

CHAPTER 29 THE PERILS OF POLITICIZATION

PAUL R. PILLAR

1. INTRODUCTION

Objectivity is inherent to the meaning of intelligence. It is part of what distinguishes intelligence from salesmanship, propaganda, political campaigning, and other forms of advocacy, not to mention from deceit and disinformation. Intelligence officers share with academic social scientists the goal of objectivity, as well as an introspective concern about the difficulties of achieving it. Some social scientists, critically analyzing their own professions, have questioned whether complete objectivity ever is attainable. Perhaps it is not, but that does not mean there is no such thing as objectivity or that it is not one of the standards for distinguishing good intelligence (and good social science) from the bad.

Objectivity is even harder to achieve in intelligence than in academia. Intelligence exists to serve the needs of those who make and execute public policy. Otherwise it would be a pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake—at best a duplication of what can be done at least as well outside government, and at worst a waste of public funds. Intelligence organizations operate within larger bureaucracies. Typically, as in the United States, they are part of the same branch of government as those who execute policy. Their chiefs are part of a chain of command in which they report to the same senior policymakers whose preferences are nonetheless not supposed to influence the judgments and analysis of their agencies. Proper support to policy is quite different from advocacy of policy, but working in an environment in which everything revolves around policymakers it is extremely difficult to exclude the influences of policy, including pernicious influences as well as proper ones. The environment is the antithesis of a university, where social scientists enjoy academic freedom. The policymaker's own needs point to the same difficulty from a different angle. Political leaders have to muster support for their policies. The ability to do so is generally viewed as one of the hallmarks of strong leadership, at least as much as the ability to devise sound policies to be sold. The selling of policy may involve spin rather than outright dishonesty, but either can form the basis for politicization.

Politicization is the compromise of the objectivity of intelligence, or of how intelligence is used, to serve policy or political aims. Preferred images that become the basis for politicized intelligence need not come only from senior policymakers. They may come from more broadly shared popular perceptions—common wisdom that is difficult to challenge. Or at least, the common wisdom is difficult to challenge without enduring a heavier burden of proof and greater skepticism than do judgments that conform to the common wisdom. Another possible source of politicization are intelligence officers themselves, who are thinking creatures who form private opinions of what their government is doing and in that sense are not policy

eunuchs. Politicization in line with such private opinions probably is a less frequent occurrence, however, than politicization driven by policymakers' preferences or common wisdom.

The private opinions of intelligence officers do not have the environment-shaping power of either official policy or broadly shared popular perceptions. Moreover, because objectivity is intrinsic to the concept of intelligence, it also is intrinsic to the professional identity and self-esteem of intelligence officers. For intelligence officers to politicize their product on behalf of their own political or policy preferences would unavoidably be, to some degree, self-destructive.

Given the imperatives of policy making and the power of public sentiments, it should be unsurprising that politicization arises frequently, in conspicuous as well as countless inconspicuous ways. The United States' foreign policy—although by no means the only place where it arises—has been littered for decades with episodes of politicization, associated with some policies generally regarded as successful as well as with unsuccessful ones. A prelude to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, for example, was an intelligence estimate that the USSR probably would not bring nuclear-armed missiles into Cuba. The members of the United States Intelligence Board who issued the estimate knew that any contrary judgment would have been unwelcome news to the Kennedy administration, which already had publicly played down the possibility of strategic missiles being introduced to the island. As Graham Allison (1971, 191) observed in his classic study of the crisis, "The implications of a National Intelligence Estimate concluding that the Soviets were introducing offensive missiles into Cuba could not be lost on the men who constituted America's highest intelligence assembly." During the Vietnam War, when the Johnson administration and the U.S. military command were anxious to show progress amid flagging public support for the war, they pressured intelligence officers to revise estimates of enemy troop strength that would have implied a lack of progress (Allen 2001, 243–54). In the 1980s, the Reagan administration's dominant policy theme of needing to stand up to threats from the Soviet Union led to scuffles with intelligence officers and revision of assessments, such as on the issue of whether Moscow was supporting international terrorism (Woodward 1987, 124–29).

