Despite a number of sensationalist publications and a handful of scholarly studies on espionage and “spies in the sky,” the role of foreign intelligence in the Cold War has received less attention than it deserves. Although much of the relevant information is bound to remain under the cloak of secrecy, a great deal has already been revealed and more will become available. To be sure, a substantial amount of this information has emerged from leaks to journalists and from memoirs and is therefore subject to intentional or unintentional distortion. Nonetheless, a sizable portion of the record, especially in the United States, has been disclosed through the standard declassification or inadvertent release of intelligence files and other relevant documents, which can be carefully studied and cross-checked with other sources.

Thus far, however, the burgeoning historiography of the Cold War has, with some exceptions, made far too little use of what is available. One reason may be insufficient familiarity with available sources, but another and perhaps more important impediment has been unfamiliarity with the subject and a presumption that it occupies a specialized niche of its own on the margins of history, even one that to some scholars seems not quite academically respectable. Such a view is wrong on all counts.

Foreign intelligence is a part of the political—and historical—process. At its core is the acquisition and analysis of information that is unavailable from open sources and is needed for political decisions and actions. Intelligence analysis of course also uses, indeed is often heavily dependent on, open sources of information, but the unique role of intelligence is the collation, integration, and analysis of information from all sources, including secret information obtained by clandestine espionage and technical means of intelligence collection. Policymakers use the resulting data to assess threats, constraints, and opportunities. Information also flows in from other sources, and critical input, especially on matters of judgment, may come from the policymakers themselves. Moreover, intelligence establishments are often used for purposes other than informing policy, including misinforming others or engaging in
covert political, military, or subversive activities. In this essay I will address mainly the core policy-support function of intelligence, including the acquisition of information. I will make less note of other functions of intelligence organizations (such as covert political action) that also influenced the Cold War.

There is a vast literature dealing with intelligence activities during the Cold War, but almost all of it is narrative or descriptive of particular intelligence operations or organizations, mainly those of the United States and the Soviet Union. Although no one is able to say what proportion of intelligence activity from the Cold War has now become public (or indeed what percentage is fully known even to the most highly cleared professionals in any country), the likelihood is that the pattern and most of the principal cases of espionage, the nature of the main technological intelligence collection means and operations, many intelligence assessments, and even much about intelligence reporting have become known. A few important cases that only recently have come to light should, however, serve as a reminder that a good deal of information is as yet undisclosed.

This survey article is by no means an exhaustive bibliographical compendium of the extensive literature dealing with intelligence activities from 1945 to 1990. I shall refer to some of the more comprehensive studies and to a number of important specific studies that are useful for illustrating and understanding aspects of the subject. The article also is not intended to be a review essay. I shall of course refer to the regrettably small number of publications that broach and begin to address seriously the role—or, more accurately, the roles—of intelligence in the history of the Cold War. Of necessity, however, this article will in large measure be a review of the subject rather than of the literature itself. The article will draw on available publications, but it also will highlight issues that are in need of further attention. In seeking to evaluate the impact of intelligence on the Cold War, the article will point out the many facets of the task and will encourage scholars who study the Cold War to give more attention to the subject.

## Availability of Sources

A brief discussion of available sources can provide a useful point of departure. The greatest part of the available declassified record of the Cold War, including intelligence materials, has been released by the United States. Not only has the U.S. government established more liberal programs of systematic declassification than most governments have; it also has instituted a procedure for scholars and others to request declassification of materials under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which has been instrumental in obtaining
the release of many formerly classified documents relating to intelligence activities.

The official documentary record of U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy is the venerable *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*) series issued by the Department of State.¹ When the *FRUS* volume covering relations with Iran in 1952–1954 was published in 1989, it included no materials pertaining to the role of the United States in the overthrow of the government of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953.² This blatant omission sparked an outcry from academic circles and in Congress, which passed a new statute in 1991 requiring the declassification and release of as full a record as possible, including records of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other relevant agencies as well as of the Department of State. It also called for publication of each volume of *FRUS* no later than thirty years after the events recorded in it. Since then, there has been a marked improvement in the release of CIA materials as well as Defense Department and Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) documents for inclusion in *FRUS*. To be sure, there is a necessary process of selection and review for intelligence documents, as there is for all documentation. This process, regrettably, has contributed to delays in the publication of the *FRUS* series, which has fallen several years behind the statutory thirty-year requirement.

Although the release of documents on intelligence activities relating to U.S. foreign policy has substantially improved overall, the declassification of intelligence materials continues to be limited by the CIA’s interpretation of its statutory requirement to protect intelligence “sources and methods.” The process of reviewing and declassifying materials even for publicly known covert operations, such as the Bay of Pigs landing in Cuba in 1961, has been slow. Nonetheless, since the early 1990s the CIA has declassified and released a great deal of documentation on a wide range of once closely held intelligence collection activities such as communications intercepts and decryption in the late 1940s, U-2 overflights of the Soviet Union in the late 1950s, and

1. All newly published volumes in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*) series are now being put out on-line as well as in the standard hardcover edition. Some of the earlier *FRUS* volumes, dating as far back as the Truman administration, also are now available on-line. As of early 2004, the website of the State Department’s Office of the Historian (http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/) carries the full text of a special *FRUS* volume on the emergence of the U.S. intelligence establishment in the mid-to late 1940s (a topic especially relevant to this essay), three of the sixty-six *FRUS* volumes covering the Eisenhower administration, fourteen of the twenty-five volumes covering the Kennedy administration, all thirty-four volumes covering the Johnson administration (the last of which, Vol. XIX, was published in February 2004), and all volumes covering the Nixon and Ford administrations that have appeared thus far.

satellite reconnaissance of the USSR in the 1960s and 1970s. Other collections of declassified CIA documents relate to specific events of the Cold War, in particular the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and the “intelligence war” in Berlin from 1945 to 1961. In addition, after the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, the CIA released most of its National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) pertaining to the USSR, as well as many of its other analytical reports on the Soviet bloc from 1946 through 1991. In a number of cases, these releases of anthologies of declassified documents have been accompanied by conferences sponsored by the CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence.3

In addition to materials released by the CIA, some important documents on early Cold War communications intercepts and photographic overhead (aerial and satellite) reconnaissance have recently been declassified by the Na-

tional Security Agency (NSA), the previously secret National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), and the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA), which in November 2003 was renamed the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). Several other works also have cast light on the CIA’s previously well-known scientific and technological intelligence collection and analysis. Among these is a fascinating memoir account by Antonio Mendez on the technical service’s support of espionage and other clandestine operations.

Post-Soviet Russia, after selectively releasing some documents from the archives of the Soviet Politburo and the Soviet state security (KGB) organs in the early 1990s, regrettably has prevented any access to key archives relating to the Cold War and has tightened access to most of the archives that were at least partly opened in 1992. When there was greater access, a few useful intelligence materials were found in Party archives, notably some of the annual KGB reports to General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s. But the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), which inherited the personnel and facilities of the former First Main Directorate (Foreign Intelligence) of the KGB, has chosen instead to release only a few selected documents to well-connected Russians (mostly retired KGB officers) who in some cases are cooperating with Western analysts on subjects that the SVR has either chosen or approved. The SVR has never granted free access to its archives or released declassified documents in a formal way. The former Soviet military intelligence organization (known then and now as the GRU) has been even more secretive, keeping its archive sealed to all researchers.

The most extensive available collection of KGB foreign intelligence documents, mostly from the early 1980s, was spirited to the West by Oleg Gordievsky, a KGB colonel who had been the station chief in London until he defected in 1985. As the Soviet Union was breaking apart, a former KGB ar-

7. For example, see John Costello and Oleg Tsarev, Deadly Illusions: The KGB Orlow Dossier Reveals Stalinist Master Spy (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993).
chivist, Vasili Mitrokhin, brought out extensive notes he surreptitiously made transcribing documents from the foreign intelligence archive. These notes were extensively excerpted in a valuable book published in 1999 by the British scholar Christopher Andrew, who also had been a coauthor with Gordievsky.\(^9\) There are also memoirs of former KGB officers now living in the West\(^10\) and many others by retired KGB officers in Russia.\(^11\) These provide interesting and sometimes useful information, although they are of varying and often uncertain reliability.

Most of the Cold War allies of the United States and the Soviet Union have declassified and released relatively little on foreign intelligence activities. Many books on the British intelligence services (and on Soviet penetrations of them) during the Cold War have appeared, despite the paucity of British archival releases and restrictive laws in Britain applying to retired intelligence officers.\(^12\) Some materials exist on most Western and former Warsaw Pact countries. In the case of the now defunct East Germany, the internal security records of the State Security Ministry (Stasi) are open, but most of the Stasi’s foreign intelligence collections are not accessible, having been sealed by the German government. However, reports from the Stasi chief to the East German Politburo are available, and memoirs by the former head of East German foreign intelligence, Markus Wolf, and other former Stasi officers are often quite revealing.\(^13\) The state security archives in the countries that were formerly republics of the Soviet Union contain copies of many Soviet foreign intelligence documents, but those archives are inaccessible, with one major

---

9. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999). Other volumes based on Mitrokhin’s notes were supposed to be published, although the lapse of more than four years without further word is puzzling. Mitrokhin himself died in January 2004.


exception. In the three Baltic states, all documents from the Soviet era, including Soviet foreign intelligence materials, are freely accessible. This applies even to raw intelligence dispatches from agents overseas. Although the total volume of foreign intelligence documentation in the Baltic states is much smaller than in the Russian SVR archive, the holdings in Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania are of great value.

