

Intelligence between knowledge and ignorance, between acceptance and rejection

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Abstract. *This article focuses on intelligence being between knowledge and ignorance, between acceptance and rejection and uses it as a research method the historical and comparative analysis. It begins with an overview of intelligence importance in the security policy of states resulting from history and continues with the analysis of knowledge versus ignorance of the historical role of intelligence. It ends with a comparative analysis of prominent political leaders such as Winston Churchill (Great Britain), Dwight Eisenhower (United States), Joseph Stalin (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and Adolf Hitler (Germany), not from the perspective of the positive or negative influence they have had, but from the perspective of using versus not using intelligence in the decision-making process. It shows that reducing the distance between ignorance and knowledge depends on human will, history being right behind us or in front of us, depending on how we look at it. It also shows that the acceptance of intelligence in the decision making process depends on human factors too, intelligence being right in front of policymakers, depending on if they understand intelligence value and if they believe more in intelligence than in themselves when it comes to national security.*

Keywords. Intelligence, knowledge, ignorance, acceptance, rejection, national security

1. Introduction

This article approaches intelligence, in the beginning, from the perspective of knowledge versus ignorance of its historical role in the security policy of states and later from the perspective of acceptance versus rejection by policymakers in the decision-making process. The research methods used will be historical and comparative analysis and the reference period will be the twentieth century. The importance of the research lies in the fact that ignorance of the historical role of intelligence, but also of history brings us back to the past and in the face of failure, while the rejection of intelligence in the decision-making process might affect national security. Holger Afflerbach [1] recommended that intelligence history should be more than a research field of a small number of specialists and that it should become a part of political history, based on the importance of intelligence in achieving political goals.

Although history is *an enigma*, an enigma that can be understood over time, it remains a proof to the continuing relevance of intelligence in the national security policy of states, from immemorial times to the present. A look back in the past sees intelligence as being *an integral part of history since its recording*. In the past, with the onset of the first major confrontations, intelligence contributed to the policies of defending states. Later, the first empires amplified the role of intelligence and armed forces in policies of maintenance and expansion. Over time, the empires proved to be temporary like any other historical phenomenon or stage, but no matter the forms of state organization, intelligence proved to be *a constant that contributed to the security architecture*.

Justin Crump defines intelligence as being "a defining function of human existence that has driven the rise and fall of empires and enterprises for thousands of years" [2], Don McDowell remarks a connection between evolution, decline and intelligence, thus: "the fortunes and misfortunes of

peoples, races, cultures, and empires has often turned on what, in retrospect, can be seen to have been either <<good>> or <<bad>> intelligence" [3], while colonel John Hughes-Wilson indicates as examples the founder of the Mongol Empire Genghis Khan and the Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu and at the same time as proofs that intelligence "has always been crucial" [4].

However, history is not enough for the role of intelligence to be understood in the present, to be given it due importance by policymakers, to become *an anchor* for the present, *a landmark* for the future or to become *a historical culture of intelligence*. Looking from a relative approach, lessons learned from the past cannot guarantee the same results now or in the future, but we believe that *this relativity should not tip the balance more towards ignorance and less towards knowledge*.

The importance of knowing the historical role of intelligence is also reflected in the report between decision and intelligence, as well as in the relationship between policymakers and intelligence officials. If for intelligence organizations the specific verbs are *to find out* what may affect national security, *to process* what has been found out and *to inform* policymakers, for policymakers in relation to intelligence specific are the verbs *to accept* or *to reject* what is not in line with their expectations, with their own political objectives or visions and *to act* or *not to act*.

Actions of acceptance or actions based on intelligence and actions of rejection, non-acceptance in the decision-making process or passivity can either confirm or nullify the value of intelligence. Regarding the activity of intelligence organizations, historical events have shown that there are difficulties not only in the process of collecting intelligence and in the process of getting an intelligence product, but also in the final stage in which intelligence should be integrated in the decision-making process, more precisely in the process of its acceptance by policymakers.

2. Knowledge versus ignorance of the historical role of intelligence

Significant historical events in the past that have involved national and international security have been analyzed over time, evaluated and interpreted from different perspectives, both by historians and by authors specialized in this field of intelligence, but this research does not involve implicitly that intelligence organizations or policymakers have learned the historical role of intelligence, that they are aware of it or that they use it wisely in order to avoid rewriting history or repeating the same mistakes.

Justin Crump remarks that intelligence has been a "poorly understood topic" and that it has long been considered a "dark art" [2]. We appreciate that the long-term contribution of intelligence over time does not automatically imply an obvious, clear, certain, transparent or unanimous understanding of it. For that intelligence has been associated with *a dark art*, one explanation could be the fact that intelligence organizations involve the distinctive element of secrecy and not transparency of methods, means, needs and activities.

