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**Robert Jervis. *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War.*** Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010. 248 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8014-4785-3 (\$27.95, cloth).

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Introduction by Richard K. Betts, Columbia University

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Since Robert Jervis is a colleague and friend my objectivity might be suspect when I introduce him as the premier academic theorist of strategic intelligence. I am quite confident, however, that other political scientists who work on the subject will endorse that judgment. And there are now many other scholars who do such work, in contrast to the situation more than thirty years ago when Bob started in it. Until the mid-1970s secrecy made it impossible for outsiders to do much serious research on the role of intelligence in national security policy. Apart from historical studies, empirical literature then consisted of little more than a few books by journalists like David Wise, and a lonely academic work -- Harry Howe Ransome's *The Intelligence Establishment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970)<sup>1</sup> -- impressive for its time, but bound by the sharp limits of reliable information available at that time.

After the mid-1970s congressional investigations and other major efforts at declassification began producing a regular stream of revelations, and the Cold War generation of intelligence professionals began retiring and, under looser strictures than during the first half of the Cold war, leapt into publishing. Literature on intelligence burgeoned -- but Bob Jervis was in the vanguard, having cut his teeth on theorization of the problem of misperception and communication in international politics and establishing himself as a rising star among political scientists in international relations.<sup>2</sup> He has since been the leading analyst of analysis, interpreting how government attempts to interpret the situations and threats it faces.

When the Central Intelligence Agency wanted an eminent outside critic to assess what went wrong in the agency's analytical performance on the Iranian Revolution it naturally turned to Bob. Scrutinizing the classified record in detail, he and a collaborator from the inside produced a lengthy report on what went wrong, why, and how. Since then he has been regularly involved as a consultant in the intelligence community, advising on how to improve official analysis, serving as head of CIA's Historical Review Panel, and chairing a

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<sup>1</sup> This was revision of Ransome's *Central Intelligence and National Security* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958). There were also a very few theoretical discussions by academics with personal experience, for example: Yale historian and shaper of the original Office of National Estimates, Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), and Columbia professor and director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Roger Hilsman, *Strategic Intelligence and National Decisions* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1956). Princeton professor Klaus Knorr, a consultant to the Board of National Estimates, also contributed one of the few academic articles informed by access to secret information: "Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Cuban Missiles," *World Politics* 16, no. 3 (April 1964). A first-rate academic work on intelligence broadly defined, not focused solely on foreign affairs, was sociologist Harold Wilensky's *Organizational Intelligence: Knowledge and Policy in Government and Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

committee of outside consultants to consider what went wrong in the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction.<sup>3</sup>

Bob has three-plus decades of thought and experience of various sorts on which to draw, but it is especially his old report on the Iranian Revolution and the recent post-mortem on the 2002 NIE that provide the core of this latest book and the vehicles for understanding more general and recurrent reasons for *Why Intelligence Fails*. The book is not about all of intelligence, nor even mainly about what most consider the principal intelligence function: *collection* of secret information through espionage, reconnaissance, and electronic monitoring. This book is mainly about problems of analysis – the implications for policy decision and implementation of the vast complex of information, secret and open, available to government. Thinking about analysis is, after all, the comparative advantage of an academic observer, although the intellectual issues are refracted when considering how analysis can and should serve government. The book is unusual in its structure, since it reproduces and interweaves the bulk of the recently declassified original Iran report, as well as commentary by government officials on the Jervis effort. Thus the book is a combination case study, theoretical essay, and personal reminiscence on how government consulting can enrich academic wisdom.

In the reviews that follow: Eliot Cohen reflects on Bob's insights from the perspective an academic who served in a high policy position (Counselor in Condoleezza Rice's State Department), one whose intellectual inclinations are more in the direction of a historian than of a social scientist like Bob; Glenn Hastedt questions Bob's desire to encourage social science methods, argues for accepting (and improving) rather than resisting the journalistic nature of intelligence analysis, and notes the importance of a trend observers of intelligence have not yet considered much – the hugely increased role of contractors; Jeffrey Richelson helpfully recounts many of the main points in Bob's book and amplifies or amends a number of them; and Wesley Wark reflects on the problem of politicization and the insights that can be gained by looking more to non-American cases.

In most public discussions of intelligence failure, attention focuses on the mistakes or even dereliction of intelligence professionals. As the reviewers that follow notice, and Bob admits, the Jervis view tends to be sympathetic to those professionals. Some of the reviewers see Bob as too lenient or exculpatory, some agree with him (as do I). Having grappled with the demands of policy at the highest levels, Cohen in particular reminds us that policymakers have a right to expect intelligence to help them by providing answers to questions they have, rather than simply presenting conclusions that the intelligence establishment happens to find easily, or covering its institutional ass with caveats and demurrals. Government officials and academic critics alike, however, would do well to ponder how their own scorecard of forecasting over time would look when they come to determining how much is reasonable to expect and judging the batting average of professional intelligence analysts.

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<sup>3</sup> Disclosure: I was one of the four members of the committee.

Finally, the sociology of academia suggests that some readers of these reviews may approach the book with skepticism because they object on principle to the model that Bob exemplifies so well: a scholar who applies his skills to serving the government of the United States of America, and serving it in the area that many on the left consider most objectionable, indeed sinister: the intelligence community. Were Bob an anthropologist, he would probably be ostracized by many of his colleagues (instead, the more tolerant members of his own discipline – or the laxer and less principled, depending on one’s attitude – selected him as president of the American Political Science Association some years ago). Leaving aside the fact that Bob Jervis would qualify as a leftist on the spectrum of American politics as it exists outside the academic cocoon, I would argue that work to improve national intelligence is exactly what devotion to scholarly first principles, and social responsibility, implies: uncompromising pursuit of the truth, and communication of the truth to the public servants with the authority to make national policy more informed, and thus better than it would otherwise be. That some of such intellectual work must perforce be done in secret is a reality constraint that does not imply any reason to suspect the honesty of the work. Indeed, it is the participation in the process by outsiders like Bob, whose academic job security and independence from bureaucracy, party, or presidential administration give them credible objectivity unconstrained by political career incentives, that should make such work by scholars in all disciplines honored, desired, and demanded by citizens and intellectuals of all stripes.

### **Participants:**

**Robert Jervis** is Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics at Columbia University. He has written a number of books including *American Foreign in a New Era* (Routledge, 2005) and *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Fall of the Shah and Iraqi WMD* (2010), the subject of an H-Diplo roundtable. He was President of the American Political Science Association in 2000-01 and in 2006 received the national Academy of Sciences’ tri-annual award for contributions of behavior science toward avoiding nuclear war. He is coeditor of the Cornell Studies in Security Affairs.

**Richard K. Betts** is Director of the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia. He was Director of National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, taught at Harvard and Johns Hopkins, served on the staffs of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the National Security Council, and the Mondale Presidential Campaign, and was a member of the National Commission on Terrorism and the National Security Advisory Panel for the Director of Central Intelligence. His books include *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises; Surprise Attack; Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance; Military Readiness; Enemies of Intelligence;* and as coauthor or editor, *The Irony of Vietnam; Cruise Missiles: Technology, Strategy, and Politics; Conflict After the Cold War;* and *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence.*

**Eliot A. Cohen** is Robert E. Osgood Professor of Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies. His government service includes membership in the National Security Advisory Panel of the National Intelligence Council, and two years as Counselor of the Department of State. His most recent book is *Supreme*

*Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, and his current book project is a study of the early origins of the American way of war.

**Glenn Hastedt** received his PhD in Political Science from Indiana University. He is Professor and chair of the interdisciplinary Justice Studies Department at James Madison University. Prior to that he served as chair of the Political Science Department. He is the author of *American Foreign Policy: Past, Present, Future*, 8th ed (Longman) and co-author of *Pathways to Conflict and Cooperation* (forthcoming, CQ Press). Along with contributing to edited volumes on intelligence he has published articles on intelligence in *Intelligence and National Security*, the *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* and other journals. He currently is co-editor of White House Studies and is on the editorial board of *Intelligence and National Security* and *Journal of Conflict Studies*.

