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# The Political Evolution of Intelligence

Stephen R. Bowers  
Liberty University, [srbowers2@liberty.edu](mailto:srbowers2@liberty.edu)

## THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF INTELLIGENCE

BY STEPHEN BOWERS

While recent attention has been focused on the sensational aspects of intelligence work, it is the mundane uses of intelligence which have most increased in importance. A broader conception of politics, coupled with an application of technologically advanced military equipment, the expanding role of high technology industries, and improved methods to obtain intelligence data have all contributed to an enlarged role for intelligence. To understand the significance of the contemporary role of intelligence, one must trace the development of the art.

Intelligence dates back to the beginning of mankind. Primitive man sought answers to questions relating to his survival and comfort. He wanted to know what his enemies were doing and how their threats could be met. Where could he find food and shelter? With his limited understanding of the world around him, these matters strained the limits of his knowledge. As society developed, there was a division of responsibilities and the appointment of intelligence 'officers'. Yet these first intelligence operatives lacked even the most rudimentary technical sophistication and, as often as not, turned for assistance to mysticists who presumably had gifts enabling them to 'see' into the future and so help heads of state.

The systematisation of mysticism occurred in China around 1200 BC with the appearance of *The Book Of Changes* or, as it is also called, *I Ching*. This work, a collection of mystical, cabbalistic teachings, served for centuries as an instructional guide for spies. While offering no direct answers, it was believed to provide, with the appropriate ritualistic incantations, important clues which the decision-maker could decipher.<sup>1</sup>

Early Greek intelligence likewise relied upon the supernatural. According to mythology, Cassandra, the daughter of Priam of Troy, received the gift of prophecy from the god Apollo with instructions that she use it to help her people. The Greeks assumed that the gods themselves provided intelligence – frequently in the form of riddles – to assist in the formulation of political or military strategy. Yet, while the warnings of the Delphic oracle eventually became less supernatural, they continued to be painfully unscientific and unreliable.

Biblical records note the application of intelligence to political and military problems of the time. For example, Numbers recounts God's

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instruction to Moses to send men into Canaan in order to learn what riches the land offered and what enemy forces would be encountered in Canaan. Their assignment was the most basic of the intelligence tasks – simple reconnaissance, a report of what was seen and no more.

### THE SOPHISTICATION OF INTELLIGENCE

In 480 BC the Emperor Xerxes captured three Greek agents sent to spy on his troops. Xerxes ordered that the three be allowed to view his impressive array of forces and then return to the Greek army. His plan, obviously, was to deter his enemies from attacking by convincing them of his invincibility. Contemporary practices of allowing some espionage against one's forces are a reflection of this early psychological ploy. Unfortunately, this gamble did not work for Xerxes but simply enabled the Greeks to be better prepared for Xerxes' large force. The transition from simple reconnaissance to modern intelligence was also aided by Xerxes' attempts to analyse the behaviour of Greek soldiers in order to detect exploitable weaknesses. This is the first recorded instance of the employment of analysts to explain foreign behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

The continued subordination of intelligence to military needs as well as the increasing sophistication and glorification of intelligence work is illustrated by the writings of Sun Tzu, a contemporary of Confucius and author of *Principles Of War*. Sun Tzu provides the first recorded effort to examine the intelligence process systematically and intellectually while developing principles and systems of espionage. He offered lessons on the functions and techniques of these systems, institutions primarily of the East, the region in which the spy's mission and importance were first recognised. Leaders of the different Chinese kingdoms, Sun Tzu explained, emphasised the necessary association of intelligence with military endeavours and stimulated its advancement far beyond simple reconnaissance. Deception had become a hallmark of intelligence as spies wearing enemy uniforms infiltrated adversary's camps. Exposed agents were allowed to continue their missions while authorities provided them with misleading information. Sun Tzu suggested that an even better course would be to win the allegiance of captured spies by generous treatment and then dispatch them back to their former masters as conscious agents of a new master. Sun Tzu wrote that the spy should enjoy a privileged position. No honour, he insisted, was too great for these heroic figures, a sharp contrast to the prevailing modern Western view of spies as contemptible individuals whose existence should, if possible, be denied. He also delineated categories of spies and gave detailed instructions on the employment of each. In view of the value of espionage in defending the nation against war and in waging war economically if it came, Sun Tzu called for a