In seeking to determine the roles of intelligence in the Cold War, the burgeoning new material from many quarters—including several of the formerly Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and to a lesser extent China and Vietnam—is also important. Although intelligence documentation is sparse, diplomatic and political materials released from the archives raise many questions and provide some clues about the roles of intelligence. The Cold War International History Project Bulletin has been an important channel for making available new source materials from these countries, as well as from Russia. Informed commentary, if little by way of documentation, is also to be found in several specialized journals such as Intelligence and National Security, International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence, and unclassified editions of the CIA's in-house quarterly publication, Studies in Intelligence.

The Cold War was, of course, waged in a global arena, and in addition to the United States, the Soviet Union, and other Western and East-bloc countries, many countries in the Third World were prominently involved in intelligence aspects of the Cold War. That is an aspect of the subject I will not address in this essay, but it merits attention by those discussing the ramifications of the Cold War in the Third World.


15. There are also a number of additional more specialized journals. For a comprehensive and thoughtful review, still useful although a decade old, see Hayden B. Peake, The Readers' Guide to Intelligence Periodicals (Washington: National Intelligence Book Center, 1992). In addition, the CIA has declassified many articles from the secret edition of Studies in Intelligence, which has been published since 1955. A useful selection from these declassified articles is H. Bradford Westerfield, ed., Inside CIA's Private World: Declassified Articles from the Agency's Internal Journal, 1955–1992 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

16. To cite but one example, Piero Gleijeses, Confllicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), is notable for its extensive and
Although our attention is naturally focused on newly available source materials, especially declassified archival documents, it is worth bearing in mind that over the past half-century a substantial corpus of contemporary analysis and early historical study was produced, based mainly on open sources. This earlier literature provides a baseline for scholars drawing on new materials to revise and expand existing accounts. Just as intelligence analysis involves integration of open and secret information, so historiography of the Cold War requires integrating new evidence with information and analyses available in the past. I note this caution after witnessing several cases in which present-day scholars have written historical studies based on new sources of information while omitting—and evidently not even being aware of—other highly relevant information from the open contemporary record of a few decades ago. Rather than being superseded, these earlier sources have been supplemented, corrected, and enriched by the new information.

The expanding universe of available source materials also helps to expand the range of intelligence considerations relevant to Cold War historiography. The declassified U.S. documents dealing with the Cold War cover a large number of topics: U.S. national security and intelligence policy and organization; some aspects of U.S. intelligence operations and covert political actions in the Soviet bloc and the Third World; U.S. counterintelligence and Soviet intelligence operations in the United States; U.S. technical intelligence collection (aerial photoreconnaissance, satellite photoreconnaissance, and early communications intercepts); and U.S. intelligence assessments, above all NIEs, many of which are now available. Much of the newly released information on “human intelligence” (HUMINT, in the jargon), espionage and counterespionage, however, has been in the form of background information provided to journalists or memoirs by former officials from the CIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), rather than declassified archival records.

Accounts of Soviet intelligence activities in the Cold War, published in Russia and the West, are almost all based on non-archival sources. These accounts have been produced by Soviet defectors, by Russian and Western journalists, and by retired Soviet/Russian intelligence officers, some of whom are now living in the West and writing in conjunction with American or British scholars. (Other former Soviet intelligence officers who are still based in Russia have, in some cases, received assistance for their memoirs from the Russian intelligence services.) The various accounts deal mainly with specific intelligence operations and activities or former agents’ service experience. Few successful use of declassified CIA and State Department intelligence assessments and analyses both for their information and as a basis for examining the role of intelligence in policymaking.
books have looked in any depth at national intelligence policy in the USSR, the role of intelligence in Soviet policymaking, Soviet technical intelligence collection, and Soviet intelligence assessments.¹⁷

**Findings from the New Sources**

What do these various sources of information—the newly available sources and the earlier literature—tell us? What do they contribute to our understanding of the history of the Cold War?

By all indications, the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact had an edge in the extent of HUMINT (espionage) against the United States and its NATO allies, and sometimes in its reach into high policy circles. With respect to signals intelligence (SIGINT), including communications intelligence (COMINT), there is not enough information in the public record to evaluate (or compare) the extent of success by any country, although it is clear that both the United States and the Soviet Union, and to a lesser extent some of their allies, had very extensive and sometimes highly successful coverage.¹⁸ For example, the United States is known to have tapped undersea Soviet communications cable, and the United States and Britain tapped underground Soviet military communications cables in Vienna and Berlin in the 1950s.¹⁹ Both sides often successfully “bugged” embassies of the other side (and of third countries) to intercept diplomatic communications. There is also little public information about the extent of U.S. and Soviet aerial and satellite photographic reconnaissance (PHOTINT), electronic intelligence (ELINT), and other means of technical intelligence collection, but it is clear that both

---

¹⁷. See, however, the account by the former GRU officer Vitalii Shlykov, Chto pogubilo Sovetskii Soyuz? Genshtab i ekonomika [What Killed Off the Soviet Union? The General Staff and the Economy] (Moscow: Mezhregional’nyi Fond Informatsionnykh Tekhnologii, September 2002), which discusses, on the basis of firsthand experience, the net assessments carried out by the GRU.


¹⁹. By far the most authoritative and complete account of the Berlin tunnel from which Soviet underground cables were tapped and communications were intercepted is in Daniel E. Murphy, Sergei A. Kondrashev, and George Bailey, Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 205–237, including an interesting analysis correcting earlier accounts. On U.S. Navy tapping of Soviet undersea military communications cables in the Barents Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk, see Sherry Sontag and Christopher Drew, Blind Man’s Bluff: The Untold Story of American Submarine Espionage (New York: Public Affairs, 1998); and John Pina Craven, The Silent War: The Cold War Battle Beneath the Sea (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).
sides were active and enjoyed some success, and it is widely thought that the United States generally gained more. Imagery intelligence (IMINT) was crucial to U.S. evaluation and understanding of Soviet military developments and capabilities (for example, assessments of Soviet strategic missile capabilities were critically dependent on satellite PHOTINT and the monitoring of telemetry emitted during missile tests). But generalizations do not carry us far, least of all when trying to judge the impact of intelligence on the Cold War.

The Role of Espionage

An evaluation of the role of espionage in policymaking is not precluded by the absence of specific information and by continued uncertainty about the availability of intelligence. We know a good deal about what political leaders (especially in the West) knew or believed—and did not know—about the adversary, and we know in most cases what political decisions were reached on both sides. We also can now have high confidence in the judgment that there were no successful “moles” at the political decision-making level on either side. Similarly, there is no evidence, on either side, of any major political or military decision that was prematurely discovered through espionage and thwarted by the other side. There also is no evidence of any major political or military decision that was crucially influenced (much less generated) by an agent of the other side.

In the early years of the Cold War, it was shocking to most Americans to discover that Soviet espionage services had extensively penetrated U.S. intelligence and government agencies in the 1930s and early 1940s (even though nearly all of the Soviet agents had been removed or forced out as of the late 1940s). But the impact of these penetrations on U.S. foreign policy appears to have been negligible, and the effect on U.S. security of the disclosure of secrets to Moscow was limited. (The two known exceptions are the compromise of nuclear weapons information from the Manhattan Project and the disclosure of early U.S. progress in decrypting intercepted Soviet intelligence communications.) Although evidence suggests that Alger Hiss was reporting to Soviet intelligence in 1945 and that he may have informed his Soviet handlers of the U.S. position at the San Francisco conference that established the United Nations (UN), the irony is that such a disclosure may actually have

been advantageous to all concerned. As for influencing policy, Hiss (either from personal conviction or to maintain his cover) opposed the granting of more than one UN vote to the Soviet Union and was overridden by the White House, which agreed to give additional votes to the Soviet Ukrainian and Soviet Belorussian republics. (Hiss also was at Yalta, but he was not privy to President Franklin Roosevelt’s thinking, and the Soviet delegation probably learned much more from bugging the Livadia Palace where Roosevelt and the U.S. delegation were quartered.21) Although Harry Dexter White, a senior Treasury Department official who was acting as a Soviet agent of influence, may have welcomed the plan favored by his boss, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., to cripple postwar Germany as an industrial power, White’s input was unneeded reinforcement for Morgenthau’s own deeply held view—and was just as ineffective as Morgenthau’s position in keeping that plan from later being scrapped.22 The high-level penetration of the British diplomatic and intelli-