**Jeffrey T. Richelson** is a Senior Fellow with the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C. His most recent books include *Defusing Armageddon: Inside NEST, America's Secret Nuclear Bomb Squad* (2009), *Spying on the Bomb: American Nuclear Intelligence from Nazi Germany to Iran and North Korea* (2006), and *The Wizards of Langley: Inside the CIA's Directorate of Science and Technology* (2001). He is currently researching the use of reconnaissance satellites in support of domestic missions as well as the history of the National Reconnaissance Office.

**Wesley Wark** is an associate Professor at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto and a visiting research Professor at the University of Ottawa's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. His most recent book is the edited Volume, *Secret Intelligence: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2009). He recently served on the Prime Minister's Advisory Council on National Security, between 2005 and 2009, and is a former (two-term) President of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies. In the late 1990s he was commissioned to write a classified history of the Canadian intelligence community during the Cold War.

Bob Jervis' book is, in many ways, that oldest of dramatic devices, a play within a play. Its actually several plays within a play – a slice of autobiography in a tale of two intelligence postmortems in a story of two foreign policy failures in a treatise on intelligence. It is wise and sober, but most interesting at the lowermost rungs of narrative structure.

As a treatise, what it says about how to improve intelligence makes a great deal of sense but is, as the author points out, not terribly new. Analysts with imagination, deep country expertise, and a penchant for self-critical, intellectually fearless examination of questionable hypotheses – sure. We need more of them. But what is most interesting in this book is Jervis himself, the centrist-liberal professor who has spent a life consulting to the CIA for the best of reasons – to serve his country, and to gratify his curiosity about how the world works.

A small number of academics – Jervis and his colleague Dick Betts foremost among them – have had a deep involvement with the analytic world of intelligence for decades, and it shows. They know the bureaucracies but more importantly they understand the analytic challenges and sympathize with those who face them. In other venues I have suggested that they may sympathize a bit too much, and Jervis (whom, like Betts, I regard as not only a respected scholar and colleague, but a friend) administers that view a gentle cuff on the side of the head. The larger issue, though, is one worth the consideration of all academics who think about intelligence, viz., the natural inclination of academics to sympathize with the intelligence analysts rather than the policymakers. After all, many of the analysts were academics, or most certainly, trained by them; and the intelligence agencies are much more respectful – for good and bad reasons – of professors than any policymaker or her staff will be. But I have to think that as rigorous as Jervis' critique of the intelligence analysts is, it would not be nearly as rough as that of a policymaker who had been burned by intelligence weaseling, leaking, or mute opposition.

I speak in part from experience here: most policymakers mistrust intelligence agencies, and not without reason. Intelligence bureaucracies may be self-critical; they are also self-protective, and most policymakers suspect that if they act based on some piece of intelligence that turns out to be faulty, the intelligence community will hang them out to dry. Of course, the intelligence community reciprocates that suspicion, with equal strength of feeling, and often with equal cause. It is, in many ways, like a bad marriage without any prospect for divorce. Where it does work (and again, experience here: I have seen it work) it is because both sides take the time to understand one another's concerns, special language, and where there is confidence in the fundamental integrity of analyst and policymaker alike. All that comes down to matters of personality – organization, procedures, and all the rest matters little.

The issue of analysis *per se* always struck me as over done. If your sources are bad or (as in the two cases Jervis discusses here) simply lacking, there is not that much analysis can

do. And because so much of the really valuable intelligence comes not from spies but from signals and other technically collected forms of intelligence, there is a gap in the literature and, to some extent, in this book. Contemporary students of intelligence are in the position of historians of World War II in the 1960's and early 1970's: they may know the rough outlines of the story, but until they understood the role of ULTRA, they really could not make sound judgments about the functioning of intelligence. Again, Jervis points out the importance of sources in his case studies, but in the nature of things, he cannot dwell over much on them.

To go back to Jervis himself, and to the academy that produced him, and the young men and women who enter the intelligence services. For many, many years, it took some courage to be a professor willing to work for the CIA, and one cannot say good enough things about Jervis for doing so, and doing so without apology. One wonders, though, whether the universities, which have lost some, but not all of their hostility to the world of intelligence (in the case of anthropology, as far as I can tell, the antipathy borders on the rabid), will provide the kinds of analysts Jervis says we need. Area studies has been in a bad way for a long time; political science emphasizes more and more in the way of austere theories and formal models; history has wandered from the political and military analysis that was a staple of earlier times. If academics wish to improve the quality of intelligence analysis, should we not focus first and foremost on the quality of the analysts we, not the intelligence community, produce?

The surprise terrorist attack of 9/11 and the failure to find Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) have spawned a veritable analytic cottage industry diagnosing the ills of the intelligence community and advancing reforms of the intelligence estimating process in order to prevent another surprise attack. In *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*, Robert Jervis examines the published intelligence on Iraqi WMDs and his own earlier post mortem of U.S. intelligence on the fall of the Shah of Iran and concludes that some of the most frequently voiced arguments on why intelligence fails most notably those involving the politicalization of intelligence, bureaucratic hindrances to information sharing and the presence of groupthink miss the mark. So too do the underlying notions behind many reform proposals that 1) intelligence failures and strategic surprise can be prevented if they were to be implemented and 2) improved intelligence products automatically will lead to better policy.

Instead of universal rules for reorganizing intelligence Jervis presents sets of prescriptions for improving intelligence analysis, prescriptions he characterizes as investments. They are rooted in his observation that not atypically the problem with a failed estimate is not that intelligence analysts made glaring errors, but that their inferences while wrong were not unreasonable and often made more sense out of the evidence available than did competing explanations. Jervis calls for a number of investments to address analytical shortcomings. He calls for a stronger middle management presence in the estimating process to ensure that the proper questions are being asked and more peer review to challenge and stimulate analysts. He also calls for a greater adherence to the demands of social science methodology and a firmer recognition of the cognitive underpinnings of intelligence analysis. The former is necessary to help move analysis and reporting from a journalistic presentation of a stream of events to an investigation of a hypothesis that is sensitive to disconfirming information and investigate comparable cases. The goal of the later is not to eliminate the role of beliefs from the analytical process, something which cannot be done, but to make analysts more cognizant of how they influence what is seen and not seen.

Jervis' post mortem on U.S. intelligence on the Shah of Iran was commissioned by the Central Intelligence Agency and presented in Spring 1979. It is published here in its entirety for the first time along with the reactions of American intelligence officials to its conclusions. In and of itself the publication of this document makes *Why Intelligence Fails* a valuable contribution to the study of intelligence estimating and the problem of strategic surprise. It puts to rest many frequently voiced misconceptions of why the United States failed to anticipate the Shah's fall since the CIA received most of its information from SAVAK. Now published, his study will provide researchers with a rich set of insights into this intelligence failure which can be compared and weighed against those which have emerged from other post mortems.

Beyond the publication of this study *Why Intelligence Fails* serves as a vehicle for Jervis to reflect on a career of studying perceptions in world politics both as an academic and

government consultant. Perhaps most telling in this regard is his comment about how his report was received. He writes: “this section can be quite short because as far as I can tell at the time there was not substantive reaction (p. 27).” Reflecting on the general problem of the politics and psychology of intelligence reform in the concluding chapter one is moved to conclude that Jervis finds this reception anything but surprising as he observes that intelligence will not win any popularity contests. Policy makers do not value good information for its own sake. For them intelligence can be as much a threat or hindrance in formulating policy as an aid because its findings tend to foreclose options rather than expand their number.

Jervis’ discussion of the nexus between policy makers and intelligence analysis is an important part of *Why Intelligence Fails*. Among his key observations are 1) few policy makers have an incentive to understand the utility or limits to intelligence 2) they often feel that intelligence is out to get them 3) they often oversell their policies in attempting to maximize political support 4) they are reluctant to develop fall back plans 5) timing matters in presenting intelligence 6) they tend to seek confirming information and 7) and they do not value intelligence for its own sake.

These observations are seconded by many who write on intelligence reform. Yet almost exclusively we find that proposals for reducing intelligence failures and improving intelligence analysis are carried out with little reference to policy makers. They tend to focus on the workings of the intelligence agencies as if they were divorced from any larger political context much in the same way that treatments of State Department and Defense Department reform have divorced the operation of these organizations from the larger context of American foreign policy making. In neither of these two cases have the reform proposals that emerged from this artificial separation of these organizations from their broader political moorings resulted in greatly increased satisfaction with the integration of diplomatic and military expertise into the policy process. Might the same fate await proposals for intelligence reform that flow from the same conceptual starting point? The next generation of intelligence reform proposals must tackle this issue head on.

