

Intelligence and Grand Strategy

by Thomas Fingar

Thomas Fingar is the inaugural Oksenberg-Rohlen Distinguished Fellow in the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. He was the Payne Distinguished Lecturer at Stanford during January-December 2009. He presented an earlier version of this article on November 8, 2010 to the Consortium on Grand Strategy, which is jointly sponsored by Temple University's Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy and FPRI. It is underwritten by the Hertog Foundation.

Abstract: Elegant strategies can be constructed without reference to intelligence but persuading policymakers to implement them without knowing what intelligence might have to say about their likely efficacy and unintended consequences would be exceedingly difficult. Intelligence-derived information and insights should not dictate the goals of grand strategy, but they should inform decisions about what to do, how to do it, and what to look for in order to assess how well or badly the strategy is working.

The relationship between intelligence and grand strategy is similar to the relationship of intelligence to policymaking. Grand strategists, like policymakers, can—and often do—formulate plans and develop policies without seeking or heeding information and insights from intelligence analysts.¹ History is replete with examples of smart people who developed compelling theories of international relations and/or effective strategies to protect and pursue the interests of their countries without reliance on inputs from spies, satellites, analysts, or other accoutrements of intelligence.²

¹For general, but insightful discussions of grand strategy, see, for example, Walter A. McDougall, “Can the United States Do Grand Strategy?” *Orbis*, Spring 2010, pp. 165–184; John Lewis Gaddis, “What Is Grand Strategy?” Karl Von Der Heyden Distinguished Lecture, Duke University, February 26, 2008 at <http://www.duke.edu/web/agsp/grandstrategy/paper.pdf>; and Peter Feaver, “What is grand strategy and why do we need it?” posted to the *Foreign Policy Shadow Government Blog* on April 8, 2009 at http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/04/08/what_is_grand_strategy_and_why_do_we_need_it. See also, Richard H. Immerman, “Intelligence and Strategy: Historicizing Psychology, Policy, and Politics,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 32, no. 1 (January 2008), pp. 1–23.

²See, for example, Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), especially the sections on Bismarck and Stalin; and Warren Zimmermann, *The First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).

What was true in the past is surely still true today, at least to some extent and with respect to some types of problems. But “intelligence-free” grand strategy is certainly less possible in the 21st century than at any time in the past. In other words, one could—and still can—formulate grand strategy without input from spies and analysts who work with covertly acquired information, but strategies are likely to be more successful if they incorporate information and insights from intelligence.³ This is even more the case during implementation; without intelligence, it is extremely difficult to know whether policies and actions are having the desired effect, triggering counter-moves different from those that had been anticipated, or spawning unintended consequences with the potential to derail even the grandest of strategies.

Perhaps the easiest way to summarize this view of the relationship between intelligence and strategy or policymaking is to paraphrase the BASF commercial tagline “We don’t make a lot of the products you use. We make a lot of the products you use better.” Intelligence does not make or define grand strategy or determine its efficacy, but it can make strategies more effective and, in that sense, better.⁴ This will seem obvious to some readers but perhaps not to the many others who live, work, and think entirely in the non-classified world of academe and other non-governmental institutions. They can—and many will—argue that one does not need classified information in order to “know” the intentions and likely reactions of key players at home and abroad, and that it is both possible and advantageous to develop “grand” strategies without trying to cope with down-in-the-weeds details and tangential trivia.⁵ Intelligence, for those who hold this view, is an unhelpful distraction that impedes rather than informs the setting of goals and the formulation of strategies, incentives, and policies to achieve overarching objectives. Besides, they would argue, we already “know” the most critical factors shaping the perceptions and behaviors of key actors and gain little by complicating the

³The roles and responsibilities of intelligence with respect to the development and monitoring of both broad strategies and tactical maneuvers are developed at greater length in Thomas Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty: Intelligence Analysis and National Security* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁴Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, Chapter 4; and Richard K. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in American National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁵This observation should not be construed as disparaging the utility of unclassified information—what the Intelligence Community refers to as “open source intelligence.” Such information is extremely useful and should be the starting point for all analysis, including that conducted by intelligence analysts, because it is often the best or only information available, and is likely to inform the perceptions and judgments of decision makers and strategic planners supported by the Intelligence Community and therefore must be understood by analysts able to supplement that information with data and insights gleaned from classified sources. In other words, classified information germane to the formulation and implementation of grand strategy should be regarded as a supplement to, not substitute for, other types of information and other sources of insight.

process or running unnecessary risks instead of moving out smartly to implement bold ideas that can be adjusted as proves necessary.