22. Journalists Jerrold and Leona Schecter have written a book on various aspects of Soviet (and U.S.) intelligence operations from the 1940s through the 1980s, based in part on disclosures from Soviet intelligence archives and the testimony of former KGB officers. The book, Sacred Secrets: How Soviet Intelligence Operations Changed American History (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 2002), does not for the most part add the conclusion implied in the subtitle. It does, however, feature a claim that there was a successful Soviet intelligence operation in 1941 called “Operation Snow,” using the Soviet agent of influence Harry Dexter White, to induce the U.S. government to take such a hard line against Japan that the Japanese would decide to attack the United States rather than the Soviet Union. This operation was first disclosed by retired KGB Lieutenant-General Vitalii Pavlov in his memoir Operatsiya “Sneg”: Polveka vo vneshnei razvedke KGB (Moscow: Geia, 1996), as well as in an interview with the Schecters. Although other former KGB officers (including the former archivist Vasili Mitrokhin) have found no documentary record of Operation Snow, Pavlov claims that this is because Stalin ordered the whole file on the operation to be destroyed. On the basis of existing evidence, it is not possible to determine the significance of Operation Snow or of other active Soviet efforts to induce the United States to provoke a Japanese attack. Although Pavlov’s claims warrant further scrutiny, one cannot rule out an attempt, in retrospect, to claim a previously unacknowledged success for the KGB and boost its reputation. Pavlov himself, incidentally, makes clear that White, who was never recruited as a controlled agent, was unaware of the KGB’s purpose in encouraging him to help the United States take a hard line against Japan. What is clear is that although White did indeed recommend this sort of policy in memoranda in June and November 1941, there is no evidence that U.S. policy would have been any different if he had not done so. Although his memorandum of 17 November was one source used in preparing the 20 November “Hull Note,” it in fact was less tough and provocative than the Hull Note itself, written in the State Department. In addition, it is by no means clear that the Japanese decision to attack the United States depended on the Hull Note. The final go-ahead for the attack was not given until 26 November, but it would probably have taken far-reaching changes in American policy (changes that did not occur) to have prompted the Japanese government to call off the planned attack. “Operation Snow” is the only major Soviet intelligence operation that the Schecters present as having “changed American history” (see pp. 3–45). The second example they cite is White’s role at the end of the war in the decision to provide the Soviet Union with American printing plates for occupation currency in Germany. That was certainly a foolish and costly decision (although chiefly for the Germans), but if it had any impact on history it was only in contributing to the U.S. and British decision to provide new currency in Western Germany in 1948, a result that was directly counter to Josif Stalin’s purposes and contributed to his disastrous Berlin Blockade. Stalin’s ploy not only failed but contributed greatly to Western resolve and confidence and to the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). But it would be too much to credit all this to White’s role in supporting the
gence services by “the Cambridge Five” in the 1940s and early 1950s was a far more serious breach in providing information about the U.S. and British nuclear weapons programs and about U.S.-British political, diplomatic, and intelligence collaboration, but the direct impact on British and U.S. policy was limited. Kim Philby was able to expose and help frustrate certain specific British and American intelligence and covert operations against the Soviet bloc but not to determine policy even in that limited sphere.

Although espionage became a familiar and in one sense accepted element over the subsequent years of the Cold War, in some circumstances the uncovering of hostile espionage had a significant adverse political impact. The discovery of Soviet wartime espionage against the United States, above all the “atomic spies,” and the first publicized disclosure of a Soviet intelligence defector (Igor Gouzenko, a GRU officer, in Canada in 1945) had a strong effect on public opinion in the United States in the late 1940s and probably contributed to the widespread support for a policy of containment of the Soviet Union. The unmasking of Günther Guillaume, the private secretary to West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, as an agent of East Germany in 1974 led to Brandt’s resignation—a result desired by neither the East German nor the Soviet leadership.

With regard to national policy, at no time throughout the Cold War did either side manage to penetrate the leadership circles of the other. Intelligence was therefore never able to ascertain the precise intentions of the other side. (We shall turn shortly to the question of capabilities.) The Soviet and other Warsaw Pact intelligence services did achieve many penetrations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and various NATO governments, giving Moscow substantial access to NATO deliberations, plans, and decisions. This included, apart from information on NATO capabilities, some significant information about NATO policy and contingency planning, including military contingency plans. As one who participated in the official NATO damage assessment of one important case, I can confirm that a somewhat counterintuitive conclusion was that Soviet intelligence acquisition of top-secret NATO plans (through multiple independent penetrations) could only have underscored the defensive nature of such plans (although that did not preclude continuing Soviet suspicions that there must be ultrasecret U.S. offensive plans not shared with the alliance as a whole). Soviet intelligence acquisitions of secret military contingency plans for Berlin could only have reinforced Moscow’s awareness of the determination of the main NATO powers to use military means if necessary to retain the West’s position in West Berlin.

transfer of the currency plates, a position that may have stemmed more from his general pro-Soviet sympathies than from orders conveyed by his Soviet handlers. (So far, no former KGB officer has come forward to claim credit for an “Operation Greenback.”)
The United States and other NATO countries did not enjoy a comparable degree of access to Warsaw Pact secrets, but their intelligence services did achieve a number of penetrations of Soviet and East European military, intelligence, and diplomatic agencies. (The most important of the Western intelligence sources to have come to light thus far is Colonel Ryszard Kukliński, a member of the Polish General Staff in the 1970s and early 1980s.23) The United States and its NATO allies also successfully recruited a number of high-level sources in Western Communist parties, who were able to provide information about meetings of the world Communist movement (revealing, for example, the growing Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s).

Successful U.S. recruitments of Soviet agents were predominantly among Soviet intelligence officers, in both the KGB and the GRU. Some lower-ranking Soviet diplomats, civilian researchers, and military officers also were recruited, mostly while serving abroad.24 Soviet intelligence agencies also

24. During the 1950s and early 1960s, a number of Soviet intelligence officers defected, especially from the KGB, but only two of these are known to have been “agents in place” for the United States before they defected: Lieutenant-Colonel Petr Popov and Colonel Oleg Penkovsky. Both men were GRU officers, and both of them volunteered their services (“walk-ins” in CIA jargon) for ideological reasons. For an account of Popov’s role, see William Hood, Mole (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982). On Penkovsky, see a CIA-sponsored account, which initially was alleged to be a journal left by Penkovsky and spirited abroad but which actually turned out to be an account based on his debriefings by U.S. and British case officers, published as Oleg Penkovsky, The Penkovsky Papers (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965). For a later, more complete account of the Penkovsky story based on declassified records of his debriefings, see Jerrold L. Schechter and Peter S. Deriabin, The Spy Who Saved the World: How a Soviet Colonel Changed the Course of the Cold War (New York: Scribner’s, 1992). This account authoritatively traces the narrative of Penkovsky’s spying for the West, but it makes no analysis of the product and does not substantiate the colorful title. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s there were few useful U.S. agents in Moscow, in part because of a general paralysis of CIA operations against the Soviet Union as a result of pervasive internal suspicions that there was a “mole” in the Soviet division of CIA’s Clandestine Service and that the KGB was seeking to plant false double agents. Much has been written about this. One good overall treatment is David Wise, Molehunt: The Secret Search for Tutors that Shattered the CIA (New York: Random House, 1992). Also, for a well-informed declassified account by a CIA officer, see Richard Heuer Jr., “Nosenko: Five Paths to Judgment,” in Westerfeld, ed., Inside CIA’s Secret World, pp. 379–414. From the mid-1970s to the end of the Cold War (and beyond) there were many successful U.S. intelligence recruitments of Soviet agents, but most were betrayed by a series of CIA and FBI officials who turned out to be spies for the KGB. Especially damaging was the information handed over to Moscow by Edward Lee Howard, Aldrich H. Ames, and Harold J. Nicholson of the CIA, and by Robert P. Hanssen of the FBI. Twelve U.S. agents in the Soviet Union who have been identified and others who have not been publicly identified were betrayed by one or more of these spies, and there probably were others who probably escaped disclosure or discovery by Soviet counterintelligence. The Ames, Howard, and Hansen cases have been discussed at great length in press coverage and books by journalists based on official indictments and unofficial revelations by the FBI. Although subject to omissions, possible distortion, and other errors, the general picture is clear. On Aldrich Ames, see Tim Weiner, David Johnston, and Neil A. Lewis, Betrayal: The Story of Aldrich Ames, an American Spy (New York: Random House, 1995); David Wise, Nightmover: How Aldrich Ames Sold the CIA to the KGB for $4.6 Million (New York: Harpercollins, 1995); and Pete Early, Confessions of a Spy: The Real Story of Aldrich Ames (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1997). On Edward Lee Howard, see David Wise, The Spy Who Got Away: The Inside Story of Edward Lee Howard, the CIA Agent Who Betrayed His Country’s Secrets and Escaped to Moscow (New York:
achieved their main successes among U.S. intelligence and counterintelligence officers (CIA, FBI, and NSA), and they also managed to recruit some diplomats and other officials, including at least one member of Congress and a sizable number of U.S. Army and Navy officers who were valuable sources on U.S. and allied military activities by virtue of their access to highly classified documents and codes.\textsuperscript{25} Important though this information about plans and weapons may have been, the most notable achievements of espionage on both sides were for counterintelligence purposes. Each government was able to expose and counter enemy penetrations of its own intelligence and military establishments. Intelligence in the form of collection (including through espionage), analysis, and assessment was an element in all national policymaking, and in many cases a valuable one. Nonetheless, espionage penetration played no significant role in any of the critical crises of the Cold War.

Random House, 1988). On Robert Hanssen, see Adrian Havill, \textit{The Spy Who Stayed Out in the Cold: The Secret Life of Double Agent Robert Hansen} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001); Elaine Shannon and Ann Blackman, \textit{The Spy Next Door: The Extraordinary Life of Robert Philip Hansen, the Most Damaging Agent in U.S. History} (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 2002); and David A. Vise, \textit{The Bureau and the Mole: The Unmasking of Roberts Philip Hansen, the Most Dangerous Double Agent in FBI History} (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2002). The record of U.S. and Soviet efforts to penetrate each other’s intelligence services is incomplete, but what is known is impressive with regard to U.S. recruitment of agents in the 1980s but disastrous with regard to the consequences of Soviet recruitment of key U.S. intelligence officials. In both respects, most agents or double agents were volunteers.