Additional reasons for thinking of intelligence reform in an explicitly political context are found in the changes that are occurring in it. The intelligence community was created during the Cold War and in an era characterized by a significant degree of foreign policy bipartisanship. Both are absent today. Within the intelligence community a DNI has been created which not only adds another bureaucratic layer in the structure of the intelligence community but creates competition for resources and influence among its members as was evidenced by the turf battle between DCI Leon Panetta and DNI Dennis Blair over who had the authority to pick station chiefs. Long standing formal and informal jurisdictional divisions within the intelligence community have eroded. During the Iraq War the Defense Department’s Policy Counter-Terrorism Evaluation Group produced “alternative” intelligence reports on Saddam Hussein’s cooperation with al-Qaida. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld also established the position of Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence during his tenure in order to better control the intelligence activities of the Defense Department. The intelligence community as a whole now also faces external challenges to its analytic and collection authority from the growth of open source

intelligence sources and the outsourcing of intelligence gathering and analysis tasks to private firms.

The primary impediment to moving intelligence reform beyond the self-imposed boundaries within which they now operate is the belief that policy making and analysis are two separate worlds –or that they should be. The politicalization of intelligence is seen by reformers as the primary evil to be avoided. Yet as Jervis notes this danger is often overstated. In fact, both policy makers and intelligence analysts benefit from perpetuating the belief that a clear line of demarcation separates their two worlds. It provides policy makers with a ready made excuse for why polices fail or surprise occurs: I was not warned; intelligence was wrong. It allows intelligence analysts to define questions about policy as off limits turning potentially open-ended analytical assignments into answerable questions. Reality, however, does not respect this division. Policy and analysis are not two separable domains. They constantly intermingle and exert an influence on each other.

Explicitly linking intelligence reform to the manner in which intelligence is integrated into the policy process recasts the reform agenda. *Why Intelligence Fails* contains several insights that could be useful starting points for starting a debate over how best to proceed. First, in an age of multiple sources of information from inside and outside of the government, and a penchant for instant analysis might the real value added offered by intelligence agencies to policy makers be the ability to ask important questions. This is not to denigrate the value of intelligence for answering questions. Rather it recognizes that the problem policy makers face is in some sense too many answers that are not germane to what they should be thinking about in formulating policy. Here again intelligence can help policy makers not by providing answers but helping them come to understand what questions they need to ask. In absence of this policy makers will fall back on preconceived views of what drives the actions of other states and seek information that confirms these ideas.

Second, in posing questions (and answers) it is clear from Jervis' accounting that journalism triumphs over social science research. Rather than fight this tendency might it not be advisable to invest in a cadre of analysts who are trained to be good journalists? Jervis notes that intelligence is a form of diagnosis. This has led some to see medicine as a reference point for thinking about intelligence reform. But there is another way in which intelligence analysis and medical diagnoses are alike. All too often their findings and insights are not written so that users --policy makers and patients-- can understand them. In frustration they turn to other sources of information, think tanks and interest groups for policy makers and Web MD for patients. The problem facing intelligence and medical specialists is not just one of improving their research skills to better understand problems but communicating them. Analysts trained as journalists may offer help.

Analysts who can convey intelligence in the manner of an investigative reporter who develops a story and presents sources in a way that poses the needed questions, lays out what is known, presents competing interpretations, and acknowledges where doubts exist. This is not a call for yellow journalism, news wire style reporting of the latest developments of a story, or one-sided sympathetic embedded reporting. Nor is it meant to

reduce the importance of analysis rooted in good social science methodologies. It is a recognition that intelligence now more than ever competes for the attention of policy makers who are not positioned by temperament, training, or time constraints to recognize the strengths and weaknesses as academically grounded analysis whose nuanced language they do not value. Such traditional reporting might be better directed at staff aides.

Third, intelligence reform might be directed at reducing the incidence of bilateral intelligence failures. These are situations where surprise occurs because leaders are unable or unwilling to anticipate how others will respond to their actions. Preventing bilateral surprise requires more than laying out alternative possibilities to policy makers. It entails a deeper involvement in the policy process whereby intelligence understands the policy makers' perspectives and is able to raise possibly undesirable foreign responses in an effective fashion. Acting in this fashion the intelligence officer must mirror the way in which military advice needs to be given. The final decision about the use of military force lies with the president and the military must obey but it is the professional responsibility of military officers to provide presidents with a full picture of the possible consequences of any decision.

Fourth, intelligence reform must address how intelligence analysts should interact with the new private sector intelligence producers. Are they competitors or collaborators? To the extent to which they are allies will they be given only certain types of intelligence tasks to perform such as information collection or will they be assigned a variety of tasks ranging from collecting data to presenting intelligence analysis to policy makers? If they engage in original analysis will it compete with the intelligence community, only examine issues the intelligence community does not have the expertise to address, or will it serve as peer reviewers of intelligence community analytical products? And perhaps most importantly, how will their performance be judged? Will it be on the strength of their product --a standard that begs the question of how this will be determined--or will it be on the strength of their connections to the intelligence community, Congress, or the White House? Outsourcing organizations are entrepreneurial in nature and will not easily be closed.

The question of how to better integrate intelligence into the policy process is not a foreign one to intelligence officials. Intelligence products and briefings are constructed with their readers' interests and decision making style in mind. Jervis tellingly notes that National Intelligence Dailies tend to be produced on the assumption that policy makers have not been following an issue or paying attention to it. The fundamental problem has not, however, been addressed in reform proposals. *Why Intelligence Fails* makes a valuable contribution to the literature on intelligence analysis and strategic surprise by leading readers through the contemporary reform debate and suggesting valuable steps that can be taken to improve the quality of intelligence today and stimulating thinking about the direction that the next generation of what reform challenges might take.

Review by Jeffrey T. Richelson, National Security Archive

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Two of the more significant intelligence failures in the history of the U.S. Intelligence Community took place with respect to the same region of the world – the Middle East – but decades apart. One was the failure to predict the collapse of the Shah’s regime in February 1979. The second was the community’s failure to conclude that Saddam Hussein’s regime had actually destroyed its stockpile of chemical and biological weapons and had not, by 2002, started to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program.

Aside from the difference in the eras in which they occurred the failures were distinct in additional ways. One concerned the political survival of an allied regime while the other concerned the weapons programs of an adversary. Second, one may have prevented the U.S. from undertaking measures intended to help that ally remain in power, while the other served to justify U.S. action to remove an adversary regime.

In his latest book, Robert Jervis examines both failures as well as the politics and psychology of intelligence and intelligence reform. The Iran chapter consists of three parts – an introduction, a redacted and edited (by the CIA and Jervis respectively) study he co-authored in 1979 for the CIA that focused on the performance of the National Foreign Assessment Center (NFAC – the designation, during the Carter administration, for the agency’s Directorate of Intelligence), and comments from CIA and Intelligence Community officials on the study.

Jervis notes that “NFAC failed to anticipate the course of events in Iran from late 1977 to late 1978.” (34) As he noted earlier in the book, such a statement alone can be rather uninteresting since there may be legitimate reasons why intelligence analysts fail to predict a course of events. (Of course, repeated reasonable failures may leave the taxpayer wondering what he or she is getting for the substantial investment in intelligence. And a reasonable failure on the part of analysts does not necessarily imply a reasonable failure on the part of the Intelligence Community as a whole). The second sense in which an intelligence failure occurred was that “there was evidence available at the time which pointed to the Shah’s vulnerability.” (35). Then he identifies a third type of failure – “given the information available at the time, was NFAC’s judgment unreasonable?” Answering that question, Jervis explains, is what “much of the discussion” addresses – although he notes that “we cannot give a short and precise answer to this question.” (35)

What the study does do, in addition to recounting some key events or issues (including the White Revolution, the Shah’s willingness to use force, the religious opposition, and Iran’s domestic economic situation) in the last months of the Shah’s rule, is try to identify problems – inherent problems that made analytical foresight difficult, maybe impossible, as well as with the analytical approach and process, problems which impeded the production of higher quality intelligence.

