has multiple meanings. It can refer to the logical structure of an argument, but it can also imply that 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' information is passing through a social filter.

There are other mechanisms for filtering ideas beneath a collegial veneer. Kent describes how once a document had been through review, the primary mechanism for registering dissent in NIEs was the footnote. NIEs are important pieces of evidence in the cases to follow in Chapters Five and Six, so we examine briefly Kent's short memoir-style essay "Law and Custom of the National Intelligence Estimate: An Examination of the Theory and Some Recollections Concerning the Practice of the Art".⁷⁶ The title, of course (e.g. "Law and Custom") points to a distinct internal culture. Even more revealing is the CIA phenomenon known as 'Taking a footnote' that Kent discusses at some length. He says:

At least two other limitations on the rights of the dissenter became accepted. One was that he did not have the license to point out in a footnote that he had once been forced to dissent on behalf of a viewpoint which had since gained currency within the community. The "I told you so" and "if you'd only listened to me" motifs were rather strongly discouraged as footnote material. Just as strongly discouraged were footnote formulations which impugned the sanity and morals of those who held to the text. I recall Mr. Dulles once explaining his objection with: "If you write a footnote such as you propose, I will have to write a footnote to your footnote, indicating that your allegations are wrong. You may then wish to do a footnote to my footnote, then I to yours, and so on. I suggest that we put a stop to such a piece of business before it gets started."⁷⁷

This passage's implications of a less than collegial discourse are highlighted by the knowledge that in 1961, a change was introduced to include the name of the official requesting the footnote in the footnote itself. As Berkowitz and Goodman

⁷⁵ Petersen, "Making the Analytic Review Process Work." Emphasis added.

⁷⁶ Accessed online on 22 May, 2005 at <https://www.cia.gov/csi/books/shermankent/5law.html>

⁷⁷ Accessed online on 22 May, 2005 at <https://www.cia.gov/csi/books/shermankent/5law.html>

dryly note: “*This change may have been intended to increase the [personal and institutional] costs of dissenting.*”⁷⁸ In other words, footnotes in CIA documents are at least partly a mechanism of controlling and channelling dissent.

The somewhat arcane practice of controlling dissent through footnoting remained so pervasive that in their attempt to update Sherman Kent’s 1949 classic *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, Berkowitz and Goodman’s 1989 *Strategic Intelligence for American National Security* have an extended discussion – ironically, mostly in a footnote – of what they call the Intelligence Community’s “game of footnotes”⁷⁹. To begin with, they record the obvious: “it was more difficult to develop [a dissenting] argument in a footnote than in the main text. Also, the implication of this format was that the main text was ‘the authoritative view’ and should be given more credence than the footnote, which was apparently ‘the alternative view’”.

They further describe how the system was changed under DCI Turner (1977-1981), and dissenters were allowed to elaborate their disagreements in the main text, and footnotes were used “primarily for identifying which members of the Intelligence Community subscribed to a given portion of the text.” As a result, “Upon receiving a new NIE, readers would often skim through it to see where the footnotes appeared...they knew that footnotes indicated which issues were more controversial. As a result, the footnoted sections of the NIEs – and possibly even the footnotes themselves-often received more attention than the rest of the estimate”.⁸⁰ Apart from ‘elevated debate’, or their usual functions in scholarship, at the CIA footnotes without a doubt have a role in channelling and controlling debate.

On the level of individual CIA analysts, though, the tension between opinions and ‘collegiality’ seems much the same. To cite one example, in a landmark 1982 speech to analysts, soon after assuming the post of DCI, Gates said that there was a need for analytical “voices crying in the wilderness”⁸¹ and invited dissenting analysts’ views to be sent to him. The ground rules for this

⁷⁸ Berkowitz and Goodman, Strategic Intelligence for American National Security, page 133. Emphasis added.

⁷⁹ Berkowitz and Goodman, Strategic Intelligence for American National Security, page 132-3; the interesting issue of whether or not intelligence publications themselves should be footnoted precipitated a vigorous exchange of articles in 1964 in *Studies in Intelligence*; see: A. John Alexander, “An Intelligence Role for the Footnote,” Studies in Intelligence 8.3 (1964), Allan Evans, “Against Footnotes,” Studies in Intelligence 8.4 (1964) and R. T. Jr. Allan, “More Against Footnotes,” Studies in Intelligence 8.4 (1964)..

⁸⁰ Berkowitz and Goodman, Strategic Intelligence for American National Security, page 133.

⁸¹ Gates, “Remarks to DDI Analysts and Managers on 7 January, 1982.”

practice would not encourage the errant analyst, however: Gates added that such views had to be sent through office directors (i.e. the analysts' superiors), and should not be used for "trivial disputes".⁸² He further stipulated that there was "no excuse for breaching discipline and carrying complaints to outside audiences..."⁸³ Not surprisingly, instead of a warrant for analytical sedition and a clarion call for genuinely collegial dissension, Gates' speech was widely seen as muzzling analytical dissent.⁸⁴

Abundant evidence that this drive for consensus under cover of a "collegial" atmosphere is a perdurable problem at the CIA can also be found in the descriptions of the review process offered in section one of this chapter. It is further indicated in the treatment the review process receives in one of the most widely cited volumes on improving intelligence analysis, the 1999 volume *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*:

The realities of bureaucratic life produce strong pressures for conformity. Management needs to make a conscious effort to ensure that well-reasoned competing views have the opportunity to surface within the Intelligence Community. Analysts need to enjoy a sense of security, so that partially developed new ideas may be expressed and bounced off others as sounding boards with minimal fear of criticism for deviating from established orthodoxy.⁸⁵

Moreover, in a 1991 resignation letter later made public, John A. Gentry, a 12-year Agency veteran, accused the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence of 'cooking the books' to please superiors, in particular claiming that at the CIA "satisfaction of bureaucratic superiors is more important than superior analysis."⁸⁶ Gentry even claim that: "DI managers asked the psychiatrists of the OMS, and the Office of Security, to evaluate individuals who had differences with their managers over analytic substance or the slanting of analysis."⁸⁷

In short, despite a veneer of collegiality, both structural and psychological factors have for decades combined to create a ferocious social mechanism to winnow out or marginalise dissent in intelligence analysis at the CIA. As one prescient 1957 article in *Studies* puts it "Being in favor of coordination [i.e. analytical consensus] in the US Intelligence Community has come to be like

⁸² Gates, "Remarks to DDI Analysts and Managers on 7 January, 1982."

⁸³ Gates, "Remarks to DDI Analysts and Managers on 7 January, 1982."

⁸⁴ John A. Gentry, "Intelligence Analyst/Manager Relations at the CIA," *Intelligence Analysis and Assessment*, eds. David A. Charters, Stuart Farson and Glenn P. Hastedt (London: Frank Cass, 1996), page 134.

⁸⁵ Heuer, *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, pages 180-1. Emphasis added.

⁸⁶ Bill Gertz, "CIA officials 'cooked books,' ex-analyst says," *The Washington Times* March 27 1991, page A3.

⁸⁷ Gentry, "Intelligence Analyst/Manager Relations at the CIA." page 140-1.

being against sin; everyone lines up on the right side of the question,"⁸⁸ but the end results do not accord with the stated description of a truly collegial environment (at least not insofar as it implies "power and authority vested equally among colleagues.")⁸⁹

3E Socialization - Analytical 'wisdom literature' and an academic cargo cult

Despite the social mechanisms described thus far, there are superficial resemblances between the identity and culture a CIA analyst experiences and that of an academic community (despite the obvious fact that open dissent is an integral part of academic entrepreneurship above the undergraduate level.) After all, DCI Dulles moved the Agency several miles outside Washington DC to Langley VA, to a sylvan facility that is still called the CIA's 'campus'⁹⁰. As we have seen, like any good academic community, the Agency also has a journal, *Studies in Intelligence*. On closer inspection, one can argue that this journal is yet another social mechanism that perpetuates an identity and culture of the analytical arm of the CIA that is at odds with a real academic community. Instead – as is developed below – these qualities contribute to the exact opposite: a culture in which empty academic forms encourage collective self-deception about the free flow of ideas.⁹¹

We can see this first by returning to the inaugural issue in *Studies in Intelligence*, and the essay called "The need for an intelligence literature". Kent wrote:

What [Intelligence] lacks is a literature. From my point of view this is a matter of greatest importance. As long as this discipline lacks a literature, its method, its vocabulary, its body of doctrine, and even its fundamental theory run the risk of never reaching full maturity. I will not say that you cannot have a discipline without a literature, but I will

⁸⁸ Ray S. Cline, "Is Intelligence Over-Coordinated?," *Studies in Intelligence*. Fall (1957), page 1.

⁸⁹ Houghton-Mifflin online dictionary, emphasis added; accessed online on 22 May, 2005, at www.Houghton-Mifflin.com.

⁹⁰ Westerfield, ed., *Inside CIA's Private World: Declassified Articles from the Agency's Internal Journal 1955-1992*.

⁹¹ One might observe here (like Seliktar) that Thomas Kuhn's "Paradigms" are instructive here. One of Kuhn's points is that there is dissent within a discipline, but only at the margins. There is actually an enforced conformity to what a discipline is, what questions it asks, and what methods are appropriate in answering them. Dissent normally comes about the methods and answers. Naturally, Kuhn's characterizations of the actual processes of science have been questioned, most prominently in Imré Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), and also in a more general sense in Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1993).

assert that you are unlikely to have a robust and growing discipline without one.⁹²

So far, so good, with respect to advancing an epistemic community characterized by free inquiry. Indeed, in fairness to Kent (and to the hundreds of intelligence professionals who have contributed to *Studies* since), a large part of this foundation document is solid, liberal-tradition academic common sense. Since 1955, *Studies in Intelligence* has published more than 1,200 classified and unclassified articles by members of the Intelligence Community about a myriad of aspects of their craft.⁹³ The tone and form of most of these articles is as graceful as one could expect from any academic institution in the world.

But if one steps back and considers the whole of *Studies* rather than individual articles, the journal begins to reveal evidence – even at its genesis – that it is a least partly CIA ‘wisdom literature’:⁹⁴ a vehicle for a tightly bounded discussion rather than a forum for debate. There have been honourable exceptions to this generalisation,⁹⁵ but a stable pattern can still be discerned. As early as 1964, an article appeared that appeared to imply this: “Styles and Stereotypes in Intelligence Studies”. It observed, “A uniform style adopted by all producing agencies and for almost all types of intelligence production has been perfected to a degree which may have reached the point of being self-defeating.”⁹⁶ The article speaks of the existence of an “invisible elite phrasebook”, “editorial compulsion”, and the favouring of “the elegant cliché”⁹⁷ instead of attempt to take in a messy or indistinct reality.

In the discussion of collegiality above, for example, we have Kent’s exhortation for an “elevated debate” and for some members of the Community to “brood”; this was to lead to a “revitalized discussion among the people of the indicator business”. What is revealing, however, is how that same paragraph continues:

⁹² Kent, “The Need for an Intelligence Literature.”

⁹³ Nicholas Dujmovic, “Fifty Years of Studies in Intelligence,” *Studies in Intelligence* 49.4 (2005), page 1.

⁹⁴ The use of this term is especially appropriate in light of what Berkowitz and Goodman say: “Intelligence professionals would probably never use the term, but they often perceive their role as developing ‘wisdom’. It is almost as much a part of the intelligence culture as secrecy. As with most cultural traits, outsiders often reinforce this trait by having the same perception.” See Berkowitz and Goodman, *Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age*, page 160.

⁹⁵ The author believes, for example, that the article Kerbel, “Thinking Straight: Cognitive Bias in the US Debate about China.” cited above and below is superb.

⁹⁶ Frank A. Knapp, Jr. “Styles and Stereotypes in Intelligence Studies,” *Studies in Intelligence* 8.2 (1964), page A2.

⁹⁷ Knapp, “Styles and Stereotypes in Intelligence Studies.” pages A2-A4.

I hope that they now, more than ever before, discuss indicators *within the terms of a common conceptual frame and in a common vocabulary*. From the debate in the literature and from the oral discussion, I see another man coming forward to produce an original synthesis of all that has gone before. His summary findings will be a kind of intellectual platform upon which the new debate can start. *His platform will be a thing of orderly and functional construction* and it will stand above the bushes and trees that once obscured the view. It will be solid enough to have much more built upon it and durable enough *so that no one need get back in the bushes and earth to examine its foundations.*⁹⁸

In other word, Kent conceived of dissent within the CIA and this journal instrumentally, something that is necessary to lay the foundation for a *progressive science* or a *cumulative discipline*.

An examination of hundreds of declassified articles – many fascinating, most earnest, and a few downright jocular (including even some doggerel)⁹⁹ - from this journal both online and in a bound collection¹⁰⁰, produces little evidence that *Studies in Intelligence*, this “thing of orderly and functional construction”,¹⁰¹ ever moved beyond this essentially positivist, instrumental approach to dissent. New methodologies are suggested, but positivism itself is not explicitly questioned or approached problematically. Throughout the scope of this dissertation (and beyond), no articles in *Studies* gets “back in the bushes and earth to examine”¹⁰² the epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning of the “Sherman Kent School” of intelligence analysis (i.e. 1950s positivism)¹⁰³. We see in numerous examples below that the contrary is true – *Studies* is a vehicle to perpetuate Kent’s approach (cf. Figure 2, below, “A Taxonomy of Intelligence Analysis Variables” from a 2004 *Studies* article¹⁰⁴).

⁹⁸ Kent, “The Need for an Intelligence Literature.” Emphasis added.

⁹⁹ For examples, see Dujmovic, “Fifty Years of Studies in Intelligence.”

¹⁰⁰ Westerfield, ed., Inside CIA's Private World: Declassified Articles from the Agency's Internal Journal 1955-1992.

¹⁰¹ Kent, “The Need for an Intelligence Literature.” Emphasis added.

¹⁰² Kent, “The Need for an Intelligence Literature.” Emphasis added.

¹⁰³ The closed nature of the CIA as a result of security concerns is discussed below. Here we will simply record that one reason for this phenomenon might be that for many years, the *Studies* articles “published” were classified. It is hard to see how it could ever achieve one of the key marks of a true scholarly journal: peer review, and free intellectual exchange with experts and scholars with a stake in overturning accepted wisdom, the intellectual *status quo*.

¹⁰⁴ Rob Johnston, “Developing a Taxonomy of Intelligence Analysis Variables,” Studies in Intelligence 47.3 (2004). For other examples, see: R. A. Random, “Intelligence as a Science,” Studies in Intelligence 2.2 (1958), David L. Wark, “The Definition of Some Estimative Expressions,” Studies in Intelligence 8.4 (1964), Jack Zlotnick, “A Theorem for Prediction,” Studies in Intelligence 11.4 (1967), Stanley A Feder, “FACTIONS and Policon: New Ways to Analyze Politics,” Studies in Intelligence 31.1 (1987); Charles E. Fisk, “The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: A Comparison of the Conventional and Bayesian

Moreover, in subtle ways, it discourage other approaches (e.g. through the topics consider worthy or publication; the vocabulary employed to address issues). A single official journal, no matter how academic its form, can reinforce as well as challenge an intellectual monopoly.

Even worse, *Studies* may contribute to a “Cargo Cult” academic atmosphere on the CIA’s ‘campus’ in which the external form of academic convention masks a different reality.¹⁰⁵ Cooper certainly thinks so, saying baldly in his summary of the situation in 2005:

The Intelligence Community presently lacks many of the scientific community's self-correcting features. Among the most significant of these features are the creative tension between “evidence-based” experimentalists and hypothesis-based theoreticians, a strong tradition of “investigator-initiated” research, real “horizontal” peer review, and “proof” by independent replication. Moreover, neither the community as a whole nor its individual analysts usually possess the ingrained habits of systematic self-examination, including conducting “after action reviews” as part of a continual lessons-learned process, necessary to appreciate the changes required to fix existing problems or to address new challenges.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, each year, the CIA presents for “the most significant contribution to the literature of intelligence submitted to *Studies*”¹⁰⁷ the Sherman Kent Award. According to *Studies* itself, the award is “The Oscar of intelligence literature”.¹⁰⁸

3F Socialization – Isolation, Compartmentalization, and Secrecy

The inherent impossibility of peer review of *Studies in Intelligence* introduces another social mechanism at work in at the CIA, the final one under the heading “Socialization”: the ‘compartmentalization’ of information, the isolation of intelligence analysts from their social science peers (from other

Methods for Intelligence Warning,” *Studies in Intelligence* 16.2 (1972); Kent, “Words of Estimative Probability.”. The honourable (if partial) exception is cited heavily elsewhere in this text: Kerbel, “Thinking Straight: Cognitive Bias in the US Debate about China.”

¹⁰⁵ Soon after WWII, anthropologists in New Guinea noticed an unusual phenomenon: tribes deep in the interior of the country were building full-sized ritual airfields and airplanes out of bamboo, grass, etc. Anthropologists soon discovered that withdrawal of military forces had created a scarcity of modern technological goods, and the tribes, under the influence of so-called “Cargo Cult prophets”, were converting communities’ desires for these possessions into the external forms that had brought them in the past. The perfectly human hope that these prophets shared with their followers was that if the correct external forms were present, the actual goods associated with them would arrive.

– See Craig Calhoun, ed., *Cargo Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁶ Cooper, *Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis*, pages 5-6.

¹⁰⁷ Dujmovic, “Fifty Years of Studies in Intelligence.”

¹⁰⁸ Dujmovic, “Fifty Years of Studies in Intelligence.”

branches of government, and from each other), and the security mechanisms that surround intelligence work.

Johnston, above, defined intelligence analysis as “the application of individual and collective cognitive methods to weigh data and test hypotheses *within a secret socio-cultural context*”¹⁰⁹. This section makes clear that this “secret socio-cultural context” introduces several powerful social mechanisms (overt ones like classification and ‘compartmentalization,’ but also an overarching culture pervaded by concern for secrecy), that can be tied to key features of the CIA’s identity and culture. We discover, as Powers says, “CIA people are cynical in most ways, but their belief in secrets is almost metaphysical”.¹¹⁰

That the CIA has mechanisms for security is obvious – they are part of the ‘tradecraft’ of intelligence work. As most people know, background checks and security investigations grant CIA employees access to ‘classified’ information. Less well known is that there are sub-distinctions beyond ‘Classified’, ‘Secret’ and ‘Top Secret’, such as ‘Cosmic,’ ‘NOFORN’ and ‘SCI’,¹¹¹ each mandating how information must be handled. Many documents have different classifications within them (i.e. they classify paragraph by paragraph: a Top Secret paragraph might be followed by a merely Confidential, one etc.)¹¹² In the 9/11 case below, for example, we have access to only the Executive Summary of the Agency’s Inspector General’s Report on CIA accountability for the attacks¹¹³ – the rest of the report remain classified.

In other words, because there is a perceived need for the vast majority of what the CIA does to remain opaque, information is not merely classified but ‘compartmentalised’¹¹⁴ to protect ‘sources and methods’, (i.e. the specifics of how information is obtained such as the identity of agents or the exact capabilities of surveillance systems.) Compartmentalization – the mandatory prohibition against information sharing on anything but a ‘need to know’ basis – is one of the factors that make it difficult to ‘connect the dots’ in intelligence work.

¹⁰⁹ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 4. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁰ Powers, The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA, page 297.

¹¹¹ Author’s experience as an officer in the United States Marine Corps. NOFORN = No Foreign Distribution; SCI = Special Compartmented Information.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,”

¹¹⁴ Compartmentalization goes beyond mere secrecy or “classification”; it is the practice used in intelligence work in which analysts are only given classified information that is needed for the performance of their particular analytical task – on a “need to know” basis.

An analyst working on economic growth in the Soviet Union, for example, could not expect to have routine access to information concerning the political leanings of the military officers of a particular country in South America, even if both analysts had a clearance of Top Secret: the presumption is always against a 'need to know' the details (or even the subject) of anyone else's work.

The informational costs of compartmentalisation policies are well recognised¹¹⁵, as are their role in specific strategic surprises.¹¹⁶ What is less explored is the self-imposed social and psychological isolation that arguably go hand-in-hand with these security measures. It seems that because information cannot flow *out* of the CIA, it also does not flow *in* as efficiently as it does in other environments.

Robert Gates recalls, for example, that Director Casey (an alumnus of the Research Institute of America, author of several books on tax law and one on the American Revolution, and an amateur historian) "was enormously impatient and frustrated with the career analysts' unwillingness to follow his lead in aggressively looking beyond the walls of CIA for new information and insights, in being willing to question their own assumptions and always challenging conventional wisdom."¹¹⁷

Casey's view is backed up by recent efforts to help the various Information Technology (IT) systems in the Intelligence Community work together and share data. John Grimes noted as late as 2006 that while technological barriers to sharing intelligence were real, "cultural barriers" in and among the US Intelligence Community "still remain the leading obstacle to communication between US Intelligence agencies".¹¹⁸ CIA cultural barriers certainly appear in the 9/11 case study below. We see, for example, that in the 1990s DO officers assigned to work on terrorism requested additional safes and security procedures to keep their information away from the DI analysts working alongside them, despite the fact that these analysts had the same clearances that they did, *and* despite the fact that their unit was started precisely to foster information sharing!¹¹⁹ Allison and Zelikow had phenomena like this in mind

¹¹⁵ See, for example Arvin S. Quist, Security Classification of Information: Volume 1. Introduction, History, and Adverse Impacts (Oak Ridge, TN: Oak Ridge National Laboratory, 2002).

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Chapter 11 in The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States

¹¹⁷ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, page 200.

¹¹⁸ Anonymous, "DNI Brings Private Firms Into Intelligence Sharing Effort," Intelligence Online August 25 2006.

¹¹⁹ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 91.

when they wrote “Operational experiences in the field reinforce certain capacities and routines, even endow capacities and routines with a ceremonial power that provides legitimation internally or in dealings with the outside world.”¹²⁰

Advocates of so-called Open-source Intelligence (OSINT) at the CIA make a similar point. To be sure, open source intelligence has long played a role in the analysis performed by the CIA.¹²¹ Nevertheless, there is abundant anecdotal evidence that within the CIA there are social mechanisms that lead analysts to prefer secret information and to slight or ignore openly-obtained information. As early as 1979, Daniel Graham essentially said that open literature was “too often regarded as soft data”¹²² and therefore “largely ignored” in assessments of the USSR.¹²³ The conflating of openly-available data with ‘soft data’ looms large in the four case studies below. A respected private intelligence service staffed by many former CIA personnel referred to the Agency’s open-source efforts as historically “small and dysfunctional”,¹²⁴ and contrasted it unfavourably with the Chinese approach. The operative assumption at the CIA is ‘If information is worth knowing, why isn’t it secret?’, arguably, such an attitude is fostered by an environment of pervasive secrecy and compartmentalization.

This social mechanism even appears to separate the CIA from the highest levels of their intelligence ‘consumers’ in Washington and it fosters a sense of isolation. Former DCI Gates, speaking of the 1970s, relates:

120 Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 155.

¹²¹ See, for example, Herman L Croom, “The Exploitation of Foreign Open Sources,” *Studies in Intelligence* 13. Summer (1969).

¹²² Roy Godson’s discussion of the article Graham, “Analysis and Estimates.” page 32.

¹²³ Roy Godson’s discussion of the article Graham, “Analysis and Estimates.” page 32.

¹²⁴ Anonymous, *Bolstering Russia's Image -- and Its Intel?*, 4 February, 2008, 2008, Stratfor, Available: http://www.stratfor.com/geopolitical_diary/geopolitical_diary_bolstering_russias_image_and_its_intel. In keeping with the general thrust of this chapter, the report goes on to say “The Russian model of collecting intelligence has always been based on getting hold of tightly held secrets, usually in some elaborate or devious way. (The American model is based on the Russian model, but with more expensive gadgetry.) But the Chinese model is quite different. Beijing focuses on gathering open-source material from every part of the globe. The Chinese — using myriad tools, of which Xinhua is one — have put people in every nook and cranny of the world, no matter how insignificant or unpleasant. These agents send every piece of information they hear on the streets or observe in the media back to a massive central processing unit in China, where it is sifted in search of useful patterns and valuable nuggets. It is a colossal undertaking requiring enormous manpower — but China has plenty of that.” Indeed, Nigel West maintains that “Employing more than 400,000 personnel, including internal security troops and border guards, the KGB was the world’s largest intelligence organisation, but lacked any independent analytical function.” See Nigel West, “KGB,” *Historical Dictionary of Cold War Counterintelligence*, ed. Nigel West (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007, page 173.

I realised quickly that CIA knew how foreign policy was made in every country in the world except one – our own. Analysts and their supervisors were oblivious to how information reached the President. They had no idea of the sequence of events preceding a visit by a foreign leader or a Presidential trip abroad, or even the agenda of issues the President and his senior advisers would be working on during a given week. In short, the distance from CIA's headquarters at Langley to the White House was vastly greater than the drive down the Washington Parkway.¹²⁵

The final word on the social mechanism of compartmentalisation, secrecy, and isolation, however, should go to Berkowitz and Goodman, both Intelligence veterans. In a vivid passage in *Best Truth* (that also ties in to the mechanism of Active Selection, above), they say:

It is difficult for an outsider to appreciate just how thoroughly secrecy shapes the intelligence culture. For example, in the military, the first experience a new marine recruit enjoys is learning how to take orders, usually through the gentle prodding of a Drill Instructor. In contrast, the first experience a person has in an intelligence career is filling out a form for a security clearance – that is, the process by which the Intelligence Community decides whether to share secrets with him or her. The clearance process is an experience all intelligence professionals share, just as all marines share the experience of boot camp. Once on the job, one of the first appointments a newly minted intelligence officer has on his or her schedule is to attend a briefing on security procedures – that is, to learn how to handle secrets. At each step in a career, moving to a new assignment usually means being “read into” a program, or learning new secrets...[a] culture of secrecy...defines an essential part of both how intelligence specialists see themselves and how the rest of society sees the Intelligence Community.¹²⁶

Before closing this discussion, in the interests of fairness it is important to note here that the CIA's isolation and mechanisms of security discussed above are relative. As individuals CIA analysts live in 'normal' communities (unlike for example, many of their Soviet counterparts during the Cold War, who lived in special compounds or apartment blocks reserved for those in Intelligence work). In addition, there are efforts like the CIA 'Officer in Residence' programme, in which a small number of CIA employees openly

¹²⁵ Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, page 56.

¹²⁶ Berkowitz and Goodman, *Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age*, page 150-1 For a non-Intelligence Community view of how both secrecy and a homogeneity hinder knowledge creation generally, see Rebecca Mitchell and Stephen Nicholas, "Knowledge Creation in Groups: the Value of Cognitive Diversity, Transactive Memory and Open-mindedness Norms," *Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management* 4.1 (2006).

spend two-year tours of US university campuses teaching and speaking.¹²⁷ This programme, begun in 1985, continues and is deemed a success¹²⁸, but operates on a small scale (and does not appear to have had much direct impact on helping information flow into, as opposed to out of, the CIA. While specifically forbidden to recruit students during their tenure at these schools, great stress is laid on explaining the Intelligence Community to outsiders). Then there is the raw material on which this dissertation is based: while many articles in *Studies in Intelligence* were originally classified, many have since been declassified, and each quarter a few unclassified articles appear on the CIA's website. There is also scrutiny of CIA activities by Congress,¹²⁹ even if the Agency is not as open as many legislators and journalists would like.

Overall, despite a secret *internal* culture, in other respects it is clear that the CIA is probably the most 'open' of the world's secret intelligence agencies.¹³⁰ That the social mechanisms of security, compartmentalisation, and even a degree of isolation are powerful at the CIA, however, is not a difficult to document. In section three of this chapter, we see their on-going effects on the CIA's identity and culture.

Mirror-imaging

The fourth and final¹³¹ social mechanism that this dissertation argues profoundly shapes the identity and culture of the CIA is "Mirror-imaging".

In intelligence literature, mirror-imaging is usually defined as either to become like one's targets, or "to assume that the other country's leaders think like we do".¹³² The phenomenon is a widely acknowledged as a common source of analytical failure.¹³³ This section uses the term more broadly. Here, mirror-imaging refers to the related phenomena in which the CIA's analysis inadvertently either assumes the characteristics of or makes assumptions about three exogenous groups: the *recipients* of its intelligence (in their parlance

¹²⁷ John Hollister Hedley, "Twenty Years of Officers in Residence," *Studies In Intelligence* 49.4 (2005).

¹²⁸ Hedley, "Twenty Years of Officers in Residence.", page 1.

¹²⁹ For a summary of this, see Snider, *The Agency and the Hill: CIA's Relationship with Congress, 1946–2004 passim*.

¹³⁰ Turner, "A Distinctive US Intelligence Identity.", page 49.

¹³¹ Obviously, there may well be others but from the outside, the four social mechanisms discussed here seemed to make to most impact on the Agency's identity and culture.

¹³² Heuer, *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, page 181.

¹³³ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, pages 272-7.

Intelligence 'consumers' or 'customers'), *other agencies* in the US Intelligence Community, and the CIA's *targets*. What concerns us here is not only the well-examined mental process of mirror-imaging by individual analysts, but also the social process of mirror-imaging of these groups by the DI. What this section does, therefore, is to highlight the mechanism that links the 'national' security culture¹³⁴ of the United States and the culture and identity of the CIA.

In so doing, this section is in keeping with efforts like that of Kowert and Legro, who discuss the "ecological" processes (i.e. "the patterned interaction of actors and their environment")¹³⁵ as one source of organisational norms.

4A Mirror-Imaging – "The Customer Is always right"

Intelligence consumers have exercised direct editorial control over the content of intelligence estimates only in the most exceptional cases.¹³⁶ From early in their work, however, analysts are taught that as individuals and as an organisation, the CIA is "Customer-focused", i.e. attuned to and responsive to the needs and desires of the recipients of their intelligence 'products'.

The reasons for this focus appear to be structural and historical. Gates, who served as DCI through five Presidential administrations, says, "More than any other government department, the CIA's influence and role are determined by its *relationship to the President and the National Security Adviser*, a relationship that finds expression almost exclusively in the CIA director's personal relationship with those two individuals."¹³⁷ To win Washington's bureaucratic turf-wars, the CIA must support *and be seen to be trying to support* Executive Branch power.

There is also the burden of consumer expectations: the Intelligence Community's huge budget and 'legendary' technical capabilities feed into demands by 'consumers'. Berkowitz and Goodman state flatly "Providing

¹³⁴ As such, it draws generally on several of the essays in Peter Katzenstein, The Culture of National Security Norms and Identity in World Politics, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹³⁵ Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, "Norms, Identity and Their Limits, A Theoretical Reprise," The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996). page 470

¹³⁶ In George W. Allen, None So Blind: a Personal Account of the Intelligence Failure in Vietnam (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2001) between Allen narrates a few such incidents during the Vietnam war involving US Ambassador Taylor. Drawing on 30 years of analytical experience, Allen, however, he says that he highlights these episodes because they are "Unique in my professional experience". See Allen, None So Blind: a Personal Account of the Intelligence Failure in Vietnam pages 188-94.

¹³⁷ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War page 31 Emphasis added.

wisdom – crisp, unambiguous, to-the-point judgements – is part of the culture.”¹³⁸ But this ‘wisdom’ spills into something more:

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...Presidents and their national security teams usually are ill-informed about intelligence capabilities; therefore, they have unrealistic expectations of what intelligence can do for them, especially when they hear about the genuinely extraordinary capabilities of U.S. intelligence for collecting and processing information.¹³⁹

Obviously, however, allowing responsiveness to these customer demands and expectations to shape the CIA’s work excessively is problematic, because it assumes no unconscious ignorance on the part of intelligence consumers (despite the refreshing candour of one consumer - a former Secretary of State – who reportedly admitted, “I don’t know what kind of intelligence I need, but I know when I get it.”¹⁴⁰). Nevertheless, it does not seem that the CIA sets out to disabuse consumers of the expectation that the CIA’s intelligence ‘products’ will cater to their policy interests, approaches and expectations.

In fact, quite the opposite. A former Director of Analysis at CIA wrote “Anxious to impress each incoming [US] President with the sophistication of its product, the Intelligence Community [has been] understandably reluctant to emphasise its own limitations.”¹⁴¹ One scholar even contends:

Intelligence professionals would probably never employ the term, but they often perceive their role as developing “wisdom”. It is almost as much a part of the intelligence culture as secrecy. As with most cultural traits, *outsiders often reinforce this trait* by having the same perception...Access to secrets, people seem to believe, leads to better knowledge, and that can be interpreted as wisdom.¹⁴²

This passage is interesting for the light it throws on mirror-imaging of the intelligence customer, but also for the linkage it points out between that phenomenon and the mechanisms of secrecy just discussed.

¹³⁸ Berkowitz and Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age page 164

¹³⁹ Robert M. Gates, “An Opportunity Unfulfilled: the Use and Perception of Intelligence at the White House,” Washington Quarterly. Winter (1989), pages 38-9.

¹⁴⁰ Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 21.

¹⁴¹ Christopher Andrew, “American Presidents and Their Intelligence Communities,” Intelligence Analysis and Assessment, eds. David A. Charters, A. Stuart Farson and Glenn P. Hastedt (London: Frank Cass, 1996) page 104.

¹⁴² Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 307. Emphasis added.

Unlike its traditional counterpart, mirror-imaging of the customer by the DI is conscious. The CIA considers it so important that it begins even before the ultimate 'consumer' - the President and his team - arrive in the White House. The volume *CIA Briefings of the Presidential Candidates, 1952-1992* (produced in cooperation with the CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence), details such efforts. In the forward to this volume, a revealing assertion occurs:

The most important lesson of this book is that, if the CIA is to provide effective intelligence support to policymakers, there is no substitute for direct access to the President. There is the implied lesson also that, *if Presidents are to make the best use of the CIA, they need to make clear to the Agency at regular intervals what intelligence they do and do not want.*¹⁴³

As we shall see, this tacit assumption of the omniscience by the CIA of intelligence consumers has serious consequences: if no consumer asks the CIA about Islamic fundamentalism in Iran, for example, the Agency keeps watching the Soviets.

The mirror-imaging of consumers has been taken to strange extremes. In a CIA briefing that begins "This paper is designed to give Governor [soon to be President] Carter an outline of our intelligence system and how it works", the CIA decided – "in light of his success in transforming the fortunes of his ailing family peanut producing and processing firm" to "appeal to Carter's business instincts:"¹⁴⁴ To do so, they explained the work of the Agency with reference to a peanut factory!¹⁴⁵ Carter had also been a naval officer and governor of a state; the point, however, is not to quibble with the metaphor the CIA employed to explain itself to a President-Elect, but to highlight the pervasive "consumer focus" of CIA personnel and work practices.

The customer-focus of the CIA continues once a President is installed in the White House, and can reach astoundingly trivial (while simultaneously – as

¹⁴³ Helgerson, CIA Briefings of the Presidential Candidates, 1952-1992, page vi. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁴ Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 426.

¹⁴⁵ The document reads in part: "Essentially, the intelligence process can be likened to an industrial one. Raw material-fragments of information of various types and degrees of detail and validity-is collected and fed into a factory-an analytic or *production* organisation. The factory distils its raw input into a variety of products, *finished intelligence*, designed for the use of a variety of *consumers*. Intelligence *managers* seek to determine the needs of their consumers, to translate these into *requirements* for collection, to direct collection in response to these requirements, and to shape the finished intelligence product so as best to meet consumer needs." "The Organisation of American Intelligence", August 12, 1976, DDRS, 1986, no 2477. Cited in Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 426. Emphasis in original.

this dissertation argues – serious) levels. An incident in the early 1990s provides an almost comic example. During a briefing on developments in the highly unstable Soviet Union of the late Gorbachev era, President George HW Bush objected to the CIA analysts' "use of the word 'conservative' to describe Soviet hard-liners. He was, he complained, a conservative himself." In response, "the Directorate of Intelligence began to use the word 'traditionalist' instead. George Kolt, the director of SOVA (CIA Office of Soviet Analysis), preferred Leninist; Fritz Ermath...of the National Intelligence Council, suggested simply 'bad guys'".¹⁴⁶ Did such a debate contribute to the quality of analysis of the fast-moving events in the USSR? More importantly, there is no evidence that the exchanges above prompted any organisational introspection by the CIA about the nature of the different factions within Soviet leadership, much less how the USSR was perceived and analysed by SOVA.

Some might charge that criticism of the CIA's top-level focus is mis-directed. Perhaps the phenomenon described above is just the reality of sharp bureaucratic practice, the inevitable result of internal power politics, and an 'Imperial' Presidency. To counter such criticism, what is also needed is evidence that mirror-imaging of the customer permeates the Agency's identity at all level, as opposed to simply the presentational styles it uses for Presidents. Fortunately, such evidence is abundant.

Take for example, a section called "Addressing US Interests in DI Assessments", in a 1995 CIA document entitled "Notes on Analytic Tradecraft". The document's self-described purpose is: "This is the first of a series of Product Evaluation Staff notes to clarify the standards used for evaluating DI assessments and to provide tradecraft tips for putting the standards into practice."¹⁴⁷

The first section of this document, "Getting Started" provides five bullet points for CIA analysts to absorb. The first two points are what one would expect – laudable calls to "think of the analyst's role as that of the objective or tough-minded expert for a policymaking team", and to "recognize that research and reporting are inputs or means to an end". The next two bullet points, however, provide clear evidence of intentional mirror-imaging of consumers' thinking in CIA analysis. They are worth quoting:

¹⁴⁶ Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 506.

¹⁴⁷ Anonymous, "A Compendium of Analytic Tradecraft Notes, Volume I," page 1.

- **Put a face as well as a name on the five to 10 policy officials who are the core customers on a country or functional account.** *Analysts should study what these officials have written or said on important substantive issues and debrief policy staffers who work for core consumers, as well as anyone on the intelligence side of the river who knows their professional habits.* The goal is to learn how key officials absorb information and reach judgements, as well as *their current priority interests.*
- **Target the policymakers' specific interest in a substantive issue.** To identify lines of analysis that provide value added, analysts should think through what they would want to know if they were policymakers charged with leveraging an issue.¹⁴⁸

The final bullet point is also relevant: "Be aware that consumers' needs may change as the policymaking process evolves" - also customer-focussed, though difficult to argue with! Still, it is worth pointing out the foundational assumption that the intelligence customer will always *know* that their needs have changed. The operative words seem to be the customer's "*current priority interests*".

Mirroring the customer even affected the choice of methodologies selected by CIA. In a passage that also highlights how the social mechanisms identified are mutually reinforcing, Heuer admits in *Quantitative Approaches to Political Intelligence: the CIA Experience*:

The ability to portray results of the analysis graphically was one of the strongest arguments for using a quantitative method like Bayes's [theorem used to recalculate probabilities when new information emerges], and the graphs in the publication have been well-received...*It is just possible that much of the success of the reports is due more to this informative brevity than to the validity of the estimative technique.*¹⁴⁹

As one thirty-five year British practitioner of intelligence put this view crisply: "Salesmanship is a part of the game",¹⁵⁰ but the passage above demonstrates that the CIA allows salesmanship to change the methodologies which analysts employ. Similarly, a 1964 Studies article about African statistics spends a page debunking Nigerian population statistics, only to conclude "But we may be required to accept them by our customers."¹⁵¹ In the USSR case below, we will

¹⁴⁸ Anonymous, "A Compendium of Analytic Tradecraft Notes, Volume 1," pages 2-3. Bold type original; emphasis added.

¹⁴⁹ Richard J. Heuer, Quantitative Approaches to Political Intelligence: the CIA Experience (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978) page 11, cited in Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence page 300. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁰ Herman, Intelligence Power in Peace and War page 46.

¹⁵¹ Walter McDonald, "African Numbers Game," Studies in Intelligence 8.4 (1964) page 18.

find that because “Shortages, queues, rotting potatoes and exploding TV sets were hard to quantify”,¹⁵² the CIA did not meaningfully incorporate them in their analysis of the USSR’s economy.

The final manner in which mirror-imaging of intelligence consumers manifests itself at the CIA is in intelligence Tasking (the first part of the so-called “intelligence cycle”, explained in Chapter 4). The bureaucratic process of formally Tasking the CIA has changed over time¹⁵³, but the basic process has remained the same: it begins when CIA “issue coordinators meet with over a hundred...high-level consumers”.¹⁵⁴

The problem with such a customer-focused approach to Tasking is that usually the biases, blind spots and preconceptions of intelligence consumers divert resources Collection and Analysis from other, perhaps more productive, lines of inquiry. As Osama bin Ladin built his network during the Clinton administration, the CIA asked the National Security Council (NSC) to rank threats in order to determine how to allocate resources and effort. Terrorism was part of Priority Three:¹⁵⁵ they should provide “Intelligence about specific trans-national threats to our security, such as weapons proliferation, terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime, illicit trade practices and environmental issues of great gravity.”¹⁵⁶ When the NSC here groups al-Qa’ida alongside gangs illegally trading tropical hardwood, will a CIA analyst steeped in a culture that mirrors the intelligence customer push back? Any intellectual or epistemic problem created by mirror-imaging the consumers, moreover, is compounded by a vast scale and a huge – and presumably not always entirely rational – competition for resources.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² David M. Kennedy, “Sunshine and Shadow: The CIA and the Soviet Economy, Case C16-91-1096.0,” (Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1991 page 27. Emphasis original.

¹⁵³ See Berkowitz and Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age, page 34. It has taken the form of: “Strategic Intelligence Reviews, Presidential Policy Documents, Key Intelligence Questions, National Intelligence Topics, the “DCI’s Top Ten List”, etc.

¹⁵⁴ Berkowitz and Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age, page 46

¹⁵⁵ Parker and Stern, “Blindsided? - September 11 and the origins of strategic surprise.” page 619.

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Steve Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 (New York: Penguin Books, 2005) page 362.

¹⁵⁷ Laqueur supports this supposition about Tasking with facts and experience: “The attempts to establish [Tasking] priorities frequently result in bureaucratic nightmares...The CIA had at one time 83 intelligence topics concerning 120 countries, with assigned numerical priorities from one to seven. Furthermore, the DCI distributed lists of ‘Objectives’ (for the next year) and ‘Perspectives’ (for the next five years). Under [DCI] Colby, the CIA system of key intelligence questions (KIQs) was introduced, but this

This section has established is that there is a powerful social mechanism at work – a mélange of rules, norms, and procedures – that drives a mirror-imaging of consumers by the CIA. As such, it provides a partial linkage between the 'national' security culture of the United States and the internal identity and culture of the CIA. The next section addresses a different type of mirror-imaging.

4B Mirror-Imaging – The Community: Technology and the 800 pound Gorilla

Another type of mirror-imaging occurs when CIA analysis is shaped by a different exogenous factor: other agencies in the US Intelligence Community.

In some sense, the CIA's analysis *must* reflect the information provided by other US intelligence agencies. That is their mandate, and it is the point of much of the 'coordination' (as distinct from 'Review') discussed above. Like mirroring of the Customer, this mechanism links the 'national' security culture of the United States¹⁵⁸ as a whole to that of the Agency. Here, therefore, what we will underscore is the *inadvertent* ways that CIA analysis mirrors the rest of the Community. That mirror-imaging occurs when the technical capabilities ('what is possible') drives what 'should' be done at CIA.

Despite the attention that Langley receives, the CIA is one of many agencies in the US Intelligence Community. Measured by either number of personnel or budget, it is not the largest – the Pentagon's¹⁵⁹ are. Collectively, the Pentagon agencies have been called the "800-pound Gorilla" of the

did not solve the problem either. In the early 1980s NITC (National Intelligence Tasking Center) was created to direct collection efforts in the field of espionage, photos and electronic intercepts. But its authority was contested from the first day and after a few years it was abolished. Obviously, once a war or other emergency had broken out, the area automatically became a priority intelligence target. ...An internal report calls (a tasking document named) Priority National Intelligence Objectives (PNIOs) "lamentably defective documents," and "ritual justification of every kind of activity that anybody believe to be desirable"...Five years later, future DCI Schlesinger called PNIOs "aggregated wish lists" which could mean all things to all people. Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 21.

¹⁵⁸ As such, it draws generally on several of the essays in Peter Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹⁵⁹ The National Security Agency (NSA) was founded in 1952 and performs cryptological intelligence and electronic interception; the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) was founded in 1961 and manages military intelligence for the Department of Defense (DOD); the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) was established in 1960 and operates spy satellites; and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) was started in 1996 and combined numerous previously independent agencies that had produced geographic information for the Community. The best one-volume source for understanding what all these agencies do and how they fit together is Richelson, *The US Intelligence Community*.

Intelligence Community,¹⁶⁰ and though their budgets are classified, in 1996 the US House of Representatives estimated that the Secretary of Defense controls about 85 percent of all US intelligence spending,¹⁶¹ much of it on technical collection systems. Indeed, since the 1950s the American Intelligence Community has been the most technically advanced in the world.¹⁶² (This imbalance arose in part because under President Eisenhower the US felt that it was losing the ‘secret war’ against the Soviets, and a report recommended to him that the US explore “every possible scientific and technical avenue of approach to the intelligence problem”.¹⁶³ The military was deemed the best organisation for this, despite the CIA’s success managing the U2 programme.)¹⁶⁴

Political-military culture has been identified as a source of inertia in policy making across many cultures,¹⁶⁵ and the DOD ‘gorilla’ affects intelligence analysis in several important ways: Berkowitz and Goodman write that it “has greatly shaped the bureaucratic culture of the CIA”.¹⁶⁶ Specifically, previous efforts to evaluate US intelligence have found that it is generally over-reliant on technical capabilities at the expense of human intelligence.¹⁶⁷ Certainly, this was alleged after the Iranian Revolution.¹⁶⁸ The section above mentioned a reinforcing factor for this mechanism: the Community’s technology has often dazzled consumers, thereby feeding demand for the technical “intelligence” generated, whether it supports better decision-making or not.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁰ Loch K. Johnson, “The DCI and the Eight-Hundred-Pound Gorilla,” Intelligence and the National Security Strategist: Enduring Issues and Challenges, eds. Roger Z. George and Robert D. Kline (Lanham, MD Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), page 459.

¹⁶¹ “Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community,” (Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, U.S. House of Representatives, US Government Printing Office, 1996, page 131.

¹⁶² Andrew, For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 2.

¹⁶³ Martin, Wilderness of Mirrors, page 62.

¹⁶⁴ Chapter 4 in Turner, Burn Before Reading: Presidents, CIA Directors, and Secret Intelligence.

¹⁶⁵ Berger, “Norms, Identity and National Security in Germany and Japan.” page 329. As a source of these doctrines, it is also addressed in Kier, “Culture and French Military Doctrine Before World War II.” *passim*.

¹⁶⁶ Berkowitz and Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age, page 112

¹⁶⁷ The latest of these was the 9/11 Commission Report: The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 103-4.

¹⁶⁸ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, pages 52-3 and *passim*.

¹⁶⁹ The author has seen some of these capabilities first hand, and they are truly astounding, exciting and “cool” on a technical level.

Nevertheless, a simple 'because of an excess of *x* (technology), then *y* (other forms of intelligence) is neglected' conclusion misses the related social mechanism that has a larger effect in the end: the distortion of Tasking (i.e. the selection of what pieces of information the CIA *should* gather) that this advanced capability produces. One internal report on Tasking, for example, was candid: "After a year's working on intelligence requirements, we have come to realise that they are not the driving force behind the flow of information. Rather, the real push comes from the collectors themselves – particularly the operations of large, indiscriminating technical collection systems – who use national intelligence requirements to justify what they want to undertake for other reasons, e.g. military readiness, redundancy, technical continuity, and the like."¹⁷⁰ The *type* of information such systems generate – frequently quantitative – is also shown to reinforce the CIA's "already powerful inclination to count rather than interpret"¹⁷¹, and looms large in the Iran and USSR case studies.

In short, it is plain that mirror-imaging of the Community reinforces the CIA's over-reliance on technology, leads to a neglect of human sources for collection, and distorts Tasking. We also see how such an over-reliance reinforces a more insidious phenomenon: the mistaken belief that quantitative 'hard data' obtained by secret technical means is more important than other forms of intelligence. Like the other social mechanisms discussed in this section, this view allows an understanding of how part of the CIA's identity and culture are created and maintained.

4C Mirror-imaging - Target

The final social mechanism we will examine shaping the identity and culture of the CIA is the mirror-imaging of intelligence targets, especially the USSR.

As a general phenomenon, mirror-imaging of the target is discussed at length in Heuer,¹⁷² and in the *Studies in Intelligence* article "Fifteen Axioms for Intelligence Analysts". That article includes the unambiguous dictum: "*Avoid mirror-imaging at all costs. Mirror-imaging--projecting your thought process or value system onto someone else--is one of the greatest threats to objective intelligence analysis.*"¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 21.

¹⁷¹ Robert B. Bathurst, *Intelligence and the Mirror: On Creating an Enemy* (London: Sage, 1993), page 89. Emphasis added.

¹⁷² Heuer, *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, pages 70-1 and page 181.

¹⁷³ Watanabe, "Fifteen Axioms for Intelligence Analysis." Emphasis original.

Still, it happened, sometimes at crucial junctures. One famous example occurred when Sherman Kent personally oversaw the Agency's report on the likelihood that the Soviets would move missiles into Cuba. As we see in the case study below, even after massive increases in shipments of Soviet military equipment into Cuba were detected, Kent deemed any movement of missiles to be "too provocative" to be "a rational decision".¹⁷⁴ As we shall explore in the case studies, 'rational' depends partly on one's point of view, but Kent defended his analysis in 1964, writing in *Studies* that: "No estimating process can be expected to divine exactly when the enemy is about to make a dramatically wrong [sic] decision."¹⁷⁵

DCI Gates admitted that a similar process was at work when the CIA failed to predict the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. He said analysts "simply could not accept that Brezhnev or the others might see the equation differently. The analysts thought that the Soviet leaders thought as they did. It was not the first or the last time that they would make this mistake."¹⁷⁶ At the same time, while he was DCI Gates displayed on his desk the maxim "As a general rule, the best way to achieve complete strategic surprise is *to commit an act that makes no sense or is even self-destructive*".¹⁷⁷ (Presumably the limits of this axiom were evident on September 12th, 2001; as we see in the 9/11 case, Huizinga had pointed in the 1930s that rationality is only one human value among many, and that even wars have been fought to "obtain a decision of holy validity"¹⁷⁸, or as "a form of divination").¹⁷⁹

What concerns us primarily here, however, is not the mental process of mirror-imaging by individual analysts of the intelligence target, but the *social process* of mirror-imaging by the analytical institution.

¹⁷⁴ George, "Fixing the Problem of Analytical Mindsets: Alternative Analysis." page 314.

¹⁷⁵ Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived."

¹⁷⁶ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, page 134. An outstanding exposition of the context of exactly why the Soviet leadership might have felt confident with this decision is provided by Alexandre Bennigsen, "The Soviet Union and Muslim Guerrilla Wars 1920-1981: Lessons for Afghanistan," N1707 (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1981, which deserves to be more widely known.

¹⁷⁷ Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 538 Emphasis added. For more on the degree to which terrorists – even suicide terrorists – are *actually* irrational, see especially ¹⁷⁷ Louise Richardson, What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat (New York, NY: Random House, 2007).

¹⁷⁸ Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955) page 91.

¹⁷⁹ Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture page 91.

This *social* mirror-imaging mechanism links to other social processes described above, and like them feeds directly into creating the persistent traits of the CIA's identity and culture. CIA analysts might prize, for example, an intercepted cable not only because of the impressive technology used to intercept it, but also because – no matter what its contents – the cable was deemed 'secret' by the Soviets. This approach presupposes that one's target's classification system is fully 'rational' and such rationality is 'bounded' by factors different from one's own: apart from the Soviet penchant for utterly counter-productive secrecy,¹⁸⁰ in Saddam Hussein's Iraq weather forecasts were state secrets.¹⁸¹ Once such 'secret' information is obtained with difficulty, it is hard to believe that is treated objectively.

Open source intelligence advocates frequently make the same charge, saying, "There remains an ingrained Intelligence Community (IC) prejudice – sometimes no more than a subliminal one, but a prejudice nonetheless – against open sources. There will always be IC officials, and some of their policy customers, who believe that the greater the difficulty involved in collecting the intelligence, the better the intelligence has to be."¹⁸² Handel agrees, pointing out that having worked to obtain secret information, intelligence services are psychologically predisposed to believe it.¹⁸³ One can imagine the cumulative effects of such an attitude when working against totalitarian regimes!

How can one find such distortions? They can be detected most easily in the Tasking and Collection phase of the intelligence cycle. What many critics

¹⁸⁰ When the author studied in the USSR in 1985, the only place where one could purchase an accurate street map of Moscow was at the US Embassy: Soviet-produced maps of the city introduced intentional errors after German soldiers were found to be carrying Soviet maps in the Second World War. At the risk of mirror-imaging, one can say that this was not a society that excelled at cost-benefit analysis!

¹⁸¹ Col Charles M. Westenhoff, USAF "Airpower and Political Culture," Airpower Journal, Winter (1997) page 43 There are actually some good reasons why certain weather data has been deemed secret in the past, though these do not detract from the example above. One reason Westenhoff cites: during the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam feared that the Iranians could use weather reports to help time their attacks. A more subtle use has been made of weather data reported over encrypted channels, however, because one key to breaking a code is knowing its contents. If, for example, an airfield is known to provide temperature and barometric data each day to headquarters over an encrypted channel, and that same weather data can be verified independently, a portion of that encoded message is known, and that portion may provide cryptographers with valuable clues to the functioning of the encoding mechanism as a whole.

¹⁸² Mark M. Lowenthal, "Open-Source Intelligence: New Myths, New Realities," Intelligence and the National Security Strategist: Enduring Issues and Challenges, eds. Roger Z. George and Robert D. Kline (Lanham, MD Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), page 274.

¹⁸³ Michael. I. Handel, "Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise," Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence, eds. Richard K. Betts and Thomas G. Mahnken (London: Frank Cass, 2003) page 9.

say ended up happening during the Cold War, for example, was that the CIA largely spied on itself (through counter-intelligence) and its counterparts: the KGB and GRU, the Soviet military industrial complex, and the urban elites. One internal critic charged SOVA (the CIA's office of Soviet Analysis): "You guys just take in each other's laundry" (i.e. CIA targeted KGB and vice versa)¹⁸⁴. The KGB officer Victor Cherkashin, who 'handled' the CIA traitor Aldrich Ames and FBI traitor Robert Hanssen, agreed.¹⁸⁵ Memoirs recently published by Markus Wolf, the former head of foreign intelligence for the DDR, echo these sentiments, adding, "Most spying has actually made little difference... [the USSR's] problems were lying in plain sight."¹⁸⁶ While on an institutional level this spy-on-their-spies approach made sense (especially viewed in light of the security mechanism discussed above) the cases in later chapters explore how it also lays the groundwork for surprises of which the KGB and others knew little or nothing. We even learned after the Cold War that the KGB, in order to foil fictitious reporting by party bosses, employed its own spy satellites to ascertain the size of the Uzbek cotton harvest;¹⁸⁷ in the 1980s, the KGB also used CIA estimates to forecast Soviet grain harvests¹⁸⁸ and to correct problems in their oil

¹⁸⁴ Bearden and Risen, The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown with the KGB page 459.

¹⁸⁵ After the Cold War ended, he wrote: "In the end, even the most valuable double agents were rarely worth the intensive efforts it took to run them. Taxpayers on both sides of the Atlantic paid huge sums for very little. More often than not, double agents were scarcely more than balls in the games played by intelligence agencies. Some of the best-known Cold War espionage cases were more about spy versus spy than real issues of national security. Aldrich Ames would arouse great emotion in the United States, not least because the information he gave us led to the deaths of ten U.S. agents. But with few exceptions, most of those executed were intelligence officers involved in the narrow game tasks assigned them, *with little knowledge about what was going on in the rest of the KGB, let alone the country...It was thieves stealing from thieves*, which again raises the question of whether all the years of work and hundreds of millions of dollars were worth it. Victor Cherkashin and Gregory Feifer, Spy Handler: Memoir of a KGB Officer (New York: Basic Books, 2005), page 108-9. Emphasis added.

¹⁸⁶ Wolf and McElvoy, Man Without a Face: the Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster, page 283.

¹⁸⁷ Kotkin, Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000, page 67.

¹⁸⁸ Sergo Mikoyan, "Eroding the Soviet 'Culture of Secrecy': Western Winds Behind Kremlin Walls," Studies in Intelligence Fall-Winter.11 (2001), page 7 of 12 https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/fall_winter_2001/article05.html. There is also the amusing fact that at the first SALT talks held in 1968, the senior Soviet military negotiators stopped discussions as soon as the American negotiators began to summarise the Soviet nuclear weapons programmes, and asked the Soviet civilian negotiators to leave the room. The Soviet military man stated that "they were not cleared for such information, even if it was considered unclassified in the West". See Robert W. Pringle, "Arms Control Intelligence," Historical Dictionary of Russian & Soviet Intelligence, ed. Jon Woronoff (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006).

industry,¹⁸⁹ proving that economic forecasting about the USSR in the 1980s was at least partly an unacknowledged “wilderness of mirrors.”¹⁹⁰

If organisational mirror-imaging can be found during Tasking and Collection, the effects of over-exposure to a totalitarian society in a secret environment can also be discerned in the Analysis part of the intelligence cycle.

Here is one scholar’s evocative recollection in *Intelligence and the Mirror*:

Soviet consensual reality was eventually translated into US forms or put into US boxes. Gradually, the process was standardized. A whole generation of scholars emerged in the late 1950s who engaged in Talmudic-like studies of the military texts and signs. For instance, Harriet Scott...discovered that there were hidden messages about disasters and upheavals in official obituaries. She taught generations of analysts the importance of ritual in intelligence analysis. Robert Herrick discovered, during his research into Soviet naval doctrine, its infernal Dantesque structure. He identified those who said the word “aircraft carrier” at the wrong time and died, and those who proposed it and lived, and those who suffered for lack of courage to say it at all...James McConnell, like a Shakespearean scholar meticulously comparing folios, deduced a new system of interpretation by observing which concepts and words in Soviet military texts were changed, which was missing, which ritual was intoned, which authority praised. *From these divinations he could conjecture how close we were to war, and his insights taught a generation of analysts the importance of signs and signals*¹⁹¹.

A glimpse of such activities is also found in the glossary provided for “Sherman Kent and the Board of National Estimates: Collected Essays”. It defines the term “Cratology: The study of the size and function of shipping crates seen on photographs (from various sources). The size and configuration

¹⁸⁹ Turner, Burn Before Reading: Presidents, CIA Directors, and Secret Intelligence, pages 168-9.

¹⁹⁰ As noted above, this phrase is used frequently to describe counterintelligence, and originally appeared in TS Eliot’s *Gerontion*.

¹⁹¹ Bathurst, Intelligence and the Mirror: On Creating an Enemy, page 96. Emphasis added. Another example of such an esoteric textual discourse in CIA Sovietology is provided on pages 57-8 of Richard W. Shryock, “For an Eclectic Sovietology,” Studies in Intelligence 8.1 (1964): “Some years ago a CIA analyst discovered Nikita Khrushchev referred to as the First Secretary of the CPSU, whereas previously he had been identified in the official press only in lower case, “first secretary”. The conclusion from this evidence, that Khrushchev was on his way up, was subsequently hailed as a methodological triumph, proof of a newfound world of analytic method. No matter that indicator’s of Khrushchev’s ascending fortunes were apparent in almost all areas of Soviet life; this little ‘esoteric communication’ became cause in part for the establishment of a whole new approach to Soviet studies and a whole new corpus of political philosophy concerning the Soviet and Communist systems.” The actual article to which he referred was written some six years before, and acknowledged a certain “Talmudic” approach to “esoteric” Soviet discourse: Myron Rush, “A Neglected Source of Evidence,” Studies in Intelligence 2.3 (1958). A rebuttal to Shryok’s article was published in the same issue; see: John Whitman, “Better an Office of Sovietology,” Studies in Intelligence 8.1 (1964).

of a shipping crate often will indicate what is inside.”¹⁹² We see cratology in action in the Cuban Missile Crisis case, but what these passages reveal are the social mechanism by which the nature of the USSR shaped and maintained the identity and culture of the CIA.

Based on evidence like this one can hypothesize that the more abstruse analytical efforts at the CIA from its inception until 2001 result as much from the mirroring of their totalitarian targets as from the sometimes-necessary secrecy of their other efforts.¹⁹³ At the far end of such a hypothesis, one might even view the CIA’s drive for consensus (see section three, below) as a mirror-image of Leninist “democratic centralism”, by which in theory Communist parties could combine free discussion prior to a decision with strict hierarchical discipline once a decision was reached; in practice, the former was always much subordinate to the latter.¹⁹⁴

Section Two Summary

Section two of this chapter has advanced the idea that the four social mechanisms (Self-selection, Active Selection, Socialization, and Mirror-imaging) individually and in concert shape the CIA’s unique identity and culture. We seen how these mechanisms function in reproducing the existing social structures of the CIA, and we have shown how these structures can transform the agents (no pun intended) within them. This section has identified each mechanism, explained why it exists and how it operates, and then offered first-hand evidence of its sustained presence at the CIA during the scope of this dissertation.

Section three now provides evidence for the existence of the four characteristics of the CIA’s identity and culture that result from these mechanisms. These characteristics, in turn, are ultimately used in the case

¹⁹² Sherman Kent, Sherman Kent and the Board of National Estimates: Collected Essays, Undated, Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, May 4 2004. A good description of the basics of Photo Interpretation is given in Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence, pages 49-51.

¹⁹³ Such speculation is akin to Karl Mannheim’s “Functional Analysis”: Ritzer says: “Functional analysis is the key to Mannheim. He is interested not only in the functional relationship between specific ideas and the Weltanschauung, but also in the functional relationship between ideas and the larger social setting. One of the more important definitions of the sociology of knowledge is ‘a discipline which explores the functional dependence of each intellectual standpoint on the differentiated social group reality standing behind it, and which sets itself the task of retracing the evolution of various standpoints.’” See George Ritzer, Classical Sociological Theory (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1996), page 341.

¹⁹⁴ See Leopold Labedz, “democratic centralism,” The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, eds. Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley (London: HarperCollins, 1999, page 209.

studies to unravel erroneous threat assessments and the resultant strategic surprises.

Section III: Key Constants of the CIA's Identity and Culture

Chapter 3 concludes by describing the effects of the self-selection, active selection, socialization, and mirror-imaging: the characteristics of the CIA's identity and culture produced by the social mechanisms just described, and to which later chapters ascribe strategic surprise. Referring again to Figure 1 (reproduced below), one can see that these four attributes of the Agency's CIA's identity and culture are 1) homogeneity of personnel; 2) scientism, sometimes manifested as the reification of 'objectivity' and 'Reason'; 3) a preference for 'Secrets' over other categories of information; and 4) a tendency to be consensus-driven.

Figure 1: Perennial Features of the CIA's Analytical Identity & Culture and Their Related Social Mechanisms

		Perennial Features of the CIA's Identity and Culture			
		Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
Social Mechanism					
1	Self-Selection				
2	Active Selection				
3	Socialization, including:				
	A. Induction and Training				
	B. Definition of "Analytical" Activity				
	C. A Vocabulary of false precision				
	D. "Collegiality": marginalizing dissent				
	E. "Wisdom Literature"				
	F. Isolation, Compartmentalisation & Secrecy				
4	Mirror-imaging				
	A. Mirroring the Consumer				
	B. Mirroring the Community				
	C. Mirroring the Target				

Several of the enduring traits in the CIA's identity and culture described below have been anticipated in section two's discussion of the social mechanisms at work in their creation (given the iterative, intersubjective, and collectively-reinforcing nature of these mechanisms and the qualities that produce them, this should not be surprising). Nevertheless, some of this section is by-necessity deductive. Its deductions, however, are supported by a wide variety and depth of anecdotal data, and are clearly labelled supposition. Further evidence in their favour also appears in later chapters.

This is another way of saying that this section (and the hypothesis presented in this dissertation as a whole) is making an "abductive" argument, a term coined by the American philosopher Charles Peirce, and defined as "the process of using evidence to reach a wider conclusion".¹⁹⁵ Specifically, it

¹⁹⁵ Simon Blackburn, ed., *"Abduction"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also Arthur W. Burks, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* vol. 8 (Cambridge MA:

employs “Reactive abduction,” in which “we recognise a particular pattern as the manifestation of characteristics of a general pattern/law/principle/hypothesis”.¹⁹⁶ In layman’s terms, it is about answering the question “*How is it possible* for the CIA’s identity and culture to form?”

The CIA's Homogeneity of Personnel

The first consistent attribute of the CIA’s identity and culture from 1947 until 2001 that the social mechanisms described above produce is homogeneity of its personnel in terms of race, sex, ethnicity, and class background (relative both to the rest of America and the world as a whole).

At least one expert – Markus Wolf – former head of East Germany’s Foreign Intelligence Bureau speculates that perhaps “The predominance of WASP, East Coast Americans in the CIA” was a form of “protective mechanism against betrayal” through a “strong collegial feeling”.¹⁹⁷ As Figure 1 summarised, however, one can posit that this homogeneity flows from three social mechanisms: Self-Selection, Active Selection, and certain aspects of Socialization (i.e. Isolation, Compartmentalisation, and Secrecy).

In evidence of this feature, apart from the sustained lack of émigrés (noted in the description of Active Selection, described above), there is statistical data. An Inspector General’s study of CIA recruitment found that:

[In 1964] the Office of National Estimates had ‘no black, Jewish, or women professionals, and only a few Catholics. In 1967,...it was revealed that there were fewer than 20 African Americans among the approximately 12,000 non-clerical CIA employees. According to a former CIA case officer and recruiter, the agency was not hiring

Harvard University Press, 1958), page 209 in which Peirce says “... There are but three elementary kinds of reasoning. The first, which I call abduction ... consists in examining a mass of facts and in allowing these facts to suggest a theory. In this way we gain new ideas; but there is no force in the reasoning. The second kind of reasoning is deduction, or necessary reasoning. It is applicable only to an ideal state of things, or to a state of things in so far as it may conform to an ideal. It merely gives a new aspect to the premises. ... The third way of reasoning is induction, or experimental research. Its procedure is this. Abduction having suggested a theory, we employ deduction to deduce from that ideal theory a promiscuous variety of consequences to the effect that if we perform certain acts, we shall find ourselves confronted with certain experiences. We then proceed to try these experiments, and if the predictions of the theory are verified, we have a proportionate confidence that the experiments that remain to be tried will confirm the theory.” Cited in <http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/idm/personen/mhoffman/papers/abduction-logic.html>

¹⁹⁶ C. J. Lofting, Integration, Differentiation, & Meaning: The Properties and Methods of Personal and Social Identification, 2004, Available: <http://members.iimetro.com.au/~lofting/myweb/idm009.html>, 6 April 2007.

¹⁹⁷ Wolf and McElvoy, Man Without a Face: the Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster, page 193.

African-Americans, Latinos, or other minorities in the 1960s, a habit that continued through the 1980s...Until 1975, the IC openly barred the employment of homosexuals... [Moreover, residual distrust of gays still pervades the Agency].¹⁹⁸

In June of 1979, legal action began against the CIA charging that the CIA had “wilfully violated the Equal Pay Act of 1963” by failing to promote female Operations Officers; the Agency settled the case in June of 1980, worried that it would “put the Agency’s entire personnel system on trial”, and agreed to the substance of the woman’s complaint.¹⁹⁹ Two similar sex-discrimination lawsuits were brought against the CIA in 1994 that resulted in Congressional Hearings,²⁰⁰ and resulted in the Agency paying out almost a million dollars in back pay.²⁰¹

In the next decade?

At a November 1999 CIA-sponsored conference *U.S. Intelligence and the End of the Cold War...* of the 35 speakers and presenters, 34 were white males. The one exception was a white female who introduced a dinner speaker. Of the approximately 300 people who attended the conference, fewer than five were not white, and only a handful were women.²⁰²

In other words, the CIA was consistently far more uniform in sex, ethnicity and class background (given that the vast majority of analysts had at least one degree) than US society as a whole.²⁰³ We see in the 9/11 case that Cassandra

¹⁹⁸ Callum, “The Case for Cultural Diversity in the Intelligence Community.” page 28

¹⁹⁹ Dawn Ellison, “One Woman’s Contribution to Social Change at CIA,” *Studies in Intelligence* 46.3 (2002) page 52. For a bit more background on this case and its aftermath see Snider, *The Agency and the Hill: CIA’s Relationship with Congress, 1946–2004*, page For interesting commentary on this issue in the first few decades of the Cold War, see Kathryn S. Olmsted, “Blond Queens, Red Spiders, and Neurotic Old Maids: Gender and Espionage in the Early Cold War,” *Intelligence and National Security* 19.1 (2004).

²⁰⁰ See Snider, *The Agency and the Hill: CIA’s Relationship with Congress, 1946–2004*, page 322. Snider says “Taking note of these complaints, the HPSCI held open hearings in September 1994 to explore the Agency’s personnel policies and practices with respect to the hiring and promotion of women and other minorities. While conceding that ‘minorities are still underrepresented in the Agency’s workforce, and the advancement of women and minorities is still limited,’ DCI Woolsey said he was intent on breaking down any existing barriers. ‘The ability to understand a complex, diverse world,’ he stated, “a world which is far from being all white male—is central to our mission.” Amen.

²⁰¹ Turner, *Burn Before Reading: Presidents, CIA Directors, and Secret Intelligence*, page 232.

²⁰² Callum, “The Case for Cultural Diversity in the Intelligence Community.” Callum, “The Case for Cultural Diversity in the Intelligence Community.” page 29. This conference’s output was described in Henry R. Appelbaum and John Hollister Hedley, “US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War,” *Studies in Intelligence* 9 (2000).

²⁰³ Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, “The Socio-Educational Composition of the CIA Elite: A Statistical Note,” *Journal of American Studies* 19.1 (1985) *passim*. Ironically, the opposition counted on stereotypes of US intelligence personnel for recruitment as well: according to one of the best accounts of a counterintelligence investigation available, “New KGB officers were imbued with the credo that virtually any American non-

Michael Scheuer's CIA colleagues derisively called the bin Ladin Unit "The Manson family",²⁰⁴ both for his fervour *and* because the unit was filled disproportionately with young female analysts.

Further support for this aspect of the CIA's identity and culture can be found in a 1999 statement by DCI Tenet.²⁰⁵ In a passage almost custom-made to draw attention to the interactions between the social mechanisms discussed above with one another, Tenet's statement was titled "On Diversity". First, he acknowledged the need for a more diverse workforce at the CIA in terms of race, sex and background. Then, Tenet justifies this goal partly because "Having a more diverse workforce will help us serve our customers better."²⁰⁶

As Chapters Five and Six demonstrate, the CIA's homogeneity has important ramifications for how intelligence is Tasked, Collected, and Analysed, and it contributes in no small part to strategic surprises. There is also undoubtedly more work to be done on value of cognitive diversity,²⁰⁷ and it is not too large a leap to propose that the CIA's homogeneity of personnel if not diminishing cognitive diversity, does not improve it. What is inarguable, however, is that the CIA was considerably less diverse than US society over the period in question.

The CIA's Scientism and/or Its Reification of 'Objectivity' and 'Reason'

The second consistent characteristic of the CIA's identity and culture is a tendency towards scientism and the consistent reification of 'objectivity' or

commissioned officer could be bought if you offered him (sic) three times his annual salary." They were further taught that (in a charge the author of this work can neither confirm nor deny), commissioned officers were a more difficult target not only because they are better paid, but because "they come from the reactionary circles of American society." See Stuart A. Herrington, Traitors Among Us (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1999), pages 23-4.

²⁰⁴ Lawrence Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11 (New York: Random House, 2006), page 353-4. Confirmed in Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190. It is a reference to the cult comprised mostly of women who blindly obeyed the murderous Charles Manson in 1970s California.

²⁰⁵ See CIA Press Release, 1 February, 1999, Statement of the Director of Central Intelligence, George J. Tenet, "On Diversity" available https://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/press_release/1999/ps020199.html.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. Tenet explains this connection thus: "The consumers of our intelligence products will come from more diverse backgrounds as American society continues to shift demographically. Our customers will have a wider variety of perspectives and they will demand intelligence products that take a wide range of views into account. We are often asked by policymakers whether we have considered all factors and options in arriving at our assessments or in planning operations. Having a diverse workforce can deepen our insights and widen our frames of reference."

²⁰⁷ See, for example Mitchell and Nicholas, "Knowledge Creation in Groups: the Value of Cognitive Diversity, Transactive Memory and Open-mindedness Norms." *passim*. See also Taleb, The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable, page 224-5.

'reason.' As Figure 1 summarises, one can posit that all four of the social mechanisms discussed above (Self-Selection, Active Selection, Socialisation, and Mirror-imaging) contribute to this pervasive characteristic of the CIA's identity and culture.

The first piece of evidence for this characteristic was prefigured in section one of this chapter: Kent's volume *Strategic Intelligence for America World Policy*. Recall that Kent maintains "[We] insist, and have insisted for generations, that truth is to be approached, if not attained, through research guided by a systematic method. In the social sciences which very largely constitute the subject matter of strategic intelligence, there is such a method. It is much like the method of the physical sciences."²⁰⁸ His only disclaimer separating social sciences from physical sciences was the former's frequent lack of practical experiments.²⁰⁹

Kent made other contributions in this direction, however, as he also pioneered the "Vocabulary of false precision" discussed above (including his dismissive use of the term "poets" for those who made non-quantified judgements in his "classic" essay "Words of Estimative Probability"²¹⁰). Other deep background factors already mentioned (e.g. the self-definition of intelligence interpreters as 'analysts') contribute, too, as does the 'wisdom literature' that Kent established at Langley.

On the other hand, it is important to recall that Kent's 'scientific' approach reflected the zeitgeist of 1950s America. As *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military Industrial Complex* conveys, in the 1950s and early 1960s, 'behaviouralists' in the US fetishised statistics and numbers, and when forced to use words, shoe-horned them into tight jargon, "the linguistic equivalent of numerical precision."²¹¹ Significant here is the fact

²⁰⁸ Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, page 156.

²⁰⁹ Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* page 156, fn 4.

²¹⁰ Sherman Kent, "Words of Estimative Probability," *Studies in Intelligence*. Fall (1964).

²¹¹ See especially Chapters 1 to 3, pages 19-71 in Ron Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Robin says: "Having dismissed their humanist colleagues as captives of the vagaries of language, behaviouralists of all persuasions endorsed a quantitative discourse. They believed that a positive reception of their disciplinary innovations hinged on the strict avoidance of the imprecision of conventional language...When forced to use words rather than mathematical representations, behaviouralists resorted to technical jargon – the linguistic equivalent of numerical precision. Numbers, according to the behaviouralists, offered transparent presentations of difficult problems. There was a symbiotic relationship among objectivity, openness and 'trust in numbers'...'firm statistical rules' promoted a sense of order by suppressing the unruly, diverse forms of interpretation associated with ambiguous qualitative data... Numbers permitted comparison of people, places and problems that were otherwise

that as a result the social mechanisms introduced above (e.g., relative isolation; mirror-imaging the customer and other members of the Intelligence Community), this 1950's positivist mindset *persisted* at the CIA. In "Intelligence for the 1980s," DCI Colby wrote:

A new discipline specifically designed for intelligence analysts must be refined, and the process of research and development has already begun. It will step beyond academic analysis through new techniques to project future probabilities rather than explain the past. Experiments in this new discipline are by no means limited to the official Intelligence Community, as they take place in information science research centers, among political risk analysts, and in the projections of the Club of Rome, the Global 2000 study, and others.²¹²

Long after the reputation of efforts like that of the Club of Rome *et al* had shrunk to almost vanishing in the social sciences, such approaches permeated the CIA.

We have already cited the *Studies* article "Developing a Taxonomy of Intelligence Analysis Variables".²¹³ We have not, however, yet looked at the Editor's Note that preceded it:

By distilling a list of the variables that affect analytic reasoning, the author aims to move the tradecraft of intelligence analysis closer to a science. A carefully prepared taxonomy can become a structure for heightening awareness of analytic biases, sorting available data, identifying information gaps, and stimulating new approaches to the understanding of unfolding events, ultimately increasing the sophistication of analytic judgements.²¹⁴

The idea that the various entries in this table are social rather than natural facts is entirely absent. Johnston himself introduces his final taxonomic product by quoting the 18th century pioneer of biological classification, Linnaeus: "The first step of science is to know one thing from another. This knowledge consists in their specific distinctions; but in order that it may be fixed and permanent distinct names must be given to different things, and those names must be recorded and remembered."²¹⁵ The resulting unselfconscious "taxonomy", which presents

different and ostensibly incomparable. Quantification enabled the codifying, unifying, and above all the simplification of large and diverse bodies of information."

²¹² Quoted in Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence, page 162.

²¹³ Johnston, "Developing a Taxonomy of Intelligence Analysis Variables."; this article is also Chapter 3 in Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study.

²¹⁴ Johnston, "Developing a Taxonomy of Intelligence Analysis Variables." page 1.

²¹⁵ Johnston, "Developing a Taxonomy of Intelligence Analysis Variables." page 4. Also cited in Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 37.

social facts like so many types of naturally occurring frogs and birds, is reproduced in Figure 2, below:

Figure 2: A Specimen of the CIA's Persistent Scientism

Taxonomy of Intelligence Analysis Variables			
Systemic Variables	Systematic Variables	Idiosyncratic Variables	Communicative Variables
Organization	User Requirements	Weltanschauung (Worldview)	Formal
Internal	Operations	Affiliation	Inter-Organization
Structure	Information Acquisition	Familial	Hierarchical
Leadership	Collection Methods	Cultural	Inter-Division
Culture	Overt	Ethnic	Inter-Group
History	Covert	Religious	Intra-Organization
Tradition	Information Reliability	Social	Hierarchical
Social Practice	Reproducible	Linguistic	Intra-Division
Taboo	Consistent	Political	Intra-Group
Group Characteristics	Information Validity	Psychology	Individual
Hierarchy	Historical	Bias	Hierarchical
Resources & Incentives	Single Source	Personality Profile	Inter-Group
Manpower	Dual Source	Security/Trust	Intra-Group
Budget	Triangulation	Cognitive Processing	Informal
Technology	Information Archive	Learning Style	Inter-Organization
Assets	Storage	Information Acquisition	Hierarchical
R&D	Access	Information Processing	Inter-Division
Facilities	Correlation	Expertise	Inter-Group
Work Groups-Teams	Retrieval	Problem-Solving	Intra-Organization
External	Analytic Methodology	Decisionmaking	Hierarchical
Consumer Needs	Approach	Cognitive Load	Intra-Division
Time and Imperatives	Intuitive	Speed/Accuracy	Intra-Group
Consumer Use	Structured	Stress Effects	Individual
Consumer Structure	Semi-Structured	Education	Hierarchical
Consumer Hierarchy	Information Processing	Domain	Inter-Group
Consumer Reporting	Historical Information	Location	Intra-Group
Politics	Current Information	Mentor	Technology
Internal - Organization	Decision Strategies	Training	Networked Analysis
Policy	Estimative	Organizational	Collaboration
Tradition	Predictive	Domain	
Taboo	Reporting	Procedural	
Security/Access	Verbal Methods	Readiness	
External - National	Written Methods	Resources	
Law		Facilities	
Policy			
External - International			
Security			
Denial			
Deception			
Policy			

This naively positivistic approach continued largely unquestioned through the scope of our analysis. The first explicit critique of it in the CIA itself only appeared in 2005 in *Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis*. The author says that the CIA's "The Myth of 'Scientific Methodology,'"²¹⁶ its "strong cultural orientation towards an 'evidence-based' scientism"²¹⁷ are deeply ingrained. He wrote:

²¹⁶ Cooper, *Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis*, page 26.

²¹⁷ Cooper, *Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis*, page 31.

Many well-informed outside commentators and intelligence professionals continue to talk about the “science of analysis”, and only some of them are truly aware of the shaky foundations of this belief or of its real implications. But this talk of a “science of analysis” is a conceit, *partly engendered by Sherman Kent’s dominating view of intelligence analysis as a counterpart of the scientific method.* The reality is otherwise; analysis falls far short of being a “scientific method” in the common, but usually misunderstood, sense. Moreover, this view of science itself is “scientism”, which fails to recognize the important role of less “rational” and less ‘scientific’ elements, such as imagination and intuition.²¹⁸

Note again, though, that this internal criticism occurs *four years after* the last strategic surprise examined here.

Did this ‘scientific’ attitude appear in day-to-day analysis? According to a CIA guide, “Warnings of Revolution”, published in 1980, a “discerning analyst would have recognised the warnings of the [French] revolution at least a year prior to the fall of the Bastille”.²¹⁹ Our first case reveals the rich irony of this predictive confidence: “Warnings of Revolution” was published the year after the CIA was surprised by the fall of the Shah of Iran (and a decade before our second case, the demise of the Soviet Union)!

Similarly, the discussion of mirror-imaging of targets in Section Two provides evidence for a consistent spill over of narrow expectations of ‘reasonable’ or ‘reasoned’ behaviour by CIA analysts to their opponents.

Another facet of this trait of the Agency’s identity and culture is the famous American “intelligence-policy divide” (one of Turner’s distinctive traits,²²⁰ also known as the “Kent Doctrine”²²¹). This doctrine asserts that CIA analysis must (and can!) always be “separate” from “policy-making”, and never slip into “advocacy”.²²² A thirty-five year veteran of the CIA calls the divide a “Red Line”, and says, “The ‘Red Line’ is a warning to intelligence officers that, in order to maintain credibility with the policy community, they need

²¹⁸ Cooper, Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis, pages 26-7.

²¹⁹ Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 261.

²²⁰ Turner, “A Distinctive US Intelligence Identity.” *passim*.

²²¹ See Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, pages 214-6. This facet of Kent’s approach was questioned almost immediately by a CIA colleague, Willmore Kendall in a 1949 review of Kent’s book. See Willmore Kendall, “The function of intelligence,” World Politics 1 (1949), page 548-50. See also Jack Davis, “The Kent-Kendall Debate of 1949,” Studies in Intelligence 35.2 (1991), *passim*.

²²² See Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, pages 214-6.

to limit their role to informing policy discussions rather than expressing a policy preference."²²³

However, as Seliktar observes, "the so-called Kent Doctrine [of the intelligence-policy divide]...exuded a strong positivist belief in a 'rational' political universe that experts could objectively analyse by parsing political reality in a detached and dispassionate way."²²⁴ *The notion of a 'Red Line', an intelligence-policy divide, is entirely innocent of the idea that as bureaucrats classify and organise information and knowledge, they exercise power and choice.*²²⁵

We shall see some of the practical consequences of such epistemological naiveté. The group that bombed the World Trade Center in 1993 was for years afterwards referred to by the head of the CIA's Counterterrorist Center (CTC) as "ad hoc terrorists"²²⁶ – a group that spontaneously came together for a one-time operation rather than "al-Qa'ida"; CIA documents going to the NSC (when they referred to bin Ladin at all) called him the "terrorist financier Usama bin Laden."²²⁷ To cite another example, the crucial Special NIE (SNIE) requested by Kennedy just days before the USSR's missiles were discovered (issued 19 September 1962) stated that "the Soviets would not do anything so uncharacteristic, *provocative* and *unrewarding*"²²⁸ as place missiles in Cuba. Policy choices are inescapably embedded in textual decisions, and the CIA's cherished notion of an intelligence-policy divide actively obscures such choices and reinforces a flawed self-image of analysts doing 'science'.

²²³ James E. Steiner, "Challenging the Red Line between Intelligence and Policy," (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, 2004, page 1.

²²⁴ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 214.

²²⁵ Barnett and Finnemore, "The Power, Politics and Pathologies of International Organizations." pages 710-2.

²²⁶ Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 261 and page 279.

²²⁷ Richard A. Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror (New York, NY: Free Press, 2004), page 135 Note that Paul R. Pillar, "Good literature and bad history: The 9/11 commission's tale of strategic intelligence," Intelligence and National Security 21.6 (2006) states that such quotations about bin Ladin appearing as a "mere" financier of terrorism in CIA documents is sharply disputed in Pillar, "Good literature and bad history: The 9/11 commission's tale of strategic intelligence." page 1030-1.

²²⁸ SNIE 85-3-62 "The Military Buildup in Cuba", cited in Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence page 81. The full text of this SNIE has still not been declassified, just the summary pages are available. These thoughts are certainly consistent with the message of the SNIE's summary, which also shares some of the same vocabulary, especially paragraph D of the summary, referring to still-classified SNIE paragraphs 29-33, available in McAuliffe, CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962 pages 91-3.

The social mechanism of isolation further maintained scientism and a reification of 'objectivity'. Westerfield ascribes Dulles's decision to move the CIA out of Washington to the Langley 'campus' as contributing to "Analysts [becoming] more royalist than the king" [i.e. Sherman Kent], and helping them "to idealize their own objectivity and keep policymakers at arm's length."²²⁹ As a result, in 2004 the New York Times could comment:

For decades, the U.S. Intelligence Community has propagated the myth that it possesses analytical methods that must be insulated pristinely from the hurly-burly world of politics. *The CIA has portrayed itself as, and been treated as, a sort of National Weather Service of global affairs. It has relied on this aura of scientific objectivity for its prestige, and to justify its large budgets, despite a record studded with error.*²³⁰

Apart from confirmation that the CIA cultivates an aura of scientific objectivity for its prestige, in this quotation we also see mirror-imaging of intelligence consumers reinforcing this phenomenon.

One can imagine the methodological and epistemological gymnastics required to try to sustain this particular form of 'objectivity' in any but the most mundane analytical situations. Nevertheless, the CIA has fought to preserve this intellectual fossil. It even crops up in articles about improving intelligence analysis. In "Fixing the Problem of Analytical Mindsets: Alternative Analysis", a veteran analyst writes, "*One difficulty with this sort of outside-the-box analysis [that might otherwise improve the CIA's performance] is that it can blur the line between intelligence analysis and policy advocacy.*"²³¹ Such evidence of intellectual tenacity in clinging to an artificial intelligence-policy divide is perhaps the best indicator of the epistemological and methodological limits imposed by the culture and identity of the Agency.

In sum, there is more than ample evidence that scientism and the reification of 'objectivity' and 'reason' is a powerful, pervasive and continuous feature of the CIA's identity and culture from its genesis to 2001.

The CIA's Preference for 'Secrets'

The idea that the CIA prefers secrets over other forms of information was introduced during our discussion of the social mechanisms of Self-selection, in

²²⁹ Westerfield, ed., Inside CIA's Private World: Declassified Articles from the Agency's Internal Journal 1955-1992 page xii.

²³⁰ David Brooks, "The C.I.A: Method and Madness," The New York Times February 3 2004 page A4. Emphasis added.

²³¹ George, "Fixing the Problem of Analytical Mindsets: Alternative Analysis." page 320

some aspects of Socialization (including as Induction; Isolation, Compartmentalisation and Secrecy) and in exploring Mirror-imaging of its consumers, community and main targets.

However, the word 'prefer' does not fully convey the strength of this component of Langley's identity and culture. Instead of a mere preference, what one discovers in examining the identity and culture of the CIA across time is an abiding "belief that *only clandestinely obtained information can be reliable*, and that it is precisely the secrecy in which it is obtained which guarantees this reliability and makes it more credible than other more overt sources of information."²³²

The most powerful generators of this belief might be during the pre-selection phase, in which candidates are drawn to what one CIA veteran calls "The Power of Secret Knowing."²³³ What is indubitable, however, is that stress on secrecy begins – and has always begun since the CIA has existed – with the Active Selection mechanism. The background investigations, polygraph examinations,²³⁴ and nonverbal messages noted above in the discussion of the Active Selection mechanism should have made this factor abundantly clear. In a 1963 passage, for example, Dulles even stresses, "every employee signs an oath which binds him not to divulge anything he learns or does in the course of employment to any unauthorized person...What this means is that an employee cannot discuss the substance of his daily work with his wife or his friends."²³⁵ The day-to-day socialising effects of compartmentalisation and the daily security rituals of 'tradecraft'²³⁶ constantly reinforce this message.

²³² Watt, "The Historiography of Intelligence in International Review." page 185. NB he is not describing US strategic culture here, but captures the idea beautifully.

²³³ Felix, A Short Course in the Secret War, pages 32-46.

²³⁴ For more on the strengths and weaknesses of polygraph examinations to maintain security at the CIA, see John F. Sullivan, Gatekeeper: Memoirs of a CIA Polygraph Examiner (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2007), *passim*. Sullivan was a polygraph examiner with the CIA for thirty-one years, during which time he conducted more tests than anyone in the history of the CIA's program. He acknowledges that there is more art than science in use of the machine, but he stands by its efficacy in the hands of a skilled user.

²³⁵ Dulles, The Craft of Intelligence, page 177. The former director goes on to find an upside to this fact, noting that secrecy quickly ceases to be a burden for many CIA employees, as after all "Most wives, after the honeymoon is over, easily tire of hearing their husbands talk about the office and the intricacies of their business, or of the legal or governmental world in which they work."

²³⁶ One of the first things that the author was taught while working in a USMC communications center was a series of tricks to help remember all the safe combinations required on a day-to-day basis to perform a relatively mundane role.

Robert Gates recalls that when he joined the Agency in 1969, a “culture, and ethic of secrecy” emanated from the DO and permeated the entire organisation. He writes of his DO colleagues:

For them, secrecy is not a convenience or a bureaucratic matter, but the essential tool of their craft – without it, sources are executed, operations fail, case officers’ careers are cut short, and sometimes they and their agents die. Their culture, their ethic were the CIA’s in 1969. They ran the Agency bureaucratically and *dominated it psychologically*. And few question the rightness of that.²³⁷

Secrecy was fetishised right up through 9/11, as the previously-related anecdote regarding new safes and procedures at the CTC to keep information from analysts confirmed.

Even the CIA term “Open Source Intelligence” is indicative of the pervasiveness of this cultural attribute. Treverton in the 1990s could call this term a “Relic of the Cold War” that in and of itself betrays a preference for secret information: “There is one other source besides intelligence’s specialized INTs [e.g. SIGINT, HUMINT, etc.]: everything else. That ‘everything else’ equals open source.”²³⁸ While he notes that the Intelligence Community created the Community Open Source Program Office (COSPO) “as a focal point for innovation in using open sources” by the late 1990s, “COSPO was to be wound down as intelligence returned to a *preoccupation with secrets*.”²³⁹

There is also that basic fact that while some security *is* necessary, it is not the *only* thing that is necessary to intelligence work, especially in those aspects that closely resemble ‘social science’. As Johnston summarised:

Secrecy and efficacy conflict. Secrecy interferes with analytical effectiveness by limiting access to information and sources that may be necessary for accurate or predictive analysis. In turn, openness interferes with security by degrading the value of information sources and by revealing specific sources and methods....Between [the extremes of perfect secrecy and perfect openness] there is some notional point where secrecy and openness converge to create optimal performance trade-off. *My perception is that, within the Intelligence Community, more*

²³⁷ Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, page 33.

²³⁸ Treverton, *Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information*, page 108.

²³⁹ Treverton, *Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information*, page 113. Emphasis added. Though outside the scope of this dissertation, it should be noted that the Director of National Intelligence created the DNI Open Source Center (OS3) based at CIA, effective 1 November 2005. See CIA press release available <https://www.cia.gov/cia/public-affairs/press-release/2005/pr11082005.html>

*organisational emphasis is placed on secrecy than on effectiveness.*²⁴⁰

Without a doubt, a cult of secrets is part of the identity and culture of the CIA. DCI Tenet had a fondness for the phrase “We steal secrets”, to summarise the work of the Agency in public speeches.²⁴¹

More evidence for this trait manifests itself through ‘Overclassification’, in which items receive a higher classification (say ‘Secret’ instead of ‘Confidential’) than they objectively merit in an effort to raise their status.²⁴² A recent *Studies* article states, “Too many policymakers and intelligence officers mistake secrecy for intelligence and assume that information covertly acquired is superior to that obtained openly”.²⁴³ Underlining the mechanism of self-selection, the same article laments that recent CIA recruiting literature suggests to applicants: “You can be on the sidelines, *reading about global events in the newspaper*. Or you can be at the heart of world-shaping events [in the CIA]”. The brochure proposes a world divided between those who read newspapers and are “on the sidelines” and those with access to ‘intelligence’ within the Agency.²⁴⁴

This attribute of the CIA’s identity and culture led an exasperated former staff director of the House Intelligence Committee to tell a CIA Deputy Director bluntly: “We don’t give you brownie points for collecting intelligence by the hardest means available.”²⁴⁵ This cultural penchant for secrets has even become something of a joke at the CIA. A former member of the National Intelligence Council (NIC) reminisces, “At the NIC, we used to quip that if academics sometimes did better than intelligence analysts, it was because the former weren’t denied access to open sources!”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 11. Emphasis added. This CIA, even US government preference for secrecy, of course, is as nothing compared to that of their Soviet counterparts: At the first SALT talks held in 1968, the senior Soviet military negotiators stopped discussions as soon as the American negotiators began to summarise the Soviet nuclear weapons programmes, and asked the Soviet civilian negotiators to leave the room. The military man stated that “they were not cleared for such information, even if it was considered unclassified in the West”. See Pringle, “Arms Control Intelligence”.

²⁴¹ Stephen C. Mercado, “Reexamining the Distinction Between Open Information and Secrets,” Studies in Intelligence 49.2 (2005), fn 2.

²⁴² Jeffrey Richelson, Thomas Blanton and William Burr, “Dubious Secrets,” The National Security Archive 2003. this issue is also addressed on a regular basis by the Federation of American Scientist’s newsletter “Secrecy News”.

²⁴³ Mercado, “Reexamining the Distinction Between Open Information and Secrets.”

²⁴⁴ Mercado, “Reexamining the Distinction Between Open Information and Secrets.”

²⁴⁵ Lowenthal, “Open-Source Intelligence: New Myths, New Realities.” page 274.

²⁴⁶ Treverton, Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information, page 108.

In short, there is generous evidence that several distinct social mechanisms produce in the CIA a privileged regard for 'secrets', and that this fact is a key part of the culture and identity of its members. As the cases below make clear, it is a culture and identity that at times distorts the business of intelligence, which is defined by the CIA itself as "knowledge and foreknowledge of the world around us...that helps consumers, either civilian leaders or military commanders, to consider alternative options and outcomes"²⁴⁷.

The CIA's Drive for Consensus

The fourth and final characteristic of the CIA's culture and identity explored in this dissertation is that it is 'consensus-driven'. This trait does mean merely Janis's 'Group Think' (though it does not exclude it): as described in the literature review, Group Think is a 'hot' psychological process; 'consensus-driven' takes that in, and then includes a colder process of winnowing of information inside the CIA so that it neither disagrees with precedents set by the Agency's prior positions nor dismays other agencies or intelligence consumers. It is enabled in part by the veneer of 'collegiality' discussed above.