\textsuperscript{25} I will omit here the period of the late 1940s and 1950s. No cases of U.S. agents in the Soviet Union during these years (except Popov in the late 1950s) have yet come to light, and only a few significant Soviet agents are known to have been active in the United States after 1947 (except an enlisted man at the National Security Agency, William Weisband). There may well have been some agents who were not disclosed or discovered. From the 1960s through the end of the Cold War and beyond, a large number of U.S. officials worked as spies for the Soviet intelligence services. As noted in the previous footnote, a number of high-ranking CIA and FBI officials who provided crucial information in the 1980s (and 1990s) about U.S. penetrations of the Soviet intelligence services have come to light, and there may have been others who have not yet been uncovered. At lower levels, many of the Soviet spies were U.S. Army and Navy sergeants or warrant officers, and some were low-ranking CIA and NSA civilians who were in a position to hand over highly classified military and intelligence documents. These included Sergeant Roy Rhodes, Sergeant Jack F. Dunlop, Sergeant Robert L. Johnson, Sergeant James Mintkenbaugh, Sergeant Clyde Lee Conrad, and Warrant Officer James W. Hall III of the U.S. Army; Chief Warrant Officer Jerry Whitworth and Glenn Souther, of the U.S. Navy; NSA employee Ronald Pelton; CIA employees Christopher Boyce, Andrew Lee, William Kampiles, Karl Koecher, and David Barnett; and FBI agents Richard Miller and Earl Pitts. A few were higher-ranking officers, including Lieutenant-Colonel William Whalen and Colonel George Trofimoff of the U.S. Army; Foreign Service Officers Irwin Skarbeck and Felix Bloch (not indicted); and CIA officer Edward Gibbon Moore II. Many of these Soviet spies were able to provide extremely sensitive information about U.S. codes, code-breaking, satellite reconnaissance, nuclear arms, NATO activities, military contingency plans, and other crucial military and intelligence activities. The ultimate impact of these leaks of military information is, however, difficult to evaluate. In some cases they may, paradoxically, have served a useful deterrent purpose. In others, they potentially would have been exceptionally damaging to military security if there had been a war. Of the cases mentioned here, the best known and most widely discussed has been the Walker family spy ring. See John Barron, \textit{Breaking the Ring: The Bizarre Case of the Walker Family Spy Ring} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); Pete Early, \textit{Family of Spies: Inside the John Walker Spy Ring} (New York: Bantam Books, 1988); and Robert W. Hunter, \textit{Spy Hunter: Inside the FBI Investigation of the Walker Espionage Case} (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999).
All such crises (and the decisions that led to them) were handled without first-hand HUMINT about the thinking of the political leadership of the other side.

For example, Stalin made his decision to “unleash” North Korea in 1950 based on his own incorrect estimate that the United States would not intervene militarily. We do not know whether he sought an intelligence assessment of likely American reactions, but it seems quite doubtful. Even if he did, he would not have received any “hard” intelligence. The United States had withdrawn its troops from South Korea and had declared a perimeter defense of “vital interests” that pointedly did not include South Korea. If a high-level Soviet agent had been in the U.S. government in early 1950, the most he (or she) could have done would have been to report that there was no contingency planning for, or likelihood of, a U.S. military response (especially with only two under-strength occupation divisions in Japan). On the other side of the equation, only a handful of Soviet Politburo members could have told the United States that Stalin approved the invasion of South Korea not because he wanted to test the U.S. reaction, but because he had convinced himself that the United States would not intervene.

In 1961 and 1962, Soviet and Cuban intelligence officials were well aware that the CIA had dispatched agents into Cuba to carry out subversion and sabotage, but the authorities in Moscow and Havana had no high-level agents in Washington to tell them whether Operation Mongoose was the prelude to a U.S. attack or merely a substitute for one. Indeed, even U.S. policymakers themselves were unsure about this. Soviet intelligence was caught off-guard by the U.S. discovery of missiles in Cuba in October 1962. During the ensuing crisis, the KGB apparently had no source other than the bartender at the National Press Club to pass on rumors of U.S. military plans. The United States likewise had no agents in Moscow or Havana who could have disclosed the missile deployments before October. Fidel Castro’s personal pilot had been heard boasting about weapons able to strike the United States, but it took aerial photography to confirm the presence of Soviet medium-range missiles. Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, the best-placed U.S. spy in Moscow to that date, was not able to tell the United States about the planned deployment of the missiles. When the missile sites were finally detected in photographs taken by a U-2 reconnaissance plane, they were identified not by information from Penkovsky but by photoreconnaissance analysts who were familiar with the construction of similar sites in the Soviet Union. Penkovsky, to be sure, had supplied operational manuals on the medium-range missile systems deployed in Cuba, and these contributed to U.S. assessments of the readiness, operational characteristics, and capabilities of the missiles. There was a very useful confluence of technical intelligence collection and informa-
tion provided earlier by this key human source. Nonetheless, the most critical information for policymakers came from the aerial photography.26

These are of course only sketchy illustrative examples of critical points during crises when intelligence information, especially HUMINT, was absent. Intelligence on military measures and other possible indicators of intentions was usually available, but was usually too sparse or ambiguous. For example, NATO had intelligence on Soviet military preparations in October and early November 1956 before Soviet troops moved en masse into Hungary to suppress the revolution. But intelligence on whether Soviet leaders would commit their forces to intervene was lacking. Indeed, we now know that the Soviet Presidium in fact decided on 30 October 1956 not to intervene, only to reverse that decision the following day.27 Similarly, there was intelligence on Warsaw Pact military preparations for possible intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968—as there also had been in July, when no intervention occurred. Intelligence indicators that Soviet military forces were prepared to intervene in Poland in December 1980 and April 1981 could not tell us whether they would do so or, as proved to be the case, would not.28 In October 1973, ambiguous intelligence on Soviet military preparations led some in Washington to believe that Soviet leaders might intervene in Syria during the Yom Kippur War. A U.S. strategic military alert was called, albeit mainly for political effect. We now know that Soviet leaders at the time were not prepar-

26. The prize for overstatement in evaluating the role of intelligence in the Cuban missile crisis without doubt goes to the depiction of Penkovsky’s role by Schecter and Deriabin in The Spy Who Saved the World. For a useful corrective, see Len Scott, “Espionage and the Cold War: Oleg Penkovsky and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” Intelligence and National Security, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn 1999), pp. 23–47. Penkovsky also has been credited by some with providing information that permitted the United States to reevaluate Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capabilities and dispel fears of a “missile gap” in favor of the Soviet Union, a change that gave President Kennedy confidence in U.S. strategic superiority during the Berlin and Cuban missile crises. These claims, too, are problematic. Although Penkovsky did assert that Khrushchev was bluffing when he boasted about Soviet missile strength, Penkovsky did not provide any evidence to support this assertion. The “missile gap” was deflated by evidence from satellite photoreconnaissance, not by anything Penkovsky could say. See Raymond L. Garthoff, A Journey Through the Cold War: A Memoir of Containment and Coexistence (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001), pp. 111–117.


ing for a unilateral military intervention, even if there had been no U.S. alert.29

The Role of Intelligence Assessment

When intelligence officials and policymakers on one side tried to determine the other side’s intentions, intelligence analysis usually was more important than intelligence information, if only because the latter was lacking or non-indicative. No less important, political leaders tended to make their own assessments of the adversary’s intentions, and formal intelligence estimates may or may not have played a significant part.

With regard to assessments of the other side’s military forces and capabilities, the role of intelligence information was far more salient, if only because political decision-makers depended on it. The validity of intelligence on the adversary’s military force levels, weapons deployments, and overall military capabilities was extremely important. Because the information presented was (more or less) concrete, it was less subject to challenge by policymakers. Intelligence analysts and agencies did, however, occasionally diverge in their assessments of military strength and compete for the attention of policymakers.

Throughout the Cold War, both sides generally had a solid appreciation of the main elements of the military equation.30 The most common general error was the tendency to exaggerate the strengths of the opposing side. In the United States, NIEs overstated future projections of Soviet forces throughout the Cold War, particularly during certain periods. For example, in the early 1950s the CIA overestimated the Soviet nuclear weapons program and erroneously projected that a “bomber gap” would emerge by the mid-1950s and a “missile gap” by the late 1950s.31 There are many indications, although not yet much archival documentation, of a similar tendency on the part of Soviet intelligence analysts.32 Perhaps such overestimates of the capabilities of the


30. For still useful earlier academic assessments based on materials available in the open literature, see Lawrence Freedman, U.S. Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977); and John Prados, The Soviet Estimate: U.S. Intelligence Analysis and Russian Military Strength (New York: Dial Press, 1982). In addition, a number of valuable internal CIA retrospective “post-mortems” and critical analyses of earlier CIA estimates and analyses have been declassified and released to NARA.


32. See, for example, Shlykov, Chto pogubilo Sovetskii Soyu?
other side contributed to caution and to deterrence, but they certainly also contributed to the arms race. This phenomenon was an important element in the Cold War, but all that I can do in a general review of this sort is to flag it as a topic warranting further consideration. The recent mass declassification of U.S. NIEs on Soviet military forces over the entire span of the Cold War provide much invaluable material, but unfortunately we do not have access to comparable Soviet evaluations. This inequity greatly limits our analysis of the Soviet side of the dynamic arms competition.