This is a reasonable position. The fact is that those charged with the formulation of policy and strategy do have a rich store of historical knowledge and useful theoretical insights. They also know a great deal about how other nations' leaders think, and should begin with a clear vision of what grand strategy is supposed to achieve rather than a minimalist sense of what is possible. Even more to the point, I believe in the necessity of having a grand strategy that can be easily explained and easily understood by politicians, pundits, and the public. The value of such a strategy is not merely its utility for "selling" policies and programs intended to achieve strategic objectives, but more importantly, as a litmus test for ensuring that bureaucrats and politicians remain focused on what is most important for the defense and advancement of national interests.⁶ To be effective at both levels, i.e., for explaining and anchoring policy decisions, grand strategy must be defensible without recourse to "classified information" or "if you knew what I know" justifications inaccessible to critics and potential supporters alike. That said, intelligence could make grand strategy better in at least three respects.

First, intelligence can help by reducing uncertainty and providing insight regarding increasingly complex issues. In the past, grand strategists needed to factor in the ambitions and capabilities of relatively few states (the "major powers"). They exercised substantial control over what happened inside their borders and had only limited dependence on external factors (e.g., access to energy resources). That is not the case today. For one thing, the number of players is much greater; there are more "major powers" and globalization has dramatically increased the importance of interdependence and the influence of "lesser powers" in every region. Indeed, strategic planning increasingly takes into account the intentions, capabilities, and activities of non-state actors running the gamut from transnational terrorist groups like al Qaeda to multi-lateral control regimes like the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Moreover, the spread of democracy and greater need for even authoritarian governments to be responsive to the demands of their citizens constrains the potential for classic balance of power alignments. It also complicates the task of negotiating alignments and arrangements by increasing the number of issues that can be put on the table. Perhaps most important of all, the interests of ordinary people, who must be treated as citizens rather than subjects, make it far more complex to formulate and implement grand strategies than in the past. Intelligence cannot simplify the real world, but it can provide insight with respect to the objectives, strategies, resources, leadership, priorities, etc., of key

⁶ See Daniel W. Drezner, Editor, *Avoiding Trivia: The Role of Strategic Planning in American Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2009), especially the chapters by Drezner, Thomas Wright, and Stephen D. Krasner.

constituencies in the countries and transnational institutions that must be factored into any overarching national strategy.

With the increasingly complex world and the greater number of developments that could disrupt or derail implementation of any strategy, it would appear self-evident to tap all possible sources of information to reduce uncertainty about anything that could affect the success of steps taken in pursuit of strategic objectives. This is true at the front end of the process when intelligence-derived inputs should help to clarify the objectives, fears, and expectations of all actors targeted or likely to react to prime-mover initiatives. It is also true during stages of implementation when intelligence can identify and illuminate initial reactions to proclaimed or predicted strategies and steps to implement them. Indeed, without intelligence, feedback needed to monitor and adjust policies would be more serendipitous.⁷

The second way in which intelligence contributes to the efficacy of grand strategy is by adding to the comfort level of officials who must be persuaded that a strategy is viable and worth the political and opportunity costs of pursuing it. Scholars, strategists, and critics without policymaking responsibilities often do not appreciate fully the importance of day-to-day interactions between the Intelligence Community (IC) and the officials it supports. Although it is frequently the case that first-time appointees to policymaking positions enter office with a skeptical view of intelligence and intelligence professionals—the “incompetents” who failed to detect the 9/11 plot and were so wrong about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq—most soon learn to appreciate what intelligence can do to help them. At a minimum, intelligence can help them to understand the complex, dynamic, and interactive issues in their portfolios of responsibility. The intelligence analysts who support them bring expertise to the table that is often more useful than the “intelligence factoids” obtained through clandestine collection or culled from the vast amounts of unclassified information collected and reviewed by the intelligence community on a daily basis. The information and analytic insights provided by intelligence analysts are not random; analysts are supposed to—and usually do—understand what their customers are working on, worried about, and attempting to accomplish.⁸

Armed with this knowledge, they seek information, and task intelligence collectors to seek additional information, that will help to clarify trends, drivers, and other key variables, and in other ways to reduce uncertainties inherent in the analysis of complex situations. More information and analysis

⁷ Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, Chapters 2 and 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1; and Thomas Fingar, “Analysis in the US Intelligence Community: Missions, Masters, and Methods,” National Research Council, *Intelligence Analysis: Behavioral and Social Scientific Foundations* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2011), pp. 3–27.

does not ensure better decisions or more successful policies, but logic and experience indicate that decisions based on deep understanding and careful analysis of relevant factors are more likely to achieve desired results than are those based on poorly assessed information. Intelligence inputs, especially those from skilled analysts who understand exactly what policymakers seek and make judgments about what will be helpful even if not requested, increase both understanding and confidence in characterizations of the situation and in the efficacy of measures designed to implement overarching strategies.⁹ Even more importantly, in the real world of policymaking, having more information—especially from the Intelligence Community—is often a sine qua non for selling a course of action to skeptical colleagues, congressional leaders, and to the public. No decision maker that I have ever encountered thinks it is a good idea to argue an approach without input from the Intelligence Community. Decision makers may disregard what intelligence analysts tell them, but they want to know what intelligence is available and how analysts assess its reliability and implications.