While the idea that the CIA particularly is consensus-driven should come as no surprise given its coordinating mandate, this characteristic nevertheless merits examination in strengthening this dissertation's argument. Recall Martin Petersen words cited in the first section of this chapter: "If there is a first principle in producing written intelligence, it is that finished intelligence is a *corporate product, not a personal one.*"²⁴⁸ What form does this drive for a corporate product take?

As Figure 1 summarises, one can posit that this drive for consensus at CIA springs from three social mechanisms: Active Selection, certain aspects of Socialisation, and the Mirror-imaging of both the consumer of intelligence and the wider US Intelligence Community. It is more than a mere bureaucratic imperative, but rather a key feature of the CIA's identity and culture that plays a role in each of the four examples of strategic surprise provided below.

As the initial evidence for this assertion, consider the following interview with an analyst, that provides a "typical description of the analytic process":

When a request comes in from a consumer to answer some question, *the first thing I do is read up on the analytic line. [I] check the previous publications and the data.* Then, I read through the question again and *find where there are links to previous*

²⁴⁷ *A Consumer's Guide to Intelligence*, page vii.

²⁴⁸ Petersen, "Making the Analytic Review Process Work." Emphasis added.

*[Intelligence Community] products. When I think I have an answer, I get together with my group and ask them what they think. We talk about it for a while and come to some consensus on its meaning and the best way to answer the consumer's questions. I write it up, pass it around here, and send it out for review.*²⁴⁹

In the highlighted passages, the analyst is evidently stressing the primacy of the corporate CIA views on a topic (along with providing yet more evidence in favour of intelligence analysis as a social process that section one established, and an example of mirroring the customer that section two discussed). Cooper restates this idea more broadly: "The validity of the earlier judgements expressed in finished products is especially important because of the common practice of 'layering,' that is, using previous, formally coordinated products as the starting point for new assessments and estimates."²⁵⁰ From that evidence, the conclusion that the CIA's is a highly consensus-driven culture is inescapable. DCI Robert Gates's address to analysts shortly after he was confirmed in 1992 (discussed above) is another example.²⁵¹

We not only have anecdotal evidence for the prizing of consensus above other values in analysis. There is also evidence that social pressure not to be an analytical 'outlier' exists in the work environment. One CIA veteran remembers:

As a result of the extensive coordination required to write them, NIEs and SNIEs were sometimes criticized for being the 'lowest common denominator' judgements available in the analytical community. Nevertheless, they were broadly considered the analytical professions most prestigious products...In some circles,

²⁴⁹ Johnston, Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study, page 5 Emphasis added.

²⁵⁰ Cooper, Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis, page 33.

²⁵¹ As recorded above, Gates said: "We do produce a corporate product...Your work...counts because it represents the well-considered views of the entire directorate and, in the case of the National Estimates, the entire Intelligence Community... Analysts must understand and practice the corporate concept. They must discard the academic mindset that says their work is their own, and they must take into account the views of others during the coordination process. See Gates, "Guarding Against Politicization (Transcript of remarks to analysts made on 16 March, 1992 in the CIA auditorium)." Gates goes on to that there was a need for analytical "voices crying in the wilderness" and invited dissenting analysts' views to be sent to him. The ground rules for this practice would not encourage the errant analyst, however: Gates added that such views had to be sent through office directors (i.e. the analysts' superiors), and should not be used for "trivial disputes." He further stipulated that there was "no excuse for breaching discipline and carrying complaints to outside audiences..." Not surprisingly, instead of being a warrant for analytical sedition and a clarion call for greater collegial dissension, Gates' speech was widely seen as muzzling analytical dissent. See; Gentry, "Intelligence Analyst/Manager Relations at the CIA." page 134.

*an analyst could not convincingly claim the status of a proven veteran until he or she had participated in an NIE or a SNIE.*²⁵²

In this passage, note the link between “the ‘lowest common denominator’ judgements” and “the professions most prestigious products”. There is no need to introduce the hot-box small-group dynamics of Group Think to see a consensus-driven culture existing at the CIA.

Roger George, a veteran analyst, agrees. In “Fixing the Problem of Analytical Mindsets: Alternative Analysis” George writes, “Trying to argue against the current analytical line can be seen as undermining teamwork or even a sign of personal self-promotion”.²⁵³ Recall also the “game of footnotes” and its role in channelling dissent discussed above, along with all the data supplied to CIA by the ‘800 lbs gorilla’ of the DOD. Recall too that Gertz said that satisfaction of bureaucratic superiors at the CIA is more important than superior analysis²⁵⁴ for those who wish to get ahead. Then there was Gentry’s claim that managers used staff psychiatrists at Langley’s Office of Security to pressure individuals over issues of analytic substance.²⁵⁵

A quick example of this trait’s role in threat assessment (discussed at greater length in Chapter 5) was described by a retired CIA officer with whom the author corresponded. This source reported how in 1984, the chief of the Soviet Economy Division at the CIA had forcefully argued that the USSR would soon face a Hobson’s choice in the coming five year plan between ‘guns and butter’. The former analyst reported, however, “The problem here (sic) was that in 1984 *the rest of the community - especially the DOD - was not willing to even entertain such an idea*”,²⁵⁶ so the chief’s argument didn’t make it into CIA assessments. Here, CIA culture anticipated (i.e. mirrored) the objections of another Intelligence Community member (i.e. the DOD), and in so doing was complicit in a “discourse failure”²⁵⁷ (i.e. an erroneous threat assessment) prior to a strategic surprise (the downfall of the USSR).

At the risk of being charged with scientism ourselves, we note that a consensus-driven aspect to an identity and culture as a well-spring of surprise is

²⁵² Shreeve, “The Intelligence Community Case Method Program: A National Intelligence Estimate on Yugoslavia.” page 333 Emphasis added.

²⁵³ George, “Fixing the Problem of Analytical Mindsets: Alternative Analysis.” page 323

²⁵⁴ Gertz, “CIA officials ‘cooked books,’ ex-analyst says.” page A3.

²⁵⁵ Gentry, “Intelligence Analyst/Manager Relations at the CIA.” page 140-1.

²⁵⁶ Personal email correspondence between the author and a retired CIA source who wished to remain anonymous, arranged by Allen Thomson on 5 October, 2007.

²⁵⁷ For a wider treatment of this view of the collapse of the USSR, see Neil Robinson, Ideology and the collapse of the Soviet system: A critical history of the Soviet ideological discourse (Aldershot, UK: Elgar Publishers, 1995).

consistent with either Lakatos²⁵⁸ or Kuhn's²⁵⁹ theories of the role of criticism in the growth of knowledge.

In conclusion, influential social structures like the review and coordination process, combined with powerful social mechanisms like Self- and Active Selection, ersatz 'collegiality', and mirror-imaging produce a culture and identity in the CIA that is strongly consensus-driven at the expense of other values and viewpoints (notwithstanding the demonstrated pretence to the contrary). Chapters Five and Six link this drive's working through several phases of the intelligence cycle to erroneous threat assessment and to strategic surprise.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 has performed three roles. Section One introduced social constructivism, and demonstrated that it is well suited to investigating intelligence analysis.

Section Two answered the question 'What are the social mechanisms that shape and maintain the identity and culture of the CIA?' These were identified as Self-selection, Active Selection, types of socialization, and mirroring of intelligence consumers, partners and targets. We also saw how these mechanisms interlock and reinforce each other.

Section Three then concluded the chapter by answering the question 'Given those social mechanisms, what have been persistent features of the resulting identity and culture of the CIA?' These were found to be homogeneity of personnel; scientism and the reification of narrow forms of objectivity and reason; a preference for secret over openly-obtained information; and a drive for consensus.

In the following chapters, we explore via case studies how these four properties of identity and culture become the key variables to understand both mystery-based and secrets-based strategic surprises.

²⁵⁸ Imré Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, eds. Imré Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), *passim*.

²⁵⁹ Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), *passim*.

Chapter 4 – Case Selection & Organisational Rationale

Before diving into the cases in the next two chapters, three brief introductory discussions about the selection and internal organisation of the cases are in order, and that is the role of this chapter.

The first section of this chapter explains the criteria employed for selecting the four cases of strategic surprise analysed in this dissertation: the Iranian revolution of 1979, the collapse of the USSR, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. It first explains why case studies are needed at all, and then what filters were applied to choose those used to elucidate the hypothesis.

The second section elaborates on the distinction used extensively in the literature of intelligence, the difference between 'Mysteries' and 'secrets'. This distinction is important because though the analytical problems associated with each type of failure have attributes in common, the 'unknowable but perhaps foreseeable' (a mystery), and the 'knowable but unknown action of an adversary' (a secret) are logically distinct. This divide is important to elucidate for three reasons. Firstly, it is a basic organising principle of intelligence work; secondly, it bears on the case selection criteria discussed below. (As we also see, apologists for the CIA sometimes attempt to blur this distinction following surprises, so it is important to inoculate ourselves against this sort of chicanery before proceeding.) Third, the distinction has heretofore been used to wall-off mystery-based surprises from consideration by the 'orthodox school' of strategic surprise, whereas this dissertation is pursuing an understanding of surprise based on erroneous threat assessment, which allows it to consider surprises rooted in both.

The final section of this Chapter introduces the internal framework around which all four cases studies – Chapter 5's mysteries and Chapter 6's secrets – are organised: the so-called 'intelligence cycle'. The intelligence cycle is how the Community describes the fundamental processes of intelligence. Here it is used to provide a coordinating structure to examine the social construction of surprise in each case study in depth. It is, however, merely a lens to focus on how the four central characteristics of the CIA's culture and identity revealed in Chapter 3 interact and translate into specific failures in gathering, analysing and distributing intelligence prior to strategic surprises. Its iterative nature is also central to our findings in Chapter 7.

Section I: Case Selection Criteria

As the introduction to this chapter said, this dissertation examines four examples of strategic surprise: the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, the downfall of the USSR, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and 9/11. This section answers the questions 'Why uses cases at all?' and 'How were these cases selected?'

'Why use cases at all?' can be swiftly dismissed. As Historians never tire of reminding IR scholars,¹ each instance of strategic surprise is distinct,

¹ This is in no way to trivialize an important and illuminating debate between historians and political scientists (i.e. between the so-called the ideographic and nomothetic approaches to the past). For the uses of history in and for intelligence see Len Scott and R. Gerald Hughes, "Intelligence, crises and security: Lessons from history?," Intelligence and National Security 21.5 (2006). For an extended exploration of how the disciplines of International Relations and History approach "the same" material, see Milo Jones, "History in *Foreign Affairs*, 1965-2000," Masters, University of Kent, 2003 pages 16-29. See also Philip E. Tetlock and Richard Ned Lebow, "Poking Counterfactual Holes in Covering Laws: Cognitive Styles and Historical Reasoning," American Political Science Review 95.4 (2001); A. H. Birch, "Historical Explanation and the Study of Politics," Government and Opposition 4 (1969); G. A. Craig, "The Historian and the Study of International Relations," The American Historical Review 88 (1983); Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, eds., Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations (BCSIA Studies in International Security) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); John Lewis Gaddis, "In Defense of Particular Generalization: Rewriting Cold War History, Rethinking International Relations Theory," Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations (BCSIA Studies in International Security), eds. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); A. N. Gilbert, "International Relations and the Relevance of History," International Studies Quarterly 12 (1968); R. Hall and F. Kratochwil, "Medieval Tales: Neorealist 'Science' and the Abuse of History," International Organization 47 (1993); E. Ingram, "The Wonderland of the Political Scientist," International Security 22 (1997); J. S. Levy, "Too Important to Leave to the Other: History and Political Science in the Study of International Relations," International Security 22.Summer (1997); I. S. Lustick, "History, Historiography and Political Science: Multiple Historical records and the Problem of Selection Bias," American Political Science Review 90 (1996); Lustick, "History, Historiography and Political Science." P. W. Schroeder, "History and International Relations Theory: Not Use or Abuse, but Fit or Misfit," International Security 22 (1997); Schroeder, "Not Use or Abuse, but Fit or Misfit." For how leaders use and misuse history in foreign-policy decision making, see L. M. Bagby, "The Use and Abuse of Thucydides in International Relations," International Organization 48 (1994); Alexander Dallin, "Learning in U.S. Policy Towards the Soviet Union in the 1980s," Learning in U.S. And Soviet Foreign Policy, ed. George Breslauer; Philip Tetlock (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), Michael G. Fry, ed., History, the White House and the Kremlin: Statesmen as Historians (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), Barbara A. Spellman; Keith J. Holyoak, "If Saddam Is Hitler Then Who Is George Bush? Analogical Mapping between Systems of Social Roles," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 62.6 (1992), David Patrick Houghton, "The Role of Analogical Reasoning in Novel Foreign-Policy Situations," British Journal of Political Science 26 (1996), Yuen Foong Khong, "From Rotten Apples to Falling Dominos to Munich: The Problem of Reasoning by Analogy About Vietnam," Harvard, 1987, Yuen Foong Khong, "Seduction by Analogy in Vietnam: The Malaya and Korean Analogies," Institutions and Leadership: Prospects for the Future, ed. Kenneth Thompson (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1987), Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War : Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965 (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992), J. S. Levy, "Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," International Organization 48 (1994a), Scot

exceptional and the result of human agency combining with chance in multifaceted ways.

It is for exactly that reason, however, that cases are useful: Collier says “Scholars [who] are deeply engaged both with theory and with the close analysis of cases” are granted “an unusual capacity to see the general in the particular”.² One of the strengths of constructivism discussed in Chapter 3 was its ability to “extract new ideas at close range”³ from specific social milieus while simultaneously providing an Olympian theoretical viewpoint. A constructivist theory with no case studies is almost an oxymoron, a “Columbus without America”.⁴ The initial puzzle this research set out to answer is meaningless without examples of erroneous threat assessments, strategic surprises, and Cassandras.

Why and how, then, were these *particular* cases chosen to explore the social construction of strategic surprise? This is an important question.⁵ In a recent book, Zeev Maoz observes, “one often gets the impression that the use

Macdonald, Rolling the Iron Dice: Historical Analogies and the Decisions to Use Military Force in Regional Contingencies (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), Scot Macdonald, “Hitler's Shadow: Historical Analogies and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait,” Diplomacy & Statecraft 13.4 (2002), Dwain Mefford, “Analogical Reasoning and the Definition of the Situation: Back to Snyder for Concepts and Forward to Artificial Intelligence for Method,” New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy, ed. Charles Herman; Charles Kegley; James Rosenau (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers (New York: Free Press; Collier Macmillan, 1986), O. Njølstad, “Learning from History? Case Studies and the Limits to Theory Building,” Arms Races: Technological and Political Dynamics, ed. N. P. Gleditsch O. Njølstad (London: SAGE/International Peace Research Institute Oslo, 1990), Jeffrey Record, Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002), Michael Roskin, “From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: Shifting Generational Paradigms and Foreign Policy,” Political Science Quarterly 89.Fall (1974), Howard; Rieger Schuman, Cheryl, “Historical Analogies, Generational Effects, and Attitudes toward War,” American Sociological Review 57.June (1992), Yaacov Y. I. Vertzberger, “Foreign Policy Decisionmakers as Practical-Intuitive Historians: Applied History and Its Shortcomings,” International Studies Quarterly 30 (1986), Yaacov Y.I. Vertzberger, The World and Their Minds: Information Processing, Cognition and Perception in Foreign Policy Decision Making (Stamford: Stamford University Press, 1990).

² David Collier, “Letter from the president: Data, field work, and extracting new ideas at close range,” APSA-CP - Newsletter of the Organized Section in Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association 10.1 (1999).

³ Collier, “Letter from the president: Data, field work, and extracting new ideas at close range.”

⁴ The phrase was originally Dostoevsky's: in *The Possessed* Pyotr Stepanovitch says to Stavrogin: “Without you I am nothing. Without you I am a fly, a bottled idea; Columbus without America”. It was later used to encapsulate the life and work of the Anarchist Mikhail Bakunin.

⁵ Chan, “The Intelligence of Stupidity: Understanding Failures in Strategic Warning.” pages 174-9 discusses “Availability Bias, Hindsight Bias, and Problems of Pluralism” specifically in the context of choosing cases to study strategic surprise. The cases that follow were screened in light of his points generally, though hindsight bias is especially difficult to eliminate.

of the case study [in IR] absolves the author from any kind of methodological considerations. Case studies have become in many cases a synonym for freeform research where everything goes”.⁶ Undoubtedly, it can also be true that, in Geddes’ words, “The cases you choose [can] affect the answers you get.”⁷ Caution – or at least awareness of one’s choices in case selection⁸ – must be exercised. In the specific field of strategic surprise, as early as the 1980s Ariel Levite stressed the theoretical importance of using multiple rather than single cases⁹ (as Wohlstetter¹⁰ did).

Conversely, if the set of cases considered is expanded in an attempt to counter suspicions of selectivity, other dilemmas arise: numerous authors have pointed out that the formal selection criteria appropriate for large-*N* studies are not necessarily useful for most qualitative approaches.¹¹ The use of too many cases also lead back to charges of cherry-picking of evidence through superficial treatment. Thus, exactly which cases, how many cases, and the depth with which each case is investigated are essential questions to engage in

⁶ Zeev Maoz, “Case study methodology in international studies: From storytelling to hypothesis testing,” Evaluating Methodology in International Studies, eds. F. P. Harvey and M Brecher (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

⁷ B. Geddes, “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics,” Political Analysis: An Annual Publication of the Methodology Section of The American Political Science Association, ed. J. A. Stimson, vol. 2 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990), *passim*.

⁸ Aspects of case selection and use are somewhat akin to the problem faced by archaeologists when reconstructing a site (though not nearly as severe). When the author worked at the site of the *Sanctuary of the Great Gods* on the Greek Island of Samothrace in 1993, the Director of the dig was always careful to point out that the site as a whole comprised evidence from the Neolithic to “The 20th Century pig-farmer stage”: what is finally reconstructed after excavations is only a single, at times arbitrary – even political – choice. See also Philip L. Kohl and Clare Fawcett, eds., Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1994).. Schroeder employs a similar metaphor when he says: “Misfit leading to misuse or abuse occurs when [people] fail to understand or to keep sufficiently in mind that historical ‘facts’...are pieces of sculpture, and do not work well as building blocks.” He concludes “The sign I am trying to post on historical terrain...is not ‘Keep Off—Private Property’ (which would be absurd) but rather ‘Thin Ice’ ” See Schroeder, “Not Use or Abuse, but Fit or Misfit.” pages 71-3. For a 1950’s view of the role of history in intelligence estimating, see Cyrus H. Peake, “History’s Role in Intelligence Estimating,” Studies in Intelligence 3.1 (1959).. Historians certainly played a large role in the CIA’s forerunner, the OSS and in the Agency’s early days; for a list of the most prominent among them, see Winks, Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961, pages 495-7.

⁹ Levite, Intelligence and Strategic Surprises, pages 61 and 175.

¹⁰ Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision.

¹¹ Cf. D. Collier and Mahoney J., “Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research,” World Politics 49 (1996), Geddes, “Selection Bias in Comparative Politics.”, Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), and James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, “A tale of two cultures: Contrasting quantitative and qualitative research,” Political Analysis 14.3 (2006).

hypothesis testing rather than story telling that points to a pre-cooked result.¹² Therefore, this section explains the criteria used to select the cases of strategic surprise used here. At the same time, it justifies why other possible cases of strategic surprise were excluded.

The four cases chosen mix mysteries and secrets, relatively complete failures with more subtle occurrences; they span almost five decades, and arguably address the most dramatic and important instances of strategic surprise in the CIA's history. Most importantly, the examples to follow use pre-existing categories used by the Intelligence Community (secrets and mysteries), and examples that the community itself takes as paradigmatic of each category (attacks and social upheaval).

The first criterion for selecting the cases used was their chronological fit with the scope of the topic: the strategic surprises in question had to occur between the founding of the CIA in 1947 and the present.

The second criterion was purely practical: the schedule of both CIA declassification and/or the lag before the appearance of peer-reviewed literature and the publication of the memoirs of participants places limits on how recent the strategic surprises discussed can be. This means that near-contemporary potential cases such as the US failure to find WMD after the 2003 invasion of Iraq are removed from consideration: one cannot be reasonably sure that an adequate picture of the course of events at the CIA is yet available. In some instances, one factor helps balance another: though much of the CIA's internal analysis of the situation in Iran remains classified, enough time has passed for the literature on the Islamic Revolution to be enriched by the memoirs and considered scholarship of participants.¹³ In the 9/11 case, the converse is true: raw intelligence documents are not yet fully enriched by numerous measured

¹² Maoz, "Case study methodology in international studies: From storytelling to hypothesis testing." *passim*.

¹³ These are cited in the text below, but see for example, J. A. Bill, The Eagle and the Lion: the Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981 (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983); Cynthia Helms, An Ambassador's Wife in Iran (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1981); Richard Helms and William Hood, A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency (New York: Ballantine, 2003); M. Rafizadeh, Witness: From the Shah to the secret arms deal: An insider's account of U.S. involvement in Iran (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1987); B. Rubin, Paved with Good Intentions: the American Experience in Iran (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980); Gary Sick, All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran (New York: Random House, 1985); Gary Sick, "Iran: A view from the White House," World Affairs 149 (1987).

memoirs. Compounding the possible “problem of silent evidence”¹⁴ with cases too close to our own day is the fact that the entire US Intelligence Community was reorganised after 9/11, and it is too soon to say whether these exogenous changes substantially altered CIA’s identity and culture.¹⁵

The unevenness of direct primary source material about each case is further compensated for in *Constructing Cassandra* through the abundance of indirect primary sources (such as articles from *Studies in Intelligence* and other CIA documents from the period) that while not directly addressing the surprises in question *do* directly address the culture and identity of the CIA in that era. In the case of the Iranian Revolution, for example, that section draws upon the CIA guide, “Warnings of Revolution”, published in 1980.¹⁶

The third criterion applied was positive rather than negative: the desirability of a chronological thread several decades long. Issues related to the social construction of culture and identity are most interesting – and convincing – when they are a ‘film’ rather than a ‘snapshot’ i.e., when they span a reasonable length of time. For this reason, strategic surprises from the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and the new millennium are utilised. Constants of the CIA’s identity and culture are also more convincing when the cases span twelve Directors of Central Intelligence (DCIs - John McCone, appointed 29 November 1961, to George Tenet, who retired on 24 September, 2004).¹⁷

The fourth screen used was that the cases had to be of *direct* US national interest. This criterion is an obvious fit with the definition of strategic surprise employed, but there is more to it than that. The CIA was surprised by other events such as the Falklands/Malvinas War, and giving warning for such events *is* within its remit. In Chapter 2’s literature survey, too, we saw there is a large body of theoretical literature addressing strategic surprises, such as the Yom Kippur War, in which the CIA also undoubtedly took a strong interest. To

¹⁴ See Chapter 8: Giacomo Casanova’s Unfailing Luck: the Problem of Silent Evidence in Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*.

¹⁵ For a good overview of these reforms and the indeterminacy created by them, see Richard A. Falkenrath, “The 9/11 Commission Report: A Review Essay,” *International Security* 29.3 (2004/05), pages 185-8. In this new world, are the social mechanisms of self-selection, active selection, socialization, and mirror-imaging behaving as before? What *is* known is that as of 2008, over sixty percent of analysts in the Intelligence Community as a whole have been hired since 2002. See “CI Centre Course 560: Middle Eastern Intelligence Services and Terrorist Organizations,” *Counter-Intelligence Centre Podcasts* (United States: The Counter-Intelligence Centre, 2007).

¹⁶ Excerpted in Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 261.

¹⁷ For an institutional history of these directors, see Douglas F. Garthoff, *Directors of Central Intelligence as Leaders of the US Intelligence Community* (Washington, DC: The Center for the Study of Intelligence, The Central Intelligence Agency, 2005), pages 41 to 276.

address such cases, however, muddies the waters of this analysis, because critics could argue that the CIA was surprised simply because these incidents were peripheral to the policy concerns of the CIA's intelligence 'customers' – that the Agency's Tasking, Collection and Analysis was only focussed on *vital* America interests.

The fifth, related, criterion for the cases selected was the 'importance' of the surprise in question: while a minor 'strategic surprise' is almost an oxymoron¹⁸, there are some (relatively) less consequential US intelligence failures discussed in the literature, such as the Indian nuclear weapons tests in 1996.¹⁹

The sixth criterion was dealt with above: maintaining equilibrium between mysteries and secrets. Doing so allows the fullest exercising of the hypothesis that strategic surprises are the result of erroneous threat perceptions are therefore socially constructed. This criterion balances both the logical and practical aspects of the problem strategic intelligence – it links back to the common sense view of strategic surprise as broad intelligence failures in which one can seek to discover commonalities.

Before closing this section, there are two other factors regarding case selection to discuss briefly.

The first is that to test fully the sturdiness and utility of this theory, not all of the strategic surprises discussed are entirely clear-cut. The first case for example, the fall of the Shah, is a major, almost utterly uncontested²⁰ strategic surprise. The second case, however, the collapse of the USSR, *is* contested – even among CIA analysts and senior policymakers today – as constituting a true

¹⁸ Cf. the definition of strategic surprise given in Chapter 1: "the sudden realisation that one has been operating on the basis of an erroneous threat perception which occurs through failure to predict, much less anticipate, an acute and immediate foreign threat to the vital national interests." Also relevant is the US Marine Corps definition of "Unacceptable" or "Predictable" strategic surprises, also cited above. As a reminder, these surprises are characterised by three factors: "1. the event is contrary to one's expectations; 2. the event has no, or deeply inadequate, advanced warning; and, 3. the event reveals patently inadequate preparation."

¹⁹ Cf. the Appendix "Empirical Studies of Surprise: A Bibliography" in Levite, "Intelligence and Strategic Surprises." page 189-190; and Davis, "Improving CIA Analytic Performance: Strategic Warning." *passim*, and Turner, Why Secret Intelligence Fails, page 158.

²⁰ The only partial exception discovered has been Douglas MacEachin, Janne Nolan and Kristine Tockman, Iran: Intelligence Failure or Policy Stalemate? (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University, 2004), which attempts to position it as a "policy stalemate", and shift the burden from the CIA to policymakers. MacEachin also defends the CIA's record on the USSR in Douglas J. MacEachin, CIA Assessments of the Soviet Union: The Record Versus the Charges (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1996).

surprise. We try not to stray into the ‘warner’ versus ‘warnee’ debates, but as a matter of both intellectual integrity and because the debate itself throws light on the social construction of strategic surprise, the ‘case for the defence’ vis-à-vis the USSR surprise is given a hearing.

The second general point regarding case selection is that though the cases are not presented chronologically, the evidence for the hypothesis as a whole *is* intended to be additive. Exactly because the key explanatory attributes of the CIA’s identity and culture discussed in Chapter 3 (homogeneity of personnel, scientism and/or the reification of ‘objectivity’ and ‘reason’, excessive regard for ‘Secrets’ over other categories of information, and a drive for consensus above other analytical values) are demonstrably persistent over the entire interval considered, the cases and the evidence within them are intended to be *cumulative* and *complementary*. The demonstrable persistence of cultural traits at the CIA allows us to move comfortably from a case of the 1970s, to a case of the late 1980s, then back to a case in the 1960s before closing with a near-contemporary incident. The CIA’s Tasking in the 1970s, for example, neglected the internal situation in Iran partly because secret telemetry data about the USSR’s missile programs gathered from SIGINT stations in Iran was considered a higher priority. The Siren calls of that same secret Russian telemetry data should be borne in mind as we consider the neglect of open source indications of the collapse of the USSR.

Similarly, there are not in each and every case study exact data points – anecdotes and evidence – offered to slot neatly into every block in the frameworks offered in Figure 5 and Figure 8 below (and nor is there an attempt to shoe-horn evidence in). Among other reasons, this is because one person’s Analysis problem is another person’s Tasking problem, and because the features of identity and culture creating these problems are inextricably intertwined. In short, there are never absolute causal links among intersubjective variables, because causal relationships can only exist between independently existing entities.²¹ Again, the choice of the intelligence cycle as an organising device within the cases was made partly to highlight this element of constructivism.

At the same time, the cases contain an abundance of overlapping anecdotes and evidence that, in the language of regression analysis, ‘fit the curve’: individually and as a whole, portrait that they paint reinforce the

²¹ Wendt, Social Theory, pages 167.

hypothesis the CIA's identity and culture are the key to understanding how repeated strategic surprises have occurred. Historically unique qualities of each surprise that have explanatory power and that do 'fit the curve' are also included, even when they protrude slightly beyond the boundaries of each phase of the intelligence cycle; as Bernstein *et al* say, "God gave Physics the easy problems",²² because their categories are composed of natural facts.

Section II: Strategic Surprises: Secrets and Mysteries

In both the literature and practice of intelligence analysis, a distinction is made between 'Secrets' and 'mysteries'.²³ Introducing this distinction now is analogous to Darwin opening *The Origin of Species* with a chapter on pigeon breeding:²⁴ it is a commonly agreed point of reference from which one can progress to controversy.

In Hollywood's view of intelligence, secrets are the CIA's *raison d'être* – clandestinely obtaining plans, blueprints, maps or hidden facts from an opponent.²⁵ For our purposes, the central point is made by Berkowitz and Goodman: 'Secrets' they say are "*facts that actually exist, but which the opponent is trying to hide*".²⁶

In the real world, while obtaining 'secrets' matters to the CIA (in fact, as is argued here, sometimes matters too much!), Hollywood grossly exaggerates their importance. Secrets have never been the sole focus of the Agency's work: 'Mysteries' also bear on the tasks that intelligence agencies are charged with because so many of their tasks involve prediction (either explicitly or implicitly).

The difficulty, as Treverton points out, is that a secret is like a puzzle, and "puzzles are relatively stable."²⁷ Such puzzles can also be relatively value-free: either a cache of nerve gas exists or it does not. Moreover, in the realm of secrets, an insightful adage obtains: "If a critical piece is missing one day, it usually remains valuable the next".

²² Steven Bernstein, Richard Ned Lebow, Janice Gross Stein and Steven Weber, "God Gave Physics the Easy Problems: Adapting Social Science to an Unpredictable World," *European Journal of International Relations* 6.1 (2000), *passim*.

²³ Cf. J. S. Nye, "Peering into the Future," *Foreign Affairs* 77 (1994), pages 86-8.

²⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2003), Chapter 1, pages 31-59.

²⁵ For a comparison between the popular view of intelligence work and the "reality" of it, written by a former Inspector General of the CIA, see Hitz, *The Great Game: The Myths and Reality of Espionage*.

²⁶ Berkowitz and Goodman, *Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age*, pages 74-5. Emphasis added.

²⁷ Gregory F. Treverton, "Risks and Riddles," *Smithsonian* 2007. Accessed online, no page number.

Mysteries, in contrast, pose a “question that has no definitive answer because the answer is contingent”.²⁸ The answers to mysteries cannot be definitively answered through a covert – or overt – operation, they can only be “framed by identifying the critical factors and applying some sense of how they have interacted in the past and might interact in the future.”²⁹ The distinction is vital to this thesis because it seems to argue in favour of the division of the world that the orthodox school of strategic surprise has always advocated, i.e. that strategic surprises that stem from mysteries and those that stem from secrets are of such a different character that they cannot be analysed together. The argument here is that because all strategic surprises have their origins in erroneous threat assessments, one can find common features that link them (and thus also arrive at a theory of strategic surprise logically prior to any of the orthodox school’s explanations of secrets-based surprises).

In favour of this approach is that while it is logically necessary and methodologically useful to distinguish between the two surprise types, no strategic surprises are ‘pure types,’ i.e. strategic surprises invariably contain elements that stem from both sources.

One aspect of the CIA’s miscalculation about Iran’s stability that illustrates this point is that prior to his exile the Agency was ignorant of the Shah’s grave medical condition – a secret that he kept from even his most trusted advisors. Nevertheless, it is difficult to make the case that the Iranian revolution was foreseeable primarily through the acquisition of the Shah’s recent medical records. The revolutionary events of 1979 were a multi-causal and at times randomly determined set of events that remain to this day a mystery in many respects.

Moreover, to say that something is a mystery is different from saying that it was *unforeseeable*, or that better warnings could not have been provided through the acquisition of both secret and non-secret information. Above, the introduction to this chapter mentioned that a frequent defence of the CIA’s analytical performance following a strategic surprise is to disown the ‘mysteries business’ entirely, or to muddle the logical distinction between mysteries and secrets. For the first case study, a great example of this phenomenon is the rationalisation given former DCI Richard Helms (who was also Ambassador to Iran, 1973-76). After the Iranian revolution, Helms conceded, “Certainly it would have been useful to have advance knowledge...But *the participants in the*

²⁸ Treverton, “Risks and Riddles.”

²⁹ Treverton, “Risks and Riddles.”

*uprising did not themselves have that foreknowledge. It is thus questionable whether more contacts with religious and bazaar elements would have provided it.*³⁰ Helms here implies that CIA's threat assessments look better when "even the participants didn't know what would happen".

In the same manner, Ken Adelman, a member of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, in an interview with National Public Radio in 2002, trots out a similar defence for the CIA's performance regarding the implosion of the USSR: "Mikhail Gorbachev shaking up the Communist system through *perestroika* and *glasnost* was out there for everyone to see, but it was a *mystery* how it would all play out. *Gorbachev himself and even his KGB didn't know, so how could the CIA?*"³¹

Of course, mysteries are contingent events that no one can predict with absolute certainty. As we explore, however, this manner of defending the Agency's record – especially concerning these two particular strategic surprises – is disingenuous, especially coming from men with intelligence backgrounds. We demonstrate decisively that such intellectual humility was in short supply at CIA *prior* to these mysterious events. Indeed, *ab ovo* Sherman Kent asserted that the prediction of mysteries in human affairs is "a feasible intelligence task, provided that intelligence learns to use the methods being developed in the social sciences."³² Enormous predictive hubris contemporary to these events and – ironically – linked to erroneous threat assessments, is documented below.

Furthermore, statements such as these set up the straw man of absolute precision and omniscience as the only criterion by which to judge the CIA's record. It has been clear since 1947 that one of the CIA's main roles is to serve as a 'safety valve' to "help reduce uncertainty about potential threats as well as a source for identifying opportunities to promote the national interests".³³

³⁰ Stephen S. Rosenfeld, "Knowing the Outs as Well as the Ins," The Washington Post 1979, page A17. Emphasis added. The by-then pitiable Shah, speaking from his deathbed exile in Mexico, was equally convinced of the mystery of his end, calling the upheaval in Iran "unnatural and unpredictable". See Bill Gold, "The Shah Was Also Surprised," The Washington Post November 19 1979, page B10.

³¹ "Difference between a secret and a mystery when it comes to intelligence failures," All Things Considered (8:00 PM ET) USA: National Public Radio, 2002. Emphasis added. It is interesting to discover that one 'secret' that was probably actually a mystery is the burden of Soviet Defense spending on the USSR. While certainly much greater than CIA estimates (see below), the true burden was probably not known to anyone, including Gorbachev. See Noel E. Firth and James H. Noren, Soviet Defense Spending: A History of CIA Estimates 1950-1990 (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, 1998), pages 188 to 191.

³² Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence, page 173.

³³ Turner, Why Secret Intelligence Fails, page 6.

Helms's and Adelman's arguments intentionally obscure the simple distinction made by Paul Saffo, a prominent expert on prediction between 'accurate' versus 'effective' forecasts: effective forecasts are not be completely accurate, but they "define the cone of uncertainty", i.e. they effectively "delineate the possibilities that extend from a particular moment or event," and "tell you what you need to know to take meaningful action in the present".³⁴ In the language of strategic surprise, Saffo argues for a 'high quality' warning.³⁵

Intelligence consumers share this view. Brzezinski puts it with characteristic clarity in his memoirs: "Failure [in Iran] is not so much a matter of particular intelligence reports or even specific policies"; instead it was "a deeper intellectual misjudgement of a central historical reality".³⁶ As a Washington Post editorial opined in December, 1979, "What is the purpose of intelligence...if not to arm policy-makers with the best available materials of decision? Helms' dismissal of what greater professionalism might have produced in Tehran turns the intelligence creed upside down."³⁷

George Allen produced a similar view reflecting on almost twenty years of working on another intelligence failure, the Vietnam War: "Intelligence," Allen says, must "detect and report incipient trends and patterns, anticipate changes, be 'ahead of the curve'. Intelligence staffs should never be satisfied with merely reporting, analyzing and interpreting what *has* happened; they must concern themselves with what *is* happening now, and *where it seems likely to take us*"³⁸ Finally there is the view of one of the deans of strategic surprise, Richard Betts: "Warning need not be conclusive to be credible, assuming that its function is to alert leaders to danger even if the evidence does not warrant firm prediction."³⁹ With mysteries, absolute precision and omniscience is not expected of the CIA; adequate strategic warning of possibilities is.

The second, related, misuse of the mysteries/secrets distinction can be dealt with summarily: the reframing of secrets as mysteries. As an example, one particularly egregious mischaracterisation relates to 9/11 – from an expert who, as a senior terrorism policy analyst at RAND, Gregory Treverton – suffices.

³⁴ Saffo, "Six Rules for Effective Forecasting." page 1.

³⁵ See especially Levite, Intelligence and Strategic Surprises, pages 27-8, 34, 159.

³⁶ Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981 (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), page 397.

³⁷ Rosenfeld, "Knowing the Outs as Well as the Ins." page A17.

³⁸ Allen, None So Blind: a Personal Account of the Intelligence Failure in Vietnam, page 161. Emphasis added.

³⁹ Betts, "Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy: A Review of Ariel Levite's Intelligence and Strategic Surprises." page 331.

In a 2007 article, Treverton says “until the 9/11 hijackers actually boarded their airplanes, their plan was a *mystery*, the clues to which were buried in too much ‘noise’ – too many threat scenarios”⁴⁰. The reply to this statement is to contrast the Shah’s knowledge of likely future events in late 1978, or Gorbachev’s knowledge of future events in 1988, with Usama Bin Ladin’s knowledge of likely events in the summer of 2001 (or, in keeping with our other secrets case, with Khrushchev’s knowledge of Soviet plans for Cuba in the summer of 1962). Obviously, the epistemological gap is immense: the former two involve genuine contingency and the interaction of an immense number of agents and structures; the latter two involve advanced plans and clearly delineated chains of human intention and agency. The first two cases are things that “nobody can know for certain,” while the latter two primarily involve “bits of information that exist somewhere but to which one does not have direct access”.⁴¹ Intentionally clouding the distinction prevents lucid thinking about these problems, and thus does an active disservice to how such strategic surprises occur. Conversely, if the epistemological distinction between a mystery and a secret is not clear to the CIA’s partisans, then the lack of methodological self-awareness at the CIA documented below runs even deeper than is alleged here.

To close this section - and as a prelude to the Iran case - the thoughts of another intelligence consumer, Gary Sick (principle NSC aide for Iran in the White House during the revolution), are worthy of reflection. In a section of his memoirs entitled “From Chess Board to Hurricane”, Sick wrote:

The classic model of foreign policy decision making is the chessboard, but the Iranian crisis was not in any sense comparable to a chess game. A chess game involves two opponents competing over a well-defined territory according to agreed rules, with the ability to observe each move as it takes place. The process is incremental, goal-oriented, competitive and fundamentally rational, although the greatest players display creativity and boldness as well. Governments are organised to deal with chesslike questions.⁴² They examine the position of players, consider the relevant factors and evaluate available options. There is another model of decision-making that is more of a hurricane model... A hurricane is not a calculated act, and its internal logic can produce some whimsical twists and turns. Careful observation and a knowledge of historical patterns are helpful but seldom conclusive... [Of course] the Iranian revolution was not a force of nature. It was ‘man-made’ in the sense that it was the tumultuous outcome of decades of accumulated

⁴⁰ Treverton, “Risks and Riddles.” Emphasis added.

⁴¹ Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence, page 236n.

⁴² Cf the CIA’s predilection to characterize its Analysts as chess players discussed in Chapter 3.

human acts, encouraged and exploited by various men for their own political objectives. Unlike a hurricane, the revolution was susceptible to some measure of human manipulation and crude adjustment.⁴³

A political hurricane can also, if the right 'barometers' are watched, be at least foreseen as a *possibility*, but in 1979, the CIA's attention was elsewhere for reasons we describe.

In the cases that follow, this section's excursus into the distinction between mysteries and secrets – the unknowable and the knowable – is a point of reference for determining elements of strategic surprises that can be laid fairly at the door of the CIA's identity and culture.

Section III: The Intelligence Cycle

Chapter 3 explicated four central properties of the CIA's identity and culture and the social mechanisms involved in their formation; the section above distinguished between two types of strategic surprises. This section provides the framework used to operationalise the case material: a way of organising intelligence activities to understand better how identity and culture make specific surprises possible.

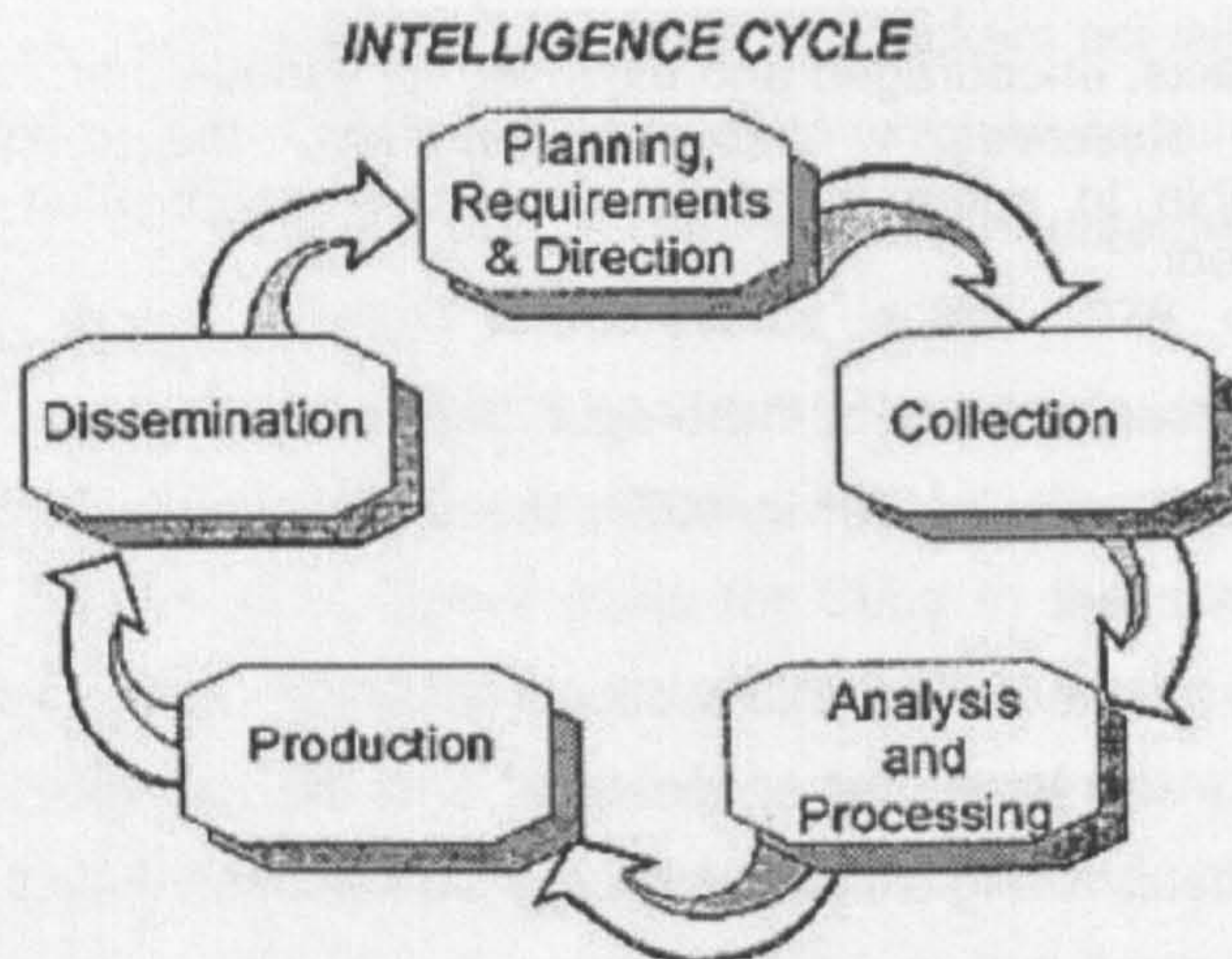
The framework employed is well known to intelligence practitioners,⁴⁴ the so-called 'intelligence cycle'. It is reproduced schematically in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The Intelligence Cycle⁴⁵

⁴³ Sick, All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran, page 44-5.

⁴⁴ Examples of prominence/use of the intelligence cycle can be found in A Consumer's Guide to Intelligence. and Factbook on Intelligence, (Washington DC: Office of Public Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency, 1997), pages 12-14.

⁴⁵ Graphic taken from: <http://www.fas.org/irp/eprint/ic2000/ic2000.htm>



Defining the Steps

As is evident from the diagram, the intelligence cycle is a five-step process. The first step (though as a cycle, it is conceived of as iterative, and thus “first” is actually a misnomer)⁴⁶, involves planning what intelligence is desired; in the shorthand of this dissertation this is henceforth called ‘Tasking.’ The items of intelligence desired are then – hopefully – gathered; this is henceforth called ‘Collection.’ Logically enough, Analysis and Processing (i.e. the scrutiny and transformation of the data collected into usable forms, for example, by translating foreign language documents), are then performed; this is henceforth called ‘Analysis.’ The final steps are the creation of intelligence reports or ‘products’ for the Agency’s ‘consumers’, and the delivery of these to end-users; this is henceforth called Production and Dissemination. The only aspect of this part of the cycle that deserves special mention here is that it is that information might be ‘sanitized’, i.e. have its origins disguised to protect the method or source from which it was collected.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Though the intelligence cycle is being used here only as a lens to focus further on specific problems in the CIA’s intelligence processes, according to Berkowitz and Goodman, “The intelligence cycle reflects the best thinking about how an information service should work from the late 1940s and 1950s, when people began to write about intelligence policy and develop concepts about how intelligence ought to operate. It has been a durable concept and it pervades our thinking about intelligence. CIA publications and training materials feature it prominently.” See Berkowitz and Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence in The Information Age, page 69. On the other hand, a recent book for intelligence analysts referred to it critically as “somewhat of a theological concept: no one questions its validity” Clark, Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach, page 15. For an extended discussion of its potential flaws as a representation of the intelligence process, see Arthur S. Hulnick, “What’s wrong with the Intelligence Cycle” Intelligence and National Security 21.6 (2007).

⁴⁷ Powers, The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA, page 185 offers an excellent example of this phenomenon.

While the cycle as a whole is a serviceable framework for exploring the cases that follow, Dissemination problems frequently fall outside the scope of this dissertation, because they involve entities far removed from the CIA.⁴⁸ For that reason, the Production and Dissemination sections in each case study below are short in comparison to those on Tasking, Collection, and Analysis. Production and Dissemination issues are interesting, but all too often take our analysis outside the walls of the CIA, and therefore out of scope. In any case, such issues become moot if (thanks to processes in the previous three parts of the cycle), there was no warning issued. That is the case made in each example below.

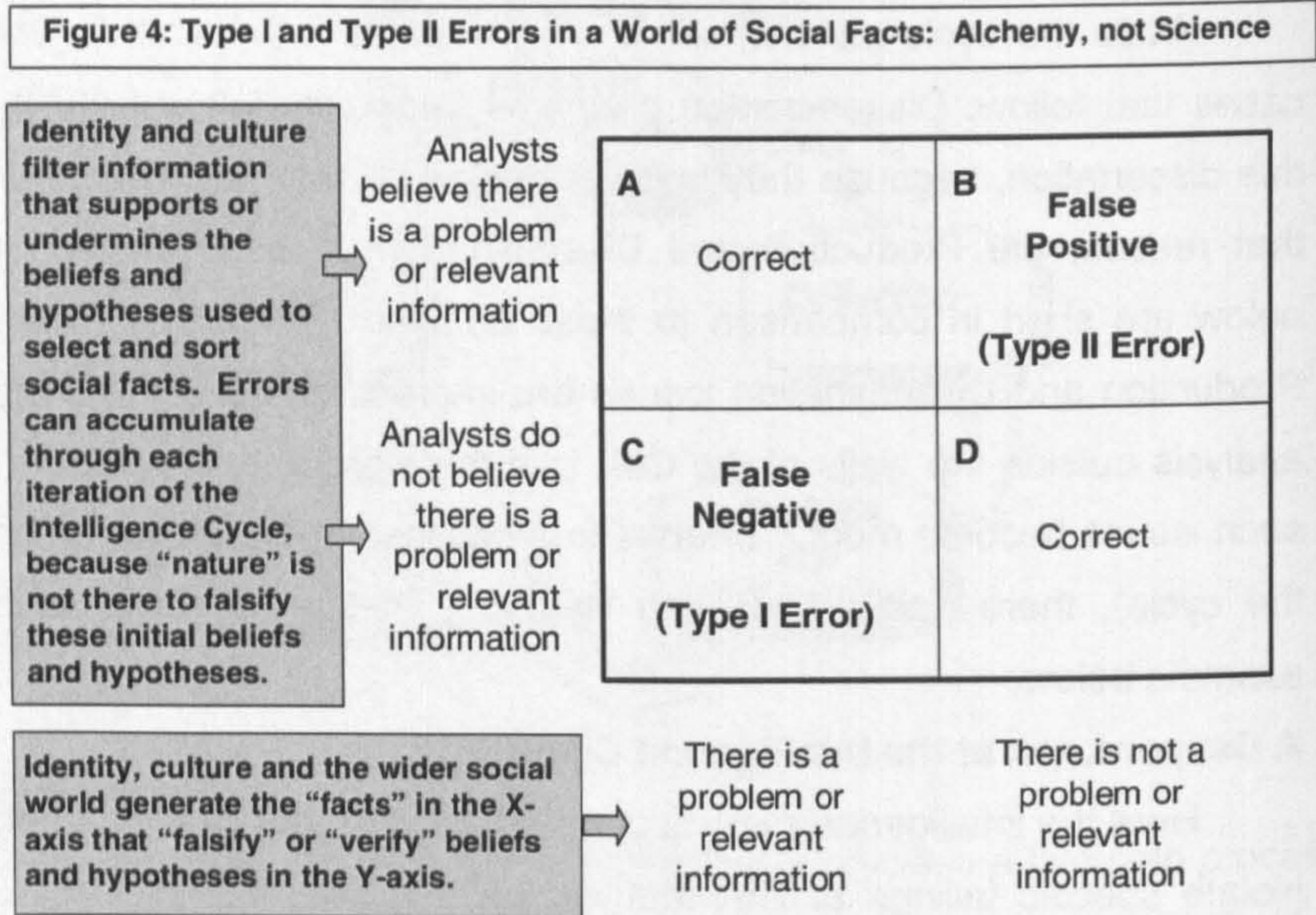
A Deeper Look at the Intelligence Cycle

Here the intelligence cycle is used as an organisational aid to discover and isolate specific failings at CIA that tie the qualities of the CIA's identity and culture identified in Chapter 3 (homogeneity, scientism, an excessive regard for secrets, and a drive for consensus) to the strategic surprise examined. In other words, the cycle is a tool to disaggregate the contributory elements of surprises to lay bare their ultimate origins in Chapter 3's elements of identity and culture.

Figure 4 below helps the reader visualize how errors accumulate as a result of this filtering. It also shows how many of the problems that intelligence analysis addresses are 'mutually constitutive'. Through each iteration of the intelligence cycle, analysts either reject true hypotheses or accept false hypotheses; in the language of statistics, they commit 'Type I' and 'Type II' errors (where false negatives and false positives are called Type I and Type II errors, respectively⁴⁹). Minus the shaded text boxes, Figure 4 illustrates a logical truism: when Cassandras say there is a problem (or information relevant to a problem available from certain approaches or sources), they are correct in Cell C but incorrect in Cell D. Conversely, when CIA analysts say there is no problem (or no information relevant to a problem available from certain approaches or sources), they are correct in Cell B but incorrect in Cell A. In each case study, one can witness both types of errors accumulate through the cycle. Both types of errors play a role in each phase of the intelligence cycle in reinforcing the problem of the 'Wrong Puzzle'.

⁴⁸ As the literature review in Chapter 2 notes, Dissemination problems are frequently blamed for *tactical*, as opposed to *strategic* surprises, when intelligence or warning is not passed on to those who are in a position to take action.

⁴⁹ The author is grateful to Professor Kent Grayson of Northwestern University for this distinction as it applies to *Constructing Cassandra*.



The text in the shaded boxes in Figure 4, however, also call attention to two things. First, that identity and culture-generated filters help analysts select and sort social facts, because belief plays a central role in that process (the “Y-axis” in Figure 4).⁵⁰ This is the heart of Kuhn’s idea⁵¹, and also Wohlstetter’s thesis about strategic surprise when she writes the “job of lifting signals out of a confusion of noise is an activity that *is very much aided by hypotheses*“.⁵² Wohlstetter, however, does not discuss in depth *how* these hypotheses arise, and nor does Seliktar, who also uses a Kuhnian approach.⁵³ Here we assert that they are in large part a function of the identity and culture of the analyst and his or her organisation.

Second, in intelligence analysis – unlike in the natural sciences – the identity and culture of both the analysts and of the world at large also affect the X-axis, i.e. they help create many of the “facts” used to verify the hypotheses of the Y axis. This phenomenon goes beyond the notions that “the questions you

⁵⁰ The same process happens in the natural sciences, and is by no means foolproof. Each morning, the evidence of the senses persuasively verifies the hypothesis that the sun revolves around the earth if a limited subset of natural facts are considered. See Kuhn and also David C. Lindberg, The Beginnings of Western Science: the European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious and Institutional Context, Prehistory to A.D. 1450 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pages 95-105.

⁵¹ Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, *passim*.

⁵² Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, page 70.

⁵³ See Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, *passim* and Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union *passim*.

choose affect the answers you get”:⁵⁴ it is that in the world of social facts, sometimes the questions you choose help to *generate* the answers you get. Over time, the course of events affects analysts’ thinking, and analysts thinking affect the course of events. Many facts in intelligence analysis only exist as a result of thinking participants, and that leaves deductive-nomological model of science in a shambles: rather than social science, intelligence analysts are often engaged in social alchemy, because their thinking can change the essential properties of the elements that they study.⁵⁵

Figure 5 brings these abstract notions to bear on the first two case studies. It summarises the linkages between the persistent attributes of the identity and culture of the CIA and those parts of the intelligence cycle where they offer the greatest power to understand surprises involving mysteries. (For an analogous treatment of these features for secret-based surprises, see Figure 8).

Figure 5: Mysteries - Features of Identity & Culture vs. Key Distortions of the Intel Cycle

Intelligence Cycle Phase	Feature of the CIA's Identity & Culture			
	Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
<i>Tasking</i>				
<i>Collection</i>				
<i>Analysis</i>				
<i>Production</i>				
<i>Dissemination</i>				

Where a block is filled in Figure 5, the corresponding characteristic can be inferred as a contributory factor to distortions in that phase of the intelligence cycle. Both case studies offer evidence of that characteristic’s role in each portion of the cycle involving a mystery-based surprise.

Before closing this section, the attention of the reader is drawn to the fact that Figure 5 is merely indicative – the linkages portrayed in it are general; this chart is decidedly not an attempt to capture precisely the intersubjective

⁵⁴ See Geddes, "Selection Bias in Comparative Politics." *passim*.

⁵⁵ See Soros, *Alchemy of Finance: Reading the Mind of the Market*, pages 317-22. In the natural world, saying or thinking something doesn't make it so. Giordano Bruno expressed this idea best in 1600, at the cost of his life: as he was being burned at the stake by the Papacy for asserting that the earth revolves around the sun, he cried "And still it turns." (Galileo, of course, was more discrete, and merely spent his last few years under house arrest for the same assertion. Apparently, a few years ago the Vatican apologised the latter, though the former would seem to have greater grounds for complaint).

variables of identity and culture in the manner of a periodic table and assign to them a unidirectional causal role. Instead, it is intended as a rough guide, a semi-impressionistic map of where particular aspects of the CIA's identity and culture exercise the greatest effects on the intelligence cycle. Using it one must bear in mind both that properties of identity and culture are not always separable explanatory variables, and that the cycle itself is an imperfect map of the intelligence process. In addition, as a reminder, the cycle itself is iterative, so that errors in each phase – but especially in initial tasking – can be self-reinforcing.

Conclusion

This chapter has had three purposes. The first section introduced the criteria for selecting the four cases to be analysed, a mix of 'mysteries' and 'secrets'. These criteria can be summarised as the importance of the surprise, its fit with the scope of this work, and the accessibility of information about it.

The second section of Chapter 4 introduced the logical divide between mysteries and secrets. This logical divide is important both because it is one of the basic organising principles of intelligence analysis and the literature of strategic surprise. This distinction is also important to clarify because of the broad definition of strategic surprise that this dissertation uses: "The sudden realisation that one has been operating on the basis of an erroneous threat assessment that results in a failure to anticipate a grave threat to 'vital' national interests". Strategic surprises, when linked to erroneous threat assessments, can arise from either mysteries *or* secrets.

The third section detailed the "intelligence cycle", the framework through which each case analysis is pursued. The iterative nature of a cycle of intelligence Tasking, Collection, Analysis, Production and Dissemination was underlined, along with the importance of the fact that the cycle operates in the realm of social, not natural, facts.

Chapter 5 – Cases and Cassandras: Mysteries

Chapter 5 is devoted to the in-depth exploration of two cases of strategic surprise rooted in those aspects of the CIA's identity and culture that were introduced in Chapter 3. Both of these cases are – in the parlance of intelligence analysis - 'Mysteries': the Iranian Revolution of 1978-9, and the demise of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991.

The failure of the CIA to anticipate the Iranian Revolution, and thus allow US policy-makers to either forestall or mitigate its consequences, created a foreign policy disaster for which the United States continues to pay. The relative simplicity and clarity of this strategic surprise (at least compared with our other case studies) make it an excellent initial starting point for our analysis.

Next, this Chapter discusses a second "mystery", but a far less simple one: the CIA's failure to apprehend the fragility of the USSR, and to understand the possibility of its liquidation in a timely manner. This case study is more complex than the first because the Agency's record on the USSR is enveloped in extensive claims and counter-claims. At the same time, the debate itself throws a useful light on the social construction of strategic surprise. Because this case's failure is less blatant than the first, it receives somewhat longer treatment than the Iran case.

Case I: The Fall of the Shah of Iran

This case study introduces the pattern that is used for all the cases presented in this chapter and the next. First, it provides general evidence for the existence of a massive intelligence failure, a strategic surprise. Second, it employs the intelligence cycle to explore that failure in depth and map it back to the key attributes of the CIA's identity and culture identified in Chapter 3 (homogeneity, scientism, an excessive regard for secrets, and a drive for consensus).

That mapping process also reveals evidence for the existence of 'Cassandras' prior to strategic surprise (As a reminder, Cassandras were defined in Chapter 1 as "individuals inside or outside the Agency who anticipated the approximate course of events that comprised a strategic surprise based on reasoned threat assessments that differed sharply from those of the CIA"). Thus, the origin of this strategic surprise is shown to be less the inherent unpredictability of external events than internal factors at the CIA that created the antecedent conditions for the surprise to occur.

Part I: Evidence of the Failure

On December 31, 1977, President Carter and the Shah of Iran welcomed the New Year together at a lavish party in the opulent Niavaran Palace in Tehran. "Iran," the President began his toast, "because of the great leadership of the Shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world." As his toast went on, Carter called the Shah as "a man of wisdom" who was "loved by his people."¹

"The hinge of world history"

Carter had good reasons to flatter the Shah in this way. As Henry Kissinger explained in his memoir *The White House Years*, Iran mattered a great deal to America:

Under the Shah's leadership, the land bridge between Asia and Europe, so often the hinge of world history, was pro-American and pro-West beyond any challenge. Alone among the countries of the region – Israel aside – Iran made friendship with the United States the starting point of its policy. That it was based on a cold-eyed

¹ Scott Armstrong, "Failing to heed the warning of revolutionary Iran," The Washington Post October 26 1980, page A1.

assessment that a threat to Iran would most likely come from the Soviet Union, in combination with radical Arab states, is only another way of saying that the Shah's view of the realities of world politics paralleled our own.²

Indeed, Iran was a regional anchor for US policy in the Gulf since 1953, when Kermit Roosevelt³ and his CIA compatriots overthrew Premier Mossadeq in Operation Ajax (November 1952-August 1953) culminating in the installation of the Shah.⁴ While "there had always been someone somewhere predicting the fall of the Shah",⁵ the prevailing US view of Iran in Langley and in Washington was summed up in Carter's New Year's Eve toast: the Shah was secure.⁶

"Nobody can overthrow me – I have the Power"

Perhaps this view prevailed because, as one scholar puts it, "the Shah's downfall had so often been predicted and his survival so often observed that warning about his imminent downfall had gradually lost credibility".⁷ "The CIA considered the Shah to be a 'professional worrier' and an alarmist,"⁸ but a *Foreign Affairs* article in 1978 called him "the most important of the five major absolute monarchs left in the world [and] undoubtedly one of the cleverest political leaders of this century."⁹ 'Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi' generally

² Henry Kissinger, The White House Years (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), page 1262.

³ I am grateful to my stepmother, Helen Roosevelt, for reminding me of Kermit's central role in this affair.

⁴ See, first and foremost, Donald N. Wilbur, "Clandestine Service History: Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran (CS Historical Paper 208)," ed. Central Intelligence Agency (Central Intelligence Agency, 1954.; Kermit Roosevelt also wrote a (rather ironically-timed) history of the operation: Kermit Roosevelt, Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); a more recent work is Stephen Kinzer, All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003).

⁵ J. A. Bill, The Eagle and the Lion: the Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), page 424.

⁶ Berkowitz and Goodman, Strategic Intelligence for American National Security, page 108. For an interesting exploration of how US policy towards Iran might have taken other courses, especially in light of Soviet reactions to the coup against Mossadeq, see: Richard K. Herrmann and Michael P. Fischerkeller, "Counterfactual Reasoning in Motivational Analysis: US Policy toward Iran," Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics, eds. Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁷ B. Rubin, Paved with Good Intentions: the American Experience in Iran (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), page 149-50.

⁸ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 93.

⁹ James A. Bill, "Iran and the Crisis of '78," Foreign Affairs 57.2 (1978/79), page 324. Bill goes on to point out that the Shah "Since his accession in 1941 he has survived two public assassination attempts (1949, 1965), numerous plots against his dynasty, a popular political movement led by the charismatic Prime Minister Mossadeq (1951-53),

maintained a brave public face (even as events spun out of control at the end of his reign). In a June 1978, for example, in an interview with *US News and World Report*, the Shah said: "Nobody can overthrow me. I have the support of 700,000 troops, all the workers, and most of the people. Wherever I go, there are fantastic demonstrations of support. I have the power, and the opposition cannot be compared in strength with the government in any way."¹⁰

Gary Sick, the NSC White House Aide for Iran whom we met above, agrees with the Shah, saying that the Pahlavi monarch:

...had thirty-seven years' experience on the throne and had survived crises which, by appearance, were no less severe than the riots of 1978. [He had control over Iran's oil wealth, the army, and a prominent place on the world stage, and ranged against him were merely] "An aged cleric...congeries of aging Mossadeghists [supporters of the Premier deposed in Operation Ajax] village ecclesiastics and disgruntled job seekers."¹¹

Nevertheless, after a sequence of increasingly dramatic upheavals, on the 16th of January, 1979, the Shah left Iran to go "on vacation"¹² to Egypt, never to return; in so doing, he set firmly in train a series of events that culminated in the creation of an Islamic state led by the Ayatollah Khomeini and his fundamentalist Shiite supporters. As a former member of the NSC Staff said at the time, "with the fall of the Pahlavi regime in Iran...a profound change in the regional balance took place."¹³

The Scale and Scope of the Fallure

Since the Shah's 'vacation', the dramatic events in Iran routinely figure on lists of American strategic surprises.¹⁴ Indeed, a (still classified)¹⁵ 1983 CIA

and the machinations of dozens of other wily politicians who have sought to loosen his grip on the controls of powers. He has lost two prime ministers through assassination (Razmara in 1951, Mansur in 1963), and has thrice ordered his troops to turn their machine guns on demonstrators in the streets of his capital city (1952, 1963, 1978). He has had to overcome both Allied occupation of his country and Soviet-supported separatist movements in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in the 1940s." See Bill, "Iran and the Crisis of '78." pages 324-5.

¹⁰ Dennis Mullin, "Nobody Can Overthrow Me - I Have the Power", US News & World Report June 26 1978, page 37.

¹¹ Sick, All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran, page 41

¹² Jim Hoagland, "CIA Will Survey Moslems Worldwide," The Washington Post January 20 1979, page A1.

¹³ W. B. Quant, "The Middle East crisis," Foreign Policy 58 (1980), page 540.

¹⁴ See, for example, Coogan, "America's strategic blunders: Intelligence analysis and national security policy, 1936-1991." *passim* and Matthias, America's Strategic Blunders, page 288-9.

¹⁵ Charles Kurzman, The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). page 4.

internal review of the intelligence that preceded the collapse of the regime was tasked, revealing, “To examine the quality of judgements preceding significant historical failures over the last twenty years or so”, and cites the Iranian revolution as a clear case of intelligence failure.¹⁶ One intelligence insider said baldly:

Everyone is aware that as the Shah of Iran was falling, a score of highly paid analysts at CIA was writing that Iran was not in a revolutionary situation or even a pre-revolutionary one. That kind of ignorance not only crippled our policies in the years prior to the revolution, years which could have been used to warn and bolster our friends, it also could have led us to think the foolish thoughts by which we advised our Iranian friends during December and January 1978-79 and which proved lethal to them.¹⁷

No less a figure than the DCI during these events, Stansfield Turner, acknowledged, “In my time as director of the CIA, our greatest failure was inadequately emphasizing the dangerous waters into which the Shah Reza Pahlavi of Iran was sailing in 1978”.¹⁸ He later elaborated:

We had not appreciated how shaky the Shah’s political foundation was; did not know that the Shah was terminally ill; did not understand who Khomeini was and the support his movement had; did not have a clue who the hostage-takers were or what their objective was; and could not pinpoint within the embassy where the hostages were being held and under what conditions.¹⁹

There is no doubt that with the fall of the Shah, a profound and – and from America’s point of view, adverse - change took place in the regional balance of power,²⁰ and the CIA was as surprised as anyone in Washington.

A “Gandhi-like” figure

If that is the general conclusion regarding the CIA’s performance prior to this surprise, what are the specifics?

Let us turn the focus first to the CIA’s reporting on the man who would emerge as revolutionary Iran’s *de facto* leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. A June, 1963 study by the CIA highlighted Khomeini’s rise to prominence and

¹⁶ Excerpts from this study appeared in Willis C. Armstrong, William Leonhart, William McCaffery and Herbert C. Rothenberg, “The Hazards of Single Outcome Forecasting,” Studies in Intelligence 28.3 (1984). The same study and conclusion is quoted in MacEachin, Nolan and Tockman, Iran: Intelligence Failure or Policy Stalemate? page 2.

¹⁷ Godson, Intelligence Requirements for the 1980’s: Elements of Intelligence, page 24.

¹⁸ Turner, “Intelligence for a New World Order.” pages 154-5.

¹⁹ Turner, Burn Before Reading: Presidents, CIA Directors, and Secret Intelligence, page 180.

²⁰ William B. Quandt, “The Middle East Crises,” Foreign Affairs 58 (1980), page 540.

called him “the most outspoken critic of the government’s reform programs” and “an extremely dangerous threat to the regime”²¹; a 1978 CIA report, however, simply “considered the cleric anti-Communist, but reasoned...without providing evidence, that his movement “may be susceptible to Communist and radical penetration.”²²

The intelligence provided by and to the US embassy in Tehran was poor enough so that as late as November 9, 1978, in a dire telegram entitled “Thinking the Unthinkable,” Ambassador Sullivan²³ – in what must be one of the most ill judged personality sketches ever - described Khomeini as a “Gandhi-like” figure who “would not get personally involved in politics”.²⁴

To compound matters, the Agency reported innocuously on October 27, 1978 – less than 100 days before the Shah fled the country – that “the political situation is unlikely to be clarified at least until late next year [i.e. Autumn, 1979] when the Shah, the cabinet, and the new parliament that is scheduled to be elected in June begin to interact on the political scene.”²⁵

“We were just plain asleep”

The intelligence situation was no better in Langley. Samuel Huntington, who served on the NSC staff at the time, recalls that because of the ‘Jaleh Square massacre’ (an event that Sick calls “the turning point from sporadic acts of popular rebellion to genuine revolution”)²⁶, he asked the CIA for “an assessment of prospects for a post-Shah Iran”. In response, he received “a discussion of the Iranian constitution and the chances of creating a regency council for a transition within the Pahlevi dynasty. There was no mention of potential successor regimes.”²⁷

Such an omission of potential successors is only natural: just the year before, in August of 1977, the CIA produced a 60-page estimate that directly

²¹ MacEachin, Nolan and Tockman, Iran: Intelligence Failure or Policy Stalemate? page 5.

²² Treverton and Klocke, “Iran, 1978-1979: Coping with the Unthinkable.” page 124.

²³ Equally damning is that the US Ambassador who proceeded Sullivan was Richard Helms, who was DCI just prior to accepting the post in Tehran, where he served from 1973 to 1976. See Helms and Hood, A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency, chapter 41, and the account by his wife Cynthia Helms, An Ambassador’s Wife in Iran (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1981).

²⁴ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 105.

²⁵ Kurzman, The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran, page 1.

²⁶ Sick, All Fall Down: America’s Tragic Encounter With Iran, page 59.

²⁷ Treverton and Klocke, “Iran, 1978-1979: Coping with the Unthinkable.” page 119.

addressed the subject of “Religious and Intellectual Opposition to the Shah”.²⁸ It concluded that “the Shah will be an active participant in Iranian political life well into the 1980s” and that there would “be no radical change in Iranian political behavior in the near future”.²⁹

In short, the fall of the Shah of Iran was a massive intelligence failure. It also surely constitutes a strategic surprise by the definition set forth in Chapter 1: “the sudden realisation that one has been operating on the basis of an erroneous threat assessment that results in a failure to anticipate a grave threat to ‘vital’ national interests”.

DCI Turner later said of this calamity, “We were just plain asleep”;³⁰ the next section examines the factors that engendered this slumber.

²⁸ MacEachin, Nolan and Tockman, Iran: Intelligence Failure or Policy Stalemate? page 10.

²⁹ Hoagland, “CIA Will Survey Moslems Worldwide.” page A1.

³⁰ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 370.

Part II: Mapping the Failure and Revealing the Cassandras

How did an intelligence failure of this scope and scale occur at CIA? What are its proximate and distal causes? The answer to those questions go the heart of this dissertation, and an examination of each phase intelligence cycle through the prism of the CIA's culture and identity points to some of them. We begin, therefore, with the CIA's Tasking on Iran in the 1970s.

Tasking

As Figure 5 indicates, Tasking prior to and during the debacle that ended the Pahlavi dynasty appears to have been adversely affected by all four of the key components of the CIA's identity and culture discussed in Chapter 3.

"All but 'miscreants and bastards' will be able to see him"

First of all, the homogeneity of CIA personnel, and their obsession with 'objectivity', 'science' and 'reason' led to a consistent lack of curiosity about the religious opposition to the Shah, and to a corresponding neglect of less quantifiable questions of the legitimacy of the regime. While such opposition could have been introduced as a variable in positivist models of political change in Iran, it seems to have been almost wholly omitted from CIA calculations until the situation was irretrievable.

Codevilla, for example, says that in this period there was at the CIA an "educated incapacity to take seriously reports dealing with religion from the Middle East".³¹ Already in December of 1979, Richard Helms, agreed that "The lack of coverage in depth of church [sic] activities during the '70s may well have prevented an adequate understanding of religious forces at work when trouble started in 1978."³² The ethnocentric bias inherent in Helms' choice of words is itself telling of the lack of curiosity about or sensitivity to cultural differences that might influence 'models'.

In fact, between 1975 and 1977 the CIA provided not a single report based on sources within the religious opposition,³³ and there is no evidence that they sought any such sources until too late. Ofira Seliktar observes:

In the Iranian case, there was a strong partiality [at the CIA] for the study of empirical indices of performance, but little inclination to follow the more esoteric field of normative judgement, culture and

³¹ Codevilla, *Informing Statecraft: Intelligence for a New Century*, page 17.

³² Rosenfeld, "Knowing the Outs as Well as the Ins." page A17.

³³ Treverton and Klocke, "Iran, 1978-1979: Coping with the Unthinkable." page 112-3.

spirituality. The diffuse notion of legitimacy that was at the heart of the crisis was beyond the pale of the intelligence purview.³⁴

This failing was so widely recognised that a 1979 satirical article in the *Washington Post* entitled “A Primer for Spies”, suggested – in a tragic echo of criticism of the Agency after 9/11 – that the Agency adopt the analytical heuristic “Many people take God seriously”.³⁵

On some levels, it is easy to see why in the day-to-day press of reporting events in Iran such ‘squishy’ matters were ignored. Seliktar cites an instance in which “the followers of the ayatollah had also made good use of the ubiquitous Iranian rumor mill. One notorious rumor...held that the face of Khomeini would appear on the face of the moon on November 27, and all but ‘miscreants and bastards’ would be able to see him.” Had CIA analysts paid sustained attention to this seemingly absurd prediction, however, they would have noted that “on the appointed night *millions attested to seeing the apparition*, a line that was supported by *Novin* [the newspaper of the Iranian Communist Party, *Tudeh*, which was printed in the Soviet embassy in Tehran]”.³⁶ The lack of anthropologists and sociologists on the CIA’s staff³⁷ is addressed below; here one can simply adduce that their absence is in keeping with a preference for ‘hard data’, and that this absence had adverse effects the CIA’s Tasking, Collection, and Analysis.

Ironically, had CIA been inclined to pursue such matters, there would have been no shortage of ‘outliers’ that would have inspired further review of the situation inside the country. These quantifiable indicators *could* have been Tasked:

More new mosques were built between 1968 and 1978 than in the previous two centuries and the number of pilgrims to Mecca reached some one hundred thousand in 1977. The number of theology students quadrupled and private donations to clergy reached an

³⁴ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 190.

³⁵ Seth Lipsky, “A Primer for Spies,” The Washington Post March 12 1979, page A19. In addition, the piece offers such rules of thumb as: “a king’s standing among his people usually runs in inverse proportion to the number of medals he wears with his dress uniform”, and “discontent runs directly proportionate to the number of pictures of the head of state displayed in homes and shops”.

³⁶ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 97-8. Emphasis added. (One can deduce from this anecdote that *The Emperor’s New Clothes* was not available in Farsi).

³⁷ Stansfield Turner, Secrets and Democracy: The CIA in Transition (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1986), page 125.

estimated \$200 million, a sevenfold increase from the previous decade.³⁸

Other quantifiable elements could also been setting off alarm bells had the CIA been monitoring them: “It was estimated that between October 1 [1978] and January 1979, some 100,000 Iranians left and some \$2.6 billion were transferred abroad.”³⁹

Nobody, however, among the CIA’s customers asked about Iran; as one insider observed in an unconscious summary of Tasking (and mirror-imaging at work): “No ping [from an intelligence consumer], no priority; no priority, no warning. [Topics] slip between the cracks”.⁴⁰ An analyst later testified to Congress: “Until recently you couldn’t give away intelligence on Iran...Policymakers were not asking *whether* the Shah’s autocracy would survive indefinitely; policy was premised on that assumption.”⁴¹

Why were these, along with softer indicators (such as the perceived religious illegitimacy) of the regime, not Tasked? More than scientism was at work. Tasking was also distorted by a need to maintain the consensus about the Shah’s regime noted above. The CIA’s generalised preference for consensus was amplified here by a more specific desire not to ‘rock the boat’ of the special relationship between Iran and the US generally, and between the Shah’s entourage and the CIA particularly. This is one of the historically unique features of this strategic surprise.

“I’ll let you have all the telemetry and monitoring equipment you want”

As a post-mortem from the Washington Post observed “the Central Intelligence Agency’s long and close ties to the Shah of Iran and his intelligence service effectively prevented Langley from giving the White House a clear warning that public unrest posed a major threat to the Shah and U.S. policy.”⁴²

³⁸ A. Taheri, Nest of Spies: America’s Journey to Disaster in Iran (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1988), page 44 and S. Arani, “Iran: from the Shah’s dictatorship to Khomeini’s demagogic theocracy,” Dissent 27 (1980), cited in Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 64.

³⁹ A. Taheri, The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1985), page 233 and R Wright, In the Name of God (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), page 58 cited in Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 96

⁴⁰ Berkowitz and Goodman, Best Truth: Intelligence In The Information Age, page 60

⁴¹ Congressional testimony quoted in Kam, Surprise Attack: The Victim’s Perspective, pages 209-10. Emphasis original.

⁴² Jim Hoagland, “CIA-Shah Ties Cloud Iran Data,” The Washington Post December 17, 1978, Sunday 1978, page A21.

In fact, after the military agreement between President Nixon and the Shah in 1972, the CIA “dismantled many of its own operations in Iran, and it thus became more and more reliant on SAVAK, the Shah’s feared secret police, for information about internal events.”⁴³

Iran was, in the mind of intelligence consumers in Washington, as Kissinger says above “pro-American and pro-West beyond any challenge”. Because of this mindset, “American diplomats and politicians [i.e. the CIA’s ‘consumers’] tended to take what the Shah and his military and intelligence men told them on trust. They completely ignored the strength of religious opposition which ultimately revealed itself as the driving force of the revolution.”⁴⁴

To compound this Tasking problem, in order “not to offend the Shah” the CIA was persuaded not establish links with opposition figures.⁴⁵ As one exasperated analyst told the *Washington Post* (while events firmly took the saddle in 1978 and when the CIA began to be criticised on Iran): “We can’t do much with opaque regimes headed by friendly authoritarian figures.”⁴⁶ The *Post* went on:

The political opposition and officer corps have been off limits for years to the 50 to 75 agents the CIA maintains in Iran. The agency’s professional intelligence on domestic Iranian developments has had to come largely from the Shah’s own secret police, SAVAK, which could hardly be expected to report that the Shah was in trouble. “If we had tried to penetrate the opposition, we would have been caught immediately by SAVAK,” a CIA official said. “Iran is an ally. In England, we would not try to penetrate the opposition.”⁴⁷

There is also evidence that SAVAK, to whom Tasking and Collection was effectively ‘outsourced’ by the CIA, was brutal but not especially competent. Apparently they were unable to distinguish between the various types of non-communist opposition groups, and frequently confused them with ‘communist

⁴³ Gregory F. Treverton and James Klocke, “The Fall of the Shah of Iran,” Harvard University, 1988, page 2.

⁴⁴ Andrew Gowers, “Review of *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian relations*, by James A Bill,” *The Financial Times* May 26, 1988, Thursday 1988, page 26

⁴⁵ Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush*, page 440.

⁴⁶ Hoagland, “CIA-Shah Ties Cloud Iran Data.” page A21. This problem currently infects CIA reporting on Saudi Arabia; see Robert Baer, *Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold Our Soul for Saudi Crude* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 2003), page 35-6.

⁴⁷ Hoagland, “CIA-Shah Ties Cloud Iran Data.” page A21. In light of the activities of British Security Coordination in the US prior to the Second World War, this is an absurdly naive analogy for a CIA employee to employ; see Thomas E. Mahl, *Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939-44* (London: Brassey’s Inc., 1999).

groups' or with each other.⁴⁸ SAVAK had poor success infiltrating subversive groups, performed little analysis, and the information it gathered was mostly limited to what could be obtained through torture.⁴⁹

Finally, it is clear that the CIA's preference for secret information – in this case, about the USSR – distorted Tasking priorities in Iran. A newspaper article of the period hypothesised that the CIA restricted their contacts with political opponents in Iran because they feared displeasing the Shah, and had they done so they would have lost signals intelligence facilities in Northern Iran that were exceptionally important for monitoring the USSR.⁵⁰ In short, the CIA viewed Iran mostly as a window on its main target, the USSR.

Almost ten years later, one of Carter's advisors revealed that this was indeed true:

Our understanding was that the deal with the Shah was, "You rely on me for what goes on here, and I'll let you have all the telemetry and monitoring equipment [against the USSR] up north you want"...it was more important to monitor Soviet missiles and so forth than have agents keeping tabs on the political situation inside Iran.⁵¹

Given the short-run priority of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks II (SALT II) taking place at the time, it was difficult to argue with this logic.⁵² On the other hand, "Iran may have been something of an exception",⁵³ as the CIA routinely has contact with the political opposition within countries even if it displeases their hosts.

Clearly misplaced Tasking priorities – rooted firmly in the CIA's identity and culture – played a critical part in this strategic surprise.

⁴⁸ S. Armstrong, "U.S. urged 'Crackdown on opposition'," The Washington Post October 28 1980, page A1.

⁴⁹ S. Armstrong, "Vance Deflects Call for Toughness," The Washington Post October 28 1980, page A1.

⁵⁰ According to Armstrong, these were located at Behshahr and Kabkan.

⁵¹ John Ranelagh, The Agency (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1986), page 649

⁵² It is a testament to the quality of the NSA technical effort (if not security, as clearly the facility should have been destroyed) that though American personnel abandoned the listening post at Behshahr on January 31st, it continued to relay automatically SIGINT to Fort Meade via satellite "for some time". The Iranians left it alone, because as an Iranian employee at the facility explained: "It might hurt the machinery if we switch off the electricity." See Dial Torgeson, "US Spy Devices Still Running at Iran Post," International Herald Tribune March 7 1979, and William Branigin, "Iran's Airmen Keep U.S. Listening Posts Intact and Whirring; Iran Keeps Secret U.S. Listening Posts in Working Order," The Washington Post May 20 1979.

⁵³ Rosenfeld, "Knowing the Outs as Well as the Ins." page A17.

Collection

The preference for secrets about the USSR in Tasking noted above overlaps with problems in the Collection of intelligence on Iran. When we review the list of the CIA's identity and cultural features in figure four (above), we see that three – homogeneity, the reification of objectivity and reason, and a preference for secrets – also distorted the Collection phase. Inasmuch as we have already mentioned the Agency's focus on secret Soviet missile telemetry over other types of information, let us begin there.

“Executives who did business in Iran were somewhat anxious...”

Seliktar and Rubin both point out that “A study of media coverage found that ‘a full year before the revolution began the best American newspapers were clearly telling a story of a country with a harsh dictatorial government, severe economic difficulties, and an unhealthy emphasis on importing weapons’”.⁵⁴

We can conclude that these open sources had little effect on Collection by the CIA because Laqueur stated in 1985 that the CIA may have been the victim of “the most transparently naïve...idea that something published in the ‘open literature’, ranging from newspapers to scholarly journals, need not be taken into account when making intelligence assessments that have to be based on secret information”. Tellingly, Laqueur goes on in a footnote to reveal, “A striking example was a series of important articles in the French newspaper *Le Monde* during the spring of 1978 on events in Iran. These were taken into account by the Intelligence Community *after an academic had called them to high-level White House attention in the fall of that year.*”⁵⁵ (Note that it is the White House not *Tasking* the CIA after reviewing open-sources, but performing *Collection*!) As Robert Gates would later observe in an interview: “There were scholars out there saying the Shah was in trouble, and somehow (sic) that never got incorporated into any official assessment’.”⁵⁶

Eric Rouleau, the chief Middle East correspondent for *Le Monde* observed in 1980, “From the very beginning of the Iranian Revolution [the United States] seems to have been struck by a peculiar sort of political blindness.”⁵⁷ A 2004

⁵⁴ Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: the American Experience in Iran*, page 348 cited in Seliktar, *Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran*, page 58.

⁵⁵ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 64 and footnote 38 page 352. Emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Stephen Engelberg, “CIA Says It Has Restored Link to Campuses to Get More Advice,” *The New York Times* January 19 1986, page 1.

⁵⁷ Eric Rouleau, “Khomeini's Iran,” *Foreign Affairs* 59.1 (1980), page 1.

study of intelligence failures prior to the Shah's downfall also concluded that "It's a mentality out at the CIA that if you don't get the information from spying, it's not intelligence",⁵⁸ and that factor played a part in analytical failures regarding Iran.

It would seem that academic open sources were not the only overt sources ignored at CIA. The business world, too, could have offered valuable information had the CIA been minded to collect it:

Executives who did business in Iran were somewhat anxious during a briefing for [Ambassador] Sullivan in May. The ambassador was amazed to discover that few corporations made long-term investment in Iran, normally a sign of low business confidence. By mid-1977, there was a growing reluctance to engage in new ventures. Some businessmen noted that Iranians were sending out record amounts of money. Political risk analysis services picked up the social tremors in Iran. Business International, which used the Delphi technique, gave Iran a score of 10, a midpoint between "long term stability" and "active factionalism". Business Environment Risk Index rated Iran's stability at 43 out of a possible 100.⁵⁹

Also ignored in Langley was well informed more generalised "open-source" analysis like that offered by Archibald Roosevelt, the political advisor to Chase Manhattan Bank, "who warned about the danger to the Shah".⁶⁰ In fact, between October 1, 1978 and January 31, 1979, more than 100,000 "well-heeled people" fled Iran, taking some 10% of the country's foreign currency reserves (i.e. about \$15 billion), with them.⁶¹ In the right circles, such information isn't remotely secret.

There is also the issue of how the Ayatollah Khomeini communicated with his followers. Pilgrims returning to Iran from the 'holy' Shiite city of Najaf, Ayatollah Khomeini's place of exile in Iraq, brought back with them cassettes of his sermons lambasting the Shah. These tapes were patently not secret: they "were played in mosques all over Iran almost immediately."⁶² According to

⁵⁸ MacEachin, Nolan and Tockman, Iran: Intelligence Failure or Policy Stalemate? page 9.

⁵⁹ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 69.

⁶⁰ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 83.

⁶¹ Ronen Bergman, The Secret War With Iran, trans. Ronnie Hope (New York, NY: Free Press, 2008), page 21.

⁶² Treverton and Klocke, "The Fall of the Shah of Iran." page 7 This is not an unreasonable or especially exotic task: in a conversation between the author and the US Marine Colonel in charge of the Iraqi city of Fallujah in Amman, Jordan in May of 2005, the Colonel revealed that a large part of the Marines anti-insurgency campaign involved monitoring every sermon in every mosque each Friday. The Egyptian and

Mossad, by the end of 1978, there were over 600,000 such tapes circulating in the country.⁶³ Though this activity went on for over ten years,⁶⁴ it would seem that because “it did not require a covert operation to obtain copies of Khomeini’s tape-recorded sermons”⁶⁵, the CIA ignored them.

Contrast also the CIA’s singular focus on Soviet telemetry data with the fact that when – under pressure from Tehran – Khomeini was sent by Iraq⁶⁶ into exile in France,⁶⁷ he continued to direct events in Iran simply by using an international direct-dial telephone.⁶⁸ According to Bergman, in fact, Paris even agreed to install a number of special telephone and telex lines linked directly to Iran at the post office near Khomeini’s home.⁶⁹ In concert with the National Security Agency (NSA), the CIA could presumably have listened to these calls with ease. Khomeini also granted – over a four-month stay in Paris – over 400 interviews, and a local recording studio cancelled all of its other contracts to produce thousands of cassettes of his daily broadcasts and interviews.⁷⁰ Though he and his entourage employed *taqiyyah* in this period (a particular form of dissimulation, fully defined below),⁷¹ it was during this time that Khomeini “spelled out in some detail his program for establishing an Islamic republic.”⁷² The CIA’s Collection efforts apparently ignored all of these factors.

Turkish governments also listen closely to Friday sermons at major mosques around their countries.

⁶³ Ronen Bergman, The Secret War With Iran, trans. Ronnie Hope (New York, NY: Free Press, 2008), page 11.

⁶⁴ Rouleau, “Khomeini’s Iran.” page 6.

⁶⁵ Andrew, For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 440.

⁶⁶ Bergman maintains that what occurred is that Saddam Hussein sent his half-brother Barazan al-Tikriti to Iran with an offer to the Shah to have Khomeini killed in Najaf, but that the Shah requested exile from Iraq instead. If this is true, it is further evidence that “No good deed goes unpunished.” Ronen Bergman, The Secret War With Iran, trans. Ronnie Hope (New York, NY: Free Press, 2008), page 20.

⁶⁷ Specifically, Neauphle-le-Chateau.

⁶⁸ Treverton and Klocke, “The Fall of the Shah of Iran.” page 7.

⁶⁹ Ronen Bergman, The Secret War With Iran, trans. Ronnie Hope (New York, NY: Free Press, 2008), page 20.

⁷⁰ Ronen Bergman, The Secret War With Iran, trans. Ronnie Hope (New York, NY: Free Press, 2008), page 20.

⁷¹ Elaine Sciolino, “Iran’s Durable Revolution,” Foreign Affairs 61.4 (1983), page 894-5. See also Jonathan Randal, “Exile Leader Shifts View On U.S.-Iran Ties; Iranian Exile Leader Shifts Stance on U.S.,” The Washington Post 1 January 1979, and note that the interview took place the morning after Carter’s new year’s toast, cited above.

⁷² Jonathan Randal, “Khomeini: From Oblivion to the Brink of Power,” The Washington Post January 21 1979, page A23.

The “Real makers of history”

Turner later cast some light on this phenomenon and put it in the wider Collection context (one that extends beyond a preference for secrets, encompassing also the homogeneity of the CIA’s identity and culture):

What we needed to know that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his lieutenants were secretly scheming in Paris and employing such unorthodox techniques (sic) as sending taped cassettes of propaganda into Iran... American intelligence operatives were simply not in touch with the mullahs in the mosques, who were telling the peasants how the Shah was “profaning” Islam; nor with the merchants in the bazaars, who were grumbling about the stranglehold of the regime on the economy; or the politically educated, who were exasperated with the Shah’s unwillingness to share political power. Not only were we not talking with a broad enough cross-section of people, we were not sampling attitudes widely enough across the country. In part that was because in the past few decades the State Department, and with it the CIA, have confined their operations only to the capitals and one or two cities in major countries.⁷³

Such techniques were only “unorthodox” from the point of view of conventional planning of coup d’états⁷⁴, not for religious figures.

As the 1970s unfolded in Iran, “Fundamentalism, once the preserve of illiterate peasants and urban poor, had spread to the middle class...pilgrimages to Meshad and Mecca became socially in.”⁷⁵ The CIA, both because of its preference for secrets and because (as Turner indicates, above) a homogeneous identity that confined their Collection operations to a narrow range of Iranian society, and so failed to detect the true nature of the changes happening in Iran. “Almost to the very end,” Seliktar says, “the Carter administration took ‘the middle-class fellow travellers’ [of the Iranian revolution] as the ‘real makers of history’ and ignored the Imam [Khomeini] and his foreign policy vision.” Thus, it would seem that in the Collection phase the homogeneity of the CIA allowed it to maintain, in the facing of mounting evidence to the contrary, the same operative assumptions as the end-users of its intelligence.

An “Exaggerated faith”

⁷³ Turner, “Intelligence for a New World Order.” pages 154-5.

⁷⁴ See for example, Edward Luttwak, Coup d’État: A Practical Handbook (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), *passim*, or Gregor Ferguson, Coup d’État: A Practical Manual (Poole, Dorset: Arms and Armour Press, 1987), *passim*.

⁷⁵ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 64.

The Agency's perennial obsession with 'objectivity,' 'reason' (as narrowly defined), and 'science' also effected Collection in Iran. Their "infrequent forays into monitoring public opinion lacked depth and sophistication; *little attention was paid to cultural and theological issues.*"⁷⁶ Bozeman confirms that this neglect stemmed from the CIA's "ahistorical and anticultural" bias, and from their "emphasis on materialism, economic determinism, and current events".⁷⁷

Tehrani models a situation in which Iran at that time was composed of two "epistemic nations" with two belief systems and two parallel communication systems.⁷⁸ "With only limited intercourse between them, it was easy for American observers, largely attuned to the epistemics of modernization, to overlook the growth of the fundamentalist movement."⁷⁹ Bill agrees: "The Intelligence Community...that supplied much of the daily evaluation focused for the most part on the analysis of the official power elite. There was little understanding of the *legitimacy discourse and its key players and efforts to study religious leaders were dismissed as 'sociology.'*"⁸⁰ This assertion is supported by the fact that in January 1979, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was told that because of "the Islamic revolt that helped drive the Shah of Iran from his country this week," the CIA was ordered by the White House to "survey Moslems worldwide".⁸¹ In short, the Senate ordered the CIA to 'close the barn door'.

A more commonly discussed malign influence on the CIA's Collection prior to the revolution in Iran must also be raised. It ties back to the CIA's culture and identity, but only in a general sense. At the very least, knowledge of it reveals further the operation of some of the social mechanisms introduced in Chapter 3 that so deeply impact other traits of the Agency. It is rooted in American political culture, in this particular era in US politics, and especially in

⁷⁶ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 189.

⁷⁷ A. B. Bozeman, "Political intelligence in non-western societies," Comparing Foreign Intelligence: the US, the USSR and the Third World, ed. Roy Godson (McLean, VA: Pergamon Brassey, 1988), page 129.

⁷⁸ M Tehranian, "Communication and revolution in Iran: the passing of a paradigm," Iranian Studies 13 (1980), page 13 cited in Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 60-1.

⁷⁹ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 60-1.

⁸⁰ (Bill, The Eagle and the Lion: the Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations, page 414) quoted in Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 189. Emphasis added.

⁸¹ Hoagland, "Hill Report on Iran Faults Carter, Top Aides; Hill Panel Faults Carter, Aides on Broad Failure In Assessing Iran Crisis; Reactions to Shah's Crisis Called a Broad Failure." page A1.

the *Weltanschauung* of the main intelligence “consumer” of the Agency’s ‘products’ on Iran, President Carter and the man whom he appointed to lead the CIA, Stansfield Turner.

Arriving in Washington condemning “the national disgraces” of “Watergate, Vietnam, and the CIA”⁸², Carter and his team came to the White House “sceptical and suspicious” of the Agency⁸³. These attitudes were reflected in Carter’s first choice for DCI, Theodore Soresen. The former Kennedy aide withdrew his nomination, however, after it was discovered that he had 1) asked for non-combatant status as a conscientious objector during his draft registration in 1946, and 2) he had allegedly illegally removed classified material from the White House to assist with his biography of President Kennedy.