The George W. Bush administration's huge effort to muster public support for the invasion of Iraq in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks included the selective use of intelligence reporting to conjure up an "alliance" between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaida (Pillar 2006). Such history demonstrates that politicization is not the product of any one group of aggressive policymakers, although the audacity with which different policymakers have relied on it certainly has varied. Nor is it the product of any one group of pusillanimous intelligence officers. Countering politicization is not a task for a Diogenes, wandering with his lantern in search of an honest

man. Politicization has roots in the very nature of political leadership, of intelligence, and of the relationship between them.

Politicization takes two basic forms, although some prefer to apply the term only to the second. The first is the public use of intelligence—directly by policymakers or indirectly instigated by them—that is intended to bolster support for their policies, and that involves misleading the public about some aspect of the subject at hand. The second form is the influence of political or policy preferences on the judgments of intelligence services and intelligence officers.

2. PUBLIC USE OF INTELLIGENCE

Policymakers have strong reasons to try to use intelligence in publicly selling their policies. Because intelligence is supposed to be objective, it bolsters the credibility of any sales campaign. It adds what are perceived as hard facts—from sources that skeptics may find difficult to question—to what might otherwise be dismissed as mere exhortation from policymakers. It can make an act of choice appear to be one of necessity. Intelligence adds authority to any case for a policy. Policymakers' own public use of intelligence may not seem, at first glance, to concern intelligence services directly. The latter have little or no control, after all, over what the policymakers do with their material.

Such public use does involve intelligence services, however, in several ways. The use that is made of intelligence and its impact on policy debates is an inherent part of intelligence, broadly and properly defined. Again, this is part of what distinguishes intelligence from other forms of inquiry, such as academic research, that are not tied to the process of making public policy. Intelligence officers are taught that part of their job is not just to assemble accurate information and to make sound judgments based on that information, but also to present the information and the judgments in a form useful to policymakers. Thus the subsequent use, including public use, of their material does and should concern them.

Sometimes intelligence services get dragged directly into the public spotlight by policymakers anxious to obtain their imprimatur for decisions they are about to make or actions they are about to take. During the missile crisis, a major part of the Kennedy administration's public case for imposing a naval quarantine on Cuba was the presentation by Ambassador Adlai Stevenson to the United Nations Security Council of photographic evidence, collected by intelligence aircraft, of the Soviet missile emplacements. Four decades later, the Bush administration's public case for invading Iraq featured a presentation by Secretary of State Colin Powell to the Security Council, centered on supposed Iraqi programs to develop unconventional weapons. With the evidence of those programs sketchier and less direct than the photographs of missile sites in Cuba, the incentive for the policymakers to place intelligence's stamp of authenticity on the case was all the greater. Seated directly behind

Powell, prominent in the camera frame, was Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet. The earlier request by members of Congress for an intelligence estimate on the same subject, to be hastily prepared before the members voted on a resolution authorizing the war, had a similar purpose. Although the estimate was classified, members supporting the war would use it as a public rationale for their votes.

Intelligence services also sometimes get dragged into public debates over policy not just by policymakers but by their opponents, who look to intelligence to serve as a check on the policymakers' public excesses and inaccuracies. This usually happens when policies turn sour and fingers start pointing to people and agencies to blame. When a policymaker misused intelligence in publicly presenting a misleading public case, critics ask, why didn't our intelligence service speak up to correct him? No matter who does the dragging, once an intelligence service is involved in public debate over policy, it finds itself extremely difficult either to extract itself from the debate or to avoid politicization while immersed in it. Its fundamental handicap is the structural one of working directly for the same political leaders who are selling the policy. Or to put it more bluntly, how does one stand up against the boss, especially in ways that will make his political task far more difficult? But isn't this, some might say in Diogenes-like fashion, a simple matter of honesty? If the truth is different from what political leaders are uttering, what is so hard about pointing out the truth? Would that it be so simple.

Politicization seldom entails just the conveying of a falsehood that facts would directly disprove. Far more often it is a matter of analysis, emphasis, characterization, interpretation, suggestion, wording, or innuendo. It is less a misstatement of facts than a presentation of selected facts in a manner designed to convey misleading messages. A prime example was the same Bush administration's stitching together of selected scraps of reporting to convey the impression of the supposed alliance between Iraq and al-Qaida. Intelligence officers skate on especially thin ice if they dare to challenge their political masters publicly on matters of analysis or interpretation rather than simple facts. Policymakers are entitled—indeed, obligated, as a proper performance of their role—to make their own analysis of the situations they confront when making policy.