Intelligence helps in formulating and explaining grand strategy, but it is also important during the implementing of policies intended to advance a strategy. Whatever the likelihood of getting it completely right the first time—of formulating a strategy and policies that accurately describe and anticipate all relevant parameters—success will be impossible without continuous and competent monitoring of what happens during the course of implementation. As the literature on policy implementation makes abundantly clear, there will be unanticipated consequences and things will go wrong.¹⁰ Intelligence is critical to discovering, assessing, and explaining both direct consequences of policy implementation and serendipitous developments that could affect the

⁹ Intelligence analysis takes many forms ranging from quick and dirty assessments of breaking developments or newly obtained information (referred to as “current intelligence”) to “estimative products” that attempt to clarify high salience or potentially consequential developments or trends on which information is scant or problematic, to more forward looking or “strategic assessments” that attempt to anticipate where events are heading, what drives them, and what might deflect their current trajectory. Strategic planners can benefit from all these and other types of analysis but what they report that they find most helpful are assessments that identify opportunities as well as problems and attempt to put “micro” developments into a broader strategic or “macro” context. For additional information on the different types of intelligence analysis and discussion of why analysts are often reluctant to identify opportunities, see Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, Chapter 4; and Fingar, “Analysis in the US Intelligence Community.” The best examples of strategic analysis prepared by the Intelligence Community are the four reports in the *Global Trends* series prepared by the National Intelligence Council, especially the 2008 report entitled *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*. These reports are available at http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_2025_project.html.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Policy Implementation: What USAID Has Learned* (Washington, DC: Center for Democracy and Governance, January 2001). Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky’s classic *Implementation: How Great Expectations In Washington Are Dashed in Oakland* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973) is still a useful cautionary tale for all who must implement policy decisions.

success of specific policies or the strategy as a whole, and delivering those insights to policymakers in time to make appropriate course corrections. In other words, implementing grand strategy requires continuous monitoring and adjustments. Feedback comes from many sources. One of the most revealing is intelligence. Other sources can provide valuable information, but only the Intelligence Community and other components of the U.S. government (e.g., diplomatic posts) have as a primary responsibility the monitoring of developments germane to grand strategy and, as importantly, the direct access to decision makers responsible for implementation.¹¹

Intelligence does not tell policymakers what to do. That would be overstepping the policy-intelligence divide intended to ensure that U.S. government policymakers have at least one source of information that is objective and without a policy agenda of its own. In other words, the information provided by the Intelligence Community should be immediately helpful to policymakers because it is tailored to meet their needs by people who have an insider's understanding of what those needs are. Intelligence is a support function in the U.S. government and the mission of the Intelligence Community is to ensure that the decision makers it supports receive timely information derived from the analysis of unclassified, as well as classified information, collected explicitly to illuminate issues germane to the national interests and policy objectives of the United States. The political system, not the Intelligence Community defines both interests and objectives. The Intelligence Community as an institution does not have a policy agenda of its own, and individual analysts are trained not to allow personal preferences to skew the objectivity of the selection and interpretation of the information they provide to customers. Is the system perfect? Of course not. But I am confident that what policymakers receive from the Intelligence Community is consistently and generally the most objective and most focused on policymaker needs of all the inputs that come at them each day.

Using Insights from Intelligence to Craft Grand Strategy

The discussion above is highly general. It would be far more compelling if I could provide specific examples of how intelligence contributed to the formation and implementation of America's current grand strategy to protect and promote its interests in the 21st century. Unfortunately, it is impossible to

¹¹ Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*; and Thomas Fingar, "Office of the Director of National Intelligence: Promising Start Despite Ambiguity, Ambivalence, and Animosity," in Roger Z. George and Harvey Rishikof, Editors, *The National Security Enterprise: Navigating the Labyrinth* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), pp. 139–155.

do so, not because of classification issues but because the United States does not have a grand strategy, as I understand the term.¹² There is no consensus, inside or outside the government, with respect to overarching objectives, priorities, prerequisites, or strategies to achieve them. This is unfortunate for both the country and the international system because the absence of even an incomplete grand strategy means that all foreign and security policy issues are treated in virtually an ad hoc fashion. Additionally, other nations infer and impute objectives to the United States that are wrong, more malign than I think warranted, and injurious to our efforts to preserve peace and prosperity.¹³ In other words, the failure of the United States to articulate a coherent vision and global strategy impedes regional arrangements, exacerbates hedging against uncertainty, and erodes the ability of the United States to provide global leadership in a time of rapid change.