It is also necessary to bear in mind the effects of what might be termed “self-deception” in assessment, a problem that afflicted both sides but particularly the Soviet Union. Ideological preconceptions and the psychological blinders of a secretive totalitarian system led Soviet intelligence agencies to distort and misconstrue much of the information they received on U.S. plans, motivations, and intentions.

Attempts to evaluate the influence of intelligence on the course of the Cold War are inescapably hindered by several factors. First is the problem of sources of information, which are limited not only by the residual secrecy of archival records but also by the absence of documentary files on some matters, and even by intentional obfuscation of the official record on some others. This problem is of course compounded by a frequent imbalance in available information from U.S. and Soviet records (with the former much more freely available than the latter). Another limitation is the problem of perception (and misperception) of others, particularly of adversaries. Although this problem is by no means unique to intelligence activities and has attracted academic attention, it is especially critical in intelligence assessment. Finally, and perhaps most difficult to overcome, is the problem of determining the role of intelligence information and assessments in policymaking. Was relevant and timely intelligence available; was it effectively brought to bear; and, above all, was it accepted and used by policymakers?

**Intelligence at the Macro and Micro Levels**

In addressing these questions, I shall introduce two levels of approach to the roles of intelligence. At the *macro level* we face the question of the role of intelligence in affecting the general course (and perhaps the outcome) of the Cold War. At the *micro level* are the many cases of the influence of intelligence on particular episodes or events during the Cold War. This includes major crises but also other aspects of what one might term “normal” relations between the adversaries—relations not only during times of conflict and competition but also during periods of détente and coexistence. In short, we need to con-
sider the effects of intelligence on specific events and on the broader dynamics of the Cold War.

At the macro level, the most crucial issue of the Cold War was whether it would turn hot and lead to a general nuclear war. Obviously, no such war occurred, and one of the few conclusions we can state with certainty is that intelligence officials, at a minimum, did not lead decision-makers to believe that a large-scale nuclear war was either so feasible and desirable, or so imminent and unavoidable, that it must be launched. Short of the initiation of war, however, intelligence assessments of external threats and the danger of war did at times have important effects. Many believed during the Cold War—and some still believe today—that such alarmist assessments were justified or were at least beneficial in spurring the adoption of unilateral and allied military and political countermeasures that helped to prevent war. Others would argue that the most negative overall impact of intelligence assessments during the Cold War (in both the United States and the Soviet Union) was to exacerbate tension and sustain an unnecessary extent of arms competition, which in turn helped to perpetuate the Cold War.

It should be noted that although intelligence officials never determined that an enemy attack was imminent, technical intelligence warning systems on a number of occasions generated false alerts of a hostile attack under way. If these false warnings had been accepted without further corroboration, they could have prompted U.S. or Soviet leaders to launch strategic missiles in response to what they erroneously believed was an enemy attack, thus inadvertently initiating a larger war. We were lucky that the warnings did not spark hasty action and that all such errors were promptly corrected or discounted.

In at least a few cases, faulty intelligence reports added to fears and suspicions that could have resulted in war. In June 1960 the KGB informed Khrushchev that a NATO liaison officer with the CIA had reported that senior officials in the U.S. Defense Department were convinced of the need to launch a preventive war against the Soviet Union. In the spring of 1962 a GRU agent, described as “a well-placed source in the U.S. national security bureaucracy,” reported to Moscow that the United States in June 1961 had decided to launch a nuclear strike against the Soviet Union in September of that year but had dropped the plan after the Soviet Union announced a new series of large-yield thermonuclear tests. This report, like the earlier one, was glaringly erroneous, and in this case it is not known whether it was circulated.


to Soviet policymakers and, if so, what their reaction was. But it illustrates the extreme kind of false reporting that can be provided by (or credited to) a supposedly "well placed" source.35

The most significant and dangerous known case of faulty intelligence assessment occurred during a special intelligence alert in the Soviet Union in the early 1980s. This alert, known as "VRYaN"—the Russian acronym for the words "Surprise Nuclear Missile Attack" (Vnezapnoe raketno-yardenoe napadenie), though it is often referred to imprecisely in the Western literature as "RYAN"—was initiated in May 1981 by Yuri Andropov, who was then chairman of the KGB and a member of the Soviet Politburo. The alert was still in effect in November 1983 when, at a time of acute tension, NATO held a high-level political-military exercise on nuclear weapons release called Able Archer. Andropov (who by this point had succeeded Leonid Brezhnev as the top Soviet leader) and some (though not all) senior intelligence officials suspected that the exercise was a cover for a possible NATO attack, and the KGB intensified the intelligence alert. That much is established. Apparently some other Soviet political leaders did not share these fears, and no comparable high-level political or military alert was initiated. Still, the dangers from the high tension were real. (This war scare also contributed to Ronald Reagan's turn in January 1984 to a less harshly confrontational posture after he was advised of the Soviet intelligence alert by the British, who themselves had been informed of it by their agent in the KGB, Colonel Oleg Gordievsky.)36

In considering the impact of intelligence on the macro level of the Cold War, we observe that intelligence collection and assessment (and other intelligence-related activities) not only were continuing functions of international relations, but also operated within the framework of the Cold War and the mindset of ideological and geopolitical adversaries. Consequently, intelligence failed to provide support to policymakers for any radical change to the prevailing international framework and mindset. In that respect as well as some

35. See Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–1964—The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), p. 155. Outsiders have never been permitted to work in the GRU archive, but Aleksandr Fursenko, a well-connected Russian scholar, apparently was given privileged access to some GRU files pertaining to U.S.-Cuban relations and the Cuban missile crisis. Thus far, no copies of the items he cites are available to other scholars, and hence there is no way to ascertain any further details about the 1962 report. Fursenko himself provides no information about the way the report was evaluated, the recipients of it, and the reactions it evoked.

others, intelligence activities can be seen as having buttressed or perpetuated the structures of the Cold War. But before we can evaluate the macro-level impact of intelligence on the Cold War more fully, we must await a fuller understanding of the nature of the Cold War itself, as well as further evaluations of the role of intelligence in the micro-level processes that unfolded during the Cold War.

The record of intelligence in providing relevant information or assessments at the micro level—during the numerous episodes of the Cold War—is, naturally, a checkered one. In some instances, intelligence support clearly was successful, whereas in other cases it was plagued by shortcomings or failures. Each such event requires its own investigation and conclusions. As a general observation, however, I would emphasize that although it is necessary to consider each case on the basis of what is now known about the facts, one should not in hindsight assume that intelligence officials should have been able to know everything. The performance of intelligence agencies should be judged on the basis of what they could and should have known at the time.

In recent years a few historians have begun to draw attention to the need to include more consideration of the role of intelligence in writing the history of the Cold War. Notable were two articles in the journal Diplomatic History by John Lewis Gaddis and John Ferris.\(^\text{37}\) Even these discussions, though, have focused mainly on the micro level. Moreover, despite a growing volume of declassified intelligence materials, particularly in the United States, there has not been much follow-through. For example, although it may still be early to make the attempt, there has been no effort at a comparative analysis, such as Ernest May’s pathbreaking study of the prewar intelligence assessments by major European countries before World War I and World War II.\(^\text{38}\)


other hand, as archival materials (particularly on the early period of the Cold War) have become increasingly available, many descriptive and analytical articles have appeared about U.S. and Soviet intelligence activities and organizations during the Cold War.

Some historians of the Cold War, and of episodes of the Cold War, have included in their analysis at least some aspects of intelligence, particularly major cases of espionage and of covert actions. To note but a few, Melvyn Leffler, Richard Betts, Mark Kramer, John Gaddis, Vojtech Mastny, Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, and the present writer have done so. Christopher Andrew, specializing in intelligence, has sought to relate intelligence activities to a broader context and to the historiography of the Cold War. A few historians have addressed the role of intelligence assessments in policymaking. No one, however, has yet attempted to deal with broader issues relating to the overall impact of intelligence on the Cold War.

It is neither surprising nor inappropriate that most attention thus far has been focused on intelligence at the micro level. The micro level, as I have defined it above, encompasses almost all of the extensive history of events of the Cold War. Moreover, it is the easier level to visualize, to focus on, and to evaluate, and it provides much of the basis for a larger foundation that will be needed to analyze the macro-level impact of intelligence on the Cold War. Nonetheless, even as we continue to examine events at the micro level, we should expand our horizons and undertake at least a preliminary evaluation of the macro level.

It is hardly surprising that scholars have tended to focus their attention on identifiable major events of history at the micro level. Crises and other turning points in the Cold War understandably attract and appropriately deserve our attention. But so do questions of the less dramatic and more subtle influences of intelligence on routine, non-conflictual aspects of Cold War

coexistence. Even as we use newly available materials to clarify and enlarge our understanding of the impact of intelligence on key episodes of the Cold War, we should also strive to expand our understanding of the various indirect influences of intelligence on the dynamics and structures of the Cold War.

**Complexity of the Impact of Intelligence: The Example of Satellite Reconnaissance**

Intelligence developments are often complex in their impact. This can be seen very well in the case of satellite photoreconnaissance. After the shooting-down of an American U-2 reconnaissance plane on May Day 1960 near Sverdlovsk in the heart of the Soviet Union led to an end of aerial reconnaissance missions over the USSR, U.S. intelligence satellites more than made up for the shortfall. In 1961, satellite reconnaissance effectively eliminated fears in the United States of an impending or actual “missile gap” in favor of the Soviet Union. More generally, over the years, satellite reconnaissance helped to offset the relative lack of U.S. opportunities to gather intelligence in the Soviet Union through official travel, espionage, and other means.

