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Published online: 19 Jul 2022.

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Arzan Tarapore

ABSTRACT

Why do intelligence estimates sometimes fail to prepare policymakers for change? Some explanations suggest the fault lies with insufficient data collection, weak analysis, or unreceptive audiences. But while more data and better analysis would always be welcome, they may not materially reduce uncertainty; and explanations centering on the intelligence-policymaker relationship offer no systematic critique of the orthodoxy that keeps intelligence and policymakers at arm's length. This paper argues that some cases of estimative failure – including the case of the 1979 Iranian revolution – are the result of a flawed orthodoxy of intelligence-policymaker relations, which overlooks the policymaker's actual and potential impact on the target. In contrast, this paper introduces the concept of "the view from somewhere", which places the customer's policy and preferences at the center of the intelligence problem. In the Iran case, estimates adopting the view from somewhere could have warned Washington of critical decision points while it still had leverage to act, explained how US policy had inadvertently shaped the Shah's ineffectual response to unrest, and assessed opportunities for effective policy alternatives.

When revolution consumed Iran, policy-makers in Washington were caught wrong-footed. Protests that began in early 1978 escalated throughout the year, and culminated in February 1979 with the ascension of Ayatollah Khomeini and his theocratic regime. Throughout this process, the US intelligence community wrestled with a highly uncertain situation. Their estimative assessments of the unfolding crisis offered little actionable insight to their policy customers. Estimative intelligence, for the purposes of this paper, comprises forward-looking all-source assessments about an indeterminate, dynamic situation.[1] It is designed not to predict the future, but to provide customers with actionable insights, so they can advance their policies even in the face of uncertainty.[2] Estimates fail – as they did in 1978-79 – when they leave the customer unprepared for change, without warning of impending threats and opportunities.

What accounts for the failure of U.S. assessments on the Iranian revolution, and estimative intelligence generally? Some analysts have suggested that US intelligence simply lacked sufficient data on the situation on the ground in Iran – which Israeli intelligence, for example, could better access.[3] Others have suggested that poor analytic tradecraft kept US intelligence analysts from anticipating the potential dangers posed by the protests.[4] Others have suggested that the intelligence community's steady drumbeat of bad news on Iran was unwelcome and ignored by policy-makers who had invested heavily in the Shah's continued rule.[5]

These existing accounts capture the three most common explanations for intelligence failures generally – insufficient data collection, weak analysis, and unreceptive audiences. While they may be reflections of deeper maladies,[6] many explanations equate intelligence failure with a failure to

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reduce uncertainty, because of shortcomings in either collection or analysis.[7] More data and better analysis are always welcome and would doubtless have averted some intelligence failures. But in some cases, including US estimates of the Iranian revolution, they would not have materially reduced uncertainty and would not have better prepared the customer for change. In such cases the root of the failure lies instead in the problematic intelligence-policymaker interaction. But explanations focusing on intelligence-policymaker interaction do not systematically critique the orthodoxy, which keeps intelligence and policymakers at arm's length.[8] In reality, sometimes the problem is not a simple case of customers ignoring intelligence advice, but a more fundamental flaw in the intelligence-policymaker orthodoxy, which limits the types of questions intelligence estimates address.

In this paper I argue that some failures – including the Iran case – are the result of intelligence neglecting a critical variable in the analytic problem: the policymaker's actual and potential impact on the target. The intelligence-policy orthodoxy prescribes a separation, both institutional and analytic, between producers and consumers of intelligence. The intelligence community accordingly aspires to a rich and objective understanding of the target – a neutral "view from nowhere",[9] which sees any intelligence discussion of its own side's actions as anathema, strictly the province of policymakers and strategists. This orthodoxy is driven by a concern over politicization in its many forms – a concern that is fundamentally sound, but often overblown or applied dogmatically. In fact, in some cases this aspiration to a view from nowhere is itself the impediment to effective estimates. Overlooking the customer's impact on the target obscures often critical factors shaping the situation. In the Iran case, intelligence did not highlight the impact of existing US policies, and never even entertained the possible effects of different policy settings.

In contrast, a "view from somewhere" places the customer's policy and preferences at the center of the intelligence problem. As the Iran case illustrates, the view from somewhere could have improved estimates in three ways: it could have warned Washington of critical decision points while they still had leverage to act; it could have explained how US policy had inadvertently shaped the Shah's ineffectual response to unrest; and it could have assessed opportunities for effective policy alternatives. By explicitly accounting for customer's actual and potential impact on the situation – in those cases where policymakers had some influence on the target – analysts would have better prepared customers for change. There is no guarantee that the customers would implement better policy or achieve better outcomes; but they would be better served with more effective estimates. While the intelligence-policy orthodoxy fears that greater integration risks increased politicization, the view from somewhere offers a form of integration that may even reduce the risk that intelligence outputs would be captured by policy interests.

The remainder of this paper is divided into six parts. The first two sections deal with existing explanations for estimative failures – insufficient data and weak analysis, respectively – showing why those explanations may be inadequate in general, and do not apply in the case of the Iranian revolution. Third, I tackle the issue of intelligence-policymaker relations, showing how the orthodoxy is grounded in overwrought fears of politicization. Fourth, I introduce the concept of the view from somewhere, which explicitly incorporates customer interests and preferences in intelligence analysis. Fifth, I briefly illustrate the framework with a case study of the Iranian revolution. Finally, I note some limitations and risks of the view from somewhere, which should guide its application.

Reducing uncertainty with more data

The most common critique of US intelligence during the Iranian revolution centers on its lack of sufficient information. Gary Sick, the National Security Council's lead officer on Iran, excoriated the intelligence community at the height of the crisis, for "the astonishing lack of hard information we are getting", and recommended redoubling the US Embassy's reporting capabilities.[10] A CIA case officer, who was among the US hostages held in Iran in 1979-81, notes that US diplomatic and intelligence reporting for decades before the revolution barely covered the domestic political target

in Iran – because of staffing shortages in Tehran and an apparent lack of demand in Washington.[11] A recent analysis of U.S. cable traffic shows that Washington received reporting of mounting protests, but that reporting was insufficiently alarming to grab policymaker attention.[12] Scholars have since argued that the US could have avoided surprise if it had better collection networks,[13] or a better cultural understanding of the target.[14]

Data collection has traditionally been the solution of first resort – the largest and costliest portions of the intelligence community are dedicated to collection. Much of this is driven by the scarring experiences of strategic surprise, when the US was caught unawares by enemy action, and paid a dear price. Indeed, the totemic examples of intelligence failure are examples of a failure to warn – the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Cuban missile crisis, and the 9/11 attacks all had grave implications for US national security policy, and all stand as examples of warning failure.[15] The simplest solution to such failures is more data. Even if unambiguous indicators of enemy intentions are notoriously difficult to gather, better data collection could have tipped off the US to the location of Yamamoto's fleet, or the transfer of missile canisters across the Atlantic, or the network plotting to hijack aircraft in 2001.

Accordingly, many of the responses to such failures are designed to improve data collection and access. Taking the 9/11 case as an example, this prompted not only major new technical collection programs, but also calls for organizational reforms to allow disparate analysts across the community to share and access data collected by other agencies.[16] Scholars have sidestepped hackneyed calls for "connecting the dots", or finding the "needle in a haystack", but some have suggested that more precise, well-targeted data would have been decisive in avoiding surprise.[17] Unsurprisingly, leaders of collection agencies pounced on the need to "collect the whole haystack".[18] Even in basic intelligence doctrine, the intelligence cycle demands that analysts who cannot readily answer customer requirements should, in the first instance, pulse their collection colleagues for data.[19] This is reasonable up to a point – after all, data is the raw material of intelligence, and utterly necessary for its function.

