

Keeping Secrets Secret in the Post-Modern Era

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Abstract

This paper contains an overview of the U.S. military and intelligence history while examining political, technological, scientific, and cultural issues in the 20th and 21st centuries, where the U.S. intelligence community grew and evolved. In all of these contexts, the paper tries explaining how the U.S. can keep its secrets secret, which is particularly compelling today, where significant intelligence breaches from the lowest levels of the field compromise U.S. security. We show a broad analysis of how American alliances have been weakened and its methods and sources.

KEYWORDS: comparative politics, foreign policy, international relations, international security, politics and social sciences, political science, social sciences, public administration and public policy.

INTRODUCTION

This paper includes a brief overview of the U.S. military and intelligence history. Moreover, the paper explores the political, technological, scientific, and cultural milieu of 20th and 21st centuries in which the U.S. intelligence community grew and evolved. It is within all of these contexts that this paper seeks to answer the question of how the U.S. can keep its secrets secret. This question is especially compelling today in the wake of massive leaks from the lowest levels of the community imperil this nation's security. Hence, we offer a broad, but "all source" analysis on how it is that this country's alliances have been weakened and its methods and even sources have been compromised.

1. The U.S. as a rising power begins to grapple with its strength

For more than 100 years, the American public and U. S. political leadership largely obeyed what President Washington had promulgated in his farewell address to his countrymen: that this nation stay clear of entangling alliances especially those involving the powerful, undemocratic, and amoral European powers. The interpretation of this dictum has varied: to some it has been bolstered a powerful rhetoric of isolationism. On the other hand, this rhetoric was trumped by a calculation of interest. In addition, to the extent that isolationism has informed policy, these putatively isolationist policies have been grounded in geostrategic reality. Hence, U.S isolationism did not emanate from an ideology, philosophic principle, or political slogan; instead isolationism was a physical and geographic reality consisting of the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean and a lack of palpable threat from the north or south (Ruggie, 1997).

Clearly there were exceptions to the putative isolationism. Exceptions from this reality included France's intervention in the Revolutionary War, England's attack on U.S. soil in 1812, and England's intervention in the American Civil War. Moreover, there was no consensus on what isolationism meant. As the 20th century neared and dawned, the U.S. did involve itself in many adventures in Haiti, Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, and other places in the Caribbean and Central America and even in the Pacific. Still, however, it did not contradict George Washington's plea with regard to the Great Powers of Europe. Moreover, demobilization of the ranks usually followed any far-flung military adventures, meaning that any standing army that the U.S. had was a skeleton staff and any information or intelligence units directed at the rest of the world were nonexistent or so secret that they remain unknown until this day.

New and evolving technologies blossomed during the 19th century and the first couple of decades of the 20th century, making the world smaller. This shrinking world included a shrinking Atlantic and Pacific. The telegraph, steam ship, telephone, ever faster railroads, air travel, and the beginnings of radio make distances smaller and make the U.S. more vulnerable to Great Power machinations, ambitions, and the realization of ambition. The instruments of the state, any state, are cold, calculating, and incomprehensively cruel. During World War I, the participants possessed new instruments of death: chemicals, gigantic automatic guns, artillery, tanks, and even air power. This awesome power led the Great Powers into the trap of an unending stalemate. The U.S. could no longer continue to play the role as the "exceptional" isolationist on the world stage. Its economic power and its potential military power belie playing such a role. As World War I ground on, U.S. exceptionalism as suggested by President Washington and subsequent isolationists became untenable.

The United States became impelled to play a global role and found itself in Europe as the only power able to break the stalemate known as World War I. President Wilson framed the war as a onetime exception to Washington's dictums. It was the "War to end all wars" and the war to "Make the world safe for democracy." The Republicans obliged Mr. Wilson's exceptionalism and blocked participation in a League of Nations, and under Mr. Harding's "Return to Normalcy" demobilized the Armed Forces and stopped gathering foreign and/or military intelligence. As Ruggie (1997) states, "The interwar era saw a reversion to American isolationism in security policy and erratic behavior in the international economic realm."