Analysis, moreover, can be wrong. Intelligence analysts' interpretation of any given situation may turn out to be mistaken, and the policymakers' interpretation to be correct. No code of professional conduct tells intelligence officers when their analytic disagreements with policymakers are rooted in honest differences in interpreting ambiguous situations and when they stem from politicized interpretations designed to sell a policy. Even when intelligence officers are confident they smell politicization, they have no good recourse to counter it publicly. If the policymakers' selective use of intelligence reporting conveys only a partial and

thus misleading picture of a threat or opportunity overseas, intelligence officers could round out the picture only by taking the initiative to do so. This would amount to engaging at their own behest in a public debate with policymakers. Intelligence services have no license to do that. Attempting it would quickly subject them to charges that, far from attempting to present a complete and objective rendering of an issue to the public, they instead were pursuing their own policy agenda.

Intelligence services thus find themselves in the uncomfortable situation of vouching, implicitly or explicitly, for the individual intelligence-based facts that policymakers may adduce in constructing a public case but being unable to question publicly whether the facts really imply what the policymakers are suggesting they imply. In this way the service may become associated in the public mind with analysis with which it disagrees, not to mention with policies based on that analysis. It provides its imprimatur whether it wants to or not. This form of politicization, given the incentives of political leaders to indulge in it, is almost inevitable. Its severity depends on how much of a challenge policymakers face in mustering the necessary support for their policies. The most serious politicization in the Johnson administration's public portrayal of the Vietnam War came when public dismay over the costs of the conflict had made sustained support for the expedition especially problematic.

Politicization associated with the invasion of Iraq reflected the inherent challenge of mustering support for the extraordinary step of launching an offensive war. That challenge was considerable in both the United States and Britain, where the government of Tony Blair—unlike in the United States—eventually acknowledged that policy and intelligence had been improperly commingled in the run-up to the war.

3. POLICY INFLUENCE ON INTELLIGENCE

The second basic type of politicization—the slanting of the judgments and other substantive output of intelligence services—is of more direct concern to professional intelligence officers, most of whom never are in the public eye. The two types are not entirely distinct, however. Classified intelligence judgments underlie public debate about policy insofar as they leak, they become the basis for unclassified statements by policymakers, or they affect the public deliberations of legislators. Some of the most contentious instances of politicization of classified intelligence products have been contentious precisely because they have played a role in public arguments about controversial policies. This form of politicization is commonly and simplistically conceived as intelligence officers succumbing to arm-twisting by policymakers. Viewed this way, combating politicization appears to be a simple matter of intelligence officers mustering enough courage and fortitude to stand up to such pressure. Again, reality is much more complicated. Direct pressure by policymakers is neither ubiquitous nor an especially effective way to influence intelligence judgments, notwithstanding the

previously mentioned example of it regarding enemy troop strength in Vietnam. Attempts at exerting such pressure are not common. Attempts that are made often are not successful. Such pressure is clearly a breach of the proper roles of policymaker and intelligence officer, and thus only the most bullheaded policymakers tend to use it. As a violation of proper roles, it is relatively easier for intelligence officers to parry, knowing they have propriety on their side and that any reasonably objective observer would agree that propriety is on their side. Part of the emotional reaction of many intelligence officers to any such blatant attempt at pressure would be for dander to rise and defenses to be put up against such an affront to their professionalism. Arm-twisting is distressing to anyone on the receiving end, and it would be among the lowest of low points for any intelligence officer who experiences it. But it represents only a small proportion of politicization.

Most politicization of the work of intelligence officers rests on those officers' keen awareness of what policymakers want to hear, without those preferences ever having to be communicated directly. Intelligence officers know what policymakers want to hear partly through their observations of discussions inside government councils. They know it partly from how policymakers react to different intelligence products. Mostly they know it, as any observant citizen could know it, from the publicly available indications of policymakers' objectives and the arguments they are using to win support for those objectives. Awareness of what policymakers would like intelligence to say, not the method through which that awareness is imparted, underlies politicization.