More recently, the expansion in "big data" has redoubled this temptation. The proliferation of electronic sensors and in computing storage and processing power has enabled the collection of exponentially increasing amounts of data. Much of this data is open-source and structured, allowing easier collation and processing. The availability of this data, combined with accompanying technological tools, promises enormous gains in understanding some aspects of intelligence targets.[20] They could be used, for example, to more efficiently catalog the physical signatures of adversary military platforms, or to analyze trends in social media use in countries facing civil unrest. Sophisticated uses of computational social science, using techniques such as agent-based modelling, can simulate complex social phenomena in ways of obvious utility to intelligence analysis.[21] More and more aspects of the target can be quantifiably described – so that direct observation can replace inference. At their most ambitious, big data champions suggest we may be on the cusp of being able to collect and collate all the relevant data on a given target, obviating even the need for inference.[22] Aggregated data may even lend insights into individuals' motivations and intent, long the most elusive of intelligence secrets.[23]

But estimates face irreducible uncertainty

As alluring as the promise of more data may be, it is a false promise, for two groups of reasons. The first group of reasons is pragmatic – even for targets where observable data exists, some proportion of the data will remain out of practicable reach. In part, this is a function of shifting expectations – as the intelligence community increases its collection capabilities, it will constantly expand the type and set of data it wishes to collect. Imagery intelligence provides a clear example of this: even as resolution and modes of detection in satellite imagery improve, they create a demand for still greater resolution, and still more modes of observation. In part, it is also because there will be no *ex ante* way

of knowing if collectors have gathered enough data, or the right type of data. This is especially true for complex "mysteries", such as social and political revolutions, for which there are apparently limitless data parameters that could conceivably be relevant.

For estimative intelligence, however, there are also theoretical explanations for why some uncertainty is irreducible. First, estimates are by definition forward-looking, anticipating events that have yet to occur, and it is impossible to observe that which has not yet transpired. For this reason, estimates can at best be probabilistic – and will inevitably involve some uncertainty.[24] Second, targets of estimates inhabit social and political systems which are complex, characterized by nonlinearity, feedback loops, and emergent properties. In contrast to linear, mechanistic systems, complex systems cannot be reliably predicted.[25] Third, estimates generally make judgments about causality, which are also unknowable with certitude. Claims about causality can seek to illustrate the causal chain with as much fidelity as possible, but always and inescapably involve an inference that *A* causes *B*.[26] Thus for both pragmatic and theoretical reasons, some uncertainty is irreducible; no matter how much data can be collected, it can never be enough.

As revolution approached in Iran, the US intelligence community began receiving more dire and more urgent reports of impending tumult. In fact relevant data had been received from Iran throughout. US intelligence had reporting that protests were engaging more elements of Iranian society, spreading across the country, and that the clergy was becoming increasingly politicized – all indicators of mounting trouble for the Shah.[27] The problem, however, was that these signals were lost amid contradictory noise. And perhaps more problematically, these indicators of trouble were rejected by intelligence analysts and policymakers with firm pre-existing biases.[28] All-source estimates that reached the policymaker therefore down-weighted reports of instability. Unless the mix of reporting changed radically enough to overturn long-held suppositions among analysts and policymakers – which eventually happened, but only at the height of the revolution – increments of more data would not have improved intelligence estimates.

Reducing uncertainty with better analysis

Other critiques of the Iranian revolution failure rest on the methods of analysis. Critics point out the flawed logic in US assessments which suggested that the mounting protests in Iran must not have been serious because the Shah's regime was not cracking down on them. That supposition in turn reassured American policymakers that their long-standing policy of uncritically backing the Shah was sound.[29] This was a core facet of the failure of estimative intelligence to prepare its customers for impending change.

In most intelligence problems, analysts lack conclusive data and must draw some inferences to make assessments. Long-established methods used in social science offer useful principles for this analytic requirement. A long history of scholars have urged intelligence analysts to adopt best-practices from social science – beginning with Sherman Kent, Washington Platt, and Klaus Knorr, a line of scholars have urged the intelligence community to embrace the scientific method.[30] Just as the scientific method does, these scholars urged the intelligence community to go beyond the data, to theorize causal relationships and infer the target's motivations and intent. Otherwise, as Willmoore Kendall warned, analysts would remain wedded to "a crassly empirical conception of the research process", struggling to keep up with a "tidal wave" of data while gaining little useful insight.[31] Others, like Stephen Marrin, have argued that analysts, who are typically inculcated with a coldly rationalist disposition, would benefit from adding a layer of empathy to their analysis – to see the world through the target's eyes.[32]

To the extent that intelligence failures were the result of poor analysis, they could often be addressed by greater adoption of social science methods in analysis. Indeed, this is a central argument of Jervis' analysis of intelligence on the Iranian revolution and Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD).[33] In both cases, Jervis laments that CIA analysts remained too close to the data, unwilling to use elementary modes of argument commonly found in social sciences. For example, in the example of Iraq

assessments, he argues that analysts could very profitably have used the hypothetico-deductive model – that is, testing whether the hypothesized assessments about Iraq were substantiated by the evidence. Analysts could and should have asked "what events should occur and what evidence should be observable if a particular argument or explanation is correct".[34] A balanced rendering of the evidence, which also weighed the absence of expected evidence, would have introduced more doubt that Iraq actually possessed the weapons. These skewed tests of the evidence and lack of rigorous thinking about causal hypotheses, could have been rectified with the use of social science methods.

Recognizing these lessons, the independent reviews of 9/11 and Iraq WMD intelligence recommended a series of reforms designed to adapt and codify the use of social science methods. They mandated the use of "structured analytic techniques" to inculcate the use of better analysis.[35] They also demanded greater transparency in analysis, so that customers could clearly distinguish between what analysts knew based on reporting, what they inferred, what they still did not know – and how all those elements were assembled into an assessment.[36] In part this also included new guidance on how intelligence assessments should be communicated, acknowledging that precision in communication was part of analytic excellence. The use of such techniques remains uneven, and unevenly effective.[37]

But judgments may still not improve Social science methods, when properly applied to intelligence analysis, are likely to improve the analytic understanding of the complex reality being examined. However, they may not leave the policymaker better prepared for change. Jervis, in his analysis of the cases of Iran and Iraq, makes a trenchant case for the use of social science methods, but even he concedes, in the central thesis of his study, that:

> while there were errors and analysis could and should have been better, the result would have been to make the intelligence judgments *less certain* rather than to reach fundamentally different conclusions.[38]

That is, better analysis would have had the opposite effect of its intended purpose. It would not have reduced uncertainty, and was unlikely to have changed bottom-line assessments. At best, this may have sensitized the customer to a wider range of possibilities – policy-makers in Washington, if they took the intelligence at face value, may have then been more open to the possibility of an Iranian revolution, or a lack of Iraqi WMD.[39] In fact, this injection of uncertainty – especially by raising "inconvenient facts and unwanted interpretations which challenge reigning assumptions, presumptions, and preferences" – is precisely the purpose of intelligence advice, lest policymakers pursue their plans too uncritically.[40]

Most importantly, however, better analysis would not have enabled better decision-making. As Jervis notes, the more uncertain judgments developed by better analysis "would not have made policymakers' lives or decisions easier and would not have been happily received, but [they] would have been truer to the evidence".[41] Therein lies their critical shortcoming: while social science methods are necessary for better analysis, they are not sufficient for effective intelligence support. They are focused primarily on delivering a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the situation, which is critical. But they are not designed to improve the decision-makers' agility or resilience in the face of contingent reality.

In the Iran case, more social-scientifically rigorous estimates would have been dismissed as equivocation, and certainly no grounds to discard decades of an apparently successful policy. As CIA veteran Daugherty put it,

> In all probability, the only interagency intelligence assessment which might have caught [policymakers'] attention would have been a unanimous and unequivocal community assessment stating that "the Shah's days are numbered and here's how, why, and when."[42]

Analytic rigor, in other words, is necessary but not sufficient to prepare customers for change. At best, better analysis in 1978 may have flagged the possibility of the Shah's ouster earlier; but it would not have been dispositive. Gary Sick lambasted the intelligence community for its reluctance to

"make the call" that the Shah was doomed.[43] But better analysis would not have made a clear call any more likely. Given the policymakers' hunger for certitude, more rigor would not have resulted in effective warning.

