

**CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE IN FULL**

18 SEPT 95

TITLE: Book Review: Strategic Intelligence and
National Decisions

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VOLUME: 1 ISSUE: Fall YEAR: 1957

STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



A collection of articles on the historical, operational, doctrinal, and theoretical aspects of intelligence.

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By *Roger Hilsman*. (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press. 1956. Pp. 183.)

Strategic Intelligence and National Decisions has many shortcomings. It suffers (inevitably, under circumstances of secrecy) from an overbalance of theory as against practice; it confuses departmental with central intelligence; it shows little awareness of the special problems of Sino-Soviet Bloc intelligence which dominate the business. Its radical proposals for a total reorganization of the effort are debatable. Nor is it an easy book to read. But it has the great virtue of reviving and placing in the center of the stage the fundamental question of the relation of intelligence to policy. Or, put more simply, what are we here for?

Hilsman's argument starts with a declaration that the only justification for intelligence is the assistance which it gives to the making of policy. The core of his analysis lies in the

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eighth chapter, which deals with the relationship in foreign policy between knowledge and action. He breaks down the decision-making process into its parts — examination of US values; recognition of a problem involving these values; selecting an objective; appraising alternative means of pursuing it; calculating the subsidiary effects upon other goals; making the choice itself; and, finally, modifying the decision in response to the reactions which accumulate as the decision is implemented.

The aim of intelligence is to make this process as rational as possible. Thus, according to Hilsman, the only knowledge worth acquiring is knowledge which informs action, which can be used to judge how probable developments will affect US values, to weigh alternative means, and to appraise the subsidiary effects of pursuing a given objective. In the ideal case, the requirements for knowledge spring directly from the demands of action at each stage. "Knowledge and action should interact, should condition and control each other at every point Knowledge for these purposes must be adapted to the uses of action, shaped to the task of best utilizing the means for action that are at hand It should be recipient as well as provider — cast in the framework which action presents, nurtured by the information uncovered as action is carried out, and tested in the laboratory that action provides. Action in turn should not only be planned by knowledge, but guided by it at every step — in the pause, perhaps, between question and reply in some vital negotiation."

Although this theory seems so sound as to appear unexceptionable, a little reflection will convince most intelligence officers that the present organization of intelligence is constructed on quite different, even contrary, assumptions. The basic concept, as Hilsman discovered in a series of interviews with intelligence producers and consumers, concerns facts. Facts are held to be the only true and dependable things in an otherwise tricky and deceptive world. Not only are they hard to find, but Hilsman's informants all felt that the commitment of policy people to the line of thought embodied in existing policy tends to blind them to any disturbing fact which conflicts with that line. Thus a special type of person, with a nose for facts and

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uncommitted to policy, is needed to search them out and put them together, and this type of person requires, in turn, a special organization called an intelligence unit.

In his interviews and his reading of intelligence doctrine, Hilsman uncovered a widely shared set of beliefs about the function of intelligence. Intelligence was held by his sources to be completely separate from the policy-making function, and therefore it was proper that intelligence and policy making should be assigned to different organizations and separated geographically. Fearful of bias in the assembling of information and respectful of the truth contained in the facts themselves, the holders of this doctrine also insisted that with only a minimum of guidance the research intelligence function should be performed before, rather than during or after, the formulation of policy or the taking of action. Thus the two should also be separated in time and in outlook.

It is easy to see how such a set of beliefs could arise, and Hilsman gives some of the reasons in an historical chapter which is useful and interesting reading for any practitioner. The first great impetus for organizing a postwar intelligence organization was the attack on Pearl Harbor, which became a notorious example of the costs of failing to assemble and put together information. The conduct of war required great masses of facts about areas with which Americans had been little concerned before, and the possibility of another war suggested that next time we should be forearmed with these facts. Policy people were naturally suspicious of the ambitions of intelligence, and collecting and assembling facts seemed to offer a satisfactory compromise. The policy people felt that this was a harmless activity which might even on occasion do them some good, and the infinite world of facts offered virgin land for the devotees of intelligence.