"Normalcy" only lasted some 15 years. By 1935, nations, European and Asian, old and new, rose up against each other to gain territory, power, and wealth. Millions of people in the way were slaughtered or hurt beyond recognition. The madness of mass slaughter and destruction once again engulfed the world. World War II led the U.S. to cooperate with Britain on intelligence matters and this cooperation proved essential for Allied victory. Lives saved by us and British intelligence stemmed from a realization that we could not stay out of all wars forever, or that in the act of preserving American or British lives, we still had to do something about global threats to our allies before they occurred. Intelligence was vital in helping us stop mass slaughter before it occurred, but if not for the brave efforts of those involved in the intelligence field, we would not have been able to continue on to understand the importance of keeping abreast of world affairs. In addition, were it not for the intelligence community, as seen by an open letter (on display at Los Alamos National Lab) from Einstein's associates (the Einstein-Szilard letter)

(Elert, 1997) addressed to the US government about the concerns of Hitler acquiring the means to develop the atomic bomb, we would not have been able to intercept any chance of dangerous technology ending up in the wrong hands.

II. Intelligence as a tool for peace in an era of rapid change, 1947-1989

Between 1947 and 1989, the Cold War forces the U.S. to adopt a permanent military and intelligence presence around the world, often pejoratively called the “national security state.” Although qualms about the “national security state” were uttered by such disparate voices as President Dwight Eisenhower and Senator Eugene McCarthy, activist American foreign and defense policies rested on a bipartisan consensus on the mass and elite levels. And bipartisanship in Congress regarding these policies reflected this consensus.

A domestic consensus involving labor and management in which shared efforts and shared rewards increasingly began to include minorities heretofore excluded from the progress yielded by a growing American economy. A wide consensus regarded material and social progress a commodity that could be exported to the “Third World” as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism.

Hence, between 1947 and 1968, American foreign and defense policies were undergirded by a strong consensus built on the idea of progress: what progress was, how it was to be obtained, and the widening international and domestic circle that would benefit from it. By 1968, political and cultural trends began a process of questioning what constituted progress, if not the very idea of progress. Post-modernists rejected the idea the capitalist and communist notions that history could be imbued by progress. In fact, Klein (1995) posits that post-modernists came to believe that “It was *good* to be without history”.

Despite a crumbling consensus on foreign and defense policies, intelligence of both the U.S. and the Soviet Union kept the superpowers appraised of each other’s capabilities, and to some extent, intentions. This capability possessed by both sides helped to avert thermonuclear war if not the wars, coups, and assassinations that took place on the periphery of the conflict. In addition to military vigilance, the U.S created an alliance structure that provided economic security and dynamic economic growth within its sphere of influence. The health and dynamism of the countries in the U.S alliance structure stood in stark contrast to the growing problems in the Soviet sphere. Nevertheless, vigilance by U.S. intelligence provided the essential ingredient of time that allowed containment to work in the years 1989-1991. American exceptionalism was, in essence, something that we should have realized was truly not the case, but in reality, resembled a system backed by a strong alliance of world powers looking to the US as a guide to action. This strategy leveraged U.S. power in the ideology struggle that characterized much of the Cold War and strengthen our alliance structure (Ceaser, 2012; Gardbaun, 2008).

Because the Cold War was as much an ideological struggle as a geostrategic struggle, soft power became an important tool in limiting Soviet expansion and eventually “rolling it back” in the late 1980s. Essentially, soft power consisted of the dissemination of the ideas of democracy, freedom of expression, capitalistic prosperity associated with the United States and the West. Combining our resources together to represent the culmination of all that we had learned from the flaws of isolationist policy, we can begin to realize that a group effort, with the US setting a positive example, can lead to change in the way we traditionally conducted our affairs, and that by upholding the principles of democracy,

though able to do this on our own with the geographic and physical separation of an ocean in front of us, the world is watching, the world needs us to remain open to the idea that this idea of American exceptionalism can be used to foster change with democratic initiatives, that democracy evolves into a position of responsibility of leadership (Onuf, 2012). Indeed, “Lipset’s investigations did not convincingly argue that the United States’ political or economic institutions are more different from others,” which means that we have much in common with many other nations without actually realizing it (Restad, 2012). Staying ahead of the curve with technological advancements in military and intelligence sectors remains essential to preserving our society.