Rethinking intelligence-policymaker relations

The third type of explanation for intelligence failures focuses on how intelligence is accepted and used – or not accepted and misused – by the policymaking customer. Most discussions of the interaction between intelligence and policymakers are concerned with the threat of politicization: whereby policymakers exercise undue influence to elicit intelligence assessments supporting their policy positions, or use intelligence product as a cudgel in domestic rivalries, or unfairly blame intelligence analysis for poor policy outcomes.[44] Politicization, of course, is not entirely avoidable – and nor is it, as Richard Betts argues, necessarily a corrupting influence; bringing policy concerns into analysis should make intelligence more useful, so long as it does not violate the "irrevocable norm" of leaving judgments untouched.[45]

Some scholars have recognized that the "proximity" between intelligence and policymaker therefore involves a trade-off – a balance, as Richard Betts characterized it, between "incorruptibility or influence".[46] Greater integration may increase intelligence's utility for the decision-maker, but comes at increased risk of politicization; whereas greater separation is more likely to assure analytic independence, but also heightens the risk of irrelevance.[47] The U.S. intelligence community, at least, has come to accept uncertain influence over policymaking in exchange for assurances against politicization. Influence is desirable and a measure of good performance, but guarding against politicization is a core value that brooks no compromise. This is the prevailing intelligence-policy orthodoxy – intelligence is clearly separated from policy; both institutionally, with different organizations and personnel, and normatively, with procedures and deeply held beliefs.

The intelligence-policy orthodoxy was advanced and critiqued when the US intelligence community was in its infancy. Its most significant – although not first – champion was Sherman Kent, whose 1949 treatise on strategic intelligence was met with an immediate riposte by Willmoore Kendall. Kent argued that intelligence and policy must remain institutionally, procedurally, and substantively separate from each other, to ensure that intelligence advice was objective and rigorous.[48] For Kent, intelligence should first and foremost be concerned with mastering knowledge of the target, rather than influencing policy.[49] Kendall argued for somewhat more integration, suggesting that intelligence should not seek simply to understand and predict world events, but to advise political leaders on how best to advance American interests.[50] This "debate" between Kent and Kendall defined the two broad schools of thought on intelligence-policymaker relations for decades to come.[51]

According to the orthodoxy, only by being organizationally and procedurally separate from policy can intelligence pursue objective and systematic study of its target. Kent warns that integration would bring with it at least two major risks: politicization and distortion. First, even in the absence of overt pressure from superiors to slant assessments, integrated intelligence analysts are more likely to fall prey to unconscious bias reaffirming a certain policy when surrounded by officials committed to that policy. Second, intelligence analysts who are apprised of their own side's position in a given situation are likely to skew their assessments of the target, allowing that knowledge of their own side's strengths or weaknesses to implicitly taint judgments of the target's capability or intent.[52] History offers many examples of these types of distortions, which sometimes fuse together – from unduly favorable assessments of the Vietnam war to worst-case assessments of Iraq's weapons programs.[53]

The orthodoxy is so prevalent that it has weathered recent major crises and reforms in the intelligence community. Reforms since the debacles of 9/11 and Iraq WMD intelligence focused, in particular, on data collection and analytic rigor. When reforms have advocated integration, it has been integration within the intelligence community, not between intelligence and policy. The US

intelligence community brought down many walls, organizational and procedural, especially between collectors and analysts, and between foreign and domestic intelligence.[54] But the walls between intelligence and policy remained. In fact, if anything the post-Iraq reforms reinforced the normative consensus on separation of intelligence and policy – because, by many accounts, the fault lay in politicization, or at least improper influence, which distorted intelligence.[55]

Indeed, politicization is the central concern that sustains the orthodoxy. Intelligence agencies may be subject to any number of other pathologies – up to an including subversion of the state's constitutional order – but they do not have the same implications for intelligence-policy relations.[56] Politicization is a danger that lurks in various different forms. It could occur most obviously and directly, from top-down direction to change assessments; or more indirectly, by rigging the institutional rules or personnel involved, so that one assessment is more likely to prevail; or more organically, through bottom-up pressures or rewards to conform to prevailing sentiment.[57] Political leaders may seek to doctor intelligence findings for a range of reasons – everything from gaining advantage in domestic debates[58] to supporting diplomatic initiatives.[59]

As a practical matter, intelligence professionals routinely change the emphasis or framing of their advice to customers, so they do not squander their credibility or undermine their relationships on relatively trivial matters. There is a "thin line between managerial responsibility and political manipulation",[60] but one which intelligence agencies and professionals routinely navigate. Some research suggests that such closeness yields little apparent benefit to intelligence agencies, while continuing to risk the destructive implications of politicization.[61] Other scholarship argues almost the opposite, arguing that intelligence could continue seeking objectivity in analysis, while being explicit in advocating for a particular policy position – precisely because that explicit advocacy would force implicit biases out into the open.[62]

Empirically, however, the link between separation and politicization is not so clear. The orthodoxy as institutionalized in the US has, by some accounts, been riven with politicization, despite its fidelity to separation;[63] whereas models that favor greater integration, such as in the UK, have not suffered higher rates of politicization.[64] Indeed, most scholarship on politicization relies explicitly or implicitly on the model of the U.S. intelligence community, and especially CIA; many other democracies do not share the same institutional or normative set-up, the same concerns with politicization, or the same orthodoxy of intelligence-policy separation.[65]

The orthodoxy is an ideal type; in practice, the functional differentiation prescribed by orthodoxy is much muddier. Policymakers, especially, routinely do their own analysis of the situation. Even the prophet of orthodoxy, Kent, recognized that sometimes policymakers may have just as much experience dealing with the target, and are more likely to have a broader, more contextualized view than the specialized intelligence analyst.[66] Except in the most adversarial cases, policymakers are also more likely to have the unique advantage of direct interaction with counterpart officials of the target state. Those relationships with the target are a double-edged sword: they can distort the policymaker's view as much as enlighten it. Leaders, especially, often place too much stock in fleeting or manipulatable personal relationships with their opposite numbers.[67] Whatever the source of their own analytic self-confidence – whether a special insight or none at all – it is the customer's prerogative to make their own mental "images" of the target and disregard intelligence advice.[68] The policymaker is the supported element in the national security apparatus, and intelligence is the supporting element. Indeed, in many cases intelligence is a "duplicative step" in the policy process.[69]

Similarly, intelligence often comes close to the edge of what the orthodoxy permits. Most commonly, this comes in the form of setting, or at least elaborating on, intelligence requirements. The issuance of requirements, the first stage of the intelligence cycle, ought to be the province of the policymaker. But in the absence of sufficiently clear or detailed or updated requirements, intelligence is more likely to "usurp" what is nominally the policymaker's role and fill in the blanks to establish their collection and analysis priorities.[70]

More occasionally, intelligence also offers especially pointed advice on opportunities for policy action – what may be called "opportunity analysis".[71] Such analysis assesses the implications – and thereby weigh the advantages and disadvantages – of one or more possible policy options, while still adhering to the orthodoxy's proscription against advocacy for a specific policy direction. In a recent Australian intelligence review, opportunity analysis was singled out as a form of analysis that can provide useful actionable advice to policymakers.[72] Nevertheless, the orthodoxy can accommodate such forms of analysis – opportunity analysis, when done properly, makes no recommendations to the policymaker, and so stays clear of the injunction against policy advocacy. It is also very rare – in the vast majority of output, intelligence is entirely concerned with the target and does not even acknowledge its customers' policy actions or options.