That intelligence officers are part of a hierarchical bureaucracy with policymakers at the top is what gives mere awareness of preferences the power to politicize. In a perfect world of orderly decision-making and completely open-minded decision-makers, hierarchy would not be a problem because decision-makers would always be seeking unvarnished and unbiased input, including input from their intelligence services. In the much different real world of politics and policy making, decision-makers more commonly arrive early at their own conclusions and devote most of their attention to the sometimes difficult task of mobilizing support for the policies they have selected. Anything that makes that task even more difficult is likely to annoy or anger them. Knowing this is a powerful influence on anyone, including intelligence officers, who work for the policymakers.

Displeasing the policymaker, through intelligence products that make his political task harder rather than easier, can spoil an intelligence officer's day in numerous ways. The cost can be as simple as a critical or biting remark, which, if coming from a powerful person, can be a major blow to a relatively powerless one. The cost may take the more pointed form of accusations that the intelligence officers involved are not team players and are not supporting policymakers as they are supposed to. The costs may be especially acute for the most senior intelligence

officers, who must deal directly with policymakers, regularly and face-to-face. They are likely to feel the most pain from any suggestion that they are not team players, because to do their job they to some extent are co-opted onto the policy team. The specific sanctions may include exclusion from the policy making circle, making them even more ineffective and irrelevant, or loss of their positions altogether.

Whatever is the politicizing effect on senior intelligence officers, a ripple effect is felt down through the organizations that they lead. At all levels of an intelligence service, a standard measure of success is the extent to which policymakers appreciate and use the service's products. One of the brightest feathers in an intelligence officer's hat is a compliment from a senior policymaker about something the officer produced. Although in the perfect world such compliments would reflect the quality and insightfulness of intelligence products regardless of whether or not they imply support for current policies, in the real world the compliments are highly correlated with the implied support. Intelligence officers' appetite for kudos is thus another unseen but significant channel for politicization. Any politically inconvenient exercise of independence by an intelligence service—in the form of judgments implying that current policies are ill-advised—weakens the service's ability to exercise independence again by offering further politically inconvenient judgments. Annoying the policymaker once makes it riskier to annoy him again.

An intelligence service, like any other segment of government, has only a limited supply of fuel to burn in fighting bureaucratic battles. It must choose which battles it will try to fight. Repeatedly waging battle opens intelligence officers to charges that they are pursuing their own policy agendas. Such charges, even if untrue, make it harder to wage the next battle credibly. This was true to some degree of U.S. intelligence during the run-up to the Iraq War, in which supporters of the war inside and outside government repeatedly accused intelligence officers of having separate policy agendas. The battles fought over the manufactured issue of terrorist links further diminished what stomach intelligence officers might otherwise have had to raise doubts about Iraqi weapons programs, which were not a manufactured issue but instead the subject of widely shared perceptions.

An intelligence service's standing to resist policymakers' pressures and preferences is weakened by anything that puts the service in the policymaker's doghouse. This includes not only previous judgments that appear to run against current policy but also any conspicuous intelligence failure. An example was the behavior of Director of Central Intelligence John McCone, whose standing in John Kennedy's White House was weakened by the intelligence assessment that had said the Soviets were unlikely to introduce strategic missiles into Cuba. When a pessimistic draft intelligence estimate about Vietnam—which would have been unwelcome reading for the Kennedy administration, eager as it was to show progress in the

American-assisted counterinsurgency effort there—reached McCone’s desk a few months later, he remanded it with instructions to the analysts to heed the views of military and civilian policy officials who saw the situation more optimistically. The analysts revised the estimate accordingly. After several more months of deterioration in Vietnam showed the analysts’ earlier pessimistic judgment to be correct, McCone apologized to them for his patently policy-driven interference and promised not to do the same thing again (Ford 1998, 12–18).