The immense faith in facts which underlies prevailing doctrine and structure is nowhere illustrated more clearly than in the analogy of the jigsaw puzzle — probably the most harmful concept ever applied to intelligence. Whereas everyone is conscious of its limitations, it remains the standard thumbnail guide to the intelligence process; no one has offered a better

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analogy, and intelligence organization in fact follows it with remarkable faithfulness. First there are the collectors, to whom every fact is a piece in some jigsaw puzzle; and because there are so many facts, the hapless collector has to assume that all are of equal value, and he gathers them indiscriminately. Then there are the processors and storers, who need a large staff simply to determine what puzzle each piece belongs to. Then the analysts, so swamped with facts that they must be divided up into specialists in edge pieces, sky pieces, cloud pieces, and faces. Atop them all, then, are the "big picture" men, who integrate the sub-puzzles, joining the fence to the house, the tree to the sky, until the puzzle is complete. The implication is obvious that, if everybody does his job, life will turn out to be fully consistent, entirely knowable, and perfectly rectangular.

It is hard to argue against the need for facts, against the claim that you can never have too many facts. But there is reason to believe that intelligence already has far too many facts in the numerical sense, although obviously some extremely important ones are always missing. But large numbers of facts, precisely because they require so many people to handle them, take their toll in over-specialization, in loss of the ability to make judgments, in increasingly attenuated communication, in remoteness from policy problems.

The last point, that of the distance between intelligence and policy, is Hilsman's most penetrating concern. And, indeed, who of the veterans in intelligence has not had the disconcerting experience of being asked by a six-month neophyte whether he knows of any cases where intelligence has actually been related to policy. To most analysts, any such relation is rarely discernible. In some cases, this destroys incentive; most of those who remain in intelligence overcome their frustrations (Hilsman found many indications of frustration on this point in his interviews with intelligence officials) by turning scholar. They simply get interested in their subject for its own sake, derive their satisfaction from knowledge itself, and work mainly for the sake of convincing their colleagues. On this level, research and internal debate are the main driving forces, and

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the question of justifying all this activity as a government program, which can be done only through reference to policy, recedes into oblivion.

Of course, this may be a wrong view. It may be that, in personal contacts, the Director and his chief assistants regularly transmit to the appropriate persons the distilled product of the Agency in a form and on a schedule useful to policy formulation and execution. But this is not evident to the rank-and-file analyst, and his morale suffers for it because he finds it hard, as does Hilsman, to see any policy-related function being performed in the stream of current intelligence reporting, the esoteric research papers, and the grand estimates.

These defects were illustrated several times in the recent case of the Polish loan. First, as soon as the early hints appeared of Gomulka's desire for an American loan, any outsider familiar with the size and competence of CIA's staff in this field would automatically have assumed that a study was immediately initiated to determine the probable effects of various types and sizes of loans on the Polish economy, not to speak of the effects on Polish internal and external politics. No such reaction occurred, however, because everyone was busy with something else and no one was sufficiently attuned to policy either to order such a project from above or undertake it on his own from below. Later, when a Soviet-Satellite estimate was being drafted, mention was made of the probable effects of such a loan, but only in the most general way, and some participants were rather disquieted by touching so closely on a policy matter. Finally there came a request from the State Department for an analysis of probable effects of the loan actually under consideration by the US Government. Here, it would seem, intelligence was actually to be used in making a decision. But alas, in reading the resulting memorandum, the State official, coming across the statement that grain in the proposed amount would not permit the cessation of compulsory deliveries from the Polish peasants, took his pencil and crossed out the word "not." When remonstrated with, he answered that, just that morning, the US had quintupled the amount of grain to be loaned. Perhaps the intelligence memo was needed to explain

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to someone why the loan had been made; perhaps it was an attempt to spread responsibility for a dangerous policy. At any rate, the request for an intelligence analysis certainly had nothing to do with the policy choice, which had already been made.

Readers should be forewarned that Hilsman's book is heavy going. But it would be unfortunate if, merely on this account, intelligence professionals were to ignore this thoroughgoing treatment of the theory of intelligence. It is interesting particularly because of its provocative and persuasive conclusion that much, in fact most, of today's intelligence production is wasted effort.

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