Inherent problems included the fact that the Iranian revolution was a “major discontinuity” and “no one does a good job of understanding and predicting unprecedented events.” (39)

The event was unprecedented according to the study in that it involved a mass uprising overthrowing a regime that had support from all its security forces. A second inherent problem was the difficulty of estimating the intensity of the opposition to the Shah's regime – of exactly how far people would go to get rid of the Shah. That, according to Jervis (and his supposedly anonymous co-author) is “very hard to estimate ... short of the actual test.” (39).

Jervis notes other problems that contributed to NFAC's less than stellar performance. He states one as “some of the central beliefs ... were disconfirmable” – although what he really means is that by the time they would be disconfirmed it would be too late. (24) One example was the proposition that the diversity of the opposition to the Shah would result in a split – a split which never came.

A second problem related to the failure to study the Shah's past behavior. Analysts believed that the Shah was strong and decisive, but Jervis notes that had analysts gone over his history or read assessments produced in the 1950s and 1960s they would have seen a very different Shah. In addition, according to Jervis, “no one in or out of the government understood the role of religion and Khomeini” and faults analysts for not realizing that the Shah's clampdown on other forms of opposition would result in religious leaders being the focal point for anti-Shah activities.(25) Finally, “the role of nationalism and its twin, anti-Americanism, was missed and misunderstood because CIA associated these forces with terrorism ...” (25).

The NFAC process for producing finished intelligence is critiqued on several counts. At one point Jervis remarks that in his contact with CIA analysts he was surprised that they were more like journalists – reporting on current events – than scholars trying to determine underlying causes for events. Thus, he notes that the system “produced a steady stream of summaries of recent events with minimal degree of commentary, analysis, and prediction” and that there was a “lack of discussion of forces effecting events.” (43-44)

The greatest problem was with the *National Intelligence Daily*, which except for the *President's Daily Brief*, was the highest level current intelligence product produced by the U.S. Intelligence Community. The NID, Jervis complains, focused on describing what had happened, rather than on why. And while there were, on occasion, conclusions in a NID there was no attempt to explain how those conclusions were reached.

In addition to identifying problems, Jervis suggested a number of correctives, some of which follow directly from his critiques. He proposed that evidence should be provided to explain how analysts reached their conclusions as well as the exploration of alternative explanations. In addition, prediction should be used as an analytical tool – analysts should identify that should happen if their views are correct. If the predicted events do not occur they would have to reconsider their analysis. There was also a need for discussion and review – a common occurrence in the academic world – but one that Jervis found lacking in NFAC.

In some ways the chapter is two case studies in one – a study of NFAC performance with regard to the fall of the Shah, as well as a study of its tradecraft applied to the fall of the Shah. Of course, many of the problems identified with NFAC tradecraft as well as the correctives proposed would apply to other analytical organizations, in other times, and in other circumstances – including the presence or absence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in 2002.

But the Iran chapter is not, and was never intended to be, an assessment of the entire Intelligence Community's performance with respect to the fall of the Shah – any Intelligence Community post-mortems of that nature have yet to be released. There are glimpses of the views of the relevant National Intelligence Officer, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) but they are not major subjects of discussion.

And while there is a bit of discussion about collection it is also a minor subject in the study – as it was attempting to assess NFAC performance based on the information that was available, not explore what information could or should have been available. Thus, absent, at least from the redacted versions, and maybe from the unredacted version, are discussions of any clandestine human or communications intelligence operations directed at either the Shah's regime or the opposition. Nor is there any significant discussion of inputs from foreign intelligence services that were monitoring events in Iran.

In assessing the reasons for the Iraqi failure, Jervis rejects the arguments of authors such as John Prados, James Bamford, and David Corn and Michael Isikoff that painted the intelligence effort as a politically-directed attempt to 'hoodwink' Congress and the public.<sup>1</sup> Making use of the extensive documentary record, particularly the reports of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Jervis identifies several factors that contributed to the intelligence failure – too much certainty on the part of analysts, the failure to consider alternative explanations, and a lack of imagination. (All of which also applied to NFAC analysis of events in Iran during mid-1977 to November 1978).

At the same time, he rejects four “common but misleading explanations” – including groupthink, excessive consensus, a failure to challenge assumptions, and politicization. Some of Jervis' conclusions are similar to those found in Richard Betts' *Enemies of Intelligence* and my *Spying on the Bomb*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James Bamford, *A Pretext for War: 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America's Intelligence Agencies* (New York: Doubleday, 2004); Michael Isikoff and David Corn, *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War* (New York: Crown, 2006); John Prados, *Hoodwinked: The Documents that Reveal How Bush Sold Us a War* (New York: New Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge & Power in American National Security* (New York: Columbia, 2007), 104-123; Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb: American Nuclear Intelligence from Nazi Germany to Iran and North Korea* (New York: Norton, 2006), 470-502.

Two issues that Jervis also tackles in the chapter are the aluminum tube controversy and the uranium from Africa issue. One key element in the aluminum tube issues for Jervis is the actions (or lack of actions) by Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet. Jervis faults Tenet for not even being aware that there existed an interagency controversy over Iraq's planned use of the tubes – that intelligence analysts from State Department and, more importantly, the Department of Energy did not share the CIA's views. He explains that Tenet was “physically, politically, and psychologically at some distance from analysts outside CIA.” (144). I would add that another factor that contributed to Tenet's failure to fully embrace his role as DCI was that he followed a director during whose tenure CIA morale dropped significantly. Tenet quickly became a cheerleader for the agency and solid supporter of agency positions.

Jervis also addresses a problem that faced analysts in the case of Iraq – the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence, an observation of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

He notes that “there [is] quite a bit to this, but it disguises quite a bit as well.” (151). Jervis observes that it was rare “for negative information to be solicited, reported or noticed.” (151).

Jervis doubts, however, that had such messages arrived they would have been passed on to analysts. One mistake in ignoring such evidence, he argues, is that “instances in which specific behavior does not occur or evidence is absent are highly significant *if* this contradicts an important proposition or argument ...” (151).

One might argue that Rumsfeld's proposition can be quite valid when dealing with a small number of observations, even if it does contradict an important proposition, but loses validity as the number of instances increases – since the probability of the proposition being true keeps falling. But if such data is not passed on to analysts, the declining probability of there being something to find, whether it be aliens or stocks of WMD, cannot be determined.

But in the end, Jervis finds that the Intelligence Community's 2002 assessment of Iraq weapons of mass destruction was not unreasonable. He writes that in retrospect, “the most reasonable assessment would have been that Iraq probably (but not certainly) had active and broadly based WMD programs and a small stockpile of chemical and perhaps biological weapons.” (155). But the assessment also could have, and should have, noted the “wide band of uncertainty” and indicated that the conclusion was more a result of previous regime behavior than current evidence. Although he does not say so, clearly an analysis that reflected this uncertainty should have prevented the DCI from claiming that the case against Iraq was a “slam dunk.”

Jervis, in his conclusions to his Iraq chapter, notes the difference between his views and the standard journalistic accounts of the failure, as well as between his views and those of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI). He doesn't really explore the reasons for the views of the former – although I would suggest that a combination of political bias (left-

wing bias, in this case), the same analytical shortcomings Jervis identified as plaguing NFAC analysts in the late 1970s, and a rather limited knowledge of the Intelligence Community, its capabilities, and how it works are all factors.<sup>3</sup>

In his concluding chapter Jervis does turn to the expectation held by policymakers of intelligence – which are probably often similar to the expectations of many Senators and Congressman. Thus, he faults the SSCI for expecting too much from analysts studying Iraqi WMD programs.

While this critique is fair, in at least one case I would consider Jervis to be too lenient. He quotes Henry Kissinger with regard to the CIA failure to predict certain coups – “... you start with the assumption that the home government missed it ... Why the hell should we know better than the government’s that being overthrown?” (p. 158).