In sum, intelligence-policy proximity has fluctuated at different times and with different agencies. In some historical cases, procedural integration was especially close.[73] Short of that, analysts are now commonly directed to provide "actionable" intelligence, which requires an intimate understanding of policymaker priorities. But even the standard-bearer of this actionable-intelligence approach, then-Deputy Director of CIA Robert Gates, only urged that intelligence "has to understand what is on [the policymakers'] mind" to maximize its relevance.[74] That is, even this approach, which is often viewed as the most bullish on intelligence-policy interaction, stays well within the orthodoxy, advocating merely that analysis of the target be responsive to policymaker priorities. Actionable intelligence seeks to be relevant and responsive, but still limits analysis only to the actions of the target.

In focusing solely on the target, the intelligence-policy orthodoxy adopts the "view from nowhere" – an epistemological conceit that the target is an object to be observed as objectively as possible.[75] It purports to offer a snapshot appreciation of the situation, albeit as comprehensive and empirically rich as possible, from which predictions may even be made. The view from nowhere seeks to transcend any particular point of view or perspective. Instead, it aspires to an understanding of the world – or a target within it – that is as objective as possible, detached from the character and preferences of the observer. Philosopher Thomas Nagel notes the core benefit of such an objective view:

> We rightly think that the pursuit of detachment from our initial standpoint is an indispensable method for advancing our understanding of the world and of ourselves, increasing our freedom in thought and action, and becoming better.[76]

Thus applied to intelligence, the orthodox analyst and agency must maintain a studied distance from the target. Kendall described the orthodoxy's norm thus:

> The course of events is conceived not as something you try to influence but as a tape all printed up inside a machine; and the job of intelligence is to tell the planners how it reads. With this conception of intelligence one does not, and, on the record at least, cannot distinguish between what we may call absolute prediction and contingent prediction. The latter is what the government needs, especially in peacetime.[77]

"Absolute prediction" here denotes the idea that events will transpire in a certain mechanistically predictable – almost inevitable – way, whereas "contingent prediction" suggests that the future trajectory remains unwritten, and can be shaped and influenced by an agentive customer of intelligence. Kendall's point was that Kent's orthodoxy erroneously treats the intelligence endeavor as though the target is independent of the customer; whereas in fact intelligence's purpose is to support the customer's efforts to shape and influence the target.

In intelligence practice, as in philosophy, the view from nowhere's objectivity is an aspirational norm. Intelligence analysts all have implicit biases, and recognize that fact when they use structured analytic techniques to overcome their cognitive shortcomings. The problem is magnified in intelligence because these biases are reflected in collection priorities. So the intelligence community artificially limits the data and perspectives that it gathers, presenting analysts with an already distorted subset of data – a form of selection bias – which further deepens their analytic predilections.

The intelligence community maintains the view from nowhere as the analytic norm even in instances of relatively close intelligence-policy integration. Even in cases where restructuring reforms sought to improve intelligence-policy interaction – such as the creation of a cabinet-level Director of National Intelligence position – the intelligence community's epistemological frame and procedural norms have abided faithfully to the view from nowhere. The increasing emphasis on actionable intelligence has increased the use of opportunity analysis, but very rarely – outside some military operations – does intelligence drive decision-makers' tempo or shape their agenda. And assessing the impact of the customer's previous actions on the target remains virtually anathema.

A new perspective: the view from somewhere

The alternative to the view from nowhere is the "view from somewhere". This ideal-type alternative to the intelligence-policy orthodoxy, sees both the target situation and the customer's policy as variables shaping assessments. Of course the primary purpose of intelligence remains assessment of the target, but in the view from somewhere, that assessment is made with reference to the customer's actual and potential impact on the target. It is self-consciously subjective; not in the sense that it permits baseless opinionating – it still aspires to the highest standards of analytic rigor – but in the sense that it assesses the target through the prism of what matters from a particular point of view – the customer's. Kent himself declared that useful intelligence must be tied to a particular policy question: "unless [intelligence] is complete, accurate, and timely, and *unless it is applicable to a problem which is up or coming up*, it is useless".[78] The orthodoxy attempts to accomplish this simply through the *questions* that policy asks of intelligence – the provision of initial guidance on priorities – which are then answered with strict disregard for policy concerns. The view from somewhere demands that intelligence's *answers* to policy – the analytic outputs – also directly address policy interests.

The view from somewhere makes the customer's actual and potential impact on the target an explicit variable in analysis of the target. It thereby brings into the open some factors that, in traditional analysis, may remain obscured by the orthodoxy's imperative to focus solely on the target. Other analytic methods place the customer even more centrally. Net assessment, for example, offers a comparative assessment of the analyst's own side and the adversary; but it is generally conducted by policy analysts rather than intelligence because the orthodoxy prohibits intelligence analysis of friendly forces, and a synthesized assessment of friend and foe requires intimate knowledge of the policymakers' most closely-guarded strategies and plans.[79]

In which cases would the view from somewhere make a meaningful difference to estimative intelligence? It is most important in cases where the target is significantly dependent on the US – such as pre-revolutionary Iran – or committed to competition with it – such as Iran or China today. The target need not be an adversary – indeed, pre-revolutionary Iran was a critical U.S. ally, as was the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan before it succumbed to the Taliban in 2021. In such cases, intelligence estimates can critically evaluate existing and possible options beyond the continuation of support to the ally government. That is, it matters most when the US policymaking customer looms large in the target's thinking and actions. It will obviously have less impact in cases where the target regards the US as one of many minor influences.

Estimative intelligence can take the view from somewhere in three ways. First, it can better synchronize with the customer's key decision points. This not only means providing timely advice for major policy decisions, but also, critically, it means shaping the customer's decision points – warning policymakers of closing windows of opportunity to act, or salient inflexion points where the target may be particularly responsive to policy action.

Second, intelligence can candidly acknowledge the effects, good and bad, of its customer's past or extant policy. Honest appraisal of policy effects on the target may be otherwise elusive; and intelligence should offer the policy's authors every opportunity to amend or redouble their efforts. In estimative intelligence especially, this should extend to yet-unseen but possible future effects of existing policy.

Third, intelligence can offer opportunity analysis – assessments of the implications and second-order effects of future policy options. These may include options that policymakers are actively considering, as well as hypothetical options that the intelligence analysts devise, possibly by reverse-engineering how desired effects on the target could be caused by the policy customer's actions.

The view from somewhere intrinsically accepts that policy settings are not fixed. Indeed the purpose of estimative intelligence is to prepare customers for a changing situation, so they may accordingly anticipate or at least respond to those changes. This is especially the case in crises, when looming threats demand reassessment of extant policy settings. But it is also true in peacetime, when policymakers could be on the look-out for opportunities to advance national interests. Assessing how policy could profitably change requires understanding the implications, including the unobvious second order effects, of that policy change – as well as the implications of not changing. In the view from somewhere, this is as central a task of intelligence as the baseline appreciation of the situation.

Widening analysts' aperture to also consider new decision points or opportunity analysis also requires overcoming the in-built collection and analytic paradigm, based on existing policy settings. Analysts already use structured analytic techniques to overcome implicit biases, and these would be even more critical in a faithful application of the view from somewhere. This also reinforces the importance of intelligence conducting such alternative analyses, because their policy analyst brethren would be even more deeply implicated in the prevailing paradigm, and even less likely to break free of it.