In order to “hit the pacifism [charge] in the neck”,⁸⁴ Carter next opted for a military man to lead the CIA, and settled on his former Annapolis classmate, Admiral Stansfield Turner whom the Senate duly approved.

Both Carter and his new DCI consider the “‘traditional human spy’ as largely outmoded”,⁸⁵ and had an “exaggerated faith in advanced technology.”⁸⁶ Andrew says that the President’s “view of intelligence collection [was] dominated by the high-tech wonders of IMINT and SIGINT.”⁸⁷ That positivistic mindset resulted in a systematic effort to “hamstring or ignore” human intelligence sources.⁸⁸ Their mindset is revealed perfectly in a gee-whiz passage in Turner’s *Secrecy and Democracy*:

Now that we have technical systems ranging from satellites travelling in space over the entire globe, to aircraft flying in free airspace, to miniature sensors surreptitiously positioned close to difficult targets, we are approaching a time when we will be able to survey almost any point on the earth’s surface with some sensor, and probably with more than one. We can take detailed photographs from long distances, detect heat sources through infrared devices, pinpoint metal objects with magnetic detectors, distinguish barely moving and stationary objects through the use of Doppler radar, use radar to

⁸² Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 425.

⁸³ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, page 136-7.

⁸⁴ Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 428.

⁸⁵ Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 429.

⁸⁶ Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush.

⁸⁷ Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 439.

⁸⁸ Benjamin F. Schemmer, “The Intelligence Community’s Case Against Turner,” The Washington Post April 8 1979, page D1.

detect objects that are covered or hidden by darkness, eavesdrop on all manner of signals from the human voice to electronic radio waves, detect nuclear radiation with refined Geiger counters, and sense underground explosions at long distances with seismic devices. Most of the activities that we want to monitor give off several kinds of signals. Tanks in battle can be detected by the heat from their engines, the magnetism of their armor, or photographs. A nuclear weapons plant emits radiation, has a particular external physical shape, and receives certain types of supplies. One way or another, we should soon be able to keep track of most activities on the surface of the earth, day or night, in good weather or bad.⁸⁹

Note well – Turner wrote this paean to high-technology intelligence collection over five years *after* the Iran fiasco!

Imagine the effects on Collection (and Tasking, and Analysis) at the CIA when such positivistic views are held by the man at the top, a DCI who was not only “interested in analysis” as opposed to covert methods, but who “spent a lot of time with analysts from every subject area and at all levels of seniority.”⁹⁰ Even if they were so inclined, it would have been difficult to for other CIA employees be both ‘collegial’ and to insist that phantasmagoria like Khomeini’s face appearing on the moon should enter into the CIA’s evaluations of Iran.

Alexander Wendt observes that “people act towards objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them” and these meanings are intersubjectively constituted.⁹¹ It seems clear that on that basis, the CIA’s culture and identity, with one of its central planks as a faith in “science”, was woefully ill disposed to see that such material was collected for analysis of the internal situation in Iran.⁹²

“HUMINT was likely to be suspect on moral grounds”

Along with an exaggerated faith in high-technology, Carter, Turner and those who followed in their train (i.e. those Washington critics taking a so-called ‘New View’ of intelligence in this era), felt that technical means of intelligence collection were somehow ‘morally superior’ to human intelligence⁹³. They posited, “Human espionage corrupts the process of intelligence gathering”; they

⁸⁹ Turner, Secrets and Democracy: The CIA in Transition, page 92.

⁹⁰ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, page 139.

⁹¹ Wendt, “Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics.”

⁹² While it is outside the scope of this dissertation, one might argue that this is an essentially American characteristic that is merely amplified by various factors at CIA.

⁹³ The merits and demerits of this view are well explored in a reasonably contemporary book Powers, The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA, pages v-xi.

“wanted to replace it with ‘clean’ technical intelligence.”⁹⁴ As one Turner appointee describes, “HUMINT was likely to be suspect on moral grounds and do moral damage (sic) to the collector”.⁹⁵ This ‘moral’ factor, along with his faith technology, led Turner to cut 820 positions from the DO, which handles HUMINT. While exact figures to put these cuts in perspective are not available, scholars agree that Turner’s cut of the DO was substantial, and was a “reduction both then-current and retired DO officers regarded as crippling and unwise”.⁹⁶ In addition, critics at the time said that Turner’s “preference for technology over people...[and other measures] have destroyed morale with the CIA, led hundreds of key CIA personnel to resign and prompted far more to ‘retire in place.’”⁹⁷

The effects of these ‘New View’ changes (which, one can argue, partly reflect a mirroring of the customer, and are partly in keeping with the trait of venerating ‘objectivity’) on Collection in Iran prior to the end of the Pahlavi dynasty are easy to surmise. “The complicated [new, ‘moral’] rules for recruiting agents adopted by the Agency – summed up in a 130-page manual – made it hard to draft foreign nationals.” To make matters worse, “veteran chiefs of station who were associated with the old [CIA] regime were often replaced with people who had no knowledge of the language and culture of the country.”⁹⁸ These ‘New View’ changes, too, had come on the back of a “brutal”⁹⁹ set of personnel cutbacks of CIA HUMINT personnel begun (at President Nixon’s instigation) by DCI Schlesinger in 1973, and that continued under DCI Colby. By the end of 1978, only 10 percent of the State Department’s diplomats in the Embassy (a figure that would encompass the vast majority of the CIA’s Case Officers in the country, who are usually under ‘official cover’ as US Government employees while collecting intelligence¹⁰⁰) spoke fluent Farsi.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 47.

⁹⁵ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 52. For an exploration of whether this is indeed true, see Goldman, ed., The Ethics of Spying: a Reader for the Intelligence Professional; Part Four, comparing espionage and intelligence work to other professions, is especially thought-provoking.

⁹⁶ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, page 138.

⁹⁷ Schemmer, “The Intelligence Community’s Case Against Turner.” page D1.

⁹⁸ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 68.

⁹⁹ An excellent account of this process is found in Powers, The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA, pages 278-282.

¹⁰⁰ See Codevilla, Informing Statecraft: Intelligence for a New Century, page 78-9. This is for reasons discussed in Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare: Understanding the

In summary, as Seliktar says:

The Carter-Turner restructuring affected the CIA's ability to discern the revolutionary dynamics in a number of ways. At the organisational level the 'New View' reform dismantled much of the human intelligence operation that was considered "corrupt" and morally tainted...The "clean" technical intelligence on which Turner planned to rely was poorly equipped to deal with the complexities and chaos of an esoteric revolution.¹⁰²

Over a decade later, Turner mused, "What we missed was the breadth and intensity of feeling against the Shah inside Iran... Those feelings against the Shah were shared by disparate groups that came together for the specific and temporary purpose of deposing him."¹⁰³ They missed registering these feelings about the Shah despite the fact that at least as early as 1977, a CIA employee sent to the US Embassy in Iran was approached by academics and others who, he said, "would find 15 to 30 seconds to whisper in my ear that all was not well...that there was great unrest, that the Shah was not popular."¹⁰⁴

It is evident that key elements in the CIA's culture and identity – elements that both reflected and amplified specific properties of intelligence consumers – played a role in ensuring that the Collection phase of the intelligence cycle missed numerous signals that might have raised in advanced at least the possibility of instability in Iran.

Analysis

Given the warping of Tasking and Collection discussed above, a balanced and open-minded analysis of the situation in Iran in the late 1970s from a vantage point in Virginia would have presented a considerable predictive challenge. Instead, the factors related above compounded problems in Analysis, and for the same deep-seated reasons.

World of Intelligence, page 12-3; Shackley decries this ongoing collection problem in Shackley, Spymaster: My Life in the CIA, pages 284-5. Jones, The Human Factor: Inside the CIA's Dysfunctional Intelligence Culture is largely a tale of how difficult it is to function in the CIA's bureaucracy under non-official cover.

¹⁰¹ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 68. This is among the reasons Iranian diplomats are still expressly forbidden to have any contact with American diplomats. See Jones, The Human Factor: Inside the CIA's Dysfunctional Intelligence Culture, page 18.

¹⁰² Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, pages 186-7.

¹⁰³ Turner, "Intelligence for a New World Order." pages 154-5.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in MacEachin, Nolan and Tockman, Iran: Intelligence Failure or Policy Stalemate? page 9.

The finger of critics of the Agency's performance in this era usually point to the Carter/Turner reforms and their "attempt to castrate the CIA"¹⁰⁵ after Vietnam and Watergate. A closer inspection of this part of the intelligence cycle through a constructivist lens reveals that the real source of these failures are the same enduring attributes of the CIA's identity and culture: homogeneity, unreflective regard for 'objectivity', 'reason', and 'science', a reflexive preference for secret information, and an impulse for consensus.

It is clear, in addition, that *contra* those defenders of the CIA above like Adelman and Helms above who might allege that the event was an inherently unpredictable mystery, the facts speak otherwise. Apart from the more diffuse warnings about the situation issued by Cassandras among academics, business and the media already revealed, the historical record reflects that two rival foreign intelligence agencies were also deeply concerned about Iran. Around May of 1978:

The American Embassy in Tehran became aware of two reports predicting that the Shah would be deposed within a year. A junior intelligence officer of the French Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage (SDECE) wrote one, and Uri Lubrani, the unofficial Israeli envoy in Tehran and Reuven Merhav, a MOSSAD operative, authored the other one.¹⁰⁶

The Israeli reporter Ronen Bergman supports this account, writing that the CIA's experts on Iran discounted Merhav's report.¹⁰⁷

It is an obvious point that logically, if foreign intelligence analysts – clearly Cassandras - could draw these conclusions and issue warnings about Iran's stability, then CIA's analysts could have, too.

"Very Important Patients"

Before beginning this dissection of the core causes of the analytical failure, it is crucial to record that there was a key "un-Collected" secret, a piece of the puzzle missing from the CIA's Analysis of the Iran situation until it was too late: the Shah had cancer.

Though the Shah's cancer was diagnosed in 1974 in Europe, and both the monarch's doctors were French, French intelligence was also ignorant of his

¹⁰⁵ See letter from Richard Nixon to Richard Helms of October 24, 1983 reproduced in the photos in Helms and Hood, A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency.

¹⁰⁶ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 84.

¹⁰⁷ Ronen Bergman, The Secret War With Iran, trans. Ronnie Hope (New York, NY: Free Press, 2008), page 17.

condition. The Shah took extreme measures to keep his condition a secret, and his wife and twin sister only learned of it after he had left Iran. Gary Sick later said: "The Shah's cancer was, without question, one of the best-kept state secrets of all time."¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, Sick's assertion is flatly contradicted by some, who say that Tehran was "alive" with the rumour that the Shah was dying of cancer.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps for that reason, in 1991 Turner admitted, "We [i.e. the CIA] were remiss in not knowing how ill the Shah was."¹¹⁰

In 2005, just how remiss Langley was here became (with rich irony) clear. In that year, an article from *Studies in Intelligence* entitled "Remote Medical Diagnosis: Monitoring the health of Very Important Patients" was declassified. The article's case studies detail the CIA's efforts at long-range monitoring of the health of Georges Pompidou of France, Hourari Boumediene of Algeria, Leonid Brezhnev of the USSR, and Menachem Begin of Israel...and revealed that it was published and circulated in the CIA in the spring of 1979!¹¹¹ This fact makes it probable that the Shah's cancer was only "the best-kept secret of all time" due to the CIA's excessive deference to the Shah's sensibilities regarding collection within Iran in order to preserve their right to pursue secrets about the USSR.

In any case, the Shah's illness was important because during the key events in the autumn of 1978, the Shah was extraordinarily indecisive and frequently depressed, both characteristics that were likely the result of secret chemotherapy treatments. "By fall numerous reports about the Shah's unusual behavior reached Washington, including a Mossad message conveyed by the Israeli Foreign Minister, Moshe Dayan."¹¹² An updated CIA psychiatric profile "included [a] reference to depression and impaired leadership but cancer was

¹⁰⁸ Sick, All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran, pages 212-4.

¹⁰⁹ S. Armstrong, "Carter held hope even after Shah had lost his way," The Washington Post October 25 1980, page A1.

¹¹⁰ Stansfield. Turner, "Purge the CIA of KGB types," The New York Times October 2 1991, page 25.

¹¹¹ Myles Maxfield, Robert Proper and Sharol Case, "Remote Medical Diagnosis: Monitoring the health of Very Important Patients," Studies in Intelligence 23.1 (1979), *passim*. For recent overviews of the topic see Jonathan D Clemente, "CIA's Medical and Psychological Analysis Center (MPAC) and the Health of Foreign Leaders," International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence 19.3 (2006); Jonathan D Clemente, "In Sickness and in Health," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 63.2 (2007), and Rose McDermott, "The use and abuse of medical intelligence," Intelligence and National Security 22.4 (2007).

¹¹² Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 102.

not considered".¹¹³ In fact, that CIA assessment, issued on November 22, concluded (more truthfully than they knew) that the Shah's "mood is not inappropriate to this situation"¹¹⁴; unfortunately, they also concluded, "that he is not paralyzed by indecision."¹¹⁵

No matter what, the CIA can also be faulted for failing to take full account of the openly-available fact that the Shah had "painstakingly constructed the machinery of the state around his person"¹¹⁶ – an inherently fragile arrangement.

The "Unit lacked Persian specialists"

Even if the Shah's condition had been known, the Analysis that the CIA conducted would still likely have been subsumed by other problems created by the culture and identity-driven factors previously discussed.

First, because of Turner's recent reforms that reflecting Turner's high-tech approach to intelligence, the CIA's analytical unit on Iran "lacked Persian specialists."¹¹⁷ Experienced Iran operatives from the DO like Kermit Roosevelt also "were largely ignored."¹¹⁸ We know, too, that the people who left because of Turner's reforms were not only 'black operators' from DO but career professionals from the DI such as Ernie Oney, the Agency's chief Iranian analyst.¹¹⁹ Allison, writing in 1980, said "the inadequacy of current analytic expertise results [is the result of a lack of] a small, dedicated group of experts focused on Iran". He cites not only Turner's reforms for creating this problem: Allison also discusses the social mechanisms of self-selection and isolation of Chapter 3, saying, "The deterioration [of the cadre of analysts at CIA] of recent years also reflects the estrangement between the Intelligence Community and the institutions that maintain our society's storehouses of knowledge, especially universities and corporations."¹²⁰

¹¹³ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 102.

¹¹⁴ Brzezinski, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981, page 368.

¹¹⁵ Brzezinski, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981, page 368.

¹¹⁶ Said Amir Arjomand, "Iran's Islamic revolution in comparative perspective," World Politics 38 (1986), page 385.

¹¹⁷ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 83.

¹¹⁸ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 83.

¹¹⁹ Schemmer, "The Intelligence Community's Case Against Turner." page D1.

¹²⁰ Graham Allison, "An Intelligence Agenda," The New York Times December 21 1980, page 17.

“We did not make the Islamic Revolution so the Persian melon would be cheap.”

In his memoirs, Turner acknowledged that in the late 1970s the CIA did not have the anthropologists and sociologists that could deal with the revolutionary situation in Iran.¹²¹ Magnifying this deficiency on CIA analytical teams was the fact that according to Gates (who was a senior member of the DI at the time) managers at the CIA placed *“little value on the idea that people of different cultures have different habits of thought, values and motivations”*.¹²² Sharply questioned by Carter in November of 1978 over the CIA’s failings, Turner mainly “blamed the mysterious aloofness of the Shiite clergy.”¹²³ As one internal critic put it “[We need] cultural intelligence, not just informants.”¹²⁴

These factors – lack of staff with Iranian experience, lack of anthropologists and sociologists on analytical teams, and managers with a low tolerance for consideration of cultural differences – are all entirely consistent with the portrait of the CIA’s identity and culture presented in Chapter 3. They are an antecedent condition to a cultural blindness that tended to rule out certain directions of political and social change on the grounds that they are “irrational”.¹²⁵ More specifically, these factors combined to create the following analytical difficulty:

It made it harder to decipher the deeply seated religious idioms and the ingrained mistrust and dissimulation that pervaded [Iranian] popular culture. In commenting on this failure, one observer described these beliefs as ‘centuries of tradition, superstition, magic and mythology, cocooned in a xenophobic and ritualistic Islam’. Even if this depiction is too harsh, the inability to discern the discourse of the traditional ‘epistemic community’ – the ulama, the bazaaris, and peasant migrants – was costly. Deep cultural knowledge was essential because 1979 represented the ‘first modern revolution whose idiom of discourse is exclusively derived from native sources and whose moral claims are advanced in confrontation with the ideological and political currents of the modern world.’¹²⁶

¹²¹ Turner, Secrets and Democracy: The CIA in Transition, page 125.

¹²² Robert M. Gates, “Discussion,” Intelligence requirements for the 1990s: Collection, analysis, counterintelligence and covert action, ed. Roy Godson (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), page 114. Emphasis added.

¹²³ Armstrong, “Failing to heed the warning of revolutionary Iran.” page A1

¹²⁴ Quoted in MacEachin, Nolan and Tockman, Iran: Intelligence Failure or Policy Stalemate? page 9.

¹²⁵ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 176.

¹²⁶ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 176.

After the fact, many observers insisted on comparing the Iranian revolution of 1978-9 with its French predecessor almost two centuries before, but – because it was entrenched in Shi'ism – “the Iranian revolution is like no other.”¹²⁷

Certainly, the CIA's Western economic models would have been little help understanding what occurred in Iran. Soon after the revolution, Khomeini responded to complaints about the state of Iran's economy with the retort, “We did not make the Islamic Revolution so the Persian melon would be cheap”.¹²⁸

“I've never actually met him, but I feel I have known him for nearly 1,300 years”

There was another feature of the Iranian revolution made to order (some might say, ‘Heaven sent’) to confound the CIA's analysis constructed under assumptions of ‘objectivity,’ ‘science’, and Western notions of ‘reasonable behaviour’: *taqiyyah*. *Taqiyyah*¹²⁹ is a form of Machiavellian dissimulation “most closely associated with the Shia, who practice it “systematically and widely...to hide their beliefs”, especially “where no useful purpose would be served by publicly affirming them”.¹³⁰

Unfortunately for Langley's analysts, “Iranian political culture, not to mention the tactics of the fundamentalists, was permeated by *taqieh* and other tools of dissimulation and deception.”¹³¹ This is part of the reason why experienced observers like Codevilla could write that “anyone who watched the Iranian revolution of 1978 unfold on television screens could not help but notice incongruities of which the crowds seemed unaware: Muslim mullahs led crowds brandishing Soviet-made AK-47 rifles and shouting un-Islamic slogans that sounded as if they had been written in Moscow, together with quotes from the Koran.”¹³²

The ultimate origin of this failure to cope with *taqiyyah*, however, arguably lies in Kent's analytical doctrine, an intelligence dogma at the CIA that

¹²⁷ Rouleau, “Khomeini's Iran.” page 2-3.

¹²⁸ Arjomand, “Iran's Islamic revolution in comparative perspective.” page 405.

¹²⁹ Also spelled *taqieh*

¹³⁰ Cyril Glassé, The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam (New York: HarperCollins, 1991). page 397; see also A. B. Bozeman, “Iran: US foreign policy and the tradition of Persian statecraft,” Orbis 23 (1979).

¹³¹ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, pages 187.

¹³² Codevilla, Informing Statecraft: Intelligence for a New Century, page 382.

“exuded a strong positivistic belief in a ‘rational’ political universe which experts could objectively analyze. It relied heavily on predictions that were considered ‘objective’ truths - derived from what was considered a detached parsing of political reality - and left little room for cultural difference.”¹³³ As Halliday says, Iran was “one of the most difficult Third World countries to deal with, not least because *the understanding of what constitutes ‘reasonable behavior’ or ‘good intentions’ notoriously differ.*”¹³⁴

On the issue of *taqiyyah*, no matter what “camouflage” statements were made by Khomeini in Paris¹³⁵ and or actions were taken soon after his arrival in Iran¹³⁶, there is the awkward fact that:

If there is a single constant in Khomeini's thinking -- contained in sermons, statements and about 30 published books -- it is a deep-seated sense of Iranian nationalism and suspicion of foreign powers seen as exploiting his country. "All the problems besetting Iran and other Islamic nations are the doings of the aliens of the United States," he said in a fiery sermon in 1964, climaxing several years of attacks on the Shah, which led to his exile.¹³⁷

Behind each of these individual factors distorting the Analysis phase of the intelligence cycle, however, is an antecedent condition, the overriding fact that CIA analysts because of the workings of culture and identity detailed above, lacked a “conscious epistemology”. Deeper epistemic and methodological self-awareness would have “helped analysts and their consumers understand the implications of developmentalism and dependency on forecasting political change”¹³⁸ during the Analysis part of the intelligence cycle:

¹³³ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, pages 187-8. NB these situations can also be partly explained by active Soviet trouble-making in the country like that via the communist newspaper *Novin*, cited above, and radio broadcasts, etc. See Don Oberdorfer, “U.S. Makes Contacts With Shah's Foes,” The Washington Post November 28 1978, page A1. The Cuban Missile Crisis case in the next chapter offers a overview of Soviet deception measures that may be taken as representative of those used in intelligence operations more generally.

¹³⁴ F Halliday, “The Iranian revolution and great power politics: Components of the first decade,” Neither East nor West: Iran, the Soviet Union and the United States, eds. N. R. Keddie and M J Gasiorowski (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), page 249 cited in Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 146. Emphasis added.

¹³⁵ See for example Sciolino, “Iran's Durable Revolution.” page 894-5.

¹³⁶ Possibly including the appointment of Mehdi Bazargan to head the provisional government on 5 February, 1979. See Rouleau, “Khomeini's Iran.” pages 7-9.

¹³⁷ Jonathan Randal, “Views differ on Islamic role in republic,” The Washington Post February 4 1979, page A23.

¹³⁸ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 192.

The unprecedented nature of Iranian fundamentalism confounded accepted notions of rationality, linear progression and other time-honoured tools for peering into the future...[CIA analysts] could not envision a country which would adopt a seemingly regressive collective belief system and proceed to institutionalize it amid breathtaking repression and violence¹³⁹...Expectations about Iran "were amplified through 'model fitting', that is, the tendency of observers to corroborate their paradigmatic assumptions regardless of the political reality...[and] were often based more on the belief in the logic of the paradigm than on the detailed knowledge of the situation."¹⁴⁰

In other words, the CIA ended up with what Milani describes as "a sort of theoretical glaucoma"¹⁴¹ because they failed to be aware of the master theories (what Kuhn called paradigms)¹⁴² that dictated the standards of inquiry in their field. The strangeness of the revolutionaries' ideology – and its distance from Western preconceptions – was captured by a distinguished Iranian historian of Islam. When asked soon after the revolution if he was acquainted with Khomeini, he answered: "I've never actually met him, but I feel I have known him for nearly 1,300 years".¹⁴³ Sherman Kent's analytical progeny dwelt not simply in Virginia, but in another universe.

Even in 1986, the confusion among some analysts and political scientists was palpable: "If the Shah's regime collapsed despite the fact that his army was intact, despite the fact that there was no defeat in war, and despite the fact that the state faced no financial crisis and no peasant insurrections, where does this leave the usual generalizations about revolutions? Mostly in the pits."¹⁴⁴

We should note, however, that this does not mean that there were no relatively recent Western parallels to important aspects of Khomeini's movement that a different CIA culture might have detected. Arjomand finds such correspondences between Iran and European fascist movement like the Slovak Republic established by Father Hlinka's People's Party (run by Father Tiso), the Ustasha movement in Croatia, and especially the Romanian Iron Guards and the Legion of the Archangel Michael – all were movements characterised by

¹³⁹ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 172.

¹⁴⁰ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 174.

¹⁴¹ M. M. Milani, The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), page 22.

¹⁴² Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, page 173-8.

¹⁴³ Randal, "Khomeini: From Oblivion to the Brink of Power." page A23.

¹⁴⁴ Arjomand, "Iran's Islamic revolution in comparative perspective." page 387.

“extraordinary cults of suffering and martyrdom”,¹⁴⁵ and prominently combined priests and university students. Ramazani, meanwhile, finds two historical precedents in Iran’s past with which the revolution of 1979 shared four factors,¹⁴⁶ all of them ‘soft’ rather than quantitative features, and thus less likely to register with Agency analysts.

In summary, all four of the properties of identity and culture at CIA detailed in Five Four – but especially the Agency’s reflexive predilection for secret over open-source information, combined with the pervasive legacy¹⁴⁷ of the Sherman Kent-era’s positivism - contributed heavily to the failure in the Analysis phase, which in turn contributed to this strategic surprise of revolution in Iran.

¹⁴⁵ Arjomand, "Iran's Islamic revolution in comparative perspective." page 412.

¹⁴⁶ R. K. Ramazani, "Iran's Revolution: Patterns, Problems and Prospects," *International Affairs* 56.3 (1980), page 444.

¹⁴⁷ Kent himself retired in 1967. See <https://www.cia.gov/library/kent-center-occasional-papers/vol1no5.htm>

Production & Dissemination

Before closing our discussion of the key qualities of the culture and identity of the CIA's contributions to the shambles of the American grasp of the Iranian situation during the Carter Administration, it is worth noting the effect of the CIA's inclination for consensus on the last two phases of the intelligence cycle, 'Production' and 'Dissemination'.

"Salesmanship Is a part of the game"

One can argue that this cultural trait – created by the social mechanisms self-selection, socialisation, and mirror-imaging detailed in Chapter 3 (Summarised in Figure 1) provides a more parsimonious explanation of the CIA's failures in these phases than more complex theories of bureaucratic or organisational politics detailed in Chapter 2's literature survey.

Recall the 'game of footnotes' and associated social mechanisms described in Chapter 3. Then consider this chain of events surrounding the CIA's failure to produce and disseminate an NIE on Iran in the autumn of 1978, and consider whether the "Bureaucratic infighting" this passage suggests is an adequate explanation:

Bureaucratic infighting impeded the drafting of the National Intelligence Estimate "Iran: Prospects Through 1985" ordered by Turner in March...the INR claimed that the CIA and the DIA were too optimistic about the Shah; in turn, the agencies accused the INR of being unduly pessimistic. Griffin [of the INR] issued a dissenting note when, in August, the CIA published an interim report which stated that 'Iran was not in a revolutionary or even pre-revolutionary state' and that the 'Shah will be an active participant in Iranian life well into the 1980s'. On September 1, the INR responded that there is a 'basic unresolvable conflict between the Shah's liberalization program and the need to limit violent opposition', and predicted that there are 'some chances that the Shah will be forced to step down. In a September 28 report, the DIA argued that the 'Shah is expected to remain actively in power over the next 10 years'. *Failing to achieve consensus, Turner quietly abandoned the NIE.*¹⁴⁸

As the Washington Post put it, "Turner kept 'honing' the 1978 NIE on Iran until it simply was overtaken by events, arriving on U.S. policymakers' desks on the edge of the Shah's downfall".¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 92. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁹ Schemmer, "The Intelligence Community's Case Against Turner." page D1.

Similarly, Turner may have been disinclined to use probability estimates about the Shah's chances of remaining on the throne because he was sensitive to past criticism of the CIA 'waffling' in its analysis.¹⁵⁰ If, as Herman says above, "salesmanship is a part of the game,"¹⁵¹ Turner's mirror-imaging of the customer's desires for certainty *and* his unwillingness to upset the consensus regarding the Shah probably contributed to the CIA's 'single outcome forecast' of the Shah's permanence.

In a manner fully consonant with the mirror-imaging hypothesis proposed so far, Seliktar offers details of this process at work in the Analysis phase in a manner that links it to the Production and Dissemination phase:

Left to their own devices [sic], individual analysts could probably have produced more nuanced and intellectually sophisticated analysis. Many of them are trained academics whose natural inclination is to write in ways that reflect the ambiguity and complexity of political change. However, *busy bureaucrats and politicians see ambiguity and complexity as irritants and impediments to good decision-making. There is even less tolerance for theoretically laden concepts such as discourse, legitimacy or collective belief systems.* In the words of one observer, "policymaking elites and intelligence bureaucracies are not readily disposed toward dealing with theories in a conscious, rigorous or sustained manner."¹⁵²

In other words, we again see mirroring of the customer at work in the CIA's culture, to the detriment of strategic warning – the "consensus" will always drive towards crisp and simple analysis, even if the underlying reality is more complex.

¹⁵⁰ Turner, Secrets and Democracy: The CIA in Transition, page 121 cited in Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 93.

¹⁵¹ Herman, "Identity, Norms and National Security: the Soviet Foreign Policy Revolution and the End of the Cold War." page 46.

¹⁵² Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 191. Emphasis added. She was here quoting "Intelligence and Crisis Forecasting," Orbis 27.4 (1989), page 823.

Case Summary

This chronicle of the disastrous surprise of the collapse of the Shah of Iran's regime first offered clear evidence that the end of the Pahlavi dynasty was a strategic surprise about which the CIA failed to provide warning. It then detailed how, beginning in Tasking – and following the intelligence cycle through Collection, Analysis, Production and Dissemination – the key attributes of the CIA's identity and culture that were detailed in Chapter 3 contributed to this intelligence failure. Along the way, it revealed Cassandras outside of the Agency's culture who accurately foresaw how the process in Iran might end and tried to provide strategic warning. In so doing, it put paid to the suggestion of some of Langley's advocates that because the *outcome* of unrest in Iran was unforeseeable, the intelligence agency is 'not to blame' in any sense for the failure to give warning.

In short, this case detailed why – if the outcome of Iranian revolution of the late 1970s was a true 'mystery' – the origin of the CIA's failure to predict its general outline is not: it ultimately resides in perennial internal characteristics of the spy agency's identity and culture.

Case II: The Collapse¹⁵³ of the USSR

In Chapter 4, we discussed the fundamental logical difference between mysteries and secrets. Before discussing the evidence for the CIA's failure to anticipate the mysterious implosion of the USSR, three caveats are in order.

First, there is the obvious fact that the CIA was by no means alone in not anticipating the 'self-liquidating' nature of the Soviet Union. Second, there is the so-called 'Triumphalist Hypothesis'. Third, there is in some quarters an absolute denial¹⁵⁴ that the collapse of the USSR was a surprise to the CIA. These caveats – and their possible significance - are addressed below.

"The appearance of solid well-being"

The first item on our preliminary agenda is simply to acknowledge that the CIA was not alone in failing to predict the demise of the USSR: it was the failure of an entire *profession*, Sovietology.¹⁵⁵ No less a figure than John Kenneth Galbraith, on returning from a 1984 visit to the USSR, asserted that the Soviet economy had made "great material progress," and remarked on "the appearance of solid well-being of the people on the streets"; Galbraith ascribed these facts to the idea that "in contrast to Western industrial economy," the

¹⁵³ NB: though it includes economic arguments, this case study is about the collapse of the USSR itself, i.e. the state, not the economy, of the USSR. As Petrakov notes, "[Economies] may suffer severely from maladies like inflation, unemployment, corruption, black markets, etc. But they do not "collapse" like a tent whose guy ropes have been suddenly severed; they do not die." See Blair A. Ruble, "Occasional Paper #283, U.S. Assessments of the Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Economy: Lessons Learned and Not Learned," (Washington, DC: The Kennan Institute, The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002, page 27.

¹⁵⁴ NB: Such denial or redefinition is firmly in keeping with established theories of the mechanisms of bureaucratic politics and institutional self-preservation.

¹⁵⁵ On the Soviet economy, see Wilhelm, "The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession.;" for a more complete coverage of the "Cold War consensus", and the failings of the profession, see Michael Cox, "Whatever Happened to the USSR: Critical Reflections on Soviet Studies," Rethinking the Soviet Collapse: Sovietology, the Death of Communism and the New Russia, ed. Michael Cox (London: Pinter, 1998) and the more recent Christopher I. Xenakis, What Happened to the Soviet Union?: How and Why American Sovietologists Were Caught by Surprise (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers 2002). At least one Sociology scholar reports presenting a geopolitical model of possible Soviet collapse at Yale and Columbia in 1980 (published as Randall Collins, "The Future Decline of the Russian Empire," Weberian Sociological Theory, ed. Randall Collins (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1986) to a hostile reaction among both "conservatives" and "liberals"; see Randall Collins, "Prediction in Macrosociology: The Case of the Soviet Collapse," The American Journal of Sociology 100.6 (1995).

USSR “makes full use of its manpower (sic).”¹⁵⁶ It was only on the edge of the mainstream, and mainly the right-wing edge – ‘hard-line’ conservative academics like Richard Pipes,¹⁵⁷ who maintained that the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s was in the midst of a systemic crisis, an ‘Upper Volta with missiles’¹⁵⁸ – that the Soviet regime was largely illegitimate in the eyes of its citizens.¹⁵⁹

On the other hand, before the CIA is lumped among the many others who misjudged the USSR, it is important to recognize the CIA’s central contribution to the failure of the Sovietological profession as a whole. In 1990, Eberstadt made the point this way: “The CIA’s figures on Soviet economic trends are widely regarded as the most authoritative currently available...Unclassified CIA publications serve as basic reference sources on the Soviet economy in our universities, in our newspapers, and for the interested public.”¹⁶⁰ Through its uniquely authoritative voice, the Agency enabled and reinforced Sovietology’s central misjudgements. It was not perceived as especially ideological in academe, for example, with a scholar in *Slavic Review* saying in 1981: “By the traditional measures of quality employed by scholars, the work done by CIA [on the Soviet economy] receives high marks. It exhibits methodological integrity, analytical rigor and thoroughness in research.”¹⁶¹

The “Secret Strategy”

The ‘Triumphalist Hypothesis’, summed up in *Victory: The Reagan Administration’s Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union*¹⁶², can also be disposed of relatively quickly.

What is this hypothesis? The publication of various memoirs and selected CIA declassifications reveal that under President Reagan (or even before: one

¹⁵⁶ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 118. This puts one in mind of George Orwell’s observation that in order to believe certain absurdities it is necessary to have attended university. See Moynihan’s Introduction to Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule page xvii.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example Richard Pipes, “Can the Soviet Union reform?,” Foreign Affairs 63.47-61 (1984), Richard Pipes, “Misrepresenting the Cold War: The hardliners had it right,” Foreign Affairs 74.1 (1995), and Chapter 3 in Pipes, Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger.

¹⁵⁸ The famous phrase was first uttered by West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.

¹⁵⁹ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 110.

¹⁶⁰ Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule, page 137.

¹⁶¹ William Moskoff, “Review Essay: CIA Publications on the Soviet Economy,” Slavic Review 40.2 (1981), page 270.

¹⁶² Peter Schweitzer, Victory: The Reagan Administration’s Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union (New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994).

chapter in DCI Gate's memoirs dealing the Ford and Carter years is titled "Planting Lethal Seeds"¹⁶³), United States undertook a covert strategic offensive to attack "the very heart of the Soviet system".¹⁶⁴ This offensive, did not, as some allege, create the various crises that ended the USSR. It did, however, amount to a "comprehensive policy to exacerbate"¹⁶⁵ the many of the problems involved in this downfall, and thus these policies arguably hastened the events of 1989-91.

There *is* ample evidence that all of the policies that advocates of this hypothesis enumerate¹⁶⁶ were pursued. It is not at all clear, however, the degree to which these policies were 'pushing on an already opening door' or the degree to which a list of policies like this do not represent *ex post facto* pattern-finding (i.e. hindsight bias) of the sort that Taleb explores convincingly.¹⁶⁷ This approach also ignores larger historical and geopolitical factors beyond the tactical measures it brings to the foreground, and factors internal to the

¹⁶³ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, pages 85-96.

¹⁶⁴ These operations were apparently code-named "Famish", according to David Major, a former FBI Agent and the first Director of Counterintelligence Programs at the National Security Council during the Reagan Administration; see "CI Centre Course 105: John Walker Case," Counter-Intelligence Centre Podcasts (United States: The Counter-Intelligence Centre, 2007. See also Schweitzer, Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union, *passim*.

¹⁶⁵ Schweitzer, Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page xv.

¹⁶⁶ According to Schweitzer, Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page xviii - xix, these measures included: "1) Covert financial, intelligence, and logistical support to the Solidarity movement in Poland that ensured the survival of an opposition movement in the heart of the Soviet Empire 2) Substantial financial and military support to Afghan resistance, as well as supplying mujahedin personnel to take the war into the Soviet Union itself 3) A campaign to reduce dramatically Soviet hard currency earnings by driving down the price of oil with Saudi cooperation and limiting natural gas exports to the West 4) A sophisticated and detailed psychological operation to fuel indecision and fear among the Soviet leadership 5) A comprehensive global campaign, including secret diplomacy, to reduce drastically Soviet access to Western high technology 6) A widespread technological disinformation campaign, designed to disrupt the Soviet economy 7) An aggressive high-tech defense buildup that by Soviet accounts severely strained the economy and exacerbated the resource crisis."

¹⁶⁷ Taleb, Foiled by Randomness: the Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets, pages 1-69. Niall Ferguson also explores the issue of hindsight bias in a novel and empirical way. Most first-person narrative accounts and many historians describe the period before the First World War as one of "mounting international tensions" and "escalating crises". Ferguson shows that none of these "tensions" and "crises" were reflected in contemporary Imperial Bond prices, and thus are likely to be pure hindsight bias. See Niall Ferguson, "Political Risk and the International Bond Market Between the 1848 Revolution and the Outbreak of the First World War," Economic History Review 59.1 (2006).

communist experiment itself that transcended the merely economic or political, such as those Kotkin explores.¹⁶⁸

What's more, the Triumphalist thesis discounts Josh Kerbel's common sense (but oft-neglected) observation that:

Emphasis on economic leverage and levers illustrates how the linear template (in this case one providing for proportionality and identifiable cause-and-effect), when erroneously applied to a nonlinear system, provides the illusion of calibrated influence. *Economies, like the nation-states and international system to which they are intertwined, are nonlinear and notoriously resistant to precise manipulation...*¹⁶⁹

The evidence presented below shows that though the strategic offensive of the Reagan years was real, there were at the CIA intelligence failures that involve "a deeper intellectual misjudgement of a central historical reality"¹⁷⁰ about the USSR. As in the Iranian crisis, and for many of the same underlying reasons, US policy-makers were once again not offered "the best available materials of decision".¹⁷¹ In other words, despite the Triumphalist Hypothesis, the next section substantiates the scale and scope of the surprise of the CIA and the US government as a whole at the collapse of the USSR. These misjudgements, documented below, ultimately demolish the logic of the Triumphalist Hypothesis: complexity aside, it is not credible that an entity as profoundly misunderstood by the CIA as the USSR was could nevertheless be manipulated into a planned outcome – peaceful collapse - with such precision.

"Right on the mark"

The CIA's record has many defenders, scholars, and retired analysts who allege that there was no surprise at the cessation of the USSR. It is time to turn for a moment to these arguments.

One noted expert, Jeffrey T. Richelson, says: "I think they did a good job...If you had read the estimates and studies that I read from 1985 to May of 1991, I don't think anybody would have been surprised by the evolution of events in the Soviet Union, and that's all that anybody could ask." Richelson ascribes the perception that there was a strategic surprise to two factors: "Partly

¹⁶⁸ Kotkin, Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000. Among other things, Kotkin points out the importance of the ultimate belief in "socialism with a human face" among Gorbachev and others.

¹⁶⁹ Kerbel, "Thinking Straight: Cognitive Bias in the US Debate about China." Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁰ Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, "Tragic dilemmas of Soviet world power: The limits of a new-type empire," Encounter 61 (1983), page 397.

¹⁷¹ Rosenfeld, "Knowing the Outs as Well as the Ins." page A17.

it comes from statements by [Senator Daniel] Moynihan and partly it comes from the assumption that, because we didn't announce all of this was going to happen, there was no understanding that it could".¹⁷²

The effort to understand the CIA's record on the USSR – and to counter criticism of it – began in 1991, when the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence commissioned a group of non-government economic experts to review CIA's analysis of the Soviet economy. They concluded:

Most reports [from 1979] through 1988 on the course of the Soviet GNP and on general economic developments were equally satisfactory: accurate, illuminating, and timely. In fact, we find it hard to believe that anyone who has read the CIA's annual public reports on the state of the Soviet economy since 1975 could possibly interpret them as saying that the Soviet economy was booming. On the contrary, these reports regularly reported the steady decline in the Soviet growth rate and called attention to the deep and structural problems that pointed to continued decline and possibly to stagnation.¹⁷³

Similarly, in a 1995 article in *The National Interest* entitled "The CIA Vindicated: The Soviet Collapse Was Predicted", for example, two intelligence scholars flatly avow: "The Intelligence Community did not fail to predict the Soviet collapse. Quite the contrary, throughout the 1980s the Intelligence Community warned of the weakening Soviet economy, and, later, of the impending fall of Gorbachev and the break-up of the Soviet Union."¹⁷⁴

On the issue of the USSR's economy, these same scholars assert: "Far from ignoring the Soviet economic malaise, by the middle of the Reagan administration the Intelligence Community understood as a matter of course that the Soviet economy had been consistently slowing down, slipping to mediocre--and, in some years, negligible--growth rates".¹⁷⁵

At times, these scholars seem to fall back on fig leaves, as demonstrated by the following: "It is notable that the five-year prediction of stability presented in the 1985 NIE stopped just short of the actual date of the Soviet collapse (1991)". Nevertheless, they ultimately conclude of the CIA's record on the "Strategic Problem"¹⁷⁶ of "Detecting Soviet Decline" that:

¹⁷² Vernon Loeb, "Back Channels: The Intelligence Community," The Washington Post November 19 1999, page A43.

¹⁷³ "An Evaluation of CIA's Analysis of Soviet Economic Performance 1970 -1990,"

¹⁷⁴ Bruce D. Berkowitz and Jeffery T. Richelson, "CIA Vindicated: The Soviet Collapse Was Predicted," The National Interest 41 (1995), page 36.

¹⁷⁵ Berkowitz and Richelson, "CIA Vindicated: The Soviet Collapse Was Predicted." page 39.

¹⁷⁶ Which they distinguish from what they call the "Tactical Problems" of: 1) "Will Gorbachev and the Soviet Union Survive?", and 2) "Has the Coup Started Yet?".

By attempting to estimate specific growth rates, the Intelligence Community diluted its main message, which was that the Soviet economy was stagnating and--even more important--that there were no apparent or available means for it to be reinvigorated. This basic message, which was accepted throughout the Intelligence Community and was repeated in official estimates over the course of several years, was right on the mark.¹⁷⁷

When republishing a 1995 monograph entitled *Intelligence fiasco or reasoned accounting?: CIA estimates of Soviet GNP*¹⁷⁸, the RAND Corporation calls the debate over the CIA estimates of the Soviet economy “heavily politicized”. The abstract says demurely: “The author finds little evidence to support the common indictment that the CIA seriously misestimated the Soviet growth record. [But] the author finds *somewhat greater reason to believe that the Agency's comparative size ratios were overstated.*”¹⁷⁹

The central significance of drawing such a careful distinction between “growth record”, and “comparative size ratios” (but common among the defenders of the CIA's record) is addressed below.

“Obviously there were deficiencies...”

Much of the testimony during the second confirmation hearings of Robert Gates to become DCI in 1991 (See Appendix) , a 1994 Kennedy School case study,¹⁸⁰ a 1996 article in *The Los Angeles Times*,¹⁸¹ and a 1997 article in *Studies in Intelligence* all make a similar case: “The assertions that the CIA got it blatantly wrong are unfounded – that charges that the CIA did not see and report the economic decline, societal deterioration, and political destabilization that ultimately resulted in the break-up of the Soviet Union are contradicted by the record.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Berkowitz and Richelson, “CIA Vindicated: The Soviet Collapse Was Predicted.” page 41.

¹⁷⁸ Abraham S. Becker, “Intelligence Fiasco or Reasoned Accounting?: CIA Estimates of Soviet GNP,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* (Silver Spring, MD: V.H. Winston & Son, 1994).

¹⁷⁹ See <http://www.rand.org/pubs/reprints/RP414/>. Emphasis added.

¹⁸⁰ Kirsten Lundberg, “CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: the Politics of “Getting It Right,” (Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1994).

¹⁸¹ James Risen, “In Defense of CIA's Derring-Do,” *The Los Angeles Times* 1996, page 1

¹⁸² MacEachin, *CIA Assessments of the Soviet Union: The Record Versus the Charges*, page 1 A more recent attempt to defend the CIA's record is Bruce Berkowitz, “US Intelligence Estimates of Soviet Collapse: Reality and Perception,” *Blindside: How to Anticipate Forcing Events and Wild Cards in Global Politics*, ed. Francis Fukuyama (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

Robert Gates, who began his career as a Soviet analyst, and was the first former analyst selected to be DCI, said in a 1992 speech to the Foreign Policy Association:

Obviously there were deficiencies in the CIA's work on the Soviet Union – things we did not know and areas where we were wrong. But the body of information, analysis and warning provided to policymakers and to Congress was of extraordinarily high quality. To claim that US intelligence in general and the CIA in particular failed to recognize the systemic weakness of the Soviet system, failed to inform policymakers of the growing crisis, or failed to warn of impending collapse of the old order is not consistent with the facts.¹⁸³

The following year, the CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence even sponsored a three-day conference at Texas A&M University's Bush School of Government and Public Service entitled "U.S. Intelligence and the End of the Cold War" that was intended to lay to rest charges that the failure of the USSR was a surprise.¹⁸⁴

"It could have resulted in great damage to U.S. interests"

The former US Ambassador in Moscow during this period, Jack Matlock, also defends the CIA record, and does so in a somewhat novel manner (for intelligence literature, at any rate). He does so by highlighting the practical danger posed by issuing a warning that might become a "self-altering prediction".¹⁸⁵ He says: "If the analysis leaked, as it certainly would have, it could well have

¹⁸³ Cited in Lundberg, "CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: the Politics of "Getting It Right", page 2.

¹⁸⁴ Loeb, "Back Channels: The Intelligence Community." page A43 Also described in *Studies* the next year: Appelbaum and Hedley, "US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War."

¹⁸⁵ For a general overview of the problem of self-altering predictions, see Richard L. Henshel, "The Boundary of the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and the Dilemma of Social Prediction" *The British Journal of Sociology* 33.4 (1982). These issues are also dealt with extensively in the literature on "strategic warning" and "indicators analysis"; see for example, Handel, "Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise." pages 17-20. Readers interested in the closely-related topic of counterfactuals are referred to the excellent Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); James D. Fearon, "Counter Factuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science," *World Politics* 43 (1991); Roland Wenzlhuemer, "Counterfactual Thinking as a Scientific Method," *Historical Social Research - Special Issue: Counterfactual Thinking as a Scientific Method* 34.2 (2009); and Richard Ned Lebow, "Counterfactuals, History and Fiction," *Historical Social Research - Special Issue: Counterfactual Thinking as a Scientific Method* 34.2 (2009). Note especially Jervis's contribution to Tetlock and Belkin, which addresses counterfactuals when dealing with a system: Robert Jervis, "Counterfactuals, Causation and Complexity," *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological and Psychological Perspectives*, eds. Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). A logically weaker analysis, but closely on topic, is

precipitated a crackdown in the Soviet Union that reversed Gorbachev's reforms, restored many Cold War practices, and preserved authoritarian controls in the Soviet Union for a generation or longer."¹⁸⁶

On one level, the Ambassador and those like him are correct: the CIA was *not* completely wrong about every aspect of the USSR. It is indeed easy to find CIA studies that document the problems that led to the demise of the USSR, and leaks do pose dangers. Moreover, there is also substantial disagreement among both scholars and veteran CIA employees themselves about the exact nature and timings of their surprise at the shape and speed of the USSR's downfall. Without a doubt, "the predominant value of the CIA's economic research on the USSR is that the Soviet economy does not function very well",¹⁸⁷ and thus the story of this surprise is certainly more nuanced than the fall

Fred I. Greenstein, "The Impact of Personality on the End of the Cold War: A Counterfactual Analysis," Political Psychology 19.1 (1998). Insofar as one sees individual proclivities and actions as relevant to counterfactual histories and contingent events, Russia and the USSR offer rich ground for counterfactual speculation. It is fascinating to consider, for example, that Boris Yeltsin was almost drowned by a drunken priest during his baptism, lost two fingers playing with a hand grenade as a boy, almost died of typhus brought on while exploring a swamp, and appears to have made several suicide attempts; see Kotkin, Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000, page 92 and 95, and Mikhail Gorbachev, Memoirs (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996), page 246. In the more distant past, Trotsky offers speculations in this same for-want-of-a-nail vein in the four pages of his autobiography devoted to the consequences of a particularly poorly scheduled duck hunting expedition (that arguably led to a chain of events concluding in Stalin winning their leadership contest). See Trotsky, My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography, pages 495-8; this is addressed in more detail below.

¹⁸⁶ See Jack F. Matlock, "Western Intelligence and the Collapse of the Soviet Union, 1980-1990: Ten Years That Did Not Shake the World (review)," Journal of Cold War Studies 6.Spring (2004), page 100. The context of that remark is: "In June 1990, when I was still the U.S. ambassador, I sent a top-secret message to the president and secretary of state advising them to make contingency plans for a possible break-up of the Soviet Union. The CIA circulated this message, without negative comment, in its briefing package to other senior officials. Why, then, did the CIA not predict the Soviet collapse, even when it was close at hand? There were very good reasons for avoiding a formal intelligence assessment with that prediction. If the analysis leaked, as it certainly would have, it could well have precipitated a crackdown in the Soviet Union that reversed Gorbachev's reforms, restored many Cold War practices, and preserved authoritarian controls in the Soviet Union for a generation or longer. Even if the collapse occurred as predicted, many persons would draw the conclusion that it had been engineered by the United States. This would have greatly burdened future U.S. relations with a nuclear-armed successor state. That is why there was no formal CIA prediction. It was not needed, and it could have resulted in great damage to U.S. interests if it had been issued." It would seem, under Ambassador Matlock's logic, that the CIA should never provide accurate forecasts of anything amenable to human agency, lest the prediction leak and trigger a self-cancelling response. In any case, if one considers his remarks in light of Figure 4, above, all pretence of intelligence as a science must go out the window: self-cancelling predictions do not occur in the real science. That is the essence of the deductive-nomological model.

¹⁸⁷ Moskoff, "Review Essay: CIA Publications on the Soviet Economy." page 270. Ironically, Moskoff goes on to characterize the CIA's analysis as "essentially negative" and therefore "unbalanced", citing such "facts" as that the USSR has "the second largest

of the Shah, or than the somewhat simplistic charges made in Senator Moynihan's newspaper articles.

Nevertheless, asserting that the CIA's view of the USSR was essentially correct in its assessment of the political, military and economic state of the USSR, is (to put it at in its most polite form), a selective reading of the CIA's record regarding the last decade of Soviet power. There is adequate evidence of an ongoing misjudgement of many aspects of the central political, social, economic and military conditions of the CIA's primary target for over four decades,¹⁸⁸ and that its sudden demise was a strategic surprise. The overarching fact is that for the US government, the fall of the USSR meant a "sudden realisation that one has been operating on the basis of an erroneous threat assessment": a strategic surprise.

This debate's existence can be seen on one level as a bureaucracy protecting itself. On another level, it can be seen as "the first draft of history" by those inside and outside the Sovietological profession to make sense of momentous events. In the context of the orthodox school of strategic surprise, it can be seen as a debate about the quality of warning issued, a variation on the warning-response problem. In constructivist terms, however, the debate sharply underlines the notion that intelligence analysis and threat assessment – *contra* the naive empiricism and scientism so central to CIA identity and culture – traffic in social, not natural, facts.

We will now review evidence demonstrating that despite the protestations of its bureaucratic defenders, a record of honourable service, and occasional triumphs, the foundation of the Agency's threat assessments about the USSR were gravely flawed.

gross national product in the world" and "it has been a rare occurrence in the past twenty years when growth of real GNP (total or per capita) in the Soviet Union has been exceeded by that of the United States or the European community." Again – it wasn't just the CIA that got a lot wrong! As Wilhelm courageously says in Wilhelm, "The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession", there was a failure of an entire *profession*.

¹⁸⁸ Or longer: see, for example, Leonard Leshuk, "US Intelligence Perceptions of Soviet Power, 1921-1946," (London: Frank Cass, 2003), *passim* on US misjudgements regarding the USSR prior to the creation of the CIA.

Part I: Evidence of the Failure

As explored above, there is evidence that the CIA successfully identified many strains that eventually contributed to the collapse of the USSR. Despite a huge generational investment of resources, however, their threat assessment was badly skewed.

“The largest single social science research project in the history of humanity”

As we begin, we should recall that during the Cold War much of what could be learned about the United States from the Government Printing Office or a local library had to be pieced together painstakingly about the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁹ At one point, even samovar production figures were a state secret.¹⁹⁰ Obviously, this information vacuum exacerbated many of the factors discussed below. If the Soviet Union was secretive about its economy, it was still more so about its military might. In a military context, virtually everything had to be pieced together from information that was collected either secretly or by unusual means (such as interpreting telemetry from Soviet missile test).¹⁹¹ Thus, no one should underestimate the complexities of the task with which the CIA was charged. Undoubtedly, the CIA’s “quest to describe the Soviet economy absorbed enormous resources and marshalled considerable analytical talent”: with some justification, it was called “the largest single social science research project in the history of humanity”.¹⁹² The crucial term in that description, of course is *social science*.

¹⁸⁹ Treverton, Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information, page 8-9

¹⁹⁰ Edward R. Allen, “The Validity of Soviet Economic Statistics,” Studies in Intelligence 4.3 (1960), page 1.

¹⁹¹ Treverton, Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information, pages 8-9.

¹⁹² “Inside the CIA: An interview with former CIA analyst Melvin Goodman” Cold War (USA: Cable News Network, 1998), ed. Jeremy Isaacs.. Sakwa’s point, however, is well-taken: “The academic discipline of Sovietology was no more than a small, and by no means the most significant, part of the attempt by writers, émigrés, intellectuals and others to understand the origins not just of communism (in its various guises) but of Russia’s ambiguous relationship with modernity and the West.” See Richard Sakwa, “Russian Political Evolution: a Structural Approach,” Rethinking the Soviet Collapse: Sovietology, the Death of Communism and the New Russia, ed. Michael Cox (London: Pinter, 1998), page 181. On the other hand, the Cold War as a whole obviously had an immense influence on the social sciences generally. For more on that topic see Christopher Simpson, ed., Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences During the Cold War (New York, NY: The New Press, 1998).; Winks, Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961., Robin, The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex; for the CIA’s influence on culture more broadly see Frances Stonor Saunders, Who Paid the Piper?: CIA and the Cultural Cold War (London: Granta Books, 2000); and Frances Stonor Saunders,

“Why were so many of us so insensitive to the Inevitable?”

We can begin by polling the opinion of Stansfield Turner, whom we met as DCI during the Iran debacle. In 1991, he stated:

*We should not gloss over the enormity of this failure to forecast the magnitude of the Soviet crisis... Yet I never heard a suggestion from the CIA, or the intelligence arms of the departments of Defense or State, that numerous Soviets recognized a growing, systemic economic problem. Today we hear some revisionist rumblings that the CIA did in fact see the Soviet collapse emerging after all. If some individual CIA analysts were more prescient than the corporate view, their ideas were filtered out in the bureaucratic process; and it is the corporate view that counts because that is what reaches the President and his advisers. On this one, the corporate view missed by a mile. Why were so many of us so insensitive to the inevitable?*¹⁹³

In 1994, Turner repeated the charge, saying that CIA assessments of the USSR were not necessarily always inaccurate, but were essentially “irrelevant”.¹⁹⁴

The leading intelligence scholar Richard Betts concurs: “Before the end of the Cold War, intelligence did not give advance warning that the Soviet Union would collapse” – though he feels that the CIA did provide ample evidence of ‘intractable’ problems facing Soviet leaders.¹⁹⁵ But intractable problems are the stuff of politics everywhere, not a forecast of breathtaking change.

Contra claims made by the CIA’s defenders above, a similar assessment is given by some lower-ranking but long-serving CIA analysts and important intelligence ‘customers.’ Melvin Goodman, who worked in SOVA from 1966 to 1986 maintains, “Probably the greatest failure in the history of the CIA is the error with regard to exaggerating the size and the strength and the capabilities and the intentions of the Soviet Union.”¹⁹⁶ Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Bush remembers that in 1989 that the CIA “talked about the Soviet Union as if they weren’t reading the newspapers, much less developed clandestine intelligence.”¹⁹⁷ Harold Ford, a

The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters (New York, NY: The New Press, 2001).

¹⁹³ B. A. Turner, “Issues in evaluating U.S. intelligence,” International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence 5 (1991). Emphasis added.

¹⁹⁴ Matthias, America's Strategic Blunders, page 313.

¹⁹⁵ Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, page 190.

¹⁹⁶ “Inside the CIA: An interview with former CIA analyst Melvin Goodman ”

¹⁹⁷ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 430.

forty-year veteran of the CIA says simply that they had been “dead wrong’ on the facts of life inside the Soviet Union.”¹⁹⁸

“CIA figures implied a picture that did not correspond to the reality we found...”

Documentary evidence supports the idea that the CIA's record of assessment of the USSR is not as sterling as some maintain. Defenders of the CIA's record rarely cite the Agency's 1984 report that “concluded the leadership could muddle along almost indefinitely,”¹⁹⁹ and that “although there had been a marked ‘slowdown’ in Soviet growth since the 1970s, ‘the Soviet economy’ was ‘not going to collapse’.”²⁰⁰ Instead, CIA expected “GNP to continue to grow, although slowly.”²⁰¹

The most egregious, sustained and important errors in the CIA's assessments concern the total size of the Soviet economy. Nicholas Eberstadt, formerly of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, says: “With the benefit of hindsight--and post-Cold War revelations--it is now widely agreed, I think, that many of the Intelligence Community's key estimates of Soviet economic performance were seriously off the mark, perhaps for decades.”²⁰² Wilhelm, another scholar, says: “CIA figures implied a picture that did not correspond to the reality we found when the veil of secrecy was lifted by *glasnost* and the fall of communism.”²⁰³ Melvin Goodman – the CIA analytical veteran cited above – in an article in *Foreign Policy*, has the same opinion: The CIA failed to see the magnitude of the crisis in the Soviet Union in the 1980s.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 432.

¹⁹⁹ Cox, “Whatever Happened to the USSR: Critical Reflections on Soviet Studies.” page 23.

²⁰⁰ Michael Cox, ed., Rethinking the Soviet Collapse: Sovietology, the Death of Communism and the New Russia (London: Pinter, 1998), fn29 page 31. As Cox notes, for a full text of this report see Henry Rowen, “Central Intelligence Briefing on the Soviet Economy,” The Soviet Polity in the Modern Era, eds. Erik P. Hoffmann and Robin F. Laird (New York: Aldine Publishing, 1984).

²⁰¹ Cox, ed., Rethinking the Soviet Collapse: Sovietology, the Death of Communism and the New Russia, fn29 page 31. As Cox notes, for a full text of this report see Rowen, “Central Intelligence Briefing on the Soviet Economy.”

²⁰² “United States Policy Toward North Korea: Testimony of Nicholas Eberstadt American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research” The thinking behind this claim is fully explored in Chapter 6, “CIA Assessment of the Soviet Economy” of Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule.

²⁰³ Wilhelm, “The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession.” page 68.

²⁰⁴ Melvin A. Goodman, “Ending the CIA's Cold War Legacy,” Foreign Policy 106.106 (1997), page 128. He also elaborates on the cost of this failure: “The costs of this failure include the huge defense budgets of the Reagan-Bush years, with their damaging expansion of the deficit; a needlessly prolonged confrontation with Moscow that delayed

It is noteworthy – and somewhat ironic given the preference at CIA, documented above, for quantitative measures – that most partisans of the ‘no surprise’ school avoid mentioning the CIA’s basic numbers about the USSR. That is probably because as Senator Patrick Moynihan pointed out, numbers undermine the CIA’s case:

At the outset of the '50s, the CIA estimates (secret at first, but later published) depicted the Soviets with a sizable economic base, about 350 billion 1980 U.S. dollars and a formidable rate of economic growth. This growth rate was consistently depicted as higher than that of the United States. Over three decades there is only one five-year interval in which the United States outstrips the USSR. For the entire period, the Soviet growth is shown at 4.8 percent, almost half again the American 3.4 percent. Investment rates were seen to soar, doubling in three decades to 32.5 percent, twice that of the United States and equal to Japan. In the mid-'70s, *the size of the Soviet economy in relation to the United States was thought to have passed into the 60 percent range.*²⁰⁵

Similarly, in 1988, a noted expert could observe: “Until recently, the CIA stated that the national income per capita was higher in the Soviet Union than in Italy.”²⁰⁶

These patently absurd high-level economic figures are crucial, *because they were the denominator used to calculate the total burden on the Soviet economy of their military expenditure* and thus inputs into almost every feature of US government economic thinking.²⁰⁷ Insofar as other parts of the Intelligence Community were complicit in this over-estimate, this simply confirms mirror-imaging of the Community and the drive for consensus that is part of the CIA’s culture and identity.

In 1975-1980, for example, the CIA put Soviet military spending at 11-15% of GNP. As became evident after the break-up, this is *approximately two times lower than actual figures.*²⁰⁸ In fact, what the ‘no surprise’ school never addresses is the persistent logical clash between the *qualitative* statements that

arms control agreements and conflict resolution in the Third World; and a lost opportunity to influence developments in the Russian Federation.”

²⁰⁵ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Soviet Economy: Boy, Were We Wrong!,” The Washington Post July 11 1990, page A19. Emphasis added.

²⁰⁶ Anders Aslund, “The CIA vs. Soviet Reality,” The Washington Post May 19 1988, page A25 Their 1987 *World Fact Book* also listed GNP per capita in West Germany as lower than that in the DDR! See Codevilla, Informing Statecraft: Intelligence for a New Century.

²⁰⁷ It is out of scope to pursue here, but clearly there were many other organisations within the US government complicit in this process.

²⁰⁸ Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, page 193.

they use in defence of the CIA's analytical record, and the *quantitative* estimates that the CIA continuously supplied to policy-makers and Sovietologists for decades. Collections of primary sources (i.e. declassified NIEs like *Soviet Defense Spending: A history of CIA estimates 1950-1990*)²⁰⁹ miss this point because they remove these NIEs from their central context: *the CIA's estimate of the USSR's GNP*. If, as the CIA's defenders contend, "a key purpose of intelligence is to provide some key 'concrete facts'"²¹⁰ to policy makers, then by the absolutely central measure of GNP the CIA was wildly off target.

Eberstadt makes another important link: a profound misreading of an adversary's military burden also strongly suggests an acute misreading of an adversary's intentions: Soviet authorities had committed their economy to something like a full war mobilization that lasted for decades, and that decision was extraordinarily significant.²¹¹ Far from being "right on the mark"²¹² the CIA's decades-long gross underestimates of the USSR's military burden suggest a profound misunderstanding of the intentions of Langley's main target.

According to a scholar who was a Soviet citizen then living in the USSR, the declassified NIE 11-18-85 of the Gorbachev period, *Domestic Stresses on the Soviet System* "lucidly and incisively" portrays the mounting political and socio-economic challenges facing Gorbachev.²¹³ The author of this dissertation visited four Soviet Republics in 1984, and was a language student at the Pushkin Institute in Leningrad in 1985, and agrees: this NIE's *qualitative* statements regarding daily life in the USSR accurately portray the country's profound social problems. But that same NIE and others at the time used extensive *quantitative* data to portray a *still growing* Soviet economy (albeit at a slower rate than previously estimated).²¹⁴ While "little of what later proved fatal to the Soviet system escaped the CIA's attention",²¹⁵ the quantitative information that the Agency provided from the 1970s right up to the downfall of the USSR "set up quite a few hedges against anyone concluding that the Soviet Union was

²⁰⁹ Firth and Noren, Soviet Defense Spending: A History of CIA Estimates 1950-1990.

²¹⁰ Appelbaum and Hedley, "US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War." page 16.

²¹¹ Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule, page 147.

²¹² Berkowitz and Richelson, "CIA Vindicated: The Soviet Collapse Was Predicted." page 41.

²¹³ Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, page 216.

²¹⁴ Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, page 216. Emphasis added.

²¹⁵ Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, page 216.

on a course leading to a meltdown”.²¹⁶ As Brooks and Wohlforth astutely note, the longer that Soviet stagnation and qualitative indicators pointing towards decline continued, the more these factors should have become *variables* rather than *constants* in the CIA’s analysis, because every year that they continued is “another piece of evidence that the problem [was] systemic rather than cyclical,”²¹⁷ and that something ‘had to give.’

“We thought they would tighten their belt”

Lest a customer of the CIA’s intelligence attempt to resolve the paradox between the qualitative and quantitative facts in *Domestic Stresses on the Soviet System*, the NIE began with a special insert that was separate from the narrative text: “The Exceptional Sector: The Soviet Military-Industrial Complex”. This insert *does* say that the Defense sector was “not isolated from the problems of the surrounding society”, but it then (using the CIA’s ‘building-block’ methodology²¹⁸) states that the USSR had spent about US\$640 billion on

²¹⁶ Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, page 218. We should also here note that the CIA has had at various times formal programmes to evaluate the accuracy of intelligence estimates: see for example: Abbot E. Smith, “On the Accuracy of National Intelligence Estimates ” Studies in Intelligence 13.4 (1969).

²¹⁷ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Re-evaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas,” International Security 25.3 (2000), page 18.

²¹⁸ Essentially the CIA used Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), explained by one intelligence professional as follows: “In the 1950s basic data either didn’t exist or were suspect; moreover, because prices were determined by administrative fiat and the ruble wasn’t convertible into any other currency, there was no way to calculate Soviet Gross National Product (GNP). The CIA’s response was to examine Soviet goods and price them by Western standards...The CIA reconstructed the Soviet economy from the ground up.” See Treverton, Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information, page 8-9. The building block methodology is also explained in Firth and Noren, Soviet Defense Spending: A History of CIA Estimates 1950-1990, pages 13 to 26. and pages 140 to 185. I refer any economists outraged by the suggestion that PPP lay at the root of CIA’s analytical problems with respect to the Soviet economy (especially those who advocate its utility regarding the Chinese economy today) to A. Edward Gottesman, “Two Myths of Globalization,” World Policy Journal XXIII.1 (2006). A brief *tour de horizon* before the fall of the USSR is provided in Maurice C. Ernst, “Economic Intelligence in CIA,” Studies in Intelligence 28.4 (1984). Also useful is William T. Lee, CIA Estimates of Soviet Military Expenditures: Errors and Waste (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1995) and Gertude E. Schroeder, “Reflections on Economic Sovietology,” Post-Soviet Affairs 11 (1995). For evidence that the CIA accepted many of the USSR’s official figures at face value as they were beginning the Sovietological enterprise, see Allen, “The Validity of Soviet Economic Statistics.” *passim*. He concludes “We can be reasonably sure that economic data presented by the Soviet Union will continue to have both meaning and significance;” see page 8. Other articles offer a similar lack of scepticism about official Soviet figures. For example, see William Terechow, “The Soviet Atlas as a Source,” Studies in Intelligence 10.2 (1966). The alternative view, apparently not acted upon, was presented in Gertrude Schroeder,

roughly 200 new or modernised military systems (this in the larger context of a grossly over-stated total Soviet GNP). It certainly gives no hint of near-term collapse when it says that the USSR “scored major military and technology advances in solid-propellant strategic missiles, surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles, long-range cruise missiles, fighters, bombers, transport aircraft, tanks, command-and-control systems, and re-entry vehicles”, *but then ventures no quantitative projections of the impact of these procurement policies!*²¹⁹ As Alexseev points out, “During 1987-1989, the CIA’s Office of Soviet Analysis continued to draw attention to major political and socioeconomic pathologies obstructing Gorbachev’s reforms; yet once again, estimates of the quantitative impact of these challenges on Soviet defense outlays were explicitly absent”.²²⁰

That trend of reporting continued until very close to the end of the USSR. In the 1988 report *Soviet National Security Policy: Responses to the Changing Military and Economic Environment* the CIA wrote: “All this [i.e. the reasoning and data presented in the report²²¹] suggests that we will see a prolongation of the trend of the past decade-continued high but flat or slowly growing defense

“Soviet Reality Sans Potemkin,” *Studies in Intelligence* 12.2 (1968) *passim* (discussed below).

²¹⁹ Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, page 219.

²²⁰ Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, page 220-1. He goes on to give clear examples: “a February 1987 report suggested that ‘there will be a time in the next year or two, we think, when the question of cutting tools for the next generation of weapons systems will be a serious issue, and when debates begin on the next Five Year Plan. It is clear that the military is going to have to be dealt with insofar as its share of investments is concerned’. In July, another CIA paper saw no signs of slackening in what was perceived as Gorbachev’s military modernization program. In April 1988, while reporting troubles for Gorbachev with ‘too few investments chasing too many needs’, the CIA testified to Congress that ‘military expenditures remained at the generally low rate of growth but they remained at an extremely high absolute level’, a conclusion that generally fits the quantitative pattern outlined in the declassified NIEs for 1983-1984 and in Robert Gates’s briefing of the Joint Economic Committee in 1983.”

²²¹ To quote the preceding sentences: “Even if growth is constrained, the present high level of military spending ensures a continuing large input of new weapons that should keep the defense constituency mollified, as long as the military does not sense a serious deterioration of the Soviet side of the military balance. Because so much of the USSR’s superpower status rests on military power, however, resistance to any efforts to slacken appreciably the defense effort will not be confined to the military. Indeed, what Soviet military writers tout as the Western thrust into high-technology hardware will continue to be a basis for arguing to increase defense resources.” See: Anonymous, Soviet National Security Policy: Responses to the Changing Military and Economic Environment, SOV 88-10040CX (Washington DC: Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Soviet Analysis, Central Intelligence Agency, 1988).

spending.”²²² There is no whiff of Gates’ warnings about the “impeding collapse of the old order”²²³ in such statements.

Former DCI Turner appears more clear-sighted about the CIA’s assessments of the USSR: “We were appreciating as early as ’78 that the Soviet economy was in serious trouble, [but] we didn’t make the leap that we should have made...that economic trouble would lead to political trouble. We thought they would tighten their belt under a Stalin-like regime and continue marching on.”²²⁴ The CIA also missed completely the significance of the 1975 Helsinki Accords, which led to a “full court press” on Soviet diplomats and negotiators and further undermined the USSR’s legitimacy at home and abroad.²²⁵

“A dairy superpower”?

This in turn raises the question of whether the CIA’s defenders are being consciously disingenuous regarding the Agency’s record vis-à-vis the USSR given the information-processing habits of the CIA’s customers: American policy-makers. In this NIE and others, “predictions of a possible slowdown and decline of the Soviet economy” were not only based on a wildly inaccurate GDP estimate, but they were accompanied by additional grossly misleading quantitative data.²²⁶ As the Cold War ended, a US Senate report could observe with considerable irony “the latest CIA handbook of economic statistics...suggests that per capita output of milk is today higher in the USSR than in the United States, making the Soviet Union not only a nuclear power, but a dairy superpower.”²²⁷ As Senator Moynihan wrote:

At the same hearing of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations [that produced that report], Michael J. Boskin, then-Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, estimated that the Soviet economy was “about one-third” the size of the United States. At this time, the official Handbook of Economic Statistics, produced by the

²²² Anonymous, Soviet National Security Policy: Responses to the Changing Military and Economic Environment, SOV 88-10040CX. Emphasis added.

²²³ Cited in Lundberg, “CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: the Politics of “Getting It Right,”” page 2.

²²⁴ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 361.

²²⁵ Kotkin, Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000, page 24.

²²⁶ Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, page 218.

²²⁷ “Estimating the Size and Growth of the Soviet Economy: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations,” Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 101st Cong., 2d sess. ed. (Washington, DC US Government Printing Office, 1990, page 49. The Senate is referring to Handbook of Economic Statistics, (Washington, DC: The Central Intelligence Agency, 1989).

Intelligence Community, put the ratio at 52 percent...The United States GDP for 1990 was \$4.8 trillion. The Intelligence Community put Soviet GDP at \$2.5 trillion. The President's chief economist made it more like \$1.6 trillion. The difference is \$900 billion.²²⁸

The same CIA *Handbook of Economic Statistics* that was almost a trillion dollars off about the economy of their primary target for decades estimated that per capita meat production in the USSR was nearly a third higher at the end of the 1980s than it was at the start of the 1970s.²²⁹ This conclusion would have astounded both Soviet citizens and Western visitors to the country and would have required "vast secret stockpiles of milk and meat"²³⁰ which the USSR clearly did not have.

"Gorbachev consistently surprised them"

The Agency's record on political and military reporting is also more mixed than its partisans allow. Without a doubt, it was easy to misread the political signals coming from the USSR in the late 1980s: it was Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko who capped Soviet military spending in the early 1980s. Gorbachev began his tenure in office by *reversing* the cap on military spending, who approved an effort to try to settle the Afghan war by a military escalation, and who increased arms transfers to Third World states to magnify Moscow's leverage on other issues.²³¹

On the other hand, Gorbachev also surprised Agency analysts when he publicly admitted in 1988 the large and sustained deficit in the USSR's state budget - another key fact missing from Langley's understanding of the Soviet economy!²³² Soviet deficit figures were falsified and doctored for over thirty years - a fact detected by an émigré researcher²³³, Birman, using only open-source data²³⁴ but missed the CIA.

According to some important consumers - selective NIE quotations notwithstanding - the CIA was also back-footed by events on non-economic issues.

²²⁸ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "REPORT of the COMMISSION ON PROTECTING AND REDUCING GOVERNMENT SECRECY," ed. United States Senate (US Government Printing Office, 1997, Appendix A.

²²⁹ Handbook of Economic Statistics, pages 64,44-5, and 23, cited in the table on Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule, page 139.

²³⁰ Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule, page 140.

²³¹ Brooks and Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Re-evaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas." page 30.

²³² Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule, page 140.

²³³ Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule, page 141.

²³⁴ Igor Birman, Secret Incomes of the Soviet State Budget (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981).

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell wrote that in his view the CIA “didn’t anticipate events much better than a layman watching television”.²³⁵ Former Secretary of State George Shultz is more specific, writing: “When Gorbachev 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.”²³⁶ He continues: “When it became evident that the Soviet Union was, in fact, changing, the CIA line was that the changes wouldn’t really make a difference.”²³⁷ According to Shultz, as late as 1988, Gates still believed that Gorbachev was merely a Leninist trying to gain “breathing space with the West”.²³⁸ At the end of this period the rise of Gorbachev’s replacement, Yeltsin, also took the CIA by surprise.²³⁹

A recent book supports Shultz’s memory on the CIA’s Gorbachev reporting, and offers concrete examples:

The CIA did not know that Gorbachev had told the Warsaw Pact meeting in May 1987 that the Soviets would never invade Eastern Europe to shore up their empire. The CIA did not know that Gorbachev had told the leader of Afghanistan in July 1987 that the Soviets were going to start pulling their occupying troops out soon...the CIA did not grasp the concept [that Gorbachev was trying to change the fundamental dynamic of the Cold War]. Bob Gates spent the next year asking his underlings why Gorbachev consistently surprised them.²⁴⁰

It would seem that Gates and his team did not find the underlying cause of this difficulty. On December 1, 1988, for example, the CIA issued a NIE 11-3/8-88: “Soviet Forces and Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict through the Late 1990s”. In it, the CIA stated with assurance that “the basic elements of Soviet defense policy and practice thus far have not been changed by Gorbachev’s reform campaign.”²⁴¹ Less than a week later, the Soviet leader stood at the podium of the UN in New York and offered to cut unilaterally half a

²³⁵ Quoted in Turner, Burn Before Reading: Presidents, CIA Directors, and Secret Intelligence, page 218.

²³⁶ George P. Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State (New York: Charles Scribner’s & Sons, 1993), page 864-5.

²³⁷ Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State, page 1002-3

²³⁸ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 158.

²³⁹ Turner, Burn Before Reading: Presidents, CIA Directors, and Secret Intelligence, page 219.

²⁴⁰ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 417-8.

²⁴¹ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 417-8.

million troops from the Soviet military.²⁴² Recall the importance of arms control in this period, and the idea from Chapter 3 that NIEs are “considered the analytical professions most prestigious products”,²⁴³ and it is difficult not to conclude that the CIA’s understanding of the USSR was missing many important elements.

“Without any hint that such fundamental change is going on...”

Despite voluminous (but uncontextualised) quotations from NIEs of this period (offered in Gates’s defence in the Senate Appendix II, and in even greater depth in Center for the Study of Intelligence’s book *CIA Assessments of the Soviet Union: The Record Versus The Charges*²⁴⁴), the fundamental judgement – one that swamps the details offered by the “no strategic surprise” school – is that for decades Langley profoundly misjudged the total size of the USSR’s economy, the true burden of their military spending, and the long-term political consequences of the system’s numerous economic and social problems relative to those in the West. The CIA’s central economic figures were not just wrong, they were off by at least one hundred percent, and probably closer to two hundred percent. The CIA’s basic figures point not to an economy in crisis, but to sustainability and continuity: they to *slowdown*, but not to *breakdown*.²⁴⁵

We will close this section with a Gates quotation that the ‘no surprise’ partisans frequently omit. In hearings before the US Senate on March 19, 1986, when Gates (then head of the Directorate of Intelligence) was asked “what kind of work the Intelligence Community was doing to prepare policymakers for the consequences of change in the Soviet Union”, he responded: “Quite frankly, *without any hint that such fundamental change is going on*, my resources do not permit me the luxury of sort of *just idly speculating on what a different kind of Soviet Union might look like*”.²⁴⁶ That statement was unexceptional coming from an organisation that had consistently told US policymakers and the world of Sovietology that the USSR’s economy from 1981 to 1988 had grown faster than that of either France or West Germany!²⁴⁷

²⁴² Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, page 429.

²⁴³ Shreeve, “The Intelligence Community Case Method Program: A National Intelligence Estimate on Yugoslavia.” page 333.

²⁴⁴ MacEachin, *CIA Assessments of the Soviet Union: The Record Versus the Charges*.

²⁴⁵ Eberstadt, *The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule*, page 149.

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Lundberg, “CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: the Politics of “Getting It Right”,” page 18. Emphasis added.

²⁴⁷ *Handbook of Economic Statistics*, pages 33.

“Thus will you profit him best”

It was a bureaucratic imperative in the 1990s for the CIA to downplay their surprise at the collapse of the USSR. To do so now, however, does the Agency a disservice. As Nietzsche has Zarathustra say: “If you have a suffering friend, be a resting place for his suffering, but a *hard bed* as it were, a field cot: thus will you profit him best.”²⁴⁸ A problem must be faced squarely before it can be solved.

By most honest measures, the Agency’s USSR record does not pass Allison’s central test of a national intelligence service: “How well its analyses and estimates inform policy-makers of *probable* developments abroad”.²⁴⁹ As Brzezinski reminded us with Iran: “Failure is not so much a matter of particular intelligence reports,” instead it is “*a deeper intellectual misjudgement of a central historical reality.*”²⁵⁰

The next section’s analysis of how the culture and identity of the CIA contributed to this surprise make clear how such deep intellectual misjudgements about the USSR happened. As in the case of Iran, the origin of this strategic surprise is shown to be less the inherent unpredictability of external events than internal factors at the CIA that created the antecedent conditions for these events to be classified as a strategic surprise.

Part II: Mapping the Failure and Revealing the Cassandras

A devastating forest fire may be the result of a single human action, but there is little likelihood of such a conflagration in a rainforest.²⁵¹ As with the overthrow of the Shah, the four perennial features of the Agency’s identity and culture made the CIA at the time of the Soviet demise a tinderbox. Moreover, the alert reader may have deduced from the first case study that distortions in one part of the intelligence cycle operate synergistically with deformations in other parts of the cycle: omissions and oversights in Tasking and Collection open gaps in Analysis, and vice-versa. For this reason, despite the framework offered in Figure 5 (reproduced again below for convenience), as was the case for Iran, the discussion that follows is a pointillist portrait, in which individual pieces of evidence contribute to an overall picture of how deeply-rooted and

²⁴⁸ Walter Kaufmann, The Portable Nietzsche (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), page 202.

²⁴⁹ Allison, “An Intelligence Agenda.” page 17. Emphasis added.

²⁵⁰ Brzezinski, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981, page 397.

²⁵¹ The metaphor is employed in Greenstein, “The Impact of Personality on the End of the Cold War: A Counterfactual Analysis.” page 2.

interlinked patterns in the intelligence cycle interacted with the key components of the CIA's identity and culture to make the collapse of the Soviet Union a strategic surprise. While direct causal links cannot be drawn, the important epistemological question of "How possible?" becomes much clearer.

Figure 5: Mysteries - Features of Identity & Culture vs. Key Distortions of the Intel Cycle

Intelligence Cycle Phase	Feature of the CIA's Identity & Culture			
	Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
<i>Tasking</i>				
<i>Collection</i>				
<i>Analysis</i>				
<i>Production</i>				
<i>Dissemination</i>				

Tasking

Tasking in the decades prior to the end of the USSR appears to have been adversely affected by all four of the key components of the CIA's identity and culture discussed in Chapter 3. As seen in Figure 5, these components were homogeneity, the reification of objectivity and reason, a preference for secret information, and a drive for consensus. As before, it is somewhat artificial to disentangle these interwoven factors, but for the sake of organisational clarity, we do so below.

"Both Russians and Americans tended to think of the USSR as a vast melting pot"

The homogeneity of CIA personnel probably contributed to Tasking missteps regarding ethnic tensions in the USSR. As Pipes points out, "Both Russians and Americans tended to think of the USSR as a vast melting pot, much like the United States, made up of numerous ethnic groups that voluntarily discarded their ethnic identity in favour of a new, 'Soviet' nationality."²⁵² Pipes ascribes this propensity to a deeply rooted mirror-imaging phenomenon: not only were the US and the USSR *self-proclaimed melting pots*, but he also notes that "the few native-born Americans who could claim expertise on the Soviet Union had been trained by Russians and identified completely with Russia and

²⁵² Pipes, *Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger*, page 72.

her culture”.²⁵³ Rutland agrees, saying in general that American ‘Soviet’ specialists were actually *Russian* specialists who “lacked a rigorous grounding in the languages and histories of the region – particularly the non-Russian peoples of the USSR.”²⁵⁴ Robert Conquest offers an example:

This is even true for as simple a distinction as between Ukrainian and Russian – long after the fact Ukrainian-Russian tension has been assigned as one of the causes of the man-made Stalinist Great Famine of the late 20s and early 30s, but lack of understanding of the distinct Ukrainian language and identity contributed to a misunderstanding of the event in the West.²⁵⁵

Sadly, even “a well-informed and clear-headed expert”²⁵⁶ like George Kennan could write in the late 1950s “that the Ukraine was economically as fully integrated into the Soviet Union as Pennsylvania was integrated into the United States.”²⁵⁷ In truth, according to Nikolai Leonov, one-time Chief Analyst of the KGB, “the Soviet Union resembled a chocolate bar: it was creased with the furrowed lines of future division, as if the for convenience of its consumers”.²⁵⁸

It is not a wild surmise, therefore, to suggest that this unconscious ignorance of deeper questions of nationality in the USSR, when reinforced by the homogeneous background of most CIA personnel, could lead to a sustained failure to task intelligence assets to explore issues of ethnic integration in the USSR. DCI Gates said as much in 1991: “Our efforts had long been focused on events in Moscow, and we were only beginning to realize how small and inadequate were collection capabilities and expertise on the non-Russian republics and ethnic groups”.²⁵⁹

Figures 6 and 7, below offer practical examples. They are drawn from NIE 11-18-89, *The Soviet System in Crisis: Prospect for the Next Two Years*, published by CIA in November of 1989. They are entitled “Reported Incidents of Economic Unrest, January 1987 – September 1989” and “Reported Incidents of Nationalist Unrest, January 1987 – September 1989”. As a thought-experiment, consider whether it is likely that specialists who “lacked a rigorous grounding in

²⁵³ Pipes, *Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger*, page 72.

²⁵⁴ Peter Rutland, “Who got it right and who got it wrong? And why?,” *Rethinking the Soviet collapse: Sovietology, the Death of Communism and the New Russia*, ed. Michael Cox (London: Pinter, 1998), page 37.

²⁵⁵ Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivisation and the Terror-Famine* (London: Pimlico, 1986) page 5 and *passim*.

²⁵⁶ Pipes, *Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger*, page 72.

²⁵⁷ Pipes, *Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger*, page 72.

²⁵⁸ Quoted in Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000*, page 86.

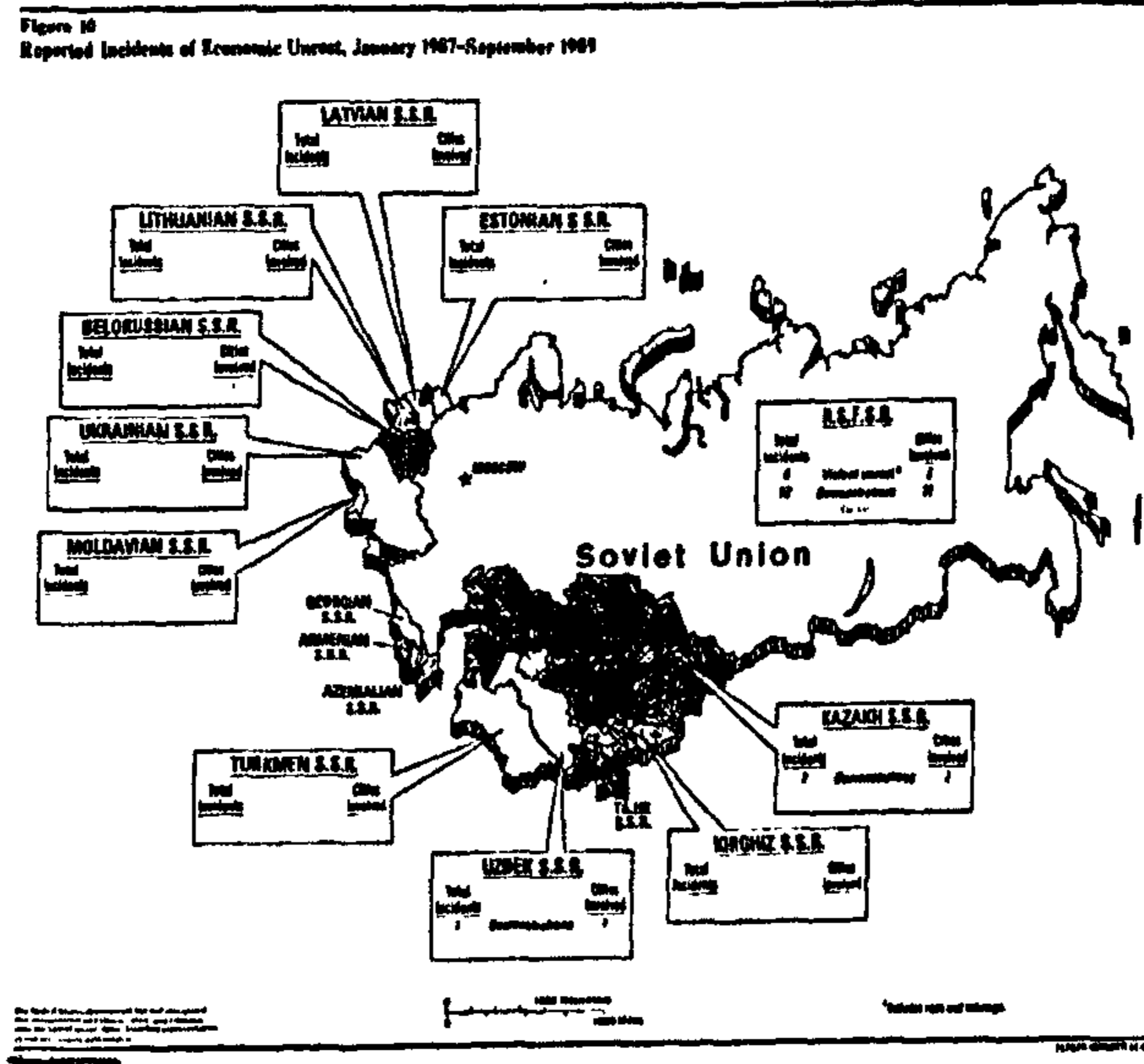
²⁵⁹ Quoted in Turner, *Burn Before Reading: Presidents, CIA Directors, and Secret Intelligence*, page 220.

the languages and histories of the region – particularly the non-Russian peoples of the USSR”²⁶⁰ would be likely to have foreseen or expertly interpreted the incidents that these exhibits report? These charts dramatically illustrate that being a Russian expert was not the same as being a Soviet expert.

²⁶⁰ Pipes, Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger, page 72.

Figure 6 – “Reported Incidents of Nationalist Unrest, January 1987 – September 1989” from NIE 11-18-89, *The Soviet System In Crisis: Prospect for the Next Two Years*²⁶¹

3. (Continued)



23

-Secret

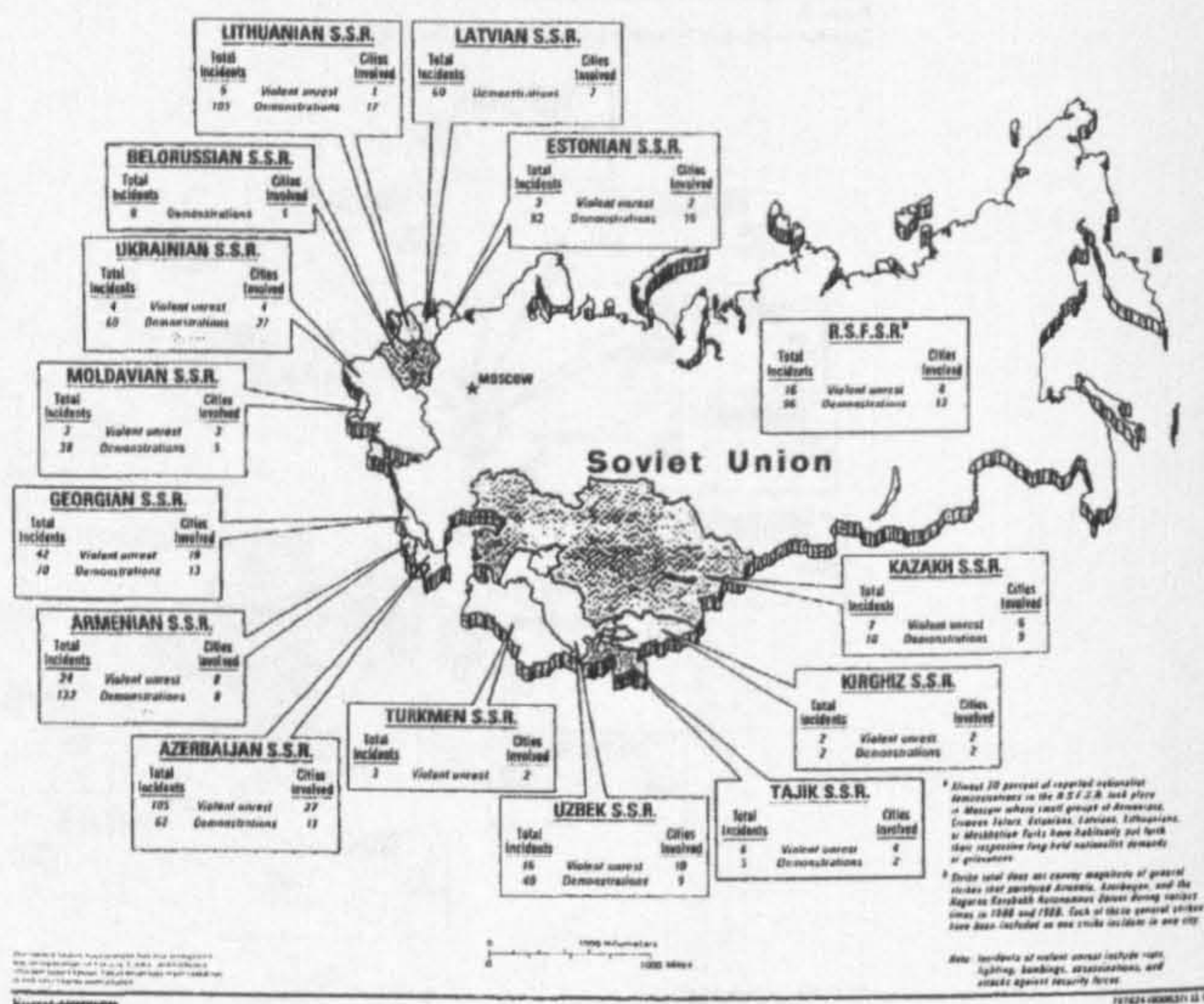
²⁶¹ Reproduced from the original NIE found in Fischer, At Cold War's End: US Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, page 80.

Figure 7 - "Reported Incidents of Nationalist Unrest, January 1987 – September 1989" from NIE 11-18-89, *The Soviet System in Crisis: Prospect for the Next Two Years*²⁶²

3. (Continued)

Secret

Figure 11
Reported Incidents of Nationalist Unrest, January 1987-September 1989



²⁶² Reproduced from the original NIE found in Fischer, At Cold War's End: US Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, page 81.

An “itch for quantification...”

The reification of ‘objectivity’ and ‘reason’ also permeated much of the intelligence Tasking concerning the Soviet Union. “This is revealed,” Seliktar says, “by the over-riding priority given to either economic data (however spurious) and the counting of military hardware”. She goes on to make the connection between this Tasking and the strategic surprise of the collapse of the USSR explicit: “The emphasis on quantified indices detracted from efforts to analyse the more qualitative aspects of Soviet life that could have alerted the Intelligence Community to the impending legitimacy crisis”.²⁶³

As the previous section touched upon, the CIA’s “exactitude reflected the penchant for quantitative evidence in the American political culture”.²⁶⁴ Recall the CIA’s advice to its analysts noted in Chapter 3: “To identify lines of analysis that provide value added, *analysts should think through what they would want to know if they were policymakers charged with leveraging an issue*”.²⁶⁵ The CIA was mirroring their intelligence customers, who a veteran Agency analyst attested “generally prefer to focus on pragmatic as opposed to theoretical matters, on material rather than abstract values, on measurable, quantitative distinctions rather than qualitative factors”.²⁶⁶

A tendency to allow quantitative Tasking, Collection and Analysis vis-à-vis the USSR to submerge other forms of intelligence was implicitly raised in 1990 by Carver in “Intelligence in the age of Glasnost”:

America's Intelligence Community has been excellent in addressing many problems, such as keeping track of the Soviet Union's evolving strategic weapons capabilities [but] analysts should never forget that the methods and approaches that work so well in tackling those problem are frequently inappropriate for assessing, let alone predicting, emotion-driven, political upheavals such as the events of 1989. Such situations do not lend themselves to quantification, and they become totally distorted if forced into a conceptual matrix better suited to assessing missile telemetry data. If American intelligence analysts or academics or citizens--want to understand and assess the historic political tide shifts in which the world is currently immersed, they must ignore their itch for quantification, curb their fascination with models that bear minimal relation to reality and avoid

²⁶³ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 215.