Moreover, policymakers in pursuing national security policies "have always used intelligence selectively and (they) will always do so" [5]. These choices of use, selective use or non-use of intelligence in national security decisions, although blamed by intelligence organizations and the public, are now irrelevant to decisions that were made in the past, but could become useful for the future by assuming mistakes and by learning lessons from them. We appreciate that the historical role of intelligence viewed through the lens of the present, but also of the future offers us the opportunity to reduce future risks.

Intelligence seems to be not only a topic poorly understood and not enough used in the decision-making process, but also not enough known, actions of knowledge, understanding and use of intelligence between which a causal link can be observed. Christopher Andrew, an expert in the history of security and intelligence organizations, summed up that intelligence in this century "suffers from long-term historical amnesia" [6]. In reducing this amnesia, the author [6] urges to recover this gap so that the historical role of intelligence can be discovered to a greater extent and better understood, based on the fact that increasing the degree of knowledge will diminish ignorance of the past.

If the historian Christopher Andrew recommends increasing the level of knowledge and the level of understanding, the historian John Bew [6] adds a much-needed quality to policymakers in the authentic process of understanding history, namely *patience* and draws attention to the difficulty of exercising this quality of patience in direct relation to the degree of urgency that is specific to the policy. John Bew also offers a perspective on approaching the past, respectively with *wisdom*, a quality those policymakers should have, in addition to patience.

Regarding the historical role of intelligence ignorance in relation to the level of competence of policymakers, another quality that they should have, Christopher Andrew approached the very high level of education of policymakers such as Woodrow Wilson (President of the United States between 1913 - 1921) and Herbert Asquith (British Prime Minister 1908-1916) related to their ability to use intelligence in the unexpected event First World War (1914-1918). The author concluded that their failures in relation to the use of intelligence "derived not from any lack of ability but from ignorance of the historical role of intelligence" [6]. At the beginning of the First World War "war leaders' ignorance of past experience made them ill-equipped to put intelligence to good use" [6] and in the Second World War the ignorance of German and Soviet political leaders was seen not only in history, but also in the field of intelligence. Mark Jensen [7] concluded that ignoring intelligence, regardless of the reason behind this action, has the same effect, the lack of contribution to decision.

The constant rejection of intelligence by a policymaker also presents the risk that intelligence organizations provide intelligence that would correspond to his vision with the intention of being accepted and therefore would become politicized and would lose the unique value. Ralph Bennett in chapter *Intelligence and Strategy: Some Observations on the War in the Mediterranean 1941-45* suggested that the focus should be on "a better understanding of the value and use of intelligence" [8] given the fact that operational mistakes occurred in the beginning of World War II and at the same time that the focus should be on warning about what could happen in case of happening again the same mistakes.

Colonel John Hughes-Wilson drew attention to the fact that "although intelligence can help, it cannot make commanders' decisions for them" and remarked that history has revealed to us political and military leaders as "stubborn, ambitious or misguided" [4] who ignored the eloquent proof. In World War II (1939-1945), an example of intelligence ignorance in national security decisions can be found in Soviet political leader Joseph Stalin who ignored intelligence about Germany's potential attack on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of June 22, 1941 (USSR), who appreciated that intelligence "cannot always be believed" [9] and who was driven by fear of losing the power, by suspicion and by control. Colonel John Hughes-Wilson [4] mentioned that the Soviet leader had received 103 warnings about the Germans' intentions, but he ignored them all.

After this failure in 1941, Uri Bar-Joseph and Rose McDermott [10] remarked, in addition to the admirable intelligence provided at the Battle of Moscow (1941-1942) Joseph Stalin's awareness of previous mistakes by giving greater attention to military and intelligence experts' advice. In essence, the two authors highlight a process of learning lessons by Joseph Stalin (1941-1942) from the previous intelligence ignoring actions on the German offensive (June 22, 1941) that endangered the national security of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

As for Germany, Holger Afflerbach [1] mentioned a common indicator of Germany's defeat in the two World Wars: the misuse of the intelligence provided. It can be argued that German political leaders did not assimilate the historical role of intelligence in the two major events that had a major impact on the European security architecture. The result of the First World War for the Germans, but also its effects created a fertile ground for the emergence of Nazism, an ideology that promoted a policy aimed at revenge against the British, French and Americans, the extermination of Jews and Communists and at expansion. This policy proved to be incompatible with the basic responsibilities of intelligence and with a key role played by it in relation to a type of authoritarian leadership.