Getting the customer to listen

To be effective, the intelligence community's use of the view from somewhere would require up-front buy-in from the customer. In some cases this may not be difficult. Opportunity analysis, for example, is often sorely missed and increasingly welcomed by policymakers. A 1990 NIE that correctly warned of the impending break-up of Yugoslavia went largely unheeded by policymakers – in large part because the NIE did not offer any opportunity analysis that could facilitate responses from a policymaking system already overstressed by concurrent crises from Eastern Europe to the Persian Gulf.[80] More recently, US policymakers have openly stated they and their colleagues would welcome more such analyses, as long as they struck an appropriately non-prescriptive tone.[81]

In many other cases, however, the view from somewhere will be a shock. Unless the policymaking customer willingly embraces intelligence taking the view from somewhere, such assessments will be perceived as taking pot shots at current policy, or interfering in the normal process of weighing options. Policymakers are then likely to ignore assessments, and cut off access. This is especially the case when the policy is entrenched and not up for review:

> Analysis that undermines a policy option is most useful if it arrives before a decision to choose that option is made. It may be discomfiting or unwelcome even then, but it has more of a chance of affecting choice. Once policymakers move from decision to implementation, however, their interests become vested.[82]

There have been occasions when policymakers embraced more integration with intelligence. In one historical example, intelligence was fed directly into National Security Council papers, creating joint assessments which offered both intelligence analysis of the target and policy options. Those assessments were extremely well-received by customers, and represented unparalleled intelligence impact on the policy process.[83] This example of intelligence-policymaker integration attracted relatively little policy resistance because intelligence provided inputs to papers that were authored and controlled by policy – it played a close supporting role in policymakers' process. In the view from somewhere, however, the intelligence community would be producing intelligence products with the admixture of policy references. This intelligence-driven analysis is more likely to be seen as usurpation or unwanted meddling from an outside agency.

To secure policymaker buy-in, the executive leader that oversees both customer and intelligence must signal their enthusiasm for the view from nowhere. They could even mandate the change, although that is more likely to work in a military rather than civilian setting, and is less likely to result in enduring change. A better option than a mandate would be incentivizing the customer to accept greater contestability or opportunity analysis in their policy work – which many policymakers already routinely welcome.

Such intelligence advice is also much more likely to be received in the constructive spirit in which were intended – and therefore heeded – if it comes in the context of an overall productive and mutually-respectful relationship between intelligence and policy. Practically, such relationships depend on cultivating effective interpersonal relationships. Delivering critical feedback, or warning of impending risks, or assessing the relative advantages of different policy options, is often much more easily done in person, face to face between acquainted colleagues, than in a written formal product that arrives without warning. Intelligence analysts also have an interest in using the approach sparingly, lest too-frequent calls for policy adjustment damage their credibility. Just as NIEs are a "for the record" synthesis of assessments that have often already been conveyed piecemeal to customers,[84] formal written estimates that adopt the view from somewhere should be used sparingly, as punctuation marks in an ongoing intelligence-policy conversation. Otherwise, they risk being rejected out of hand.

A limited revision

This is not a root and branch critique of the intelligence-policy orthodoxy. It is a critique of the orthodoxy's epistemological paradigm of the view from nowhere, which dictates that intelligence must willfully ignore, or at least not address, the policymaker's plans and preferences. It is not a critique of the orthodoxy's organizational or personnel prescriptions – there are compelling reasons why intelligence and policy should occupy different and independent institutions, and why intelligence should cultivate an independent and professional cadre of all-source analysts.[85]

More fundamentally, this is not a critique of the orthodoxy's red line that intelligence should never advocate for one policy over another. Even with the view from somewhere, Kent's exhortation still holds: "Intelligence is not the formulator of objectives; it is not the drafter of policy; it is not the maker of plans; it is not the carrier out of operations".[86] Analysts presenting the view from somewhere, in explicitly commenting on policy settings, would have to be especially deliberate in avoiding the "unconscious politicization" caused by their implicitly-biased views of the customer's policy approach.[87]

Nor is it an argument that all intelligence analysts should be privy to all of the state's most closely guarded policy secrets, of the type that would be necessary for net assessment. Secrecy is to an extent essential – policymakers seek to protect their plans and preferences from unnecessary exposure, just as intelligence professionals see to protect their sources and methods. So there are reasonable grounds to maintain limits on the flow on information from policy to intelligence. But when secrecy stipulations are applied too stringently, they can become self-defeating: "You can pile on the armor until the man inside is absolutely safe and absolutely useless".[88] Intelligence can still adopt the view from somewhere while protecting policy-sensitive information – under the general principle of the need-to-know, and with well-established practices of granting selective access to compartmented information, and expanding that access in times of crisis.

The view from somewhere and the Iranian revolution

In an internal memorandum to staff at the height of the crisis, in February 1979, Director of Central Intelligence Stansfield Turner defended the intelligence community's work on Iran. "No intelligence service predicted [that Khomeini would replace the Shah]", he wrote, "no newspaper columnist; no academic; nor the Shah; nor, I suspect, did Khomeini".[89] Some subsequent analyses have

sympathetically agreed – that the intelligence community gave notable indications of trouble in Iran, but could not be expected to predict the future.[90] Accurate prediction of complex political events is, indeed, impossible; and estimates are exceedingly difficult. But the purpose of estimates – and the metric upon which they should be judged – is not to predict the target but to prepare the customer.

American national interests in Iran revolved around maintaining the strategic status quo of a powerful – indeed indispensable – ally. The central policy questions facing Washington was whether and how it should encourage the Shah to maintain control – using carrots and sticks – and, once it was apparent the Shah would lose control, the extent to which the U.S. would back a particular group as the successor regime.[91] As the crisis escalated, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski advocated for a U.S.-backed military coup. Coloring these considerations throughout the crisis was a thread of American thinking, led by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, which emphasized the centrality of human rights in the Carter administration's approach to foreign policy, and especially Iran. U.S. policy was far from the decisive element in causing or enabling the revolution; but more effective estimates would have equipped U.S. decision-makers to maximize their impact on the situation. Washington could, for example, have nudged the Shah to manage unrest or, failing that, establishing productive relations with his successor. Of course, improved intelligence is no guarantee of improved policy; and even less, of improved outcomes.

My argument here is that the prevailing analytic paradigm of the view from nowhere delayed prudent planning, and obscured the actual and potential impact of US policy on the situation in Iran. The U.S. intelligence community viewed the target narrowly as a friendly regime under mounting pressure. A view from somewhere would have widened that focus to consider other factors, including a closer reading of the population and the opposition, and the impact of U.S. policy on those dimensions of the target. Highlighting those variables, with a view from somewhere, would have prepared customer better for change. Such analysis would not have improved intelligence predictions of events in Iran, but it would have primed US policy-makers to consider how best to adjust their actions in response to a rapidly evolving crisis. Such a perspective would have operated in the three ways I outlined in the previous section: shaping the customers' decision cycle; judging the impact of existing policy; and opportunity analysis.

Synchronize with or shape customer's decision cycle

To be effective, estimates must support the customer's decision cycle. Decision points are usually either predictable, given routine bureaucratic processes, or obvious, in the form of requests for information. In such demand-driven instances, the intelligence community must simply be responsive to its bureaucratic obligations. In other cases, however, the policymaking customer may not be engaged in a routine process about the target, or may be comfortably confident in the standing assessment about the target. In those cases, the view from somewhere dictates that the intelligence community has an obligation to warn its customers – based on its understanding of the fluid target situation and the customer's policy interests – about the opening or closing of a window of opportunity to act.

In the Iran case, a major analytic issue throughout the crisis was the question of when the Shah would use force to crack down on protestors. CIA assessed that, given the pattern of popular revolutions and the Shah's own behavior during earlier unrest, he would crack down when the protests became sufficiently threatening – thus the lack of a crack-down suggested to CIA that the protests were not especially dangerous. Jervis takes CIA to task because this logic was circular and not falsifiable.[92] But this reasoning also gave US policy-makers no identifiable opportunities to intercede or urgency to alter their approach. Indeed, if anything, it served as an anti-warning, comforting decision-makers that no action was necessary.

In a highly uncertain situation, where intelligence made no clear predictions, policymakers felt no pressure to make urgent decisions. Gary Sick complained that "each individual and each organizational element procrastinated, waiting for incontrovertible evidence before pronouncing such a fateful judgment".[93] Throughout the crisis, this uncertainty delayed effective policy action.

Early in the Iran crisis, US intelligence did provide accurate assessments – but they failed in their task of highlighting the policymakers' finite opportunity to act. One key and early possible decision point came in early 1978, just after the violent January protests in Qom, which marked the start of pre-revolutionary unrest. At that time, INR reported the protests were "the most serious of their kind in over a decade", but that "they are not an immediate threat to the Shah's regime".[94] That was accurate, but it served as an anti-warning, conveying to American policymakers that the unrest would be limited.