Intelligence can provide valuable input to the formulation of a new grand strategy, but it cannot—and should not—take the initiative in proposing what the strategy should be. Doing so would cross the boundary between intelligence and policy. In order to begin a process to which the Intelligence Community can contribute, policymakers—persons currently serving in positions of responsibility, not former officials or other “outside experts” and armchair strategists—must pose questions to which the Intelligence

¹²This statement probably seems outrageous or misinformed to readers generally familiar with the fact that several successive administrations have issued official “National Security Strategies.” Examples include the Obama administration’s *National Security Strategy* (May 2010) at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf; the George W. Bush administration’s *The National Security Strategy* (March 2006) at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>, and *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (September 2002) at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>; and the Clinton administration’s *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (February 1996) at <http://www.fas.org/spp/military/docops/national/1996stra.htm>. Several earlier versions are readily available but all of them read more like justifications of the issuing administration’s foreign policy than compelling arguments for specific priorities and commitments of resources. See also McDougall, “Can the United States Do Grand Strategy” and the sources cited therein; and Michele A. Flournoy and Shawn W. Brimley, *Strategic Planning for U.S. National Security: A Project Solarium for the 21st Century* (Princeton, NJ: The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, no date) at <http://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/papers/interagencyQNSR.pdf>.

¹³A recent, but certainly not the last, example of the kinds of domestic disagreements and foreign misperceptions that are made more likely and more severe by the absence of a “grand strategy” able to command broad consensus in the United States is the lead-up to, execution of, and reaction to US intervention to protect Libyans from attack by their own government. See, for example, Richard N. Haass, “Libya: Too Much, Too Late,” *Politico*, March 21, 2011 at <http://www.cfr.org/libya/libya-too-much-too-late/p24444>; “Goal For Libya is Have Gadhafi To Step Down [sic],” National Public Radio interview with John Negroponte, March 22, 2011 at <http://www.npr.org/2011/03/22/134755646/Libya-Intervention>; and “Libya can turn into another Iraq,” quoting Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, *PressTV*, March 27, 2011 at <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/171928.html>.

Community can respond. The need to do so becomes more pressing by the day because there is no “default setting” strategy to guide decisions and intelligence input. We had a grand strategy during the Cold War and it worked quite well—so well that it changed the world to the point that the strategy became obsolete. Twenty years after the Soviet Union’s demise, we have yet to devise a replacement for “Containment” and are now in what I consider the fourth successor approach, none of which was fleshed out sufficiently to constitute a compelling grand strategy.¹⁴

In one idealized version of the proper relationship between intelligence and policymaking, formulating grand strategy begins with the collection and analysis of global developments, drivers, and event trajectories that could entail dangers or opportunities for the United States (or any other nation). Stated another way, the process begins with the identification of threats or challenges that must be addressed by any grand strategy, and opportunities to reduce or mitigate dangers or to shift trajectories in directions more favorable to U.S. interests. These stages of the process could be, and to a significant extent are, performed by scholars, consultants, and many elements of the national security bureaucracy, including the Intelligence Community. Some of those who collect and interpret information thought to be germane to formulating a grand strategy also propose policies that incorporate their findings and purport to achieve “their” definitions and prioritization of “national interests.” In other words, what they do is frequently, if not inherently, self-serving. The Intelligence Community should not do that because its role is to support policymakers by providing information and insights that will help those who make policy decisions to understand the issues, how they interrelate, what drives and shapes their trajectories, and what might alter those trajectories in particular ways. It is not the job of the Intelligence Community to propose policies or to integrate them into grand strategies. Indeed, to do so would violate one of the cardinal principles of the U.S. national security enterprise.¹⁵

This theoretical description of the way intelligence might contribute to the making of grand strategy provides an opportunity to illustrate *how* and *why* the Intelligence Community is different than all others who contribute to grand strategies. These differences can be grouped under three broad umbrellas: support, objectivity, and information.

Support. As noted above, the U.S. Intelligence Community exists to support policymakers. Its primary missions are to reduce uncertainty, provide

¹⁴ See Richard K. Betts, *U.S. National Security Strategy: Lenses and Landmarks* (Princeton, NJ: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, November 2004).