Here one can offer a reasonable objection to Kissinger’s view and Jervis’ support for it. The fall of the Shah involved not a coup, but a national revolt – and predicting how both the leaders of the opposition and how the general public would respond to the opposition – particularly if things turned violent – may be too much to expect. But coups are plots, and have plotters. It may not be inevitable, but it is certainly not unreasonable that the U.S. Intelligence Community with its vast technical (particularly eavesdropping) capabilities would have better access to what the plotters are thinking and planning than the target government. In addition, plotters may talk to U.S. representatives or individuals to whom the U.S. has access to about their plans although they would clearly avoid similar disclosure to the target government or its security services.

The final chapter also focuses on an inevitable consequence of intelligence failure – calls for ‘reform.’ And the severity of the 9/11 failure (at least in the first sense of failure) led to actual change – particularly the creation of the office of the Director of National Intelligence, with more authority than held by the Director of Central Intelligence. Jervis accurately notes that the proposal to create a DNI had been around for a while, indeed it had been around for decades, and “was seized on even though it did not match the precipitating problem.” (183).

A couple of his other observations deserve further comment. He suggests that the president could have simply have given the DCI more authority by “telling the secretary of defense that his budget requests in the intelligence area, especially the enormous sums for spy satellites, had to be approved by the DCI before they went to the White House.” (183). Here I think Jervis underestimates the powers exercised by DCIs. While some of the most significant DNI decisions have involved the cancellation of satellite programs, past DCIs have also exercised significant control over satellite decisions. For example, it was William Casey, not Caspar Weinberger, who gave the go-ahead for at least two revolutionary

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<sup>3</sup> Those shortcomings often include a failure to distinguish between necessary and sufficient conditions and the appreciation that conclusions often are the consequence of initial assumptions or premises.

systems and approved a CIA proposal to modify a SIGINT system rather than invest in a far more expensive new program.

Jervis also notes that there is much to be said in favor of a decentralized intelligence system, since different agencies need intelligence for different purposes – but does not elaborate. This is a crucial issue in the debate of the authorities of the DNI. Some proposals (such as that of former DNI) that would bring the entire intelligence system under the complete control of the DNI would inevitably serve to stifle dissenting views and ignores one reason so many different analytic units have been established over the years. To take one example, a reform in which the DNI would truly be the boss of the head of INR would eliminate the Secretary of State's ability to obtain truly independent assessments of developments of concern and limit his or her ability to receive finished intelligence relevant to his or her requirements.

In addition, Jervis discusses the impact of the creation of the office of the DNI (and the subordinate National Counterterrorism Center and National Counterproliferation Center) on the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence (DI). He suggests that one problem is that producing intelligence on topics outside of the counterterrorism and counterproliferation areas, which are still the responsibility of the DI, largely involve reliance on open sources. I think there is indeed a problem with regard to the future of the DI, but that is not it – since it still is active in the counterterrorism and counterproliferation areas and a number of other areas (such as China) require far more than open sources.

Rather, a major problem lies in the fact that the creation of the DNI creates a fragmented national analytic activity – divided between the CIA and DNI centers. The possibility of new centers being established by the DNI could further weaken the CIA 's analytic capability and role – and creates an air of uncertainty. That situation is the product of a reform effort that did not consider all the implications of the effort. As a result, we have seen the recent battle between the DNI and the director of the CIA over who would chose the individuals to represent the Intelligence Community in foreign capitals.

While Jervis' book treats what, are in some ways, very divergent topics it does provide a coherent multi-faceted message about the cause of intelligence failures and its consequences.

One element of that message is that mere organizational change is not a sufficient or adequate response. Another is that failure can be the result of who is doing analysis and the process involved – insuring that those are not reasons for future failure requires actions by national security and intelligence officials that may not be visible on an organization chart, or in legislation. But those invisible actions may be crucial to improving future analysis and, at least, reducing the probability of failure.

Robert Jervis is a wide-ranging scholar of international relations, and long-time faculty member at Columbia University, where he holds the Adlai Stevenson Chair. That Bob Jervis would write a book on intelligence comes as no surprise; that he is able to offer this particular book is a treat, not least because it represents work, some of it dating back to 1979, that Professor Jervis undertook in unusual circumstances. His book features two case studies of intelligence failure—Iran in 1978; and the run-up to the Iraq war in 2003. Both studies are products of Jervis's invited role as an outside expert brought into the U.S. intelligence community as a consultant and given access to classified material. The Iranian case study involves a failure of warning about the likelihood of the overthrow of the Shah's regime. The Iraq case, a study of the deeply flawed intelligence assessments of Iraq's alleged armoury of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), was an estimative failure that had a contested impact on policy-making.

Both studies, although distinct in time and space, are crucial to our understanding of how the U.S. intelligence community functions and how intelligence relates to policy-making. Jervis's analysis is acute throughout and should serve to make his book a clear pick for anyone's list of top ten books on intelligence. Beyond the acute analysis there is an overall tone of pessimism about the U.S. intelligence community's adaptive capacity and a cautionary argument about the high expectations that we bring to the intelligence function. Some readers might be troubled by this tone, which reinforces similar arguments made by Richard Betts, but it's a message that needs to be heard and pondered.<sup>1</sup>

While the links between policy failures and intelligence failures are not always clear, we need to understand the intelligence input not just to appreciate its direct impact on decision-making, but as a way to probe the contemporary images that shaped more broadly the understanding of security challenges. The mental maps that intelligence communities operate with are generally similar to the mental maps that hold wide currency in government and sometimes even in society at large. Intelligence failures are rarely if ever a product of some unique process of understanding crafted behind the walls of intelligence systems. But we expect intelligence communities not only to have unique access to information, but to do the uncommon thinking, come up with the quirky view, an expectation that both places a heavy burden on intelligence systems and can place them in an awkward position with the policy community they serve. We expect intelligence communities to be 'imaginative' bureaucracies—whether they can truly be such beasts and whether this is what politicians really want from their intelligence agencies are issues that go to the heart of the intelligence function. But without resolving such thorny issues as the bureaucratic culture of intelligence, or the intelligence-policy relationship, we frequently judge intelligence community performance against a baseline quotient of imagination and

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<sup>1</sup> Richard K. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in American National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

are quick to reach summary findings of a “failure of imagination.” The 9/11 Commission report is but one prominent example of this tendency.

In both the Iranian and Iraq cases that Jervis surveys, we can posit clear failures of imagination. The U.S. intelligence community failed to “imagine” in 1978 that the Shah might fall from power. The U.S. intelligence community failed, 24 years later, to imagine that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq possessed no weapons of mass destruction, had no real ties to Al Qaeda, and posed no imminent threat to regional or international security (that he posed a clear and present danger to the security of his own people is another matter). What is important is to determine just how difficult, even how plausible, it was to construct an alternative imaginative picture with respect to both crises.

The retrospective expectation surrounding intelligence on both events is that the U.S. system should have been able to see the likelihood of the Shah’s overthrow and should have been able to see that Saddam’s war chest was empty. What counter-factual universe of alternate policies the U.S. might have adopted if it had seen these issues clearly is another matter and not one that Jervis spends much time on. His studies are devoted to understanding why the intelligence process in both cases failed to capture the reality.

Two answers stand out, relevant to both case studies. One involves the relative paucity of intelligence sources; the other involves the perils of conformity.

Jervis’s study of intelligence reporting about the Shah’s regime is a declassified version of a postmortem report that he prepared for the CIA in 1979. Jervis examined CIA reporting done for the then National Foreign Assessment Center. His conclusions are clear. The CIA, when confronted with growing domestic unrest in Iran in 1978, utterly failed to imagine the possibility that it would lead to the overthrow of the Shah. CIA analysts worked with a limited range of reporting, mostly from diplomatic sources. This reporting stream provided little to nothing in the way of insight into such key issues as the nature of dissent in Iran, the psychology of the Shah, the nature and outlook of the religious opposition led by the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, or the depth of anti-US sentiment in the country.