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permanent espionage service to tell leaders about all foreign developments.<sup>3</sup>

### INCREASED DEMANDS ON INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS

The changing conditions of military campaigns led to increased demands on intelligence operatives. Knowledge of languages, dialects, and customs became vital to the success of intelligence. Master strategists such as Hannibal recognised this through bitter experience, such as his unfortunate campaign in southern Italy where he instructed his guides to take him to Casinum. Hannibal's poor command of the guides' language resulted in a misunderstanding and they took him to Casilinum instead of Casinum resulting in near disaster. Mithridates, on the other hand, was a master of twenty-two languages and always understood local tribes and their customs. His thorough training enabled him to enjoy great success in his rivalries with the Romans. The Romans long suffered from a self-imposed handicap in that espionage was originally rejected by their leadership. Both Tiberius and Julius Caesar opposed the establishment of a secret service: the existence of one might have prevented Caesar's assassination.<sup>4</sup>

Failure to understand the culture and customs of the East led to mistakes by European leaders during the Middle Ages. They knew little of the Byzantine Empire, the Eastern Slavs, or the Muslim peoples. Efforts to make contacts with these civilisations were branded as 'heresy'.

### POLITICAL ADAPTATIONS OF INTELLIGENCE

The next phase in the evolution of intelligence saw commercial activities used for espionage with an increasingly political overtone. European ignorance of the East was reduced by commercial ventures in that region. European political leaders, however, did not immediately utilise the knowledge placed at their disposal by ambitious merchants. It was not until the fifteenth century that the Italians realised the folly of isolating political intelligence operatives from commercial operatives and established embassies and missions in foreign states, a new practice soon adopted by other European imitators.<sup>5</sup>

By the time of the Hundred Years' War, espionage was having a major impact on political and military affairs. The English, unable to defeat the French forces inspired by Joan of Arc placed a covert agent among the French clergy who organised a plot which eventually led to the death of Joan of Arc. This significant event illustrated the link between information and action and also demonstrated the application of politically based intelligence.<sup>6</sup>

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### THE DOMESTIC FUNCTION OF INTELLIGENCE

With the application of intelligence to political concerns of an international character came intelligence systems for maintenance of domestic political control. If it was important to know what a foreign adversary was planning, it was equally vital to know about one's domestic rivals. By 1600, the Japanese Shogun Yeyasu had established a domestic espionage network to watch provincial governors. This system operated through Yeyasu's personal followers who commanded spies positioned throughout the nation. Even more extensive was the earlier Chinese family spy system of the tenth century AD by the emperor's Privy Councillor, Wang An-shih. At the time, the country was plagued by banditry and Wang decided that only a comprehensive spy system could help. Under his system, families were organised into units of ten, fifty, and five hundred with all family members responsible for the crimes committed by other members or relatives and guests visiting in their homes. Citizens were required to report on good as well as evil deeds. Wang's family spy system became a model for future regimes, including that of Mao Tse-Tung.<sup>7</sup>

Intelligence had expanded beyond 'battlefield' intelligence, linking information with action, developing political intelligence and organising domestic security. Application of intelligence to state service was the most significant step, however, in establishing specific, identifiable users of intelligence with overt political interests and requirements.

