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What Does Intelligence Do? What Can Politicians Do?

President Bush justified the military intervention in Iraq based on the weapons of mass destruction possessed by Saddam's cabinet and the implied threat that they might be used against the United States. Prime Minister Blair justified the British participation in the intervention by the weapons of mass destruction possessed by Saddam's cabinet and the implied threat of their use against the United Kingdom on 45 minutes notice. The weapons have not been found in Iraq so far, though they are sought by thousands of agents, and jesters now propose the following formula for eternal marriage vows: "...[to have and to hold] until weapons of mass destruction are found."¹

Let us compare this situation with another situation which occurred over twenty years ago, when "Solidarity" was not warned of the impending introduction of martial law (which took place on December 13, 1981), even though the CIA had known of the decision since October (1981), and at some point even knew the exact date. D. J. MacEachin, former vice-director of American intelligence, claims that the US government did not do anything to prevent martial law in Poland and did not warn "Solidarity" because it was also taken by surprise.²

If the American government really was taken by surprise in 1981, as it had been previously in the cases of Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and in Afghanistan in 1979—even though the CIA had extensively informed government officials about the

¹ M. Crawford, *The New Yorker* Collection 2003, as reproduced in *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, vol. 3, No. 5 (15), September–October 2003, p. 225.

² D.J. MacEachin, *U.S. Intelligence and the Confrontation in Poland, 1980–1981*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002, p. 256.

situation in these countries and the Soviet policies with regard thereto—then the question arises: Was the information in all these cases, including Iraq, adequate? Did the politicians understand the intelligence information properly?

Inasmuch as the documents regarding the intervention in Iraq are still confidential, I would like to sketch out certain prerequisites of political decision-making based on the example of the confrontation of 1980–1981 in Poland, with regard to which the CIA bulletin, “National Intelligence Daily” for the Polish period is already available and a book by the aforementioned vice-director of US intelligence on the information and its intelligence analyses has been published.³

The fact that the CIA knew of the preparations to introduce martial law was already known in the Polish General Headquarters as early as the beginning of November 1981. In late November an important CIA source, Colonel Kukli ski, was already in America. The generals in Warsaw knew for certain that the CIA was up-to-date with regard to its plans to introduce martial law. The Americans knew that the generals knew that the US knew. The generals could observe the Americans and investigate the behaviour in Washington to develop their prognosis of American reactions to the Warsaw plans. The Americans were silent throughout this entire period, while the generals spent the entire period getting ready to act. Two weeks after Kukli ski’s escape to the USA and—as it soon turned out—three weeks before the introduction of martial law, General Jaruzelski received the US ambassador Francis J. Meehan, who had asked to be received before the periodic consultations in Washington. We do not know what they talked about. We do know, however, what the Secretary of State (Alexander Haig) and one of his deputies (Lawrence Eagleberger) revealed after December 13: martial law was the lesser evil and since the USA was not planning to do anything to defend “Solidarity”, a warning to the Polish authorities would have only made the situation worse. A similar explanation was then presented by Meehan.⁴

As we will see below, the CIA systematically and exhaustively informed the politicians and high-ranking officers, covering the whole world with its service, and its system of bulletins probably functions the same way to this very day.

³ *Ibidem.*

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 213.

The “President’s Daily Brief” (PDB) was presented to the President six times a week (on Sundays a special note was delivered if required by a developing situation), presenting information on several issues, one page each, and one special issue was chosen and presented in greater detail, though still not in an excessively long text (no more than two pages). The special issue usually concerned a periodic assessment of a longer process or the background of a detailed issue. The PDB was usually given to the President via his national security advisor (in the Carter cabinet, from January 20, 1978 to January 20, 1981 Zbigniew Brzezinski occupied this post). After being read the text was taken back by the CIA. During the crisis in question the recipients of the PDB included the Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defence, and the Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Other information was not presented in writing. In a safe room of the White House the President and a small group of his advisors were informed by the Director of Intelligence (the Director of the CIA, who also coordinates the work of the other intelligence institutions) about the information provided by Kukli ski. The President, his National Security Advisor, and the other recipients received the PDB every day, always from the same CIA officer. This officer would remain present during the time when the recipients got acquainted with the text, and then the text was given back to the CIA.

The “National Intelligence Daily” (NID) contained slightly more detailed information, including that found in the PDB, but in this bulletin information which revealed or implied the existence of certain sources was concealed, owing to the fact that the group of NID recipients was quite large and this created the increased possibility of disclosure of its contents. In the period in question the NID did not provide the information coming from Kukli ski. None of this prevented the intelligence community of the Polish People’s Republic from discovering in October 1981 that the Americans knew of their current plan for the introduction of martial law.