¹⁵ See, for example, Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy, Fourth Edition* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2009), Chapter 9; and Gregory F. Treverton, “Intelligence Analysis: Between ‘Politicization’ and Irrelevance,” in Roger Z. George and James B. Bruce, Editors, *Analyzing Intelligence: Origins, Obstacles, and Innovations* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), Chapter 6.

warning, and identify opportunities. Stated this way, it is an unrealistically broad responsibility that could be recast as a requirement to monitor and know everything about everything, everywhere, all the time. To the extent that this is the mission of the Intelligence Community, it makes the IC an ideal instrument for collecting and assessing information germane to the formulation of grand strategies. No one even pretends that other contributors to the process—academics, for example—cast the net as widely or need to consider “everything” in order to develop grand strategy. Everyone makes the task more manageable by narrowing the scope of the search and the number of places, issues, and transnational trends to be considered.

Most who work on grand strategy set the parameters for themselves, deciding where to focus based on a preferred theoretical framework, institutional or individual priorities, or criteria derived from analogies or some other construct. They can start essentially where they wish and their initial criteria largely shape their findings and the strategies they formulate to address what they discover and the goals that had previously, if unconsciously, determined how they would bound the exercise in the first place. Intelligence Community analysts do not have the same latitude to determine what to look for.¹⁶

As a support function, intelligence is guided by the needs and priorities of the individuals and institutions it serves. Conversely, the Intelligence Community is not supposed to have a policy agenda of its own. The Intelligence Community exists to inform and improve policy decisions made by the elected and appointed officials in the executive branch and the congress. It is not supposed to propose or champion policy options or integrating strategies. If it did so, it could not meet its responsibility to be as objective as possible (see below). For the system or process to work properly, policymakers must provide guidance to the Intelligence Community that will enable it to focus its efforts in ways that address the issues of greatest concern for the policymakers it supports.

This creates a chicken and egg problem. Policymakers interested in developing grand strategies inevitably have ideas about what they want to accomplish, what challenges must be addressed, and how best to achieve their

¹⁶ For a general discussion of this dimension of the intelligence mission, see Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, Chapter 2. For a specific example of expectations regarding what the Intelligence Community does, should, or must know, see commentary on the “inadequacy” of Intelligence Community foreknowledge and forewarning about the 2011 “Jasmine Revolution” in Tunisia, and subsequent events in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East. Examples include the criticisms of Intelligence Community performance with respect to developments in the “Jasmine Revolution” as reported by Josh Gerstein in “Diane Feinstein: U.S. Intel Missed Warnings on Egypt,” *Politico*, February 16, 2011 at <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0211/49686.html>; and Josh Rogin, “Feinstein Complains to Panetta About Intelligence Gaps on Arab Revolutions,” *Foreign Policy’s “The Cable”* blog, March 8, 2011 at http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/08/feinstein_us_intelligence_community_s_got_nothing_on_arab_revolutions.

objectives. Yet they also want input from the Intelligence Community (and others) that will reduce the likelihood of overlooking something critical to the success of their strategies. Their predetermined ideas shape the instructions they give to the Intelligence Community, but this guidance almost always is accompanied by an instruction to “flag anything else that I need to know.”¹⁷

It is a relatively easy matter for the Intelligence Community to focus attention on the key questions raised by policymakers. It may not be easy to obtain the desired information and analytic insights, but the process is highly routinized because it is what the IC does all the time. It responds to questions and taskings from decision makers across the U.S. government. The second part of the instruction—the “anything else I need to know” part—is more difficult. Consideration of “everything” is impractical because there will never be enough time, data, or analysts to do so. Even if it were possible, moreover, the result would overwhelm the absorptive capacity of policymakers and be an impediment to formulating grand strategy.

Nevertheless, a reason, policymakers turn to the IC for help is to ensure that they do not overlook developments crucial to understanding the dynamics shaping the challenges they want to address, and to the efficacy of the strategy and policies they adopt to meet those challenges. Therefore, the Intelligence Community must find ways to broaden/complement the focus of what it has been asked by the policy community without becoming too unfocused to be helpful or too focused on matters tangential to grand strategy. Since 1996, the Intelligence Community has attempted to manage this part of the requirement by undertaking increasingly sophisticated attempts to discern developments and trends that appear likely to shape and constrain future possibilities (more below).