Within a few years, after the Soviet Union developed a satellite reconnaissance capability of its own, Moscow dropped its earlier opposition and was willing to accept a global international regime governing activities in space. In the long run, the intelligence derived from satellite reconnaissance during the remainder of the Cold War allowed both the United States and the Soviet Union to have confidence in mutual deterrence (although it could not dispel all fears, in either Washington or Moscow, about “windows of vulnerability” to surprise strategic attack).

In the short run, however, the advent of U.S. satellite reconnaissance in 1961 deprived the Soviet Union of much of its prized strategic asset of secrecy. It contributed to the Soviet decision to place missiles in Cuba in 1962, a move undertaken in part to provide an ersatz interim strategic capability against the United States until larger numbers of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) became available. There were other motivations as well for...
Nikita Khrushchev’s reckless gamble in the Cuban missile decision, but the perceived need to compensate for the weakness exposed by U.S. satellite reconnaissance was important insofar as it contributed to Khrushchev’s readiness to take greater risks than if he had simply been launching an offensive probe or reinforcing deterrence of a U.S. attack on Cuba. Incidentally, the failure of U.S. intelligence officials to give due weight to this crucial incentive for Khrushchev to deploy the missiles had a direct impact on their erroneous forecast in mid-September 1962 that the Soviet Union would not, despite potential gains from a successful deployment, embark on such a risky venture merely to bolster an offensive political strategy.42 (This episode is discussed in greater detail below.)

After both sides developed satellite reconnaissance, serious negotiations and some agreements on strategic arms control finally became possible. The ability to rely on unilateral “national means of verification,” the euphemism for national technical intelligence collection (above all by satellite reconnaissance), enabled the two countries to overcome the previous stalemate over arms control verification. Each side’s awareness of the general capabilities of satellite intelligence collection also helped to ensure that they would submit accurate data at the arms control talks and would not differ in their estimates of the existing levels of strategic arms.43

Although satellite reconnaissance broke the logjam over verification in strategic arms control, it did not have the same effect on negotiations of conventional arms and troop levels in Europe. Indeed, indirect—and in this case negative—effects of intelligence played a not insignificant role in frustrating attempts to reach agreement on mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) in Europe from 1973 to 1989. (This influence was probably not decisive inasmuch as there were also strong political-military disincentives to reach a meaningful agreement, but it did contribute to the stalemate.) When the MBFR negotiations began, the Warsaw Pact participants—especially the Soviet Union—submitted data on their existing force levels (which were to be the baseline for any reductions) that NATO rejected as too low. In reality, because the Warsaw Pact countries had succeeded in planting a number of spies in NATO, the leaders of those countries knew precisely what the estimates

43. Satellite photographic reconnaissance was the mainstay for verification but was used in conjunction with all other sources, including electronic and radar intelligence and analysis of telemetry emitted during missile tests. The combination of technical intelligence systems permitted the identification of enemy missiles and the monitoring of missile warhead loadings as well as silo launchers. In addition to the earlier-noted CIA release of records on the early CORONA satellite reconnaissance photography, see David T. Lindgren, Trust but Verify: Imagery Analysis in the Cold War (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000).
were that NATO had been compiling of Soviet and East European forces. Hence they ensured that their own data submissions adhered closely to those levels, which they knew to be too low. But in preparation for the opening of the talks, NATO reassessed its estimates of Warsaw Pact forces and concluded that a number of the estimated levels should be raised. The new NATO estimates were considerably higher than the previous estimates and therefore also were higher than the Warsaw Pact data submissions. The discrepancy was significant enough to cause a problem, as the Pact countries were not prepared to retract or change the data they had submitted. The “data dispute” in MBFR dragged on for years. Only many years later did the United States conclude that its estimates (and therefore NATO’s) of manpower levels in Soviet forces—the principal issue of contention—had been too high. Thus, the data dispute apparently stemmed both from deliberate understatements by the Warsaw Pact governments (in line with the earlier NATO data on Pact forces) and from overstatements by NATO because of incorrect intelligence estimates. Although the errors in intelligence estimates were not militarily significant, they became diplomatically and politically significant and stymied the negotiations.

In 1989–1990, as the Cold War was ending, the NATO and Warsaw Pact governments jettisoned MBFR after seventeen fruitless years and launched new negotiations on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), which were successfully concluded in November 1990. A new approach involving reductions to equal and lower levels of arms that were agreed on by both sides and the inclusion of detailed on-site verification provisions—measures that in both cases became feasible because of Mikhail Gorbachev’s determination to end the Cold War and the political-military division of Europe—swiftly removed the impasse. (The CIA failed to predict that Gorbachev in December 1988 would announce a major unilateral reduction of Soviet forces without awaiting the CFE negotiations. This failure occurred despite available indications of Gorbachev’s intent. Once the unilateral reductions were under way, they were monitored and confirmed by U.S. and NATO intelligence.)

**Intelligence and Cold War Crises**

There is no need here to review in detail any of the many flashpoints or crises of the Cold War, which of course include many confrontations in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America as well as in Europe and East Asia. In nearly all of these crises, the first question usually posed with respect to the role of intelligence is whether the intelligence agencies provided sufficient warning that a crisis would erupt. (In crises that arose from third-party initiatives or
from uncontrolled events, the question may have arisen for both of the principal adversaries.) Insofar as the Soviet Union or the United States took an initiative that resulted in a crisis, a parallel question that should be posed is whether the initiating side tried to predict the likely reaction of the other side and, if so, whether the prediction was correct. (I phrase the question this way because political leaders often undertake an initiative without bothering to obtain a prior intelligence estimate of the expected reactions.) One can raise a number of other questions about the role of intelligence in gauging the actions and reactions of the other side during a crisis and also about the role of intelligence in the resolution of the crisis. But there are often many other ways that intelligence can affect the behavior of states during a crisis, as well as the outcome of the crisis. Let us turn to a specific example to illustrate the point.

The Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 is probably the most intensively studied crisis of the Cold War. An early flurry of self-congratulatory accounts by some of the U.S. officials who took part in the standoff emphasized that the U.S. government’s management and resolution of the crisis was highly successful. After this initial burst, there was a long hiatus. However, beginning with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the crisis in 1987, there ensued a remarkable series of international conferences involving not only scholars but also former participants in the crisis (initially just former American officials, then former Soviet as well as American officials, and eventually Cuban as well as American and Soviet officials). The conferences resulted in a number of new books reanalyzing the crisis. I will not recount the conferences or books here, nor will I review even the principal findings of these historical reassessments. Instead, I will simply note some of the intelligence issues that were raised, including a few lesser-known aspects of the role of intelligence in the crisis. In what may be a pioneering forerunner of analyses of other Cold War crises, an international conference that was held in 1997—ten years after the series of conferences began—led to the publication of a comprehensive volume of essays dealing with the role of intelligence in the Cuban missile crisis.44 Earlier, in 1992, the CIA hosted a conference in conjunction with its release of a number of intelligence documents relating to the crisis, but that conference featured only the release of those documents along with some reminiscences of the crisis and did not consider other information or analyses that had appeared since 1962.45 Many other U.S. intelligence as well as policy documents also have been declassified. Although a number of important Soviet

---


45. See McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, which includes 112 documents and was released in conjunction with the CIA’s first Intelligence History Symposium in October 1992.
documents from the crisis have been released, no Soviet intelligence reports or assessments have been included.46

On 19 September 1962 the U.S. intelligence community unanimously estimated (the one doubter, Director of Central Intelligence John McCone, was in Europe) that Soviet leaders would probably not deploy long-range nuclear missiles in Cuba. This misjudgment has been known ever since the crisis. The reason for the error has not been clear, aside from the agencies’ overreliance on past patterns of Soviet behavior. But although the precise reason cannot be conclusively documented, a major factor behind the error, as noted earlier, was probably the CIA’s failure to take sufficient account of the Soviet Union’s perceived need to shore up its weak strategic posture vis-à-vis the United States. This motivation inspired Khrushchev to take greater risks than he otherwise would have. Less attention has been given to the reasons for the Soviet Union’s own intelligence failure—namely, its erroneous belief that the United States would acquiesce in the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba. The only explanation offered thus far is that Soviet leaders wrongly expected that the deployments could be completed in secrecy and be presented to the United States and the world as a fait accompli. Only a relatively small amount of the relevant Soviet documentation has been released, but the items that are available, including some Politburo-level deliberations along with key memoirs and other testimony, leave little doubt that no formal intelligence assessments were requested or provided to the Soviet leadership either before or during the crisis. Khrushchev and his colleagues were their own “intelligence estimators.” Moreover, assessments by the Soviet KGB and GRU (and by Cuban intelligence) of U.S. political intentions and plans during the crisis were extremely limited, with no high-level or well-placed sources and only a few low-level sources. This was also true of U.S. intelligence agencies’ efforts to gauge deliberations in the Soviet Politburo. No sources were available at that level. In other respects, however, U.S. intelligence support to policymakers during the crisis was extensive and very good—within the limitations noted above. By contrast, all the available evidence suggests that Soviet intelligence support was very limited and inadequate.