²⁶⁴ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 215.

²⁶⁵ Anonymous, “A Compendium of Analytic Tradecraft Notes, Volume I,” pages 2-3. Emphasis added.

²⁶⁶ Allen, None So Blind: a Personal Account of the Intelligence Failure in Vietnam, page 35.

*the temptation to use bad data (such as Soviet economic statistics) simply because it exists and can be run through computers.*²⁶⁷

Ironically, Gorbachev's reforms only *reinforced* this deformation of Tasking: when *glasnost* began in 1985, many items already being counted by CIA were suddenly easier to count! As Bathurst says: "US intelligence about the Soviet Union existed in a state of cultural deprivation until *glasnost* opened doors and windows... [but ironically] that encouraged the *already powerful inclination to count rather than interpret*".²⁶⁸

"Spy versus Spy"

On the preference for secret information in Tasking, we noted already the charge levelled against SOVA that "you guys just take in each other's laundry" (i.e. the CIA spent lots of time targeting secrets about KGB rather than the USSR as a whole, and vice versa),²⁶⁹ and Victor Cherkashin's observation that "some of the best-known Cold War espionage cases were more about spy versus spy than real issues of national security".²⁷⁰

Even Joseph Nye, generally sympathetic to the CIA says that while "the Intelligence Community accurately reported a slowdown in the Soviet economy...it did not adequately estimate the rapidity of the economic collapse". Note that Nye here says "slowdown" rather than *size* of the Soviet economy. He continues by asserting "the questions posed by policymakers were not about some abstract future, but about whether even a weakening Soviet economy could support a formidable military threat".²⁷¹ This is undoubtedly true (and was a valid concern; see comments from an anonymous retired analyst to the author regarding NIE-11-14 on Warsaw Pact Theatre Forces – the last one ever issued, in 1988 – in the footnote below), *but* had policy-makers not been so misled by the CIA's sustained headline quantitative misinformation, they might have tasked the CIA to probe more deeply beneath the USSR's surface, and explore questions about the sustainability of the Soviet enterprise generally.

²⁶⁷ George A. Carver, Jr., "Intelligence in the age of glasnost," Foreign Affairs 69.3 (1990), page 160. Emphasis added.

²⁶⁸ Bathurst, Intelligence and the Mirror: On Creating an Enemy, page 89. Emphasis added.

²⁶⁹ Bearden and Risen, The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown with the KGB, page 459.

²⁷⁰ Cherkashin and Feifer, Spy Handler: Memoir of a KGB Officer, pages 108-9

²⁷¹ Nye, "Peering into the Future." page 85.

Collection

As might be expected, factors of culture and identity shaping Collection largely mirror those bearing on Tasking: the Agency's homogeneity, obsession with 'objective' quantitative factors, and a partiality for secrets.

"Cabbages are *not* cabbages in both countries"

With respect to homogeneity and how it affected judgements about the USSR, take two of the most prominent features of Soviet life that *Constructing Cassandra's* author witnessed in the mid-1980s: the lines for consumer goods and the moderately well-attended church services.

In the former case, one source of the failure of imagination was that an overwhelmingly large percentage of CIA personnel were male (see Chapter 3). Arguably, this skewed gender profile contributed to an underestimate of the societal strains created by shortages of consumer goods because Soviet women *bore the brunt of the immense effort needed to obtain simple household items*. The at-times Herculean efforts of Soviet housewives and mothers would be as invisible to Langley as the efforts of housewives were to 'traditional' men in US society.²⁷²

Here we witness the social mechanism of the mirror-imaging of the target at work. As discussed above, much of the CIA's analytical effort nominally devoted to the USSR was actually devoted to the KGB, the USSR's most privileged caste. As the highest-ranking KGB officer to ever go public, Oleg Kalugin, points out: "We at Yasnovo [a sprawling KGB complex outside Moscow] like all the Soviet elite, lived in a privileged cocoon that left us far removed from the travails of daily Soviet life. For us, Communism was indeed a good thing, for all our needs were cared for as we glided above the fray, impervious to the lines and the humiliation and the squalor that had become the hallmarks of Soviet existence."²⁷³ In effect, in its quest for secrets, the CIA became most focussed on the least representative segment of Soviet society, the KGB.

²⁷² On the other hand, one of the "deans of American national income measurement, Edward Denison" said in 1990 in this context: "I have been in a lot of countries and I have looked into a lot of stores, but I am convinced you cannot get a clue about relative consumption levels by casual observation. You can tell that one country is richer or poorer, or a lot richer or a lot poorer, but whether it is 3 times or 10 times as high is virtually impossible to say. I do not think that kind of casual observation is evidence one way or another." Cited in Becker, "Intelligence Fiasco or Reasoned Accounting?: CIA Estimates of Soviet GNP." page 321.

²⁷³ Kalugin and Montaigne, The First Directorate, pages 236-7.

Similarly, the fact that the vast majority of congregants at those churches that the Soviet Authorities permitted to operate were older women (who may also be logically inferred to have been less visible to the CIA's mostly male staff) probably also led to an overestimation of the Soviet regime's legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. (Indeed: the outside world later learned that there were seventeen attempts at self-immolation in Red Square in 1981 alone by seekers after religious freedom;²⁷⁴ as in the Iran case Sherman Kent's progeny did not always register that "Many people take God seriously"²⁷⁵).

In like manner, Bathurst stresses the gender-skewed secondary effects of the alcoholism rampant in Soviet society, which hit females harder than males.²⁷⁶ Here again, the imagination required to Task information related to these societal issues might not easily arise in an environment made up almost entirely of middle class, conventional males.²⁷⁷ What is certain is that American specialists never took proper account of the effect of unchecked alcoholism in the Soviet Union.²⁷⁸

Telling, the single article in *Studies* that this author has found raising questions about the *real* standard of living in the USSR is a 1968 piece by one of the few woman CIA officers in Moscow. Gertrude Schroeder dressed up in her shabbiest clothes and tried to "live" as an average Soviet. She quickly concluded that life in the USSR was "hard and very, very frustrating"²⁷⁹, with uncertainty, absurdity, coarseness, and dullness permeating almost every aspect of daily life.²⁸⁰ Moreover, in her article Schroeder explicitly questions the CIA's PPP assumptions. She says that in the CIA's *US and USSR: Comparisons of Size and Use of Gross National Product, 1955-64* (Estimate CIA/RR ER 66-6 - published in March 1966), the Agency "equated apples with apples and bread with bread"²⁸¹ and for consumer durables they merely raised the ruble-dollar price ratios "an arbitrary 20 percent"²⁸² to make some allowance for the superior quality and durability of US products. Schroeder's 'undercover'

²⁷⁴ Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000*, page 46.

²⁷⁵ Lipsky, "A Primer for Spies." page A19.

²⁷⁶ Bathurst, *Intelligence and the Mirror: On Creating an Enemy*, page 73.

²⁷⁷ As an example, the author can quote his paternal grandfather, "When I was young, there *were* no 'drunk drivers': we just called them car accidents."

²⁷⁸ Seliktar, *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, page 216 .

²⁷⁹ Schroeder, "Soviet Reality Sans Potemkin." page 46. A similar argument was made a few years before in *Studies* under an obvious *nom de plume* in *Amerikanskiy Turist*, "A Note on Casual Intelligence Acquisition," *Studies in Intelligence* 2.3 (1958).

²⁸⁰ Schroeder, "Soviet Reality Sans Potemkin." pages 46-50.

²⁸¹ Schroeder, "Soviet Reality Sans Potemkin." page 43.

²⁸² Schroeder, "Soviet Reality Sans Potemkin." page 44.

observations as an average Soviet housewife trying to provide for a family led her to assert:

I think our measurements of the position of Soviet consumers in relation to those of the United States (and Western Europe) favor the USSR to a much greater extent than I had thought. The ruble-dollar ratios are far too low for most consumer goods. Cabbages are *not* cabbages in both countries. The cotton dress worn by the average Soviet woman is *not* equivalent to the cheapest one in a Sears catalogue; the latter is of better quality and more stylish. The arbitrary 20 percent adjustment that was made in some of the ratios is clearly too little.²⁸³

Her article is titled *Soviet Reality Sans Potemkin* – and appears under the Editor's note "A logical but little used methodology for overt observation in the USSR"²⁸⁴ This "logical but little used methodology" (i.e. relying on common sense, open source observation) was never embraced by the CIA. Indeed, a 1960 article in *Studies* had concluded that while official Soviet economic statistics were to be interpreted "with care", they "are not seriously fudged or fabricated"²⁸⁵ – a statement simultaneously both arithmetically correct and exceptionally misleading. One need not fully adopt 'identity politics' to postulate that many key features of life in the USSR that might have offered hints of its future were systematically neglected in the Tasking and Collection due to the homogenous nature of the CIA's identity and culture.

"It is useful to read Gogol's *Dead Souls*..."

Similarly, an obsession with 'factual' data amenable to 'objective' analysis and the collection of secret information led to fundamental misunderstandings about the trajectory of the USSR. A leading non-CIA scholar – and émigré - in the field of Soviet economics noted that the best material about village life and agriculture in the USSR appeared in the *fiction* of Soviet literary monthlies, where "reality appear[ed] in fiction".²⁸⁶ However, as Bathurst records: "Few analysts assigned to the Soviet desk had the time, background or prescience to understand that they required a complete Russian *tour d'horizon* to perform their job adequately. It is difficult to leap cultural barriers and not easy to understand why it is useful to read Gogol's *Dead Souls* and

²⁸³ Schroeder, "Soviet Reality Sans Potemkin." page 51. Emphasis original.

²⁸⁴ Schroeder, "Soviet Reality Sans Potemkin." page 43.

²⁸⁵ Allen, "The Validity of Soviet Economic Statistics." page 1.

²⁸⁶ Conquest, Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivisation and the Terror-Famine, page 8.

Dostoevsky's *Notes From the Underground*"²⁸⁷ in order to understand the Soviet economy or society.

As a result, according to Seliktar softer questions concerning the legitimacy of the USSR in the eyes of its citizens were ignored at CIA: corruption scandals in the late Brezhnev and Andropov years were noted but "not given much prominence"²⁸⁸ in Agency reports. Overall, she writes: "Limited by its analytical parameters, the Agency was hardly in a position to capture the subterranean and often esoteric legitimacy discourse"²⁸⁹ that was then occurring in the USSR. Because of this biased pattern of Tasking and Collection, the CIA had "little inside knowledge about the crisis of confidence among the Soviet leadership", so they "stuck to the linear progression model of forecasting. This type of prognostication posited that the 'future Soviet system [will reflect] the present pattern of institutionalized power relationships ... [and]...the basic social policies of welfare-authoritarianism'. Radical change was virtually ruled out."²⁹⁰

In fact, the legitimacy discourse then raging in the Kremlin was ignored while Chernenko lay dying. "His state of health was the subject of intense speculation in Washington, eclipsed only by the interest in his potential successor and the projections of economic performance. True to its analytic character, the CIA focussed most of its attention on the Soviet economy"²⁹¹ and ignored the non-quantifiable issues of *legitimacy* or *stability*.

What did it mean, for example, when General Secretary Brezhnev began drooling on himself during appearances on Soviet television²⁹² (after awarding himself more state awards than all previous Soviet leaders combined, and more military awards than Marshall Zhukov, who captured Berlin in 1945)?²⁹³ Or that a few years later, in 1984, Chernenko ordered a hidden escalator built so that he and other leaders could still ascend Lenin's tomb for holiday parades?²⁹⁴ Nikolai Leonov (a top intelligence analyst at the KGB) recalls, "We were ashamed of our

²⁸⁷ Bathurst, *Intelligence and the Mirror: On Creating an Enemy*, page 121.

²⁸⁸ Seliktar, *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, page 97.

²⁸⁹ Seliktar, *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, page 97.

²⁹⁰ Seliktar, *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, page 101.

²⁹¹ Seliktar, *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, page 117.

²⁹² Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000*, page 50.

²⁹³ Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000*, page 50.

²⁹⁴ Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000*, page 53.

state, of its half-dead leaders, of the encroaching senility”,²⁹⁵ but the assumption of the inherent system’s durability went unquestioned at CIA until almost the very end of the USSR.

Here a comparison with the academic community – subject to other factors distorting its understanding of the USSR²⁹⁶ but more diverse and less distracted by ‘secrets’ than the CIA – is illuminating. During the same period, “the academic community utilized the Chernenko interlude to engage in a wide-ranging debate about the legitimacy, durability and changeability of the Soviet enterprise.”²⁹⁷

The Agency itself later conceded (albeit in a limited way) that too great an emphasis on ‘factual’ data and secrets might have adversely affected its analysis of the USSR. An internal CIA review in 1976 (the famous Team A – Team B Experiment²⁹⁸), but only released in 1992 during the George H. W. Bush presidency admitted that NIEs “substantially misperceived the motivations behind Soviet strategic programs”, and then continued thus: “This misperception has been due in considerable measure to concentration on the so-called hard data collected by technical means, and the resultant tendency to interpret these data in a manner reflecting basic U.S. concepts while slighting or misinterpreting the large body of ‘soft’ data concerning Soviet strategic concepts.”²⁹⁹ It concluded, “The failure to take into account or accurately to assess such soft data sources has resulted in NIEs not addressing themselves systematically to

²⁹⁵ Kotkin, Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse 1970-2000, page 53. As Kotkin further observes on page 59, the mere fact that Gorbachev showed up at his office rather than worked out of a hospital signalled a profound change.

²⁹⁶ Here it is useful to consult Wilhelm, “The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession.” and Rutland, “Who got it right and who got it wrong? And why?”; see also Gabriel A. Almond, A Discipline Divided: Scholars and Sects in Political Science (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

²⁹⁷ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 117; for a comparison between the two tasks, see A. H. Bernstein, “The academic researcher and the intelligence analyst: How and where the twain might meet,” Military Intelligence and the Universities: A study of an Ambivalent Relationship, eds. B. W. Watson and P. M. Dunn (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984).

²⁹⁸ Three independent groups looked at Soviet air defences, missile accuracies, and strategic objectives. They arrived at very different conclusions from those of the CIA. The reports of both Teams remain classified, but for a first-hand account of these Experiments, and the controversy that they generated, see Pipes, Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger, pages 134-43 and Pipes, “Team B: The reality behind the myth.” *passim*. A summary account with the broader political picture in mind is available in Andrew, For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 422-4.

²⁹⁹ Quoted in Matthias, America’s Strategic Blunders, page 309, and in Pipes, Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger, page 136.

the broader political purposes which underlie or explain Soviet strategic objectives.”³⁰⁰

Analysis

When considering the role that Analysis played in this surprise, and how mis-analysis occurred, the usual suspects of our culture and identity line-up appear: homogeneity of personnel, reification of objectivity and reason (especially reflected in a preference for quantitative data), and a partiality for secret over openly-obtained information. Frequently, evidence for these cultural characteristics appears related to specific analytical problems, and also linked back to the generative social mechanisms were discussed in Chapter 3.

“He’d never once been there...”

Fortunately for the arguments of this thesis, evidence of homogeneity and insularity – even provincialism – in analytical staff (both senior and junior) and its linkage to analytical failings regarding the USSR is not far to seek. The Cold War and restrictions on CIA travel within the USSR made it almost inevitable, and we have already discussed above that émigrés were generally excluded from the CIA’s talent pool.³⁰¹ Robert Gates, for example – between 1982 and 1989 the chief of SOVA³⁰² and then DCI (and holder of a doctorate in Russian and Soviet history from Georgetown University) – had never actually visited the Soviet Union. An infuriated critic noted: “He’d never once been there, and he was the top so-called expert in the CIA!”³⁰³ Was Gates representative? A 1996 report to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) suggested that his biography was not unusual: “More intelligence analysts should be given the opportunity to serve in, and travel to, the country or countries they are expected to cover. *An extended visit to the country or countries involved should be a minimal pre-requisite for any intelligence officer prior to undertaking*

³⁰⁰ Quoted in Matthias, America's Strategic Blunders, page 309, and in Pipes, Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger, page 136.

³⁰¹ There is some evidence that within the Directorate of Operations this bias against émigrés has been relaxed in certain periods. See, for example, Jones, The Human Factor: Inside the CIA's Dysfunctional Intelligence Culture, page 105.

³⁰² Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, page 91.

³⁰³ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 430.

analytical duties."³⁰⁴ Nevertheless, even in 2007 the CIA's Office of Security preferred to approve individuals for the DI who have little or no foreign travel experience or contacts.³⁰⁵

Moreover, despite Gate's contention that CIA in the 1970s "was not a Cold War, bureaucratic monolith"³⁰⁶, there is little doubt that SOVA in the late 1980s was the home of true 'Cold Warriors.' Milton Bearden, for example, the man charged with overhauling the old Soviet division in 1990 recalled that on August 20th, 1991, immediately after the hard-line coup attempt against Gorbachev, many people around him felt a "delicious sense of vindication... Some of [analysts] were pretty happy about it... Happy days were here again."³⁰⁷

"What effect did this have on the American specialists in the subject? None."

It seems that this lack of access to the subject at hand, the inescapably ideological nature of the work, and "isolation from the core social science disciplines"³⁰⁸ made Soviet area studies generally methodologically feeble.

In the sphere of political analysis, self-selection was also at work as the CIA was apparently drawing from a pool of political scientists who became Soviet specialists because they were attracted to intrigue: "Students of such systems were not required to engage in what may appear the somewhat arid activity of counting votes, adding up figures representing public opinion, observing parliamentary coalitions forming and disintegrating – what for many students of politics is their very bread and butter."³⁰⁹

The robustness of the CIA's economic estimates suffered because of secrecy: according to Eberstadt, they were never properly challenged by

³⁰⁴ "Preparing for the 21st century: An appraisal of U.S. intelligence : report of the Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community," Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1996, Chapter 8. Emphasis added.

³⁰⁵ Russell, Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right, page 131. The author's Top Secret clearance for the USMC took considerably longer than those of most of his peers because of numerous trips abroad, including both tourism and a language course in the USSR.

³⁰⁶ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, page 28.

³⁰⁷ Bearden and Risen, The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown with the KGB, page 484.

³⁰⁸ Rutland, "Who got it right and who got it wrong? And why?" page 37.

³⁰⁹ Ron Hill, "Social Science, 'Slavistics' and Post-Soviet Studies," Rethinking the Soviet Collapse: Sovietology, the Death of Communism and the New Russia, ed. Michael Cox (London: Pinter, 1998), page 216.

outside economic views.³¹⁰ These outside views need not have only been academic. One alternative source of challenge might have been the famous scenario planning group at the oil company Royal Dutch/Shell.³¹¹ As early as 1982, Shell scenario planners presented a credible and coherent case that the USSR could collapse in the decades ahead.³¹²

Did the homogeneity (especially the lack of émigrés) and methodological feebleness have an impact on the distance between Soviet reality and the *Weltanschauung* at Langley? The case of émigré economist and Cassandra

³¹⁰ Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule, page 143.

³¹¹ Scenario planning came out of Herman Kahn and Arnold Wiener's futurology (a term that they originated) done at the Hudson Institute in the mid-1960s. For general background on Shell's scenario planning unit, see Peter Cornelius, Alexander Van de Putte and Matti Romani, "Three Decades of Scenario Planning in Shell," California Management Review 48.1 (2005), and Paul J. H. Schoemaker and Kees van der Heijden, "Integrating Scenarios Into Strategic Planning at Royal Dutch/Shell," Planning Review 20 (1992), *passim*. For the use of scenarios in business more generally see: Max H. Bazerman and Michael D Watkins, Predictable Surprises: The Disasters You Should Have Seen Coming, and How to Prevent Them (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), Robert Bood and Theo Postma, "Strategic Learning with Scenarios," European Management Journal (1997), Debra Elkins, Robert B. Handfield, Jennifer Blackhurst and Christopher W. Craighead, "18 Ways to Guard Against Disruption," Supply Chain Management Review (2005), Liam Fahey and Robert M. Randall, eds., Learning From the Future: Competitive Foresight Scenarios (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), Leonard Fuld, "Be Prepared," Harvard Business Review (2003), Mats Lindgren and Hans Bandhold, Scenario Planning: The Link Between Future and Strategy (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), Timothy N. Nolan, Leonard D. Goodstein and Jeanette Goodstein, Applied Strategic Planning: An Introduction, 2nd ed. (Pfeiffer, 2008), Rafael Ramirez, John W. Selsky and Kees van der Heijden, Business Planning in Turbulent Times: New Methods for Applying Scenarios (Earthscan Publications, 2008), Gill Ringland, Scenario Planning: Managing for the Future, 2nd ed. (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), Paul J. H. Schoemaker, "Scenario Planning: A Tool for Strategic Thinking," Sloan Management Review (1995), Peter Schwartz, The Art of the Long View: Paths to Strategic Insight for Yourself and Your Company (New York, NY: Currency/Doubleday, 1996), Kees van der Heijden, Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation, 2nd ed. (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), Kees van der Heijden, Ron Bradfield, George Burt, George Cairns and George Wright, The Sixth Sense: Accelerating Organizational Learning with Scenarios (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), Pierre Wack, "Scenarios: Shooting the Rapids," Harvard Business Review 63.6 (1985), and Pierre Wack, "Scenarios: Uncharted Waters Ahead," Harvard Business Review 63.5 (1985). In practice, in the corporate world scenarios are often integrated with real options theory. For an introduction to real options see Alexander B. van Putten and Ian C. MacMillan, "Making Real Options Work," Harvard Business Review 82.12 (2004), Marion A. Brach, Real Options in Practice (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), Lenos Trigeorgis, Real Options: Managerial Flexibility and Strategy in Resource Allocation (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), Martha Amram and Nalin Kulatilaka, Real Options: Managing Strategic Investment in an Uncertain World (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), and Jeffery J. Reuer and Michael J. Leiblein, "Real Options: Let the Buyer Beware," Mastering Risk, ed. James Pickford, vol. 1 (London: Financial Times and Prentice, 2001). For an example of the use of real option theory when considering country risk, see Alexander Lehmann, "IMF Working Paper: Country Risks and Investment Activity of US Multinationals in Developing Countries," (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 1999).

³¹² Cornelius, Van de Putte and Romani, "Three Decades of Scenario Planning in Shell." page 94.

Igor Birman is instructive. Birman was a Soviet-trained economist, who, when he moved to America, continued to monitor open-source Soviet publications.³¹³ Birman was a persistent critic of the CIA for overestimating the health and size of the Soviet economy. Seliktar records, “In a series of detailed analyses that echoed much of the internal discourse in Moscow, Birman claimed that the Soviet Union was plagued by extremely serious problems and that the budget writers had used statistical gimmicks to mask considerable inflation. He confirmed Gorbachev’s then still secret allegations that the government had tapped into people’s savings to balance the budget.”³¹⁴ Birman’s efforts, however, to meet with Gates – then Director of the Analytical wing of the CIA – were rebuffed.³¹⁵

In fact, Birman was “one of the first to argue that the Soviet economy was in deep crisis, with important implications for the stability of the Soviet political system”.³¹⁶ Wilhelm opines that given Birman’s track record, it is “a particularly egregious misrepresentation of the situation”³¹⁷ to call his work – as did the author of the 1991 House committee’s report assessing the CIA’s performance evaluating the Soviet economy – a ‘hunch’. The same applies, of course, to other émigré Cassandras like Naum Jasny³¹⁸ and Vadim Belotserkovsky that Wilhelm also cites at length.³¹⁹

That the CIA failed to anticipate the actual course of events between 1988 and 1990 as accurately as Cassandras did does not *ipso facto* make it a low probability outcome (as the House’s specialists argued).³²⁰ In response, one can return to the fact that the CIA was so dramatically mistaken regarding the size of Soviet GNP that their predictions of continuity made sense to them and

³¹³ Wilhelm, “The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession.” page 69.

³¹⁴ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 109. She is referring to Birman, Secret Incomes of the Soviet State Budget, *passim*.

³¹⁵ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 109 .

³¹⁶ Wilhelm, “The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession.” page 69. Supported in footnote 5 on page 141 of Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule.

³¹⁷ Wilhelm, “The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession.” page 69. Supported in footnote 5 on page 141 of Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule.

³¹⁸ An émigré figure from the 1950s and 1960s: see Naum Jasny, Essays on the Soviet Economy (New York, NY: F. A. Praeger, 1962).

³¹⁹ Wilhelm, “The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession.” *passim*. Supported in footnote 5 on page 141 of Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule.

³²⁰ Wilhelm, “The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession.” page 69

others, but that a more accurate picture of the size of USSR's economy would have made instability a serious possibility.

To reinforce this assertion, consider that the émigré Cassandras' predictions extended to areas beyond the Soviet economy. In 1975, writing in the avowedly opinionated *Partisan Review*, the émigré Belotserkovsky said:

The centrifugal forces in the national republics have reached – to borrow a metaphor from Solzhenitsyn – force 10 on the seismic scale. The absence of real national freedom coupled with the authorities' lip service to this freedom causes enormous popular discontent. The "empire" is maintained only by inertia, military force, and the KGB. Any radical changes in Moscow are likely to burst the dam of national patience, and any attempt by Moscow to stop the tidal wave will merely replenish it with blood. For the most part the Russian people have never perceived any benefit in a "Great Russia", nor are the masses ready to give moral support to the ruthless suppression of the national movements in the republics.³²¹

Clearly, Belotserkovsky's characterization of the USSR was prescient. Yet Professor Harry Rowen, chair of the National Intelligence Council (NIC) from 1981-83 and former President of RAND, says that the CIA slighted as 'biased' "practically every émigré"³²². He concluded that from the 1960s forward there were literally thousands of émigrés who "said the place was falling apart".³²³ He then asked rhetorically: "What effect did this have on the American specialists in the subject? None."³²⁴

Even Gates conceded memoirs that "the clearest American vision of the future of the Soviet Bloc in the spring of 1989 came not from the Bush administration, and probably not from its Intelligence Community, but rather from a *handful of experienced outside observers*".³²⁵ Note even in that concession, Gates omits to mention émigrés.

³²¹ Belotserkovsky, "Letter to the Future Leaders of the Soviet Union." page 269 cited in Wilhelm, "The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession." page 70.

³²² Lundberg, "CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: the Politics of "Getting It Right" page 65

³²³ Lundberg, "CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: the Politics of "Getting It Right" page 65

³²⁴ Lundberg, "CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: the Politics of "Getting It Right" page 65

³²⁵ Gates, From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War, page 509.

“Anyone who spent an hour walking the streets of Moscow, the Soviet Union’s richest city, with open eyes...”

Homogeneity of staff reinforced an unhealthy focus on ‘objectivity,’ ‘reason’ and quantification in CIA’s analysis. We examine this misplaced focus operating at three levels: Sovietology generally, SOVA at CIA, and in a specific analytical problem that the CIA addressed.

Reflecting on the death of the USSR, Novak says: “Communism destroyed, or perhaps gravely injured, the ‘social capital’ on which all human progress depends... *Most Western economists, alas, have little or no comprehension of how much they take this sphere for granted.*”³²⁶

If that was the case for economists generally, it was certainly the case for Sovietologists. Pipes says, “Sovietologists treated societies as if they were mechanisms.”³²⁷ In this passage, he recalls much of what we already know about the CIA’s culture and identity:

It seems likely that ultimately the reason for the failure of professionals to understand the Soviet predicament lay in their *indifference to the human factor*. In the desire to emulate the successes of the natural scientists, whose judgements are ‘value free’, politology (sic) and sociology have been progressively dehumanized, constructing model and relying on statistics (many of them falsified) and, in the process, losing contact with the subject of their inquiries – the messy, contradictory, unpredictable *homo sapiens*. Anyone who spent an hour walking the streets of Moscow, the Soviet Union’s richest city, with open eyes, would have dismissed as preposterous CIA statistics showing the Soviet gross domestic product as well as its living standards to be nearly half of the United States. Talking to Soviet citizens with an open mind would have revealed that the appearance of widespread support for the regime was fraudulent. Such evidence, however, was generally dismissed as “anecdotal” and hence unworthy of serious attention.³²⁸

In short, Pipes lays much of the surprise at the downfall of the USSR at the door of an ‘objectivity-as-totem’ analytical approach.

³²⁶ Michael Novak, “The Silent Artillery of Communism,” *The Collapse of Communism*, ed. Lee Edwards (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), page 112-3. Emphasis added.

³²⁷ Pipes, *Vixi: Memories of a Non-Belonger*, page 128. He goes on to provide an illustration: “One of their basic premises held that all societies performed the same ‘functions,’ even if in different ways, on which grounds they interpreted in familiar terms all those features of the communist regime which to a mind untutored in social sciences appear outlandish. One such ‘expert,’ for example, found no significant difference between the way New Haven was administered and any city of similar size in the Soviet Union.”

³²⁸ Pipes, “The Fall of the Soviet Union.” page 47-8. Emphasis added.

If indifference to the human factor was the sin of Sovietology generally, what of Analysis at CIA? One can already see that by their inability to travel to the USSR, combined with the exclusion of people who had actually lived there previously, CIA analysts would have trouble effectively understanding the USSR. Seliktar offers a picture similar to Pipes', but shows how unique factors at the CIA (that she labels 'the Kent Doctrine') magnified these mistakes at the CIA. She maintains that in spite of efforts "to modify the Kent doctrine",³²⁹

Like their academic counterparts, SOVA analysts were most comfortable with things that could be formally defined, put into a Western context, and preferably, counted. This type of empiricism, exacerbated by cultural parochialism, ethnocentric projection, mirror-imaging, and plain gullibility, made it hard to discern the more amorphous expressions of delegitimation [and exhaustion of the regime]...[Among] other things the CIA did not understand religious or ideological beliefs.³³⁰

Clearly, the CIA's identity and culture blinded the Agency to elements that proved central to this strategic surprise.³³¹

Speaking at a conference in 2002, former DCI James Schlesinger is clear on the blinding role that scientism played in the CIA's analysis of the USSR's economy:

The intelligence agency was working on a giant computer model of how the Soviet economy worked. And that giant computer model acquired a life of its own, so that instead of looking at what was actually going on, we tended to interpret everything through that model of the Soviet economy Madame Roland (I heard a reference to the French Revolution earlier) said, "Oh, Liberty! What crimes are committed in thy name?" Well, here was "Oh, Computing! What crimes are committed in thy name?" Through this model we were grinding out detailed calculations about the Soviet Union, and we were failing to look at the realities.³³²

³²⁹ These were part of an effort made in the Reagan administration known by the shorthand "Team B" to incorporate the views of "an intellectual rival" of Sherman Kent, Willmore Kendall, into analysis. According to Seliktar, Kendall "disputed the epistemic assumption that predictive 'truths' can be separated from the values and outlooks of analysis"; see Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 214 and Kendall, "The function of intelligence."

³³⁰ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 216 .

³³¹ As Birman noted at a conference in 2002, "It is important to be scientific, but it is also important not to be wrong." Quoted in Blair A. Ruble, "Occasional Paper #283, U.S. Assessments of the Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Economy: Lessons Learned and Not Learned," (Washington, DC: The Kennan Institute, The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002 page 43.

³³² Blair A. Ruble, "Occasional Paper #283, U.S. Assessments of the Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Economy: Lessons Learned and Not Learned," (Washington, DC: The Kennan Institute, The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002 page 116-7.

One can trace these general cultural tendencies to a truly acute incapacity to understand their target and to quite specific analytical failings. The volume *Intelligence Analysis: a Target-Centric Approach* provides a concrete example of how this misperception could occur. It points out that “U.S. intelligence frequently overestimated the capability of Soviet military research and development institutes based on the large number of engineers that they employed”. This is because the tendency to count reinforced a bias caused by cultural and experiential ignorance: “It took some time [for analysts] to recognise how low the productivity of those engineers could be, but the reason had nothing to do with their capability. They often had to build their own oscilloscopes and voltmeters-items available in the United States at a nearby Radio Shack.”³³³

Senator Moynihan was making a similar point when he asked rhetorically: “What American could imagine that 40 percent of the crops would rot in the distribution system? ... You can count tanks, and mostly they don't spoil.”³³⁴

“Exploding TV sets were hard to quantify”

As discussed above, these analytical problems added up and it is argued here that they contributed directly to the strategic surprise that arrived beginning in 1989. Seliktar attributed this aspect of the CIA's analytical culture and identity directly to the mirror-imaging of the customer discussed in Chapter 3, and then linked it to the CIA's misestimates parsing the Soviet economy: “Because of the ‘culture of exactitude’ in Washington, the CIA...continued to use GNP and other statistical measures even when it became clear that the Soviet economy bore little resemblance to a rational Western model”.³³⁵ Eberstadt agreed, writing that part of the reason that the CIA was so credulous about official Soviet statistics was because making such assumptions facilitated the of the complex econometric models they had devised.³³⁶

Hanson, a British economist who worked on the USSR took a broader but complementary view, asserting that the CIA was simply the victim of American political culture: “The notion that, though you can generate a number,

³³³ Clark, *Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach*, page 235.

³³⁴ Moynihan, “The Soviet Economy: Boy, Were We Wrong!” page A19.

³³⁵ Seliktar, *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, page 215.

³³⁶ Eberstadt, *The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule*, page 139. For an example of this credulity, see Allen, “The Validity of Soviet Economic Statistics” or Terechow, “The Soviet Atlas as a Source.”

it might be wiser not to, is un-American and un-governmental".³³⁷ Indeed, as head of SOVA Gates had wanted to do away with direct dollar-cost estimates of the Soviet economy. Alexseev was blunt about the quixotic result: "The Department of Defense and Congress insisted that without quantitative data, however flawed, on the Soviet economy and military spending, the United States would have tremendous difficulty in passing its own budget",³³⁸ so the CIA continued to produce them. This is a clear example of social mechanisms (mirroring of the IC and the consumer) acting to maintain a feature of the CIA's identity and cultural (scientism).

Birman also made the point repeatedly to the CIA that because of the USSR's quality issues, the Agency should not compare capital investments in the Soviet Union and the U.S. by cost: costs in the Soviet Union were tremendous, but the results were frequently miserable.³³⁹ Apparently, the utility of the USSR's investments was never properly quantified in Agency models.

Kennedy takes the argument further:

In its zest for academic correctness [the CIA] had buried what was perhaps the most crucial bit of economic intelligence of the cold war, the most *politically* significant aspect of the Soviet economy: its inability to satisfy the mass of the Soviet people. Shortages, queues, rotting potatoes and exploding TV sets were hard to quantify, but they mattered a good deal to the Soviet citizenry and arguably thus to Gorbachev and the Kremlin.³⁴⁰

In other words, he attributed CIA's analytical problems regarding the USSR to this quantitative penchant, but ascribed to them not merely a misestimate of the *economy* of the USSR but to a fundamental misreading of Soviet *political* reality.

Interestingly, mirror-imaging of the USSR may also have reinforced CIA's analytical problems centred on the reification of reason and illusory notions of objectivity. How did this synergy occur? It made Langley particularly susceptible to the 'scientific' linguist prevarication to which the Soviets were addicted: "The use of value-neutral 'scientific' terminology, the reliance of

³³⁷ Quoted in Becker, "Intelligence Fiasco or Reasoned Accounting?: CIA Estimates of Soviet GNP." page 317.

³³⁸ Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, page 91.

³³⁹ See Blair A. Ruble, "Occasional Paper #283, U.S. Assessments of the Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Economy: Lessons Learned and Not Learned," (Washington, DC: The Kennan Institute, The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002, page 44-5.

³⁴⁰ Kennedy, "Sunshine and Shadow: The CIA and the Soviet Economy, Case C16-91-1096.0" page 27. Emphasis original.

official statistics, and the use of comparative functional-structural methodology to analyse Soviet Institutions” led social scientists at the CIA to the conclusion that the regime was considered quite legitimate, even by Western standards.³⁴¹

In reality, the CIA’s focus on ‘reason’ when analysing the USSR was particularly ill suited to the task in a ‘macro’ sense. Bathurst makes the point with some drama:

If, on the eve of a war for survival [in the 1930s], a government which has been warning of war, planning for war, having already adopted a militarized economy at least eight years before, arranges the execution of three out of five marshals, fourteen out of sixteen army commanders, all eight of its admirals, and 60 out of 67 corps commanders, as well as thousands of other officers and men, then a self-destructive cultural process of such magnitude is operating that it obviously overrides what we [i.e. Americans] think of as rational behaviour.³⁴²

His central point was that it was actually illogical for the CIA to attempt try to be fully ‘rational’ in any positivist sense about the USSR.

We will revisit this point in Chapter 6’s consideration of the CIA’s analysis of Khrushchev’s – a Great Purge survivor’s - likely behaviour prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

“These problems are not new”

This cornucopia of illogic was a matter of historical record, and that fact leads us to the final aspect of the CIA’s identity and culture that exercised a malign influence on the CIA’s analysis of the Soviet Union: its preference for secret over open-source information.

Having offered in Chapter 3 strong evidence for this preference, the burden here is merely to offer examples where ‘open source’ information possibly important for anticipating the collapse of the USSR was neglected. Three examples of widely-known facts that would have helped the CIA avert this strategic surprise suffice.

The first commonplace fact ignored in the CIA’s analysis of the USSR was the quality issue in Soviet production, and abundant anecdotal evidence regarding the hardship of Soviet daily life due to shortages of consumer goods.

³⁴¹ Seliktar, Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union, page 207.

³⁴² Bathurst, Intelligence and the Mirror: On Creating an Enemy, page 41. For a fascinating theory that employs a secret to make sense of Stalin’s mysterious behaviour (that papers had been discovered proving Stalin was an *Okhrana* informant), see Appendix II of Alexander Orlov, The March of Time (London: St. Ermin's Press, 2004).

As noted above, the longer Soviet qualitative indicators pointed to decline, and the longer anecdotes of consumer privation piled up, the more these factors should have become *variables* rather than *constants* in CIA's analysis: every year these factors persisted was "another piece of evidence that the problem [was] systemic rather than cyclical".³⁴³

The second salient open source body of information that was largely discounted in CIA's analysis – but which arguably contributed substantially to the USSR's collapse – was its attempt at economic autarky. Even scholars from 'the Left' such as Immanuel Wallerstein argued for years before the USSR collapsed that the Soviet Union was engaged in "mercantilist withdrawal"³⁴⁴ from the world economy.

But the USSR's economic isolation, always relevant, became increasingly important because "'globalization' was not global: it took sides in the Cold War".³⁴⁵ As John Stopford, Susan Strange, and John Henley richly explored, the structure of global production began to change rapidly in the 1970s, and accelerated in the 1980s.³⁴⁶ As this trend accelerated, it greatly increased the opportunity cost of the USSR's isolation from the world economy. As Brooks and Wohlforth cover in detail³⁴⁷, it did so for three reasons: 1) an upswing in the

³⁴³ Brooks and Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Re-evaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas." page 18

³⁴⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein, Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), page viii.

³⁴⁵ Brooks and Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Re-evaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas." page 35 and Alexseev, Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence and Global Struggle, pages 110-19.

³⁴⁶ John M. Stopford, Susan Strange and John S. Henley, Rival States, Rival Firms: Competition for World Market Shares Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), *passim*.

³⁴⁷ Brooks and Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Re-evaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas" pages 36-7. Emphasis added. They say: "[The handicaps of economic isolation of the USSR] greatly increased in relative importance as the cost, complexity, and difficulty of technological development spiralled upward in the late 1970s and 1980s and as the globalization of production concomitantly accelerated. It is easy to see how isolation from the globalization of production increased the difficulty of keeping up with the West in terms of general economic and technological productivity... Less obvious is the fact that Soviet isolation from these global production changes simultaneously made it much more difficult to remain technologically competitive in the arms race...Interfirm alliances in the 1980s were concentrated in those sectors with rapidly changing technologies and high entry costs, such as microelectronics, computers, aerospace, telecommunications, transportation, new materials, biotechnology, and chemicals. At the same time, production appears to have been most geographically dispersed in those sectors of manufacturing with high levels of R&D costs and significant economies of scale, such as machinery, computers, electronic components, and transportation. These sectors read like a Who's Who of dual-use industries. Thus the very sectors that were becoming most internationalized in the 1980s were those that provide much of the foundation for military power in the

number and importance of interfirm alliances; 2) an increased geographic dispersion of production; and 3) a growing opportunity cost of a deficiency in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).³⁴⁸

Obviously, the fact that the USSR was cut off from the world economy was no secret. What is argued here is that the CIA failed to understand the implications of these facts partly because of its focus on 'secrets' when the 'signalling function' of these facts changed. The increasing dire consequences of this isolation were noted in Gorbachev's speech to the Twenty-seventh Party Congress in February 1986, and he and other Soviet leaders were lectured on these same points by George Shultz, James Baker and other US officials.³⁴⁹ Yet while the CIA definitely acknowledged Soviet difficulty keeping pace with Western technology, they signally failed to analyse the possible *implications and consequences* of these particular shifts in the global economy and their special consequence for the USSR.

In July 1977, for example, the Agency published Economic Research (ER) 77-10436U, *Soviet Economic Problems and Prospects*. Its Summary makes clear that "reduced growth, as is foreshadowed over the next decade, will make pursuit of [the USSR's] objectives much more difficult, and pose hard choices for the leadership..." It then lists four "factors tending to slow the rate of growth [that] have been apparent for some time", one of which is "a limited capacity to earn hard currency to pay for needed technology imports and intermittent massive grain purchases".³⁵⁰ Lest someone start to unravel the long-term implications regarding these Soviet sectors, however, the next sentence reads: "These problems are not new." The report continues: "Looking towards the next five to ten years, these long-standing problems are likely to intensify, and will be joined by two new constraints which will greatly aggravate the resource strain: a

modern era. For this reason, Soviet isolation from ongoing global production changes became a tremendous handicap relative to the West in the 1980s in the military realm."

³⁴⁸ Brooks and Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Re-evaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas" page 34. For further background, see also Stephen G. Brooks, "The Globalization of Production and the Changing Benefits of Conquest," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43.5 (1999). To update these arguments for contemporary debates about the effects of international economics on global security, see Stephen G. Brooks, *Producing Security: Multinational Corporations, Globalization, and the Changing Calculus of Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³⁴⁹ Brooks and Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Re-evaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas." page 38.

³⁵⁰ CIA: Economic Research (ER) 77-10436U, *Soviet Economic Problems and Prospects*. The other three provide no succour to the Agency's defenders "1) The drying up of rural sources of urban labor force growth; 2) A slowdown in the growth of capital productivity; and 3) An inefficient and undependable agriculture which may be hit by a return of the harsher – but probably more normal – climatic patterns that prevailed in the 1960s".

sharp decline in the growth of the working age population and an energy constraint."³⁵¹ In sum, the possibly enormous implications of the trends above went un-discussed.

Similarly, In December that same year, in ER 77-10769, *Organisation and Management in the Soviet Economy: The Ceaseless Search for Panaceas*, the Agency concludes, in effect, that the system itself is also ceaseless: "As long as present organisational arrangements continue to yield modest, even if declining, rates of growth, the leadership will probably prefer to put up with the familiar deficiencies in the systems, rather than to launch major changes with unknown payoffs and political risks."³⁵²

Finally, over ten years later, the second sentence of the "Key Judgements" (i.e. the consumer-friendly Executive Summary) section of NIE 11-23-88, *Gorbachev's Economic programs: The Challenges Ahead*, published in December 1988, offers no warning of a coming sharp change. It reads: "Soviet attempts to raise technology levels will not narrow the gap with the West in most sectors *during the remainder of this century*."³⁵³

Alexseev points out that when Bill Gates was starting Microsoft, Soviet scientists were still forbidden free access to photocopy machines;³⁵⁴ by the late 1980s, the US had 600 times as many personal computers as the USSR (approximately 30 million versus 50,000).³⁵⁵ There is no evidence among declassified documents, however, that these overt global economic shifts and glaring societal disparities prompted a fundamental rethink among CIA analysts of the "cone of uncertainty"³⁵⁶ regarding the long-term viability of the USSR, or the ultimate consequences of this particular vulnerability.

The third and final example of the effect of a preference for secrets on analysis draws on the work of the representative Cassandras outside the CIA, the émigré with whom the CIA refused to work until after 1990, Igor Birman. It is

³⁵¹ Gerald K. Haines and Robert E. Leggett, eds., CIA's Analysis of the Soviet Union 1947-1991: A Documentary Collection (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2001), page 207-8.

³⁵² Haines and Leggett, eds., CIA's Analysis of the Soviet Union 1947-1991: A Documentary Collection, page 218.

³⁵³ Fischer, At Cold War's End: US Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, page 3. Emphasis added.

³⁵⁴ Those copiers that were in the USSR were extremely primitive. When the author was applying for Soviet visas, there was only one place in Washington DC that took "acceptable photos" for these visas, because all photos submitted to the Embassy had to be in black and white and with a particular matt finish in order to accommodate primitive Soviet copy machines both at the embassy and back in the USSR.

³⁵⁵ Brooks and Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Re-evaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas." page 115.

³⁵⁶ Saffo, "Six Rules for Effective Forecasting." page 1.

instructive – especially to counter the ‘hunch’ or ‘hindsight’ sceptics of the Cassandras – to observe the type of analysis that they performed using open sources, first-hand experience, and a detailed knowledge of the language, culture and *mores* of the USSR.

In an article entitled “The Soviet Economy: Alternative Views” in the journal *Russia* Birman wrote:

Finally, let me submit another very simple consideration. American agriculture produces more than does Soviet. Though our population is smaller, we eat much better and export food, whereas the USSR imports it. Nevertheless, let’s assume the two agriculture sizes are equal. American agriculture is something like 3% of GNP. In regard to Soviet agriculture, it is not so clear, estimates vary. According to the CIA, in 1976, Soviet agriculture produced 16.7% of GNP. From this you may easily conclude that the total Soviet GNP was at most five and a half times less than [that is, about 18% of] the American.³⁵⁷

Here, a Cassandra trumped billions of dollars of spies, secrets, ‘experts’ and satellites photos not with ‘hunches’ but with grade-school arithmetic and ruthlessly consistent logic. Wilhelm, in a clear echo of Thomas Kuhn,³⁵⁸ maintained that phenomenon of this type happened because “the model, or paradigm, for analysing the system [of the USSR became] more important than the facts.”³⁵⁹

Ultimately, the argument of this chapter (and this dissertation as a whole) rests on the idea that using constructivism to parse the culture and identity of the CIA, one can expose the naively empirical foundations of these analytical paradigms – and thus surprises that flow from them.

“They'd have been branded a kook”

Regarding the hunger for consensus in the Analysis phase, a single instance, directly addressing surprise at the implosion of the USSR, meets our requirements. It reveals many of the specific social mechanisms that create the

³⁵⁷ Igor Birman, “The Soviet economy: Alternative views,” *Russia* 12 (1986), page 66, cited in Wilhelm, “The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession” page 71. For further evidence see also Steven Rosefielde, “The Soviet Economy in Crisis: Birman's Cumulative Disequilibrium Hypothesis” *Soviet Studies* 40.2 (1988), Igor Birman, “Rosefielde and My Cumulative Disequilibrium Hypothesis: A Comment” *Soviet Studies* 41.1 (1989), Igor Birman, “The financial crisis in the USSR,” *Soviet Studies* 32 (1980), Igor Birman, “Limits of economic measurement,” *Slavic Review* 39 (1980), Igor Birman, “The Soviet Economy: Alternative View,” *Survey* 29.102-15 (1985), and Birman, “The Soviet Economy: Alternative View.” His primary monograph was Birman, *Secret Incomes of the Soviet State Budget*.

³⁵⁸ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, *passim*.

³⁵⁹ Wilhelm, “The Failure of the American Sovietological Economics Profession” page 72.

CIA's persistent properties of identity and culture discussed in Chapter 3, and foregrounds the pernicious effects of consensus-seeking on analysis.

Allen Thomson, who worked as an analyst in the Office of Scientific and Weapons Research and the Office of Strategic Research at CIA from 1972 to 1985 related the following anecdote to the author in an email:

[I] can confirm that many people knew that the Soviets were in considerable economic and societal trouble. But, however, *nobody knew what it meant for the future....* An example: I was on the small drafting team that wrote the Interagency Intelligence Assessment, "Possible Soviet Responses to the US Strategic Defense Initiative", now declassified... Being a technical intelligence analyst in the Office of Scientific and Weapons Research, I was unqualified to have a professional opinion about the Soviet economy, but had certainly read enough "it's in trouble" reports. Accordingly, trying to get inputs to the assessment, I put in some placeholder no-brainer lines such as, "If they attempted to deploy new advanced systems not presently planned, while continuing their overall planned force modernization, significant additional levels of spending would be required. This would place substantial additional pressures on the Soviet economy and confront the leadership with difficult policy choices."

Going around to the economic analysts to try them to provide more in-depth comments and projections, *it turned out that no-one was willing to do so.* So the placeholders remained in place as the best and coordinated judgement of the Intelligence Community... *I guarantee that if someone had gotten up in a National Intelligence Estimate coordination meeting in 1983 or 1985 and said that the Soviet Union had even a miniscule chance of collapse, they'd have been branded a kook...In other words, we didn't have a clue what was coming.*³⁶⁰

This anecdote provides clear evidence of two things: 1) that the potential end to the USSR was a surprise at CIA until well into the mid-1980s; and 2) that even as the possibility of the USSR's collapse began to dawn on some analysts, one of the key attributes of the CIA's identity and culture – a drive for consensus³⁶¹ – contributed to the ultimate strategic surprise for the United States by muzzling clear-headed analysis.

Production and Dissemination

³⁶⁰ Allen Thomson was also a consultant to the National Intelligence Council as an Assistant to Larry Gershwin from 1988 through 1996. This account was originally posted in June of 2000 to http://yarchive.net/space/politics/soviet_collapse_predictions.html; it was then confirmed – as were the edits of it – on October 4, 2007 through personal email correspondence with Mr. Allen. Emphasis added.

³⁶¹ It also confirms the operation of several of the social mechanisms which Chapter 3 posit create the Agency's identity and culture.

As the passage above foreshadows, a need for consensus at CIA further contributed to the social construction of this particular strategic surprise during the Production and Dissemination phase of the intelligence cycle.

“The rest of the community - especially the DOD - was not willing to even entertain such an idea”

Despite the fact that “Warning does not flow from a majority consensus” is the sub-chapter heading in the CIA analytical manual entitled *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*,³⁶² a consensus-driven approach is precisely what the Intelligence Community followed to produce reports about the USSR. *Anticipating Surprise* specifically cautions: “Warning has failed more than once simply because what the analysts really thought, and were saying to one another, was never put into print. Or, if it was, it was so caveated in ‘coordination’ or by a series of editors that what the analyst meant to convey was lost.”³⁶³ This was exactly the situation that Thomson described in the passage above.

Fritz Ermarth, a National Intelligence Officer (NIO) who helped prepare the 1985 NIE *Domestic Stresses on the Soviet System* (that characterised the USSR as a “very stable country”), agrees. Instead of pressures from the consumer, however, he (like Thomson) identifies pressures from the rest of the Intelligence Community: “I’m not proud of some of the bottom lines, because we pulled our punches. Not because [Director] Casey said so or [President] Reagan said so, but because it would have been too hard to get coordinated in the bloody Intelligence Community.”³⁶⁴

An anonymous “retired intelligence officer who was deeply involved in this issue in the last 5 years of the USSR” relates a similar tale, but with more detail:

I was present at a briefing by then chief of the Soviet Economy Division in SOVA in 1984 wherein he stated quite forcefully that the Soviets faced a Hobson's choice with the coming 5-year plan. That is, they could not make the capital investments they would need to carry the plan to success while meeting the projected military plan and the requirement for consumer goods simultaneously. His best judgement was that they would spend dear hard currency to buy grain from the US (they did just that) and try to meet the military plan while fudging on the capital investment. They did just that and

³⁶² Grabo, *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*, page 8.

³⁶³ Grabo, *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*, page 15.

³⁶⁴ Lundberg, “CIA and the Fall of the Soviet Empire: the Politics of “Getting It Right”,” page 13

economic collapse was the result – just what he predicted. The problem here was that in 1984 (as [Allen Thomson in the passage above] properly stated) *the rest of the community - especially the DOD - was not willing to even entertain such an idea.*³⁶⁵

In short, consensus (or mirroring the needs of the Intelligence Community and Consumers) trumped analysts' best instincts.

Section Summary

The CIA's record regarding the strategic surprise of the implosion of the USSR is certainly more complicated and nuanced than its record regarding the fall of the Shah. Nevertheless, this section has argued that there is firm evidence of a strategic surprise.

It has further argued that – because of the same features of the CIA's identity and culture discussed in the first case (homogeneity of personnel, scientism and/or the reification of 'objectivity' and 'reason', excessive regard for

³⁶⁵ Personal email correspondence arranged by Allen Thomson on 5 October, 2007. Emphasis added. The anonymous official goes on to concede some points to Thomson and the "it was a surprise" thesis. He also – interestingly – echoes the remarks of Ambassador Matlock cited above regarding the possible effects of leaks; overall, however, he convincingly supports the idea that a drive for consensus distorted analysis regarding the collapse of the USSR: "In 1988 the last NIE-11-14 on Warsaw Pact Theatre Forces (which has subsequently been declassified) included a KJ [Key Judgement] that stated that the Warsaw Pact was still a formidable fighting force. In terms of equipment and numbers that was true – although it was not believed by any one on the Review Committee except the DIA Rep. That KJ was forced into the NIE by LtGen Lenny Peroots DDIA when the NIE was brought to the NFIB [the National Foreign Intelligence Board]. And the Agency leadership accepted it in order to placate Peroots – after all, it was not wrong. But the same NIE stated that the Warsaw Pact was declining in size, quality of equipment and capability, and would continue to do so for the period of the estimate. I fought a 12 month battle to get that KJ [included]. I would also note...that this estimate made a strong case that one of the possible futures facing the Warsaw Pact was its demise. DIA went ballistic over that, but we kept it in the Estimate, though it did not make the KJs." He goes on "I will give you [Thomson] the point that there was disagreement within CIA over the extent of the Soviet crisis in the period 1989-1991. For example, in the summer 1991 Bob Blackwell, then NIE, was not willing to go as far as SOVA under Kolt to the effect that the USSR would not last out the year. But Blackwell did have the job of representing the IC, not just CIA as you well know. And SOVA was turning out papers making clear that the likelihood was that Gorbachev could not overcome the economic crisis, and that the Union Republics would not likely sign the Union Treaty on 21 August when it came due for renewal. Most of those papers have not been declassified, but Doug McEachin (sic) has published a volume that examines some of this stuff (– presumably MacEachin, CIA Assessments of the Soviet Union: The Record Versus the Charges.)... The point here is that we did know what was coming, but Washington was filled with policymakers who did not want to see the future. And they fought us tooth and nail to keep a "community" assessment from stating what the CIA believed internally by 1989...The simple truth is that there is a ton of material out there that makes clear we did have a clue as to what was coming. But there were budget and other policy reasons the political class in Washington in 1990-91 did not want to deal with this publicly."

'secrets' over other categories of information, and a drive for consensus above other analytical values) – the CIA's assessment of the USSR was fundamentally flawed. Émigré Cassandras, especially those who stood in opposition to the pervasive scientism at the Agency, provided valuable contrast.

At the same time, this section has offered ample hearing to the defenders of the CIA's record vis-à-vis the USSR, and brought into the foreground what the debate itself reveals: that the social facts in which intelligence analysis deals can be contested. In so doing, it underlines the importance of a constructivist approach to strategic surprise.

Chapter Conclusion

The first case of this Chapter discussed the relatively straightforward mystery-based surprise of Iranian revolution in 1979. Its comparative simplicity and clarity made the fall of the Shah a useful introductory case to see Chapter 3's ideas of culture and identity in action.

The next case then undertook a far more complex and ambiguous strategic surprise rooted in mysteries: the CIA's failure to anticipate and understand in a timely manner the downfall of the USSR. The treatment of this case first made it clear that there *was* a surprise. It then offered extended arguments based on the Agency's homogeneity, scientism, excessive pursuit of 'secrets', and a drive for consensus for how this surprise happened.

The identification of Cassandras prior to both the fall of the Shah and the collapse of the USSR brought the central role of the CIA's identity and culture into focus, showing how it enabled erroneous threat assessments. They confirmed that even if events were not amenable to a precise prediction, internal factors at the CIA that shaped the antecedent conditions for these strategic surprises to occur.

Chapter 6 – Cases and Cassandras: Secrets

Chapter 4, Section two introduced the distinction between secrets and mysteries. Briefly stated, a mystery is an ‘unknowable but perhaps foreseeable’ event, and a secret is a ‘knowable but unknown action of an adversary.’ Our contention is that strategic surprises can stem from both, and Chapter 4 examined two surprises rooted mainly in mysteries.

In contrast, Chapter 6 focuses on two cases stemming largely from secrets, events that were knowable but which were not discovered in sufficient time to prevent surprise: the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and al-Qa’ida’s attacks on September 11, 2001.

The cases differ in length and depth. The Cuban Missile Crisis is one of the most written about incidents in modern history, and scholarship about it has benefited from extensive declassification by both the US and the Russian Federation. Declassification will only be complete when Cuba’s government follows their examples, but the primary source material is extensive, and the secondary material is vast. This case also briefly considers the role of deception in surprise.

In contrast, despite a plethora of “instant” books and articles, 9/11 retains many of its secrets. For that reason, the Cuban Missile Crisis case is extremely detailed in places, and the longest of the four cases. Conversely, the 9/11 case should be considered a ‘first pass’, though one that fits all the patterns previously identified.

As Chapter 5 does, this chapter argues that these surprises originate in those aspects of the CIA’s identity and culture introduced in Chapter 3. Though separated by almost forty years and perpetrated by vastly different entities, the CIA’s failures to uncover sufficient secret information to prevent these two surprises share an intellectual genealogy now familiar to the reader: four obdurate aspects of the CIA’s identity and culture. As before, the task is now to underscore the relationship between these aspects and specific problems in each stage of the intelligence cycle.

Case III: The Cuban Missile Crisis

No episode in the history of international relations has received such microscopic scrutiny from so many historians and political scientists¹ as the events that are known in the US as “the Cuban Missile Crisis”, in the USSR as “The Caribbean Crisis”,² and in Cuba as the “October Crisis”.³ According to Chang, it has become “the most studied international confrontation of the twentieth century”.⁴ Indeed, Graham Allison’s *Essence of Decision* considers nothing else.⁵

Much of Allison’s work, however, relates to what happened *after* the missiles were discovered, not the intelligence provided by the CIA to President Kennedy *prior* to their discovery. The same is true for the vast percentage of other works in Political Science: they begin where this discussion ends – with Khrushchev’s secret gamble revealed.

At the CIA, the missiles’ ultimate discovery is viewed as a triumph: at the in-house gift shop at Langley, there are Christmas ornaments for sale featuring a miniature U-2 dangling in a gold ring above tiny maps of Cuba and the USSR.⁶ In contrast, this case approaches these events as a study in the CIA’s fallibility, which is in turn traced back to the leitmotifs of identity and culture previously sketched.

The case proceeds as follows. Part I is a time line of events leading up to the Crisis. Timelines are used so commonly in intelligence that there are special printers at the CIA that print them out on long rolls of thick white butcher paper.⁷ Here, one is employed because few people have a feeling for events

¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), page 260.

² Gribkov and Smith, *Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 10.

³ James H. Hansen, “Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *Studies in Intelligence* 46.1 (2002), page 49.

⁴ Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh, eds., *The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1998), page xv.

⁵ See Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, *passim*; the most thorough and cogent critique of Allison’s models – albeit of the first edition of his book – is J. Bendor and T. H. Hammond, “Rethinking Allison Models,” *American Political Science Review* 86.2 (1992). For a broader look at what can and what cannot be “learned” from the Crisis, see Richard Ned Lebow, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: Reading the Lessons Correctly,” *Political Science Quarterly* 98.3 (1983).

⁶ Diamond, *The CIA and the Culture of Failure: US Intelligence from the End of the Cold War to the Invasion of Iraq*, page 3.

⁷ Shenon, *The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation*, page 137. Interestingly, Shenon notes that the day-by-day, hour-by-hour chronology used by the

prior to the Crisis or for the CIA's analysis of those events and such background is central to the case. Next, we review evidence confirming that the Crisis was a strategic surprise, and explore the scope of the intelligence failure that it represented.

In Part II, we use the prism of intelligence cycle to scrutinize how qualities of the culture and identity of the CIA contributed to this strategic surprise. After reviewing Tasking, however, we break from the cycle briefly to cover three items vital to appreciating the remaining elements in the cycle. These three areas are the USSR's security measures, the deception techniques they employed (i.e. "*Maskirovka*"), and the main collection methods that the CIA used to watch Cuba at the time. Like the timeline, these areas are necessary background for a full understanding of this case.

We then resume the usual thread of the cycle, and consider the interaction of the four key characteristics of the CIA's identity and culture with pre-Crisis events during the Collection, Analysis, and Production and Dissemination phases. We again find that the origin of this strategic surprise is related not only to an adversary's skill at keeping secrets (an exogenous factor), but to Langley's identity and culture (an endogenous factor) shaping the antecedent conditions to allow this surprise.

9/11 Commission to look at the Agency's knowledge of Al-Qa'ida measured "at least 150 feet."

Part I - Time Line⁸

Before saying something new about this strategic surprise, a brief recap of preliminary events offers a contextual skeleton to the reader. This timeline both constructs a chronology of events before the Crisis and looks at the conclusions of a key intelligence product, SNIE 85-3-62, "The Military Buildup in Cuba," issued by the CIA just before the Crisis.

"That which you and you alone said would happen, has happened."

1959: On 1 January 1959, Cuban President Fulgencio Batista fled Cuba, and Fidel Castro took power. The Soviets began supplying covert assistance to the Castro government as early as the spring of 1959, and secretly arranged the first arms sales in the fall of 1959; this military buildup began "well before such aid was detected by a United States government that was still deciding whether Castro would be a friend or a foe".⁹ Later that year, on October 28, Turkey (a member of NATO sharing a border with the USSR) and the United States agreed to deploy fifteen nuclear-tipped Jupiter missiles in that country starting in 1961.

1960: In September, the first large Soviet-sponsored arms shipment arrived in Cuba. Soon afterward, Czech and Soviet technicians were reported assisting the Cuban military in assembling equipment and installing weapons such as anti-aircraft batteries. Warsaw Pact personnel also began to be employed as military instructors, advisers, and technicians.

⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, all dates and events are drawn from <http://nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/nuclear-weapons/history/cold-war/cuban-missile-crisis/timeline.htm>. NB: The task of distilling such a complex event into a skeletal timeline is fraught with peril: many will argue that their pet explanatory variable of Soviet behaviour ("Operation Mongoose" and other pre-Crisis CIA activities in Cuba are always popular candidates) is missing from the timeline, but was *the* key variable. The author can only refer the reader to Lewis Carroll's map-making parable: "That's another thing we've learned from your Nation," said Mein Herr, "map-making. But we've carried it much further than you. What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?" "About six inches to the mile." "Only six inches!" exclaimed Mein Herr. "We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!" "Have you used it much?" I enquired. "It has never been spread out, yet," said Mein Herr: "The farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well." See Lewis Carroll, The Man in the Moon: Sylvie and Bruno Concluded (London: Macmillan, 1893). In other words, one must always strike a balance between utility and complexity.

⁹ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 83.

1961: On April 17-18, US-backed Cuban guerrillas staged an abortive landing at the Bay of Pigs. On the night of August 12-13, all eyes focused on Europe as the Berlin Wall was erected to stem the flow of immigrants from the DDR to the FRG.

1962 – January: On January 1, the New Year's Day parade in Cuba provided the U.S. Intelligence Community with the first reliable overview of Warsaw Pact arms delivered to Cuba. These included around sixty Soviet-built jet fighters. Small numbers of helicopters and light transport aircraft were probably also provided to Cuba by this time.¹⁰

1962 – April: US Jupiter missiles in Turkey became operational. On 21 May, after a visit to Bulgaria,¹¹ Khrushchev told the Defense Council of the USSR of his decision to deploy Soviet MRBMs and IRBMs in Cuba. His decision was ratified at a combined meeting of Defense Council and the Presidium on Thursday, 24 May.¹² *Maskirovka* – deception operations – began immediately. For the Soviet general staff, Khrushchev's suggestion was a surprise, "like a roll of thunder in a clear sky".¹³ The General Staff began a "blur of work"¹⁴ to make the operation possible.

1962 – June: The Cubans exhibited increasing sensitivity to US violations of their airspace and territorial waters. The Cuban press began referring to the 'buzzing' of Soviet and Cuban merchant ships by US reconnaissance planes to photograph their cargos as "piratical actions".¹⁵

1962 – August 10: After examining CIA reports on the movement of cargo ships from the Black and Baltic seas to Cuba, DCI John McCone dictated a memorandum for President Kennedy expressing his belief that Soviet MRBMs were destined for Cuba. McCone's memorandum was sent "over the objections

¹⁰ CINCLANT Historical Account of Cuban Crisis, 4/29/63, pp. 6-8 available in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader.

¹¹ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 84.

¹² Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 7-8.

¹³ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 88.

¹⁴ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 17.

¹⁵ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 91.

of subordinates”, who were concerned that McCone had no direct evidence to back his suspicions.¹⁶

1962 – August 22: A CIA ‘Current Intelligence Memorandum’ noted: “The speed and magnitude of this influx of bloc personnel and equipment into a non-bloc country [i.e. Cuba] is unprecedented in Soviet military aid activities; clearly something new and different is taking place.”¹⁷

1962 - August 23: President Kennedy called a meeting of the NSC to air John McCone's concerns that the Soviets were introducing missiles into Cuba. Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara argued against McCone's interpretation of the military build-up, but Kennedy concluded the meeting by saying that a contingency plan to deal with Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba should be drawn up. Kennedy's instructions were formalised in National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 181, issued the same day. Kennedy directed several additional actions and studies be undertaken “in light of the evidence of new bloc activity in Cuba.”¹⁸ Papers were to consider the pros and cons of a statement warning against the deployment of any nuclear weapons in Cuba; the psychological, political, and military effect of such a deployment; and the military options that might be exercised by the United States to eliminate such a threat.

1962 – August 29: After several delays due to bad weather, the second regularly scheduled monthly overflight of Cuba by a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft was flown. Minutes after the film was placed on a light table at the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC – the specialised facility where U-2 film was taken for analysis), a photo interpreter shouted: “I’ve got a SAM [surface-to-air missile] site.”¹⁹ Complete analysis of the film revealed that the entire western third of Cuba was now defended by the Soviet Union’s most sophisticated air defence missiles, a huge change from the last U-2 mission on August 5. The same mission revealed “fragmentary evidence” suggesting that

¹⁶ Chronology of John McCone's Suspicions on the Military Build-up in Cuba Prior to Kennedy's October 22 Speech, 11/30/62; *Recollection of Intelligence Prior to the Discovery of Soviet Missiles and of Penkovsky Affair*, n.d. Available in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., *The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader*.

¹⁷ Available in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., *The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader*, page 67.

¹⁸ <http://nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/nuclear-weapons/history/cold-war/cuban-missile-crisis/timeline.htm>

¹⁹ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 104.

the Soviets were installing another sixteen SA-2 sites elsewhere in Cuba.²⁰ Within days, U-2 flights over Cuba risked being shot down.²¹ McCone was highly agitated by this development, but for virtually every other senior CIA official and analyst, the deployment “came not as a shock, but as a problem to be dealt with deliberately.”²² the same missiles had been sent previously to other Soviet client states in the Third World.

1962 - August 31: Senator Kenneth Keating told the US Senate that there was evidence of Soviet “rocket installations”²³ in Cuba. “When news of Keating’s statement was flashed on the various wire services, a scramble ensued in the lower echelons of the Intelligence Community, with analysts calling one another to see if any information existed confirming Keating’s statements.”²⁴

1962 – Early September: The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to restrict the movement of all foreigners in Cuba.²⁵ Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara was reported by one agent “to be promoting the thesis that the NATO nations constituted a belt of bases surrounding the Soviet Union” and that “Cuba was going to become the buckle in that belt”.²⁶

1962 - September 15: The *Poltava*, a Soviet large-hatch cargo ship, docked at the port of Mariel, Cuba carrying the first MRBMs to be deployed. US intelligence sources in Cuba reported on what appeared to be the unloading of MRBMs at that port on September 15-17, and the movement of a convoy of at

²⁰ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 104.

²¹ Fursenko and Naftali, *“One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964*, page 204.

²² Max Holland, “The “Photo Gap” that Delayed Discovery of Missiles,” *Studies in Intelligence* 49.4 (2005), page 19.

²³ This bit of Crisis history has long baffled scholars. It was finally partly clarified in the 1990s by newly released CIA documents. As noted above, prior to the missile crisis New York Senator Kenneth Keating shrilly and repeatedly denounced the Kennedy administration for minimising the intensifying Soviet military build-up in Cuba. He insisted on the Senate floor on October 10th that he had inside information that strategic missiles were being introduced there by the USSR (See Fursenko and Naftali, *“One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964*, page 220). The source of Keating’s information was a mystery for many years, and consideration was even given that his informant was a member of the Cuban delegation to the UN (See Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 170). It turns out that Keating’s source was noted playwright, former member of Congress, and ambassador Clare Booth Luce (See Brian Latell, “The Castro Obsession (Review),” *Studies in Intelligence* 49.4 (2005)) though who *her* source was is not clear. For our purposes, it is sufficient to say there is not enough clarity about this incident to include Keating among our Cassandras.

²⁴ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 169.

²⁵ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 148.

²⁶ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 164.

least eight MRBMs to San Cristóbal, where the first missile site was constructed.²⁷

1962 - September 17 or 18: Recognisable missile equipment reaches the vicinity of San Cristóbal; these dates were subsequently fixed as the earliest after which U-2 surveillance might have gathered 'irrefutable' evidence²⁸ of surface-to-surface missiles in Cuba.²⁹ (Of course, the USSR's plans could have been discovered earlier by other means).

1962 - September 19: The United States Intelligence Board (USIB) approved a report on the Soviet arms buildup in Cuba, SNIE 85-3-62. It stated in part: "We believe that the military buildup which began in July does not reflect a radically new Soviet policy towards Cuba, either in terms of military commitments or of the role of Cuba in overall Soviet strategy."³⁰ As Sherman Kent wrote in 1964, "This estimate was undertaken when reporting from Cuba began to indicate a steep acceleration in Soviet deliveries of military supplies to Cuba. The tempo of its production was more rapid than 'routine,' but far less rapid than 'crash.' At the time it was completed, those of us engaged in it felt that its conclusions A and B represented a basic analysis of the situation."³¹ These two conclusions in the SNIE – a document that is central to the following analysis of this case – read thus:

A. We believe that the USSR values its position in Cuba primarily for the political advantages to be derived from it, and consequently that the main purpose of the present military buildup in Cuba is to strengthen the Communist regime there against what the Cubans and the Soviets conceive to be a danger that the US may attempt by one means or another to overthrow it. The Soviets evidently hope to deter any such attempt by enhancing Castro's defensive capabilities and by threatening Soviet military retaliation. *At the same time, they evidently recognize that the development of an offensive military base in Cuba might provoke US military intervention and thus defeat their present purpose.*

B. In terms of military significance, the current Soviet deliveries are substantially improving air defense and coastal defense capabilities in Cuba. Their political significance is that, in conjunction with the

²⁷ The Soviet Bloc Armed Forces and the Cuban Crisis: A Chronology July-November 1962, 6/18/63, p. 15; p. 152. available in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader.

²⁸ The question of what constitutes "irrefutable" evidence in this case is dealt with below.

²⁹ Holland, "The "Photo Gap" that Delayed Discovery of Missiles." page 22.

³⁰ Quoted in Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 143.

³¹ Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 1.

Soviet statement of 11 September, they are likely to be regarded as ensuring the continuation of the Castro regime in power, with consequent discouragement to the opposition at home and in exile. The threat inherent in these developments is that, to the extent that the Castro regime thereby gains a sense of security at home, it will be emboldened to become more aggressive in fomenting revolutionary activity in Latin America.³²

The SNIE contained other conclusions, however, and they too bear upon our examination of the interaction of the CIA's culture and identity with this surprise. In these conclusions, labelled "C" and "D", the Agency attempted to predict further developments on the island. They read:

C. As the buildup continues, the USSR may be tempted to establish in Cuba other weapons represented to be defensive in purpose, but of a more "offensive" character: for example, light bombers, submarines, and additional types of short-range surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs). A decision to provide such weapons will continue to depend heavily on the Soviet estimate as to whether they could be introduced without provoking a US military reaction.

D. The USSR could derive considerable military advantage from the establishment of Soviet medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba, or from the establishment of a Soviet submarine base there. As between these two, the establishment of a submarine base would be the more likely. *Either development, however, would be incompatible with Soviet practice to date and with Soviet policy as we presently estimate it. It would indicate a far greater willingness to increase the level of risk in US-Soviet relations than the USSR has displayed thus far, and consequently would have important policy implications with respect to other areas and other problems in East-West relations.*³³

Kent later summarised: "As is quite apparent, the thrust of these paragraphs was that the Soviets would be unlikely to introduce strategic offensive weapons into Cuba. There is no blinking the fact that we came down on the wrong side."³⁴

1962 – Early October: Bobby Kennedy, the Attorney General and the President's brother, "actively demands" that McCone send CIA agents into Cuba not only to mine the harbours but also "to kidnap soldiers for interrogation about Soviet intentions".³⁵ These demands were not acted upon by the Agency.

³² Original document reproduced in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader, page 72 -3.

³³ Original document reproduced in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader, page 73-4.

³⁴ Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 1. Emphasis added.

³⁵ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 196.

1962 – October 4: On 4 October 1962, the Soviet freighter *Indigirka* docked at Mariel with a lethal cargo: “36 warheads in the 200-700 kiloton range for the MRBMs that had already arrived; 80 cruise missiles warheads, each in the 5-10 kiloton range; 12 charges for short-range Luna rockets at 2 kilotons each; and six atomic bombs for IL-28 medium bombers [being supplied in other shipments]”.³⁶ The first missiles, *sans* warheads, had arrived about three weeks before.

1962 - 8 October: The CIA’s Board of National Estimates (BNE) restated that the Soviets will not put offensive missiles in Cuba. In the Memorandum for the DCI entitled “Implications of an Announcement by the President that the US would Conduct Overhead Reconnaissance of Cuba, and the Actual Reconnaissance Thereafter”, the BNE states: “We do not believe that the announcement, or succeeding overflights, would cause the USSR to alter its Cuban policy in a direction which increased the provocation offered to the US, *e.g. the provision of medium-range missile bases.*”³⁷

1962 – October 14: Air Force major Richard Heyser flies the U-2 mission over Cuba whose photographs would reveal the USSR’s missile sites.³⁸

1962 – October 15: Missiles are detected by NPIC personnel. When an employee asked what code word he should apply to the Cuban material now, his supervisor replied: “This is all so confused, a good term might be ‘Mass Confusion’”. All subsequent photo-laboratory work done throughout the Crisis received priority treatment if it bears the title ‘Mass Confusion.’³⁹ Soon after the photos were verified, McCone’s executive assistant, Walter Elder, told the DCI of the event over an unsecured telephone line: “That which you and you alone said would happen, has happened.”⁴⁰

1962 – October 16: 8:45 A.M.: McGeorge Bundy informed President Kennedy that “hard photographic evidence” had been obtained showing Soviet MRBMs in

³⁶ Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, page 274-5.

³⁷ Original quoted in McAuliffe, *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962*, page 121. Emphasis added.

³⁸ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 219.

³⁹ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 212.

⁴⁰ “A Look Back...Remembering the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *CIA Featured Story Archive* (2007).

Cuba.⁴¹ Later that morning, Sherman Kent (whose analysts bore primary responsibility for the flawed Cuban assessment) came out of DCI McCone's office and remarked: "I've just been made a charter member of the bleeding asshole society."⁴² Gaddis records that later that day, a shocked Kennedy mused that the USSR's placing missiles in Cuba was "just as if we suddenly began to put a major number of MRBMs in Turkey". "Well we *did*, Mr. President", someone had to remind him.⁴³

1962 – October 22: Kennedy revealed to the world that Soviet Missiles were in Cuba. "Khrushchev," said Soviet diplomat Vassily Kuznetsov, "shit his pants."⁴⁴ He then behaved, however, in "the chillingly 'realist' manner of Stalin: walking over the egos and bodies of those who had helped in the implementation of his grandiose designs, but just happened to be in the way of retreat".⁴⁵

⁴¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all dates taken from <http://nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/nuclear-weapons/history/cold-war/cuban-missile-crisis/timeline.htm>

⁴² Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, page 144.

⁴³ Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, page 264.

⁴⁴ Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, page 266.

⁴⁵ Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, page 268. For more on reaction to the crisis in Moscow – at least what could be seen from the US side, without the benefit of hindsight, see William F. Scott, "The Face of Moscow in the Missile Crisis," *Studies in Intelligence* 37.5 (1966), *passim*.

Part II**The Scope of the Failure**

Following that overview of key events prior to the Crisis, we now examine the evidence for the scale and scope of this intelligence failure.

According to a CIA historical article entitled *A Look Back...Remembering the Cuban Missile Crisis*, the Crisis was a 'watershed' for the CIA because it "demonstrated that the technological collection capabilities so painstakingly constructed to monitor the Soviet Union had matured to give the IC an unmatched ability to provide policymakers with sophisticated warning and situational analysis."⁴⁶ In this view, the astounding abilities of the U-2 (matched with, it was later revealed, the technical intelligence on Soviet missiles provided by a GRU officer working for British and American intelligence, Oleg Penkovsky),⁴⁷ caught the Soviets 'red-handed' before their missiles were ready for launch, allowing Kennedy to call Khrushchev's bluff. Kennedy's subsequent handling of the Russian missiles in Cuba is remembered as a textbook case of effective crisis management.

"I think that the world might have been blown up"

That perception of success, however, is not shared by those with even a passing knowledge of the intelligence provided by the CIA to the White House prior to 14 October. This fact is significant because as Robert Kennedy would later say: "The fourteen people involved [in the Crisis meetings] were very significant – bright, able, dedicated people, all of whom had the greatest affection for the US...*If six of them had been President of the US, I think that the world might have been blown up.*"⁴⁸ The CIA's failure to discover the Russian secrets or to divine earlier their intentions in Cuba earlier brought the world to a three-in-seven chance of destruction.

⁴⁶ "A Look Back...Remembering the Cuban Missile Crisis,"

⁴⁷ Pringle, Historical Dictionary of Russian & Soviet Intelligence, page 61. See also Hitz, The Great Game: The Myths and Reality of Espionage, page 90-1. For a discussion of how important – or how unimportant – the intelligence provided by Oleg Penkovsky actually was during the Crisis see Len Scott, "Espionage and the cold war: Oleg Penkovsky and the Cuban missile crisis " Intelligence and National Security 14.3 (1999).

⁴⁸ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 325.

“Why not throw a hedgehog at Uncle Sam’s pants?”

There are four clear reasons why despite the ultimate discovery of the Russian plan, the Cuban Missile Crisis represented an intelligence failure for the CIA.⁴⁹ Each lends support to the possibility of earlier detection of the USSR’s plans, and therefore legitimates the classification of the Crisis as a strategic surprise.

First, there is the fact that Khrushchev’s plan was a ‘discoverable’ secret at least five months before Kennedy’s speech.⁵⁰ Khrushchev’s motives remain a mystery (and are still widely debated⁵¹), but as soon as he suggested to his staff:

⁴⁹ There are a few dissenting perspectives to viewing the CIA’s record prior to the missiles discovery as an intelligence failure; these again rely on counterfactuals. As Holland notes in a 2005 *Studies* article: “It has been argued, therefore, that the system basically worked. ...Yet some students of the missile crisis have gone too far, raising a counterfactual argument to claim that the CIA’s misestimates were the most significant shortcoming, and that the photo gap, in essence, did not even matter. “Discovery [of the missiles] a week or two earlier in October would not have changed the situation faced by the president and his advisers”, Raymond Garthoff, one of the most esteemed scholars of the crisis, has written. This is probably not the most appropriate counterfactual argument to pose, given that the missiles were found none too soon. A more significant question is: What would have happened if the missiles had been found even slightly later? If some combination of the administration’s caution, more active Soviet radars, mechanical problems with the aircraft or cameras, or inclement weather had delayed discovery by as little as a week to 10 days, then the first sighting would have correlated with a judgement that some SSMs were already capable of being launched, with who knows what consequences for ExComm’s deliberations. It was the administration’s restraint in the face of a blatant Soviet deception/provocation that won allied and world opinion over to the US position very quickly. That restraint might have been even more sorely tested than it was if some missiles, when discovered, were simultaneously deemed operational. Then, too, the looming mid-term election helped define what the administration saw as its window of opportunity for a negotiated settlement. Appreciably shortening the amount of time left before the 6 November voting suggests that the missile crisis might have played out very differently.”; see Holland, “The “Photo Gap” that Delayed Discovery of Missiles.” page 26.

⁵⁰ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 3.

⁵¹ Insofar as it touches upon CIA analysis of Soviet motives, possibilities for Khrushchev’s actions will be considered below. Here, one may note, however, that speculation about Khrushchev’s medley of motives is so varied that Fursenko compares it to Agatha Christie’s popular thriller, *Murder on the Orient Express*: “The detective Hercule Poirot encounters a train full of individuals who had motive and opportunity to kill the wealthy American found dead in his luxury compartment. Students of the Cuban Missile Crisis have suggested a series of plausible explanations for Khrushchev’s decision in May 1962 to break with Soviet tradition and station nuclear weapons outside of Eurasia. Some people have claimed that Khrushchev did this to paper over the USSR’s strategic inferiority by doubling at a stroke the number of Soviet missiles that could hit the United States. Another explanation, especially popular in the 1980s, was that Khrushchev was genuinely concerned about the likelihood of an American invasion and thought that a battery of medium- and intermediate-range missiles could deter Kennedy. It has also been suggested that anger at the American decision to station Jupiter missiles in Turkey provoked the impulsive Khrushchev. Finally, there are those who interpreted Khrushchev’s decision as an attempt to guarantee the status quo in Cuba and to prevent any attempt by the Chinese to dislodge him from the leadership of international communism. Like the all-star cast in this Christie mystery, all of these

“Why not throw a hedgehog at Uncle Sam’s pants?”⁵² Soviet plans moved into the realm of discoverable fact. Unlike the mysteries explored above, this strategic surprise presented no epistemological problems: logically speaking, it was a ‘pure’ failure to learn ‘knowable’ facts in a manner that would have prevented such a ‘close call’.

Second, this was not a credible case of a “failure of imagination”:⁵³ the possibility of such a secret action by the Kremlin was entertained as a theoretical possibility for several years before it occurred. Trachtenberg recounts that President Eisenhower predicted such a scenario in 1959.⁵⁴ Walt Rostow made similar prediction in a memo to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the DCI of April 24, 1961, saying that there was a threat that Cuba “might join with the USSR in setting up an offensive air or missile base.”⁵⁵ These were not predictions, but the threat was imagined.

Third, the Cassandra of this case, DCI John McCone, *did* predict these events to his staff. On August 10 (while Soviet plans were well underway, but weeks in advance of the fateful SNIE, and a full sixty-six days before the

factors are responsible for the act. Each played a part in pushing Khrushchev to take the very serious step [of deciding to station missiles in Cuba].” See Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, pages 182-3. According to Lebow, new evidence from former Soviet officials suggests that Khrushchev wanted “to deter an anticipated American invasion, to compensate partially for American strategic superiority, and to establish an atmosphere of “psychological equality”. He may also have had strong domestic incentives that grew out of the failure of his economic and political reforms. See Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, “Back to the Past: Counterfactuals and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics, eds. Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), page 134. In his autobiography, Khrushchev himself says: “We had to think up some way of confronting America with more than words. We had to establish a tangible and effective deterrent to American interference in the Caribbean. But what exactly? The logical answer was missiles. The United States already surrounded the Soviet Union with its own bombers and missiles. We knew the American missiles were aimed at us in Turkey and Italy, to say nothing of West Germany. Our vital industrial centers were directly threatened by planes armed with atomic bombs and guided missiles tipped with nuclear warheads.” See Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers, trans. Strobe Talbott (New York, NY: Little Brown & Company 1970), page 493.

⁵² Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 171.

⁵³ CF The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 339-347.

⁵⁴ Marc Trachtenberg, History & Strategy, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). page 203. He says In a meeting with his Defense Secretary, Eisenhower “could see reasons for putting IRBMs into such areas as Britain, Germany and France. However, when it comes to ‘flank’ or advanced areas such as Greece, the matter seems very questionable. He reverted to his analogy – if Cuba or Mexico were to become Communist inclined, and the Soviets were to send arms and equipment – what would we feel we had to do then.”

⁵⁵ Available in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader, page 16.

missiles were discovered). “If I were Khrushchev,” he said, “I’d put offensive missiles in Cuba. Then I’d bang my shoe on the desk and say to the United States, ‘How do you like looking down the end of a gun barrel for a change? Now let’s talk about Berlin and any other subject that I choose.’”⁵⁶ McCone’s fears were discounted until U-2 photographs provided irrefutable proof.

Fourth, no consumers were ‘looking the other way’: Cuba was under heavy scrutiny by US intelligence assets at the time. In the terminology of the previous chapters, Cuba was definitely “being pinged.”⁵⁷ In contrast to other cases, intelligence consumers in both the Executive and Legislative branches took an active interest in Cuba.

Ironically, during the Crisis and for the previous ten years, the CIA’s Office of National Estimates was directed by “perhaps the foremost practitioner of the craft of analysis in American intelligence history”, a man we have met before: Sherman Kent.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 191.

⁵⁷ Here is Wohlstetter’s 1965 summary of how Cuba was being scrutinized in the months leading up to the Crisis: “There was first of all magnificent photographic coverage as well as visual reconnaissance. The Navy ran air reconnaissance of all ships going in and out of Cuba, especially ships originating in Soviet or satellite ports during the summer of 1962, and intensified this sort of coverage during September. High-level photographic reconnaissance by U-2s over the island of Cuba was taking place at the rate of one flight every two weeks until the month of September, [here, Wohlstetter is incorrect: see below] when it increased to once a week. Low-level photographic reconnaissance began only after the President’s speech of October 22 – the first being on October 23. In addition to photography, we had voluminous accounts from Cuban refugees who were leaving the island in a steady stream. We had agents stationed on the island who were reporting, and we were listening to radio broadcasts from Cuba. The Cuban press, while carefully controlled, was making some announcements which are interesting in retrospect. A number of European correspondents stationed on the island were reporting to their newspapers, though the American press was not welcome. Finally, but by no means least, we had Castro’s pronouncements. Wohlstetter, “Cuba and Pearl Harbor.” page 693 She is right that in hindsight, press clues are easy to find. Wohlstetter herself notes: “On September 11, the day of the falsely reassuring TASS statement, the Cuban newspaper *Revolucion* underlined the threat of thermonuclear war invoked by TASS. The front page was printed with a single white headline on a black background, and it said: ‘Rockets Over the United States if Cuba is Invaded.’ Forcing the Soviet Union’s hand in this way had been Cuban policy for some time, so that it was natural for our experts to take this as another instance of Cuban wishful thinking.” See Wohlstetter, “Cuba and Pearl Harbor.” page 705. The author of this dissertation, for one, does not blame the analysts, and feels too much can be made of such an approach.

⁵⁸ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 80.

“An improvement in the Soviet strategic position... quickly and cheaply”

In spite of these four factors in favour of earlier detection of Russian moves, the Soviets were able to achieve what Wohlstetter called “a logistical surprise comparable to the technological surprise at the time of Pearl Harbor”.⁵⁹

The gravity of the CIA’s Cuba failure in 1962 can be compared to Pearl Harbor for four reasons: first, it had grave national security consequence; second the CIA, even after the discovery of the missiles, missed several significant factors that – if known – could have dramatically altered Kennedy’s handling of the Crisis, possibly leading to inadvertent nuclear war; third, the failure involved a *sustained* misestimate of Soviet intentions and actions – it was more than simply an incorrect one-off prediction; fourth, the CIA inadequately allowed for the possibility of deception by the Soviets in Cuba. We should briefly explore each of these four dimensions of the failure before proceeding.

It should be obvious that Khrushchev’s plan to dispatch surreptitiously nuclear-capable SS-4 and SS-5 missiles to Cuba dramatically upset the strategic balance between the US and the USSR.⁶⁰ Had the missiles become operational, they would have doubled or tripled the total number of Soviet warheads capable of reaching the US.⁶¹ As Horelick says: “It is difficult to conceive of any other measure that promised to produce so large an improvement in the Soviet strategic position as quickly and cheaply”.⁶²

Time, moreover, was a key element in America’s retaliatory nuclear capability, and missiles in Cuba would have had a substantially diminished flight time (ten to twenty minutes less than that of missiles launched from the Soviet Union).⁶³ According to General William Y. Smith,⁶⁴ that extra force and the diminished warning time could have severely, perhaps fatally, limited the US ability to retaliate and thus would have made the idea of a first strike much more tempting for the Soviets.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Wohlstetter, “Cuba and Pearl Harbor.” page 698.

⁶⁰ Hansen, “Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis.” page 49.

⁶¹ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 104.

⁶² Arnold L. Horelick, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Analysis of Soviet Calculations and Behavior,” World Politics 16.3 (1964), page 376.

⁶³ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 104.

⁶⁴ On the staff of Kennedy’s most trusted military advisor, General Maxwell Taylor.

⁶⁵ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 104.

“The relevant national intelligence estimate was proved completely wrong”

Dramatic illustration like that can obscure the operational scope of the surprise inflicted. In an operation that later estimates say cost the USSR about one billion 1962 US dollars,⁶⁶ the Soviets transported a *wide variety* of nuclear weapons and delivery systems to the island. According to Gaddis:

On 4 October, 1962, the Soviet freighter *Indigirka* docked at Mariel with a lethal cargo: 36 warheads in the 200-700 kiloton range for the MRBMs that had already arrived separately; 80 cruise missile warheads, each in the 5-10 kiloton range; 12 charges for short-range Luna rockets at 2 kilotons each; and six atomic bombs for IL-28 medium bombers [being supplied in other shipments]. Another 24 warheads in the 200-800 kiloton range, for the IRBMs, reached the port of La Isabella on another freighter, the *Alexandrovsk*, but were never unloaded because the missiles for which they were intended never arrived. In sum, at the time of the crisis, there were at least 158 strategic and tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba, 42 of which (the MRBM warheads plus the IL-28 bombs) could have reached some part of the United States.⁶⁷

Langley missed all of these: throughout the Crisis, the CIA stated that they did not believe that there were any nuclear warheads on the island.⁶⁸ Instead, they thought that the warheads would be delivered *after* the missiles were operational. Likewise, the existence of tactical nuclear weapons on the island during the Crisis was not discovered by the CIA until years later.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev, page 259.

⁶⁷ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 274-5. Fursenko illustrates this point in a less clinical way: “One can note that Hiroshima was flattened by a blast equivalent to 14,000 tons of TNT. A single [warhead from these missiles] represented 1 million tons of TNT”; from Cuba, each of these warheads could have been dropped on any point from Dallas, Texas to Washington, DC. Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 216. For a discussion of the role that this knowledge played – or failed to play – during the Crisis itself, see chapter six, pages 235 to 260 in Trachtenberg, History & Strategy.

⁶⁸ Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader, page xii.

⁶⁹ Russell, Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right, page 34. Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 216 concurs. Here it is fair to note that despite the information supplied by the spy in the USSR Oleg Penkovsky, very little information was available on Soviet practices transporting and storing strategic nuclear weapons, and even less was known about the field deployment of tactical nuclear weapons. Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 541. This is understandable. “Security measures [for the USSR’s nuclear weapons] included denial of access to production centres (including the establishment of ten “closed” nuclear cities), and the isolation of personnel employed in them” (at least 15 of 114 GULAG camps supported these cities. For more on this topic, see E. Animitsa, N. Vlasova, E. Dvoryadkina, N Novikova and V Safronov, Russia's Closed Nuclear Cities: Features of Development and Management

This seemingly technical failure matters because, as Betts relates, with hindsight we know that it generated extra dangers after the missiles' discovery: "In the biggest crisis in the Cold War, over Soviet missiles in Cuba, the relevant national intelligence estimate was proved completely wrong... intelligence collection failed to detect facts that might have yielded catastrophic results if Moscow had not backed down immediately." He supports claims that the CIA was unaware of the nuclear warheads, bombs, tactical nuclear rockets and the four Soviet diesel attack submarines nearby carrying nuclear torpedoes, and writes, "*These were facts that would have been crucial matters for the deliberations and risk calculations made by American leaders had they known about them.*"⁷⁰

To round out this catalogue of failure, the CIA's estimates of Soviet military manpower throughout the Crisis were four to ten times too low:⁷¹ Langley estimated the presence of some 10,000 Soviet troops on the island, while the truth was that 43,000 military personnel were present.⁷² This fact alone could have had dramatic consequences had the Crisis played out differently.

"The most accurate possible picture of what the Soviets might be up to in Cuba"

The Pearl Harbor analogy is also justified because the intelligence failures prior to the Crisis, like those 7 December 1941, transcended a single estimate. Nevertheless, the key SNIE 85-3-62 of 19 September 1962, "The Military Buildup in Cuba", exemplified many of the CIA misestimates and misconceptions about Soviet intentions prior to the Crisis.⁷³ This failure to

(Yekaterinburg: Urals State Economics University, 2002)., *passim*). In short, there was a special cocoon of secrecy – extreme even by Soviet standards – around any information "even remotely associated with nuclear weapons", and extensive counterintelligence and technical countermeasures operations. See Oleg A. Bukharin, "The Cold War Atomic Intelligence Game, 1945-70," Studies in Intelligence 48.2 (2004), pages 2-8.

⁷⁰ Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, page 190. Emphasis added.

⁷¹ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 267.

⁷² Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader, page xi.

⁷³ In fact, when Abbott E. Smith, in a 1969 *Studies* article on accuracy in NIEs says "I know of several difficult estimates which proved wrong, and wrong because they showed a failure to grasp the nature of forces at work in a situation", he could have had SNIE 85-3-62 in mind: in it, the Agency definitely showed a failure to grasp the nature of forces at work in the Cuban/Soviet situation. See Smith, "On the Accuracy of National Intelligence Estimates ". page 26.

assess accurately the dynamics of the situation is the third dimension of the intelligence failure preceding the Cuban Missile Crisis.