Objectivity. This is the characteristic that most distinguishes the Intelligence Community from other contributors to the development of U.S. security policy, including grand strategy. While many will challenge this statement, observing, i.e., that what I wrote above about guidance from policymakers means that the work of the Intelligence Community is inherently skewed because its starting point is to look at issues of importance to American officials. That narrow point is true; a substantial part of what the IC does is driven by the demands of U.S. government officials. The Intelligence Community is not a freestanding research organization empowered to examine anything that it or individual analysts might find interesting. U.S. taxpayers fund the work of the Intelligence Community and have a right to ensure, through the president’s budget and congressional appropriations, that its

¹⁷ Additional discussion of the relationship between intelligence analysts and those they support can be found in Fingar, “Analysis in the US Intelligence Community;” Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*; and Lowenthal, *Intelligence*.

efforts are directed to prioritized national requirements as they are determined by elected and appointed officials.¹⁸

Objectivity is critical to the way issues are assessed by intelligence analysts. Policymakers get to specify the issues Intelligence Community analysts will examine, but they do not specify how they will be assessed. Attempting to do so would be regarded as “politicization” by the Intelligence Community, its oversight bodies, and a variety of others—ranging from the members of the opposition party to the media. Bureaucratic procedures and professional ethics reinforce the strongly ingrained ethos of independence and “speaking truth to power” characteristic of most analysts. The job of IC analysts is to “call it as we see it,” regardless of how well the message is likely to be received by the policymakers. Analytic judgments produced by the Intelligence Community must be as objective as possible. That is what makes them valuable to policymakers and what makes them unique in the formulation of grand strategy and other national security policy decisions. Other contributors to the process—officials in specific executive branch departments, members of congress, think tank researchers, lobbyists, foreign governments, academics, etc.—are assumed, usually accurately, to have a preferred policy outcome and to construct their arguments and analyses to support that preference. When Intelligence Community analyses are done properly, which in my experience is most of the time, they do not cherry pick facts, weight evidence, or skew analyses to support a predetermined approach or strategy. Greater objectivity, actual or assumed, does not necessarily make IC contributions more influential, but it does make them different. They also are different because they do not contain recommendations or advise recipients what they should do.

Information. The Intelligence Community has more information on matters germane to grand strategy than does any other organization or individual. Much of that information is freely available, albeit not always easily accessible, to policymakers, pundits, and geostrategic thinkers everywhere. As noted previously, intelligence analysts should and do make extensive use of publicly available information, vast amounts of which are collected daily and made available to Intelligence Community and other U.S. government officials through the Open Source Center.¹⁹ Other information, often the product of clandestine collection but also including classified information provided by diplomats, military attaches, commercial and legal attaches, and other U.S. government officials, generally is not available to persons working

¹⁸The formal mechanism for determining policymaker requirements and priorities is a twice-yearly process known as the National Intelligence Priorities Framework. This process is described in Intelligence Community Directive 204: Roles and Responsibilities for the National Intelligence Priorities Framework at http://www.dni.gov/electronic_reading_room/ICD_204.pdf.

¹⁹See Intelligence Community Directive 301: National Open Source Enterprise at http://www.dni.gov/electronic_reading_room/ICD_301.pdf.

outside the government.²⁰ More information does not ensure more accurate judgments, but it can clarify ambiguities, reveal intentions, and in other ways corroborate, complement, or challenge what is known through other means. Not having access to classified information is seldom a major impediment to the formulation of grand strategy because grand strategies are inherently very general and do not require micro-level knowledge of capabilities and intentions. I would argue that it is preferable to define and describe grand strategies without reference to classified information. Among other reasons, successful grand strategy must be easy to explain, easy to understand, and able to win broad public support. That is difficult, if not impossible, to do if key elements are based solely on classified information.

Classified information does have special importance in the formulation and defense of grand strategy, however. It is a check on what is known through other means. The fact that such information exists, and has been collected and analyzed by intelligence professionals with the express purpose of informing and assisting the formulation of national strategies and policies, makes it politically, if not logically imperative for officials to double check what they know through other means against what is known in the realm of intelligence. The vast majority of facts and judgments are likely to be corroborated, albeit sometimes with valuable nuance. At a minimum, checking with the Intelligence Community can bolster confidence and reduce the likelihood that U.S. government officials will justify decisions with reference to examples that could be refuted by facts that at least temporarily are known only to the Intelligence Community and to persons in other countries.

Using Insights from Intelligence to Monitor and Adjust Grand Strategy

Although the unique contributions of intelligence to formulating grand strategy are limited, that is not the case with respect to formulating and monitoring of policies and other measures to implement the strategy. Even the best of grand strategies are largely descriptive, hortatory, and extremely general. Execution of such strategies requires carefully tailored, closely monitored, and regularly adjusted policies to achieve specific objectives. All three can be accomplished without intelligence, but all are likely to be more successful if informed by information from the Intelligence Community. Grand strategies tell officials, the American public, and people around the

²⁰ Illustrations of the kinds of information available in sources of this kind can be found in the diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks beginning in late 2010. See, for example, Scott Shane and Andrew W. Lehren, "Leaked Cables Offer Raw Look at U.S. Diplomacy," *New York Times*, November 28, 2010 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/29/world/29cables.html>. I deplore the theft and premature public dissemination of these documents, most of which would have been declassified after the passage of time specified at the top of each document, but their release does make clear the range and quality of this type of reporting.

world what the United States hopes to achieve and why those goals are important. It does not tell policymakers how officials and relevant constituencies in other countries interpret the strategies, assess their implications for themselves and others, or what they may do or are doing in response.