The Egyptians and the Italians did much to develop the practice but the contributions of Sir Francis Walsingham and Joseph Fouche were vital. Walsingham established the first modern political espionage system that gave open service to the state. The political spy system which he set up for Queen Elizabeth I employed almost every technique of espionage: his organisation combined the domestic and the international. It dispatched students from Cambridge University in an effort to penetrate the French court; the plot involved the poet and dramatist Christopher Marlowe whose mysterious death some believe was connected with this undertaking. Walsingham's system is credited with defeating the French-backed conspiracy to elevate Mary Queen of Scots to the English throne and procuring the naval intelligence that enabled England to destroy the Spanish Armada.<sup>8</sup>

Joseph Fouche organised Napoleon's secret political police and counterespionage machinery. Unlike Walsingham two hundred years earlier, Fouche was not involved in the collection of military and foreign intelligence. The primarily domestic political concern of the French organisation continued even after Fouche's departure. By this time, recognition of the importance of intelligence had led most European nations to develop improved intelligence operations. Sweden

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and Holland became the premier examples of small states which enjoyed prominence because of outstanding intelligence systems. The Swedes used religious connections to recruit foreign nationals for Swedish espionage. Such religious recruitment was a precursor of Soviet ideological recruitment in the name of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>9</sup>

### INTELLIGENCE IN SERVICE TO THE STATE

The art of intelligence was to advance rapidly under state tutelage. Intelligence technology benefitted from generous state funding; legal support made possible the application of new information-gathering devices and the recruitment of the best personnel. State interests demanded the extensive development of counter-intelligence or counter-espionage. Britain's passage of the Official Secrets Act of 1889 was the first significant legal expression of the need to make systematic efforts to protect the information of the state. This law was not only the product of Victorian military devices, but also came about as a result of numerous scandals in England in 1888 involving officials who, for various reasons, shared information with foreign military representatives. The development of weaponry by private interests made supervision of security difficult and the Official Secrets Act was an important effort to protect the state's secrets.<sup>10</sup>

The Act helped resolve long controversies about what could and could not be properly disclosed or shared by making criminal the communication of any defence information to foreign representatives. Additional legislation dealt with giving secret information to newspapers. A more stringent Secrets Act was passed in 1911 in response to widespread concerns about the success German agents were allegedly enjoying. Open foreign efforts to recruit individuals who had worked on classified British military projects — such as the placing of advertisements in newspaper by agencies of the US government — underlined the need to do more to protect British security.

### INTELLIGENCE DURING WORLD WAR TWO

It was not until nearly the middle of the Second World War that the United States joined the British in development of a coherent system for production of systematic intelligence. The creation of the Office of Strategic Services is well known.<sup>12</sup> It was now that the Soviet Union improved its intelligence to a point so their operations were comparable to those of the British and the Americans in terms of the committed resources and efforts.<sup>13</sup>

Pearl Harbour did the most to stimulate American efforts to establish an effective intelligence system. In early 1942 there was recrimination and hints of espionage which led Congress to mount an

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investigation to fix responsibility. It became evident that documents had crossed the desks of many US officials. Many of them with proper analysis, would have indicated the strong likelihood of a Japanese attack. Congressional summaries declared that it was not treason or ineptitude but the lack of a coordinated system for gathering and evaluating information on Japanese military, political, social, and economic developments that made the disaster at Pearl Harbour possible. This set the stage for the creation of a centralised intelligence agency to replace the various departmental operations.

A problem during the early years of the war was the almost complete absence of cooperation between the British and American intelligence agencies. The job of establishing an unofficial relationship between British and American services fell to Canadian businessman, William Stephenson. His travels as a businessman convinced him that the Germans were building an armaments industry that would threaten Britain, a view rejected by most in the British government. Recognising Stephenson's skill and perception before the war, Winston Churchill turned to Stephenson after the war began, asking the Canadian not only to conduct propaganda for the British in the United States, but also to work out an arrangement with the Americans for intelligence sharing. As a result of his success in approaching the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover designated Stephenson as 'Head of British Security Co-ordination' and supported measures for sharing intelligence efforts.<sup>14</sup>