What were these dynamics? Prior to the Crisis the CIA sustained a blind spot regarding the USSR's intentions, capabilities, and actions in Cuba so great that the possibility of Khrushchev's plan was unequivocally rejected by CIA analysts even as it happened. As Fursenko says: "The US Intelligence Community *repeatedly* assured the White House that Moscow did not consider Cuba a vital interest and would neither station a significant force on the island nor send a military force in a conflict to defend Cuba."⁷⁴ As far as the CIA analysts were concerned, for the Soviets to install missiles in Cuba would have been "aberrational,"⁷⁵ and therefore unlikely. As late as 8 October, the Board of National Estimates stated its belief that the Soviets would not move offensive missiles to Cuba:⁷⁶ "We do not believe that the announcement, or succeeding overflights, would cause the USSR to alter its Cuban policy in a direction which increased the provocation offered to the US, e.g. the provision of medium-range missile bases."⁷⁷

There is further evidence that this failure was more than a single 'bad' estimate. On 4 February 1963, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) issued a major post-mortem about the Crisis, the "Killian Report"⁷⁸. As Hansen says:

The Killian Report described the introduction and deployment of Soviet strategic missiles in Cuba as a "near-total intelligence surprise." It concluded that the Intelligence Community's analysis of intelligence indicators and its production of current intelligence reports "failed to get across to key government officials the most accurate possible picture of what the Soviets might be up to in Cuba" during the months preceding 14 October. The report took the Community to task for inadequate early warning of hostile intentions and capabilities; failure to provide senior policymakers with meaningful, cumulative assessments of the available intelligence indicators; and failure to produce a revision of the erroneous National Intelligence Estimate (NIE 8-3-62) of 19 September 1962. *...It is likely that with a trained, well-staffed, and deception-aware analytic corps, the United States could have*

⁷⁴ Fursenko and Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 205. Emphasis added.

⁷⁵ Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 367 footnote 116.

⁷⁶ In a "Memorandum for the Director entitled "Implications of an Announcement by the President that the US would Conduct Overhead Reconnaissance of Cuba, and the Actual Reconnaissance Thereafter".

⁷⁷ McAuliffe, CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962, page 121.

⁷⁸ The report was named for the chairman of the Commission looking into events in Cuba, James R. Killian, Jr.

*uncovered Khrushchev's great gamble long before Maj. Heyser's revealing U-2 mission.*⁷⁹

Other post-mortems agreed. The Stennis Report isolated one "substantial"⁸⁰ error in the CIA's evaluation of Soviet intentions towards Cuba. The Agency's predisposition to the "philosophical conviction"⁸¹ that it would be incompatible with Soviet policy to introduce strategic missiles into Cuba. Because Khrushchev had never put nuclear-capable missiles in any Soviet satellite country before, the CIA reasoned, he certainly would not put them in a country thousands of miles away from the USSR, and only 90 miles away from America.⁸² The Report also said that the CIA had reasoned that the Soviets "would almost certainly estimate that [introducing missiles into Cuba] could not be done without provoking a dangerous US reaction." As Laqueur notes, however, at the CIA "no consideration seems to have been given to the possibility that the Soviet Union did indeed allow for a strong US reaction in its calculations"⁸³ but were prepared to risk such a reaction!

The Soviet gamble almost paid off: even once the missiles got to Cuba, there was a gap of thirty-seven days from the first visual observation made by a Cuban exile – on September 8, reported to the CIA on September 9 – to October 14, the day that photographic evidence was obtained.⁸⁴ This thirty-seven day lag, during which no U-2 flights covered the San Cristobal area,⁸⁵ is alarming. Allison speculates that had the presence of the Soviet missiles only become known a few weeks later when they were fully operational, possible American responses would have been severely restricted.⁸⁶

The final dimension of the CIA's failure prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis was also touched on in the Killian Report: the Agency's lack of a 'deception-aware' analytic corps. Until the Crisis arose, the CIA was not alive to the

⁷⁹ Hansen, "Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis." page 56. Emphasis added.

⁸⁰ John *et al* Stennis, Investigation of the Preparedness Program, Interim Report on the Cuban Military Buildup by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee (Washington, DC: Committee on Armed Services, US Senate, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 1963), page 2.

⁸¹ John *et al* Stennis, Investigation of the Preparedness Program, Interim Report on the Cuban Military Buildup by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee (Washington, DC: Committee on Armed Services, US Senate, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 1963), page 2.

⁸² Wohlstetter, "Cuba and Pearl Harbor." page 701.

⁸³ Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 367 fn 115.

⁸⁴ Wohlstetter, "Cuba and Pearl Harbor." page 697.

⁸⁵ For the reasons for this poor coverage, see Holland, "The "Photo Gap" that Delayed Discovery of Missiles." *passim*. See also Snider, The Agency and the Hill: CIA's Relationship with Congress, 1946–2004, page 231.

⁸⁶ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis. page 219.

possibility of deliberate Soviet deception on the island. The best case in point for this is that the crucial estimate – SNIE 85-3-62 – nowhere considered the possibility of deception. Instead, the SNIE accepted with a minimum of scepticism Soviet statements about their intentions in Cuba, and cited earlier private reassurances conveyed by Ambassador Dobrynin.⁸⁷ Yet the Agency knew that the USSR's nuclear weapons programme was always considered the 'crown jewel' of Soviet secrets,⁸⁸ and that the USSR used *maskirovka* to cover *all* nuclear deployments⁸⁹, *even those occurring within the Soviet Union.*⁹⁰ Open-minded logic would dictate, therefore, that the Soviets would employ *maskirovka* extensively if they were to attempt to put nuclear weapons in Cuba. In fact, the Soviets did use *maskirovka* during Operation Anadyr (as they called this operation), though as we shall see much of this effort was highly imperfect.

“A narrow escape”

Eyewitnesses support that the Agency did not consider deception by the USSR. When the Director of the NPIC, Arthur C. Lundahl first displayed the crucial U-2 photographs taken on October 14,⁹¹ Sherman Kent, Director of the

⁸⁷ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 367 footnote 114.

⁸⁸ Bukharin, "The Cold War Atomic Intelligence Game, 1945-70." page 2.

⁸⁹ The central tenet of *maskirovka* is "to prevent an adversary from discovering Russian intentions by deceiving him about the nature, scope, and timing of an operation. *Maskirovka* covers a broad range of concepts, from deception at the strategic planning level to camouflage at the troop level. Russian military texts indicate that *maskirovka* is treated as an operational art to be polished by professors of military science and officers who specialize in this area" Hansen, "Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis." page 49. For more on *maskirovka*, see Henry S. Marsh and Jennie A. Stevens, "Surprise and Deception in Soviet Military Thought, Part I," *Military Review*. June (1982); Henry S. Marsh and Jennie A. Stevens, "Surprise and Deception in Soviet Military Thought, Part II," *Military Review*. July (1982); Brian D. Dailey and Patrick J. Parker, eds., *Soviet Strategic Deception* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987); Pringle, *Historical Dictionary of Russian & Soviet Intelligence*, pages 153-5 and Roger Beaumont, "On the Analytical Challenges of Maskirovka," *Intelligence and Intelligence Policy in a Democratic Society*, ed. Stephen J Cimbala (Dobbs Ferry, VA: Transnational, 1987). For a wider history of *maskirovka* in the context of deception and operational mass see Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory*, The Cummings Center Series (London: Frank Cass, 2004), pages 30-69. For more on strategic deception generally, see Sherwin and Whaley, "Understanding Strategic Deception: An Analysis of 93 Cases."; Wohlstetter, "Slow Pearl Harbors and the Pleasures of Deception."; Michael I. Handel, "Intelligence and Deception," *Intelligence and the National Security Strategist*, eds. Roger Z. George and Robert D. Kline (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006); and the useful though now dated Stanley Zell, *An Annotated Bibliography of the Open Literature on Deception* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1985).

⁹⁰ Fursenko and Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964*, page 190.

⁹¹ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 219.

Office of National Estimates, “was shaking his head from side to side, in total disbelief that the Soviets would do something so earthshaking”.⁹²

In short, what is remembered as a triumph of crisis management and diplomacy by President Kennedy was also a strategic surprise for the CIA and, as Wohlstetter noted, “A narrow escape”⁹³ for the United States. What we have demonstrated in this section is that while the outcome of the Crisis was a success for the United States, the *emergence* of the Crisis was an intelligence failure, a clear strategic surprise. The scale and scope of this failure extended beyond a single poor judgement by the CIA about Soviet intentions on the island (though a single SNIE does distil several misjudgements), and the consequences were almost colossal.

⁹² Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*. page 219.

⁹³ Wohlstetter, “Cuba and Pearl Harbor.” page 691.

Part III

Mapping the Failure and Revealing the Cassandras

Part I of this case study provided a basic chronology of Crisis, an overview of the intelligence produced by the CIA, and evidence of the scale and scope of this strategic surprise. In Part II, we outlined the scope of the failure. In Part III, use the prism of intelligence cycle to understand how properties of the CIA's culture and identity contributed to this strategic surprise. We get behind the questions of the post-mortem reports on intelligence prior to the Crisis, and seek to identify not only what some of the known errors were in Tasking, Collection, Analysis and Production and Dissemination, but how they were possible. More specifically, we ask what was the role played by the aforementioned attributes of the CIA's identity and culture. Why, in the words of the Stennis Report, was there a predisposition at the CIA to the conviction that it would be incompatible with Soviet policy to introduce strategic missiles into Cuba?⁹⁴ Why were "indications to the contrary" of what the CIA expected not "given proper weight"?⁹⁵ Why was there a tendency "to discredit and downgrade the reports of Cuban refugees and exiles"?⁹⁶ If, as the PFIAB Report on the Crisis stated, the President had been "ill served"⁹⁷ by the CIA, which had "failed to get across to key government officials the most accurate possible picture" of Soviet activity,⁹⁸ we seek to discover how this was possible.

In answer to all these questions, we see how in Tasking, Collection, Analysis, and Production and Dissemination, familiar features of the CIA's culture and identity played a key enabling role. Repeatedly, the CIA's homogeneity, concentration on narrowly defined reason and scientism, over-emphasis on secret versus openly obtained information, and a drive for consensus obscured clues that might have allowed the Agency to discern Soviet actions earlier. In so doing, essential elements of the USSR's secrecy and deception measures are looked at, along with the collection mechanisms that had the raw capability to have prevented the Crisis from developing. The perspective of the Cassandra of the case, John McCone, highlights our

⁹⁴ Stennis, Investigation of the Preparedness Program, Interim Report on the Cuban Military Buildup by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, page 2.

⁹⁵ Stennis, Investigation of the Preparedness Program, Interim Report on the Cuban Military Buildup by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, page 11.

⁹⁶ Stennis, Investigation of the Preparedness Program, Interim Report on the Cuban Military Buildup by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, pages 5 and 10.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 196.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 196.

contention that Khrushchev’s secret moves could have been discovered far earlier.

In Chapter 4, we introduced Figure 5, a grid that illustrated those features of the CIA’s identity and culture that had the greatest impact on the intelligence cycle for surprises that were rooted in mysteries. Figure 8, below, serves the same function for this chapter for surprises that are rooted in secrets.

As before, Figure 8 is merely indicative: the linkages portrayed in it are general. This chart is not an attempt to capture precisely the variables of identity and culture in the manner of a periodic table, and then assign to them a unidirectional causal role. Instead, it is a rough guide, a semi-impressionistic map of where particular aspects of the CIA’s identity and culture exercised the greatest effects on the intelligence cycle in these cases.

One must also bear in mind both that attributes of identity and culture are not always separable explanatory variables, and that the cycle itself is an imperfect map of the intelligence process. Once again, it would be imprudent to draw direct causal links, but the chart acts as a summary answer to the important epistemological question of ‘How are such surprises possible?’

Figure 8: Secrets - Features of Identity & Culture vs. Key Distortions of the Intel Cycle

Intelligence Cycle Phase	Feature of the CIA's Identity & Culture			
	Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
Tasking				
Collection				
Analysis				
Production				
Dissemination				

With these caveats in mind, we now turn to an examination of the first phase of the intelligence cycle, Tasking.

Tasking – “How Cuba might look to the Russians”

For many, the Cuban Missile Crisis seems an extraordinary period. Until the missiles were found, however, it was not. According to Allison – arguably the leading scholar on the Crisis – “the organisational routines and standard operating procedures by which the American Intelligence Community discovered Soviet missiles in Cuba were neither more nor less successful than they had

been the previous month or were to be in the months to follow”.⁹⁹ In other words, despite the hindsight bias that make the intelligence cycle below appear extraordinary (either in a positive or in a negative way), it was not, and this ‘ordinariness’ makes it an ideal surprise for our analysis.

In the introduction to this section, we learned that Cuba was under heavy surveillance, but we should remember that many nations had as high a priority as Cuba.¹⁰⁰ Cuba had been heavily Tasked ever since the Castro regime came to power (and especially after the Bay of Pigs disaster in April 1961¹⁰¹) but not to the exclusion of other intelligence targets. One aide to the Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) even recalled, “To us, the buildup on Cuba seemed largely a sideshow. Berlin was the main draw, and Southeast Asia a coming attraction.”¹⁰²

Much of the Tasking throughout the Intelligence Community was attentive to Cuba but was routine. Soviet ships going to Cuba were systematically tracked and photographed if they were deemed to fit a seven-part ‘special interest’ profile prepared by the Office of Naval Intelligence.¹⁰³ Because of this surveillance, the CIA certainly noticed a change in the Soviet/Cuban relationship: in a Current Intelligence Memorandum of 22 August, 1962 for example, they said: “The speed and magnitude of this influx of Soviet personnel and equipment into a non-bloc country is unprecedented in Soviet military aid activities; clearly something new and different is taking place.”¹⁰⁴ Because there was a clear consensus at the CIA that Cuba was not a vital interest for the USSR,¹⁰⁵ however, the CIA’s Tasking process was not focused specifically on whether the Soviets would try to make strategic use of the island (beyond the largely rhetorical actions of Castro, and the possible knock-on subversion of other countries in the Hemisphere).

Such Tasking priorities mirrored intelligence consumers’ concerns. Instead of focusing on what the *Russians* might be doing on Cuba, they were

⁹⁹ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 219.

¹⁰⁰ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 223.

¹⁰¹ Matthias, America's Strategic Blunders, page 177.

¹⁰² Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 97.

¹⁰³ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 220.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 99.

¹⁰⁵ James Kenneth McDonald, “CIA and Warning Failures,” Intelligence in the Cold War: Organisation, Role, International Cooperation eds. Lars Christian Jenssen and Olav Riste (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2001), page 48.

mostly focused on internal developments on the island. McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's national security advisor, remembers the situation thus: "When we thought of Cuba during 1962, at least until September, most of us thought first of our own frustrations, second about Castro's ambitions, and only after that about how Cuba might look to the Russians."¹⁰⁶ (The "frustrations" to which Bundy refers involved the Bay of Pigs and the ongoing failure of 'Operation Mongoose,' a CIA plan to foment internal revolt in Cuba.)¹⁰⁷

It is well established (among others, by Cynthia Grabo, an 'inside observer' during the Crisis¹⁰⁸ and author of the CIA manual *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*)¹⁰⁹ that in the early 1960s it was *Soviet experts* at CIA who were highly unwilling to believe that the Soviet Union would attempt something as rash as putting missiles in Cuba.¹¹⁰ Based on, in the words of the famous SNIE, "indicators derivable from precedents in Soviet foreign policy",¹¹¹ such a bold Russian move was considered by the Agency to be too radical a departure from normal Soviet behaviour, and thus improbable.¹¹² In this view, CIA experts both set and reflected the prevailing mindset in Washington, which was that anything so provocative would be incompatible with traditionally cautious Soviet behaviour.¹¹³ It is perhaps for this reason that the September 19 SNIE postulated that the construction of an arguably less provocative submarine base on Cuba was more likely than the deployment of missiles:¹¹⁴ such a course fit better with the tenets of Soviet foreign policy in the perception of the CIA.

At the CIA, too, there was the over-confidence that arose from the apparent omniscience offered by U-2 flights – that could reveal Soviet

¹⁰⁶ McGeorge Bundy, Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years (New York, NY: Random House, 1988), page 415.

¹⁰⁷ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 84.

¹⁰⁸ Grabo, Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning, page vii.

¹⁰⁹ Grabo, Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning; she is also author of the useful survey Cynthia M. Grabo, "The Watch Committee and the National Indications Center: the Evolution of US Strategic Warning, 1950 - 1975," International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence 3.Fall (1989).

¹¹⁰ Grabo, Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning, page 46.

¹¹¹ Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, page 56.

¹¹² Knorr, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles." page 461.

¹¹³ Knorr, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles." page 458.

¹¹⁴ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 156.

capabilities, if not intentions. The capabilities of the U-2¹¹⁵ led Sherman Kent, for example, to say of the 1962 NIE “Soviet capabilities for Long-Range Attack” (11-8-62): “Hell, this isn’t an estimate, it’s a fact book”.¹¹⁶ Brugioni relates how on a different occasion Kent said: “My views of the intelligence taken from the U-2 was the view I would have of a holy miracle”,¹¹⁷ which presumably indicates both strong confidence and a profound lack of appreciation for the possibility of deception.

“It was wholly a question of judgement.”

The Cassandra of this case, John McCone, later said: “Let me make it unmistakably clear that there was no – I repeat no – hard evidence supporting my view in August that there were offensive missiles going into Cuba. *It was wholly a question of judgement.*”¹¹⁸

Indeed, it *was* a question of judgement, and the first part of the intelligence cycle to reflect the CIA’s misjudgement of the USSR’s view of Cuba was Tasking. Had Tasking been informed by different assumptions and judgements, the evidence gathered might not have been as inchoate as it was. Stated another way, the attitudes at the CIA about the situation in Cuba – formed by the four factors of identity and culture identified above – altered Tasking of intelligence assets in way that allowed the Soviets get close to a strategic coup. In particular, these factors prevented the Agency from seeing the world more as the USSR and Khrushchev did, and thus aided the construction of this strategic surprise.

What were the misjudgements which, had they been corrected in the Tasking, might have altered the balance of probability away from surprise? Though we are of necessity dealing in counterfactuals when we examine these failures, a case can be made that unnecessary Tasking misjudgements occurred in several important areas.

¹¹⁵ For these capabilities in the historical perspective of the Cold War as a whole, see Paul Lashmar, Spy Flights of the Cold War (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), *passim*.

¹¹⁶ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 93.

¹¹⁷ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 538.

¹¹⁸ Hughes, The Fate of Facts in a World of Men: Foreign Policy and Intelligence-Making, page 44. Emphasis added.

“We’d be doing nothing more than giving them a little taste of their own medicine”

The first way that the CIA’s erroneous assumptions adversely affected Tasking was that they did not account sufficiently for the USSR’s sense of encirclement and vulnerability. The CIA’s obsession with secrets blinded it to the obvious fact that the US, through the Western Alliance controlled the key industrial areas of Europe and Japan. The CIA also knew that despite the showy triumphs of *Sputnik*, Leninism was delivering less than expected in the USSR. Dramatic demonstrations of Soviet citizens’ profound dissatisfaction with Leninist policies can be seen in food riots (like the one at Novocherkassk that resulted in a massacre less than a year before the Cuban initiative. In fact, it was the commander of the troops that fired on these protestors, Issa Pliyev, who Khrushchev put in charge of the missile assignment in Cuba: he felt that he could trust Pliyev to ‘obey orders to the last’.)¹¹⁹

The CIA also might have better appreciated the Soviet sense of vulnerability had they considered the implications of the ‘Missile Gap’ that the U-2 had revealed. According to Allison, prior to the development of the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, governments believed: “Size matters. Significant strategic nuclear advantages conveyed significant bargaining advantages, especially in a crisis.”¹²⁰ For that reason, Allison says, “The detached analyst could note the symbolic importance of strategic nuclear weapons in the politics of nations and states: international, domestic, and bureaucratic”.¹²¹ Were they to do so, CIA analysts might have deduced the USSR would perceive itself as at an unacceptable nuclear disadvantage – both practical and symbolic – that could not be rapidly fixed in conventional ways. Had they done so, they might have been more open to the notion that the Soviets would be tempted to try what Gaddis called the “strategic Potemkinism”¹²² that Khrushchev’s manoeuvre represented (i.e. a bold stroke, involving sleight-of-hand, that would alleviate pressures from several directions”).¹²³ Therefore, without recourse to any

¹¹⁹ Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev, page 264 and Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, pages 276-7.

¹²⁰ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 94.

¹²¹ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 94.

¹²² Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 262.

¹²³ Adapted from James Richter, Khrushchev’s Double-Bind: International Pressures and Domestic Coalition Politics (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), page 194 quoted in Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev, page 259.

secrets at all, and knowing nothing about the government of the Soviet Union or its leaders, Allison maintains that a neutral analyst:

...could have gotten quite far by examining objective facts...Starting only with the presumption that the goals of each state included survival and the avoidance of extreme coercion by the other, and objective facts about current and projected strategic nuclear forces of each [an] analyst would have put higher odds on the Soviet players moving missiles to Cuba than did Sherman Kent's Office of National Estimates. Objectively, the Soviet Union faced a serious and widening 'Window of vulnerability'..."¹²⁴

Khrushchev said as much in his memoirs: "The Americans had surrounded our country with military bases and threatened us with nuclear weapons, and now they would learn just what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointing at you; we'd be doing nothing more than giving them a little taste of their own medicine".¹²⁵ Even if Gaddis is right in maintaining that Khrushchev understood more clearly than Kennedy and the CIA that the West was winning the Cold War,¹²⁶ had the CIA more broadly considered the visible big picture instead of focussing on secret information, Tasking prior to the Crisis might have been enhanced.

Another 'open secret' was also at work, one that with a different culture and identity might have shifted Tasking by the CIA. According to Fursenko, "it was no secret that Khrushchev stood in awe of nuclear weapons"¹²⁷. At the Vienna Conference (June 1961) Khrushchev described them as "The new 'Gods of War'", publicly stating, "They were the finest weapons in any arsenal"¹²⁸. Fursenko also feels that Khrushchev's obvious jubilation after *Sputnik* showed that the Soviet leader "correlated a country's nuclear capabilities with its vitality and potential."¹²⁹ Even if Fursenko here engages in some hindsight bias, the record clearly shows that Khrushchev obviously "focused on missiles obsessively as an index of his country's military power, and for years claimed to have more of them than he really had."¹³⁰ That, after all, was what the 'Missile

¹²⁴ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 91-2.

¹²⁵ Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers, page 547.

¹²⁶ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 260-1.

¹²⁷ Fursenko and Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 178.

¹²⁸ Fursenko and Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 178.

¹²⁹ Fursenko and Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 178.

¹³⁰ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 95.

Gap' was all about, but the CIA's Tasking failed to account fully for this fact as Cuba grew ever closer to the USSR after 1959.

In a similar vein, Tasking did not account for Khrushchev's alleged personal insecurities and peculiarities. Here, the culprit is partly an obsession with secret information, but partly also the CIA's pervading cult of objectivity and reason, which precluded the Agency from understanding just how *personally* Khrushchev perceived strategic issues. Khrushchev regarded US Jupiter and Thor nuclear missiles in Turkey (exactly the ones that Kennedy, above, had forgotten about), as a "personal affront".¹³¹ Khrushchev associates later remembered that his complaints about American missiles "tended especially to surface when he vacationed, as he often did, on the Black Sea. 'What do you see?' he would ask visitors after handing them binoculars. 'Nothing' they would reply, puzzled. Their host would then seize the binoculars, survey the horizon, and make his point: 'I see US missiles in Turkey, aimed at *my dacha*'.¹³² The General Secretary's sentiments were a world away from CIA-style 'objective analysis' or 'relevant variables' concerning the nuclear balance. For that reason, we now drill down into the human factor as it relates to the 'science' of intelligence work prior to the Crisis.

"Precedents in Soviet foreign policy" meet "Strategic Potemkinism"

Perhaps the CIA cannot reasonably have been expected to know of these conversations. Had they been more open to the human dimension of Khrushchev, however, they might have noted that what SNIE 85-3-62 called "Precedents in Soviet foreign policy"¹³³ might have less bearing on the situation than the insecurities of the flesh and blood human being now running the Kremlin.¹³⁴ They knew, for example, that Khrushchev was a man who had

¹³¹ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 264.

¹³² Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 264. Emphasis in original.

¹³³ Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, page 56.

¹³⁴ By relying on precedent, the CIA faced what philosophers call the "problem of inductive knowledge": how could they logically go from specific past instances of Soviet behaviour to reach a general (and accurate) knowledge of future Soviet actions? Here we argue that the Agency's culture and identity – its focus on secrets, its homogeneity, and the atmosphere of scientism permeating the CIA – formed barriers to such inductive knowledge. As a result, the CIA almost fell into the trap to which all inductive reasoning is prey, a problem which Taleb illustrates with a turkey (This is Bertrand Russell's famous example of the chicken modified for a North American audience): Every single feeding firms up the bird's belief that it is the general rule of life to be fed every day by friendly humans. On the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, after hundreds of consistent

admitted to a sense of inferiority over his smaller plane as he flew into Geneva for a summit with Eisenhower in 1955.¹³⁵

The human factor is germane because, as Matthias points out, what was attempted in Cuba was very a 'Khrushchevian' concept. Instead of a conscious new Soviet policy on risk-taking, what occurred had "the same kind of boldness that had led to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, to his missile-rattling during the Suez Crisis, to his initiation of the Berlin Crisis. It was revolutionary romanticism – something quite different from Stalinist pragmatism."¹³⁶ Khrushchev's decision, according to General Anatoli I. Gribkov (who literally had a ringside seat as Khrushchev's plans were announced and executed), "was an old Bolshevik's romantic response to Castro and to the Cuban revolution and an old soldier's stratagem for deploying Soviet force to defend an endangered outpost and ally".¹³⁷

In contrast, because its culture downplayed emotion in strategic issues and stressed the 'science' of intelligence work, the CIA was less likely to Task assets to detect such a 'Soviet' (actually, a single human's) strategic move in Cuba. In 1964, for example, in defending the Agency's work prior to the Crisis, Kent wrote: "Like any solid conceptual construction, the National Intelligence Estimate is prepared in rough accordance with the procedures of the *scientific method*."¹³⁸ That is fine, until one reads on to where Kent wrote:

It has been murmured that a misjudgement such as occurred in the Cuba SNIE warrants a complete overhaul of our method of producing estimates. In one sense of the word "method", this cannot be done. As indicated earlier, the method in question is the one which students reared in the Western tradition have found to

observations (and following each of which, its confidence grows) the turkey has reached, unaware, the moment of maximum danger. "What," Taleb asks, "can a turkey learn about what is in store for it tomorrow from the events of yesterday? Certainly less than it thinks." Taleb, The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable, pages 40-1.

¹³⁵ Robert M. Gates, "The Prediction of Soviet Intentions," Studies in Intelligence 17.1 (1973), page 40.

¹³⁶ Matthias, America's Strategic Blunders, page 181.

¹³⁷ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis. page 28.

¹³⁸ Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 5. Emphasis added. Kent goes on to describe the scientific method thus: "In very general and, I fear, over-simplified terms, the process goes like this. After a confrontation of the problem and some decisions as to how it should be handled, there is a ransacking of files and minds for all information relating to the problem; and an evaluation, analysis, and digestion of this information. There are emergent hypotheses as to the possible aggregate meaning of the information; some emerged before, some after its absorption. No one can say whence came these essential yeasts of fruitful thought. Surely they grow best in a medium of knowledge, experience, and intuitive understanding. When they unfold, they are checked back against the facts, weighed in the light of the specific circumstances and the analysts' general knowledge and understanding of the world scene. Those that cannot stand up fall; those that do stand up are ordered in varying degrees of likelihood."

be best adapted to the search for truth. *It is the classical method of the natural sciences, retooled to serve the far less exact disciplines of the so-called science of human activity – strategy, politics, economics, sociology, etc. This is our method; we are stuck with it, unless we choose to forsake it for the "programmer" and his computer or go back to the medicine man and his mystical communion with the All-Wise.*¹³⁹

Here, we must simply question whether a man who would contrast the “science of human activity” with “the medicine man and his mystical communion with the All-Wise” is likely to Task intelligence assets in the manner most capable of detecting Khrushchev's ‘strategic Potemkinism.’ Kent’s revulsion at the intrusion of any ‘human factors’ on analysis is here starkly revealed, and the straw man that such a phrase sets up points towards a multitude of Tasking errors.¹⁴⁰

“It makes us feel like boys again!”

We can note, too, that the centrality of human issues to understanding what the USSR might attempt in Cuba went beyond Khrushchev himself. Here, in addition to scientism, Langley’s homogeneity also distorted Tasking.

Eisenhower wrote in 1960 “I have been told that Mikoyan on returning to Moscow from Cuba was exuberantly rejuvenated, finding that what was going on in the youthful and disorganised Cuban revolution brought him back to the early days of the Russian Revolution.”¹⁴¹ Instead of viewing Cuba in a purely bloodless, geostrategic way, senior Soviet visitors to Cuba found that “the place had the invigorating effect...of an ideological Fountain of Youth.”¹⁴² Mikoyan subsequently explained to Dean Rusk: “You Americans must realise what Cuba means to us old Bolsheviks. We have been waiting all our lives for a country to go Communist without the Red Army. It has happened in Cuba, and it makes us feel like boys again!”¹⁴³ Arguably, the pervasive scientism at the CIA would have veiled such emotional factors, thus having an effect on intelligence Tasking.

Future DCI Gates observed (with some understatement) in a 1973 *Studies* article: “There is a wide cultural gap between a college educated analyst

¹³⁹ Kent, “A Crucial Estimate Relived.” page 7. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁰ This passage is also reminiscent of the highly positivist views of the “scientific method” and the social sciences expressed 14 years before, in the 1949 volume *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, cited above.

¹⁴¹ Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, page 181.

¹⁴² Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, page 181.

¹⁴³ Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, page 181.

in the West and the Soviet leadership.”¹⁴⁴ One can assume that such people would have difficulty granting adequate weight to how emotional Cuba was for the Soviet leadership. Even if we grant the romantic, ill-judged nature of the Soviet effort, as Knorr says, “Even irrational behavior may not completely defy prediction”¹⁴⁵ if *the human factor is deemed relevant in the first place* and there is sufficient cognitive diversity among the predictors.¹⁴⁶

This insensitivity to emotional factors perhaps also helped ensure that the CIA’s Tasking ignored possible precedents and analogies from the Soviet perspective.¹⁴⁷ In Soviet publications, for example, it is widely held that the relative success of Khrushchev’s coarse and bullying style along with blustered nuclear threats (and the promise of the dispatch of ‘volunteers’) in the Suez Crisis of 1956 helped inspired Khrushchev to try placing missiles in Cuba.¹⁴⁸

What is certain is that in Soviet eyes the US missiles in Turkey legitimated their missiles in Cuba.¹⁴⁹ Gaddis is adamant on this point. He says that Khrushchev got the idea for placing missiles in Cuba from “Eisenhower and Dulles” – from their decision to place Thor and Jupiter missiles among NATO allies to “reassure” them of the US commitment to their defence.¹⁵⁰ This perception of equivalence, moreover, was not only Soviet, and certainly not secret. Even the cover of *Time* magazine on 13 April 1959 reduced American strategic missile policy among allies to the formula “IRBM + NATO = ICBM”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴ Gates, “The Prediction of Soviet Intentions.” page 39. As he goes on to note, Czech Communist leaders returning from Moscow in 1968 remarked that they had expected “narrow dogmatists”, but not the “vulgar thugs” that they found!

¹⁴⁵ Knorr, “Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles.” page 460.

¹⁴⁶ Mitchell and Nicholas, “Knowledge Creation in Groups: the Value of Cognitive Diversity, Transactive Memory and Open-mindedness Norms.” page 68.

¹⁴⁷ Unexamined analogical reasoning, of course, can be exceptionally misleading. See for example, Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War : Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam decisions of 1965 (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992); loose analogies are frequently crudely applied by “The Media.” Consider, for example, the variety of conflicts considered “Vietnam-style quagmires” in the press: the list includes “Nicaragua, Haiti, Bosnia, Colombia, Afghanistan and Iraq (all new American Vietnams), Afghanistan (the Soviet Union’s Vietnam), Chechnya (Russia’s Vietnam), Kashmir (India’s Vietnam), Lebanon (Israel’s Vietnam), Angola (Cuba’s Vietnam), the Basque territory (Spain’s Vietnam), Eritrea (Ethiopia’s Vietnam), Northern Ireland (Britain’s Vietnam) and Kampuchea (Vietnam’s Vietnam).” See Philip E. Tetlock, Expert Political Judgement: How Good Is It? How Can We Know? (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), page 38.

¹⁴⁸ Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, Foxbats Over Dimona: the Soviets’ Nuclear Gamble in the Six-Day War (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pages 20-1 and 31-2.

¹⁴⁹ Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 196.

¹⁵⁰ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 263.

¹⁵¹ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 263-4.

(i.e. Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles positioned in NATO countries equal Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles: exactly what Khrushchev tried in Cuba).

This section has served to illustrate the ways in which certain aspects of the CIA's identity and culture contributed to Tasking misjudgements prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis that helped bring the US to the moment of maximum danger before achieving an understanding of what Khrushchev planned.

Excursus – Security, *Maskirovka*, and Collection Methods

Secrets, unlike mysteries, are the work of human agency. Almost by definition, they are shielded by security measures and deception.

Before examining how the CIA's identity and culture interacted with Collection and the other phases of the intelligence cycle, a brief look at Soviet security and *maskirovka* is required. After doing so, we will explore briefly the Collection mechanisms at CIA's disposal prior to this surprise. This break in the framework of the intelligence cycle provides enough background on these matters to concentrate more on the role of the CIA's culture and identity as we move through the rest of the case.

SOVIET SECURITY

First, let us consider the security measures – extreme even by Soviet standards – under which Khrushchev's plan was conducted.

“Vodka, brandy, caviar, sausages and other delicacies”

From the moment that Khrushchev shared his plans with his colleagues in the Kremlin, Gribkov claims, “the order of the day – every day of operation Anadyr – was secrecy, secrecy and speed.”¹⁵² Throughout the early planning stage, no secretaries were used to prepare final texts: all planning documents were hand-written.¹⁵³ A colonel with good penmanship wrote the proposal that the Soviet Defense Council formally adopted, and even as it grew into a full-fledged plan, it remained handwritten; neither the operation approved by Malinovsky on 4 July, nor the final version approved by Khrushchev on 7 July were typed.¹⁵⁴ Similar secrecy surrounded the delegation that went to propose Khrushchev's plan to Fidel Castro: the officials arrived in Havana with no fanfare amidst a delegation of agricultural experts.¹⁵⁵ Only in July, when a legal agreement clarifying Soviet-Cuban relations had to be written in Spanish (and thus with Latin rather than Cyrillic characters), was a typist used.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 23.

¹⁵³ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 7.

¹⁵⁴ Hansen, “Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis.” page 50 citing Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 24.

¹⁵⁵ Hansen, “Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis.” page 50.

¹⁵⁶ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 21.

As plans turned into reality in the USSR, the secrecy measures continued with equal intensity. Troops for the operation were moved by rail only at night; the trains' routes and destinations were secret, and mail and telegrams along the way were forbidden. Once the troops arrived, they were restricted to base until they embarked on the ships taking them to their (yet unknown) destination. Likewise, the crews of these ships were forbidden shore leave, and were prevented from corresponding.¹⁵⁷

Shipping for Operation Anadyr originated in eight ports in the USSR: Kronstadt, Liepaya, Baltiysk, and Murmansk in the north and Sevastopol, Feodosia, Nikolayev and Poti on the Black Sea.¹⁵⁸ Some of these cities were already 'closed' (e.g. Sevastopol – meaning there were always special restrictions on their residents, and foreigners were completely barred), and others, like Feodosia, were not.¹⁵⁹ In early September, those Baltic and Black Sea ports that were not closed had that restriction imposed. All messages between the ports and Moscow were carried by couriers rather than radio or telephone.¹⁶⁰ Missiles were loaded aboard the ships in darkness and under the strictest security conditions.¹⁶¹ Once aboard, any crates containing distinctive military hardware on deck were shielded with metal sheets to render infrared photography useless.¹⁶²

Before casting off, each ship's captain received a large envelope that contained instructions to open the smaller envelope within only at specific coordinates in the Atlantic. This smaller envelope – which revealed the ship's true destination – had to be opened only in the presence of a KGB officer.¹⁶³ Every ship also carried thick folders of material on locations all over the globe. According to Gribkov, "buried in these packets, so that not even the compilers would know the real focus of Operation Anadyr, were the study materials on

¹⁵⁷ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 36.

¹⁵⁸ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 20.

¹⁵⁹ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 34.

¹⁶⁰ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 20.

¹⁶¹ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 149.

¹⁶² Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 36.

¹⁶³ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 31.

Cuba” for the troops and their commanders to master whilst under way.¹⁶⁴ Every detail was apparently considered: for those ships originating in the Black Sea, baskets of “vodka, brandy, caviar, sausages and other delicacies”¹⁶⁵ were provided to be lowered overboard to induce pilots not to come aboard as the ships passed through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.¹⁶⁶

As the ships arrived in Cuba, Cubans themselves were almost completely excluded from relevant port areas.¹⁶⁷ At Mariel, the Soviets even built a cinder-block wall around the unloading area so that none of the port activity could be observed by land-based agents,¹⁶⁸ and local inhabitants within a mile of the waterfront were ordered to evacuate their homes.¹⁶⁹ Regular Cuban stevedores were dismissed, and the ships were unloaded by special stevedore groups.¹⁷⁰

Finally, the Soviets were aware of overhead surveillance. They knew U-2 capabilities in detail from the Gary Powers downing in 1960,¹⁷¹ and they thoroughly studied the optical and film qualities of a number of Genetrix surveillance balloon cameras that had fallen into their hands in 1956.¹⁷² For that reason (in theory at least), Khrushchev made defence against the U-2 a priority in the operation: “The original plan had given priority to erecting the nuclear missiles in Cuba. Khrushchev’s suggestion was that the anti-aircraft missiles, the fabled SA-2s, go up first so that American spy planes could be shot out of the skies before they detected the early construction of the ballistic missile sites.”¹⁷³

In sum, the Soviets appeared to take every security precaution that they could think of to prevent the CIA from discovering their plans.

¹⁶⁴ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 31.

¹⁶⁵ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 37.

¹⁶⁶ There is also at least one source which indicates that shipments through the Turkish or Danish Straits could have been monitored for radioactivity, but apparently were not, as the Soviets did not use more northerly routes. See Dwayne Anderson, “On the Trail of the Alexandrovsk” Studies in Intelligence 10.1 (1966), page 39.

¹⁶⁷ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 211.

¹⁶⁸ Hansen, “Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis.” page 53 citing Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 150.

¹⁶⁹ Hansen, “Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis.” page 53.

¹⁷⁰ Justin F. Gleichauf, “A Listening Post in Miami,” Studies in Intelligence 46.10 (2001), page 52.

¹⁷¹ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 94.

¹⁷² Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 204-5. For more on what the Soviets knew about the U-2 program, see Alexander Orlov, “The U-2 Program: A Russian Officer Remembers” Studies in Intelligence. Winter (1998/99).

¹⁷³ Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 192.

MASKIROVKA

An integral part of the security measures above was a comprehensive deception campaign designed to camouflage each step the Soviets took: *maskirovka*. The deception plan operated on several levels, began at the inception of the operation, and extended even to its code name, 'Anadyr', which was designed to mislead Soviets as well as US observers¹⁷⁴ (The Anadyr is a river in Russia's north).

"Create the Impression of a spontaneous deck party"

To reinforce the Arctic cover story, the trains carrying troops for the operation included carloads of skis, sheepskin coats, felt boots, and fur hats right up to the loading docks.¹⁷⁵ Once these winter supplies were loaded, the Soviets applied the usual *maskirovka* measures that they used to send weapons to Cuba. Not only was special foil used in the crates to defeat infrared photography, but the CIA's "cratology" was also accounted for: any telltale military equipment on deck was boarded up with planks to make it look like the ship's superstructure. Even on-deck field kitchens were disguised.¹⁷⁶

Once underway, *maskirovka* measures continued. As a rule, NATO forces maintained a close watch on ships bound for Cuba from the moment that they left the USSR's waters. A representative ruse to mask the mass movement of troops from NATO's efforts was that organised on the Soviet passenger ship *Khabarovsk*. Arkady F. Shorokhov, a political commissar on board the ship, recalls that on August 16th, as they rounded the Danish peninsula, a NATO surveillance plane was spotted. As instructed, the Soviet military men on the *Khabarovsk* "tried to create the impression of a spontaneous deck party. They put out tables and invited the female nurses below to come above deck and

¹⁷⁴ As Hansen relates: "The General Staff's code name for the operation—Anadyr—was designed to mislead Soviets as well as foreigners about the destination of the equipment. Anadyr is the name of a river flowing into the Bering Sea, the capital of the Chukotsky Autonomous District, and a bomber base in that desolate region. Operation Anadyr was designed to suggest to lower-level Soviet commanders – and Western spies – that the action was a strategic exercise in the far north of the USSR. Promoting the illusion, the troops that were called up for the Cuban expedition were told only that they were going to a cold region." Hansen, "Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis." page 50.

¹⁷⁵ Fursenko and Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 191.

¹⁷⁶ Hansen, "Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis." page 52.

dance.”¹⁷⁷ As they passed the Azores, the ruse was repeated for the benefit of a curious US reconnaissance plane.¹⁷⁸

Once they arrived, some Soviet troops were required to wear Cuban military uniforms or were kept in civvies. Until the end of August, moreover, the Russians used Cuban tractor-trailers and transport machinery to move their heavy equipment. Conscious of the NSA’s signals intelligence capabilities, all commands issued along the convoy routes from the ports to the future missile bases were issued in Spanish. Once the forces arrived at their destinations, total radio silence was maintained (except for brief equipment checks), and not even written communications were permitted: messages to Havana were delivered orally.¹⁷⁹

Meanwhile, in parallel with these tactical deception measures, the Soviets employed strategic deception methods. These involved the Soviet diplomatic corps, the Soviet press, the Miami émigré community, and the enthusiastic participation of Khrushchev himself.

“Pressure the United States to refrain from its warlike attitude”

To begin the diplomatic *maskirovka*, in July 1962 Khrushchev used a back channel to try to minimize the threat of overhead reconnaissance (not by U-2s, but by other, lower-flying aircraft, like those photographing the ships headed to Cuba). He did this by sending a proposal via the Soviet ‘journalist’¹⁸⁰ Georgi Bolshakov, to the President’s brother, Robert Kennedy. In this proposal, Khrushchev suggested that the “harassment” of Soviet ships in international waters be stopped “for the sake of better relations”.¹⁸¹ Afterwards, during the September-October cocktail circuit, Soviet diplomats were instructed to repeatedly buttonhole Western diplomats “to pressure the United States to refrain from its warlike attitude” and to be especially critical of the “Pentagon

¹⁷⁷ Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 198.

¹⁷⁸ Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 198.

¹⁷⁹ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 39.

¹⁸⁰ Bolshakov was a GRU (i.e. Soviet Military Intelligence) officer. See Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 184.

¹⁸¹ Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 193-4.

clique” that seemed to want to inflame tensions.¹⁸² Also, on September 4 the Soviet Ambassador to Washington, Dobrynin, told Robert Kennedy that “he had received instructions from Khrushchev to assure President Kennedy that there would be no ground-to-ground missiles or offensive weapons placed in Cuba. Dobrynin also added that Bobby [Kennedy] could assure the President that the military buildup was not of any significance.”¹⁸³

As time went on, the Soviet press agency TASS was enlisted to mock US suspicion of increased Soviet shipping to Cuba and to assert Soviet nuclear parity with the US. In early September, the Soviet press began dwelling on two themes: incidents in Berlin, and the violation of Soviet airspace by a stray U-2 over Sakhalin Island in the Far East.¹⁸⁴ (Providentially for the Soviet deception plan, on August 30, the pilot of a U-2 on an air-sampling mission in the Far East briefly violated Soviet airspace because he navigated using the wrong star).¹⁸⁵ TASS called the pilot’s nine-minute error a “gross violation” of the Soviet frontier that was “obviously provocative in nature”, and repeated previous threats to destroy the air bases in other nations used by the US for these flights.¹⁸⁶ The protest, however, was not made until five days after the incident and coincided with the eve of a meeting of the UN General Assembly: it was probably timed to distract attention from Cuba.¹⁸⁷

On September 11th, when Soviet missiles and warheads were actually *en route*, TASS issued a statement that said that the buildup in Cuba was “strictly for defensive purposes”. It went on to say, “The explosive power of our nuclear weapons is so great and the Soviet Union has such powerful missiles for delivering these nuclear warheads that there is no need to seek sites for them somewhere beyond the borders of the Soviet Union”. Interviews with ‘indignant’ Soviet civilians and military officers at “Hands Off Cuba” rallies were also published.¹⁸⁸ TASS maintained that Soviet ships were only carrying “Necessary

¹⁸² Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 132.

¹⁸³ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 115.

¹⁸⁴ Fursenko and Naftali, *“One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964*, page 207-8. At the height of the Crisis a US plane again blundered into Soviet airspace. Kennedy – undoubtedly thinking back to his days in the Navy – is reported to have remarked, “There is always some poor son-of-a-bitch who doesn’t get the word.” See Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 143.

¹⁸⁵ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 108.

¹⁸⁶ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 108-9

¹⁸⁷ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 109.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 140.

foods and foodstuffs to the Cuban people”.¹⁸⁹ As for the increased shipping generally, TASS addressed Washington with a sneer: “Gentlemen, you are evidently so frightened you're afraid of your own shadow.”¹⁹⁰ As if on cue, on September 13th full-page articles in Havana, Warsaw, Sofia, New Delhi, Berlin and Paris voiced support for the TASS statement.¹⁹¹

Meanwhile, another component of the *maskirovka* campaign was underway around Cuba itself. This effort involved the release of a mix of accurate and inaccurate information by the Soviets and the Cubans about events on the island to both refugees and to the Miami émigré community.¹⁹² In parallel, Cuban and Soviet intelligence planted misleading reports among CIA agents on the island (many of whom they actually controlled;¹⁹³ see below).

“Urgent Questions for the Further Development of Agricultural Production”

A member of the Soviet General Staff has since admitted that as a part of the *maskirovka* campaign, Kennedy was “not just misled but lied to”¹⁹⁴ by Khrushchev during some of this back-channel diplomacy. Khrushchev’s effort to conceal, cozen, and mislead about the Cuban operation went much farther than a simple lie, however, and operated on many levels. In fact, the centrepiece of the *maskirovka* effort involved Khrushchev’s actions, schedule, and speeches.

In July, in his final meeting with US Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson (who was rotating out of Moscow), Khrushchev made a point of raising the

¹⁸⁹ Text of Soviet statement. *The New York Times*, September 12, 1962. Quoted in Wohlstetter, “Cuba and Pearl Harbor.” page 703. and Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 79.

¹⁹⁰ Text of Soviet statement. *The New York Times*, September 12, 1962. Quoted in Wohlstetter, “Cuba and Pearl Harbor.” page 703. and Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 79. The text continues with that elevated tone: “It seems to you some hordes are moving to Cuba when potatoes or oil, tractors, harvesters, combines, and other farming industrial machinery are carried to Cuba to maintain the Cuban economy. We can say to these people that these are our merchant vessels and what we ship in them is none of your business; it is the internal affair of the countries conducting this commercial transaction. We can say in the words of the popular expression, ‘Don’t stick your nose where it does not belong’.”

¹⁹¹ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 140.

¹⁹² For full coverage of the Cuban side of this effort, see Domingo Amuchastegui, “Cuban Intelligence and the October Crisis,” Intelligence and National Security 13.3 (1998), *passim*.

¹⁹³ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 86. The definitive account of how such double agent networks can be run remains John C. Masterman, Double-cross System in the War of 1939 to 1945 (Guilford, Connecticut The Lyons Press, 2000).

¹⁹⁴ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 3.

subject of U-2 flights several times, and referred to the plane as “that beast”¹⁹⁵ over which he had lost a number of sleepless nights. He kept emphasizing, “And you’re still flying it”.¹⁹⁶

Similarly, when US Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall was making a goodwill tour of Soviet hydroelectric facilities in early September, he was shocked suddenly to be told that Khrushchev wanted to meet him. Udall was promptly flown to Khrushchev’s luxurious Black Sea villa at Pitsunda, where Khrushchev started talking bombastically about Berlin. As the meeting went on, however, Khrushchev also couldn’t resist gloating, saying to Udall: “It’s been a long time since you could spank us like a little boy – now we can swat your ass”. He added: “So let’s not talk about force; we’re equally strong.” The fact is, though, *Udall had not said anything about force*. The Soviet mindset discussed above also came up, as the Soviet Premier told the US Secretary: “Just recently I was reading that you have placed atomic warheads on Japanese territory, and surely this is not something the Japanese need,” adding, “You have surrounded us with military bases...” After shocking Udall, Khrushchev then teased him (perhaps letting pride stand in the way of his *maskirovka* campaign), saying: “Out of respect for your President we won’t do anything until November” and going on to say that Cuba was “an area that could really lead to some unexpected consequences.”¹⁹⁷

Effective misinformation campaigns are about more than what is hidden, however – they are also about what is said and done to *distract* opponents.¹⁹⁸ In that spirit, despite the lapses noted above, Khrushchev attempted to create an atmosphere of normality in Moscow, and the Soviet press avoided any bellicose remarks. First, over that summer the Soviet press devoted considerable space and editorial attention to the problems of Soviet agriculture. Then, on September 4th, Khrushchev sent a comprehensive memorandum to the presidium of the Communist party entitled “Urgent Questions for the Further Development of Agricultural Production”. This was followed on September 10th

¹⁹⁵ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 93.

¹⁹⁶ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 93.

¹⁹⁷ The incident and all quotations are from Fursenko and Naftali, *“One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964*, page 207-9. The American poet Robert Frost, also visiting the USSR, got a similar surprise invitation a few days later, where he pressed Khrushchev to forswear “blackguarding”. After the visit, Frost was “exhilarated” and said of Khrushchev: “He’s a great man; he knows what power is and isn’t afraid to take hold of it.” Events in coming months would prove the poet a prophet. See Fursenko and Naftali, *“One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964*, pages 210-1.

¹⁹⁸ “Military Deception: Joint Publication 3-13.4,” (Joint Chiefs of Staff of United States Department of Defense, 2006, page 1-2.

by a note entitled “On the Reorganisation of Party Leadership of Industry and Agriculture”.¹⁹⁹ Then, as Brugioni related, “Even as some of the MRBM missiles were being moved to their sites in Cuba, Khrushchev, with considerable publicity, left Moscow on September 27 for a barnstorming tour of agricultural enterprises in the Turkmen and Uzbek republics”.²⁰⁰ During this tour, Khrushchev made enough speeches to fill an entire volume, but he offered no signs of aggression and issued no threats against the United States.²⁰¹ Finally (by coincidence, just as Air Force major Richard Heyser was flying the mission on October 15th that discovered the missiles in Cuba), the Soviets announced a distraction on the other side of the world: they announced that the USSR would be conducting missile tests from 16 October to November 30th at their Tyura Tam missile test range in Kazakhstan, firing ICBMs from there into the Pacific Ocean.²⁰²

“Try to think like an adult”

For some of the Soviets the *maskirovka* measures worked too well. Gribkov reports being greeted by Major General Pavel Petrenko, a top political officer at their headquarters in Cuba with an ironic smile and the reproach: “You know-it-alls in the General Staff! Why did you saddle us with all this winter gear? If you’d done your job right, you would have sent us shorts and bathing suits.”²⁰³ Gribkov remembers responding: “Try to think like an adult. Remember the secrecy of this operation. It’s called Anadyr for a reason. We could have given away the game if we had put tropical clothing in your kits.”²⁰⁴

This incident reveals something of why the Soviet operation – especially as it was conducted in Cuba – had a schizophrenic mix of extreme secrecy and flagrant openness: the need for deception was not pushed down to the level of the Soviet soldiers actually conducting the operation in Cuba.²⁰⁵ We will now turn to the Collection sources and methods against which *maskirovka* was vying.

¹⁹⁹ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 117-8.

²⁰⁰ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 157-8.

²⁰¹ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 157-8.

²⁰² Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 189.

²⁰³ Gribkov and Smith, *Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 15.

²⁰⁴ Gribkov and Smith, *Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 15.

²⁰⁵ Specifically, according to Allison, this difference in behaviour can partly be explained by the fact that the loading in the USSR, shipping, and unloading of the missiles was planned by the Soviet General Staff, working closely with Soviet intelligence agencies. Once the missiles were unloaded, however, operational command passed to the Group for Soviet Forces in Cuba, and their SOPs, took over. For that specific fact, see Allison

US COLLECTION SOURCES AND METHODS

As we said in the introduction to this section, an overview of the Collection methods used to gather information about events in Cuba make the exploration of the problems in the rest of the case smoother. These collection methods fell into three categories: human intelligence, signals intelligence, and aerial surveillance.

Human Intelligence – “We never got to first base in Cuba”

Human intelligence about Soviet intentions in Cuba during this period arrived at the CIA from a variety of sources.

From within the USSR, human intelligence about the plans for Cuba was non-existent. There is no indication that the US had forewarning from Penkovsky or other human sources in the USSR,²⁰⁶ although the Soviets were certainly alive to that possibility, particularly in the later stages of the operation. Even though military *attachés* of the American embassy only enjoyed what one called a “worm’s eye view”²⁰⁷ in Moscow at the best of times, early in October an assistant US naval *attaché* was declared *persona non grata* and a second member of the embassy staff got the same news on October 12.²⁰⁸

In retrospect, the assignment of a known high-ranking KGB agent, Aleksandr Ivanovich Alekseyev, as ambassador to Cuba in June of 1962 offered a clue that something special was afoot, but it was not recognised at the time.²⁰⁹

In Cuba itself, the first source of information was travellers to the island. These sources sometimes even mentioned missiles, but were not always reliable. Richard Helms recalled, for example, the following scenario: “A merchant seaman gave us a detailed description of what he thought might be a rounded concrete dome covering missiles – complete with range and bearings

and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 211. For a general review of what Allison calls his “Model II”, based on organisational behaviour, see Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 143-96.

²⁰⁶ Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 164.

²⁰⁷ Less than one percent of the total Soviet land area was open to their inspection. See Scott, “The Face of Moscow in the Missile Crisis.”, page 105.

²⁰⁸ Scott, “The Face of Moscow in the Missile Crisis.”, page 105.

²⁰⁹ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 95.

from the pier where his ship was docked. A map of Havana and a recent city directory established that it was a relatively new movie theatre."²¹⁰

Diplomats and newspapermen from friendly nations also reported on events on the island.²¹¹ Indeed, because some of the Soviet troops were from Central Asia, the CIA received reports of 'Mongol' and Chinese troops²¹² arriving to support the Castro regime. On the other hand, by early autumn Cuban agents began both to watch and to harass foreigners, especially British embassy officials, who were known to be helping US intelligence.²¹³ (By that time, the US did not have formal representation in Cuba).

Meanwhile, the CIA was running agents on the island. The Castro regime was a co-conspirator of Khrushchev's,²¹⁴ and many Cuban personnel were certainly aware of Russian intentions. In principle, therefore, a solid Cuban network would have forewarned the Agency. Regrettably, however, the Agency had never been very successful at establishing a network of agents on the island, and many of their agent-led collection efforts on the ground went awry.²¹⁵ Indeed, it was partly the inability of the CIA to establish a working underground on Cuba that prompted the overt Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961. Richard Bissell said after that debacle: "We never got to first base in Cuba in building an underground organisation",²¹⁶ and the few extant agents were wiped out in the mass arrests and executions – Castro's 'war on traitors' – that followed it.²¹⁷

Crucially, however, this sombre assessment of the CIA's human assets on the island is *retrospective*. Only following the defection of Florentino Azpillago Lombard in Vienna in 1967 did it became clear that "almost all"²¹⁸ CIA assets had been under the control of Cuba's Dirección General de Inteligencia (DGI). Foreshadowing our analysis below, it is fair to wonder here whether the CIA's established preference for secret information, combined with this thoroughly penetrated network, led the CIA to discount accurate reporting from sources such as simple travellers or refugees.

²¹⁰ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 88.

²¹¹ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball* page 101.

²¹² Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 101.

²¹³ Hansen, "Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis." page 53 and fn 42.

²¹⁴ Available online at the CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence website: Richard Helms in an interview: https://198.81.129.100/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/docs/v44i4a07p_0001.htm

²¹⁵ See for example, Robert Wallace, H. Keith Melton and Henry Robert Schlesinger, *Spycraft: The Secret History of the CIA's Spychechs from Communism to Al-Qaeda* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2008), pages 249-76.

²¹⁶ Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, page 120.

²¹⁷ Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, page 120.

²¹⁸ Allison, *Historical Dictionary of Cold War Counterintelligence*, page 74.

Off the island itself, there were other human sources of intelligence. Following the Bay of Pigs, Cuban refugees were arriving in the US at a rate of 1,700 per week.²¹⁹ This flood was large enough to necessitate the active involvement, besides the CIA, of thirteen other government agencies.²²⁰ Many of these refugees were interviewed about events on the island by CIA staff at a refugee-debriefing centre at Opalocka, Florida.²²¹ The information elicited from these interviews was filed on cards and placed in specific categories, including “Missile sightings, rumors of missile or rocket launching pads or bases”.²²² In other words, properly exploited, it is conceivable that Khrushchev's plan could have emerged from HUMINT alone.

Brugioni records that sightings from each of these categories were checked against U-2 photography,²²³ so it is to aerial Collection efforts on the island that we now turn.

Aerial Photography – “A strip of film 100 miles long and 20 feet wide”

Following the Crisis it was decided that had there been regular U-2 flights over the USSR's Black Sea and Baltic ports, they would likely have revealed the missiles destined for Cuba as they were loaded onto ships.²²⁴ Soviet air defences, however, made such flights impossible.

Once ships left the USSR, we have already noted above how ships travelling to Cuba (and elsewhere) were shadowed by NATO aircraft for most of their journey. Over sovereign Cuban territory, however, such low-level photography was impossible, so the high-altitude U-2 was employed.

²¹⁹ Gleichauf, "A Listening Post in Miami." page 51.

²²⁰ These were: the Immigration and Naturalisation Service, the Border Patrol, Customs, the Coast Guard, the State Department, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the FBI, the Army Counter Intelligence Corps, the Navy Office of Naval Intelligence, the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and local law enforcement agencies see Gleichauf, "A Listening Post in Miami." page 49.

²²¹ Note that the man that the CIA sent to run the centre apparently did not speak Spanish: he later recounted that in response to threatening phone calls that he was receiving at home, “I memorized Spanish insults, which I directed at Fidel via the open line. The calls eventually dwindled.” Gleichauf, "A Listening Post in Miami." page 50.

²²² According to Brugioni, among the categories that this refugee information could be placed were: “Missile sightings, rumors of missile or rocket launching pads or bases; loading and unloading activities...movements of military convoys; new road construction; closing or sealing off of roads or railroads; use of concrete in constructing military projects; activities at caves; construction of military camps, airfields and radar stations; all activity at unidentified installations;...camouflage efforts...military equipment sighted in farming or wooded areas; and Soviet, Czech or ‘Mongol’ troop sightings.” Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 86-7.

²²³ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, pages 86-7.

²²⁴ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 117.

The U-2 program was created by the CIA during the Eisenhower and provided “revolutionary”²²⁵ capabilities for overhead surveillance. While the resolution of the U-2 cameras has been exaggerated,²²⁶ it was amazing: it could capture objects of about 0.25 square metres from altitudes of between 20,000 and 22,000 metres.²²⁷

Once the plane landed, all of its film was processed by the National Photographic Intelligence Center (NPIC) near Washington.²²⁸ This was no small task: on the morning of October 18, for example, John McCone mentioned to his colleagues that the six U-2 missions flown the previous day generated about 28,000 linear feet of film. “When this is enlarged,” he said, “it means the [NPIC] has to examine a strip of film 100 miles long and 20 feet wide.”²²⁹

Could these collection capabilities have found the Russian missiles earlier? The answer must be an emphatic ‘yes’. Consider that the Soviet MRBMs measured just over 18 metres long (without their four metre nosecones) and were 1.65 metres in diameter.²³⁰ Some help in picturing the scale of these missiles is provided by the knowledge that they were transported to Cuba via the lumber ships *Omsk* and the *Poltava*, both which had been designed with extra large hatches for huge logs.²³¹ More significantly, despite the security and *maskirovka* measures sketched above, once in Cuba the construction of MRBM and IRBM sites proceeded with little attempt at camouflage²³² (ironically, camouflage from aerial surveillance of the sites only began *after* the missiles

²²⁵ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 222.

²²⁶ See, for example, Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1967), page 168, in which he says that resolutions of four square inches were being achieved “above 70,000 feet”.

²²⁷ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 185. For a marvellously evocative and informative portrait of the human and technical achievement that each U-2 flight embodied (and the individual and collective effort that each entailed) see Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, pages 181-6.

²²⁸ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, is largely the story of the NPIC.

²²⁹ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 222. McCone added laconically: “Quite a job.” At the height of the Crisis, the analysts nevertheless completed the entire job in about a single day. This achievement is put in perspective by a quotation from the founder of the UK Air Ministry’s Photographic Interpretation Unit said “Looking through magnifying glasses at minute objects in a photograph required the patience of Job and the skill of a good darning of socks”. Andrew, For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush, page 200.

²³⁰ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 203. Converted from Allison’s Imperial measurement.

²³¹ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 203.

²³² Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 207.

were discovered.²³³) Moreover, the SAM, MRBM, and IRBM sites that the Soviets constructed in Cuba were built to conform to exactly the same pattern of SAM, MRBM, and IRBM sites in the Soviet Union, and so would appear as such in photographs.²³⁴

It appears that Soviet reconnaissance team sent before the operation over-estimated the ability of Cuban forests to shield the missiles from overhead observation.²³⁵ In fact, Gribkov later wrote, “Only someone with absolutely no competence in such technical matters could have reached such a conclusion. [A missile installation in the forests of Cuba] could be hidden from ground-level view. From above, however, it could – and did – stick out like a sore thumb.”²³⁶ Because Standard Operating Procedure in the USSR did not require overhead camouflage of missiles sites, however, it was not done.²³⁷

At the time, however, the Soviet’s lack of subtlety was a mystery. Once the missiles had been discovered the head of NPIC himself wondered, “Why would the Soviets leave the missiles and all the support equipment exposed in an open field in such a manner that they would certainly draw a photo interpreter’s attention?”²³⁸ Even so, Allison feels that if the Soviets had restricted construction of the sites to nighttimes and camouflaged the sites during the day, they might have escaped detection.²³⁹

Nevertheless, the missiles were not picked up by U-2 photographs earlier because no collection was done over Cuba for thirty-nine days – from the

²³³ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 437.

²³⁴ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 208.

²³⁵ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 16. Soviet General Staff officers quickly realised this fact while the operation was underway: “A detailed inspection of the area convinced me that even with the commanders’ best efforts, total concealment was next to impossible...With some bitterness, I recalled Sharaf Rashidov’s report that palm trees would make the missiles undetectable. Only someone with no military background, and no understanding of the paraphernalia that accompanied the rockets themselves, could have reached such a conclusion. But the Politburo had accepted in uncritically.” See Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 55.

²³⁶ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 40.

²³⁷ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 213.

²³⁸ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 207.

²³⁹ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 208. Allison notes here too that they “did use lights for night-time construction in the frantic days after the missiles were discovered”.

5th of September until the 14th of October.²⁴⁰ We explore the reasons for this 'Photo Gap' below.

SIGINT – “Like the song of a rare bird out of its normal habitat”

Compared with other sources of information about the Soviet buildup prior to the Crisis, information about what Signals Intelligence was gathered is sparse. According to the NSA, “signals intelligence did not provide any direct information about the Soviet introduction of offensive ballistic missiles into Cuba.”²⁴¹ It is worth reviewing those scattered facts that are known, however.

Beginning late in 1960 and extending through the Crisis, the NSA intercepted messages concerning Soviet ships headed for Havana. The cargo manifests were “suspiciously blank”²⁴², and Soviet ships were making false port declarations (i.e. listing less than their known cargo-carrying capacity) indicating that what they carried was more than just the “palm oil” or “farm equipment” claimed.²⁴³ We also know that whenever Soviet personnel lists were intercepted that contained an unusually large number of personnel with the surnames ‘Petrov’ and ‘Ivanov’ – the Russian equivalent to ‘Smith’ and ‘Jones’.²⁴⁴

Well prior to the Crisis, moreover, RB-47 ‘Strato-spy’ SIGINT planes were flying along the Cuban coast three times a day.²⁴⁵ Because of their high

²⁴⁰ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 163.

²⁴¹ Thomas R. Johnson and David A. Hatch, *NSA and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Ft. Meade, MD: US National Security Agency 1998), page 1. On the other hand, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, one-time Chief of Naval Operations and subsequently Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the US Congress “*electronic intelligence led to the photographic intelligence that gave indisputable evidence of the Soviet missiles in Cuba.*” Quoted in James Bamford, *Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2002), page 109. Emphasis added. Thus, one must agree with Laqueur that SIGINT might have played a role, but that “in the Cuban missile crisis, it had to appear that human intelligence and aerial photography provided the decisive intelligence information.” Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 165.

²⁴² Johnson and Hatch, *NSA and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, pages 3-4.

²⁴³ Johnson and Hatch, *NSA and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 2.

²⁴⁴ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 79-80. These were not the only pseudonyms used, but false names in general caused the Soviets problems. Indeed, the Soviet commander on the ground, Pliyev, even protested when he was issued a passport in the name of “Ivan Aleksandrovich Pavlov”, that he “did not intend to take on a strange name, much less leave his real identification papers at the General Staff. He did not want to part with them for anything, and Ivanov and I had a hard time convincing him to live and work under a pseudonym from then on.” With some understatement, Gribkov continues, “We should have taken that episode as an early warning of Pliyev’s lack of subtlety and the difficulties it would spawn.” See Gribkov and Smith, *Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 25.

²⁴⁵ Bamford, *Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency*, page 102.

speed, however, aircraft are poorer SIGINT collection platforms than ships²⁴⁶ so as Kennedy's interest in Cuba increased the SIGINT ship *Oxford* was dispatched to hug the Cuban coast,²⁴⁷ as was the USNS *Muller*.²⁴⁸ "From the ship we could look up and down the length of the island...The quality of the intercept was good,"²⁴⁹ said Harold L. Parish, an NSA Soviet analyst. These operations led to a "gush" of SIGINT from the island. Because of these surveillance activities, the NSA issued a "dramatic"²⁵⁰ report on the Soviet buildup to the rest of the Intelligence Community, including the CIA, on August 31, 1962. It showed that in the last three months of 1961, total gross tonnage of ships headed for Cuba was 183,923; in July and August alone of 1962, gross tonnage had jumped to 518,196.²⁵¹ The CIA also knew – though the NSA apparently had not broken Soviet codes of the period – that Soviet cargo ships headed for Cuba were sometimes receiving 'high precedence' messages from the USSR, which indicated that they were in the words of an NSA report, "engaged in other than routine activities."²⁵²

There is detailed evidence too that on August 17th an Electronic Intelligence (Elint) operator on the *Oxford* heard "an unusual sound, like the song of a rare bird out of its normal habitat. It was the electronic call of a Soviet

²⁴⁶ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 102.

²⁴⁷ Hansen, "Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis." page 54 and footnote 55, citing Johnson and Hatch, NSA and the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 2-3. The *Oxford* used a unique "moon-bounce" antenna that prior to the satellite age was critical in relaying messages quickly and securely to Washington, but it only operated 12 hours a day, because the moon was not visible the other half of the time. See Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 101.

²⁴⁸ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 103.

²⁴⁹ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 100.

²⁵⁰ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 101.

²⁵¹ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 101.

²⁵² Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 676 fn 109. Through electronic intercepts, the CIA also established that by fall of 1962 there were at least seven separate Soviet tactical radio networks in Cuba (which allowed them, incidentally, "to dispense with the existing American-built telephone and microwave systems" on the island). Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 166. While the Cubans never tried to scramble voice communications, the Soviets made a concerted effort to speak only Spanish on unencrypted networks. They would nevertheless revert to their native tongue when dealing with complex subjects. Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, pages 99- 101. The author had similar experiences in the USMC which indicated that even exceptionally well-disciplined and trained troops with clear procedures had trouble maintaining "radio discipline" when faced with novel problems.

radar codenamed Whiff,” which indicated that Russian anti-aircraft weapons were now operational on the island.²⁵³ Then, on September 15, the ship detected another *rara avis*, ‘Spoon Rest’ radar, which indicated that SA-2s – surface to air missiles capable of bringing down the U-2 – were operational.²⁵⁴ The NSA’s reaction was to employ both submarines and listening stations on Florida, Puerto Rico and “elsewhere”²⁵⁵ to collect intelligence on Cuba.²⁵⁶

Excursus Summary

In this break from the structure of the intelligence cycle, we examined three areas that are fundamental to the rest of the case. First, we looked at various security measures the Soviets employed to try to keep the US from discovering their actions. Next, we examined some of the deception methods that were used to try to mask the secrets of Operation Anadyr. Finally, we reviewed the basic collection methods that the CIA used that the time to try to monitor events in the Caribbean and the USSR.

Together, these sections give the readers some appreciation for the practical aspects of the work of hiding and exposing secrets. We now resume our examination of events and their interaction with the CIA’s culture and identity via the intelligence cycle, beginning with Collection.

In the next section, we consider how intelligence Tasking interacted synergistically with Collection to hide further the very secrets the CIA in could have uncovered to prevent a full-blown crisis.

²⁵³ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 100.

²⁵⁴ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 106-7.

²⁵⁵ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 107. The NSA itself sums up the information it gained in this pre-Crisis period in this way: “Cuban air defences improved at an accelerating pace. In May, SIGINT reports had the first indication of airborne fire control radar on MIG-17 and MIG-19 planes. Ground radar activity became heavier all over the island. By early summer, NSA analysts concluded that the Cubans were putting together an air defence system copied from the Soviet model. Equipment, training, and procedures were the same. In fact, by early fall NSA was listening to Russian ground controllers speaking in heavily accented Spanish to Cuban pilots.” Johnson and Hatch, NSA and the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 4.

²⁵⁶ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 104 and 106-8. How quickly SIGINT was passed from the NSA to the CIA is not known; what is known is that there was a shortage of Spanish-speaking linguists at NSA. See Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 101. This is a grim foreshadowing of the next case, where the NSA was farming most Taliban intercepts prior to 9/11 out to Pakistan’s ISI for translation.

Collection

What, then, were the misjudgements that – had they been corrected in Collection– might have altered the balance of probability away from a dramatic strategic surprise, and what is their relationship to the Agency’s culture and identity? The argument here is that claims made by other theorists about insufficient data prior to the Crisis beg precisely this question. Obviously, had there been sufficient information, there would not have been a Crisis. The question thus is *why* with such high stakes and such a priority target was more of the information needed not collected better and faster?

Kuhns writes for example: “A fair judgement would be that there was insufficient intelligence available to the drafters [of the 19 September, 1962 SNIE] at the time of publication, to permit them to reasonably conclude that the Soviets were placing offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba”.²⁵⁷ Even accepting that argument on its merits, when examining the entirety of the intelligence cycle, one is left asking: “Why not? *What were the factors prior to the Analysis phase that contributed to this ‘insufficient intelligence’?*” What were the antecedent conditions to that analytical failure?

“A trail of downed telephone poles and mailboxes”

First, we should remind ourselves that the dramatic aspects of the missile’s discovery in Cuba sometimes overshadow the simple fact that the CIA collected no information about what was going on in the *Soviet Union* in the spring and summer of 1962 that hinted at the USSR’s preparations for the deployment of missiles to Cuba.²⁵⁸ What appreciation Langley had for the situation was almost entirely dependent on what US and NATO forces collected on the high seas and in Cuba.²⁵⁹ The meat of the problem, however, is to highlight how four properties of the CIA’s identity and culture made the Collection phase prior to the missile’s discovery less effective. Let us start with the Agency’s partiality for secret information.

²⁵⁷ Woodrow J. Kuhns, “Intelligence Failures: Forecasting and the Lessons of Epistemology,” *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence*, eds. Richard K. Betts and Thomas G. Mahnken (London: Frank Cass, 2003), page 84.

²⁵⁸ Robert Gates as a junior analyst in the early 1970s (in a *Studies* article entitled “The Prediction of Soviet Intentions”), makes this point exactly. He writes that a CIA analyst “must somehow perceive a change in policy between the time the decision is made in Moscow and the time when it is manifested in action – such as the building of the Berlin Wall or the dispatch of missiles to Cuba”. Gates, “The Prediction of Soviet Intentions.” page 44. Khrushchev’s plan was obviously “manifested in action” in the USSR long before anything changed in Cuba.

²⁵⁹ Grabo, *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*, page 35.

We know, for example, that the CIA received reports from friendly nations and newspaper correspondents indicating that hundreds of Russian troops in fatigues had been seen both in Havana and in “seemingly endless convoys along Cuba’s main highways”.²⁶⁰ Significantly, many of the convoys appeared to be going to Torrens, where the missiles were later spotted.²⁶¹ It is at least possible that the Agency’s disdain for open sources led them to discount this openly-collected information.

This same preference for secrets led the Agency to discount information collected in June and July 1962, when the Soviets began chartering Western vessels to carry general cargo from the Soviet Union to Cuba, reserving their own ships for other – presumably military – cargo.²⁶² Charter agreements, after all, require no clandestine theatrics to obtain, merely the correct hypothesis to collect and verify.

There were other clues for all to see on the Cuba’s streets. According to Fursenko: “The missiles were moved to launch sites on 67-foot trailers...Not built to negotiate the tight turns of Cuban town streets, the trailers left a trail of downed telephone poles and mailboxes when used to move the missiles into the countryside.”²⁶³ Again, detecting such clues required no special training or exotic ‘sources and methods’, but would have allowed an analyst to conclude that something very special was going on in Cuba.

“Operation ‘Checked Shirt’”

Similarly, many of the *maskirovka* measures employed could not have withstood scrutiny by casual observers. As far as the 40,000 Soviets troops’ dress and behaviour were concerned, much of the *maskirovka* was otiose. They wore civilian clothes, but these young, trim, physically fit, suntanned “agricultural experts and technicians” debarked at Cuban docks and then formed into ranks of four before marching out to truck convoys.²⁶⁴ Even Gribkov was struck by the fact that these men almost all wore the same checked shirts. He remembers: “So much, I thought, for the sophisticated foresight of our camouflage experts.

²⁶⁰ Hansen, “Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis.” page 54 and footnote 55, citing Johnson and Hatch, NSA and the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 2-3.

²⁶¹ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 101.

²⁶² Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 92.

²⁶³ Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 216.

²⁶⁴ Interestingly, the Cubans supplied the Russians with pre-revolutionary maps made by the US Army Corps of Engineers, which was exactly what the CIA photo interpreters were using. See Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 80.

Even without uniforms, Soviet troops nonetheless stood out from the Cuban civilian population; their clothes gave them away.”²⁶⁵ Soviet soldiers even joked that the operation should have been code-named ‘Checked Shirt’.”²⁶⁶ According to one source, the Soviets used their standout ‘varicoloured’ shirts as unit designations!²⁶⁷

Sophisticated collection skill and mastery of Soviet military *arcana* was certainly not required to know something outside the usual Soviet pattern was occurring on an island 150 kilometres from Florida. Once they arrived at their barracks, many Soviet units decorated the area in front of their quarters with standard Soviet ground force insignia representing infantry, armor forces, elite guard badges, or large Red Army Stars.²⁶⁸ In the Current Intelligence Memorandum of 22 August 1962, however, the CIA reported: “There is no hard evidence that any of these people are in combat military units. There is strong evidence that their mission is related to unidentified military construction.”²⁶⁹ No one seems to have pursued the logical follow-up question: “What specifically might that military construction be? Is something unprecedented occurring?”

Brugioni writes: “The Russians and the Cubans stoutly maintained that only Soviet ‘technicians’ were being sent to Cuba. They were supposedly experts in soil cultivation, irrigation, sugar-cane growing, rice harvesting and animal husbandry.”²⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Gribkov says that if any of these ‘technicians’ had been questioned about their field of expertise, “they wouldn’t have the faintest notions of the answers to give.”²⁷¹ Brugioni also admits that Luis Botifoll, a prominent Cuban exile, told the American embassy in Mexico City “among the thousands of Soviet technicians who recently arrived on the island, many appeared to be between eighteen and twenty years of age, too young to have had time to have acquired any technical experience to impart to the

²⁶⁵ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 57.

²⁶⁶ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 57.

²⁶⁷ Gleichauf, “A Listening Post in Miami.” page 52.

²⁶⁸ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 210.

²⁶⁹ Available in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader, page 68.

²⁷⁰ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 103.

²⁷¹ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis. page 38.

Cubans.”²⁷² Botifoll reported that these young Russians “dress in sports clothes but give the appearance of only recently completed their military training”.²⁷³

In short, what we glimpse through these anecdotes is the strong possibility that if prosaic sources had been pursued with more vigour in the Collection phase, the alarm level at Langley might have been higher.

“How do you expect me to negotiate on Berlin with all these incidents?”

Such higher levels of alarm might have affected another aspect of Collection, one that in the key period was captive not to the preference for secret sources, but to the need for consensus: the crucial overflights of Cuba by U-2s. As mentioned above, there was a lacuna of thirty-nine days – from the 5th of September until the 14th of October²⁷⁴ – when no aerial collection was made because the U-2s assigned to Cuba were grounded. Following the Crisis, Kennedy administration officials claimed that bad weather had delayed the U-2 overflights,²⁷⁵ but this was only partly true. In fact, a key cause of this delay was the ‘consensus culture’ at Langley and ‘negative synergy’ with the CIA’s own previous assessments affecting Tasking (exactly as the intelligence cycle would leave one to expect).

How did this synergy operate? Though the U-2 is often the ‘hero of the piece,’ it is important to remember that prior to the Crisis Soviet propaganda had successfully managed “to turn U-2 into a kind of dirty word,”²⁷⁶ as one columnist later put it. International opinion regarded the overflights as “illegal and immoral”,²⁷⁷ and even some of Washington’s staunchest allies found them unpalatable.

In this general climate, a series of mishaps created conditions that made the overflight of Cuba particularly controversial. First, as mentioned above, *Pravda* made the accidental nine-minute overflight of Sakhalin Island a front-page issue. In addition, a Taiwan-based CIA U-2, flown by a Chinese Nationalist pilot, had lately been shot down over mainland China.²⁷⁸ Both of

²⁷² Text of Soviet statement. *The New York Times*, September 12, 1962. Quoted in Wohlstetter, “Cuba and Pearl Harbor.” page 703. and Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 79.

²⁷³ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 103.

²⁷⁴ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 163.

²⁷⁵ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 337.

²⁷⁶ Holland, “The “Photo Gap” that Delayed Discovery of Missiles.” page 21.

²⁷⁷ Holland, “The “Photo Gap” that Delayed Discovery of Missiles.” page 21.

²⁷⁸ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 108.

these incidents gave the CIA pause about increased U-2 flights, *and* led to a sharp reaction from the State Department: at a meeting called for the purpose of deciding if the U-2 should be flown over Cuba, Secretary of State Rusk asked CIA Deputy Director Pat Carter: “How do you expect me to negotiate on Berlin with all these incidents?”²⁷⁹ The meeting broke up with no decision.

Second, it was clear that the Cuban air defence system was rapidly improving. As of August 29th, there was certainty that Cuba had surface-to-air missiles. These created, according to McCone, “an understandable reluctance or timidity”²⁸⁰ to authorize more U-2 flights. Once the NSA reported the first operation of the SA-2-associated radar on September 15th, the danger was even clearer. By then, Cuban air defences went beyond merely switching on a type of radar: the system as a whole matured in September,²⁸¹ and these Cuban air defences added to the general climate against risking more U-2 downings.²⁸² They constituted, however, only the proximate trigger for the Collection problem known as “The Photo Gap”.²⁸³ The drive for consensus explains more.

There *were* what a *Studies* article later called “diplomatic problems”²⁸⁴ regarding U-2 flights. What is frequently glossed over is the relationship State Department objections and the CIA’s own view of events in Cuba. According to Holland, CIA Deputy Director (and in McCone’s absence, Acting Director) Carter proved incapable of reversing the decision to delay U-2 missions largely because the “19 September Special National Intelligence Estimate *reaffirmed*

²⁷⁹ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 108.

²⁸⁰ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 194.

²⁸¹ How mature they were became clear on October 27th, when during the Crisis US Air Force Major Rudolf Anderson’s U-2 was downed by an SA-2 missile, and Anderson was killed. Though the Soviets claimed for many years this was the work of either the Cubans or a low-level “trigger-happy Soviet air defence commander”, in 1989 it was revealed that the downing was made at the instigation of General Igor D. Statsenko, commander of Soviet Forces in Cuba. See Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, pages 461-3.

²⁸² NSA reported that Cuban pilots, previously trained in Soviet Bloc countries, frequently went up to challenge American aircraft buzzing the periphery of the island. Cuban pilots practiced timed scrambles, and performed border patrols whenever American naval aircraft approached. Under the watchful eye of Russian GCI (Ground Controlled Intercept) controllers, their procedures became coordinated and efficient. With the new MIG fighters, using Soviet-originated ground control procedures and Soviet weapons, Cuban pilots were becoming a potent defensive force. With the antiaircraft weapons and surface-to-air missiles, American aircraft would approach Cuba at their peril. On October 10, NSA reported that the Cuban air defence system seemed to be complete. They had just begun passing radar tracking from radar stations to higher headquarters and to defensive fighter bases using Soviet procedures. Their system, with Russians in advisory positions at every point, was ready for business. Johnson and Hatch, NSA and the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 5-6.

²⁸³ Holland, “The “Photo Gap” that Delayed Discovery of Missiles.”

²⁸⁴ “A Look Back...Remembering the Cuban Missile Crisis,”

*the conventional wisdom*²⁸⁵ that the Soviets would not place offensive missiles in Cuba. Specifically Holland says: “The presumption was that even if the Soviets dared to introduce SSMS, against all estimates, that would only occur after the SA-2 defence system was complete, which still appeared some weeks away.”²⁸⁶ In other words, *there was a negative feedback loop between CIA's earlier misestimates of Soviet intentions and later suggestions to increase Collection efforts.*

Yet the crucial U-2 flight was made, and right into the “defensive thicket”,²⁸⁷ that Johnson describes. Why? DCI McCone – the Cassandra of this case – had spent a critical few weeks in France on his honeymoon, but intervened directly soon after his return, and ordered the resumption of flights.²⁸⁸ A Cassandra – not a break in the weather – saved the day.

“Inflicting an outsider on the CIA”

To one unfamiliar with the details of CIA history (or the operations of any large bureaucracy),²⁸⁹ it seems counter-intuitive that the DCI himself could be a ‘Cassandra’, a man dramatically at odds with his own analytical staff. John McCone, however, was not an Agency ‘insider.’ He was new, and when he was appointed DCI following the Bay of Pigs fiasco in September 1961, most senior officials at the CIA – who had been admirers of Allen Dulles – were decidedly sceptical about being led by a newcomer without previous intelligence experience.²⁹⁰ According to one *Studies* article, senior officials at the Agency “reserved their judgement [of McCone], some of them quite pointedly.”²⁹¹

Because McCone was a Republican – according to Holland “the stereotype of the wealthy, conservative Republican businessmen”²⁹² – some

²⁸⁵ Holland, “The “Photo Gap” that Delayed Discovery of Missiles.” page 23. Emphasis added.

²⁸⁶ Holland, “The “Photo Gap” that Delayed Discovery of Missiles.” page 23.

²⁸⁷ Johnson and Hatch, NSA and the Cuban Missile Crisis pages 5-6.

²⁸⁸ Holland, “The “Photo Gap” that Delayed Discovery of Missiles.” pages 20-1.

²⁸⁹ There is a large body of theory surrounding the working of bureaucracies, some of which Allison ably explores in his Model II. See Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 143-196. After completing an MBA, serving in the US military, working inside several large banks, and viewing from inside numerous large organisations as a management consultant, the author favours two works to plumb the depths of bureaucracies: C. Northcote Parkinson, Parkinson's Law, or The Pursuit of Progress (London: Penguin, 1957), and Lawrence J. Peter and Raymond Hull, The Peter Principle: Why Things Always Go Wrong (London: Souvenir Press, 1969). They distil and illustrate without management or sociological jargon the actual operation of large organisations.

²⁹⁰ Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 80.

²⁹¹ Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 80.

²⁹² Holland, “The “Photo Gap” that Delayed Discovery of Missiles.” page 23.

Democrats within the Kennedy administration were appalled by his appointment. These fears were matched inside the CIA, if for different reasons. As Holland says: "McCone was virtually a novice with regard to the craft of intelligence, and inflicting [sic] an outsider on the CIA was considered an even graver punishment [for the Bay of Pigs] than saddling it with a dogmatic man known for his molten temper and 'slide-rule mind.'"²⁹³ In short, though nominally 'in charge', DCI McCone faced numerous internal challenges to his authority.

It was not only McCone's lack of intelligence experience that made him a problematic fit within the Agency's culture. Unlike Dulles, McCone was no East Coast patrician. Instead, McCone was a devout Catholic who came from a working-class San Francisco Irish family who "exhibited all the traits of the classic self-made man."²⁹⁴ As mentioned above, these traits included an explosive temper and an acerbic leadership style. Soon after he became DCI, for example, McCone was invited to visit Langley's computer centre to give a pep talk for 'morale purposes'. McCone "declined the invitation with the acid comment that... if the computer center was dependent upon him for morale, there must be something wrong with the management".²⁹⁵

There is also evidence that McCone's devout Roman Catholicism (he went on to be US envoy to the Vatican after leaving the CIA), might have rubbed some people the wrong way. We have no direct evidence for this, but we do have substantiation that his religiosity affected his role as DCI in dealing with other members of the Administration. Allison reports that at a meeting on August 10th, 1962 that "McCone was shocked when McNamara alluded to the possibility of assassinating Castro. Then and later, McCone quashed any discussion of such schemes on moral as well as practical grounds. 'I could get excommunicated', he affirmed with a wink."²⁹⁶ It is well within the bounds of possibility, therefore, that McCone's religiosity created an additional barrier to full acceptance in the culture of the Agency, especially among those personnel concerned with Cuba.

²⁹³ Holland, "The "Photo Gap" that Delayed Discovery of Missiles." page 16.

²⁹⁴ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 63.

²⁹⁵ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, pages 64-5.

²⁹⁶ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 333. Ironically, this was the first meeting at which McCone raised the possibility of Soviet missiles in Cuba. Equally ironically, on the matter of assassination, McCone was then bypassed, and the necessary authority and supervision of efforts to kill Castro apparently came directly from now often beatified Robert Kennedy.

“They’re not putting them in to protect the cane cutters.”

If one follows the trail of evidence back from McCone’s intervention in favour of renewed U-2 flights over Cuba through the events of the previous few months, there is ample evidence of his lone voice saying that “something new and different was going on”²⁹⁷ in Cuba. Kam says:

McCone had argued as early as the spring of 1962 that the Soviets might install medium-range missiles in Cuba. From the French Riviera, where he had gone for a three-week honeymoon, McCone bombarded his deputy with telegrams emphasizing his speculations, but the deputy did not distribute them outside the CIA...*Apparently from the standpoint of the CIA McCone was considered a nonexpert because of his lack of political or intelligence experience and expertise in Soviet affairs.*²⁹⁸

Kam understates the case: McCone was actively mocked for what his Deputy Director for Intelligence, Ray Cline, facetiously called his “Honeymoon Cables”²⁹⁹ expressing suspicion of Soviet intentions in Cuba. During the three weeks he was away, Agency people got so sick of McCone’s warnings that they repeated with delight one wit’s remark that “I have some doubts that the old man knows what to do on a honeymoon.”³⁰⁰

Worthy of emphasis here is that the substance of these cables and McCone’s earlier warnings do not simply serve to corroborate McCone’s status as a Cassandra. When they are combined with aspects of his background and our knowledge of the CIA’s culture and identity, they offer clues about *why* McCone was a Cassandra and why the rest of the CIA failed to consider other evidence pointing towards Soviet missiles in Cuba.

When he was first briefed on 29 August about the emplacement of SAMs, for example, McCone observed: “They’re not putting them in to protect the cane cutters. They’re putting them in to blind our reconnaissance eye.”³⁰¹ In other words, as an ‘intelligence novice’, unclouded by ‘Soviet expertise’, McCone’s deductive instincts as a successful businessman were alerted by this deployment. For virtually every other senior CIA official and analyst, however, because the same missile had been sent previously to other Soviet client states

²⁹⁷ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 81.

²⁹⁸ Kam, *Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective*, page 162. Emphasis added.

²⁹⁹ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 97.

³⁰⁰ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 97.

³⁰¹ Holland, “The “Photo Gap” that Delayed Discovery of Missiles.” page 19.

in the Third World, the SAM deployment “came not as a shock, but as a problem to be dealt with deliberately.”³⁰²

Soon thereafter, McCone left on his honeymoon. From there, his background as a business executive and engineer became apparent, as he expanded on the disconnect between the costs and benefits of the air defence system that the Soviets were installing. His ‘honeymoon cable’ of 10 September read in part:

Difficult for me to rationalize extensive costly defenses being established in Cuba as such extremely costly measures to accomplish security and secrecy not consistent with other policies such as refugees, legal travel, etc. Appears to me quite possible measures now being taken are for purpose of ensuring secrecy of some offensive capability such as MRBMs to be installed by Soviets after present phase completed and country secured from overflights. Suggest BNE [Kent’s Board of National Estimates] study motives behind these defensive measures which seem to exceed those provided most satellites.³⁰³

In other words, according to Laqueur: “For John McCone, the emplacement of SAMs at sites apparently unrelated to the defense of specific military installations was sufficient evidence of Soviet intentions to install offensive missiles ...McCone could not believe that such an expensive weapons system would be installed unless it was intended to defend very important military targets.”³⁰⁴ Laqueur, however, does not ask why McCone, in the absence of evidence, had the correct intuition of Soviet intentions, only commenting: “In a word, he had the *imagination* indispensable to superior intelligence work.”³⁰⁵ *Constructing Cassandra* maintains that McCone’s imagination was only exceptional in the narrow context of the CIA’s unique culture and identity.

For reasons that we explore during our examination of Analysis, however, senior analysts at the BNE replied to McCone’s cable the next day: “[We] are still persuaded that costly crash operation to install SA-2s is reasonably explained by other than desire to hide later build-ups and the Soviets likely to regard advantage of major offensive build-up not equal to dangers of US intervention.”³⁰⁶

³⁰² Holland, “The ‘Photo Gap’ that Delayed Discovery of Missiles.” page 19.

³⁰³ This cable of 10 September, 1962 is quoted in a declassified Top Secret memorandum of 31 October, 1962 “Soviet MRBMs in Cuba”, reproduced in McAuliffe, *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962*, page 13.

³⁰⁴ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 168.

³⁰⁵ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 168. Emphasis in original.

³⁰⁶ McAuliffe, *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962*, page 41.

Again, on September 16 McCone cabled “extensive comments on the Cuban situation making the point that we must carefully study the prospects of MRBMs in Cuba”.³⁰⁷ The DDI’s response stated, “An introduction of MRBMs was unlikely because of the risk of US intervention.”³⁰⁸

Similarly, when McCone received the text of the 19 Sept SNIE in France, he questioned its conclusions. “As an alternative”, he cabled Acting Director Carter, “I can see that an offensive Soviet Cuban base will provide Cubans with the most important and effective trading position in connection with all other critical areas and hence they might take an unprecedented risk in order to establish such a position.”³⁰⁹

In the last of his “Honeymoon Cables” to headquarters on 20 September, McCone urged his Agency to think further about Soviet intentions in Cuba. In response, according to Weiner, “the analysts sighed.”³¹⁰ Though he was DCI, McCone was in many senses an outsider by background and temperament at the CIA, and it was easy for analysts to dismiss his cogent speculation as the dabbling of an amateur.

“Royal palm trees were being used as a unit of measure.”

Another measure of the climate of scepticism that greeted McCone’s warnings is revealed by that which infected the final part of Collection we consider, Human Intelligence, i.e. information from both refugees and agents.

Below, we first consider five of the conventional, relatively mechanistic explanations for HUMINT Collection failures prior to the crisis. Next, we look at three more subtle approaches to Collection failures. These offer less direct lines of cause and effect from Collection problems to Crisis. Finally, however, we offer evidence that joins these previous proximate explanations for failure back to the distal explanation: qualities of the Agency’s identity and culture that enabled and at times magnified them. The full import of some of the phenomena and evidence described below only becomes apparent in the next section, on Analysis, but they are introduced here because they occurred in the Collection phase.

One of the conventional explanations for the general discounting of Cuban HUMINT in the period was that agent and refugee reports were

³⁰⁷ Footnote this from original documents in Cuban Missile Crisis documents book

³⁰⁸ McAuliffe, CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962, page 42.

³⁰⁹ Quoted in McDonald, “CIA and Warning Failures.” page 49.

³¹⁰ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 195.

frequently incorrect or contradictory.³¹¹ Indeed, analysis after the Crisis showed that the CIA's files had 211 intelligence reports³¹² from HUMINT on missiles and "missile associated activity" in Cuba before January 1962 when the missiles first arrived, all of which were either false or misinterpretations of other kinds of activity.³¹³

A second explanation is that scepticism at Langley about Cuban human sources slowed the speed of the Collection effort in Cuba and Florida. As Betts has pointed out, because HUMINT coming from Cuba had previously been poor, it was given a low priority and processed slowly.³¹⁴

A third, related explanation extended beyond the slow speed at which HUMINT from Cuba was processed. According to Brugioni, Agency personnel charged with merely *gathering* refugee reports began placing 'qualifying comments' on individual reports emanating from the interrogation centre (see below). He says that these remarks "became increasingly evaluative, to the extent that they ultimately demeaned the substantive worth of the reporting system."³¹⁵ In fact, it is clear that blatant 'Analysis during Collection' was widespread at the time. It was later discovered, for example, that the Soviet ship *Poltava* was observed by one collector riding "exceptionally high in the water", meaning that it carried a low weight, high volume cargo. The un-named Collection organisation decided that the Soviets were sending such ships to Cuba to remove all the 'unnecessary' military equipment that they had previously provided, and thus they chose not to pass the information along to the CIA.

After the Crisis McCone was furious about this incident, and "ordered that intelligence-collection organisations never analyse intelligence they had

³¹¹ Richard Betts, Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1982), page 94.