4. INTELLIGENCE RESPONSES TO INFLUENCE

The common conception of politicization is an oversimplification not only in equating the influence of policy with arm-twisting by policymakers, but also in thinking only of an intelligence service making judgment X rather than judgment not-X. Intelligence judgments tend to be viewed in stark binary terms. Politicization occurs, according to this view, only if an intelligence service says X, the correct judgment is not-X, and the service would have said not-X in the absence of policy influence. Reality is more complicated in several respects, one of which is that most intelligence judgments are matters of degree rather than yes-or-no, X-or-not-X propositions. Questions for intelligence analysts are more often “How powerful is an adversary’s military?” rather than whether he has a military at all, or “How rapidly is the adversary expanding his military?” rather than whether he is expanding it at all. They are more often about how close is a relationship between a regime and a terrorist group than about whether there have been any contacts at all between the two. They are about how much impact a counterinsurgency effort is having rather than whether it is having any impact at all.

Politicization would be much less frequent, and the few instances of it easier to identify, if intelligence judgments were analogous to a switch with only two positions. But instead they are more like a sliding lever, which even subtle and unseen influences can nudge one way or the other. Intelligence judgments are matters of degree also in the sense that they are determinations of probability amid uncertainty, even if they are not expressed in explicitly probabilistic terms. The main reason for this is that a topic becomes an issue for intelligence in the first place because important information is ambiguous or missing, often due to an adversary’s effort to conceal it. (Otherwise the topic would instead be a matter for routine reporting by some other component of government.) Another reason is that intelligence often is called on to make projections about the future, in which uncertainty stems less from an adversary withholding a secret than from the inherent indeterminacy of complex events and their dependence on decisions that foreigners have not yet taken. For each of these reasons, intelligence judgments involve subjective probability and degrees of likelihood and unlikelihood. Even modest and unseen political influence can move the expressions of likelihood a few degrees in one direction or another.

Another respect in which reality departs from the oversimplified concept of politicization is that many major intelligence issues, including ones that turn out to be controversial, have multiple components. They involve not one judgment—although popular perceptions may reduce them to that—but rather judgments on many different sub-issues. The issue of Iraqi unconventional weapons programs prior to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a prime example. Although the popular view of this issue was a simple yes-or-no one of whether Saddam Hussein’s regime had weapons of mass destruction, the intelligence analysis involved many discrete judgments about different weapons or delivery systems, each of which in turn was founded on several sub-judgments about the significance, if any, of different pieces of evidence. Yet another complexity is that intelligence judgments are not the product of a single intelligence officer but instead the outcome of a process of negotiation and review involving many people and often multiple agencies. Anything that influences the thinking of some of those people—even just a few of them, or perhaps only one of them—can influence the shape of the collective judgment.

Considered together, these complexities of intelligence judgments—that they are the product of many different people, considering many different questions, each of which can have many possible answers along a continuum of possibilities—add up to an enormously large number of opportunities for any outside influence, including policy or political influence, to have an effect. The opportunities typically are so numerous that it would be surprising if awareness of policymakers’ preferences did not have at least some influence on most intelligence judgments.

Two other realities about intelligence analysis make the opportunities even more apparent. One is that politicization usually is not a matter of policy influence pushing against strong arguments that are pushing in the opposite direction. Far more typically, given the inherent uncertainties surrounding any issue that becomes a subject for intelligence, no strong arguments push intelligence analysts toward any particular conclusion. This means that even a very slight influence—which might be merely an awareness in the backs of some analysts’ minds of what message policymakers would prefer—is sufficient to tip judgments in one direction or another. An illustration is the work of analysts at the National Security Agency in interpreting intercepted communications surrounding what became known as the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964. At issue was whether North Vietnamese torpedo boats had attacked two U.S. destroyers on the high seas, two days after an undisputed attack on one of the destroyers when it had been closer to the North Vietnamese coast. An NSA historian later aptly described the question as an “analytic coin toss,” given the murky and ambiguous nature of the available information (Hanyok 2000, 38). The preference of the Johnson administration was clear; it wanted to declare that an attack had occurred, with the incident becoming the stimulus for a Congressional resolution authorizing the later large-scale U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Consistent with that preference, the NSA analysts said that a second attack had indeed taken place. Research over the subsequent four decades suggests they were

wrong (Moise 1996). Intelligence work is filled with analytic coin tosses, even though very few of the issues involved ever get the public notice that this one did.