Whether the historical role of intelligence has been *a misunderstood or a dark art* waiting to be discovered as far as possible, *an art ignored* by policymakers such as: Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Asquith, Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler or become *a culture of knowledge*, as it should, we appreciate that the historical role of intelligence will certainly help in the process of re-examining the present and *projecting the future in the light of the past*.

Paying attention to the history of intelligence and not only that is waiting to be discovered when we are ready to learn from it will not solve the problem, but *it will reduce the distance between ignorance and knowledge*. We shouldn't forget either in the process of understanding and using it the patience that should be shown and the wise use of what has been discovered and understood from the past. So, if we want to pay attention or to learn from the past it depends only on us, more exactly on human will, *history being right behind us or in front of us, depending on how we look at it*. Regarding the moment when we think we are ready to do it, we believe that we are ready when we decide that we are ready, individually or at the society level.

3. Acceptance of intelligence by Winston Churchill and Dwight Eisenhower versus rejection of intelligence by Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler

Over time, nations have been led and shaped by political leaders who have received a prominent place in history, positive or negative, depending on how they won their power, through inspiration (democratic states) or through force (authoritarian states). With World War II as a reference period, such leaders stood out in the positive register of history Winston Churchill in Great Britain and Dwight Eisenhower in the United States and in the negative one Joseph Stalin in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Adolf Hitler in Germany. Next, we aim to analyze these prominent political leaders, not from the perspective of the influence they have had on the ruled nations, but from the perspective of using versus not using intelligence in the decision-making process.

If in Great Britain, United States and other democratic states intelligence organizations and policymakers are driven by national interest and democratic values, in states such as Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Germany in twentieth century, the type of leadership adopted by Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler was influenced by the Communist ideology too that involved expansion, control or terror, by the Nazi ideology that involved racial superiority, revenge or extermination and by the distinctive personalities, grandiose visions and irrational decisions made by Soviet and German leaders regarding the Europe security architecture.

To these ideologies it can be added *the human factor* resulting from the pathological states of megalomaniacs specific to Adolf Hitler or the persecution specific to Joseph Stalin. If Hitler was *his own architect of the security environment*, Stalin was *his own prisoner in the struggle for power*, intelligence losing its fundamental attributes in this context. Of the three democratic, Nazi and communist ideologies that *collided* in Europe during the twentieth century, although the Nazi threatened to become dominant and triggered World War II and the communist one dominated after World War II by 1991, democratic ideology had finally won supremacy.

3.1. Winston Churchill (1874–1965) and Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890 - 1969)

British political leader Winston Churchill is a prominent figure in World War II and in British history. He participated in both World Wars in different positions: First Lord of the Admiralty (1911-1915) and Prime Minister (1940-1945). George Cristian Maior [11] attributed the victory of World War II to a large extent to Churchill's heroic and predictive qualities and Stalin [12] distinguished the British political leader from the other democratic leaders in the year's war and recognized his supremacy over them. Historian Christopher Andrew [6] distinguished Winston Churchill from all other previous political leaders by his long and varied involvement in intelligence, while Captain Malcolm Kennedy [6] noted his permanent interest and availability in this field.

Winston Churchill [6] at the beginning of the First World War paid more time and more attention to the field of intelligence compared to other policymakers, justifying this statement by the fact that during his tenure as First Lord of the Admiralty (1914-1915) he read all the decryptions resulting from *Room 40*¹ and appreciated their contribution to an honest judgment of policymakers in decision-making process and their distinction in relation to the other sources of knowledge. We note from here the time, attention, appreciation and distinction that British political leader gave to intelligence and that should be given by any political leader.

With his inauguration as Prime Minister in 1940, he regained access to intelligence and reactivated his passion for this field. Christopher Andrew [6] notes that Winston Churchill became the first political leader of the twentieth century to hold this position and to frequently request not only intelligence products, but also raw intelligence, especially that one obtained from signal interception. However, the lack of time for interpretation determined him to accept daily information of the most important topics and the lessons from the past determined him to limit the access to intelligence.

Dwight Eisenhower as the supreme commander of the Allies in Europe during World War II benefited from intelligence obtained at the highest level, including that obtained by Great Britain and the United States through decryption of the secret messages of the Germans, Italians and Japanese whose beneficiaries were limited. He coordinated not only the allied armed forces, but also the intelligence obtained from all sources.