A view from somewhere, even without the benefit of knowing what was to come, would have reframed the assessment, suggesting that the Iranian situation was at that stage still amenable to shaping by the Shah, and possibly by Washington. Indeed, some actors did reach that conclusion. By March, as protest kept escalating, the Israeli Embassy in Tehran assessed that violent regime change overthrowing ther Shah was "highly likely".[95] An outside expert advised the State Department that the Shah "can now only respond with more and more coercive force and military control and repression"[96] – thereby not only presenting a bleak assessment, but also framing the policy decision for Washington. The spring and summer of 1978 presented the U.S. with a viable window of opportunity, when unrest was clearly a threat to the Shah, but not yet uncontrolled, and revolution not yet inevitable. Its unclear – and unknowable – whether the U.S. could have averted disaster for the Shah, but certainly U.S. policymakers could have been more seized of the matter and apprised of the urgency to act.

Instead, intelligence continued to inaccurately judge the regime was basically stable. Starting in June 1978, the intelligence community began to compile an NIE on "Iran to 1985". Although very ambitious in scope, it was nevertheless analytically useful in identifying some root causes of opposition to the regime, and questioning the loyalty of the Shah's military. But the product was shelved in September – so its assessments never fed into the policymaking process.[97] Instead, assessments from CIA, DIA, and INR consistently judged that Iran was fundamentally stable and the Shah would retain power for years into the future.[98] In August, CIA judged that Iran was not "in a revolutionary or even pre-revolutionary situation".[99]

A second hypothetical decision point came in early September, when the Shah's police killed and injured hundreds of unarmed protesters in the "Black Friday" massacre. Rather than treating this as an opportunity reassess policy settings, President Carter's tone-deaf response was to make a publicized phone call offering fulsome support to the Shah two days later. This alienated and angered Iranian public opinion, inadvertently further isolating the Shah.[100] A "view from somewhere" approach would have treated this as a potential decision point – even if policymakers decided not to change their position. But intelligence estimates offered no such advice. As late as 28 September, DIA assessed the Shah was "expected to remain actively in power over the next 10 years".[101]

Only when evidence became overwhelming – in November – did intelligence assessments warn of the Shah's dire prospects. The US Embassy in Tehran issued a now-notorious cable titled "Thinking the Unthinkable", which shifted the debate in Washington, from "how to buck up the Shah to the (previously inadmissible) consideration of whether he would survive at all".[102] The same day, an INR report warned that, short of urgent and drastic action, the military would likely intervene – but even military rule would be short-lived in the face of opposition disaffection.[103]

Some policymakers – chiefly Brzezinski – still called for a crack-down, but others disagreed: "By early November, the CIA, the State Department, the American ambassador to Iran, and even the Shah saw the futility of a repressive response to the crisis".[104] In other words, the window of opportunity to restore stability had all but closed, and estimative intelligence had failed. By the end of November, CIA was reporting fatalistically that Khomeini was determined to depose the Shah, and would not accept any compromise.[105] Intelligence was then more focused on closely reporting on the target rather than providing actionable advice to the customer.

The view from somewhere would have shaped the policymakers' decision cycle, compelling them to confront difficult policy choices earlier in the crisis. Some senior CIA officers later lamented: "Several possible intervening factors could have modified or postponed the revolutionary events or

led to a different denouement".[106] The only way those intervening factors could have worked, however, was if intelligence had shaped policymakers' decision cycle. This increased timeliness would have come with increased uncertainty. Indeed, the view from somewhere privileges decision support over predictive accuracy; as Kent argued, "intelligence is not knowledge for knowledge's sake alone, but ... knowledge for the practical matter of taking action".[107] Attuned to the need to support policymaker action, estimates with a view from somewhere would have alerted policy-makers to closing windows of opportunity, even if intelligence and policymaker alike were less confident in their estimates of the future.

Judge the effects of past and current policy

The view from somewhere remains focused on assessing the target situation, but in so doing, acknowledges that the customer's policies may be an important variable shaping that situation. There is, of course, some hesitancy to do this because it would be perceived as unwelcome criticism of the customer's performance. Even without explicitly negative commentary, simply the act of initiating estimates on a high-profile policy issue could be viewed as inflammatory. Senior US analysts, for example, were reluctant to offer analyses of the likely effects of the impending war in Iraq, lest they be accused of second-guessing policy.[108] Little wonder, then, that even if intelligence had an impulse to conduct such analysis, and even if it was not outright stopped by the customer, it would likely confront a countervailing impulse to self-censor, to conserve its bureaucratic capital. Of course, not all policy impacts are negative; identifying instances of effective policy can be just as useful for the customer, as a guide of how to manage a particular target.[109]

At the time of the revolution, however, the impact of past US policies were hardly positive. Disregarding the impact of US policy greatly skewed US assessments because it neglected a significant causal factor in how the crisis was developing. President Carter's effusive embrace of the Shah, including massive new arms deals, helped to inflame anti-regime protests in 1978; the Shah, in turn, assured of uncritical US support, incoherently vacillated between half-measures of reform and repression.[110]

Several estimative assessments in the course of 1978 accurately noted the Shah's dilemma between continuing a program of gradual political liberalization and more forcefully cracking down on violent unrest.[111] In fact the Shah's inconsistent response – with some bloody but haphazard repression – was in large part a result of long-standing US pressure to respect human rights.[112] It was clear that neither political concessions or force alone would ameliorate the situation – the draft NIE, representing all agencies, noted the need for a bold, decisive mix of political and security action.[113] Intelligence analysts likely understood the Shah's quandary, but the impact of US policy was not identified as a contributory factor in the crisis.

Instead, intelligence assessments continued to treat the Iran target as distant situation unaffected by previous American actions – they carefully avoided any critical references to US policy to avoid the appearance of politicization. Ironically, this concern over perceptions created a different type of actual political pressure – some analysts were even pressured to subtly adjust assessments. DIA analysts, for example, were pressured to adjust language in the draft NIE so that it would not appear critical of US military aid programs.[114]

Sensitivities over avoiding policy criticism also inadvertently narrowed collection, which created a vicious cycle of keeping assessments and policy options narrow. A House of Representatives investigation later found that "long-standing US attitudes toward the Shah inhibited intelligence collection".[115] For example, with the prevailing judgment through most of 1978 that the Shah would survive, diplomatic and intelligence collection de-prioritized reporting on the opposition, leading to less analytic focus on alternatives to regime survival. Not only did this create significant blind spots in intelligence analysis, it also foreclosed potential policy options for decision-makers.

A view from somewhere would instead have explicitly noted that US policy was contributing to the Shah's soft response, in turn allowing the unrest to escalate. If the Shah and Washington wanted to restore order expeditiously, a tougher line would have been necessary, abrogating earlier US policy and ending Washington's deference to the Shah's lackadaisical crisis management.

Assess alternative policy options

Policymakers have a bureaucratic – almost an intrinsic – interest in seeing the success of their policy; so much so that they may view the very existence of alternatives, or a Plan B, as an admission of failure.[116] This often translates to obstinately maintaining existing policy settings even in face of crisis. Intelligence, with less vested in a particular policy and steeped in traditions of objectivity, is better placed to see not only early warning signs of a failing Plan A, but also how possible alternative policies could produce a different outcome. With sound analysis and subject matter expertise about the target, they are also better postured to assess unintended consequences and second-order effects of policy alternatives.

This opportunity analysis made by intelligence differs from policymakers' own analysis in at least two key ways. First, it does not advocate for a particular course of action; it simply lays out the effects and risks of alternate options. In part this to retain objectivity of analysis, as the intelligence-policy orthodoxy well articulates. In part, it is also because policymakers' decisions are a function not only of assessed effects on the target, but also several exogenous variables, including domestic political viability and coordination with policy for other targets, which probably and rightly lie outside the purview of intelligence.