Another relevant reality is that intelligence judgments are not to be equated with intelligence products. The products include papers that contain judgments, but how the judgments are presented in a paper greatly influences the message conveyed. Differences of wording, construction, and placement can convey much different impressions based on the same judgments. “X is true, except for Y1, Y2, and Y3” sends a much different message than “X is false, except for Z1, Z2, and Z3,” even if substantively and logically they add up to the identical judgment. Merely putting a sentence in a different part of a paper, with the wording of the sentence unchanged, can change the overall message of the paper—which is why intelligence analysts sometimes tussle at length over which judgment will have pride of place in the first lines or first paragraph of an assessment. The importance of presentational matters opens up vast additional opportunities for policy influence to have an effect. Indeed, such matters provide some of the most fertile ground for politicization, because artful crafting of an intelligence product can leave the policymaker satisfied (or at least not displeased) while leaving intelligence officers comforted by the thought they did not abandon their underlying judgments.

Most politicization takes the form of countless subtle adjustments, to judgments or to how judgments are presented, within the innumerable spaces within which such adjustments are possible. Some of these adjustments are sufficient to cross the invisible line that separates—in the common, oversimplified view of intelligence—a judgment of X from one of not-X. Many other adjustments do not cross that line. Some politicization shapes intelligence products that become widely known or even causes célèbres; many other instances of it go unnoticed. Very few instances of politicization can be proven to be such, because of the impossibility of demonstrating what an intelligence service would have said on the same topic but in a different policy environment. Many of the politicized adjustments take place at some subconscious level at which even the intelligence officers involved would not recognize or acknowledge them as such. But it is politicization nonetheless. Occasionally the adjustments are consciously made and much more readily recognizable. When they are, intelligence officers search for formulas that placate the policymaker but enable them to say to others and, perhaps most importantly, to themselves that they did not compromise their integrity. Usually such formulas involve semantic or classificatory legerdemain.

The controversy over Soviet support to terrorism was handled by laboriously negotiating an intelligence estimate that did not say the USSR was supporting terrorist groups per se but said enough about Soviet support to revolutionary movements that have used terrorist methods for the Reagan administration to claim publicly that intelligence backed its assertion that Moscow

was behind international terrorism (Garthoff 1994, 25–26). In the controversy over Communist troop strength in Vietnam, the “circle was squared,” in the words of the CIA’s senior negotiator on the matter, with an estimate that simply omitted by definition from total Communist strength certain militias that the intelligence officers had thought ought to be included. This kept the bottom-line number—the one that would be most quoted and noted—below the figure the military command was determined to stay below. Readers of the estimate had to turn to footnotes and back pages to get the more complete picture (Allen 2001, 252).

Politicization can affect any aspect of an intelligence service’s work, not only the substance and presentation of its judgments. Politicization can be reflected in what intelligence officers do not do. For example, they might not subject hypotheses that conform to the policymakers’ preferences to as much questioning and scrutiny as hypotheses that contradict those preferences. Awareness of policy preferences almost certainly was a factor in the U.S. intelligence community’s failure to raise more searching questions about seemingly less probable (but as it turned out, more accurate) explanations for Saddam Hussein’s behavior regarding unconventional weapons programs—explanations that would have negated the policymakers’ main argument about Saddam’s regime posing a threat.

A related pattern concerns management’s handling of draft assessments within an intelligence service, which typically involves multiple levels of review and revision. Intelligence managers chary of running afoul of the policymakers with whom they interact apply different standards according to whether the assessment under review would be welcome or unwelcome to the policymaker. Knowing the unwelcome ones may draw return fire from the policymaker, the manager will ask tougher questions, impose heavier burdens of proof, and be more likely to remand drafts for further work than with assessments unlikely to elicit a negative reaction from policymakers. This kind of management resistance is another way to spoil the day of an intelligence officer who has worked hard on an assessment. Working-level intelligence officers respond by introducing a similar asymmetry in their analysis of the available information, by adjusting their judgments or presentation of their judgments to make them more palatable to the policymaker, or by not attempting to produce at all any assessments that policymakers will attack (or, what may be almost as bad for the working level intelligence officer, that policymakers will ignore) and instead spending their time on products that will get a better hearing.