³¹² There is some disagreement in the sources about the exact number and type of pre-Crisis missile sightings. According to "Excerpt from Memorandum for Director of Central Intelligence, 'CIA handling of the Soviet Buildup in Cuba' 14 November, 1962" there were 138 missile sightings in Cuba from May to August; and nearly 900 in September, but almost all seemed connected to SAM or cruise-missile installations; the three that could not be traced back to those categories were "negated" by U-2 photos. See McAuliffe, CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962, pages 99-102.

³¹³ McDonald, "CIA and Warning Failures." page 48.

³¹⁴ Betts explains this linkage: A human source in Cuba reported sighting a missile on 12 September, but the report did not arrive at the CIA until September 21, two days after the meeting of the U.S. Intelligence Board. *The time required to process reports could have been shortened, but previously there had been no reason to invest the resources and take the necessary risks (endangering agents and communication networks), because the value of these sources had usually been minimal.* Betts, Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning, page 88. Emphasis added.

³¹⁵ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 87.

collected".³¹⁶ As we have seen, however, in some ways, "Analysis during Collection" is inevitable, for as Chapter 2 discussed, central to Wohlstetter's theory of strategic surprise is that unless collectors have a hypothesis to guide them, it is impossible to sift 'signal' from 'noise' in a flow of information.³¹⁷

In addition to the importance of an over-arching hypothesis for effective Collection, Wohlstetter adds a fourth point specific to our analysis of pre-Crisis HUMINT: that refugee reports were discredited without careful verification because refugee intelligence on anti-Castro feeling in Cuba had not been properly discounted before the Bay of Pigs landing.³¹⁸ Following logically from this, she adds that it was in the refugees' self-interest to push the US to greater involvement in Cuba, and this likely increased CIA scepticism of their reports.³¹⁹

Fifth, we know that the Cubans and the Soviets were aware of the dubious light in which refugee accounts were held by the CIA, and exploited it. Amuchastegui, a former Cuban security official, describes how this was done: "From June to September, Cuban intelligence intercepted some 17,000 letters [between Cubans and friends and relatives in the US] that had something to say about the deployment of Soviet troops and missiles in Cuba. In late September, Cuban authorities permitted those letters to arrive in Miami as part of the deception campaign. Just as Havana expected, the CIA paid no attention to

³¹⁶ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 149. The imperfections of the intelligence cycle as a representation of reality are here evident.

³¹⁷ Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, *passim*, but especially pages 386-96. In this specific instance regarding the clue offered by the amount of water the ships were drawing, Wohlstetter certainly agrees, writing: "[The] ships, in transit, had been noted to be riding high in the water. If intelligence analysts in the American community had been more ready to suspect the introduction of strategic missiles, would this information have led them to surmise, before as well as after October 14, that these ships carried 'space-consuming [i.e. large volume, low density] cargo such as an MRBM' rather than a bulk cargo?" She goes on that "Roger Hilsman points out that these vessels had been specially designed for carrying lumber, and 'our shipping intelligence experts presumably deduced that lumbering ships could be more easily spared than others.' 'We knew', Hilsman writes, 'that the Soviets had had some trouble finding the ships they needed to send their aid to Cuba,' This is a good illustration of the way we can adjust (without doing violence to the facts) a disturbing or unusual observation to "save" a theory – in this case that the Soviets would not send strategic missiles to Cuba." Wohlstetter, "Cuba and Pearl Harbor." pages 699-700.

³¹⁸ Wohlstetter, "Cuba and Pearl Harbor." page 699.

³¹⁹ Wohlstetter, "Cuba and Pearl Harbor." page 699. Knorr, agrees, citing the Stennis report. He says that the Cuban eyewitness reports were discounted because 1) untrained observers might be unable to distinguish between different types of missiles, and 2) the sources had an interest in stimulating a US invasion of Cuba. See Knorr, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles." page 456.

these letters.”³²⁰ With no clear (or an incorrect) hypothesis, ‘noise’ easily drowns the ‘signal’.

If these five factors are the most simple explanations of HUMINT Collection failures prior to the Crisis, what are the other, more subtle dynamics to which authors have ascribed problems?

Clark offers the first of three possible explanations. He links much of the tendency to discount Cuban refugees as merely crying ‘wolf’ back to the Agency’s established analytical point of view that the Soviets would not place such missiles in Cuba.³²¹ Again, negative synergy. In 2004, he wrote that the assessments of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba would have been made sooner, “except for the difficulty of changing a conclusion once reached and the tendency to ignore the Cuban refugees who cry ‘wolf’ too often... [And] *once an intelligence agency makes a firm estimate, it has a propensity to ignore or explain away conflicting information in future estimates.*”³²² In short, Clark blames a species of institutional cognitive dissonance acting in concert with the more mechanistic explanations above.³²³

Kam, however, favours a return to the idea expressed by Sherman Kent’s ‘Holy Miracle’ comment above, saying that the capability of U-2 pictures to provide (seemingly) relatively firm evidence of military activity in Cuba made analysts less inclined to rely on agents’ and refugees’ reports for conclusions regarding Soviet activities and intentions.³²⁴

Shackley, an active participant in the operation, offers a third and – similar to Kam – higher-level view of Collection failures. In his memoirs, he makes it clear that a high evidential bar was set by the ultimate consumer of intelligence, President Kennedy. He recounts a meeting in July 1962 in which “the agents were now describing the canvas-wrapped equipment as being more in the length category of a royal palm tree”. The President then asked Shackley “a few questions about agent reporting in which royal palm trees were being used as a unit of measure”. Apparently, Kennedy “finished his inquiry into this

³²⁰ Hansen, “Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis.” page 54, citing Amuchastegui, “Cuban Intelligence and the October Crisis.”

³²¹ For a discussion of “Crying Wolf” and so-called warning fatigue, see Mark M. Lowenthal, Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2002), page 87.

³²² Clark, Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach, page 117.

³²³ The same defense was made in *Studies* by DI officers to DO critics soon after the Crisis. See Harlow T. Munson and W. P. Southard, “Two Witnesses for the Defense,” Studies in Intelligence 8.4 (1964). They say on page 97 that “We agree with Mr. Kent that Khrushchev made a serious mistake in judgment.”

³²⁴ Kam, Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective, page 136.

matter with the comment he needed 'hard intelligence' on what the royal palm trees were." Crucially, Shackley goes on to say: "No one at the meeting had the wit to ask what the President would accept as having met the requirements of hard intelligence."³²⁵ From this dialogue, one can infer that the CIA would have been extremely reluctant, given both the problematic nature of HUMINT from Cuba explored above, combined with its 'customer focus' described in Chapter 3, to give much weight to intelligence that, unlike a U-2 photo, was not concrete.³²⁶ Allison sums the situation up perfectly: "What the President and the administration least wanted to hear, the CIA felt reluctant to say, at least without solid proof."³²⁷

Further evidence of this fact is that an internal CIA report on briefing Kennedy on September 6 about the discovery of coastal defence missiles noted a "freezing atmosphere at the White House"³²⁸ following the delivery of this news. As a result, at the insistence of the President (who was worried about the reactions of Republicans like Senator Keating), a special 'compartment' for intelligence related to missiles in Cuba was created, and given the codeword 'PSALM'.³²⁹

All of these explanations for problems in the Collection phase sound convincing, and undoubtedly contributed to the CIA's failure to detect Soviet missiles in Cuba sooner. They can also be viewed, however, as having been enabled and even magnified by the attributes of Langley's identity and culture. Specifically, there is evidence that the CIA's homogeneity led it to underweight HUMINT in the Collection of intelligence prior to the Crisis.

For this assertion, we have three pieces of evidence. Two are highly revealing articles from *Studies in Intelligence* that were written within two years of the Crisis, and one is a concrete reflection during the Collection phase of the attitudes that these articles reveal.

³²⁵ Shackley, Spymaster: My Life in the CIA, pages 62-3.

³²⁶ Brugioni concurs, saying "The accuracy of missile reporting was still open to question and the Washington atmosphere was sceptical of generalizations. The president's statements of September 4 and September 13 had raised the requirement of the quality of proof for any judgement that offensive missiles had been introduced into Cuba" See Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 147.

³²⁷ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 335. Note that this is a prime example of mirror-imaging of the Customer discussed in Chapter 3, above.

³²⁸ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 335.

³²⁹ Levite, "Intelligence and Strategic Surprises." page 139.

“The Pitfall of a Latin Quirk”

When considering Collection of HUMINT from Cuban sources, the first article of note (previously classified ‘Secret’) appeared in *Studies* in 1963, “The Pitfall of a Latin Quirk”. This article demonstrates clearly an innate CIA tendency to discount intelligence from “Latin nationals”:

A problem of interpretation recurs from time to time in current intelligence on Latin America. The set-piece situation is created by spot reports of statements from a Latin national “in a position to know” to the effect that events in his country have passed into a critical stage. Of unimpeachable authenticity and alarming content, these reports are immediately disseminated in raw form at the cabinet or Presidential level. At the same time, fill-in and assessment are urgently demanded of the area specialist. The analyst whose expertise is primarily Latin America is thus brought into contact with the higher levels of current intelligence – men whose background tends to give them a particular familiarity with European and Sino-Soviet problems – and it is often extremely difficult for him to explain to them his grounds for recommending caution about accepting reports whose authenticity [i.e. provenance] he does not question... *The Latin American tendency to express the most nebulous of ideas in extremely positive fashion and describe dreams as if they were reality makes it difficult for the analyst himself to assess an unexpected report. He can never be sure immediately whether he has in a particular instance an example of this tendency.*³³⁰

From this quotation, published in-house at the CIA less than a year *after* the Crisis, one can fairly infer that Cuban refugee and agent reports collected about Soviet actions on the island were unlikely to be given full weight by analysts unless they were sustained and received in massive quantities. It also seems clear that the attitudes the article reflects are in keeping with our portrait of the CIA’s identity and culture as uniformly Anglo-Saxon and technocratic. The traits that the article describes would also tend to be anathema to a culture that reified ‘objectivity’ and ‘reason’ (as we have established the CIA’s did). At the very least, the attitude that this article reveals links back to the speed with which HUMINT was processed, and the marginal notes that Brugioni described. It also fits well with the crying ‘wolf’ explanation that Clark suggested, and touches upon Shackley’s thesis that Kennedy wanted ‘hard’ intelligence about Cuba.

A similar article, also originally ‘Secret’, appeared in *Studies* the following year. “Portrait of a Cuban Refugee” provided a “frame of reference”³³¹ for

³³⁰ M.E.O. Gravalos, “Pitfall of a Latin Quirk,” *Studies in Intelligence* 7.4 (1963), page 31-2. Emphasis added.

³³¹ Andrew Wixson, “Portrait of a Cuban Refugee,” *Studies in Intelligence*, Summer (1964). page 36.

handling Cuban refugees recruited as agents. The article opens by noting that the refugees, though they “range from illiterate peasants to highly educated members of professional groups” have a level of intelligence “which is comparable over-all with that found in the United States” - it “runs from the nearly deficient to superior.”³³²

With this condescending baseline established, the author then shares with his CIA colleagues Cubans’ “Attitudes towards Work”. Here he maintains that the average Cuban male “admires intellectual achievement in others and can himself learn facts and procedures fairly rapidly, but *these attributes only make him appear better informed and intellectually oriented than he is or he himself feels*. Since he can retain information with more ease than he can assimilate or understand it, he tends to be defensive when he meets with any form of testing or criticism.”³³³ As a result, the author warns patronizingly, “he can work without supervision if he knows exactly what he is supposed to do.”³³⁴ In contrast, the Cuban female can, “somewhat more than the male... perform boring, tedious, and repetitive activities for long periods with little apparent fatigue or loss of efficiency”.³³⁵ The article concludes with a warning: “the biggest problem appears to be that of long-term loyalty and control... In his relationship with a case officer [a Cuban male] will tend to view himself as a colleague rather than as a subordinate.”³³⁶ As in “The Pitfalls of a Latin Quirk”, this article provides evidence for deeply seated cultural attitudes at Langley that would contribute to discounting HUMINT coming from Cuba dramatically, and thus links the Agency’s culture and identity to the surprise of this case.

While both of these articles are ‘children of their time’, undoubtedly reflecting deeper US Anglo-Saxon attitudes to Latin America, that is not the issue here. The point is that the analytical disdain for Cubans that they reveal almost certainly provides a context for sub-optimal Collection of HUMINT prior to the Crisis, especially in light of Chapter 3’s demonstration that the CIA was even more homogeneous than the US as a whole.

³³² Wixson, “Portrait of a Cuban Refugee.” page 35.

³³³ Wixson, “Portrait of a Cuban Refugee.” page 37. Emphasis added.

³³⁴ Wixson, “Portrait of a Cuban Refugee.” page 37.

³³⁵ Wixson, “Portrait of a Cuban Refugee.” page 39. Given the importance of U-2 photographs to the Crisis, it is ironic to recall that the founder of the UK Air Ministry’s Photographic Interpretation Unit said “Looking through magnifying glasses at minute objects in a photograph required the patience of Job and the skill of a good darning of socks”. See Andrew, For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush.

³³⁶ Wixson, “Portrait of a Cuban Refugee.” page 41.

“CIA analysts thought it improbable that an area that size could be cleared”

Even if a tendency can be detected, can these attitudes be linked plausibly to specific Collection problems? In at least one instance, the answer seems to be ‘yes’. Indeed, beyond any given anecdote, it can be shown where these attitudes contributed to an obvious *structural* impediment to rapid and complete information flow from refugees back to the CIA. In this instance, Homogeneity not only precluded the objective consideration of information from Latin sources, but also introduced an additional impediment to Collection.

For entirely practical reasons, women were not housed at the CIA’s refugee reception centre at Opalocka, Florida. They were housed at a separate facility nearby. This facility, however, had only a single, Cuban-born female Army intelligence officer assigned to it to determine if female refugees possessed any knowledge of interest.³³⁷ If Cuban refugees were arriving prior to the Crisis at anything remotely approaching the 1,700 a week number offered above,³³⁸ if more than a tiny fraction were female, a single interrogator would be inadequate to elicit information about events on the island from them. Considering the transparent nature of much of the Soviet *maskirovka* (remember the Soviet joke about Operation ‘Checked Shirt’?), it seems likely that Cuban women – out and about at least as much as men – would have noticed revealing anomalies.

In closing this examination of HUMINT (and Collection generally) prior to the Crisis, it is worth recording that according to Fursenko, the U-2 flights that ultimately found the Soviet missiles were guided by HUMINT. Apparently, a source in Cuba had reported that there appeared to be some “very secret and important work” on a farm southwest of San Diego de los Baños, and that the area had been cleared of all civilians. Specifically, this source said that a 130 square kilometre, “roughly trapezoidal” swath of territory was guarded by Soviet soldiers. Fursenko says that “While CIA analysts thought it improbable that an area that size could be cleared”, the report caught the eye of the analysts at the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), and U-2s were directed to photograph the area³³⁹ after McCone authorised U-2 flights to resume.

³³⁷ Gleichauf, “A Listening Post in Miami.” page 52.

³³⁸ Gleichauf, “A Listening Post in Miami.” page 51.

³³⁹ Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, page 221. Weiner also attributes the key insight to HUMINT, but in a different version: “They took another look at a message received at least eight days

Analysis

We now turn to Analysis. The Report by the PFIAB following the Crisis unequivocally laid the blame for this surprise at the door of analysts at CIA: “The near total intelligence surprise experienced by the United States with respect to the introduction and deployment of Soviet strategic missiles in Cuba resulted in large part from *a malfunction of the analytic process* by which intelligence indicators are assessed and reported.”³⁴⁰ The purpose of this section is to examine the connection between these malfunctions (essentially, an erroneous threat assessment) and the central features of the Agency’s identity and culture, especially the reification of reason and objectivity.

We have already seen how the Agency’s pre-Cuban Missile Crisis Tasking and Collection was frequently driven either by the incorrect assumptions embedded in its analysis of Cuba and the USSR, or by the CIA’s actual intelligence output itself (i.e. NIEs and SNIEs) in a clear negative feedback loop. Now we look at what the misjudgements and assumptions were which – had they been corrected in the Analysis phase – might have altered the balance of probability towards the earlier discovery of Khrushchev’s plans. Just as important, we examine what the relationship was between these misjudgements and assumptions and the four persistent attributes of Langley’s identity and culture. Finally, we ask what does an examination of John McCone’s dissent reveal about Analysis.

earlier from a road watcher, a Cuban agent at the lowest rung in the intelligence hierarchy. He had reported that a convoy of seventy-foot Soviet tractor-trailers was moving mysterious canvas-covered cargo the size of think telephone poles around the Cuban countryside near the town of San Cristóbal. “I never knew his name,” the CIA’s Sam Halpern said. “This one agent, the only decent result out of [Operation] Mongoose, this agent told us there’s something funny going on... And after ten days of arguing in front of the Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance, it was finally approved to have an overflight.” See Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 195. Laqueur, meanwhile, maintains that French intelligence apparently provided the CIA with at least one credible eye-witness report of missiles under transport, and that that drove the overflight. Specifically, he says that Thyraud De Vosjoli, a French intelligence officer who had been sent to Cuba in the summer of 1962, provided McCone with eyewitness evidence of the preparations for the installation of the missiles. But Laqueur admits “The chronology is unclear, and the connection is beyond substantiation pending the publication of the pertinent CIA records.” See Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 365 fn 93 and page 367 fn 111. The author finds the inclusion of the trapezoidal shape and geographical detail in the account above to be most convincing, so that is the account cited. In any case, most sources concur with the overall point – that HUMINT was indirectly responsible for the final discovery of the missiles.

³⁴⁰ Quoted in Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 196. Emphasis added.

“Doubt that this should be in metres, probably ought to be in feet”

We begin by looking at a specific example of a phenomenon touched on above, the wholesale dismissal as unreliable of reports by Cuban eyewitnesses. Martin describes an incident in which an analyst clearly demonstrated the attitude expressed in “The Pitfalls of a Latin Quirk”. After receiving an eyewitness report from a Cuban accountant of a missile matching a Soviet MRBM, the analyst noted in the margin of the report “Doubt that this should be in metres, probably ought to be in feet.”³⁴¹ The import of that marginalia? Changing the unit of measure here instantly downgrades the missile from an MRBM to a SAM.³⁴² Shrink a ballistic missile by 67%, and you have a fair approximation of an anti-aircraft missile, and your *Weltanschauung* as a CIA analyst in 1962 is untroubled.

Previous looks at analytical errors prior to the Crisis stressed the proximate causes of scepticism noted above (i.e. the cry ‘wolf’ syndrome born of frequent incorrect reports). One can argue, however, that the attitude embodied in “The Pitfall of a Latin Quirk” and “Portrait of a Cuban Refugee”, (enabled in part by the Agency’s homogeneity), played the major supporting role. It is almost as if the analyst is ascribing child-like naiveté to the eyewitness, who in his “Latin tendency” to express “nebulous of ideas in extremely positive fashion

³⁴¹ Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, page 141. The incident is worth reporting in detail. Martin says, “On September 12, three days after the *Omsk* unloaded her mysterious cargo under cover of darkness, a forty-four-year-old Cuban accountant in a small town southwest of Havana looked up from his desk to see a large missile being towed through the streets. By coincidence, the accountant was wrestling with a problem that hinged on the dimensions of the property across the street. As the missile passed by, he was able to gauge its precise length. The accountant packed his bags and headed for Florida...On September 20, eight days after he had spotted the oversized missile outside his office window, the Cuban accountant reached the CIA’s refugee-debriefing center at Opalocka, Florida. The dimensions that he gave his interrogators exactly matched those of a Soviet medium range ballistic missile (MRBM). The interrogators, who had been listening to exiles tell of Soviet missiles in Cuba for more than a year, were doubtful. The accountant was shown photographs and drawings of all types of missiles from around the world. The pictures had all been reduced in size so that he would have to rely on characteristics other than length in attempting to identify the missile he had seen. Without hesitation, he pointed to a picture of the Soviet MRBM. The report was forwarded to Washington, where it was greeted with the same weary skepticism born of a thousand false missile sightings. “Doubt that this should be in metres, probably ought to be in feet,” one analyst noted on the margin of the report.” Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, page 140-1.

³⁴² Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, page 141. A recent outstanding article on evaluating human sources objectively is David A. Schum and Jon R. Morris, “Assessing the competence and credibility of human sources of intelligence evidence: contributions from law and probability,” *Law, Probability and Risk* 2007 6.1-4 (2007). Had many of the twenty-five questions that it poses of a theoretical source been asked in this case (under the rubric of methodology called MACE - Method for Assessing the Credibility of Evidence), the outcome would have been very different.

and describe dreams as if they were reality”³⁴³ has confused metric and Imperial units of measure. It is fair to wonder if an eye-witness report by, say, a Connecticut accountant named Williams or Johnson would have received the same marginal note.

In Chapter 3, we discussed the social mechanism of mirror-imaging the consumer as one of the ways that the identity and culture of the CIA shapes outcomes. For that reason, it is interesting to note here that similar sceptical or dismissive attitudes to Cubans – at least Cuban revolutionaries – prevailed among the *consumers* of the CIA’s intelligence in this period. According to Weldes, for instance, part of the reason that George Ball warned the President on the first day of the Crisis that Castro was “obviously erratic and foolish”³⁴⁴ was Castro’s ‘beardedness’. She says that the dictator’s beard was among the features which rendered what Ball called “Castro and his gang”³⁴⁵ instinctively unpalatable to middle-class Americans in the early 1960s, because (given the standards of acceptable physical appearance then prevalent), having a beard “connoted unkemptness which, in turn, indicated a desire to flout middle-class conventions. This lack of respect for conventional niceties, in turn, implied a lack of responsibility and an unwillingness to act in an accepted civilized fashion.”³⁴⁶ While we do not know precisely how CIA analysts in the early 1960s felt about Cuban grooming choices, a 1991 *Studies in Intelligence* article called “The In-Culture of the DO”, says clearly “No DO officer would be seen wearing a beard”.³⁴⁷ Certainly, no member of the NPIC analysis team of Brugioni’s *Eyeball to Eyeball* is anything except clean-shaven, crew-cut and at work in a necktie, as are the members of the US Intelligence Board shown.³⁴⁸ Being ‘clean-cut’ in CIA culture was a visual synecdoche for trustworthiness generally. This observation is completely in keeping with Allison and Zelikow’s point that Professionals try to distinguish the nature of their work from non-professionals

³⁴³ Gravalos, “Pitfall of a Latin Quirk.” pages 31-2.

³⁴⁴ In the RAND study prepared for the Kennedy Administration at about the same time, Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter concluded that “Castro was an unstable – which is to say, irrational – personality full of guile who could not be trusted”. See Abella, Soldiers of Reason: The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire, page 172.

³⁴⁵ See Abella, Soldiers of Reason: The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire, page 172.

³⁴⁶ Weldes, Constructing National Interests: the United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 183. On page 185, ironically, Castro is on record agreeing with Ball on this point, saying to a colleague who made light of shaving off his beard “You can’t do it. It’s a symbol of the revolution. It doesn’t belong to you. It belongs to the revolution.”

³⁴⁷ Charles G. Cogan, “The In-Culture of the DO,” Intelligence and National Security 8.1 (1993), page 81.

³⁴⁸ See Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball; both pictures are in the 47 photo insert between pages 368-9.

establishing norms of appropriate behaviour, even by their “style of dress and manner of speaking”³⁴⁹; what is of interest here is the possibility that unconscious assumptions about the professionalism of others get layered onto intelligence analysis as a result of those norms.

In a similar vein (as was pointed out in Chapter 3) we know that at the CIA “modern architecture with its dramatic departures from conventional design often plagues (sic) [photo] interpreters in their attempt to make identification.”³⁵⁰ External adherence to ‘convention’ in most realms was the norm at Langley, and likely had an impact on analysis. (Keep this idea in mind in the next case, when Scheuer says of bin Ladin: “They [i.e. CIA analysts] could not believe that this tall Saudi with a beard, squatting around a camp fire, could be a threat to the United States of America.”³⁵¹)

In short, several highly varied indicators point to the conclusion that a considerable cultural gap separated CIA analysts from both their Cuban revolutionary targets *and* from their Cuban informers (both agents and refugees). As before, we cannot say HUMINT was poorly analysed ‘because’ it was examined by a homogenously Anglo-Saxon population of analysts, but that factor is a clue pointing to ‘How possible?’ It is another element that forms a link between the Agency’s identity and culture and several strategic surprises.

“Knowing how much flesh the Soviets fed their troops”

While the examples above are symptomatic rather than decisive, there is certainly further evidence of analytical disdain for Cuban-supplied HUMINT’s contribution to this surprise.

³⁴⁹ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 155.

³⁵⁰ The article continues with a Cuban example: “A case in point occurred in Cuba when four odd structures were constructed atop the highest elevations of the Sierra Maestra mountains... these structures resembled large parabolic dish antennas. A missile or space satellite tracking role was postulated, but the necessary power plant and electrical transmission lines for such an installation could not be detected, and this facility was carried as unidentified for more than a year. Suspicion that it might be a military installation was heightened when a helicopter was observed at the site. Great was the surprise, therefore, when the Cubans, in a September 1963 issue of the periodical *Bohemia*, unveiled the installation as Castro’s Museum of the Revolution. Because of a lack of water at the hilltop location, the roofs of the buildings had been designed by the ‘revolutionary’ architect to trap rainwater and channel it to storage tanks.” Dino A. Brugioni, “The Unidentifieds,” Inside CIA’s Private World: Declassified Articles from the Agency’s Internal Journal 1955-1992, ed. H. Bradford Westerfield (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), page 15.

³⁵¹ Quoted in Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190.

Recall that the CIA's failures prior to the Crisis extended beyond merely the introduction of missiles, and included a dramatic under-estimation of the total number of Soviet personnel involved in Operation Anadyr. Until the 1990s, the CIA was adamant that the number of Soviet troops in Cuba did not exceed 15,000, when the actual number peaked at over 43,000.³⁵² Here again, we can find evidence in the Analysis phase that this error is traceable to a disregard for Cuban HUMINT.

A case in point is a CIA source who was a department head at the Cuban Ministry of Defense. This agent processed and approved all food requests for the Soviet contingent. Shackley says: "Within forty-eight hours of the time these requests landed on the official's desk, we [the CIA] had them in Miami."³⁵³ This agent reported that the most pressing requirement for the Soviets was for fresh meat and fish. By the summer of 1962, the Soviets were requisitioning fourteen thousand kilograms daily; by the fall of that year, the figure rose to between fifteen thousand and sixteen thousand kilograms. While the Cuban source was never told the number of troops for whom the requisitions were intended, he told the CIA that the Soviets were probably using a target about four hundred grams per day per man. If so, this would mean that the Soviets were requisitioning meat for more than forty thousand men.³⁵⁴

What did Langley make of this? Shackley says: "The first reaction from headquarters was a cautious comment that there was no way of knowing how much flesh the Soviets fed their troops."³⁵⁵ When Shackley's Miami station pushed back on the Langley analysts, the analysts never revised its estimate of a maximum of fifteen thousand Soviet troops, even after a 1947 Soviet Army manual was found that gave the recommended meat consumption of three hundred fifty to four hundred grams per man per day.³⁵⁶ Based on this example, it is again fair to infer that Langley's homogeneity was a high-level, surprise-enabling factor: the intellectual climate which published "Portrait of a Cuban Refugee" and "The Pitfall of a Latin Quirk" was inclined to disbelieve a department head at the Cuban Ministry of Defense even in his exact area of expertise.³⁵⁷

³⁵² Chang and Kornbluh, eds., The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: A National Security Archive Reader, page xi.

³⁵³ Shackley, Spymaster: My Life in the CIA, page 61.

³⁵⁴ Shackley, Spymaster: My Life in the CIA, page 61.

³⁵⁵ Shackley, Spymaster: My Life in the CIA, page 62.

³⁵⁶ Shackley, Spymaster: My Life in the CIA, pages 61-2.

³⁵⁷ One might counter that the analysts were cautious about the Cuban's motive -- perhaps (à la Wohlstetter: Wohlstetter, "Cuba and Pearl Harbor." page 699.) he was

“There were a lot of people that had their heads up their asses”

The pervasive discrediting of Cuban sources by analysts is only one cog in the wheel of understanding this strategic surprise. The main event was not necessarily what Cubans saw and reported, but what the Soviets did. Here we find not only the influence of the CIA's homogeneity, but also a role for the reification of reason and objectivity. (The two factors are obviously related: as Quiggin says, diversity is one clear answer to the problem of fixed views,³⁵⁸ such as reifying a 'scientific' viewpoint).

We should remind ourselves that we are not criticising CIA analysts for a single incorrect guess – a one-off judgement that the Soviets would not risk putting nuclear missiles in Cuba. Instead, we are trying to understand how it was possible that a 'knowable but unknown action of an adversary' was not discovered sooner,³⁵⁹ and how a stream of fundamental misjudgements about the scale, scope, and intention of the USSR in Cuba occurred (i.e. How a fundamentally erroneous threat assessment was made and sustained).

Laqueur frames the problem using the Cassandra of the case as a touchstone: “If McCone was able to make the leap from capability to intention,

inflating the figures to provoke the Americans into attacking Castro? If so, it seems incredible Langley would retain an agent thought to be systematically tripling troop numbers over a period of six months in the raw information that he passed to the Agency. One must be cautious about hindsight wisdom about any single source of information, but the point here is that Cuban HUMINT was likely more heavily discounted at the CIA given their attitudes to “Latin Quirks”, and that this attitude was partly enabled by a constant of the CIA's identity, its homogeneity. Quiggin generally supports this conclusion: “Knowledge is context dependent, and if the analysts involved do not have a sufficiently broad and diverse set of backgrounds, faint signals will be missed or their importance overlooked.” Quiggin, Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age, page 129. In Shackley's anecdote, we see this concept in action.

³⁵⁸ Quiggin, Seeing the Invisible: National Security Intelligence in an Uncertain Age, page 128.

³⁵⁹ Abbott Smith, in 1969 article in *Studies* called “On the Accuracy of National Intelligence Estimates” says “I think that a reader [of SNIE 85-3-62] might well have understood that it showed the Intelligence Community to be beset by the gravest doubts and concerns”, because “The text of that paper was obviously laboured, difficult, and inconclusive”. In fairness, as Smith notes, “Nowhere does the estimate declare even that the Soviets would 'probably' not” put missiles in Cuba. Nevertheless – as Smith finally concedes – in that estimate and others leading up to the Crisis, the Agency “conveyed an unmistakable impression that the Soviets would probably not do what they did.” He goes on “Sophisticated estimating indeed ought almost always to be something more than bald prediction... A good paper on a complicated subject should describe the trends and forces at work, identify the contingent factors or variables which might affect developments, and present a few alternative possibilities for the future, usually with some judgement as to the relative likelihood of one or another outcome.” By these standards, the CIA's work leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis shows that it fundamentally misjudged “the trends and forces at work” in Cuba. See Smith, “On the Accuracy of National Intelligence Estimates”, pages 29-30.

what prevented the CIA estimators from doing likewise?”³⁶⁰ His answer? “The primary reason seems to be that the estimators were inclined to foist American constructs about nuclear strategy on Soviet policy and to attribute American conceptions of rationality in policy making to the Soviet leadership.”³⁶¹

What we argue is that the roots of *how* such “foisting” and “attribution” of US “rationality” on the Soviets by US analysts was possible can be found in the properties of culture and identity of the Agency revealed in Chapter three – specifically, the reification of reason that pervaded the CIA.

Some of the best evidence for a contribution to this strategic surprise by the CIA’s obsession with an extremely narrow definition of reason comes from the reaction of analysts once the missiles were discovered. One theory analysts quickly advanced was that Soviet intelligence had fallen prey to a bad intelligence system, telling the top leaders only what they wanted to hear.³⁶² In the preface to the 1966 edition of his *Strategic Intelligence for America World Policy* Kent speculates, “perhaps one reason why the Soviet leaders got themselves into the fix they did (sic) with the missiles in Cuba was because some Soviet secret operative stole some secret documents which turned out to be the wrong documents.”³⁶³

At the time of the crisis, Kent used the more salty language for which he was famous:³⁶⁴ he said that for something like this to occur, at the Soviet embassy in Washington there must have been “a lot of people that had their heads up their asses to believe that the President and the nation would accept missiles in Cuba without doing something about it”.³⁶⁵

A few years later Kent expanded less colourfully on this sentiment: “I would like to suggest that if we were to study...more deeply we might discover that many a Soviet *misestimate and wrong-headed policy* is traceable to the peculiar way in which the Soviets regard the mission of their ambassadors and

³⁶⁰ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 168-9.

³⁶¹ Laqueur, *A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence*, page 168-9.

³⁶² Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 147. For a full and fascinating exploration of an actual instance where this was the case, i.e. Stalin’s intelligence apparatus on the eve of Barbarossa, see David E. Murphy, *What Stalin Knew: The Enigma of Barbarossa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

³⁶³ Sherman Kent, “Preface-1966,” *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), page xxiii.

³⁶⁴ Richard Helms says that Kent’s “salty tropes” reminded him of his days working in a newspaper office, saying “His assessment of a tin-pot dictator’s feckless efforts to tidy up his government as akin ‘to gathering piss with a rake’ is typical”. See Helms and Hood, *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency*, page 237.

³⁶⁵ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 247.

the role they assign to their intelligence service.”³⁶⁶ Under this argument, the Soviet action only *appeared* irrational, because Khrushchev would not have tried such a move if he had understood the ‘facts’ from intelligence and diplomatic reports.

Quite the opposite was true. According to Lacqueur, the official statements of Soviet foreign Minister Gromyko and Ambassador Dobrynin were specifically designed to reinforce the American assumption that the Soviet Union would act according to American canons of rationality; that approach would certainly have been in the best tradition of *maskirovka*.³⁶⁷

Dissecting “A Crucial Estimate Relived”

A companion to Kent’s ‘flawed intelligence’ theory (which embedded the assumption of a unitary Soviet actor)³⁶⁸, is the ‘aberrant faction’ theory. In “A Crucial Estimate Relived,” Kent wrote: “We relied as usual on our own Soviet experts. As normally, they did try to observe and reason like the Soviet leadership. *What they could not do was to work out the propositions of an aberrant faction of the leadership to the point of foreseeing that this faction’s view would have its temporary victory and subsequent defeat.*”³⁶⁹ In this view CIA analysts understood the Kremlin (and presumably Khrushchev himself), but some “anomalous faction” had “temporary ascendancy”, and that faction decided – irrationally – to put missiles in Cuba.³⁷⁰

In another part of this article (which as a whole is the opposite of a *mea culpa*), Kent employed language that reveals Chapter 3’s scientism starkly. He wrote: “Like any solid conceptual construction, the National Intelligence Estimate [about Cuba was] prepared in rough accordance with the procedures of the scientific method.”³⁷¹ Consider the language Kent employed as he continued:

As long as all the discernible constants in the equation are operative the estimator can be fairly confident of making a sound judgement. It is when these constants do not rule that the real trouble begins. It is when the other man zigs violently out of the track of "normal" behavior that you are likely to lose him. If you lack hard evidence of the prospective erratic tack and the zig is so

³⁶⁶ Kent, “A Crucial Estimate Relived.” page 18. Emphasis added.

³⁶⁷ Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 169.

³⁶⁸ See Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 30-2; such an assumption is at the heart of the classic “Rational Actor Model” that is Allison’s “Model I”.

³⁶⁹ Kent, “A Crucial Estimate Relived.” page 16. Emphasis added.

³⁷⁰ In effect, this is Allison’s Model III, that of Governmental Politics. See Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 255-8.

³⁷¹ Kent, “A Crucial Estimate Relived.” page 5.

far out of line as to seem to you to be suicidal, you will probably misestimate him every time. *No estimating process can be expected to divine exactly when the enemy is about to make a dramatically wrong decision.* 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 Khrushchev could make a mistake.*³⁷²

Considered through the lens of scientism, this passage largely speaks for itself. Kent was saying that this surprise arose not from the CIA's error, but because Khrushchev failed to compute properly the "discernible constants" in the "equation" which were "operative", and thus made a "dramatically wrong decision", a "mistake" that CIA analysts not possibly be have anticipated.

Here, the reification of reason blinded Kent and his analysts even after the fact to the basic point that the criteria used to determine the selection, categorisation, and corroboration of a foreign leader's choices cannot ultimately be detached from what Handel calls "ethnocentric biases, preconceived ideas and concepts, and wishful thinking".³⁷³ Intelligence analysts do not work with "discernable constants" that resemble those of physicists. As noted in the literature review's discussion of Allison's Model One (the Rational Actor Model), they always run the risk of either deception or circularity: If analysts rely on what actors say their preferences and interests are, they run the risk of being taken in by intentional deception. If analysts rely on what actors *do* to reveal their preferences and interests, they run the risk of circularity in their argument, because every action taken by an adversary, by definition, is in an actor's interests when interests are defined purely through actions.³⁷⁴ Kent here seems to have missed both of these points.

Khrushchev, for example, was aware that 'offensive' missiles would gravely alarm the US, but apparently he thought of his missiles as 'defensive' since they were few in number, intended to deter a US invasion of Cuba³⁷⁵ and because the US missiles cited above were aimed at *his* dacha.³⁷⁶ Kent used what Tetlock calls "The 'I made the right mistake' defense",³⁷⁷ but our knowledge

³⁷² Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." pages 17-8. Emphasis added.

³⁷³ Handel, "Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise." page 9.

³⁷⁴ After Kowert and Legro, "Norms, Identity and Their Limits, A Theoretical Reprise." page 484.

³⁷⁵ Matthias, America's Strategic Blunders, page 182.

³⁷⁶ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 264.

³⁷⁷ Tetlock, Expert Political Judgement: How Good Is It? How Can We Know? page 135.

of scientism pervading the culture of the CIA gives deeper context both to the analytical mistake made and such *ex post facto* rationalisations.

The same article considered the possibility that the Soviets misunderstood 'US resolve'. "With hindsight one may speculate," Kent wrote, "that during the winter and early spring of 1962, when the Soviets were making their big Cuba decisions, they examined the posture of the United States and thought they perceived a change in it. Is it possible that they viewed our acceptance of setbacks in Cuba (the Bay of Pigs), in Berlin (the Wall), and in Laos as evidence of a softening of US resolve?"³⁷⁸ Under this approach, the embedded assumption of CIA-style rationality in the Kremlin can be preserved, and the miscalculation can be assigned to Jervis-style misperception.³⁷⁹ With this fig leaf in place, Kent went on: "Their estimate of the US mood was wishfully nudged in this direction", and he thereby concluded: "Even in hindsight, it is extremely difficult for many of us to follow their inner logic or to blame ourselves for not having thought in parallel with them."³⁸⁰

Brugioni supports this point of view, saying that the consensus at the analytical meetings prior to issuing the SNIE was that the Soviets would realise that the deployment of an "offensive capability in the Western Hemisphere"³⁸¹ would provoke strong American intervention.³⁸² The contrary was the case, but an assumption by analysts that was never documented, challenged, or subjected to validation prior to the crisis was that the Soviets understood how angry Americans were over the Cuban revolution.³⁸³

Kent ended this article (a wonderful, if unintentional, illustration of what Tetlock calls "Belief System Defenses"³⁸⁴) on a revealing note. He wrote: "It is tempting to hope that some research and systematic re-interrogation of recent defectors, together with new requirements served on our own intelligence services [i.e. better Tasking and Collection], might turn up new insights into the Soviet process of decision making". He laments, however, "the odds are pretty strongly against it; and *yet the – to us – incredible wrongness of the Soviet decision to put the missiles into Cuba* all but compels an attempt to find out".³⁸⁵

³⁷⁸ Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 11.

³⁷⁹ Jervis, Perception and Misperception. *passim*.

³⁸⁰ Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 11.

³⁸¹ Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 146.

³⁸² Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 146.

³⁸³ Michael Douglas Smith, "The Perils of Analysis: Revisiting Sherman Kent's Defense of SNIE 85-3-62," Studies in Intelligence 51.3 (2007), page 31.

³⁸⁴ Tetlock, Expert Political Judgement: How Good Is It? How Can We Know? pages 129-37. Emphasis added.

³⁸⁵ Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 20.

The possibility that Khrushchev's move was anything but a massive logical error, a blunder, simply could not be contemplated in analytical culture of the CIA. Perhaps for this reason, one of the CIA's after-action reports on the Crisis was called "Cuba 1962: Khrushchev's Miscalculated Risk."³⁸⁶

In fact, as Handel points out, "There is no *rational* connection between the degree of risk on the one hand and the choice of strategy on the other. The temptation to choose a high-risk-high-gain strategy is always present."³⁸⁷

The unfamiliar versus the improbable

We have documented that the Soviet's past behaviour also weighed on the analytical process. The ultra-cautious Joseph Stalin had been dead less than ten years, and in many ways his foreign policy legacy seemed to continue. When CIA analysts examined how carefully the Soviet leadership had threaded its way through other passages of the Cold War,³⁸⁸ they found no parallel for such a daring move. As Kent says: "When we then asked ourselves would the Soviets undertake the great risks at the high odds – and in Cuba of all places – the indicator, the pattern of Soviet foreign policy, shouted out its negative".³⁸⁹

As Schelling dryly notes in the context of Pearl Harbor, however: "There is a tendency in our planning to confuse the unfamiliar with the improbable."³⁹⁰ Khrushchev's move was certainly unfamiliar, and also unprecedented; except for a few brigade or regiment-size amphibious assaults during World War II (tiny

³⁸⁶ CIA Office of Research and Reports "Cuba 1962: Khrushchev's Miscalculated Risk" EP SC 64-5 February 13, 1964. Mentioned in footnote 2 of Munson and Southard, "Two Witnesses for the Defense.". Smith, in a 2007 article in *Studies* entitled "The Perils of Analysis: Revisiting Sherman Kent's Defense of SNIE 85-3-62", agrees: "Kent and his colleagues do not appear to have examined their model of a Soviet decision maker, which was essentially a Russian-speaking Western rational actor who made choices with an understanding of US public opinion and pressures on our policymakers."³⁸⁶ Smith, "The Perils of Analysis: Revisiting Sherman Kent's Defense of SNIE 85-3-62." page 31; the SNIE is also well-covered in Gil Merom, "The 1962 Cuban Intelligence Estimate: A Methodological Perspective " Intelligence and National Security 14.3 (1999). Here we should not that Smith is continuing in a *Studies* article in the best tradition of what Kent intended, which is a thoughtful re-examination of errors in the interests of improving analysis – just as this dissertation as a whole attempts to be, despite the bruising of Kent's reputation that must inevitably occur. Kam makes the same point, saying that analysts assumed that the Soviets would regard missile deployment as a high-risk strategy, when in fact Soviet leaders evidently believed that it was "a calculable and controllable low-risk strategy." Kam, Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective, page 70.

³⁸⁷ Handel, "Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise." page 17. Emphasis in original.

³⁸⁸ Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 11.

³⁸⁹ Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 11.

³⁹⁰ Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, Foreword by Thomas C. Schelling, page vii.

compared to the American and British invasions of North Africa, Sicily, and Normandy), the Soviet military had only ever moved large numbers of troops by land.³⁹¹ Perhaps more significantly, the Soviets had also never moved nuclear weapons to another nation.

At the same time, instead of being minatory, aspects of the build-up were reassuring familiar to analysts at the CIA. The SA-2, for example, had previously been supplied as part of the pattern of progressively advanced conventional weapons build-ups in Egypt, Syria, and Indonesia.³⁹²

This reliance on precedent sheds light on other aspects of the intelligence failure, especially the judgement during the Crisis that no nuclear warheads were delivered. Shulsky relates how CIA photo interpreters used visual ‘signatures’ of nuclear installations in the Soviet Union to look for the warheads. In the USSR, these included extensive and elaborate security measures. We now know that the warheads were stored in rather innocuous-looking vans, and CIA analysts, seeing no special security or activity around the vans, left them unidentified or categorized them generically as missile-support vehicles.³⁹³ This example shows how even after evidence of a massive paradigm shift in Soviet behaviour, vital assumptions went unquestioned by Agency analysts.

We return to Schelling’s point, however: the unfamiliar is not the same as the irrational.³⁹⁴ As Smith points out, even after the fact Kent and his analysts were oblivious to the possibility that it was not the Soviet decision-making process that was opaque and misleading, but the inability of CIA experts to

³⁹¹ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 9.

³⁹² Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball, page 99.

³⁹³ Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence, page 51. This is an interesting departure by the Soviets from Allison’s Model II, Organisational behaviour, which in other ways so tripped up the USSR’s effort. See Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 143-96. On the other hand, Allison says ultimately: “The missiles sites were constructed in the configuration that was standard in the Soviet Union...At a White House meeting on the evening of October 16, the intelligence briefer explained that they could spot the launchers, in part, because “they have a four-in-line deployment pattern...which is identical to...representative of the deployments that we note in the Soviet Union for similar missiles.” See Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 109. In short, reliance on some precedents of Soviet behaviour sometimes contributed to the ultimate detection of the missiles, and at other times helped prevent it.

³⁹⁴ See also the discussion of the unfamiliar versus the improbable in Paul Dragos Aligica and Kenneth R. Weinstein, eds., The Essential Herman Kahn: In Defense of Thinking (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2009), Chapter 12, “The Objectives of Future-Oriented Policy Research.”

recognise a radical change in their field.³⁹⁵ This conclusion is reinforced by our knowledge that the ‘non-expert’ McCone was able to detect what was unprecedented about the Cuban situation. After the Crisis, he wrote:

The majority opinion in the Intelligence Community, as well as at State and Defense, was that this would be so out of character with the Soviets that they would not do so. They had never placed an offensive missile in any satellite area. *I pointed out that Cuba was the only piece of real estate that they had indirect control of where a missile could reach Washington or New York and not reach Moscow. So the situation was somewhat different.*³⁹⁶

In other words, we have a classic case in which a Cassandra – somewhat in the mode of Thomas Kuhn's figure whose breakthrough is explained partly by being on the edge of a discipline³⁹⁷ – used purely deductive logic,³⁹⁸ rather than pre-digested views of Soviet behaviour, along with reason unclouded by scientism, to arrive at an accurate view of Soviet intentions.

“Men who are born poor are always like that”

Other of McCone's remarks reveal this interplay between his status as a heterodox outsider and his ability to transcend the CIA's reification of reason to divine possible Soviet intentions. According to one witness, on 21 August McCone said:

I had to put myself in Khrushchev's shoes. And adopting Khrushchev's mental attitudes, I would have to believe that what my intelligence officers were telling me and what the leaders in the United States were saying about our relative military strengths was true. Khrushchev is no fool. He's a conniving but very pragmatic man. *Men who are born poor are always like that...*If I were Khrushchev, I would put MRBMs in Cuba and I would aim several

³⁹⁵ Smith, "The Perils of Analysis: Revisiting Sherman Kent's Defense of SNIE 85-3-62." page 31.

³⁹⁶ Quoted in Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 146. Emphasis added.

³⁹⁷ See Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, page 85. For an outstanding general introduction to a "Kuhnian" view of intelligence analysis, see Seliktar, *Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran*. and Seliktar, *Politics, Paradigms, and Intelligence Failures: Why So Few Predicted the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. These two volumes, because they deal with the two mysteries of the previous two cases, are extensively cited above, though Seliktar does not deal with strategic surprise *per se*, and does not deal with intelligence failures or surprises rooted in secrets, but rather mysteries like the Iranian Revolution and the collapse of the USSR. But NB: Kuhn makes the point that anomalies appear "*only against the background provided by the paradigm*" (Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, page 65) and this is clearly not the case with McCone's insight – the conventional view of likely Soviet behaviour is why we notice his observation, but it is not why McCone made it. Thus, the Kuhnian paradigm is illuminating but not definitive in this instance.

³⁹⁸ Fursenko and Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964*, page 199.

at Washington and New York and then I would say, 'Mr. President, *how would you like looking down the barrels of a shotgun for a while.* Now let's talk about Berlin. Later, we'll bargain about your overseas bases...That's the kind of situation that we can be faced with in the future, and we had better do some planning for it.³⁹⁹

Note two things about this passage. First, one can detect the understanding of one self-made man for the thought-processes of another when McCone refers to the consistent behaviour of men who are "born poor" (Khrushchev was a coal miner and the son of a miner before the Revolution⁴⁰⁰).

Second, when McCone reveals empathy with Khrushchev's personal resentment⁴⁰¹ of US missiles in Turkey when he hypothetically asks the President to imagine himself looking down the barrels of a shotgun. In other words, aspects of McCone's biography appear to have informed the successful thought experiment that allowed him to anticipate Khrushchev plan. In addition, Khrushchev was not necessarily 'eccentric' in his view of Cuba as an opportunity: a few months before McCone's insight, Yuri Andropov (then an advisor to Khrushchev) told him that Cuba was a way to take missiles and "to sight them at the soft underbelly of the Americans".⁴⁰²

No matter what his early background, had McCone been long immersed in the culture and identity of the CIA, he may not have been as insightful. His apparent empathy with Khrushchev is in sharp contrast to Kent's terse dismissal of the idea that analysts failed to put themselves in Khrushchev shoes in their estimates of Soviet intentions in Cuba.⁴⁰³

From such evidence, it is easy to argue that the dual factors of the analytical staff's homogeneity and its reification of reason allowed the formation of mental blocks that substantially contributed to the strategic surprise known as

³⁹⁹ Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 96-7. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰⁰ See Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, pages 12-24.

⁴⁰¹ Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, page 268.

⁴⁰² Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, page 98.

⁴⁰³ An obviously stung Kent said: "Some of our critics have suggested that we could have avoided the error if we had done a better job of putting ourselves in the place of the Soviet leadership – that if we had only looked out on the world scene with their eyes and thought about it the way they did we would not have misread indicators and all would have been clear.... As such statements are made, I must confess to a quickening of pulse and a rise in temperature. I have wondered if such people appear before pastry cooks to tell them how useful they will find something called 'wheat flour' in their trade." Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 15. Kent also describes a so-called "Red Team exercise" (in which a group of people are set apart from the rest of the analytical effort and tried to simulate enemy thinking) as "a new high in human fatuity", concluding: "Of course we did not go in for this sort of thing [prior to the Crisis]" Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 16. Any departure from a reified version of reason seems anathema to Kent.

the Cuban Missile Crisis. An analytical staff with a self-conscious commitment to the ‘scientific method’, that speaks of “discernible constants in the equation”, is unlikely to anticipate in a timely fashion the moves of an adversary whose members “[f]eel like boys again”⁴⁰⁴ as a result of the Cuban revolution, or who sees US missiles “aimed at *my dacha*”.⁴⁰⁵ They may abstractly assess the risks involved in an initiative to place missiles in Cuba, but they will be prone to underestimate their adversary’s willingness to “up the ante”.⁴⁰⁶

We have clear evidence, on the other hand, that John McCone, familiar with exactly the same facts but a stranger to this culture, successfully made that analytical leap. As the French polymath Paul Valéry once remarked: “There is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography.”⁴⁰⁷

“The Logic of Crazyiness”

There is one final piece of evidence that Langley’s analytical staff – immersed as they were in American constructs about ‘rational’ nuclear strategy⁴⁰⁸ and in the thrall of scientism – inappropriately and unconsciously attributed American conceptions of rationality to the Soviet leadership. This evidence is found in analysts’ failure to consider what Betts calls “The Logic of Crazyiness”⁴⁰⁹. By this phrase, Betts means to underline that ‘rational’ strategy does not mean ‘good’ strategy, but simply that means are logically consistent with ends: “If surprise suffices to unbalance the defender long enough for the

⁴⁰⁴ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 181.

⁴⁰⁵ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 264. Emphasis original.

⁴⁰⁶ James J. Wirtz, “Miscalculation, Surprise, and U.S. Intelligence,” Studies in Intelligence. Special November 2002 Issue (2002), page 85.

⁴⁰⁷ Cited in Susan A. Crane, “(Not) Writing History: Rethinking the Intersections of Personal History and Collective Memory with Hans Von Aufsess,” History and Memory 8 (1996), page 5.

⁴⁰⁸ Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 168-9. It is also interesting to note here the connection with Chapter 3’s discussion of the employment of chess as an inappropriate metaphor for intelligence analysis. One of the primary architects of US nuclear theory and a co-developer of Game Theory, John von Neumann, focused his analysis of nuclear strategy on *games of perfect information*, chess among them. This is odd, because apparently in his private life he preferred *Kriegsspiel*, a nineteenth-century German version of chess in which neither player can see the other’s pieces (and that requires a third party to act as a referee). See Daniel Johnson, White King and Red Queen: How the Cold War was Fought on the Chessboard (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), page 210. See also <http://www.chessvariants.com/incinf.dir/kriegsspiel.html>. It would appear as if as soon as the U-2 began flying, the CIA thought it was playing chess when it was still playing *Kriegsspiel*.

⁴⁰⁹ Betts, Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning, page 128-30.

attacker to grab the objective, then paradoxically high risk is actually low risk”.⁴¹⁰ Another way of saying this is that CIA analysts failed to appreciate what Luttwak describes as “The Strategic Paradox”,⁴¹¹ the fact that it is frequently advantageous in strategy, especially military and diplomatic strategy, for one’s enemy to do consciously the unexpected, seemingly irrational, or more difficult thing.

Under this argument, analysts working in a homogenous atmosphere and with a powerful, narrow and superficial obsession with reason failed to appreciate the intensity of Khrushchev’s desire to find a quick way to escape the ‘Missile Gap’.⁴¹² They developed an erroneous threat assessment that failed to predict the emplacement of missiles in Cuba in 1962. We saw above, moreover, that failure to consider possibilities in the Analysis phase fed into both Tasking and Collection efforts, in turn ensuring that the Soviet effort remained secret long after it was ‘discoverable’.

⁴¹⁰ Betts, Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning, page 129.

⁴¹¹ Examined extensively in Edward N. Luttwak, Strategy: the Logic of War and Peace (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

⁴¹² Betts, Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning, page 129.

“Success depended on effecting a *fait accompli*”

In “A Crucial Estimate Relived,” Kent offers no evidence that ‘The Logic of Craziness’ was considered by analysts. We know, however, that it figured in the thinking of the Soviets. Gaddis confirms that on 18 October (two days after Kennedy had learned of the presence of the missiles, but before he said anything publicly) Foreign Minister Gromyko assured Khrushchev that “the very unexpectedness – even irrationality – of Moscow’s commitment [of missiles to Cuba] would make it work.”⁴¹³

Note that ‘The Logic of Craziness’ contains a time factor: the surprise has only “to unbalance the defender *long enough* for the attacker to grab the objective”.⁴¹⁴ Allison provides more evidence of the restricted rationality of analytical staff in this regard. He says that the CIA analytical staff opposing McCone “just did not believe that a sensible Soviet government would accept the extraordinary risk such a venture entailed. Specifically, the initiative’s success depended on effecting a *fait accompli* without discovery.”⁴¹⁵

We know, in fact, that Khrushchev *was counting on this time factor*.⁴¹⁶ Fursenko reports that even after the jungle’s presumptive failure to mask the missiles from the U-2 became known, Khrushchev “clung to the thesis that the U.S would not detect the missiles until it was too late to do anything about them.”⁴¹⁷ In other words, Khrushchev saw a way around the possibility of provoking US military intervention that was not considered by the analysts, namely, presenting the US with a *fait accompli*.⁴¹⁸ As Smith notes: “A key

⁴¹³ Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History, page 263.

⁴¹⁴ Betts, Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning, page 129. Emphasis added.

⁴¹⁵ Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, pages 95-6.

⁴¹⁶ It appears that his plan was to announce his “deterrent” to Kennedy only after the November mid-term elections in the United States. Zubok says: “Even if there were tremendous pressure on Kennedy to do something, Khrushchev reasoned, the president had enough common sense to be daunted by the threat of nuclear war over Cuba.” Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev, page 265.

⁴¹⁷ Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, pages 191-2. The Soviet’s chief military representative in Cuba, Major General A. A. Dementyev raised the issue of detection by U-2s with Rodion Malinovsky, the Soviet Defense Minister, before the Presidium conditionally approved the plan. “It will be impossible to hide these missiles from American U-2s”, he warned. The comment not only provoked an angry verbal response from the Minister, but according to Alekseev, who was sitting nearby, the defence minister actually kicked Dementyev under the table to register his disapproval. See Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964, pages 191-2; for more on how much the Russians knew about the U-2, see Orlov, “The U-2 Program: A Russian Officer Remembers”.

⁴¹⁸ Some even maintain that Raul Castro suggested that Khrushchev “make a public announcement that the Soviet Union was shipping missiles to Cuba” so that the US

assumption of the drafters was off kilter.”⁴¹⁹ They were assuming perfect information arriving at Langley in ‘real time’, which we know from our examination of Collection above, was a deeply flawed assumption.

Here, we find a connection with Chapter 3’s discussion of the employment of chess as a frequent but an inappropriate metaphor for intelligence analysis. One of the primary architects of US nuclear theory and a co-developer of Game Theory, John von Neumann, focused his analysis of nuclear strategy on games of perfect information, chess among them. This is odd, because apparently in his private life he preferred *Kriegsspiel*, a nineteenth-century German version of chess in which neither player can see the other’s pieces (and that requires a third party to act as a referee).⁴²⁰ In effect, before the Cuban Missile Crisis, it seems as if as U-2 flights over the USSR made the CIA think it was playing chess (Cf. Kent’s “Holy miracle” comment above), when it was actually still playing *Kriegsspiel*.⁴²¹ Another way of saying this is that while the CIA was playing chess,⁴²² Khrushchev was playing a game of strategy, but not pure reason: poker.⁴²³

As before, we see that the culture and identity of the CIA (specifically their reification of a narrow form of reason), hindered the Agency’s understanding of the fact that there is no rational connection between the degree of risk on the one hand and the choice of strategy on the other.⁴²⁴ In the CIA’s culture and identity, we find a path to understand how the crucial SNIE

would not overreact to their discovery or unveiling, but Khrushchev rejected the suggestion. Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1993), page 398-9.

⁴¹⁹ Smith, “The Perils of Analysis: Revisiting Sherman Kent’s Defense of SNIE 85-3-62.” page 30.

⁴²⁰ See Johnson, White King and Red Queen: How the Cold War was Fought on the Chessboard, page 210. See also <http://www.chessvariants.com/incinf.dir/kriegspiel.html>

⁴²¹ This analogy also highlights the difference between a secret and the previous chapter’s mysteries. As Sick says about the overthrow of the Shah: “In its inchoate appeal to social destruction and its incalculable effects, the revolution was no nicely plotted move on the international chessboard. On the contrary, it was the fury of the player who smashes his fist into the board and showers the pieces about the room in an emotional demand for a fresh board, new players and a radically restructured rulebook.” See Sick, All Fall Down: America’s Tragic Encounter With Iran, page 45.

⁴²² It is fair to add the adjective “basic” here because in basic chess, the pieces have constant values – pawns are always “1”, while knights are always worth “3” – one of the things that makes programming a chess computer (or playing good chess) so complex, however, is that the value of the pieces actually change depending in their *position* on the board, just as the value of a few well placed missiles could at a stroke have closed the “Missile Gap” for Khrushchev.

⁴²³ For more on poker as a game of imperfect information and its relation to strategy in business and military matters, see John McDonald, Strategy in Poker, Business & War (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996).

⁴²⁴ Handel, “Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise.” page 17.

and other CIA estimates came to state that “the Soviets would not do anything so uncharacteristic, provocative and unrewarding”⁴²⁵ as placing nuclear weapons in Cuba.⁴²⁶

Close consideration of the Analysis phase thus reveals that the main culprit of CIA culture and identity contributing to strategic surprise were a decided emphasis on scientism and/or the reification of reason and objectivity. During the Production and Dissemination phases, we can see contributions of a different component of CIA identity and culture: the drive for consensus. In concert with other factors, the drive for consensus further altered the balance of probability away from a likelihood of quick discovery of Khrushchev's plan.

Production and Dissemination

To see the phenomenon of the drive for consensus at work, let us briefly review how NIEs – including the crucial Special NIE that distilled the fatal Cuba opinion – were created. Kent described the process thus:

When time allows (and it did in the case of the Cuba estimate) the process is fairly complicated; it involves a lot of thought and planning at the outset, a lot of research and writing in the intelligence research organisations of the military and the State Department, a drafting by the ablest staff in the business, and a painstaking series of interagency meetings devoted to review and coordination. Before it gets the final USIB imprimatur a full-dress

⁴²⁵ SNIE 85-3-62 “The Military Buildup in Cuba”, cited in Laqueur, A World of Secrets: Uses and Limits of Intelligence, page 81. The full text of this SNIE has still not been declassified, just the summary pages are available. These thoughts are certainly consistent with the message of the SNIE's summary, which also shares some of the same vocabulary, especially paragraph D of the summary, referring to still-classified SNIE paragraphs 29-33, available in McAuliffe, CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962, pages 91-3.

⁴²⁶ Just how enduring the reification of reason is at the CIA can be judged by the fact that as late as 1989, some senior CIA analysts maintained that it was the Kremlin, not the CIA, who had “erred” by “ignoring the dangers of such a risky undertaking.”⁴²⁶ Brugioni makes that assumption in 1991, writing, “Intelligence officers were confident that the Soviets would not be that irrational.” Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball*, page 127. Emphasis added. Even after 9/11, the lesson has not been learned: a CIA analyst present during the Crisis writes in a 2002 handbook *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning* the sensible cautions that “before we conclude that some other nation is acting ‘irrationally’...we should carefully examine our own attitudes and make sure we are not rejecting such action as illogical because we either do not fully appreciate how strongly the other country feels about it”. Amazingly, however, the analyst-author then goes on to say: “But there still remain those cases, like Cuba in 1962, that are not logical and do not meet objective criteria for rational action.” Grabo, *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*, page 102. Emphasis added. Clearly, even recently, the CIA's culture did not easily digest the notion that there is no absolute yardstick for judging what constitutes a “rational” strategic move, or even Handel's more basic warning above: “that which is considered a high risk in one culture may be acceptable in another.” Handel, “Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise.” page 15. Even faced with 9/11, the CIA continued to extol scientism and a reified brand of reason.

NIE goes down an assembly line of eight or more stations. At each it is supposed to receive (and almost always does) the attention of a highly knowledgeable group. The Cuba estimate passed through all these stations.⁴²⁷

This quotation crisply reveals the CIA culture's passion for consensus is reinforced by a powerful series of processes that make compromise – a softening of judgements and opinions – almost inevitable. It highlights how unlikely it would be for any dissenting analyst's – or even a dissenting DCI's – views to become part of the CIA's intelligence 'product'.

That is exactly what occurred. McCone read the finished SNIE on 19 September, and immediately cabled back on 20 September suggesting a "most careful consideration of the conclusion that introduction of offensive missiles was unlikely."⁴²⁸ From the Agency's review after the Crisis, we know that "this paragraph, paragraph one of [McCone's] cable, was immediately passed to the DD/I."⁴²⁹ The report then reveals: "However, no change was made to the estimate. *It had already been endorsed by the Intelligence Community and released.*"⁴³⁰ In other words, the logic of McCone's argument was over-ridden by Langley's culture and machinery of consensus. Once consensus was reached, it could not be contravened, even by the DCI.

Anyone who has worked in any large organisation would find this conclusion unsurprising (especially after reading Kent's NIE creation process above); here we can simply note another data point confirming that the drive for consensus contributed to strategic surprise, in this case by hobbling the arguments of a perspicacious Cassandra.

⁴²⁷ Kent, "A Crucial Estimate Relived." page 4.

⁴²⁸ Declassified CIA memo, No date, by Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, "Memorandum for the Director, Action Generated by DCI Cables Concerning Cuban Low-Level Photography and Offensive Weapons", page 6; found in McAuliffe, CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962, page 44.

⁴²⁹ Declassified CIA memo, No date, by Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, "Memorandum for the Director, Action Generated by DCI Cables Concerning Cuban Low-Level Photography and Offensive Weapons", page 6; found in McAuliffe, CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962, page 44.

⁴³⁰ McAuliffe, CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis 1962, page 44. Emphasis added.

Case Summary

One cannot argue with Gribkov's conclusion that "however else the events of 1962 are judged, they gave conclusive proof that the USSR could, in the jargon of strategists, project power farther and faster than its friends or rivals had imagined".⁴³¹

This case has examined why one rival of the USSR – the CIA – did not imagine such a projection of Soviet power. In Part I, we examined a time line of events leading up to the Crisis in order to provide context for the discussions that followed. Next, because some scholarly and most popular literature positions the Cuban Missile Crisis as a triumph for the CIA we reviewed evidence confirming that the Crisis was a strategic surprise.

In Part II we employed the prism of intelligence cycle to understand how features of the culture and identity of the CIA contributed to this strategic surprise. Why, in the words of the Stennis Report, was there a "predisposition at the CIA to the conviction that it would be incompatible with Soviet policy to introduce strategic missiles into Cuba"?⁴³² Why were "indications to the contrary" of what the CIA expected not "given proper weight"?⁴³³ Why was there a tendency "to discredit and downgrade the reports of Cuban refugees and exiles"?⁴³⁴ As the PFIAB Report on the Crisis said, the President was "ill served"⁴³⁵ by the CIA, which had "failed to get across to key government officials the most accurate possible picture" of Soviet activity;⁴³⁶ we sought to see how this was possible.

In answer to all these questions, we saw how in Tasking, Collection, Analysis, and Production and Dissemination, the CIA's culture and identity played a key enabling role. Repeatedly, the CIA's homogeneity, concentration on narrowly defined reason and scientism, over-emphasis on secret versus openly-obtained information, and a drive for consensus obscured clues that might have allowed the Agency to discern Soviet actions earlier.

In so doing, essential elements of the USSR's secrecy and deception measures were looked at, along with the collection mechanisms that had the

⁴³¹ Gribkov and Smith, Operation ANADYR: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 17.

⁴³² Stennis, Investigation of the Preparedness Program, Interim Report on the Cuban Military Buildup by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, page 2.

⁴³³ Stennis, Investigation of the Preparedness Program, Interim Report on the Cuban Military Buildup by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, page 11.

⁴³⁴ Stennis, Investigation of the Preparedness Program, Interim Report on the Cuban Military Buildup by the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, pages 5 and 10.

⁴³⁵ Quoted in Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 196.

⁴³⁶ Quoted in Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 196.

raw capability to have nipped the Crisis in the bud, or to have prevented it all together. This section also provided more context to the case as a whole, and to the mechanics of intelligence activities. The perspective of the Cassandra of the case, John McCone, was used to contrast how an outsider in this culture was capable of formulating a correct hypothesis far earlier than the rest of the Agency.

In the next section, this Chapter concludes with another eminently 'knowable' plot that a profoundly erroneous threat assessment hid: al-Qa'ida's 9/11 attacks. Once again, a Cassandra inside the CIA brings out the fundamental contribution of the Agency's identity and culture to this strategic surprise. As in the previous three cases, we again find that the origin of the strategic surprise of 9/11 can be traced to Langley's internal identity and culture's role in shaping the precursor conditions to surprise.

Case IV: The Terrorist Attacks of September 11th, 2001

Introduction

The final case study addresses the greatest debacle in the history of the CIA: the suicide attacks carried out by al-Qa'ida on September 11, 2001 in the United States.¹

We will not explore in detail the tactical aspects of the attacks, nor their aftermath. Here, we simply remind ourselves of the consequences by noting that a leading authority on strategic surprise called 9/11 "a second Pearl Harbor for the United States."² Their human cost actually exceeded that of the Japanese attack by a factor of two, and their economic cost was a huge multiple of it.³ To make matters worse, as CIA veteran Melvin Goodman pointed out, in 1941 the United States did not have a 'Director of Central Intelligence' and a CIA charged to provide early warning of an enemy attack, thirteen other intelligence agencies, or a combined intelligence budget of more than \$30 billion.⁴ We should also recall that the damage would have been far worse had heroic airline passengers not stopped - at the cost of their lives - 25 percent of the attacking force.⁵

As in the three preceding cases, this case sets out to establish the relationship between the strategic surprise of 9/11, specific malfunctions in each stage of the intelligence cycle prior to the attacks, and aspects of Langley's identity and culture. It links these aspects to an across-the-board failure in the Analysis stage of the intelligence cycle. As we have seen in previous cases, elements of the Agency's identity and culture also feed into failures through the entire intelligence cycle, and exert an especially powerful influence during the Tasking and Collection stages.

In comparison to the last two cases discussed, this chapter is relatively short. This brevity is the result of two source-related causes. First, much material related to the 9/11 attacks remains classified. This case draws heavily

¹ Russell, Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right, page 71.

² Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, page 104.

³ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page xv.

⁴ Melvin A. Goodman, "9/11: The Failure of Strategic Intelligence," Intelligence and National Security 18.4 (2003), page 59.

⁵ At Pear Harbor, the US military only managed to down 8 percent of the attacking force. See James J. Wirtz, "Déjà Vu? Comparing Pearl Harbor and September 11," Secret Intelligence: A Reader, eds. Christopher Andrew, Richard J. Aldrich and Wesley K. Wark (London: Routledge, 2009), page 191.

upon the so-called *9/11 Commission Report*, but even for the ten Commissioners the process of declassification was apparently neither complete⁶ nor (allegedly), balanced.⁷ The members of the Commission, for example, were not permitted to interview any detainees in US custody who may have participated in the attacks.⁸ In addition, a large body of material related to the attacks was discovered by the NSA too late for the 9/11 Commission to consider, all of which remains classified.⁹ The CIA's internal report by its Inspector General – the June, 2005 *OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks*, totalling several hundred pages – also remains classified. Fortunately, at the insistence of Congress, its summary pages, lightly redacted, have been released.¹⁰ The earliest official report on the attacks by the US Government – *The Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001*¹¹ – was conducted by thirty-eight politicians¹² and released in the run-up to the November 2002 midterm elections.¹³ It is a sprawling, 858-page, heavily redacted muddle,¹⁴ and is drawn upon only lightly here.

Even those most critical of the *9/11 Commission Report* concede that its pre-attack historical sections (as opposed to its recommendations) are “detailed, precise, and exceptionally well done”.¹⁵ The Commission did, after all, have far more time than the Joint Inquiry, a \$15 million budget, the power of subpoena, access to much classified information (with some de facto power of declassification), the chance to interview all senior policymakers (including Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush), and more than eighty staff.¹⁶ Nevertheless, because there has been cogent and detailed criticism of both the

⁶ See Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton, *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Commission* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2007), *passim*.

⁷ Shenon, *The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation*, pages 73-6.

⁸ Robert Windrem and Victor Limjoco, "9/11 Commission Controversy," *Deep Background: NBC News Investigates* 2008.

⁹ Shenon, *The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation*, pages 370-3.

¹⁰ Mark Mazzetti, "CIA Lays Out Errors It Made Before Sept. 11," *The New York Times* August 22 2007, page A1.

¹¹ "Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," ed. United States Congress (US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and US House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Together with Additional Views, 2002.

¹² Twenty Republicans and eighteen Democrats.

¹³ For general background on the report see Snider, *The Agency and the Hill: CIA's Relationship with Congress, 1946–2004*, page 73.

¹⁴ Falkenrath, "The 9/11 Commission Report: A Review Essay." page 172.

¹⁵ Falkenrath, "The 9/11 Commission Report: A Review Essay." pages 174-5.

¹⁶ Falkenrath, "The 9/11 Commission Report: A Review Essay." pages 174-5.

process¹⁷ and the content¹⁸ of the *9/11 Commission Report*, wherever possible this case also draws upon the CIA's internal critique, the *OIG Report*.

The second reason that this case is relatively short is that there are few memoirs and first person accounts by participants in these events, especially by CIA personnel. There are notable exceptions to this generalization – in fact, the Cassandra of this case, Michael Scheuer – but compared to the cases above such sources are scarce. Similarly, serious scholarship by political scientists and IR theorists about the attacks remains relatively limited, though much that exists is used in this thesis.

In the wider world, a veritable flood of instant books and articles have been released about 9/11, al-Qa'ida and the CIA. As the former head of the bin Ladin Unit of the CIA says, however, looking into this literature you find yourself “harrowingly ensnarled in material that is overwhelmingly secondary, translated with varying degrees of accuracy, and sensationalized or embellished by the need to sell copies or by the sloth of those doing insufficient research”.¹⁹ Huge amounts of finger-pointing journalism and some serious scholarship have also focused on tactical “missed chances”²⁰ to stop the al-Qa'ida hijackers prior to 9/11. These works have generated anecdotes that are interesting but which are not particularly useful for understanding the root causes of this debacle.

Then, there are the conspiracy theories. There was a conspiracy behind the September 11th attacks: a conspiracy by Usama bin Ladin and al-Qa'ida members to attack the United States (in the same way that there was a ‘conspiracy’²¹ by the USSR to place missiles in Cuba in the previous case).

¹⁷ See, for example, Shenon, *The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation*, *passim*.

¹⁸ See, for example, Pillar, “Good literature and bad history: The 9/11 commission's tale of strategic intelligence.”, *passim*.

¹⁹ Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America*, page 315.

²⁰ Zegart does a wonderful job cataloguing eleven of these tactical missed opportunities for the CIA alone starting in January, 2000 and ending in August 2001. See Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11*, pages 115-19. Similarly, the FBI's parallel twelve tactical missed opportunities to stop the plot are discussed in Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11*, pages 156-68.

²¹ As noted above, in place of both ‘analysis’ and ‘tradecraft’, Russian uses the word ‘conspiracy’. See Richard Helms and William Hood, *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Ballantine, 2003), page 115. Kent makes a similar observation in a footnote of *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, and expands on it: “The Communists – most notably the Soviets – use the word [‘intelligence’] in a more restricted and quite different sense. To begin with, the expression ‘overt intelligence’ is to them pretty much a contradiction in terms. All intelligence work and intelligence (the resulting knowledge) is to them highly secret. It is almost wholly espionage, counterespionage, and the fruits thereof... If in fact the Soviets engage in what we in the West call ‘intelligence research and analysis’ they have

There are also certainly unanswered questions about these attacks and about al-Qa'ida's previous activities.²²

Thanks to a predilection for baroque conspiracy theories in both the US and the Middle East,²³ however, there is a rich seam of work spinning mind-numbingly elaborate alternative explanations for 9/11. Such 'literature' ranges from books by self-appointed 'terrorism experts' to sensationalist Pakistani tabloids.²⁴ Occam's razor²⁵ was applied to all such speculation, however, and no such 'sources' are used below.

The three previous cases proceeded in two Parts: Part I reviewed evidence of the failure, offering appreciation for the complexity and historical nuances involved in each surprise, touching upon alternative explanations and 'extenuating circumstances'. Part II then used the prism of intelligence cycle to understand how properties of the culture and identity of the CIA contributed to

another name for it and a name bereft of the cachet of 'intelligence'. It is seemingly inconceivable to them that large numbers of people will be quite overtly engaged in something known as intelligence work, able to inform all and sundry that this is in fact their calling, and obliged to guard with secrecy only those matters having to do with sources, methods and foci of their attention, and the content of their findings." See Kent, Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy, page xiii fn.

²² Especially intriguing in this web of questions and possibilities is the evidence that Terry Nichols – accomplice of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh – had contact with a Kuwait-born Pakistani citizen named Abdul Basit (aka Ramzi Yousef) or Khalid Sheik Muhammad on Cebu (and island in the Philippines, where Nichols wife originated) when Nicholas visited the island in the 1990s. According to a responsible source – former National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection and Counterterrorism Richard A. Clarke – we know that Nichols, Yousef, and Muhammad were on Cebu at the same time, and we know Yousef and Muhammad were there helping create the local Al-Qa'ida affiliate, Abu Sayaff (named for a hero of the Afghan war against the Soviets). Clarke reports: "We do know that Nichols's bombs did not work before his Philippine stay and were deadly when he returned. We also know that Nichols continued to call Cebu long after his wife returned to the United States. The final coincidence is that several al Qaeda operatives had attended a radical Islamic conference a few years earlier in, of all places, Oklahoma City." See: Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 127.

²³ Scholars have long argued that both the Middle East and the United States have been unusually prone to conspiratorial explanations of dramatic events. For a cogent look at why this is so in the Middle East, see Daniel Pipes, The Hidden Hand: Middle East Fears of Conspiracy (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996); for why the US suffers from a parallel malady, see Richard Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), and Robert Alan Goldberg, Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); for Goldberg's specific look at 9/11 conspiracies, see: Goldberg, "Who Profited from the Crime?; Intelligence Failure, Conspiracy Theories and the Case of September 11."

²⁴ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 315.

²⁵ Otherwise known as the 'Law of Parsimony', it states that assumptions introduced to explain a phenomenon should not be multiplied unnecessarily, and therefore, all other things being equal, the simplest of competing explanations is the one most likely to be true.

each strategic surprise (an approach that often leaves room to mention other, proximate, explanations).

In this abbreviated case, we proceed directly to the intelligence cycle, and consider the interaction of the four key characteristics of the CIA's identity and culture with pre-9/11 Tasking, Collection, Analysis, and Production and Dissemination. While doing so, we weave in many of the singular elements that make this surprise historically unique. As above, we also see how the presence of a Cassandra throws into relief how the attributes of the CIA's culture and identity enabled this surprise.

A few final preliminary notes are in order. First, it should be said clearly that 9/11 was certainly not purely a CIA failure: more than the previous three cases, 9/11 was truly a failure of the entire US Intelligence Community, US politicians and policymakers, and government employees across a myriad of agencies. Betts, a respected expert on surprise and intelligence, baldly says that the "FBI fell down the most".²⁶ This author, however, agrees with Coll and others that the CIA stands at the centre of the failure.²⁷ Prior to 9/11, the CIA was *primus inter pares* among the agencies of the US Intelligence Community, chartered specifically to coordinate the Community's activities against threats – especially surprise attacks originating abroad.

Moreover, unlike the 'mystery' cases above, the 9/11 plot was a secret – i.e., it was 'knowable.' The broad outline of the 9/11 attacks was given the 'green light' by Usama bin Ladin sometime "in late 1998 or early 1999";²⁸ the actual 'Planes Operation' (as was known within al-Qa'ida) was approved by him in March or April 1999.²⁹ In other words, the CIA had twenty-nine months to discover the attack's secrets (i.e. approximately five times longer than the Agency had to discover the USSR's plans in the preceding case). As we explore, Langley failed to do so for some of the same reasons that brought disaster so close in Cuba almost forty years before: the dynamic between features of the threat and elements of the CIA's identity and culture.

²⁶ Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, page 108.

²⁷ Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 16.

²⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 149.

²⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 154.

Finally, Arabic words and names are transliterated into English in many ways; in the text below, the CIA's in-house spellings are used: Usama Bin Ladin, al-Qa'ida, etc.³⁰ are used (except within quotations).

³⁰ For a discussion of how the spelling, transliteration and translation of Arabic, Persian, Chinese, etc. names into English has proved an immense challenge for intelligence agencies and databases, and how they are using special software to circumvent this issue, see "What's in a name? (Technology Quarterly)," The Economist March 10th 2007.

The 9/11 Attacks - Failures and the Cassandra

Tasking – The Pre-Attack Context

Towards the end of its report, the 9/11 Commission wrote plaintively: “the methods for detecting and then warning of surprise attack that the US government had so painstakingly developed in the decades after Pearl Harbor did not fail; instead, they were not really tried”.³¹ One of the central reasons that these mechanisms were “not really tried” is rooted in the CIA’s failure to Task intelligence assets effectively in order to gather information about al-Qa’ida. Of this failure, there can be little doubt. To anyone who studies 9/11, it is clear that the CIA failed, as Zegart says, “ever [to] develop a comprehensive collection and analysis plan [i.e. Tasking] for the rest of the Intelligence Community”.³² Specifically, Zegart says that the Agency’s Tasking failed to ask the following basic questions about al-Qa’ida: “What al Qaeda information did US intelligence agencies already possess? What questions still needed to be answered, and in what priority? What kinds of intelligence could fill in the gaps? Which agencies and people were best suited to the job, and how could they work together most productively?”³³ As we see below, this Tasking failure is partly understood by failures during the Analysis phase: if you do not recognise an entity as a threat, you do not seek additional information about it.

“It would be a mistake to redefine counterterrorism as a task of dealing with ‘catastrophic’, ‘grand’ or ‘super’ terrorism”

Before we examine the role played in this surprise by the Agency’s identity and culture during the Tasking, we should examine both the context of policy-making before 9/11, and competing explanations have been advanced to explain this lack of Tasking.

The first piece of context needed to understand these failures is the formal priorities assigned by the primary ‘consumers’ of intelligence. During the Clinton Administration, the CIA asked the NSC to rank threats in order to help it determine how to allocate resources and effort. China, Iran, and Iraq were ranked number one; terrorism was ranked number three³⁴ as part of a sprawling

³¹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 347-8.

³² Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 118-9.

³³ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 119.

³⁴ Parker and Stern, “Blindsided? - September 11 and the origins of strategic surprise.” page 619.

grab bag of a mandate: Clinton's officials said that the CIA should provide "intelligence about specific trans-national threats to our security, such as weapons proliferation, terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime, illicit trade practices and environmental issues of great gravity."³⁵ In other words, this Tasking guidance officially ranked intelligence about al-Qa'ida equal to that about gangs engaged in the illegal trade of tropical hardwood. As an organisation forever mirroring the concerns of consumers, the CIA did not 'push back'.

After the election in 2000, President Bush's security policy was more focused; its centrepiece was the pursuit of ballistic missile defence.³⁶ To the extent that the government as a whole concentrated on terrorism, it was focused mainly on terrorists acquiring WMD.³⁷ Some of the attention bin Ladin received, in fact, was due to his pursuit of such weapons;³⁸ it is possible that what clues were available would have received more attention had the 9/11 plot included them. Paul Pillar (head of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center – the CTC – until 1999) summarised the prevailing view in Washington when he said a few months before 9/11: "It would be a mistake to redefine counterterrorism as a task of dealing with 'catastrophic', 'grand' or 'super' terrorism, when in fact these labels do not represent most of the terrorism that the United States is likely to face or most of the costs that terrorism imposes on US Interests."³⁹

The reason for this relative lack of concern (in effect, a consensus that al-Qa'ida was relatively unimportant), and another explanation for why Tasking was not more focused on al-Qa'ida, is the transient nature of previous terrorist groups. Al-Qa'ida's longevity makes it an outlier. Only 50% of terrorist groups

³⁵ Quoted in Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 362.

³⁶ Parker and Stern, "Blindsided? - September 11 and the origins of strategic surprise." page 619. See also Parker and Stern, "Bolt From the Blue or Avoidable Failure? Revisiting September 11 and the Origins of Strategic Surprise." page 320-2. Their section on "Agenda-Political Factors" addresses high-level Tasking failures by another name, and in the context of the US policy-making community as a whole. See Parker and Stern, "Bolt From the Blue or Avoidable Failure? Revisiting September 11 and the Origins of Strategic Surprise." pages 317-322. This ends up returning to the sort of case that is made in Patrick J. Haney, "Soccer Fields and Submarines in Cuba - the Politics of Problem Definition," Naval War College Review (1997).

³⁷ Parker and Stern, "Blindsided? - September 11 and the origins of strategic surprise." page 620.

³⁸ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190

³⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States page 343 and fn 9, Chapter 11. Pillar takes sharp issue with this finding in Pillar, "Good literature and bad history: The 9/11 commission's tale of strategic intelligence." pages 1033-6.

survive a year, and only 5% survive a decade.⁴⁰ After the fact, one can speculate that the group's persistence alone should have been a cause for concern, and thus raised al-Qa'ida's Tasking priority, but that is the wisdom of hindsight. As Avi Shlaim said in the context of the Yom Kippur War, one must be wary of "conclusions crystallized in the light of history and the chain of events as they occurred",⁴¹ and not in accordance with the internal logic of the pre-surprise situation. Until 9/11, the CIA had dealt with terrorist organisations in what Shultz calls "an *episodic, transitory, and ad hoc* manner",⁴² and such an approach had seemed adequate.

The annual surveys of terrorism that the CIA published prior to 9/11 reflect this less-than-systematic approach. The survey only covered 'international' terrorism, so if an Egyptian group killed tourists, it made the next year's survey; if the same group's victims were all Egyptians, the attack did not make the survey. As a result, some countries with substantial domestic terrorist movements (e.g. Columbia and Sri Lanka) only appeared in the CIA survey because their terrorists also engaged in international drug smuggling.⁴³

Al-Qa'ida was also an outlier with respect to its (apparently⁴⁴) relatively minimal ties to governments. Scheuer said in 2006: "There is no persuasive reporting or analysis showing that al-Qa'ida was dependent on any state for essential material or logistical support."⁴⁵ (It should be noted that other sources

⁴⁰ Bruce Hoffman, "The Modern Terrorist Mindset," Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment, eds. R D Howard and R L Sawyer (Guilford, CT: McGraw Hill, 2002), page 84.

⁴¹ Shlaim, "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Yom Kippur War." page 356.

⁴² Richard H. Shultz, "The Era of Armed Groups," The Future of American Intelligence, ed. Peter Berkowitz (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2005), page 2. Emphasis original.

⁴³ Walter Laqueur, No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), page 234.

⁴⁴ The NSA material that the 9/11 Commission did not have a chance to review (see Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 370-3) apparently provides extensive information indicating that Iran facilitated certain aspects of the plot without necessarily knowing what the plot was. For that reason, the 9/11 Commission Report merely says "There is strong evidence that Iran facilitated the transit of al-Qaeda members into and out of Afghanistan before 9/11, and some of these were future 9/11 hijackers...After 9/11, Iran and Hezbollah wished to conceal any past evidence of cooperation with Sunni terrorists associated with al Qaeda." See The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 240-1. In sum, as the Commission itself said, "We believe that this topic requires further investigation by the US government." The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 241.

⁴⁵ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 193.

make a case for relatively light but important support for the group from Iran.⁴⁶) In the 1970s and 80s terrorism experts' frame of reference was that the level of threat posed by a terrorist group was determined by the strength and audacity of its sponsoring state, not that of its members.⁴⁷ Even if light support was there, al-Qa'ida's departure from the Cold War paradigm of heavy state support probably contributed to its relatively low Tasking priority.⁴⁸

It is also only fair to recall that despite a timeline after 9/11 that reveals repeated and escalating attacks on America overseas, before 9/11 al-Qa'ida had killed fewer than fifty Americans *in toto*.⁴⁹ It had not carried out any hijackings, and in 2001 it had been 14 years since the last US plane had been hijacked, and 13 years since the last US plane had been bombed;⁵⁰ no domestic hijacking had occurred since 1968.⁵¹ A President's Daily Brief of December 4, 1998 had the subject "Bin Ladin Preparing to Hijack US Aircraft And Other Attacks" – but it did not discuss the possibility of suicide attacks, instead suggesting a plot focused on trying to obtain the release of Abdul Basit (aka Ramzi Yousef) et al.⁵²

⁴⁶ Ronen Bergman, The Secret War With Iran, trans. Ronnie Hope (New York, NY: Free Press, 2008), pages 222-235 makes the case for heavy Iranian involvement in the rise of al-Qa'ida.

⁴⁷ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 21. This view is wonderfully Summarised in the entry on Terrorism in the *Penguin Dictionary of International Relations*, published in 1998. It reads in part: "It is usual to distinguish between 'state' and 'political' or 'factional' terrorism. The former has been more lethal due mainly to the monopolistic nature of the coercive agencies at the state's disposal combined with ideologies that rest on ends/means rationalizations." See Evans and Newnham, "The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations," page 530-1.

⁴⁸ For Scheuer's view of "Obsolete Experts" and state sponsorship of terrorism, see: Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, pages 20-23. The issue of state support for terrorism has always been controversial at the CIA, and was fraught with difficulty even during the Cold War. In the early 1980s, for example, CIA Director Casey, for example, was highly critical of the Directorate of Analysis's failure to link the Soviets to international terrorism after reading a book by Claire Sterling, The Terror Network (Claire Sterling, The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism (New York, NY: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston, 1981)). Long after chastising the analysts for their intellectual blindness, Casey discovered that Sterling's information linking the USSR to these terrorist operations had come solely from a disinformation operation by the CIA's own Directorate of Operations - the CIA disinformation had "blown-back" to the Director himself. See Bob Woodward, Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987 (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1987) pages 124-9.

⁴⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 340.

⁵⁰ Parker and Stern, "Blindsided? - September 11 and the origins of strategic surprise." page 606.

⁵¹ Jan W. Rivkin and Michael A. Roberto, "Managing National Intelligence (A): Before 9/11," Harvard Business School (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2006, page 8.

⁵² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 128. Abdul Basit (widely known by his alias,

(On the other hand, al-Qa'ida broke its religious taboo on suicide bombing as early as 1993,⁵³ and the systematic use of suicide missions for political purposes in the modern age dated back ten years earlier.⁵⁴ Al-Qa'ida had also 'merged' with a known lethal terrorist group, Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad in 1998,⁵⁵ and their operatives trained with Hezbollah – a group skilled in suicide tactics – as early as 1994.⁵⁶)

Finally, before the 9/11 attacks, the 'jury was still out' for many people on bin Ladin himself: in April 1999, the New York Times even sought to debunk claims that he was a terrorist leader: it ran the headline "US Hard Put to Find Proof Bin Ladin Directed Attacks".⁵⁷ In retrospect there was a "discourse failure"⁵⁸ regarding terrorism in Western society. Prior to 9/11, much of the media avoided the term "terrorist", and substituted such terms as 'militants' or 'activists.' The BBC would not use the term 'terrorist' in the Middle East, but applied it in the rest of the world. Reuters avoided the term both because it might offend dangerous people and thus endanger their correspondents, and because it might lose them customers. *The Chicago Tribune* jettisoned the term 'terrorism' in the 1990s because "it is tendentious and propagandistic, and because today's terrorist sometimes turns out (sic) tomorrow's statesman".⁵⁹ If such views tended toward the 'Left' of the US political spectrum, the 'Right' made its own contribution to this problem through a state-centred terrorism discourse.⁶⁰ Essentially, non-state actors did not register on "Realist" policy-makers' radar.⁶¹ Insofar as CIA Tasking was driven by general intelligence

Ramzi Yousef) was the convicted mastermind and co-conspirator of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the Manila Air/Bojinka plots.

⁵³ Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, page 211.

⁵⁴ Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, page 78. On the same page, Laqueur records that in the modern age suicide terrorism has been used by Muslim (both Shiite and Sunni), Christian, Sikh, Hindu, Jewish and atheist groups.

⁵⁵ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, page 67.

⁵⁶ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, page 68.

⁵⁷ Tim Weiner, "US Hard Put to Find Proof Bin Laden Directed Attacks," *The New York Times* April 13, 1999, page A1.

⁵⁸ See Neumann and Smith, "Missing the Plot? Intelligence and Discourse Failure." *passim*.

⁵⁹ Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, page 236. As Laqueur goes on to ask, why not call Eichmann "an activist demographer... To call a terrorist an 'activist' or a 'militant' is to blot out a dividing line between a suicide bomber and the active member of a trade union or a political party or a club."

⁶⁰ See, for example, Condoleezza Rice, "Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*. January/February (2000) *passim*.

⁶¹ Neumann and Smith, "Missing the Plot? Intelligence and Discourse Failure." page 103. Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, page 277, agrees.

consumer demands (e.g. from Congress), this discourse failure reinforced the primacy of other issues for the Agency.

Meanwhile, and perhaps partly as a result, ambiguous messages were sent *within* the Agency regarding the importance of al-Qa'ida relative to other issues. Almost all the defenders of the CIA's performance prior to 9/11 raise the December 4, 1998, memo in which DCI Tenet wrote to several CIA officials and his deputy for Intelligence Community management stating: "We are at war [with al-Qa'ida]. I want no resources or people spared in this effort, either inside CIA or the Community."⁶² As the 9/11 Commission records, however, "the memorandum had little overall effect on mobilizing the CIA or the Intelligence Community."⁶³ This may be because of the example the DCI set: much of the Tenet's effort prior to 9/11 was devoted Arab/Israeli peace negotiations.⁶⁴

Apart from rhetoric and his own time, there is another way to measure DCI Tenet's actual commitment to bin Ladin as a target for intelligence effort: budgets and personnel assignments.

"Everything that they were doing was more important than fighting al Qaeda"

One good proxy for the actual amount of effort the CIA directed towards al-Qa'ida is its budgets. While not a perfect proxy for Tasking, the numbers certainly say something about institutional priorities.

⁶² Quoted in The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 357.

⁶³ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 357.

⁶⁴ Jones is scathing: "[Tenet] was remarkable for his lack of military, business, leadership or foreign experience. He'd been a loyal Washington staffer for years, a man who got along well with his superiors. Unfortunately, prior to 9/11, Tenet had devoted all his energies not to intelligence collection but to Arab/Israeli peace negotiations. Tenet traveled from capital to capital with a large entourage, including 35 security guards, in a C-141 Starlifter. Tenet's autobiography contains humorous anecdotes about meetings with Yasser Arafat." Jones, The Human Factor: Inside the CIA's Dysfunctional Intelligence Culture, page 275. Scheuer also characterizes Tenet as the opposite of a Cassandra: "It's impossible to dislike Tenet, who is smart, polite, hard-working, convivial and detail-oriented. But he's also a man who never went from cheerleader to leader." See Michael Scheuer, "Tenet Tries to Shift the Blame. Don't Buy It," The Washington Post April 29th 2007. Coll agrees, saying that "there was an all-things-to-all-people quality about Tenet's reform program" at the CIA. See Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 361. One can also note that "Intelligence analysis" – apart from an outline of "Analysis functions" at the beginning of the book, is not discussed in Tenet memoirs (George Tenet and Bill Harlow, At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007), pages 15, 18, 24-5); the import of this fact – the linkage of the Analytical failure under Tenet to this strategic surprise, will be made plain below.

As a whole, intelligence budgets have always been classified.⁶⁵ We do, however, have some evidence about CIA budgetary decisions prior to 9/11, and what they reveal is that terrorism generally and al-Qa'ida specifically was an extremely low priority: almost all of the CIA's activities against al-Qa'ida prior to 9/11 were paid for by 'Emergency Supplementals.' In other words, there were *almost no baseline Agency funds going into the effort against bin Ladin.* As Clarke reports:

In 2000 and 2001 we [i.e. the NSC] asked CIA to identify some funds, any money, earmarked for other activities that were less important than the fight against al Qaeda, so that those funds could be transferred to the higher priority of countering bin Laden. The formal, official CIA response was that there were none. *Another way to say that was that everything that they were doing was more important than fighting al Qaeda.*⁶⁶

Clarke's allegation was confirmed by CIA Inspector General's report on the pre-9/11 failures, which found that the Agency had repeatedly diverted money away from counterterrorism to other purposes.⁶⁷ More authoritatively, the CIA Inspector General's report itself devastates any contention that DCI Tenet was (as some have claimed) powerless to move people and money into the 'high priority' area of counterterrorism. The IG's report is worth quoting at length:

In the five years prior to 9/11, the DCI on six occasions used [his] authorities [in the Intelligence Community] to move almost [amount redacted] in funds from other agencies to the CIA for a number of important purposes [text redacted]. One of these transfers helped fund a Middle East program that was terrorism-related, but none supported programs designed to counter UBL or al-Qa'ida. Nor were DCI authorities used to transfer any

⁶⁵ This issue and the barriers that imposes have been addressed for many years by Steven Aftergood in "Secrecy News", published by the Federation of American Scientists. See www.fas.org.