III. Intelligence as a force-multiplier and deterrent to conflict in the Post-Cold War Era

If soft power is perhaps the greatest tool in the U.S.s arsenal, then it depends upon the hard power of a strong dynamic economy and military with global reach that can carry out self-interested interventions and humanitarian missions. U.S. military power without robust intelligence would be prohibitively expensive in terms of both dollars and lives and would be ineffective no matter the lives and dollars that might be expended in pursuing the U.S.’s interest.

According to Pellerin (2013), scientists and engineers at the Missile Space Intelligence Center perform the vital function of pulling together threat assessments of SAMs, anti-tank weapons, and short-range ballistic missiles. Our soldiers serving all around the work can encounter these dangerous threats. The job of MISC is to allow our men and women in uniform to not have to encounter these threats through all source intelligence and proper analysis on their own. When and if they do encounter these threats, intelligence, such as that arrayed at MISC in Redstone, Alabama, will give them the critical knowledge to survive and win the fight.

A vital part of MISC’s mission is to enhance the survivability of American air assets. Pellerin’s description of MISC’s various missions reminds us that air superiority is essential in giving our troops a fair chance on the battlefield in order that they can perform their mission without unheard of serious casualties.

Furthermore, Pellerin points that as the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons spreads throughout the world, the “short-range” nature of ballistic missiles possessed by such countries as North Korea is more consequential and dangerous to global stability. The computing power of MISC enables the lab to analyze tactical, strategic, and global threats.

IV. Intelligence and democracy

Military power serves democracy by allowing it to flourish in this country and abroad. Most of mankind for most of its history has not experienced anything resembling liberal democracy. Historically, democracy is an aberration. It is also an aberration that has many detractors depending on a geographic and temporal specificity.

Ironically, U.S. intelligence operations are subject to more public scrutiny and legislative oversight than comparable operations in any other nation democratic or otherwise especially since the Church Committee Senate Hearings of 1975. More specifically the conduct of U.S. government operations, including military and supposedly “covert” intelligence operations is more transparent by far than those other nations including

democratic allies such as the U.K., France, Israel, German, and Japan. Illegal scrutiny of such operations threatens to make them so transparent as to render U.S. intelligence a ludicrous travesty that will be exploited by our non-democratic “enemies” and even more so by our democratic allies, allies whose operations are little different from U.S. intelligence but are much more secret, even hypocritically. So, one of the fiercest critics of the excesses and abuses of U.S. intelligence agencies, Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, stated, with regard to the National Security Agency, “The value of its work to our national security has been and will continue to be inestimable. We are determined to not to impair the excellent contributions made by the NSA to the defense of our country” (p. 2, October 29, 1975, Select Committee to Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities of the United States Senate, Ninety-Fourth Congress). Mr. Church went on to denote the meticulous safeguards to insure that secrets were kept secret, while allowing an extensive public airing of abuses by the U. S. intelligence community (2). This hearing publicly unearthed extremely controversial misdeeds, such as the MNARET program, in which the NSA spied on anti-Vietnam war protesters in the 1960s, to see if they were controlled by foreign adversaries such as the Soviet Union (149-151). These programs were examined, sometimes using NSA documents in public as exhibits, without endangering U.S. soldiers, sailors, airmen, diplomats, or other people, U.S. or otherwise, who work for our government. After 9-11 and the 2001 USA Patriot Act, it is even more necessary for our democracy that questions of intelligence operations to be accountable to elected officials and that elected officials be accountable to the public. The need for secrecy and the need for accountability both be pursued in the spirit of the Select Committee to Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities of the United States Senate, Ninety-Fourth Congress.

