

Diplomacy & Intelligence: Strange Bedfellows

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"Women: can't live with 'em; can't live without 'em!"

— Kent Dorfman, *Animal House* (1978)

Spies and diplomats; diplomats and spies. Funnily enough, each could use precisely Dorfman's adage about the other.

Diplomacy¹ – particularly effective diplomacy – depends on intelligence – particularly effective intelligence².

But there's an interesting asymmetry here. Obviously, ineffective diplomacy – aimless, vacillating, irresolute, perhaps lacking strategic vision or clear goals, or a realistic grasp of the available leverage and resources – doesn't particularly need intelligence. In life, it's said, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there." But in diplomacy, the problem is even more acute: if you don't know where you're going, even the most detailed and accurate 'map', provided courtesy of your intelligence apparatus – even one that identifies every peril that lies down each available road – won't save you. In this sense, even the most effective intelligence can't redeem ineffective diplomacy. And, in diplomacy, taking just 'any road' won't necessarily get you to your undetermined goals; more likely, it will just get you into deeper trouble.

By contrast, ineffective intelligence or assessments – too late, too vague, false, mistaken, or misleading – can destroy even the most craftily devised and executed diplomatic strategy. The most infamous recent example – the briefing on the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to the UN Security Council by Secretary of State Colin Powell in February, 2003 – worked in the short-term, helping rally a 'coalition of the willing' to join the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and equipping the Bush Administration with arguments that helped secure a substantial, bi-partisan Congressional authorization for the use of force. But, in the long run, failure to find the evidence of the WMD program that Secretary Powell described in such detail – and that the Director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet, assured President Bush before the invasion decision would be a 'slam dunk' to uncover – undermined confidence in the entire enterprise of the Iraq War, at home and abroad.

¹ For the purposes of this article, we use 'diplomacy' to mean strategically purposeful official communication between and among governments intended to persuade other governments to cooperate with one's own position or course of action or to motivate collaboration on a collective solution to an international problem.

² By intelligence, we mean the collection by official governmental means of information on foreign parties and events/developments that is not otherwise publicly available, along with forecasts and analyses, which may combine this information with other openly collected or public-source information, to support policy-makers' decision-making and/or military acquisition, deployment or employment decisions.

Diplomacy's Dependence on Intelligence

Diplomats are often reluctant to admit how much their 'art' depends on the 'craft' of intelligence. To anticipate looming international crises; to accurately assess adversaries' capabilities and intentions – and allies' strengths and degrees of steadfastness; to estimate the 'limits of the possible' in enlisting/aligning with allies and supporters, or in confronting international adversaries or miscreants; to understand and exploit sources of leverage provided by possibly peripheral or even unrelated issues, with allies or adversaries; to discover -- if possible in advance -- diplomatic counterparts' negotiating positions and 'bottom-lines'; even to verify adversaries' or allies' compliance with international obligations – all of these either require or are, at a minimum, facilitated by effective intelligence.

Here are three concrete 20th century illustrations – among the hundreds possible -- of how intelligence helps diplomats. One is old; the others are of more recent vintage.

In 1921 the US intercepted and decrypted Japanese diplomatic communications during the Washington Naval Conference, providing foreknowledge of the Japanese negotiating positions, which allowed US diplomats to obtain an advantageous outcome.

More recently, the use of geospatial intelligence (GEOINT) during the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995 provided detailed ground truth of the situation in that conflict area, which allowed the antagonists to negotiate having a common view of the terrain and who occupied what.³

During the Cold War, the Reagan Administration regularly dispatched the Deputy Director for Intelligence of the Defense Intelligence Agency, John Hughes, to allied capitals in Europe and Asia, sharing a detailed and comprehensive briefing on Soviet military capabilities and new weapons developments. These briefings made a major contribution to holding the NATO allies together in the face of enormous Soviet diplomatic and propaganda pressure through the Soviet boycott of the START nuclear arms reduction talks in Geneva. They bolstered the NATO allies in carrying through the decision to deploy intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in Europe to offset the Soviet SS-20 missile threat – leading ultimately to the successfully negotiated elimination of INF weapons from Europe entirely.

Perhaps the most significant diplomatic achievements – bilateral and multilateral arms control and non-proliferation agreements – depend critically on intelligence. Verification of early Cold War era arms control agreements – the Atmospheric and Threshold Test-Ban Treaties; the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty; the SALT I and START I nuclear weapons agreements – depended on 'national technical means' – chiefly satellite reconnaissance.⁴ Of course, other intelligence collection – human source collection, defectors, etc. – supplemented what could be discovered remotely about Soviet capabilities, new weapons developments and tests, and compliance or non-

³ See Weir, Gary, "The Evolution of Geospatial Intelligence and The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency," in *the Guide to the Study of Intelligence*, Association of Former Intelligence Officers, <http://www.afio.com/publications/WEIR%20NGA%20Essay%202014Nov05%20DRAFT.pdf>.

⁴ See Robert A. McDonald, "I Can See It From Afar: I Can Hear it From Afar," *Guide to the Study of Intelligence* at <http://www.afio.com/publications/MCDONALD%20See%20From%20Afar%20DRAFT%202015May08.pdf>.

compliance. And at the end of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became possible to agree to measures for continuous and periodic intrusive, on-site inspections – including on-the-ground monitoring of the output of missile production facilities – to provide robust and continuous verification.

Negotiated multilateral arms control/nuclear non-proliferation agreements similarly depend for their verification on the 'national technical' intelligence capabilities of especially the United States and other western nations, along with whatever insights can be gleaned from human source intelligence, to bolster the on-site inspections of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Compliance with multi-lateral non-proliferation agreements like the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Chemical Weapons Treaty, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and the Australia Group (which restricts international trade in chemical weapons-relevant technologies) relies on information and intelligence sharing and liaison among the participating countries, since these agreements lack a central agency responsible for surveilling compliance. And, rather obviously, the members with the most extensive and robust array of intelligence capabilities – like the United States – make the most critical contributions to compliance and enforcement efforts for such agreements

Without the contribution of intelligence to verification, both bilateral and multi-lateral arms control agreements – arguably the capstone achievements of the diplomat's 'art' in pursuit of peace -- would be worse than meaningless. They would be dangerous, delusional traps, behind which nations bent on aggression would mask their military preparations.

Intelligence – particularly new or sudden discoveries or forecasts -- often sets the diplomatic agenda. Presidents will direct diplomatic action when reading about specific threats or situations in their daily intelligence reports.⁵ A threatened terrorist attack may lead to immediate cooperative international action against the terror group and its state sponsor, if it has one. Planned military actions always involve supportive diplomatic activity to gain acceptance or allay suspicions of what the U.S. intends. Imagery intelligence of mass graves in Bosnia resulted in diplomatic pressure to indict Serbian officials by the International Criminal Court. Data on global warming, gathered by both scientific earth observation satellites and intelligence sensors, has prompted diplomatic efforts to negotiate limits on greenhouse gas emissions.

Intelligence discoveries also help set the national strategy. For example, during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, intelligence was important in allowing the President to choose diplomacy over immediate military action when he learned the readiness status of the missiles introduced to Cuba. A quarantine, coupled with intensive diplomatic action and public diplomacy, led to a successful – and peaceful – resolution of the crisis.

Furthermore, intelligence can serve as a check and balance for diplomats in their exchanges with others. Is a foreign representative lying? Or is he being only partially truthful? A well-placed human source can provide confirming or other intelligence.

⁵ *The President's Daily Brief (PDB)* is shared with other senior national security policy officers, including the Secretaries of State and Defense.