War had stimulated the advance of British cryptanalysis as dozens of mathematicians, lawyers, chess players, and historians joined forces to break the German wartime 'Enigma' code. The breaking of codes produced by 'Enigma', the German encyphering machine, was the responsibility of this varied group of individuals known as 'Ultra'. Having broken the German code, the Ultra group intercepted Nazi wireless traffic as it was dispatched and read it as quickly as those for whom it was intended. As a result, Allied commanders had remarkable insight into enemy dispositions and plans. In one case (later well publicised), Ultra actually read a German directive before it was read by General Rommel, to whom it was addressed.<sup>15</sup>

The development of intelligence continued in the post-war years and led to the creation of the US Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA's broadened concerns, political, military, social, and economic, to name the most notable ones, carried this organisation beyond the earlier OSS which was subordinated to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The CIA mandate was oriented toward a general political assignment and thus represented an important step in the political evolution of intelligence during this period.<sup>16</sup>

Such advances did not always mean greater effectiveness, either in

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satisfying new political demands or in accomplishing military objectives. American experiences in Korea highlighted the problem. The CIA failure to assess Chinese intentions in Korea lead to what is generally viewed as the major political mistake of the war. Faulty estimates of North Korean arrangements for the defence of Seoul – intelligence estimates were off by 100% – threatened the prospects for the success of the Inchon campaign.<sup>17</sup> However the fact is that Korea presented Western forces with an opportunity to develop more sophisticated methods for digesting and sifting enormous amounts of intelligence data. The war in Vietnam added still more to the science of collecting both political and military data under combat conditions. The main effort was put into the American Phoenix programme. Although often denounced as a simple 'assassination programme', Phoenix involved the establishment of District Intelligence Operations Centers in about two-thirds of the country's 240 districts and in almost all of Vietnam's 44 provinces. The objective of Phoenix was to identify Communist military and political leaders so as to neutralise their influence.<sup>18</sup>

While the reorientation of intelligence objectives was taking place, there was also another dramatic change in intelligence technologies. Computers, reconnaissance satellites, and even more 'space-age' innovations have now allowed machines to replace agents on the ground in many cases.<sup>19</sup> The advance of technology enabled the intelligence operative to find new uses for his product. Global surveillance means that the earth's natural resources themselves can now be the target of the spy's attentions. Not surprisingly, many intelligence functions have been converted to commercial uses just as commercial endeavours once aided the development of intelligence activities.

### THE SOVIET EXAMPLE: COMBINED OBJECTIVES

The best example of a reorientation of intelligence objectives is the Soviet intelligence system, known as the KGB. It combines domestic and international functions with the ability to unite intelligence with action. In the broadest sense, the KGB is responsible for monitoring the daily lives of Soviet citizens and preventing 'anti-Soviet provocations'. This task is done by the Second Chief Directorate, a force of several hundred thousand men and women who run the most effective control system of any modern industrial state and perform an invaluable political service in helping the Communist Party of the Soviet Union maintain power. In addition to this force, there is a supplementary informer network which at one time numbered over five million unpaid volunteers. This mammoth system made it difficult for Western intelligence services to place agents on the ground – the United States only early warning device against a possible Soviet attack – before the

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start of U-2 flights and satellite surveillance.<sup>20</sup>

For the KGB, defence of the homeland does not stop at the USSR's frontiers. The KGB's First Chief Directorate enables the Kremlin to reach beyond Soviet borders to frustrate incipient movements by emigre groups hoping to penetrate the CPSU's empire. The 'Trust Operation' of the 1920's demonstrated Soviet capabilities as the Kremlin sometimes deceived both British and French intelligence while blunting the political threat of the million-strong anti-Soviet emigration in the West. After World War Two, Soviet concern for former citizens was reflected in the forced repatriation of Soviet nationals left in occupied Germany, the KGB's infiltration of the anti-Soviet 'People's Labour League' and the large Ukrainian emigration, and the physical liquidation of numerous leaders of the Soviet emigration and defectors from official USSR services. Although the KGB's Laboratory of Special Weapons has devoted considerable energy to the development of the 'perfect' murder weapon, the West German trial of Bogdan Stashinsky in 1962, with its worldwide, sensational reports, and the interests of the USSR's image during the years of detente have discouraged direct Soviet involvement in so-called 'wet affairs'.<sup>21</sup>