⁶⁶ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 210. Emphasis added. Scheuer agrees on both terrorism's low priority and the decline of the Clandestine service generally, (related below), saying: "Tenet had helped preside over every step of the service's decline during three consecutive administrations -- Bush, Clinton, Bush -- in a series of key intelligence jobs for the Senate, the National Security Council and the CIA." See Scheuer, "Tenet Tries to Shift the Blame. Don't Buy It..." page B1. As far as analytical capability assigned to Al-Qa'ida, the Joint Inquiry also found that "The only substantial infusion of personnel to counterterrorism occurred after September 11, 2001, when the number of CIA personnel assigned to CTC nearly doubled -- from approximately 400 to approximately 800 -- and additional contractors were hired in support of CTC. No comparable shift of resources occurred in December 1998 after the DCI's declaration of war, in December 1999 during the Millennium crisis, or in October 2000 after the attack on *USS Cole*." See "Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," page 233.

⁶⁷ "OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks," page ix.

personnel into these programs in the five years prior to 9/11.⁶⁸
 [The IG's Report also found that agency managers moved funds from the base budgets of the CTC to] to meet other corporate and Directorate of Operations needs. The Team found that from FY 1997 to FY 2001 (as of 9/11) [amount redacted] was redistributed from counterterrorism programs to other agency priorities...Conversely, no resources were reprogrammed from other Agency programs to counterterrorism, even after the DCI's statement in December 1998 that he wanted no resources spared in the effort...Finally, CTC managers did not spend all of the funds in their base budget, even after it had been reduced by diversions of funds to other programs.⁶⁹

In other words, if money or personnel decisions are valid indicators of the CIA's Tasking priorities, al-Qa'ida ranked *very* low.

George Tenet would later testify before Congress that: "People use the word 'failure' – 'failure' means no focus, no attention, no discipline – and those were not present in what either we or the FBI did here and around the world."⁷⁰ The budgetary and personnel choices of Langley that he directed, however, contradict this assertion. CIA effort – i.e., Tasking – was simply not heavily oriented to al-Qa'ida.

"Red flags In a sea of Red flags"?

More damning still for the CIA's Tasking priorities is the fact that not all intelligence consumers were quiescent about al-Qa'ida. Richard Clarke (National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection and Counterterrorism), insists that as early as 1993, he, Anthony Lake (then-National Security Advisor), Samuel Berger (then-Deputy National Security Advisor) and Nancy Soderberg (Anthony Lake's Staff Director at the time) persisted

...in asking the CIA to learn more about the man whose name kept appearing in CIA's raw reports as 'terrorist financier Usama bin Laden.' It just seemed unlikely to us that this man who had his hand in so many seemingly unconnected

⁶⁸ "OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks," page ix

⁶⁹ "OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks, page xi. On the other hand, a few weeks before the 9/11 attacks, the CIA's Inspector General submitted a report on the CTC to Tenet. It found that the CTC "is a well-managed component that successfully carries out the Agency's responsibilities to collect and analyze intelligence on international terrorism and to undermine the capabilities of terrorist groups." Report quoted in Diamond, The CIA and the Culture of Failure: US Intelligence from the End of the Cold War to the Invasion of Iraq, page 372. That would argue that the analytical failure described below must carry more explanatory weight, because it indicates that the CTC was deemed up to the threat as it was (mis)perceived.

⁷⁰ George Tenet, "Worldwide Threat — Converging Dangers in a Post 9/11 World - testimony of February 6, 2002," Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Washington, DC: 2002.

organizations was just a donor, a philanthropist of terror. There seemed to be some organizing force and maybe it was he. He was the one thing that we knew the various terrorist groups had in common. And we kept coming back to the incredible notion offered by CIA and FBI that the gang that bombed the World Trade Center had just come together as individual agents who happened upon one another and decided to go to America to blow things up.⁷¹

The CIA, however, persisted in holding this 'happenstance' view of Islamic terrorism. In fact, Paul Pillar, head of the CTC until 1999, even coined the term "ad hoc terrorists" to describe the first World Trade Center bombers.⁷²

Furthermore, we know that Samuel Berger (National Security Advisor 1997-2001) "upbraided DCI Tenet so sharply after the *Cole* attack – repeatedly demanding why the United States had to put up with such attacks – that Tenet walked out of the meeting."⁷³ Nevertheless, although bin Ladin's name surfaced with increasing frequency in raw intelligence in the mid-1990s, when bin Ladin came up in the CIA analyses, they only referred to him as terrorist financier, characterising him as "a radicalized rich kid, who was playing at terrorism by sending checks to terrorist groups".⁷⁴ The Agency never tasked intelligence assets to collect information that might verify this view of al-Qa'ida's chief.

There is one final argument employed by the defenders of the CIA's pre-911 Tasking, which constitutes a variation on Wohlstetter 'signal-to-noise' problem.⁷⁵ A former government counterterrorism chief characterised the problem for intelligence agencies before 9/11 as sorting "Red flags in a sea of Red flags".⁷⁶ This statement is untenable, however: *al-Qa'ida was a known, abiding, and self-declared enemy of America that had repeatedly struck US interests over a period of years, in multiple locations, on an escalating scale of violence, and displaying increasing sophistication.* No other individual, group or state at this time comes close to fitting that description. Yes, there was a great

⁷¹ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 135. Note that Pillar, "Good literature and bad history: The 9/11 commission's tale of strategic intelligence." states that such quotations about bin Ladin appearing as a "mere" financier of terrorism in CIA documents is sharply disputed in Pillar, "Good literature and bad history: The 9/11 commission's tale of strategic intelligence." page 1030-1

⁷² Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 261 and page 279.

⁷³ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 193.

⁷⁴ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 96.

⁷⁵ See Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, *passim*, but especially pages 386-96.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 116-7.

deal of terrorist ‘chatter’⁷⁷ in the years before 9/11, but the real question is why did al-Qa’ida stay so low on the scale of CIA’s Tasking priorities? Why, as Zegart says, was the signal “found and then lost”,⁷⁸ subsumed beneath other CIA priorities?

The answer to this ‘deeper,’ macro question of the loss of signal can be traced to a Tasking process that was captive to familiar attributes of the Agency’s culture and identity; the Cassandra of the case throws this process into stark relief.

The Prophet(s)

In 1996, the CIA set up a special ‘virtual station’ – ‘Alec Station’ – focused on bin Ladin.⁷⁹ To stress its experimental nature, Alec Station was based not at CIA Headquarter in Langley, but located in an office complex in Northern Virginia.⁸⁰ It was conceived of as an entity that would operate focused on a particular subject much as traditional CIA stations at Embassies focus on countries.⁸¹ According to the 9/11 Commission, the station’s choice of bin Ladin as its focus was “essentially happenstance: the original idea had been to focus the station on terrorist finance”.⁸² When veteran Agency analyst Michael Scheuer was recruited to run Alec Station,⁸³ however, he suggested that the unit focus on bin Ladin (with whom Scheuer was familiar because he had previously been running the Islamic Extremist Branch of the CTC⁸⁴).

As we soon explore, Scheuer is the Cassandra of this case: his nickname among some 9/11 Commission staffers was “the Prophet.”⁸⁵ More than anyone else in the CIA (and much earlier), Scheuer understood the danger

⁷⁷ George Friedman, America's Secret War: Inside the Hidden Worldwide Struggle Between America and Its Enemies (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2004), page 207.

⁷⁸ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 118.

⁷⁹ Abraham H. Miller and Nicholas Damask, "Thinking about intelligence after the fall of communism," International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence 6 (1993), page 150.

⁸⁰ For those familiar with the area, Shenon says that it was close to the well-known Tyson's Corner shopping center. See Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 188.

⁸¹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 109.

⁸² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 109.

⁸³ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 187.

⁸⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 109.

⁸⁵ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 188.

posed by bin Ladin and al-Qa'ida.⁸⁶ For this reason, we might quibble with the term 'happenstance' in the context of Alec Station's remit; their point that the focus on bin Ladin not a result of strategic insight by the DI, however, is well-taken. Nevertheless, Scheuer's epithet within the Commission contains a revealing irony, making his role a good point of departure to look at culture and identity's role in this surprise.

Scheuer remembers that as early as December 1996, he had trouble convincing anyone outside of Alec Station of the menace of al-Qa'ida. The reason that Scheuer gives for this trouble is extremely revealing: "They could not believe that this tall Saudi with a beard, squatting around a camp fire, could be a threat to the United States of America."⁸⁷ As with Castro in the previous case, external features as trivial as a man's beardedness was a heuristic⁸⁸ used in CIA culture to judge a lack of seriousness. What makes this dismissal even more disturbing, however, is that in the intervening years the CIA had experienced the shock of our first case – the Iranian Revolution – to heighten its sensitivity to the power of radical Islam. In our first case, a bearded devout Muslim leader in robes caused vast amounts of damage to US national interests. Despite that potentially salutary lesson, according to Miller, the CIA "continued to overlook, or at least underestimate, the breadth and power of the fundamentalist Islamic reform movement sweeping the Middle East."⁸⁹ Therefore, when Scheuer prepared a fifty-paragraph memo about bin Ladin's efforts to obtain WMD and sent it over to Langley that year (i.e. 1996), his superiors refused to circulate it throughout the Agency, saying that it was "alarmist and wouldn't be taken seriously; they agreed to circulate only two paragraphs from the report and only if they were buried in a larger memo".⁹⁰

Obviously, this anecdote is about more than bin Ladin's beard: it brings into focus Langley's perception of the Third World⁹¹ as a whole. According to

⁸⁶ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 188.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190.

⁸⁸ Arguably, this is a case of culturally-induced cognitive bias, or "simplified information processing strategy". See Heuer, The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis, page 111-3.

⁸⁹ John Miller, Michael Stone and Chris Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2003), page 129.

⁹⁰ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190

⁹¹ While not a precise analytical concept, the term Third World is both a geographical and political category referring broadly to Asia, Africa and Latin America; it is a convenient shorthand to refer to "the wretched of the earth". See James H. Mittleman, "Third World," The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World, ed. Joel Krieger (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993, pages 908-10.

Vince Cannistraro, a former top-ranking CIA official, “The Third World was just theater in the Agency’s eyes, a stage on which to play out their conflict with the Russians...In 1979, Afghanistan was an officially neutral, landlocked Asian nation without any significance to our vital interests. The CIA didn’t give it much strategic importance before the Soviets invaded; and *once they’d departed, I think they gave it even less.*”⁹² While bearded men around campfires might have added local colour to this theatre, they certainly did not justify Tasking additional resources to collect intelligence about serious threats.

Homogeneity likely also played a role. We have no numbers on the religious orientation of CIA officials responsible for deciding the Agency’s Tasking priorities, but we can assume based on what we know of Langley’s homogeneity demonstrated above that there were few (if any) Muslims among them.

This “beard and campfire” anecdote is evidence of a larger pattern, one that persisted even after 9/11, in which non-Muslim Americans – even experienced consumers of intelligence – underestimated al-Qa’ida for cultural reasons.⁹³ Richard Holbrooke, for example, wondered, “How can a man in a cave out-communicate the world’s leading communications society?”⁹⁴ The answer is that Usama bin Ladin has always framed his movement “by calling up images that were deeply meaningful to many Muslims and *practically invisible to those who were unfamiliar with the faith*.”⁹⁵ This ‘practical invisibility’ also explains the lack of Tasking to investigate al-Qa’ida more deeply before the attacks, and constitutes a clear indication of the consequences of the DI’s homogeneous makeup. Like many highly devout Muslims, Usama bin Ladin consciously models himself on the Prophet Mohammed: he fasts on days that Mohammed fasted, wears clothes like the Prophet’s, and even sits and eats in the postures that Islamic tradition ascribes to him.⁹⁶ One can assume that these facts would diminish the likelihood that the homogeneous (and scientifically

⁹² Miller, Stone and Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It, page 125 Emphasis added. This sentiment is supported in Baer, Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold Our Soul for Saudi Crude, page 98.

⁹³ They might be well-advised to remember the Rudyard Kipling poem of 1892, “Soudan Expeditionary Force” or “Fuzzy-Wuzzy”: “So ‘ere’s ~to~ you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, at your ‘ome in the Soudan;/ You’re a pore benighted ‘eathen but a first-class fightin’ man” See Rudyard Kipling, Barrack Room Ballads (New York, NY: Signet Classics, 2003), page 12.

⁹⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 377.

⁹⁵ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 264. Emphasis added.

⁹⁶ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, pages 263-4.

oriented) Tasking process at CIA would take a person of bin Ladin’s appearance seriously.

A detailed example of this inversion phenomenon (by which the very features that grant bin Ladin credibility to one audience diminish his credibility for CIA analysts) is unlocked by the “cave man” rhetoric in the Holbrooke quotation above. Reference to caves is frequently used in the US even now to disparage bin Ladin. Ironically, after his return to Afghanistan in 1996, bin Ladin began to make statements and to receive visitors in caves quite intentionally. For bin Ladin, it would appear that his frequent appearance with caves are a personal version of the Prophet Mohammad’s *hijrah* (or *hijira*), the incident in 622 CE when Mohammad and his closest friend, Abu Bakr, fled in advance of his persecutors from Mecca to Yathrib (later renamed Medina). As every Muslim knows, though Mohammad’s enemies searched for him, he was safe in a cave on Mount Thawr (partly through three wondrous events: a miraculous acacia tree blocked the entrance, and both a miraculous spider’s web and a miraculous dove’s nest containing an egg all made the cave where Muhammad hid seem unoccupied).⁹⁷ Muslims also know that Mohammad’s revelation of the Koran occurred in a mountaintop cave.⁹⁸ Pious Muslims make an association between caves and holiness automatically: even Islamic art (when it ventures beyond geometric abstraction and calligraphy), is replete with images of stalactites, references to both the sanctuary that a cave provided the Prophet and to his original encounter with the divine.⁹⁹ In short, a key part of the backdrop that makes bin Ladin appear ‘primitive’ to non-Muslims places him for pious Muslims outside “time, history, modernity, corruption, and the smothering West”.¹⁰⁰ From a cave, bin Ladin simultaneously earned the disdain of a homogeneous, rationalist, science-oriented CIA analytical corps and in the eyes of his followers earned the right to “presume to speak for the true religion”.¹⁰¹

In sum, some of the very sources of bin Ladin’s strength in the Islamic world – features such as his beard, his dress, and dwelling amongst caves – are the first tier of explanation of how this strategic surprise occurred. The CIA’s

⁹⁷ Glassé, The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam. See entry on *Hijrah*, pages 156-7. It is interesting to note that as the author’s mother – an Art Historian – noted, the West has similar tales of heroes and spiders’ webs, the most famous of which, of course, involves Robert the Bruce (which parallels similar tales involving both King David and Tamerlane).

⁹⁸ Glassé, The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam. See entry on the Koran, pages 228-32.

⁹⁹ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 264.

¹⁰⁰ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, pages 264-5.

¹⁰¹ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, pages 264-5.

faith in 'science' served to magnify the inbuilt tendency of American culture to underestimate people of the sort that composed al-Qa'ida; in concert, the Agency's homogeneity was an enabler for its unconscious ignorance about Islam. Together, these attributes of identity and culture hindered better Tasking regarding this threat.

"Look Out America, Usama Is Coming."

This almost diametrically opposing perception of bin Ladin's public persona raises a final matter to address with respect to pre-9/11 Tasking failures: al-Qa'ida made no secret that it had 'declared war' against the United States. As in previous cases, this allows us to conjecture whether the CIA's cultural predilection for secret information curbed Tasking about al-Qa'ida. To be fair to the Agency, prior to these attacks there was an entire class of Islamists who "had consistently forecast catastrophic doom for the United States in many unpleasant ways."¹⁰² Nevertheless, given the Agency's demonstrated preference for secret rather than open-source information, we can here note five representative facts about al-Qa'ida available to anyone seriously interested prior to 9/11.

First, bin Ladin did not hide: he began speaking to the Western press corps in December 1993.¹⁰³ Second, bin Ladin publicly declared war on the US on 2 September 1996, in his "Declaration of Jihad against the United States", which was first published in the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia's *Al-Islah* newsletter;¹⁰⁴ he declared Jihad again in the media on 23 February, 1998.¹⁰⁵ Third, it was no secret that his message was resonating in the Islamic world: after the *USS Cole* attack, in the Arab world bin Ladin's name was "scrawled on walls and plastered on magazine covers",¹⁰⁶ tapes of his speeches were sold in bazaars, and in Pakistan T-shirts bearing his photograph and the caption "The Great Mujahid of Islam"¹⁰⁷ were sold alongside calendars labelled

¹⁰² Friedman, America's Secret War: Inside the Hidden Worldwide Struggle Between America and Its Enemies, page 207.

¹⁰³ Robert Fisk, "Anti-Soviet Warrior Puts his Army on the Road to Peace," Financial Times 6 December 1993.

¹⁰⁴ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 45.

¹⁰⁵ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page xvi.

¹⁰⁶ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 307.

¹⁰⁷ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 307.

“Look Out America, Usama Is Coming”.¹⁰⁸ Fourth, his message’s resonance was noted among informed Westerners. If you subscribed to *Foreign Affairs* for example, in 1998 you would have noted Bernard Lewis’s article “License to Kill: Usama Bin Laden’s Declaration of Jihad”.¹⁰⁹ Had that article inspired you to do more digging, two book-length studies of bin Ladin were published in English before the attacks.¹¹⁰ Fifth, even relatively ‘actionable’ intelligence reached the public (at least semi-public) domain: on 7 March 2001, the Russian permanent mission to the UN submitted a report on al-Qa’ida, bin Ladin, and the Taliban to the Security Council’s Committee on Afghanistan. The report, later leaked to the press, gave information on 31 senior Pakistani military officers actively supporting bin Ladin, and described the location of fifty-five al-Qa’ida bases or offices in Afghanistan.¹¹¹ From a Tasking point of view, there was no ‘secret’ to ‘steal’: al-Qa’ida was an enemy of the US.

Given this flood of public information about bin Ladin, and what we know about Langley’s preference for secret information, it is not a significant intellectual leap to imagine that bin Ladin’s very public stance as an enemy of the US actually worked against efforts at the CIA to Task assets to collect intelligence on al-Qa’ida. Meanwhile, one imagines CIA analysts putting pre-announced terrorist attacks in the same categories that Sherman Kent put coups in his aphorism: “Any coup that I have heard of is not going to happen”.¹¹² In Tasking, therefore, we find numerous indications that the CIA’s homogeneity, scientism and predilection for secrets contributed to its misconceptions about al-Qa’ida, and thus to the strategic surprise of 9/11.

¹⁰⁸ Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies’ Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America*, page 307.

¹⁰⁹ Bernard Lewis, “License to Kill: Osama Bin Laden’s Declaration of Jihad,” *Foreign Affairs* 77.6 (1998).

¹¹⁰ Simon Reeve, *The New Jackals: Ramzi Yousef, Osama Bin Laden, and the New Terrorism* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1999), and Youssef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (Rocklin, CA: Forum, 1999), though Bodansky does not offer footnotes or sources in order to protect his “sources and methods”, which does not exactly shout credibility; he also views bin Ladin as a tool of state sponsors of terrorism, Iran, Syria and Iraq. Reeve, in contrast, mostly draws on FBI sources.

¹¹¹ “Russian Files on al-Qa’eda Ignored,” *Jane’s Intelligence Digest* October 5 2001, page 4. There are certainly grounds for believing that Russian intelligence services knew a great deal about Ayman al-Zawahiri: according to one source, they actually held him in custody for over six months in 1996, “tried” him for violating the passport regime, and acquitted him... Al-Zawahiri then “disappeared” for two weeks before leaving Russia, only to return in 1998 to spend two weeks at an FSB base in Dagestan. See Michel Elbaz, “Russian Secrets of Al-Qaeda’s Number Two - 19 July,” *Axisglobe.com*, 2005, Michel Elbaz, “Unknown History of Jihad - 20 July,” *Axisglobe.com*, 2005, and Michel Elbaz, “Soviet Past of Worldwide Jihad - 21 July,” *Axisglobe.com*, 2005.

¹¹² Charles D. Cremeans, “Basic Psychology for Intelligence Analysts,” *Studies in Intelligence* 15.1 (1971), page 111.

Collection – The Pre-Attack Context

It is close to tautology to assert that those terrorist groups that endure are skilled at minimizing their exposure to the Collection efforts of intelligence agencies.¹¹³ Without a doubt, beginning in the mid-1990s, al-Qa'ida fit this description. Since its genesis, it has had an excellent understanding of US intelligence, applied security rigorously, and possessed an impressive cadre of highly disciplined and competent covert operators.¹¹⁴

Bin Ladin's brainchild, therefore, was a 'hard target' as far as Collection was concerned, but it was not small. Consider the scope of his achievement. In addition to running training camps that vetted thousands of potential terrorists during basic paramilitary training,¹¹⁵ by 2001 bin Ladin had created a truly global jihad network,¹¹⁶ enlisting groups in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Oman, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Somalia, and Eritrea.¹¹⁷ He had also established 'cooperative agreements' with like-minded Islamic extremist groups

¹¹³ Hoffman, "The Modern Terrorist Mindset." page 84.

¹¹⁴ Friedman, America's Secret War: Inside the Hidden Worldwide Struggle Between America and Its Enemies, page 2. On the other hand, not everyone associated with Al-Qa'ida and trained as terrorists by them were exactly James Bond clones: according to the 9/11 Commission Report, one "Terrorist training course" for three men "lasted a week or two in Karachi", where Khalid Sheikh Mohammed "Showed [his students] how to read phone books, interpret airline timetables, use the Internet, use code words in communications, make travel reservations and rent an apartment." In short, these training courses were somewhat akin to an orientation program for a study-abroad student, though the trio's training also included "Using flight simulator computer games, viewing movies that featured hijackings, and reading flight schedules." See The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 157-8.

¹¹⁵ US Intelligence estimates between 10,000 and 20,000 fighters between 1996 and 2001. See The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 67.

¹¹⁶ The network structure and operational security measures of used by al-Qa'ida is often referred to as "unique". It is nothing of the sort: it follows patterns and methods first established by Russian revolutionaries of the early modern period. See Steven G. Marks, How Russia Shaped the Modern World: from Art to Anti-Semitism, Ballet to Bolshevism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), Chapter 1, pages 7-37, especially page 37. Certainly the CIA recognises such a creature. Another piece of evidence for how little good cell-based networks need to change over time is Victor Serge, What Every Radical Should Know About State Repression: A Guide for Activists (New York, NY: Ocean Press, 2005), which is a re-issued manual originally published in Bulletin Communiste in Paris in November 1921. It outlines the tactics developed by Russian revolutionaries to prevent penetration by the Okhrana and latter agencies over the previous forty years (i.e. since the founding of the Okhrana – from the Third Section of the Russian Ministry of the Interior – in 1881), and has been re-issued for modern "activists" (or delusionals and fantasists with a free-floating sense of grievance and/or a persecution mania: take your pick). At any rate, when it comes to basic tradecraft there is little new under the sun, and al-Qa'ida's network structure is not Web 2.0.

¹¹⁷ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 58.

in these countries plus in Chad, Mali, Niger, Uganda, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bosnia.¹¹⁸

In other words, it is a mistake to imagine that penetration opportunities against al-Qa'ida existed solely in Afghanistan, "one of the poorest, most remote, least industrialized countries on earth".¹¹⁹ It was active in regions in which US and other Western intelligence agencies took an active interest in the late 1990s, like the Balkans. According to Clarke, in fact, "What we saw unfold in Bosnia was a guidebook to the bin Laden network",¹²⁰ though it was not recognized as such at the time. In the Bosnian case, al-Qa'ida used mosques, Islamic cultural centres, and Islamic relief agencies in the UK, Italy, the US, Austria, and Saudi Arabia to provide funds and logistical support to their efforts to send hardened Arab veterans to fight.¹²¹ Collection of intelligence about al-Qa'ida, therefore, was not solely a matter of Third World skulduggery; the tactical leader of the 9/11 attacks, Mohamed Atta, famously spent extended periods in Germany¹²², for example. It is simpleminded, therefore, to limit thinking about the pre-9/11 Collection failure to Afghanistan.

The popular wisdom, moreover, is that the monetary resources behind the 9/11 attacks were "trivial".¹²³ The 9/11 Commission cited a figure of al-Qa'ida using only between \$400,000 and \$500,000 to finance the attacks.¹²⁴ Such paltry sums are disingenuous and misleading: they represent only the *incremental* costs of this attack. Any one terrorist act by al-Qa'ida might cost such sums, but it took far more to finance all of al-Qa'ida's activities in the years prior to 9/11.¹²⁵ Bin Ladin's personal fortune was useful when establishing al-Qa'ida, but the organisation's financial network dealt in sums that were far beyond his personal means.¹²⁶ In other words, the organisation called 'al-

¹¹⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 58.

¹¹⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 340.

¹²⁰ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 137.

¹²¹ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, pages 137-8.

¹²² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 160-1. As did the 911 hijackers Ramzi Binalshibh, Marwan al Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah. See The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 161-5.

¹²³ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 340. For a complete list of the quite minor "Requirements for a successful attack" see, The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 172-3.

¹²⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 169.

¹²⁵ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 192.

¹²⁶ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 192.

Qa'ida' included a vast, global fundraising machine,¹²⁷ the scope of which was partly concealed through its extensive use of *hawala* (a trust-based system for transferring funds outside of 'normal' banking channels that has been used in the Islamic world for centuries.)¹²⁸ Therefore, it is deeply ironic that although the CIA's Alec Station had originally been inspired by the idea of studying terrorist financial links, few personnel assigned to the bin Ladin case had any experience in financial investigations.¹²⁹ As far as Collection of financial information about al-Qa'ida, the 9/11 Commission reported: "Any terrorist-financing intelligence appeared to have been collected collaterally, as a consequence of gathering other intelligence."¹³⁰ Given the Tasking discussed above, this neglect of al-Qa'ida's finances is not surprising, but we should note that the Collection opportunities extended well beyond tracking the half-million dollars or so that were the tactical funding for the 9/11 attacks.

"Officers had little familiarity with the new issues"

Historically unique features of the pre-9/11 protrude beyond the conventional boundaries of any given phase of the intelligence cycle. As al-Qa'ida coalesced and grew, the CIA was suffering what most observers agree was a human intelligence 'meltdown' as a result of the end of the Cold War.¹³¹ Budget cuts had badly affected the Clandestine Service, the mainstay of the CIA's human intelligence Collection system.¹³² In 1995, for example, only 25 trainees became new case officers.¹³³ One consequence of this crisis in human Collection assets is that beginning in the early 1990s the Agency began to respond to crises around the globe (e.g. in Africa or the Balkans) by "surging",¹³⁴ or taking officers anywhere they could find them to respond to immediate

¹²⁷ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 192.

¹²⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 171; Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 192-4. The best overview of how *hawala* works is found in John A. Cassara, Hide & Seek: Intelligence, Law Enforcement, and the Stalled War on Terrorist Finance (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, Inc., 2006), pages 144-50.

¹²⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 185.

¹³⁰ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 185.

¹³¹ Miller, Stone and Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It, page 127.

¹³² For more on budget cuts after the Cold War, see Snider, The Agency and the Hill: CIA's Relationship with Congress, 1946-2004, pages 184-7.

¹³³ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 90.

¹³⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 90.

problems. “In many cases”, the 9/11 Commission noted, “The surge officers had little familiarity with the new issues. Inevitably, some parts of the world were not fully covered, or not covered at all.”¹³⁵

By one account, the CIA’s Collection efforts in Somalia during the US intervention in 1992-3 – where it might have gained early appreciation for the seriousness of al-Qa’ida – fit this pattern (along with displaying the risk-aversion documented below): “They [i.e. the CIA] had nobody in the country when the marines landed. Then they sent in a few guys who had never been there before. They swapped people out every few weeks and they stayed holed up in the US compound on the beach, in comfy trailer homes that they had flown in by the Air Force.”¹³⁶ Evidence later emerged that bin Ladin sent advisers into Somalia to organise attacks against US forces, and al-Qa’ida elements helped down US helicopters.¹³⁷ In the event, it took three years for the US to recognize fully al-Qa’ida’s participation in the death of the 18 US soldiers in those actions.¹³⁸

Thus, most sources discussing CIA Collection efforts against al-Qa’ida prior to 9/11 are content to rest on the (obvious) fact that the CIA had no human sources inside al-Qa’ida (or among the Taliban security that surrounded bin Ladin)¹³⁹ in the years prior to the attacks.¹⁴⁰ The CIA did have a few assets in Afghanistan left over from the Jihad against the Soviets¹⁴¹ of the 1980s, but these people had no inside knowledge of the bin Ladin organisation. In fact, in addition to being near useless for intelligence Collection, the doubtful reliability of these ‘assets’ was allegedly one of the important obstacles to the CIA’s half-hearted efforts to capture or kill bin Ladin before 9/11.¹⁴² Clarke reports that as

¹³⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 90.

¹³⁶ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 87.

¹³⁷ The 911 Commission, The 911 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (Washington, DC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004), pages 59-60.

¹³⁸ Miller and Damask, “Thinking about intelligence after the fall of communism.” page 163.

¹³⁹ Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 315. Confirmed in “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” pages xviii-xix, and in “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001,” page 91.

¹⁴⁰ The spiritual father of al-Qa’ida was Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian member of the Muslim Brotherhood. At least through 1985 if not after, the CIA also had no sources whatsoever inside the Muslim brotherhood, the oldest and largest radical Sunni organization. The CTC files on the brotherhood that year were nothing but “old newspaper clippings, a few analytical pieces, and cables from embassies.” See Baer, Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold Our Soul for Saudi Crude pages 98-9 and 112.

¹⁴¹ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 301

¹⁴² “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” pages xxi-xxii.

the NSC attempted to plan such operations in 1998-9, the “CIA’s assets in Afghanistan could usually tell us where bin Ladin was a few days earlier. They did not know, except rarely, where he would be the next day. On a few occasions, they were able to tell us where they thought he was at the moment.”¹⁴³ Pakistani intelligence could have provided better information, but they repeatedly rebuffed the CIA when they were asked.¹⁴⁴ Clearly, there was a range of problems with the CIA’s HUMINT capabilities that contributed to the strategic surprise of 9/11.

“Nobody actually said you can’t do recruitments...”

The quantitative problems of HUMINT Collection – too few Case Officers – were amplified by a recurrence of the sort of ‘moral qualms’ about human intelligence¹⁴⁵ that we saw flourish in the post-Watergate era (i.e. prior to the Iranian Revolution). This likely led to qualitative problems, too. Above, we heard one Turner appointee to the CIA say in the 1970s, “HUMINT was likely to be suspect on moral grounds”,¹⁴⁶ something that would do moral damage (sic) to the collector.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, in 1995, the Agency was criticised for having a Guatemalan army officer on its payroll who was suspected of involvement in the murder of another Guatemalan married to an American woman.¹⁴⁸ The case

¹⁴³ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 199. Tenet agrees in Tenet and Harlow, At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA, page 109, but Scheuer disputes this in Scheuer, “Tenet Tries to Shift the Blame. Don't Buy It..”.

¹⁴⁴ Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 444.

¹⁴⁵ For a good exploration of the ethical issues of intelligence, see E. D. Godfrey, “Ethics and intelligence,” Foreign Affairs 56 (1978), *passim* and Goldman, ed., The Ethics of Spying: a Reader for the Intelligence Professional, *passim*.

¹⁴⁶ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 52.

¹⁴⁷ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 52. For an exploration of whether this is indeed true, see Goldman, ed., The Ethics of Spying: a Reader for the Intelligence Professional; Part Four, comparing espionage and intelligence work to other professions, is especially thought-provoking. Powers, The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA, pages v-xi and *passim* explores this issue in the context of US national power and domestic politics with the lightest touch and most engaging style. He quotes CIA officials as taking the attitude that “The basic business of the Agency, if ugly in some of its particulars, is necessary too, one of the fatal facts of modern life like taxes, prisons and armies. An outsider naturally resents this argument – it smacks so much of an adult’s explanation of the world to a child – but two thousand years of history, in which failures of intelligence were often as destructive as failures of arms, make it hard to dismiss.” Powers, The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA, pages v.

¹⁴⁸ Miller, Stone and Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It, page 133.

triggered Congressional hearings.¹⁴⁹ As a result, the CIA instituted “new rules that required case officers to vet shady informants through a series of special committees”.¹⁵⁰ Most sources agree that these new procedures caused many case officers to simply stop trying to recruit,¹⁵¹ “either cutting loose potentially embarrassing agents or not bothering to recruit new ones”.¹⁵² One officer remembers: “Nobody actually said you can’t do recruitments. What they said was, ‘If you recruit someone and he goes out and does something – you know, whacks someone – you’re responsible. Your career’s over.’ So of course no one did anything.”¹⁵³ It does not seem to have occurred to anyone drafting these rules that in order to recruit someone within a terrorist group, by definition one has to put on the payroll someone who associates with killers. The Inspector General’s Report coyly says: “While agreeing that the dirty asset rules may have created a climate that had the effect of inhibiting certain recruitment operations, the [investigating] Team is unable to confirm or determine the extent

¹⁴⁹ For an overview of this incident see Snider, The Agency and the Hill: CIA’s Relationship with Congress, 1946–2004, pages 244-5.

¹⁵⁰ Miller, Stone and Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It, page 133.

¹⁵¹ Author’s conversation with a serving DO officer, November, 18, 2005.

¹⁵² Miller, Stone and Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It, page 133.

¹⁵³ Miller, Stone and Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It, page 134. While out of scope of this dissertation (which does not cover covert action), it would appear that the culture of risk-aversion also affected the use of the armed Predator against Al-Qa’ida: according to a “senior DOD official”, the CIA opposed the initial use of the Predator to go after bin Ladin, and the White House “had to cram this down the throat of the Agency. The [CIA] Directorate of Operations, they go to cocktail parties and recruit spies, and they said this is paramilitary and can screw up my relationship with the host government...the head of the Directorate of Operations, Jim Pavitt, was heard to say that if the Predator was used against bin laden and the responsibility for this use of lethal force was laid at the Agency’s doorstep, it would endanger the lives of CIA operatives around the world.” In a White House meeting the week of September 3rd, 2001, Tenet “intervened forcefully. It would be a terrible mistake, he declared, for the Director of Central Intelligence to fire a weapon like this.” See Miller, Stone and Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It, page 134. Note also that the CIA was reluctant to strike bin laden in part because of the fallout from previous intelligence failures: the mistakes made in the 1998 strike against Al-Qa’ida and the mistaken targeting that resulted in the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999. See Diamond, The CIA and the Culture of Failure: US Intelligence from the End of the Cold War to the Invasion of Iraq, page 297. (It was an “Accurate Miss”, or, as an anonymous US Navy planner involved in planning the Kosovo air campaign said “We shoot a whole lot better than we aim” Diamond, The CIA and the Culture of Failure: US Intelligence from the End of the Cold War to the Invasion of Iraq, page 322. NB: it was a failure to use publicly available information that caused this faulty targeting: the Belgrade telephone book. Diamond, The CIA and the Culture of Failure: US Intelligence from the End of the Cold War to the Invasion of Iraq, page 295.)

of the impact.”¹⁵⁴ Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence: *Ipsa facto*, these rules cannot have made it easier to penetrate al-Qa’ida.

“No Ops, No Problems”

This scrutiny apparently led to a much more risk-averse culture in the DO generally.¹⁵⁵ One agent remembers requesting permission to go into Northern Iraq to conduct routine surveillance of the fighting between the Kurds and the Iraqi army, but being ordered not to cross the border. He says his Station Chief “wanted me to monitor the war from Ankara. If he’d had his way, I’d have spent my days in the local Sheraton eating peanuts, watching CNN and reading two-day-old newspaper reports from Reuters.”¹⁵⁶ Clearly, such an environment lowered the odds of collecting useful information about al-Qa’ida.

Similar risk-aversion hindered technical collection efforts. When the ‘Predator’ UAV flew over Afghanistan for the first time on 7 September 2000 it provided video of “truly astonishing” quality.¹⁵⁷ The Predator had a long ‘dwell-time,’ and could offer detailed, real-time video feed from 10,000 miles away.¹⁵⁸ On at least one occasion, however, the Taliban scrambled MiG fighters to try to shoot it down.¹⁵⁹ Had they done so, they would likely have not only have publicly trumpeted this fact, but they would also likely have sold the surviving pieces of the drone to either Russian or Chinese intelligence. Apparently, by 1997 the attitude to risk at the DO was best articulated by a sign that hung over a case officer’s desk in the Agency’s Rome station: “Big Ops, Big Problems. Small Ops, Small Problems. No Ops, No Problems.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” page xix. The CTC officials interviewed by the Joint Inquiry disagreed. See “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001,” page 93.

¹⁵⁵ For an overview of how low morale had sunk at the CIA, and how risk averse the culture had become, Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 pages 316-318, and Jones, The Human Factor: Inside the CIA's Dysfunctional Intelligence Culture *passim*.

¹⁵⁶ Miller, Stone and Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It, page 132.

¹⁵⁷ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 189-90.

¹⁵⁸ Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 220.

¹⁵⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 189-90. For an actual account of the scramble and how it was viewed on the Predator, see Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, page 221.

¹⁶⁰ Miller, Stone and Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It, page 134. These conclusions are supported in “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” page xviii-xix. This may still be a problem at the Agency, one compounded by a culture of careerism: according to Jones,

In short, in the years before 9/11, CIA human intelligence collection assets in close proximity to Usama bin Ladin were non-existent and Langley's human collection system generally was abysmal. The use of some promising technical collection assets was hindered by a culture of risk-aversion.

If one looks deeper, though, these assertions about human intelligence meltdown and risk-aversion are valid but insufficient to provide a complete picture of the collection failure prior to the attacks. To understand collection problems against al-Qa'ida more deeply, we have to explore how the gaps in and strains on collection assets were exacerbated by a familiar quality of the CIA's identity and culture: homogeneity.

“The CIA probably doesn't have a single truly qualified Arabic-speaking officer of Middle Eastern background...”

Until the mid-1990s, US Customs forms asked ships entering American ports to list the number of cannons they carried on board; federal law also required that the US Agriculture Department keep field offices “within a day's horseback ride”¹⁶¹ of everyplace in the country. Bureaucracies adjust to change slowly, if at all.

The CIA certainly did not adjust the composition of its human intelligence assets rapidly following the collapse of the USSR. Despite a sweeping post-Cold War mandate, they remained just as homogeneous as before. As the *9/11 Commission Report* noted: “New hires in the Clandestine Service tended to have qualifications similar to those of serving officers: that is, they were suited for traditional agent recruitment or for exploiting liaison relationships with foreign services but were not equipped to seek or use assets inside the terrorist network.”¹⁶² In other words, they were mostly white, middle class, third-generation Americans.

in 2008: “Recruiting human sources does not appear to lead to career advancement. It is the lowest form of work within the Agency, and few top managers have ever recruited a good human source. To have recruited human sources in Al-Qa'ida...a case officer would have had to be in the field for years, away from Agency stations and HQs. He'd have returned to a dead career, with no management experience and with none of the connections at HQs necessary for personal advancement.. A person who want to advance in the organisation does so through lengthy service at HQs, with rare assignments overseas.” See Jones, The Human Factor: Inside the CIA's Dysfunctional Intelligence Culture, page 359.

¹⁶¹ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 51.

¹⁶² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 92.

One former CIA officer was slightly more graphic soon after the attacks, and highlighted the effect of this homogeneity on the intelligence Collection after against al-Qa'ida: "The CIA probably doesn't have a single truly qualified Arabic-speaking officer of Middle Eastern background who can play a believable Muslim fundamentalist who would volunteer to spend years of his life with shitty food and no women in the mountains of Afghanistan. For Christ's sake, most case officers live in the suburbs of Virginia."¹⁶³ While we have no exact figures, language skills tell part of the story: in 2001, only 20 percent of the graduating class of clandestine case officers were fluent in a non-Romance language.¹⁶⁴ Even after al-Qa'ida's 1998 embassy bombings, the CIA did not employ a single case officer who spoke Pashto, the primary dialect of their hosts, the Taliban (it still had none as of 2002).¹⁶⁵ In a revealing turn of phrase, witnesses to the Joint Inquiry emphasized "The linguistic expertise needed to identify, analyze, and disseminate intelligence relating to the al-Qa'ida threat includes an understanding of colloquial expression in [Redacted] 'terrorist languages' and dialects."¹⁶⁶ The mere fact that the phrase 'terrorist languages' was used by members of the US Intelligence Community in testimony to Congress is an indication of the cultural blindness imposed by its homogeneity.

There is also evidence that when the CIA was in contact with people in the same region as al-Qa'ida, its people brought American mindsets with them: the Northern Alliance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud's intelligence men were frustrated "that the CIA always seemed to think Massoud and his men were motivated by money".¹⁶⁷ How could such teams take in the mindsets of the 19 men who became the 9/11 hijackers?

In addition to the impetus from the Africa embassy bombings, the persistence of homogeneity among human collectors is surprising in light of two recent episodes in the CIA's history: their massive failure in Iran in the early 1980s, and their much-acclaimed success in assisting Afghans in their struggle against the Soviets in the 1980s. Apparently, neither episode substantially

¹⁶³ Quoted in Reuel Marc Gerecht, "The Counterterrorist Myth," Atlantic Monthly July/August 2001.

¹⁶⁴ Zegart, "September 11 and the Adaptation Failure of U.S. Intelligence Agencies." page 104.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Powers, "The Trouble with the CIA " New York Review of Books January 17 2002, page 4.

¹⁶⁶ "Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," page 343.

¹⁶⁷ Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 7. The author is reminded of a conversation with a USMC intelligence officer in Jordan, who described an Iraqi as "a Fundamentalist in the sense that he can't be bribed with *money*."

changed the makeup of the CIA's Operations Officers. After the Revolution in Iran, Miller says, the Agency "failed to upgrade the competence and suitability of the agents it sent" to the Middle East.¹⁶⁸ Likewise, according to Gerecht, even *during* the Afghan war, the CIA never developed a team of true Afghan experts,¹⁶⁹ much less a diverse range of collectors. One former DO officer recalls that through the 1990s, the CIA had a "white-as-rice" culture.¹⁷⁰ Another DO officer said that prior to 9/11, the CIA "just kept driving down that set of tracks, working through diplomatic receptions, and areas that (sic) we knew there were no terrorists."¹⁷¹ The US embassy in Kabul was shut in January 1989,¹⁷² so no one was going to get closer to bin Ladin via that route. The fact that the number of Non-Official Cover (NOC) officers – those not working out of embassies – remained flat from 1990 to 2001¹⁷³ reinforces this assessment. The odds become even bleaker when one learns that the vast majority of NOC officers tended to be fake businessmen,¹⁷⁴ poorly suited to infiltrating al-Qa'ida. There is no evidence that any CIA asset posed as the sort of Western 'lost soul' who turned up on al-Qa'ida's doorstep prior to 9/11 (though some managed to join the fringes of the group).

Bin Ladin likely knew all these facts about the CIA, and more. An anecdote concerning the NSA supports this assertion. Like the CIA, language problems hindered the NSA, on whom the CIA relied to collect much of its signals intelligence about al-Qa'ida. On 9/11, the number of Afghan language specialists (i.e., those speaking Pashtun or Dari) at NSA was, Bamford writes, "almost nonexistent...they could be counted on one hand with fingers left over."¹⁷⁵ (Equally disturbing from a counterintelligence viewpoint is the NSA's manner of coping with this linguistic shortfall: it sent its al-Qa'ida intercepts to

¹⁶⁸ Miller, Stone and Mitchell, The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop It, page 129.

¹⁶⁹ Gerecht, "The Counterterrorist Myth."

¹⁷⁰ Baer, Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold Our Soul for Saudi Crude, page 97. He goes on "most case officers were middle-aged, Caucasian Protestant males with liberal-arts degrees. If they had any experience, it was in the military. Few spoke Arabic, and the ones who did spoke it badly."

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 94.

¹⁷² Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 5.

¹⁷³ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 94.

¹⁷⁴ Byman, "Strategic Surprise and the September 11th Attacks." page 157.

¹⁷⁵ Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 648.

Pakistan's ISI for translation, an organisation with a long history of involvement with the Taliban and bin Ladin)¹⁷⁶.

Al-Qa'ida had spent years studying US intelligence,¹⁷⁷ and understood the operational space that this crippling homogeneity afforded. How can we be sure? On Sunday, 9 September 2001, bin Ladin had the chutzpah to call to his mother in Syria¹⁷⁸ and tell her, in effect: "In two days you're going to hear big news, and you're not going to hear from me for a while".¹⁷⁹ Bin Ladin understood that that his call would be intercepted,¹⁸⁰ but he also knew that even for a relatively high-priority target like himself, the NSA's "Intercept-Interpret-Analyze" cycle for the region was running at about seventy-two hours: bin Ladin knew that by the time the phone call was collected, listened to, and understood by the CIA, the attacks would already have taken place!¹⁸¹

In sum, in addition to immense problems with HUMINT generally, including understaffing and risk-aversion, the CIA's homogeneity appears to have compounded its pre-9/11 blindness to the peril of al-Qa'ida during the Collection phase.

¹⁷⁶ Powers, "The Trouble with the CIA" page 4.

¹⁷⁷ Friedman, America's Secret War: Inside the Hidden Worldwide Struggle Between America and Its Enemies, page 2.

¹⁷⁸ Some allege that bin Ladin stopped using satellite phones in 1998 after a US newspaper story leaked the fact that the NSA could listen to his calls. See The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 127. This appears to be in correct: the source of the leak was a "foreign government", probably, given the NSA's outsourcing of translation to the ISI, Pakistan. See Glenn Kessler, "File the Bin Laden Phone Leak Under 'Urban Myths'," The Washington Post December 22 2005.

¹⁷⁹ Friedman, America's Secret War: Inside the Hidden Worldwide Struggle Between America and Its Enemies, page 2. For those who are interested, bin Ladin's satellite phone number was 00873682505331; see Bamford, Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency, page 615.

¹⁸⁰ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 127.

¹⁸¹ Friedman, America's Secret War: Inside the Hidden Worldwide Struggle Between America and Its Enemies, page 2. Similarly, on the day before the attacks, the NSA intercepted messages in which Al-Qa'ida suspects said things like "The match is about to begin" and "Tomorrow is zero hour". These were not translated until the 12th (presumably the cycle was somewhat accelerated by the attacks). On the other hand, more than thirty similar cryptic warnings had been intercepted in the months before 9/11, and these warnings were not followed by attacks. See Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, page 107.

Analysis – the Epicentre of the 9/11 Surprise

A few voices maintain that there was no failure at the CIA during the Analysis phase prior to 9/11. Byman, for example, says: “The Intelligence Community, particularly the CIA, did well in providing strategic warning of an al-Qa’ida threat. The identity of the foe, the scale of its ambitions, and its lethality were known and communicated in a timely manner.”¹⁸² Similarly, the former head of analysis at the CTC until 1999 alleges: “The [9/11] commission staff used such techniques as highly selective use of material, partial truths, irrelevant references, plays on words, quotations out of context, and suggestive language leading to false inferences to portray as weak what had been a strong strategic analytical performance.”¹⁸³ Even Betts does not hold analysts fully to account, saying that the CIA vaguely warned *whether* an attack was coming, though he acknowledges that CIA Analysis did not provide actionable warning about where, how, or exactly when it would come.¹⁸⁴

In contrast, this dissertation argues that analytical failure at the CIA lay at the epicentre of this strategic surprise. The failure during the Analysis phase was not entirely the product of the CIA’s identity and culture, but the fingerprints of those features that have been explored in previous surprises are also found on 9/11.

Therefore, in this section we first demonstrate that there was a basic analytical failure responsible for this surprise. Second, we explore some explanations offered by other scholars for this failure. Third, we explore this failure through both the perspective of culture and identity factors and through the words, actions and fate of the Cassandra of this case, Michael Scheuer.

“The preposition in the NIE’s title was not ‘against’ or ‘to’. The preposition was ‘in’”

The facts of the CIA’s failure during the Analysis phase are stark, and reveal misjudgements that are both broad and deep. First, al-Qa’ida was formed in 1988, and the CIA did not describe this organisation – at least in

¹⁸² Byman, “Strategic Surprise and the September 11th Attacks.”, page 151.

¹⁸³ Pillar, “Good literature and bad history: The 9/11 commission’s tale of strategic intelligence.”, page 1022, abstract.

¹⁸⁴ Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, page 105. Confirmed in Parker and Stern, “Bolt From the Blue or Avoidable Failure? Revisiting September 11 and the Origins of Strategic Surprise.” page 311. This case attempts to show that, as one of author’s masters at boarding school used to intone with deep irony: “If this isn’t a failure, it is certainly an invitation to greater effort.”

documents shown to the 9/11 Commission – until a decade later, in 1999.¹⁸⁵ As Laqueur notes, the only short profile of bin Ladin by the CIA (published in 1996) was entitled “Islamic Extremist Financier”: this was true but was “only the less important part of the truth”.¹⁸⁶ As Laqueur also says, the word “terrorism is notably absent in the 1996 profile, and it said nothing about the motivation, aims, or activities of al-Qa’ida outside of the Middle East”.¹⁸⁷ These facts stand in stark contrast to any exculpatory statements about the Agency’s pre-9/11 analytical performance.

Second, the CIA did not write any analytical assessment of possible hijacking scenarios by al-Qa’ida.¹⁸⁸ In the words of the 9/11 Commission: “The CTC did not analyze how an aircraft, hijacked or explosives-laden, might be used as a weapon... [T]he CTC did not develop a set of telltale indicators for this method of attack... [T]he CTC did not propose, and the Intelligence Community collection management process did not set requirements to monitor such telltale indicators.”¹⁸⁹

Third, there was at the CIA “limited analytic focus on the United States as a target”.¹⁹⁰ Even as late as 2001, when the CIA briefed Attorney General Ashcroft on al-Qa’ida on 5 July, the Agency simply warned, “that a significant terrorist attack was imminent.”¹⁹¹ Though Ashcroft was told, “preparations for multiple attacks were in the late stages or already complete and that little additional warning could be expected... the briefing only addressed threats *outside the United States*”.¹⁹² When questioned over this failure, DCI Tenet employed a semantic fig leaf, emphasizing to investigators that the CIA’s 1995

¹⁸⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 341. This is sharply disputed as a “gross” mischaracterization in Pillar, “Good literature and bad history: The 9/11 commission’s tale of strategic intelligence.”, but widely accepted elsewhere.

¹⁸⁶ Laqueur, No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century, page 122.

¹⁸⁷ Laqueur, No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century, page 122.

¹⁸⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 345. Confirmed in the CIA Inspector General’s report on the pre-9/11 failures: “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” page xvii.

¹⁸⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 347. Confirmed in the CIA Inspector General’s report on the pre-9/11 failures: “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” pages xvii.

¹⁹⁰ “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” page xvii.

¹⁹¹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 259.

¹⁹² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 259. Emphasis added.

NIE was entitled “The Foreign Terrorist Threat *in* the United States”.¹⁹³ Tenet told them: “the preposition in the NIE’s title was not ‘against’ or ‘to’. The preposition was ‘in’.”¹⁹⁴ Such hair-splitting is hardly the stuff of analytically-reasoned threat assessment or high quality strategic warning.

Fourth, as Betts notes above, the CIA’s warnings about al-Qa’ida were vague about where, how, or when an attack would come. The best example of this nebulous strategic ‘warning’ is the famous Presidential Daily Brief (PDB) entitled “Bin Ladin determined to strike US,”¹⁹⁵ which President Bush received on 6 August 6 2001.¹⁹⁶ This was the 36th PDB item of the year to mention bin Ladin or al-Qa’ida, but it was the first devoted to a possible attack *in* the US.¹⁹⁷ However, few who actually read this document – alleged by some because of its title to be a ‘smoking gun’ that shifts culpability squarely from the CIA to the White House – would say that CIA analysts issued a clear strategic warning in

¹⁹³ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 139. Parker and Stern, “Bolt From the Blue or Avoidable Failure? Revisiting September 11 and the Origins of Strategic Surprise.” page 311 seems to take Tenet’s side, saying “the attacks on September 11th could be seen as vindication for Tenet’s vigilance.”

¹⁹⁴ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 139. Given the amount of self-pleading by Tenet on this issue, a short amplification of it is required. In his memoirs, Tenet attempts an interesting spin on the lack of an NIE. He says that he “decided that the usual intelligence reporting in the form of Presidential Briefs, finished intelligence reports, National Intelligence Estimates, and the like was insufficient for conveying the seriousness of the threat (sic). So I began sending personal letters to the president [i.e. both Clinton and Bush] and virtually the entire national security community, explicitly laying out why I was concerned about the looming terrorist attacks. I knew that all senior officials had full in-boxes -- only something out of the ordinary would get their attention. Even one such letter would have been an unusual step. During my tenure, I wrote eight of them....I believed the only way to get their attention was to tell them what I knew and what concerned me, and to do so over and over and over again.” See Tenet and Harlow, At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA, page 122. Given how Tenet treated the frantic email from Michael Scheuer discussed below, this passage is deeply ironic. It also, of course, turns on its head the intelligence cycle (how were such letters going to affect Tasking and Collection against Al-Qa’ida in the Intelligence Community?), and runs counter to the idea – that permeates the literature - that NIEs are the primary method of providing focus and warning to the US Government. The CIA Inspector General’s Report certainly gave no credence to this self-pleading. See “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” (pages vi and viii. Tenet’s defense of, “I was so concerned, over a period of years, I threw out all usual intelligence procedures: sadly, Government (parties otherwise unnamed) didn’t listen”. It is the self-portrait of a would-be Cassandra, but is instead a classic piece of hindsight bias and rationalization. As we discuss below, the Inspector General’s Report is clear “Neither the DCI nor the DDCI followed up these warnings and admonitions by creating a documented, comprehensive plan to guide the counterterrorism effort at the Intelligence Community level.” See “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” page viii.

¹⁹⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 261.

¹⁹⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 261.

¹⁹⁷ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 260.

this document. The PDB was, as President Bush later described it, “historical in nature”.¹⁹⁸ The following, for example, are the bold typed headlines of this PDB, the key ‘take-aways’ for the President:

- Clandestine, foreign government, and media reports indicate Bin Ladin since 1997 has wanted to conduct terrorist attacks in the US;
- The millennium plotting in Canada in 1999 may have been part of Bin Ladin’s first serious attempt to implement a terrorist strike in the US;
- Although Bin Ladin has not succeeded, his attacks against the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 demonstrate that he prepares operations years in advance and is not deterred by setbacks;
- Al-Qa’ida members – including some who are US citizens – have resided in or traveled to the US for years, and the group apparently maintains a support structure that could aid attacks;
- We have not been able to corroborate some of the more sensational threat reporting, such as that from a [REDACTED] service in 1998 saying that Bin Ladin wanted to hijack a US aircraft to gain release of ‘Blind Shaykh’ ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Rahman and other US-held extremists.’¹⁹⁹

Except for the last three sentences of the PDB (which discuss ongoing FBI activities in response to the historical portrait just painted), this ‘strategic warning’ is almost entirely historical background. It is disturbing, yes, but it is not a basis for action, especially in light of the thirty-five other snippets about bin Ladin and al-Qa’ida in the preceding seven months’ PDBs.²⁰⁰ If anything, this PDB makes gaining an understanding of the CIA’s failure to better Task and Collect information about bin Ladin even more pressing (or it makes these failures even more outrageous). The PDB of 6 August 2001 is certainly not evidence of a strong analytical performance by the CIA prior to 9/11, i.e., it was not ‘actionable warning’.²⁰¹ It amounts to what is called in Washington a ‘backgrounder’ about an ongoing FBI investigation.

“What was missing was an analytical overview”

In fact, this PDB exemplifies the CIA’s analytical failure regarding al-Qa’ida, and not simply because it is overwhelmingly historical. It exemplifies the failure because it is representative of the stream of minor historical or tactical

¹⁹⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 260.

¹⁹⁹ The text of that portion of the August 6th, 2001 PDB is available The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 261-2.

²⁰⁰ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 260.

²⁰¹ As the author of a CIA manual on strategic surprise and warning clearly states as a section heading “Policymakers need evidence on which they can act.” See Grabo, Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning, page 139.

reports about al-Qa'ida that the CIA issued without preparing an NIE or SNIE about the threat. Despite numerous individual papers dealing with al-Qa'ida and Bin Ladin,²⁰² prior to 9/11 the CIA provided no complete portrayals of his strategy or of the extent of al-Qa'ida's involvement in past terrorist attacks.²⁰³ As we have seen in the three cases above, NIEs and SNIEs are "considered to be the DCI's most authoritative written judgements on national security issues",²⁰⁴ yet the last time an NIE focused on foreign terrorism prior to 9/11 was in 1997.²⁰⁵ That NIE was six pages long; it devoted three sentences to bin Ladin, and did not mention al-Qa'ida at all.²⁰⁶ The previous NIE on terrorism, issued in July 1995, did not mention bin Ladin or al-Qa'ida.²⁰⁷

Betts says, "The intelligence system can avert policy failure by presenting relevant and undisputed facts to non-expert principals who might otherwise make decisions in ignorance."²⁰⁸ Those presentations must be made in the format and manner that principals can digest and act upon. Because of this lack of an NIE, however, the 9/11 Commission reported: "Policymakers knew that there was a dangerous individual, Usama Bin Ladin, whom they had been trying to capture and bring to trial. Documents at the time referred to Bin Ladin 'and his associates' or Bin Ladin and his 'network'. They did not emphasise the existence of a structured worldwide organisation gearing up to train thousands of potential terrorists."²⁰⁹ In other words, not one of the

²⁰² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 342 cites "Bin Ladin Threatening to Attack US Aircraft [with antiaircraft missiles] (June 1998), "Strains Surface Between Taliban and Bin Ladin" (January 1999), "terrorist Threat to US Interests in Caucasus" (June 1999), "Bin Ladin to Exploit Looser Security During Holidays" (December 1999), "Bin Ladin Evading Sanctions" (March 2000), "Bin Ladin's Interest in Biological, Radiological Weapons" (February 2001), "Taliban Holding Firm on Bin Ladin for Now" (March 2001), "terrorist Groups Said to be Cooperating on US Hostage Plot" (May 2001), and "Bin Ladin Determined to Strike in the US" (August, 2001).

²⁰³ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 342. The general failure of the CIA to provide strategic warning is confirmed in the CIA Inspector General's report on the pre-9/11 failures: "OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks," pages xvii.

²⁰⁴ Turner, Why Secret Intelligence Fails, page 109.

²⁰⁵ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 86.

²⁰⁶ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 86.

²⁰⁷ John Solomon, CIA Warned of Attack 6 Years Before 9/11, 2004, Associated Press, April 16, December 19 2008.

²⁰⁸ Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable." page 88.

²⁰⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 118. The general failure of the CIA to provide strategic warning is confirmed in the CIA Inspector General's report on the pre-9/11 failures: "OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks," pages xvii.

hundreds of reports on al-Qa'ida produced by the CIA between 1998 and 11 September 2001 provided a broad overview of al-Qa'ida's involvement in past terrorist acts, a comprehensive overview of their strategy, a summary of their financial reach, or an in-depth discussion of the nature of their relationship with governments in the Middle East. As Zegart says, "CIA assessments pointed out the trees but never provided a picture of the forest".²¹⁰

We have seen this pattern in our previous cases. Brzezinski's comments about the Islamic Revolution in Iran are equally appropriate to 9/11: "Failure is not so much a matter of particular intelligence reports"; instead failure results from "a deeper intellectual misjudgement of a central historical reality".²¹¹ An NIE is where the CIA would convey such a judgement to policymakers and to the rest of the Intelligence Community – in the language of strategic surprise, how it would have provided a 'high quality' warning. As a former member of the National Intelligence Council said: "The lack of an NIE is a strong piece of evidence that Director Tenet and the Intelligence Community failed to take a strategic view of the terrorism threat."²¹² In this instance, the threat assessment prior to the strategic surprise was not so much distorted as inchoate.

The 9/11 Commission arrived at the same conclusion. Commission staff member MacEachin – a veteran former CIA analyst himself – thought that it was "unforgivable"²¹³ that no NIE on al-Qa'ida or terrorism of any sort was produced for four years before the attacks. MacEachin was "shocked that no one at the senior levels of the CIA had attempted – for years – to catalog and give context to what was known about al-Qa'ida."

To make this point to the 9/11 Commissioners, MacEachin even prepared – "as a piece of wise-ass" theatre,"²¹⁴ – a bogus intelligence report nominally written in 1997 which detailed everything that was then known by the different parts of the CIA about al-Qa'ida. It was filled with graphs, charts, and timelines. MacEachin then summoned the ten Commission members to a special briefing where he unveiled this concocted "Pre-911 CIA report". In response, the members were outraged at the apparent lack of action by US policymakers (e.g., Commissioner Jamie Gorelick said: "I insist that we get a

²¹⁰ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 115.

²¹¹ Brzezinski, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981, page 397.

²¹² Quoted in Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 86.

²¹³ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 314.

²¹⁴ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 312.

copy”; Commissioner Bob Kerrey responded more passionately: “What the *fuck?*”).²¹⁵ After MacEachin explained the actual origin of the report, the ex-CIA man’s point was clear: instead of providing analysis that gave context to a national security threat, the CIA had turned itself into a “Headline service” that “fed small nuggets of intelligence about terrorist threats to policy makers but never made the larger context clearer”.²¹⁶

At least one current CIA supervisor, known to the 9/11 Commission as ‘John,’ agreed with MacEachin’s view;²¹⁷ certainly an excessive preoccupation with current intelligence is identified in the literature on strategic surprise as a precipitating factor of surprises.²¹⁸ In its conclusions, the 9/11 Commission made plain their view that the failure of the CIA to produce an NIE about al-Qa’ida was a grave blunder, not least because: “[NIEs] provoke widespread thought and debate, have a major impact on their recipients, often in a wider circle of Decisionmakers. The National Intelligence Estimate is noticed in Congress, for example.”²¹⁹ In other words, a potentially important tool to prompt better Tasking and Collection by both the CIA and the rest of the Intelligence Community was never employed.

The CIA-IG Report echoed the Commission’s conclusion, saying: the IG “Team found that neither the DCI nor the DDCI followed up [their] warnings and admonitions by creating a documented, comprehensive plan to guide the counterterrorism effort at the Intelligence Community level”.²²⁰ As Diamond says, prior to 9/11: “What was missing was an analytical overview that could have given the harried operators [of Collection platforms and tasks] a better idea of

²¹⁵ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 312-3. Emphasis original.

²¹⁶ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 314. According to Betts, in the post 9/11 world bureaucratic defensiveness adds this headline-service mentality, and intelligence bureaucrats “pass all information on to avoid ‘later accusations that data was not taken seriously. As one official complained, this behaviour is...’preparing for the next 9/11 commission instead of preparing for the next 9/11.” See Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, page 111-2.

²¹⁷ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 277.

²¹⁸ Grabo, Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning, page 164.

²¹⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 343.

²²⁰ “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” age viii. Responding to criticism after public release of the CIA-Inspector General report in 2007, “former director Tenet issued a three-page statement that omitted any discussion of CIA or Intelligence Community analysis of the terrorist threat prior to 9/11. When confronted with evidence of an across the board failure by the analytical community to address a threat that Tenet himself believed worthy of a declaration of war, Tenet had nothing to say.” See Diamond, The CIA and the Culture of Failure: US Intelligence from the End of the Cold War to the Invasion of Iraq, page 372.

what they should be looking for, what kinds of intelligence should be deemed important".²²¹ An intelligence cycle is only as strong as its weakest link, and Analysis prior to 9/11 was very weak indeed. The question is "How and Why?" We now move to answer that question in the second part of our examination of the Analysis phase.

"'Failure of Imagination' is more of a slogan than an argument"

Numerous indicators and informed judgements point to a massive failure in the Analysis phase at the CIA prior to 9/11. Oddly, however, the reasons for this failure have not been fully explored. Soon after the attacks, those who chose to see bin Ladin as a "megalomaniacal hyperterrorist"²²² – a sort of 'lone gunman', a Lee Harvey Oswald writ large – contended that al-Qa'ida did not receive sufficient attention from analysts because it did not fit into the traditional classifications of terrorist groups "along organizational or ideological lines, with revolutionary left wing, conservative right wing, separatist-nationalist and religious terrorism as typical categories".²²³

Another approach was that of the *9/11 Commission Report*, which popularized the phrase "Failure of imagination"²²⁴ to explain analytical failures at the CIA. As Falkenrath says, however: "The Commission's 'failure of imagination' is more of a slogan than an argument: it sounds good but is an almost indecipherable muddle."²²⁵ This slogan did capture, however, the imagination of the media, and spawned some scholarly efforts that put the focus back on the individual psychological make-ups of intelligence analysts²²⁶, on

²²¹ Diamond, The CIA and the Culture of Failure: US Intelligence from the End of the Cold War to the Invasion of Iraq, page 370-1. Confirmed in "Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," page 336-7 and "OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks," pages xvii-xviii.

²²² Ehud Sprinzak, "The lone gunman," Foreign Policy November/December (2001), page 72.

²²³ Sprinzak, "The lone gunman." page 72.

²²⁴ See The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 339-47. Some ascribe this phrase to Paul Wolfowitz (see The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 336), but the science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke used it in the title of an essay ("Hazards of Prophecy: The Failure of Imagination") in a book entitled Profiles of the Future first published in 1962.

²²⁵ Falkenrath, "The 9/11 Commission Report: A Review Essay." page 178.

²²⁶ For example Uri Bar-Joseph and Rose McDermott, "Change the Analyst and Not the System: A Different Approach to Intelligence Reform," Foreign Policy Analysis 4 (2008).

organisational theories of intelligence failure,²²⁷ and on the various ways that imagination might be ‘institutionalized.’²²⁸

It has also been suggested that, in addition to a failure of imagination, the CIA’s CTC focused too much on tactical issues, operations and collection problems, and not enough on analysis.²²⁹ The CIA’s Inspector General Report concluded that the CTC’s operational focus “overshadowed collaborative strategic analysis”.²³⁰ Even Deputy DCI John McLaughlin (generally a supporter of Langley’s pre-911 performance) has conceded that most of the work of the CTC’s 30- to 40-person analytic group (out of a unit of about 400)²³¹ dealt with collection issues.²³² In late 2000, DCI Tenet himself had recognized this deficiency at the CTC and appointed a senior manager to create “a strategic assessment capability” there.²³³ The CTC established this strategic assessment branch in July 2001, but then laboured to find analysts to staff it.²³⁴ It was too little, too late: the new analytical chief reported for duty at the CTC on September 10, 2001.²³⁵

Another explanatory factor already touched upon deserves further exploration. When the Cold War ended, the culture of the Directorate of Intelligence moved away from “a patient, strategic approach to the long term accumulation of intellectual capital” to “the culture of the newsroom”.²³⁶ In the era of CNN, the so-called 24-hour news cycle “eroded the CIA’s strategic analysis capabilities.”²³⁷ Some have suggested that as a result, “Current intelligence” – as opposed to strategic intelligence – was where analysts could “look good and occupy center stage”.²³⁸

²²⁷ For example, Zegart, “September 11 and the Adaptation Failure of U.S. Intelligence Agencies.”

²²⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 346.

²²⁹ Byman, “Strategic Surprise and the September 11th Attacks.” page 157.

²³⁰ “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001,” page 342.

²³¹ “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001,” page 233.

²³² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 342

²³³ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 342

²³⁴ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 84-5.

²³⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 342

²³⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 91 See also Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 68-9.

²³⁷ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11 page 69

²³⁸ Turner, Why Secret Intelligence Fails page 104.

This change also impinged on the analytical talent pool. According to one insider, the DI's concentration on current intelligence led to a premium being put not on substantive expertise, but on analysts who were generalists, who wrote well, and who met tight deadlines quickly.²³⁹ Meanwhile, the post-Cold War resource problems plaguing the DO were also at work in the Directorate of Intelligence, where they were also solved by 'surging.' A 1997 *Studies* article titled "The Coming Intelligence Failure", says that "the analytic base is dangerously thin" and that there is an attitude that "Analysts are fungible... [A] belief that we can meet crises by moving analysts between disciplines has distinct limitations."²⁴⁰

There is also the fact that bin Ladin used rumours²⁴¹ and disinformation to keep the system on alert,²⁴² which naturally leads to analysts' "warning fatigue".²⁴³ For example, bin Ladin "routinely told important visitors to expect significant attacks against US interests soon, and [in the summer of 2001] during a speech at the al Faruq camp, exhorted trainees to pray for the success of an attack involving 20 martyrs".²⁴⁴ Clearly, combined with other factors, this drumbeat of threats and invective by al-Qa'ida against the US desensitised some analysts.

Soon after 9/11, a former CTC chief gave a different explanation. He told the Joint Inquiry that the CTC "have underinvested in the strategic only because we've had such near-term threats. The trend is always toward the tactical...The tactical is where lives are saved. And it is not necessarily commonly accepted, but strategic analysis does not...get you to saving lives."²⁴⁵ In any case, the IG Report found that "the DCI Counterterrorist Center (CTC) was not used effectively as a strategic coordinator of the IC's counterterrorism

²³⁹ Russell, Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right page 126.

²⁴⁰ Russ Travers, "The Coming Intelligence Failure," Studies in Intelligence 01.1 (1997) page 3.

²⁴¹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 251.

²⁴² Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 419

²⁴³ Lowenthal, Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy, page 87.

²⁴⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 251.

²⁴⁵ "Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," page 338.

efforts. Before 9/11...the Center's focus was primarily operational and tactical."²⁴⁶

All of these assertions may contain elements of the truth. In the third part of our examination of pre-911 Analysis, however, we advance a different explanation for the analytical breakdown. The four characteristics of the CIA's identity and culture – scientism, homogeneity, an obsession with secrets, and an impulse to consensus – one shown to have played a highly influential role in this surprise.

The "Mathematicians" versus the Poet

In Chapter 3, we the discussed the formation of the tone of scientism that pervaded the analytical culture of the CIA. In doing so, we quoted a passage in which Sherman Kent poured scorn on his colleagues who resisted his attempts to create an "airtight vocabulary of estimative expressions" for CIA analysts to employ. Specifically, Kent alleged that his substantial efforts in this arena were opposed by "the 'poets'--as opposed to the 'mathematicians'--in my circle of associates". He added: "If the term [i.e. poet] conveys a modicum of disapprobation on my part, that is what I want it to do".²⁴⁷ We have also seen how this narrow approach to 'reason' endured in the CIA's analytical culture.

It is revealing, therefore, to realise that bin Ladin's first declaration of war against the US included a poem addressed to then Secretary of Defense William Perry:

*O William, tomorrow you will be informed
As to which young man will face your swaggering brother
A youngster enters the midst of battle smiling, and
Retreats with his spearhead stained with blood.*²⁴⁸

In fact, bin Ladin was prone to expressing himself in poetry. In the following, he praises the attack on the *USS Cole* by writing that the US ship:

*Sails into the waves flanked by arrogance, haughtiness, and false power.
To her doom she moves slowly. A dinghy awaits her riding the waves.
In Aden, the young men stood up for holy war and destroyed
A destroyer feared by the powerful.*²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ "Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," page 336 and confirmed in "OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks," page viii.

²⁴⁷ Kent, "Words of Estimative Probability."

²⁴⁸ Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 10.

²⁴⁹ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 215.

In the same poem, bin Ladin alluded to future attacks, saying:

*"Your brothers in the East have readied their mounts...and the battle camels are prepared to go."*²⁵⁰

We have returned to a situation akin to that of bin Ladin's use of caves: a medium perfectly attuned to appeal to bin Ladin's audience is also tailor-made to be ignored in a CIA culture steeped in scientism. Bin Ladin's penchant for versifying and the poetry itself was not merely in the foreign language of Arabic, it derived from a conceptual universe light years from Langley. It is a revealing symptom of the profoundly differing worldviews of analytical subject and object. As in the Iranian case above, it is evidence of the difficulty that CIA analysts had entering the mindset of an enemy for whom "the Crusades were a continual historical process", ²⁵¹ one who was "spiritually anchored in the seventh century."²⁵² Kent and his progeny found (as "students reared in the Western tradition"²⁵³) that the Scientific Method "to be best adapted to the search for truth."²⁵⁴ In bin Ladin, however, analysts confronted exactly that which Kent had disdained in the same article: "the medicine man and his mystical communion with the All-Wise".²⁵⁵ Far from embodying elements of science and progress (not to mention US benevolence): "Bin Ladin clearly believes that the twentieth century was characterized by a steady return to barbarism, and more precisely, barbarism refined, modernized and practiced by the Christian West, and especially the United States, against Muslims in a high-tech replay of the murderous practices used by Catholic armies during three-plus centuries of Crusades."²⁵⁶

Institutionally, the CIA's persistent analytical culture of 'reason' was almost an exact opposite of al-Qa'ida's, which married the assumption that 'faith' is stronger than weapons or nations with the idea that the ticket to enter a sacred zone where miracles occur is the willingness to die.²⁵⁷ Of course, bin Ladin and al-Qa'ida also embody many qualities at odds with such caricatures,

²⁵⁰ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 215.

²⁵¹ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 194.

²⁵² Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 194.

²⁵³ Kent, "Words of Estimative Probability." page 7. Emphasis added.

²⁵⁴ Kent, "Words of Estimative Probability." page 7. Emphasis added.

²⁵⁵ Kent, "Words of Estimative Probability." page 7. Emphasis added.

²⁵⁶ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America page 206 For an interesting and historically well-grounded exploration of the implications of Al-Qa'ida's world view for deterrence, see Jonathan M. Schachter, "The Eye of the Believer: Psychological Influences on Counter-Terrorism Policy-Making," RAND Graduate School, 2002. pages 79-102.

²⁵⁷ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 138.

including a strong sense of personal responsibility, patience, and professionalism.²⁵⁸ We begin to see here why Alec Station, composed of a group of analysts who had studied bin Ladin and his worldview enough to grasp his intent encountered such problems 'selling' a threat to the rest of the CIA.

Facing the CIA analysts was, after all, a self-proclaimed enemy who was hosted by the Taliban, a group not known for its commitment to Enlightenment ideals. After the fall of Kabul, one of its number jumped into a cage at the Kabul Zoo and cut the nose off a bear because the animal's 'beard' was not long enough to satisfy Koranic injunctions.²⁵⁹ Such heinous behaviour was writ large when bin Ladin's hosts dynamited and shelled the 'idols' at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Bamian.²⁶⁰ A sign posted on the wall of Kabul's (Saudi-trained) religious police would seem to say everything a CIA analyst needed to know about Afghanistan and the movement that it harboured: "Throw reason to the dogs: it stinks of corruption."²⁶¹

When one's analytical background is 'science-based' and one's analytical mandate involves "weapons proliferation, terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime, illicit trade practices and environmental issues of great gravity",²⁶² a self-proclaimed enemy with such a *Weltanschauung* is difficult to credit as a top-priority threat.

"Theoretical glaucoma"

A focus on reason and a worldview accustomed to framing its thinking entirely in post-Enlightenment terms would also find al-Qa'ida's grievances against America opaque. Without a doubt, deference to the supernatural is omnipresent in the United States,²⁶³ but bin Ladin's declarations that during the 1990 Gulf War the US gravely insulted Islam by "entering a peninsula that no religion from among the non-Muslim states has entered for 14 centuries", and

²⁵⁸ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, pages 75-81 discusses bin Ladin's character traits.

²⁵⁹ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 262. The noseless bear was one of four animals in the zoo that survived Taliban rule; a second was a lion that the Taliban had blinded with a grenade.

²⁶⁰ "Taliban Explains Buddha Demolition," The New York Times March 19 2001. no page: accessed online at www.nytimes.com.

²⁶¹ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 262

²⁶² Quoted in Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 362.

²⁶³ See <http://www.the-brights.net/>. Alternatively, consider the central role offered to the supernatural in the opening ceremonies of government, legal procedures, and the US tax code; no elected official can admit to a naturalistic cosmology and expect to gain high office.

that “never has Islam suffered a greater disaster than this invasion”²⁶⁴ would strike the non-Islamic specialists among US analysts as eccentric. As Seliktar discusses in the context of the Iranian Revolution, Islamic fundamentalism confounded “accepted notions of rationality, linear progression and [therefore the] time-honoured tools for peering into the future”.²⁶⁵ Once again, the CIA's culture and identity, especially its deference to Western reason, led to a “theoretical glaucoma”²⁶⁶ much like that which blinded analysts to the threat posed to the Shah by Islamic Fundamentalism in our first case. Bin Ladin and US analysts were operating in different Kuhnian paradigms.²⁶⁷ Despite the lesson of 1979, the CIA's culture and identity still could not credit the idea that “many people take God seriously”.²⁶⁸

This blindness was not limited to CIA analysts. Ralph Peters issued this warning to the Department of Defense in a 1999 essay in *Parameters* entitled “Our Old New Enemies”:

We maintain a *cordon sanitaire* around military operations, ignoring the frightening effect of our enemy's will and persistence. We accept the CNN reality of “mad mullahs” and intoxicated masses, yet we do not consider belief a noteworthy factor when assessing our combat operations...We shy away from manifestations of faith, suspecting them or ignoring them, or, at best, analyzing them in the dehydrated language of the sociologist. But if we want to understand the warriors of the world and the fury that drives them, we had better open our minds to the power of belief.²⁶⁹

What we argue here is that the CIA's pervasive privileging of ‘reason’ – Peter's “dehydrated language of the sociologist” – amplified a general American cultural predisposition to underestimate danger from al-Qa'ida.

“A form of divination”

The same analytical outlook that led to a mis-assessment of al-Qa'ida's sincerity of intent contributed to a blind spot about its likely aims and *modus operandi*. Michael Handel pointed out that in the Western tradition it is usually assumed that if it is impossible to win a war, then starting one is

²⁶⁴ Quoted in Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 124.

²⁶⁵ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, page 174.

²⁶⁶ Milani, The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic, page 22.

²⁶⁷ Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, page 173-8.

²⁶⁸ Lipsky, “A Primer for Spies.” page A19.

²⁶⁹ Ralph Peters, “Our Old New Enemies,” Parameters 29.2 (1999), pages 28-30.

counterproductive and irrational.²⁷⁰ Handel said, however, that a crucial point repeatedly missed by Western analysts is that for many non-Western cultures (among them the Chinese, Vietnamese, and the Arabs), Clausewitzian primacy is taken one step farther. Handel argued that, in these cultures, “it makes sense to resort to war even if victory is impossible, as long as one can win *politically*.”²⁷¹ Johnston also underscored this point in the context of Islam: “As a result of the fundamental cultural rejection of war for religion by the West in the early modern period, it has been especially difficult for Western culture to accept and make sense of the ongoing presence of the phenomenon of war for the faith in modern Muslim societies”.²⁷² How much more difficult for CIA analysts steeped in an internal culture of positivism? As Betts reminded us in the context of Khrushchev’s plans for Cuba, ‘rational’ strategy was simply one in which means were logically consistent with ends,²⁷³ and said nothing whatever about the nature of those ends.

For that reason, we can say that bin Ladin’s worldview – while definitely grounded in a form of reason – is pre-Clausewitzian. As Monroe and Kreidie say in “The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists and the Limits of Rational Choice Theory”, rational choice requires “some sequential ordering of events, but *the events themselves need not be real*”.²⁷⁴

One might even take this argument a step further and suggest that the most useful guide to bin Ladin’s worldview might be the pre-WWII Dutch cultural theorist Johan Huizinga, who pointed out that prior to the notion of either ‘Total War’ or ‘Limited War’, wars were sometimes fought to “obtain a decision of holy validity”²⁷⁵, or even as “a form of divination”.²⁷⁶ The CIA’s analytical culture, exuding “a strong positivistic belief in a ‘rational’ political universe which experts could objectively analyze”,²⁷⁷ simply could not register bin Ladin as a serious

²⁷⁰ Handel, “Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise.” page 34.

²⁷¹ Handel, “Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise.” page 34.

²⁷² James Turner Johnson, The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1997), page 15.

²⁷³ Betts, Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning, page 129.

²⁷⁴ Kristen Renwick Monroe and Lina Haddad Kreidie, “The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists and the Limits of Rational Choice Theory,” Political Psychology 18.1 (1997), page 27. Emphasis added. For more on the degree to which terrorists – even suicide terrorists – are *actually* irrational, see especially Louise Richardson, What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat (New York, NY: Random House, 2007).

²⁷⁵ Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture, page 91.

²⁷⁶ Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture, page 91.

²⁷⁷ Seliktar, Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran, pages 187-8

threat, except perhaps to characterize him as one of Peter's "mad mullahs".²⁷⁸ It was an analytical culture singularly ill equipped to understand the nature of many – though not all²⁷⁹ – of al-Qa'ida's grievances, many of its aims, and especially its "theory of victory".²⁸⁰

Such a 'rationalistic' worldview likely also contributed to the failure by CIA analysts to explore al-Qa'ida's method of attack on 9/11: that aircraft, explosive-laden or otherwise, might be used as part of a suicide operation.²⁸¹ *Contra* the 9/11 Commission, more than a 'Failure of Imagination' is required to understand this oversight. In 1994, an Algerian group hijacked a plane in Paris and apparently intended to fly it into the Eiffel Tower;²⁸² in 1995, Manila police reported in detail about a suicide plot to crash a plane into CIA Headquarters;²⁸³ since the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, the NSC actively considered the use of aircraft as suicide weapons.²⁸⁴ Tom Clancy also wrote a novel about such an attack.²⁸⁵ As the Commission itself noted, the possibility of commercial planes as suicide weapons was both "imaginable and imagined",²⁸⁶ *just not at the CIA*. It is likely that a persistent 'cult of reason' we have documented among CIA analysts played a role.

"An analyst who was born and raised in rural America immediately recognizes a barn, a silo, or a windmill on an Iowa farmstead..."

²⁷⁸ Peters, "Our Old New Enemies." pages 28-30.

²⁷⁹ Scheuer says in Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 189, that many of bin Ladin's demands are "substantive, tangible issues". He expands on this theme in Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, pages 45-74.

²⁸⁰ An excellent recent discussion of how to approach the concept of "Theory of Victory" is Colin S. Gray, "Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory," (Carlisle, PA: The Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, 2002, *passim*, though this author disagrees with Gray's characterization of Al-Qa'ida's Theory. For a discussion of the Islamic Fundamentalist views of rational choice versus that of the average Muslim, see Monroe and Kreidie, "The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists and the Limits of Rational Choice Theory." page 31-41.

²⁸¹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 347.

²⁸² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 345. As the Commission points out on the same page, in 1994, a private plane was also crashed into the south lawn of the White House.

²⁸³ Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 275.

²⁸⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 345.

²⁸⁵ Hitz, Why Spy? Espionage in an Age of Uncertainty, page 83.

²⁸⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 345. For an accessible discussion of the logic of religious terrorism and violence, see Mark Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God: the Rise of Global Religious Violence (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), *passim*.

Another factor of CIA culture and identity that contributed to under- and mis-estimating al-Qa'ida in the Analysis phase is the homogeneity of the Agency. While this persistent attribute is heavily documented above, the CIA became even more homogenised when the Cold War ended. Former DCI Gates speaks of the post-Cold War CIA as less and less willing to employ “people that are a little different, people who are eccentric, people who don't look good in a suit and tie, people who don't play well in the sandbox with others. The kinds of tests that we make people pass, psychological, and everything else, make it hard for somebody who may be brilliant or have extraordinary talents and unique capabilities to get into the Agency.”²⁸⁷ Perhaps as a result, very few CIA analysts can read or speak Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, or Farsi²⁸⁸ – which collectively comprise the languages spoken by nearly half the world's population.

To this effect must be added the security requirements, which the 9/11 Commission underscored as a particular problem for recruiting counterterrorism analysts:

Security concerns also increased the difficulty of recruiting officers qualified for counterterrorism. Very few American colleges or universities offered programs in Middle Eastern languages or Islamic studies. The total number of undergraduate degrees granted in Arabic in all US colleges and universities in 2002 was six. Many who had travelled outside the United States could expect a long wait for initial clearance. Anyone who was foreign born or had numerous relatives abroad was well-advised not even to apply [to work at the CIA].²⁸⁹

We have no direct evidence, but considering that al-Qa'ida was drawn from what one expert called “a stateless, vagrant mob of religious mercenaries”,²⁹⁰ who “as stateless persons...naturally revolted against the very idea of the state”²⁹¹ and who “saw themselves as a borderless posse empowered by God to defend the entire Muslim people”,²⁹² the average CIA analyst (likely to be an ‘average American’) would struggle to fathom al-Qa'ida's

²⁸⁷ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 471.

²⁸⁸ Weiner, Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA, page 471.

²⁸⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 92 A *New York Times* article published about six months after the 9/11 Commission Report noted that the figure for Arabic Studies majors in 2003 had only risen to twenty-two. See Hitz, Why Spy? Espionage in an Age of Uncertainty, page 69.

²⁹⁰ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 185.

²⁹¹ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 121-2.

²⁹² Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 121-2.

motives in order to anticipate its possible actions. Michael Scheuer himself – our Cassandra – highlights this problem, saying that most Americans are simply puzzled when America is vilified, so we assume our accusers must be “demented”.²⁹³ Superficially crazy people, in a poor land, far away, rarely constitute a threat worth much serious analysis.

As discussed above, Scheuer also mentions the appearance of al-Qa’ida and its influence on the average American’s analysis: “The West has been too often misled by the raggedy appearance of bin Ladin and his subordinates – squatting in the dirt, clothed in robes and turbans, holding AK-47s and sporting chest length beards – and automatically assumes they are antimodern (sic), uneducated rabble.”²⁹⁴ Given the homogeneity of the CIA’s analysts, what Scheuer calls a problem of the West was most surely an acute problem of the CIA. It was akin to that described in a 1969 article in *Studies* (originally classified both “Secret” and “Not for Foreign Distribution”) which addressed the problem of unidentified objects in photographs. It read:

An analyst who was born and raised in rural America immediately recognizes a barn, a silo, or a windmill on an Iowa farmstead...the same analyst, however, might spend hours trying to identify fishnets drying on poles in Thailand because they resemble antenna arrays at certain electronic sites in the West, even though drying fishnets are as common in Thailand as windmills in Iowa...A domed building in a remote area of the western world is at once suspect as a radar site, but a domed building in an area inhabited by Moslems is usually a mosque.²⁹⁵

The CIA’s culture and identity remained that of the hypothetical photo-interrupter of this piece: someone from an Iowa farmstead whose rearing and training predisposed them to watch for radar domes, not mosques, and almost certain to ignore is said inside them.

In fact, the latest generation of analysts, insofar as they had encountered Islam, were probably like most American graduates in the ‘social sciences’ produced by US universities since the 1970s. As a result, Edward Said’s 1979 thesis in *Orientalism*²⁹⁶ had a central place in their theoretical baggage. We

²⁹³ Quoted in Scheuer, Through Our Enemies’ Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page xxi.

²⁹⁴ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies’ Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 80.

²⁹⁵ Brugioni, “The Unidentifieds.” page 9.

²⁹⁶ Laqueur, No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century, page 132, talking, of course, about Edward W. Said, Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient (London: Penguin Books, 1995). NB Said was a secularist of Christian descent, but nevertheless felt that he had an explicit duty to defend Islam against its detractors. See, for example, Said’s later volume, Edward Said, Covering Islam: How the Media and the

know that graduates from so-called ‘post-Orientalist’ study centres and departments later joined many government agencies,²⁹⁷ and this very likely included the CIA. This is part of the ‘discourse failure’ raised above. Laqueur writes: “the post-Orientalist mainstream views were perhaps most authoritatively expressed by Professor John L. Esposito of Georgetown University, not an extreme exponent of this school.”²⁹⁸ Esposito’s main text was *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* It voiced his belief that the threat was largely or perhaps entirely a figment of imagination.”²⁹⁹ Prior to September 11th, Esposito called bin Ladin merely a “champion of popular causes”;³⁰⁰ others of his colleagues were even more sceptical of any danger from Islamic terrorism.³⁰¹ It is therefore possible that chariness to accusations of Orientalism interacted with the CIA’s cultural appetite for consensus to downplay the menace of al-Qa’ida.

“Given the emotion of the moment, I let the analyst vent and just walked away”

As we begin the third and final section of our look at pre-9/11 Analysis, we should remind ourselves that convincing colleagues of a new and somewhat radical threat scenario is difficult. Lempert relates “In 1940, future General Matthew Ridgway wrote a war-game scenario about a surprise attack on the US fleet at Pearl Harbor. Ridgway’s fellow officers refused to take part in the war game because they regarded it as a ‘possibility so improbable that it did not constitute a proper basis for maneuver.’”³⁰² The experience of the Cassandra of the 9/11 case, Michael Scheuer – like DCI McCone a CIA employee – sheds light on how the demand for consensus played a part in the CIA’s chaotic analysis of al-Qa’ida.

Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World (New York, NY: Random House, 1997) *passim*.

²⁹⁷ Laqueur, No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century, page 133.

²⁹⁸ Laqueur, No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century, page 133.

²⁹⁹ Laqueur, No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century, page 133.

³⁰⁰ Laqueur, No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century, page 133.

³⁰¹ Here is Professor Fawaz Gerges: “Should not observers and academics keep skeptical (sic) about the US Government’s assessments of the terrorist threat? To what extent do terrorist ‘experts’ indirectly perpetrate the irrational fear of terrorism by focusing too much on farfetched horrible scenarios? Does the terrorist industry (sic), consciously or unconsciously, exaggerate the nature and degree of the terrorist threat to American citizens?” Quoted in Laqueur, No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century, page 134. This issue is also covered more broadly in Neumann and Smith, “Missing the Plot? Intelligence and Discourse Failure.” pages 98-102.

³⁰² Robert Lempert, “Can Scenarios Help Policymakers Be Both Bold and Careful?,” Blindside: How to Anticipate Forcing Events and Wild Cards in Global Politics, ed. Francis Fukuyama (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), page 113.

In 1998, simultaneous al-Qa'ida bomb attacks in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam killed about 220 people and wounded over 4000. Within a few days, one of the bin Ladin Unit's female analysts confronted DCI Tenet "crying and sobbing",³⁰³ (or according to Tenet, "quivering with emotion").³⁰⁴ In "a very rough scene,"³⁰⁵ she told him: "You are responsible for those deaths because you didn't act on the information we had, when you could have gotten him."³⁰⁶ Tenet records: "I had some self-doubt...but given the emotion of the moment, I let the analyst vent and just walked away".³⁰⁷

Apart from its inherent drama and tragedy that it foreshadows, this incident raises a pertinent question: 'How, after a confrontation like that, could even an analytical culture as poorly suited to al-Qa'ida as that described above fail to give proper strategic warning?' As the 9/11 Commission wrote: "Those government experts who saw Bin Ladin as an unprecedented new danger needed a way to win broad support for their views or at least spotlight the areas of dispute, and perhaps prompt action across government".³⁰⁸ We have seen that Langley failed to do so, and the familiar features of the CIA's identity and culture, appearing in the experience of Michael Scheuer, offer clues as to why.

In the years before 9/11, there were two CIA analytical units working on al-Qa'ida. At Langley, there was the CTC, a unit of some 400 people that included approximately thirty analysts working on terrorism. Al Qa'ida was not these CTC analysts' primary responsibility;³⁰⁹ their remit included all sorts of terrorism around the world.³¹⁰ The CTC, however, was not housed either as a stand-alone unit (like Alec Station; see below) or inside the Directorate of Intelligence – it was embedded in the DO. For this reason, the CTC was "viewed as an Operations shop."³¹¹

³⁰³ Quoted in Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 405.

³⁰⁴ Tenet and Harlow, At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA, page 115.

³⁰⁵ Quoted in Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 405.

³⁰⁶ Quoted in Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, page 405.

³⁰⁷ Tenet and Harlow, At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA, page 115.

³⁰⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 343.

³⁰⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States page 276.

³¹⁰ For example, their remit included the actions of "doomsday" cults like Aum Shinrikyo that spread sarin nerve agent on the Tokyo subways system in 1995; see The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 198.

³¹¹ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 84.

As a result, the Center “had difficulty attracting top-flight analysts”:³¹² a small minority of CTC analysts had PhDs;³¹³ one former senior manager had a master’s degree in English; and a former Chief at the CTC had a bachelor’s degree in forestry.³¹⁴ As noted above, when the attempt was made to give the CTC a more strategic focus in 2000, the DCI struggled to find analysts to staff it.³¹⁵

Zegart, a specialist in organisational theory, holds that for strategic analysts, working in the DO was “akin to operating behind enemy lines: the DO was home to people who ran spies, stole secrets, and conducted clandestine operations, not for egghead analysts who sat behind desks piecing together information about future threats.”³¹⁶ As a result, it is argued above, the CTC’s resulting operational focus overshadowed its strategic analysis.³¹⁷

The DO’s obsession with secrets³¹⁸ made for an exceptionally constrained analytical environment. Zegart writes that when the CTC was created in 1986:³¹⁹

Nowhere was a culture of ‘need to know’ more deeply rooted than in the DO: when the CTC was first created about fifteen years before 9/11, *DO personnel assigned to it requested additional safes and procedures to keep their information out of the hands of analysts working alongside them*, despite the fact that 1) the analysts all had the same clearances that they did, and 2) the CTC was started precisely to foster this kind of collaboration.³²⁰

Ironically, here DO personnel treated the secrets that they managed to collect about al-Qa’ida exactly as bin Ladin would have wished: they concealed them from CIA analysts!

³¹² Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11*, page 84.

³¹³ Russell, *Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right*, page 124.

³¹⁴ Russell, *Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to be Done to Get It Right*, page 124-5.

³¹⁵ Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11*, page 84-5.

³¹⁶ Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11*, page 91.

³¹⁷ “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001,” page 342.

³¹⁸ According to Gates, each of the CIA’s four directorates (the Directorate of Operations – DO; the Directorate of Intelligence, which does analysis – DI; the Directorate of Science & Technology – DS&T; and the Directorate of Administration- - D1) have “four distinct, bureaucratic cultures” Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*; it seems apparent from the passage that follows that the preference for secret information in the DI is amplified in the DO.

³¹⁹ “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001,” page 34.

³²⁰ Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11*, page 91. Emphasis added.