V. Intelligence in the “Post-modern” information age

Cold War competition on Earth and Space accelerated technological progress in the area of electronics. By the mid-1980s, it was clear that the U.S. was in midst of an information revolution. As we enter the third decade of the information revolution, these compelling questions about information, and hence knowledge, present challenging questions such as: What is knowledge? Where does it reside? Who owns and controls it? As knowledge and information become ubiquitous as the air we breathe? What is secret? Lastly, are information and knowledge in a continuous state of transformation and therefore will do all secrets inevitably morph into non-secrets.

U.S. intelligence cannot be separated from the rapidly changing society that it serves. The availability of information and knowledge and the means of sharing such have grown exponentially in the last few decades, indeed within the last few years. As the technology revolution quickened in the 21st century, military intelligence faced new opportunities and new challenges. According to Merriam-Webster.com (2013), Moore’s law posits, “an axiom of microprocessor development usually holding that processing power doubles about every 18 months especially relative to cost or size” (2013), Although some doubt whether this doubling can continue indefinitely, “Moore’s law” offers an apt metaphor for the exponential growth of computing power and speed that has been accomplished by the high technology industry over the past few decades. Hence, the computing and information revolutions interact with an ever more post-modern culture in which

technical and mental boundaries fall, secrets gush into the media, and compartmentalization of information almost becomes an oxymoron.

The exponential growth of information makes it imperative that we start to make an inquiry into knowledge and information within organizations and in the societal context in which organizations exist. Hence, knowledge and information are both endogenous and exogenous variables that affect the workings of U.S. intelligence agencies. With regard to information as an endogenous variable: Shannon (1948) as a part of an inquiry into the limits of efficiency of telephones and telegraphs used “entropy functions to characterize the probability distributions of the states of sending and receiving devices”. Moreover, Shannon proved “theorems regarding the capacity of such ‘channels’ to transmit information, and the nature and availability of coding schemes to maximize information transmission”.

Shannon deals with the maximization of information in systems. The amount of information is a function of the amount of entropy in the system. If R tracks S , then entropy and information (*denoted as H*) will be maximized when R and S are independent and uncorrelated $H(S) + H(R)$ and entropy (i.e. information) will be minimized when R and S are not independent but correlated. The formula for the maximization of entropy is:

$$R(S; R) = H(S) + H(R) - H(S \& R).$$

That is information $R(S; R)$ is maximized to the extent that $H(S) + H(R)$ is maximized and to the extent that $H(S \& R)$ is minimized. Thus, Shannon’s work represents the best theoretical case for the compartmentalization of information.

The relevance of information theory to the world of intelligence occurs when the unit of analysis is changed from entropy or information to information that is thoroughly analyzed and that is secret. $R(S; R) = H(S) + H(R) - H(S \& R)$ becomes $I(S; R) = I(S) + I(R) - I(S \& R)$, where I is intelligence. R is the intelligence community and S is the world of threat, potential threat, and opportunity that is tracked. When the intelligence community loses boundaries, definition of mission, and corporate integrity it comes to mirror to closely the world it is supposed to track. Thus, $I(S \& R)$ is maximized and intelligence quickly decays back to information, un-compartmentalized and exposed. This might occur when the community becomes over-reliant on models in the private sector that emphasize fluidity, flexibility, and out-sourcing. It might be the result of complexity of the global terror threat. In addition, the intelligence gathering system can meld into the world in which intelligence is to be gathered because of the increase in resources, budgetary and personnel that this war demands. Furthermore, the sheer magnitude of the information explosion as exemplified in “Moore’s law” may mean that the information gathering resources of R may seamlessly transform into the world of information outside of intelligence gathering or S ; witness Snowden’s use of a thumb drive. If Shannon gives use a roadmap for the maximal utilization and possibly control over information, he does so in the context of a modernizing, industrial world of telephone and telegraph technology.