¹British Admiralty Section used for cryptanalysis during the First World War

David Haight in the article *Ike and his Spies in the Sky* highlighted the report between decision and intelligence in the context of the Normandy Landing (June 6 - August 19, 1944) which had a major effect in ending the war, as follows: "before making the final decision to launching the attack, (Dwight Eisenhower) called for the best intelligence available and obtained it". David Haight mentioned that Dwight Eisenhower used this practice of asking and using intelligence and later when he became president (1953-1961) and that he understood that "knowledge based on credible intelligence is power" [13].

The American leader Dwight Eisenhower proved to be an example of a leader both as commander of the armed forces and as commander of one of the most powerful nations in the world. In both positions held, Dwight Eisenhower was confronted with the need for intelligence, with a major decision-making responsibility, but also with the assumption of consequences. *In war time, Dwight Eisenhower as commander of the armed forces used intelligence to achieve peace; in peace time as president he used intelligence to prevent a new open war.* Looking back, it can be seen that the previous experience that American leader had had with intelligence before becoming president of the United States had positive effects both for the development of United States' intelligence organizations and for the relationship between the president and intelligence officials.

3.2. *Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (1878–1953)*

He led the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which became the world's first communist state in 1922, for about three decades (1924-1953), with an indestructible strength, genius and terror to maintain its position of leader and to impose his political vision. He managed to keep his power by eliminating all enemies, extended communism globally and turned the USSR into a world power, but the Russian people paid with millions of lives to be achieved these goals and others nations paid an immeasurable price only because they were in the proximity, so in the way of the expansion and supremacy of communism.

Paradoxically, although the USSR had one of the most successful intelligence organizations in the world, Stalin preferred his own interpretation, did not accept different points of view and considered that "you should not believe everything is written in the secret service reports" [12]. One of the consequences of such different views was the removal from office and even the loss of life. An example of this is provided by Timothy Walton [9], that in July 1940 the head of the military intelligence organization, after a contradictory discussion with Stalin, was removed from office and later shot.

An eloquent example of the rejection of intelligence is the warning of the Soviet leader by various intelligence sources about the German attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941. Regarding the intelligence provided by US President Franklin Roosevelt, which clearly indicated Germany's intention to attack the USSR, Stalin considered it a "challenge" [9] and not a truth interpretation that made the USSR's national security vulnerable. When Winston Churchill warned of Germany's intention from interception and decryption of German communications, Timothy Walton [9] mentioned that Stalin ignored this warning as well, with the suspicion that Churchill was trying to put the USSR at war. Author Timothy Walton specifies that the intelligence provided by the two democratic political leaders was also confirmed by USSR own intelligence sources, including Soviet border patrols with Ukraine confirming the presence of German troops at the border and their visible intentions of war.

The difficulty was that Stalin was receiving conflicting intelligence reports. Another fragile aspect of the war scenario was the non-aggression treaty signed with Germany in 1939, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, which Stalin believed Hitler would honor. Also, Stalin believed that the other actors involved in the war were trying to bring the two signatory states into conflict, through warnings about Germany's war intentions. Stalin also benefited from intelligence from his human sources from Germany or Japan, but this type of intelligence from human sources (HUMINT) did not affect Stalin's decision to defend the national security of the USSR either.

Raymond Garthoff [14] concluded that intelligence did not have a visible impact on Stalin's decision-making process. As intelligence had no influence on Stalin's decision to prepare for war, Soviet General George Konstantinovich Zhukov, a notable military figure during the war, acknowledged the possibility that he hadn't had "enough influence" [12] on Stalin too, given the fact that he was a trustworthy person for the Soviet leader.

Uri Bar-Joseph and Rose McDermott in the book *Intelligence Success and Failure. The Human Factor* remarked that “Stalin’s consistent rejection of every warning of imminent war, no matter what its source, sets him far outside the boundary of reasonable consumer intelligence” [10]. If the acceptance of the strategic intelligence provided to the Soviet leader would have surprised the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics during the German attack on offensive or defensive positions, its rejection surprised the Soviet armed forces *between the reality of being attacked and their leader's belief that they would not be attacked*. So, the human factor of the Soviet leader reflected in his beliefs, own interpretation, inflexibility and suspicion influenced the acceptance of intelligence in decision-making processes provided by from the Allies or from both internal and external sources of intelligence.

3.3. *Adolf Hitler (1889-1945)*

In Germany, Adolf Hitler through his inciting speeches against the British, the French and the Americans on the one hand and the Jews and the Communists on the other hand, through his vindictive promises against them, through his promises to revive Germany, to regain lost honor, to restore German pride and through the grandiose vision of the German nation brought a new *breath* to the Germans defeated in the First World War and thus *paved* the way for absolute power.