The thinness of intelligence reporting contributed to and sustained an analytical process based on a small set of critical and overlapping assumptions. These included an argument from historical continuity, that because the Shah had survived previous domestic political challenges, he could do so again. The CIA, in keeping with the wider U.S. policy community, also understood Iran in a particular light, as a country in the throes of modernization and liberalization, led by a Shah who wielded sufficient power (in the form of the military and the internal security service, SAVAK), and had sufficient resolve, to put down any protests that threatened his realm. They persisted in seeing (or imagining) a strong “moderate” element in Iranian politics that would ally itself with the Shah against his more extreme opponents. This, incidentally, is a favourite device of intelligence communities when confronted with turbulent and hard-to-understand political systems. Similar thinking, to give but one example, influenced British intelligence assessments on the eve of war in 1939.

CIA analysts on Iran, Jervis tells us, operated not just with too little information and too many dubious assumptions, but also in a relative intellectual and policy vacuum. They engaged in a form of “group think” without being part of any real group. They were cut off from other agencies of the U.S. government, particularly the State department, and had no access to outside sources of expertise, such as might have been found in the academic community. If intellectual isolation was not bad enough, the methods employed and bureaucratic culture of CIA analysis was lacking. Bob Jervis gives impressive chapter and verse on this. He condemns CIA analysts for being forced to serve in effect as journalists, reporting in shallow and serial fashion on current events, without any training in or appreciation for social science methods of analysis.

Methodological poverty, when combined with information scarcity and the weight of dubious assumptions, makes the Iran intelligence failure look over-determined. But Jervis knows that inadequate intelligence collection and piled-up misperceptions are the usual lot of intelligence communities. What makes the Iran case study of particular significance is that CIA assessments featured so many assumptions that simply could not be disproved (or tested) before it was too late. This was especially true about assumptions regarding the willingness of the Shah to crack down hard against opponents if and when necessary, and the significance of the “moderates” in Iranian politics. By the time it became clear that the moderates were not the key and that the Shah’s willingness to deploy strong-arm tactics was missing, the Shah himself was done.

To his credit, Bob Jervis has included some critical commentary on his 1979 report commissioned from within the government, as the CIA tried to figure out what use to make of it. Some of this commentary is a bit mean-spirited and seemingly designed to denigrate the understanding of mere academic outsiders when confronted with the holy mysteries of intelligence. But the best of it, from Klaus Knorr, calls attention to a missing piece of the Iranian study puzzle. The missing piece has to do with the impact of U.S. policy on intelligence assessments. The Shah was a key U.S. ally in the region, his country a major supplier of oil, and his modernization program involved lavish spending on the military with major purchases from the U.S. arms industry. The very fact that the Shah was an indispensable and indeed lucrative ally made imagining his downfall all that more difficult, either as an outcome of assessment or in terms of finished intelligence reporting to policy-makers. This was compounded by the fact that some part of the Shah’s downfall might be attributed to the difficulties caused for his regime by U.S. pressure to liberalise, as well as by a studied blindness to the degree to which this U.S. ally was seen internally as a corrupt U.S. puppet. U.S. intelligence could hardly comment on the Shah’s fitness as an ally—that would be to stray too far into the realm of policy-making. But it did not see, and was not encouraged to see, the negative impact of liberalization pressures or of the U.S. image in Iran. In the Iran case, it was not that CIA reporting fell victim to the hidden, or not so hidden, hand of political pressure, but rather that the CIA could not escape from a corporate conformity. Conformity can always be read as a form of self-politicisation, but the more interesting and pertinent picture that Jervis draws is of a CIA institutionally and intellectually ill equipped to understand the turmoil that beset the Shah’s regime in the course of 1978. Jervis argues that the key question that had to be faced was “whether the

Shah's dictatorial regime could safely permit a high level of political freedom." (65) That question, he notes, was never asked. (67)

Jervis ends his Iran case study with what he calls a dual appeal: to analysts to re-examine assumptions and beliefs; and to managers to create an intellectual environment devoted to something more than the mere reporting of events.

This due appeal inevitably hovers over the second of Jervis's case studies—on Iraq. A truly comparative study of these two intelligence failures would have been desirable, but Jervis leaves them only loosely linked, with no sustained commentary about the ways in which the intelligence community had changed or altered its ways and capabilities in the intervening 24-odd years. We never learn if Jervis believes the CIA paid any heed to his dual appeal, although one suspects the answer.

The U.S. intelligence assessments on Iraq have been extensively analysed by government inquiries, by scholars, and by journalists. Jervis himself has previously written on the subject.<sup>2</sup> He tells us in an endnote that he "headed a small team of academics who studied the failure and advised CIA on remedies." (fn. 2, p. 202). To this he adds a gentle warning label: "This and other consulting I have done may have made me (unduly?) sympathetic to the organization." (fn. 2, p. 202) Those of us in academe who have engaged in such work will recognize the peril while wanting, at the very least, to emphasise the question mark. Perhaps Bob Jervis would share my view that such consulting opportunities, rather than serving to make you a captive, tend to deepen one's understanding and sharpen one's critical insights.

Jervis's chapter on the Iraq assessment failure reaches two basic conclusions, both of which are bound to be controversial. He holds that, contrary to much of what passes for received wisdom, politicisation was not the key factor in the U.S. intelligence performance and does not serve to explain the intelligence failure. The bulk of his argument can be found on pages 131 to 136 of his book and it is worth examining. Jervis argues that while there are clear instances of Bush administration figures cherry-picking and distorting intelligence community views, this in itself is not evidence of politicization, but rather the opposite—such things happened because the intelligence community wasn't providing the desired message. As for the presence of a "motivational bias" to produce intelligence reporting that would conform to known policy directions, Jervis argues that the time-lines don't fit, and that a good part of the U.S. intelligence community's view on Iraq and WMD was formed before the Bush administration began to make rhetorical and visible preparations for war. Nor is it easy to see politicization as being in the driving seat given the intelligence community's own, near universal, disbelief when no evidence of Iraq WMD emerged following the U.S. led invasion. What Jervis is doing is rejecting, holus-bolus, a crude version of the politicization argument, which is also, alas, the popular version.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Jervis, "Reports, Politics and Intelligence Failures: The Case of Iraq," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29, no. 1 (2006), pp. 3-52; reproduced in Christopher Andrew, Richard Aldrich and Wesley Wark, eds., *Secret Intelligence: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 193-228.

Where Bob Jervis does credit the presence of the “fog” of politicization is in the creation of “an atmosphere that was not conducive to critical analysis, encouraged excessive certainty and eroded subtleties and nuances.” (135) But it is also possible to see this same phenomenon in a slightly different light, not as a product of politicization but as a by-product of a kind of war fever that grew in intensity the greater the military preparations became and the closer that the United States and its allies drew to a likely invasion date. The idea that the United States as a nation was gearing up for war may have been a more powerful repressive factor than the notion that senior political decision makers wanted a certain kind of intelligence picture.

Jervis does gesture to such a finding by arguing that probably the best evidence for politicization of intelligence comes only late in the day. At some point, he says, it would appear that the U.S. intelligence community stopped thinking. This could explain the lack of attention paid to the UN weapons inspectors’ failure to turn up any evidence of a sustained Iraqi WMD effort, and the sullied effort to make the best of a mixed lot that characterised the behind-the-scenes preparation of Secretary of State Colin Powell’s crucial presentation to the UN Security Council in February 2003. Jervis is willing to concede that the U.S. intelligence community might have, in essence, shut down its critical faculties at some late stage in the crisis, recognizing that the path was set. But this does not, of course, explain the original intelligence assessments, especially the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE).

Bob Jervis wants us to think more carefully about politicisation than we have been wont to do, to establish its time-lines, if any, to be clear about what the evidence for it might be. Overall, he rejects the idea that politicisation played a formative role.

This finding is linked to his second, controversial point. The Iraq intelligence failure was an intelligence failure, but only one of degree. It was neither scandalous nor extreme. Jervis is prepared to argue that intelligence community analysts should have reached the conclusions that they did on Saddam’s WMD. That Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was developing WMD capabilities and had some weapons at hand was the most plausible explanation, one that fitted the known record of the past, that fitted perceptions of the nature of the regime, that allied with the fragmentary evidence that was available (strong at least for missile delivery systems) and that took account of Iraqi deception and denial techniques. But the analysis failed not in reaching the broad conclusions that it did, not in embracing the plausible explanation, but in failing to be more qualified about its judgments, more explicit about the limitations of its evidence, and more clear about its reasoning. Had intelligence been presented in this way it would have been less useful for the purposes of public presentation. Jervis doubts that a more cautious and qualified intelligence picture, had it existed, would have had any impact on the course of U.S. policy towards Iraq. But here we enter a complex world of alternative realities—could sufficient public support really have been sustained for a policy that could not be explicitly based on strong intelligence findings? What if a weak intelligence picture had been magnified by leaks from dissenters within? What would have happened to the UN process and the demand on the part of some UN Security Council members (and non-members like Canada) that more time be given to

UN inspectors before the decision on war was reached. I suspect, but it is only a suspicion, that a more qualified intelligence picture might have had a significant slowing effect on the drive for war.