While violent measures against emigres make exciting reading, the KGB's political activities had a more significant impact on the international balance of power. Efforts to utilise espionage and covert operations to create distrust among the Western allies have illustrated the political utility of the KGB. Much has been written about the career of Kim Philby and the operations he directly compromised. Yet, the secrets betrayed by Philby also contributed to a loss of mutual confidence by the Western allies. The 1974 case of the GDR agent Guenter Guillaume, one of Chancellor Brandt's closest aides, added to this loss of trust. The KGB also recruits 'agents of influence', people who serve the USSR not by revealing Western secrets but by supporting Soviet positions in a public forum. In recent years the Soviet embassy in Washington has become active in lobbying Congress by presenting the Soviet position on legislative proposals relating to foreign affairs. The Soviet techniques are no different from those of countless domestic 'pressure groups'. Journalists, businessmen, lawyers, and numerous professionals can serve as 'agents of influence'.

Soviet political objectives are also advanced by the deployment of Soviet intelligence forces against Western firms dealing in technologies that are of military significance. Soviet success in acquiring Western technology can be attributed to a blending of legal purchases and illegal acquisitions. These efforts are directed by several thousand technology collection officers working in Western nations. Open literature, legal trade channels, and scientific conferences are the most common legal

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avenues utilised by the Soviets and their allies. Illegal methods involve everything from outright theft to the establishment of firms which pass technology directly from the West to Eastern Europe. Over twenty firms set up by Soviet and East European agencies operate in the United States for this purpose and over 300 similar firms operate in Western Europe and Canada. Where they have not set up their own firms, Soviet frequently use agents-in-place who will divert important technology to the USSR. Among the primary targets of this campaign are aerohydrodynamics, cryogenics, optics, lasers, computers, magnetic bubble computer memories, microelectronics, structural and electronic materials, and general nuclear developments.<sup>22</sup>

### CONCLUSION

As this brief examination shows, intelligence has become a general political tool rather than simply a military weapon. Gradually, its objectives have changed: military concerns have merged into political ones. The evolution of intelligence objectives was constant. Advances in technology have sometimes masked the direction of this evolution as fascination with intelligence techniques obscured the more fundamental changes in the use of intelligence. The evolution of intelligence simply matches recognition of the relationship between politics and war. War, it is often said, is merely an extension of politics. Thus, intelligence objectives must ultimately be political ones because most issues – economic, social, or technological – eventually translate themselves into political concerns.

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### BOOK NOTICE

*The Dictionary of Essential Quotations* by Kevin Goldstein-Jackson (Croom Helm, Kent) £12.95.

A book of 'Essential' Quotations necessarily means that a subjective choice has been made. This is no exception; from my own, albeit selective dipping, Mr Goldstein-Jackson is cynic first, author second. Few of his 'essential' quotations show pleasure.

Hence 'Joy' is missing altogether and 'Happiness' has rather sad quotes like 'A lifetime of happiness; no man alive could bear it; it would be hell on earth' (George Bernard Shaw) or even 'We are never happy, we can only remember we were so once' (Alexander Smith). 'Armies' has only three quotations – all by Mao Tse Tung. 'Honour' has only three negative references while 'Courage' and 'Defence' nothing at all. He cannot find one positive quotation about 'Democracy'.

However, there are some pithy and witty words of wisdom in this book. The after-dinner speaker, may find inspiration.  
*1983. 215 x 130mm. 184pp, 14pp index. Hardcover.*