How much can be discovered about such matters using open sources and overt means of collection depends on the issue and the affected polity. Some systems are quite transparent and officials are willing to share their concerns with American officials and other “outsiders.” Others are much more reluctant to do so. Analysts working outside the U.S. government tend to be more interested in formulating and championing grand strategy than in monitoring steps to implement the strategy. Furthermore, there may be a natural tendency for those who did not favor the adopted strategy to follow its implementation more closely, and more critically, than do those who supported it. In both cases, the objectivity of what they find is likely to be diminished by desires to validate or discredit the adopted strategy. Intelligence analysts are more likely to have information about foreign perceptions, reactions, and objectives than are people outside of the U.S. government. Moreover, since they were neither advocates nor opponents of the strategy adopted and have a professional obligation to be as objective as possible, their evaluations of what is and is not working, and why, are likely to be more valuable and more highly valued than are the pronouncements of persons with less information and more transparent agendas.

Intelligence analysts have another important advantage compared to external observers—access to policymakers responsible for implementing policies derived from grand strategy. The fact that intelligence analysts have access to decision makers is sometimes more important than the classified information collected specifically to assess the efficacy of specific policies. They do not have to hope that the scholarly article written to critique policies or their implementation will be published at the right time and read by the right officials in time to make a difference. Rather, they have easy access to those most interested in learning whether the policies for which they are responsible are achieving the desired results. Relevant intelligence reports and concise analytical papers focused precisely on the issues of greatest interest to key decision makers (something they know by virtue of their regular, often daily, interaction) can be—and usually are—provided to officials immediately.²¹ Officials who interact daily with their intelligence support team have developed confidence and trust in the members of that team and look forward to, even seek out, what the Intelligence Community has learned about specific dimensions of a policy or problem. Grand strategies do not change quickly but implementing measures can and often must be adjusted frequently. Only the Intelligence Community can keep pace with the speed of decision.

²¹ See, for example, Roger Z. George, “Central Intelligence Agency: The President’s Own,” in George and Rishikof, Chapter 8; and Fingar, “Office of the Director of National Intelligence.”

Is There any Evidence that Intelligence Actually Contributes to Grand Strategy?

None of the strategies articulated since 1990 meets the minimal requirements for a new grand strategy to replace that which guided U.S. policy during the Cold War. For starters, the fact that the numerous strategies prepared by George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama contain many and fundamental differences means that none of them qualifies as a strategy capturing U.S. interests that transcends a single party or administration. Throughout the Cold War, we had one grand strategy that was tweaked, as necessary, by a succession of both Republican and Democrat administrations. Over the last twenty years, we have had at least four different approaches. I agree with the judgment of a Center for Strategic and International Studies report that the several national security strategies have been little more than attempts by each administration to showcase its own approach to foreign policy.²²

That the United States still lacks a fundamentally bipartisan grand strategy is the result of many factors, including the absence of a peer competitor to the United States or significant rival to the global order led by the United States, greater and still increasing global interdependence, and perceptions that diminution of the existential threat to our nation and way of life have opened more space to partisan and special interest wrangling on issues long considered off the table. The absence of a grand strategy with broad public and political support probably makes it more difficult to reach agreement on all kinds of foreign policy and national security issues, and more difficult still to achieve coherence and clear prioritization of policy objectives.²³ As a result, we confuse our public and foreign audiences who look to the United States for clarity, coherence, and consistency in its conduct and leadership of world affairs. It is hard to lead if you and others are unclear about what you want to achieve, how you intend to accomplish prioritized goals, and how long those goals will retain their prioritized status. In short, there are many disadvantages to not having a recognizable grand strategy.

The absence of a grand strategy is one of but a few foreign policy shortcomings that has not been and really cannot be blamed on the Intelligence Community. Recasting the slogan cited earlier, intelligence can make grand strategy better but it cannot make grand strategy. In the U.S. government, policymakers formulate, adopt, and implement strategies; intelligence supports but does not usurp that responsibility.

²² *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: U.S. Government and Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 2005), pp. 28 at http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/bgn_ph2_report.pdf.

²³ See Catherine Dale, *National Security Strategy: Legislative Mandates, Execution to Date, and Considerations for Congress* (December 15, 2008) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service); and McDougall, "Can the United States Do Grand Strategy?"