Second, whereas policymakers' analysis seeks to develop and understand different policy options available, the best opportunity analysis works from the other direction. It begins by understanding the target and the extent to which it can be shaped by external actors, and then reverse-engineers that shaping to analyze what options the policymaker could use to achieve those effects. This should have the added benefit of creatively brainstorming policy options that the policymaker, cognitively biased by existing policy settings, may have overlooked.

In the Iranian revolution, intelligence resiled from even entertaining the possibility of different US policy settings. CIA presumed US policy would remain fixed. As Jervis notes, "If one believes that issuing a warning is useless, then one is less likely to believe that a warning is needed".[117] Since policy supported the Shah, CIA did not make analytic inquiries that could have informed policy change. INR came somewhat closer. In November, it assessed that "if [the Shah] does nothing to channel the course of events, he is likely to be ousted" – thereby leaving open the possibility that a tough regime response could yet shape outcomes.[118]

The draft NIE, aborted in September 1978, thoroughly assessed the Shah's near-term prospects, pointing out that the unrest required a mix of hardline security enforcement and long-term political concessions.[119] This was analytically honest because it highlighted that its estimate could not be not deterministic, but contingent on government actions. But it was limited to actions that the Shah's regime could undertake – and thereby relegated the US government to a spectator role. Policymakers could have extrapolated from the analysis to find points of US leverage, but they were not prompted to believe they had effective options to influence, and their analysis would not have the benefit of intelligence systematically and objectively analyzing the potential effects, including second-order effects, on the target.

Granted, opportunity analysis would have faced an uphill struggle to be accepted. Even at the height of the crisis, in December 1978, once it was clear that the Shah's demise was inevitable, President Carter and Brzezinski rebuffed a policy proposal to encourage an orderly transition of power and opening channels of communication with Khomeini.[120] They would likely have resisted earlier intelligence analysis of alternative policy options, when the prognosis was more optimistic. But perhaps such analyses would have helped to cultivate, over time, an openness to alternative thinking; or allowed other elements of the policymaking apparatus to consider and prepare alternatives in a timely manner.

Opportunity analysis could have addressed many issues. By understanding the core priority of US policy as the stability of a friendly Iran, US intelligence analysis could have offered some opportunity analysis to weigh the comparative merits and risks of various policy options to achieve that objective. How would the Shah respond if the US urged a security crack-down? What types of concessions should the US counsel the Shah to make? What forms of leverage would be most effective against the Shah? Until what point would US influence be effective? Intelligence could have profitably analyzed these questions – without advocating for any particular course of action – to more pointedly highlight the transient opportunities to protect American interests.

The limits and risks of the view from somewhere

Estimative intelligence can and should serve a purpose beyond reducing uncertainty. Its central measure of effectiveness is if it can equip the policymaking customer to manage unpredictable change. As the Iran case shows, the view from somewhere would have improved on the orthodox view of intelligence-policy relations, by explicitly acknowledging the customer's actual and potential impact on the target, enabling more timely policy responses. Adopting that approach would have allowed the intelligence community to prompt earlier decision points, critically evaluate the effects of existing policy, and objectively explore the implications of changing some policy settings. This approach brings its own caveats and risks.

First and foremost, the view from somewhere does not reduce uncertainty; collecting more data and doing better analysis using social science methods are still critical elements of an effective intelligence enterprise. Using the view from somewhere would not have enabled the US intelligence community to predict a discontinuity like the Iranian revolution, or to overcome basic flaws in analytic processing, or to see through enemy denial and deception. More data and better analysis may have alerted analysts more quickly to the Shah's unexpectedly weak response, or to the opposition's unexpected unity. But with a more intimate understanding of policymaker interests, intelligence could have cued collection and prioritized analysis in a way that provided more actionable advice, rather than seeking to predict the target's trajectory for its own sake.

Second, bringing the customer to the center of the intelligence problem means that intelligence analysts must track two moving objects: the target and the customer. The desired end-states, priorities and other constraints of the customer are also dynamic – they will shift as a function of political evolution, bureaucratic arrangement, or other policy developments. Their demands of the intelligence community will accordingly also shift. Thus the intelligence support required against the same target will also shift, and cannot be assumed to be constant. Continual intimate contact with the customer is necessary. In practice, the customer will not pursue their intelligence counterparts to integrate them more closely into the policy process. It falls to intelligence managers to solicit, interpret, and define the specific analytic questions to be addressed, based on only broad topics provided by customer.

Third, this close intelligence-policy nexus always and inevitably will raise concerns over politicization. It is not, however, the same thing as politicization. In fact, contrary to the intelligence-policy orthodoxy, which sees politicization as an inevitable byproduct of greater proximity, the view from somewhere also shows how intelligence and policy can work more closely while even reducing the risk of politicization. Once again, it falls to the intelligence managers to clarify that their proposed estimative assessments are only offering a scrupulously objective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of existing and potential policy options. The same long-standing injunctions about politicization apply: intelligence analysts must not advocate for one position or another. This tension may be ameliorated in a host of ways, especially through strong intelligence community leadership, but ultimately it is inherent in the intelligence-policymaker relationship. The view from somewhere cannot overcome it any more than the view from nowhere can evade it.

Fourth, understanding and addressing the decision-maker's policy preferences suggests the decision-maker should have a policy in the first place, with articulated end-states and stable preferences. This is, of course, not always the case, when policy-makers – especially when they are

pressed by competing priorities and limited senior-leader bandwidth – simply respond to dynamic events, rather than seek to shape them according to a positive policy vision. Thus, the view from somewhere is more likely to find application only in the biggest, thorniest policy challenges facing decision-makers – and where they have levers of influence they can manipulate – for which they have either a deliberate policy or contingency plans. In most other cases, both intelligence and policy-makers will likely face strong incentives to focus on quick and simple current-intelligence reporting, rather than considered estimates.

Fifth, as with all intelligence advice, the intelligence community can only do so much to shape the customer's views and prepare them for change. When the decision-maker is bent on a certain course of action, no amount of nuanced and useful intelligence assessments will shape their approach. In most cases, when policymakers are confronted with contrary advice that challenges their chosen policy, they are more likely to ignore the inconvenient intelligence rather than reconsider their policy.[121] During the Iranian revolution, changing US policy toward Iran – the linchpin of American strategy in the region – would have entailed changes to policies across the region, coordination with European allies, and extensive domestic political negotiation.[122] Policymakers would be unwilling to overturn such an important policy on the strength of early, uncertain warning signs. The view from somewhere, however, would have been a useful tool to sensitize customers to the risks of not changing course – that failing to even tentatively prepare for change could result in an even costlier policy catastrophe, as occurred with revolutionary Iran.

Finally, as with all intelligence problems, even effective estimates and customer receptivity may not yield a positive policy outcome. Even if a customer has a definite policy and is willing to adjust it, they may lack the policy tools to achieve their desired effects. Even willing policymakers would need to navigate many obstacles, from resource shortages to domestic politics to competing policy priorities, before enacting a change.[123] And even if change is made, there are no guarantees it will affect the target's situation in the desired way. Either way, the task for intelligence is to ensure that the policymaker is prepared for change, has the freedom to act should they choose to exercise it.