In opposition, Adolf Hitler through the attitude of infallibility, the impatience, the boundless ambition, the lack of experience in the decision-making process and in the use of intelligence, the distrust in experts that would have been able to compensate for it, by the strategic error of fighting on two fronts simultaneously which proved to be a failure and by ignoring the history and historical role of intelligence *has removed not only intelligence from the decision-making process, but also Germany from the European security architecture*.

If in the first part of the Second World War these last attributes were offset by offensive military actions, by the element of surprise, by the advanced level in technology, by the discipline required and by the motivation instilled in the German soldiers, in the second part of the war with the offensive on the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics losing its element of surprise, *Hitler won at Stalingrad to the extent that weather conditions and military strategy helped him*.

If for Winston Churchill there was a certain report between decision and intelligence and for Joseph Stalin a report was created between decision and intelligence only when intelligence confirmed his point of view, for Adolf Hitler a report between decision and intelligence was created only in certain operations or moments of war. As an example for the German leader, in the first half year after the USSR attack (June 22, 1941), Heinrich Himmler, military and Gestapo commander, was Hitler's "most frequent visitor" [6]. In opposition, at the Battle of Stalingrad (1942-1943), historian Christopher Andrew [6] remarked how this operational failure was due to Hitler's military strategy, a strategy that was contrary to his generals' advice. In this last example, Hitler, as a political leader, not a military one, exercised this attribute of power given his ambition and intuition and not intelligence expertise as he should have used.

3.4. *A comparative analysis of these leaders contribution to history*

In the United States, Dwight Eisenhower is an example of a commander in war and peace time and an example of a leader who accepted and used intelligence in the decision making process. In Great Britain, Winston Churchill is an example of political leadership not only from the perspective of leading a nation during an uncertain security environment as Prime Minister or of distinction from other contemporary political leaders, but also from the perspective of an involved, interested, available and wise policymaker who paid unlimited time or special attention for intelligence provided, appreciation for intelligence contribution to a honest judgment and intelligence distinction among other sources.

German political leader Adolf Hitler, an example of inadequate leadership, relied more on megalomaniac ambitions, intuition or overconfidence than intelligence, intelligence that requires caution, evidence or logic. In the same category, history and historians have included the Soviet political leader Joseph Stalin who relied more on itself than on intelligence. Joseph Stalin showed interest in intelligence, but the Soviet political leader *overshadowed* the successes achieved by Soviet and allied intelligence organizations by using intelligence in line with his own vision, compared to

Winston Churchill who showed a superior understanding in the use of this *weapon* and who used it wisely and towards the national interest.

From Dwight Eisenhower we can learn to use intelligence no matter the security environment and from Winston Churchill we can learn to be responsible, involved, interested, available, and open to pay attention and to understand and recognise the importance of intelligence. From Soviet leader Joseph Stalin we can note that attention should not be paid only to intelligence reports that confirm the political decision-makers vision, especially when the stake is national security and that sources of intelligence may be a more credible source than one's own estimate or judgment. From the German political leader Adolf Hitler we can learn not to act only on the basis of ambition and intuition when the decisions concern a nation and not only, to take into account the advice of the people that have expertise in the field and to accept the human limitation.

4. Conclusions

As long as it is not a *must* for policymakers to know the historical role of intelligence or to use intelligence in decision-making process, we can try to get attention as possible and hope for policymakers' will in discovering it, their patience in understanding it, for their wisdom in using it and for their responsibility when it comes to national security. Also, as long as knowledge or ignorance depends on the human will, we must do whatever we can to indicate to them that nations depend on their will and at the same time to contribute ourselves to a new level of society development.

Historical events have shown that intelligence proved to be not enough to compensate for the inadequate leadership during World War II in Germany and in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, while intelligence proved to be beneficial to decision-making process and the national interest in the case of leadership promoted in Great Britain and in the United States. In these last states, leaders such as Winston Churchill and Dwight Eisenhower have shown a type of leadership assumed by promoting national and international interest, by respecting the main democratic values and principles, by understanding the intelligence role and by accepting it in the decision-making process.

Although Stalin benefited from a top intelligence organizations subordinated to the communist regime, the value of intelligence provided from its own internal and external sources and from the Allies was nullified by the human factor manifested by excessive self-confidence, by own interpretation of intelligence and events, by inflexibility and by suspicion of the British and American leaders intentions. He found himself *between suspicion and confidence, between despair and hope, between acting prudently and boldly, between irrationality and proofs* which affected the decision-making process and the formulation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics domestic and foreign policy.

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