It is generally assumed that accurate information is always an asset to policymakers. However, an evaluation of the role of U.S. intelligence support to policymakers during the Cuban missile crisis suggests the counterintuitive conclusion that ignorance of relevant information can sometimes be conducive to crisis resolution. During the missile crisis, the United States lacked in-

46. For useful commentary on this point, see Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*; and Fursenko and Naftali’s “Soviet Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis” in Blight and Welch, *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, pp. 64–87.
telligence confirming the presence of any Soviet nuclear warheads in Cuba. Even so, U.S. intelligence analysts and policymakers decided to make the prudent assumption that warheads were there and available for the missiles. Only in 1989 did we learn from former Soviet officials (later confirmed by archival releases) that indeed some sixty thermonuclear warheads had been in Cuba for deployment on the same number of medium- and intermediate-range missiles and their forty associated launchers. This disclosure was important, but it did not affect our understanding of the history of the crisis. However, in 1992–1994 we learned that, in addition, about 100 tactical nuclear warheads also were sent to Cuba in 1962. That was important news. The United States had known in 1962 that dual-capable delivery systems were in Cuba and might be armed with nuclear warheads, but it was not considered likely by intelligence estimators or policymakers. Military planners did take the possibility into account, and they ensured that U.S. tactical nuclear weapons were available if needed, but they, too, did not regard it as likely that Soviet tactical warheads were present.

Consequently, when the crisis was resolved, the United States was content to monitor the removal of Soviet medium-range missiles and light bombers (the latter on principle because President Kennedy had specified “bombers” as offensive arms in his pre-crisis public warnings, not because they were believed to be equipped with nuclear weapons). On-site inspections within Cuba proved infeasible because of Fidel Castro’s adamant refusal to allow them and because of the U.S. government’s exclusion of Cuba from the negotiations. If, however, U.S. intelligence agencies in 1962 had detected the presence in Cuba of roughly 100 small tactical nuclear warheads for deployment on several different air and land delivery systems, there would have been tremendous political pressure in the United States to insist on the removal of all Soviet military forces from Cuba. There also would have been great pressure to require on-site inspections in Cuba to monitor the removal of all nuclear warheads. In short, if the United States had possessed more complete intelligence, the negotiation of a settlement would have been much more difficult, and perhaps impossible. During the crisis itself, the knowledge that Soviet tactical nuclear warheads were present in Cuba undoubtedly would have placed U.S. officials under greater pressure to embark on an all-out preemptive invasion of Cuba, despite the risks of casualties from possible tactical nuclear warfare on the island.47

This essay is not the place to examine even one Cold War crisis fully, much less to address a number of such crises. Nonetheless, it may be useful to note one other example of the various roles of intelligence in such situations.

---

47. See Garthoff, “U.S. Intelligence in the Cuban Missile Crisis,” pp. 50–53.
During the Berlin crisis of 1958–1962, intelligence assessments were important, but direct intelligence information about the political positions of the two sides was thin. There was no high-level intelligence source on either side that could inform the other of the real objectives, strategy, or determination of the adversary. Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, the American spy in Soviet military intelligence, did provide information in 1961 on Soviet policy vis-à-vis Berlin as it was understood in high military circles in Moscow. However, he was not a proven source, and even though he accurately reported his information, it often proved to be incorrect (as when he insisted that Khrushchev would sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany by the end of that year).

The United States and NATO did not know, from Penkovsky or any other source, about Soviet and East German plans to cut off West Berlin with the construction of a wall in August 1961. Once the wall was built, U.S. intelligence analysts did correctly surmise that it would meet the Soviet Union’s principal “defensive” objective of stopping the debilitating outflow of people from East Germany and thus that in due course it might lead not only to the abandonment of Khrushchev’s demands for a peace treaty and recognition of East Germany but also to the cessation of Moscow’s “offensive” pressure on West Berlin. This estimate might have paved the way for a gradual de-escalation of the crisis, but in October 1961, as the two sides were still adjusting to the existence of the wall, a particularly dangerous local confrontation occurred.

The confrontation began after the East German authorities demanded that Western civilian officials entering East Berlin display their identification credentials to East German police at crossing checkpoints, a move intended to force the Western powers to recognize East German authority at least implicitly. This demand was not entirely unreasonable (and indeed the British acceded), but U.S. officials in West Berlin saw it as “salami tactics” toward undermining Western occupation rights in all of Berlin. They refused to comply and brought up armed U.S. military police escorts to enter East Berlin. After several days of escalating actions, the United States and then the Soviet Union ordered battle tanks to move into the area. Some ten U.S. tanks, with guns uncovered and engines revved up, squared off against ten Soviet tanks at “Checkpoint Charlie.” Each side had roughly twenty more tanks in reserve, and some of the U.S. tanks were equipped with bulldozer attachments to clear away any barriers. After a tense, 20-hour standoff, the Soviet tanks withdrew, soon followed by the withdrawal of the U.S. tanks. The confrontation was over.

This is a capsule summary of the confrontation as it was seen and depicted in the West. The United States had not agreed to permit the display of identification (although it curtailed visits by civilian officials), and General
Lucius Clay, the senior American official, argued that the very fact that Soviet tanks had become involved undercut East German claims to authority. Soviet leaders had a different view, but they eschewed public comment. The only exception was a claim by Khrushchev a decade later in his memoirs that he ordered the Soviet tanks to withdraw because he was confident that the United States would promptly follow suit—as in fact it did. He depicted the outcome as a victory for common sense and for the Soviet Union.

After the Cold War ended, some thirty years later, several things became known. First, it was revealed that President Kennedy had taken the initiative, through an unofficial “back channel” recently established in Washington (via a GRU colonel under cover at the Soviet embassy, Georgii Bol’shakov), to urge Khrushchev to take the first step in pulling back his tanks, on the condition that U.S. tanks would then promptly be withdrawn. Khrushchev, who had not disclosed this confidential back-channel exchange in his memoirs, thus had good reason to be confident that the United States would do its part if he started the mutual tank withdrawals. Second, former Soviet officials and Soviet archival materials indicated that Soviet leaders had not authorized the East Germans to step up their harassment and indeed had earlier warned them not to do so. More important, Soviet leaders believed that the entire confrontation had been engineered by the United States to provide an excuse to move tanks with bulldozer attachments into the city to breach the wall. The Soviet leaders had therefore decided to deploy their own tanks and stand fast. From this perspective the U.S. government’s withdrawal of its tanks was a victory for the Soviet side, ending a threat to the wall. No wonder Khrushchev believed he could afford to “go first.” Third, the reason that Khrushchev and his colleagues believed that the United States wanted to pierce the Berlin Wall is that Soviet military intelligence had observed—and photographed—an exercise by U.S. tanks with bulldozer attachments that were attempting to knock down segments of a replica of the wall constructed by U.S. military engineers in a forested military training ground in West Berlin. Indeed, General Clay had, on his own authority, arranged that exercise—without authorization and without informing anyone in Washington. President Kennedy had no idea that Khrushchev believed, on the basis of supposedly “hard” intelligence, that the Soviet Union was in a high-level crisis. Nor was Kennedy aware that Khrushchev had convened a special group of political and military leaders to advise him on a crisis that no one in Washington even knew was taking place!

In this case, intelligence agencies on both sides were blind to the real situation, especially with regard to the objectives of the other side. For that reason, in addition to the unique circumstance that U.S. and Soviet tanks were in direct armed confrontation (and it is worth emphasizing here that the tanks
on both sides were fully armed), the situation was unusually dangerous. The success of Soviet military intelligence collection, in monitoring the U.S. tank exercise, caused Soviet leaders to assume that U.S. objectives during the crisis were offensive, and the lack of more complete political intelligence on the U.S. position reinforced that erroneous impression. The United States was even more in the dark. U.S. intelligence agencies acquired no information at all about Khrushchev’s perception of U.S. intentions, nor did U.S. officials realize that certain U.S. actions had fostered the Soviet leader’s mistaken view of the situation.48

**Deception, “Disinformation,” and Covert Action**

Intelligence agencies are responsible for ferreting out information about the other side’s intentions and capabilities and for preventing state secrets from being compromised by the other side. In addition to these basic tasks, intelligence organizations seek to deceive and misinform the adversary. The most common means is simply through concealment of the truth and the dissemination of false information in public statements. Another means of deception is the “turning” of an enemy agent who has been uncovered, persuading him to transmit misinformation along with certain pieces of valid information to establish credibility. (Alternatively, an enemy agent who has been identified but is not aware of the fact may be left at liberty and fed misinformation to supplement the valid information he continues to collect. This strategy can be highly effective, but it is risky insofar as it is difficult or impossible to know what sort of information the agent is acquiring.)

Deception of an adversary can also be served by other means, such as political bluff. Khrushchev’s threats from 1958 to 1961 to sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany and turn over authority in East Berlin were eventually revealed to be a bluff (although he may at one time have considered such an option). Khrushchev’s boasts about Soviet ICBM strength in the late 1950s were deceptive, although the fears in the United States of an adverse “missile gap” were more the product of self-deception than of his boasts.

“Disinformation” has become a word in the English language as a result of its adoption during the Cold War as a translation of the Russian word *dezinformatsiya*. Presumably this was because the term “disinformation” sounds more ominous and deceitful than the English word “misinformation.” Cold War usage also tended to lump together “Disinformation” with “Active

Measures” (aktivnye meropriyatiya), a catch-all Soviet term referring to a complex of propaganda, deception, and covert actions. As a result, many Soviet propaganda and political-warfare measures have come to be called “disinformation” in the West, even though no one ever expected that Western leaders would be deceived by them. For example, the Soviet propaganda campaign in the early 1980s against NATO’s plans to deploy Pershing II and cruise missiles in Western Europe was termed a “disinformation” campaign. Although misrepresentations were made during the campaign, and although it involved “active measures” conducted by the KGB (in stirring up Western pacifist groups for example), it was not a true disinformation or deception operation.