The “Alert Memorandum” was an *ad hoc* note, prepared for all levels in those cases where there was a perceived necessity to draw attention to something of particular importance or something which was about to happen very shortly. This device was designed to prevent the effects of information overflow, but in the Polish case under analysis it turned out to be ineffective.

The “National Intelligence Estimate” (NIE), which had the status of a study agreed upon in the “intelligence community”, was

of a more speculative and prognostic nature. It could contain contradictory opinions and was generally quite extensive.

The reception of this information concerning Poland, which constituted merely a part of the overall intelligence complex, was influenced by the views on Poland held by the individual recipients, long-rooted stereotypes, and the accumulation of media, intelligence, and other information. This resulted in the strong conviction on the part of the American administration that the worst possible scenario would be a Soviet invasion. When the manoeuvres of the Warsaw Pact military forces indicated that the danger of an intervention had subsided and military intelligence passed along the information that there were no more than four divisions near the Eastern Polish border (the book makes no mention here of the Eastern German divisions), whereas as many as thirty were deemed necessary to launch an invasion, Soviet intervention was deemed improbable, though some extraordinary expedition in response to the appeal of the Polish communists was not excluded. Against this background a conviction developed that while the persons in power in Poland might make threats to introduce martial law, they were not stupid enough to do such a thing. This kind of reasoning also appeared in Polish opposition circles, and may have influenced the opinion formulated by the American embassy in Warsaw. Thus the politicians in Washington did not believe that the introduction of martial law would actually take place, and considering the possibility from the point of view of US interests, they considered such a possibility in any case to be much less important to them than a Soviet intervention.

The intelligence analyst in charge of a given issue has a comprehensive view of the whole matter and a sense of the dynamics of the process under investigation, whereas a politician receives information on various events taking place in various parts of the world and cannot have either such a comprehensive view or be able to sense the dynamics of the particular and numerous processes. In addition the lack of permanent access to the texts once they are read results in their inability to refresh their memories.

A politician thus takes into account the rational factors relating to the case analysis presented to him/her, the political requirements relating to his/her participation in the power process, and in addition filters the analysis through his/her personal philosophy and the accumulated and complex psycho-social considerations, of which he/she may not be fully aware.

What are the consequences of all this for the Iraqi case?

Firstly, if the CIA, DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) and INR (Intelligence and Research Bureau in the Department of State) had an adequate assessment of the situation in Iraq, and the CIA properly cooperated with the British Intelligence Service (MI6) and the British assessment of the situation did not contradict the American one, it would be advisable to consider whether the manner of informing Bush and Blair allowed them to form a proper view of the situation. If this was not the case, then it would indicate that the processes of providing information to politicians, discussed in relation to the Polish situation, may be in need of improvement, as for example by increasing the role of coordinators on the side of intelligence and of the officer teams of the President and Prime Minister. This cooperation should be designed to ensure that an adequate system is in place for politicians to receive current signals regarding the assessment of the *status quo* and/or turning or culmination points in the observed process, as recommended by MacEachin, through the update of current assessments and the permanent inclusion of key assessment criteria referring to the situation in question. Defining such criteria is an art in itself.

Secondly, the government must make its intervention policy a part of its long-term policies. Otherwise intervention policy will not be pursued in a rational manner.

Thirdly, informing the public of the government's position must be a function of that policy and must not be left to press spokespersons, whose role is to handle public diplomacy as a derivative of governmental policy. The government's manner of informing the media should be subordinated to its long-term strategy, which must in turn become a part of the public domain. The *raison d'état* or national interest, however we may call it, must be publicly specified in a manner which would make it possible to publicly connect it with the current—and publicly visible—decisions of the government.

Now we can turn to the Iraqi case to search for possible parallels concerning the attitudes of the politicians assessing that crisis and compare the case of the Polish People's Republic in 1980–1981. Undoubtedly the same mechanisms prevail with regard to the provision of information by the intelligence services and ways of forming views and opinions on the part of politicians with regard to the state of affairs and possible responses. At the same time, fixed conceptions of the Islamic world, the Third World, backwardness

etc. do function, accompanied by stereotypes formed over a long period of time via the accumulated media, intelligence, and other information. There is also the American concept of the United States. All this is intertwined with the overarching concept of the war with terrorism, which fails to point to a definitive enemy such as a concrete state or a group of states and is intertwined with the ideas of the future role of the United States as a global power. Seen in this way Iraq may be treated as a weak element in the world system in need of repair, which is what the Republicans presently in power in the US are doing. Inasmuch as the collapse of the USSR has lowered the importance of the human factor in American intelligence in favour of technology,⁵ the aforementioned factors hampering the flow of intelligence to politicians are accompanied by an uncertainty in the assessment of social relations in the field of operations, which in turn enhances the influence on the decision-takers of stereotypes and inadequate visions of the world. It is also by no means clear that, in the case of the Iraqi intervention, the US intelligence agencies cooperated as well as they did during the confrontation in Poland.⁶