As an exogenous variable, knowledge and how it is socially constructed in technologically advanced societies such as the U.S. has gone through a tremendous transformation since the late 1960s. If we are, as some argue in a post-modern world, then the control over information is increasingly difficult using the most sophisticated form of information theory. As Mirchandani (2005) paraphrases Derrida (1978) as stating

“before the crisis in representation, knowledge in the form of conceptual structures, templates for the social and political world, involved some sort of center to balance and organize an overall structure” (89). When these structures no longer mold knowledge, culture, politics, then the subjective and the uncertain become the norm in society. This “deconstruction” can complicate the aims of government including intelligence gathering, sensible secrecy, warfighting, and the maintenance of security. Certainly, the rise of non-state actors such as terrorist organizations can be seen as one of the components of a post-modern society.

Moreover, Mirchandani notes that Godel (1962) and Kuhn (1962) attack the notion that Western science is at all objective. Indeed Kuhn argues that science is merely a reflection of shifting paradigms that are so subjective as to be driven by the popularity within the scientific community of theories at critical, “revolutionary” junctures. Imre Lakatos (1969), however, most convincingly described science as an exercise in which there are revolutionary junctures but that these junctures are structured around a process in which new theories win out by explaining both all the knowledge revealed by the old theory and new knowledge left unexplained by the old theory. Hence, Lakatos provides an objective, rigorous, and structured system of explaining and reifying scientific progress. If Lakatos preserved an objective measure of scientific progress in science, little else was left undeconstructed in Western society. Although France is the mother of postmodernism, the United States as the most advanced country on earth with regard to technology, cultural variation and dynamism as well as home to a multiplicity of media is at least as postmodern as any country on earth. Americans born within the last 20 to 30 years hold extremely varied beliefs and are informed by varied and constantly changing forms of media. Some hold to the tenets of religion, democracy, peace, and patriotism but many of these young people construct these tenets in ways that are vastly different from their elders and from each other. The integrating power of network television, Christianity, government, traditional politics, and identity have disintegrated into a deconstructed world of new technology platforms, identity politics, and millions of opinions that are blogged and globally reified by any number of media and are at the same time local and individual expressions not connected to time or anchors of meta-narratives such as Christianity, Islam, Marxism, scientific progress, Western democracy, or other constructions that have held societies and civilizations together for hundreds of years.

Hence, the intelligence community recruits from a population that may have little sense of history and of a present in which modern meta-narratives such as liberal democracy, institutional continuity, authority and legitimacy derived from representative government have little or no meaning. Moreover, the recruitable population is often imbued with a sense that the ephemeral, novel, disconnected, and deconstructed is more authentic and compelling than modern meta-narratives that may have little or no meaning.

CONCLUSIONS

This country has spent billions of dollars building a remarkable array of intelligence software, hardware, and human resources that should be a source of pride. Instead as more is revealed about the intelligence capabilities of our country, the more these capabilities are seen as a threat to privacy, liberty, and even democracy. Partly, this stems from the mismanagement of raw information and even intelligence that constitute our country's secrets. On the other hand, U. S. intelligence capabilities are undervalued

because of their very success. This extensive intelligence system succeeded in preventing the Cold War from becoming a thermonuclear war and preventing any attack on U. S. soil until September 11, 2001. Almost miraculously, the U.S. has avoided another devastating attack on its soil since September 11, 2001. Intelligence failures make the news; intelligence successes do not.

Ultimately, failure and successes must be evaluated by this country's elected officials. Only robust, and publicly enunciated where feasible, Congressional oversight of U.S. intelligence operations can assure the American people that intelligence is necessary and legitimate to a democracy under threat. Moreover, such oversight is the best way to make clear to intelligence personnel that secrecy, integrity, and fealty to democratic principles must always be adhered to in their activities. Clearly Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the authority and the duty to oversee intelligence. In addition, the president as the executor of the Article I, Section 8 powers of Congress, must also hold the intelligence community accountable to the point where the president should dismiss the head of agencies that are guilty of mismanagement. If this does not happen, then the public will hold the entire community in contempt.

Moreover, robust executive and legislative oversight is essential because like all national institutions the intelligence community exists in the post-modern era during the continuous information revolution.

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