Incidentally, Soviet intelligence on the range of Pershing II medium-range ballistic missiles led officials in Moscow to believe that the missiles were capable of striking key Soviet command centers in and around Moscow, even though the official range quoted for the Pershing II by the United States and NATO was just short of Moscow. Whether Soviet military intelligence was mistaken or exaggerating, or the United States had engaged in deception, is not entirely clear, but in any case the intelligence assessment in Moscow reinforced Soviet leaders’ fears that the United States was striving for military superiority. (Soviet intelligence officials also were aware that the United States had stocked Pershing re-fires in West Germany, despite public U.S. claims—and official assurances to West Germany—that no such missiles were stockpiled. The GRU’s detection of the secret U.S. deployments fueled Moscow’s belief that the Pershings were intended for a first strike. The United States was embarrassed vis-à-vis its West German ally and NATO when under the INF Treaty in 1987 it had to acknowledge the presence of the additional stocks of Pershing II missiles in West Germany.)

Deception operations are carefully designed and conducted covert intelligence operations to mislead the adversary. They are, and will probably remain, one of the least disclosed areas of intelligence activity. Although most deception operations probably concern military capabilities, they can have important political fallout.

An important U.S. Cold War deception operation that recently came to light illustrates the important “blowback” (effects that boomerang against their originators) and other unintended broader consequences of even a successful misinformation and deception operation. In 1959, U.S. intelligence agencies (the FBI, together with Army Intelligence) successfully planted an agent in the GRU. Through this channel, the United States was able to feed the Soviet leadership a mixture of true and false information about U.S. chemical warfare (CW) development programs in the mid- to late 1960s. The objective was to induce the Soviet Union to divert scarce resources into the unproductive pursuit of advanced chemical weapons. The disinformation
The program was successful, except for the unforeseen side effect that the Soviet scientists managed to develop a more advanced chemical nerve-gas agent. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the U.S. controllers of the deception operation expanded it to cover biological weapons (BW) development as well. Several channels, including at least two Soviet intelligence officers who had been “turned” by the FBI and become double agents, were used in this deception operation. Again, the operation was successful, but the result was not what had been anticipated. The Soviet Union in the 1970s greatly expanded its own BW development program, and successfully developed the capacity to produce new biological weapons.49

The consequences of these “successful” U.S. deception and disinformation operations were much broader than simply the increase in Soviet expenditures and the unanticipated successes achieved by Soviet scientists in the development of CW and BW. For one thing, the disinformation operation necessarily led the Soviet authorities to believe that the United States was secretly violating President Richard Nixon’s unilateral renunciation of BW in 1969. Even after the deception operation was halted in the early 1970s, the doubts that it had sowed were bound to linger in the minds of Soviet leaders, who therefore were skeptical about U.S. compliance with the BW Convention after 1972. The operation also inadvertently spurred the establishment of an immense Soviet BW organization (“Biopreparat” was the cover name) with a staff of top-notch scientists and technicians. The sheer size of this organization apparently thwarted efforts by Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin in the early 1990s to close down the secret Soviet BW program. Although the program was sharply curtailed, the evidence suggests that BW work continued. Moreover, even the scaling back of the program was not an unalloyed blessing. The reductions created a large pool of underemployed or unemployed Soviet scientists with expertise in CW and BW, a development that sparked concern about the risk of proliferation of CW/BW expertise to other countries. (Fortunately, so far as is known, the most prominent scientists who have left have gone to the United States, Britain, Germany, and Israel.)

Deception operations also pose the risk of another kind of blowback. To cite but one example, the extreme suspicion engendered by many years of immersion in counterintelligence and deception caused the long-time head of CIA counterintelligence, James Angleton, to mount a search for a non-

existent “super-mole” in the CIA. For nearly a decade, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, Angleton’s aggressive campaign severely debilitated the agency’s intelligence operations against the Soviet Union. (So bizarre did the situation become that one of Angleton’s own men later concluded that the damage wrought by the search suggested that Angleton himself must have been the mole!) The mindset of suspicion also led Angleton to conclude that the Sino-Soviet split at the beginning of the 1960s was a sham, a Communist deception operation against the West. (Unlike the devastating impact of his suspicions on the CIA itself, his peculiar view of Sino-Soviet relations and other aspects of world politics had no effect on intelligence assessments or on U.S. policy.50)

The broad field of “covert action” goes beyond the core role of intelligence but is closely tied by several connections. Intelligence and related security agencies are the usual instrument for any type of covert operation decided on by policymakers. This was certainly true for the CIA and the KGB and for other intelligence organizations during the Cold War. Intelligence agencies have the assets and experience of clandestine operations to mount covert political measures aimed at influencing and manipulating political activities in other countries, including adversaries, neutrals, and sometimes allies. In the extreme, this has included the overthrow of governments, as when Soviet KGB special operations forces stormed Kabul in December 1979, killed the Afghan leader Hafizullah Amin, and installed a new regime. “Black” propaganda, subversive activity, and financial, advisory, and paramilitary support for insurgencies, or for governments fighting insurgencies, all are examples of covert actions (or, in the Soviet jargon, “active measures”). I will not address them in this survey article, but there is no doubt that such activities were a constant and sometimes important element in the Cold War. These activities were, and are, one of the functions of intelligence agencies, though they are not, strictly speaking, an intrinsic part of intelligence.

Intelligence and Policy

Much more attention needs to be paid to the impact of intelligence operations of various kinds on the perceptions of the adversary. The influence of U.S. intelligence activities on Soviet leaders’ perceptions and assessments is particularly important, and particularly difficult to measure, because so little is yet known. Espionage, while expected and in a sense accepted by all sides,

occasionally had unanticipated negative consequences when discovered. U.S. covert subversive operations in the Soviet Union and other Communist countries, even if largely ineffective, were evidently taken very seriously by Soviet leaders. The infiltration of Western agents into the Soviet bloc during the early years of the Cold War took place on only a limited scale, but it was enough to spark grave concern in Moscow. The level of Soviet concern was even greater during the period of détente and renewed confrontation in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Other forms of intrusive intelligence collection, especially aggressive military reconnaissance by air and sea, was also seen as evidence of hostile intent. The shootdown of Francis Gary Powers over Sverdlovsk in May 1960, leading to the collapse of a scheduled summit in Paris, was but the most notorious and diplomatically significant example.

In closing this survey of the role of intelligence in Cold War history and historiography, I want to reemphasize a point noted earlier. The role of intelligence depends heavily on opportunities and on skill in exploiting them, both in the acquisition of information and in analysis and assessment. It also depends on the effective use of intelligence by policymakers. Political leaders often fail to consult intelligence agencies at key moments, and even when they do consult them, they sometimes neglect to provide necessary relevant information about policy. The leaders also may fail to anticipate intelligence requirements, and they may seek to discourage intelligence initiatives. On the other hand, if they regard intelligence and covert operations as separable from policy, they may end up authorizing or directing activities that sooner or later bounce back with adverse political effects. Careful intelligence assessment, based on a thorough evaluation of all relevant considerations (and alternatives), is the soundest approach, but it is sometimes dismissed as “waffling” by impatient policymakers. (Of course, intelligence analysts do waffle at times, especially in drawing up consensus estimates among various agencies.) Policymakers who focus too much on the chief adversary, or on the “biggest” (or most immediate) problem, are apt to brush aside intelligence efforts to consider other aspects of the real situation. During the Cold War, CIA efforts to focus on key local aspects of Third World conflict situations were often ig-

51. There are many partial accounts of these operations in the memoirs of early CIA veterans. For two recent studies of the policies, based mainly on declassified records, see Peter Grose, Operation Rollback: America’s Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000); and Gregory Mitrovich, Undermining the Kremlin: America’s Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947–1956 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).


nored, as in Vietnam in the 1960s. Most important, there is a tendency for policymakers to encourage and use intelligence that supports their views, and to discount or disregard intelligence that challenges them.

In sum, from a historiographical standpoint, scholars may encounter formidable problems in determining precisely how intelligence was used. We need to consider not only the availability of information and assessments to policymakers, but also how they availed themselves of it. The impact of intelligence on policy and in history depends on the actual roles it played, and it can sometimes be a daunting task to figure out what these roles were. In addition to the many ways that intelligence activities, including the acquisition of information and the production of assessments, influenced the history of the Cold War, the absence of intelligence, the shortcomings of intelligence, and the failures by policymakers to use available intelligence also affected the course of events and may offer lessons for the future.

This survey has been intended to foster greater awareness of the complexity of the role of intelligence in the Cold War and to encourage further study of this key dimension of Cold War history. Many facets of the Cold War are now being examined anew and reinterpreted. The use of new archival and other sources, combined with the plethora of older material, should enable scholars to come to grips with previously obscure or unappreciated aspects of intelligence and its influence on policy decisions during the Cold War.

Note

The Publications Review Board of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency reviewed the final draft of this article solely to ensure that it does not contain currently classified information. The Review Board has posed no objection to the article’s publication. Such review, of course, does not constitute confirmation of accuracy or official endorsement of the author’s interpretations.