Even after 9/11, CTC analysts continued to complain of a lack of trust between DO and DI officers assigned there.³²¹ Information at the CIA was compartmentalized in order to protect it against exposure to technologically sophisticated adversaries, not al-Qa'ida.³²² Protection of sources and methods are important, but it is always a matter of degree. Here, they obviously affected the quality of analysis. One can also speculate that the DO obsession with 'secrets' would also make one unusually prone to imagine as chimerical a foe who declares war in a newsletter³²³ and who announces future attacks to groups of trainees.³²⁴

With this sketch of the CTC, we can already begin to see why no NIE on al-Qa'ida was produced by the CTC. The DO's operational concentration drove the culture of an unevenly staffed and poorly qualified CTC obsessed with secrecy, which took as an article of faith that "Strategic analysis does not...get you to saving lives."³²⁵

What about the bin Ladin Unit, Alec Station, the part of the CIA directly responsible for al-Qa'ida?

"The Manson Family"

In the cool prose of the 9/11 Commission, prior to the attacks analysts in the bin Ladin unit "felt that they were viewed as alarmists even within the CIA".³²⁶ This antiseptic statement masks a dramatic – even tragic – history of a Cassandra struggling to make a warning heard by his own Agency. As discussed above, Alec Station³²⁷ was an experimental 'virtual station' based in an office complex in Northern Virginia.³²⁸ It was conceived as an entity that would operate against bin Ladin much as a traditional CIA station at an embassy

³²¹ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 91-2.

³²² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 91.

³²³ Scheuer, Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, page 45

³²⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 251.

³²⁵ "Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," page 338.

³²⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 118.

³²⁷ The Station was named for Scheuer's adopted Korean son: see Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 274.

³²⁸ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 188.

would operate in a foreign country.³²⁹ Veteran analyst Michael Scheuer was recruited to run it,³³⁰ having previously run the Islamic Extremist Branch of the CTC.³³¹ The Unit started with about twelve analysts, and on 10 September 2001 was staffed by about forty people.³³²

Scheuer told 9/11 Commission investigators that he first came to see bin Ladin as a “truly dangerous man”³³³ the same year that the Station was established, at his instigation,³³⁴ with a focus on bin Ladin:

Scheuer remembered clearly sitting at his desk at Alec Station one morning in September 1996, reading through the twelve page translation of the fatwa and thinking My God, it sounds like Thomas Jefferson. This was not a ‘rant’ by some crazed religious fanatic. Instead, the fatwa read like “our Declaration of Independence – it had that tone. It was a frighteningly reasoned argument.” It contained none of the usual Islamic extremist rhetoric about the dangers of “women in the workplace or X-rated movies”. Instead, it was a clear statement of how a generation of Muslims was outraged at the Western exploitation of Arab oil, at American support for Israel, and, most important, at the presence of infidel troops in the land of the prophet Muhammad. “There was no ranting in it,” Scheuer said of the fatwa. “These were substantive, tangible issues.”³³⁵

For the next four years, his concern grew, and Scheuer – known in the 9/11 Commission Report as “Mike”³³⁶ – would do little but think of ways to capture or kill bin Ladin and to stop al-Qa’ida.³³⁷ As we saw, as early as December 1996, Scheuer prepared a fifty-paragraph memo about bin Ladin’s efforts to obtain WMD.³³⁸ As mentioned, his superiors refused to circulate the memo, saying that

³²⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 109.

³³⁰ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 187.

³³¹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 109.

³³² “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001,” page 230.

³³³ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 189,

³³⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 109.

³³⁵ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 189. Scheuer illuminates the parallels between bin Ladin and America’s Founding Fathers and various Christian religious figures on pages 3-14.

³³⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 110.

³³⁷ Klug, “Bin Laden Expert Steps Forward,” These efforts are narrated in The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 112-21 and 134-43.

³³⁸ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190.

Scheuer's work was "alarmist and wouldn't be taken seriously";³³⁹ it was cut to two paragraphs buried in a larger memo.³⁴⁰

After that memo, Scheuer became increasingly alarmed about al-Qa'ida, and in a Directorate that affected scholarly detachment and cool reason, his passion about the danger it posed became part of the problem communicating with the DI.³⁴¹

Like McCone, Scheuer's personality probably contributed to this problem. Shenon write that his mannerisms betrayed "his father was a marine"³⁴² and he was educated by Jesuits, an upbringing that Shenon speculates made Scheuer 'prickly'.³⁴³ This view of Scheuer extended beyond the CIA. At the NSC, Clarke saw the Chief of Alec Station as "dysfunctional", a "tantrum thrower," someone "whose difficult personality undermined his effectiveness".³⁴⁴ Scheuer's increasing passion, however, was also part of the problem. According to Shenon, Scheuer was "committed to his mission to the point of what some of his colleagues saw as zealotry. It could be off-putting. His eyes almost glowed with passion; it had made many of his colleagues at the CIA uncomfortable."³⁴⁵ In an interview with the investigative CBS television series *Sixty Minutes*, Scheuer was confronted with the following: "My understanding is you had a reputation within the CIA as being fairly obsessive about this subject".³⁴⁶ "I dislike obsessive," replied Scheuer. "I think hard-headed about it."³⁴⁷ As a result, in a DI that the 9/11 Commission said "still retained some of its original character of a university gone to war",³⁴⁸ Scheuer's bureaucratic position came to mirror his physical location: he became an outsider.

³³⁹ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190.

³⁴⁰ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190.

³⁴¹ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190 and confirmed in Klug, "Bin Laden Expert Steps Forward" .

³⁴² Heaven Foreend! Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190.

³⁴³ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190.

³⁴⁴ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 193; confirmed by Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 353-4.

³⁴⁵ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190.

³⁴⁶ Klug, "Bin Laden Expert Steps Forward,"

³⁴⁷ Klug, "Bin Laden Expert Steps Forward," though awkwardly phrased, this quotation is correctly quoted above.

³⁴⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 90.

The other analysts of Alec Station were in no position to amplify Scheuer's warnings to the rest of the Agency. We have already seen how Alec Station was deemed such an undesirable posting that no one from the DO wanted to run it.³⁴⁹ Similarly, once Scheuer agreed to take it over, the analysts who ended up at Alec Station were extremely junior. The Joint Inquiry's report found that they averaged about three year's experience, in contrast to the overall DI average of eight years experience for analysts.³⁵⁰ The obvious inference is that anyone with seniority or savvy avoided assignment to the bin Ladin Unit. One former DO officer remembers: "It's so smart to set up an Usama bin Ladin station, but then it gets stood up with a GS-13 [i.e., a mid-level] analyst and a few others?![sic]...The measure of true commitment is where your A+ people are. *We didn't put the right people in place.*"³⁵¹

There was another factor at work, a direct result of the Agency's homogeneity. The Near East Division had a "very masculine culture",³⁵² and most of Scheuer's team were women, which counted against them in the sense that their colleagues in the rest of the Division patronized them.³⁵³ The combination of this fact and Scheuer's passion meant that Alec Station came to be seen in the Agency as a group of fanatics. The bin Ladin Unit was caustically dismissed by the rest of Langley as "The Manson Family"³⁵⁴ – a nickname making reference to the mostly female cult comprised who blindly obeyed the murderous Charles Manson in 1970s California.

The Inspector General's Report confirms this characterization of Alec Station, and points to additional problems between the Unit and external CIA liaison partners (i.e., other foreign and domestic intelligence agencies, either US

³⁴⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 109 and Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 78

³⁵⁰ "Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," page 339-40.

³⁵¹ Quoted in Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 78. Emphasis added.

³⁵² Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 353.

³⁵³ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 353. Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 138. The Joint Inquiry even found that similar attitudes affected the Analysis/Tasking/Collection interface: "A manager in the CTC confirmed to the Staff that CIA operations officers in the field resented being tasked by analysts because they did not like 'to take direction from the ladies from the Directorate of Intelligence.'" See "Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," page 64.

³⁵⁴ Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, page 353-4. Confirmed in Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 190.

or foreign). In the section of the report called “Operations (Unilateral and Liaison)”, the Report states:

The [investigating] Team also found, however, that UBL Station and [REDACTED] were hostile to each other and working at cross purposes over a period of years before 9/11. The Team cannot measure the specific impact of this counterproductive behavior. At minimum, however, the Team found that organizational tensions clearly complicated and delayed the preparation of Agency approaches [REDACTED] thus negatively affecting the timely and effective functioning of the exchange with [REDACTED] on terrorism issues.³⁵⁵

In other words, by 1999, not merely Michael Scheuer but Alec Station as a whole was performing its role of tracking and analysing bin Ladin in isolation, both physical and cultural, from the rest of the CIA and the Intelligence Community. Just as clearly, elements of the CIA's institutional culture and identity played a large role in this seclusion.

“Professional suicide”

We can pinpoint 1999 as the latest possible year that Alec Station lost its institutional voice, because it was in that year that Scheuer's frustration “boiled over”.³⁵⁶ In a letter to the House and Senate Intelligence Committees in 2004, Scheuer explained that Alec Station had provided the CIA hierarchy with about ten opportunities to capture or kill bin Ladin, and that all were rejected.³⁵⁷ In response, Shenon says:

[Scheuer] committed what amounted to professional suicide: he went outside his usual chain of command and sent an email directly to Tenet and most of Tenet's deputies on the seventh floor at CIA headquarters that listed the ten things that needed to change at the CIA if it was ever to succeed in ending the threat from al Qaeda. Within days, Scheuer found himself called into the office of Tenet's deputy, Jack Downing, and fired from Alec Station.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” page xx-xxi.

³⁵⁶ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 194.

³⁵⁷ As Sixty Minutes describes, one of Scheuer's last proposals involved a cruise missile attack against a hunting camp in Afghanistan where bin Ladin was believed to be meeting with members of the royal family of the United Arab Emirates. The attack would have decimated the entire camp. When asked by the interviewer if this bothered him, he responds: “The world is lousy with Arab princes...And if we could have got Usama bin Ladin, and saved at some point down the road 3,000 American lives, a few less Arab princes would have been OK in my book...Sister Virginia used to say, 'You'll be known by the company you keep.' That if those princes were out there eating goat with Usama bin Ladin, then maybe they were there for nefarious reasons. But nonetheless, they would have been the price of battle.” See Klug, “Bin Laden Expert Steps Forward”

³⁵⁸ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 194.

Scheuer's email was seen as "outrageous insubordination".³⁵⁹ Without mentioning Scheuer's email, in his memoirs Tenet dismisses Scheuer as "an analyst not trained in conducting paramilitary operations", but is careful to mention, "Six senior CIA officers stood in the chain of command between Mike and me."³⁶⁰ What is indisputable is Scheuer's Kafkaesque fate. A few days after sending his email, Scheuer was summoned to CIA headquarters, told by one of Tenet's assistants that he was "off balance"³⁶¹ and "burned out".³⁶² He was then banished to a cubicle in the library at Langley, where he said he was made a "junior librarian and given almost nothing to do."³⁶³ Scheuer tried to telephone Tenet, but Tenet did not return his call.³⁶⁴ Scheuer's exile ended shortly after 9/11, when he was brought back to the bin Ladin unit as a "Special Adviser to the Chief of Station".³⁶⁵

"A systemic tendency to silence or even penalize professionals who tried to present new facts or judgments"

In addition to insubordination, it seems clear that Scheuer and Alec Station were also guilty of working against one of the enduring four traits of the CIA's culture and identity: a thirst for consensus. What's more, for the other cultural reasons discussed, in an almost nightmarish spiral the more that Alec Station's analysts understood about al-Qa'ida, the less convincing they seemed to the rest of the Agency.

³⁵⁹ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 194.

³⁶⁰ Tenet and Harlow, At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA, page 113. This, of course, begs the question of priorities: if the CIA is truly "at War" with Al-Qa'ida, (see: Quoted in The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States page 357), why is Alec station – a primary weapon of that war - being run by a GS-13 with no paramilitary training six management layers down from the DCI? One may also ask how the Intelligence Community can be at war with an enemy that never got an NIE.

³⁶¹ Quoted in Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 194.

³⁶² Quoted in Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 194.

³⁶³ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 194. Confirmed in the interview Klug, "Bin Laden Expert Steps Forward" .

³⁶⁴ Shenon, The Commission: an Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation, page 194.

³⁶⁵ Klug, "Bin Laden Expert Steps Forward,". Just to close the story: Scheuer left the CIA in 2004, and continues to make invaluable contributions to our national understanding of Al-Qa'ida; the CIA shut down the bin Ladin Unit in 2006.

A distinguished group of scholars and former intelligence analysts who examined the failure of warning prior to the al-Qa'ida bombings in East Africa (among other cases) hinted at this conclusion. Without offering specifics, in 2006 they wrote:

The impulse to protect consensus revealed a systemic tendency to silence or even penalize professionals who tried to present new facts or judgments. Violating the implicit boundaries of accepted discourse proved damaging to professional credibility, in some cases causing lasting adverse consequences for individuals' careers. Professionals who were simply doing their jobs as analysts ran the risk of being cast as dissenters who had ceased to be "team players."³⁶⁶

In other words, Scheuer had not only been guilty of insubordination, he and his analysts were guilty of breaching the CIA's powerful mechanism for preserving consensus. This failure to be seen by the DI as "team players" also contributes to our understanding of why Alec Station failed to mobilise their fellow analysts even *after* Scheuer was replaced.

Following 9/11, a CIA analyst who was also a director of an interagency course to train analysts about warning concepts and techniques, Philip A. True, wrote: "Warning is difficult in a bureaucratic culture, where prudence and caution are more career-enhancing than raising alarms and challenging conventional wisdom."³⁶⁷ Lest they forget that fact, after 1999 the members of the DI had only to visit the Agency's Library for the salutary example of Michael Scheuer to remind them.

Scheuer himself ascribes the lack of action against bin Ladin to the CIA's (especially DCI Tenet's) risk-aversion.³⁶⁸ Here, we can see that its inaction

³⁶⁶ Janne E. Nolan and Douglas MacEachin, Discourse, Dissent, and Strategic Surprise: Formulating U.S. Security Policy in an Age of Uncertainty (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, 2006), page 104.

³⁶⁷ Philip A. True, "Be Forewarned: Surprises are Inevitable," The Washington Post June 5 2002, page A23.

³⁶⁸ Scheuer wrote in a Washington Post editorial: "But what troubles me most is Tenet's handling of the opportunities that CIA officers gave the Clinton administration to capture or kill bin Ladin between May 1998 and May 1999. Each time we had intelligence about bin Ladin's whereabouts, Tenet was briefed by senior CIA officers at Langley and by operatives in the field. He would nod and assure his anxious subordinates that he would stress to Clinton and his national security team that the chances of capturing bin Ladin were solid and that the intelligence was not going to get better. Later, he would insist that he had kept up his end of the bargain, but that the NSC had decided not to strike. Since 2001, however, several key Clinton counterterrorism insiders (including NSC staffers Richard A. Clarke, Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon) have reported that Tenet consistently denigrated the targeting data on bin Ladin, causing the president and his team to lose confidence in the hard-won intelligence. 'We could never get over the critical hurdle of being able to corroborate Bin Ladin's whereabouts,' Tenet now writes.

transcended a single cause. The passionately committed analysts of Alec Station tried to raise warning in the context of an organisation ideally evolved to be obtuse about al-Qa'ida: the CIA's scientism, homogeneity, preference for secrets, and drive for consensus all worked against the effective recognition of al-Qa'ida as a threat in the Analysis phase.

Production and Dissemination

As in previous cases, the evidence for the operation of the culture and identity of the CIA in the Production and Dissemination phases of the intelligence cycle prior to 9/11 is not as massive as it is for Tasking, Collection, and Analysis. Still, we can find at least two pieces of strong evidence in this phase for a negative feedback loop between the Agency's culture and identity and al-Qa'ida's plans.

“What the President least wanted to hear, the CIA was most hesitant to say”

We have overwhelming evidence above that the CIA is a consensus-driven organisation. This trait derives in part from the fact that apart from their own peers, CIA analysts mostly look to policymakers for approval and guidance.³⁶⁹ Here is one example of the insidious effects of this fact for intelligence distribution prior to 9/11, and how it contributed indirectly to that strategic surprise.

According to the 9/11 Commission: “Soon after the *Cole* attack and for the remainder of the Clinton administration, [CIA] analysts stopped distributing written reports about who was responsible.”³⁷⁰ The reason given by the Commission for this cessation is key: “The topic was obviously sensitive, and both Ambassador Bodine in Yemen and CIA analysts in Washington presumed that the government did not want reports circulating around the agencies that might become public, impeding law enforcement actions *or backing the President into a corner*”.³⁷¹

That of course is untrue, but it spared him from ever having to explain the awkward fallout if an attempt to get bin Ladin failed.” In any case, as Scheuer goes on to say: “The hard fact remains that each time we acquired actionable intelligence about bin Ladin's whereabouts, I argued for pre-emptive action.” See Scheuer, “Tenet Tries to Shift the Blame. Don't Buy It...” page B1.

³⁶⁹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 90.

³⁷⁰ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 193-4.

³⁷¹ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 194. Emphasis added.

At the NSC, Clarke certainly appeared to believe that the CIA was equivocating in assigning responsibility to al-Qa'ida.³⁷² He wrote Samuel Berger on 7 November 2000 that CIA analysts "had described their case by saying that 'it has web feet, flies, and quacks'"³⁷³ but the analysts would not come out and call it a duck, i.e., directly pin responsibility on bin Ladin. Clarke believed that for this reason the issue of going after bin Ladin more aggressively at this time "never came to a head".³⁷⁴ He assigns, however, the reason for CIA analysts not distributing reports about who was responsible for the *Cole* attack purely to the fact that the CIA thought that the White House did not want to act against bin Ladin. He reported that he felt that both the FBI and the CIA were "holding back",³⁷⁵ because "his impression was that Tenet and Reno possibly thought the White House 'didn't really want to know' since the principals discussions by November suggested that there was not much White House interest in conducting further military operations against Afghanistan in the administration's last weeks".³⁷⁶ As with the Cuban Missile Crisis, "what the President least wanted to hear, the CIA was most hesitant to say plainly".³⁷⁷ In other words, it was deemed better at the CIA to soft-pedal information about al-Qa'ida than to lose the approval of policymakers and to disturb the consensus for silence on the issue. Who beside Tenet could have pressed the issue? Not the analysts: less than a year before, Scheuer had gone from Station Chief to junior librarian for his stridency about al-Qa'ida. If there is one thing that the literature on strategic warning is clear about, however, it is that while "one of the most difficult things for intelligence is to come to judgements which the policymaker does not want to hear"³⁷⁸ (though at times this is also its *raison d'être*).

"CTC concerns about protecting its sources and methods"

Another cultural factor, the DO's preference for secrets, also bears upon the Production and Dissemination of pre-911 intelligence. Despite DCI Tenet's

³⁷² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 194.

³⁷³ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 194.

³⁷⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 195.

³⁷⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 195.

³⁷⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, pages 195-6. Emphasis added.

³⁷⁷ Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis." page 712.

³⁷⁸ Grabo, Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning, page 142.

ringing memo proclaiming, “I want no resources or people spared in this effort, either inside CIA or the Community”,³⁷⁹ the Joint Inquiry found that:

In late 2000, according to FAA officials, FAA offered CTC Chief Cofer Black the support of its nearly two-dozen analysts regarding transportation security issues in exchange for broader information sharing, but *this offer was not accepted because of CTC concerns about protecting its sources and methods*. The Joint Inquiry was told that a similar offer of analytic support was made to CTC Chief Black by DIA in 2000, but with similar results.³⁸⁰

Said another way, the cultural impulse to privilege secrets at least partly for their own sake rather than due to the logic of the situation (along with the usual rivalry expected between bureaucracies³⁸¹) apparently overrode DCI Tenet’s melodramatic declaration that “We are at war.”³⁸²

Zegart flatly assigns this culture of excessive secrecy at the CIA a causal role in 9/11:

Different CIA officials on more than one occasion neglected to watchlist two of the September 11 hijackers, share information, and distil vital pieces of intelligence scattered throughout the Community in large part because they were steeped in an organizational culture that regarded these activities as unnatural acts: embracing new tasks, thinking beyond the agency, and sharing secrets all ran against the grain of everything CIA officers had known, believed, and cherished for years. *The CIA was more than a job; it was a brotherhood, filled with lifelong members that shared a commitment to country, a willingness to sacrifice, and the knowledge that nearly everything they did would have to stay secret.*³⁸³

Though it did not speculate directly on the reasons for the CIA’s failure to share information about Hazmi and Mihdhar, the Inspector General’s Report confirms that the CIA knew for an extended period that both were at large somewhere in the United States, and that they waited until just days before 9/11 to disseminate this information via the government’s terrorist watchlist.³⁸⁴ In fact, according to the IG’s Report, by 2000 “50 to 60” individuals at the CIA knew for

³⁷⁹ Quoted in The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 357.

³⁸⁰ “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001,” page 60. Emphasis added.

³⁸¹ The Joint Inquiry also said “Analysts at NSA commented to the Joint Inquiry that CTC viewed them as subordinate – ‘like an ATM for signals intelligence.’” See “Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001,” page 64.

³⁸² Quoted in The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, page 357.

³⁸³ Zegart, Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11, page 113-4. Emphasis added.

³⁸⁴ “OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks,” page xiii-xiv.

eighteen months of intelligence reports indicating that two of the hijackers were in the US,³⁸⁵ but none chose to notify the FBI.³⁸⁶

Thus, we find at least two instances where in the Production and Dissemination phases of the intelligence cycle features of the culture and identity of the CIA contributed to this strategic surprise. We saw first how the impulse for consensus on at least one occasion muffled clear attribution of responsibility for the *Cole* bombing by analysts. Second, we saw how secrecy and individual secrets were fetishised at the CTC to the detriment of building an adequate analytical capability and providing specific pieces of information with direct bearing on the strategic surprise that unfolded on 9/11.

Case Summary

The CIA's record regarding the strategic surprise of 9/11 is in most respects as straightforward as its failure in the first case considered, the fall of the Shah. In it, salient mitigating facts were introduced but the overall picture was clear. In no sense did the CIA develop an appropriate threat assessment about al-Qa'ida or provide effective warning prior to this strategic surprise. As a *Studies* article once said: "It is too often forgotten that the primary task of intelligence is to get a fact or judgement from the inside of a specialist's brain to the inside of a layman's, not simply to state it in words which a fellow specialist can certify as not irrelevant and not untrue".³⁸⁷ Not only did the CIA fail to achieve this task prior to 9/11, but also it relieved of his duties the head of the very analytical team that attempted it! In each stage of the intelligence cycle prior to 911, and in the marginalizing of this Cassandra, the evidence for how this occurred points to the enduring elements of culture and identity that operated in other strategic surprises: the CIA's homogeneity, scientism, preference for secrets, and a drive for consensus.

³⁸⁵ "OIG Report on CIA Accountability With Respect to the 9/11 Attacks," page xiv.

³⁸⁶ Mazzetti, "CIA Lays Out Errors It Made Before Sept. 11." page A1.

³⁸⁷ Joseph W. Martin, "What Basic Intelligence Seeks to Do," Studies in Intelligence 14.2 (1970), page 107.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion: A Constructivist Theory of Strategic Surprise

The purpose of this chapter is to draw general conclusions from the theoretical strands presented in Chapter 3, in light of the evidence from the cases presented in Chapters 5 and 6, and the work on strategic surprise by other scholars presented in Chapter 2. To do so, section one reminds the reader of the argument presented. Section two then proposes a constructivist theory of strategic surprise on the basis of that argument, and highlights its significance.

Section I: Summary of the Argument

Chapter 1 introduced the topic of intelligence analysis and strategic surprise. It defined basic terms, summarised the research question, sketched the proposed thesis, and delineated its scope. It also briefly discussed *Constructing Cassandra's* methodology, and what makes its approach original. In particular, it related the research design chosen (especially the split of cases between mysteries and secrets) to the research question (how do strategic surprises generally, not merely surprise *attacks*, occur). The research question – ‘How are strategic surprises possible?’ was deemed especially acute given the apparent existence of ‘Cassandras’ after each surprise – individuals who anticipated the approximate course of events that comprised a strategic surprise based on threat assessments that differed from the CIA’s.

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the literature on intelligence, the CIA, and strategic surprise. First, it placed the study of intelligence in the context of the discipline of IR. Next, it reviewed the two different types of primary sources that this research draws upon. Then, it provided a review of the secondary literature on strategic surprise. The literature review concluded with a summary of how and why the approach to strategic surprise used in *Constructing Cassandras* differs from those of other scholars and intelligence practitioners.

Chapter 3 performed three tasks. First, it offered evidence that intelligence analysis at the CIA is a social process, and thus a suitable subject for constructivist analysis.

Next, Chapter 3 described the social mechanisms (and their component parts) that create and maintain the attributes of the CIA’s identity and culture

that underpin the rest of this work. These social mechanisms were grouped into four categories: Self-selection, Active selection, Socialization, and Mirror-imaging. Without these social mechanisms, the attributes of culture and identity employed here to understand strategic surprise become merely arbitrary – and easily debatable – descriptive features of the CIA. By showing the social mechanisms by which these attributes arise and are sustained, however, their durability (and much of their power) is explained. Doing so also exposes why bureaucratic reorganisations of the CIA (positivistic attempts to perfect its ‘intelligence machinery’) are of secondary importance for understanding the puzzle of strategic surprise. In short, this section established why certain features of the CIA’s identity and culture can bear the weight of understanding placed on them by later chapters.

The final section of Chapter 3 introduced the four attributes of the CIA’s identity and culture that these social mechanisms produce: 1) homogeneity of personnel; 2) scientism and/or a propensity to reify reason; 3) the privileging of secret over openly-obtained information; and 4) a strong impulse towards consensus. In the cases that followed, these four components were found to influence repeatedly both the generation of hypotheses and the sifting of information, thereby shaping flawed threat assessments. Figure 1 summarises the relationship between the social mechanisms of section two, and the features of the Agency’s culture and identity in section three.

Figure 1: Perennial Features of the CIA's Analytical Identity & Culture and Their Related Social Mechanisms

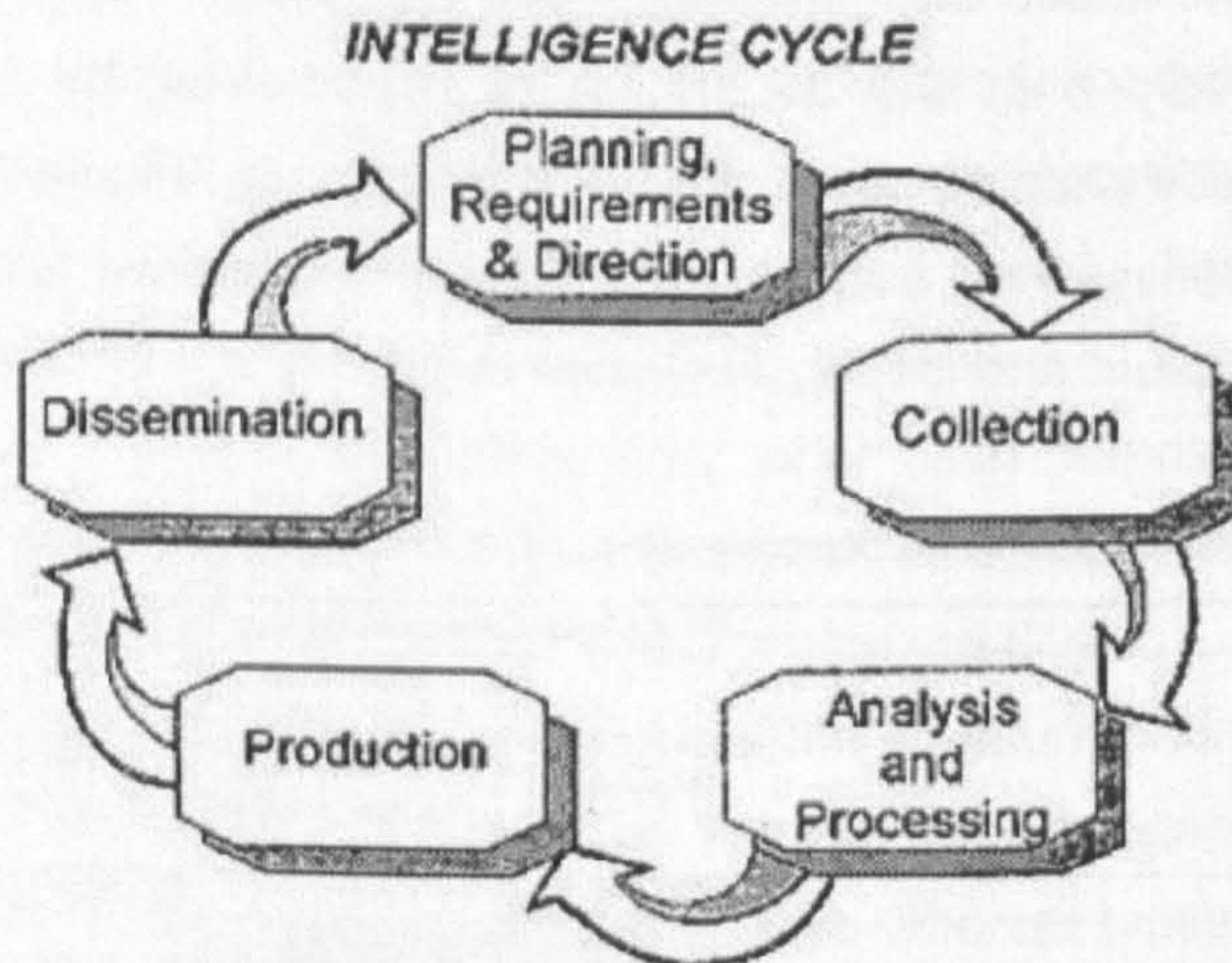
		Perennial Features of the CIA's Identity and Culture			
		Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
Social Mechanism					
1	Self-Selection	■			
2	Active Selection	■			
3	Socialization, including:				
	A. Induction and Training		■		
	B. Definition of "Analytical" Activity		■		
	C. A Vocabulary of false precision		■		
	D. "Collegiality": marginalizing dissent				■
	E. "Wisdom Literature"				
	F. Isolation, Compartmentalisation & Secrecy	■		■	
4	Mirror-imaging				
	A. Mirroring the Consumer		■		
	B. Mirroring the Community		■		
	C. Mirroring the Target			■	

Chapter 4 introduced the frameworks and ideas that underpin the case studies. It first presented the criteria used to select the cases. These criteria included the importance of each surprise for America, its fit within the scope of

this analysis, and whether enough unclassified and declassified material was available for a fair and thorough analysis of that case.

Next, Chapter 4 elucidated a key epistemological distinction used in intelligence analysis: the difference between a ‘mystery’ and a ‘secret’. This distinction – between something ‘unknowable but perhaps foreseeable’ (a mystery), and something ‘knowable but unknown’ (a secret), is central to the discussion of strategic surprise as *Constructing Cassandra* defines it, because this thesis explores how strategic surprises of *all* types – not merely surprise attacks – happen. This section also highlighted occasions when, following strategic surprises, apologists for intelligence producers have sought to explain failures by muddling the distinction between mysteries and secrets, or obscuring the difference between the chaotic, the unforeseen and the unforeseeable.

Third, Chapter 4 introduced the ‘intelligence cycle’, the organisational framework used within each case. It explained the basic tasks performed in each part of the cycle: Tasking, Collection, Analysis, Production, and Dissemination. A graphic representation¹ of the cycle was offered in Figure 3, and is reproduced below.



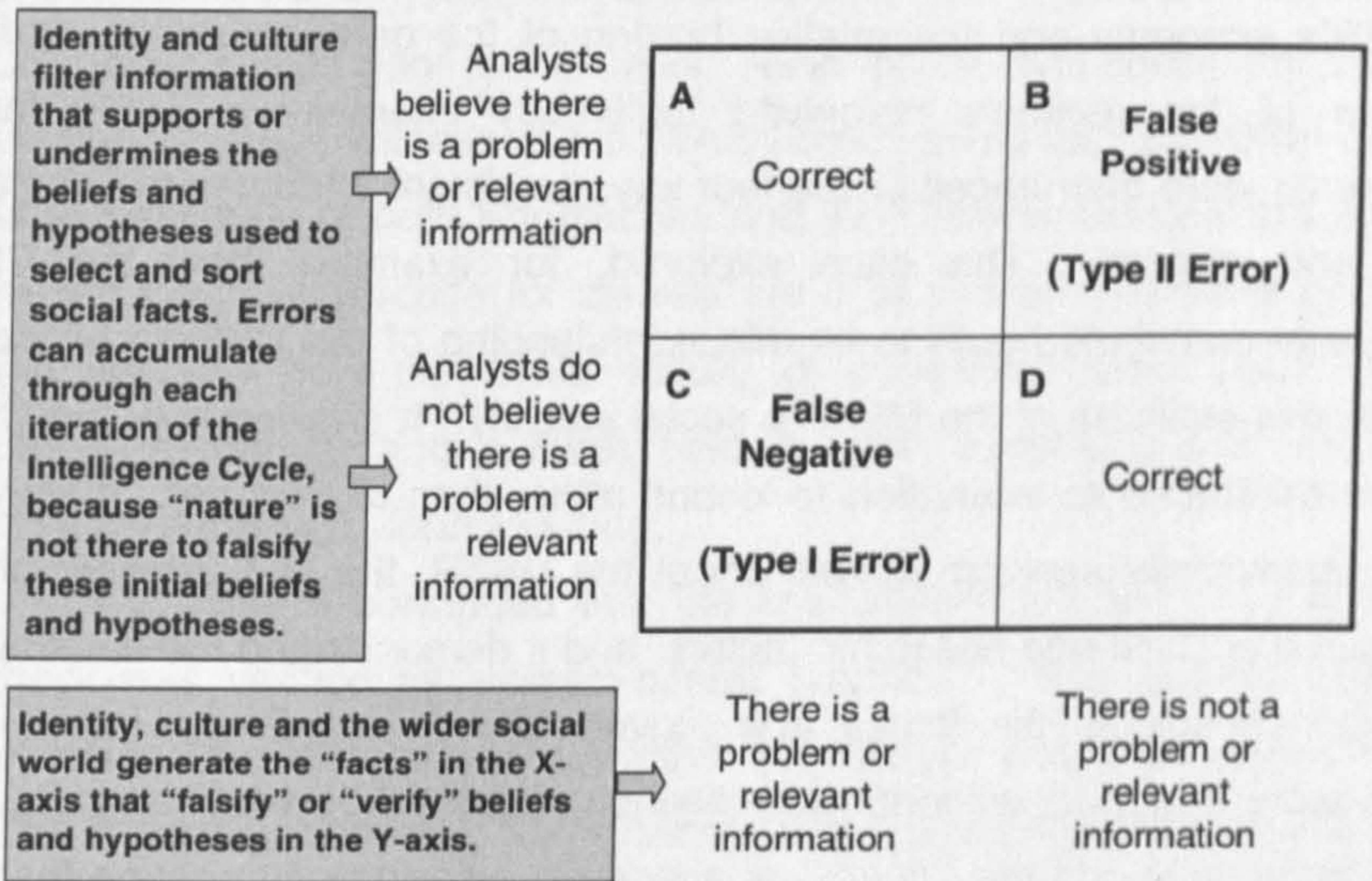
The cycle’s iterative nature was stressed for the light it shed on the self-reinforcing nature of an initially skewed (or non-existent) hypothesis or threat assessment. Therefore, the cycle also helped illustrate how the ‘problem of the wrong puzzle’² in intelligence work can grow into a strategic surprise by allowing both Type I and Type II errors to accumulate.

¹ Graphic taken from: <http://www.fas.org/irp/eprint/ic2000/ic2000.htm>

² Cooper, *Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis*, page 26.

Chapter 4 closed with a discussion of the central role of belief and thinking participants in forming both intelligence hypotheses and the ‘facts’ that are used to verify them. This discussion is summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Type I and Type II Errors in a World of Social Facts: Alchemy, not Science



Chapter 5 presented two cases. The first case was the fall of the Shah of Iran. The Iranian Revolution was shown to be both an important event for the United States, and a ‘mystery-based’ surprise for the CIA. First, clear evidence of an intelligence failure was presented, and historically singular aspects of the surprise were examined. Next, the four unique characteristics of the CIA’s identity and culture were shown to remove, change, magnify, or distort information flows throughout the intelligence cycle in the years prior to the overthrow of the Shah. The case highlighted, for example, the contributions of the CIA’s homogeneity and positivism to its underestimate of the power of religion as a force in Iran; it showed how the CIA’s predilection for the ‘trees’ of secrets (e.g. SIGINT about the USSR) made it miss the ‘forest’ of coming revolution; and it highlighted how the Agency’s consensus-driven culture thwarted key conclusions about Iran until the CIA was simply overtaken by events. Evidence was provided that Cassandras (found in academia, business, the media, and foreign intelligence agencies) detected numerous signals of impending instability that the CIA missed, and offered contrast to the CIA’s internal assessments. These Cassandras call into question the claim that this ‘mystery’ was inherently impossible to foresee.

Chapter 5's second case was a more complex mystery-based surprise, the sudden demise of the USSR. First, we saw how the CIA was not alone in failing to anticipate this event. Second, we looked in detail at claims that the CIA was *not* surprised by (or even created) the downfall of the Soviet Union. Ultimately, however, we argued that the CIA's assessments of the USSR were fundamentally flawed, especially regarding its crucial evaluations of the size of the USSR's economy and the relative burden of the defence sector, and its evaluation of the regime's perceived legitimacy internally. These faulty assessments were then traced to the four key, persistent attributes of Langley's identity and culture. The case explored, for example, how the CIA's homogeneity contributed both to its misunderstanding of the USSR's economy and to its mis-estimate of the USSR's social stability. It showed how the CIA's scientism reinforced its inclination to 'count' rather than to interpret. It showed how by obsessively seeking secrets about the USSR, the CIA underweighted open-source political and economic factors, and it demonstrated the smothering role of consensus as the forces that proved fatal to the Soviet experiment became more and more evident. Investigation of Cassandras found among the émigré community and the 'fringes' of academia aided the conclusion that the CIA's identity and culture underpinned its surprise at these historic events.

A summary of the influence of each feature of culture and identity and its relative importance to erroneous threat assessment in the first two mystery-based cases is illustrated in Figure 5, reproduced below.

Figure 5: Mysteries - Features of Identity & Culture vs. Key Distortions of the Intel Cycle

Intelligence Cycle Phase	Feature of the CIA's Identity & Culture			
	Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
<i>Tasking</i>				
<i>Collection</i>				
<i>Analysis</i>				
<i>Production</i>				
<i>Dissemination</i>				

Chapter 6 considered two surprises rooted in secrets (i.e. the definite plans and actions of US adversaries). It opened with the Cuban Missile Crisis, which was exposed as a nearly-disastrous close call for the Agency. A timeline of events prior to the missiles' discovery provided context for this discussion.

We then considered evidence that this 'close call' stemmed from several fundamental misjudgements by the Agency about the USSR and its leadership, and that these misjudgements related to the CIA's culture and identity. We paused while going through this case to review Soviet security and deception techniques (an aspect of intelligence work that further complicates any analysis of strategic surprise), and also looked in detail at the collection methods that the CIA had available prior to the Crisis. As in the first two cases, before the Cuban Missile Crisis we witnessed the CIA's homogeneity and scientism contribute to its mis-estimate of both Khrushchev and the Cubans; we saw examples of how the Agency's preference for secrets led it to discount valuable open sources; and we saw how the CIA's culture of consensus (and other attributes of Langley's identity and culture) helped stifle investigation of the contrarian insights of the DCI, John McCone.

Chapter 6 concluded with the final case study, 9/11. First, al Qa'ida's attack was verified as 'secrets-based' surprise. Then Michael Scheuer was proved to have offered warning within the Agency, and was used as a reference point to highlight how the CIA's identity and cultural prevented a critical mass of people at Langley from recognizing the threat posed by al Qa'ida. We saw how the homogeneity of CIA personnel left it blind to many aspects of this new enemy: al Qa'ida's scope, capability, ambition, and widespread appeal. The Agency's scientism again led to a fatal underestimate of the appeal of religion, and to the exclusion of the type of strategic logic that bin Ladin's disciples employed. Meanwhile, Langley's obsession with secrets left it unconcerned by an enemy that faxed its malevolent intentions around the world, and about whom an alarm was sounded in *Foreign Affairs*. We also saw how the culture of consensus led once more to a scenario in which an internal Cassandra – Michael Scheuer - assessed a threat correctly, but was mocked and ignored.

A summary of the influence of each feature of the CIA's culture and identity, and its influence on erroneous threat assessments in the third and fourth cases, is offered in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Secrets - Features of Identity & Culture vs. Key Distortions of the Intel Cycle

Intelligence Cycle Phase	Feature of the CIA's Identity & Culture			
	Homogeneity of Personnel	Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"	A Preference for "Secret" Information	Consensus-Driven
<i>Tasking</i>				
<i>Collection</i>				
<i>Analysis</i>				
<i>Production</i>				
<i>Dissemination</i>				

Having reviewed the argument presented thus far, we can now conclude by taking a step back from specific cases and considering the more general question: 'What does a social constructivist approach reveal about strategic surprise?'

Section II: Strategic Surprise as a Social Construction

This dissertation set out to solve a puzzle: since Pearl Harbor, the US has repeatedly experienced strategic surprises. These include a revolution in a key ally, the collapse of a long-time rival, a covert attempt during the Cold War to change the strategic balance, and one of the most dramatic terrorist attacks in history. How, despite a vast organisation – the CIA – dedicated to preventing such surprises, did these occur? Such an investigation also raises the question of how one reconciles the regular occurrence of such events both with multiple competing theories of how or why strategic surprises occur, *and* with the presence of Cassandras who seem to belie at least partly Betts' 'inevitability' thesis³ about surprises?

In pursuing these issues, *Constructing Cassandra* addressed several questions implicit in previous attempts to understand or to explain strategic surprise. What is the origin of the hypotheses that Wohlstetter says are needed to sort 'signal' from 'noise'? Why are intelligence hypotheses sometimes so 'sticky' in the face of contrary evidence? There seems limited utility in further 'resourcing' collection platforms – either human or technical – until these questions are addressed.

Similarly, why do bureaucratic reforms – both those that alternately centralize and decentralize intelligence, and those that seek to minimize the 'politicisation' of intelligence – never evolve towards an 'optimal' intelligence 'machine'? Are generic psychological factors of 'misperception' and bias sufficient to understand what appears to be a sustained pattern of intelligence failures? If so, how can one explain the apparent insights and threat assessments of Cassandras?

Recall the 'overture' that opened this work. Does John McCone's 'hunch' about SAMs not being shipped to Cuba 'to protect cane cutters' have nothing to teach us? Were Israeli intelligence, French reporters and Western businessmen all just 'lucky guessers' before Iran convulsed? Were Soviet émigrés simply 'stopped clocks' that were finally – and improbably – right about the fragility of the USSR? Was Michael Scheuer merely an obsessive Station Chief whom *all* reasonable intelligence analysts (or DCIs) would have ignored?

To address this puzzle, *Constructing Cassandra* set aside the easy explanation that such questions are answered by 'hindsight bias', by the *ex post*

³ Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable." *passim*.

facto needs to 'develop a coherent narrative' of how disaster surprise struck. It rejected the idea that these surprises were pure examples of unforeseeable 'Black Swans'⁴. Instead, it developed a constructivist model of the CIA's identity and culture. This model included the personal and collective identities of the Agency's corps of analysts (homogeneity), and elements particular to the organisational culture of Langley (scientism, a preference for secrets, and an over-valuation of consensus). A constructivist approach afforded the theoretical breadth to explore both types of 'common sense' intelligence failures (mysteries and secrets), not just the surprise attacks examined by orthodox scholars of strategic surprise. It also allowed the exploration of the questions about Cassandras posed above, and offered enough granularity in the case studies to see how at each stage of the intelligence cycle, culture and identity profoundly influenced hypothesis formation and information flow at Langley.

What has thereby been revealed about strategic surprises?

The maze of surprise, and Ariadne's thread of culture and identity

The first insight that *Constructing Cassandra* offers is self-evident by now: there are striking commonalities between strategic surprises rooted in mysteries and strategic surprises rooted in secrets. Langley's largest failures stem from erroneous threat assessments, and these mistaken assessments flow from distinct and lasting attributes of the Agency's identity and culture. As the cases above demonstrated, these commonalities permeate the intelligence cycle prior to each surprise: the distinctive identity and culture of the CIA runs through the maze of its failures like Ariadne's thread. These commonalities are summarised in the chart found in Figure 9. Where a block is shaded in the chart below, linkage between the features of the CIA's identity and culture in the X-axis and distortions in the intelligence cycle in the Y-axis were demonstrated in each case study in that column.

⁴ See Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*.

Figure 9: Summary of Identity and Culture's Influence on Surprises

Intelligence Cycle Phase	Features of the CIA's Identity & Culture															
	Homogeneity of Personnel				Scientism and/or the Reification of "Objectivity" & "Reason"				A Preference for "Secret" Information				Consensus-Driven			
Case	IR	FSU	CMC	911	IR	FSU	CMC	911	IR	FSU	CMC	911	IR	FSU	CMC	911
Tasking																
Collection																
Analysis																
Prod & Diss																

IR = The Iranian Revolution
 FSU = Fall of the Soviet Union
 CMC = Cuban Missile Crisis
 911 = September 11th, 2001

While this insight about the role of identity and culture in strategic surprise in intelligence failure is by now clear, it should not be underestimated: 'orthodox' literature on strategic surprise, by excluding events stemming from factors beyond the plans of adversaries (i.e. mysteries like societal revolutions and the collapse of empires), did not unearth commonalities. In that approach, there were surprise attacks, and then there were 'other failures'. This insight also has practical implications. Through this conclusion alone, *Constructing Cassandra* fulfils more than half of the nine objectives that Herman Kahn sketched for future-oriented policy research. Specifically: it improves our perspective on strategic surprises, clarifies major issues, generates new scenarios for intelligence failure, improve intellectual communication among disparate approaches to the topic, and it increases our ability to identify new patterns and to understand their character and significance.⁵ Treating strategic surprise as a social construction of a particular identity and culture brings new

⁵ Kahn's carefully-enumerated list of future-oriented policy research goals runs: "1) To stimulate and stretch the imagination and improve the perspective; 2) To clarify, define, name, expound, and argue major issues; 3) To design and study alternative policy 'packages' and contexts; 4) To create propaedeutic and heuristic expositions, methodologies, paradigms, and frameworks; 5) To improve intellectual communication and cooperation, particularly by the use of historical analogies, scenarios, metaphors, analytic models, precise concepts, and suitable language; 6) To increase the ability to identify new patterns and crises and to understand their character and significance; 7) To furnish specific knowledge and to generate and document conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions; 8) To clarify currently realistic policy choices, with emphasis on those that retain efficiency and flexibility over a broad range of contingencies; 9) To improve the 'administrative' ability of decision-makers and their staffs to react appropriately to the new and unfamiliar." See Paul Dragos Aligica and Kenneth R. Weinstein, eds., *The Essential Herman Kahn: In Defense of Thinking* (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2009), Chapter 12, "The Objectives of Future-Oriented Policy Research." This basic insight from *Constructing Cassandra* seems to fulfil objectives 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6.

insights into the CIA's close call in Cuba in the 1960s, its obtuse evaluation of Iran in the 1970s, its decades-long failure to understand important aspects of the USSR, and its contribution to the worst surprise attack in US history. This approach acknowledges some role for unpredictability in events, but uses Cassandras to highlight the key distinction between events that are *foreseeable* and those that are simply *unforeseen* by certain people and organisations. For intelligence agencies (among other entities), this insight makes 'hindsight bias' a less convincing post-disaster retort.

The Puzzle of 'the Wrong Puzzle'

The second source of theoretical leverage *Constructing Cassandra's* approach offers is indicated by the observation that the only unbroken line in Figure 9 is Tasking (i.e. in 100% of the possible instances, the four aspects of the Agency's identity and culture negatively affected Tasking prior to the four surprises). That unbroken line in turn leads to another conclusion: the iterative nature of the intelligence cycle reinforces initial errors in Tasking (i.e. the CIA's hypotheses about what information was truly important), and then information filters imposed by identity and culture impede 'course correction' in the rest of the cycle.⁶ These course corrections, naturally, are less likely to occur when the other phases of the intelligence cycle are influenced by the same characteristics of identity and culture that contributed to the initial Tasking misjudgement.

Constructing Cassandra's approach thereby brings centre-stage what Cooper calls "The problem of the wrong puzzle" in intelligence analysis. He quotes an intelligence aphorism, "You rarely find what you're *not* looking for, and you usually do find what you *are* looking for".⁷ An identity and culture-based analysis of strategic surprise reveals how the problem of the wrong puzzle arises and persists.⁸ Ultimately, every foreign policy and strategic doctrine

⁶ Though outside of scope here, one can argue that for this reason a constructivist approach to strategic surprise also has clear deception-awareness utility to intelligence agencies: better self-understanding by an intelligence organisation of its disposition to believe or discount certain types of people, theories or pieces of information makes it less vulnerable to an adversary seeking to exploit these predilections. The inscription on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi turns out to be right yet again: γνῶθι σεαυτόν is the beginning of wisdom.

⁷ Cooper, *Curing Analytical Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis*, page 26. Emphasis added.

⁸ It is hoped that the mere identification of these organisational dispositions is a partial solution to them, a sort of "immunizing awareness" (the equivalent of John Kenneth Galbraith's "immunizing memory" in economic behaviour). As Levy says: "From Max Weber on, good social scientists have recognized that any regularities in behaviour must be understood in terms of their cultural setting and *endure only as long as it remains*

needs a plot.⁹ If, as a result of a particular identity and culture that plot is too askew from reality – if the CIA has chosen the wrong puzzles – all the other parts of the intelligence cycle are working on irrelevant information. In that instance, elaborate intelligence machinery is for naught to improve strategic warning¹⁰ (or worse: the irrelevant information that they provide wastes resources and results in false confidence).¹¹ Uniquely, the social constructivist model of strategic surprise developed in *Constructing Cassandra* helps understand how the wrong hypotheses (and thus the wrong puzzles) arise and persist.

Again, the practical implications of a better theoretical understanding of the problem of the wrong puzzle are substantial. Why? Consider Thomas Kuhn's comparison of the 'information value' of failures in astronomy versus those in astrology:

If an astronomer's prediction failed and his calculations checked, he could hope to set the situation right. Perhaps the data were at fault...perhaps theory needed adjustment...The astrologer, by contrast, had no such puzzles. The occurrence of failure could be explained, but particular failures did not give rise to research puzzles, for no man, however skilled, could make use of them in a constructive attempt to revise the astrological tradition. There were too many possible sources of difficulty, most of them beyond the astrologer's knowledge, control, or responsibility. Individual failures were correspondingly uninformative, and they did not reflect on the competence of the prognosticator in the eyes of his professional compeers.¹²

By addressing the root of the 'problem of the wrong puzzle' in intelligence, and then linking it to specific aspects of identity and culture in an intelligence producer, a constructivist approach *makes intelligence failures informative again,*

stable and the regularities themselves remain unrecognized by relevant actors." Lebow, "Counterfactuals, History and Fiction." page 57. Emphasis added. Cassandras, moreover, might be actively sought and treated more as "Parakeets in the coalmine" rather than annoyances. See Appendix III.

⁹ Bathurst, *Intelligence and the Mirror: On Creating an Enemy*, page 88.

¹⁰ Diagnosing Tasking in intelligence work becomes a variation on the verdict that Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman offered on NASA's models during the investigation into the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster: "GIGO – garbage in, garbage out" see Richard P. Feynman and Ralph Leighton, *What Do You Care What Other People Think?* (New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 2001).

¹¹ Much the best general disquisition of this problem of overconfidence is found in Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, and Taleb, *Fooled by Randomness: the Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets*.

¹² Thomas S. Kuhn, "Logic of Discovery or Psychological Research," *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, eds. Imré Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) page 9. The use of this analogy brings to mind but is not a repeat of the arguments made in S. Gazit, "Estimates and fortune telling in Intelligence work," *International Security* 4 (1980).

and opens new research puzzles. Identity and culture are not a complete solution to preventing surprises, but considering them does forestall some of the intellectual shoulder-shrugging sometimes provoked in those with a passing familiarity with the ‘inevitability’ of surprise argument.

A path towards a unified model of strategic surprise

Previous work on the culture of national security found that abstract beliefs and values are more difficult to discard than simple instrumental beliefs;¹³ here, some of the reasons for such persistence are detailed. When it incorporates the intelligence cycle, for example, an identity and culture-based model of intelligence further reveals how the wrong puzzle, once chosen, is sustained (in some cases, for decades): it highlights the negative informational ‘feedback loop’¹⁴ that begins in basic Tasking decisions (i.e. the hypotheses of intelligence producers), and how in the realm of social facts these problems endure.

This idea implies that understanding strategic surprises in light of identity and culture is logically prior to the orthodox school of strategic surprise’s proximate and partial explanations (e.g. Signal-to-noise [Wohlstetter], Bureaucratic Politics or Organisational Behavior [Allison’s Models II & III], and Psychological [Jervis, Heuer, *et al*]). Thus, one can infer that even if surprises are ‘inevitable’ because of the faults of intelligence consumers, a larger than necessary number of strategic surprises will continue if reform efforts in intelligence producers attend only to the proximate, positivist understandings of them. Another way of saying this is that beyond a certain point, culture and identity appear to trump positivist reengineering of an intelligence bureaucracy. How is this so?

¹³ Berger, "Norms, Identity and National Security in Germany and Japan." page 326.

¹⁴ By feedback (i.e. the return of part of a system’s output to change its input in a manner in which initial errors gain in magnitude. See Beer, "feedback," pages 312-3), we are speaking here of a loose linkage, because strategic surprises are not pure Perrow-like “Normal Accidents” (see Perrow, “Normal Accident at Three Mile Island” and Perrow, Normal Accidents: Living with High Risk Technologies, *passim*). The feedback loop described here is not a “system” of tightly linked components in a strict – and again, mechanistic or positivist sense - though some parallels are intriguing. To take only one example: “Review” of analysts work is a form of “safety feature” that contributes to the “accidents” (i.e. surprises) by acting as a mechanism of involuntary consensus and suppression of both nuance and dissent. Handel explores this possible linkage in Handel, War, Strategy and Intelligence, pages 272-4. Allison also briefly explores this idea in Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, page 159.

Wohlstetter correctly identified that “perception is an activity”,¹⁵ and that the “job of lifting signals out of a confusion of noise is an activity that is very much aided by *hypotheses*”.¹⁶ She and others, however, did not address in any depth how these hypotheses are formed and sustained. The hypotheses of intelligence analysts were largely unproblematic. Moreover, after a surprise, hypotheses in this approach functioned as *dei ex machina*, closing off further research. Social constructivism’s identity and culture-based approach reopens the exploration of the linkage between intelligence failures, the origins of the hypotheses animating analysts, and the collection systems that serve them.

Allison’s Models II and III, on the other hand, approached political and bureaucratic culture in a largely positivist manner. The result is that these models cannot provide more than a proximate understanding of why particular political questions (and not others) are pursued time after time; they also cannot supply a fully-convincing account of how specific bureaucratic idiosyncrasies repeatedly cooperate to metastasise into surprises. In contrast, *Constructing Cassandra’s* approach was to delve more deeply into the CIA’s singular identity and culture, explore those factors’ effects on the gathering and interpretation of social facts, and then relate these to strategic surprises.

Similarly, merely saying that psychological factors lead analysts to ‘misperceive’ certain signals begs two key questions: why *these* misperceptions and not others, and how do patterns of misperception continue, sometimes for decades, in spite of supposed safeguards like ‘Review’? In Kuhnian terms, one would say that orthodox models of misperception work well explaining ‘normal’ intelligence errors, but break down when summoned to explain exactly the topic addressed here: massive ‘paradigm shifts’ or strategic surprises that are often years in the making. *Constructing Cassandra’s* identity and culture model of surprise, rooted in an appreciation for social facts, squarely addresses failures involving the development and continuation of erroneous intelligence paradigms over time. Because intelligence analysts deal in social facts, their errors – like those of astrologers – cannot decisively disprove anything.

In so doing, *Constructing Cassandra* makes previous theories of strategic surprise more useful and old intelligence failures newly-edifying. It does so by providing a coherent account of Figure 4’s comparison of Type I and Type II errors as they relate to the social facts that are the bread-and-butter of intelligence. It also demonstrates that the notion of intelligence analysis as a

¹⁵ Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, page 70.

¹⁶ Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, page 70. Emphasis added.

'science' does severe injury to the term: at best, analysts practice alchemy, because their thinking can change the properties of the world that they study.¹⁷

This understanding of strategic surprises as a phenomenon embedded in intelligence producers' erroneous threat assessments, assessments that are the products of distinctive identities and cultures, shifts the burden of proof back to intelligence producers to demonstrate that their identity and culture were not responsible for strategic surprises. How? In the cases above, we saw Cassandras at odds with the CIA's particular identity and culture offer high-quality warning that was ignored. By documenting the manner by which a consistent marginalization of some ideas occurred in an intelligence producer, the 'orthodox' school's assertion that most strategic surprises have their origins among intelligence consumers becomes (to say the least) problematic.

A choice between Cassandras or Socratic Agnostics?

Near the end of Betts's seminal essay, "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable", he writes, "The intelligence officer may perform most usefully by *not* offering the *answers* sought by authorities, but by offering *questions*, acting as a Socratic agnostic, nagging decision makers into awareness of the full range of uncertainty, and making authorities calculations harder rather than easier."¹⁸ This is certainly still true. The conclusion of this dissertation, however, is that the CIA, as a result of specific and enduring attributes of its identity and culture, was ill-equipped to perform the role of 'Socratic agnostic' – even to itself - on several occasions between 1947 and 2001. Evidence that this was so can be found among Cassandras, who were sidelined or ignored by the Agency. From that conclusion flows the more hopeful idea that approaching strategic surprises as social constructions of intelligence producers is a fresh avenue for making intelligence failures informative again. While not a panacea, *Constructing Cassandra's* approach to intelligence failure and strategic surprise may offer one way of bringing the CIA closer to fulfilling its original mandate of 'preventing the next Pearl Harbor'.

Further discussion of the practical implications that flow from the theory above, and suggestions of topics for further research, is contained in Appendix III.

¹⁷ See Soros, *Alchemy of Finance: Reading the Mind of the Market*, pages 317-22. Self-altering predictions, after all, cannot occur in the natural sciences, but they are the essence of strategic warning in many circumstances!

¹⁸ Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable", page 88. Emphasis original.

Appendix I: Acronyms Used¹

BNE – Board of National Estimates
CIA – Central Intelligence Agency
CIG – Central Intelligence Group (a CIA predecessor)
COI – Coordinator of Information (a CIA predecessor)
COSPO - Community Open Source Program Office
CSI – Center for the Study of Intelligence
CTC – Counterterrorist Center
DCI – Director of Central Intelligence
DDCI – Deputy Director of Central Intelligence
DDR – “Deutsche Demokratische Republik” – the German Democratic Republic
DDI - Deputy Director for Intelligence (Head of the CIA's analytical arm)
DGI - Dirección General de Inteligencia (Cuba's intelligence service)
DI – Directorate of Intelligence (main analytical arm) of the CIA
DIA – Defense Intelligence Agency
DO – Directorate of Operations (the CIA's covert action and HUMINT arm)
DOD – Department of Defense
ER – Economic Research (precedes documents produced by the OER)²
FSB – “ФСБ: Федеральная служба безопасности”, the Federal Security Service, a successor to the KGB
FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDI – Foreign Direct Investment
FRG – Federal Republic of Germany
FROG – “Free Rocket Over Ground” – a NATO designation for Soviet *Luna* unguided nuclear-capable surface-to-surface missiles
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
GNP – Gross National Product
GRU – “ГРУ: Главное Разведывательное Управление”, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Soviet (now Russian), Army's General Staff
GULAG – “ГУЛАГ: Главное Управление Исправительно-Трудовых Лагерьей и колоний”, The Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and Colonies (i.e. the USSR's penal labour system)
HPSCI - House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
HUMINT – Human Intelligence
IC – Intelligence Community
ICBM – Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IG – the CIA's Office of the Inspector General
IMINT – Imagery Intelligence
INR - The Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the US State Department
IR – The academic discipline of International Relations
IRBM – Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile
ISI – Inter-Services Intelligence; Pakistan's primary foreign intelligence agency
JCS - Joint Chiefs of Staff
KGB - “КГБ: Комитет Государственной Безопасности”, the Committee for State Security of the Soviet Union – here a generic term for Soviet/Russian civilian intelligence

¹ A fairly complete database of acronyms and abbreviations relevant to the fields of international relations, the military, security, telecommunications, and information and communications technology terms can be found at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/pubs/tools/>

² Personal email correspondence with Allen Thomson, retired CIA analyst, 5 October, 2007.

KJ – “Key Judgement”³ (Usually prefacing NIEs, etc. as executive summaries)
MASINT - Measurement and Signature Intelligence
MGB – “МГБ: Министерство государственной безопасности” - The Ministry of State Security of the USSR (in existence from 1946-53)
MRBM – Medium Range Ballistic Missile
NASA – National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NFIB – National Foreign Intelligence Board
NGIA - National Geospatial Intelligence Agency
NIC – National Intelligence Council
NIE – National Intelligence Estimate
NIO – National Intelligence Officer
NOFORN – No Foreign Dissemination
NPIC - National Photographic Interpretation Center, a specialized facility where U-2 film was taken for analysis
NRO - National Reconnaissance Office
NSA – National Security Agency
NSC – National Security Counsel
OER – Office of Economic Research of the CIA
OIG – Office of the Inspector General of the CIA
OSC - Open Source Center
OSINT - Open-source Intelligence
OSS – Office of Strategic Services (a CIA predecessor)
PDB – President’s Daily Brief
PFIAB – President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board
PPP – Purchasing Power Parity
SALT - Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SAM – Surface-to-Air Missile
SAVAK – Organisation for Intelligence and National Security (of Iran, 1957-1979); following the Islamic Revolution, it evolved into SAVAMA
SCI – Special Compartmented Information
SDECE - Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage (a French analogue of the CIA)
SIGINT – Signals Intelligence
SNIE – Special National Intelligence Estimate
SOVA – The CIA Office of Soviet Analysis
SSCI - Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
SVR - СВР: Служба внешней разведки, the Foreign Intelligence Service, a Russian successor to the Soviet KGB
TASS – ТАСС: Телеграфное агенство Советского Союза при кабинете министров СССР, literally “Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union” – The USSR’s official Press Service
U-2 – A high-altitude US photographic reconnaissance airplane
UAV – Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UBL – Usama Bin Ladin
UN – United Nations
USIB - United States Intelligence Board
USSR – The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD – Weapons of Mass Destruction
WWII – World War Two

³ Personal email correspondence with Allen Thomson, retired CIA analyst, 5 October, 2007.

Appendix II: Excerpts from the 1991 Nomination Hearings of DCI Gates

One of the best summary cases available that the collapse of the USSR was not a strategic surprise to the CIA was offered by US Senator David Boren (Democrat – OK), on November 4, 1991, during the second set of confirmation hearings of Robert Gates¹ to become DCI.²

Note that the Senator makes no reference whatsoever to the CIA estimates of the USSR's GNP, and thus to Soviet Union's total defense burden. That figure, as noted above, was wildly inaccurate for decades, and it speaks directly to the sustainability of the USSR. Quotations from a 1988 CIA estimate like "The budget deficit has increased dramatically over the last three years," are somewhat disingenuous: the CIA did not even estimate that the USSR was running a budget deficit until 1988, when Gorbachev announced it!³ In addition, the knowledge that the CIA published figures for US policymakers and the Sovietological community saying that between 1981 and 1988 the USSR's economy grew faster than that of either West Germany or France⁴ makes the selective quotations below less compelling. The author believe that no true friend of the CIA will ignore these facts: that is how analysis is improved. Nevertheless, they are included here for fairness.

Mr. BOREN: Mr. President, I would also like at this point to insert into the Record a summary of several different estimates and pieces of analysis done by the Central Intelligence Agency over the last decade. I will not go into all of them on the floor at this time, but I believe that they will indicate that there has been a consistent and unequivocal description in these pieces of analysis by the Central Intelligence Agency of the worsening failure of the Soviet political and economic system throughout the last decade.

The question that could not be answered with confidence, and over which there was substantial debate by analysts within the Soviet office, Intelligence communities, the Government, and the academic community, was what would the outcome be when the seemingly inevitable crisis occurred? Would it result in a move backward to more oppressive totalitarianism or would it force political reforms and move the country in a direction of a more democratic process?

Many have seized on the inability of the agency to answer this question in precise terms as a sign of failure. While I think there is room for criticism, I do not believe it would be fully fair to look at only one part of the equation. I think some of the critics have dismissed an entire body of analysis and judgement which provided policymakers from the President to Members of Congress very good insight into the Soviet political and economic transformation that has

¹ Gates was nominated to be DCI soon after DCI Casey's death in 1987, but withdrew his nomination as the Iran-Contra investigations introduced uncertainty whether he could get through the nomination process in a timely manner.

² For more background on the 1991 hearings, including how they dealt with allegations concerning the "politicising" of intelligence while Gates was under DCI Casey, see Snider, The Agency and the Hill: CIA's Relationship with Congress, 1946-2004, pages 210-1 and 342-3. For an overview of the confirmation process for DCIs up through 2004, see the same volume, pages 331-51.

³ Eberstadt, The Tyranny of Numbers: Mismeasurement and Misrule, page 140.

⁴ Handbook of Economic Statistics, pages 33.

occurred since Gorbachev came to power and very good insight into the nature of the problems of the Soviet economy.

So while I certainly do not offer this evidence in the way of apologizing for any mistakes and errors that may have been made, I simply do offer it for the sake of inserting some balance into our deliberations because it is an overstatement to say that throughout the past decade the Intelligence Community has been wrong, totally wrong, about the impending economic and political crisis in the Soviet Union. The record does not bear that out. There is room for criticism. There is also room for commendation in terms of the record of the past 10 years.

I urge my colleagues to look at the balance of the full record and not just at parts of it that have been highlighted by some of our colleagues and some in the course of the debate over the Gates nomination.

Yet, let us be clear about the fact that the Agency has not always been correct about predicting outcomes. But contrary to the allegations of critics, the Agency did not miss change in the Soviet Union during Bob Gates' tenure as DDI or DDCI. His own views in no way impeded a healthy and rich record of understanding of trends and the prospect for change in the Soviet Union.

What I have done is go back over a decade and reviewed what the Agency has been saying about the Soviet economy, defense spending, and Gorbachev. What follows is a recitation of quotes from documents that have been declassified by the CIA. What the documents show--and do so conclusively from my point of view, is that the Agency got it right, not wrong--and provided a solid understanding of trends in the Soviet Union.

In 1979, the Agency noted the societal pressures building in the Soviet Union by stating:

Soviet consumer discontent is growing and will cause the regime of the 1980's serious economic and political problems. In the longer run consumer dissatisfaction could have severe political consequences. The Soviet leaders can ill afford to ignore the material demands of their increasingly acquisitive society. If, as projected, economic growth declines to the point where the regime is unable to improve or even maintain the current standard of living by the mid-1980's, the incidence of active unrest will certainly grow, forcing the leadership to consider a reordering of its priorities.

National minorities, particularly in the Western borderlands, tend to see their economic woes caused by Russian exploitation. On several occasions in recent years, economic and national grievances have combined to produce large-scale demonstrations in the Baltic republics and in the Ukraine. The approach of 'hard times' will aggravate ethnic conflict.

In 1981, in a study commissioned by the CIA entitled 'Consumption in the U.S.S.R.: An International Comparison' and submitted to the Joint Economic Committee, the Agency stated:

The Soviet pattern in many respects conforms to that in less developed countries, and remarkably little progress toward a more modern pattern has been made in recent decades. In this and other respects, the U.S.S.R. is indeed the world's most 'underdeveloped country.' In the U.S.S.R., long-continued

investment priorities favoring heavy industry and defense, coupled with a rigid and cumbersome system of economic organisation, have combined to produce a consumer sector that not only lags behind both the West and Eastern Europe, but also is in many respects primitive, grossly unbalanced and in massive disequilibrium. These negative aspects cannot be captured in quantitative comparisons, which as a consequence, overstate the level of well being in the Soviet Union relative to other countries. Progress in raising living standards is likely to slow to a crawl and the consumer sector will remain fourth class when compared with western economies.

In a 1982 assessment the CIA stated:

The Soviet Union now faces a wide array of social, economic and political ills, including general social malaise, ethnic tensions, consumer frustrations and political discontent. How these internal problems will ultimately challenge and affect the regime, however, is open to debate and considerable uncertainty. Some observers believe the regime will have little trouble coping. Others believe that economic mismanagement will aggravate internal problems and ultimately erode the regime's credibility, increasing the long-term prospects for fundamental change.

Popular discontent over a perceived decline in the quality of life represents, in our judgement, the most serious and immediate challenge for the Politburo.

It should be noted that this study incorporated the results of Murray Feshbach's research on increasing infant mortality and declining life expectancy in the Soviet Union.

In a 1983 assessment the Agency stated:

Civil unrest in the Soviet Union takes many forms. Since 1970, intelligence sources report over 280 cases of industrial strikes and work stoppages, public demonstrations, and occasional violence, including sabotage, rioting, and even political assassination attempts. The scope and character of popular grievances that are suggested in recent civil unrest probably present a greater long-range challenge to the regime than the narrower intellect dissident movement.

In June 1983, in another assessment, the CIA stated:

Growth had been decelerating since World War II and nose-dived in 1976-1982. Productivity slumped even more dramatically. The surprising and dramatic turndown was triggered by a pathbreaking--but ultimately failed--investment decision in the 1976-1980 Five Year Plan, but other internal and external factors also caused serious damage. Strenuous efforts have not halted the decline. Even if major systematic reforms are launched--and they aren't on the agenda--industrial growth and productivity will not rise for many years.

In July 1983, with the Defense Intelligence Agency taking a dissent, the Agency stated:

New evidence indicates that in at least one major area--procurement of military hardware--the Soviets have not maintained their past spending momentum since 1976.

In a September 1985 assessment, the Agency stated:

Economic performance has improved in recent years from the low levels of 1979-1982, but the system cannot simultaneously maintain growth in defense spending, satisfy demand for greater quantity and variety of consumer goods/services, invest amounts required for economic modernization/expansion, and continue to support client-state economies. It is an open question how much economic improvement will occur and how long it can be sustained.

On July 10, 1987, the Agency stated:

If by next year, industrial modernization doesn't provide enough growth to give generous investments to consumers as well as to defense and investment, leaders will have to reallocate.

In an August 1987 assessment, the Agency stated:

Even before Gorbachev took over, there was an emerging consensus among the elite that the need to revitalize the economy was reaching a critical stage. We expected, in the long-term, major problems for him because the system would block, not help, him; and he would have to deal with increased demands for shares of a diminishing resource pie. It will be a tumultuous year ahead, politically, in the U.S.S.R.

In a submission to the Joint Economic Committee in September and October 1987, the Agency stated:

A period of economic disruption is likely over the next few years, even in the best circumstances, that would depress growth to less than two percent and complicate the delicate balance between interest groups. There might not be a noticeable payoff for years to come. Nevertheless, there are good reasons why this program has a better chance than its predecessors: it is bolder, more comprehensive, has more leadership commitment, and better means of monitoring compliance. But likely gains will not match Gorbachev's expectations.

In submission to the Joint Economic Committee in April and June 1988, the Agency stated:

We foresaw troubles for Gorbachev--too few investment resources chasing too many needs, unrealistic growth targets, a squeeze on the consumer, military expenditures at a high absolute level, and people/system problems. We continue to think the outlook for the reform program is bleak unless and until the Soviets deal with fundamental problems. Reforms are pointed in the right direction, but don't go far enough. Price reform is at the heart of the issue--also an incentive program to spur productivity.

In June 1988, in commenting on the Soviet Union's economic woes, the Agency stated:

The budget deficit has increased dramatically over the last three years. It is financed by new money and inflation is obvious and deleterious. Gorbachev must act quickly to improve the quality of life because if the deficit is not controlled, it will produce inflation much worse than at any time in the postwar era.

In the same month in 1988, the Agency stated:

Nonetheless, the meagre progress so far in the industrial modernization program, particularly in machinery output, which is the linchpin of the plan, creates powerful incentives for at least a short-term reduction in military procurement and construction, and perhaps even in the size of the active-duty forces. A leadership seeking ways to conserve resources going to military would not be hard pressed to find elements of the massive Soviet military establishment that seem excessive in relation to 'reasonable' security requirements, especially if more weight is given to political dimensions of security. Indeed, a case could be made--and is, in fact, implied in the arguments of some writers--that defense spending could be cut at the same time the effectiveness of the Soviet military is improved. All of this leads us to conclude that--barring a major change in the party leadership or in the external situation--there is a good chance that Gorbachev will, by the end of this decade, turn to unilateral defense cuts.

In March 1989 the Agency stated:

Indeed, although clearly a military superpower, the Soviet Union has an economy that in many ways is like that of a developing country. The level of per capita consumption in the U.S.S.R., for instance is far below that of the developed Western countries and Japan. * * * The pattern of consumption and output (also) resembles that of less developed nations. * * * (For example) the per capita consumption of consumer durable resembles that of many Latin American countries. * * * (it) was more comparable to countries such as Mexico and Brazil (in 1985). * * * The Soviet position relative to the rest of the world has not improved over the past ten decades. * * * The share of agricultural output in GDP in the Soviet Union is similar to that in Turkey and in the Philippines.

Appendix III: Implications and Areas for Future Research

Section I: Introduction – The Natural Selection of Accidents

In the four case studies above, we have dealt with contingent events on the one hand (i.e. the many particulars of each case of strategic surprise), and with a form of necessity, a mechanism that Trotsky called the “natural selection of accidents” - on the other (i.e. the culture and identity of the CIA). As Wendt points out, “Some causal mechanisms exist only on a macro-level, even though they depend on instantiations at the micro-level for their operation. Natural selection is one such case, temperature may be another, and ‘collective memory’ a third.”¹ The case made here is that strategic surprise is such an instance: the internal culture of the CIA acts as a filter during each stage of the intelligence cycle, obscuring Langley’s view of the possibility or likelihood of events.

Using social constructivism, a loose form of cumulative causation (in which lines of direct cause and effect, however circuitous, cannot be drawn but a relationship nevertheless deduced), is presented. Cassandras underlined that more than mere chance was at work in each case. Essentially, using constructivism to examine the Agency’s culture has tried to reconcile causation and contingency in the pattern of individual strategic surprises between 1947 and 2001.

A short historical excursus helps illuminate what we mean here. Towards the end of his autobiography *My Life*, Trotsky undertakes a somewhat poignant, seemingly eccentric, but ultimately revealing digression. In the chapter “The Conspiracy of the Epigones” devoted to the year 1923, one moment Trotsky is discussing his escalating conflict with Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev over leadership of the Bolshevik party; the next moment he is deep in a lyrical description of autumn duck hunting in a locality near Moscow known as *Zabolotye* (literally, “Beyond the Swamps”).² Trotsky, of course, has a purpose beyond the literary to this aside, which he finally reveals:

From the canoe to the automobile I had to walk about a hundred steps, not more. But the moment I stepped onto the bog in my felt boots my feet were in cold water. By the time I leaped up to the

¹ Wendt, *Social Theory*, page 154.

² It is likely that Trotsky was consciously and somewhat ironically drawing upon the rich Russian tradition of literary sketches of hunting trips and the Russian landscape; Cf: Turgenev’s *Notes of a Hunter* or *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album*.

automobile, my feet were quite cold... I took off my boots and tried to warm my feet by the heat of the motor. But the cold got the better of me... The doctors ordered me to stay in bed, and thus I spent the rest of the autumn and winter. This means that all through the discussion of "Trotskyism" in 1923, I was ill. One can foresee a revolution or a war, but it is impossible to foresee the consequences of an autumn shooting trip for wild ducks.³

Trotsky – as a Marxist, committed to understanding history as a process determined by necessity – here explores the role of chance in that same "determined" history. As he sits in exile, a master theoretician of historical necessity must account for how a simple chill caught from wet boots kept him ill the entire winter of 1923/4, and absent from the leadership discussions of the Bolshevik party. As he writes the words above some ten years later, he is in Deutscher's famous phrase "The Prophet Outcast"⁴. Stalin runs the USSR, and Trotsky says, "I cannot help noting how obligingly the accidental helps the historical law. Broadly speaking, the entire historical process is a refraction of the historical law through the accidental. In the language of biology, one might say that the historical law is realised through the natural selection of accidents."⁵

A short extension of the evolutionary analogy further illuminates this approach. There is a view of evolution that stresses the contingent. One of the best-known standard-bearers for this approach is Stephen Jay Gould. In his

³ Trotsky, My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography, page 498. Emphasis added. For an accessible discussion of the "larger" factors that prevented Trotsky from succeeding Lenin, see Richard Pipes, Three "Whys" of the Russian Revolution (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), pages 77-84. For a Trotskyite view of the same events from a contemporary, see of course Trotsky's *My Life*, but also Victor Serge, From Lenin to Stalin, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York, NY: Pathfinder, 1973), *passim* and especially 57-62. Stalin's view is presented in numerous "histories" of the USSR published up to 1991, and of course in Kirov's venomous speeches (up through his murder in December, 1934); for a sample, see Amy Knight, Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1999), pages 121-2.

⁴ Isaac Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky 1929-1940 (New York, NY: Verso, 2003), *passim*. Deutscher's epic (though overly adulatory) biographical trilogy of Trotsky, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879-1921*, *The Prophet Disarmed: Trotsky 1921-1929*, and *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky 1929-1940* is today problematic – the last volume was published in 1963, and has since been alleged to rest on "very shaky documentary evidence" (see Pipes, Three "Whys" of the Russian Revolution, page 80). Nevertheless, it is a fascinating portrait of a complex, utter ruthless but undeniably brilliant man. If one measure of the man is the quality of his followers, than no judgement of Trotsky should be made without considering the life of Victor Serge (born Victor Napoléon Kibalchiche): see Victor Serge, Memoirs of a Revolutionary, trans. Peter Sedgwick (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative Society Limited, 1984)..

⁵ Trotsky, My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography, pages 494-5. Emphasis added. For a more full discussion of how this anecdote reveals Trotsky's philosophy of history, see Ann Talbot, "Chance and Necessity in History: E.H. Carr and Leon Trotsky Compared," Historical Social Research - Special Issue: Counterfactual Thinking as a Scientific Method 34.2 (2009).

1989 book *Wonderful Life*, Gould repeatedly employs a thought experiment called “replaying life’s tape”⁶ to highlight the “staggeringly improbable series of events, sensible enough in retrospect and subject to rigorous explanation, but utterly unpredictable and quite unrepeatable”⁷ that led to life in its current forms. “Wind back the tape of life,” Gould says, and “let it play again from an identical starting point, and the chance becomes vanishingly small that anything like human intelligence would grace the replay”.⁸ Many anecdotal accounts of strategic surprise take a similar view: wind back the tape of Tasking, Collection, Analysis, Production, and Dissemination, and the chance that a particular strategic surprise occurring becomes tiny.

In contrast to this stress on the contingent, however, there are biologists who stress convergence in evolution. As Conway Morris says in *The Crucible of Creation*, Gould’s whole argument “is based on a basic confusion concerning the destiny of a given lineage...versus the likelihood that a particular biological property or feature will sooner or later manifest itself as part of the evolutionary process.”⁹ The system of natural selection, while on one level random, nevertheless has emergent properties. Some accidents, says Trotsky, “open the sluice gates of necessity.”¹⁰ Similarly, what is argued above is that given the somewhat fixed elements of the CIA’s culture and identity, strategic surprises are just like certain convergent biological properties: they will eventually manifest themselves.¹¹ There is a process akin to natural selection to Betts’ ‘inevitable’¹² and to seemingly accidental strategic surprises.

⁶ Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1989), page 48.

⁷ Gould, *Wonderful Life*, page 51.

⁸ Gould, *Wonderful Life*, page 51. A full and rewarding exposition of Gould’s view of contingency and history is presented in Chapter V, pages 292-324.

⁹ Quoted in David Darling, *Life Everywhere: the Maverick Science of Astrobiology* (Basic Books, 2001), page 124.

¹⁰ Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), page 715, referring to the “Kornilov Affair”; quoted in Talbot, “Chance and Necessity in History: E.H. Carr and Leon Trotsky Compared.” page 91.

¹¹ Examples of simple evolutionary convergence include the streamlined shapes of water-dwelling animals and wings for flying (independently evolved by birds, fish, dinosaurs, insects, mammals and reptiles). One of the centrepiece of complex convergence until recently was the eye. The eye appeared to have evolved independently at least 40 and perhaps as many as 65 times: the compound eye of an insect differs greatly from the camera eye of vertebrates (which in turn differs from eyes that appear superficially similar, like those of squids). With the 1993 discovery by Walter Gehring and Rebecca Quiring of the gene “eyeless”, and later tests to confirm the fact that all of the phyla that scientists have studied carry it, it is now suggested (though the jury is still out) that the eye evolved only once (though one has to go back very far indeed to find a common ancestor of vertebrates, cephalopods, arthropods and nemertean). See Stephen Webb, *If the Universe is Teeming with Aliens...Where is Everybody?: Fifty Solutions to the Fermi Paradox and the Problem of Extraterrestrial Life* (New York, NY: Copernicus Books, 2002), pages 221-3. Nevertheless,

Section II: Implications for Intelligence Agencies

Early advice from this dissertation's Supervisor was to stay away completely from policy recommendations or practical implications. Therefore, the vast majority of mental effort (greater than 99%), has been devoted to the main text: making the case for understanding how these historical strategic surprises occurred. In the course of that work, however, some initial thoughts on the practical implications of this thesis arose.

Before listing those, however, a reminder is in order. *Constructing Cassandra* is *not* a 'gotcha-style' attack on the CIA and its dedicated staff. It is an attempt to improve intelligence analysis by asking hard questions and facing historical patterns squarely. As Nietzsche has Zarathustra say: "If you have a suffering friend, be a resting place for his suffering, but a *hard bed* as it were, a field cot: thus will you profit him best."¹³ It is intended to serve as something akin to the unsparing after-action reviews familiar to US marines.

The Practical Case for Diversity in the Intelligence Community

In the case studies above, we repeatedly saw the homogeneity of the CIA and other US intelligence agencies severely hobble its central mission.

In the past, the case for a diverse Intelligence Community has been made on the basis of fuzzy notions of 'fairness', 'equity', or 'justice' (i.e. purely internal US concerns, irrelevant to the IC's mission). In contrast, *Constructing Cassandra's* hypothesis argues for diversity on the simple basis of long-term effectiveness: it make the catastrophic cost of the CIA's sustained homogeneity clear. With less than 5% of the earth's population, the US needs intelligence Agencies that offer unparalleled the intellectual depth and diversity to protect it effectively from the tiny percentage of the rest of the world that would do it harm.

Basic arithmetic sheds some light on the nature of the problem. If tomorrow an utterly brilliant US public diplomacy campaign instantly convinced 99% of the one billion Muslims in the world that the US was their best and greatest friend, that still leaves 1 million people in over 50 countries to host al-Qa'ida and its spawns. This diverse, educated, and dedicated population of opponents could do immense damage to the US and its allies. It is utter folly to

convergence remains a respectable theory, despite the possible loss of an important poster-child for complex convergence.

¹² Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable."

¹³ Walter Kaufmann, The Portable Nietzsche (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), page 202.

handicap the country's services for stopping them by restricting recruitment to relatively provincial, Caucasian, Liberal Arts college graduates.

Instead, properly targeted counterintelligence programmes should replace blanket prohibitions on the recruitment of recent immigrants, people who have lived or travelled widely abroad, and those with family in other countries. The current approach puts the security cart before the intelligence horse (and without any good effect: plenty of Caucasian, apparently 'conventional' Americans have betrayed many of US's deepest secrets – think John Walker of the Navy, Aldrich Ames of the CIA, and Robert Hanssen of the FBI). The downside of blanket prohibitions is also obvious when one remembers the NSA's outsourcing of the translation of Taliban intercepts to Pakistan's ISI prior to 9/11!¹⁴

'Quick wins' are possible: why did the CIA recruit among this author's friends at MBA programmes like the University of Chicago and Wharton, but ignore the American students at his *alma mater* (London Business School), the *Instituto de Empresa* and INSEAD? People in MBA programmes abroad are required to speak foreign languages and are obviously attracted to working in an international milieu. In fact, it is mystifying why anyone who has not travelled abroad extensively (but who purports to be passionately interested in international affairs), even makes it through the first screen to be a CIA analyst (much less to serve in the Clandestine Service).

Most of all, the Agency's culture should adopt the maxim of former DCI James Schlesinger. Reflecting on the lessons of the collapse of the USSR, he recommended: "Treasure your mavericks."¹⁵

The Appendix of *The Human Factor*¹⁶ by Ishmael Jones contains numerous other recommendations for reform of the Clandestine Service (and the Intelligence Community generally), along these lines, and is recommended.

The Centrality of Tasking

A recent book by three prominent intelligence scholars and practitioners stressed the importance of intelligence Collection as opposed to Analysis, saying "There is almost nothing written on designing a rational collection system,

¹⁴ Powers, "The Trouble with the CIA " page 4.

¹⁵ Blair A. Ruble, "Occasional Paper #283, U.S. Assessments of the Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Economy: Lessons Learned and Not Learned," (Washington, DC: The Kennan Institute, The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002, page 115.

¹⁶ Ishmael Jones, *The Human Factor: Inside the CIA's Dysfunctional Intelligence Culture* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2008).

the interaction of collection with analysis, or the way that expanded collection systems made possible by modern IT have transformed the corporate culture and strategies of organizations ranging from global corporations to international organizations.”¹⁷ This dissertation partly accomplishes some of those tasks, but it also points to the faulty premise at the heart of such statements: more rational intelligence collection is predicated on more rational intelligence *Tasking*.

A genuinely fresh approach to *Tasking* is the logical, ‘actionable’ corollary to Betts’ assertion that “The intelligence officer may perform most usefully by *not* offering the *answers* sought by authorities, but by offering *questions*, acting as a Socratic agnostic, nagging decision makers into awareness of the full range of uncertainty, and making authorities’ calculations harder rather than easier.”¹⁸ Until *Tasking* is *less a mirror of policy-makers “known unknowns”* and more an exercise in exposing their ‘unconscious ignorance’, a larger than necessary number of strategic surprises will occur.

The author would suggest that a partial practical response to the problem of identity and culture’s effects on *Tasking* and threat assessment might be to take a Systemic Operational Design-style (SOD) approach to it, in effect to treat *Tasking* as a ‘Wicked’ rather than a ‘Tame’ problem: ‘Systemic *Tasking* Design’. For an understanding of Systemic Operational Design, see (J. F. Schmitt) and (S. Naveh) As Schmitt explains on page 9: “Urban designers Horst Rittel and Melvin Weber coined the term to refer to primarily social problems that are particularly difficult and confusing, though not necessarily irresolvable. Wicked problems stand in contrast to tame problems, which are by no means necessarily trivial or simple. Tame problems may be very challenging, but they are sufficiently understood that they lend themselves to established methods and solutions.” For a sceptical view of SOD, see (M. N. Vego).

The solution to the problem of ‘getting fish to see the water’ is not simply a matter of drawing on outside experts, it is also a matter of seeking out dissidents – even those who disagree profoundly with the idea of the CIA. This should be done directly and routinely. Another logical (albeit wildly controversial), approach would be to run ‘false flag’ analytical operations: some of the most valuable contributions may come exactly from those who would *never* self-select to work knowingly with the US government. To be effective, this approach to

¹⁷ Bracken, Bremmer and Gordon, eds., Managing Strategic Surprise: Lessons from Risk Management and Risk Assessment, page 308.

¹⁸ Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable”, page 88 Emphasis original.

digging out dissent would go far beyond 'Team A versus Team B', 'Red Teams', 'Devil's Advocates' or scenarios (though increased use of all would be helpful). Instead, it would resemble a collection of analytical 'Trust Operations'. The Trust Operation was a fictitious opposition group set up by the Cheka and the GPU in the early 1920s.¹⁹ It established ties with Russian émigré groups, and thus was able simultaneously to monitor and to control them. Such an approach raises a thicket of ethical and legal issues that go beyond the scope of this Appendix, but it must be acknowledged as a logical possibility for improving analysis, and these issues must be weighed against the cost of surprises.

Educate - don't simply 'Train' - Analysts

It is difficult to imagine a quick fix for the lack of ontological, epistemological, and methodological self-awareness that *Constructing Cassandra* exposes (or for the persistent privileging of secret information and sources over open sources. It is hoped that the exposure of it is the first step towards a remedy). The implications of the key difference between social and natural facts has not been well-digested by society at large (which is why people speak of 'social science' at all; when your general field is a false metaphor, your in for a rocky ride).

One help might be to recognise explicitly the severe limitations of the Kennedy School of Government 'case study' style of training (in International Relations and Political Science generally, and in intelligence specifically). Intelligence analysts should be 'educated' as well as 'trained', and such set piece exercises work in the opposite direction: they are part of the 'discourse failure' and contribute to the intellectual blinders that conventional education (focused on 'right' answers and not good questions, and that perpetuates the false metaphor of 'Social Science') already impose.

A good start would be a course similar to that which the author took in Brussels in 2003: 'The Philosophy and Methodology of International Relations', but most US graduate schools (and BSIS itself), under pressure from their

¹⁹ Robert W. Pringle, "Trust Operation," Historical Dictionary of Russian & Soviet Intelligence, ed. Jon Woronoff (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006, pages 268-9. This approach drew on the rich history of the Okhrana's provocation and counterintelligence operations, some of the mechanics of which are detailed in Serge, What Every Radical Should Know About State Repression: A Guide for Activists. A less extreme form might take an approach to analysis that the CIA took to certain cultural projects of the anti-Soviet Left in the 1950s and 1960s, as detailed in Saunders, Who Paid the Piper?: CIA and the Cultural Cold War and Saunders, The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters.

'customers', are moving the other direction, towards 'practical' courses akin to trade school classes. Many students earn Masters Degrees in 'Social Science' disciplines without being able to define or distinguish among ontological, epistemological, and methodological problems. The fact that there are still numerous, sincere, and vocal intelligence practitioners who defend their craft as a 'science' does not inspire hope.

Other Issues:

The problems – which extend beyond intelligence analysis - raised by Fred Charles Iklé's *Annihilation From Within: The Ultimate Threat to Nations*,²⁰ deserve particular attention, but any relationship that they might have to *Constructing Cassandra* is outside the scope of this Appendix. Nevertheless, the author devoutly hopes that *Constructing Cassandra* will stimulate further research into improving US intelligence.

Section III: Implications for Finance

A great deal more detailed thought and research is required, but the ideas explored in *Constructing Cassandra* may have relevance to what the author thinks of as 'The Geopolitics of Asset Allocation'.

We know from the classic article "Diversification Returns and Asset Contributions," (David G. Booth), Financial Analysts Journal, (May/June 1992), 26-32, that the overwhelming majority of a portfolio's returns can be explained in terms of asset category choices rather than the specific asset choices within those categories. One might consider whether what finance calls 'contrarians' might fit the profile of what are here called Cassandras, and then match the patterns of dissent and consensus to asset categories and political risk analyses that feed into portfolio models, etc.

Section IV: Implications for Business

Just as changes in the international system – strategic surprises – affect governments, major shifts in the business environment (either domestic or international) can make whole commercial strategies obsolete.

The only source encountered during this research that seems to apply explicitly thinking from the intelligence sphere to business is Bar-Joseph, Uri,

²⁰ Fred Charles Iklé, Annihilation From Within: The Ultimate Threat to Nations (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006).

and Zachary Sheaffer, "Surprise and Its Causes in Business Administration and Strategic Studies." International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence 11, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 331-349. The authors essentially pursue a Wohlstetter-style analysis of the importance of hypotheses in sorting 'signal' from 'noise'; a post-positivist, *Constructing Cassandra*-style look at these issues might be in order.

More generally, businesses need to assess risk and opportunity in the context of the external environment that extends well beyond the standard SWOT analysis. One method of doing so has been scenario planning.²¹ As noted above, scenario planners at Shell speculated in 1982 about the longevity of the USSR.²² A look at whether and how a *Constructing Cassandra*-style post-positivist approach to scenario planning would seem to be in order; scenarios are often combined with real options theory,²³ and these could be integrated into this effort.

²¹ Scenario planning came out of the futurology (a term that he originated) done by Herman Kahn and Arnold Wiener at the Hudson Institute in the mid 1960s. For general background on Shell's unit, see Cornelius, Van de Putte and Romani, "Three Decades of Scenario Planning in Shell." and Schoemaker and van der Heijden, "Integrating Scenarios Into Strategic Planning at Royal Dutch/Shell." *passim*. For the use of scenarios in business more generally see: Bazerman and Watkins, Predictable Surprises: The Disasters You Should Have Seen Coming, and How to Prevent Them, Bood and Postma, "Strategic Learning with Scenarios.", Elkins, Handfield, Blackhurst and Craighead, "18 Ways to Guard Against Disruption.", Fahey and Randall, eds., Learning From the Future: Competitive Foresight Scenarios, Fuld, "Be Prepared.", Lindgren and Bandhold, Scenario Planning: The Link Between Future and Strategy, Nolan, Goodstein and Goodstein, Applied Strategic Planning: An Introduction, Ramirez, Selsky and van der Heijden, Business Planning in Turbulent Times: New Methods for Applying Scenarios, Ringland, Scenario Planning: Managing for the Future, Schoemaker, "Scenario Planning: A Tool for Strategic Thinking.", Schwartz, The Art of the Long View: Paths to Strategic Insight for Yourself and Your Company, van der Heijden, Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation, van der Heijden, Bradfield, Burt, Cairns and Wright, The Sixth Sense: Accelerating Organizational Learning with Scenarios, Wack, "Scenarios: Shooting the Rapids.", and Wack, "Scenarios: Uncharted Waters Ahead."

²² Cornelius, Van de Putte and Romani, "Three Decades of Scenario Planning in Shell." page 94.

²³ For an introduction to real options see van Putten and MacMillian, "Making Real Options Work.", Brach, Real Options in Practice, Trigeorgis, Real Options: Managerial Flexibility and Strategy in Resource Allocation, Amram and Kulatilaka, Real Options: Managing Strategic Investment in an Uncertain World, and Reuer and Leiblein, "Real Options: Let the Buyer Beware.". For an example of the use of real option theory when considering country risk, see Lehmann, "IMF Working Paper: Country Risks and Investment Activity of US Multinationals in Developing Countries".

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