More generally, what questions an intelligence service does or does not investigate, and what assessments it decides to write or not to write, constitute an important aspect of its output and of the overall substantive message it sends, and thus another opportunity for politicization. The selection of questions, in other words, can be just as important as the shaping of answers. No intelligence service has the resources to investigate more than a small fraction of the questions

that it legitimately could investigate. In a non-politicized world, intelligence officers choose which questions to examine based on their prior understanding of worldwide threats and of what general subjects are most pertinent to the national interest. Politicization is introduced when policymakers repeatedly ask the intelligence service to dig into specific questions aimed at producing material to support specific rationales for policy. No matter how scrupulously the intelligence service tries to conduct its inquiries in an unbiased manner, its overall product is biased because the questions it is investigating and thus the material it uncovers are oriented toward supporting certain favored hypotheses over other hypotheses. Sheer quantity, not quality, of uncovered material sends a politicized message. A prime example was the Bush administration's repeated requests to the U.S. intelligence community to look for any links between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaida.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND PROSPECTS

Some amount of politicization of intelligence is inevitable, as suggested by how often it occurs. It is inevitable not because of moral failings among either policymakers or intelligence officers, and not because of epistemological principles that worry introspective social scientists. It is inevitable because intelligence exists to serve policymakers and works within organizations headed by policymakers. Does the unavoidability of politicization matter? In one respect it does not; the same strong policy preferences that underlie politicization imply that—on issues on which such preferences exist—policymakers are unlikely to be diverted from the course they have set no matter what intelligence says. In two other respects, however, it does matter. One is that insofar as legislatures or the public can influence policy, they may be more likely to endorse bad policies because politicized intelligence has given them inaccurate images of the situations the policies are supposed to address. The other respect is that policymakers themselves may suffer a form of self-inflicted delusion, in which they interpret intelligence that has been influenced by their own perceptions as confirmation of those perceptions.

The subtle ways in which politicization usually works may leave policymakers unaware of the extent to which it is working. This is especially true of the impressions created by selective attention to certain questions over others. It is easy for a policymaker to react to the flow of intelligence he receives on a particular topic by thinking "there really must be something there," while forgetting that it was his own interest in the topic that stimulated the flow. Combating politicization, therefore, is worth attention and effort. It cannot be eliminated but can be reduced. Intelligence becomes better to the extent that it becomes less politicized. The first hurdle to be overcome in countering politicization—and it is a surprisingly high one—is merely to acknowledge it when it occurs. The indirect and often invisible ways in which it works, with a scarcity of overt arm-twisting, is one reason acknowledgement comes hard. Another is the reluctance of intelligence officers to admit when they have been a part of

politicization, because this may seem equivalent to admitting that they lack integrity. Yet another is the political interests of the policymaker.

Because politicization is rooted in the structure of government, fundamental improvements would entail a revision of the structure. Because the specific underlying problem is the close organizational connection between intelligence services and policymakers, the implied remedy is to make that connection less close. As with almost any organizational issue involving intelligence, however, there are costs and trade-offs. Intelligence officers have long debated among themselves the relative advantages of being close to, or farther removed from, the policymaker. Closeness buys exposure and presumably relevance; distance buys objectivity. The debates most often are resolved in favor of closeness, but objectivity as well as relevance is a desired trait in intelligence.

Another possible organizational fix is to make intelligence services as fully accountable to some other master—generally a legislature—as it is to the policymakers they serve now. In the United States, pressures from an opposition party in Congress have to some degree offset politicizing pressures from within the executive branch. But here too there are trade-offs. Dual accountability entails the discomforts of working for two different bosses, and the potential for still antagonizing one by being responsive to the other. Ultimately the proper placement of an intelligence service depends on what is conceived to be the most important mission the service is expected to perform. If its most important job is to support the policy of the day, even if the supporting intelligence is sometimes politicized, then it ought to be as firmly wedded to executive policymakers as most services are now. If its biggest service to the national interest is instead to provide a check on policymakers when policy is misguided, then a much different arrangement, with greater separation between intelligence officers and policymakers, is called for. Each of these functions has been demanded of intelligence services at one time or another. Which of the two to emphasize is not self-evident; nor is this a question that intelligence officers themselves can answer.

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Paul R. Pillar is a 28-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency (1977-2005) and former National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia (2000-05). Pillar is currently a non-resident senior fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Security Studies. This chapter appeared in The Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence (March 2010).