Jervis's argument is that the intelligence community failed because it allowed itself to be more assertive than it should have been about its knowledge of Iraq. This assertiveness was not forced on the intelligence community by outside political pressures, but was shaped from within. Here the Iraq study does link to the previous Iranian case. Once again, we see a startling paucity of intelligence collection resources, and a series of uncontested and, as it turned out, false assumptions about Iraq. Maybe some things had improved since 1978—maybe there was more critical mass to the community, more of an appreciation that intelligence assessment was something other than current reporting. But these improvements have to be weighed against the absence of intelligence leadership and by the ways in which intelligence silos and disagreements between component agencies had been allowed to fester. This factor comes to the fore in Jervis's brief, but excellent, examination of the reporting on the interdicted aluminum tubes, which were seized on by the CIA as an indication of Iraq's effort to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program, against strong opposition from Department of Energy experts (who, Jervis tells us, disagreed about the tubes but nevertheless supported the idea that Iraq was pursuing a nuclear weapons capability). On the issue of the aluminum tubes, the U.S. intelligence community was dysfunctional—no community at all. The same could be said about the handling of the reporting that reached U.S. intelligence from the German-controlled Iraqi agent codenamed "Curveball," a talented and bold fabricator who conjured up stories of Iraqi mobile biological weapons trailers.<sup>3</sup>

Where the Iraq case study differs from the Iranian one is that Jervis does not believe a different kind of assessment might have emerged from the exhortation to analysts to re-examine their assumptions. According to Jervis, the key assumptions were all plausible, and alternative explanations for the Saddam Hussein regime, implausible. In short, Iraq should have had WMD.<sup>4</sup> Iraq in 2002 was read in the light of the stored up experience with the Saddam Hussein regime since its invasion of Kuwait in 1990—the previous pursuit of WMD capability, the resistance to UN inspections, evidence of denial and deception, the persistence of Saddam Hussein himself. This Middle East cat could not have changed his stripes.

Yet at least one incident in the period between 1990 and 2002 should have forced some re-thinking—the temporary defection to the west in 1995 of Hussein Kamel, Saddam's son-in-law and overseer of the regime's illicit weapons program, who, according to Jervis provided

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Drogin, *Curveball: Spies, Lies and the Con Man Who Caused a War* (New York: Random House, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> This argument is also made by Kenneth M. Pollack, "Spies, Lies, and Weapons: What Went Wrong," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 293, no. 1 (Jan-Feb. 2004), pp. 79-92. Available online at: [www.theatlantic.com/issues/2004/01/pollack.htm](http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2004/01/pollack.htm).

a great deal of valuable information and “told interviewers that the old chemical and biological material had been destroyed and that the programs were moribund.” (137) Jervis is puzzled about two aspects—one, that a false story about what Kamel reported was allowed to circulate and two, that little credence was given to what he actually said. The problem was, of course, that Kamel’s re-defection back to Baghdad, where he was summarily executed, cast a large shadow of doubt over the veracity of his story. The U.S. was never lucky enough to get another Kamel-life figure as an intelligence source to back his account at any later date. What they got instead was a UN weapons inspection process that was incomplete when Saddam forcibly terminated it in 1998. After 1998, the U.S. and other intelligence communities were effectively, if stunningly, operating blind when it came to HUMINT (human intelligence) sources.

Jervis makes a strong if disquieting case that intelligence failure on the issue of Iraq’s WMD program was over-determined and inevitable. Faced with a relative paucity of intelligence and steeped in assumptions about the Iraq regime that were a product of a reading of history, the U.S. intelligence community worked in conformity to a notion that Saddam Hussein must possess WMD. No other explanation looked plausible and no one spent any time chasing alternative theories. There was too little imagination, to be sure, in the U.S. analytical process, but then it would have taken a great deal of imagination to have reach a different conclusion, and the intelligence to back it up would have been non-existent.

The only way in which the U.S. intelligence community could have come to a different conclusion about Iraqi WMD in 2002 was if more attention had been paid, in a sustained way, not to Iraqi intentions, but to Iraqi capabilities. A deeper appreciation of the decrepitude of Iraqi infrastructure, the economic impact of international sanctions, and the political debilities of the Hussein regime might have been the path to a conclusion that Hussein wanted, but could not have, WMD. But U.S. intelligence was driven by a certainty about Iraqi intentions and, as another internal post-mortem known as the Kerr group report suggests, by a tendency to restrict its effort to narrow technological issues where the US’s technical collection resources and scientific expertise could be exploited.<sup>5</sup>

The Iranian and Iraq case studies are the heart of this book. In a final chapter, Jervis reflects more broadly on intelligence, with a view to understanding what can be accomplished through intelligence reform. A key point he makes is that intelligence and policy-making communities do not mesh naturally or well. Each suspects the other; each harbours fundamental misunderstandings of the other. Each community holds to its own political views. The key to a good intelligence-policy relationship is recognizing the gulf that separates them, and trying to close it through leadership and hard work, coupled with the building of mutual respect and trust. But, as Jervis reminds us, intelligence’s product is not usually what policy-makers think they want or need. In place of clarity and simplicity, intelligence often delivers complexity and nuance.

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<sup>5</sup> “Intelligence and Analysis on Iraq: Issues for the Intelligence Community” [Kerr Group Report] 29 July 2004, On line at <http://cryptome.org/cia072904.htm>

In some of his reform discussion, Jervis leaps at a bridge too far. This, I think, is especially true for his argument that the intelligence community should work its way more centrally into policy discussions by raising questions about the fundamental issues, about risks inherent in policies, about the role of motivated biases. Yet, as Jervis knows full well, it would take a wholesale redistribution of power to affect such a change, and the only exemplar we have of such a state of affairs are totalitarian regimes where security services tend to hold the upper hand. This is not to say that intelligence communities should not be foxy in presenting arguments about such issues, but they have to be embedded carefully in intelligence assessments, otherwise the natural gulf that separates intelligence and policy makers will widen and politicization take on yet another hue.

More significant are his arguments in favour of intelligence communities not being overly obsessed with influence at the top, as opposed to spreading their knowledge through the middle ranks of the bureaucracy, and in favour of relative decentralization of community structures. Attention should be paid, as well, to his argument for more systematic postmortems on intelligence, to enable a constant process of learning.

Jarring notes are few and far between in Jervis's excellent book. I would cite only two and they come uncomfortably close to that old and unfair review practice of wanting the author to write a book other than the one he did. But I was struck by how boldly dismissive Jervis is of all the government commissioned studies of intelligence failure in the Iraq case. Maybe he has a point when it comes to the Senate study of intelligence on Iraq, but I wouldn't throw out the UK Butler Commission report and the Australian Flood report with this bathwater. They both contain many more insights into the shared intelligence failure than Jervis is prepared to credit them. This leads to a second concern with his study. It is relentlessly focused on U.S. intelligence practice and fails to consider the parallel experience of other national intelligence systems. Maybe this would be a different book, but it points to a problem in much of American writing on intelligence — a profound disregard of the experience of others.