Although the United States does not have a grand strategy, it has had a succession of “National Security Strategies.” It is appropriate to ask, therefore, what role intelligence has played in the formulation and/or implementation of those strategies. Answering that question precisely is difficult because interchange between policymakers and intelligence support teams is continuous and multifaceted. There is no single document or collection of documents that could be described as “information and insights policymakers need to formulate grand strategy.” Intelligence support teams provide information and analysis to hundreds of policymakers every day. These exchanges enhance understanding of some topics, raise questions about others, and sometimes prompt officials to make or defer decisions on specific issues. The process doubtless contributes to, and in some respects shapes, perceptions, judgments, and predictions that, in turn, are incorporated into policies, approaches, and broader strategies to achieve U.S. government objectives. Approaches and strategies do emerge from the process, but it is impossible, in my experience, to ascribe causality to ideas unique to the Intelligence Community. The process is much too complex to isolate the contributions of intelligence. Moreover, policymakers are often unaware of precisely how any particular insight came to them and understandably want to take credit for good ideas (i.e., those they decide to run with). Intelligence professionals hope they are making a contribution and may be confident that they do. Yet they seldom receive clear feedback specifying exactly what it is that is considered a significant contribution to the broader process.

Continuous interchange between policymakers and intelligence analysts makes it impossible to trace precisely how insights are (or are not) incorporated into policy decisions and the formulation of broader strategies. Still, congressional procedures and legislatively mandated requirements do provide a way for outsiders to gauge the consistency of Intelligence Community judgments about the world and administration policies and strategies to protect and advance American interests. Indeed, that seems to be the primary rationale for the mandated requirement that the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) submit to the Congress an annual assessment of the threats faced by our country. This required report, which is delivered in both classified and unclassified versions, is usually submitted in January or February as part of the process used by Congress to assess the adequacy of administration budget requests for funds to ensure national security.²⁴ The DNI’s testimony is an updated, integrated, and loosely prioritized summary document incorporating intelligence information and judgments shared with executive and legislative branch officials over the preceding twelve months. In other words, it is the

²⁴ Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper presented the 2011 “Worldwide Threat Assessment” to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on February 10, 2011. The unclassified Statement for the Record is available at http://www.dni.gov/testimonies/20110210_testimony_clapper.pdf.

judgments it contains, not the report itself that feed into decisions on the full spectrum of national security decisions, not just preparation of the budget. There is broad consistency between Intelligence Community judgments and administration policy decisions. The high degree of consistency is not the result of political manipulation or contrivance to make it appear greater than it is; it simply reflects the cumulative impact of IC-policymaker interchange across the entire spectrum of national security concerns.

Another reason for consistency between Intelligence Community judgments and policy decisions is that policymakers routinely submit draft testimony and other statements to the Intelligence Community for review prior to delivery. This review is intended to address three questions: (1) is the statement factually accurate, (2) are any references to or characterizations of intelligence accurate and presented in a way that can be disclosed in public, and (3) is anything in the statement inconsistent with available intelligence or current IC judgments?

Concluding Observations

The Intelligence Community's most direct efforts to inform grand strategy are the four reports in the National Intelligence Council's *Global Trends* series. The first two reports, published in 1997 and 2000, were pilot attempts to identify trends and drivers that might shape events over the next decade and a half (the first looked out to 2010, the second to 2015). The second two installments, *Mapping the Global Future* (2004) and *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (2008), were both more sophisticated and more influential. Each of the studies reflected current concerns at the time they were prepared, but individually and cumulatively they make a compelling case that the world of tomorrow will be very different than the one to which we are accustomed and for which we have developed institutions, policies, and global strategies.²⁵ The studies also make clear that the future is neither inevitable nor immutable; it will be shaped by decisions made by national leaders, government bureaucrats, corporate boards, bank managers, and myriad other governmental and non-governmental actors on the world stage. These reports, like the various *National Security Strategies* published since 1990, recognize that we are in a time of transition that makes it both difficult and imperative to devise wise and appropriate strategies to manage the transition, preserve the benefits of the current global system, and build new institutions to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

²⁵The four studies are: *Global Trends 2010* (Revised Edition, November 1997); *Global Trends 2015: A dialogue About the Future with nongovernment Experts* (December 2000); *Mapping the Global Future: Report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project* (December 2004); and *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (December 2008). All are available at the National Intelligence Council Web Site at http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_home.html.

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Political leaders and other policymakers must determine what is necessary and desirable and formulate strategies to achieve clear objectives. The Intelligence Community can, and will, help them to determine what is possible, how to achieve desired developments, and how to avoid or mitigate undesirable ones. No one is better positioned or better able to provide the information and insights required to formulate, monitor, and adjust policies to implement grand strategies.