Notes

1. Estimative intelligence usually seeks to understand unbounded complex "mysteries," as distinct from the "puzzles" that compromise most other intelligence functions, such as: *current intelligence*, which seeks to interpret the significance of recent events; *foundational intelligence*, which seeks to build encyclopedic knowledge of a target; or *scientific and technical intelligence*, which seeks to understand the parameters and performance of target technologies.
2. In this paper I use estimative intelligence as a generic intelligence function, of which U.S. National Intelligence Estimates are only one example. See Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, especially pp67-88.
3. Bar-Joseph, "Forecasting a Hurricane."
4. Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails.*
5. Donovan, "National Intelligence."
6. There is a prodigious literature on the underlying causes of intelligence failure, covering factors ranging from institutional structure, to organizational culture, to cognitive biases. See, for example: Zegart, *Flawed by Design*; Zegart, *Spying Blind*; Knorr, "Failures"; Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision"; Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment*.
7. Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, and Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy*.
8. For example, Davis, "Facts, Findings". A rare exception is Kerbel and Olcott, "Synthesizing with Clients."
9. Nagel, *View from Nowhere*.
10. Sick, *All Fall Down*, p90.
11. Daugherty, "Intelligence Failure in Iran."
12. Connelly et. al., "New Evidence and New Methods."
13. Bar-Joseph, "Forecasting a Hurricane."
14. Dina Rezk, although not analyzing the Iran case, makes a broader argument about western intelligence agencies' cultural blindness of the Middle East – see Rezk, *Arab World and Western Intelligence.*
15. Grabo, *Anticipating Surprise*, and Cancian, *Coping with Surprise.*
16. McConnell, "Overhauling Intelligence."
17. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack*.
18. Nakashima and Warrick, "Collect it all."

19. Hulnick, "What's Wrong with the Intelligence Cycle."
20. Symon and Tarapore, "Defense Intelligence Analysis.".
21. Frank, "Computational Social Science."
22. Anderson, "End of Theory."
23. Rogers, "Cambridge Analytica Data Apocalypse."
24. Friedman and Zeckhauser, "Assessing Uncertainty in Intelligence."
25. Jervis, *System Effects*.
26. Blankshain and Stigler, "Applying Method to Madness."
27. Donovan, "National Intelligence," pp143-45, Daugherty, "Intelligence Failure in Iran," pp462-64.
28. Donovan, "National Intelligence."
29. Daugherty, "Intelligence Failure in Iran," pp458-59.
30. For an overview, see Marrin, *Improving Intelligence Analysis*, pp.21-36.
31. Kendall, "Function of Intelligence," p550.
32. Marrin, *Improving Intelligence Analysis*, pp49-52.
33. Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*.
34. Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, p152.
35. CIA, "Tradecraft Primer."
36. Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, pp110-111.
37. Artner et. al., "Assessing the Value."
38. Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, p3. Emphasis added.
39. In the Iraq case at least, policymakers would have been unlikely to heed that caution – they had too much invested in their policy settings and were reluctant to change course, regardless of the intelligence advice they received. See Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy*, especially pp13-68.
40. Marrin, "Why intelligence analysis has limited influence."
41. Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, p155.
42. Daugherty, "Intelligence Failure in Iran," p460.
43. Sick, *All Fall Down*, pp41-42.
44. See, for example, Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy*, and Rovner, *Fixing the Facts*.
45. Betts, "Politicization of Intelligence."
46. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, pp66-103.
47. Marrin, "At Arm's Length," and Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*.
48. Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*.
49. Kent, "Estimates and Influence."
50. Kendall, "Function of Intelligence."
51. Davis, "Kent-Kendall Debate." Another framing of debates over proximity counter-poses Kent with Robert Gates, who advocated for more "actionable" intelligence. This more modest and pragmatic call for intelligence-policymaker closeness was more often realized in the US intelligence community; although it was still considered unorthodox and elicited robust bureaucratic resistance. See Westerfield, "Inside ivory bunkers."
52. Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*, pp186-201.
53. Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, pp97-98, Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp121-74.
54. McConnell, "Overhauling Intelligence."
55. Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*.
56. Rovner, *Fixing the Facts*; Faini, *Spies and their Masters*.
57. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*, Hastedt, ""Politics of Intelligence," and Gookins, "Role of Intelligence."
58. Rover, *Fixing the Facts*.
59. Rubin, "Temptation of Intelligence Politicization."
60. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence*. p81.
61. Rovner, "Is Politicization Ever a Good Thing?".
62. Woodard, "Tasting the Forbidden Fruit."
63. Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy*.
64. Marrin and Davies, "National Assessment," p646.
65. Faini, *Spies and their Masters*; Bar-Joseph, "Politicization of Intelligence."
66. Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*, p203.
67. Fournier, "Why Putin Plays our Presidents for Fools."
68. Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp.96-120.
69. Marrin, "Why intelligence analysis has limited influence."
70. Lowenthal, "Policymaker-Intelligence Relationship," pp440-41.
71. Davis, "Challenge of Opportunity Analysis."
72. Commonwealth of Australia, *2017 Independent Intelligence Review*, p32.
73. Marrin and Davies, "National Assessment."
74. Quoted in Westerfield, "Inside Ivory Bunkers," p27.

75. Nagel, *View from Nowhere*.
76. Nagel, *View from Nowhere*, p6. Nagel goes on to say "But since we are who we are, we can't get outside of ourselves completely." That is, pure objectivity is asymptotic, unachievable – but still a worthy aspiration.
77. Kendall, "Function of Intelligence," p549.
78. Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*, p180. Emphasis added.
79. Mahnken (ed.), *Net Assessment and Military Strategy*.
80. Treverton and Miles, *Unheeded Warning of War*.
81. Miller, "Lessons for Intelligence Support."
82. Betts, Enemies of Intelligence, p78.
83. Marrin and Davies, "National Assessment."
84. Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, pp68, 77.
85. Marrin, "At Arm's Length or At the Elbow?".
86. Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*, p182.
87. Betts, "Politicization of Intelligence," pp66-68.
88. Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*, p193.
89. CIA, "Notes from the Director."
90. Takeyh, "Did the US Intelligence Community Lose Iran?".
91. For background on the US policy debate during the crisis, see Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, Bayandor, *The Shah*, Emery, *US Foreign Policy and the Iranian Revolution*, and Sexton, *Wages of Principle and Power*, pp308-53.
92. Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, pp69-75.
93. Sick, *All Fall Down*, p42.
94. Quoted in Donovan, "National Intelligence," p144.
95. Bar-Joseph, "Forecasting a Hurricane," p729.
96. James Bill, quoted in Bill, *Eagle and Lion*, p245.
97. Donovan, "National Intelligence," p147.
98. Daugherty, "Intelligence Failure in Iran," p461.
99. Quoted in Guerrero, *Carter Administration*, p93.
100. Bill, *Eagle and Lion*, pp257-58.
101. Bill, *Eagle and Lion*, p258.
102. Sick, *All Fall Down*, p4.
103. INR report dated 2 November 1978, quoted in Donovan, "National Intelligence," p150.
104. Donovan, "National Intelligence," p150.
105. Donovan, "National Intelligence," p152.
106. This claim was made by Klaus Knorr, an academic consultant to CIA. But his views were echoed by senior CIA officials, who stressed that the outcome was not inevitable, or that intelligence could have better informed policy decisions. See Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, pp113-17.
107. Kent, *Strategic Intelligence*, p180.
108. Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty*, p81.
109. For example, the 2007 NIE on Iran's nuclear program assessed that Iran had halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 largely due to international pressure, and a mix of such pressure and inducements could prolong the halt. National Intelligence Council, *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*.
110. Bill, *Eagle and Lion*, p234, and Sexton, *Wages of Principle and Power*, p326.
111. Donovan, "National Intelligence," pp145-46.
112. Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, pp30, 72. James Bill notes that the regime's response was in fact extremely deadly – see *Eagle and Lion*, pp236-37. But it was still ineffective.
113. CIA, "Drfat Iran NIE," pp7-8.
114. As recalled by the former National Intelligence Officer for the region, David Blee, quoted in Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, p112.
115. Quoted in Donovan, "National Intelligence," p160.
116. Jervis, "Why Intelligence and Policymakers Clash."
117. Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, p107.
118. INR report dated 2 November 1978, quoted in Donovan, "National Intelligence," p150.
119. "Iran NIE."
120. These recommendations were made by former Under Secretary of State George Ball – see Donovan, "National Intelligence," pp156-57.
121. Marrin, "Limited influence," pp730-31.
122. Daugherty, "Intelligence Failure in Iran," p468-69.
123. Pillar, *Intelligence and US Foreign Policy*, p183.

Acknowledgments

Disclosure statement

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