I would even be so bold as to suggest that a little reflection on the Canadian intelligence response to the Iraq issue might pay some dividends. Here we have an example of a Western ally whose intelligence system did not reach the same hard and fast conclusions about Iraq WMD as did the U.S. intelligence community, even though it was working with the same material by and large, and was hugely dependent on U.S. intelligence sources. The difference between the Canadian and U.S. readings came down to different approaches. The Canadian intelligence community had no established stake in the issue of Iraq WMD, and came at the problem afresh in 2002, without the historical baggage and preconceptions the U.S. system carried. Canadian intelligence, being small, could pull together expert working groups that allowed the community to function as a genuine community. The Canadian intelligence system was able to ask a different set of questions about what the exact evidence was for the presence of Iraq WMD programs. Moreover the Canadian intelligence assessment function (not to its credit) operated entirely free of political pressure because, essentially, few in the senior ranks of the Canadian government cared about what it had to say. Canadian intelligence may, the anecdotal evidence suggests, have reached the right

conclusions about Iraq WMD, but it didn't matter. Nor were their negative findings likely shared with the U.S. at the time. Intelligence power can be a blessing and a curse, and maybe one thing that the Iraq crisis can teach us is the relative value of listening to the smaller intelligence powers. Maybe smaller intelligence powers are just powerless enough to be imaginative bureaucracies?

Jervis ends with a relatively pessimistic passage that gives a new twist to the long-established notion that intelligence failures are inevitable. What Jervis says is that reforms and change are hard, costly, of uncertain benefit and are often conceived of as a pain for intelligence communities immersed in quotidian crises. But perhaps the fundamental obstacle, as Jervis suggests, is that no one likes intelligence—not policy-makers and not (in democratic societies) a suspicious public. Only intelligence communities like intelligence, and it is hard for them to reform from within. Intelligence has no natural allies. As I have said elsewhere in print, despite a century of experience of modern intelligence, we are still learning to live with intelligence.<sup>6</sup>

In a passage in his final chapter, Jervis writes, “arguments about whether politicization occurred are rarely easy to settle.” (172). This was prescient in terms of at least one recent treatment of his book. Tom Powers, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, is harshly critical of Jervis's dismissal of politicization as the key element of the Iraq WMD estimate. Hewing to his own long-established position, Powers essentially argues that in ignoring the politicization factor, Jervis is a patsy to the power of the White House to get its way with facts.<sup>7</sup> This vitriol can only be excused, if at all, by the stakes involved and the passions that the debate over Iraq intelligence continues to arouse. For my part, I find the Jervis argument much more persuasive than anything I have seen from the redoubtable Tom Powers in print, however much I am sympathetic to his anti-Bush position. Readers can judge the politicisation debate for themselves, but the fine detail of Jervis' argument deserves better than this.

Overall, Robert Jervis's book delivers case studies that are among the very best of their kind, backed by an overview on the intelligence business that combines both a practical appreciation of how intelligence works and an unflagging belief that intelligence can be, if not more right, at least smarter, so long as it pays heed to the intellectual, social science tools it has available to it.

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<sup>6</sup> Wesley K. Wark, “Learning to Live with Intelligence,” *Intelligence and National Security*, 18, no. 4 (Winter 2003), 1-14; reprinted in Andrew, Aldrich and Wark, eds., *Secret Intelligence: A Reader*, pp. 522-32.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Powers, “How They Got Their Bloody Way,” *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. LVII, no. 9 (May 27, 2010), pp. 6-10. Representative passages from the review include the following: “Why no one said anything at the time, and why Jervis says nothing now, are silent testimony to the power of the White House to have its way” (p. 8) and, even more pointedly, “Picking a fight with a president is dangerous, no less to academics when it comes time to write the history than it was to intelligence bureaucrats in the heat of events. With his mild conclusion, Jervis tips his hat to the White House, blaming the CIA for getting it wrong, just as Bush and Cheney do...” (p. 10)

Response by Robert Jervis, Columbia University

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I am grateful to Tom Maddux for having organized this roundtable, for my friend and colleague Richard Betts for having chaired it, and for the thoughtful reviews by Eliot Cohen, Glenn Hastedt, Jeffrey Richelson, and Wesley Wark. As a frequent reader of and sometimes contributor to these roundtables, I consider them a major addition to our scholarly community.

In the absence of major points I need to rebut, let me pick up on a few important issues raised by the reviewers. I join with them in regretting the paucity of historians and, even more, political scientists who are interested in intelligence and who have had significant exposure to this world. The explanation -- or fault -- has several components, as the reviewers note. Animosity toward the U.S. government lingers, I think more among historians than among political scientists, and the subject lies outside of what most scholars in these disciplines define as central in both substance and method. Indeed, it is striking that the whole topic of American foreign policy is peripheral to the IR field. Furthermore, of course, the intelligence community does not welcome scholars with open arms because the normal tendency of organizations to protect themselves is compounded by the priority given to security. Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that many more scholars (although not many) have first-hand experience with the State Department and the Department of Defense that they do with CIA and other intelligence agencies. Even though I have had much more exposure to the world of intelligence than have almost all of my colleagues, I would not want to claim too much. For many forms of analysis, a deep exposure is required, and this I lack. Scholars like myself are perhaps akin to anthropologists who only visit their "tribes" for brief periods on special occasions.

Nevertheless, Eliot Cohen I think is right that many of us have more sympathy with intelligence analysts than with policy-makers because, as he says, the former are much more like us. Their job is essentially the same as ours in that we both seek to explain the world. Furthermore, I suspect that our modal personality types are more similar to intelligence than to policy-makers. We like complexity and ambiguity and were drawn to our professions by a deep desire to observe and understand, perhaps coupled with an aversion to taking responsibility. As I argue in the last chapter of my book, decision-makers need to project -- and often to feel -- certainty and confidence, and such a posture runs against the grain of many scholars.

Indeed, Wesley Wark's comment that intelligence often exists "in a relative intellectual and policy vacuum" (p. 3) perhaps applies to scholars as well. We are interested in policy, but aside from those who have served in government, simply cannot feel the enormous pressures that come with being in the policy world. The highest prestige goes to those who follow out a theory-driven research agenda and who contribute to the debates generated by theoretical concerns. The resulting mindset may make it particularly difficult for us to understand policies and policy-making, which are messy and inconsistent.

Part of the isolation of intelligence analysts is by design. It reflects the belief that politicization is a major danger if not the major danger. As the reviewers note and Richard Betts has discussed in detail, throughout the history of the American intelligence community (IC) there has been a debate about whether the dangers of losing objectivity that may come from being too close to policy-makers outweigh those of irrelevance that are likely to come from being too isolated.<sup>1</sup> As Wesley Wark notes, a particular problem arises when understanding the other side requires analyzing American policy, or at least how the other perceives American policy. Given the fact that the U.S. looms so large for all other countries, it should be hard to avoid this topic. But as I noted in the Iran post-mortem, ignore it American analysts often do. My sense is that the degree to which the IC has fallen into this trap has varied over time and subject matter and may depend in part on the prevailing state of relations between the IC and policy-makers.

Although I criticized the analysts on Iran for resembling journalists in sticking very close to the incoming reports rather than probing more deeply, Hastedt is correct that we should not scorn journalists' skills. Intelligence can have impact when it tells the story well, and the reason is not only that this mode of presentation is appealing and relatively easy to grasp, but also that much of the point of intelligence (and scholarship) is to render puzzling events intelligible, which is what we mean by a story. Indeed, in the case of Iran and perhaps of Iraqi WMD trying to pull a coherent story from the reporting might have raised serious questions about the prevailing interpretation. Furthermore, although the IC takes pride in its ability to convey a great deal of information concisely (and here there is an obvious contrast with the academic community), I am struck by the bland writing style that often buries the important point and disputes as well as the use of bullet points and other PowerPoint-like devices that seem to me to do more to inhibit careful thinking than to convey information and conclusions.

The recent firing of Admiral Dennis C. Blair as Director of National Intelligence (DNI) underlines the point made by the reviewers that organizing the IC is an enormous challenge. The reviewers are also perhaps too kind in noting that I did not provide a thorough analysis of this topic and that my few thoughts on it are questionable. I remain skeptical that the "reform" that established the DNI was a good idea and believe that creating a Department of Intelligence is an even worse one. But we are stuck with the reforms and need to make the best of them. Perhaps a better-chosen DNI, and one who would have greater say in who would be the CIA's Director, could show what can be done with the present structure, but the failure of three experienced leaders and the fact that so many people have turned down the job indicates that the road ahead will be rocky. This is deeply unfortunate because I think one can affirm both that intelligence is extraordinarily difficult and that we are not doing as well as we can.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in American National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press 2007), Chapter 4.

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