In the case of the Iraqi military intervention, the Polish government based its position on the assessment made by the government of the US. It stood by its ally in the time of trial, cultivating the image of a reliable partner. However, when the first battle of Baghdad was won and the intervention covered the whole of Iraq, we were faced with a question which the American government presumably faced at the beginning of the war. How is this intervention supposed to end? With the building of a democratic Iraqi state with democratic institutions and the rule of law? No intelligence services are necessary to understand that the length of the intervention is proportional to the time needed for the establishment of a new political civilisation there. Are we ready to participate in this project? Couldn't this great civilisational project be made more realistic by replacing the concept of democracy with the concept of stabilisation?

⁵ P. Todd, J. Bloch, *Global Intelligence. The World's Secret Services Today*, Zed Books, 2003, pp. 35 and following.

⁶ The drastic lack of cooperation among the institutions and the advantage of the Pentagon over the CIA and DIA are discussed by Seymour M. Hersh in the interview ("War and Intelligence") for the *New Yorker* weekly of December 7, 2003.

The Iraqi intervention offers an opportunity to present a radical vision of a USA-EU hegemonic tandem,⁷ the very proposal of which would have a calming effect in the EU and a sobering effect in America. Can't we inspire a debate in the EU and NATO designed to publicly—very publicly—develop a long-term vision of the world order, together with the hegemonic US and our other partners, both in the EU and NATO? Can't we afford to make a contribution into defining the cooperative tasks of the EU and USA in the development of a new world system? Shouldn't the politicians of the EU Member States and NATO countries, with Poland among them, manifest more originality and initiative in this issue? Shouldn't we have officially—and publicly—proposed a project of NATO activities in the Near East?⁸ Shouldn't we have accepted the newly extended invitation of Chirac and Schröder regarding consultation in the Weimar Triangle?⁹

As always when considering the issues of intelligence and foreign policy, we must take into account what in English is called deception. Let us imagine that the American government knew everything about the impending invasion in Czechoslovakia, the exact details of the approaching intervention in Afghanistan, and the whole plan for the introduction of martial law in Poland, but for some reason—and the reasons are not very important here—it was not willing or able to stop the interventions and wanted to take the opportunity of camouflaging its intelligence activity. Wouldn't it in such cases have pretended *post factum* that it had been taken by surprise and that due to intelligence failures it had not known what its rivals were doing? It can act this way only when it is certain that such a tactic will be successful. What can it say of the “intelligence failure” in the case of Iraq?

In spite of everything I do believe that the communication between the intelligence services and the government, including the analysis and distribution in the classic intelligence cycle, starting with the setting-up of a task and finishing with an action,

⁷ R. Stemplowski, “O bezpieczeństwie w Europie”, *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, No. 5 (9), September–October 2002, p. 9.

⁸ *Ibidem*, “Katalizator iracki”, *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, No. 2, March–April 2003, pp. 13–14, article ready for publication February 21, 2003; English version (“The Iraqi Catalyst”) in: *The Polish Foreign Affairs Digest*, vol. 3, No. 1 (6), 2003, pp. 7–14.

⁹ *Ibidem*, “Trójkąt Weimarski a cele strategiczne”, *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, No. 4 (14) July–August 2003, pp. 5–8; English version (“The Weimar Triangle and Its Strategic Goals”) in: *The Polish Foreign Affairs Digest*, vol. 3, No. 3 (8), 2003, pp. 41–43.

constitutes a serious organisational and research problem,¹⁰ and not only for intelligence analysts and politicians in Washington or London.

The intelligence services do their best, but the politicians can do more. The so-called intelligence failures are most of all failures of politicians, as they are the ones who bear constitutional responsibility for the operation of governmental administration and state organs; they are the ones responsible for the ultimate assessment of the situation and selection of the appropriate course of action.

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vol. 3, No. 6 (16), November–December 2003, pp. 5–13

¹⁰ Such a conclusion also results from the use of analysis based on replacing the cycle with a target centric analysis. See R.M. Clark, *Intelligence Analysis. A Target Centric Approach*, Washington DC: CQ Press, 2003, p. 18.